

## Rediscovered Voices Behind Buried History: A Study on Rachna Bisht Rawat's Kargil; Untold Stories from the War Incorporating Positive Psychology in the Forefront

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### ABSTRACT

Approaches to life can be different for different people. Some find solace in having a positive attitude in life to tackle difficult situations while others succumb to the negative aspect of it. Thus their personality plays a major role in helping a person live a better and fulfilling life. It discusses the signature strengths and virtues of a person and how it helps them in working for something much larger than the person themselves. It also describes in detail the happiness theory which can be discovered and explored with the unique combination of a person's signature strengths like humanity, temperance and persistence. Taking into account all the factors that matter in the subjective well-being of a person, this paper will analyse Rachna Bisht Rawat's book *Kargil: Untold Stories from the War* with heroes who have indirectly yet successfully used this theory on a practical level to make their lives better.

**Keywords:** Positivity, Happiness, Well-being, flourish

### Introduction

A person can have two kinds of approach to a particular problem or situation – positive and negative. Many tend to leave the positive and focus on the negative aspects of life. Negativity leaves us caught up in our own head that we miss the beauty around us and restoring our attention takes a lot of patience. Focusing on the negative aspects of life is just an excuse, rejection or fear of something over which they have absolutely no control over. These experiences tend to affect people on a more daily basis when compared to positive ones. They bring great attitude changes on their behaviour which affects their productivity, higher rates of absence, less social interaction and also low morale. They withdraw from opportunities even before they have even tried it once. This is a dilemma that should not be left neglected.

The remedy to this is very simple – positivity. Positivity aims to help people recognise happiness at all times. It also encourages people to concentrate more on the bright side of life. Increasing positivity by being mindful of what actually matters in one's life will help to divert the focus from negativity to respecting and appreciating the little moments of joy that life is filled with. This is where Martin Seligman's "Positive Psychology" is being discussed. He has been studying the concept of what a person's psyche or personality has to do with their well-being. There have been works related to this aspect of using positive emotions to tackle illness with creativity, optimism and wisdom, but there had been no theoretical framework provided for the idea up until the 2000's.

To sum up, psychology according to Csikszentmihalyi and Seligman has three major goals: Curing mental illness; to improve the lives and productivity of individuals; to identify and nurture high talent. But this was near to impossible to put into practise given the sociological and political disturbance that was going on because of World War II. Hence the focus of psychology was directed more towards the humanitarian purpose of treating psychological

disorders. This changed its course of direction to treat patients on a disease based framework rather than with its original aim. One positive outline of this was that about fourteen psychological diseases which were considered incurable were somehow cured. Even so, the failure to study talents, strengths, and other positive shades of life has significantly left a gap in the field of psychology. Any science that deals with the elemental questions of human life is incomplete if it only focuses on the negative.

From this gap arises the concept of positive psychology which was rediscovered and brought back to its initial objective. This popular stream of psychology sprung out in the late 1990's with its primary focus on the strengths rather than the failures, virtues than the vices, and on talents that help on contributing to a fully functioning and growing community to flourish. The heart of the theory came from positive emotions like happiness, resiliency, well-being, and states of flow and engagement. It was brought to light by a former president of the American Psychological Association, Martin Seligman. In 1998, he was elected as the President of the Association and positive psychology was its primary concern. Now, Seligman is widely referred to as the father of contemporary positive psychology. In her article, "Positive Psychology: An Introduction", Catarina Lino says Seligman describes positive psychology as "the scientific study of optimal human functioning that aims to discover and promote the factors that allow individuals and communities to thrive" (Lino).

Before 2004 there was no general vocabulary with which researchers could measure positive traits as the field of positive psychology was a relatively new one. Traditional psychology could benefit from the creation of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) that gave the researchers enough general words to talk about negative emotions. As a remedy to this discrepancy, in 2004 Martin Seligman and Chris Peterson took in the study of character wherein they identified, analysed, organised and measure character of people. The Values in Action (VIA) classification of strengths was an important initial step toward specifying important positive traits (Peterson and Seligman). After studying through culture and history, Peterson and Seligman were finally successful in discovering six core virtues from their analysis: courage, humanity, justice, temperance, transcendence and wisdom. The Values in Action classification of strengths can be identified as a counterpart to traditional psychology. The difference between the two lies in the fact that VIA classifies positive human emotions whereas the latter categorises human deficits and disorders.

The theory was necessarily born out of the need to scientifically study the positive aspects of life. Over the years, the study and interest in this field has tremendously risen since the concept was introduced. Today more and more people are interested in this field because of the positive response and fulfilment of life.

Where psychology gave more importance to identifying and curing human mental illness focusing its core on decreasing the dysfunctional emotions and behaviour thereby ignoring positive and optimistic function, positive psychology gave importance to identifying and at the same time enhancing human strengths and virtues for better well-being. Rather than the theory of positive thinking or new thought movements, positive psychology has been successful in scientifically providing knowledgeable outlook on what makes life worth living. As mentioned earlier its core significance lies in the fact that it can lead to happiness, feeling of fulfilment in life and flourish.

Positive psychology claims to give equal importance to the study of health, fulfilment in life and well-being as it gives to the study of illness, dysfunction and public mental health. Though

given equal importance positive psychology provides a more scientific lens or concentration on well-being, health and optimal functioning. Recent developments in the field have helped in providing a more common theoretical framework to work on, so that it can locate positive conditions, strengths and virtues so as to provide more favourable outcomes in life. Recent developments have also proved that the difficulties faced during psychological functioning can be easily dealt with in the absence, excess or opposite of negative emotions that hinder smooth psychological functioning rather than the traditionally encrypted diagnostic treatments. Thus the scientific study of mental problems through positive psychology has helped in bringing out an enlightening point to understand human experience.

This paper examines the role played by a person's personality in helping them live a better and fulfilling life. Our research also aims to elucidate the role of personality of a person in their life. It discusses the signature strengths and virtues of a person and its working in the service of something much larger than the person themselves. It also describes in detail the happiness theory which can be discovered and explored with the unique combination of a person's signature strengths like humanity, temperance and persistence.

Taking into account all the factors that matter in the subjective well-being of a person, this project will analyse Rachna Bisht Rawat's book *Kargil: Untold Stories from the War* which presents heroes who have indirectly yet successfully used this theory on a practical level to make their lives better. The book narrates the stories of numerous veterans and their experiences on the battlefield. Not only does the book revisit their experiences but at the same time it also rejoices their victories and keep the memories of the brave soldiers alive for future generations. It's compelling and mind-blowing narrations of the war heroes presents a whole different essence, ethos and motivation of the Indian soldiers. In an article for the BBC, Rehan Fazal writes that "Kargil stories have become the stuff of legends, stories that deserve to be shared and told over and over again. Rachna Bisht Rawat takes a deep look at the human face of warfare in the high Himalayas and moves out with a moving insight of the psyche and raw courage of Indian soldiers. Rachna's account will undoubtedly swell any Indian's heart with pride" (Fazal).

*Kargil* takes one to those instances of war that the Indian society saw painstakingly in their living rooms on their televisions. From those untold and unheard stories it goes beyond the tale of sacrifice to the love and remembrance that their families, friends and the people of this country have forever cherished in their hearts and mind for the past two decades. Cherishing those moments, Rachna writes in her book *Kargil* that "it is the least we can do for those who willingly gave up their lives for the country. Soldiers don't die on battlefields; they die when an ungrateful nation forgets their sacrifice" (Rawat xxv).

Through Rawat's narration we are brought straight to 1999, into the high and treacherous mountains of Kashmir and Ladakh where the Pakistani troops and militants had infiltrated the Indian side of the Line of Action (LoC), which led to the war where some of Indian Army's bloodiest battles were fought. Interviewing war survivors and martyrs' families, Rachna Bisht Rawat tells stories of remarkable and exceptional human courage, the lionhearted soldiers, of not just men in uniform but also those who loved them the most. What makes their stories so exemplary is the willingness to sacrifice their lives for the motherland, for the country. Rawat has tremendously portrayed all those brave heroes who martyred for the sake of their nation and fought till their last breath.

Through this masterpiece, the words said by their families are kept alive and at the same time we find them coping with their loss by keeping alive the beautiful memories the families have with them. The memories of their delightful daily lives, childhood escapades, social interactions

is what kept them alive in their hearts. The loss of their loved ones has not stopped them from reminiscing them. Though painful it is at the same time their only source of joy and pleasure they have left and they cherish that memory. Their hearts fill up with pride whenever they mention their names.

### **Positive Psychology and its effects on Rachna's heroes**

A majority of people tend to focus on what went wrong in their life or in a particular situation rather than focusing on what went well and move on. They tend to focus too much on the negative that the experience left them with, that they feel dejected and depressed. It is no doubt that sometimes life can be a bit overwhelming or even fearful and dreading. Sometimes one may be distressed because nothing that is happening goes their way and it is quite normal to feel unhappy about life. This dissatisfaction with life might leave one with a feeling of uneasiness, yearning for good or wishing for anything else than what one is going through at that moment. It may be caused by many situations or factors but normally happens when one is going through a difficult period or when they are defining success or happiness in their life.

Ed Diener says in an interview that the biggest insight he has gained from happiness is that it is not just a place, but also a process which led him to teach that "happiness is an ongoing process of fresh challenges, and that even when everything is in place it takes the right attitudes and activities to continue to be happy" (Diener). The problem lies in the fact that it affects our personal space, our relationships with our loved ones and also our professional elements. This is not in general a bad thing but having a more positive approach to a certain situation or problem has showed higher chances of success as well as more personal confidence that have proved to turn in much better results and living mentality. Martin Seligman says,

Even if you could alter all of the external circumstances, it would not do much for you, since together they probably account for not more than between 8 and 15 percent of the variance in happiness. The very good news is that there are quite a number of internal circumstances that will likely work for you. So I now turn to this set of variables, which are more under your voluntary control. If you decide to change them (and be warned that none of these changes come without real effort), your level of happiness is likely to increase lastingly (Seligman xiv).

Seligman, a notable figure in the field of positive psychology has made a lot of contribution to the systematic theory about why people are happy and uses a scientific method to explore it. After a significant amount of study on the subject he came to the conclusion that people who were aware of their signature strengths, for instance, courage, persistence, wisdom, humanity, temperance and so on proved to have had a more impactful and meaningful life. The branch which dealt with this aspect came to be called positive psychology. Its primary focus is that on the strengths, virtues and talents that contribute to help the individual function effectively and flourish. Core topics of the study included happiness, resiliency, well-being and states of flow and engagement.

The idea of happiness corresponds with the teachings of the virtue ethics of great minds like Confucius, Mencius and Aristotle. Seligman concludes by saying that happiness in a person's life has three dimensions that can be cultivated – "the Pleasant Life", "the Good Life", and "the Meaningful Life".

While reading each and every narration of their experiences in the battlefield, we can analyse their personality with the help of Seligman's happiness dimension. According to Seligman, the Pleasant Life can be realised when one learns to savour and appreciate basic pleasure as companionship, the bodily needs and the natural environment. Rachna's many heroes fall under

this category that seems to enjoy simple pleasures of life. They strive each day to be more and more better versions of themselves.

One such story is that of a Ladakhi Buddhist officer Sonam Wangchuk. Sitting at the living room of Rawat's home, Col. Sonam Wangchuk, MahaVir Chakra (MVC) tells the story of his experience in the battle filled with grit and courage. Sonam sets out with his battalion to his men who were stranded under the enemy shootings. Sonam says, "If their ammunition runs out, they will either be killed or captured" (18). Sensing the grave situation that his men were, he immediately sets out to help them. To lift up the spirits of his men who did not know anything about their enemy, he offers them protection in the form of prayers from the Dalai Lama. The terrain of the snow filled mountains was proving to be very difficult to climb. He was sure to give to not just to himself but also his men enough rest and encouraging words before they could give their all when they encounter the enemy post. Broad-shouldered, tanned and finely muscled, a young man of vigour then, led a group of around thirty men through the dangerous path and led them to victory. His only thought and mentality was to save his men at all costs and to let the enemy perish and for that he had to have a heart brave and leader worthy.

They can either stay in that "Pleasant Life" or move on to "Good Life" where one can nourish their own unique strengths or employ them creatively to enhance one's life or nourishing their own unique strengths in contributing to the happiness of our fellow human beings like Lieutenant Vijyant Thapar. A man of great honour and affection, he befriended a three year old Kashmiri girl who always watched Vijyant and his men with fearful eyes. Her mother tells them how the girl lost her voice from the trauma of watching her woodcutter father getting brutally killed by militants. Vijyant would always smile and wave at her with nothing but warmth. Soon the child started smiling after he gained her trust and to the mother's surprise even started talking. In Vijyant's letter to his father he requested him "to send fifty rupees to the girl for her future" (88). Later after his death, his father Col. Thapar keeps in contact with her and sponsors her. Vijyant's kindness to the little girl changed her life forever. She is able to live normally like other children. This is when a person descends from the realm of pleasant life to that of the good one. By helping the child he had not just helped nourish her strengths but also his own virtues that helped in the moral development of his family and all those who had heard of his kindness.

The final stage that Seligman describes is the "Meaningful Life" where a deep sense of fulfilment is received by employing our unique strengths for a purpose that is much greater than ourselves. He says to "use your signature strengths and virtues in the service of something much larger than you are" (Seligman 22). Each and every one of the heroes mentioned by Rawat in her book *Kargil: Untold Stories from the War* can be said to have lived a meaningful life. Just young men who had started their life's journey sacrificed their lives to protect a country whose victory they couldn't even witness. Capt. Haneef-ud-din, cheerful, handsome and politely attentive was just twenty five year old was one such brave hero who sacrificed his life on the craggy mountainside fighting and protecting the country. Yet the fear of losing his life did not stop him from valiantly sacrificing his life for the better good.

In an article to "The Performatist", Larry G. Maguire says resilience is the ability to be willing to push oneself beyond their own perceived limits and accepting the fact that achieving the desired results is not only possible but probable. Whatever the task is at work or at sport or something else, resilient people pushes themselves beyond their boundaries and despite failing, keep the vigour as the challenge itself was worth it, regardless of the outcome. These negative outcomes he says can serve as fuels for further attempts (Maguire).

Complaining or wailing about that which one has no control over (past) or daydreaming about romantic notions that has yet to happen (future) takes us away from the only moment that matters in life (present). Resilience is therefore the ability of its bearer to be able to deal with what is important right now rather than the past or the future. It helps people with the personal ability to be able to cope with and bounce back from adverse circumstances like failure or other negative emotions. It offers a more creative solution to the problems in front of them.

In her book *Kargil: Untold Stories from the War* Rachna narrates the story of Retd. Maj. Devender Pal Singh of 7 Dogra who is a perfect example of resilience. For him “battles and bravery don’t end with war. And legs aren’t always made of muscles and bone” (141). She further states,

Usually dressed in T-shirts and jeans, a bright smile on his face, Maj. DP is the quintessential Army officer—physically fit, dignified and well-mannered. He is a model for the high-impact Adidas advertisement for ‘Odds’, or footwear with both shoes of the pair on the same foot. The ad had Maj. DP running along under a steel bridge, with Kabir Bedi’s baritone asking: ‘Odd isn’t it, for a man to be running when he shouldn’t even be walking? To complete a marathon on one leg, when he really should be sitting at home and watching it’ (141).

The blast that occurred on 15th July 1999 in Kargil changed his life forever. A sleeping Singh is hit by a mortar shell. He is taken to the nearest hospital but they couldn’t save his leg as it was beyond saving by then. At the Army Research and Referral hospital, Delhi, he met other kindred souls “who are also being fitted with artificial limbs” (143). His desk job after leaving the infantry because of his 100 percent disability leaves him frustrated so he decides to take measures to change that. “In 2007, he sought retirement with a medical pension. Two years later, much to the shock of fellow participants, he runs the 2009 Airtel Delhi Half Marathon with his prosthetic leg” writes Rawat (144). Singh says, “The elation I felt was incomparable to anything else in my life. This was what I wanted to do” (144). After receiving a three-and-a-half kilo blade to run, he ran with it for the first time during which his knee “was soaked in blood” (144). But that was not enough to stop him. It has now become his passion and continues to run marathons on his walking prosthetic. Thereafter he became “India’s blade runner” (145). He explains his aim was to show differently abled people that they are not the physically challenged ones—they are the challengers.

What happened to him was not under his control nor was his personality the kind to keep on contemplating over his misfortunes but the kind that would decide what life he would live in the future. He believed in the notion of making the best out of each moment in his life and he worked hard for it. His physical ailments would not be the reason for his hindrance to an adventurous life and that was his decision. He says with a smile on his face to Rawat during their interaction, “Everything in my body is broken except for my smile! That’s apparently all one needs in life” (146). There is always a way out if the person decides that there is and faces it.

Martin Seligman’s initial theory of happiness was a combination of three key elements – positive emotions, engagement or being absorbed and having meaning in life. But this transformed and target was more concentrated on the aspect of positive psychology which dealt with well-being or flourishing. Thus the target shifted from happiness or life satisfaction to well-being or flourishing. For the later emerged target, new set of elements were also formed as the basis for which well-being could be achieved. The five being – positive emotion and engagement, as in the Authentic Happiness Theory, positive relationship, meaning and accomplishment was added. In his book *Flourish* (2011), he explains how he measures well-being. Every characteristic feature of well-being has to have three conditions fulfilled to count as an element

– it has to contribute to well-being, it has to be performed for its own sake and not to get another, it should be described and measured individually rather than in the influence of other elements.

Martin Seligman through his works and study is able to answer the question which haunts each person in their life. What is human flourishing and what enables it? His theory of well-being and elements which govern it are a perfect answer to his question. The five building blocks help people derive well-being to varying degrees. It may not be necessary that a good life for one person is also a good life for another. Different routes in the realm of positive psychology will take one to a flourishing life. Positive psychology has the power to be descriptive, not prescriptive. When an individual is able to explore, relish and merge positive emotions into their daily life with visualizations of future, it develops habitual pondering and acting.

Which of Rachna's heroes does not exhibit these positive emotions when faced with difficult situation is hard to say. Each of them face their problems no matter what in their own way. Be it Capt. Saurabh Kalia or Lietanant Vijyant Thapar who spread happiness through the little girl Ruksana, they remain immortalised by the memory that they left behind.

As Barbara Fredrickson, through her "broaden-and-build" theory (1998) suggests that positive emotions can at the same time stimulate one's physical, intellectual, and social relationships and abilities. She further states that having a positive attitude broadens our own awareness and thought-action repertoire entailing us to look for creative and flexible ways of thinking and acting. This is extremely useful in increasing our performance levels and also at the same time strengthening our relationships.

The concept of engagement or flow in life is defined as an experience of optimal psychological functioning, that is, when one is completely absorbed in a task that it is slightly over our skill level, and therefore it will require us to push ourselves a bit more so that one can reach a new level of performance. The concept was originally introduced by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in his book "Finding Flow" (1990). Here he describes flow as "the best moments in our lives are not the passive, receptive, relaxing times. The best moments usually occur if a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile" (Csikszentmihalyi 3). When one is experiencing flow, concentration becomes so laser-focused that everything else seems to disappear and perception of time seems to be altered. The voices in our head quiets down while experiencing it and scientific research on the subject also proved that the area responsible for the cognitive processes of our psyche such as self-reflection and self-consciousness, show less activation during states of flow (Dietrich). The concluding research on the subject proved that such people exhibit a higher level of performance and creativity.

Studies have shown that people who feel personally involved in achieving their goals indicate higher levels of well-being and are in better health than people who lack a sense of direction in their lives. It is known as achievement, mastery or competence. Seligman throughout his study says that a sense of accomplishment is the result of working towards reaching your goals, mastering an endeavour, and having the self-motivation to finish what you have been set out to do. He says this contributes to well-being because people can then look into their own lives with a sense of pride.

The concept behind achievement lies in the fact that achieving intrinsic goals such as growth and connection will only lead to larger gains in well-being than external goals such as money or fame. All these elements contribute in what Seligman says establishing a flourishing social relationship with oneself as well those around them.

## Conclusion

The chapter describes in detail with Seligman concept of “PERMA” that better relationship with oneself is critical in developing a healthy lifestyle and in establishing a strong personal as well as social interaction among human beings.

According to the science of positive psychology by Martin Seligman, there are a minimum of ten key findings that are important. He says that most people are happy because happiness is the cause of good things in life and not simply a result of success or good outcomes. Happy people make good things happen that is why political conservatives are happier than political liberals. Most people are resilient which helps them to bounce back from adversity, large and small.

Happiness, strength of character and good social relationships are buffers against the damaging effects of disappointments and setbacks. Using one's strength to service something that is much larger than ourselves. These virtues have helped them build a healthier lifestyle, fostering a deeper and more enduring sense of well-being that requires an exploration of meaning.

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