

CULTURE ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF BHUTAN

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ABSTRACT

The current perspective of development has hardly been more vulnerable to scepticism and serious criticism as it has been in the case of the third world countries. The prevalent notion of development is primarily based on the westernised values and consumeristic style of life which is by and large not conducive to the small sized developing countries like Nepal, and Bhutan. These are small sized landlocked countries deeply committed to their cultural traditions. As the situation today obtains, we can divide the developing world into two major categories, one, those countries who have accepted the western modernised model of development package exposing themselves to social, economic, political and cultural influences of the west like India, Pakistan, Philippines and other Afro-Asian countries and the other category includes smaller countries like Nepal, Bhutan, Afghanistan etc. which are intensely committed to their own cultural traditions, ecologically sensitive and landlocked.

Keywords: Culture Environment, Westernised Values, Consumeristic Style, Scepticism, Politico-Economic.

Introduction

The dilemma confronting these smaller countries is that if they take to uninhibited economic development through accepting increasing economic assistance from developed countries, then a serious crisis of their social, political and cultural identity creeps in and their ecological balance also gets seriously disturbed, thus causing many problems of the social and political nature, and if they commit themselves to conserve and preserve their ecology and culture, their economic development suffers a setback with other implicit consequences of the politico-economic nature. Therefore, any viable development perspective for such smaller countries must be a holistic perspective where the trilogy of development, environment and culture should grow integrally and not one at the cost of the other.

In Bhutan, from 1961 to 1991, three decades of planned development have completed. Development strategy adopted by Bhutan, have been more or less balanced. The following Table-1, presents a brief scenario of the pattern of, allocation of total outlay among different sectors during different plans.

Table 1: Outlays of Development Plans, Percentage by Category, First Plan to Seventh Plan (Percent)

Sector	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII*
Agriculture	1.8	10.7	13.3	23.4	9.0	9.2	15.6
Trade and Industries	1.0	0.5	5.3	15.8	7.0	13.3	8.99
PWD	58.7	34.9	17.8	11.6	16.9	9.3	-
Road Transport and Aviation on	7.0	5.9	2.0	-	0.6	0.5	-
Education	8.8	17.7	18.9	12.2	11.2	8.1	11.15
Total							
(Nu Million) Outlays	107.2	202.2	475.2	1106.2	4648.3	9559.2	15590.366

Source : Statistical year book of Bhutan. 1989.

* Achievements in planned development, Review of the sixth plan. 1987-92. Sept. 92, planning commission Royal Govt. of Bhutan. P. 28-29.

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From the Table-1, it can be observed that, infrastructure, Agriculture and Industry, all have been given almost equal importance, along with the preservation of their rich cultural heritage and conservation of their environment.¹ For example, upto the third five year plan, emphasis was laid on infrastructure development along with education and a gradual increase in the outlay of agriculture and industry. In the latter plans, more emphasis was given to agriculture and industry but less to education.

In the first plan the Public Works Department (PWD), the basic infrastructure received 58.7% of the total outlay. That is more than half of the total outlay was spent on the infrastructural development. This was necessary in order to remove the physical isolation of Bhutan due to its rugged terrain and lack of road facilities and communications. The second priority was given to education with the allotment of 8.8% of the total outlay. In the second plan 34.9% of total outlay was given to 'Infrastructure' and 17.7% to 'Education'.

But agriculture sector emerged as third priority sector with an increase of 9% (from 1.8% to 10.7%). In the third plan the amount to be spent on the infrastructure was further reduced and that on Education, Health and Agriculture, the outlay was increased. By the Third Five Year Plan, education became the 'top priority sector'. But since this plan a gradual decrease in the outlay for 'Education' and 'Health' began (in "Education" from 18.9% to 8.1% in the Sixth Five Year Plan and in 'Health' from 8.8% to 4.2% in the Sixth Five Year Plan).² In the outlay for agriculture also, a decrease was observed from 23.4% to 15.6% in the seventh plans. In the Sixth Five Year Plan, Industry was made the 'Top priority sector'. But 'Agriculture' is the core sector of the developing countries like Bhutan and 'illiteracy' is also a major obstacle in growth and development of the country. Thus a gradual fall in the outlay for Education, Health and Agriculture sector was disturbing.

Development of the country during these five year plans (1960-86) was mainly characterised by Primary Production in the major river valleys the regional disparity and a low base of skilled labour.⁴ During 1980s, GDP grew at an average of 7.5% - a very rapid rate of growth. Agriculture growth rate remained slow at 5% per annum while power and manufacturing sectors expanded and the majority of the population remained dependent on the agriculture sector for incomes and employment. Food processing, cement products and alcoholic beverages accounted for most of the industrial production and due to limited domestic demand much of the production was exported to India.⁵

On a cursory glance on the above trends of planning what emerges is that initially the government of Bhutan got more allured for the investment in export oriented industrialization programmes like building cement and alcohol industry but later on in the VII plan a greater emphasis is given to agriculture and fulfilling of other basic needs like Health, Education etc. This strategic shift appears to be in healthier direction.

The earlier emphasis on export oriented .Led industrialization has brought many negative impacts on their environment and cultural-identity and heritage. Some of these are as follows:

- The labour was brought from outside the country which created problem and increased outsiders' influence on the local population and their cultural life.⁶
- Regional and sectional disparities grew, large scale migrations took place and forest destruction occurred, which led to land erosion, soil impoverishment and flood from rivers.⁷
- There was increase in population growth rate (from 1.6% during 1965-80 to 2.1% in 1980-88)⁸ • which created an imbalance in the traditional parity between the food production and food consumption.
- Since the development plans were mainly financed by external assistance there has been considerable increase in the dependence on foreign aid.⁹

Due to the above effects of development undermining Bhutanese cultural identity and 'environment', the royal government of Bhutan became more cautious and careful for the preservation of their culture and environment. The orientation of the VI and the VII five year plans, reveal their concern for preserving their Buddhist culture and achieving self-reliance in the economy. For now, the government of Bhutan is exercising controls on the influx of foreign tourists are confined to specified itineraries set by the government. Youngsters who move abroad for their studies are all supposed to undergo government's mandatory "re-integration course and national cultural values".¹⁰ The education system in Bhutan is based on two broad institutional approaches consisting of traditional religious education and the formal western education. Over centuries, religious education through monasteries has enabled Bhutan to preserve its Unique culture and tradition. It has made a profound impact on influencing the social and religious character of the Bhutanese society. The foundation for a national

education system based on western mode of education was launched in the 1950s when Bhutan decided to discard the self-imposed isolation.¹¹ By 1991, Bhutan had achieved 54% of literacy rate¹². In a personal interview with the high level officials of the Bhutan's royal government it was revealed that Bhutanese government has become all the more serious about the input in 'Education Sector'. My feeling is that the development of such countries, could be much augmented and harmonized if it is primarily 'education' based than merely getting econocentric in approach. In this regard a lesson could be drawn from the experience of the neighbouring country India where during its initial planning phases of 1950s in the community development schemes the stress was laid more on economically oriented programmes and less on education which proved disastrous and brought large scale disparities at various levels. This was due to lack of coordination between the different sectors viz. culture, environment and economic development. In the process of development mostly it is quite alluring to get immediate economic gains from the initial investments but for a viable and holistic development, it is mostly deceptive. The Indian case, as revealed by its planning processes, specially the social and non-formal education was much lacking and consequently the entire scheme was a big flop. There should be an integrated approach towards 'Education' as well. The concept of 'human resources' falls short of the meaning that 'education' carries because human beings are not merely an input in the process of 'development' but contrarily it is 'development' which is to be geared for the welfare of human beings. Unless 'development' is geared to the improvement in human quality, it lacks its real meaningfulness. Human quality includes literacy, skill capability to take up different specialised works, 'innovation', social awareness, concern for human values and enlightenment. Everett E. Hagen has well argued this point on the basis of the case studies of the different countries like Java, Columbia, Burma, Japan etc., that most favourable climate for sustainable development is present only when 'innovation' is appreciably encouraged.¹³ In order to inculcate innovative personalities exposure to some liberal modern value is very helpful and this requires a dose of modern education. But in order to avoid the risks involved in too much of modernisation which is very likely to transfigure into westernisation a synthesis of tradition with modernity is much desirable.

Looking to the sojourn in the planning process and the trials and errors experienced by the small country like Bhutan, what emerges out is that the concept of "Development" should not merely be a five star metropolitan notion of consumeristic development but should evolve from within one's own environmental and cultural possibilities and constraints both. In order to develop progressively and have a cultural ethos of creativity they should inculcate innovative value orientation. It is encouraging that Bhutan government now realises the importance of education as catalyst and harmoniser in the process of balanced and integral development for it has increased its investment in education in the seventh five year plan considerably (11.4 % of the total budget).

Happiness Index and Cultural Wisdom

The cultural wisdom is so rich in its content and practices that whenever people are having problems or encounter difficult situations they look for solutions through their spiritual value system. It is in this context that culture as such becomes so important to be protected. The responsibility to protect it lies with different stakeholders, more so with the respective governments to spread its importance through proper educational modes and through public policy systems. The decision makers involved in public policy must study the impact of such prospective policies on the culture and should make sure that such policies do not in any way go against cultural wisdom of different religions prevalent and different sects/tribes or groups of people.

Apart from physical artefacts, intangible attributes of a group or society, a broader definition (of Cultural Heritage) includes intangible aspects of a particular culture, often maintained by social customs during a specific period in history, the ways and means of behaviour in a society, and the often formal rules for operating in a particular cultural climate. These include social values and traditions, customs and practices, aesthetic and spiritual beliefs, artistic expression, language and other aspects of human activity.¹ UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) defines tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Tangible cultural heritage includes movable cultural heritage (paintings, sculptures, coins, manuscripts, etc.), immovable cultural heritage (monuments, archaeological sites, and so on), and underwater cultural heritage (shipwrecks, underwater ruins and cities and so on). Intangible cultural heritage includes oral traditions, performing arts, rituals, and so on.² It makes the expression cultural heritage very clear as it puts importance on social customs, rituals, behaviour and values, formal rules, oral traditions, aesthetic and spiritual beliefs within the spectrum of cultural heritage.

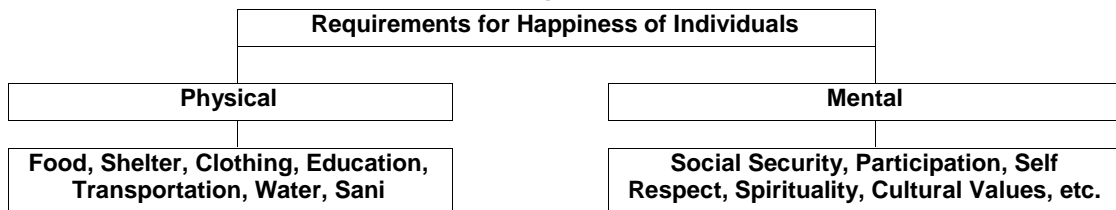
It is the responsibility of individuals, communities and the nation to preserve the culture and keep the generations aware about them through teachings at different levels of formal as well as informal education. It is also important that the oral traditions, social practices, customs and rituals are performed regularly and are made part of the syllabi wherever possible so that the younger generation is able to relate to their roots and develop a belief system which can help them to deal with different types of situations in a better, positive and indigenous way. At the national level it should be part of public policy. Bhutan has been a unique country in this respect and it is quite visible from its policy initiatives at all levels that the policies do not contradict with their cultural teachings and values. In this direction the country followed a development philosophy called Gross National Happiness (GNH) as the prime objective for all its policies. To further guide decision makers it established four pillars of GNH (GNH is described in the next Part) and one of which stands as Preservation of Cultural Heritage. It is in this context that this small nation with this big mission of GNH, becomes unique.

Concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH) in Bhutan

Happiness is a feeling of an individual and happiness of the individuals put together for a nation results into GNH of a country. The economic indicators of development can very well depict the status of development and growth of a nation but still the living standard of the people gets side-lined. Therefore, the concept of GNH has evolved to give more weight to this indicator of development as compared to the economic indicators. Development can be achieved and maintained through the philosophy of happiness which makes the process of development more focused and sustainable. GNH is more close to human development than economic development. ‘GNH rejects the notion that there is direct and close relationship between wealth and happiness’ (Bandyopadhyah 2004, p 259)

Fundamentally there are two types of requirements for the case of GNH which are derived from the sense of happiness of individuals viz., Physical requirement and Mental requirement (Shrotryia 2004). There are certain activities which provide us physical happiness like, money, food, housing, clothing, electricity, transportation, water, sanitation, health care, education etc. On the other hand there are certain activities which provide us only mental happiness like social security, participation, spirituality, cultural values, relationships, etc. (Fig 1). We tend to become complacent when we feel happy and contented. Sustainability is the issue to be kept in mind here. Sustainability here means sustaining the sense of happiness both at the individual level as well as at state level. Apart from sustaining happiness the efforts have to be put to minimize suffering. GNH is about minimizing suffering and maximizing happiness. The premise of GNH includes cultural preservation and creative experimentation apart from technological and material development.

Figure 1



Population quality and GNH are two sides of the same coin. Better quality of population ensures higher GNH. GNH finds its base in the parameters of Population quality. ‘A great deal of consistency exists between the Bhutanese concept of GNH and human development...The pursuit of GNH calls for a multi-dimensional approach to development that seeks to maintain harmony and balance between economic forces, environmental preservation, cultural and spiritual values and good governance’ (BNHDR 2000, p. 20). The Royal Government of Bhutan (RGOB) has been targeting to provide better facilities and services to the people to ensure their development through its Five Year Plans and other planning instruments. The priorities of the RGOB have been classified under five thematic headings as, Human Development, Culture and heritage, Balanced and Equitable development, Governance and Environmental conservation (BNHDR 2000, p. 21). Furthermore, Bhutan has identified four essential constituents of happiness. These are economic development, environmental preservation, cultural preservation and promotion and good governance (BNHDR 2000, p. 20). These areas have also been given focus in the latest BNHDR (2005) where little difference has been made in the terms as Sustainable and Equitable Socio-economic Development, conservation of environment; preservation and promotion of culture; and enhancement of good governance. These priority areas have been chosen to improve GNH.

There is much agreement that GNH is a good idea, for it offers the glimmerings of refuge against the steadfast tide of scientific reductionism. For others it provides relief from the stale indicators of development that enjoy so much currency (Hargens 2002, p. 32). (It)...is, undoubtedly, a unique paradigm of a chastening possibility in which the main motivating force behind human effort is not economic gain, but the cultivation of a humane society, the ultimate goal being the happiness of all people³. Veenhoven (2004) defines GNH as 'the degree to which citizens in a country enjoy the life they live; GNH is then an aggregate concept, like the concept of GNP that sums goods and services.'

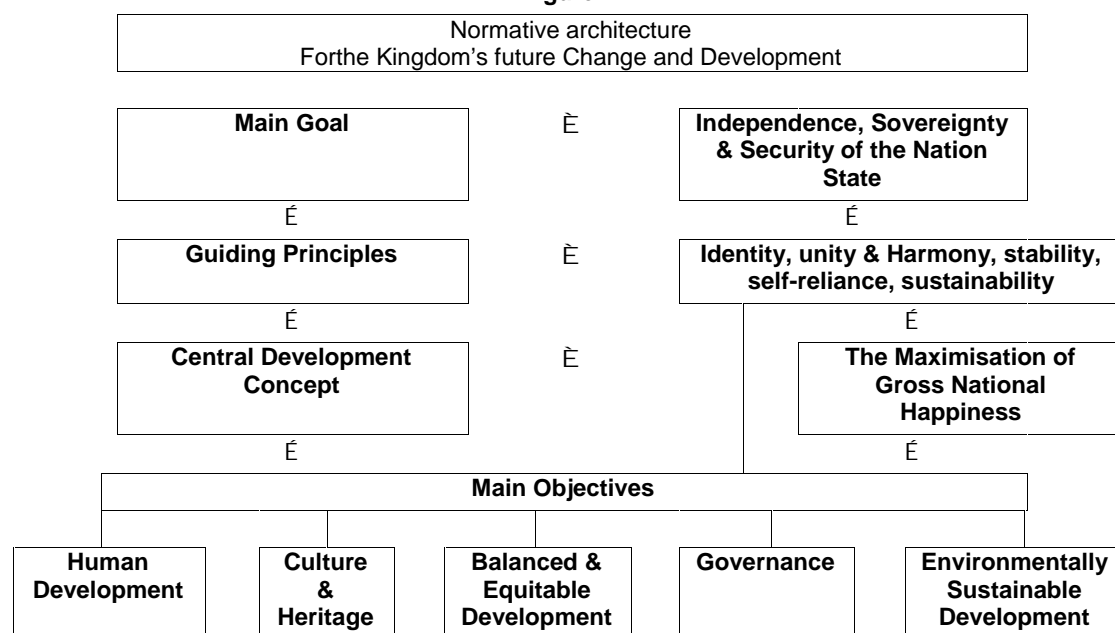
The concept of GNH has evolved from the basic constituent features of Bhutanese society in the beginning of the twentieth century, when the social fabric was being woven. Buddhism, which surrounds feudal set of values, forms the basic constituent features of Bhutanese society (Shrotryia 2006). The official documents and publications in Bhutan show that their development objectives lie in the happiness and satisfaction of their people rather than the growing GDP. The discussion during the 7th Round Table Conference held in 2000⁴ at Thimphu concluded one very interesting thought according to which the underlying idea of happiness within GNH concept is the 'capacity to make choices for oneself'. Mathou (2000) puts modernisation and preservation of national heritage as two merged rhetoric 'under the catchphrase of GNH (p 240)'. Orville (2002) writes that the King Jigme Singye Wangchuk once told Barbara Crossette, South Asia correspondent of New York Times that "Being a small country, we do not have economic power. We do not have military muscle. We cannot play a dominant international role, because of our small size and population and because we are a landlocked country. The only factor we can fall back on ...which can strengthen Bhutan's sovereignty and our different identity is the unique culture we have. ...happiness takes precedence over economic prosperity in our national development process". The kingdom has concentrated on maintaining its unique culture in all these years which is evident from the fact that as a nation there is a dress code and *driglamnamjha* (code of conduct) which is strictly followed. The residents proudly follow it in their public life.

Figure 2 shows that Bhutan considers GNH as its central development concept. Interestingly it is seen that the kingdom has two dimensions of goals namely the guiding principles and Independence, Sovereignty and Security of the Nation State. These two goals are the driving forces for the maximization of GNH but it has to ensure that there is no compromise made so far as its 'identity, unity and harmony, stability, self reliance and sustainability' is concerned which are shown as guiding principles. These guiding principles and central development concept, that is the GNH, establish five main objectives as – Human Development, Culture and heritage, Balanced and equitable development, Governance and Environmentally sustainable development. These objectives make the process of development unique in this tiny kingdom.

The sense of one community is reflected in practice in rural and urban areas alike in Bhutan. Bringing up the children of relatives or of the people of the same village, bearing their expenses, etc. is a very common practice in the country. This is also a part of culture in all Bhutanese families. Bhutan has been participating in the international discourses and deliberations and in the last decade it is observed more with a difference. It is making good investment in building up the institutions of national cohesion for the cause of well-being of its people and improvement in the GNH. The law and order condition is excellent, crime and corruption very minimal, no capital punishment, beggars hardly seen, life is relatively less hectic and the physical environment well protected. These are some of the generally observed indicators which have been maintained through different institutions and the policy of following GNH and maintaining its rich culture and traditions.

It is visible from Figure 3 that the RGOB has narrowed down its priority areas on the basis of GNH. The Bhutan National Human Development Report (BNHDR) 2000 identifies four important pillars of happiness for the nation and these pillars are same as the priority areas of the government. This also indicates that the kingdom has not vitiated from the basic concerns. If at all we try to relate the priority areas of the 9th Five Year Plan (FYP) with that of 7th and 8th FYP, we see that the first area of concern is economic growth and development which ultimately results into self sufficiency and sustainable economic development which was the primary concern in 7th FYP and 8th FYP. The 8th FYP had elaborated these priorities but the 9th FYP further bracketed them into four basic focus areas which are in a similar way reflected in Figure 2 as the main objectives of GNH. Further the 10th FYP also reiterates the focus areas of the 9th FYP and includes improvement in quality- of-life in the plan.

Figure 2



Source: RGOB 1999 - Bhutan 2020, p 15

Priesner (1999) has given few influencing and determining factors. The backdrop on which the concept of GNH is based has been termed as a ‘Superstructure’ which includes Indigenous national building and absence of foreign domination as preconditions for political, social and cultural identity, and Buddhism and feudalism as cornerstones of traditional Bhutanese socio-economic identity giving psychological and substantive input respectively. These inputs result in the thinking of GNH which is termed as the ‘Output Concepts’ and reflected through four basic policy guidelines as self reliance, human development, cultural preservation and environmental preservation. This theoretical model puts forward the major determinants of GNH which are the basis for development projects and policies in the country and they reflect the vision of the RGOB.

Table 1: Priority Areas in the Planning Documents of Bhutan

7 th FYP (1992-1997) p 23	8 th FYP (1997-2002) p 25	Bhutan HDR 2000, p 21 *	9 th FYP (2002-2007) p 4-6	10 th FYP (2008-2013) p 17
Self reliance	Self reliance	Human Development	Economic growth & development	Broad based sustainable growth
Sustainability	Sustainability	Culture & heritage	Preservation & promotion of cultural heritage	Preservation of country's rich culture
Efficiency & Development of the private sector	Preservation & Promotion of Cultural & Traditional values	Balanced & Equitable development	Preservation & sustainable use of the environment	Conservation of the natural environment
People's Participation & Decentralization	National security	Governance & Environmental conservation	Good governance	Strengthening good governance
Human Resource Development	Balanced Development			Improving the quality of life
Regionally Balanced Development	Improving the Quality of Life			
	Institutional Strengthening & HRD			
	Decentralization & Community Participation			
	Privatisation & Private Sector Development			

*Four priority areas mentioned under HDR 2000 have been identified as four essential constituents of happiness.

The Buddhist culture has harmony, stability and integration as important components which are addressed in the policies of development (GNH driven) in Bhutan. Bhutan has concentrated on the policy of decentralization and participation in the last two decades and both of these elements have been chosen as essential elements of GNH. Since 1981, the King has initiated a vigorous program of administrative and political decentralization. The 9th FYP emphasized on *Geog*⁵ based planning which ensured the participation of people from the lowest level of administration. 'The decentralization policy has enhanced the democratic powers, social responsibilities, transparent processes and structures of villages and communities to make decisions at grass roots level' (Thinley 1999, p. 21). The nation has made great efforts to achieve these objectives through its policy initiatives in all the sectors of development. Bhutan has shown that it is open for change happening around the world even when it comes to look at its culture as its foreign minister expresses this to Orville (2002) 'Some people tend to look at culture as static, but actually culture is always evolving. It is a tool, and when a tool becomes obsolete, you have to change it.' However, Ng and Ho (2006) mention that it is a very controversial matter as to whether governments should get involved in the formation of values even though in practice almost all governments are indeed involved in some way. This view shows that the country is willing to look at its culture in the dynamic and its changing social, economic and political environment.

The reflection of GNH is seen in the cultural follow up in Bhutan 'a culture of mutuality, not of competition; of inclusion, not exclusion; and of compassion, not acrimony'. Bhutan has taken into account the cultural, social, economic and historical costs of not engaging in infrastructural development in its planning and policies. The most important factors for Bhutan's development have been continuous culture, environment and *Vajrayana* Buddhism⁶. Gayleg (2004) establishes six levels of happiness as individual level happiness, family level happiness, community level happiness, regional/ *dunkhag/dzongkhag* level happiness, national level happiness and global level happiness (p 622). The happiness which starts with the individual happiness ultimately results into global happiness if at every level it is maintained and further improved. Apart from the concern felt for satisfaction and happiness Bhutan is aware of certain approaches to development which might lead to an increase in unhappiness and dissatisfaction. Therefore it minimizes such compulsive initiatives which might lead to unhappiness and dissatisfaction. The King has been conveying his opinion through various modes on the five year plans as 'if at the end of a plan period, our people are not happier than they were before, we should know that our plans have failed.'⁷

Bhutan has developed in isolation and the development philosophy viz. GNH, has allowed this tiny nation to sustain development. There is absence of extreme poverty and negligible unemployment with large availability of renewable a natural resource base such as forests and hydropower. It has maintained its culture par excellence and has ensured that the development approaches are in no way contrary to the local conditions. It does not believe in the policy of isolation now and the initiatives taken by the government prove that the kingdom is trying to learn lessons from other nations and is prepared with a strong base for the challenges ahead. 'We can continue to be cautious, but being cautious does not mean shutting our eyes, ...shutting our eyes and cloistering ourselves as we did at one time during the policy of isolation which served us once. But then we took the conscious decision to strengthen our sovereignty through involvement in the world. That means some intrusion, and we are prepared for that' these words were told to Orville while his interaction with Jigme Thinley. Further Orville (2002) mentions on his own that 'Bhutan has passed an important milestone in convergence with the outside world.' Bhutan's all-encompassing and penultimate goal of development is the maximization and realization of GNH.

...GNH has also been enshrined as an important principle of state policy under Article 9 of the Constitution (10th FYP, p. 17). GNH is a phenomenon which has transpired the citizens of this nation to put forth their efforts to maintain peace, tranquillity and sovereignty (Shrotryia 2006). The King of Bhutan believes that GNH is Development with Values⁸. The Planning Commission of Bhutan has been renamed as GNH Commission in 2008 with an objective of spearheading the planning process and to scan through the national policies as to their impact on the well-being of its people. GNH has become a global topic because of new institutional structure and decision making processes that better reflect it. Political parties' manifestoes also have GNH in their agendas and prospective candidates swear by GNH to garner the much needed popularity and votes (Samal 2010). The nobel laureate in economics, Joseph Stiglitz while his visit to Bhutan has appreciated the framework of GNH and the concern of the RGOB towards the cause of GNH.

The relationship between culture and GNH has been studied in the earlier part of this paper. Bhutan's basic strength lies in its ability to maintain, sustain and develop its cultural values for the cause of GNH. It has also been possible since the nation is a Buddhist nation and Buddhism as a religion

teaches some of the basic tenets of well-being of people and the religious values give lot of importance on the psychological well-being which in return creates a sound framework of practical thinking to deal with all type of situations and to cope with all calamities.

As mentioned before environmental conservation is one of the most important parts of the whole concept of GNH. The initiatives taken up by the RGOB in this regard are also worth praising as they have put in place different kinds of laws and regulations⁹ in order to make sure that at no cost they make compromise on this. Further, the approach to deal with disasters and to get prepared is also driven by this fact that they are committed to conserve the environmental resources. Hence they are expected to get prepared for any disaster which affects environmental resources as well as human lives. The next part of the paper discusses different types of disasters and their aftermath.

To sum up, it is argued in this paper that a balance and harmony between the culture, environment and development is essential for the integral development of a small country like Bhutan and for this education has to play a key role in the planning process.

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