

# HAPPINESS, HOPE AND HUMANITY

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Happiness, well being and 'good time' hold different meanings for different people\_\_ which are achieved or earned by various ways. For children - is balloons, toys and chocolates; for young people - it lies in having a big house, a car and the modern gadgets. A middle class family's concept of success & pleasure believes in seeing one's children going ahead of them in the race of life.

The fact is, we define enjoyment & happiness in our own individual ways. Not only this, ways of seeking pleasure has also been changing throughout all ages & eras. If things related to parents and siblings provide enjoyment in childhood, the very person finds his/her priorities change with time. At times, it is related with teachers, friends and others. But I have chosen to speak about the beautiful bonding of happiness & Literature.

The triangle of human being, happiness and literature is as old as the very fount of human life itself. There have been times when literature was in the form of epics and folk songs. The poor and prosperous, all had their share of literary sojourns. If epic resonated in castles, huts and hamlets danced to ballads. Slaves carrying heavy weights of borrowed lives, fishermen rowing their boats, lovers pining for a sight of each other, soldiers marching ahead to meet their unknown fate, a woman savouring pleasures of domestic peace with children and husband- all owe their expression of feelings either to songs or stories in varied forms. – Leo Tolstoy commented rightly that "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way", (*Anna Karenina*, ) and literature has space for all of them. Thus, literature has been the vessel of human expression- his/ her happiness, sorrows, anxiety, dilemma, elation- all.

Today, as the world is shrinking closer, becoming a global village from that of an unknown wide world- things have changed tremendously. Perhaps, there's a far greater need of well being and happiness in our lives today. Although, one gets true happiness, attains a sense of well being in different ways; my personal experience has made me realize that literature is the only haven which enriches one with the inner joy along with letting others share the pleasure and peace embodied in it- encouraging and embracing all. The **present paper** is an effort to look upon human wellbeing from the perspective of literature; how reading can act as a healing factor for us. For, literature proves to be a ray of light when darkness is all around, a window to elevate one of everyday stress and melancholy. It is the individual/unique way to see life in a new way, to find love for life in uncountable manners. As human civilization moved towards better changes, we learned to draw & write, language took a proper form and it strengthened literature to grow and get enriched. The process was slow but steady. Today, we can't imagine spending a day

without indulging in a score of sms writing! It punctuates our very fabric of life in an inherent manner.

Literature not only pleases the heart rather, it reinvigorates the soul of a person by letting it soar and grow in new climes of thoughts & feelings. In the past, when Aristotle gave the theory of Catharsis in Greece, about the same time, our own nation India was also being enlightened by Bharat Muni's theories of Natya Shastra in Sanskrit, in which he propounded nine types of *Rasa's/related to Art & Literature*\_\_ *Shringar Rasa, Veer Rasa, Adbhut Rasa, shant Rasa, vatsalya Rasa, Bhakti Rasa & Hasya Rasa* unlike Aristotle's concept related to Tragedy & Epic, Bharat Muni's idea of Hasya Rasa for humour & entertainment through comedy sounds better which hints towards health & happiness. He emphasized how comedy can enrich any literary creation by influencing the readers' mind & heart by entertaining & blessing them with a sense of happy satisfaction.

The term Catharsis, borrowed from Greek, stands for an emotional discharge through which one can achieve a state of moral or spiritual renewal or achieve a state of liberation from anxiety and stress. In literature it is used for the cleansing of emotions of the characters. It can also be any other radical change that leads to emotional rejuvenation of a person. But as every experience affects human life in some way, we literature lovers believe that Catharsis has an effect upon the readers also along with the characters involved. Originally, the term was used as a metaphor in *Poetics* by Aristotle to explain the impact of tragedy on the audiences. He believed that catharsis was the ultimate end of a tragic artistic work and it marked its quality. He further said in *Poetics*:

"Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; . . . through pity [eleos] and fear [phobos] effecting the proper purgation [catharsis] of these emotions" (Aristotle,).

Thus, it is the purification and purgation of emotions— especially pity and fear—through art or any extreme change in emotion that results in renewal and restoration. Although in works prior to *Poetics*, Aristotle had used the term *catharsis* purely in its medical sense. Here, however, he employs it as a medical metaphor. F. L. Lucas maintains, therefore, that *purification* and *cleansing* are not proper translations for *catharsis*; that it should rather be rendered as *purgation*. "It is the human soul that is purged of its excessive passions". Some translate *catharsis* as a purification, an experience that brings pity and fear into their proper balance: "In real life," he explained, "men are sometimes too much addicted to pity or fear, sometimes too little; tragedy brings them back to a virtuous and happy mean" (Lessing). Tragedy is then a corrective; through watching tragedy, the audience learns how to feel these emotions at proper levels. The most recent interpretation of the term catharsis is "intellectual

clarification”, referring to catharsis as an emotional release with an effect upon the thinking pattern. According to Psychoanalytic Theory, this emotional release is linked to a need to release unconscious conflicts. For example, experiencing stress over a work-related situation may cause feelings of frustration and tension. Rather than vent these feelings inappropriately, the individual may instead release these feelings in another way, such as through physical activity or another stress relieving activity. Literature also provides a vicarious exposure to situation least thought of at times, but it is sure to have an effect upon the readers’ persona. No doubt, deep reading is a vigorous exercise from the brain and increases our real-life capacity for empathy. Thus, it gives us the opportunity to see and feel life through others’ lives captured in writings. That’s why George R.R. Martin says that “We look up at the same stars, and see such different things.” – (Martin,). A book is no less than the firmament above offering such myriad expressions, distant yet closer than the eye in so many ways!

Abraham H. Maslow the Psychologist has given a very comprehensive analysis of human needs and how their fulfillment makes us different from other living beings. Beginning with physical needs like breathing, water, sex, sleep, homeostasis, excretion; he discusses the need of Safety regarding security of body, employment, resources, morality, the family, health, property; Love/belonging which finds contentment in friendship, family, sexual intimacy. Then he analyses how self-esteem, confidence, achievement, respect of others, respect by others is equally important in life. But the highest ladder of his classification puts Self-actualization as the goal which is received in matters of morality, creativity, spontaneity, problem solving, lack of prejudice and acceptance of facts. Thus self actualization is closest process of achieving humanness or humanity in which creativity and acceptance of facts are essential stages. Poetry, composition and writing are thankfully still taken as the best of human creations. Thus, Matthew Arnold and other lovers of literature are fitting examples of Maslow theory that Art is capable of creating a liberal culture which can cure the society of philistinism, baseness and meanness. He believed literature contains ‘the best of human thought’, capable of rejuvenating the ossified religious practices, to make humans live again a life which is more enjoyable than that of angels perhaps!

Although what I believe is that we study/read Literature not only for enjoyment and for its fun factor, but also for the aesthetic sense which it energizes. Literature nourishes us, nurtures us, provides us a positive growth. Simultaneously, it rewards with grooming of our personality like none other. Human being is ever a traveler between positive & negative Literature guides us towards good & nobility. Although all must have aspired & dreamed of becoming Snow White & Cinderella, or the prince who saves the damsel in distress, but none must have ever preferred becoming a cruel mother, a fearsome Queen or a desperately bitter magician controlling the evil black power! That makes it obvious that since childhood we are directed towards positive thinking and development. Good characters guide us towards virtue & goodness naturally. Such writings also remind us that all of us

grown-ups were once children and mourns Antoine de Saint-Exupéry that “...only few of us remember it” (Saint-Exupéry,)

We can correct our mistakes & misconceptions by reading *Macbeth & Othello* like why we shouldn’t be over ambitions like Macbeth or blindly credulous like Othello, or how we can’t take relationships lightly and break it just on the basis of doubt & suspicion. But we do learn the value of determination and how to live with it. Othello does teach us how to love like a die-hard lover as he did to Desdemona.

If we want to live a high life in the sense of thought & ideas, then we can’t forget Sheikh Saadi’s *Gulistan & Bostan* & nothing can guide us better as these priceless treasures of wisdom have that spark to guide like a saint. In which, every word of Saadi has the power and knowledge to teach the readers how to live a full and satisfying life with nobility.

If you have read O’Henry’s *The Last Leaf*, doesn’t it make you live more energetically, giving live more than you have. It provides strength to the flickering flame of faith and hope in every heart as if the darkness and depression surrounding us part way for more life & more light.

Doesn’t Faiz Ahmad Faiz fills one’s hear with so much love, hope and wellbeing that one feels like soaring up, up and talk to the moon as he does in *Zindan Naama*, sitting in prison, missing his family yet taking the challenge of keeping his spirits high to welcome the prospective days of reunion and happiest togetherness.

“Lekin ab zulm ki miyaad ke din thode hain  
Ik zara sabr, ki faryad ke din thode hain  
Ajnabi hathon ka be-naam, granbaar sitam  
Aaj sehna ha, hamesha to nahin sehna hai!” (*Naqsh-e faryadi*, 60).

“yahi taariki to hai ghaazae-rukhsaar-e-sehar  
Subah hone hi ko hai ae dil-e- betaab thhehar” (*Daste Saba*, 10).

“Bahut siyaah hai ye raat lekin  
Issi siyahi mein runuma hai  
Wo nehre khoon jo meri sadaa hai...  
Wo mauje-zar jo teri nazar hai.  
“yahin peg hum ke shraar khil kar  
Shafaq ka gulzaar ban gaye hain...  
Ye gham jo iss raat ne diya hai  
Ye gham sehar ka yaqeen bana hai” (*Zindan Naama*, 64-66).

I have called Literature the key to happiness because this is Literature only which introduces us to the beauty of life. It induces us with human grace, the balance in relations, respect for values, relation with society and the security provided by human bonding: thus it inspires us towards good always in so many ways. Simultaneously it encourages us to continue on it always. Literature decides our targets and rewards us with aims. It rewards us with far sightedness & prognosis. It is quite a common knowledge that doctors & psychiatrists both advise pregnant women to listen to soothing music and read good Literature so that they might have a positive effect on the baby. While comedy, satire & pun makes us forget sorrows,

autobiographies motivate us to work hard, think different and make us believe how we can also do wonders without being extra-ordinary. It shows us the way of upliftment. Creation of Literature always helps us to find, and discover oneself. A writer and a poet, both help us to reflect upon our self, introspect and know oneself. As Shakespeare says "This above all; to thine own self - be true". What Socrates believed that know thyself to know the world! And what does our very Iqbal say? Khud - aagahi as the key to life! One writer or poet composes and so many of us are benefitted by it. We all are given the sensibility to decipher between good & bad with the light lent by Literature. In fact, perfect Literature is like the touchstone which blesses the readers with a value more valuable than gold.

In the present era, when true love is a distant dream, and when we are besotted with so many difficulties every moment of our life- when a citizen of the world, any part of it is trapped in a web of thorns in so many ways- it is Lit which reminds us of the pleasure of love & affection, passion & romance! So that, we can get strength by it- it might not protect us from the miseries but it does help to endure their sting. In a situation like this, a reading of *The Last Ride Together* by Robert Browning instantly infuses one with the abundance of love & passions we all are capable of. Be it the biography of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan *Hayaat-e Javaid* or James Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson*- they reveal the mysteries & secrets of a wise life in every age to every reader. Be it the poetry of Meer or Satires of Putras- I have seen my father and grandfather relishing these precious writings as much as my niece, a student of Computer Engineering gushes over them today.

If anyone wants to see how a water drop turns to a pearl-reading of Lit is must for seeing this magic of art! Maulana Rumi's *Masnavis*, Umar Khaiyyam's *Rubaiyat*, Ghazals by Saadi, Hafiz, Meer & Ghalib, the pun & humour packed Satires of Patras Bukhari, Ibn-e Insha & Mushtaq Ahmad Yusufi, poems by Nazeer, Iqbal, Faiz & Fahmida Riyaz, fictions of Ismat, Manto, Bedi, Qurraatul Ain Hyder, Syed Mohd. Ashraf & Zahida Hina- they all have the magical powers of the mystical orb or Jaame Jam on creativity. These immortal souls have the potential to create that particular ray of light which dispels the heavy clouds of debt and despondency- they all make us the beauty of a rainbow present in our daily life which most of the times, we miss. Let's enjoy this couplet of Hafiz:

*"Har ghuncha ke gulgashat digar ghuncha na gardad  
qurbaan lab-e- yaar gahe, ghuncha gahe gull!"*

Arabic poetry represents some finest examples of poetic cleavage, pleasure-kleptomania, Peans of love and Maslovian humanist self actualization. Here the love and longing is both Eros and Agapic.

Avicenna (c.980-1037), characterizes the Arabic poetry as emotive and subjective wherein the end is basically pleasure. Avicenna's view is usually seen in backdrop of the Aristotelian Poetics invading the Arab poetic lyceum after

Abu Bishr Matta ibn Yunis (c.950-1009) translated Poetica into Arabic.

For the Pre-Islamic Tarafa Ibn Al-Abd (c.543-459), in a finer piece of poetic cleavage, life is least to be longed for in absence of wine and physical intimate pleasure with a beautiful damsel in a tent in a rainy day:

The Umayyid period (662-750) witnessed emergence of two schools of love in poetry: *Udhri* and *Ibahi* (Erotic and Plautonic). The Playboy Umar Ibn Rabiya (644-711) represents the former, while Jamil Ibn Ma'mar (d. 701) symbolizes the later.

During the Abbasid period (750-1517), Abu Nuwas (756-814) is considered to be the father of Arab erotic poetry, of wine and love, both straight and gay.

He says in a poem:

*Don't cry for Layla, don't rave about Hind  
But drink among roses a roses-red wine  
A draught that descends in the drinker's throat  
Bestowing its redness in eyes and cheeks.  
The wine is a ruby, the glass is a pearl  
Served by the hand of a slim-fingered girl  
Who serves you the wine from her hand  
And wine from her mouth – doubly drunk for sure will be you  
Thus I am drunk twice, by friends only one  
A favor special for me alone.*

The Abbasid Abu l-'Atahiyya (748-828) is known for his poetic craftsmanship in *khamriyat* (wine poems) and later on, *zuhidiyat* (austerity and hermitage poems). Andalusian strophic poetry of *muwashshahat* and the Iberian Arab troubadours were known for their chant of physical love and pleasure.

Ibn Hazm (994-1064) wrote *The Ring of the Dove* in circa 1022 on the art and practice of Arab love.

Ibn Arabi (1165-1240) represents the Sufi love of the ultimate as his heart happens to be professing the religion of love. He says in his famous lines:

*O Marvel  
A garden among the flames  
My heart can take on any form  
A meadow for the gazelles  
A cloister for the monks  
For the idols sacred ground  
Ka'ba for the circling pilgrim  
The tables of Torah  
The scrolls of the Quran  
I profess the religion of love  
Wherever its caravan turns along the way  
That is the belief  
The faith I keep*

In modern times, Nizar Qabbani (1923-1998), Tarfa Abdel Khair Adam, among others, represents erotic seduction through poetry and song.

Talking of happiness, well being & Lit, I am reminded of 1952. Vice-Chancellor Aligarh Muslim University, Dr. Zakir Hussain's story for children in which he describes the stages of the long-brief journey of a chicken coming out of an egg. The little chicken reveals the mystery of one whole life in a line: "Khat khat kiye jaeye, kuchh na kuchh to niklega." Our rendezvous ends here. How Literature fills us with happiness, let see this in a poem of Tagore:

*"The setting sun asked- who will take my place?"  
The earthen lamp with the little remaining oil said:  
"I'll try, my master!"  
THANKS!*

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