



CONCEPTUALIZING HAPPINESS IN THE FRAMEWORK OF BHUTAN'S GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS

Divya Rai

Research Scholar, Department of International Relations, Sikkim University, Sikkim.

Gross National Happiness (GNH) is an ideology, just as neo-liberal Capitalism is, as well as now defunct Communism (Mancall, Mark, 2004: 11) Countries all over the world have come to acknowledge and understand that there is a serious need for an alternative ideology or model of governance due to the various destructive and ill effects that global capitalism bears. As mentioned earlier in the introductory chapter, in 2011, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution calling the pursuit of happiness 'a fundamental goal' and asking the United Nation member states to exercise initiatives which endow more importance to well-being in determining how to measure and achieve social and economic development. This move was endorsed by 68 countries then. In 2012, the United National Sustainable Development Solutions Network published a World Happiness Report which states that efforts should be made to achieve a new course "that ensures poor countries have the right to develop, and all countries have the right to happiness, while simultaneously curbing the human-induced destruction of the environment" (United National Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2012: 7). Although the neo-liberal development approach is designed to procure well-being of people, its focus on economic aspects is not enough to tell if people are actually happy. The indicators that neo-liberalism employs do not necessarily show if people are truly satisfied with the life they live. Additionally, there are many ill-effects that the approach using GDP as a measure of development carry. Environmental effects like global warming, brought on by the free market capitalism, are a serious threat to the planet and the entire life-forms living in it. Governments, International Organizations and policy makers around the world have addressed these issues and are together or independently trying to find ways for a change from the current pattern.

Bhutan is the first country to take a detour from the popular Gross Domestic Product approach and take a new, multi-dimensional approach to development, namely, Gross National Happiness. As one of the last countries to be affected by globalization, Bhutan's development process is indeed quite unique. With a population of about 784,103 and sandwiched between India and China, Bhutan has been relatively isolated until recently. What contributed to its isolation were the complex geopolitical factors which kept influence of the British India or any other colonial power at bay. Until the late 1950s, Bhutan practiced a closed-door policy refusing any foreign cultural influence keeping it far off from under the radar of the outside world (Priesner, Stefan, 1999: 31).

As a result of this active policy of isolation, Bhutan remained medieval in character until the end of 1950s (Ura, Karma, 1994: 25). The process of unification, expansion and consolidation of the state of Bhutan was religiously-inspired and carried out in the name of a religious order in the 17th century, by the Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal¹, a hierarch of the Druk Kagyu sect. As such, Bhutan was founded on a Mahayana Buddhist ideology which has made a profound effect on the nature of the state, society and the individual in Bhutan.

As increasing concerns of national security cropped up as a result of the occupation of Tibet by Chinese forces in 1950 and the suppression of the Tibetan revolt by the Chinese in 1959, Bhutan ended its isolation policy (Priesner, Stefan, 1999: 32). Bhutan did not have diplomatic relations with other countries, except India. As such, India almost entirely financed the first three development plans (1961-1976) of Bhutan (Ura, Karma, 1994: 35). Consequently, Bhutan started developing its basic infrastructure under the initiative of the third king, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, who reigned from 1952 to 1972. Until then, Bhutan was linked only by footpaths and mule tracks as they had no proper road connectivity.

The third king recognized that in a changing international setting, Bhutan faced an enormous challenge. One of the main issues was the need to train elites capable of governing the transformation (Bhattacharya, Savyasachi S., 1997: 137-165). At the end of the 1950s, Bhutan had less than 500 students enrolled in primary schools, while the only form of education widely available was those offered in the monastic centers, following the precepts of Mahayana Buddhism (Priesner, Stefan, 1999: 25). At that time, no possibility for further lay education existed within Bhutan as the country was posed with topographical barriers to modernization.

There are very little written sources available which indicate that Bhutan's development philosophy was inspired by the objective of happiness within the first two decades of Bhutan's development (Priesner, Stefan, 1999: 28). There were no

¹ The Zhabdrung is the title for the unifier of Bhutan and his reincarnations. It means "at whose feet one prostrates." Ngawang Namgyal (1594-1651) fled Tibet in 1616 following a dispute over his recognition as a reincarnate lama.



conceptual issues or broad guidelines in relation to happiness objective introduced by the National Assembly (Rose, Leo E., 1977: 162). Meanwhile, the Planning Commission, as the main body responsible for the implementation of development projects, had not yet incorporated well-being as an explicit goal (ibid: 25). There is a popular belief and claim that the idea of Gross National Happiness was invented in 1972 by the fourth King of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuck.² However, this claim has no evidence or proof of its authenticity. The earliest written reference to GNH can be found in two articles by Michael Kaufman in the New York Times in 1980 (Munro, Lauchlan T., 2016: 72). However, the concept of GNH is not presented as the central theme in both the articles (ibid: 72). As such, there was nothing about the concept of GNH that was mentioned in writing anywhere during the 1960s and 1970s, which makes the popular claim of the concept being coined by the fourth King in 1972 uncertain. The concept of GNH was first mentioned in the country's *National Budget for Financial Year 1996-1997 and Report on the 1995-96 Budget* (Royal Government of Bhutan, Ministry of Finance, 1996: 16). As such, it was in 1996 that the tradition of GNH as Bhutan's national development policy was first officially mentioned. Furthermore, while the idea of happiness and wellbeing as the goal of development has been a part of Bhutan's development endeavours, it did not take a central theme as a deliberate policy objective until very recently.

However, there were instances beginning from the late 1960s when happiness began to be loosely mentioned and a vague notion of an alternative path to development began to emerge. Just as an article in *Kuensel*³ on 1967 states that the third King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck expressed that the goal of development was to make "the people happy and prosperous" (Priesner, Stefan, 2004: 28). Similar views were expressed by the king on the occasion of Bhutan's admission to the UN in 1971, one of the most important events in the country's recent history (ibid: 28). In 1997, the Bhutanese government published its Eighth Five Year Plan 1997-2002 in which there was a fleeting mention of GNH, although the concept was framed in terms of human development and capabilities paradigm and not born of Bhutanese cultural referents (Munro, Lauchlan T., 2016: 79). In 1999, the Royal Government of Bhutan Planning Commission along with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (or UNDP) published a long-term strategic planning document entitled *Bhutan 2020: A Vision for Peace, Prosperity and Happiness*, in which the concept of GNH was the central development theme but was subordinated by the overarching goal of the "future independence, sovereignty and security" of Bhutan.⁴

The concept of GNH based on four pillars, namely, sustainable socio-economic development, environmental preservation, cultural resilience and good governance, serves as a guiding philosophy for Bhutan. These four pillars were used as a standard to construct and implement policies in Bhutan. As an alternative to Gross Domestic Product, GNH adopts a less materialistic national goal, where non-economic aspects of well-being are given equal priority. As such, GNH philosophy is a contrast from traditional western ideologies, as they continue to believe the system of well-being, self-reliance and paternalism were the main features of their traditional society (Gupta, Praethana, 2014: 33). Instead of economic development, GNH values and prioritizes non-economic development at higher extent.

Thus, the proper system of measuring the GNH was developed, as it exists today. Today, as per the latest 2010 GNH survey, Bhutan has defined this index into nine domains, which have sub-indicators under them, making the measurement an extensive process. The nine broad domains are psychological well-being, health, time use, education, cultural diversity and resilience, good governance, community vitality, ecological divergence and resilience, and living standards. These are further classified into 33 indicators, which are used to determine the GNH Index of the country.

The Idea of Happiness

The word 'happiness' is used in various ways. It carries diverse meanings which vary between individuals, over time and situations and cultural tradition. To a child, happiness could simply mean eating ice-cream or playing video games. To a lay man, happiness could mean finding his dream job, or going on an adventure. To others, happiness could represent something more, like, helping others, or living for others. However, as Neil Thin puts it, it is not a "definable entity" but it can be

² M.S. Givel in his article "Gross National Happiness in Bhutan: Political Institutions and Implementation" states that "GNH has been Bhutan's guiding directive for development since the 1907s". Elizabeth Allison of California Institute of Integral Studies also writes in her article "Gross National Happiness" that "In 1972, the fourth king of the Himalayan nation of Bhutan, King Jigme Singye Wangchuk, proclaimed, 'Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross National Product'". The President of the Centre for Bhutan Studies and GNH Research, Dasho Karma Ura has also supported the claim on many occasions, one of them being during a Lecture at Schumacher College, UK, on November 11, 2009.

³ *Kuensel* is the national newspaper of Bhutan, which was found in 1967 as an internal government bulletin. Today, the government owns 51 per cent of the newspaper.

⁴ For more details, see Lauchlan T. Munro's "Where did Bhutan's Gross National Happiness come from? The Origins of an Invented Tradition" available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2015.1128681>



understood as “an evaluative kind of ‘conversation’ concerning how well our lives go” (Thin, Neil, 2012: 33). As such, it is a process which is both dynamic and interactive and which includes “good feelings, satisfactions, and more ambitious themes such as the fabrication of meaning and purpose or coherence” (ibid: 33). On the other hand, Ruut Veenhoven defines happiness as the “subjective enjoyment of life” (Veenhoven, Ruut, 2001: 3). For him, happiness is the degree of positive assessment of the overall quality of a person’s life in its entirety. Simply put, it is how much a person likes the life he/she leads. The term happiness is often used interchangeably with terms like ‘life-satisfaction’, ‘well-being’, ‘subjective well-being’, ‘psychological well-being’, ‘hedonism’, ‘*eudaimonia*’, ‘health’, ‘flourishing’ and so on.

In the study of happiness, the various conceptions of happiness are placed within one of two well-known traditions, namely, the hedonic and the *eudaimonic* (David, Susan A., Ilona Boniwell, and Amanda Conley Ayers, 2013: 3). The major historical figures who propounded these two types of theories are J. S. Mill and Aristotle, respectively (Uyl, Douglas Den and Tibor R. Machan, 1983: 116). Research within the hedonic school of thought defines happiness as “the pursuit of positive emotion, seeking maximum pleasure and a pleasant life overall with instant gratification” (David, Susan A., Ilona Boniwell, and Amanda Conley Ayers, 2013: 4). As such, it is a constructive process of turning various pleasures and sorrows into a meaningful and evaluative story about life as a whole. On the other hand, the *eudaimonic* school “looks beyond this, and is concerned with change, growth and breaking homeostasis” (ibid: 4). It calls for people to recognize their true and fullest potential and live in accordance with that (Waterman, Alan S., 1993, 1993: 678). It is the result of the connection between personal expressiveness and self-realization (ibid: 679). For a clearer understanding of the concept of happiness, the following sections will discuss the works of J. S. Mill and Aristotle on the question of happiness.

Hedonism

According to hedonism, an individual’s overall level of well-being is determined by the balance of pleasure and pain they experience (Fletcher, Guy, 2016). As such, happiness for hedonists is a balance of pleasure over pain (Parducci, Allen, 1995: 9). In his work, Utilitarianism, John Stuart Mill tries to equate happiness with pleasure (Mill, J. S., 1862). However, unlike most hedonists, the notion of pleasure for him is something more than mere enjoyable feelings or any type of sensation. Mill’s conception of happiness has been visited by many thinkers. Traditionally, he is seen equating happiness with pleasure, and pleasure is thought of as a state of mind. As such, the value of various actions or states of affairs is determined by their contribution to a pleasurable state of mind. The actions which are taken for a particular end further acts as a means to an ultimate end which is the pleasurable state of mind. This traditional view of Mill’s idea of happiness sees him advocating a dominant end theory of happiness (Uyl, Douglas Den and Tibor R. Machan, 1983: 121). However, there are other interpretations of his work which argue that Mill’s theory of happiness is characteristically more inclusive. These works reject the dominant end theory of happiness as it is seen in Mill’s words that, “the principle of utility does not mean that any given pleasure, as music for instance, or any given exemption from pain, as for example, health, is to be looked upon as means to a collective something termed happiness, and to be desired on that account. They are desired and desirable in and for themselves; besides being means, they are part of the end” (Mill, J. S., 1863). According to Pamela Clark, Mill conceives happiness as “the good for man”, and not simply a psychological state of mind (Clark, Pamela, 1954: 247). D. H. Munro has made further exploration of the inclusive/dominant end controversy of Mill’s texts. He suggests that an individual’s pleasure or happiness can be regarded as the sum of those things one does for their own sake: the sum of one’s ends. To do something as a means to happiness, on the other hand, is to do it not for its own sake but because it leads to something that is a part of one’s happiness” (Munro, D. H., 1969:192). He further adds that the means of happiness can also be a part of happiness. He points out that Mill followed the psychological theories of Hartley that claimed that some pleasures could become associated with other, such that they take on the status of ends in themselves.

Eudaimonia

The concept of *eudaimonia* has had different conceptions offered by different thinkers. Prichard takes Aristotle’s reading of *eudaimonia* and states that *eudaimonia* is some state or feeling of pleasure, and as such what is pleasurable is the good (agathon) (Prichard, H. A., 1968). Meanwhile, Austin rejects this view by stating that *eudaimonia* cannot be pleasure, because “pleasure is a feeling” and *eudaimonia* in Aristotle is a “life of a certain kind” or “an achievement” (of which pleasure may be a part) (Austin, 1968: 280). This view is supported by many other thinkers who see *eudaimonia* as something more than a feeling of pleasure.

Regardless of the various interpretations of Aristotle’s concept of *eudaimonia*, there are three well-known features of Aristotle’s account given in the *Nicomachean Ethics* which provide the basic principles that must be explained in any interpretation: (1) *eudaimonia* is tied to man’s function (*ergon*), (2) *eudaimonia* is an end in itself, and (3) *eudaimonia* is said to be found in both the life of contemplation and the life of moral virtue, with the latter being given apparently secondary status (Uyl, Douglas Den and Tibor R. Machan, 1983: 117).



There are scholars and philosophers who claim that Aristotle has no conception of happiness at all, in the general sense of the word. His translation of the word *eudaimonia* into happiness is said to be loose and dubious (Kraut, Richard, 1979: 167). For instance, he is made to say that everything should be sought for the sake of happiness, and that children and evil adults are never happy because they have not developed such traits as justice, courage, and self- control. Furthermore, *eudaimonia* does not name a feeling or emotion, whereas happiness involves a certain state of mind (ibid: 167). As such, Henry Sidgwick warns that the word "happiness" that we find in translations of Aristotle does not have its contemporary meaning in English (Sidgwick, Henry, 1907: 92-93). *Eudaimonia* does not mean happiness in its usual sense due to the possibility that some children are definitely happy and some evil people might as well be happy.

For Aristotle, the most *eudaimon* individual is someone who has fully developed and regularly exercises the various virtues of the soul, both intellectual and moral (Kraut, Richard, 1979: 170). Such a person engages in philosophical activity (since this is the full flowering of his capacity to reason theoretically) and also in moral activities, which display his justice, generosity, temperance, etc. Aristotle thinks that a virtuous person will make the best of any situation, but that in extreme circumstances *eudaimonia* is lost. It may be regained, but only after a long period of time during which many fine things have been achieved. He thinks that exercising one's intellectual and moral capacities is the greatest good available to human beings, and he knows he possesses this good.

Aristotle also says that one who is virtuous and *eudaimon* particularly desires life, he cannot mean that he will struggle to stay alive at any cost (ibid: 172). Rather, he must mean that such individuals are more glad to be alive than others; the kind of existence they enjoy gives them a heightened love of life. As such, the *eudaimon* person is one who is fully satisfied with his life. He is, in other words, a happy person.

Buddhist Philosophy of Happiness

The Buddhist philosophy of happiness fits in the *eudaimonia* school of thought. According to Buddhist philosophy, happiness is a quality of the mind that arises from positive mental attitudes including the intention never to harm others, the desire to provide help and support to those around us, and to remain contented with one's life. According to the Buddhist philosophy there are Four Noble Truths, namely, (a) that existence is suffering, (b) that the cause of suffering is having wrong desire or craving, (c) that there is a possible end to suffering, which comes from the attainment of *nirvana*⁵ through enlightenment, and (d) that *nirvana* may be achieved by pursuing the Noble Eightfold Path which consists of (i) right comprehension, (ii) right aspiration, (iii) right speech, (iv) right conduct, (v) right mode of livelihood, (vi) right endeavour, (vii) right self-discipline, and (viii) right rapture (McGovern, Wm. Montgomery, 1919: 239).

Buddhism rejects the notion of happiness in terms of sense and ego gratification, which is resulted from favourable external factors and conditions. This form of happiness as illustrated in the *Bhava Chakra* or the Tibetan Wheel of Life relates to the never progressing aspect of *samsara*. Happiness in its truer sense in fact comes from living an increasingly skilful and pure life, having a clear conscience, from generosity and helping others, from friendship, and from creative endeavour (Lokamitra, Dharmachari, 2004: 475). Happiness which is brought from external stimuli or external conditions is not satisfactory and one which does not lead to the realization of nirvana, nor enlightenment. Enlightenment is the state of supreme bliss and peace, and the state of unrestricted freedom from all bonds (ibid: 475). Therefore, even when the external factors are unfavourable, one remains unaffected in the state of enlightenment. As such, it is only when one moves further away from being dependent on the external factors, one can achieve enlightenment.

For an individual to attain happiness, they must strive to avoid or abandon suffering immediately. Following Buddha's teachings, it is only when one abandons suffering that happiness arises. For suffering to be removed, one must know the cause of suffering. Mostly, the cause of suffering is attachment and craving which is the binding force which holds all humans within the cycle of *samsara*⁶ (Tashi, Khenpo Phuntshok, 2004: 490). So long as craving and thirst for attachment exists within the mind, it will continue to be the cause for renewal of existence or rebirth (ibid: 490). This craving is mostly associated with the need for sensual pleasure, seeking immediate satisfaction and fulfillment or gratification of various

⁵ *Nirvana* represents the profound peace of mind that is acquired with *moksha*, liberation from *samsara*, or release from a state of suffering, after respective spiritual practice or *sadhana*. In Buddhist context, *nirvana* refers to realization of non-self and emptiness, marking the end of rebirth by stilling the fires that keep the process of rebirth going. *Nirvana* is part of the Third Truth on "cessation of *dukkha*" in the Four Noble Truths doctrine of Buddhism. It is the goal of the Noble Eightfold Path.

⁶ *Samsara* is the cycle of birth and rebirth from one existence to another in continuum. *Samsara* in Sanskrit means 'to cycle' or 'go round'. The idea is that until people behave properly, they go round and round in circles, from one rebirth to another.



passions through the physical sense. As such, according to the Buddhist philosophy, by learning the truth of suffering, one can understand the cause, its path and cessation, and achieve ultimate happiness.

Buddhism has various different forms. Bhutan's Gross National Happiness is mainly based on the teachings in Mahayana Buddhism, which is one among different forms of Buddhism. In articulating GNH, Bhutan drew from the teachings of Mahayana Buddhism. According to Mahayana Buddhism, *nirvana* is not the highest goal to aspire. It goes beyond this conception and teaches that personal *nirvanaship* may be gained but it is also possible for one who desires to do so, to renounce this personal bliss in order that he may go on helping other individuals in the world out of their misery and sorrow which is seen everywhere (McGovern Wm. Montgomery, 1919: 248). It also teaches that every *bodhisattva*⁷ must finally reach the stage of perfect and supreme enlightenment, or Buddhahood, which is the highest honor to which one may aspire. The state of Buddhahood can be reached by an individual who sets his mind upon it and teaches its followers to do so.

The mission of spreading happiness and compassion among everyone in the world is central to the teachings of Mahayana Buddhism. The philosophy of Mahayana Buddhism thus tells the individuals to wake up to the Ultimate Truth in order to obtain greater clarity and insight about the true nature of the universe, leading to internal peace and happiness (Givel, Michael, 2015: 22). The goal of GNH is based on Mahayana Buddhist principles to increase happiness for everyone, which then is carried out through various governmental policies and programs that promote material needs balanced with becoming enlightened.

When examining the Constitution of Bhutan, there are various provisions laid down in it which provides a link between GNH and Mahayana Buddhism. Buddhism is regarded as the "spiritual heritage of Bhutan, which promotes the principles and values of peace, non-violence, compassion, and tolerance" in Article 3, Section 1. Similarly, Article 3, Section 3 gives power to "religious institutions and personalities to promote the spiritual heritage of the country while also ensuring that religion remains separate from politics in Bhutan." Under Article 3, Section 4, the Druk Gyalpo appoints the Je Khenpo (head monk) with training in the Drukpa School of Mahayana Buddhism. The Je Khenpo must be ordained with the nine qualities of a spiritual master and accomplished in in ked-dzog or spiritual development. In turn, under Article 3, Section 5, the Je Khenpo appoints, on the recommendation of the Dratshang Lhentshog (Commissioner of Monastic Affairs), "the Five Lopons" to serve on the central Buddhist Monk Council. Furthermore, Article 4, Section 1 states that, "The State preserve, protect, and promote the cultural heritage of the country, including monuments, places and objects of artistic or historic interest, Dzongs (ancient Buddhist religious and civil fortresses), Lhakhangs (Buddhist temples), Goendeys (Buddhist monastic communities), Ten-sum (Buddhist images, scriptures, and stupas), Nyes (Buddhist pilgrimage sites), language, literature, music, visual arts and religion to enrich society and the cultural life of citizens."

In similar terms, Article 9, Section 2 states that, "The State shall strive to promote those conditions that will enable the pursuit of Gross National Happiness." The GNH Commission also lays down their objectives in relation to the spiritual happiness by stating, "We have now clearly distinguished the 'happiness'... in GNH from the fleeting, pleasurable 'feel good' moods so often associated with that term. We know that true abiding happiness cannot exist while others suffer, and comes only from serving others, living in harmony with nature, and realizing our innate wisdom and the true and brilliant nature of our own minds (Gross National Happiness Commission 2015).

This statement is in tune with the primary objective of seeking Enlightenment under Mahayana Buddhism. In Mahayana Buddhism, overcoming suffering and becoming Enlightened and happy through the Fourth Noble Truth or Eightfold Path occurs by becoming aware of the nature of reality including good Karma by serving others and being in harmony with nature.

The Implementation of Gross National Happiness in Bhutan

In neo-liberal societies, happiness often means maximization of pleasure. As such, it is construed that true happiness would consist of an interrupted succession of pleasurable experiences (Ricard, Matthieu, 2013: 344). This notion falls short of the notion of genuine happiness, as is forwarded by the Buddhist philosophy. It is already seen that according to Buddhism, happiness means a finest way of being, a very healthy state of mind than underlies and suffuses all emotional states, and that embraces all the joys and sorrows one experiences (ibid: 344). It is therefore a state of lasting well-being along with the wisdom that allows us to see the world as it is. Finally, it is the joy of attainment of inner freedom and a sense of compassion towards others.

⁷ In Buddhism, *bodhisattava* is the Sanskrit term for anyone who, motivated by great compassion, has generated *bodhicitta*, which is a spontaneous wish and a compassionate mind to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings.



Schumacher introduced the term Buddhist economics as a concept which has been elaborated by various scholars all over the world (Schumacher, E. F., 1973: 38). The term results from combining two words, 'Buddhist' and 'economics'. Economics generally means the subject which deals with "economic activities (production, distribution, and consumption) with the aim for individuals to achieve maximum utility under the condition of resource constraint and for the society to reach maximum welfare under the same condition" (Puntasen, A., 2007: 190). Buddhist economics is therefore "the subject explaining economic activities with the aim for both individuals and society to achieve peace and tranquility under resource constraint" (ibid: 190).

The neo-liberal economics believe in the principles of selfish individualism (Tideman, Sander G., 2004: 232). According to this concept, the more an individual consumes, the more his life would thrive. If his/her needs, which increase as their living standard increases, are not satisfied immediately, it will lead to their unhappiness. As such, when individuals consume more, there will be more generation of supply and this would eventually lead to economic growth. As such, for neo-liberal economics, human beings are rational beings who pursue self-interest which translates to the generation of more utility. On the other hand, Buddhist economics claim that instead of self-interest, humans should cultivate self-less attitude based on compassion, which would lead to cooperation instead of competition among each other. In a system of capitalism, more and more production would take place in order to fulfill the endless demands for consumption and this would in turn lead to more waste generation and resource depletion, causing environmental degradation, and eventually human self-destruction. However, Buddhist economics' main concern is *sukha* or wellness which can be achieved through mental development, and does not require excessive material generation. In this way, Buddhist economics offers a much more promising alternative. Bhutan's Gross National Happiness framework was developed along these core values of Buddhist economics.

In this manner, the comprehensive purpose of all facets of life does not lie in material gains that can be easily gratified by consumption but rather in the purification of the human character (Schumacher, E. F., 2010: 63). According to Buddhist economics, people are more important than goods and creative activity is more important than consumption. The objectives of market economics, i.e. increasing consumption and accelerating growth are thus only relevant as means to an entirely different end— human well-being (Priesner, Stefan, 1998: 37). Buddhist economics rejects the values that the neo-liberal economics attaches to economic growth. According to Buddhist philosophy, happiness results when both the spiritual and material aspects of life are in harmony (ibid: 37). Although GNH has been subject to criticism in the context of its economic inefficiency, it is in fact correct to say that the critics miss the actual point, which is, the aim of GNH is not economic efficiency but rather maximization of happiness.

Bhutan perceives that development need must be human-oriented and as such, its government emerged with decisions to invest scarce resources in social facilities rather than industrialization or the diversification of economy to generate growth (ibid: 37). This people-centric perception of development explains Bhutan's commitment to the rapid enhancement of the population's health and education with the availability of financial assistance.

Since Buddhism has always been a major feature of the country ever since its establishment, its philosophy has provided strong arguments for adoption of an environmentally sensitive development strategy and it can be seen in the decision of including environmental conservation as one of the four pillars of GNH. There is a stark contrast in the way Buddhist philosophy and western economics perceive the relationship between human beings and environment. While western economics view that nature exists solely for the benefit of mankind, the Buddhist philosophy of *sunyata* maintains that no subject or object has an independent existence; rather it dissolves into a web of relationships with all dimensions of its environment (Noberg-Hodge, Helena, 1991). These relationships are not based on hierarchy because Buddhist philosophy does not lay distinction between species i.e. humans and non-humans. In similar terms, Buddhism perceives human lives as a stage in an eternal cycle of reincarnation. This naturally alters the relationship to the environment, since sustainable development is in everybody's self-interest instead of in the interest of future generations (Priesner, Stefan, 1998: 38).

Thus, this Buddhist notion on environment which has been embedded in the Bhutanese society has contributed to the development of an environmentally sensitive policy of Gross National Happiness. In 1961, Bhutan's National Assembly resolved that "trees located in and around the vicinity in keeping with the government's forest conservation policy" were exempted from taxation to discourage felling.⁸ For similar reasons, the Forest Act of 1969 (and the Land Act of 1979) was enacted, which contains a provision which states that the government owns all trees, including those growing on private

⁸ See http://www.nab.gov.bt/assets/uploads/docs/resolution/2014/16th_Session.pdf.



land.⁹ In 1974 National Forest Policy was underscored by declaring vast sanctuaries, parks and forest reserves as protected areas.¹⁰ Bhutan initiated the protected areas system as early as the 1960s. Today, protected areas constitute about 51 per cent of Bhutan's territory, which includes protected areas, biological corridors and conservation areas.¹¹ Bhutan never exploited its natural resources on grounds of commercial profitability (Priesner, Stefan, 1998: 38).

Additionally, Bhutan's cultivated the notion of self-reliance from its traditional socio-economic system. Traditionally, people of Bhutan lived in scattered villages, hamlets and isolated farms and there were no urban settlements. Bhutan was still underdeveloped in terms of infrastructure and in addition, the country's topographic constraints made the interaction between the communities difficult, and it was also one of the factors that contributed to the country remained in isolation for many centuries. The trans-Himalayan and Indo-Bhutanese trade which took place was reduced to a few necessities exchanged by barter due to the absence of market. However, among the valley communities there was vigorous exchange of goods facilitated by the migration of livestock and people from temperate settlements in summer to subtropical settlements in winter (Ura, Karma, 1994: 26). As a result, groups of neighbouring communities formed self-sufficient units for most purposes (Priesner, Stefan, 1998: 39). Since Bhutan did not encounter any foreign influences, it yielded high possibility for indigenous institutions and systems of knowledge to evolve within the country. In particular, the field of local conflict resolution and the allocation of collective resources (e. g. rules about irrigation, use of community grazing land, etc.) effective customary rules have developed over the centuries (Ura, Karma, 1993: 81).

Additionally, societies in the grass-root levels did not meet with state intervention, with the exception of the collection of tax resources for the maintenance of the religious establishment, the official and the aristocracy and occasionally the militia (Priesner, Stefan, 1998: 39). These societies did not demand anything beyond than their subsistence needs. The system was characterized by feudal paternalism (e. g. between landlord and tenant farmer) instead of state paternalism.

Although on an empirical level Bhutan fell short of almost every aspect of economic self-reliance in the first decades of modernization (lacking both financial resources and manpower requirement), the goal to achieve self-reliance has been intimately intertwined with the Bhutanese vision of development (ibid: 39). In fact, self-reliance was the first explicitly emphasized development objective. The National Assembly stated in 1959 that "to maintain the sovereignty of the kingdom through economic self-reliance" was among its primary tasks. Since then, many policies bear the stamp of the centrality of self-reliance, i.e. the gradual shift to decentralization of development decision-making, the reluctance to give up food self-sufficiency in favour of cash-crop agriculture until recently, the macroeconomic prudence to avoid dependency on external loans, etc (ibid: 39).

Conclusion

To conclude, the happiness in Gross National Happiness framework of Bhutan gives a whole new dimension to the approach to development. As a policy objective, GNH is gaining popularity among many countries as they are trying to adopt a model of development which regards not just economic aspects but social and ecological factors as significant indicators for a successful development. GNH spreads the idea that economic factors are significant for development but it is not the goal or purpose of development, rather it is a means to an even greater end, i.e. happiness of the people. Market forces can do many things but it alone is not sufficient for a thriving society. In this way, GNH calls for a system that is more human-oriented which should be the case for the system in every society.

Bibliography

1. Austin, J. L. (1968), "Agathon and Eudaimonia in the Ethics of Aristotle", in *Aristotle: A Collection of Critical Essays* edited by J. M. E. Morovesik, Notre Dame.
2. Bhattacharya, Savyasachi (1997), "Bhutan Towards Modernization" in *Bhutan: Society and Polity* edited by Ramakant and Ramest C. Misra, p. 137.
3. Clark, Pamela (1954), "Some Difficulties in Utilitarianism", *Philosophy*, Vol. 29, p. 247.
4. David, Susan A., Ilona Boniwell, and Amanda Conley Ayers (2013), *The Oxford Handbook of Happiness*, UK: Oxford University Press.
5. Fletcher, Guy (2016), *The Philosophy of Well-being: An Introduction*, New York: Routledge.

⁹ See <http://extwprlegs1.fao.org/docs/pdf/bhu2744.pdf>.

¹⁰ See <http://www.biodiv.be/bhutan/legal-instruments/policies/national-forest-policy-1974/download/en/1/National%20Forest%20Policy%201974.pdf>.

¹¹ See <http://www.biodiv.be/bhutan/legal-instruments/reports/facts-and-figures-protected-areas-bhutan>.



6. Givel, Michael (2015), “Mahayana Buddhism and Gross National Happiness in Bhutan”, *International Journal of Wellbeing*, Vol. 5, No. 2, p. 22.
7. Gupta, Praethana (2014), “Gross National Happiness”, Discussion Paper, p. 33.
8. Helliwell, John, Richard Layard and Jeffrey Sachs (2012), *World Happiness Report*, United National Sustainable Development Solutions Network, p. 7.
9. Kraut, Richard (1979), “Two Conceptions of Happiness”, *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 88, p. 167.
10. Lokamitra, Dharmachari (2004), “The Centrality of Buddhism an Education in Developing Gross National Happiness” in *Gross National Happiness and Development* edited by Karma Ura and Karma Galay, The Centre for Bhutan Studies, Thimpu, Bhutan, p. 475.
11. Mancall, Mark (2004), “Gross National Happiness and Development: An Essay”, in *Gross National Happiness and Development* edited by Karma Ura and Karma Galay, The Centre for Bhutan Studies, Thimpu, Bhutan, p. 11.
12. McGovern, Wm. Montgomery (1919), “Notes on Mahayana Buddhism”, *The Monist*, p. 239.
13. Mill, J. S. (1862), *Utilitarianism*, London: Parker, Son and Bourn, West Strand.
14. Munro, D. H., 1969, “Mill’s Third Howler,” in *Contemporary Philosophy in Australia* edited by Robert Brown and C. D. Rollins, New York, p. 192.
15. Munro, Lauhlan T. (2016), “Where did Bhutan’s Gross National Happiness Come From? The Origins of an Invented Tradition”, *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 47, No. 1, p. 72.
16. Noberg-Hodge, Helena (1991), *Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh*, Sierra Club Books, p. 73.
17. Parducci, Allen (1995), *Happiness, Pleasure, and Judgment: The Contextual Theory and Its Applications*, L. Erlbaum Associates.
18. Prichard, H. A. (1968), “The Meaning of Agathon in the Ethics of Aristotle”, in *Aristotle: A Collection of Critical Essays* edited by J. M. E. Morovesik, Notre Dame.
19. Priesner, Stefan (1999), “Gross National Happiness – Bhutan’s Vision of Development and its Challenges”, in *Gross National Happiness: A Set of Discussion Papers* edited by Sonam Kinga, Karma Galay, Phutsho Raptan and Adam Pain.
20. Puntasen, A. (2007), “Buddhist Economics as a New Paradigm Towards Happiness”, *Society and Economy*, Vol. 29, No. 2, p. 190.
21. Ricard, Matthieu, 2013, “A Buddhist View on Happiness” in *Oxford Handbook of Happiness* edited by David, Susan A., Ilona Boniwell, and Amanda Conley Ayers, UK:Oxford University Press, p. 344.
22. Rose, Leo E. (1977), *The Politics of Bhutan*, Cornell University Press, p. 162.
23. Royal Government of Bhutan (1996), *National Budget for Financial Year 1996-1997 and Report on the 1995-96 Budget*, Ministry of Finance, p. 16.
24. Schumacher, E. F. (1973), *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered*, London: Vintage Books, p. 38.
25. Sidgwick, Henry (1907), *The Methods of Ethics*, Indiana: Macmillan and Company, p. 92-93.
26. Tashi, Khenpo Phuntshok (2004), “The Role of Buddhism in Achieving Gross National Happiness” in *Gross National Happiness and Development* edited by Karma Ura and Karma Galay, The Centre for Bhutan Studies, Thimpu, Bhutan, p. 490.
27. Thin, Neil (2012), *Social Happiness: Theory into Policy and Practice*, Great Britain: The Polity Press, p. 33.
28. Tideman, Sander G. (2004), “Gross National Happiness: Towards a New Paradigm in Economics” in *Gross National Happiness and Development* edited by Karma Ura and Karma Galay, The Centre for Bhutan Studies, Thimpu, Bhutan, p. 232.
29. Ura, Karma (1993), *The Nomad’s Gamble: Pastoralists of Northern Bhutan*, South Asia Research, Vol. 13, No. 2, p. 81.
30. Ura, Karma (1994), “Decentralization and Development in Medieval and Modern Bhutan”, in *Bhutan: Aspects of Culture and Development* edited by Michael Aris and Michael Hutt, Scotland: Paul Strachen – Kiscadale Ltd.
31. Uyl, Douglas Den and Tibor R. Machan (1983), “Recent Works on the Concept of Happiness”, *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 20, No. 2, p. 116.
32. Veenhoven, Ruut (2006), “How Do We Assess How Happy We Are? Tenets, Implications and Tenability of Three Theories”, Paper presented at conference on ‘New Directions in the Study of Happiness: United States and International Perspectives’, University of Notre Dame, USA, p. 3.
33. Waterman, Alan S. (1993), “Two Conceptions of Happiness: Contrasts of Personal Expressiveness (Eudaimonia) and Hedonic Enjoyment”, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 64, No. 4.