



KERALA CALLING

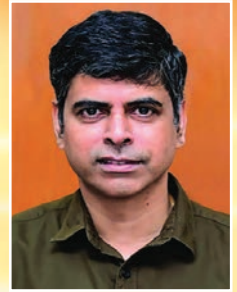


Beyond
the Smile

"Nurture Your Inner Joy"

Thank you for
all the love!





Unlocking Happiness

Happiness is a universal pursuit, yet it remains one of our most personal experiences. It is shaped by our perspectives, enriched by our connections, and discovered in the moments that matter most to us. It is found as much in the fire of ambition as it is in the quietude of a shared meal. Because happiness resists a single definition, it cannot be measured—only felt.

In this issue of Kerala Calling, we move beyond indices and statistics to explore the lived experience of joy. We look at how happiness is shaped by our culture, our relationships, and our creative spirit. Together, these perspectives highlight the subtle yet meaningful ways joy becomes part of our everyday experience.

From the liberating rhythm of dance to the empathetic lens of cinema and literature, these pages celebrate the diverse ways we

connect with ourselves and one another. We also honor the resilience of the human spirit—the remarkable ability to find laughter even when times are lean. Through diverse perspectives and lived experiences, this edition invites readers to reflect on happiness as something deeply personal yet universally shared—shaped by culture, creativity, relationships, and the passage of time.

We invite you to immerse yourself in these stories. May they help you not only understand the nature of happiness but also recognize its presence in your own daily life. May they also inspire you to pause, reflect, and cherish the simple moments that often hold the deepest joy.

Enjoy the journey.

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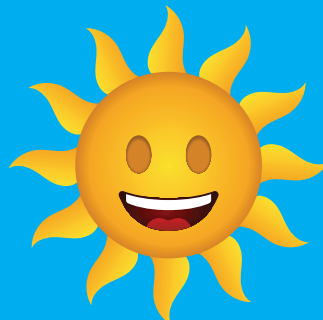
Editorial Materials

Articles/features appearing in this magazine are either commissioned or assigned. Nevertheless, other articles are also welcome. A maximum of 750 word in word file is appreciated.

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Understanding Happiness Index



Dr. Arun B. Nair

Top 10 Happiest Countries in 2025
Finland (7.74), Denmark (7.52), Iceland (7.52),
Sweden (7.35), Netherlands (7.31),
Norway, Switzerland, Luxembourg
Costa Rica, and Kuwait

The World Happiness Report published in 2025 enlists various nations in the world based on the happiness experienced by citizens living there. Finland has been named the world's happiest country for the eighth consecutive year in the 2025 World Happiness Report, followed by Denmark, Iceland and Sweden. The 2025 report focuses on Caring and Sharing, highlighting the impact of social connections. India improved its ranking to 118th, while Afghanistan remains the lowest-ranked nation.

The World Happiness Report ranks countries using six key factors:

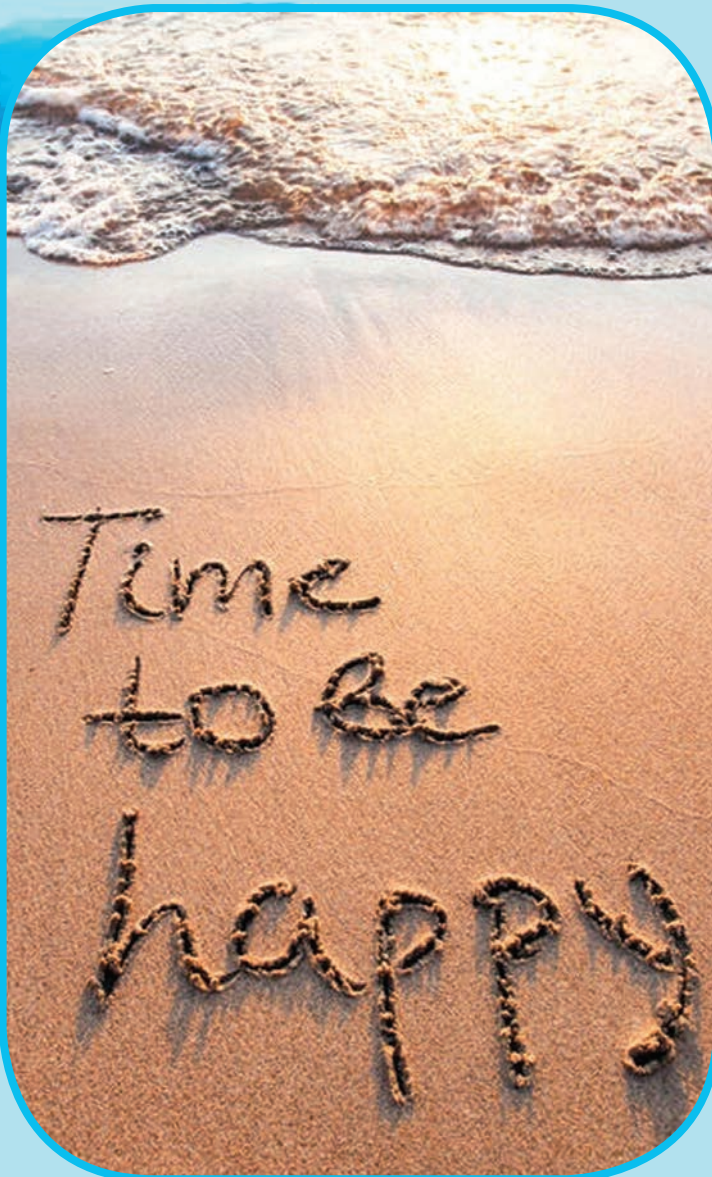
- **GDP per capita**
- **Social support**
- **Healthy life expectancy**
- **Freedom to make life choices**
- **Generosity**
- **Freedom from corruption**

These indicators are derived from Gallup World Poll data, specifically the Cantril Ladder question asking citizens to evaluate their current life.

The factors determining happiness include the following

- **GDP per Capita (Economic Strength):** Reflects the country's wealth and standard of living per person.
- **Social Support:** Measures having friends or family to count on during times of trouble.





- **Healthy Life Expectancy:** Evaluates the average number of years a person is expected to live in good health.
- **Freedom to Make Life Choices:** Assesses the individual's ability to make personal and professional decisions without fear of social constraints
- **Generosity:** Reflects how kindness and volunteering/donations act as indicators of social connection.
- **Perceptions of Corruption:** Measures trust in government and business, with higher corruption correlating to lower happiness.

The Way Forward For India

To improve its happiness index ranking, India must focus on a holistic approach that improves economic stability, mental healthcare access, social support systems and governance. Key strategies include reducing economic inequality, improving public services (health/education), curbing corruption, ensuring personal freedom to all

including marginalised sections and sexual minorities and fostering community connection to boost overall quality of life and wellbeing.

- **Economic Empowerment & Reducing Inequality:** Increasing the GDP per capita while ensuring equitable wealth distribution helps alleviate poverty and reduces stress, which are crucial for improving the happiness index.
- **Mental Health Services & Social Support:** India faces a high burden of mental health issues, with an 87% shortage of professionals. Increasing investment in mental health services, reducing stigma and fostering strong, supportive community relationships are critical to increasing social support systems.
- **Improving Public Services & Infrastructure:** Enhancing accessibility to high-quality healthcare and education is essential for long-term well-being and reducing the economic burden on households.
- **Strengthening Governance & Reducing Corruption:** Improving institutional trust and reducing corruption directly contribute to higher life satisfaction and confidence in the future.
- **Environmental Sustainability & Urban Livability:** Addressing pollution, creating safer public spaces and improving urban living conditions (reducing overcrowding) can enhance quality of life.
- **Promoting Inclusivity & Freedom:** Protecting individual freedom and encouraging social participation for women, minority groups and underprivileged communities can boost overall societal trust.

Actions to be taken at individual and community level includes:

Volunteering & Community Spirit: Fostering a culture of helping others through volunteering and strengthening neighbourhood bonds can increase feelings of fulfilment.

Work-Life Balance: Encouraging professional environments that prioritise employee wellbeing rather than just high-pressure environments, often called rat race.

Happiness may be a statistic in a report, but in our daily lives, it is the quiet confidence that we live in a society that supports us. Let us work toward an India where every citizen has the freedom to climb their own ladder to fulfilment. Ultimately, happiness is not a destination but a collective practice—one that begins with the courage to care for one another. 😊


The author is a Professor of Psychiatry, Government Medical College, Thiruvananthapuram

Is Music Bliss?



Ramesh Gopalakrishnan





**Music gives soul to the universe,
wings to the mind, flight to the
imagination, and life to everything**

– Plato

Fine arts have often been used as stimuli to bring about social change, and in this role they have played an important part in the forward journey of the human race. However, the ultimate aim of any form of art is to give joy to humans, and this principle applies to music as well. The epigraph of the article, which presents the opinion of Plato, underscores the very same idea.

Although music exists in various forms all over the world, they have been generally categorised into Eastern and Western music. While Western music is based on harmony, Eastern music, especially Indian music, is founded on melody. When chords are created by conjoining two or more notes, and sung by more than one singer or rendered by more than one instrument, harmony comes into being. On the other hand, when a singer or an instrumentalist strings together one swara (note) after another to give it a characteristic signature tune called the gamaka, it gives birth to melody. Whatever the differences, both Western and Eastern forms of music aim to give aesthetic pleasure to the listeners.

Music can be sung or played for one's own enjoyment or for giving delight to others. In the latter case, i. e., when music is meant to impart joy to an audience, rules come into play. These rules can be categorised, in simple terms, as raga (melodic mode) and tala (rhythm). When meaningful words are written and arranged to be in sync with a raga or a tala, we see the

emergence of sahitya (lyric or literature). Thus music, a magical creation of the human mind, is the fruit of the fusion of raga, tala and sahitya. All kinds of human communities, the world over, sing music that synchronises with their choices, and they derive joy from it. In a broad sense, it is an incontrovertible fact that all living beings in Nature either sing or enjoy music.

Music which is, fundamentally speaking, an auditory form of art attains perfection only with the active partnership of the singer and the listener. The imagination of the listener plays a crucial role in determining the aesthetic appeal of a song. Among all the forms of music in the world, the system of singing the ragas is unique to Indian classical music. Whereas in Hindustani music there are specific times for singing specific ragas, south Indian music does not impose such restrictions at all. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that each raga has an intrinsic ability to convey certain specific emotions very powerfully. But it takes an appropriate mental state and a rich array of life experiences of the listener for a raga to fulfill its full potential.

For instance, the Amritavarshini raga in Carnatic music evokes the experience of rain in the rasika's mind. In fact, it is said that with their renditions of that raga Muthuswami Dikshitar and Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavata have caused rain to fall. From personal experience, I can vouch that whenever I listen to M. Balamuralikrishna singing the Amritavarshini raga, I am able to vividly imagine and enjoy the sight and sounds of the dancing raindrops. So, while a lover of rain will be able to derive enjoyment from listening to the Amritavarshini raga, this may not be the experience of a person who does not like rain. This is where the sahrdaya's life experiences, imagination and subjective, aesthetic sensibility become crucial



factors in the appreciation of music.

In a similar manner, a lover of Hindustani music who loves the evening time more than the early morning hours, may show greater appreciation of the evening ragas. However, another aesthete's appreciation may be totally different because of his or her widely different mentality. So, it will not be surprising to find a Hindustani music aficionado who loves the dawn hours to lean towards the Lalith raga, and another Hindustani music lover who enjoys morning hours to favour the Bhairav raga. The reason is simple: the Lalith is a dawn-time raga whereas the Bhairav is a morning raga.

The same principle holds good in the matters related to the aesthetic appeal of each raga. After all, in films, we see the same song sung in a celebratory and a tragic situation. In some cases, among the songs sung in happy and sorrowful circumstances, the latter has greater aesthetic attractiveness. What we understand from this phenomenon is that music reaches the highest potential of evocative beauty while conveying sadness rather than joy. The different paths that humans take to experience aesthetic appreciation and to savour joy are the factors that lend depth of meaning and vastness of scope to music as an art form.

The hypothesis that music took birth when early humans sought relief from hard labour is a widely-accepted one. It may be claimed that the first musical form emerged in the history of the human race when, in the course of a day of hard labour, workers attempted to lighten their burden by chanting random musical sounds in unison and in a rhythmic pattern. For instance, in Malayalam, *ailasa ailasa ailasa* or *ohoi ohoi ohoi* are musical vocables. In its earliest form, music did not have a fixed notation. So, these were the primeval musical forms of human history

that sprouted naturally, long before linguistic scripts and musical notations were invented. What we gather from all these assumptions is that musical sounds emanated organically from humans during times of heavy work, as a means of escaping the stress that the labour put them in. Gradually, as humans evolved, they nurtured music along the path to material progress. As a result, the role of music shifted from being a mere stress-reliever to a source of enjoyment, and all the contemporary musical forms that we hear today are the result of this phenomenon. In short, as far as humans are concerned, music is fundamentally and ultimately synonymous with bliss.

As we equate music with bliss, we also need to ponder over the different ways in which humans make this possible. One, humans enjoy happiness as a temporary emotion in life. And two, due to the influence of certain factors, they may find life itself enjoyable. But since music is the subject of our discussion, let me explain the issue in connection with it. A person may enjoy happiness for some time on hearing a musical rendition or listening to someone singing a song. The lyric or the tune may temporarily transport him or her into a magical world. And as soon it ends, the *sahridaya* may descend to reality. The joy that a listener experiences while listening to music may be considered as a fleeting phenomenon. All humans on earth go through such emotions on a daily basis. To a certain extent, this gives some relief from the sorrows he or she faces in life or the stress he or she is under.

It may also happen that music, enjoyed either privately or in a group, gives a person tremendous joy. Revolutionary songs, protest songs or awareness-building songs belong to this category. Here, music becomes a tool for social change. Let me cite a couple of examples to



*Ee neela vaanangalil
thazhukiyethum ilam kaattil
kalakalam paadumee puzhakalil
visham thuppum asurare
njangal vannithaa
ee puthiya kurukshetra bhoomiyil . . .*

(Here we come
to this new field of Kurukshetra,
[to confront] demons who spit poison
in the gentle breeze
that wafts over these blue skies,
in these rivers that babble along . . .)

Written and set to music by Karivelloor Murali, this song simultaneously inspired contemplation and injected enthusiasm in the people of Kerala, thanks to the powerful ideas the lines contained as well as the scintillating score that helped convey the thoughts. By alluding to a few real-life events, it sounded a stern forewarning about the tragic results that awaited the human race if it continued to pollute the natural environment and wage wars. The relevance of this song in the present-day world, which faces a war situation, cannot be overstressed. Karivelloor Murali wrote and composed another awareness-building song, titled "Bhoomi" [The Earth], a poetic version of Karl Marx's statement that the earth is not anybody's personal property and therefore should be handed over to the next generation in a better condition than it was when we received it. The musical score, the literary beauty of the lines and the rhythm are so harmoniously mixed that the song pulls at the heart strings of the listeners. Besides, triggering joy within us, this song also inspires us to dream of an egalitarian world and join the struggle to realise the dream. And what these paths of struggle lead to is eternal joy. 😊

Ramesh Gopalakrishnan is a music critic and an author

elucidate this point. In the 1980s, an awareness-building song, popularised by the Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad [Kerala Science and Literature Movement] reverberated through the length and breadth of the state, as it was sung by members of kala jadhas [marches that blended many art forms]. This was how it began:



HAPPY ENDING



Vinod Sukumaran



Cinema—often considered a form of pop art in India, particularly the mainstream cinema - provides instantaneous pleasure for viewers, either during the process of watching it in the theatre or through a happy ending feeling at the end of the movie.



Happiness is a complex word to define aesthetically, philosophically, scientifically and psychologically. This complexity began when writers and litterateurs tried to define this human state of mind using metaphorical language, particularly in poetry and literature. This approach made the definition of 'happiness' more versatile, dynamic, wide and complex. As in literature—where each reader can find or create meaning from their own perspective, comparing it with their accumulated life experience and vocabulary - in cinema, the spectator also has the freedom to define 'happiness' according to their own visual culture, which is a key element in generating happiness when watching a film.

The narrative arc of popular cinema is constructed in a way that is similar to the stories we heard and experienced in our childhood that provided an instant pleasure at the end of the story. Even in the grown up stage, many people carry a similar mindset, that they seek instant pleasure after seeing a cinema. This is also

connected to the concept of 'reincarnation' that many mythological stories and beliefs carry in its narratives, often avoiding the concept of 'tragedy'. The concept of 'happiness' is layered in the belief of 'reincarnation' - that we will be resurrected again to fulfil our due desires. In many ways, it is reflected in Indian popular cinema.

For the Euphoria in Theatres

In India, the culture of watching cinema is also connected to traditional, religious and folk festivals in which families unite each other to share and enjoy the happiness. Even today, most big-budget films are released in alignment with such festival periods. Until the arrival and popularisation of television in India—probably until the late 1990s—for many villagers cinema was part of their festival engagements. As part of this, they would go to the cinema hall with their families simply for celebration: the joy of watching a film together that depicts - Dharma-Karma- Moksha - moral values and ethical life and ending with 'happiness'. Socially, this is again connected to the crisis that every common



man faces in life and the immediate resolution for it. They simulate their life experiences with the stories they see in cinemas and feel happy when they see an immediate solution presented for a crisis in the film's story. For them, cinema is a form of stress relief. In the darkness of the theatre, they go through several emotional journeys which they cannot get in real life: joy and laughter through physical comedy; warmth from mentally achieving dignity in an unequal world; the celebration of victory when the hero conquers the evil forces of society; and encouragement to dream against reality and so on.

To Live Vicariously

Even though the Varna system is still strongly reflected in mainstream cinema, by highlighting a happy ending at the end of the film, the common man get a feeling of overcoming difficulties and adversity, by achieving a positive and hopeful resolution. In all these, the happiness is generated in the form of transformation by following the so called 'Dharmas'! The life is analysed in a societal lawful way. The subtext of the content follows the

audience even after the end the cinema, till he gets – a self realisation- which creates happiness.

A cultural shift has occurred in the concept of 'happiness' in modern life. This is mainly due to extreme consumerism, which is strongly reflected in modern human life. Happiness becomes temporary, existing in an incomplete manner; moments of joy are unstable in modern life. Modern humans tend to follow the 'trends'—which have no philosophical soul—and this creates unhappiness. Inequality has shifted from categorising people by caste and creed to the status quo of lifestyle. The search for the 'perfect life' leads modern humans into chaos—a self-argument between their philosophical vision of life and the desire to live in a particular way. But, the same time, a philosophical shift is also happening in modern human's life. The discussion focuses more on the 'purpose of life' than on 'how to achieve material things'. Instead of waiting for destiny, earned happiness becomes a central goal in life.

To Feel Good

This cultural shift has influenced the



emergence of a new genre in cinema called feel-good films. It is a feeling created by witnessing the overall analysis of life in cinema. Modern humans have started accepting reality in a humanised form. Modern films also portray this soothing feeling, instead of the melodrama-filled older films that created artificial happiness. Even in Hollywood, creating happiness through spectacle amusement has become an artificial matter. People experience the taste of crisis in everyday life, directly or indirectly, and the content in modern cinema also focuses on crisis from a personal perspective. This is reflected even in stories about relationships, love affairs and other human existential issues connected to modern life—particularly the isolated life in metro cities.

In this genre – the feel good films - the filmmakers’ approach towards life and cinema has blurred the line between fiction and reality. Such films portray reality to a great extent, similar to the movement that happened during the Neo-Realism period. - a very realistic approach in terms of characterisation, realistic

plots and realistic stories, with characters trapped in the rigid rules of the system. A feel-good sensation emerges in the audience’s mind after they go through a series of pains experienced by the main characters and overcoming it with a resolution in the story - a self discovery that creates the feel good feeling at the end of the film.

In the current scenario, such feel-good films have a strong influence on audiences. Viewers can easily relate their own imperfections to the flaws and vulnerabilities of the characters portrayed in these films. The heart-warming content in such narratives begins to uplift audiences emotionally, creating a sense of empathy toward others who share the same world. This, in turn, influences people to share similar human stories in an empathetic way, often in the form of short reels on social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram. Instead of offering mere pleasure, these personal reels promote a deeper happiness rooted in harmony, connection and showing empathy to one’s fellow human beings. 😊

The author is an editor and filmmaker, and Dean at K. R. Narayanan National Institute of Visual Science & Arts

Twirl Your Way To Ecstasy



Radhika Radhakrishnan

Dance is not only for the body; it touches the mind and soul in a way very few things can. The experience of dancing can be profoundly cathartic for many.

Dance has always been much more than physical movement. It is one of the most powerful ways to reconnect with ourselves, experience joy and feel emotionally free. In today's fast and chaotic world, where everyone is constantly balancing responsibilities, stress and emotional pressure, dance creates a much-needed space for happiness.

I have conducted workshops for more than 250 women across Kerala and Dubai, and one thing I have noticed in almost every workshop is how emotionally powerful the experience becomes. Many women who come to these sessions once loved dancing deeply but slowly lost touch with it because of life—work, family, motherhood or simply the lack of time. The moment they start dancing again, it feels like they are reconnecting with a part of themselves they had forgotten.

This is why many of my workshops often end with an emotional breakdown—not in a negative way, but as a release. There are tears, laughter, hugs and a lot of heartfelt sharing. It comes from the joy of rediscovering something they truly loved.

A Moving Experience

Dance is not only for the body; it touches the mind and soul in a way very few things can. Once people start moving to music, they slowly enter a trance-like state where they forget their daily stress,





pain and worries. For those few minutes, they are fully present in the movement and the emotion of the dance. Sometimes they even feel like they are becoming another character through expression and storytelling, which makes the experience even more immersive.

One of the reasons dance creates so much happiness is because it requires the full involvement of the body and mind. Every part of the body participates—the eyes, hands, feet, posture, breath and expressions. This complete engagement naturally shifts our focus away from overthinking and helps us stay in the present moment. In that sense, dance creates a peaceful mental space within the chaos of everyday life.

Dance Like No One is Watching

There is also a physical reason behind the happiness we feel after dancing. Movement releases feel-good hormones like dopamine, which creates that natural emotional high and sense of satisfaction after a dance session. Many women tell me they feel lighter, calmer and happier after just one workshop.

Interestingly, the happiness often starts even before the dancing begins. The process of getting ready for dance plays a big role too. In Indian dance, we can connect this to the idea of Aharya Abhinaya, which includes costume, makeup, jewellery and overall presentation. Dressing up, wearing flowers, getting into costume and preparing

yourself mentally create excitement and boosts confidence. It adds to the joy of the entire experience.

Another beautiful part of dance workshops or dance classes is the sense of community they create. A group of like-minded women coming together to dance, laugh and sometimes cry together because of their shared love for dance is something truly special. It becomes a safe and happy space where people feel seen, understood and emotionally connected.

This shared joy is what makes dance so powerful. It is not just about learning steps. Dance is about feeling alive, expressive and connected—to yourself and to others.

I always end my workshops with one thought: art is a calling. If we make time for it and put sincere effort into it, it gives back in the most beautiful way possible. It brings joy, peace, confidence and emotional healing.

In many ways, dance really can create a little heaven on earth. 😊

The author is a classical dancer and an actor

When Happiness Happens: Exploring the Emotional Alchemy of Literature



Dr. Aparna Ajith

Literature is the extravagant manifestation of what is seen and sensed in life. Happiness remains cardinal in the literary genres, evoking a sense of contentment in the creative smithy of the readers.

Aristotle, the greatest philosopher of all time, once said, "Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence". Happiness is not something that one feels for a moment, rather it becomes the way of one's life. It is a sort of evolution shaped within oneself by the shared and collective experiences. Who does not wish to be happy in the polyglottal medley of life? Aristotelian presupposition of eudaimonia (happiness) asserts that it is not mere pleasure or material success. It is a life encircled by value, balance and ethical living. Above all, happiness offers the realisation of one's full potential as a human being, emanating a deep and lasting sense of fulfilment. The reflections or the breathing thoughts of the homo sapiens come alive in the vast expanse of literature.

Literature is the extravagant manifestation of what is seen and sensed in life. Happiness remains cardinal in the literary genres, evoking a sense of contentment in the creative smithy of the readers. Literature often mirrors the stark reality that happiness is not that easy to attain and retain forever. The definition of happiness differs from person to person. The world of poetry, fiction, non-fiction, memoir, and autobiography interprets happiness in myriad ways. Literature speaks the unspoken, providing a deeper understanding of the paths of the world. It offers a narrative cure for people pursuing a meaningful life.

Reading and writing serve as a conduit for happiness. For instance, in Mrs Dalloway, happiness appears in fleeting, everyday moments. Clarissa Dalloway experiences brief joy while walking through London, preparing for her party, and recalling memories. However, these moments are overshadowed by a sense of emptiness and existential



reflection. Woolf suggests that happiness is not permanent; it exists in fragments, often slipping away as quickly as it arrives. For Arundhati Roy, “small things” are intimate, personal moments of joy, constantly threatened by social structures such as caste, family expectations, and historical forces. John Keats experiences a moment of ecstatic escape through the nightingale’s song. Happiness fades with the return of reality here. The intense but short-lived happiness is a strong reminder of human limitations. The world of words transmutes the bibliophiles to a domain far away from the madding crowd. One tends to sit, refresh, relax and meditate in the luminous moments carved out of the real and marvellous perceptions of reality. The lurking sense of solitude comes afresh in “Daffodils”. The mighty romantic poet in William Wordsworth, charms one with the “bliss of solitude” flashing upon the “inward eye”.

Happiness takes the shape of resistance in the writings from the margins. The personal becomes the political, offering a sense of catharsis, companionship, and cognitive expansion. When Alice Walker portrays self-actualisation through her *The Colour Purple*, James Baldwin teaches authentic connection despite all heterosocial pressures. Bama’s *Karukku* brims with the joy of culture and the feeling of community. She resists the “victim” narrative

often imposed on Dalit lives by detailing the vibrancy, humour, and resilience of her village life. The phenomenal woman in Maya Angelou’s poem exhorts all black women to rise with her touching depictions in “Still I Rise”. The heard and read melodies are sweeter despite the calms and storms a character confronts in the fictitious sphere of life. The reader gets the zeal to go ahead with spectacular hopes, reclaiming the agency and waiting for the best that is yet to befall. Literature turns out to be a catalyst in this journey of joy.

Happiness comes from nature, memory, love, or even acceptance of life’s transience. It is shaped by the social and cultural expectations also. Literary outputs question these norms by presenting characters who do not conform to conventional paths. In doing so, it expands our understanding of happiness beyond societal definitions. The geography of hope imparted by the process of storytelling gives hope, the most powerful thing in the universe. A lover of literature falls for the lines of the acclaimed, influential Brazilian author Paulo Coelho, “When you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it”. That is the real alchemy of happiness gushing out of the literary horizon.

The towering existentialist in Franz Kafka has been right in stating that “a book must be the axe for the frozen sea within us. Literature does not always make one happy, but it makes one sad by breaking the ‘frozen sea’. That painful emotion awakens the self with a deeper form of understanding, happiness or peace. Literature, therefore, is an instrument of awakening. It disrupts emotional numbness, captivating readers to challenge their inner worlds. In this sense, literature does not offer happiness as escape, but as a deeper contemplation of life itself.

Happy Reading Picks

- **Joy: The Happiness That Comes from Within** -Osho
- **The Art of Happiness** -Dalai Lama
- **Walden** -Henry David Thoreau
- **Anxious People** -Fredrik Backman
- **Silas Marner** -George Eliot
- **Mrs Dalloway** -Virginia Woolf
- **The Promise of Happiness** -Sara Ahmed

Turn the Page, Find Your Smile



The author is an Assistant Professor of English at Sree Narayana College for Women, Kollam, and an author



What the Road Knows: Travel and the Happiness of Displacement



Sucheta Sankar V.

The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes. – Marcel Proust





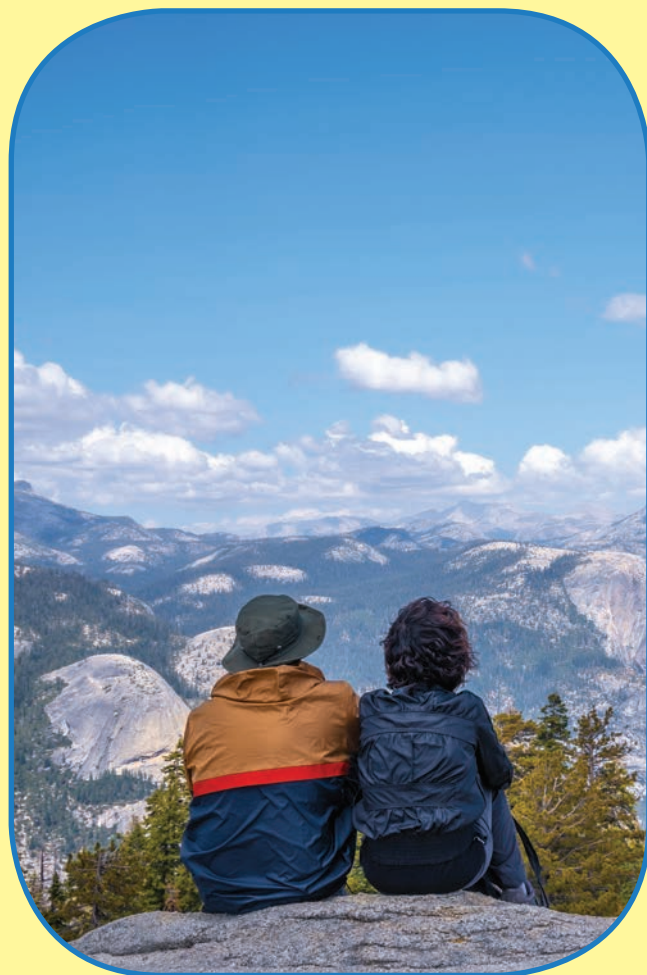
A small teashop on a hill, in between a hairpin bend and a long undulating road. The last bus back to town is late, but then the schedule might also just be a suggestion. Maybe there is no bus. So you wait on a scribbled-out wooden bench. The tea arrives in a too-hot-to-hold glass, steaming against the evening air. You wrap your fingers around it anyway because you can feel the chill of descending mist. Behind you, two men are arguing about something you cannot follow – the words are angry, quick and untranslatable. You only know what can be read from their gestures; one is exasperated, the other amused. The woman who brought out your tea is watching you from behind the counter with much curiosity, but without any self-consciousness. You are, at the moment, no one in particular. All the usual markers of self-identity – your job, your address, your routines – cannot define you here. Just a person, seeing, observing, because nothing here is rehearsed or automatic. The experience – holding onto the hot glass, listening to a strange argument, meeting the woman’s gaze, not knowing how long the bus will take – feels a lot like waking up. Travel does

The happiness at the core of travel, at its most honest, is not the hedonistic pleasure of merely ticking off a bucket list or collecting souvenirs. It is related to the Greek eudaimonia, the slow expansion of what a person is capable of feeling and knowing. Travel sets the flourishing, meaning-making self on its way.

checklist, but as a serious index of collective well-being. The gesture carries philosophical weight; it

this. Not always, not to everyone, but often to those on the road. It takes you out of everything life usually holds out to you and asks: what if you saw it differently?

Happiness, of late, has emerged as a key marker of global politics. Nations have begun measuring happiness, not as an afterthought or statistical



is an admission that the good life cannot be reduced to income, profits or any single value. But where does travel fit in this reckoning? Outside of its image as an item in the tourism industry or as leisure packaged and sold, travel makes a subtler offer; a practice that shapes how people understand themselves and the world they move through. The happiness at the core of travel, at its most honest, is not the hedonistic pleasure of merely ticking off a bucket list or collecting souvenirs. It is related to the Greek eudaimonia, the slow expansion of what a person is capable of feeling and knowing. Travel sets the flourishing, meaning-making self on its way.



The Inner Awakening

Consider the way you function within the familiar. At home, life takes on a practised, predictable quality. You know your way around the streets, your social circle, the rhythm of your day. You built this competence over a long time and it is useful in your everyday life. But it exacts a cost - you stop noticing. Travel restores your attention by displacing you. On strange coastlines, you notice how light falls differently, how people in different cities greet each other with different gestures, the passage of time in a village where no one checks a watch. You discover that your tastes,

On strange coastlines, you notice how light falls differently, how people in different cities greet each other with different gestures, the passage of time in a village where no one checks a watch.

This becomes more palpable when travel brings you into genuine contact with people whose lives are arranged

reflexes, assumptions about how life is lived, everything you thought was universal, was merely products of the bubble in which you existed. And in that discovery, you see yourself not as a fixed thing but as a person shaped by a particular place and time. And crucially, a person capable of being shaped again.

around different assumptions. Outside the organised encounters of tour itineraries, in unscripted terrain: a meal in a kind stranger's home, a festival witnessed from within the crowd rather than on the pages of a magazine, a joke shared across broken language and patient translations. These meetings cannot be packed into neatly labelled boxes because their particularity resists stereotypes. You are not meeting words about a culture, you are meeting people, and people complicate simple categories we construct for them. Which region understands this better than Kerala, with its overlapping Hindu, Muslim, Christian and indigenous communities, its centuries as a spice-trade crossroads where Arab merchants, Chinese traders and Portuguese navigators left behind grammars of coexistence? This is living proof that contact across difference, continued over ages, builds something richer and more powerful than homogeneity ever could.

Where The Crossroads Meet

But, to think about travel in these terms, a caveat is essential. Sometimes travel is not accessible to all. It is shaped by class, gender, caste, and invisible barriers erected by money and passports. Refugees, migrants and asylum-seekers have long borne the



brunt of disprivilege in a world where travel and mobility themselves are often capitalist privileges. Nor is travel universally transformative; many travellers merely conform to type, returning home with every prejudice, every entitled belief about the self, intact. But the true measure of travel that opens is not budget or distance. It is the posture and attitude of the traveller. Are you willing to be unsettled? Can you let a place in, let it work on you, rather than gliding through with a camera and a checklist? Do you have a disposition for transformation – openness, the willingness to feel foreign and, in that foreignness, a drive to find something that feels closer to you?

The bus arrives, eventually. You put down the empty glass, and nod at the woman behind the counter. It's time to step into the cool dark. The mountain is enormous above you and the road unspools downhill. By this time tomorrow, you will be home, and the teashop will become a memory you return to. But the experience is also a quiet recalibration. The next time you pour your morning tea and hold the glass, you will notice the warmth in your fingers and the steam in the air. If happiness indices seek to understand life beyond what can be counted, lay out equations for a 'good life', then travel teaches us a faintly altered way of being in the world.

Something which photos and souvenirs cannot catch. A wider eye. A lighter hold. The quiet, accumulated wealth of having been, even briefly, no one in particular, in a place that owed you nothing, and finding in that displacement something that felt, unmistakably, like joy.

Wander with Joy: Finding Happiness in Every Journey

Travel is more than just reaching a destination—it's about discovering moments that bring true happiness. Here are some useful tips for happy traveling: by embracing mindful habits, you can turn every journey into a source of joy, growth, and genuine connection.

- **Travel with Intention**
- **Pack Light, Feel Light**
- **Embrace the Present Moment**
- **Connect with People**
- **Chase Experiences, Not Perfection**
- **Explore Creativity on the Go**
- **Take Time to Slow Down**
- **Savor Local Culture**
- **Take a Digital Break**
- **Carry Gratitude with You**



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Laughter: The Key to a Happier Life

Albin Antony





Let me begin by addressing the elephant in the room: the world is not an easy place. Every single day, we are flooded with news - poverty, war(s), immigration crises, hunger, and, of course, the very straight forward topics of religion and politics (forgive my mild sarcasm). One can't help but wonder how people who invented the internet feel today. They thought they were gifting humanity the best invention in centuries, which, to be fair, they did. They genuinely believed it would connect people, help society, and make the world better. However, somewhere along the way, comment section happened. In this digital age, where it is increasingly difficult to tell what is real and what is not, it is very easy for people to spiral into a heavy mental state and ask themselves, "Why is the world so bad, and how can anyone be happy?" Very valid question indeed! Now that we have collectively agreed that the world can, at times, feel like

a rather unpleasant place, let's consider what this means at an individual level. If you are constantly weighed down by everything that is happening globally, there will be very little joy left, not just in your life, but in the lives of the people who care about you. And if joy disappears, one must ask: what is the point of living if not to experience joy?

Smiles, Laughter, and a Better You

I am a standup comedian who also works in the corporate world as a product manager. Based on my 28 years of lived experience, I cannot stress this enough: Stop taking everything so seriously!

Research across the world consistently points to one major silent killer—chronic stress. And many of us live in it every day. We are stressed because a colleague is not doing



I want you to pause for a moment and think about the last five things that stressed you out, the ones that immediately come to mind. Now think about the time you lost, the productivity that suffered, and the mental energy you spent worrying instead of actually addressing the issue.



their job properly, stressed because our partner is upset with us, stressed about our children's futures, stressed because our parents are stressed about us (strange place to be) and so on.

I want you to pause for a moment and think about the last five things that stressed you out, the ones that immediately come to mind. Now think about the time you lost, the productivity that suffered, and the mental energy you spent worrying instead of actually addressing the issue. Finally, think about how it all ended. More

often than not, you will realize that at least four out of those five things were minor issues that did not deserve the emotional weight you gave them. But if you are stressed, one of the simplest ways to reduce stress is to laugh and when you laugh, do laugh out loud! I have had a few modest achievements in my life, but if someone were to ask me when I was truly the happiest, I would take them back to very ordinary places: Christ Nagar School, Poojappura football ground, SCT College of Engineering, and my home with my family. All these memories have one thing in common - laughter. Friends and family laughing so hard that our stomachs hurt and tears rolled down our faces, completely out of control.

It is important, imperative even, that we create spaces where the people we love can come together, so more of these moments can exist.

This brings me to a question people often ask me: "What exactly is a sense of humour?"

The dictionary defines it as "a personality trait that gives someone the ability to say funny things and see the funny side of situations." My definition is simpler: a sense of humour is the ability to laugh at yourself for the foolish



things you do, especially when no one else is watching. And trust me, we all do foolish things. One interesting change I have noticed since becoming a standup comic is that I now observe my life as if I am watching a movie. I am the protagonist, and I meet many characters along the way. When I do something good, I quietly applaud myself. When I do something unnecessary or foolish, I shout at the screen. And when I make mistakes, especially funny ones, I laugh at myself.

I laugh at myself for being an ordinary, imperfect human being. And when I share these stories with friends and they laugh, I feel no embarrassment. They are no longer laughing at me; they are laughing with me. At that point, embarrassment simply disappears. This is also the point where confidence begins - confidence to share stories, to connect, and to be real with the people around you.

Some of you might be thinking, "But what if I don't have any stories to tell?"

This is where psychology comes in. Confirmation bias is our tendency to notice and remember information that supports what we already believe, while ignoring evidence that

contradicts it. If someone you trust tells you that red cars are becoming more common in your city, you will suddenly start noticing red cars everywhere, even though they were always there.

In the same way, if you believe your life is interesting, you will begin to notice moments that prove it is. You will find stories worth sharing. So seek happiness. Seek laughter. Seek the stories already unfolding around you.

And finally, what is the best kind of joke?

It is not the most complex punchline. It is not clever wordplay. It is that one simple story you share with a friend over tea in an office cafeteria or with a close friend you meet once every six months - where both of you end up laughing uncontrollably until your stomachs hurt.

Every one of us has such stories. All we need is the self awareness to notice them and the courage to share them.

Because, in the end, we are nothing more than a collection of stories in the lives of others.



The author is a stand-up comedian and a corporate employee.

THE SECRET TO JOY STARTS AT BEDTIME



Dr. Sujith Varghese Abraham



**Sleep may be one of the most underappreciated foundations of happiness.
We need to bring about a change in the way we think about sleep itself.**

In Kerala, sleep has never been seen as just a biological necessity. It finds its place in our stories, beliefs and everyday conversations—sometimes guarded by benevolent forces, sometimes feared as a vulnerable state. One of the most familiar tales from the Ramayana is that of Kumbhakarna, who set out to ask for Indrasanam (the throne of Indra) but, through a twist of fate attributed to Goddess Saraswati, ended up with Nidrasanam—eternal sleep. Even today, we use this story to gently mock missed opportunities blamed on laziness. But is sleep always the villain we make it out to be?

In reality, sleep may be one of the most underappreciated foundations of happiness. We often think of it as passive time, something expendable when life gets busy. Yet, in my clinical practice, I repeatedly see how deeply sleep shapes emotional stability and mental well-being. A good night's sleep—usually around 7 to 9 hours—helps restore the delicate balance of neurotransmitters like dopamine and serotonin, which play a key role in how we experience pleasure, motivation and calmness.

Catch Some Z's

Poor sleep has very tangible consequences. Most of us can relate to the irritability and lack of focus that follow a sleepless night. What is happening beneath the surface is a temporary imbalance between the emotional and rational parts of the brain. The amygdala, which drives our immediate emotional reactions, becomes more reactive, while the prefrontal cortex—the part that helps us think, reason and regulate those reactions—loses some of its control. The result is familiar: small inconveniences begin to feel disproportionately overwhelming.

Over time, this is not just about mood swings. Chronic sleep deprivation alters the body's stress response. Cortisol levels remain elevated, and the brain's ability to sustain positive emotional states diminishes. Patients often tell me, "I'm trying to stay positive, but I just can't." In many cases, it is not a failure of mindset—it is biology catching up.

Another subtle but important effect of poor sleep is how it blunts our ability to experience joy. Activities that would normally feel rewarding—a good meal, time with family, even a quiet moment watching a sunset—start to feel muted. It is not that life has changed, but our ability to respond to it has.

Obstructed Sleep

One condition that exemplifies this, and is often overlooked, is Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA). In today's world of late-night screens, irregular schedules and constant connectivity, sleep quality is already under strain. OSA adds another layer of disruption. Repeated pauses in breathing during sleep lead



to fragmented rest and reduced oxygen levels, often without the individual being fully aware of it.

Clinically, what we see is striking. Patients with untreated OSA frequently report persistent fatigue, irritability and low mood. Many describe a sense of being "tired but wired," unable to feel refreshed even after what seems like a full night in bed. Because deep and REM sleep are repeatedly interrupted, the brain never gets the uninterrupted time it needs to process emotional experiences and reset for the next day.

Simple symptoms—loud snoring, unrefreshing sleep, and excessive daytime sleepiness—are often dismissed. But recognizing them early can make a significant difference. A sleep study can diagnose OSA and other sleep disorders, and effective treatment often leads to noticeable improvements not just in energy levels, but in overall outlook and emotional well-being.

Sleep it off

The encouraging part is that sleep and happiness share a two-way relationship. Just as poor sleep can pull us down, improving sleep habits can create a positive upward shift. Small, consistent changes—going to bed at the same time each night, reducing screen exposure before sleep, keeping the bedroom quiet and dark and making time for regular physical activity—can have a meaningful impact.

Perhaps the biggest shift we need is in how we think about sleep itself. Too often, it is treated as something optional, something we "fit in" after everything else is done. But if there is one thing both science and experience make clear, it is this: sleep is not a luxury. It is a fundamental investment in our physical health, clarity of thought and emotional balance.

As the Dalai Lama said, "Sleep is the best meditation." In caring for our sleep, we are, in many ways, caring for our capacity to feel, to cope, and ultimately, to be happy. 😊

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Working to Live: The New Definition of Success



Sruthi A. Sreekumar

In an age defined by perpetual connectivity, blurred boundaries, and relentless ambition, the idea of work-life balance has evolved from a desirable luxury into an essential condition for human well-being. It is no longer merely about dividing hours between professional obligations and personal pursuits; it is about cultivating a harmonious rhythm that sustains both productivity and peace. The modern professional navigates a complex terrain where success is often measured in output, yet fulfillment is deeply rooted in





presence—presence with family, with self, and with life beyond deadlines. This delicate equilibrium, when achieved, becomes a powerful source of happiness, clarity, and enduring satisfaction.

At its core, work-life balance is the ability to effectively integrate professional responsibilities with personal needs, relationships, and leisure. According to global frameworks, it encompasses not just paid work, but also unpaid responsibilities such as caregiving, domestic tasks, and emotional labor.

Contrary to popular belief, balance is not a rigid 50-50 split. It is dynamic, shifting with life stages, career demands, and personal aspirations. A young professional building a career may temporarily prioritize work, while a parent or caregiver may recalibrate priorities toward family. The essence lies not in equal distribution but in intentional allocation—ensuring that no dimension of life is consistently neglected. True balance, therefore, is less about time and more about alignment: aligning actions with values, energy with purpose, and effort with meaning.

Despite widespread awareness, the global workforce continues to struggle with imbalance.

Studies reveal that while approximately 60% of workers report having a satisfactory work-life balance, a staggering 77% have experienced burnout in their current roles. This paradox underscores a critical truth: perceived balance does not always equate to sustainable well-being.

The consequences are profound. Employees working more than 55 hours per week face a 35% higher risk of stroke and a 17% increased risk of heart disease. Additionally, poor work-life balance costs organizations thousands of dollars per employee annually due to absenteeism, healthcare expenses, and attrition.

From a societal perspective, time-use studies across OECD countries indicate that full-time workers average around 14 to 16.5 hours daily on personal care and leisure—yet satisfaction with time use rarely exceeds moderate levels. These findings highlight a persistent disconnect between available time and perceived quality of life, suggesting that balance is as much psychological as it is structural.

The discourse around work-life balance is deeply



Achieving work-life balance demands both structural changes and personal discipline. At an individual level, clarity is paramount. Defining priorities—what truly matters—creates a framework for decision-making



intertwined with the rise—and gradual questioning—of hustle culture, a mindset that glorifies constant productivity, long hours, and the relentless pursuit of success. Popularized in the early 2000s and amplified by social media, hustle culture found strong resonance among millennials, many of whom entered the workforce during economic uncertainty and internalized the need to “work harder” to secure stability. In contrast, baby boomers, shaped by a more traditional work ethic, often equated long hours with loyalty and success,

viewing work as a central pillar of identity. However, emerging data suggests a significant shift with Generation Z, who increasingly prioritize mental health, flexibility, and purpose over conventional markers of success. Surveys indicate that over 70% of Gen Z professionals consider work-life balance a decisive factor in career choices, often rejecting roles that demand unsustainable workloads. Younger generations are also more vocal about burnout and more willing to set boundaries, signaling a cultural transition from endurance to equilibrium. As newer generations enter the workforce, the narrative is steadily evolving—from “living to work” toward “working to live,” redefining ambition not as constant motion, but as intentional and balanced progress.

Work-life imbalance is not merely a logistical issue; it is deeply psychological. The erosion of boundaries between work and personal life often leads to chronic stress, emotional exhaustion, and a diminished sense of identity. When professional roles dominate, individuals may begin to equate their worth with productivity, creating a fragile sense of self that fluctuates with performance.

Burnout, now recognized as a global

occupational phenomenon, is a direct consequence of this imbalance. It manifests not only as fatigue but as cynicism, detachment, and reduced efficacy. Studies across high-stress professions reveal alarming rates of burnout, with nearly half of respondents in some sectors reporting severe stress levels.

More subtly, imbalance disrupts the human need for meaning. Leisure, relationships, and introspection are not indulgences; they are essential components of psychological resilience. Without them, life becomes transactional—efficient, perhaps, but devoid of depth and joy.

While individuals are often advised to “manage their time better,” research increasingly emphasizes the role of organizations in shaping work-life balance. Workplace policies—such as flexible hours, remote work options, and adequate leave—are not perks but structural enablers of well-being.

Forward-thinking organizations recognize that balance is directly linked to productivity and retention. Studies demonstrate a strong correlation between work-life balance and employee motivation, job satisfaction, and organizational loyalty.

Innovative experiments, such as the four-day workweek, have yielded promising results globally. Large-scale trials across multiple countries report reduced burnout, improved mental health, and higher job satisfaction without compromising productivity. Ultimately, sustainable balance requires a cultural shift—from glorifying overwork to valuing well-being as a marker of success.

Achieving work-life balance demands both structural changes and personal discipline. At an individual level, clarity is paramount. Defining priorities—what truly matters—creates a framework for decision-making. Time should be allocated not merely based on urgency, but on importance.

Setting boundaries is equally critical. This includes establishing clear work hours, limiting after-hours communication, and creating physical or psychological separation between work and home. Digital detox practices, even for short durations, can significantly restore mental clarity.

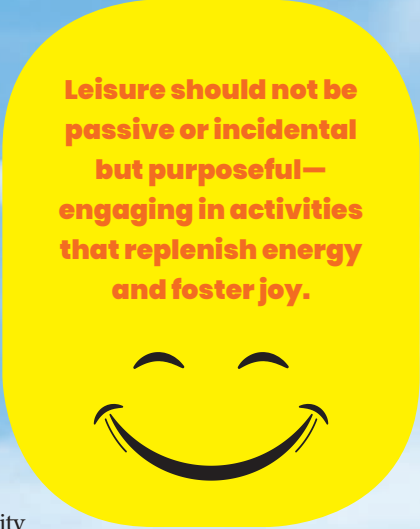
Equally important is the practice of intentional rest. Leisure should not be passive or incidental but purposeful—engaging in activities that replenish energy and foster joy. Whether through exercise, creative pursuits, or meaningful social interactions, these moments act as counterweights to professional demands.

On a systemic level, leveraging flexible work arrangements, delegating tasks, and advocating for

realistic workloads can create sustainable rhythms. Importantly, individuals must learn to resist the cultural narrative that equates busyness with importance. True productivity is not measured by hours worked, but by the quality and impact of those hours.

Technology, while a powerful enabler, has fundamentally altered the landscape of work-life balance. Remote work, digital collaboration tools, and constant connectivity have made work more accessible—but also more intrusive. The boundary between “office” and “home” has dissolved, often leading to an “always-on” culture.

Yet, technology also holds the potential to restore balance when used intentionally. Automation, asynchronous communication, and productivity tools can reduce workload and increase efficiency. The challenge lies in governance—both organizational and personal. Without clear norms, technology amplifies imbalance; with mindful use, it can become a catalyst for freedom. This duality underscores a broader truth: tools do not determine outcomes—habits do. The way individuals and organizations choose to engage with technology ultimately shapes the quality of their lives.



Work-life balance is not a destination but a continuous practice—a conscious negotiation between ambition and well-being, between striving and stillness. In a world that often rewards excess, choosing balance is an act of quiet resistance, a commitment to living not just efficiently, but meaningfully. The pursuit of balance is, at its heart, the pursuit of happiness and peace. It invites individuals to redefine success—not as relentless achievement, but as a life well-lived. A life where work is purposeful, rest is restorative, relationships are nurtured, and the self is not lost in the process.

In embracing this philosophy, we move beyond survival toward a deeper, more enduring fulfillment—one where success is not measured by how much we do, but by how fully we live.



The author is a freelance writer.



Redefining Happiness: The Generation That Speaks Up

A generation that dares to say 'I'm not okay' is already closer to being okay than those who never did.



Jomon J.

"Nee okay alle?" (Are you okay?) "Njanottum okay alleeda." (I'm not really okay).

Chances are, you've either asked this or heard it from someone close. In a world filled with curated smiles, filtered lives, and polished success stories, these words carry more weight and impact than ever; they echo what is often left unsaid.

A State That Talks, Thinks and Feels

Kerala has long been known for its high literacy rates and social awareness. Surprisingly, this also influences how mental health is recorded. According to recent surveys, 11-14% of Kerala's population experiences mental health issues, which is among the highest percentages in India. On paper, this may look concerning, but there's another way to interpret it: people here are more open to admitting that they are not okay.

Unlike previous generations, who generally hid their emotional issues, today's youth are beginning to express them. Words like anxiety, burnout, and mental health are commonly discussed and no longer whispered; they are advocated, argued, and even normalized in regular conversations.

A generation that admits, 'I'm not okay,' is already closer to being okay than those who never do.

The Pressure Beneath the Progress

Let us not simply glorify this generation, they are navigating a swift and complex reality. Today's youth face a range of challenges, including academic pressure, unemployment, migratory aspirations, and the effects of social comparison. A new youth-focused study identified lifestyle changes, technology dependency, and relationship dynamics as significant causes of mental distress.

So, the struggle is visible. Some days are quite heavy. But here's where it gets interesting: the response to this struggle is shifting.

Reclaiming Happiness and Redefining Success

Nowadays, a lot of young people think that happiness cannot be delayed. There once seemed to be a clear path: find a good job, earn a good living, and then think about contentment. However, this order is now being questioned. Unusual careers like freelancing, content creation, entrepreneurship, and creative employment are becoming more popular among young people in Kerala. It raises questions and is not always consistent (especially from well-meaning



Time to travel, engage in hobbies, work out, or just unwind without feeling bad. It is visible everywhere. There are more people in the gyms, the number of running groups is growing. Flexibility is no longer the only thing taught in yoga classes; people also need to take some time to ground yourself, breathe, and reset.

relatives). But it offers a sense of purpose in the here and now, which is something that traditional approaches often lack.

However, a lot of people still pursue traditional careers, albeit with restrictions. Work is important, but so is life. Time to travel, engage in hobbies, work out, or just unwind without feeling bad. It is visible everywhere. There are more people in the gyms, the number of running groups is growing. Flexibility is no longer the only thing taught in yoga classes; people also need to take some time to ground yourself, breathe, and reset. Often, what seems like a routine is actually a coping mechanism. Some even go so far as to move overseas for employment or education. Not only for financial gain, but also for visibility, autonomy, and a fresh start. A chance to work things out on their own terms.

Between comparison and connection

The digital world, which is constantly present and influential, comes next. Social media has created opportunities. It has created communities, normalized discussions about mental health, and provided a forum for self-expression. You believe that you are doing well, until you see someone doing better; until you begin measuring, you are content. It wears you out. This is already known to a large number of youths. This is the reason you notice minor adjustments, such as taking breaks, setting screen time limits, and unfollowing particular content. Knowingly, but not perfectly or consistently. Additionally, this awareness is a positive development.

Kerala's family structure is still significant. Expectations and comparisons are still high. Although the conversations are changing, young people are starting to express what they want, what they can manage, and what they cannot. A lot of families are paying attention, albeit slowly and occasionally grudgingly. Compared to before, there is more conversation. A new concept of happiness that is negotiated rather than imposed appears somewhere in the back-and-forth.

The Silent Pleasures That Still Matter

But the little things haven't changed. A roadside tea in the evening, an exciting match with friends, a



sudden monsoon downpour, a late-night conversation that feels like everything but doesn't go anywhere. There are still these moments. They serve as a reminder that happiness is not always the result of great achievements. Occasionally, it already exists in the everyday world.

So, are young people happier now? Not all the time, not totally. They're trying to be better, mentally and emotionally. Attempting to deal more effectively, express themselves more, create, and move forward in ways that suit them. Instead of waiting for happiness to come, they are progressively creating it along the way.

From "Njanottum okay alleda" (I'm not okay at all) to "Ellam okay aakum!" (Everything will be alright!), the journey, in many ways is about redefining happiness on one's own terms.

A roadside tea in the evening, an exciting match with friends, a sudden monsoon downpour, a late-night conversation that feels like everything but doesn't go anywhere. There are still these moments. They serve as a reminder that happiness is not always the result of great achievements



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From Screens to Smiles: Finding Joy in a Digital World

In today's interconnected world, social media has become an inseparable part of our daily lives. While it is often criticised for its negative impacts, it also holds immense potential to enhance our happiness—if used mindfully. By focusing on positivity, creativity and meaningful engagement, social media can transform into a powerful tool for emotional well-being.

Turning Likes into Light

Social media platforms provide spaces where people can connect, share and express themselves freely. For many, these platforms offer a sense of belonging—especially when real-life communication feels difficult. Through shared experiences, supportive communities and relatable content, individuals can feel understood and less alone.

Engaging in social media also allows us to celebrate small joys. Whether it is sharing achievements, appreciating art or simply enjoying humorous content, these interactions can uplift our mood and bring

moments of happiness into our routine.

Scrolling Towards Happiness

Active and meaningful engagement is the key to turning social media into a source of happiness. Instead of passively scrolling, participating in conversations, supporting others and sharing authentic thoughts can create a deeper sense of connection.

When we engage with content that inspires us—be it motivational posts, educational videos, or creative works—we not only learn but also feel encouraged

and energised. Positive engagement fosters a cycle of happiness, where giving and receiving support becomes mutually fulfilling.


Finding Joy in Creativity and Learning

One of the most enriching aspects of social media is the opportunity for creativity and learning. Platforms today offer endless possibilities to explore talents—writing, photography, music, art or even storytelling. Expressing oneself creatively can be deeply satisfying and therapeutic.

Additionally, social media has become a hub for knowledge. From educational reels to informative discussions, users can discover new ideas, skills and perspectives. Learning something new regularly can boost confidence and contribute to a sense of personal growth and happiness.

Building a Positive Online Space

Despite its benefits, social media can also expose users to negativity, comparison and misinformation. To maintain happiness, it is essential to consciously avoid these aspects. Limiting exposure to toxic content, unfollowing accounts that trigger negativity



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and setting time boundaries can significantly improve one's experience.

Comparisons, in particular, can harm self-esteem. It is important to remember that social media often showcases curated highlights rather than real life. Focusing on one's own journey instead of comparing it with others helps maintain a healthier mindset.

Practicing Mindful Social Media Habits

Mindfulness plays a crucial role in using social media positively. Being aware of how content makes us feel, choosing what we consume, and taking breaks when needed are essential habits. Setting intentions before using social media—such as learning something new or connecting with friends—can make the experience more purposeful.

Simple practices like digital detoxes, limiting screen time and prioritising real-life interactions also help in maintaining balance.

Social media, when used wisely, can be a source of happiness rather than stress. By focusing on positivity, engaging meaningfully, exploring creativity and practicing mindful habits, we can harness its benefits while avoiding its downsides. Ultimately, happiness on social media depends on how we choose to use it. With the right approach, the digital world can become a space of joy, growth and meaningful connection.



Experience Sharing



Maya Ravishankar
Content Creator

Social media helped me rediscover my dreams—to become a content creator with a voice to share my own thoughts. As we all know, it has both pros and cons. While writing this, I am reminded that some people intentionally bully others online. I have experienced this myself on one of my videos. At first, it took a toll on my mental health, but after a few hours, I realised that those comments don't define who I am—they reveal more about the people who wrote them.

Creating content on social media has been a journey of self-discovery for me. It has helped me

become more expressive, more mindful of my voice and more confident in standing by my thoughts. Over time, I have grown not just as a creator, but as a person—more responsible, more aware and undeniably bolder. Sharing my opinions has strengthened me in ways I never expected, teaching me to embrace both appreciation and criticism with resilience. I never imagined that social media could have such a meaningful and positive impact on my life. It does have two sides, but when you train your algorithm, the amount of positivity and optimism it can bring into your life is incredible.

The platform has given us a space to understand and relate to what we are going through in life, often in ways we couldn't express on our own. It has reminded me that it is okay to not be okay sometimes—that healing isn't linear, and that vulnerability is not a weakness. Through shared experiences and connections, we find comfort, clarity, and a sense of belonging. I never imagined that something like this could bring so much genuine happiness and peace into my life. Social media, when used right, helps you learn, grow, and explore more.



Let Them Feel: Nurturing Happiness in kids



Janaki Hari





Are happy children the ones who never cry? I have asked myself this more times than I can count. Because somewhere along the way, we started measuring a child's happiness by how little trouble they gave us. How easily they moved through the day. How rarely they had their tantrums and meltdowns.

It is an understandable thing to want. For any parent, teacher, or caregiver, a child in distress is not easy to sit with. We want to fix it, smooth it over, and make it stop. But the more time I have spent with children, in different roles, across different settings, the more I have come to believe that this version of happiness is selling children short. Happiness in children is not about removing discomfort. It is about helping them build the capacity to feel every emotion, recover, and stay connected to the people around them.

A child who cries is not an unhappy child, and a child who feels things deeply is not a difficult child. In fact, when a child feels free

enough to fall apart in front of you, it is often a sign that something is going right and that they feel safe enough to be exactly where they are. And that kind of safety, unglamorous as it sounds, is where real happiness begins. Children feel everything. Joy, excitement, frustration, jealousy, fear and sometimes all within the same afternoon. These emotions are not problems to be managed. They are part of what it means to be human, and children are no exception to that.

Lead by Example

What actually shapes a child's inner world is not whether they feel hard things, but what happens around them when they do. Is there someone who stays with them? Without flinching or rushing them along? Someone who helps them make sense of what they are feeling? That is where emotional intelligence begins. It is not through worksheets or instructions or structured lessons, but through the lived experience of being understood. When a child is upset and the adult



A truly happy child is not one who never cries. It's one who knows they will never have to face those feelings alone.



beside them doesn't panic or dismiss, distract or lecture, but simply stays present, something shifts. The child starts to learn

that feelings are survivable and it's okay. That they can move through something hard and come out the other side. That they are not alone in it.

This is what emotional safety really looks like. It isn't a technique or a programme. It is the feeling a child carries inside them with confidence that says,

I can be myself here. I don't have to hide what I feel to be accepted. I don't have to be easier than I am to be loved. It is built slowly, through repeated moments of connection that may not look significant from the outside but leave a deep impression on the inside.

And honestly, this is where the harder conversation begins. Because nurturing that kind of safety asks something real from us as adults.

It is not meant to be perfect; none of us manage that, but a certain level of awareness. The ability to notice what is happening within ourselves before we respond to what is happening in the child. To recognise when we are overwhelmed, stretched thin, or carrying something heavy of our own, and to try not to let that spill onto them without realising it. Children don't just listen to us. They feel us. A regulated, grounded adult, even if it is an imperfect one, creates space around a distressed child that no amount of instruction can replicate. When we are able to stay steady in the middle of a child's storm, they begin to settle because they borrowed something from our calm and not because we told them to do so. This is co-regulation, and it happens long before a child develops the ability to manage their own emotions independently.

Be the Rock

Before children can regulate themselves, they need to experience what regulation feels like with someone else. A child in distress isn't looking to be corrected first. They are looking to be met with a steady voice, a patient presence, the sense that



what they are feeling isn't too much to handle. Over time, those experiences become part of them. What starts as leaning on someone else slowly becomes an internal capacity of their own. That's where resilience takes root. So a happy child isn't a child without problems. Every child will face disappointment, confusion, loss, and conflict; that's not a failure of parenting or care, it's just childhood. But a child whose happiness has been genuinely nurtured is one who feels held even through those moments. And who knows, somewhere beneath the surface, that they can fall apart and still be okay? That there is someone they can return to. That knowing changes things. It shapes how they see themselves, how they treat others, and how willing they are to try again after something goes wrong.

For those of us who care for children, as parents, grandparents, teachers, counsellors, or simply the adults who show up for them, this shifts what our role looks like. It becomes less about keeping children happy and more about staying connected to them even when they are not. Sometimes that is sitting beside a child

who is crying without trying to make it stop. Sometimes it is listening to a story at the end of a day when we have very little energy left to give. Sometimes it is just pausing before we react and respond by taking a breath, choosing presence over reaction. These moments are really small, but they add up to something that lasts a lifetime. Because happiness isn't something we give children by making life smooth and uncomplicated. It is something we help them build through safety, through connection, through the simple but profound act of staying. A truly happy child is not one who never cries. It's one who knows they will never have to face those feelings alone.

Happiness isn't something we give children by making life smooth and uncomplicated. It is something we help them build through safety, through connection, through the simple but profound act of staying.

The author is a speech-language pathologist, parent educator, and storyteller.

Never too old to be Happy



Lakshmi Mohan

How to be happy is a latent question that persists with us throughout our lifetime. It grows like a crawling plant out of the mind as we move forward in life, sprouting new leaves and vines that wind around us. By the time you are old enough to realise that time is not a sense of space but a black hole that sucks in all the experiences of the past, leaving only a few behind, the remains that hold on by feeble threads, you will find yourself clinging to old memories rather than creating new ones, both happy and sad. You might find it surprising that you will want the saddest memories to stay just as much as the happiest ones.

Chances are, you might get lost in the deep whirls of the saddest ones. To avoid this, you will have to find your people, or be with the ones you already have, engaging with them, trying to understand and adapt to the separate lives they have. Your activities merge, and you will find the joy of doing something just for the sake of it. You will have activities of your own, your paintings, your crochet, your special dishes that the whole family talks about, the sports team you look forward to winning, riding your first and favourite scooter that has been with you through different stages of life.

And there, you realise that these experiences and memories should be preserved. So you start to find a way. You end up with the idea of sharing. You teach your grandchildren to draw, you pass on your special recipe to the relative who visits only on occasions, you give away your vehicle to your son, asking him to modify it however he wants, or showing around the photograph of an old lover that you have been keeping to yourself. Just like that, you get to see your memories becoming tangible and materialised. You see ownership shift, the sole keeper of your memories is no longer just you, but another person or even a whole group of people.

Sharing can feel final, but it is often a beginning, a defence you build around the black hole that is time. It buys you time in a world where you want to belong. The question of what will remain fades away.

Disrupt the Normal

But the answer to how to be happy is what remains. There is no perfect answer. One day, you visit a library where you are greeted by a librarian who suggests a boring history book or an autobiography of someone they think you should





have been. Instead, you skip to the manga section and read it right there in the library, not that you cannot do that, but you are not expected to. There, you realise that a form of happiness lies in finding ways to be yourself in spaces that demand you be something else.

Giving in is another form. Giving in to a new world, new ideas and technologies that scare or repel you, a new dress that intimidates you, once you try to understand it, you may see that it fits you well enough to belong. And you belong. And you will be surprised as much as the others.

And when the world around you gets smaller, step out of it. Get out of the room, the house, the circle you are in, and just walk. Walk to the beach or take a stroll through the widest roads in your town. Watch the stars in the vast sky. Observe the vehicles that rush past. Count the boats in the sea. And you will see that you are not alone.

Happiness is, in large part, knowing that you are not alone, that you have someone. A friend, a family member who gets your jokes, a neighbour who helps you with groceries, a passerby who keeps

you updated, a barista who remembers your order, a stranger who smiles. Smile back, or smile first.

Laugh. Laugh out loud at your own joke, however bad it is, and people will laugh with you. Laughter is a glue that binds us together, a bond that is fragile enough to let us remain free.

Hold on to that one belief of yours that has brought you this far, safe and steady. A belief that is harmless, formless, and hopeful. Hold on to that hope. It may be hope for a better future, for a world with more trees, or for your best friend to be cured of their illness.

However small it feels, however heavy it gets, hold on.

**Giving
in to a new
world, new ideas and
technologies. And you will
be surprised to see that you
belong.**



The author is a freelance writer.

Happiness, As it is Lived



Jeesa Chennattussery

Happiness is often spoken of as a common human pursuit, yet its meaning remains deeply personal and shaped by individual experience. It is influenced by one's profession, emotional awareness, and the values carried into everyday life. For some, it is closely tied to achievement and visible outcomes. For others, it is found in consistency, relationships, and a quiet sense of purpose. More often, it does not arise from ideal circumstances, but from the way people engage with what is in front of them.

There are also periods in life that are defined less by comfort and more by the effort to keep going. In such phases, happiness does not disappear, but takes on a subtler form. It can be found in the ability to continue despite uncertainty, in the presence of support, or in small moments of progress. In these situations, happiness is not the absence of difficulty, but the presence of strength.

Jyothis Elsa Jose, representing both youth and the teaching profession, finds happiness within daily interactions. "For me, happiness is in the small moments, when someone understands something, when a conversation feels genuine, or when I learn something new myself. It is not separate from my routine; it exists within it." Her



Jyothis Elsa Jose





perspective reflects how meaning builds through continuity and connection.

Preethi Philip, a teacher from St. George Higher Secondary School, Muttar, views happiness in relation to life's challenges. "Happiness is not the absence of problems, but the ability to deal with them. It is this motto that I follow in life. The meanderings I take through life's absolute chaos, along with the simple smiles I radiate to others, are all the happiness I can dream of." Her words place happiness within acceptance and the quiet strength of how one responds to circumstances.

Dr. Lydia Sara Mathew, a dentist, understands happiness through care

and trust. "Every patient who comes in carries more than just a dental issue. There is fear, hesitation, sometimes even past experiences. My happiness is not just in completing the treatment, but in seeing that fear slowly reduce. When someone who was anxious begins to feel comfortable,

that change stays with me. It reminds me that what I do goes beyond the technical part." Her reflection points to a professional space where empathy and responsibility hold as much value as skill.

Jisha Susan, an LLB student, relates happiness to clarity and confidence. "It is not just about results or winning. It is about knowing what you are saying and why you believe it. That clarity gives confidence, and that itself feels like happiness." Her reflection speaks to a stage where identity is shaped through thought and conviction.

Dr. Jincy, an agricultural researcher, speaks of happiness as something that develops through patience and process. "Happiness in research does not always come from immediate results, but from the process of seeking answers. Working in agriculture has taught me patience because growth itself takes time. There is a sense of fulfilment in



Preethi Philip



Dr Lydia Sara Mathew



knowing that even small findings can contribute to something larger, whether it is improving livelihoods or supporting sustainable practices. For me, happiness lies in this continuity of learning, observing, and contributing, even when the outcomes are not immediately visible.” Her perspective reflects a long view where meaning is built over time.



Dr. Jincy

Jes, a postgraduate student, describes a phase marked by expectation and uncertainty. “There is always something to think about, future, responsibilities, and expectations. Happiness is not always clear, but I find it in small progress. Completing something, understanding something new or simply moving forward makes a difference.” This captures the quiet satisfaction found in movement rather than arrival.

Dayana, a psychologist, approaches happiness through emotional awareness. “Happiness is not about feeling positive all the time. It is about

understanding what you feel and being able to manage it. When emotions do not overwhelm you, and you are able to stay balanced, that itself brings a sense of stability.” Her words shift the focus inward, toward balance and self understanding.

Sleevy George, a musician, experiences happiness through creative immersion. “When I am with music, I am fully present. There are moments where nothing else occupies my mind. That connection between what I feel and what I create is where I feel most like myself.” Her reflection brings out the depth of being fully absorbed in an act of creation.

Gautham Vincent, a music director, extends this understanding of creativity. “For me, happiness lies in the process of composition and the response it evokes. A piece of music begins as an idea, develops through structure and emotion, and finds its meaning when it reaches the audience. The most fulfilling moment comes when people



Gautham Vincent



share their interpretations or responses, whether after listening to a composition or following a performance. Those responses give the work a sense of completion and relevance, making the entire process meaningful.” His perspective brings attention to the relationship between creation and reception, where meaning is completed through shared experience.

As a PR coordinator within an institution, for me, happiness is closely connected to the act of bringing ideas into form. It begins with a concept and grows through planning, coordination, and collaboration. Much of the work remains behind the scenes, requiring constant communication and careful attention. The sense of satisfaction lies not only in the final outcome, but in the process of shaping something cohesive and meaningful from multiple moving parts.

At the same time, happiness in personal life takes a simpler and more direct form. It exists in moments where there is no role to perform, in conversations that unfold without effort, and in the comfort of familiar relationships. These moments offer space to pause and step away from structured responsibilities.

Personal happiness often rests in these everyday experiences. It is present in routine, in shared time with others, and in the ability to slow down. Such moments create a sense of belonging and stability, reminding us that happiness is not always something to be pursued, but something

that quietly exists within lived experience.

Across these voices, happiness emerges not as a fixed idea but as something shaped by context, responsibility, and personal understanding. It is seen in care, in resilience, in learning, in emotional balance, and in the act of creating and connecting. What stands out is not a single definition, but a shared sense that happiness is closely tied to involvement in one’s own life. It grows in moments where there is meaning, whether through work, relationships, or personal progress.

Happiness, in this sense, does not demand perfection or certainty. It takes form in movement, in effort, and in the ability to remain present through change. Happiness is not something distant to be reached, but something that continues to take shape within the way life is lived.



Dayana



The author is a PR Coordinator at NHS Bahrain

Decoding Happiness: Lessons from Finland



L.R. Madhujan

The core secret behind the happiness of the Finnish people lies in their unique life philosophy known as Sisu.

As the World Happiness Report continues to gauge the well-being of nations across the globe, Finland once again emerges at the pinnacle, maintaining its consistent first-place ranking. This nation stands as a profound testament to how a governance model that prioritises the human psyche and social security over mere economic growth can cultivate a truly joyful populace. Finland effectively demonstrates that happiness is not a commodity to be bought with wealth alone.

Researchers primarily consider six key variables when measuring this state of being:

- The certainty that there will be someone to lean on during difficult times
- Access to superior healthcare and a pristine living environment
- The fundamental right to make personal life choices
- A pervasive spirit of generosity toward others
- A deep-seated trust in the government and public institutions, characterised by near-zero levels of corruption
- A baseline of financial security

Where Happiness is Inner Strength

The core secret behind the happiness of the Finnish people lies in their unique life philosophy known as 'Sisu'. This represents an extraordinary mental resilience and the innate ability to face adversities without fear. Whether enduring the harsh, dark winters or confronting personal setbacks, they meet challenges with an indomitable fighting spirit, which in turn fosters a sense of profound self-confidence and contentment. Furthermore, Finland boasts one of the world's finest education systems, where children are nurtured without the pressure of heavy homework or frequent examinations. By emphasising learning through play and direct experience, the system builds immense mental strength in the younger generation.



How To Boost Your Happiness Hormones

Dopamine



The Reward Chemical

1. Eating Food
2. Achieving a Goal
3. Complete a Task
4. Self Care Activities

Oxytocin



The Love Hormone

1. Socializing
2. Physical Touch
3. Petting Animals
4. Helping Others

Endorphin



The Pain Killer

1. Exercising
2. Listening to Music
3. Watch a Movie
4. Laughter

Serotonin



The Mood Stabilizers

1. Sun Exposure
2. Mindfulness
3. Be With Nature
4. Meditation

In Perfect Harmony

The social fabric is further strengthened by a culture that values family bonds; it is common for mothers to return to their careers after maternity leave while fathers take the lead in childcare at home. This deep connection extends to the environment as well. Under the legal principle of 'Everyman's Right,' citizens enjoy the freedom to wander through forests and along lake shores at will. Ranking among the world's best for air and water quality, Finland's intimate relationship with nature serves as a natural catalyst for reducing mental stress. Safety also plays a critical role, as Finland remains one of the world's safest nations. Their justice system prioritises the rehabilitation and dignified reintegration of offenders over mere punishment, a strategy so

sisu
[Finnish] • noun

A special strength and determination to continue on in moments of adversity; having grit, bravery, and resilience; refusing to give up.

successful that many prisons in the country are now being phased out.

In stark contrast, the 2024 report ranks India 126th out of 143 countries, placing it behind even its neighbours like Pakistan and Libya. This lower standing points toward a significant lack of social support and growing challenges within the mental health sector.

The Science behind Happiness

From a neurological perspective, happiness is an intricate coordination of complex chemical reactions and neural networks within the human brain. Neuroscience identifies the primary 'seat' of happiness within the limbic system and its associated reward pathways. When we achieve a goal or spend time with loved ones, the Ventral Tegmental Area (VTA) and the Nucleus Accumbens release dopamine, triggering instant satisfaction and excitement. Additionally, the prefrontal cortex at the front of the brain helps us analyse these emotions and plan for long-term fulfilment.

Happiness, however, is not

Finland teaches us that happiness is not a final destination but a continuous journey.

merely a fleeting sensation but a precise equilibrium of 'happy hormones' including serotonin, oxytocin and endorphins. While serotonin stabilises our overall mood, oxytocin strengthens our bonds of love and trust with others. Endorphins work to alleviate pain and provide a sense of vigour following physical exertion.

While the amygdala manages fear and anxiety, the scientific essence of happiness lies in the brain's ability to override these with positive thoughts. By maintaining a healthy work-life balance, the Finnish people effectively lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol, allowing positive neurons to thrive. Ultimately, Finland teaches us that happiness is not a final destination but a continuous journey—one that can only be realised when economic progress is harmonised with social justice and individual freedom



The author is the Director of Psychopark, Thiruvananthapuram

Being Present, Being Contented



Navami Shajehan

A Malayali's 18-Year Journey into the Heart of Finnish Happiness



Even in the city, the "Nordic walk" is non-negotiable. Whether it is the cleanest air in the world or the fact that I can drink high-quality water straight from any tap, there is a profound sense of security in the environment itself.

A Society of Equals

What strikes me most after nearly two decades is the lack of hierarchy. In the office, there are no "Sirs" or "Madams." This transparency extends to every corner of life:

- **Education:** Children start school at age 7. Before then, the curriculum is playtime. There is no competition, no ranking, and no pressure to choose a white-collar career.
- **Work-Life Balance:** A one-month vacation is compulsory. When the clock hits 5:00 PM, the office is empty. Work stays at work.
- **Gender Equality:** Women are fiercely independent. In the cabinet and in the home, leadership is shared. Fathers also take career breaks to raise kids, financially supported by the state.

There is a civic sense here that I haven't found anywhere else. People abide by traffic rules, waste management is a science, and economic disparity is minimal.

So, is it happiness? I prefer to call it contentment.

It is the peace of knowing your child will get a world-class education regardless of your income. It is the trust that your government works for you. It is the 5:00 PM salad dinner, the seven cups of coffee a day, and the quiet satisfaction of living in the moment.

Finland has taught me that happiness isn't about the highs; it's about the absence of the lows. It's about a life where you are free to be exactly who you are.

The author is an IT engineer in Finland.

After 18 years in Finland, the question I get most often from friends back home is: "Is Finland really the happiest country in the world?" As a migrant who has built a life here, my answer is always more nuanced than a simple "yes." If you are looking for exuberant, dancing-in-the-streets joy, you won't find it here. Finnish people are introverted, often keeping to themselves. In the depths of winter, where the sun barely skims the horizon, the silence can feel like a heavy blanket.

Yet, as of 2026, Finland has once again secured its spot at the top of the World Happiness Report. To understand why, you have to look past the surface and see that in Finland, happiness isn't an emotion—it's a system.

The Geography of Contentment

The Finnish soul is inseparable from its landscape. Roughly 70% of the nation is forest, and that connection to nature is the ultimate stress reliever. Here, peace is a priority. Most of my colleagues spend their summers at lakeside cottages, stripping away the complexities of modern life for the simplicity of the Sauna. It isn't just a tradition; it is a spiritual reset.

A lush tropical river scene with a boat and people. The river is narrow and surrounded by dense greenery, including palm trees and other tropical plants. The water is calm and reflects the surrounding foliage. In the foreground, a small wooden boat is on the water. Three people are in the boat: a man in a blue shirt and a woman in a black top are in the front, and a man in a light blue shirt is in the back, holding a long pole. The scene is bathed in soft, golden light, suggesting a sunrise or sunset. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and serene.

Travel *for* Peace

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