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## **Happiness Quotient in Women and Cultural Sustainability**

**Ms. C. Saranya\***

Assistant Professor in French, Chennai, Tamilnadu, India.

\*Corresponding Author: saranjai19@gmail.com

### **Abstract**

Happiness is a multidimensional construct where one can aim for simple pleasures and enjoyment as well as pursuing hobbies and passions. It is also devoting oneself to various social causes thus contributing a meaning to the society. Women's wellness and happiness are multidimensional and influenced by various factors. The common sense of happiness which involves enjoyment and satisfaction is called Subjective Well-Being (SWB). Women's happiness that comes from realizing one's potentials and striving towards self-actualization is called the Psychological Well- Being (PWB). Ancient Indian texts connecting with three perspectives and four major goals of human life appear to be dedicated purely for men but on the contradictory it is not so. We have several female saints and sages who were compatible with men. To mention a few Maitreyi, Lopamudra, belonging to the past era. According to me, those women who live in alignment with their deepest values, whether in the workplace or at home, tend to experience greater fulfilment than those who feel pressured into a lifestyle that doesn't suit them. A woman should be free to choose the life that brings her joy - without judgement, who belong to the present era. The key to lasting joy isn't conformity - its authenticity. The five pillars of SDG are people, prosperity, planet, peace and partnership. These interconnected principles represent the core principles of United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals. The gender equality is the 5th SDG which comes under the pillar people. It is aimed to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls". Realization of women's potential is an essential driver not only for economic growth but for achieving full sustainable development. Almost all developing regions, women are often the primary

users and managers of land, forest, water and other natural resources. Their cultures and practices promote a balanced, respectful use and preservation of natural resources so that future generations can meet their needs.

**Keywords:** Satisfaction, Meaningful Life, Ancient Indian Texts, Past Era, Present Era, Suitability, SDG, Gender Equality, Women's Potential.

## Introduction

Women's wellness and happiness are multidimensional and influenced by various factors, including self-esteem, health, and lifestyle choices

If someone is asked about their wish in life, what would be the response? For someone it would be like owning a costly car, a bungalow in posh locality, a multinational company which sums up to acquiring wealth. For others it would be like exploring food, places, travelling, pursuing their passion which sums up to living for the moment and deriving pleasures through enjoyment. For certain others, it would be like working for the poor and need, differently abled persons which sums up to servicing mankind and servicing god. The ultimate goal in all these is that one wants to derive satisfaction, to feel good, to seek meaning and purpose in life. Ultimately one wants to be happy in the actions they do. Finding meaning in life gives us happiness and satisfaction.

If the same question is asked to a woman across different stages, a toddler may reply as playing with toys and eating chocolates. A school going child may reply as scoring high marks, having a goal and working towards it. An adolescent may reply as chatting and partying with friends, travelling to places with friends. An adult may reply as building a strong carrier, acquiring financial independence. A middle aged may reply as proper balance of work and personal life, nurturing her children in a good manner and helping others. An old aged may reply as visiting peace reflecting places, living in harmony, nature and making donations.

According to Martin Seligman (Seligman is known for positive psychology) there are three types of life to indicate various dimensions of happiness.

A pleasant life is characterized by deriving pleasures in life by fulfilling various needs of the individual.(Jeremy, 2016)

A good life is characterised by making use of our strengths and skills to feel capable and confident.(Jeremy, 2016) For example, pursuing music, excelling in a sport or engaging in business or gardening. This makes us feel good and happy about ourselves.

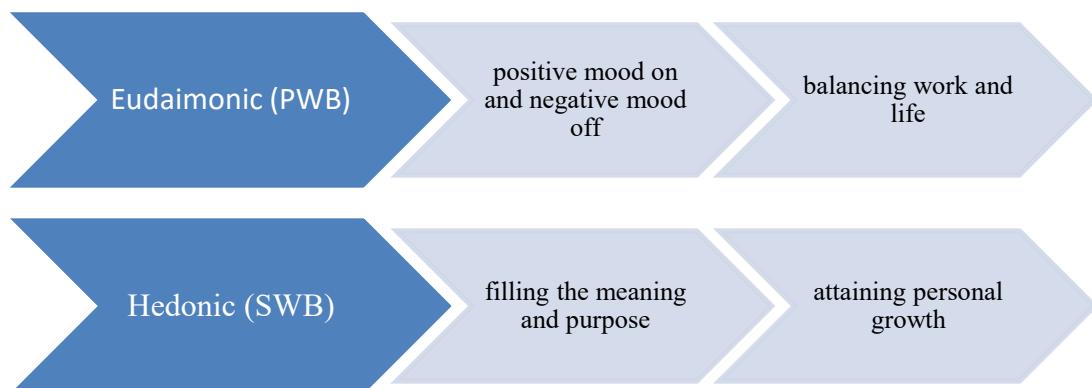
A Meaningful life is characterised by the use of our unique strengths to contribute to others and devote our selves to a greater cause. We look beyond the

pleasures and the feel-good factor about ourselves and look for a larger meaning and purpose in life. (Jeremy, 2016)

**Hedonic happiness** focuses on personal happiness involving pleasure, joy and satisfaction. For instance, one enjoys watching a movie on a big screen with proper sound effects, has fun with friends at a party, feels satisfied while sun bathing at the beach or visits sacred temples. This is the women's common sense of happiness where the good life involves enjoyment and satisfaction. Hence it is also called **Subjective Well-Being (SWB)**. SWB refers to the subjective evaluation of one's life that is how one perceives and judges one's life.(AIPC, 2010)

**Eudaimonic happiness**, on the other hand, refers to a deeper sense of meaning in life (in the works of Aristotle, *eudaimonia* was the term for the highest human good in older Greek tradition. It is a Greek word literally translating to the state or condition of *good spirit*, and which is commonly translated as happiness or welfare)

No one wants to be always in pleasure mode. If so, one will then miss the variety of emotions that appreciates and enrich our life. Aristotle's eudaimonic view of happiness states that the good life involves living according to one's "*diamon*", or 'true self'. Thus women's happiness comes from realizing their potential and striving towards self-actualization. Hence, it is also called the **Psychological Well-Being (PWB)**. PWB involves utilization of individual's strengths, abilities, talents, values and skills. (AIPC, 2010)



#### Satisfaction of women's SWB and PWB decides happiness quotient

In addition to SWB and PWB, one more factor has played a significant role in recent times in women's happiness quotient, which is termed social Well Being. It started in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century worldwide and believed to have begun in

the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in India. Surprisingly, this was preached by our Puranas and Upanishads. To gain more insight into social well-being, it is vital to know about the nature of humankind in previous centuries.

Ancient Indian texts such as the Vedas, Upanishads, and Bhagwad Gita provide more insights into the nature of human mind which contributes to our happiness 'sukha' and unhappiness 'dukha.' In common happiness is termed as 'khushi' (Kumar, 2003). He proposes three perspectives on the Indian conception of happiness and well-being.

**Charvaka perspective** The Indian perspective in ancient times focused on the concept of happiness similar to hedonic happiness, which says "Living for the moment." (Kumar, 2003)

**Collectivist perspective** It focuses on collective goodness, living for others, and other human values and principles that are advocated for promoting well-being. (Kumar, 2003) This is reflected in the following prayers:

"Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (it is quoted in MahaUpanishad) – the whole world is family

"Sarve bhavantusukhinaha, sarve santu niramaya, Sarve bhadrani pasyantu, ma kaschid dukhabhaga bhavet" – May all be happy, may all be free from disease, May all perceive good and may not suffer from sorrow. (it is quoted in MahaUpanishad)

**Transcendent perspective** on happiness and well-being focus on meaning in life but go beyond it to transcendence. It seeks spiritual well-being which is the state of 'Ananda' or pure bliss. The individual transcends the worldly limitations and enters into the divine world which gives the ultimate happiness – the blissful state of happiness (Kumar, 2003)

Indian Munis and Rishis (Sages and Seers) focused on what is permanent (truth) and what is not (maya) in their quest for ultimate truth. Maya is the worldly pleasures which is not permanent. The indefinite happiness is derived from knowing one's Self (Atman), transcending the Self, and building a higher consciousness. I and the universe are one and the same. There is no difference. This leads to true well-being and indefinite happiness (ananda).

Indian philosophy proposes four major goals in human life: *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kaama*, and *Moksha*, that is the pursuit of values, wealth, desires, and liberation, respectively. Artha and Kaama, involves acquisition of wealth and satisfaction of desires related to biological as well as psychological aspects (Hedonic happiness). Dharma involves the pursuit of life with values, discipline, responsibility, attainment of one's strengths, meaning and purposefulness (Eudaimonic happiness). Moksha, the ultimate goal, aims at transcendence and liberation from worldly existence

### **Relating to Women's Happiness Quotient of Past Era**

Ancient Indian texts connecting with three perspectives and four major goals of human life appear to be dedicated purely to men but this is not the case. We have several female saints and sages who were compatible with men. For example, Maitreyi, a philosopher known for the realisation of the nature of self and immortality chooses spiritual knowledge over worldly possessions. Her life can be related to transcendent perspective. Lopamudra, the wife of Agastya known for intellectual and spiritual pursuits along with her marital duties. Her life can be well related to eudaimonic happiness. Karaikkal Ammaiyan, known as one of the 63 Nayanmaar saints transformed herself to ghoul to become a saint and attained moksha. Her life can be well related to eudaimonic and transcendent perspective. Their lives illustrates how women happiness quotient in past era involved hedonic, eudaimonic and the ultimate happiness.

The involvement that one places on the pursuit of these four goals in life influences ones happiness and well-being. Artha and kaama conenetrates on “*preya*” (what we desire), whereas dharma and moksha concentrates on “*shreya*” (what is good). A life lived with strength, values, and virtues enhance well-being.

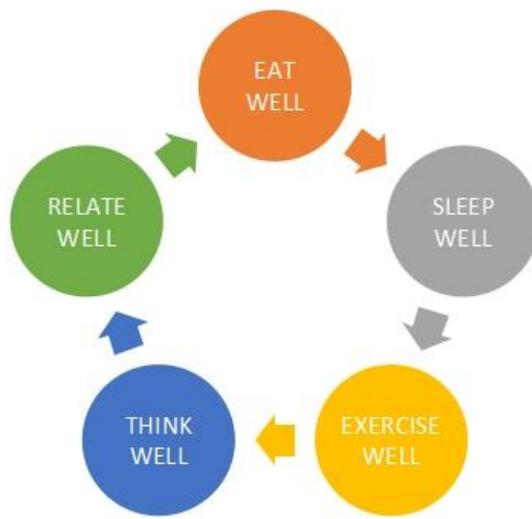
### **Relating to Women's Happiness Quotient of Present Era**

What makes a woman truly happy? Is it either attaining wealth, financial independence, achieving success in career or nurturing home and children which embraces the quiet beauty of homemaking or marching with humanity? In my opinion, those women who live in alignment with their mind and soul, whether in the workplace or at home, tend to experience greater fulfilment than those who experience a lifestyle that does not suit them. The real question is not about neither being a traditional wife or a career woman nor success at home or at profession, but rather whether a woman is free to choose what she desires in life without any obstacles or others judgement. Can she choose a life that brings her joy and satisfaction? It depends on various factors as follows. While for some it is meeting the basic needs of a family whereas for others it is building the financial stability of a family and for certain others it is meeting the demands of a society.

For many traditional wives, happiness is derived from focusing on their families, nurturing their homes and children thus living at a slower and more intentional pace. Housewives by choice feel satisfaction in their roles as wives, mothers, caretakers and homemakers, especially when their roles bear fruit in strong marriages, well-raised children and peaceful homes. Prioritising family and homemaking without the pressures of finance and society in-builds much satisfaction and contentment.

Most of the modern working women draw happiness from their careers, financial independence and professional achievements. However these working

women, despite having achieved success and financial independence undergoes a high level of stress, anxiety, and burnout than past generations. Balancing work, family, and personal health care seem to be more exhausting in the present generation. To take care of different aspects of happiness and health care, many factors such as proper food, good sleep, adequate exercise, power of thinking, maintaining positive relationships play an important role. (*Egyankosh.Ac.in/Bitstream/123456789/86648/1/Unit-7.Pdf*, n.d.)



While good sleep, proper food and exercise improves our physical health, thinking, sharing and relating well with others improves our psychological and emotional well-being which tackles our healthcare. Relating well refers to good interpersonal relationships as well as connecting to a higher and divine world thus satisfying our spiritual well-being.

Ultimately, happiness is about whether a woman is living in alignment with her inner mind, body and soul (her emotion and desires). Therefore a woman who fulfils her role happily as a traditional wife or as a career woman seem to be more happy than who feels torn between societal pressures and her true desires. Thus, women embracing a lifestyle aligned with her emotion and desire experience greater fulfilment than those who are forced into a role that does not fit. She should be free to embrace what makes her happy. The key to lasting joy is not conformity - its authenticity (darling academy)

### **Sustainability**

Sustainable development enters the picture when there is enough of everything for everyone to use but nothing left over for the next generation. (Chand, 2024) It refers to the measures that governments must adhere to in order to meet the needs of their current population while protecting natural resources for future generations. (*Culture & Sustainable Development | UNESCO*, 2008)

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), were first launched by the United Nations in 2015 September as a universal call to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. There are totally 17 SDG's. The 17 SDGs are interconnected. The action in one area will affect the outcome in others and it must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability.

**Women in Sustainability** the five pillars of SDG are people, prosperity, planet, peace and partnership. These interconnected principles represent the core principles of United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals.

The gender equality is the 5<sup>th</sup> SDG which comes under the pillar people. It is aimed to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls". (*Culture & Sustainable Development | UNESCO, 2008*)



One type of injustice that is prevailing in the world is gender inequality, which must be addressed if sustainable development is to be accomplished.

Putting an end to all discrimination against women and girls is a basic fundamental and human right. It is proven that empowering women and girls improves economic status of a country. We need to create a more accountable and dignified system for women who are homemakers. If homemakers of the family stop doing their work at home which includes cooking, cleaning, washing, grinding, buying the essential household items one has to spend a huge sum of amount which in turn proves a degradation in economic status and the economies would suffer. Therefore, empowering women in developing nations is both a wise and beneficial idea.

Kofi Annan, former United Nations Secretary General quotes "Gender Equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance". Realizing the women's potential is vital not only for economic growth but also for accomplishing the full sustainable development, both for the current and future generation.

## **Cultural Sustainability**

The ability of a culture to preserve its art, language, identity, customs, rituals, beliefs, and practices across centuries while embracing and incorporating new change in it is said to be cultural sustainability. In order to ensure their survival that has to be passed down to the future generation it is vital to preserve and promote its significance materially as well as immaterially. Material promotion includes arts, monuments, reservoirs, profession and food habits pertaining to seasons and weather whereas immaterial promotion includes language, culture, practices and protecting the environment.

Why are women important in sustainability? In the journey towards a sustainable future, historically women has played a vital role in passing down to generations as half of the population is women.

## **Women in Cultural Sustainability**

Women have traditionally performed particular tasks or customs in many civilisations. Women may be tasked with preserving cultural legacy in some civilisations by transferring customs, songs, rituals, or crafts. This supports the idea that women play a crucial role in preserving cultural continuity. (Tripathi, 2015)

Knowledge transfer from one generation to other is one of the fundamental duties of cultural sustainability. Women has played a vital role in cooking, cleaning, farming, constructing, child birth and healthcare, weaving, painting, pottery making, performing arts and martial arts, preserving environment and natural resources. Indigenous women have a special relationship to natural resources. Their cultures and practices promote a balanced, respectful use and preservation of natural resources (Natali, 2013). Through these roles she takes care of family and society which gins her leadership skill and financial independence.

India is very famous for its cultural heritage, traditions, civilization, religion and graphical features from the ancient times. India is called as "BHARAT-MATA". BHARAT-MATA means nurturing mother. The name proves the role of women in Indian society. With its proper legacy, preservation, promotion future generation can meet their needs.

## **Conclusion**

Happiness quotient in women depends on satisfaction of the work performed. Be it a homemaker, career women or spiritual person, everyone attain contentment and happiness when they perform their work in alignment with the inner mind body and soul. The happiness quotient depends not on the conformity but on the authenticity of emotion and desires.

Cultural sustainability promotes women's respect, skills, financial autonomy and gender equality in fields of social, economic and political empowerment.

Happiness quotient and cultural sustainability in women do not part their ways and goes hand in hand by promoting contentment, economic welfare and gender equality.

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