

## Are Christians more Developed and Happier? An Indian Perspective

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### Abstract

Happiness is a subjective measure of overall quality of life. The Economists tradition is to have information about the subjective measure by asking an individual about her level of happiness. The self-reported happiness is thought to be a proxy measure of the individual utility. There are several factors that affect individual well-being. Income, employment, health, religiousness, marriage, level of education and job satisfaction are few important determinants. Macroeconomic variables like unemployment rate, poverty rate, literacy rate, life expectancy, inflation rate and crime rate affect happiness. This article tours through the literature and observes the relationship between religion and happiness and finds that Christians are a happy community. The economic development of two states of India, Goa and Kerala, is observed and it is found that Christians in these two states are more developed and hence probably happier. The influence of Christianity has also helped other communities and the state in overall to develop.

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**Key Words:** Christianity, Happiness, Human Development, Wellbeing, Goa & Kerala

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Happiness is a subjective measure of overall quality of life. "The greatest happiness for the greatest number" is a well cherished goal in any society. The search for good life and happiness has a long tradition of discourse in the field of philosophy. Aristotle, Bentham, Mill and Kant are some notable names who have dealt with the topic of happiness, its source and relevance. Economists have mainly got into the field after the major contribution of Richard Easterlin in the decade of 1970's. Economists have used happiness, subjective wellbeing, individual welfare, life satisfaction interchangeably and relied on asking individuals about their level of happiness. The self-reported happiness is thought to be a proxy measure of the individual utility. Several studies have asked how an individual is satisfied with her life. The German Socio-Economic Panel asks about respondent's satisfaction with life in general and the answers are coded in a ten-point scale. The General Social Survey carried out in U.S. asks, "Taken all things together, how you would say things are these days - are you very happy, pretty happy or not too happy?"<sup>1</sup> The British Household Panel Survey asks, "How satisfied are you with

<sup>1</sup> Since 1972, the General Social Survey (GSS) has been monitoring societal change and studying the growing complexity of American society. The GSS aims to gather data on contemporary American society in order to monitor and explain trends and constants in attitudes, behaviours, and attributes; to examine the structure and functioning of society in general as well as the role played by relevant subgroups; to compare the United States to other societies in order to place American society in comparative perspective and develop cross-national models of human society; and to make high-quality data easily accessible to scholars, students, policy makers, and others, with minimal cost and waiting. GSS questions include such items as national spending priorities, marijuana use, crime and punishment, race relations, quality of life, and confidence in institutions. Since 1988, the GSS has also collected data on sexual behaviour including number of sex partners, frequency of intercourse, extramarital relationships, and sex with prostitutes. General Social Survey (GSS), NORC at the University of Chicago, <http://www.norc.org/Research/Projects/Pages/general-social-survey.aspx>, (Accessed on 02.06.2017).

your life overall?" and the responses are categorized as a number ranging from one to seven.<sup>2</sup> The World Values Survey asks, "All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?" The respondents are told to scale their life satisfaction by a number ranging from one to ten where one signifies completely dissatisfied and ten means completely satisfied.<sup>3</sup>

A typical textbook definition of happiness is almost impossible. That is why less stress is given on what is happiness and more on how people think about happiness. Income, health, family relationship etc. are the most stated factors of happiness. There are several other factors that are determinants of individual happiness. Employment status, marriage, level of education, religious consciousness and job satisfaction, to state a few of them. Macroeconomic variables like unemployment rate, rate of poverty, literacy rate, life expectancy, inflation rate, crime rate etc. affects happiness. It is thought that level of human development and level of happiness are positively related.

Studies specifically intended to observe happiness of Indians are rare. The World Values Survey takes into account of some Indian households as a part of their world survey. Macroeconomic indicators hence are used to observe the extent of happiness of a community and the society as a whole. The present paper observes the relationship between religiosity and happiness. In an Indian perspective, the study concentrates on economic and social development of two states of India, Kerala and Goa, and observes that Christians are relatively more advanced and hence can be concluded as happier than others. These two states, where Christians are a significant part of the total population, lie high in the human development index ladder.

The rest of the article is organized as follows: First, a brief literature survey to observe the relationship between religion and happiness; Second, describes the Christian influence on Indian society; Third, an investigation into the economic development of Kerala and Goa to find that the two states having a large proportion of Christians stands high in the human development index ladder. The Christians in these two states are relatively advanced than other communities.

### Religion, Religiousness and Happiness: A Survey

Psychologists believe understanding happiness should be preceded by understanding the process of adaptation. People cope with both good and bad situations they face in life. Every

<sup>2</sup> The British Household Panel Survey began in 1991 and is a multi-purpose study whose unique value resides in the fact that: it follows the same representative sample of individuals - the panel - over a period of years; it is household-based, interviewing every adult member of sampled households; it contains sufficient cases for meaningful analysis of certain groups such as the elderly or lone parent families. British Household Panel Survey, Institute for social and Economic Research, <https://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/bhps>, (Accessed on 02.06.2017).

<sup>3</sup> The World Values Survey is a global network of social scientists studying changing values and their impact on social and political life, led by an international team of scholars, with the WVS association and secretariat headquartered in Stockholm, Sweden. The survey, which started in 1981, seeks to use the most rigorous, high-quality research designs in each country. The WVS consists of nationally representative surveys conducted in almost 100 countries which contain almost 90 percent of the world's population, using a common questionnaire. The WVS is the largest non-commercial, cross-national, time series investigation of human beliefs and values ever executed, currently including interviews with almost 400,000 respondents. Moreover, the WVS is the only academic study covering the full range of global variations, from very poor to very rich countries, in all of the world's major cultural zones. The WVS seeks to help scientists and policy makers understand changes in the beliefs, values and motivations of people throughout the world. What We do, World Values Survey, <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp>, (Accessed on 02.06.2017).

individual has his/her unique evaluations regarding expectations about life, values and experiences and so different people respond differently to same life situations. The change in goal also affects the process of adaptation. If expectations are met promptly, people feel happy. If expectations remain unfulfilled, for a long time, people feel unhappy. How expectations are formed? This depends on the aspirations of the person concerned. Aspirations depend on perception about one's ability, past experience about life, relative situation of the individual compared to others, personal traits and many other factors. When aspirations are not met people try to adapt to the situation. People revisit goal as per the present life situation. But the degree of non-fulfillment even after revision of aspirations causes unhappiness, to be more specific the degree of unhappiness. The discrepancy between current condition and the multiple standards set by the individual in different domains cause unhappiness. But the extent of unhappiness reduces if the individual believes that, though the goals are not achieved, a progress towards the goal is made. Different goals have different subjective weightage to an individual. Thus, it is important, for subjective wellbeing, which goal is met and which is not met. Psychologists believe that an individual's adaptation to both good and bad life situations may be complete or incomplete.<sup>4</sup> An individual reacts strongly to any new important life event and reactions dampen over time. Another recent life event takes place of the previous event. A recent event has stronger influence on happiness than a past event.

Religious consciousness helps an individual to adapt to bad life situations. People stating belief in God are happier. Stronger religious belief and spirituality is expected to insure people from odds of life. They can cope better with difficulties and negative shocks of life than non-religious ones. Religious belief and dependence is associated with mental health benefits. Religion offers a collective identity. Religious experiences provide a sense of meaning during life crises. Studies investigating relationship between religion and happiness have come up with fairly consistent results. Irrespective of faith, happiness studies found that religious people are happier than non-religious ones. It has been found that people who are religious tend to be happier. Among Christians, people attending Church are happier.<sup>5</sup> A more intricate observation is that people spending more time on activities related to the Church have reported happier state of mind. Studies have found that happiness is related with church attendance, strength of one's relationship with the divine<sup>6</sup>, prayer experiences and devotional and participatory aspects of religiosity.<sup>7</sup>

### Christian Contribution to Health and Education

The influence and contribution of Christianity in India has many facets. One of the most important contributions is on healthcare in India. The Christians and the Church wholeheartedly followed the mandate of the Christ that it is one's duty and responsibility to serve the sick and underprivileged. The establishment of inns alongside Churches is an expression of

<sup>4</sup> A. E. Clark Lucas, Diener Y. Georgeuis, "Re-examining Adaptation and the Set Point Model of Happiness: Reactions to Changes in Marital Status", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2002. Cf. Lykken and Telegan, "Happiness is a Stochastic Phenomenon", *Psychological Science*, 7 (1996), No. 3, pp. 180-189.

<sup>5</sup> J. Gartner, D. B. Larson and G.D. Allen, "Religious Commitment and Mental Health: A Review of the Empirical Literature", *Journal of Psychology and Religion*, 19 (1991), pp. 6-25.

<sup>6</sup> M. Pollner, "Divine Relations, Social Relations and Wellbeing", *Journal of Health and Social Behaviour*, 30 (1989), pp. 92-104.

<sup>7</sup> R. Mookerjee and K. Beron, "Gender Religion and Happiness", *The Journal of Socio Economics*, 34(2005), pp. 674-685.

the commitment to serve the sick and persons in need. The arrival of missionaries initiated transition in health care system in India. The state of Kerala and Goa saw establishment of 'Holy Houses of Mercy'. The 'Holy Houses of Mercy' at Cochin later developed into a hospital. This was probably the first Christian hospital in India. Hospitals were built at Vishakapatnam, Bhuburpura, Shimuiana and in many other places. The health care apostolate in Kerala was initiated by Vicariate of Verapoly which later extended to many parts of Kerala. The protestant churches established the Vellore Mission in Tamilnadu. The Vellore hospital started its journey with only one bed in 1900. Within two years the number of beds increased to 40. This was the beginning of the glorious journey of now internationally famed Vellore Christian Medical College. The most important aspect of Christian healthcare institutions in India is its coverage of remote areas. A majority of them are situated in villages. Thus, these institutions cater to the healthcare need of deprived people. The Christian novelty of health care system is its reliance on spiritual care along with physical care.

The contribution of Christians on Indian education system is well known. There are many Christian institutions that have historically performed well in imparting quality education to Indian students. There are many Christian educational institutions in west Bengal. The district of Darjeeling has also benefited from a good number of Christian educational institutions. Don Bosco and St Xavier's are some of the renowned educational institutions of West Bengal. The St. Xavier's and Loreto College in Kolkata, Serampore College in Hooghly, Christian College in Bankura, Salesian College in Sonada and Siliguri are path leading institutions in the higher education field in West Bengal. Christians have played an active role in public life. The enlightened Christians have contributed Indian culture in many ways. John Ernest Hanxleden, worked in Kerala, made outstanding contribution on Indian literature.<sup>8</sup> The Carmelites produced many books and dictionaries. The contribution of London Missionary Society, the Church Missionary Society and the Basel Mission Society in Kerala is noteworthy.

### Christianity & Development : Happiness Link in Kerala and Goa

Why the scenario of Kerala and Goa is considered here? One important similarity between these two states is the composition of population on religious considerations. Among non-special category states in India, the percentage of Christian population in total population is highest in these two states. The Christian population as a percentage of total population in Kerala and Goa respectively are 18.6 and 14.2 percent. The human development story of Kerala is well known. The level of human development in Goa is also noteworthy. As per the India Human Development Report (2011) Kerala is ranked first with a human development index score of 0.790. Goa is not far behind. Goa stands fourth with a human development index score of 0.617. Economic conditions in these two states are relatively better than the other states of India.

The growth in state domestic product in Goa is above the national average. The performance of Goa in terms of fertility rate is best. In terms of sex ratio, Goa with 968 females per 1000 males stands above the national average. The incidence of poverty is significantly lower when compared with the national average. As per as health indicators are concerned, the proportion of underweight children is below the national average. As per Census estimate of 2011, the

<sup>8</sup> Rev. Rajasekhar, "The Contributions of Jesuit Missionaries and its Impact on Indian Christians", *Journal of C.O.T.R. Theological Seminary*, Vol. 2, No. 2, February 2016, p. 44, <http://cotr.in/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/journal-2016-feb.pdf>, (Accessed on 02.06.2017).

literacy rate in Goa is 87.4 percent when the national average is only 74 percent. The proportion of people getting safe drinking water and using toilet facility is more than the national average.

The state domestic product estimate of Kerala is among the top five major states in India. The land reform is thought to be the one of the major causes behind Kerala's development path. The level of per capita income in Kerala is higher than the national average. Kerala has a very favourable sex ratio. Not only sex ratio, but also some indicators of social development such as literacy rate, infant mortality and life expectancy, are comparable with many developed countries. All most all health indicators in Kerala stand better than the national average. Table 1 gives information of some development indicators of Kerala, Goa and west Bengal and compares it with the national average. It shows that the performance of Kerala and Goa is far ahead of West Bengal and the national average.

**Table 1: Human Development Indicators of Some States**

Indicators	% of Christians in total Population	Human Development Index Score	Incidence of Poverty in Percentage	Gross Enrolment Ratio in Primary Schools	Percentage of Children Immunised (Rural)	Maternal Mortality Ratio	
S	Kerala	18.6	0.790	15.0	92.3	69.4	81
T	Goa	14.2	0.617	13.8	129.6	73.0	N.A.
A	West Bengal	0.7	0.492	24.7	112.1	62.8	145
T	India	2.1	0.467	27.5	107.8	38.6	212
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Source: India Human Development Report (2011)<sup>9</sup>

Table 2 shows that within a state the Christians have performed better than other communities in terms of different indicators. Hereon lies the influence of Christians on the development of a state. It is of no doubt that this influence has helped the development of other communities in the state and the overall development of the state. Both the state, Kerala and Goa, where Christians are a major religious community have developed at a greater rate than most other states. In almost all indicators shown in table 2, whether it is an income, health or education indicator, Christians perform better than other communities. The performance of Kerala and Goa is better than West Bengal and national average.

<sup>9</sup> *India Development Report*, Planning Commission, Government of India (2011).

**Table 2: Estimates of Development Indicators as per Religious Communities in Different States**

Indicators	Community	Kerala	Goa	West Bengal	India
Sex Ratio Census	Hindus	973	897	977	901
	Muslims	960	902	971	931
	Christians	972	993	1066	963
Urban Literacy Rate	Hindus	96.4	87.6	88.7	85.8
	Muslims	93.8	62.6	74.6	75.1
	Christians	98.1	93.0	100.0	92.0
Rural Literacy Rate	Hindus	91.9	79.0	73.2	67
	Muslims	94.2	66.0	69.4	63.5
	Christians	95.7	88.7	66.5	52.0
Electricity for Domestic Use	Hindus	92.9	97.5	70	75.2
	Muslims	97.3	100	47.9	67.5
	Christians	94.1	99.9	61	86.2
Percentage of Children Immunized	Hindus	88.0	77.3	67.9	44.4
	Muslims	56.6	79.5	58.1	36.3
	Christians	89.3	81.6	N.A	56.4
Infant Mortality Rate	Hindus	16.5	33.2	48.5	58.5
	Muslims	17.2	N.A.	59.5	52.4
	Christians	17.1	5.8	N.A.	41.7
Rural Unemployment Rate (Current Daily Status)	Hindus	21.6	4.6	12.1	8.3
	Muslims	18.0	18.6	10.7	8.8
	Christians	13.4	5.9	8.6	9.8

Source: India Human Development Report (2011).

### Conclusion

This paper concludes that religious people are happier. The extent of happiness also depends on extent of religiosity. Christians those who feel more closeness with churches are happier. A state with high proportion of Christian population are more developed and hence a happier state. The development experience of Kerala and Goa validates the point. The level of human development and other indicators related to income, education and health proves that these two states are well ahead of many other Indian states. Christian population in these two states are relatively more developed and hence expected to be happier. The influence of Christians has had some positive externality effect on other communities in the state. These have facilitated the overall development of these two states.