



Pursuit of Happiness from the perspective of Vedānta.

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Abstract

The pursuit of happiness is one of the fundamental aspirations of human life. According to Vedānta philosophy, true and lasting happiness cannot be obtained through external objects or temporary pleasures; rather, it lies within the realization of the true nature of the Self (Ātman). Vedānta teaches that human beings constantly seek happiness in material possessions, relationships, and worldly achievements, yet these sources provide only momentary satisfaction. The central idea of Vedānta is that the individual self (Ātman) is identical with the ultimate reality, Brahman. This realization forms the essence of spiritual liberation (mokṣa). Ignorance (avidyā) causes individuals to identify themselves with the body and mind, leading them to believe that happiness is dependent on external conditions. As long as this ignorance persists, human beings remain trapped in the cycle of desire, attachment, and suffering.

Vedānta explains that genuine happiness is not created but discovered. It already exists in the nature of the Self, which is described as sat-cit-ānanda (existence, consciousness, and bliss). When a person realizes this inner nature through knowledge (jñāna), self-discipline, meditation, and detachment, the illusion of separation between the self and Brahman disappears. At that stage, one experiences permanent peace and bliss.

The teachings of the Upaniṣads and later Vedāntic thinkers emphasize that the path to true happiness involves self-inquiry, ethical living, and spiritual wisdom. Instead of running after fleeting pleasures, individuals are encouraged to cultivate inner awareness and understand their divine essence. Through such realization, the seeker transcends worldly sorrow and attains lasting fulfillment. Therefore, from the Vedāntic perspective, the ultimate pursuit of happiness is not a search in the external world but a journey inward toward the realization of the Self. This philosophical insight offers a profound and timeless understanding of human happiness and spiritual freedom.

Keywords: Vedānta, Happiness, Ātman, Brahman, Sat-Cit-Ānanda, Mokṣa, Avidyā, Self-Realization, Upaniṣads, Spiritual Philosophy.

Introduction:

'Vedānta' literally means the Siddhānta of Vedas which means the realization of mysterious and questioning life and through this realization we find our eternal feelings of life. 'Vedantā' is the supreme knowledge, which takes us into the depth of all mysterious of this universe and brings us to the ultimate truth. These questions always appear in our lives: who am I? where did I come from? and where is my final rest? – 'Vedanta' is that the

subtle perception through which the answers to the three big questions are found. The philosophical structure of Vedānta rest upon the "Prasthāntrayī". It refers to the three foundational authorities of Vedānta philosophy. These are:

1. śruti Prasthān- the Upanishads and its commentaries.
2. Smṛiti Prasthān- Śrīmad Bhagavad Gīta.
3. Nyaya Prasthān- the Bramhasūtra and Śārīraka- bhāṣya.

Experience stress, anxiety, and dissatisfaction despite material prosperity. Modern consumer culture often encourages the belief that happiness can be achieved through constant acquisition and competition. However, dependent on external this pursuit frequently leads to frustration and mental exhaustion. Vedanta offers an alternative perspective. It teaches that true happiness does not depend on external success but on inner awareness and self-understanding. By practicing mindfulness, ethical living, and self-reflection, individuals can cultivate inner peace even in the midst of modern life. Let us clarify the point with the help of a story. A speaker came to the stage to give a speech.

Suddenly he came down Happiness is one of the most universal aspirations of human beings. Every individual, regardless of culture, religion, or social status, seeks happiness and tries to avoid suffering. In modern society, happiness is often associated with wealth, success, comfort, and sensory pleasure. However, such forms of happiness are usually temporary and circumstances. According to *Advaita Vedanta* *Brahma* resides in all things everywhere in this world. The sage of *Ishopanishad* said that- "ईशा वास्यमिदं सर्वं यत् किञ्च जगत्सं जगत्।" ¹

Indian philosophy, particularly Vedanta, offers a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of happiness. Vedanta teaches that the ultimate purpose of human life is the realization of the true self (Atman) and the attainment of liberation (Moksha). According to this philosophy, true happiness is not something that must be acquired from the external world; rather, it already exists within the individual.

The Vedantic view of happiness therefore shifts the focus from material accumulation to spiritual realization. By understanding the nature of the self and the ultimate reality, a person can transcend suffering and experience eternal bliss.

Concept of happiness in Vedānta:

Sankhya school identifies three types of sufferings. These are:

1. Adhyatmika suffering: related to body and mind such as illness, anility, grief, anger or greed.
2. Adhibhautika suffering: misery from other people or animal.
3. Adhidaivika suffering: caused by the act of God. Sankhya believes that the tattva-jnana is only way to get rid from this misery. In the context of Vedanta, happiness (Ananda) is not an external achievement but the inherent nature of the self (Atman). Taitirīya Upaniṣad says "आनन्द आत्मा" Ātman is Ananda-svruṣa. The bliss of Ātman is internal, unchanging and absolute. Ātman is individual soul. The individual soul and the supreme reality (Brahman) are ultimately one and the same. When one realizes his innermost self, free

¹ Īsopaniṣad (With *Shankar Bhashya*), Sitanath Goswami, Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, Kolkata, 2010, Page No -24

from all sorrow and grief and feel Atyantika sukha, the eternal happiness. Katha Upaniṣad says “मत्वा धीर हर्षशोकौ जहाति” Dhīra (the wise person) who knows the supreme Divinity to be their own self does not succumb to fleeting joy or sorrow. Katha Upaniṣad says two paths;

1. Preyas: It is limited, often focusing on external objects which is experienced through the body, mind and intellect. Most people take this path but ultimately it leads to misery and regret.

2. Shreyas: Shreyas considers as “Amṛta”, the eternal feelings. It is inherent happiness which cannot be counted in material objects. It concludes that happiness is not to be attained but to be realized.

In Vedānta, happiness is closely associated with the concept of Ananda, which means bliss. Ananda is not merely an emotional state but the intrinsic nature of the ultimate reality, Brahman. The Upanishads describe Brahman as Sat-Chit-Ananda – existence, consciousness, and bliss. According to sages-

“आनन्दाद्भ्येवखल्विमानिभूतानिजायन्ते।”²

This indicates that bliss is not something separate from reality; rather, it is the very essence of existence itself. Since the individual self (Atman) is identical with Brahman, happiness is inherent within every human being. However, due to ignorance (Avidya), individuals identify themselves with the body, mind, and external possessions. This false identification leads to suffering, dissatisfaction, and the endless pursuit of temporary pleasures.

Vedānta therefore teaches that the true source of happiness lies in the realization of one's true nature. I want to highlight that how man achieved the inner happiness from the Vedānta thought and vedāntic felling.

Pursuit of happiness from Vedāntic perspective:

When we seek our existence only in worldly objects, it leads us to intense sufferings. We cannot find ‘I’, the supreme consciousness that resides with me. The Mahāvākyas “तत्त्वमसि”, “अहम् ब्रह्मास्मि” signify that the inner essence of an individual soul is not different from the ultimate, infinite Brahman. Taittirīya Upaniṣad says- आनन्दो ब्रह्मेति व्यजानात् bliss is the Brahman. It implies that the ultimate reality is pure and infinite which resides deep in the soul. When one begins to think “I am the body” or “I am the mind”, leads to sorrow or grief because no one can permanently eradicate physical or mental illness. Bhagvan Adi Shankaracharya says- “जीवो ब्रह्मैव नापरः”³ the individual soul Jiva is the supreme consciousness, and nothing else. The realization of this truth that who am I is to liberation and inner peace. Adi Shankaracharya says- “मनोबुद्ध्यहंकारचित्तानि नाहं.....चिदानन्दरूपः शिवोहम् शिवोहम्।”⁴ True happiness is realizing one's own auspicious and blissful self, which lies beyond the mind, intellect or ego. Removing ignorance through knowledge leads to infinite bliss.

The Illusion of Worldly Happiness:

² Taittirīya Upanishad-3/6

³ Shankarabhasya

⁴ Nirvan shatakam

One of the central teachings of Vedanta is that worldly pleasures are temporary and ultimately incapable of providing lasting happiness. Sensory pleasures depend on external objects and conditions, which are constantly changing. For example, wealth, social recognition, physical beauty, and material comforts may provide momentary satisfaction, but they cannot guarantee permanent happiness. These pleasures are limited by time, circumstance, and human desire. This theory is called Advaitattva. It is said in Isopanishad-

“ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किञ्च जगत्यां जगत्।
तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथा मा गृधः कस्यस्विद्धनम्।⁵

Vedanta explains that the human mind constantly seeks new experiences and desires. Once a desire is fulfilled, another arises. This endless cycle creates restlessness and dissatisfaction. The Upanishadic sages recognized that external objects cannot provide infinite happiness because they themselves are finite. Therefore, the search for happiness in the external world inevitably leads to frustration.

The Role of Ignorance (Avidyā):

According to Vedanta, the primary cause of human suffering is ignorance of our true nature. This ignorance makes us believe that we are limited beings defined by our body and mind. Because of this misunderstanding, individuals seek happiness in external achievements, relationships, and possessions. However, these sources of happiness are inherently unstable. Ignorance also gives rise to attachment, ego, and fear. People become attached to objects and relationships, fearing their loss. This attachment creates anxiety and suffering.

Vedanta teaches that once this ignorance is removed through self-knowledge, a person realizes that true happiness lies within the self.

Self-Realization as the Source of Happiness:

The ultimate teaching of Vedanta is that true and lasting happiness can only be attained through self-realization. Self-realization means the direct knowledge that the individual self (Atman) is identical with the universal consciousness (Brahman).

When a person realizes this truth, the illusion of separation disappears. The individual no longer feels limited by the body or mind and experiences a state of inner peace and bliss. This realization is described as Moksha or liberation. It is not merely a philosophical understanding but a profound spiritual experience that transforms one's perception of reality.

In this state, happiness becomes independent of external circumstances. The individual remains calm and content regardless of success or failure, pleasure or pain.

Ethical Living and Mental Purity:

Vedanta emphasizes that the pursuit of happiness requires ethical living and mental discipline. A restless and impure mind cannot perceive the deeper truth of the self. Therefore, Vedantic teachings stress the importance of virtues such as truthfulness, compassion, humility, self-control, and non-violence. Ethical living purifies the mind and reduces selfish desires. As the mind becomes calm and balanced, it becomes capable of

deeper spiritual understanding. This moral foundation is essential for the pursuit of self-knowledge and lasting happiness.

The Role of Spiritual Practices:

Vedanta recommends several spiritual practices that help individuals progress toward self-realization and inner happiness. These practices include meditation, self-inquiry, devotion, and the study of sacred texts. Meditation helps quiet the mind and allows individuals to experience inner peace. Self-inquiry encourages individuals to question their identity and recognize the difference between the temporary body and the eternal self. Devotion (Bhakti) cultivates love and surrender toward the divine, reducing ego and attachment. The study of scriptures such as the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita provides philosophical guidance and inspiration. Through these practices, individuals gradually overcome ignorance and discover their true nature. Depression can be overcome by a regular practice of spirituality. Thirty-three crore gods are one of the symbols of spirituality. Among the thirty-three crore gods, the twelfth 'Āditya' is one of them. The word 'Āditya' means sun. Sun rules time. And the twelfth 'Āditya' is the symbol of twelve months. So, if we can respect the time or do the right work at the right time by respecting the twelfth 'Āditya', then the frustration will go away from the mind. But if we can't settle our mind, we can't use our time properly. On the battlefield of Kurukshetra, Arjuna said to Lord Krishna, O friend, I can immobilize even air with this arrow of my bow. But I can't make up my mind. My mind is very restless.

*“Cañcalam hi manaḥ kṛṣṇa pramāthi balabaddhṛdham
tasyāham nigrāham man'yē bāyōriba suduṣkaram”⁶*

This dialogue between *Arjuna* and *Bhagavan* shows that subduing the mind is not an easy task at all.

Detachment and Freedom from Desire:

Another important principle in Vedanta is detachment (Vairagya). Detachment does not mean rejecting the world or abandoning responsibilities; rather, it means performing actions without excessive attachment to their results. When individuals become overly attached to success, wealth, or recognition, their happiness becomes dependent on external factors. Detachment allows a person to remain peaceful and balanced regardless of outcomes. By reducing desires and attachments, the mind becomes free from anxiety and dissatisfaction. This inner freedom is a significant step toward lasting happiness.

Vedānta and Modern Life:

Although Vedanta is an ancient philosophy, its teachings remain highly relevant in modern society. We can define it through a story. Today, many people will learn from this story. One day, a large audience assembled to hear the speaker. Then he took all the audience into a small room. There were already lots of balloons with air. He asked each audience member to pick up a balloon and write their name on it. Then ask them to drop the balloons with their names on the floor. So did the audience. After a while he asked everyone to find the balloons with their names on them. But in no time, there was chaos. Someone found the balloon with his name on it, and someone didn't. Then the speaker said take any balloon and return it to the person whose name is written on it. The work was

⁶ Swami Adgadanand, *Shreemad Bhagwad Geeta*. 6/34. Shree Paramhans Ashram, Faridabad, Haryana. 2021. p.197

completed in a very short time. Then the speaker said I came up on the stage to convey that your own happiness is in the hands of others and the happiness of others is in your hands. There is no limit to this perception of joy. Life brings real joy. All the frustrations of life are destroyed by this kind of joy. We realize the true value of life.

Conclusion:

Everyone wants to be happy and no one doesn't want to be unhappy. Happiness is immutable, but people's ideas about happiness are changeable. Everyone has different perspective on happiness. Some consider success in life to be happiness, while others find it in love. Most people think that happiness comes through the fulfilment of desires, which ultimately results in misery, suffering and depression. Desires are inherently endless. It never quenched by indulge them. Śrīmad Bhāgavad Mahāpūran says-

“न जातु कामः कामानामुपभोगेन शाम्यति।

हविषा कृष्णवर्त्मव भूय एवाभिवर्धते” ॥⁷

Worldly illusions suppress the inner strength. Thakur shri Ramkrishna Paramhansa says that we can suppress desires through Vivek and Vairagya. Despite of Yama's earthly and heavenly offerings, Nachiketa was not attracted to any temporary worldly illusions; instead, he refuted them more gracefully. The teachings of Śrīmad Bhāgavad Gītā are to attain inner happiness by optimizing desires- “कामक्रोधोद्भवं वेगं स युक्तः स सुखी नरः” Ishopanishad says- “तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथा”⁸ One cannot renounce all desires; instead, experience them without attachment. Śrīmad Bhāgavad Gītā considers happiness as inner peace, which lies in indulging in worldly things while being free from attachment.

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⁷ Shrimad Bhāgavad Mahapuran 9.19.14

⁸ Isha Upanishad-1