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# CONCEPT OF HAPPINESS

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## Introduction

Happiness is something that everybody is looking for. While some may be enjoying a happy life day and night, the other may end up living in misery. However, if someone asks what makes you happy which sounds a simple one but finding the answer is not that easy. By its nature, happiness does not have a straight meaning. It is a multidimensional and cannot be assessed by one single measure (Ng, 2015). The literature shows that happiness became an interesting topic when the Bhutan government decided to make public happiness as an indicator for national progress back in 1979. What is more significant step that the Gross National Happiness (GNH) has been included as part of the Bhutan's constitution in 2008. Since then the GNH had been gaining momentum and got the attention of the United Nations Assembly. In 2012, the first World Happiness Report was produced and showed the ranking of the countries in term of the level of happiness of the citizens. Now days happiness is increasingly considered the proper measure of social progress and the goal of public policy (Helliwell, Layard & Sachs, 2017).

## Western Concept of Happiness

Philosophers in the West typically classify happiness to be either of two things namely a state of mind and a life that goes well for the person leading it. As happiness is referred to the state of mind, then life satisfaction, pleasure, or a positive emotional condition are best options to describe it. For a life, the subject matter is the value attached to it like well-being, welfare or utility. "Happiness" in this category concerns with what benefits a person from various aspects of life like economic well-being, social well-being etc. Surely, happiness is the opposite of the state of being misery.

Seligman (2002) stipulated three dimensions of happiness observed from positive psychology. The three dimensions are the pleasant life (enjoying daily pleasures), the good life (using skills for enrichment) and the meaningful life (contributing to the greater good). The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire developed by Hills and Argyle (2002) used this psychological approach in measuring happiness index with Likert scale from 1 to 6. However, Clark, Fleche, Layard,

Powdthavee, and Ward (2017) in analyzing happiness in the selected countries have defined happiness as life satisfaction. In literature, studies on happiness use both primary (using survey) and secondary data (published data).

The growing importance of public happiness in affecting the survival of a government elected through democratic process is supported by Ward (2015). He argued that there is a strong correlation between government vote with life satisfaction estimated as 0.64 compared to other factors like economic growth, unemployment and inflation. This indicates that public unhappiness may lead to change of government in any democratic process. This sounds logical as the people will seek and elect a government that can expand their happiness or life satisfactions.

### **Islamic Concept Of Happiness**

In Islam, the central Arabic term to happiness is related to the root *sa'ad* from which comes the word *sa'adah* which is the closest equivalent for the English term "happiness". The Quranic terminology related to happiness is found in Chapter 11 of the Holy Quran. The word rooted from the word *sa'ad* are mentioned twice as follows: "On the Day when it arrives, no soul will speak without His permission. Some will be miserable, and some will be happy" and "And as for those who are happy, they will be in Paradise, remaining therein for as long as the heavens and the earth endure, except as your Lord wills—a reward without end".

Happiness had been discussed by great scholars like Al Ghazali, Al Farabi and Ibnu Arabi. For example, Al Ghazali classified happiness into two namely transient happiness and real happiness that result from the knowledge of God. Meanwhile, Ibnu Arabi regarded a happy person is one with whom God is pleased or content. Nasr (2014) stated that happiness in Islam is a universal concept in line with Islam as a worldview and a way of life. Thus, the pursuit of happiness is envisaged differently in Islamic framework as contrast to contemporary Western thought.

In Islam, the sources of happiness are faith (belief in God) and the Divine law. Faith in God is considered as a gift and whoever has received this gift will be a happy person. In addition, faith in God is inseparable from love for God which is full of joy and happiness. It comes with responsibilities that is to follow the Divine Law. Thus, to attain happiness, one must follow and practice the Divine Law as signs of obedience to God.

### **Conclusion**

Studies on happiness are rising tremendously for the last three decades. Given the presence of multi religions across the world, differences in the concept of happiness must be acknowledged and take into consideration. There is solid evidence that religious belief and practices play greater role in affecting the level of happiness as reported by Rizvi & Hossain (2017).

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