

Concept of True Happiness in Today's Materialistic World

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ABSTRACT

The present paper attempts to explore whether true happiness exists in actuality or it has been overshadowed by materialistic and ephemeral happiness. It has been seen that the meaning of real happiness has been misinterpreted by people and therefore the existence of true happiness has reduced drastically. Today true happiness is being related to possession of outer materialistic things for which people are toiling day and night. Further the race for obtaining all materialistic things has led to several psychological disorders like depression, anxiety, stress, and feeling of rivalry and therefore the concept of love and generosity has almost vanished in the present society. This has made people become self centred and has compelled them to take illicit path to attain fake and short-lived happiness in life forgetting about long term relationships. It will be seen through this paper how happiness is being equated to materialism and reasons why most of the people are unhappy in the present world. Further, this paper lays emphasis on the importance of real happiness both for the prosperity and health of person and for the overall growth of the society in today's modern and competitive era.

Keywords: true happiness, materialism, unhappy, ephemeral, importance, relationships.

Happiness is understood from different perspectives including environmental, sociological, economical, political and psychological processes. The fundamental striving of human beings appears to be one of seeking happiness in life regardless of his race, religion, language or nationality. Individuals everywhere and every time are moved by this zest for happiness. A person who enjoys full happiness can truly say that he has found meaning in life and that his life is at a pinnacle of achievement, a state of self – transcendence. Happiness can be defined in several ways as the experience changes from

person to person and also the same person can be happy for different reasons and at different times for the same reason. Buddhism defines happiness as the state of mind that enjoys inner peace and is contented. A state of well-being that the great Indian Pandit Nagarjuna, in one of his compositions, explains: There is no treasure like contentment. Of all the types of wealth, it is contentment, which was told by the teacher of god and men, which is the most supreme. Strive for contentment and should you achieve it, even without material wealth, you will truly have found your fortune.

It is the world where many of us think that being affluent, able to afford to buy what we want, live in a good house and drive a flash car, would make us happy. But we'd only be partly right. But once the people have minimum needs satisfied and is in control of their finances, their happiness doesn't increase much even if they get a lot more money. Wealth, luxuries and other comforts of life can bring short term happiness but to achieve complete wellbeing, life has to be with a purpose and initiative.

True happiness comes from within. It initiates from home and perpetuates in the society. A person is considered to be happy when family bonding is strong. Where love is found, happiness exists there. Real happiness exists where warmth and solace is found in relations. Money might buy material possessions what it cannot buy is affection, care and a sense of belongingness. Happiness takes place when you feel satisfaction in helping others. Caring for others is the highest level of happiness. Having a sense of gratitude is something that makes us happy. True happiness existed in India's villages where people used to live close knittedly. They used to be with each other through thick and thin. Social solidarity was high and relationships were informal. That is what kept happiness intact. With the displacement of people from rural to urban area, in the garb of progression what people have left behind is attachment and devotion towards each other. Individualistic tendencies have grown enormously. With the breakage of joint family into nuclear family, people have become self centred and familial tendencies have reduced. Happiness has become short lived and people are found to be craving for accumulating more and wealthier possessions. Now for the contemporary society conception of happiness has changed. Now people want to gain happiness at the costs of others. Materialism adversely affects society. A consumption culture leads to lower concern for the environment

and less participation in public domain issue. Strong materialistic values are also related to lessened involvement in family, community, and social issues (Kasser, 2002). Materialistic outlook ultimately leads to alienation and estrangement. It leads to social and personal disorganisation and individuation as the person becomes self obsessed.

Various reports and related data highlights that the suicidal rate is found to be higher in richer countries as money and materialistic pleasures comes with a package. People are found to be more psychologically disturbed and more prone to depression, stress and neurological disorders. Thus, People who rate materialistic goals like wealth as top personal priorities are significantly likelier to be more anxious, more depressed and more frequent drug users, and even to have more physical ailments than those who set their sights on more intrinsic values. The race for obtaining all materialistic things has led to several psychological disorders like depression, anxiety, stress, and feeling of rivalry and therefore the concept of love and generosity has almost vanished in the present society.

A country as small as Bhutan has its own index to measure happiness and is ranked among world as one of the happiest country in the world. The reason is it is still connected to its culture, tradition running across generations. Bhutan is known for protecting and preserving its cultural values and traditions that touches the roots of familial strings and respect. Whereas developed countries, might have attained high economic growth and still soaring high in all parameters but what they are lacking behind is social capital or warmth in social relationships.

Thus, happiness has a social dimension as well in the sense that a happy person establishes good social relations with others and therefore can receive social support from them. Happiness has a social dimension as well in the sense that a happy person establishes good social relations with others and therefore can

receive social support from them. it can be said that social relations and group relations are sources for happiness and joy. In the end, it should be noted that the social capital is a manageable phenomenon such that it can be restored based on the policies made in clear areas in the organization or can be helped in its process of formation.

Materialistic people believe that the continued acquisition of possessions will lead to greater happiness and satisfaction in life, and that lack of possessions will lead to dissatisfaction in life. Ironically, much empirical research has shown the opposite. These people dedicating themselves to serving others led happier, more fulfilling lives than success-driven people focused on doing well in their own careers.

The earliest work on happiness can be traced back to Aristotle's book 'Nicomachean Ethics', (Crisp, 2000) where he presents a theory of happiness. As a field of study 'happiness' can be traced back to the 'positive psychology' movement, the term 'positive psychology' was introduced by Abraham Maslow (Maslow et al., 1970) in his book 'Motivation and Personality' as a chapter titled 'Toward a Positive Psychology'. 'Happiness' is a psychological well-being, a multidimensional construct covering several components, including affective well-being (i.e., the frequent experience of positive affects (PA) and infrequent experience of negative affects), competence, aspiration, autonomy, integrative functioning and satisfaction.

Everyone strives for whatever they believe will make them happy. It starts with the little baby – when it is hungry it wants milk, and it cries. The mother nurses it, and it is happy. Later it misses its mother, and it cries again. The mother comes and holds the baby, and it is happy and smiles. As the baby gets older it wants toys – perhaps the latest toys the child sees on TV. After the kids get toys, they will play with them for a while, but they will get bored and want

newer toys. As they get older and become teenagers, popularity becomes important to them. They want their friends to think they are really cool. As they get older, popularity with the opposite sex becomes a big drive. As adults, we pursue money and success in our careers, love, marriage and a family, and a bigger house. And we still go after toys, but the toys may be more expensive – a flashy car, neat gadgets like the latest iPhone or iPad. The things we believe will make us happy do not quite get us there. As we achieve our desires, we may find that our needs grow or change.

Our religious scriptures and discourses also discuss about the concept of true happiness. Gurbani tells us that *Dukh* and *Sukh*, happiness and suffering, are a part of life. Good and bad things are going to happen; life is full of ups and downs. We think our happiness or suffering is caused by external events or situations, and that is what we try to control. But in reality it is how we react to them and how we handle these situations that determines our emotional state, much more than what happens to us. There are two significantly different ways in which we think about and use the word "happiness." The first type refers to that which give us pleasure – wealth, success, fame, etc. This is what most of us spend our lives chasing. The words used in Gurbani for this kind of happiness include "*khushi*, *hasna* and *rauna*, *harakh* and *sog*." In English we talk about pleasure and excitement. This type of happiness is externally driven, it depends on the situation we are in, and it is fleeting, leading to emotional ups and downs. This is the type of happiness and suffering that Gurbani cautions us about. We are admonished not to get caught up in it, but to learn to transcend it. There is a deeper kind of happiness, which we refer to here as true happiness, which Gurbani leads us

towards. This happiness is constant and deeper; it is more of an inner mental and spiritual state than something externally driven. In speaking of this type of true happiness, Gurbani uses words like *anand*, *Sehaj*, *vigaas* (blooming like a flower), *chau* (as in *man chau bhaiya prabh aagam sunya*), and *chardi kalaa*. It is this second form of happiness – a constant, joyful, uplifted spiritual state of *sehaj* and *anand* that we should aspire for. This is what Gurbani promises us if we follow its teachings in the way we live our lives.

In terms of the first type of happiness, which is transient, and externally driven, Gurbani urges us to learn to transcend this kind of *sukh* and *dukh*, to treat happiness and sorrow the same. Naam Simran is the core, basic path for achieving true happiness. Another key component of the strategy for true happiness is recognizing His Hukam, knowing that all that happens is according to the Divine Will. One of the most important components of our “true happiness strategy” – gratitude. Let us remember Him not only in times of trouble, but also when things go well and thank him for all

our blessings. *Seva* or selfless service and *parupkar* or doing good deeds for others, which form an important part of the Sikhi ethos, can be a powerful source of personal fulfillment and happiness. Interestingly a study reported that people involved in caring for others had the highest levels of happiness – those working for NGOs, often working in poor areas in the third world, and members of the health sector, particularly nurses and others assistants.

The concept of happiness is very subjective.

People in today’s society live ever in a state of tension, in a state of withering discord among themselves, each shattered within him. Ever agitated and restless in their minds, ever

unsatisfied with what is available in society and ever striving to cut the throats of one another, all of them always feel, in spite of all that they have, a sense of insecurity in life. Each one tries to build a wall of safety for himself with money, possessions, power, strength and social laws. Why this sad plight? Nowadays most people are stressed, over-worked, over-tired, and frazzled, due to the multiple demands in our lives from family, friends, work, and community obligations. Creating a calm, peaceful mind can do a lot for our health, state of mind, and change the way we interact with other people. In spite of all materialistic pleasures, people are found to be unhappy.

Various researches have shown of those individuals who were more materialistic were less happy and less satisfied with their 'life as a whole'. It was also found that those individuals higher in materialism were also less satisfied with particular aspects of their life such as 'standard of living' (satisfaction with material possessions), 'family life' (satisfaction with spouse/partner/children) and 'amount of fun and enjoyment' (satisfaction with fun and enjoyment in life), than those less materialistic individuals (Richins, 1987; Richins and Dawson, 1990, 1992; Sirgy et al., 1998).

The happiness strategies promoted by leading researchers also have positive implications for interpersonal relationships and for the greater community. Close and supportive interpersonal relationships have consistently been found to be positively related to individual happiness and well-being (Diener and Seligman 2004). Communicating the importance of maintaining close interpersonal relationships may encourage individuals to invest more time and effort in developing close relationships. According to Polak and McCullough (2006) encouraging gratitude has positive implications for individual

well being and for enhancing social relationships. A similar argument can be made for kindness. The happiness strategies promoted by leading researchers may also have positive implications for the greater community. Seligman's (2002) concept of the meaningful life encourages individuals to choose goals that contribute to the greater good. Similarly, Thoits and Hewitt (2001) have proposed that participation in volunteer work contributes to happiness by facilitating social bonds as well as providing individuals' with life satisfaction and strong feelings of self-respect.

Thus, materialistic things can never buy true happiness. It is not something transient. It comes from within and is intrinsic. The habit of being happy can be cultivated by loving others selflessly and helping the people around you. Another strategy of being happy is by surrendering oneself to the will of his commands. Having Positive thoughts leads to positive emotions which ultimately makes you happy. One should try to remain positive and maintain healthy relationships. One ought to find a quiet time and place to relax our hearts, restore our spirits. We can keep this calm, peaceful state of the mind and find more happiness, by practicing regular

meditation for 10 to 15 minutes a day. True happiness is stays forever and is within you.

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