

Under the Influence of Buddhism: The Psychological Well-being Indicators of GNH

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Introduction

Measuring human well-being is important in determining whether people's lives improve or worsen over time. Today many countries focus on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a basis to measure economic well-being, but focus on economic growth fails to capture the overall well-being of the people (Kusago 2007; Stiglitz, Sen, and Fitoussi, 2009). Alternative measurements such as Genuine Progress Index (GPI) and Human Development Index (HDI) have been introduced to measure the non-economic aspect of well-being. GPI and HDI include important factors that contribute to healthy living but are still calculated based on monetary values (Hargen 2002; Kusago 2007).

Gross National Happiness (GNH) is the central development philosophy of Bhutan (Planning Commission 1999). This unique philosophy aims at maximising well-being and minimising suffering by balancing economic needs with spiritual and emotional needs. Bhutan's fourth king, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, coined the term "Gross National Happiness" in the late 1980s arguing that "Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross Domestic Product" (as cited by Ura 2008, para.1). His vision was to create a GNH society: "an enlightened society in which happiness and well-being of all people and sentient beings is the ultimate purpose of governance" (as cited by Ura 2008, para.2).

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GNH is premised on the notion that happiness pursued and realised within the context of the greater good of society offers the best possibility for the sustained happiness of the individual. Yet, society as a whole cannot achieve happiness if individuals compete irresponsibly for it. To this end, GNH recognises that happiness ought to be realised as a collective goal; it cannot be left as an individual goal: “GNH stresses collective happiness to be addressed directly through public policies in which happiness is an explicit criterion in projects and programmes” (Thinley 2005, p.7). If a government’s policy framework and its goals are adverse to happiness, happiness will fail as a collective goal (Ura 2008). In the GNH context, a government concerned with the happiness of its citizens must create an enabling environment for people to achieve happiness. The Bhutan-Vision 2020 strongly reaffirms the notion of Gross National Happiness as the central development concept for the country.

Since the adoption of the concept of GNH, the government has consistently sought to address development beyond income or economic growth. Challenged with listing every factor that contributes to the happiness of its people, the government chose to focus on four major areas as the pillars of GNH: cultural promotion, equitable economic development, good governance, and environmental conservation (Planning Commission 1999). These four pillars constitute the broad strategic framework through which national development processes are actualised for the maximisation of GNH.

Measuring what really matters to people and framing policies in accordance with the needs of people would help realise the goal of GNH. Without some kind of measurement system, however, GNH cannot guide practical policies and programs (CBS 2008). What was needed was a specific and relevant development index that takes into account the core principles and dimensions of GNH. In November 2008, coinciding with the coronation of the fifth King of Bhutan, Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck, the Government of Bhutan adopted the GNH index: “The purpose of the GNH index is to reflect GNH

values, set benchmarks, and track policies and performances of the country” (Ura 2008, p.1). The Government of Bhutan states that the country is now ready with a set of mathematical formulae to measure human well-being and government performances towards achieving GNH (as cited by Dorji 2009).

The GNH index is an attempt to measure how well citizens are doing economically, socially, and emotionally. The GNH index consists of nine domains: psychological well-being, cultural diversity and resilience, education, health, time use and balance, good governance, community vitality, ecological diversity, and living standard. The nine domains contain a total of seventy-two indicators. The Centre for Bhutan Studies (2008) states that these nine domains are the components of happiness and well-being in Bhutan.

GNH is a holistic approach towards development. It seeks to complement inner happiness with outer circumstances. It addresses both material and non-material well-being. Although material wealth is associated with physical well-being, one’s mental state or inner well-being is not conditioned by material needs alone. Well-being arises when sustainable and equitable economic development is balanced with environmental and cultural preservation, and good governance (Rinzin 2006; Thinley 2005). This has been referred to as the “middle path,” which is derived from Buddhist principles of avoiding extremes and taking a balanced view (Planning Commission 1999).

Policymakers in Bhutan recognise that “simply imposing development models from outside which do not take religion and tradition into account will not only serve to diminish existing culture, but will also meet with limited success” (Planning Commission 1992, p.66). Buddhism has long played an important role in the political, economic, and social lives of Bhutanese. The Bhutanese worldview, including its social, cultural, and political ethos, is rooted in Buddhism. Bhutanese culture and development policies are greatly

influenced by Buddhism. Scholars such as Lokamitra (2004), Hewavitharana (2004), and Tashi (2004) have argued that Buddhism can help achieve the goal of GNH.

Since the philosophy of GNH is anchored in Buddhism, a question arises regarding the extent to which Buddhism influenced the GNH index, and its domains and indicators. In particular, do the indicators reflect Buddhist principles? In responding to this question, this article will seek to do two things. First, it will look briefly at some key foundational doctrines of Buddhism which might lie behind the GNH index and indicators: the Four Noble Truths, Karma, and the six perfections or *paramitas* to highlight Mahayana Buddhist principles of happiness. It will use as sources Thogme Zangpo's *Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattava (Gyalse Laglin)*, and the teachings of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Sogyal Rimpoche.

Second, it will focus on one of the nine GNH index domains – the psychological well-being domain. This domain has three classifications (general psychological distress indicators, emotional balance indicators, and spirituality practices indicators) and includes eleven of the seventy-two indicators, to determine the extent to which they reflect Buddhist principles of happiness. A high degree of Buddhist influence might then support the notion put forth Lokamitra (2004), Hewavitharana (2004), and Tashi (2004) that Buddhism can assist in achieving the goal of GNH.

Buddhist Principles of Happiness

There is a general assumption that income and happiness are directly related. Happiness research findings defy this generalisation, however, and show that increasing incomes are not accompanied by increasing happiness (Hirata 2006). The Buddha discovered this 2500 years ago. He did not reject outright the idea of possessing wealth but recognised that for the layperson a certain degree of wealth is essential to live a happy life. He did stress, however, that living an ethical and

moral life more so than wealth but would bring genuine happiness. He rejected greed in accumulating wealth, being enslaved to materialism, and treating wealth as the ultimate goal (Wijeyawansa 2009).

1. Buddhist View of Happiness

According to the Dalai Lama (2001), “the purpose of spiritual practice is to fulfill our desire for happiness” (p.30). Buddhism indeed has much to say about happiness. Sogyal Rimpoche, a renowned Buddhist teacher, states there are two kinds of happiness: one based on material comfort and pleasures; the other on inner contentment and peace (Dorji 2010). The two are the physical and mental components of happiness, with the mental experience or the inner force playing a more powerful role. A very pleasant environment will make little difference if we are mentally depressed, but inner peace or mental happiness will make it easier to face any challenge (Dalai Lama 2001). Tashi (2004) asserts that in Mahayana Buddhism happiness springs from an altruistic or compassionate mind. Since human minds are often agitated by afflictive emotions, the results frequently are negative actions, which in turn cause suffering. The essence of Buddhism therefore is to tame, transform, and conquer the human mind, for it is the root of everything – it is the creator of happiness and suffering.

There is a similarity between the Buddha’s teachings and Aristotle’s concept of happiness (*eudiamonia*). Aristotle indicated that if we want to be happy, we should cultivate and practice virtues through wisdom. Most of his ethic is devoted to an account of virtuous activities that he states constitute happiness. He describes happiness as “doing well combined with virtue or self sufficiency of life or the pleasantest life with safety or prosperity of possessions and bodies with power to protect them and use them in action” (Irwin 1999, p.3). He also believed that power and fortune are aspects of happiness because they are the best providers of safety.

The idea that happiness requires fortune, however, conflicts with what Buddha taught: that fortune, power, and possession are all material and subject to change. They are therefore not a source of genuine happiness but a cause of suffering. The Dalai Lama states that Buddhists aim not merely for temporary happiness but for long-term results – they are also concerned with life after this life. This means that ultimate happiness in Buddhism is Nirvana, the cessation of suffering, the end of the cycle of birth-and-death. He further adds that spiritual practice, the practice of dharma, can bring both long-term happiness and more inner strength day by day (Dalai Lama and Hopkins 2000). Buddhist teaching employs innumerable skilful means through which happiness can be achieved at the individual and collective levels, one of which is the Bodhisattva path (Powers 1995).

In his search for the meaning of life, the Buddha discovered the *Four Noble Truths*. They are the very foundation of all Buddhist beliefs, explaining the truth of suffering and the way to overcome it. The first noble truth recognises that suffering is the essence of human existence: suffering from birth, old age, sickness, and death as well as the pain from separation, grief, and despair. The second noble truth explains that desire or craving is the cause of all suffering: craving for pleasure, for individual existence, and for release from our present situation. The third noble truth states that suffering can cease by overcoming craving or desire. The fourth noble truth prescribes the way to overcome desire by following the *Eightfold Noble Path* (Easwaran 2007).

The most common belief among Buddhists is that we can never escape from our own *Karma*, the law of cause and effect, whether in this life or the next. Certain key aspects of a person's birth are thought to be karmically determined, such as one's social status, physical appearance, character, and personality. But not all things are determined by one's karma: humans do have freedom to choose (Harvey 2000).

Buddhist philosophy explains innumerable ways to achieve positive Karma. Actions motivated by greed, hatred, and delusion result in bad Karma, while actions motivated by their opposites – non-attachment, loving kindness, and right understanding – result in positive Karma. Good intentions, therefore, must find expression in right actions, and right actions are basically those that are wholesome and harm neither self nor others. Tashi (2004) states that in order to accumulate merits and to be happy, our actions can be summed up under three principle causes: 1) developing the attitude of not harming, 2) cultivating the attitude of helping others, and 3) being content.

The principle of *interdependence* is one of the most important principles of Buddhism (Negi 1999; Flanagan 2007; Dorji 2009). Buddhism teaches that we are all interdependent; what we do affects those around us. To create happiness, it is important that we not only reflect on the interrelationship of all things but also see ourselves clearly as a part of one larger system of causal relationships. Genuine happiness can be generated from developing a compassionate heart focused also on animals and the environment because they too are part of the same world. The root of all Buddhist practices is the heart of loving kindness and compassion (Gyatso 1984; Dalai Lama 2000 and 2001).

2. The Six Perfections (paramitas)

Mahayana Buddhism's teachings on the six perfections (*paramitas*) shed light on how to achieve happiness. These *paramitas*, based on the Thogme Zangpo's 12th century text, are as follows: generosity (*dana*); ethics/virtues/morality (*sila*); patience/tolerance (*kshanti*); perseverance (*virya*); meditative concentration (*dhayana*); and wisdom (*prajna*). These six teachings stress inner cultivation, an ethic that focuses directly on daily life through which one accomplishes genuine happiness (Wright 2009).

According to Thogme Zangpo all worldly or ultimate happiness comes from the practice of Dharma, which in effect is the practice of virtues. Dharma is the inner realization that can minimise human suffering (Gyatso 1984). Virtues are actions that bear the fruit of happiness; ill deeds cause suffering and unhappiness. According to Buddhism, ignorance, desire, and hatred are the main cause of suffering, which are known as the three poisons and to which all sentient beings are subject (Dalai Lama 2000). The three poisons can be resisted and virtues cultivated through training in the six practices which naturally generate virtuous actions leading to happiness.

The first practice is *generosity*, which is the first principle of happiness. Mahayanists maintain that happiness comes from a compassionate and altruistic mind and the practice of compassion is training oneself in the perfection of generosity. This practice refers to unconditional love, a selfless generosity, and giving which is completely free from attachment and expectation. Internally, it means overcoming our emotions (greed and hatred) and being generous with others; giving one's material goods, time, or wisdom to others (Das 1995).

The second practice is *ethics/morality/virtue (Sila)*. Right speech, action, and livelihood, which form the part of Eightfold Noble Path, fall under ethical practice. The Dalai Lama (2001) states that "ethics means avoiding the ten non-virtuous actions" (p.34): killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, divisive speech, harsh speech, gossip, greed, malice, and wrong views. These ten non-virtuous actions lead to bad Karma and suffering. Avoiding them brings good Karma and happiness. We can enjoy greater freedom, happiness, and security through our virtuous behaviour and no longer create suffering for ourselves and others; we become virtuous and harmless in our thoughts, speech, and actions. The Dalai Lama states that the aim of ethical practice is to transform motivation and mental disposition and become better human beings. The more we succeed in training our hearts and

minds the more we will be able to cope with adversity and our actions will be naturally ethical, which leads to goodness and happiness.

The third practice is *patience and tolerance*. Patience in Buddhism entails strength to face the challenges and difficulties of life without losing composure and inner tranquility. Bodhisattvas are challenged to endure, tolerate, and bear any hardship without retaliation or negative thoughts. Endurance and tolerance do not imply defeat but make the mind stronger. With patience, the mind will be calm and clear, enabling one to make better decisions. Through the practice of patience, inner peace can be maintained under any circumstance, and thus genuine happiness can be experienced.

The fourth practice is *joyous effort* or *enthusiastic perseverance (virya)*. It is the quality of persistent effort or working hard towards achieving a goal. Zangpo points out that one must strive diligently to free oneself and all sentient beings from suffering. Without putting in right effort, we can be disillusioned and thus fail to achieve any goal. The Dalai Lama states that with joyous effort and enthusiastic perseverance, we can regard failure as another step towards success, danger as an inspiration for courage, and affliction as an opportunity to practice wisdom and compassion. Thus, to achieve happiness, one must put in right effort to be compassionate, virtuous and ethical at all times.

The fifth practice is *meditative concentration (dhyana)*. Meditative concentration is very important in developing mental qualities and overcoming the three poisons. Zangpo indicates that through hearing the dharma teachings, meditating day and night, and developing a heart of loving kindness and compassion, sentient beings can be liberated from suffering. Buddhism greatly stresses the taming of the mind because the mind can be transformed and meditation is the means to transform it. Tashi (2004) speaks of the usefulness of meditation in destroying the root causes of

suffering and providing an antidote to them. Meditation aims at taming the mind so that it does what we want it to do. According to John Milton, “the mind is its own place and, in itself, can make heaven of hell, and a hell of heaven” (as cited by Williams 2008, p.24). We stabilise our mind and emotions by practicing meditation, by being mindful and aware in everything we do. When we train the mind in this way, all mental distortions and misperceptions are eliminated; we achieve focus, composure, and tranquility. Concentrating deeply makes us realise the cause of confusion and suffering and helps us directly experience inner joy.

The sixth practice is *wisdom (prajna)*. Wisdom is the key to everything; it will help us find the path to happiness. Without wisdom we easily succumb to the three poisons. Wisdom is therefore necessary to cultivate other practices (Zangpo, n.d.). Wisdom does not refer to mere intellectual understanding. According to Ron Liefer (1997), mere intellectual understanding of reality will not change habitual negative thoughts, speech, and action because the intellect serves the ego: we cannot achieve wisdom without seeing through the trickery of ego. Through wisdom one will be able to distinguish between what is ethical and unethical, virtuous and non-virtuous. We see the essential nature of reality with utmost clarity; our perception goes beyond the illusive and deceptive veils of material existence (Rink 2010). Thus, overcoming the three poisons by understanding the true nature of reality and developing qualities of generosity, morality, patience, and meditating with joyous effort is said to generate the highest level of happiness in Buddhism.

The teachings on the Four Noble Truths indicate that happiness is beyond material well-being and that the real essence of happiness lies within us. Some may wonder whether a focus exclusively on getting rid of desire would inhibit worldly progress. The path to overcoming attachment and achieving worldly progress, such as accumulating wealth, appear to be poles apart. But Buddhism does not say that one must relinquish the material life. It does stress, however,

the greater importance of having a good heart, of not harming others, of being compassionate and morally disciplined, and of exhibiting loving kindness, generosity, patience, and a joyful desire to practice virtues. These positive qualities can reduce suffering and give happiness to self and others.

Buddhism and the Psychological Well-being Indicators

Psychological well-being deals with emotions and feelings which are subjective experiences. The measure of the psychological well-being of citizens is extremely important in a country pursuing GNH because mental or psychological well-being influence the overall well-being of people. A GNH state therefore needs to minimise those mental conditions that can be disruptive. The Bhutanese government attempts to measure psychological well-being by assessing the socially destructive attitudes and symptoms of psychological distress and the prevalence of practices that combat them.

Ekman, Davidson, Ricard, and Wallace (2005) agree that psychologists and Buddhists alike believe that emotions strongly influence people's thoughts, words, and actions, and that they help people in their pursuit of transient pleasures and satisfactions. Earlier psychologists were largely interested in negative emotional states such as depression and anxiety but have now begun to focus on positive emotions to evaluate overall well-being (Ryff and Singer 1998). To measure happiness, the absence of negative experiences is not sufficient; positive feelings must also be exhibited (Hirata 2006). The psychological well-being domain under the GNH index similarly includes both positive and negative emotions.

People experience moods and emotions which have an enormous range of effects on their well-being. To gain an understanding of people's psychological state, something must be known about their subjective experiences. The psychological well-being domain of the GNH index thus assesses people's subjective experience based on eleven indicators. These indicators have been grouped into three

broad categories. The *emotional balance* category comprises both negative (jealousy, selfishness, frustration, suicidal thoughts) and positive (generosity, calmness, compassion) indicators. The *spiritual practice* category comprises meditation, prayer recitation, and taking account of Karma indicators. The *general mental health* category focuses on such matters as depression, anxiety and low confidence.

Larsen and Fredrickson (1999) point out that “the content of a person’s emotional life strongly influences his or her judgments of the quality of that life” (p.40). Buddhist teachings are directly or indirectly based on the workings of the mind and hold strongly that it is the emotional and mental state of people that influence their well-being or happiness. In Buddhism mind, awareness and consciousness are synonyms and the mind in Buddhism includes all perceptual, conceptual, and emotional states, both conscious and unconscious (*Abhidhamma* 1987; Negi 1999). The emotional/mental states therefore are all mind related subjective experiences. Here we can determine the extent to which the indicators under the psychological domain reflect Buddhist principles of happiness.

1. Psychological Well-being Measures

a. Emotional Balance

Diener and Lucas (1999) state that although emotions are momentary influences and do not reflect a stable state of happiness they do provide insight into a person’s life situation. Research indicates that a variety of causal factors contribute to these emotions (Berenbaum, Raghavan, Le, Vernon, and Gomez, 1999). Buddhist teachings similarly maintain that these emotions do not occur on their own. Buddhism places the mind at the centre of all experiences. The Buddhist tradition therefore places emotions at the core of individual and universal happiness.

i. Negative Emotions

Negative emotions in Buddhism arise out of ignorance, desire, and hatred. Humans suffer because of their own negative emotions. These are negative because they harm self and others. As we ignore the reality around us and cling to the self or “I”, we get angry for things we do not like, jealous when others succeed, and frustrated when we fail. An extreme reaction is suicidal thought and action. All of these negative emotions, from the Buddhist perspective, fall under unethical actions: actions that occur through the mind. These actions are distorted, confused, or afflictive. Jealousy, selfishness, frustration, and suicidal thoughts arise due to covetousness, ill will, and wrong view. The four negative indicators form part of the ten non-virtuous actions and are afflictive regardless of their degree or the context in which they arise.

Jealousy, as the first negative indicator, is often defined as a feeling of resentment when others succeed. Harris (2004) points out that jealousy (*dhrad-dog*) is likely to arise over perceptions that a potential rival poses a threat to what one perceives to be valuable in oneself or in an important relationship. Jealousy in Buddhism is defined as “a disturbing emotion that focuses on other people’s accomplishments such as their good qualities, possessions, or success, and is the inability to bear their accomplishments, due to excessive attachment to our own gain or to the respect we receive” (Berzin 2004, p. 1). Mullen (1995) points out that men and women experience different types of emotions when they are jealous. These include pain, distress, oppression, anxiety, sadness, apprehension, anger, restless, distress, humiliation, shame, agitation, and betrayal. All of these are negative and against happiness or well-being.

The Buddhist *Abhidhamma* text classifies “jealousy” as part of hostility and calls it “immoral”; it is opposite to compassion and appreciative joy. Lama Zopa Rinpoche (1973) states that “rejoicing is the best remedy for jealousy and envy” (p.1). Buddhist teaching maintains that we must rejoice for the

success and happiness of others. We cannot achieve GNH if we are jealous of others. Jealousy is therefore opposed to GNH values. Since jealousy is directly opposed to the psychological well-being of people, it is appropriate that it be an indicator of GNH.

Selfishness, as the second indicator, refers to an unwillingness to share due to cravings for the self. Selfishness (*serna*) in Buddhism originates from attachment and greed: “it is an extension of attachment and resists the spirit of generosity” (Negi 1999, p.93). The *Abhidhamma* text terms it “immoral consciousness” (p.96). Buddhists believe that replacing selfishness with generosity will attain inner joy. In particular, the *paramita* of ethics emphasises restraining self-centeredness and to rooting it out completely. According to the Dalai Lama (2000), “the ethic of restraining self-centeredness is crucial” (p.101). A selfish attitude according to Buddhism obstructs the path towards achieving Bodhisattva, and thus genuine happiness. Selfishness gives rise to negative Karma, leading one to be reborn in the lower realms. Similarly, since the concept of GNH supports the idea of interdependence, selfishness is opposed to the GNH values.

The third indicator, *frustration*, occurs when an impulse or an action is thwarted by an internal or external force. There is no exact term for frustration in Buddhism, but is related to the term *gopa* which is translated as “agitation”. Negi (1999) describes *gopa* as a mental factor that “disturbs the inner calm and focus of the mind” (p.44). *Gopa* forms part of the twenty secondary delusions in the *Abhidhamma*. In the Bhutanese national language the word *ouggam* holds equivalent meaning to frustration. *Ouggam* literally means pressurising the breath; *oug* is breath and *gam* means pressure. When we pressurize our self, we get frustrated and this comes out as anger, causing suffering to others and ourselves. Frustration is without doubt a negative emotion because it disturbs the peace of mind causing anxiety and stress which, like jealousy and selfishness, arises out of attachment and desire. In Buddhism, any emotion that arises

out of ignorance, desire, and hatred is afflictive and non-virtuous. In a GNH society that seeks to maximise the happiness and well-being of people, frustration is a negative trait and opposed to the concept of GNH because it obstructs the path towards happiness. Since frustration has a negative impact on well-being, it is necessary to determine if such emotions occur frequently among people. Therefore, it is appropriate to have it as a negative indicator of psychological well-being.

The fourth indicator, *suicidal thought*, usually occurs when one is no longer able to bear suffering in life. According to Buddhism, suicide is an unwholesome act since it is encouraged by a mind filled with greed, hatred, and delusion (Dhammananda, n.d.). Killing is one of the ten non-virtuous acts in Buddhism. According to the Dalai Lama (1981), suicide will not solve one's problems. Buddhist teachings on Karma maintain that death by suicide only leads to another cycle of rebirth in the same condition. In the next life the person will have to take another body that again will be the basis of suffering. In order to get rid of all the difficulties we experience, we need to get rid of the fundamental cause (greed, hatred, and delusion) that gives rise them. Buddhists therefore discourage suicide and encourage constructive living, using this life to diligently practice virtuous action, thus changing the present and the future for the better.

Research indicates that suicide and attempted suicide are associated with "elevated levels of anger, anxiety, guilt, sadness, and shame" (Berenbaum, Raghavan, Le, Vernon, Gomez, 1999, p. 279). Depression is found to be the main cause of suicide. The most common factors that push youth to commit suicide, according to Bhutanese psychiatrist Nirola, are peer and parental pressures, competitive scenarios, and failure to get a job, among others (as cited by Dorji 2010). This indicates that suicidal thoughts occur because of what Buddhism calls the three poisons, leading to further afflictive emotions. Suicidal thoughts similarly are

against the essence of GNH and therefore a negative indicator of psychological well-being.

Jealousy, frustration, selfishness, and suicidal thoughts are negative emotions that affect individual and the societal well-being. Negi (1999) asserts that “the distorted emotional states have achieved such a pervasive status that our era may become known in history as the Age of Emotional Epidemic” (p.2). The effects of negative emotions are clearly visible in society: increasing crime, substance abuse, suicide, and divorce are all symptoms of emotional dysfunction. Research also indicates that individuals with emotional disturbances are prone to induce negative effects upon those with whom they have ongoing relationships (Berenbaum et al 1999). Besides evaluation of the frequency of negative emotions, it is important for the government to know the reasons or the conditions that give rise to these negative emotions. The four indicators are directly opposed to the essence of GNH and therefore it is appropriate to have them as indicators, in order to minimise or eliminate the presence of such negative emotions in a country.

ii. Positive Emotions

The process for accomplishing happiness in Buddhism involves uprooting the negative emotions and enhancing the positive ones. The three indicators – generosity, calmness, and compassion – are positive because these emotions bring happiness to self and others. They can replace the three poisons and hence are considered positive indicators of psychological well-being.

Generosity is the act of giving and a means to overcome greed and selfishness. In Buddhism, the practice of generosity (*dana*) brings happiness to others. Generosity is a moral practice that relates to positive virtues such as compassion and loving kindness, the cultivation of which leads to mental development and spiritual happiness. In a GNH society, people must help each other to promote a healthy environment. Helping does not necessarily mean giving all

your possessions to others but it does entail sharing a part of your wealth and being helpful in many ways. Happiness derived by the act of generosity, which does not get included in the Gross Domestic Product (Hewavitharana 2004), should be included in the evaluation of GNH. The whole idea of generosity supports the concept of interdependence which is the core principle of GNH and Buddhism. Therefore, “generosity” as an indicator of psychological well-being is coherent with and appropriate to the concept of GNH.

Calmness refers to clarity of mind and entails patience and tolerance. Calmness is opposed to anger which is one of the three poisons in Buddhism. The Buddhist practice of patience and tolerance (*kshanita paramita*) stresses the importance of having a calm and composed mind at all times. Patience involves strength to face the challenges and difficulties of life without losing composure and inner tranquility. When we are calm we develop a tendency not to harm others and we are usually at our best when we are calm. Tranquility gives rise to clarity from which understanding and wisdom grow (Graham 2007). A calm mind is therefore essential for living a happy and healthy life. On the other hand, constant fear and anger affect our own health and overall well-being. According to Horton (2010), mental calmness can lead to inner peace and success. Calmness is therefore a virtue consistent with GNH ideals.

Compassion is a wish to relieve the suffering of others and is central to Buddhist practice. It is the most essential and important trait for bodhisattvas within Mahayana Buddhism. Compassion in Buddhism arises out of empathy towards the suffering of others but also from understanding and realising the meaning of emptiness, the law of Karma and interdependence: viewing self and others as devoid of inherent meaning. Compassion thus leads to the practice of loving kindness, and helps to overcome afflictive emotions such as hatred, jealousy, and selfishness, which are considered negative under the psychological well-being indicators. It can be a powerful means to creating a GNH society. The CBS

(2008) holds “compassion” as sympathy for the suffering of others which is necessary to establish a compassionate society. Therefore, compassion as an indicator is very much coherent with the GNH values.

Overall, emotions such as compassion, calmness, and generosity have a positive impact on physical well-being, on decision-making process, and on the potential for leading a happy life. Further, each of the three indicators is clearly related to the Buddhist *paramitas*.

b. Spiritual Practices

Indicators under this section (meditation, prayer, karma) consist of Buddhist ritual practices to overcome negative or afflictive emotions. Practicing them with sincerity can hold negative emotions at bay.

Buddhists consider *meditation* an important method to calm the mind and a means to destroy the three root causes of suffering (desire, hatred, and ignorance). According to Rimpoché (2002), meditation is the key to finding happiness and peace of mind. Tashi (2004) points out that the important egalitarian aspects of meditation are its accessibility to everybody, with little or no cost involved. Researchers have shown that Buddhists who meditate may be able to train their minds to feel genuine happiness and control aggressive instincts (Connor 2003). Study has found that meditation tames the amygdala, the part of the brain involved with fear and anger. Even brief courses of meditation with very short periods of the simplest meditative practices are associated with better psychological and physical health (Levenson et al 2004). The CBS does not link meditation to Buddhism, but it is implicit that the indicators are inspired by Buddhist teachings.

Regular meditation alleviates a range of conditions including stress, anxiety, depression, poor sleep, and coping with chronic pain. It can also reduce inflammation, improve immunity, and lower blood pressure. According to Lutz,

Lewis, Johnstone, and Davidson (2008), the long-term goal of meditation is to weaken egocentric traits so that altruistic behaviours might arise more frequently and spontaneously. Rimpoché (2002) states that the gift of learning to meditate is the greatest gift you can gift yourself in this life, for it is only through meditation that you can undertake the journey to discover your true nature, and so find the stability and confidence you will need to live and die well.

The practice of meditation will have a positive impact on the well-being of people, which directly contributes to the essence of GNH. Having meditation as a GNH indicator signifies the importance given to it by the government. Meditation has recently been introduced in Bhutanese schools. Overall, the indicator of mediation is coherent with GNH values. Further, since Buddhism greatly stresses the importance of meditation, the indicator seems to have been influenced by Buddhism.

Prayer is a religious practice that seeks to connect a person to some greater power and is a component of most religions. The word “prayer” in Bhutanese is *thuen*, which literally means the recitation of mantras. Buddhism emphasises the recitation of prayer-like mantras. A mantra is “a word, a syllable, a phrase or a short prayer that is spoken once or repeated over and over again (either aloud or in a person's head) and that is thought to have a profound spiritual effect on the person” (BBC 2006, p.1). Mantra literally means “that which protects the mind from negativity” (Sogyal Rimpoché 2002, p.71). According to Sogyal Rimpoché, mantra is the essence of sound, and the embodiment of the truth in the form of sound. Each syllable contains spiritual power and vibrates with the blessing of the speech of the Buddha. There are mantras that are thought to subtly alter one’s mind and make a connection with a particular Buddha or enlightened being. Buddhists believe that when certain mantras are said many times, they arouse good vibrations within the person; they awaken our inherent inner capacities of strength, compassion, and wisdom (Lewis 2006).

In addition to reciting mantras, a majority of the Bhutanese Buddhists pray to local deities. It is a popular belief in Bhutan that deities can protect us from evil forces. In a real sense, this is uncharacteristic of Buddhism for the Buddha never prayed to anyone. But Bhutan was largely a Bon country prior to the entry of Buddhism and Bonism emphasised worshipping deities. Bhutan's national newspaper *Kuensel* reports that Bonism mixed with Buddhism is still prevalent in the country (Wangchuk 2005). Many pray and perform rituals to appease local deities (*yu-lha*), summoning deities and spirits residing in mountains, valleys, lakes, forests, streams, and cliffs invoking them to assist and protect people from misfortunes (as cited by Wangchuk 2005). Though not distinctively Buddhist (Powers 1995), praying to deities has been absorbed by Bhutanese Buddhists long ago and is now considered an integral part of their culture.

Prayer recitation in Buddhism itself is a form of meditation. The CBS does not mention how prayer recitation is consistent with GNH values but the benefits of prayer recitation and meditation maybe the same, for both practices require mindfulness and concentration. In this sense, prayer recitation too is coherent with GNH. Prayer in the form of mantra accords with Buddhist principles, while prayer to deities is a local Buddhist practice. Therefore, the indicator of prayer recitation seems to have been influenced by Buddhism with traces of local beliefs.

Karma is a very important Buddhist principle that guides the Buddhist psyche. The law of Karma provides the basis for ethics (*sila*.) Karma as one of the GNH indicators clearly implies that Buddhism has influenced the indicator. The literal meaning of "taking account of Karma" is being morally responsible for our own actions. When a person takes account of Karma in daily life, he/she is being aware and morally responsible for their actions. When we understand the law of Karma, we are discouraged from performing non-virtuous or unwholesome actions which cause suffering.

Realising that Karma conditions and determines our happiness, we will refrain from unwholesome behaviour, to avoid the negative effects of these actions. Similarly, understanding that virtuous actions bear the fruit of happiness, one is encouraged to practice wholesome actions. The law of causality therefore promotes moral and ethical life.

For a country pursuing GNH, it is important to take account of Karma on a daily basis because Karma promotes healthy and ethical living, ideal for a GNH state. According to CBS, “for Bhutanese, an understanding of the dynamics between causes and effects are critical to each individual’s pursuit for happiness as it tends to provide a clearer understanding and cultivation of GNH values” (p.1). Understanding that the real reason for our sufferings is our own Karma (action through body, speech, and mind) serves as an antidote to all our afflictive emotions. Karma promotes the sense of helping each other and living in harmony with all forms of life. It is therefore important that a GNH society take account of Karma daily to promote wholesome actions for a happy society. The indicator of taking account of Karma daily is thus a reflection of Buddhist principles and is consistent with GNH values.

c. General Mental Health

The *general mental health* indicator assesses the mental health of people and seeks to monitor mental stress problems such as depression, anxiety, low confidence, and concentration levels. The CBS (2008) asserts that mental health is an important indicator for the health status of a population. Studies have revealed that mental stress can negatively affect well-being. Studies also point out that stress may alter the immune system and increase susceptibility to disease (CBS 2008).

From the Buddhist perspective, psychological distress such as depression, lack of confidence, and anxiety are the result of our own afflictive emotions. According to Gyatso (2009), the overriding cause of mental stress is self-cherishing –

seeing one's own physical and mental pleasure as more important than that of others. People who have the tendency to use more self-referential terms (I, me, myself) tend to have more health problems and earlier deaths (Dalai Lama 2009). According to Buddhism, it is our own ego – a focus on “I” – that causes us to suffer. Since causes of mental distress lie in the mind, the cure is also in the mind. Buddhist teachings maintain that meditating on emptiness can get rid of the notion of “I”. Thus, mental distress similar to other negative emotions is a result of ignorance, desire, and hatred.

The mind drives every action that occurs through the body, speech, and mind. The causal factor therefore lies within us. It is our ability to deal with emotions that influences the mental state. Since mental stress obstructs the path towards happiness, it opposes the goal of GNH. It is therefore important to assess the stress levels of the population to identify the risk group. Intervention by government and offering remedy (for example, offering counselling) and monitoring changes over time can help people pursue happiness.

Conclusion

From the very beginning of its development plan, Bhutan chose to ensure the preservation of its culture, tradition, and natural resources. This came to be called the philosophy of GNH, where spiritual and emotional well-being is afforded equal importance to economic well-being. GNH recognises that economic development without spiritual and emotional well-being will not bring happiness to people. The adoption of the GNH Index, with its seventy-two indicators, became a means to measure whether Bhutanese society is progressing towards GNH. The GNH index is now the most important tool in guiding the performance of the government towards achieving the goal of GNH.

The ultimate goal in Buddhism is to achieve genuine happiness. Inspired by this belief, Bhutan is the only country

in the world that officially pursues the state of happiness. The government believes that happiness is in the end what matters the most and seeks to create condition for people to pursue happiness. Happiness is not only worldly pleasure derived from physical comfort but also an inner state of mind, which can be cultivated through the practice of compassion, generosity, ethics, meditation, patience, and wisdom. This can bring happiness to the individual and to society. Although GNH stresses collective happiness, Buddhism states that peace must first be developed in the individual mind before it can contribute to others and the happiness of the society. Thus, in the words of Master Shantideva, it is not primarily the outer conditions of our life that determine our happiness or suffering, it is our own mind that creates the cause for happiness or success.

Humans experience many emotions, and narrowing them down to eleven indicators is not an easy task. There is a strong relationship between emotions and well-being. The intensity of pleasant and unpleasant emotions influences the degree of psychological well-being. Studies have also shown that emotions play an integral role in affecting the overall physical health. Emotions also have powerful effects in shaping and regulating social interactions and influencing how one appears to others. Like the mind-transforming practices in Buddhism, the key to a nation's progress lies in tracing problems and solutions to the root causes. The indicators under the psychological domain reflect Buddhist principles of happiness and their coherence with the Buddhist influenced concept of GNH.

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