

Construction of Positivity in Indian Scenario

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Abstract- Positivity refers to the degree to which something is positive or the quality or state of being positive. Positivity is that which accepts the world as it is, takes inspiration from it and sees the brighter side of it.

Positive Psychology, a newly developed branch of Psychology, is an evolving branch of psychology developed by Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in 1998. It was developed in order to get an insight and understanding in to various dimensions of the concept of positivity. The aim of this branch of psychology was summed up by its authors in the following words:

“We believe that a psychology of positive human functioning will arise that achieve a scientific understanding and effective interventions to build thriving in individuals, families and communities.”

Positive psychologists seek to find and nurture genius and talent and to make normal life more fulfilling rather than treating mental illness.

The paper deals with a study carried out on Indian adults (both young and middle-aged males and females) to understand what constitutes as ‘positive’ in their lives with respect to their country, culture, education, family and relationships, life-style and changing trends, personal experiences, technology and sports. Open ended personal interviews of the sample were taken. The sample comprised of 80 subjects with the age group of youngsters ranging between 18-25, while that of the older group between 40-55 years. The content analysis of the interviews was done to understand the positivity in Indian perspective.

The above study yielded a pleasantly surprising result—the common perception that we as a society are extremely negative and cynical in our attitude was found out to be completely untrue.

Index Terms- Positivity, Positive Psychology, Social Constructionism, India

I. INTRODUCTION

Positivity refers to the degree to which something is positive or the quality or state of being positive. Positivity is that which accepts the world as it is, takes inspiration from it and sees the brighter side of it.

In order to get an insight and understanding in to various dimensions of the concept of positivity a branch of psychology has been developed recently and is christened positive psychology

Positive Psychology is an evolving branch of psychology, which has been aptly summed up by Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in the following words : "We believe that a psychology of positive human functioning will arise that achieves a scientific understanding and effective interventions to build thriving in individuals, families, and communities."^[1] Positive psychologists seek "to find and nurture genius and talent", and "to make normal life more fulfilling",^[2] not simply to treat mental illness.

Positive Psychology is intended to complement, not to replace traditional psychology. It does not seek to deny the importance of studying how things go wrong, but rather to emphasize the importance of using the scientific method to determine how things go right. Researchers in the field analyze things like states of pleasure or flow, values, virtues, talents, as well the ways that they can be promoted by social systems and institutions.^[3]

Positive Psychologists are concerned with four topics:

- 1) Positive experiences

- 2) Enduring psychological traits
- 3) Positive relationships
- 4) Positive institutions

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi define positive psychology as the “the scientific study of positive human functioning and flourishing on multiple levels that includes the biological, personal, relational, institutional, cultural and global dimensions of life.”^[4]

L.M. Keyes and Shane Lopez illustrate the four typologies of mental health functioning, flourishing, struggling, floundering and languishing. However complete mental health is combination of high emotional well-being, high psychological well-being and high social well-being along with low mental illness.^[5]

Historical Background

The history of positivity is ancient, even though the term “positivity” was not used in those days. Socrates advocated self-knowledge as the path to happiness. Plato's allegory of the cave influenced western thinkers who believed that happiness is found by finding deeper meaning. Aristotle believed happiness, or eudaimonia is constituted by rational activity in accordance with virtue over a complete life. The Epicureans believed in reaching happiness through the enjoyment of simple pleasures. The Stoics believed they could remain happy by being objective and reasonable, and described many "spiritual exercises" comparable to the psychological exercises employed in cognitive behavioral therapy and positive psychology.

Several humanistic psychologists of the 20th century—such as Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, and Erich Fromm—developed theories and practices that involved human happiness. Recently the theories of human flourishing developed by these humanistic psychologists have found empirical support from studies by positive psychologists. Positive psychology has also moved ahead in a number of new directions.

Positive psychology began as a new area of psychology in 1998 when Martin Seligman, considered the father of the modern positive psychology movement,^[6] chose it as the theme for his term as president of the American Psychological Association,^[7] though the term originates with Maslow, in his 1954 book *Motivation and Personality*,^[8] and there have been indications that psychologists since the 1950s have been increasingly focused on promoting mental health rather than merely treating illness.^{[9][10]} Seligman pointed out that for the half century clinical psychology "has been consumed by a single topic only - mental illness",^[11] echoing Maslow's comments.^[12] He urged psychologists to continue the earlier missions of psychology of nurturing talent and improving normal life.^[2]

The first positive psychology summit took place in 1999. The First International Conference on Positive Psychology took place in 2002.^[2] More attention was given by the general public in 2006 when, using the same framework, a course at Harvard University became particularly popular.^[13] In June 2009, the First World Congress on Positive Psychology took place.^[14]

Social Constructionism

Social constructionism and social constructivism are sociological theories of knowledge that consider how social phenomena or objects of consciousness develop in social contexts. A social construction (social construct) is a concept or practice that is the construct (or artifact) of a particular group. When we say that something is socially constructed, we are focusing on its dependence on contingent variables of our social selves rather than any inherent quality that it possesses in itself. The underlying assumptions on which social constructivism is typically seen to be based are reality, knowledge, and learning.^{[15][16]}

Social constructionists posit that there is no real reality. All reality is socially constructed. Social construction takes place in our day to day interactions with others. Hence what we consider as real is the outcome of various social processes. E.g. - Negotiation, communication and reflections, etc. This process is very forceful in framing our cognitions and taking things accordingly. Repeated exposure and social construction help us to believe that only our construction of reality is unique and formulated in this fashion. Even we construct the meaning of our experiences and believe that these are our 'real' experiences.

A common perception among the masses is that the country and the society are going down abyss with rampant corruption, crime, inequality and injustice being the order of day. The major reason for such an attitude is the media that more often than not thrives by publishing negative stories. This study was conducted to determine if this concept of social constructivism holds true in the present scenario.

II RESEARCH ELABORATION

Objective : To find out about the positive aspects of modern life among adult (youth and middle aged persons, old persons).

Method

Sample : The sample comprised of 80 adults (both males and females) with the age group of youngsters varying from 18 to 25 years, while that of the older group between 40 to 55 years. The sample was urban and educated, and the socio-economic status of the sample was middle middle-class to upper middle-class. There were 40 females and 40 males. The young group was mostly students while 5 participants were working. The older group comprised of working women, housewives and employed males in different fields. The participants were selected on the basis of their agreement towards sparing time for this study.

Procedure : The tools for data collection were open ended interviews. The interviewees were told of how different events unfolded in our day to day life, and how we sometimes take them very seriously particularly when they impact our lives. Besides this, they were told about several other national events that were occurring in the country in which their role is negligible as they weren't directly involved. Even in such case, there are positive and negative impacts, we feed on ourselves and others. In our day to day interaction with others we often engage in discussing many things and they shape our views about those events. More often than not, we discuss the negativities. For example—when we discuss our politicians or even our neighbor, we are tempted to highlight negative aspects and ignore the positives. In this context, I would like you to see what positive things are happening in your life and in the country as a whole.

The participant were asked what aspect of their life they view as positive with respect to culture, family, relationships, country development, changing trends, lifestyles, technology, education, personal experiences, religion etc. etc. Indepth interviews were taken and the participants were encouraged to share their views about positivity in whatever area or field they like without restricting them to aforementioned areas.

III RESULTS

Analysis and Discussion

Content analysis of the interviewees was done. The interviewees were read and categories of the responses were generated. After reading the interviews many times, the general categories gradually became more crystal and general categories emerged. Some categories were clubbed into one and some broad categories were subdivided into sub-categories. Response of youngsters and middle-aged participants were also studied to see if there was any difference in their responses on positivity, and if there were then which category did they belong to. The responses of males and females as separate groups were also analyzed.

The eight categories which finally emerged from the content analysis of interviewees:

- 1) Country
- 2) Culture
- 3) Education
- 4) Family and Relationships
- 5) Lifestyle and Changing trends
- 6) Personal Experiences
- 7) Technology
- 8) Sports

The responses of the participants in each category are as follows:

1) *Country:* Almost 65% of the participants agreed that there has been a positive growth in the country over the years. As a whole roads, infrastructure, education, health-standards have improved significantly. Our country has a strong army capable of defending our sovereignty come what may; we are far far ahead of other countries in the subcontinent in almost every field. People have been empowered with new schemes, the Right To Information Act being perhaps the most important among the many reforms introduced. The Medical facilities in India are extremely good and the average life-expectancy has increased considerably, while the mortality rate has gone down. At the end of the day, even after all the shortcomings of our country, the general perception for the country's present and future is positive and upbeat.

2) Culture: The response of the younger and older group was quite different varied and interesting on the topic of culture. Around 55% of the respondents had positive outlook towards their culture and traditions. Younger group showed positivity towards their cultural traditions (such as “*Garbha*”, an Indian folk dance), while the older generation stressed on the religious traditions (such as ‘*Satsang*’, a religious gathering), Art and Drama. Both the groups however showed commonalities in their liking for festivals, marriage traditions and Yoga. A few differences between the two groups on how these traditions and rituals should be performed was observed.

3) Education: The responses of the participants were very positive for this category. Almost everyone viz. 95% of the participants agreed that education has brought a tremendous change in the present scenario. Women participants were very enthusiastic about the increasing literacy rate especially among females. Everyone agreed that villagers are also becoming more aware towards the importance of education, and the literacy rates among them have gone up considerably. Schemes like “*School Chalein Hum*” (“Let’s go to school”) are very effective. Participants agreed that there was ample scope for excelling in life with proper education, notwithstanding the person’s financial standing in the society. Social ills such as Child Marriage, Dowry, Cast Divisions, etc. are also decreasing with increased awareness due to education. However, 2 elder participants said that modern education system was also eroding the established moral value-systems.

4) Family and Relationships: The responses of the participants were mixed in this category. 75% of the respondents were positive and upbeat about their family and relationship structures. The older group saw less positivity than the younger lot. Younger females stated that there is more freedom, equality and frankness in parent-child /husband-wife relationship. Freedom of speech has increased and females can be financially independent. The responses of males and females were a bit different when it came to family life (Ex-- Females were more happy about nuclear families). But both the groups saw positivity in Indian family structure and value system. Everybody agreed that India’s strong family-values are one of its major strengths and asset.

5) Life-Style and Changing Trends: Our society and culture is a reality. About 90% of the respondents viewed their current Lifestyle and changing trends positively. The participants highlighted tremendous improvement in the medical facilities as a major barometer for this positivity. The life-style has improved—even a domestic help can buy a one rupee shampoo. Every person is better dressed than they used to be a generation ago. The younger group was particularly impressed with the culture of malls and multiplexes. People have become more aware about health and fitness. Elder people are now very careful and aware about their health and go for regular check-ups. Everyone wants to have a secure old age.

6) Personal Experiences: This is the most varied category with the participants giving many interesting views. 60% of the respondents had a positive outlook about their personal experiences. Some respondents saw positivity in beauty and spirituality. A respondent explained how he liked to work on his own creations (such as opera) and see the results of his work. One of the participant enjoyed playing football in the rains. Experiences of honesty were memorable for most respondents. A particular respondent narrated how an auto-driver returned her handbag that she had left in the auto. Others found positivity in feeding animals, doing social work, listening to *satsangs*, etc.

7) Sports: This perhaps is the least appreciated category on the positivity scale. 50% of the respondents, mainly youngsters showed positivity in this category. Younger group was very enthusiastic about sports especially cricket. But sadly apart from cricket, only the names of Saina Nahewal (Indian badminton champion) and Sania Mirza (Indian tennis player) awoke some interest in the younger group. The younger group stressed that sport complexes were being opened across India which would provide new opportunities to budding sportsmen. In totality, both the groups appreciated sports—mainly cricket (though the older group criticized the private cricketing ventures such as IPL as a waste of time).

8) Technology: Technology is undoubtedly modern India’s most positive story. Almost all the respondents i.e. 98% were very happy with the advances in this field and agreed that it had brought about a lot of positivity in their day-to-day life. The use of mobile phones, internet, and computers has made life much easier and interesting. Females were happy about the positive role of technology (such as mixer-grinder, washing machines, microwave, vacuum cleaners, etc.) in easing the burden of house-hold chores. The advent of internet railway ticket booking has made travel much more easier task for the common people.

IV CONCLUSION

The above study yielded a pleasantly surprising result—the common perception that we as a society are extremely negative and cynical in our attitude was found out to be completely untrue. Infact, the general attitude of the respondents was pretty positive towards almost all aspects of life.

Hence the study negates the long-held view that Indians by and large are cynical and unappreciative people. Moreover, the basic statement of Social Constructivism that “*reality is relational*” finds support in this study. However positivity and negativity aren’t very stable, these categories emerge and re-emerge in various social processes.

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