

Foundations and Scope of Gross National Happiness: A Layman's Perspectives

T S POWDYEL

Preamble

There was once a king who regularly took the advice of a wise man. This sage was called to the king's presence. The king asked him how he could get rid of his anxiety, how he might be truly happy. The sage replied: "There's but one cure for your highness's anxiety. Your highness must sleep one night in the shirt of a happy man".

Messengers were sent through the kingdom in search of a truly happy man. But everyone who was approached had some cause for misery, something that robbed them of true and complete happiness. At last, they found a man who sat smiling by, and had no sorrows. He confessed that he was a truly happy man.

Then the messengers told him what they wanted. The king must sleep one night in the shirt of a happy man, and had given them a large sum of money to get such a shirt. Would he sell them his shirt that the king might wear it?

The beggar burst into uncontrollable laughter and said: "I am sorry I can't oblige the king. I haven't a shirt on my back".

The Search for Happiness

This is, perhaps, the highest common factor and the single constant theme that unites all human beings of all colours and faiths and persuasions in all hemispheres and continents, in all parallels and meridians, at all times and in all space. From the time the homo sapiens learnt to hope and to dream, the central context of their engagement has been the pursuit of happiness.

What constitutes happiness though? Where does it reside? Is happiness a reality or an illusion? Is it process or product? Does happiness die, like the frog, if we dissect it? One gets muddled! But certainly, an individual's "heart leaps up with joy" on seeing "a rainbow in the sky". For some, happiness is "great love and much service; having something to do, something to love, and something to hope for".

"The way to be happy is to make others so", some would say. There are others who believe happiness to be "absence of pain and stillness of soul". To others still, happiness is the continuous progress from one greed to another. Some people recommend drugs to achieve an illusion of happiness. There are those who find happiness in the satisfaction of their cruel impulses.

To the formidable Irish playwright, George Bernard Shaw: "This is the true joy in life: the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; the being thoroughly worn out before you are thrown out on the scrap-heap; the being a force of nature instead of a feverish little clod of ailments and grievances, complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy".

Some compare happiness to a butterfly – the more we go after it, the more it eludes us. Some want the moon and the stars for breakfast. Others just want to eat bread and salt and tell the truth.

Many years ago, one of my teachers used to tell us the story of a village community somewhere in north India. It was a community with a special concept of happiness. If the members of a certain family had business elsewhere and were required to go away, they would leave the house unlocked. The house would be cleaned and beds neatly arranged. The fireplace would be ready for use – they would keep fine pieces of dry wood and a match-box near it.

Some food items and cooking and serving utensils would be kept within obvious recognition and easy reach. Every essential item that a person would need to spend a comfortable night was invitingly provided for.

This community believed that, during their absence, some visitors or guests might come. They may be total strangers to the place. They may need food and shelter. On no account should the visitors have any inconvenience in the absence of the owners of the house. The guests should feel happy.

In an age of intruder alarms and security or insecurity threats, as today, this community might sound as an unbelievable package of weird practices. This community, however, epitomized the essence of a highly civilized and evolved culture which considered the happiness of even a complete stranger so important!

Closer home, I was once waiting for a vehicle on the Tsirang-Wangdi road with my family and in-laws, feeling rather embarrassed at not being able to find one.

At long last, a truck emerged at the far bend, bound for Thimphu. I collected courage and raised my hand to stop the vehicle. It was a Royal Bhutan Police truck packed to its capacity. A senior officer sat on the front seat with his daughters.

"Could you give us a lift, Sir, if there is space?" I asked. His response has been etched into my heart ever since: "There will always be space in the vehicle if there is space in the heart". He asked his daughters to move to the back and seated my in-law and child in the front.

Fifteen years on, I still remember the officer as one of the finest human beings on earth. That police officer had a unique view of happiness.

On yet another occasion, my host at Salunke Vihar in Pune was a retired army general. He had a wonderful notion of happiness: If he could not do anything useful for the community on any one day, he would drive his car to the main road and reach at least one stranded person, waiting for a vehicle, to his or her home.

That community, that police officer, that army general, lived out, in their simplicity and wisdom, the essence of a very profound Bhutanese notion about happiness: *mii tsi gaawai soenam, tra khei nga yang baa mi thei*, that is, the intensity of happiness experienced by a single person is such that even a hundred horses cannot carry it.

The intelligence (or rank stupidity!) of clustering the definitions and illustrations of examples of happiness instanced above is to demonstrate the bewildering variety and diversity in which happiness is understood or experienced. At one level, it appears that happiness is a unique and personal experience. At others, it seems to encompass whole communities.

Is happiness then a function of personal experience? Or is it communal in nature? In either case, a programme of gross national happiness is certainly the most inclusive and ambitious enterprise ever undertaken by governments. But the kingdom of Bhutan has envisioned and committed itself to do just that.

Plato's Ideal State was the vision of an empire founded on the grand principle of justice. St Augustine dreamt of the City of God. King Arthur established the institution of the Round Table on the highest ideals of honour and service. Marx had his vision of a classless society! Ashoka the Great made non-violence the foundation of state policy! And, of course, we have heard stories of Rama Rajya!

What will it take for us to make Gross National Happiness a reality in Bhutan? The demands are no less high than those called up for the making of the Ideal State, or the institution of the Round Table. Where does our faith stem from?

We have our advantages. As the world marched, the land of the peerless Buddha, Sambhava and Shabdrung has chosen to survey, from the snug canopies of the mighty Himalayas, where the rains had started beating nations and humans. It seems as if she knew what was always there: that all the sound and fury of the world would dissipate and after all the Faustian adventures, it would come to value its soul.

Completing a full circle now, the world knows what the Bhutanese always knew: that the profoundest needs of human beings are not material, but spiritual, that all the wealth of the world does not measure up to the worth of a single human being.

The minds which conceived the inner mandala and projected the image to the outer mandala, the hearts nourished in the most ancient religious traditions of the world should have the necessary resources to define and refine the notion and dimension of development and success.

The Light of Asia had already discovered the paramount pillars on which happiness of all would rest: right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. These sublime and supremely all-encompassing virtues are already a self-evident foundation of gross national happiness.

Moreover, in spite of its size and geographical circumstances, Bhutan has been singularly fortunate in having the privilege of choice, and our leaders have made a most enlightened use of this boon. Whether it was self-chosen-isolation, or the desire to open up, or to opt for a certain system of governance, or to adopt a specific development path, they have all been the result of selecting the best alternative from among many, by right of vision. So with the principle of gross national happiness.

The Bhutanese idea of happiness is expressed in the famous proverb: *mii tsi gaawai soenam, rta kheh nga yaa baa mi thei*. Simply translated, the line means that the intensity of happiness experienced is such that even a hundred horses cannot carry it! As a matter of fact, this concern for the happiness of others goes beyond the human plane to cover all other sentient beings including animals and insects.

As an instance, the child Jangchuhub Sempa spontaneously realized that removing his shirt on a cold morning and covering the shivering ants with it was the correct thing to do. A lama lost no time in offering his own body to a lion because the animal was hungry!

The most favoured correspondence between the ideal of *peljor* – economic-material-physical well-being – and *gakid* – psychological-emotional-spiritual-personal well-being – is at the heart of the normative planning paradigm in Bhutan.

As a matter of fact, the gross national happiness idea has already been travelling around the globe. So said Ms Meiko Mishizima, Vice President, World Bank, South Asia Region: “It is rare to find a nation, today or in the history of our globe, whose people share a clear and dynamic vision rooted in their cultural heritage and common values. It is even rarer to encounter a nation, which, by the strength of her conviction, initiates a new paradigm for the transformation of its society – sometimes called ‘development’ – that challenges the world to reconsider established methods of measuring change. This unique nation is the kingdom of Bhutan, and the ultimate source of its uniqueness rests singularly in the leadership of His Majesty”.

The story of development in the Bhutanese context could well be a record of the process of educating the concept of ‘development’ itself. The flood-gates had opened. Bhutan could have run amok in the glitter and glory of progress worshipped all around. But she chose the pilgrim’s progress:

Better, though difficult, the right way to go
Than wrong, which though easy, where the end is woe.

The Bhutanese people understand that they are no more than human and it will be unreasonable to take on responsibilities we are unable to handle. And, the quest for general happiness, at least at the obvious level, appears an impossibility, especially in an age long accustomed to quantifying and measuring everything on an economic scale. But the pursuit of gross national happiness is the function of a conscious decision between the futility of a life and a society dedicated to the physicalist-materialist position and the human-idealist paradigm of development.

The quest for gross national happiness is not a function of having to give up all our comforts and our properties and our relations. That would hardly be possible for most of us, nor would it be desirable. A threshold level of material well-being is essential for a human being to live a life free from economic and physical insecurity and mental stress. But to reduce the scope of human life simply to the cycle of production-possession-consumption would be to wound and limit the tremendous possibilities that human beings are capable of.

The unique Bhutanese concept of empowering the emotional-psychological-spiritual-personal capacities of human beings could well be defined as *meta-development* – development beyond development.

The institutional processes needed to produce and promote gross national happiness are by now largely in place in the country. As early as 1974, at the tender age of eighteen, the youngest monarch in the world Druk Gyalpo Jigme Singye Wangchuck had already made a solemn statement on the auspicious occasion of His Majesty's coronation: "I will be happy if Bhutan remains an independent country and my people are happy, united and self-sufficient. I don't think that there is anything else a king can achieve".

During an audience granted to us, young graduates fresh from universities, aspiring to enter the system as civil servants, in early eighties, His Majesty the king had said: "If, at the end of a plan period, our people are not happier than they were before, we should know that our plans have failed". This pronouncement already brought to the centre-stage the quest for gross national happiness.

Nearly three decades on, all that His Majesty has done has been a fulfilment of that prophecy – that gross national happiness is more important than gross national product. The novelty of the gross national happiness principle in the Bhutanese context is its viability as it is intimately interwoven with our country's development philosophy.

His Majesty's vision of gross national happiness sounds a chastening challenge to reconsider and recognize the equation between pleasure and happiness, flesh and spirit, indeed between the standard of living and the standard of life.

Gross national happiness as a state policy subsumes and transcends mere economic considerations as indicators of national well-being.

So far so good. But how to establish and advance real, authentic happiness for *all* the people of Bhutan? The towering ideals are gross – total, all, national – of the nation, belonging to the nation, nation-wide, happiness – the experience of well-being and satisfaction we all desire.

Foundations of Gross National Happiness

Viktor E Frankl (1985) said: “Happiness cannot be pursued; it must ensue. One must have a reason to “be happy”. Once a reason is found, however, one becomes happy automatically...A human being is not one in pursuit of happiness, but rather one in search of a reason to become happy...”. What are the reasons to be happy?

Security

I went to Plato. I went to King Arthur. I went to the Enlightened Ones. At the end of the day, I had to come back to something as fundamental as the question of survival. From the most basic desire for survival to the most evolved state of excellence and perfection, a condition of security is a pre-requisite.

Of all the levels of security, national security is the most paramount. National sovereignty and independence hinge on security. Only in a situation of security can a nation be viable. A sense of security enables nations and peoples to chart their destiny and have of visions of excellence and glory in the diverse fields – physical, personal, cultural, spiritual, artistic, literary, scientific, economic, commercial... - of national life.

Freedom from threats to national sovereignty releases the available material and human resources and permits their engagement in pursuits of higher and nobler kind.

Security to the life of the nation is the necessary condition for security to every other aspect of life. Gross national happiness is essentially a function of national security in the first place.

Social security is another expression that translates the creative dimension of national security. The level of imaginative and creative engagement of a people in the diverse fields of national endeavour is greatly influenced by the sense of security that they feel in the society. Every citizen being every other citizen’s keeper will already ensure everybody being a keeper of the nation.

The benefit of confidence that one’s life and family, one’s property and dues are secure engenders an experience of well-being that is conducive to happiness. The reach and power of the rule of law, a creative covenant between rights and responsibilities, a heightened level of civic sensitivity, coupled with a desire to live and let live will ensure personal and social

security and well-being. Every Bhutanese caring enough and sharing enough will create a country where everyone will have enough.

Peace

Peace is the primary condition for the birth and growth of happiness – in all its dimensions – personal, social, national, universal. Peace is one of the most profound desires of all humans – from the peasants of the Nile delta, the slum-dwellers of Calcutta, the farmers of Zhemgang... to the inhabitants of cyber-cities. Peace is the fundamental condition for human happiness, growth and development.

What kind of peace are we talking about though? War and peace are not necessarily exclusionary extremes. Peace is more than the absence of war or a situation of strife and crisis. Genuine peace is a condition of mind – it is peace that makes life and living a worthwhile experience – a state of mind that empowers life to grow, to hope, to build, to create and to celebrate the process and joy of living on this earth.

Authentic peace – not the peace of the grave or of silence – affirms and promotes the goodness and the basic sanctity and dignity of the human person. Peace is the medium of co-existence and survival, as war is that of negation and annihilation. Peace is the language of mutual tolerance, respect and interdependence, the bond of trust and fellow-feeling, the solidarity-principle of human life.

It is in the nature of peace that its pursuit is less dramatic than the pursuit of violence. Building and promoting peace is a slow, often painful, process, unlike the swift expediency of war. Too often, the advocates of short-term solutions to problems advance the theory that the best defence is offence, that peace is an illusion – just as happiness is an illusion, for them – that it is unreal and impossible. Such a belief does not only reflect a blinkered vision promoting the inevitability of conflict and the impotency of the humans, but also the notion that there is no alternative to belligerence and violence.

Peace-cultivation is the anodyne against and the antidote to the fragmentation of the world, societies, families and friendships.

Peace is a dynamic, creative and affirmative power. It is less stirring but more profound; less exciting but more permanently enduring; it is less loud but more eloquent.

Peace is not an event, but a process, the happy sum of many good acts and attitudes. Peace is the final proclamation of the goodness of man, the stamp of humanity. Peace is the unity and harmony of nature.

Living peace is more important than building peace, because peace in the universal, national and social contexts acquires meaning and vitality from one's individual standards. Peace-living individuals make peaceful families, peaceful families make happy nations, happy nations make a peaceful and happy world.

Harmony

United we stand; divided we fall. Harmony is one of the most powerful positive values that make life, families, societies and nations worthwhile and meaningful. All the wealth and riches of a country weigh less than the virtue of harmony and unity. Citizens living in harmony with each other, be they ever so poor, give energy and power to the society and the state. United families nourished by love and understanding create united societies. United societies are the bulwark of a strong and united country. This is certainly an environment in which happiness grows and prospers.

The different communities and people of a state animate and give it its colour and vital life. An environment that nurtures mutual respect, tolerance, and fellow-feeling among the various races will allow the flowering of peace and happiness. And certainly, a house divided against itself cannot stand.

What is more? Where there is harmony among the people, there is peace and happiness. People who live in harmony with each other are also freer from the stress and strains which plague life otherwise. Conversely, vices like disharmony, distrust, intolerance and hatred breed tension and ill-will which weaken societies and nations.

An important indicator of gross national happiness is, therefore, the level of harmony among the people in the country. Harmony heals and affirms life. Let us look for the many similarities that unite us than belabouring the few differences that divide us.

Love of Life Vs Love of Death

All life is precious and worth-preserving. The love of life is so great that even animals struggle against all odds to live - be it for even a brief while. Human beings, regardless of the quality of life that they live, want to live even if it is for just one more tomorrow. People eat grass and shoe-leather just so that they can live a little more. The love of life is so basic.

But there are those who decide to terminate their lives long before nature decides. "Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight", people mourn. Some people extinguish the light of their life in the prime of their youth. Others decide the negative course of action as circumstances warrant. In any case, they love death more than they love life! When or how does it happen?

Cases of alcoholism, drug addiction, homicide and suicide are among the highest in some of the most developed countries of the world. Material prosperity alone does not seem to define well-being and happiness. Suicide is the logical consequence of a feeling of defeatism and a sense of worthlessness. Love of death gets the better of the love of life. Negation and obliteration of life is the consequence.

Incidence of suicide and destruction of life are a critical indicator of the quality of life and the level of happiness.

Contentment

There is sufficiency in the world for man's need, but not for man's greed. So said Mahatma Gandhi. Albert Schweitzer, the 1957 Nobel Peace Laureate had warned: "Man has become a superman... but the superman with the superhuman power has not risen to the level of superhuman reason. To the degree to which his power grows, he becomes more and more a poor man... It must shake up our conscience that we become all the more inhuman as we grow into supermen".

One of the most glaring features of modern development is that it is not built on the principle of contentment, but on the principle of appetite. The dominance of a reductionist utilitarian orientation has transformed human beings into 'the universal wolves', as Shakespeare calls them, or 'frightening commercial vampires' with their awesome appetites.

Today's media and advertising pander to the pleasure-orientation of people. Their capacity to possess and hoard, desire to satisfy the senses - bodily propensities -, their gullibility are the constituencies of communication and media.

The exploitation of the more physical, external, and material capacities of the customers supports and promotes the superstructure of the advertising industry. The more stable, authentic and profounder selves of the people are more difficult to move and influence. So the more recalcitrant and maverick aspects of human beings, the more vulnerable and exploitable pleasure-seeking impulses surrender easily to the influences of forces which are hardly productive of real joy or happiness.

The argument is that the more one has, the more happy and secure one is supposed to feel. Happiness is believed to be directly proportional to the quantity of goods and services one is able to command and control.

The fact, however, is that this line of reasoning is in itself a contradiction in terms in the sense that what one might achieve in this mode is not happiness, but pleasure, at best. Happiness is a more sublime, satisfying sense of well-being and fulfilment, and not necessarily a consequence of possession of property.

Happiness is primarily a function of the 'being mode' - defined by a sense of independence, inner activity, and a productive use of human powers and endowments. Happiness is characterized by a desire 'to renew oneself, to grow, to flow out, to love, to transcend the prison of one's isolated ego, to be, to give'.

Contentment is the primary condition for happiness. Being content with what one has critical implications for the national self-reliance and self-sufficiency arguments. Simpler needs, by definition, are easier met and easier sustained, unlike the complicated, sophisticated wants which must be pampered by objects which are hard to find and harder to mind.

Another significant offshoot of being content with small means concerns itself with the vital question of national self-respect and

sovereignty. As with individuals, so with nations. The need to cater to wants and demands which are sometimes out of proportion to the resources of one's own country creates a dependent situation where national self-respect is often compromised.

Contentment is such a powerful indicator of personal, social and national well-being and self-respect.

Nature-Human Covenant

Human beings are fundamentally nature-dwellers, rather than city-dwellers. The nature-human covenant has been forged by centuries of interaction right from the advent of man on the face of this earth. However, there is a significant difference between the two entities. Nature is autonomous, independent and self-sustaining. It can do without human beings. It is not a projection of our ego or our manipulative skills.

Human beings, however, cannot do without nature. From the most fundamental life-sustaining air that we breathe, the water that we drink, indeed the earth on which we walk, to the food that we eat, the shelter that we need, the dress that we wear, to the most sophisticated incarnations of the raw materials in our homes and offices, we humans depend upon nature.

Spiritually viewed, nature is home to the gods and deities, divinities and powers, beings and presences which exercise or have exercised tremendous influence on the life and minds of human beings throughout history. Nature is home too to the infinite variety of animal and plant species which enrich and regulate the grand scheme of our universe. Human beings have been a mere microcosm in the great macrocosm of nature.

The continued survival of the human race will depend upon the kind of relationship it maintains with nature. The history of mankind has demonstrated that any aberration of this bond, any act of non-cooperation with the environment, results in the impoverishment of the soul and the body.

The kingdom of Bhutan has been one of the greatest natural gifts of God, as indeed the myriad valleys and mountains, rivers and springs, forests and rocks have been the sacred dwellings of infinite deities and supernatural beings. For centuries, the Bhutanese people have preserved and promoted this nature-human bond within moral, cultural and spiritual boundaries, and sustained our natural environment as one of the ecological wonders of the world.

Many of our sacred monuments and structures emerge as a spontaneous extension of nature and the whole kingdom is a grand narrative of a religious landscape with prayer-flags spanning over deep river-valleys from hill to hill, water-driven prayer-wheels repeating hymns to gods and goddesses, and numerous other tokens of the divine-human

link. The pristine cover of greens, the rolling fields, cascading streams, the sights and sounds and smells of our earth, the untold wealth of *menjong* have provided an emotional and spiritual anchor to generations of our people and ensured the rhythm and harmony of our co-existence with nature.

Wittingly or unwittingly, however, manifestations of modernisation and progress have been making fast inroads into the pattern of our life, and some of the consequences are already being painfully felt. The spiritual vibrations and deep intimations that our ancestors felt are being sabotaged by some of the ugly signs of development.

Sustaining and empowering the capacity of our natural environment will be crucial for the sustainability of our human and mental ecologies. Our search for gross national happiness should be based on an acknowledgment of this vital life-support system that the natural environment provides. An understanding of and a sensitivity to the fragile natural eco-system will deepen and chasten the pattern of the fragile mental and emotional eco-systems, and thus contribute to gross national happiness.

Our Cultural Frame

Culture is the deposit of knowledge, experiences, beliefs, faith, values, attitudes, meanings, relations, world-view, objects and possessions acquired by a large group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving.

One of the greatest gifts of many centuries of Bhutan's self-chosen isolation has been the preservation of our country's rich cultural heritage. Isolation was an extremely difficult and painful policy, but it was a wise policy - it defended the unique Bhutanese way of life handed down from generation to generation, creating and reinforcing a distinctive Bhutanese identity.

Our architectural and historical artefacts and monuments, folk-lore, myths, legends, customs, crafts, rituals, symbols and systems, superstitions and beliefs, art and literature, dance and music, sport and astrology reflect our unique Bhutanese cultural wealth, as do our world-view, our perceptions of ourselves and others, our ideas and notions of moral categories and choices..

Thanks to the genius of our ancients, the Bhutanese culture possesses some of the finest treasures of the human race and is the essential and primordial element of our country's personality.

Preservation and promotion of our unique culture in enlightened and dynamic ways are vital to ensure the future of our country as a distinctive entity in a fast globalising world.

A nation expresses its personality and identity through culture; it lives by and for culture. Culture is the medium of a nation's proclamation of its existence and its soul.

At a more individual level, culture touches the deepest chords of a person's being. As a matter of fact, culture can be defined as the *study of man*. The human being is the subject as well as the object of culture. It is through culture that a human being is distinguished and differentiated from everything else in the world. The people in the society express and objectify themselves through their culture. Man is the prime factor, the primordial and fundamental element of culture.

What is more? The essential and fundamental dimension of culture is sound morality. At its heart, culture is a great humanising and civilising force. It is also an instrument of empowerment and enrichment of peoples and societies. Of course, cultures misunderstood and abused have the potential of doing untold damage by fragmenting and weakening social bonds and human relationships.

Our Bhutanese people personally living out the essence of our culture will create the emotional and psychological foundations and promote amity and cohesion, thus advancing the scope and strength of gross national happiness.

Our Needs and Our Wants

Human beings may not live by bread alone, but without bread, they will not live at all. Thanks to the vision and the enlightened policies pursued by our government, Bhutan has developed at a pace and in a way not experienced by most under-developed or developing countries of the world. Just about four decades on the path of modern development, and the results have been greatly gratifying. The development of infrastructure and sound economic policy has produced tangible benefits for the people – in the standard of living, better housing, improved health facilities, longer life-span, higher education coverage, and, of course, enhanced gross national product and per capita income. Social mobility and communication facilities have enabled the Bhutanese populace to discover the world and its realities hitherto shut out to them.

Strengthening the conditions for and meeting the threshold levels of economic security and ensuring a fair distribution of the fruits of material development are essential for promoting general happiness. People living on the fringes of mainstream economic life and dreading every tomorrow as a bringer of despair and struggle can hardly think of the prospect of happiness. The stress imposed on people by circumstances often beyond their control often produces a mental state where the dominant impulse is more of a life of resignation than a life of expression.

Ensuring the basic minimum conditions for self-preservation is an essential condition of happiness. Promotion of economic security through formal and informal channels will strengthen psychological and emotional security – thus creating an environment conducive to the blossoming of gross national happiness.

Institutional Standards

So said Bernard Shaw: "There are two kinds of people in the world – the reasonable and the unreasonable". He went on to define them. Reasonable people are those who adapt themselves to the society, and the unreasonable those who adapt the society to themselves. All progress depends upon the unreasonable people. The fact, fortunately or otherwise, is that the unreasonable ones are in an absolute minority. The fact that they move the world forward is another matter.

The vast predictable majority of the average populace is amenable and willing to follow the guide. The arrangements made by the state for the management of the different aspects of the society's life are adequate and to that extent perfect. And, basically, nations and societies are a function of aggregates.

But, societies and peoples do not merely exist. They are dynamic and creative entities. They imagine and create room for excellence and perfection. They validate the need to grow and to blossom forth. "...a man's reach must exceed his grasp/What is a heaven for?", Browning had asked!

Governance as an instrument to set standards and promote gross national happiness, for instance.

The government is the single most important, and often the most difficult, enterprise undertaken by the people of a state. Aristotle described the state or government as "being the highest of all communities because it aims at the highest good in a degree greater than any other...".

Indeed, the government covers a wider range of aims and activities than any other enterprise or organization. It sustains the frame of national and social life, the economic and service delivery systems, guides and determines foreign relations and conduct of war, and draws up policy instruments covering general welfare.

Countries around the world, sorely afflicted with the indifference, inefficiency, and insolence of office, might decide that "that government is the best which governs the least". There are also samples of governments in the same world which epitomize the highest ideals of service in their commitment to bring out the best in people by engaging their genius and creativity, their honour and integrity.

But the government is more than an enterprise as is generally construed. The objectives and scope of government are more complex and often more intangible than those of other enterprises whose aim could be limited to mere profit-making in the most efficient manner.

People look up to governments for establishing and promoting justice, peace, law and order, maintenance of equality and impartiality, enforcement of even-handedness in the administration of services and opportunities. Satisfaction of the more basic expectations of the citizens,

which form a very large part of the non-economic values, is a primary function of governments.

Indeed, to a very considerable extent, people prefer the non-economic values of justice, security and dignity to the economic law of efficiency and swiftness. They have an abiding interest in and concern for the more intangible person of the state, its capacity for right and wrong, its soul – sovereignty – its self-respect and integrity – the state's being.

In the ultimate analysis, the foundation of gross national happiness and its sustainability is the establishment and continued cultivation of "justice which is at once the most exalted and difficult of the aims which a state may aim to achieve..."

Good governance entails more than the day-to-day running of administration and maintenance of law and order. It is and should be concerned with setting standards for the flowering of the genius of the citizens – in diverse ways – economic, social, political, scientific, civic, spiritual, cultural, artistic, personal, ethical.

Good governance includes and transcends the provision of basic services and securities. It engages and empowers the intellectual, emotional, and psychological attributes of the people of the country. Good governance is building that strength and integrity in the citizens which ensure and promote the country's soul and its most sacred values and ideals.

Gross national happiness is a function of the highest expressions of the diverse peoples of our country in the diverse fields of endeavour for individual, social and national well-being. The ideal of gross national happiness affirms the primacy of the human being over all other considerations. It is the acknowledgement of the essential dignity and sanctity of human beings. That is why it is so important to cultivate the positive energies and potentials of the human factor both as an agent as well as beneficiary of growth and development.

Moral Literacy

The world has come a very long way in developing the most intricate and complex indicators to measure its success. It has fashioned myriad smart tools and used different statistical methods to determine progress and put nations on its league-tables. Literacy rate or educational attainment has been seen as a significant factor.

Perhaps, it is time that a hitherto unexplored but most critical indicator of the quality of development be used to examine and evaluate development. The level of moral standard and uprightness across the system could well be a more authentic indicator of the health of the society. Moral literacy is an index of the personal, institutional, social and national uprightness of the way people and countries progress.

Long ago, Mahatma Gandhi had asked for a society where the priorities are straightened and where there is no: wealth without work,

pleasure without conscience, knowledge without character, commerce without ethics, science without humanity, religion without sacrifice, politics without principles. I may add: rights without responsibilities! In the ultimate analysis, the greatest strength of a nation comes from the strength of the character and integrity of its citizens. Gross national happiness will then be a natural culmination of individual virtues and the release of these virtues to the society.

Personal Standards

As I am, so is my nation. My country is made up of over half a million people like me. For the programme of gross national happiness to flourish and sustain, every Bhutanese – man, woman, and child – will need to pause a while and do some serious soul-searching. Am I, as an individual, a positive force to create and foster happiness – mine and my neighbours, and my country's? Is the foundation of my happiness built on the unhappiness of others?

In the unimpeachable law of social relativity, my existence is communal rather than individual, inclusive rather than exclusive. That is why, at the most fundamental level, the search for gross national happiness is built on a moral decision – beginning at the personal level. It is the outcome of a vision no less inclusive and familiar than the Eight-fold Paths of the Buddha. We do not need to be a Buddha. All we need is to be a little more human, a little more seeing and feeling. To be a little more Bhutanese – worthy of a country and a king such as ours.

Ultimately, the fulfilment of the goal of gross national happiness will depend upon the character and conviction and action of each Bhutanese. As I am, so is my nation.

Conclusion

An environment of security, peace, harmony, and contentment, supporting a love of life and living, nurtured by our cultural and natural endowments, nourished by individual ethical responsibilities, and guided by the highest institutional and personal standards, will be the true foundations on which to build and further our dream.

The full flowering and sustainability of the gross national happiness programme requires the engagement of the essential and the intrinsic, the positive and the creative energies of the Bhutanese people and our institutions. That happening, this abode of the peaceful dragon, the land of our thunder kings, the seat of the peerless Buddha will release a moral force that will light up the world.

Bibliography

- Frankl, Viktor E (1985): *Man's Search for Meaning*, Washington Square Press, New York.
- Fromm, Erich (1979) *To Have or To Be*, ABACUS, Sphere Books Ltd, India.
- Galay, Karma, et al (ed.) (1999): *Gross National Happiness*, Centre for Bhutan Studies, Thimphu.
- Maurus, J (ed.) 1994): *A Service Book of Inspiration*, Better Yourself Books, Bombay.
- Samovar, Larry A, et al (1986): *Understanding Intercultural Communication*, Wasdworth Publishing Company, CA, USA.
- Powdyel T S (999): *Right of Vision*, Millennium Essay, Kuensel, January 1, 2000.
- Powdyel T S: *Personal Diaries*.