



Economics of
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Volume 1

EDITORS

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Dr.Shirley Jose K
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WHY DOES HAPPINESS ELUDE INDIA?**ELUCIDATING THE WORLD HAPPINESS REPORT (WHR) 2021****Mr. Nijil Jacobi**

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Abstract

International Happiness Day is celebrated every year on 20th March to highlight the importance of happiness in the diurnal lives of people. The United Nations started to celebrate the International Day of Happiness in 2013 but a resolution for the same was passed in July, 2012. This resolution was first initiated by Bhutan which emphasised on the importance of national happiness over national income since the early 1970s, thereby adopting the Gross National Happiness (GNH) over Gross National Product (GNP). The phrase 'Gross National Happiness' was first coined by the 4th King of Bhutan, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, in 1972. The concept implies that sustainable development should take a holistic approach towards notions of progress and give equal importance to non-economic aspects of wellbeing. Since 2002, the World Happiness Report has used statistical analysis to determine the world's happiest countries. In its 2021 update, the report concluded that Finland is the happiest country in the world. To determine the world's happiest country, researchers analyzed comprehensive Gallup polling data from 149 countries for the past three years, specifically monitoring performance in six particular categories: Gross domestic product per capita, Social support, Healthy life expectancy, Freedom to make your own life choices, Generosity of the general population, Perceptions of internal and external corruption levels. In order to properly compare each country's data, the researchers created a fictional country—christened Dystopia—filled with "the world's least-happy people." They then set Dystopia as the rock bottom value in each of the six categories and measured the scores of the real-world countries against this value. All six variables were then blended to create a single combined score for each country. This paper examines the World Happiness Report (WHR) 2021 and the position of India in WHR 2021.

Keywords: *Gross National Happiness (GNH), Happiness, life, wellbeing, World Happiness Report (WHR)*

Introduction

The World Happiness Report, one of the best tools for evaluating global happiness, is based on how ecstatic people perceive themselves to be. It considers six characteristics to rank countries on overall happiness: GDP per capita, social support, life expectancy, freedom to make choices, generosity, and perception of corruption. In July 2011, the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 65/309 Happiness: Towards a Holistic Definition of Development inviting member countries to measure the happiness of their people and to use the data to help guide public policy. On April 2, 2012, this was followed by the first UN High Level Meeting called Wellbeing and Happiness: Defining a New Economic Paradigm, which was chaired by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and Prime Minister Jigmi Thinley of Bhutan, a nation that adopted gross national happiness instead of gross domestic product as their main development indicator. The first World Happiness Report was released on April 1, 2012 as a foundational text for the UN High Level Meeting: Well-being and Happiness: Defining a New Economic Paradigm, drawing international attention. The first report outlined the state of world happiness, causes of happiness and misery, and policy implications highlighted by case studies. In 2013, the second World Happiness Report was issued, and in 2015 the third. Since 2016, it has been issued on an annual basis on the 20th of March, to coincide with the UN's International Day of Happiness.

World Happiness Report 2021

This ninth World Happiness Report is unlike any that have come before. COVID-19 has shaken, taken, and reshaped lives everywhere. The pandemic's worst effect has been the 2 million deaths from COVID-19 in 2020. A rise of nearly 4% in the annual number of deaths worldwide represents a serious social welfare loss. For the living there has been greater economic insecurity, anxiety, disruption of every aspect of life, and, for many people, stress and challenges to mental and physical health. The World Happiness Report 2021 focuses on the effects of COVID-19 and how people all over the world have fared. The theme of 2021 is "Happiness For All, Forever". The aim of the study was two-fold, first to focus on the effects of COVID-19 on the structure and quality of people's lives, and second to describe and evaluate how governments all over the world have dealt with the pandemic. In particular, the report tries to explain why some countries have done so much better than others.

Finland has been ranked as the happiest country in the world for the fourth consecutive year. The Nordic nation is followed by Iceland, Denmark, Switzerland, The Netherlands, Sweden, Germany and Norway. Pakistan is on 105th, Bangladesh on 101st and China on 84th,

according to the report. People in war-torn Afghanistan are the most unhappy with their lives, followed by Zimbabwe (148), Rwanda (147), Botswana (146) and Lesotho (145). The happiness study ranks the countries of the world on the basis of questions from the Gallup World Poll. The results are then correlated with other factors, including GDP and social security. The United States ranks at 19th place for happiness, despite being one of the richest countries in the world. Overall, the index showed little change in happiness levels compared to last years' report, which was based on information from before the Covid-19 pandemic.

Table 1: Happiest Countries in the World 2021

Rank	Country name	Regional indicator	Happiness 2021
1	Finland	Western Europe	7.842
2	Denmark	Western Europe	7.620
3	Switzerland	Western Europe	7.571
4	Iceland	Western Europe	7.554
5	Netherlands	Western Europe	7.464
6	Norway	Western Europe	7.392
7	Sweden	Western Europe	7.363
8	Luxembourg	Western Europe	7.324
9	New Zealand	North America and ANZ	7.277
10	Austria	Western Europe	7.268
11	Australia	North America and ANZ	7.183
12	Israel	Middle East and North Africa	7.157
13	Germany	Western Europe	7.155
14	Canada	North America and ANZ	7.103
15	Ireland	Western Europe	7.085
16	Costa Rica	Latin America and Caribbean	7.069
17	United Kingdom	Western Europe	7.064
18	Czech Republic	Central and Eastern Europe	6.965

19	United States	North America and ANZ	6.951
20	Belgium	Western Europe	6.834
21	France	Western Europe	6.690
22	Bahrain	Middle East and North Africa	6.647
23	Malta	Western Europe	6.602
24	Taiwan Province of China	East Asia	6.584
25	United Arab Emirates	Middle East and North Africa	6.561
26	Saudi Arabia	Middle East and North Africa	6.494
27	Spain	Western Europe	6.491
28	Italy	Western Europe	6.483
29	Slovenia	Central and Eastern Europe	6.461
30	Guatemala	Latin America and Caribbean	6.435
31	Uruguay	Latin America and Caribbean	6.431
32	Singapore	Southeast Asia	6.377
33	Kosovo	Central and Eastern Europe	6.372
34	Slovakia	Central and Eastern Europe	6.331
35	Brazil	Latin America and Caribbean	6.330
36	Mexico	Latin America and Caribbean	6.317
37	Jamaica	Latin America and Caribbean	6.309
38	Lithuania	Central and Eastern Europe	6.255
39	Cyprus	Western Europe	6.223
40	Estonia	Central and Eastern Europe	6.189
41	Panama	Latin America and Caribbean	6.180
42	Uzbekistan	Commonwealth of Independent States	6.179

43	Chile	Latin America and Caribbean	6.172
44	Poland	Central and Eastern Europe	6.166
45	Kazakhstan	Commonwealth of Independent States	6.152
46	Romania	Central and Eastern Europe	6.140
47	Kuwait	Middle East and North Africa	6.106
48	Serbia	Central and Eastern Europe	6.078
49	El Salvador	Latin America and Caribbean	6.061
50	Mauritius	Sub-Saharan Africa	6.049
51	Latvia	Central and Eastern Europe	6.032
52	Colombia	Latin America and Caribbean	6.012
53	Hungary	Central and Eastern Europe	5.992
54	Thailand	Southeast Asia	5.985
55	Nicaragua	Latin America and Caribbean	5.972
56	Japan	East Asia	5.940
57	Argentina	Latin America and Caribbean	5.929
58	Portugal	Western Europe	5.929
59	Honduras	Latin America and Caribbean	5.919
60	Croatia	Central and Eastern Europe	5.882
61	Philippines	Southeast Asia	5.880
62	South Korea	East Asia	5.845
63	Peru	Latin America and Caribbean	5.840
64	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Central and Eastern Europe	5.813
65	Moldova	Commonwealth of Independent States	5.766

66	Ecuador	Latin America and Caribbean	5.764
67	Kyrgyzstan	Commonwealth of Independent States	5.744
68	Greece	Western Europe	5.723
69	Bolivia	Latin America and Caribbean	5.716
70	Mongolia	East Asia	5.677
71	Paraguay	Latin America and Caribbean	5.653
72	Montenegro	Central and Eastern Europe	5.581
73	Dominican Republic	Latin America and Caribbean	5.545
75	North Cyprus	Western Europe	5.536
74	Belarus	Commonwealth of Independent States	5.534
76	Russia	Commonwealth of Independent States	5.477
77	Hong Kong S.A.R. of China	East Asia	5.477
78	Tajikistan	Commonwealth of Independent States	5.466
79	Vietnam	Southeast Asia	5.411
80	Libya	Middle East and North Africa	5.410
81	Malaysia	Southeast Asia	5.384
82	Indonesia	Southeast Asia	5.345
83	Congo (Brazzaville)	Sub-Saharan Africa	5.342
84	China	East Asia	5.339
85	Ivory Coast	Sub-Saharan Africa	5.306
86	Armenia	Commonwealth of Independent States	5.283

87	Nepal	South Asia	5.269
88	Bulgaria	Central and Eastern Europe	5.266
89	Maldives	South Asia	5.198
90	Azerbaijan	Commonwealth of Independent States	5.171
91	Cameroon	Sub-Saharan Africa	5.142
92	Senegal	Sub-Saharan Africa	5.132
93	Albania	Central and Eastern Europe	5.117
94	North Macedonia	Central and Eastern Europe	5.101
95	Ghana	Sub-Saharan Africa	5.088
96	Niger	Sub-Saharan Africa	5.074
97	Turkmenistan	Commonwealth of Independent States	5.066
98	Gambia	Sub-Saharan Africa	5.051
99	Benin	Sub-Saharan Africa	5.045
100	Laos	Southeast Asia	5.030
101	Bangladesh	South Asia	5.025
102	Guinea	Sub-Saharan Africa	4.984
103	South Africa	Sub-Saharan Africa	4.956
104	Turkey	Middle East and North Africa	4.948
105	Pakistan	South Asia	4.934
106	Morocco	Middle East and North Africa	4.918
107	Venezuela	Latin America and Caribbean	4.892
108	Georgia	Commonwealth of Independent States	4.891
109	Algeria	Middle East and North Africa	4.887

110	Ukraine	Commonwealth of Independent States	4.875
111	Iraq	Middle East and North Africa	4.854
112	Gabon	Sub-Saharan Africa	4.852
113	Burkina Faso	Sub-Saharan Africa	4.834
114	Cambodia	Southeast Asia	4.830
115	Mozambique	Sub-Saharan Africa	4.794
116	Nigeria	Sub-Saharan Africa	4.759
117	Mali	Sub-Saharan Africa	4.723
118	Iran	Middle East and North Africa	4.721
119	Uganda	Sub-Saharan Africa	4.636
120	Liberia	Sub-Saharan Africa	4.625
121	Kenya	Sub-Saharan Africa	4.607
122	Tunisia	Middle East and North Africa	4.596
123	Lebanon	Middle East and North Africa	4.584
124	Namibia	Sub-Saharan Africa	4.574
125	Palestinian Territories	Middle East and North Africa	4.517
126	Myanmar	Southeast Asia	4.426
127	Jordan	Middle East and North Africa	4.395
128	Chad	Sub-Saharan Africa	4.355
129	Sri Lanka	South Asia	4.325
130	Swaziland	Sub-Saharan Africa	4.308
131	Comoros	Sub-Saharan Africa	4.289
132	Egypt	Middle East and North Africa	4.283
133	Ethiopia	Sub-Saharan Africa	4.275

134	Mauritania	Sub-Saharan Africa	4.227
135	Madagascar	Sub-Saharan Africa	4.208
136	Togo	Sub-Saharan Africa	4.107
137	Zambia	Sub-Saharan Africa	4.073
138	Sierra Leone	Sub-Saharan Africa	3.849
139	India	South Asia	3.819
140	Burundi	Sub-Saharan Africa	3.775
141	Yemen	Middle East and North Africa	3.658
142	Tanzania	Sub-Saharan Africa	3.623
143	Haiti	Latin America and Caribbean	3.615
144	Malawi	Sub-Saharan Africa	3.600
145	Lesotho	Sub-Saharan Africa	3.512
146	Botswana	Sub-Saharan Africa	3.467
147	Rwanda	Sub-Saharan Africa	3.415
148	Zimbabwe	Sub-Saharan Africa	3.145
149	Afghanistan	South Asia	2.523

Source: Statistical Appendix - WHR 2021

World Happiness Report (WHR) & India

The Happiness Index of the World Happiness Report (WHR) indicates that India's rank has deteriorated over the years. Starting with rank 111 in 2013, it has consistently been going down and was a dismal 139 in the 2021 report – a dip of 25%. This decline has happened irrespective of successive governments and apparent economic progress, and India being one of the fastest-growing economies in the world in the last several years.

India's rank in GDP per capita has remained low at 102 and hardly changed despite a high GDP growth rate in the last four, pre-Covid years of 6%-8%. This decrease seems to indicate that even though GDP increased, the increase in population nullified it out. Similarly, there has been only a marginal improvement in India's rank (2021 rank: 104) for Healthy Life

Expectancy despite being a pharma capital of the world, growing medical tourism or an overall increase in healthcare facilities in the country.

India has shown notable improvement in its ranking for intangible criteria like Generosity and Freedom to make choices. Interestingly, amidst all the talk about freedom of speech, India consistently improved its ranking from 56 in 2018 to 37 in 2021. However, the long-lasting problem of corruption is there, and the perception of corruption has only increased. The Happiness Index also considers positive and negative effects: positive effect measured in happiness, laugh and enjoyment, whereas negative effect measured in worry, sadness and anger. On both these factors, India's ranking has slipped.

Table 2: World Happiness Report (WHR) and India

WHR India Ranking	2021	2020	2019	2018
Ranking of Happiness	139	144	140	133
Happiness score	3.82	3.57	4.02	4.19
Natural Log of GDP Per Capita	102	102	103	103
Social Support	141	145	142	144
Healthy Life Expectancy	104	104	105	107
Freedom to make life choice	31	37	41	56
Generosity	44	49	65	84
Ranking of Positive Effect	102	100	93	NA
Ranking of Negative Effect (reversed*)	14	17	41	NA
Perception of Corruption (reversed*)	75	79	76	84

Source: WHR 2018-2021

An Unhappy India, Happier Neighbours! - Comparison with other countries

One may argue that India is still a developing country, and it will be unfair to compare with the western nations. However, comparison with neighbouring countries reveals a shocking

reality. India has the lowest happiness score among the neighbourhood: Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are ahead of it. It has a lower rank for social support (meaning having someone to count on during times of trouble) than most of its neighbours. On criteria such as generosity and perception of corruption, it sits in the middle. In freedom to make choices, India fares much better than its neighbours except Bangladesh, which is at 26 vs India at 31 in WHR 2021 report. In terms of intangible criteria such as happiness, laughter and enjoyment, India is better than most neighbouring countries. However, in terms of sadness, worry and anger, it stands at the worst footing. These results indicate that people are generally more negative in India and that India represents a diverse group of people.

In the last eight years, India lost 28 spots in the Happiness Ranking, whereas some of its neighbours like Nepal improved by 48 places, Sri Lanka by 8 and Bangladesh by 7. Pakistan is 34 spots higher than India in WHR 2021. The gap was much more significant in WHR 2020, with Pakistan being 78 spots ahead of India.

Table 3: India and Neighbours – World Happiness Report 2021

WHR Report (2021)	India	Pakistan	Bangladesh	Nepal	Sri Lanka
Ranking of Happiness	139	105	101	87	129
Happiness score	3.82	4.93	5.03	5.27	4.33
Natural Log of GDP Per Capita	102	111	112	117	76
Social Support	141	133	126	105	80
Healthy Life Expectancy	104	113	88	93	61
Freedom to make life choice	31	108	39	83	59
Generosity	44	49	102	38	36
Ranking of Positive Effect	102	132	138	139	21
Ranking of Negative Effect (reversed*)	14	15	39	32	59
Perception of Corruption (reversed*)	75	71	102	91	28

Source: WHR 2021

Another neighbouring country not covered in the 2021 WHR is Bhutan, which continues to be an inspiration to the entire world and, in fact, inspired the World Happiness Report to come into being. Bhutan's explicit use of the 'Gross national happiness' measure and how it influenced the country to avoid even a single COVID-19 death in 2020 is something for every country, particularly India, to learn from.

Among the BRICS nations, India is ranked the lowest on the happiest index and this actually is disheartening.

Table 4: India and BRICS - World Happiness Report 2021

Country	Happiness Score	Rank
Brazil	6.33	35
Russia	5.477	76
India	3.82	139
China	5.339	84
South Africa	4.956	103

Source: WHR 2021

Five reasons for an unhappy India

The picture about India's happiness quotient presented by the World Happiness Report 2021 is quite disappointing. The top five reasons for an unhappy India can be analyzed as follows.

✓ Declining incomes and unemployment

The year 2020 is a testimony to how an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in the form of the COVID-19 pandemic wreaked havoc around the world. One of the immediate responses to the onset of this crisis was the imposition of a lockdown in many countries. India was one of them. In fact, Oxford University stringency index christened India's lockdown as one of the world's strictest. This lockdown dealt a severe blow to the Indian economy. The most severe repercussion of this lockdown manifested as the migrant crisis in the country. Loss of livelihoods and a consequent decline in incomes were inevitable. Of course, consistent with the timing and relative stringency of the lockdown, the steepest decline in incomes were

witnessed in April 2020, of 19 percent and 41 percent in rural and urban India respectively. This decline corresponds to an economic de-growth of 23.9 percent and an unemployment rate of around 24 percent. Recoveries in both employment and income have at best been patchy. Decent employment and an adequate source of income may definitely not be sufficient to ensure life satisfaction, as is often argued, but are surely necessary for the same. What worsens the situation in India is that about 90 percent of the workforce operates in the informal sector. Consequently, they are deprived of social security and the kind of income security that ensures savings and resources that can act as a buffer in the face of shocks like the one levied by the ongoing pandemic. As such, the economic burden of the pandemic was disproportionately heavier and the misery that followed was much more for the informally employed.

✓ **Unfavourable perceptions about corruption in the country**

On the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2020, India scores 40 on 100. Scores in between 90–100 represent a very clean nation, while a score in the range 0–9 represents a highly corrupt nation. India ranks 86 among 180 nations on CPI 2020. There are experts who believe that this score fails to capture the true greater extent of corruption in India. Echoing this belief are the findings of the survey called the Global Corruption Barometer Asia, published by Transparency International. According to this survey, India has the highest overall bribery rate (39 percent) and the highest rate of citizens using personal connections (46 percent) in Asia. To quote the findings of the report, “Of the people surveyed in India, who came into contact with the police, 42% had paid bribes. The use of bribes was also rampant (41%) to obtain official documents such as identity papers. Use of personal connections was also largely made in dealings with the police (39%), procurement of identity documents (42%), and in relation to courts (38%).”

✓ **Lack of social support**

The national scores on social support are the national average of the binary responses (either 0 or 1) to the question “If you were in trouble, do you have relatives or friends you can count on to help you whenever you need them, or not?” India attained a score of 0.617, higher only to the scores of three countries out of the total 95 nations for which data was collected in the 2020 survey. In other words, as far as social support is concerned, India ranks as low as 92 among 95 nations for which data were available.

✓ **Low levels of educational attainment****Table 5: Percentage Distribution of workers by educational qualifications (2018–19)**

Education Level	Regular Formal	Regular Informal	RWS	Self-Employed	Casual Workers	Total
Not literate	2.29	11.79	7.93	25.70	37.41	24.30
Literate without formal education	0.04	0.19	0.13	0.43	0.50	0.38
Literate below Primary	1.25	3.90	2.83	5.67	8.03	5.56
Primary	3.28	12.66	8.85	14.20	18.14	13.88
Middle	10.52	23.57	18.27	22.46	21.72	21.28
Secondary	10.99	15.00	13.37	12.99	8.90	12.09
Higher Secondary	20.16	14.79	16.97	10.06	4.24	10.30
Graduates and above	51.48	18.09	31.65	8.51	1.06	12.22
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: PLFS unit data (2018–19)

As the table above indicates, 87.79 percent of the workforce have higher secondary education or below. Jobs with social security, a written job contract and other employment benefits generally employ those with higher educational qualification — which represent a minority in India. Jobs that engage highly qualified people are usually those that are amenable to becoming digital. For instance, a labourer's job cannot move online while many dimensions of the knowledge economy can easily make such a shift. In the COVID-19 era, it is obvious then that those with higher educational qualifications and in turn better job prospects are better placed to cope with the impending economic disruptions. No wonder then that education is an important driver of life satisfaction and more so in the COVID-19 era. Those with higher educational attainment are likely to find it easier to migrate to digital modes in maintaining social relationships which are crucial for life satisfaction.

✓ **Age composition of India's population**

India's demography is predominantly young. About 67 percent of India is in the age -group 15–64 years. The WHR 2021 informs us that there has been a significant reduction in the frequency of reported health problems from 23 percent to 20 percent for the population as a whole, while such increments being more pronounced among those above the age of 60. As

far as India is concerned, these gains went to a minority of the population thanks to its youth-dominated structure. Furthermore, life evaluations are considerably higher among those below the age of 30 and above the age of 60. Roughly 50 percent of the population lies in these age intervals. Gains in life evaluations enjoyed by this half of the population might have very well been offset by the worry, anger, and sadness experienced by the loss of livelihoods and income experienced by the remainder half of the population. As already argued, the burden of these losses was heavier in the Indian context. What was once celebrated as an opportunity to reap demographic dividends has now turned into a national liability, given the unemployment levels in the country.

Conclusion

Even though India has been one of the fastest developing countries, the happiness score has worsened year by year. Amid the pandemic, happiness has become more elusive than ever. COVID-19 has also taught us how to value immaterial aspects more than anything and the true purpose of a country. These findings suggest that the country needs to focus on intangible aspects and happiness during these challenging times. Finland and Bhutan, amongst the happiest the countries, have adopted various strategies to reach where they are today. Finland, for example, has invested in its education system. India needs to learn from such trends and rethink its strategy to become one of the happiest and the fastest economies globally. There is much to ponder upon as far as India's happiness quotient is concerned. No better words than that of the late President Pranab Mukherjee to summarise the key takeaway. To quote him, "A narrow vision focus on economic development may have given us a better GDP and increase in per capita income but moved our focus from environmental sustainability, social welfare, emotional and mental wellbeing of our people... The quest of happiness is closely tied to the quest for sustainable development which is a combination of social inclusion and environmental sustainability." Indeed, for pursuing progress in its truest sense which is reflected no better than in happiness, India has to embrace sustainability and inclusivity in all economic, social, and political dimensions.

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