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# **Pursuit of Happiness in Contemporary English Literature**

**Proceedings  
4th National Conference  
30-31 January 2018**

**Edited by  
Dr. Savita Singh  
Convener**



**The Chhattisgarh English Teachers' Association  
Raipur , Chhattisgarh**

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**in**  
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**Struggling with happiness delineated through  
Abhiram Bhadkamkar's  
*Sukhanshi Bhandto Aamhi***

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**Abstract:**

What is the definition of 'Happiness'? What are its different parameters? Can material benefits give us happiness? Does all the search lead us to disillusionment in the end? Such and many more questions have been topics of speculation for man since ages. With the help of the Marathi play 'Sukhanshi Bhandto Aamhi' (2011) by Abhiram Bhadkamkar, this paper endeavours to delineate the ideas of happiness of the various characters of the play who are representatives of people at large and help them to understand their dissatisfaction. The study will be at three levels: the urban versus the rural; the educated versus the uneducated and the sane versus the insane. The contrary aims of realising one's ambitions and also getting peace of mind are targeted in the play. The paper also deals with how the Western influence over the characters have tainted their rosy spectacles eventually leading to disillusionment and a return to the roots for realising the true meaning of life.

**Key words:** happiness, play, western influence, parameters, money, prosperity, ambition, rootlessness, disillusionment

**Introduction:** A Marathi Shlok from 'Manache Sholk' by Shri Ramdas Swami states the truth about existence:

*'Jagi sarva sukhi asa kon aahe  
Vichari Mana tuchi shodhuni pahe....'*

The shlok has a deep rooted meaning. There is no one in this world, who is completely happy in all respects. Whatever one has accumulated through the past actions, one has to suffer on account of that. Happiness is a state of mind and it is experienced not as a continuous feeling but only when the outcome of the actions is in sync with our expectations. It is a relative term. Some realise the underlying happiness through sufferings and some lose themselves in the process of achieving happiness. One has to know and acknowledge the parameters of happiness, and then feel contented because of it. There is no set formula to make one happy. Some connect it with material prosperity, some with power and yet others with satisfaction. The essence of the struggle of the mind is beautifully captured in the Marathi play *Sukhanshi Bhandato Aamhi* written in 2011 by Shri Abhiram Bhadkamkar and directed by Kumar Sohoni. The tagline could be 'For those who have a mind'. In a bid to attain higher material benefits, man loses his focus and ends up a failure.

**Plot:**

It is story of a successful psychiatrist and an insane patient, who comes to the psychiatrist to be 'treated completely' by the doctor. The doctor has a wife and a son, both are highly ambitious, and run after material happiness. The husband-wife dream of building a posh five-star hospital and earn a lot of money which would yield happiness, status, power and security. They take great efforts to realise this dream sometimes at the cost of their relation, family, togetherness and happiness. They share this false notion of guaranteed happiness through money. At the beginning of the play, the insane patient enters their life and starts questioning the doctor about some primal issues. The doctor has no answers but decides to treat the patient. The dialogues that ensue between them actually reverse the situation. The patient seems to be the wiser of the two. The price that the doctor has paid, of his mother, his village, of his beloved that the doctor has paid to become rich seems to weigh heavy on his mind. He too starts talking to his inner self like the



patient. His wife takes great efforts to instil the lost ambition in him. She ultimately loses the battle when their only son decides to go away to America forever. Her dream of handing over the reign of the hospital to her son, is shattered, as he also walks on their footsteps. He too finds no scope in India and is lured by the dollar-land America. Both husband and wife, come back to their senses when they lose their son to a foreign land and the insatiable greed to earn more money. In the end, they can only comment that the son would eventually come back to his roots just as they had realised, after moving full circle. True happiness lies in adhering to one's roots and in the oneness that can be experienced with one's own people. They realise the fact that material comforts are not guarantors of happiness.

#### **Characters:**

*Sukhanshi Bhandato Aamhi* is the story of Dr. **Shreedhar**, a psychiatrist by profession whose life is based on the compromises made by him in the early part of his life with a faulty notion of success which he holds onto because of his wife. Hailing from a small village called Pimpalgaon, Shree represents the first generation of immigrants who have brooded over their limitations and left their hometowns in search of material happiness in cities. His son, Akshay, represents the second generation of immigrants to the dream land called America where people go to earn dollars. They never come back since that alluring country keeps them away from their own land. Shree represents those people who have held wrong notions of their goals of life. Yet when he is forced to deliberate on life's choices, he vacillates between his present goal of building a posh five star hospital on the place meant for a children's park, and returning to his roots and his mother. The struggle that goes on in his mind has actually not made his life worth it. In the end, he loses in this battle. He gains realisation at the cost of his life.

'Sukhanshi Bhandato Aamhi' is also the story of **Sadashiv Nashikkar** 'who finds it impossible to turn a deaf ear to his ever-questioning mind, and becomes insane in his attempt to capture the mind and cage it'. The play is a dialogue between this 'insane' man

in the guise of a patient and the 'sane' doctor, Shree. Sada was once a lecturer in an agricultural college. He teaches the sons of the farmers to love the land and work on it with full dedication, but they too dream of comforts found in the cities. The corrupt management of the college compelled Sada to rebel in a different way. Sada tells the doctor that he had killed his wife and son as he felt that this world is a rotten place to live in. The sooner one goes away the better. He is sentenced to seven years imprisonment as the *vakil* proves that Sada is mentally unstable. After finishing his sentence, the mental hospital declares that Sada is fit to live in society, but he is unable to come to terms with the situation, and so goes on from one psychiatrist to another in search of a solution.

Oscar Wilde, the famous Irish author writes in one of his poems, 'The Ballad of Reading Gaol' that each man kills the thing he loves: some do it with a bitter look, some with a flattering word and the coward does it with a kiss, The brave man with a sword..... Wilde adds further that some strangle with the hands of lust and some with the hands of Gold. It is only the kindest people who use a knife. He writes that even though each man kills the thing he loves, yet each man does not die.

Shree and Sada both have killed the things they loved. Sada was imprisoned for killing his wife and son. He repented everyday for his deed, and Shree, on the other hand, goes scot free. He is respected and loved in society. He is rich, famous and secured. Yet if one looks at his past, he is equally guilty of leaving his village, his old mother, his beloved and all the lovely promises that he had made to her. He never goes back. He considers the noble profession of Medicine only as a business to be executed. He looks at patients as money-minting machines. Yet he is never punished by law. It is his mind that punishes him when he is alone. It is the conscience, the inner mind, which passes judgement.

The story also has a third character, **Meeta**, Shree's ambitious and practical wife. The audience comes to know of her personality as the story unfolds. For her, marriage is a business and she executes the business quite professionally throughout her life.

She always dreamt to use Shree's intelligence and become rich. She is very focused on what she wants in life and puts in great efforts in achieving it. She sacrifices morals, at times, to please the influential Chawala. Chawala is the Chairman of Dynasty Club. He can get the plan of the hospital sanctioned. She lets him use her to a certain extent. When she sees that Shree is vacillating between the past and the future, she struggles to pull him together. She dreams big things for her only son Akshay. She feels that she has done her motherly duties by hammering into his mind the importance of earning money. She collapses when Akshay walks the same path and decides to go away to America to earn money. He does not even feel any emotional connection with his parents when he goes away. This is when Meeta understands the futility of her constant chase after money.

**Akshay** is the only son of Dr Shree and Meeta. He is reared up in a modern way. The Western influence over him is evident in the fact that he drinks alcohol with his parents, talks without emotions about his parents, is clear about bribing others to gain something. Just like his parents, he chooses America which is a dreamland for the young generation nowadays. He decides to become a Green Card holder, settle there and never come back. He tells his parents that building a posh five star hospital was not 'his' dream. It is 'their' dream. He would earn in dollars as if only money ensures happiness. It is an echo of what his parents had taught him in his life. Shree and Meeta remember their first unborn child, which Meeta had aborted since both of them had had their careers to think of then. Destiny had brought them face to face with their own doing.

There are two more characters: Kamala Bai and Mrs Pradhan. They are contrary to each other. Kamala Bai is the maid servant of Dr Shree and Mrs Pradhan is his patient. The writer has introduced and retained humour in the play through them. Kamala bai represents the lower stratum which is always thinking about mere survival. Whereas, Mrs Pradhan is a rich lady with her son settled abroad, with a lot of time and resources at her disposal. She suffers from insomnia and so is troubled. She is cured of her so-called disease by Sadashiv as he simply directs her un-channelized energy.

On the other hand, Kamala Bai leads a hard life. For her, mere survival is a big thing. It consumes all her energy. She does not understand Dr Shree's patients. She is of the opinion that only rich people need psychiatrists since they have a lot of money with no care and work. Her husband is a drunkard and she has the responsibility of rearing her family.

**Discussion:**

As mentioned earlier, the play depicts conflict at three levels: urban – rural, educated-uneducated and sane – insane. The Urban – Rural conflict is depicted by Shree and Sada. Sada belongs to a small place. He teaches in an agricultural college. His students are disillusioned because of the easy life that they see in the cities. Shree himself had felt in a similar way in his youth. Sada tries to teach them beautiful poetry and instil hope and happiness in them. He understands the importance of their profession, the need of a secured life for a farmer. He feels helpless. People like Shree find the simplest way, that of running away from the situation. Shree also belongs to a small village called Pimpalgaon. He is also neo-rich. He also misses the culture of the villages. He has got entangled in the web of the city. The process of urbanisation which has damaged the rural life can be seen from the struggle. Shree and Sada both aspire for happiness and satisfaction and both suffer because they do not get it. Sada suffers as he is unable to bear the corruption prevalent in society. He is not able to change the system and falls a prey to his ever-questioning mind. Shree also suffers because of his faulty notion of happiness. Money can never be the end, it can be only a means to reach the end. Shree does not know when to stop and settle down. So money cannot be the key factor to attain happiness.

The English-speaking Mrs Pradhan and the uneducated Kamalabai clearly depict the difference between the haves and the have-nots. The sophisticated environment of Mrs Pradhan and the poor background of Kamala Bai state the two worlds that one often sees. Both suffer on account of their lives. Mrs Pradhan suffers from insomnia. She tries many remedies. Kamala Bai suffers because of poverty, hardships and her husband. One is an internal, self-inflicted

suffering and the other is external, situational suffering. One can conclude that man's suffering and sadness is not due to the presence of money or the absence of it.

One can also analyse the play from another angle: Meeta – Shreedhar – Sadashiv. If they are placed on a linear path, Meeta would represent the highest level and Sadashiv, the lowest. This leaves Shree in the middle. Sadashiv's philosophy highlights integrity and rootedness as the means of achieving happiness. For Meeta, happiness can be gained only and only through money. She is focused. She dreams of building a posh five-star hospital where her husband followed by her son would earn lots of money. She wants the hospital 'at any cost'. Her clarity of thought is her strength even though her thoughts are misleading. Yet for Shree, his dream is dependent on Meeta and Akshay. He does not know what he wants. When he is with Meeta, he rides on the high wave as propagated by her. When he is with Sada, he starts thinking like him. Meeta fears Sada's influence over Shree. There is a 'method in madness' in Sada's case. Even though he comes as a mental patient to be treated for his absurd views, the audience understand the wisdom of his words as the dialogues unfold his thoughts. Man aspires for many things in life, but by the time he gets it, he realises that his mind has moved on. Clothes, language, looks should not be the deciding factor for humans. Man is beyond all these external things. Real happiness is in realisation.

Talking of idealism, Sada tricks Shree into realising the split personality that Shree has instead of Sada. The audience understand and somewhere identify themselves with Shree. Sada says he is a schizophrenic, yet he thinks and behaves in a homogeneous way. It is people like Dr Shree who think in an ideal way and act in a convenient way, thereby creating a split in their personality. The insane Sada defeats the sane Shree. Shree changes after this exchange of dialogues. Meeta comments appropriately that idealism weakens Shree at the most opportune time. He wants to talk with her as they used to do when they were young. She finds it absurd. All this leads to a complete disillusionment in the characters. Except Sada, both the

lead characters are lost in the myriad labyrinths of money and prosperity sans emotions and relations. Sada has no family. He has killed them. Shree also has no family to call his own. He has never brought his old mother from the village. He has never really come close to Meeta. His son has also gone away from him. Both the characters are alone and so devoid of happiness.

**Conclusion:**

The above discussion is with reference to the Marathi natak 'Sukhanshi Bhandato Aamhi'. One struggles with happiness. The first thing one notices is that the title suggests that there is no 'collective happiness'. Every individual defines happiness in different context and so happiness is depicted in plurality. It can be safely concluded that this pursuit of happiness that all humans are engaged in is a continuous process. Our Karma comes back. It is integrity, gratitude, rootedness that determines the satisfaction at the end. One should 'sow well to reap well'. Nothing comes free of cost. Ambition is a wonderful thing, but man should realise that over-ambition is a sin. Ambition should not take one away from life. It should be an integrating experience. Man should feel gratitude towards life that is encompassing. One should do his duty honestly; the returns would come automatically. Poverty has its own hardships, but man should not fear poverty and run away from life. One should, in whichever situation that he is, try to think wisely and in the interest of mankind to get satisfaction. Only then can the struggle with happiness have a happy ending.

Dr Shreedhar had intelligence to match his ambition. He could have, if he wished, realised his ambition by going back to his village, or be satisfied by what he had in the city. He could have asserted himself in front of Meeta which he never did. He was suffering from inferiority complex since he was considering himself something less than the city-folks. Meeta is the representative of the big sophisticated moneyed class of the city. Shree bowed down before the moneyed class, and that was the root cause of his dissatisfaction. He could not rise up and live his life according to his wishes. Sada, on the other hand, at the outset seems to be

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anachronistic, but in the end, his arguments show his wisdom. He did not want his dear wife and son to live in a vicious world where moral degradation has reached to a point of irreversibility. The writer has attempted to conclude the play on a happy note echoing the sentiment 'All's well that ends well', and one has to wait and wait for the end.

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