

Culture, Liberty and Happiness

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Introduction and Key Concepts

In today's heightened and perplexing intercultural world, both really and virtually, culture should become an important issue. Apart from anthropologists and traditionalists, culture has had a marginal role in development thinking. Nor is culture, it seems, given such importance in the international political and economic order. An analysis of cultural liberty has to be seen within the context of global problems to which the analysis is addressed implicitly. As I perceive, the three dominant global problems are: inequality of income, environmental deterioration, and conflicts not only between human beings but human beings and other life. Promotion of cultural liberty around the world is particularly meant to promote democracy and human rights, and through them peace and development. Conflict usually means violence. Absence of conflict (understood as violence) does not mean collective happiness, which is also a self-evident value and for which much more positive conditions are needed to be felt. The Bhutanese government's agenda has attempted to encompass the global problems mentioned above locally within Gross National Happiness. There is the beginning of a search for gross or collective national happiness, it being understood that happiness can become elusive while individuals become perfectly 'better off' through modernization. The challenge is how to transcend various problems of material poverty while simultaneously creating conditions for happiness.

My intention here is to explore mainly the relationship between culture and globalization, and also to a limited

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extent the ties and differences, if any, between cultural liberty and happiness. This paper attempts to relate the concept of cultural liberty to the idea of Gross National Happiness in-the-making. However, I would like to underline strongly that the culture discussed is not about the particular culture of Bhutan; it is about culture in general and in abstract. Likewise happiness referred to here is not about happiness in Bhutan, although Bhutan's Gross National Happiness provides the frame for seeking solutions for some of the contemporary problems, not only in Bhutan but also elsewhere in the world. The perspective of Gross National Happiness, however skeletal its concepts may be, is used in this essay to view and analyse contemporary problems beyond Bhutan. Thus, I need to point out clearly that the essay is not about implications of Bhutanese culture on Bhutanese happiness or vice versa.

But an essay tracing the relationship between culture, globalisation, cultural liberty and happiness is easier if there are clear conceptions of both cultural liberty and Gross National Happiness (hence abbreviated to GNH). This is not the case. GNH is in a conceptually formative stage, and is open to different conceptualisations and interpretations, and even contestations. Within Bhutan, GNH has been variously perceived: as statist narrative of policy evolution that provides a narrative frame; as a legitimisation of policy bundle at any given moment to suggest that the current policies subsumes GNH without any need to explain what it is independently of policies at a given time; as a normatively defined goal for the country towards which its sub-units should navigate and gravitate; as a self-representation or identity of the state in comparison to the 'imagined or real outsider-audience' when its bureaucratic class who explicates it confronts them, really or imaginarily; as a search for extension and application of Buddhist ontology to development practice and to contemporary governance.

Among anthropologists, culture as a concept is contested and that means the content of what is viewed as a particular culture will vary over time and place, and by individuals. Thus, both the topics I want to relate, Gross National

Happiness and culture, have far less shape and form than favourable to my attempt to relate them. I mentioned about the formative stage in which gross national happiness is, but the definition of culture seems no less certain. Wright (1998:8) mentions that “by mid-century, Krober and Kluckholm had found 164 definitions in their famous review of what anthropologists meant by culture” (1952: 149). Invoking current meanings of culture as a set of meanings and ideas, Wright says that: “‘culture’ is a dynamic concept, always negotiable, and in process of endorsement, contestations and transformation. In a process of claiming power and authority, all are trying to assert different definitions which will have different material outcomes” (Wright 1998:8-10). This new concept of culture¹ rejects any culture as being unchanging, authoritative, and bounded. It does not accept, contrary to the old concept of culture, that there are timeless consensus meanings in a society. Rather, the new concept of culture suggests that meaning is produced by opposing discourses mounted by different groups. It leaves open the idea that the shifts in the meaning of key terms occur. Of course, everything is a matter of definition and who and how something is defined is itself a historically contingent matter in social science. Defining culture is often an act of politics and politics is about shaping meaning in a society. Hershock (forthcoming book: Chapter 5:9) has suggested that politics is not only about managing

¹ Susan Wright writes that “In sum the characteristics of new ideas of culture are: ‘culture is an active process of meaning making and contestation over definition, including of itself’ (Street 1993:2) people, differently positioned in social relations and processes of domination, used economic and institutional resources available to them to try and make their definitions of our situation ‘stick’, to prevent other’s definitions from being heard, and to garner the material outcome sites are not bounded -people draw on local, national, global links the way clusters of concepts form is historically specific, and ideas never form a closed or coherent whole in his hegemonic form, culture appears coherent, systematic, consensual, like an object, beyond human agency, not ideological - like the old idea of culture” (Wright 1998: 10).

asymmetries of power but that it is ultimately about making meaning within such asymmetries.²

With the foregoing discussion, three key terms—culture, liberty and diversity—can be now tentatively defined. A culture according to current definition is a loose set of ideas and meanings (and their material expressions) that are subject to change because of contest between opposing discourses. Individual liberty can be understood in the standard liberalist way as mere absence of ‘illegal or unconstitutional’ coercion while making any choice. The term diversity can be best understood as it is done in ecological terms. “Diversity measures the resilience of a self-sustaining ecosystem” (Hershock, forthcoming book. Ch. 5). When this concept is applied to cultural diversity, it can be understood as the extent of “interdependencies by means of which individual members contribute to each other's welfare” (Hershock, forthcoming book. Ch. 5), materially, emotionally, and spiritually. If we push this notion of diversity further, it seems that diversity is indeed necessary for us as individuals to contribute and be contributed to. When there is no diversity, there will be no space to contribute in any meaningful way to each other. And it is only through the meaningful diversity and interdependence, “not mere co-existence”, as Hershock writes, that we can increase our welfare, which is always a relational matter.

Cultural liberty, which needs to be distinguished from culture, although both culture and cultural liberty are interrelated, is far more explicit and explicated. The UNDP devoted its admirable annual, 2004 Human Development

² Hershock (forthcoming book. Chapter 5:9) “...Power has normative force in the sense that it is exerted in order to frame (if not determine) situation in meaning. This, indeed, is why politics is so often an intensely emotional: it involves arriving at substantially and effectively shared public emotions. To be empowered is to be freed toward what is desired and the opportunity of making it our own. Power implies choice, and politics reveal the imaginings of the chosen.”

Report to the issue of cultural liberty.³ *Human Development Report 2004* is a valuable navigational tool both in theory and practice with regard to cultural issues. In terms of ethnic conflicts and identity-based politics that have been the site of conflict and confrontation within and between nations, the report sharpens our focus on a global problem. In the last 59 years of its existence, the UN has had to respond to ethnic conflicts through various ways including mediation, negotiation, sanctions, and peace enforcement (Carment and James, 1998). As ethnic diversity rises within a state due to the inflow of culturally different groups, the tasks of conflict prevention, reduction, and resolution with immigrant groups with other particularistic traits have become vital. The *HDR 2004* enhances our knowledge about cultural issues and its analysis and prescriptions provide broad basis for individuals, institutions, and states to design solutions. I greatly admire with the general ethos of the report. It advances global vision and suggests new frames of state and governance. It does not privilege any culture or polity above the other, against a world which is often hierarchically structured. It has no special targets; nations where cultural liberty is upset or flourishing are mentioned as far as evidences are collected. Its only universalising project is human development by strengthening liberty and choice of the individual, not even the group or collectivity that is constituted by a culture.

The principle message underlying cultural liberty and that of the *HDR 2004* is that the best way for peace between and within culturally different societies lies in promoting

³ UNDP, 'Human Development Report 2004 Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World'. UNDP (2004) pp.285, is the most comprehensive document to appear on the subject. Its non-technical language makes broad audience possible. Its magisterial survey of evidences takes the readers to all the corners of the globe where cultural signposts (indicators) of tight spots and good-practices are flagged. The reports explodes so-called myths fuelling tensions, mistrust and conflicts over cultures, and it frames challenges and remedies.

cultural liberty. An articulation of cultural diversity as a possible outcome of liberty, as well as liberty as a precondition of any society, projects a future of meaningful global diversity. This view of the world, for example that which *HDR 2004* paints, opens more space in all directions—politics, economy, law, religion, etc., by not privileging or enforcing one priority value, or one system, over another as long as individual liberty is respected in any society. Such an ethos of cultural liberty can lead to a better, alternative kind of relations between and within states.

Self, Identities, and Happiness

As I understand, the *HDR 2004* powerfully reinforces the picture of an individual as the choice-maker that is part of political liberalism and value pluralism.⁴ A belief in value pluralism implies that there are many types of moral reasons or sources of morality and that the heterogeneity of moral sources means that there cannot be an all encompassing value or a single good or value that can override all other values or goods in all circumstances.⁵ The breadth of the

⁴ Galston (1999:770) succinctly summarised the basic features of value pluralism by the following: Firstly, statements of value pluralism are claims about the structure of our moral universe or “objective structures of the valuational universe”. Secondly, value pluralism is different from relativism given that value pluralism, in contrast to relativism, believes or defines a minimum condition that must be met in any society in order to allow for moral decency. Thirdly, above the minimum conditions that must be adhered in all societies, value pluralism recognises that there are heterogenous “moral and non-moral goods”. Fourthly, such goods or values cannot be ranked and ordered across individuals and societies who are different. Fifthly and finally, value pluralism says that “a single good or value, or set of values or goods” is paramount in all circumstances. So it rejects this single dominant value for all circumstances.

⁵ Galston (1999) specifies at least five competing values or moral claims. These are (1) particularistic duties, (2) aggregate consequences, (3) universal (deontological) rules of conduct, (4) perfectionist-achievement values and (5) commitments to personal understandings. He attributes the first three

choice is to be limited only by respect for human rights of others. If an individual's choice leads him to abutting or knocking against the walls of social, political, and cultural constraints of a group, the walls are to be removed, not the individual. The balance that has to be negotiated in the relationship between the group and the individual is the core of the report's subject, although how an individual has to negotiate through the maze of changing and conflicting identities within himself receives far less focus.

The *Human Development Report 2004* reminds us about the multiple identities of an individual and defends cultural liberty and multiple identities. The acknowledgement of multifaceted, multiple identities could lead to a lesser urge to construct imagined cultural boundaries around ourselves. Our plural identities cannot be understated for peacefully coexistent but diverse social and political orders. Reading the report provokes an imagination of our world reversing the accelerating path to sameness and diminishment of meaningful diversity, while the methods to this goal of meaningful diversity has to adhere to respecting individuals within any society. The concept of multiple identities of an individual is in fact somewhat new in the discourse of culture. Sokefeld (1999) has drawn our attention to the fact that if our identities are plural or multiple, we need to have a conception of self as a kind of manager of these identities.⁶

claims to Larmore (1987,1991,1996) and the last two moral claims to Thomas Nagel (1979). At the same time, Galston reminds us that there may be conflicts in alternative choices within the same value.

⁶ Sokefield mentions that western anthropologists have worked on the assumption of there being a self among themselves in a Cartesian self. Such selves were considered: "subjects in the dual sense of being subjected to the conditions of the world and, simultaneously, being the agent of knowing and doing in that world. The belief in this subject became a priori for the possibility of knowing the world" (Sokefeld 1999: 417). But he mentions that the non-westerns subjects of anthropologists were considered not to have self, but only identities as sameness over time. This was because Western anthropologists subsumed non-westerners "under groups to which they belong". In the extreme case, this led to the conclusion that non-westerners

But others (Fuchs in response to Sokefeld, 1999: 433-434) suggest that the self is constituted by identities.

The conceptualization of multiple identities and complementary identities is a significant contribution that emphasises continuity and commonalities between cultures and individuals. This is a major direction in moving away from conceptualisations of culture as differences and boundaries. Multiple identities of the members of a society may not perfectly overlap, or be shared. It means that in the set of multiple identities, each individual will be characterised by differences as well as commonalities with others. Two types of conflicts are possible. The first type of conflict is between individuals or groups of individuals with more or less similar traits because the identity differences that they have fuel or cause conflict. But I wish to focus here on the second type of identities' conflict. This second type occurs within an individual because certain elements of his multiple identity conflict with the other identities he has. It is usual in anthropology nowadays to say that identity is not a basic indivisible concept, because the multiple identities and the relationship between multiple identities of an individual keep on changing. This leads to what Sokefeld has described as the self⁷ being confronted with conflicting identities. The *Human Development Report 2004* did not consider this aspect of the conflict between self and cultural identities or any identities exhaustively. Without being fixated on the nature of self as a Buddhist usually does, it would be fair to say that *HDR 2004* does not talk about conflict and ambiguities within multiple identities of an individual. I feel that contradictory identities

did not have self-consciousness (Sokefeld 1999:419). He argues for accepting self as a universal.

⁷ Following Harris, Sokefeld notes that self, person and individuals are used in a confusing way but no thorough analytical distinctions have been made so far. Harris has suggested that self refers to psychological aspects, individuals to biological aspects, and persons to social aspects. Sokefeld used self to mean individuals and persons (Harris cited by Sokefeld 1999:428-429).

that rip through a self is the basic challenge, and without getting a picture of this we are likely to simplify cultural problems as external ones among and between people. How strong a self is in negotiating through conflicting identities is key to stability and mental coherence. Often, dissolution of a culture will negatively affect the personal identities of its members. At the same time, being absorbed or integrated against one's wish by force of circumstance into another culture may spell discontentment. The process of revising or switching identities of an individual is often challenging and stressful to the self, and can undermine peace of mind silently, yet there may be no overt social and cultural conflict. The process of change adversely affects especially those who cannot negotiate a positive relationship between the self and identities. Unlike external masks which we easily wear to suit different 'operas', the self has to cope with adjusting rapidly to many identities and roles to fit oneself into circumstances. Sokefeld mentions that this enactment of different identities is possible only with reflective sense of the self which he defined as "being distinguished from others" ie, awareness of what one is doing by enacting one's identity while being aware of being distinct in other identities. In Sokefeld's study, "the consistency of the self rests on the ability to describe one's self in a more or less consistent way" (Sokefeld 1999: 424).

Identities conflict within individuals is high when their society faces extremely rapid cultural change due to profound and sometimes capricious forces of change within which individual choice or liberty does not have much of a role. In such a situation that is not a gradual evolution, large scale shifts in pattern of relationships take place and interdependencies may be broken for sometime before a new kind is regained. Breakdown in relationship is at the centre of suffering and unhappiness. Bonding, or what has been called social capital, which is important, is eroded. One's own culture as a context of choice for life plans is weakened. An individual faces greater ambiguity in reconciling his or her expanding multiple and conflicting identities and that breeds identity conflicts within himself, and perhaps also adds to

pain and stress and even meaninglessness and unhappiness. What I have described is not conflict between cultural groups, but within an individual, whose happiness has to be ultimately understood in terms of the meaning one feels and in terms of relationality with others (Hershock, forthcoming book, Chapter 5). When circles of overlapping interdependencies between citizens are weak, that is the time a state is weak and Gross National Happiness is low. Cultural homogeneity in itself does not seem to be a strong explanation for unity, power, flourishing or strength of any country.

However, we have to enter a broader discussion on the concepts of self because that itself may be culturally varied. All concepts of self are views on human nature, both what it is and what it should be. Different societies may have different empirical as well as idealized views of human nature. The concept of self in political liberalism implied in the Human Development Report 2004 emphasises the individual as an autonomous chooser also of cultural identity and personal development. So this particular concept has political and economic implications: all institutional frameworks are created to fulfil the individual's own goals and aspirations; the individual is responsible for his choice and is socialised to be guilty and culpable when he commits transgressions. He is responsible for himself and towards himself (Pollis 1965). Problems with the concept of self as autonomous chooser (agency) arises if there are divergent concepts or views of self in different cultures that then makes social and political institutions and structures function in a different way.

For example, groups created by voluntary associations presuppose the concept of self as the basic unit of autonomy. Such groups are formed to pursue associational interests through political processes and are seen as a prerequisite for competitive democratic politics. Some have argued that an acceptance of the self as autonomous is necessary for democratic political system. Others do not think that it is a crucial assumption.

Liberty is based on the assumption of autonomy which is defined as conscious choice or reflection. Only if an individual

has no space to make choices consciously is the person without autonomy. This raises a further problem: if a person makes a choice due to socialisation, that is unawareness of the choice or decision he is making, which may seem to be a contradiction in terms, the person may be said to lack autonomy in a weak sense. Choices that individuals make are framed by current conceptions of what is normal, acceptable, and expected, and such frameworks exert powerful influences on the degree of autonomy and choice individuals are capable of making.

However, if a certain society's conception of self lacks any construction of an autonomous individual, it creates room for alternative group-oriented concepts of self which must be distinguished from groups created by individuals who have a concept of self as autonomous choosers.

Group-oriented concepts of self have the image of an individual being involuntary and un-autonomous within a group, and subordinated to the group. Of course, one can understand the notion of a group-oriented identity for human beings not as evolutionary organisms but social and political beings. The problem that anthropologists face in accepting group-oriented concepts of self vis-avis culture is that: "so long as we think of humans simply as individuals subjected to a collectivity... change of the sort to which human history so richly attests becomes curiously distant and difficult to comprehend...human sociality evolved through the selective advantage conferred upon individuals who possessed increasingly powerful sociality... sociality be a trait of individuals...The individuals here are conceived solely as part of the process of evolutionary change-or-continuity" (Carrithers, 1990:191-192). But this view of social evolution in terms of sociality is also contested.

From a Buddhist point of view, the view of self neither affirms group dependence nor individualistic independence. It is said that self exists conventionally but not in an ultimate sense. In the ultimate sense, there is no self and no personal identity over time, as we normally think separate entities exist over time (Inada 1988, 1997). Another way to understand the lack of separate self is that there is nothing

permanent and this can be revealed by focusing on the moment-to-moment continuum of existence. Inada writes:

As such, nothing permanent resides in the continuum, nor is anything made permanent by cycle or moment in question. The continuum is more like a symmetrical series of intersecting and overlapping phenomena. But within this context of things, it is so easy to refer to a permanent nature of a self that is directing the compounding activity... to set the self apart from the activity itself is to commit a fallacy of misplaced abstraction or simply beg the question. The self, therefore, does not exist in the moment-to-moment continuum; if reference is made to it at all, then it would have to be in terms of what has already transpired (Inada 1988:263-264).

But there is an illusion of the self existing through time, when any of the five impermanent aggregates are causally related and when such 'conceptual fiction' or illusion is produced by convenient linguistic designation as 'self', 'person', 'I', 'you', 'he', etc (Inada 1997: 10-14). If we use the postmodernist Derrida's vocabulary here, we could say that the pronouns of this type are signs pointing to entities which are not present. But what the absent entity points to is another question. Further, in Buddhist moral concepts, the notion of lack of self is shown to be consistent with rebirth, to comply with the doctrine of karma and cosmic justice.⁸

However, what the concept of lack of self means normatively in everyday legal and constitutional terms is not spelt out anywhere, it seems. All that can be drastically concluded here is that if the Buddhist reductionist philosophical point of view is to be taken seriously, there no person and identity as we postulate in liberalism which claim the existence of self. We can further deduce that in our

⁸ An eminent Buddhist scholar, Samten Karmay, has questioned whether the doctrine of no self actually took root in Tibetan cultural area. He uses the widespread belief in *srog* (life force or vitality) and the rituals associated with it to be in tension with doctrine of no self. Although I remember this argument he has noted in an article, I have forgotten where I read it and therefore I cannot give any reference here.

ordinary thinking (that is in conventional sense) of self and personal identity, what we construe and apply in law and other ordinary affairs of life is incomplete. So an institution like law that is based on premise such as conventional sense of self (conceptual fiction) must also be conceptual fiction, not ultimate justice that is provided only by karma. A glaring problem (for me) is that if a virtuous activity is performed by a person who is a conceptual fiction, how does that accrue rewards and punishment. The problem is resolved at the level of conception where the 'original mind' is said to be inherently compassionate, loving, and kind.

Taking a Buddhist perspective, Hershock (forthcoming book Ch.5:11-13) poses the question whether an increase in autonomy in the sense of political liberalism results in the disparate ends between individuals, or groups and whether the differences have to be contained by rule of law. He notes the tension between equality and liberty, and between private and public spaces. He is of the view, moreover, that pushed to its limit, both autonomy and equality can be pursued only if both conflicts and contribution to each other are reduced through rule of law. What we ideally need is not an institutionalized reduction to contribute to each other. His argument is that if differences between individuals are non-existent, for example, through institutional equalization of inherently different individuals, logically, there is no way individuals can make any contributions to each other. "No meaningful change in relational quality is possible in ignorance of the karma of presently obtaining patterns of interdependence as well as the patterns of denying this interdependence in the assertion of either independence or dependence" (Hershock forthcoming book. Ch. 5:16). Hershock sees a danger that "the logic of autonomously exercised freedom of choice" could lead "interdependent relationships into mere co-existence".

Liberty, Choice, and Value Pluralism

Human Development Report 2004 acknowledges that we have multiple identities. But some of these are inherited as

members of groups into which we came about without choosing to be so, like being born in a certain community and to certain religious beliefs, customs, kinship, values, etc. We are born diverse but socialised to be alike under dominant values. What is emphasised in *HDR 2004* is that to continue living with such multiple identities still involves making choices. Individuals can change certain identities when they become aware of other forms of life. What the *HDR 2004* strongly argues is that individuals should be given liberty to change their identities and that institutions and processes must give an indispensable place to liberty. The argument is that continuous, conscious, and voluntary identification by an individual is necessary with respect to a certain way of life, that is libertarian. While voluntary identification may be necessary to sustain cultural liberty, whether liberty is valued for its own sake or whether liberty is valued for human flourishing is not clear. The argument put forward in the *HDR 2004* is that lack of cultural liberty and freedom stunts human development and that is by definition diminishment of human potential, human flourishing, and human development. We need to make a link between human flourishing and individual liberty clear. When arguments about human flourishing are generally based on indicators of economic success and political liberalism, which are further based on arrangements like free market and political liberalism, it is very difficult to disentangle claims about certain institutional flourishing from human flourishing. It is equally easy for institutional discussions to occlude long-term human happiness issues.

A discussion of individual liberty and human flourishing also leads to a discussion about diversity. With more liberty, one may expect more diversity. Diversity may threaten solidarity, especially if diversity is developing too fast and is perceived as dissent and deterioration. Once again, value pluralism would see diversity as a reflection of the existence of individual liberty. But we should distinguish here between allowing individuals to change their identities consciously by their own choice and allowing powerless individuals to be changed by profoundly pervasive forces such as marketing

and media that seeks to seize onces consciousness and attention before one is even conscious and attentive to change.

Rich cultural heritage provides the options and choices for us to select life plans. So not having a rich and intact culture is a diminishment of choices. A state which cannot defend its cultural richness is thus one where the choices of its citizens are constrained. According to this line of argument advanced by Kymlicka, culture is not valuable for its own sake but as a means of, or precondition of, maintaining self-respect based on one's own life plans (Kymlica quoted in Danley 1991:171). Danley also cites Mill's arguments for happiness. Mill advocated most probably, Danley says, cultural diversity instead of cultural conformity as one of the two conditions for happiness given than cultural diversity allows individuals alternative choices or options for their life plans. Self-respect means that any plan in our life is worth carrying out. In this context, the argument for cultural diversity, and thereby defense of a particular culture, is based on cultures as a context of choices.

Value pluralism's fundamental point that is shared with political liberalism is that there should be minimal conditions which should include negative liberty (absence of coercion of any kind). The emphasis on liberty and choice, *per se*, has been criticised also by John Gray (1995).⁹ The central thrust of his criticism was based on the fact that making choices is not a crucial feature of our life because we are what we are in which making choices has not been so critical. We happen to be in societies. This means that there is nothing logically self-evident about choice. So the assumption that choice is crucial

⁹ Gray's criticism was that negative liberty is not necessarily part of value pluralism. Galston tried to show that value pluralism and political liberalism, as defined by Berlin (1969) view), are consistent. At the heart of both, Berlin wrote, was individual liberty, essentially negative liberty: liberty not be coerced to do something. Gray attempted to show that Berlin's pluralist stance is not fully consistent with political liberalism (Gray 1995; Galston 1999:760).

to value pluralism and liberalism is not deduced from human nature. As Galston says, “We cannot move directly from the inescapability of choice to the valuing of choice that liberalism implies, a link Berlin too casually implies” (Galston 1999:774).

However, states are not completely free, for obvious reasons, from leaving individuals to make their choices and chose their values. Often they have to take a range of incomparable values and prioritize them in spite of the fact that there may not be a completely logical and rational basis for rankings among values. They carry out some ordering of values on various grounds such as the need for social order, law, and solidarity. States often seek limitations on individuals’ cultural liberty for the cause of collective success. Political institutions often assert that enforcing certain cultural traits in their society, and thus restricting liberty, is necessary for economic and social successes. Sometimes, and only sometimes, these assertions are proven by their ability to secure comparatively higher economic growth and better material living conditions for their citizens.

Unity, Diversity, and Homogeneity

States are in a paradoxical situation with regard to culture. On the one hand, culturally oriented states seek cultural promotion. Such tendencies manifest in their policies of education, media, tourism, etc. that attend to cultural heritages or particularisms. On the other hand, in our current times of racing towards globalisation and integration, most governments promote open-air and open-trade policies that tilt the balance radically in favour of cultural diversity reduction and even negation. We clearly see evidence of cultural implosion in terms of lifestyles, languages, and knowledges. These two aspects of policy bundle often lack coherence, leading to contradictions. The spread of certain digital technology is often cited as a new avenue of promoting and preserving cultures, but that is preservation digitally and virtually, not really as a mode of actual living.

Yet as Walzer pointed out, states make the world of

common meaning possible (Walzer 1983 cited in Bader 1995: 218) and each state does endeavour to do that. And it would seem that no state can be completely free from the task of creating a certain degree of common identity and meaning, although the task is probably becoming far more challenging in a globalizing world where identities continue to meld and be challenged.

It is an old, comforting belief that if we live in a space where there is “common meaning, shared language, common cognitive and normative frameworks” (Bader 1995: 218) we can be closely affiliated as citizens or members, and bring collective consciousness as a distinct community. Common meaning means mainstreaming historical memories to national narratives, and implies development of something over and above local histories and memories. Hence, local history and identities are not necessarily preserved to the same degree as national identity and history.¹⁰

The belief in cultural unification and homogeneity is probably pursued partly for national unity, and unity is pursued for the security, strength, and independence of decision-making. However, we must begin discussion on this issue by pointing out that complete sovereignty of a nation is itself a dramatic myth. The unity and powers of all sovereign nations’ are in fact not absolute in any sense. A state shares its powers internally through subsidiarity, federalism, decentralisation, and so forth. At the same time, a state shares its powers externally with supranational institutions. States have joined movements towards formation of regional associations and communities that diminishes their monopoly of legislations and decisions. Both internal and external power-sharing arrangements are further constrained by international laws. These external limitations on a state’s sovereignty have resulted in what is called domestic democracy deficit (Habermas, 2003). The divisibility of a state’s powers, both internally and externally, even in a

¹⁰ The belief in common meaning led many states to unavoidable dilemmas in multi-cultural and multi-lingual units within a state.

culturally homogeneous nation means that its culture is really not the basis of strength and unity, as a state's power cannot be mobilised solely on the basis of a relationship between the state and its culturally homogenous people.

Just as a state's sovereignty (power to make decisions) is not unitary (singular), the notion of citizenship in a state does not coincide completely with the set of traits of a multicultural nation. In a culturally diverse nation, citizenship cannot be bound to any culture. In an increasingly globalising world, citizenship may not even be bound to a nation. In the EU, for example, some elements of citizenship, for example freedom of mobility and work is granted on an EU-wide basis.

Habermas ((1992) cited in Bader 1995: 223) has argued that national identity in terms of culture should be divorced from citizenship because citizenship since the French Revolution has been mainly a democratic concept. In a Habermasian democracy, there is no particular history, no particular culture, perhaps only a common language and a political community (Bader 1995, 232). However, Bader has raised a question as to how individuals can be motivated to democracy when they are divorced from their cultural identities.

If we use certain criteria like military, economic, or political power, a state containing homogenous culture has not necessarily been stronger or more successful than a heterogeneous state and vice versa. Even if a state is culturally homogenous, that in and by itself does not guarantee that there will be complete harmony, equality, and unity amongst its people. We can conceive of conditions under which exclusion thrives under class system, caste system, gender discrimination and domination, even in a culturally homogeneous nation. As in every community, or even in a family some of the times, a homogenous nation is also often marked by conflicts and dissension.

Human Development Report 2004 mentions that cultural hybridisation has contributed to rejuvenation, and conversely, homogeneity and purity may often lead not to organic growth but ossification. Of course, how much of

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hybridisation and crossing strains has to take place has to be judged carefully by taking account of the relative penetrative power of each culture. Both the speed and scale of change need to be considered. Too fast a cultural change can bring dislocation in the society where parts of it do not meld but become antagonistic to each other. Sudden change at a mass level breaks down bonding and cohesion, unity which are valueable asset to build a community. If it is swept away by sudden cultural change, it can unleash a disintegrating effect.

Cultures and Globalization

From a developmental point of view, one is interested in the importance of globalisation as a process promoting international equality. In *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, its author, Friedman (1999), argued that globalization is a given, reifying it almost to a natural force. However, if globalisation were to benefit citizens everywhere, it would have to contribute towards global equality of income or distribution of resources, greater environmental preservation, and peace.

Bader (1995) has argued that we happen to be citizens of a particular nation entirely due to accidents of birth and descent that then determines what our country has to offer as life chances, privileges, and rights of a citizen. If life chances for individuals are so vastly unequal simply because of accidents of birth, and individuals are not responsible for their births or choice of country, in a sense they have moral claim to globally equal resource distribution. And if immigration does contribute to global equality, it seems that it is a means to a better or just world. Adverse immigration conditions indicate a lack of attention to global collective welfare (Bader 1995:214-216).

As we know, movement of capital is more free than labour. Immigration is at the end spurred on by inequality and poverty. However, almost all governments today, for fear of stress and strain of introducing foreigners into the body of polity and economy, opt for investments and trade as ways of addressing international iniquity. The conditions for entry of immigrants, refugees, and workers are tough enough to

discourage everyone except the clever and the well-off. Yet a century or so ago, in colonial times, movement of people was very prevalent from some of today's northern countries to the lands of the indigenous people who have become minorities in their own homelands. Restrictive immigration policies today are mainly defended and legitimated on grounds of cultural self-determination and protection (Bader 1995, 213), and by fear that immigrants will flood the host countries because both the size and growth of population are smaller in today's host countries. The necessity for tight entry policy is particularly strong and obvious for countries with small population like that of Bhutan.

Kenneth Waltz (1999:700) has noted that "the main difference in international politics now and earlier is not found in the increased interdependence of states but in their growing inequality." He was talking about "distribution of capability across states", but it is also true of income equality. The measures of interdependence of states he uses is trade and capital flows as a percentage of GNP. With respect to the mobility of labor, Waltz mentions that we have reached only about 1910 level, although the rate of migration is rising. In spite of a tendency for rising mobility of labor, legal and physical doors for immigration to developed countries are getting relatively tighter and narrower. *Human Development Report 2004* advocates liberalisation of immigration on the grounds that it brings similar gains to the host economy as lowering trade barriers does (p. 102) and suggests rather optimistically that anti-immigration is like "fighting against the tide of globalisation". In dealing with immigrants, the past practices of differentialism and assimilation are argued to be outmoded and the report argues in favour of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism supports value of diversity within a society, and it does not exclude participation of any members of society in civic and socio-political sphere because of someone's cultural identity.

Regardless of lower mobility of labour from south to north, the spread of commercial interests backed by corporations as part of globalization has threatened indigenous peoples and their knowledge and cultural

properties. Michael Brown (1998) has explored the implication of cultural appropriations of intellectual property rights. Benedict Kingsbury (1998) has inquired into the concept of indigenous peoples in international law. Territories of indigenous people are being mined and their resources extracted with no just compensation. Indigenous knowledge associated, for example, with crop genetic resources and herbal medicines are stolen, patented, and trademarked. *Human Development Report* (p. 86) mentions that “A March 2000 study concluded that 7,000 patents had been granted for unauthorized use of traditional knowledge, or the misappropriation of medicinal plants.”

What are indigenous knowledge, cultural productions, and cultural properties, that may include intangible things and to which such legal instruments can be plausibly applied, are the nub of the problem. There is a belief, regardless of the viability, that copyright and intellectual property rights are the legal instruments to control cultural properties. Copyrights and patents are supposed to protect private ideas and creations. Such laws give the private persons or legal persons compensation for their work when their works enter the so-called public domain. Application of patents and trademarks would prevent unauthorized use of such cultural properties, but only for a period of time, after which they can become part of public domain. Contrary to expectations of some cultural groups, patents and trademark laws as they are today will not give permanent right of cultural ownership (Brown 1998:204) as they have finite terms: patents for 17 years and copyrights for author’s lifetime plus 50 years (Brown 1998:196). But there are two problems that need further attending. First the concept of intellectual property, which is wedded to private property and solitary invention, sits uneasily with cultural forms which are collective patrimonies and dynamic. Moreover, current intellectual property laws cannot cope if the definition of cultural properties is so wide as to include both ideas and their expressions within a cultural heritage. Brown’s example about musical performance within certain cultures which may not have any written musical scores demonstrates the

complexity it presents to intellectual property laws. He thinks, however, that radical change to intellectual property laws is an unworkable solution to preservation and control of cultural properties and suggests more options like “creative licensing partnerships between native communities and corporate interests...”, provided of course the corporations are in the first place sympathetic to the conservation of cultures.

Second, political liberalism based on individuals as autonomous choosers are ambivalent about group-based rights “which do not fit into the structure of liberal thought” (Kingsbury 1998; 426), except as some kind of civil society. Indigenous people are defined provisionally by three criteria: consisting of nondominance within the area, cultural affinity with the area, and historical continuity until colonisation (Kingsbury, 1998:454). It is rare to have bounded or distinct areas occupied by specific native minorities as in America and Australia, which we can call indigeneous people (Comments by Descol in Brown 1998:209). In non-colonized nations, there seems to be rarely any concept of indigenous and non-indigenous people, a terms which has roots in the colonial period. But defining who indigenous people are seems to be a problem beyond liberal thinkers alone. Several states in Asia¹¹ have rejected recognition of indigenous collective rights, because it seems that recognising more than one peoples in their states and accepting indigenous legal and political systems with ‘indigenous people’ will have radical consequences.

Diversity Vs Human Development Priorities

As far as democratic or political liberalist states are concerned, they have no set goals, because the basic principle is that individuals are free to do what they value and what

¹¹ Kingsbury (1998, 433-436) mentions that Asia, India and China, for example, have rejected the concept of indigenous peoples. Both China and India seem to have argued that indigenous peoples are those “peoples who came first, (or at least earlier than those who are now dominant)... and it is impossible to say who came first”.

gives them meaning. The state does not have a collective end to pursue except to maintain, broadly stated, the democratic principles of equality and liberty. The end is up to the individuals; the means must be democratic.

The contention of UNESCO's (1995) report *Our Creative Diversity* has been that the neglect of culture, which it defined (using the old definition of culture) as inclusive of all domains of life including economy, in development discourse and practice has led to some degree of failure of development (Wright 1998:11). The old idea of culture in the UNESCO report is that of a bounded culture, which led it to recommend cultural diversity on the basis of ethnic groups or a 'people'. But Wright criticises this standpoint of the report and shows that any definition of concept of culture is not a 'given' and its definition is a 'construction' made by definers and is susceptible to the "political process of contestation over the power to define key concepts..." (Wright 1998:14).

Hershock writes that:

All suffering is pivots on the experience of meaninglessness. We all know that it is possible not just to endure, but to learn and grow from even the most extreme hardships. Very often, it is in the most dire straits that we learn how compassionate we can be, how appreciative of every small nuance in our relationships with others. In yet, each of us also knows precisely what it is to feel that though we are still going through the motions of living, our lives have already ended. This feeling of profound impasse, their sense that there is no point in going on, no direction promising an exciting and meaningful continuation of our story, announces not the factual nature of our situation but the extreme poverty of our dramatic resources—our blocked or depleted capacity for meaningfully revising our situation and appreciating our unlimited intimacy with all things (Hershock 2000:23).

From a Buddhist point of view, many scholars have shown that human rights are consistent with Buddhist teachings while others have seen the limitations of human rights as a culturally and historically contingent idea. Hershock (2000) points out that human rights as a purely conceptual entity considers all human beings as equal and

independent, and thus in defining ourselves in such universalistic or generic terms as right bearers, devoid of our cultural and social connections, we ignore all the particularities that define us. One of the consequences of such a view of human beings, he sees, is that rights are about “mediating between claims of groups or states and those of individuals” (p. 17). In any case, the central plank of his Buddhist discourse on rights begins with the Buddhist notion of all things—individuals, cultures, environments, etc—as having no essential or fixed natures in and by themselves. For example, human beings exist neither inside nor outside the five *khandas*: “a human being is irreducibly relational”, “arising as a quality of relationship between ‘beings’ and ‘the environment’” (p.18). His structure of a moral universe is based on karmic value and intention, where everything (meaning, the ideas, events, experiences, actions, objects) is interdependent and relational, as part of the evolving meaning of our lives. We contribute to meanings in others’ lives as and while they contribute to ours in what he calls “the creative continuation of a shared narrative”. Given that Buddhism is concerned with the conditions of pain, Hershock points out that “both suffering and its resolution must be understood as native in nature—as a function of the interruptions and healings of our dramatic or meaningful interrelationships... that is, from a Buddhist perspective, suffering arises only when our narrative moment, the meaningful flow of our interdependence, is radically diverted, interrupted, or blocked” (p. 22). If I understand Hershock correctly, our interactions can be either based on rich direct personal interrelationships or organisationally or institutionally mediated interrelationships. When the organisationally mediated inter-relationships are on the ascendant, naturally free personal relationships are displaced by control and atomised by security institutional regulations. He mentions human rights as organisationally mediated relationships whereby different domains of rights are secured. His contention is that the focus on regulatory institutions like human rights steers individuals away from meaningful interdependence because institutions designed for control at

the end are not conducive to “adding value to our already meaningful pattern of interdependence. Human rights, then, will to insure... the conservation and development of our resources for dramatic virtuosity.”

Hershock (2000) has suitably charted out a fuller evaluation of human rights in a new original light of subtle and rich interpretations of old Buddhist concepts of interdependence, no essential natures, karmic values, and the Eightfold Path. If I simplify it to a bare thread, that cannot do justice to it, his interpretations of Eightfold Path stress freedom from ideological, institutional, and technological dominations that diminish our capacity to freely and spontaneously direct our attention to realise more meaningful and responsive relationships with one another (p. 29).

Unity between Human Rights and Cultural Liberty

There is a serious attempt to reconcile and harmonise human rights, cultural identities, competitive politics of liberal democracy, biased WTO-blessed international trade, and investment regimes. Throughout, the report resonates with the message that an individual must be free, and must have the right, to choose, change, and revise various elements of his multiple cultural identities if he wishes to. The entire discussion is suffused with human rights as free choice, and free choice as cultural liberty. The core ideal of liberal democracy is its fabric. Free choice of identities is argued as being central to human rights and human development. All institutional arrangements, local or global, therefore must allow for individuals to exercise a free choice in cultural matters to be consistent with human rights. Human rights trumps over or subordinates cultural liberty, in the book. Actually, at one point, the report goes so far as to say that cultural diversity is not an end in itself but an outcome of freedom and choices (*HDR 2004*, p. 89), and that human rights is also one of the five family members of universal or global ethics. According to the report, global culture equals universal ethics of human rights and responsibilities.

Is there a consonance between human rights and

cultural liberty? One would like it to be there. If we believe that an ethnic nation or an ethnic people “have comprehensive rights in its own cultural productions and ideas” (Brown 1998, 195), these may include their own notions of right and wrong. If we limit ourselves to cultural diversity and moral relativity, it is hard to reconcile human rights with cultural liberty of individuals within a single culture where such human rights may be violated as part of their culture. And if we believe also that there is no evidence for cultures to be ranked as better and worse (*HDR 2004*, p. 90), we have no ground to advance global ethics of human rights into any particular cultural group. On the other hand, acceptance of human rights as a universal standard that should arbitrate or evaluate intercultural diversity in the political domain, overtly calls on all ethnic nations and peoples to converge on the liberal political state, which is exactly why it is seen as controversial by some cultural entities.

We are aware that people everywhere do not see it as a universal standard, because every standard is a standard from within a particular worldview (Cleveland cited in Brown 1998: 207). Individual choice and rights cannot be universalised through power relationships, or by force on others. We can say that tolerance is necessary. But we can also ask as to whose tolerance we are talking about. I personally think that human rights are the bench mark for all societies. But cautionarily, all are aware that human rights, especially in its specifications of economics and politics (as part of the second generation rights), are rejected by particularists.

Multi-religion

Secularisation was often seen as a dependant variable, dependent directly on modernization (Chaves 2004:765). In these days of science, individualism, and globalisation, it is certainly a widespread assumption that religion has a marginal role in politics and society. For a long time, academics who subscribed to modernisation theory believed

that modernisation will lead to lesser role of religion in politics. Numerous prominent political events driven by religion have forced a reevaluation. Likewise, secularization,¹² which predicted the diminishment of religion as a social force, has also drawn doubts. Following Dobbelaere, Chaves (1994) characterised secularization as: domains gaining autonomy from religious institutions whereby religion is reduced to one sphere among many, the conformity of religious institutions with the secular framework, and the decline of religious practices among individuals. Chaves, in keeping with his definitional focus on authority, redefined all three dimensions of secularisation to a reduction in the scope of control by religious authority in the institutional sphere, the organisational level, and individual level. He made religious authority an object of secularisation rather than religion itself (Chaves 1994:757-770).

The persistent role of religion has to do with several factors, but in political terms, it would seem that the religious organisations which already exist lend to political mobilisation, mass media, and public influence (Fox 2004:57). His explanation for the rise of the religious resurgence is that "... in many ways, religious fundamentalism is an organized criticism and rejection of modernity. Fundamentalists reject the replacement of religious morality and explanations for the world in which we live with scientific and rational explanations and moral systems" (Medelsohn, 1993; Tehranian, 1993 cited in Fox 2004:58). According to Fox, at present, religion is being used

¹² Chaves (1994) defines secularization as declining scope of religious authority. He distinguished his definition from that of secularization as declining religion. Chaves says that actual or potential use of physical violence is key to political authority. Likewise, he points out that "An authority structure is religious as long as its claims on obedience are legitimated by some reference to the supernatural referent... Secularization as declining religious authority, then, will referred to the declining influence of social structures whose legitimation rests on a reference to the supernatural" (Chaves 1994:756).

politically for (a) providing legitimacy to governments or resistance to certain governments and (b) justification for terrorism or war. The religious conflicts are difficult to resolve because articles of faith are not negotiable.

The presence of religious conflicts suggests that religion is an important factor in modernity: it will not disappear. Even if the conflicts are not religious in nature, Fox says that religion may influence the conflict when the two conflicting groups belong to different groups. Studying findings of conflict studies for the 1990s only, he suggests that “religious conflicts are a significant minority of conflict” contrary to Huntington’s predictions if civilizations are equated roughly with religions. Jonathan Fox (2004), using state failure data set for the period 1950 to 1996, has studied religious conflict for that period. His study suggests that non-religious conflicts are much more numerous than religious conflicts in the period since 1960 (Fox 2004:64). However, the number of religious conflicts has remained steady and has not declined. Among the religious conflicts, the most common are shown by Fox to be between two Christian groups, followed by two Muslim groups. But the number of inter-religious conflicts are highest between Muslims and other religious groups (Fox 2004:67-69).

Only four countries have state religion and they all happen to be Buddhist. All other countries, theoretically, are said to be secular. The secular nature of a state is considered universal whereas religion is considered particular and local. But whatever the exact nature of the state, the important thing is that no religion is going out of the public space, and it cannot go out of the public space in any democracy.

Secularism, by which is meant the separation of politics and religion, is supposed to provide public scope for rightful difference in multilingual societies. From a Buddhist point of view, Hershock writes that:

The Buddha did not argue for or against any particular form of government... he consistently and powerfully advocated committed revision of the meaning of political and social relationships, focusing in particular on the dramatically significant interplay of values and intention...

Media and Public Culture

Buddhist teachings aimed at opening up an entirely new kind of space—a new dimension. Taking up the Middle Path was not aimed at coming to rest at a point of perfect balance among competing and thus mutually limiting viewpoints, but at abandoning the very terms and conditional circumstances of the competition itself (Hershock forthcoming book: Ch. 5:3-4).

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