



Gross National Happiness: A Bhutanese Innovation

Jayanta Kumar
Dash

PhD Scholar, P.G Department of Political Science, Utkal University,
Bhubaneswar

ABSTRACT

Gross National Happiness is a term coined by His Majesty the Fourth King of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuck in the 1970s (Medha, 2013). The concept implies that sustainable development should take a holistic approach towards notions of progress and give equal importance to non-economic aspects of wellbeing. The concept of GNH has often been explained by its four pillars: good governance, sustainable socio-economic development, cultural preservation, and environmental conservation. Lately the four pillars have been further classified into nine domains in order to create widespread understanding of GNH and to reflect the holistic range of GNH values. The idea of GNH is unique to Bhutan. The concept is now however being translated from an ideational to an operational level. Since 1971, the country has rejected GDP as the only way to measure progress. In its place, it has championed a new approach to development, which measures prosperity through formal principles of Gross National Happiness (GNH) and the spiritual, physical, social and environmental health of its citizens and natural environment. However Bhutan is a living example of interconnected communities radiating happiness while living within the limits of our fragile planet.

KEYWORDS : Gross National Happiness, Least Developed Country, Gross Domestic Product, UN

Introduction:

Happiness is sought by all -both individual and state. Individual's happiness may be material or spiritual, but it is always personal and subjective. Therefore it is indefinable. However, state's seeking for happiness is manifested through its development programmes and varied development paradigms. Looking at the progress and prosperity attained by the countries in the west, the western model of development had attracted the rest towards it. They saw in it the panacea for their backwardness and misery. But the Gross-Domestic-Product (GDP)-based development statistically showed something which was untrue to the reality. According to that model the country advanced not its people. Therefore, that model baffled the rest of the countries especially the poor and under-developed ones. They found it to be unsustainable and alien. Surprisingly a Least Developed Country (LDC) has now come with a solution which is both sustainable and common-man centric. The solution is not suggested in terms of Gross National Product (GNP), but in terms of Gross National Happiness (GNH). This GNH-model is floated by Bhutan.

What is Gross National Happiness?

Gross National Happiness is a term coined by His Majesty the Fourth King of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuck in the 1970s (Medha, 2013). The concept implies that sustainable development should take a holistic approach towards notions of progress and give equal importance to non-economic aspects of wellbeing. GNH is a holistic and sustainable approach to development which balances between material and non-material values with the conviction that humans want to search for happiness. The objective of GNH is to achieve a balanced development in all facets of life which is essential to our happiness. The goal of GNH is happiness. One of several means to achieve this goal is sustainable economic growth. GNH is a unique approach to national and global development. However the fourth king's initiative to promote Gross National Happiness in the idyllic Himalayan country is mainly for sustainable development (Mohapatra, 2008).

Four Pillars of GNH:

The concept of GNH has often been explained by its four pillars: good governance, sustainable socio-economic development, cultural preservation, and environmental conservation. Lately the four pillars have been further classified into nine domains in order to create widespread understanding of GNH and to reflect the holistic range of GNH values. The nine domains are: psychological wellbeing, health, education, time use, cultural diversity and resilience, good governance, community vitality, ecological diversity and resilience, and living standards. The domains represents each of the components of wellbeing of the Bhutanese people, and the term 'wellbeing' here refers to fulfilling conditions of a 'good life' as per the values and principles laid down by the concept of Gross National Happiness (Karma, Tshoki and Karma, 2012). In sum, the concept of Gross National Happiness consists of four pillars: Fair socio-economic development (better ed-

ucation and health), conservation and promotion of a vibrant culture, environmental protection and good governance.

The Operationalization of GNH in Bhutan

Bhutan's model of GNH has been highlighted as a development indicator (Dorji, 2004). The concept is now however being translated from an ideational to an operational level. Since 1971, the country has rejected GDP as the only way to measure progress. In its place, it has championed a new approach to development, which measures prosperity through formal principles of gross national happiness (GNH) and the spiritual, physical, social and environmental health of its citizens and natural environment. However Bhutan is a living example of interconnected communities radiating happiness while living within the limits of our fragile planet. The continued erosion of human well-being is inevitable until the flaws in the corporate capitalist system that urbanises people and centralises trade and finance, are exposed, not least within the education system. The operationalization of GNH now appears as a reasonable and logical development in the history of Bhutan and of the Bhutanese state. As Bhutan and its state apparatus developed, the question of the direction of development appropriate to Bhutan quite naturally led to His Majesty's promulgation of the idea of GNH. All the experience of the Bhutanese state and society led to this point. We may ask why the idea of GNH has become a conscious challenge instead of an implicit assumption that gives form and content to the development process. The answer to this question is important for the discussion of the operationalization of GNH. GNH, then, arises out of the very nature of Bhutanese history and of the Bhutanese polity and is a reflection on that historical experience while it is, at the same time, a description of the future path Bhutan will travel.

GNH and Economic Development: Development for its own sake is not GNH. By development for its own sake we mean development that aims primarily at statistical growth in the material domain. GNH, therefore, is an integrated and systemic approach to change, with certain particular objectives, into which economic development must be consciously integrated as one, but only one, component. Economic development, as defined above, is part of, but neither the whole of GNH nor its primary objective. Ultimately, GNH must determine the course of economic development and not vice versa. GNH requires comprehensive planning, whose point of departure is the complex of values that define GNH. The evaluation and implementation of policies must take place within the framework of GNH values. Existing and future resources must be directed to the achievement of the goals of GNH.

Education: One of the pillars upon which GNH must rest is education. In Bhutan one school had banned plastic bags and all junk food. While Buddhism is not taught outright, meditation began the day at one school. All classes except the national language are taught in

English, and students seemed eager to practice their English with us. Many in Bhutan are worried that as more people become well educated, traditional values will disappear, and young people will flock to the city rather than stay in villages. The entire educational curriculum of Bhutanese schools needs to be infused with the GNH ethos. GNH values need to be taught at all levels of the school system. Textbooks and other training materials that specifically reflect Bhutanese and GNH values need to be written and used. In this way, GNH will become a reality for future generations.

Religion: At the present time, it can be argued that the members of the Monk Body are not fully participant in the national project. Many believe that the members of the Monk Body need not become active members of this project; their purpose is to do what they are doing. On the other hand, experience suggests that many members of the dharma community could play a very significant role in bringing a higher level of consciousness of Buddhist and GNH values to the villages, particularly to the village children. Teaching is a significant activity in Buddhism, and perhaps a certain social responsibility is also part of the commitment to this lifestyle. The GNH Directorate should undertake to explore ways in which members of the dharma community may become active in social affairs. There are many examples of this in the present-day Buddhist world.

Health: There is a school of traditional healing in Thimpu as well as a hospital of Western medicine. Both are subsidized by the government and both were crowded the day we visited. Health care is free to all. Bhutan has been deemed a biodiversity "hotspot" by the UN, and many of the plants in the high Himalayas are medicinal. There are only two psychiatrists in the whole country. Life expectancy has increased from 44 to 65 in one generation, which says a lot about improved health care and nutrition (Harmon, 2012)

Village Life: The improvement of village life and of employment opportunities in the countryside is absolutely crucial if attempts to encourage people to remain in the villages are to have any hope of success and if migration to urban centers is to be discouraged.

This means, among other things, improvement of income wherever possible. One technique that has proven successful in other parts of South Asia and beyond has been the development of a system of micro-loans with low interest rates and guaranteed not by collateral but by the communal action of the village. This system can be introduced into Bhutan, based on experience elsewhere. Bhutanese banks have significant liquidity, and this would be an important use of those funds. It is an excellent example a GNH program.

The success of GNH will rest on the construction of a system of good governance, which is already underway. Public discussion of GNH must be conducted, whatever the medium, in a language that is clearly understood by all levels of Bhutanese society. GNH must be institutionalized in an organization that will provide leadership, research, planning, and evaluation of the operationalization of GNH.

Conclusion:

Saying all these it seems that GNH is uniquely a Bhutanese approach to development. However to confine it to Bhutan means to bereave the humanity of its utility. Acknowledging its importance and relevance to the whole world, the present king of Jigme Keshar once remarked that, "I believe that while Gross National Happiness is inherently Bhutanese, its ideas may have a positive relevance to any nation, peoples or communities – wherever they may be. I also believe that there must be some convergence among nations on the idea of what the end objective of development and progress should be. There cannot be enduring peace, prosperity, equality and brotherhood in this world if our aims are so separate and divergent – if we do not accept that in the end we are people, all alike, sharing the earth among ourselves and also with other sentient beings, all of whom have an equal role and state of this planet and its players." This bears a testimony and assurance for the future course of development for any country in the days to come.

REFERENCES

- Bisht Medha (2013) "Bhutan and climate change: identifying strategic implications", Contemporary South Asia, Vol. 21, No. 4, pp. 398–412 | • Dorji, Kinley (2004), "Gross National Happiness: concepts, status and prospects", Seminar on Gross National Happiness, Centre for Bhutan studies, Thimphu | • Harmon, Nancy Warnock (2012) "Gross National Happiness in Bhutan A Learning Experience", The Center for Global Awareness | • Karma Ura, Sabina Alkire, Tshoki Zangmo and Karma Wangdi (2012), "A Short Guide to Gross National Happiness Index", The Centre for Bhutan Studies | • Mohapatra Anil (2008), "Small states in South Asia: A Security Perspective of the Himalayan States" Panchashila, Bhubaneswar |