



■ *The happiness index considers current conditions and also takes into account not just economic measures, but also positive social relations, characterized by values such as trust, benevolence and shared social identities*

# The Unhappy Indians

**With a rank of 117, India is pushed behind by its neighbours Pakistan and Bangladesh which secured the 81st and 109th ranks respectively in the World Happiness Index**



BY DR M.D. THOMAS

**T**he third 'World Happiness Index' published on April 23 places India at the 117th place out of 158 countries. This is as per the report published by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), which is a global initiative for the United Nations. This report is a landmark survey of the state of global happiness. The first report was published in 2012 and the second in 2013. India was on the 111th rank in 2013 and has dropped six notches since then. While Switzerland is acclaimed the happiest country in the world and the other countries in the top five are Iceland, Denmark, Norway and Canada. India is pushed behind by its neighbours Pakistan and Bangladesh, which secured the 81st and 109th rank respectively. Even Ukraine (111), Palestine

(108) and Iraq (112) have gone ahead of India in the happiness index, shockingly so.

The happiness index is grounded in the principle that 'happiness, increasingly so, is considered a proper measure of social progress and goal of public policy'. It describes how measurements of well-being can be used effectively to assess the progress of nations. The report also takes into account GDP per capita, social support of having someone to count on in times of trouble, freedom to make life choices, healthy life expectancy, generosity and perceptions of corruption as indicators of happiness. On the other hand, what makes people unhappy are joblessness, worries about the future, strained relationships, clogged cities, potholes on roads, slow internet, and the



■ **India is less happy than Pakistan and Palestine, says World Happiness Report. What's going on?**

like. The US is ranked 15, followed by UK (21), Singapore (24), Saudi Arabia (35), Japan (46) and China (84), whereas Afghanistan and war-torn Syria joined eight sub-Saharan countries in Africa (Togo, Burundi, Benin, Rwanda, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Guinea and Chad) are the 10 least happy countries (*The Hindu*, 24 April 2015)

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One would certainly wonder how India with several superlative claims of merits has such a deficit of happiness and well-being in life. It is indeed a contradiction in terms that India has an all-inclusive aspiration of '*sarve bhavantu sukhinah*' (let all be happy) and not have enough happiness for herself. India sings vibrantly '*saare jahaan se achha, hindustan hamaaraa*' (Hindustan is the best country in the world) and ironically fall short of the end result of happiness in life. '*Aham brahmasmi*' (I am Brahman) is the foundational philosophy of the majority of the people; but, yet people are mostly

found unhappy. People of India profusely engage themselves in religious theories and practices in India, but they are not fortunate to enjoy the intended outcome of happiness in life. Indians are not tired of repeating phrases like 'incredible India' and '*meraa bhaarat mahaan*' (my India is great), but, the incredibility and greatness are not reflected in the index of happiness in life, unfortunately so. Without doubt, India is in a very sad predicament of life as regards being happy in life.

The index reveals that, on the one hand, most of the countries have revised the yardstick for measuring the health of a nation by its wealth and have gone for a more human notion of being well and happy. On the other hand, India is still struggling with the outdated notion of amassing wealth for happiness, by hook or by crook, and, no wonder, it has not yet come to the track of integral happiness and wellbeing. As a matter of fact, wealth-based happiness is on a shaky foundation, like a house being built on sand, and it fluctuates according to the volume of wealth coming in and going out. As a country with nearly one-third of its population living below poverty line, the acute value of money in India, especially in that section, is more than understandable. The craze for money in the fairly well-off middle class and the affluent upper middle class is highly inclined towards upward mobility. Even the billionaires, who form the creamy layer of the Indian society, seem to be not satisfied with the unimaginable volume of wealth they possess. Such an irony gives a clear clue that Indians badly require realizing that even large credits of wealth fails them in life. Therefore,

■ **Already rated an unhappy place in 2014 with a ranking of 111, the country dropped six places to 117 out of 158 countries ranked in the 2015 list**



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Indians have to revise the wealth-based approach to achieving happiness, in favour of improving the overall target of integral happiness in life.

The DNA of Indians has a very high content of preoccupation with the self. There is no debating the fact that thinking for oneself is basic to human existence. But, human being is equally a social animal and therefore thinking for the other as one thinks for oneself is indispensable. Thinking for the other cannot be restricted to one's kith and kin, too. Caring for one's progeny is a quality by instinct found even in animals. What is plus in the human species is its capacity to go beyond the network of blood-relations, in a spirit of larger solidarity with the entire human family. Although the ideal of '*vasudhaiva kutumbakam*' has the scope of such wide reach out, most Indians are not capable of stretching out their hearts and minds to that magnitude. Remaining coiled around oneself doesn't bring lasting happiness to anyone. The real source of happiness is hidden in staying networked with others in a spirit of love and service to them. Evidently, Indians require a shift of paradigm in the fundamental strategy of life from I-centred to other-centred way of conducting one's life to become happier in life.

Indians are highly emotional. The fibre of rationality is considerably weak in us. There is a very little content of scientific temper in our life. We are very good at imagining things and we survive on fairy tales. We tend to take stories more than real. Our sense of history is poor. We feel very uncomfortable with the negative accounts. Therefore, we attempt to change them from our records. We believe in astrological calculations very much. If astrological predictions do not turn out right, we get discouraged, if not disappointed. Though optimism is a good attitude, it cannot substitute the sense of realism in life. We are overly ambitious, but are not accustomed to work hard towards

■ **Why India, which is generally considered a country with great promise and a bright future is ranked so poorly, while countries with aging population and declining economic growth are ranked higher?**

the goal conceived and set. We constantly compare ourselves with others with everything possible and get dispirited if we don't succeed in overtaking them.

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We have not learned to say no when we want to say no. Either we give a non-committal yes or ambiguous and misleading answers. Although the sweet-speaking is intended to avoid harshness to others or to be nice with them, the negative result is bound to spoil the fun of mutual relations, all the more. The intention to strike a positive note always ends up in a more or less tragedy. How could Indians with such a mental make-up be happy in the ultimate context!

Self-image is very dear to Indians and that too, often the projected image than the real one. Indians are always ready to pick up an argument and to conquer the other or prove that I am right and the other is wrong. No wonder, this is a way of borrowing a headache for nothing. They are often not able to call a spade a spade. They take a roundabout way to justify themselves, even when they are



clearly wrong. Accepting even a casual a mistake is not within their policy. More often than not, there is no hesitation to present a series of lies for justifying in a foolproof manner the lie one wants to hide and declare one's lie more of a truth than otherwise. No wonder, the voice of the conscience would admonish one privately, which is sure to leave the person concerned with a guilt feeling, some time or other.

Indians are world-renowned for the high volume of religious engagement, even at the cost of their official duties. But, all that religious engagement does not seem to make us happy in life. Tendencies and occurrences like these are sure to shatter the happiness of life. We believe in good and bad omen. An auspicious time is fixed for almost every venture and unfavourable times are consciously

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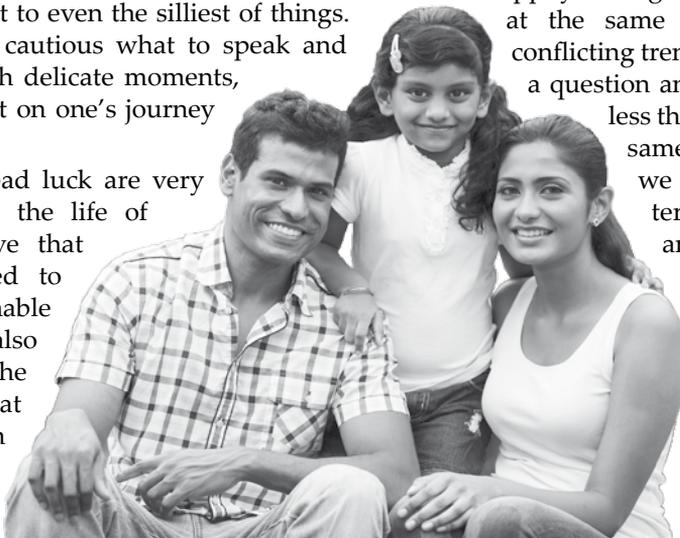
avoided. There are lots of superstitious beliefs and practices that support our theories. We are very much prone to react to even the silliest of things. One must be very cautious what to speak and what not to on such delicate moments, like when one is set on one's journey or a new venture.

Good luck and bad luck are very sensitive things in the life of Indians. We believe that we are conditioned to our fate and are unable to change it. We also get disturbed at the slightest of things that are not in line with our set beliefs. We are not used to give much value

to the word we speak. We tend to compromise with anything and everything. We may condemn a thing as useless or not worthwhile, but normally would still do it. Many Indians would so scrupulously worship goddesses and yet rape women, when and where opportunity comes forth. Deep within, Indians do not seem to be confident about their own capacity to be within one's own control. How could such tendencies give lasting happiness!

Indians are known for wrong priorities. According to a study, 75% of Indians have mobile phones, whereas only 35% have access to toilets. Lots of Indians are ready to share their food with you, even if you have no place to be seated, declining which would run the risk of offending the one who offers. It is a sort of misplaced hospitality. Indians, by and large, have a sense of time that is highly elastic and adjustable, unlike that of the western countries. The sense of work is not much different, either. Often, work is understood to be oriented to earning money. Therefore, commitment to and quality in work is secondary and the returns of the work is primary. Corruption is normally not an issue for Indians, so much so that not only in terms of money but also in almost all matters a loose and utilitarian attitude is widely prevalent.

Indians are mostly double-faced people. Following the values we profess is not important. We can comfortably preach one thing and practice the opposite. One could easily oppose English language and send children to English language schools at the same time. One could abuse the West and can do anything to emigrate to the West or at least ape the West in possible matters. Indians are capable of beating up the girls found in pubs and happily indulge in all sorts of immorality at the same time. 'How could such conflicting trends make Indians happy' is a question answering which is nothing less than a herculean task. All the same, fellow Indians, should we not revisit ourselves in terms of the above indicators and ensure that the degree of our happiness in life increase? When are Indians going to secure a respectable place in the world happiness index?



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