
Happiness and Future of Asia

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“Every moment is a moment of rebirth.” said the Buddha. You can revise your future or fate anytime. Up to the last second, it was determined, but in the next second we can revise it. We can do something new. Something can be born every second.

Gross National Happiness (GNH) is both a development philosophy as well as a personal ethos and operates at two levels. To the extent, a state frames so many aspect of people's lives, GNH has to be about development philosophy. GNH is also a personal guide to life to once an individual has the necessary space to structure it or to obtain that space. As a development philosophy and as the main agency of social-economic development, the framework of GNH has to be adopted by governments. It should be reflected in State policies, legislation and in the programmes of a government in its various fields of operation, as for instance in education, agriculture, trade, industries, manufacturing, services and cultural affairs. Then it can act on the structures impinging on personal life.

For GNH to be an effective development philosophy, the framework of development that a government adopts must be pro-GNH. But doing so has huge implications. The existing structures and processes of governments are not particularly pro-GNH. Nevertheless, they are so well-established. The structure and processes of most governments around the world are also quite similar. If GNH is to have any impact it must be able to shift these current and widespread structures and processes of government.

In my opinion the significance of GNH as a development philosophy is far greater than GNH's role as a personal ethos. As a personal ethos or personal programme GNH can be very helpful regardless of whether the government does or does not follow GNH policies. In our individual capacity we can restructure our values and behaviour towards GNH to pursue holistic well-being and happiness; we can practice GNH independent of the government's stance. However, individual's behaviour and ethos are substantially and inevitably affected by a government's policies and legislations. The degree of freedom among individuals is determined by the wider environment which is a result of legislations, policies and programmes.

Because of this, GNH as a development philosophy should be practised as much as it is practised as a personal ethos. Personal ethos can be more easily followed if GNH is already in place as a development philosophy. As individuals, we assume that we have far more free will and freedom in shaping the nature of our existence than we actually do. While this may be so for individuals with the power to control their own lives, for instance intellectuals, politicians, and leaders in business, religious and civil society organisations, for most people almost all the things they do are extensively determined by government policies and legislation. Our lives are affected deeply by the social, economic and political topographies created by the state. To change the nature of the state is to change our lives gradually.

For instance, take the food we eat every day. We tend to think that the food we consume is a neat result of our own choices. There is freedom to choose both the type and amount of food we

eat. On the other hand, to a large extent, the trade regulations about food, the standard of safety concerning our food, the notions of dietary balance and the prices we pay affect our consumer behaviour. Agricultural policies that biases food production towards either chemical based agriculture or organic agriculture, have already decided the nature of our freedom or the lack of it as the case may be with respect to the choice on our plates.

Happiness and Medieval Bhutanese Governance

Bhutan is situated ecologically, socially and philosophically on the overlapping fringe of two large civilizations: Chinese and Indian. Bhutan had more contact with The Tibetan civilization before it became part of China in the 1950s. Bhutan is lodged in one of the most geo-politically sensitive parts of the world with Tibet (China) to the north and India to the south. The Tibetan plateau and the Indian plains border Bhutan. As it is in the middle, Bhutan has been a tremendous meeting point not only of cultures and languages, but of micro-climatic ecologies, which has resulted in an spectacular diversity of flora and fauna, Vast swathes of the country are nature reserves. Forest and wildlife are close to farms, sometimes to the detriments of the farmers. Wildlife destroy crops and farmers lose a good part of crops to bears, wild boars, monkeys, elephants, deer, sambars, porcupines and birds. A combination of Buddhist values and lack of arms among farmers have lead farmers to tolerate them. One of the most moving sights for me is that of a farmer intoning loudly, or banging bells, on the verge of a cloud forest to scare away wild animals from coming into his fields. It is so non-violent though onerous on farmers.

The area of the country is relatively small, at about 38,394 sq km. Its borders shrank in the 19th and 20th centuries. Yet its size is not small if we take ecological diversity as a dimension of its size. Simple measurement by area is misleading when we measure it by other qualities. Take two contrasting patches of land of equal size: one is barren and other is dense with diverse flora and fauna. We should certainly count and value the patch dense with flora and fauna as larger because it holds more. Diversity is another face of depth. In addition, Bhutan is not flat. The deep Himalayan mountain folds, if ironed out, will make it 50% larger compared to a flatter place.

The country's diversity also applies to ethnicities, consisting of a mosaic of people. The total population in 2010 was 6,83,000. All faces of Asia are visible in Bhutan. About 20 percent of the population is Nepalese, some of whom are Tibetan-Mongoloid, and among the migrants trickling into these densely foliated mountains, they were the latest to settle, in southern parts of Bhutan.

Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel, often simply called the Zhabdrung Rinpoche, consolidated smaller valley kingdoms into a bigger theocracy in 1626. From 1626 to 1907, Bhutan was a country that was managed differently from most countries. The incarnations of the founder, the Zhabdrung Rinpoche, were supreme leaders. For practical affairs, the two highest officials owing allegiance to the incarnations of the founder managed the country. The first was the Desi who oversaw the civilian administration. The second was the Je Khenpo, or the Chief Abbot, who administered the state-supported monastic bodies in the country. Both ruled in the name of the supreme leader, the Zhabdrung reincarnation, in particular the mind incarnation of the founder of Bhutan. The founder of Bhutan, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel, took rebirth not as one individual but three individuals at the same time. They were the emanations of the mind, the speech and the body of the first Zhabdrung Rinpoche. The mind, the speech and the body are considered as three divisible key aspects of a person, as if each key aspect had different identities.

With the onset of the colonial threat from British India in the 19th century, the old system of

governance began to buckle, under strain from internal feuds for the post of various high civilian officials as well as the increasingly aggressive stance of the British in India. This ultimately led to the emergence of a centralised leadership in the person of the father of the first king, Desi Jigme Namgyel (1824-1881). The consolidation of power in the hands of Desi Jigme Namgyel finally led—with the support and recognition of the people of Bhutan and the British—to the founding of the monarchy in Bhutan in 1907. The son of Desi Jigme Namgyel, the Tongsa Penlop who was the governor of eastern Bhutan, Ugyen Wangchuck (1862-1926), became the first king of Bhutan. The country was governed in a spiritual direction for 276 years before the monarchy was established. From 1907 until 2008, Bhutan was ruled directly under the wise leadership of monarchs. Under the monarchy's progressive leadership, Bhutan became a multi-party democracy, under the new Constitution, in 2008. The government is now elected and the lower house of the parliament has two parties. The members of the upper house are elected as non-partisan candidates not affiliated to political parties.

Bhutan belongs to a stream of civilisation where the purpose of the government is to create well-being and happiness among its citizens. We find this purpose clearly mentioned in the biography of Desi Sherab Wangchuck, a civilian ruler of Bhutan. He quotes the intention of the founder of Bhutan in the legal code of 1729, which is a kind of short constitution of medieval Bhutan. There is a passage in the legal code that says unequivocally that if the government cannot create happiness and peace for its people, then there is no purpose for government to exist. However, in practice, people had to pay an awful amount of taxes in both labour and commodities that created hardship.

The code then goes into other means of fostering happiness, such as the need to curb the consumption of resources by officials of the state. This is not an insignificant point because an overwhelming portion of tax money gets consumed by the officials of the government, allegedly to provide goods and services for the people. In modern jargon, we call such expenditure the budget. We can interpret the key passage in the legal code of 1729 to suggest that the budget of the government should be designed to promote well-being and happiness. This passage prompts reflection on the budgets of various governments around the world. They are not necessarily designed to promote well-being and happiness.

The main mechanism for sustaining the happiness of the people in medieval Bhutan was to maintain the Buddhist outlook on life. In other words, the enlightenment education system of Buddhist polities became an important instrument for a happy society. A discussion about such enlightenment education system would lead us into detailed discussion of a different kind. But it is important to press the thrust of this simple point on the reader's attention. Education system should impart values and practices that equip individuals to know enough about well-being and happiness.

We are now in at a stage of history where education is not for the enlightenment of the individual in a Buddhist sense, or in the sense of the age of enlightenment in Europe. It is for developing civics and market competencies so that one becomes a good citizen in a narrow sense and has the requisite skills to find jobs in highly unstable economies. Economies are unstable because the markets, both abroad and domestic, expand and contract. Markets are volatile for several reasons, but let me give only two. Products are changing in quality and the locations of their production move around the world looking for cheaper costs of production. Such flux in economies is reflected in the compulsion to update the content of education aimed at renewing

competencies and overcoming competition in the market place.

The quality of products changes due to innovations, some of which are excellent while others appeal to the artificial needs of human beings. The distinction between artificial and authentic needs is, in my opinion, very much dependent on the psychological stability of the consumers. If the consumers are unable to develop any consistency and stability in their psychology over time, no consumer good would be seen as good enough for long enough.

Convergence of Politics and Spirituality

I mentioned a while ago that the purpose of medieval government of Bhutan was to promote happiness and well-being. The founder of Bhutan and his heirs stated that the government and politics cannot be separated from spirituality. A government that practices spirituality sounds rather vague. What is spirituality? Ultimately, spirituality can be defined as compassion, an attitude that takes into consideration the well-being of sentient beings, which includes of course, other people. Understood in this general way, a convergence between politics and spirituality cannot be controversial. If spirituality is at the heart of governance it rules out any major policies, any laws, any programmes that are not consistent with compassion and concern for others.

It is common place to defend secularism today. However, the Zhabdrung Rimpoche, the founder of Bhutan, thought in a different way. When he set up the new State of Bhutan by unifying small independent valley kingdoms that existed before, he thought that good politics and good governance is truly about spirituality. Spirituality does not necessarily mean following a particular religion or a particular school of religion as a whole. In the context of Buddhism and any of its schools, the indispensable core of spirituality is cultivation and manifestation of compassion. It is said that anyone who claims that there is a route to enlightenment without practising compassion is lying outright.

The convergence of government and spirituality was a serious departure in both philosophical and political discourse, and started in Tibet during Emperor Trisong Detsen's reign (755-793). Guru Rimpoche, Trisong Detsen and Shanta Rakshita introduced Mahayana Buddhism into the governance system of Tibet. I can cite one simple instance. The sacrifice of animals in state rites was permissible under the earlier Bon religion of Tibet. But it was not under Buddhism. So from the eighth century onwards in Tibet, the idea that government and spirituality must converge took hold. The king of Bhutan around that time in the eighth century was Sindharaza in Bumthang and Hamray in Kurulung (Kurtoe) region. Sindharaza also received similar teachings about framing governance and politics by Buddhist thoughts from Guru Rinpoche who first visited Bhutan before he was invited to Tibet.

The idea that spirituality and governance should not be integrated is perhaps a modern but outdated idea. It is an extraordinary change in ideas. Thus, we have replaced the idea of spirituality to view government and its policies and substituted it with the idea of rights and freedom. Rights and freedom may overlap with spirituality of compassion to a certain degree. On the other hand, spirituality of compassion generates direct responsibility for others' well-being and happiness that rights and freedom do not.

GNH, a Small Revolution

Almost all villages stage a festival that lasts a few days. Performances are held in the foreground of a community temple to present religious dances with solemn messages in

metaphorical and allegorical terms about morality, samasara, karma and liberation on the Buddhist path. But there are also characters who are absolutely free to do irreverent things they wish. At every festival in Bhutan there are jokers or clowns, with a phallus each hanging over their heads. A joker is called *atsara* (spelt often as *acharya*, meaning a master). Consummate tantric practitioners were called *acharyas* since the eighth century, during Guru Rinpoche's times. A joker can be a master or teacher. To the lay audience, the dances can get intolerably formal. The purpose of these theatrical performances can fall flat particularly if ordinary people's behaviour and values are contrastingly different from what the dances try to convey. The presence of jokers or clowns in the festival provides light relief. They break tension and heaviness of the formal performances, by poking fun at the despicable, often selfish, behaviour of the villagers. They are very boorish themselves but they expose the hypocrisy and common failings of society.

If we are always stuck with the tremendous forces of the mainstream, we cannot make any progress and this is the point of the jokers. They are able to make a small revolution in the perceptions of people. In the openings of a hilarious moment people can feel a tiny shift in their attitude and thought. GNH is similar: it tries to force creative thinking about the heavy structures in the contemporary world that need changing.

Unorthodox and unconventional ideas are very important to create a positive shift in society. 'A joke is a small revolution,' is a quote from Milan Kundera. People are mired deeply in the mundane existence of consumption and building security around their life. When we ask them to live according to GNH, they might suspect it as a joke. The idea of restoring balance in life is, they might conclude, impossible in the runaway consumerist world of today, but it is an authentic option. Once an individual recognises the potential of GNH to lead us to well-being and happiness, the joke becomes a reality. The boundary between a joke and a fact becomes blurred. Just as a joke is a small revolution—a minor, but effective act of rebellion—GNH is, in its own way, a small revolution.

The presence of the joker or a clown is a mark of self-confidence of a society. A dull place where a joker is not tolerated is authoritarian. Listening to alternative voices is a very valuable freedom. The search for such freedom and voice was part of the history of Bhutan where, from time to time, the greatest religious figures were non-institutional and non-establishment. Many revolutionary Buddhists teachers such as Thangtong Gyalpo and Drukpa Kuenley resisted the career ladder of established monasteries. They found the clericalism of these institutions lacking the necessary freedom to facilitate deep practices and visionary experiences. At the same time, the established institutions resisted them because they drew their authority from visionary sources, not from institutions, which the institutional people dominated.

The 4th King and the Beginning of GNH

I would like to sketch social and political settings in which GNH came about in the late 1970s in Bhutan, although the ideas of happiness as a purpose of the State was present centuries earlier. When modernisation was stepped up in the 1970s, the Fourth King began to make repeatedly certain public pronouncements about happiness and well-being. In those days, he did not coin the word GNH—or the precise Dzongkha equivalent—he just spoke about happiness and contentment. His intuition told him he came to the conclusion that many developed nations had modernized successfully. But it was also the beginning of his ambiguous perception of development in the West and in the developing countries. It was not delivering something. In the process of

development, some aspects were being forgotten and omitted.

He began to feel concern about the lack of environmental quality and the displacement and downgrading of culture and identity in developing countries. Countries where its people were no longer being able to find their own centre, and where they were not being able to hold and be stable were another concern. They had no anchor in the values and ideas of their own. If that were to happen, he thought that decision makers in Bhutan would be unduly swayed by endless streams of consultants and foreign advisors each advocating this model or that model which would make the country successful. Yet there were not enough vocabularies or alternative framework to contest them until GNH emerged from the Fourth king of Bhutan.

In the early stages of the economic development of a country, transformation is launched by invoking new ideas of the needs and their solutions in terms of development strategies. In the early phase in Bhutan, Indian officials were the primary source of new ideas for creating the country's communications, education and health infrastructure. In course of time, even more complex, softer engineering took place in terms of changing the fiscal, social, legislative systems in the country.

As Bhutan opened up to the international organisations under the United Nations and bi-lateral development partners, more ideas about what to change and how to change poured in. As these expatriates advised on the new strategies for development, there were often no constructive counterpoints to adjust their models in the light of local values and local knowledge. As has been experienced in many other developing countries, it was simply not easy to blend the local perspective with internationally agreed strategies, external perspective, and externally developed models.

The contestation between the external and internal viewpoints remained latent, which means the people were not able to find a framework for blending the two. That framework took time to come out and when it did, it took the form of GNH. That is what I meant by the birth of enough vocabulary and alternative frameworks that would mobilize indigenous viewpoints. GNH can now supply some vocabulary for discourse on what development is, and what the purpose of life is. For vocabularies and frameworks to emerge it has to resonate with norms and values that people want to express collectively.

The Fourth King began to doubt some of the new strategies for development from extraneous sources. His Majesty emphasized culture as a very important theme and a strategy as a way of countering the external influences and promoting continuity. His Majesty believed that environmental wealth was fundamental to well-being. In his personal life too, he lived close to nature; he lived in single storey log houses erected on mud and stone foundations in the inspiring woods and wilderness of Samtenling. The place had no garden or any exotic plants in the surrounding. He was convinced about the goal of self-reliance at both community and national levels, and had his policies continued after his reign, economic direction might have been different. His policies were not in favour of national indebtedness and government deficits. During his reign, foreign ownership and foreign direct ownership did not exist. He did not want to depend endlessly on foreign aid to develop Bhutan. He did not want the cooperative production and maintenance system of local community infrastructures to be undermined. To mobilize people's energies and initiative, he launched decentralization.

In his famous dictum, 'GNH is more important than GDP', he boldly dethroned economic growth as the ultimate goal of societies. Today, it is not odd to speak out against GDP as an inadequate aim of societies, as enough people have voiced this new realisation. But back in the

1970s and 1980s, those who did that might have been dismissed as fringe. GDP was the only prevailing dogma then. And because of that the Fourth King did not have a big audience at that time. It is different now.

In the mid 1980s, some perceptive journalists began to pick up the phraseology of GNH and attach it to what they saw as a curious little country in the Himalayas. In those days, there were two responses on the part of journalists: what is this curious country? And what is this exotic idea known as GNH? Down the decades, serious observers began to anticipate the problems related to growth mania. The observation of the lack of contentment among a substantial section of the world was another new finding that resonated with GNH. Social scientists began to pay attention, but in those days to question GDP and economics was still not common. But that was, nonetheless, the silent beginning of GNH.

People are now reinterpreting their concepts of both the good life and the good economy. They are looking for a renewal of democratic politics and economic democracy in a better direction. The unsustainable and unequal world we live in is forcing many to think afresh. The thoughts of radical thinkers today might become the dogma of tomorrow. The financial crisis has added to the need to do this, and as a result, the economic profession itself will face a profound change. One of these changes will be less reliance on measures like GDP and the Fourth King foreshadowed this change decades ago.

During the Fourth King's reign, the implementation of GNH through government programmes depended on people who were working almost subliminally, or unconsciously. There was neither doctrinal position to follow nor managerial formats like goals, strategies and indicators of GNH to be adhered. These were to come later. For a long time GNH was not institutionalized as procedures, so it depended on people who had intuitively internalized it – and these were older, traditional civil servants some of who were earlier courtiers. It is arguable that intuitive internalisation is superior to bureaucratic institutionalization.

Today, some young Bhutanese who have studied abroad and who have been influenced by free market economics are sceptical about GNH. Other youth are rightly concerned, given their idealism, about the fact that poor people comprise over 15 percent of the population, and the wealth gap is increasing even though everyone is becoming wealthier. Equity is key to happiness when people think of their material standing in comparisons to others.

Yet even poor families in Bhutan own a house and have sufficient food. Each family also owns land though the holdings may not be extensive. If the growing size of a rural family fragments the land holdings into unviable units or a rural family becomes landless, there is an appeal procedure whereby the King of Bhutan can grant land to the landless. Free health care and education, free safe drinking water supply and rural electricity are provided throughout the country. These elements of a welfare state are the minimum material living conditions in Bhutan.

But the new generations everywhere believe perhaps too strongly in the material route to happiness. This brings us to a new phase where we have to introduce people to the principles of GNH. It is a critical time. Bhutan started to introduce GNH in the education system, which would require overhauling of its content to create a blend of the best from outside and from GNH. It is promoting procedures in the bureaucracy that would embed GNH in projects and programmes. But there is also a sense of accelerated change that is not completely coherent from a GNH of view.

The process now taking place in Bhutan will be quite a challenging one. There are new players in the form of multinationals and businesses, which can be socially, culturally and

ecologically insensitive. Their profit motivation, which can be proven on balance sheets, may prove to be irresistible to policy makers and lawmakers compared to the subtleties of GNH. There is a rising level of consumption and unsustainable lifestyle in towns, which is hardly pro-GNH. The carbon footprint of an urban family is higher than that of a village family because of its ownership of fossil fuel based car, food mile of imported food, and other imported goods used by an urban family.

The challenges have to be met as they arise, but it is best if they are preempted. To tap ideas wherever they are, Bhutan held international conferences on GNH creating a platform of like-minded intellectuals. Five international conferences have been held so far. The first one was held in Thimphu in 2004. The rest were held in Canada, Thailand and Brazil, and they were attended by people from numerous countries. Smaller conferences not initiated by Bhutan have been held at an increasing rate around the world. So, very slowly, GNH is becoming enriched by participation from outside.

Attitude of Ordinary Bhutanese to Happiness

People regard happiness as a great value. They would not trade it off against income. However, the regard for happiness as a great value could persist in an environment of relatively static traditional social and economic setting. To live free, to work on ones land, to attend local festival, dance, dine and socialize was a preferred way of life in the villages for the old generations of Bhutanese. They had a low sense of insecurity and risk about the future. The diversity of experiences and freedom of rural life were a bulwark against the desire for migration. But the youth who went to schools never experienced it in the first place and they are thus vulnerable to the pulls of towns.

There is a telling anecdote, recounted by our current Prime Minister Jigmi Y Thinley, though that may not apply to most farmers now. A high yield variety of rice was introduced and a farmer chose to grow it in eastern Bhutan. He managed to grow two bumper crops and was held up by the Ministry of Agriculture as a progressive farmer, one to be emulated by others. The next year, however, he refused to grow two crops. When asked why he did not go for two crops, he replied 'Why should I do it? I have more than I need.' A single crop was enough for him. He knew his sufficiency level. Such farmers worked for just what was needed; then they enjoyed themselves. Free time was valued, and it could be found by giving up surplus rice. The equivalent of this in modern setting would be to give up certain portion of work everyday for leisure. Free time should not be traded off with money after certain hours every day.

Older generations of Bhutanese people generally shun work in industry. Bhutanese usually do not opt for employment in the big industrial units like cement factories, calcium carbide factories, ferro-alloys factories. They do not submit to the relentless regimen of daily work in spite of the fact that people do not make enough money. As long as they feel secure that they will not go hungry, they prefer to stay in the village. Nor will they generally work as road gangs. Farmers' income may be much less than that of road workers. However, if they have enough to eat, own a house, and own a patch of land, they would not be overly attracted to employment elsewhere. An entrenched and instinctive valuation of good life creates an inbuilt resistance to the brutalities of sweatshop. Underlying such reservations on off-farm employment among older generation is an intrinsic attachment to farmland and community. Ties to their lands and community has to be weakened if not broken when they leave.

Creating Good Relationships, Creating Happy Society

When a society sparkles with good relationships, the result is a happy society. If we succeed in creating conditions for individuals to be happy, there is a high probability that they will consume less and they will therefore not run the environment down. Besides the intrinsic value of making people happy, it will be useful at a time when the environment is collapsing from pressure of overconsumption. Unhappy people seek gratification and sensory stimulus to overcome unhappiness. Some even literally eat abusively to redeem self-esteem, which is an aspect of unhappiness. We are accustomed to the idea that sensory stimulus, which require material consumption, is the central input into happiness. However, we make countless mistakes of purchasing things that turn out later to be not either useful or satisfying. We suffer from illusion with regard to potential of material possessions to accrue greater satisfactions. Characterisation of individuals as rational is exaggerated even in this narrow context, as we express our need for many things that prove to be unsatisfactory sources of happiness for a reasonably long period. If we can however create happy individuals, the negative impact on material resources will be less.

Across and within nations, lack of fundamentally good relationship is one of the main contemporary challenges all over the world. At the level of international relations, it is manifested in the rising amount of resources going into defence and security sectors. Within each nation, increasing expenditures on police, judiciary, and law and order are a symptom deteriorating social relationships. These expenditures divert resources from, say, health and education.

I want to stress the importance of social harmony and community vitality, which are in turn important for happiness. Happy individuals can create social capital, in terms of better workplaces and communities. In general, happy people are productive not only in inventing things but also in social situations; they bring creative solutions to negotiations and relationships. We should not restrict the notion of creativity to material inventions that yield patents. To build harmonious social atmosphere is a very important part of creativity. It takes a great deal of creativity to diffuse a situation of conflict, and that too promotes conditions of human flourishing just like technological progress.

In this regards, the role of selfishness in human behavioural models is perhaps lopsided. There is more than a hint in such selfishness centred models that altruism, which is necessary condition for good relationship, is not favourable to selection. The implication is that altruism can be practised but at the cost of one's extinction. Evolution has been characterised as selection of the fittest by mutation and by chance. But imagine an alternative evolution by first imagining a different kind of relationship. Let us say that the dominant form of relationship is altruistic, or compassion in other word. Altruism and compassion will then drive our actions. Conceptually, once the pattern of relationship is predominantly based on altruistic relationship, it would allow more species to thrive. Under a set of relationships based on altruism or compassion, more species will do well, and evolutions would take a slightly different course. So, relationships are prior to the question of which individuals will succeed. One aspect of compassion or altruism, like that of a muscle, is that it can be trained. If it is not exercised, it will gradually atrophy and disappear. More precisely, it will get obscured and suppressed by negative emotions and selfishness. The technique of generating compassion is to break the barrier between ourselves and others that can induce the feeling of an inclusive awareness of others and their sufferings. If compassion and altruism is partly a matter of education and training, as much as selfishness, human behaviour cannot be a

given fact. It can be subject to enlightened education.

GNH as a Response to Perceived Problems

Bhutan is not an isolated place, after 50 years of development. As a nation integrating into the world, the problems of the world seem to be approaching Bhutan. To put it another way, Bhutan is becoming part of integrated world where problems are common.

What happens in a newly developing country on a trajectory of socio-economic development is that in the early phase it is all about establishing health, education and other physical infrastructures. In the next stage it begins to integrate with other countries in terms of its ideas and artefacts. That means that a good deal of the artefacts of daily life from food and furniture to construction materials and technology come from outside, while some of our own produce like apples, potatoes and oranges, are exported. In the case of Bhutan we also export an invisible merchandise which is tourism. About 30,000 tourists come to this country for an average period of ten days. The consequence of all this mixing and imbibing ideas from other parts of the world is that the country becomes gradually integrated internationally through trade, media and communications. Concepts and perspectives - the artefacts of mental structures - if I may say so, also gets imported. So GNH is not the only organising principle and perspective on people's life.

The ultimate effect of integration is that the problems of Bhutan become tied up with the problems of the world. That means that in order for Bhutan to define its development path clearly, it must understand the situation in the world because without understanding the wider world it cannot solve its own problems and cannot define its own development path in the way it can in a closed economy and a closed political system.

The global situation is rather precarious from the point of view of sustainability. It may not be so precarious from the point of view of well-being at this moment, but if the well-being cannot be sustained (taking all things into account) then the enjoyment of well-being levels in the current population is somewhat immoral in the sense that the level of well-being that the current generation enjoys is produced by depriving the future generations. Western society as a whole is still reconstructing its concepts of both the good life and the good death. The unsustainable and unequal world we live in is forcing many to think fresh. The financial crisis has added to the need to think fresh. The lack of contentment among a substantial section of the world is another reason for the search for fresh directions. There are many other alarming situations that we need to remedy.

These include:\

1. The explosion of populations in developing countries.
2. The depletion of biodiversity and the expansion of mono-cultures. That is a reason for a high rise cliffs to be part of 'Six Longevities'.
3. The depletion of fossil fuels. Some people believe that oil production has already peaked.
4. The growth of the global weapons industry and the increasing expenditure on weaponized security.
5. The increasing size of government in terms of the burgeoning of annual budgets, with the ironic result that democratisation is becoming parallel to greater presence of state in absolute terms.
6. The climate disasters and climate change as a result of excessive Co2 in the atmosphere.

7. The dominion of the decision structures by men leading to over reliance on male views and male logic in solving problems.
8. The shift of people towards unhealthy lifestyles even though we have achieved higher longevity. This shift results in the intensification of healthcare for us to live longer but IT means we have to spend more and more money on maintaining our health, instead of pursuing a healthy lifestyle.
9. The concentration of decision making among a group of powerful nations. This in itself is not wrong providing that the decisions that emerge are enlightened. But if a group of nations have disproportionate power in shaping the decisions that are not enlightened, then it is better not to have G20 but to have a G192 with a weaker but somewhat more balanced role in global decision-making. Ultimately, it is not the equality of the views that counts but their quality.
10. The free market system that has developed over the last two centuries but more vigorously since the 1950s. Although it has tremendous virtues, the free market system has not been able to tackle the growing inequality of wealth.

Development, which comprises of programmes and policies proceed from a conception of what is the problem or a set of problems. If the conceptual diagnosis of the problem or the prioritization of the problem is wrong, the policies will naturally be ineffective.

The conceptual structure of GNH is linked to the nature of problems. It is a local response to the major global currents we are facing. I would like to present what the major problems are in the region and the world.

In the last 100 years the planet has become extremely congested. At the end of the nineteenth century we had only two billion people. That is the number of people that accumulated since the Big Bang. Now we have nearly seven billion. In the next 40 years, there will be nine billion. This will have many consequences. One is that the percentage of aged or elderly people, meaning those aged 60 and over, is going to increase in the developed world much more rapidly than it will in the developing world. In the asian region, aging of nations have already started with Japan. China will be next, and after that South Korea and Thailand will start aging.

I raise this issue from a GNH point of view. In nations as diverse and Bhutan and Japan, women take more responsibility to take care of her parents or her husband's parents in their old age. Once again, women bear the burden. It would be desirable to equalize the burden between man and woman. Moreover, in a sharply greying society like Japan, it is difficult to maintain the well-being of elderly people predominantly through care given by family members. One of the reasons for this is the aging of the family care givers themselves. Those who need care are often 80 years old but their care givers are also over 60 years of age. We need to anticipate challenges of demography in the North where greying is coming fast.

As a whole, the dependency ratio should be balanced for the pensions system to be healthy and for the care of old and the young to be nurtured. If you have such a globally lopsided age-demographic distribution, it immediately suggests that the caring and nurturing at the end of your life is going to be challenged, especially in the North. And that raises many sociological and economic issues. Who will pay for the pensions? The number of workers will shrink. Would you allow immigration? Even if you allow nurses to come from abroad, the quality care may not be as good as that provided by a family. Ideally, most elderly people would like to live with their children. In developed countries, most elderly people who live alone are women, and most elderly

people who live alone are frail. Illness means the elderly are entitled to be treated, free of charge, under the any free medical care. But frailty - the need for help with washing, dressing and personal hygiene is not paid for by the state or by insurance company. All over the world, many old people now die alone, unloved and broke. Most of them are women. It is an indictment of society we live in. Paradoxically, in less developed countries old people live in larger families, and they therefore receive human attention. But as I said a moment ago, this too is under stress, even in Bhutan. Elderly will increasingly miss supportive companionship in familiar surroundings to end their days. From a Buddhist point of view, repaying the infinite kindness of ones parents by taking care of them is of highest importance. Gratitude to them is the king of virtue.

The issue of the elderly will soon arise as a challenge in Bhutan. As Bhutanese people unfortunately shift to a more urban lifestyle and urban setting, there is an obvious migration, dislocation and breakdown of community and social bond. In today's urban and work dominated life, community and social life is threatened, especially for the elderly. We have to regenerate the social heartbeat of the people as a community - one of the essential foundations of happiness. Social support and social participation for the elderly is one of the most important elements of a happy aging. How can we lessen the pain for old people for whom hardly a month goes by without the loss of a dear friend. How can we give support to the elderly by not making old age a time of mourning. How can we maintain the integrity of the extended family and the social support of a closely knit village.

A much more comprehensive social, economic and medical planning should be taken into account in GNH. These are issues beyond financial issues of pensions and old age benefits. The issue of long-term care for the elderly is one of the most important silent issues facing the world today.

GNH is about promoting a successful life cycle of birth, living, ageing and dying without killing the earth and other lives. I would like to say that is not a matter of individual choice alone. We can have a happy and healthy life only within the broader context of favourable structures. You will appreciate the fact that enjoyment of life is hindered not only by individual circumstances, but also by the structural conditions of society, which we collectively create for the future generations, and which were also created by policy makers and our forefathers before us.

GNH is about being born very successfully, living well, and I should say, dying well. Successful birth means achieving an almost zero infant and maternal mortality rate. From a technical viewpoint, being born successfully means zero infant mortality. But being born well is not all; you want children to grow well. And to grow well they need good parenthood, a good neighbourhood, and so forth. These are depreciating significantly across the world, especially in urban areas. Successful living means having a productive, fulfilling and enjoyable working life, without sacrificing it for the sake of simply earning a living or saving for an old age pension. Then we want to work successfully and happily. However, we find from GNH surveys that the time when we should be enjoying ourselves because we are at the peak of our health from a conventional point of view, say from 35 to 45 years old, we find that the happiness curve is dipping and bottoms out at this time. We are pressed too much to work hard, to collect savings and to beautify our nest for our old age. So life in this period might not be as rosy or enjoyable as we would like. Successful ageing means remaining vital in our senior years, without succumbing to disabilities and auto-nervous degenerative diseases, and without being confined to places where life has little dignity. Finally, a successful death is about having 'good' death that is neither

traumatic nor wrenching in social, psychological and spiritual terms. The role of living is to provide inspired and courageous support those dying to have good death. That means the dying person have to be inspired, given dignity and peace. This cannot be done without courage and wisdom on our part.

And lastly, we want to age nicely and die well. As the Buddhist say contemplation of death is the most transformative drive, instead of falsely assuming that it will only happen suddenly to others. We have a habitual tendency to think that our own death will arrive at a time of our bidding, at a convenient moment. The usual tendency is therefore to forbid oneself from thinking and discussing it. This is absolutely contrary to the recommended everyday thought about impermanence to transform oneself in Himalayan tradition.

What is a good death or dying well for people who have a short time to live? People dying of cancer have told researchers how they would like to experience the last three days of their lives. Among their wishes were the following: certain people to be around; to feel at peace; to be free from pain. So the vision of the good death in some respect represents a continuation of the life they have known. So good death is not very different from good life for certain elements. Lopsided demographic distribution both across the world, between North and the South, and within a nation between urban and rural areas, is making being born well, living well and dying well difficult.

The second half of the last century was dominated by the Cold War and its politics. We thought we left that behind and we would have peace and dividends of peace. But the spending in so called defence is escalating. I will come to the issue of weaponized security. As regards to global decisions, we have a G20 coalition setting the big agendas of the world. Ideally, what we want is some sort of equal participation by all countries.

For example, we would like to think that in a world where biodiversity and nature is shrinking, those places which take more care of their environment and have demonstrated their capability, should have more say in the world. It is not a very radical idea and we can think of many other, more radical new designs. For example, if the county of Devon has more biodiversity weight in the UK than other counties, then maybe the number of parliamentarians in Westminster from Devon should increase. We should give some weight to other sentient beings present in a habitat or constituency, not just the head count of human voters. The point is, we have to think in many different ways but we are far away from such novel thinking just now.

The last century and all the previous centuries have been dominated by males and that has also resulted in some serious global consequences. Possibly in the level of aggression in the world and the level of resource allocation to security and defence may not have happened if females rose to leadership positions. Common sense observation of maternal love makes me believe that women will bring other qualities to leadership. Business, parliament and the judiciary are all fairly well dominated by men just now. There is still quite a long way to go to remedy this situation. Some research suggests that the more male leadership is asserted, the more logical we become and the more aggressive we become. These values are obviously not very consistent with GNH. The statist view of the world is now very dominant. It's the government's view that determines so many things and much work has to be done in this regard to increase the space for society in place of state, as well as greater space for women.

Around 1950 50 percent of the global population, about three billion, lived in urban areas. From the UN habitat projections to every country's projection, it shows that 70 percent will live in urban areas by around 2050. So our world will really become an urban world in our lifetimes.

There are views that this is best for the world from an ecological point of view: that living in urban areas is better in solving problems easier, faster and more economically.

From our early research in Bhutan, the view that concentration of population in the urban settings is better should be treated with caution. We find that urban areas are places where people are not as content. In terms of goods and infrastructure availability urban places rank higher than rural areas. But when psychological dimensions such as negative emotions such as jealousy, competition and frustrations, and community relationships such as belonging, trust, and safety, and environment dimension such as clean air and water are factored, urban areas are not necessarily better than rural areas to live.

Added to that is the reality of higher food mileage and higher per capita of energy consumption by the urban people in a year. Bhutan. Let me give some examples. More sugar, oil, meat, and rice, transported from far by fuel-intensive trucks, are consumed every year. By importing larger quantities of food every year, the urban Bhutanese breaks free from our soil and our farmers. That generates a sense of abundance, and non-dependence on local farms and farmers; this itself is not good for solidarity of a nation. By necessity, most of the imported foods are consumed by urban groups because they do not grow food. Packaged foodstuffs coming from huge distances from outside Bhutan. Some of those packaged food stuffs are mass produced under chemical-based agriculture and packed after adding preservatives. So even though Bhutanese in urban areas do not use so much energy, the energy used in such imported foodstuff must be taken into account from an overall point of view.

Some people say that when people live in dense places, per capita energy drops, but it appears to me on the whole that the footprint of people living in urban areas will be very high and thus if people continue to live in urban areas in a way that we do today, the world will suffer from a much bigger footprint. Even in Bhutan, urban people clearly have a higher ecological footprint than the rural people, because of the use of automobiles.

The counter idea to urbanisation is to disperse and stem the flow of people into urban areas, but there is not much going on in this direction. All governments spend more money on urban infrastructure and urban creation than on rural renewal. It is a general practice in spending around the world. The general urban bias of the governments around the world is based in good faith that urbanisation is more beneficial economically and ecologically. In Bhutan, people have long lived in remote communities placed far apart from each other and could therefore support themselves in a self-sustaining way. But once people converge in a large mass in one place, they place a burden on the habitat. This leads to a chain reaction that includes trade, as items have to be imported from a long distance. So trade becomes an inevitable aspect of urban life and in an environment but fuel supplies are declining and becoming more and more costly. The preliminary evidence from 2007 GNH survey is that the levels of social and cultural vitality are lower in urban areas,

We are given new hopes all the time and for a time, that works for us. We forget about fundamental solutions because we think, this new thing may work. But at the same time technology has not addressed many important things. Take a very simple example. So much machine power is now available, yet farmers all over the world still use the same, simple plough. It has not improved for centuries, and there's no interest in doing so although there is much interest and innovation surrounding the tractor.. It's extremely disturbing that no scientific invention has been addressed to the things that ordinary people use. It may be because they do not have purchasing power. Or it may be that governments want all farmers to use tractors. But a

technocratic utopia is completely viable only in conjunction with higher purchasing power.

In late 2009, I was in a glacier area in Bhutan. A certain part of the glacier was not exposed just 10 years ago. Now it is, and the melting of the Himalayan glaciers will have a very drastic effect on the hydrological dream in our country, which is so dependant on hydropower. There is always plenty of discussion on the situation in the Arctic, –icebergs melting and so on-but not much on the Himalayas, which is in fact regarded as the ‘third pole’, because of the mass of potential water held there.. The population around it- two billion-are affected by what might happen to the Himalayas. This is happening rapidly in our country. Yak herders report the snowline receding in northern Bhutan. There has been no systematic monitoring of glacial melting in Bhutan, but the visual observations of the yak herders make it quite clear that there is a huge effect from climate change in the Himalayas.

Governments and societies in South Asian countries or beyond have not made very radical changes in their behaviour – the same transportation, more car imports - and every year ever increasing quantities of petroleum and diesel are used, even in Bhutan. On the other hand, deforestation has been considerably reduced in our country. In Bhutan, forests are increasing every year because the Third King of Bhutan stopped forests fire to create pastures for grazing some 40 years ago. It was also legislated in 1979 with the Land Act. A few exceptions were made for the semi-nomadic yak herding communities in northern Bhutan because they are primarily dependent on yaks. However, since the late 1970s that has been discouraged. Individuals found causing forest fires are punishable by law.

Other means of livelihood are provided if the people lose pasture completely, but this is rather a slow process of adaptation. People are given land if they have no land that can be cultivated. Improved, high-yielding breeds of cattle are propagated by the Livestock Department for those people who have to forego burning pastures. The burning of shrubs in fallow land has also been discouraged in the rest of Bhutan. The traditional practice was to work fallow land after five years or so when it is covered in growth. This regenerated growth is then cut and burnt in winter to generate soil nutrients, especially potash.

If the sea level rises by one metre in Asia, river banks and coastal areas south of Bhutan are going to be severely affected. Submergence will affect the Bangladesh delta, for instance, and the Brahmaputra and the Ganges estuaries. It would be devastating to see rise of water levels in these areas. If sea levels do rise the agricultural land in this coastal region will be submerged and the people will have to migrate. Bhutan is not far from these places threatened by submergence.

I would like to link the sea level rise and the consequent probability of submergence with the use of fossil fuels. If the price of fossil fuels were very high, then the cost of the goods that are traded around the world would also be very high. A rise in the price of oil, with other things remaining the same, would subsequently lead to a rise in a price of goods. As a result, the sales of these goods would decrease. Lower sales would then feed into the production process, resulting in less production of those goods and services. That means the level of use of fossil fuel would go down. There would be a kind of recession, but it would also be very good for the conservation of oil and for the stability of the climate. But the resulting unemployment will have to be tackled in a different way.

However, if the price of oil is maintained at a low level because energy is a primary input to the economy and given the kind of dirty technology we have used so far, then the climate cannot be saved. The low price of energy, especially fossil fuel-based energy, coupled with the low

efficiency of the technologies we use is linked to climate change. If the price of fossil fuel energy has been kept artificially low by the major industrial powers and emerging economies, it means that industrial growth in this region of emerging economies is being supported and maximised at the expense of the ecological and climatic future of the rest of mankind.

Although we are at the beginning of the realisation that we have to move to the distribution of energy like solar, wave, wind and thermal, the actual quantity of the energy produced from these alternative sources is really quite low at the moment and how it will become viable, I really don't know. Where it is needed most is in places like China and India, places where technological innovation is not as active nor is the transfer of technology of this kind from West to East, or North to South being discussed in a new paradigm. They still rely on the same patent systems and the same costly royalties.

But taking the long term view, the future of merchandise trading, which is based on transport, doesn't look so good to me. So any idea that we will benefit infinitely by comparative advantage theory, underlined by the notion of an infinite supply of ever increasing speed and distribution, does not look so likely, especially after 2030 when peak oil production will go into terminal decline. This is one of several oil production forecast. Others forecast say that oil has already entered into terminal peak production. Our present way of life is supported by the pervasive use of oil. If that basic support is undermined, there will be some transformation. No political party wants to discuss this openly. Meanwhile the emissions from fuel-based technologies being released into the air are making us suffer and could produce unknown diseases.

The last 100 years have brought us tremendous benefits in terms of medical, surgical, pharmaceutical innovations. These have led to the conquest of infectious disease and has been one of the most remarkable features of the last century. It has primarily been the diagnostic treatment that has led to an increase in longevity of both infants and the elderly. The infectious aspects of morbidity were combated by medical treatment. Of course, it also led to the population explosion from two million at the end of the nineteenth century to almost 6.7 billion now. Projections show that the population will rise to nine billion by the middle of this century.

As a result there is better health and a longer life span, but if we look very closely, we will also observe that increasingly we are losing a healthy lifestyle and that our longevity and good health rest on our dependence on treatment rather than on a healthy lifestyle. What we really want is a minimal-dependence on treatment by having a very vital, innately healthy life that is fuelled by healthy food, physical activity and a pure environment.

Taking a short term view of a period of two to three years, our health may be genetically determined. But I would like to think that to a large degree we can overcome genetic predispositions by revising our lifestyle immediately. Health depends on us revising our lifestyle. Diabetes, which is spreading spectacularly, especially in developing countries, is due to lifestyle of a bad diet and inadequate physical activity. A predominant cause of mortalities is unhealthy lifestyle.

My main point here is that the century of treatment has not been accompanied by a consistent attention to a healthy lifestyle, which means a long life and low morbidity without an unacceptable level of expenditure on medical care. Medical care is expensive and the intensification of medical care in our lives shows that we are slipping away from a healthy lifestyle and gradually shifting to a lifestyle which needs more drugs to support it.

An unhealthy lifestyle also comes about when there is a deterioration in the social

environment that affects our health. It has to do with the invisible, relational part. Poor social relationship plays an aggravating if not a causal role in illness of the mind – from extreme anxiety to depression.

Mental disorder, or clinical depression, is projected to be the second highest morbidity by 2030 or so. This is the World Health Organisation's projection. Clinical depression is a measure of psychological failure. If a person is clinically depressed it means that he or she is not able to function mentally. People can function by being just above the depression level. Although they do not register as clinically depressed, he or she is close to the depression, hovering just above the clinical depression line. Such people are mentally far from vital.

From a GNH point of view, people should function mentally way above the depression level because GNH is a concept based on the flourishing of a human being. It is not a concept or measurement about survival. Clinical depression is a measure of malfunction. Poverty is a measure of deprivation. Poverty is a subsistence or livelihood measurement, whereas GNH is a measure of human flourishing. Your mind should be far more liberated and happier and far above the clinical depression level. Clinical depression is projected to be a major cause of disability in this century.

Trends of mortalities from cardiovascular diseases and road traffic are also expected to rise. Traffic deaths will increase because transport usage will increase.

Of wider significance is that this century we have invested a great deal of faith in the free market as something which will bring greater prosperity and welfare to everybody. And with globalisation, wherever it is cheaper to produce, we can bring the barriers and tariffs down so factories can be built everywhere.

20 richest countries own over 80 percent of the world's GDP, according to one estimate. We don't know whether it is the by-product, accidental outcome or the intrinsic part of economic system we are following, but the fact is this gap is growing dramatically. We have had increasing inequality since 1950. Wealth, which is dependent on manufacturing or agriculture, is not as volatile as wealth that is in the form of financial instruments. In the North, especially in such economies as Japan, Western Europe and North America, a substantial part of wealth is in the form of financial products. Some of these products have no relationship with genuine progress as most of the investments in the financial sector are very speculative in nature. Some of the richest economies are dependent on the financing through borrowing from countries in the East. Their GDP measures do not show the stockpile of debt they have. It is an inadequate measure of welfare; it cannot represent well-being as a whole.

America, the supposedly most powerful economy depends on its deficit budget financing on the surpluses of countries like China. In that sense, the financing of the richest countries such as Britain and the USA depends on borrowing from the market, but as the financial market of the world is integrated, the financial institutions handle the surpluses of China that pay for the deficits of these countries. But somehow along the way GDP came to be adopted by everyone as a principal measure of well-being, yet there are several deficiencies in GDP.

Firstly, you can have growth but growth can be bad growth, poor growth or immoral growth, because it makes no distinction. You can make one trillion dollars in various ways. But for GDP, one trillion is one trillion. It doesn't say whether it has been achieved through clean, innovative, creative, joyful, or in an ethical way or not.

Secondly, there are no deductions from the GDP, and yet there should be many. Whatever the cost is should be deducted, but no deductions are made. The cost to the environment, or to the

culture, imposed in the process of producing goods and services are not deducted. Part of problem is that it is a flow measure. GDP is primarily an income measure. It is not an asset measure. If the income flows from a certain level or stock of wealth that is intact, then the income that is flowing from it can be sustainable. However, if the stock is depleted then sometime in the future income must decline. GDP is an income measure and therefore the state of the stock and how to reach this income is not visible in the GDP.

In regard to sustainable development both income and stocks have to be measured in order to assess the future stream of resources. For example, if you leave a tree standing, GDP is blind to it. It does not take it into account; but if you cut it down it will enter into production process and transaction, so therefore it is registered, but that is not a good measure of wealth. Bhutan's normal concept of wealth includes this. It's my land, it's my tree. I have invested 40 years in its growth, so it should be included.

Free time is also not valued. The Sarkozy Commission report recently did some interesting calculations that included pricing of leisure. It has shown what difference it makes to American GDP and French GDP, and there is the noticeable variation in the GDP if you include leisure.

Free time is not an insignificant issue. All of us want free time. All of us want to have time to do things that we value and cherish; this may not necessarily include work which we are compelled to do because of market conditions. Sometimes we have to do things we don't like. We talk so much about freedom, but essentially I think two or three things are very important for freedom and choice.

One is the values set-up. All of us make fundamental choices which determine whom we are in touch with in the community—the people to whom we have obligations and responsibilities. Secondly, what we value as work is very important. Thirdly, there's partnership: who you marry. Once you make the decisions, then choice disappears. It's only commitment after that. All literature is always talking about choice and freedom but doesn't elaborate enough about the limitations within a commitment we make, which we work at after we make the choice. We make the choice only once, —and we may even be mistaken. Nevertheless, we have to bear the huge consequences of the choices we make, and in much of our life we do unpaid things which are not valued, but they should be.

I want to explain the lingering issues, the contemporary issues, which we are left with. We have to fit GNH within the issues we are facing, which are global, such as ageing, demographic issues, GDP, transport, trade, and urbanisation. What will we do then in the long, medium and short term? Long term for me means about 20 years, medium term about 10 years and short term for five years.

For example, how should we reorganize the structure of government? Once again the state is very important in my concept. It sets the climate and tone for everything. The structure of government just now is based on the delivery of a few things including these called defence or security. In many countries, the military complex, that promotes arms and ammunitions, is also the key engine for technological development. In some countries like Britain, USA, Russia, China and Israel, arms production is very important component of exports. They are substantial exporters of arms in the world. That's how they make money.

But now that the Cold War has collapsed, we really don't know what is the new threat is, yet the escalation of military spending is going on and on. The US government spends about US\$ 700 billion every year. The Chinese government spends about US\$ 87 billion every year. This is just to

give a comparison, to bring perspective and scale.

The Bhutanese GDP, using this bad method of calculation, is a little over US\$1 billion per year. So if Bhutan had to spend US\$700 billion, it would take 700 years to keep up with the America's military establishments. It's that sort of scale.

Now governments normally deliver defence and infrastructure—roads, telecom, plus education and health, which are shared facilities; they also deliver justice in the sense of criminal and civil justice but also, sometimes, social justice.

But if we look very closely at the organisational charts in terms of ministries and their departments, we find it's parallel to GDP: agriculture, fisheries, industries, banking, finance and also community service. Although we have the judiciary and parliament, structurally it is really organised to deliver GDP and its growth.

The composition of GDP is based on sectors of production like agriculture, fisheries, forests, livestock, mining, quarrying, community services—which really means government expenditure—banking and finance, and electricity etc. These are the main components of GDP. If we look at the set up in the government we have roughly the same ministries. There is a GDP counterpart in the form of organizations and ministries. The ministry of agriculture under which there is the department of fisheries, the department of forests, the department of livestock and the department of agriculture. Then there is the ministry of trade, which consists of the department of industries, the department of trade, and the department of electricity or energy. Then there is the ministry of finance that stands roughly as a counterpart to all financial operations in the country, like banks, insurance, the department of revenue and the department of Customs.

These organisations are really parallel to GDP's sectoral compositions so the structures of the government are organised to primarily deliver goods and services. There are some exceptions in this format such as health and education, while defence and the Judiciary are supposed to provide us with a sense of security.

But if you now change and think that happiness is the main public good, not the infrastructure, many new kinds of organizations have to come into being. It could be the Ministry of Psychological Well-being, or the Ministry of Community, or the Ministry of Time Use. The distribution of our time over 24 hours is a very good and direct way of measuring our welfare. Some people are forced to use inordinate amount of their 24 hours in work, slavish work, exhausting work, and life depriving work. So the Ministry of Time Use would directly study which section of population is being exploited, deprived of sleep and so on. Fictional, yes, but nevertheless not completely weird if you think of it from the point of view of holistic well-being. We have to change the organization of the government, so that bodies like the ministries of security and defence would be accorded a low priority.

Some Changes Needed Towards Promoting Happiness

One long term action we have to contemplate is a consciousness shift. We have a strong preconception today that our well-being and happiness depends on external stimuli of our sense faculties: vision, taste, smell, sound and touch. There is an exaggerated belief that well-being and happiness really depend on satisfying our sensory system. A mechanistic believer in the mechanistic relationship between sensory enjoyment and our well-being will believe that external stimuli of the senses are needed to generate well-being and happiness. Eating good food is a gustatory enjoyment. Travelling hundreds of miles by air to be on a beach is a combination of

touch, vision, sound and taste enjoyment.

However, the chain effect of this dependence on external stimuli for happiness is that resource consumption is always involved, whether it is enjoying food, or enjoying scenery in Bangkok or a tropical beach, because these activities involve energy use and consumption of other resources. Our dependence on external stimuli happiness causes the extraction of natural resources. Whatever we consume eventually has to be extracted from nature and is part of the chain of resource degradation.

There's nothing new in that. The thing is that somewhere along the way we forgot we also have the means to generate that sort of thing from within. If our potential for happiness by contemplation and meditation is promoted the effect on the resource depletion due to dependence on external stimuli-related happiness will be very significant. What we have to do is to balance inner contemplation methods of generating well-being and happiness with a reasonable degree of external stimuli-dependent happiness. However, in the contemporary world, the potential for an individual to feel well by shutting down his or her extremely stressed mind, is not appreciated as much as it should be.

At some point in history, around 1,000 years ago in some parts of Asia, this approach was vibrant, but then it entered into a huge decline. We forgot about it. The same level of satisfaction and calmness and contentment that external stimuli bring, can be felt, but through the wind of contemplation method. In fact, you raise the potential within yourself. Whereas in the economic way of thinking, so much external input is required; the visual input, for instance, which also has an impact on nature, and the gustatory input which also has a very long footprint.

The idea that aspiration can be infinite or the material supply can be infinite is a fantasy. We have to work backwards from what is the absolute level which we have. The absolute level, for example, of carbon deposit in the atmosphere is something like 2,500 billion tons of carbon. That's the limit. If you exceed that, the consequences are the jacking up of the temperature. We can work out scientifically what is the absolute level. We know the absolute level of the fish we can harvest, but we ignore it nevertheless. But we have to work hard. People in many parts of the world don't know what absolute silence is.

Today, one part of the problem is that we are caught in a competitive psychology, and happiness—in the western sense—is sometimes also predicated on the idea that you can only be happy if someone goes down. A very relative concept. You can't bear to be happy if others seem happier, because it means they are getting ahead of you. I think we can live without comparison.

In absolute terms we have to distribute resources far more equally because after sometime we know that excessive wealth is of no use for many people, except psychologically. The distribution of wealth in the world is becoming more inegalitarian with every passing year. Those who have accumulated a tremendous amount of wealth in their life may not have so much need for it in a strict sense because an increase in wealth does not lead to a proportionate increase in happiness. This is a common sense conclusion that is widely acceptable. In an absolute material sense there is no need for so much wealth, but in a relative psychological sense wealthy people might draw pleasure from the sheer fact that they own more than others. The generation of this kind of satisfaction is based on the fact that they have a competitive framework of mind. This brings us back to the idea that psychology has to be changed.

Government systems won't change unless we change the fiscal system. In that regard we need to change the budget rules: what is to be taxed, what is not to be taxed from the point of view of

holistic well-being. Today, many taxes are not based on that principle of happiness or well-being. To do that we have to change the accounting system. And to do that we have to change the GDP accounts, which is very incomplete and partial just now, because we don't know the full cost of things because social and environmental costs are not deducted at the moment.

For the first time we see emergence of alternative media, . That is very welcome but it is still not enough. Major media groups are still servants of commerce and marketing. This is true in many places. It's certainly true in India where the media focus on celebrity issues to the exclusion of organizational development and human resource development issues which are yet to be introduced in any really meaningful ways.

Unfortunately, the media is part of the degradation of the psychology consciousness because they try to capture the attention of the people on a daily basis by bringing up issues that are irrelevant to the true well-being of the people. These include the media's focus on celebrities, sports and on the lifestyles of political leaders. I would consider giving space to this kind of news as a waste of consciousness. I would also consider watching television news and issues of a fantasy kind and irrelevant happenings faraway as an export of consciousness.

The most important thing for our consciousness to engage in is the improvement of the situations in our own neighbourhood. This is where we have to direct our creativity. To deal with local issues. However, if our consciousness is exported to places and issues where we cannot matter, it is not a good investment of our mental powers. In fact, the more we irrelevantly export our consciousness to issues on which we cannot make any difference, the more frustration can arise within ourselves.

The alternative use of media would be to focus far more on local affairs and make them important, and to make us understand deeply and in a very detailed way what we can do in our own localities. This is where we are, so our locality is the most important place. The media should try to amplify the local to the world not the world to the local in an irrelevant way.

By way of planning, my view is that we have to develop a clear vision or a clear state of the things which we have to attain and then work backwards from it. It is not a technocratic but a moral choice issue. It's quite different from the incremental changes we do in our normal planning where so many compromises take place along the way. But if you see what the absolute state, within a reasonable time frame, we want to attain is, we can work backwards. Through education and research we can find out what the exact situation today is and what we want to change. That's very important and that's why every two years we do a survey related to GNH.

Objective and Subjective Aspects of GNH

As an approach to moral thought, I would like to discuss the specifications of what is to be measured; what ought to be measured, which are questions about value. Selecting the key variables to represent your development is very tough.

Normally, people settle for very few uncontroversial indicators like enrolment, longevity or per capita income, which are the constituents of human development. One way is just to settle on the most uncontroversial things, but that leaves out a great deal about what should be the content of education, and why longevity is uncontroversially valued. It is not only the quantity of life that we want. Throughout our lives we strive for something else while being healthy and alive, otherwise longevity itself is hardly something to be valued.

Income is extremely controversial if we shift to a broader perspective. What does US \$

21,000 mean in Singapore compared to US\$ 10,000 in Bhutan? We cannot understand the relevance of those income level without studying the consumer basket - how and where people spend money so that we can construe what it may mean in terms of welfare. What goods are construed as welfare within certain culture has to be understood too. But as you expand the list of goods that constitute well-being, the problem gets more and more complicated, but it's better to do that instead of restricting it to a limited number of goods. The problem gets greater as we include not only goods in a physical sense but social, cultural and psychological ones.

Great political philosophers have tried to grapple with this and they have specified primary goods that include rights and liberties. Some of them list of what they call primary goods. Others list fundamental needs of human beings. One of them also adds sexual satisfaction to her list as a primary human drive. I am in favour of this type of explicit listing. Her (Martha Nussbaum) list is slightly Buddhist in so far as this pervasive and distinctive drive of human beings is listed. But it is not wholly Buddhist as she leaves these kind of urges as given, whereas the purpose of Buddhist discipline is to find ways and techniques to overcome them or to use in certain sects in Buddhism as a weapon to overcome it.

Let's consider some general ingredients or characteristics that apply to happiness. We have to think about happiness in terms of a public good, not as a private pursuit. We provide all the public services like education, health, good economy, employment, and how that is converted in terms of subjective reality by yourself is up to you. The state will not be concerned with that. That has been the idea.

The responsibilities of the government in the conventional sense is that it will provide public infrastructure like health, education, economy, employment, security, defence and justice. How these responsibilities are translated into individual happiness is not clearly spelt out. On the contrary, it is thought that the government should provide these kind of public infrastructures, while the individual is responsible for his or her own happiness. In the dichotomy between the private and public realm happiness is left as a private realm issue, whereas public infrastructures are public realm issues. My contention here is that most of the responsibilities of the government lie with the eventual aim of making people enjoy well-being and happiness. So the link between the government's responsibility and happiness must be made much clearer as it isn't clear at the moment. The purpose of GNH is really to clarify this link.

One of the excuses as to why happiness is not taken into account is because it is a subjective reality, which means that it is felt entirely by the individual concerned and is completely dependent on a first person account. Here, we must distinguish between two kinds of subjectivity. When we elicit first person accounts to get data especially on mental phenomena, that process is not subjective. It follows statistical sampling rules like any other scientific data collection. When the conclusions about phenomena are drawn on that basis, it is scientific. However, if an individual makes a judgement on society without any scientific process involved, that is subjective. We must distinguish between these two kinds of subjectivity: one which is scientific and one which is not.

The idea was that a certain level of objective conditions must be fulfilled as we have a body. We need a certain level of material conditions to be able to consider other possibilities. As we also exist on a material plane so our material needs must be fulfilled, especially the basic functionalities of our body, which must be realised. This must be the responsibility of the state. A person must not go hungry and must not be left unattended when he or she is sick. They must not be illiterate just because they don't have the financial means to be literate and healthy. The justification for all of

this is that the person himself is not responsible for his hunger, illiteracy and lack of health. The reasons for this are societal not personal.

A person may not be inherently unhealthy so he is not within his intrinsic self, a sick person. He might have got sick because of the deteriorating environment or social and economic conditions around him. So, it is the responsibility of society that is expressed in the form of government to provide the resources for him to get well.

The point is, objective conditions are excessively taken as the measure of well-being, yet there is no radar to measure the subjective level of well-being, although it may be touched on by the psychoanalyst or the psychotherapist. Various government ministries only focus their discussion on the production of things; how this production contributes finally to well-being at the subjective level is simply not an issue.

The idea of GNH is that objective reality and subjective reality must progress together. If objective reality is moving ahead but the subjective reality is stuck, it is of concern because something is going wrong. An example can be provided in terms of human development indicators (HDI), which are a kind of measurement of objective reality. Income, enrolment and longevity levels can be measured in an objective way. HDI is a composite measurement of these three factors. These objective factors may be progressing in most countries, –for that matter in Bhutan, too. If we measure some dimensions of psychological well-being such as emotional balance or stress levels of the people, then it might show that the subjective reality is not improving as much as the objective reality measured in terms of human development indicators.

A great deal of development over the last 20 years in the Northern hemisphere has shown a tendency to go that way, where there is tremendous progress on the objective level. The GDP and lifespan is going up, the education level is going up, the infrastructure is going up, the number of cars are going up, farm production has gone up. But something is not quite clear at the subjective level. People are beginning to express some doubt. They are not feeling a corresponding level of elation or vitality.

However, if the objective level is static and the subjective level is moving, that is also good, subject to the proviso that it must not be due to some kind of false consciousness. This is a kind of binary measurement of objective and subjective levels of progress.

For us to judge that a society is progressing in such a manner—that the objective one is not improving very much but the subjective level is moving—means that the relational, intangible parts are improving in society, although things like roads, electricity and hospitals are not getting built. The subjective reality must be progressing due to two factors. One subjective progress is genuine—when people judge themselves completely and rationally.

However, subjective reality may also be made to progress fully by manipulating the consciousness of the people by the authorities. This scenario is possible when the citizens in a country are indoctrinated by the government to have a false consciousness. The people may be badly treated and deprived, but the propaganda can be so effective and convincing that the people feel that they are actually in some kind of peaceful paradise.

Even if things are terrible, you are indoctrinated to feeling that everything is okay. But I don't think there are many societies who can successfully do that today—to close off all the senses of people and make them feel happy, even though they are not. The idea is really to have simultaneous movement on the objective and subjective levels, yet subjective level measurements do not exist today even in many advanced countries.

In the comparative and competitive framework we live in, we are made to feel that happiness is a function of comparison with your neighbours, or with what you have achieved in last year; these are the reference points. At a psychological level, some people have explained that in terms of a threshold level of neurological feeling, you need to jack it up all the time, to have some stimulus in your body for you to feel better and better.

The concept is that your thrill level is relative to your previous experience. For a person to feel excited or stimulated, the level of stimulation has to be increased a little more each time. This suggests that the attention a person can generate to an absolutely identical level of stimulus is declining. At an objective level the stimulus is the same but the psychological attention to that stimulus has declined. It is the degradation of one's attentive power. Normally, people do not try to enhance their attention but what they do is to increase the dose of stimulus so you take more drugs, more alcohol, more coffee, more chocolate and then go down the path of addiction.

Underlying all of this depends on the type of psychological characterization of the individual, which is competitive or referential all the time to a certain level of standards. But if you break that down to a level of wider or deeper understanding, that argument looks unsustainable. It is also a cultural question. If you have a status bound society, you are more likely to use this frame of reference for an argument for happiness, but our point is that it is far more relational than relative.

In Western literature, happiness and well-being is depicted as a relative phenomenon. It is relative in the sense of your own achievement temporally and relative in the sense of what others have achieved. Underlying this supposition a person will feel happiness and well-being only when they improve upon their own previous achievements or when you have outdone the people in your peer group reference.

This may be all true, but this truth is based on assumption that for me to feel happy I must do better than others and improve on my own performance from last year. However, we can develop our psychology which is neither comparative nor competitive in the manner just described. We can have a psychology that works on an absolute basis that is not on a relative or competitive basis. If others are doing better than me, why should I feel worse off? In an absolute sense I have not become worse off and if I don't acknowledge reality in a relative or competitive way, then I am free from such negative comparisons.

The Nine Domains of GNH

Anything which is holistic must be synonymous with well-being. Anything that is complete must represent well-being and it must appeal in its reach to everywhere. It must not be confined in its attractiveness to Bhutan. It must represent some sort of universality in values. Any concept which claims to be holistic must also be universal in scope. What it says should be acceptable on a larger basis. In order to do this it must speak to all sectors of society. It must have something to say to everybody. That is what I mean by multi-dimensionality. Finally, it must be relevant and valid for a much longer time; its lesson must not be drawn from a temporal shortness. Its lesson cannot be drawn from what happened in the 1950s or 1970s, or from this crisis or that crisis. Its value must be far more deeply rooted and we should not base it on the experience of this country or that country, or this period or that period. It must have timelessness to the aspect of it.

Of course, GNH is far short of this, but if you get a perfect representation or methodology or measurement of well-being, it must have similar properties. Our well-being and happiness accrues from completeness.

If you divide our wealth, our capital, it can be broken down into economy, ecology, social, human and cultural. When we talk about wealth it's already a misnomer, because we immediately think about something that can be transacted, or liquidated and turned into money, and saved or transferred. Some things cannot be transacted in that way at all. So it is wrong to call it wealth. It is not the right word. Yet we have to use this word for lack of better option.

What has happened in the last 20 years is that we can see a resurgence in trying to evaluate and value capital or wealth we obtain from social, cultural and ecological spheres of our existence. We have also in the last 200 years developed some methodologies to estimate and account for ecological or environmental wealth. It is just a beginning in some spheres like social and cultural capital. There are very few systematic ways to account for what the social wealth is. Although the United States has done lot of work on trust, it is not robust enough yet.

In the absence of better measures, GNH tries to capture the importance of all of the social, cultural, ecological and economic resources important for our flourishing also through proxy qualitative measures. We have identified nine domains for the sake of convenience of communication, as contributing to GNH. Think of a wheel, a symbol of holism and completeness, with nine spokes: there is a spoke of ecological diversity, a spoke of living standards, a spoke of community vitality, spoke of good governance, spoke of time use, spoke of health, spoke of education, spoke of culture, and spoke of psychological well-being—all of which strengthen the wheel.

One reason we have devised GNH indicators is to track the status of happiness over time, and to compare the performance of one section of the population with others, or one part of the country with other. An additional purpose is to establish goals related to GNH and guide us towards measures to reach them. We have to prepare for the changes and the social and economic reconfiguration that are desirable from the perspective of GNH.

What we measured in GNH survey are the outcome of a discussion between random respondents and interviewers. We asked questions about 400 variables that are suspected to have bearing on happiness. But we used about 72 of them in the final construction of the index. We needed another layer of variables we didn't use to make make comprehensive sense of the 72 factors.

Happiness is the outcome of various factors in balance and harmony. However, the relationship between these factors are not linear. The relationship is not only unidirectional - from these factors to happiness. The inter-relationship between the variables is most important, but it can be non-linear. How education levels affect our living standards, how time use is linked to psychological well-being are examples of inter-relationship between domains of GNH. Non-linear relationship can be difficult to decipher but people know about its existence in any intuitive way. The choice of variables used for the construction of the GNH indicators, the choice of aggregation methods used to combine the variables statistically, the use of indicators in influencing policy making in Bhutan are however not discussed here in this short article. The nature of discussion would be slightly different if such technical issues are dealt here. At the same time, the article would be much longer.

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