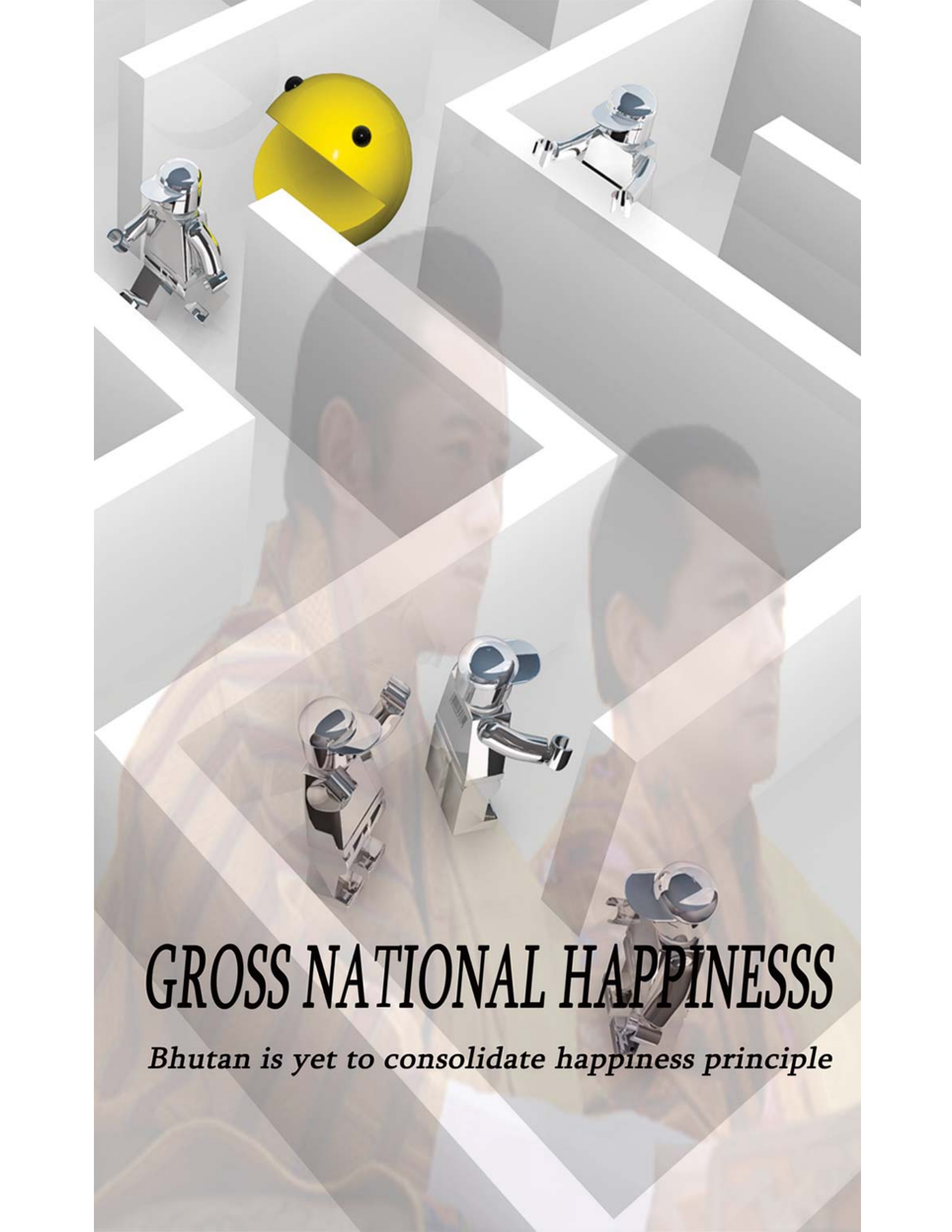


A 3D maze made of white walls on a light gray floor. A large yellow Pac-Man character is in the upper left. Several small, shiny silver robots are scattered throughout the maze. In the background, there is a faint, semi-transparent image of a man and a woman looking forward.

# GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESSS

*Bhutan is yet to consolidate happiness principle*



## **GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS**

Bhutan is yet to consolidate happiness principle

**Association of Press Freedom Activists**

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# **GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS**

Bhutan is yet to consolidate happiness principle

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## **Forward**

The story of happiness in Bhutan is patchy, shaky. Several policies that govern this kingdom today are erratic and divisive. Happiness-driven policies and practices are in absentia.

Bhutan talked much about happiness, told others to remain happy yet it failed to consolidate the principle within the country. While it is the constant fear and panic since last two decades making people accept what regime gives, Bhutan claims this suppressed situation to say it is the happiest nation.

Few western Bhutan towns like Paro, Punakha or Thimphu have been the instruments to introduce Bhutan to outside world. Fortunately, these are the places where the ruling class and the happiest people live. And it is no wonder to mark Bhutan a happiest country through surveys drawn from these cities.

The reality of Bhutan is expected to open gradually if, as claimed, democratic franchise really worked well. The early indications are no sympathetic.

The happiness debate, despite other realities on the background, in Bhutan has overshadowed the human rights violations triggered by state terror in 1990s. Since those years, the regime has denied any cultural and religious rights to southerners. Representation to government from eastern and

southern districts was banned until the recent 'democratic' elections where these districts proved detrimental in shaping the national politics.

Gross National Happiness was a matter of discussion since the last few years. We observed if things would come practically. It did not, it is hoped will not. That's the reason, a leader in exile explained GNH as gross national hopelessness. Later, while covering the elections, Nepali Times weekly, published from Kathmandu, said Bhutan but has gross national sadness.

Years of effort through sponsoring Indian writers to write in favor of revising tarnish image of government and the king begin to fade by the end of 1990s. This led to formulate new strategies under the cover of happiness, that had already been the subject of scholarly debates in western societies. Bhutanese monarchs see hopes to revise their tainted image being friendly with some citizens, this is not all enough. The best will a benevolent loyalty and respect to cultures and religion of other ethnic groups and elimination of policies like Tsa Wa Sum, One Nation One People or Driglam Namzha.

We have attempted to come out with the reality check report on happiness in Bhutan ahead of the fourth conference on GNH this November end in Thimphu to facilitate other side of the happiness story in this kingdom. This effort is not to prick the ideology but help provide a balance eye. The speakers of the first international conference in

Thimphu had cautioned government of its absolutism and lack of freedom in the country. Consequently, those suggestions were not only ignored but participation of those who made such suggestions were barred in the succeeding conferences. The conferences following saw ray of people praising monarchs and the regime which in fact will not help sharpen and purify the ideology. Seeing no respite over repeated praise of the principles with closed eyes to human rights violations and political suppression, we thought a rivalry thought must come to forum for debate.

We hope, the practice will continue on the succeeding conferences as well and we expect more help from our well wishers to critically view the principle of happiness if practically been implemented in Bhutanese society.

What you choose will determine how happy you remain. In a democratic and free society, choice is the birth rights. Informed choice makes you happy, not forced acceptance. Choice is your God-given right. Choose wisely, choose well, and by all means, always choose happiness.

Authors

November 15, 2008

Kathmandu, Nepal (In Exile)



# **Fragmented Happiness**

**By I. P. Adhikari**

## **Introduction**

Bhutan, well, emerged as a promoter of happiness parameter to measure the status of social well-being. Unfortunately, the country failed to ensure that the principle becomes part of the Bhutanese society. Bhutan talked much of happiness, implemented less of it. Bhutanese, in all, failed to feel they are happy.

Bhutan King's ingenious idea of Gross National Happiness over Gross Domestic Product to measure development has stoked interests among many western scholars and even governments. The fact is that the idea of happiness had evolved well before the enthronement of the King Jigme Singye Wangchuk in Europe and entered Bhutan in late 1990s. What Bhutan did is just coining a new term for it – Gross National Happiness.

Early philosophers have extensively talked about happiness in human society. The concept could not be transcended through generations due to increasing influences of consumerism and capitalism. Yet, search for happiness had not ended up all. Today, this has come up as an idea of fusion between positive psychology and economics. You

must be mentally sound and economically well to live a happy life.

Well certainly the pursuit of happiness is not a new concept; the American Declaration of Independence eloquently makes a passing reference to it as the right of human to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. Nevertheless economists have shied away from pursuing the path of happiness for long claiming that there is no scientific basis to measure happiness. But things seem to be changing.

Happiness in Buddhist, Hindu and Stoic sense points towards detachment and comes from within, not outside and this makes amuses among the western scholars. From that point of view, certainly the material development becomes pointless and of no consequence to actual happiness.

Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan, that make up most of the Himalayan range in Asia, have always been seen as the exotic place. The increasing tourism flow and exposure to consumerism of Nepal make it lost the idyllic status but Bhutan still holds the charm as the relatively un-spoilt and pristine place of nature. It has been exoticized as the peaceful and last remaining awe-inspiring places on earth in addition to the fact that Dalai Lama's closeness to westerners made them soft to Buddhism.

## **Driglam namzha and GNH: two diverse concepts**

Cultural identity matters when it comes to live in a multi-ethnic country. To be happy, somewhere a negotiating point is required to find balance between diversity and identity. As the world grows towards multiculturalism, social scientists feared conflict especially among Asian and African groups who have lived in closed cultural society for centuries. But, there is no solution that nation states are created just for a tribe or community.

In late 20<sup>th</sup> century, rulers in Bhutan popularized the slogan of nationalism in their effort for revival of Drukpa hegemony. A number of legislations and policies were brought in exclusively to be implemented in southern districts. The discontent in the eastern districts had not spilled off when the regime had unveiled these policies but the 1997 uprising in the east forced the regime to review number of its policies. Many of them have been made less effective while implementing to the easterners after that.

Government unveiled the policy of Driglam namzha in November 1989 with primary objectives of enforcing compulsory use of Gho and Kira, which are dresses originated in western Bhutan, to all ethnic groups living in the country. The instrument

was developed in the middle of the census that the regime was exclusively carrying out in the southern districts.

The policy makes it compulsory that citizens of the country wear gho and kira, just because they are declared as national dresses. The enforcement of the policy extended to such a grave situation that residents, especially in the southern hotland, had to wear even during they are at farmland. The policy is still in force yet its gravity of compulsion has lessened.

Driglam namzha aims not only to preserve the Ngalung culture and dress but wants it to be expanded to other ethnic groups as well, as part of the Bhutan-ization campaign. The policy contradicts with the basic foundation of the Gross National Happiness.

On one hand, GNH aims to preserve national culture, and to its paradox government takes steps to eliminate culture of other ethnic groups to expand that of the rulers. National culture of Bhutan consists of various forms derived from a large number of tribal and ethnic groups. Three major groups have different cultures and traditions. In addition to them, there are over a dozen tribal groups who practice entirely different social norms. In totality, Bhutan is a multi ethnic nation, consisting

of large number of cultures, customs and practices integrated into one to form a distinct identity of a Himalayan nation.

The notion of implementing ethnic policies is will of the rulers. It is impossible to satisfy the will, and we are determined to walk the hedonistic treadmill endlessly. We feel pain if the will is blocked. In *Aphorismen zur Lebensweisheit*, Arthur Schopenhauer said personality, with all it entails, is the only immediate and direct fact in a person's happiness and welfare. The Driglam namzha has come short of this value, diminishing the social position that a person holds. Many Hindus and Christians were demoralized by the government action to wear gho or kira even while performing domestic rituals.

Driglam Namzha is regarded as state's efforts of enslaving other ethnic groups and making them subservient to Drukpa ethnocentrism. Denial of cultural diversity and imposition of forced national integration policies through forced assimilation and racial discrimination have created for the Lhotshampas and other ethnic groups, a virtual apartheid of a western Bhutan culture.

## **Culture, Identity and Happiness**

Cultures is "understood as systems of symbols and meanings that even their creators contest, that lack fixed boundaries, that are constantly in flux, and that interact and compete with one another"<sup>1</sup> and is "the way of life for an entire society."<sup>2</sup>

Culture matters a lot when it comes to happiness. Culture is the reflection of social phenomenon and a person's attachment with culture is his daily involvement in social life. Being a social animal, it is otherwise to say, human being remains happy in absence of his culture and tradition.

Ed Diener and Christie Scollon, say, how we define happiness has as much to do with our cultural influences as it does with our personality, goals and other individual factors.<sup>3</sup>

The movement for religious reform in Europe was a glaring example of people's sentiments towards culture. Not only is this the matter of daily living but also the matter of identity and distinctiveness. In forming a cultural identity, people come to identify with and attach themselves to a particular set of ideas that are characteristic of their larger family. A strong cultural identity can contribute to people's

overall wellbeing<sup>4</sup>, which has been the most desired aspect of life by human being.

In the word of Ed Diener and Christie Scollon, what's perhaps important is that each culture finds its own sources of well-being and maximizes them.

Protection of culture has been distorted in the campaign of GNH by the Bhutanese rulers and their followers. According to the movement leaders, culture forms the core principle of GNH and it is highest ethnical role for every citizen to uphold, protect and promote culture. GNH commission is mandated to promote harmonious living – in harmony with tradition and nature<sup>5</sup>.

Religion is part of the cultural traits. There's more to religion than just prayers. In fact, the social aspects of organized religion may hold greater influence on well-being like culture does than just about anything else. For instances, sharing of greetings, hugging and staying together during Tshechus or Dashain adds more pleasure, satisfaction and happiness to people than they are in daily job schedules. Certainly many faces of religious participation make it a powerful potential resource for improving one's happiness.

Bhutanese rulers have in some instances highlighted the necessity of promoting national identity over cultural identity, contradictory to what

GNH emphasizes. In the post communist world where thoughts of multiculturalism have dominated, creating national identity exclusively through the cultural and religious dominance of one ethnic group is beyond imagination, rather people do believe in becoming multiculturalists<sup>6</sup>. And gradually, Bhutanese visiting western societies begin to feel the regime's effort to impose one culture for sake of creating a happy nation is bogus. They have seen happiness exists even in diversity<sup>7</sup>.

Cultural and religious identity is an important contributor to people's wellbeing and happiness. Identifying with a particular culture or religion makes people feel a sense of security in their community. Cultural identity provides them access to social networks, which helps to break down barriers and build a sense of trust what has sometimes been called the social capital. A recent study over 3000 identical and fraternal twins (some raised together and some apart) found that genetically identical twins reported similar level of happiness even when they have different life experiences – but fraternal twins did not<sup>8</sup>. They found that 44-52 percent of the variance in well being was linked with genetic variation.

Social capital has two aspects and the government of Bhutan has masterminded on bonding social

capital ignoring the importance of bridging social capital. So, when bonding social capital drowns bridging social capital, conflict is inevitable<sup>9</sup>.

And, fundamentalists' way of cultural identity expressed in the wrong way can bring barriers between groups or invite conflicts like in many newly formed nations. Bhutan must head not to this path.

Researches proved participation in religious and cultural activities helps people to erase negative thoughts. And more positive you are, the happier you would be<sup>10</sup>. Thus, religion, culture and happiness have two-way relationship.

Despite the fact that GNH aims to protect and promote culture and religion for overall wellbeing of the citizens, religions and cultures other than that of the ruling elite have faced array of pre-planned prosecution from the government authorities in Bhutan. Existence of Christianity has been denied since the establishment of monarchy while Hinduism is extensively discouraged. In fact, since 1970s, government has sent several Buddhist monks to turn Hindus in the south into Buddhists while those following Christianity faced inhuman treatment.

Protection and promotion of culture and accept the cultural identity of other ethnic groups is not

enough just through photo snaps. (It has the practice in Bhutan for king and the ministers to receive tika from Hindu pundits during Dashain). What people value will greatly determine what shape that pursuit of happiness will take. It is not the state that determines the form of culture or religion of its citizens rather it the individuals who have rights to choose that culture they like to adopt or which religion they follow<sup>11</sup>. It is not forced adoption but an informed choice that brings cheers, pleasure and happiness in people.

A given culture may be highly intolerant to some who follow other, forcing those to suppress their views, go underground or go into exile. Dissent may lead to the formation of counter-cultures that promote values that are more accepting of dissenters<sup>12</sup>. This has been the very case in Bhutanese context where cultural and religious suppression and prosecution created tension and dissent groups.

One of the propaganda that Bhutanese regime has been raising since years is that the country like Bhutan, owing to its geographical size, cannot withstand the multiculturalism and ethnic diversities. The regime has strengthened this campaign much after the formulation of GNH policy, and continues a slow and steady measure to compel other ethnic groups to surrender under one cultural

banner. Smaller ethnic groups like Monpas, Brokpas or Doyas are rarely now recognized as the tribal groups.

Countries like Switzerland, Denmark, Netherlands, Belgium, Kuwait, Cyprus, Bahrain and scores of countries smaller than Bhutan<sup>13</sup> have well maintained their diversities. Scandinavian countries, though smaller in sizes, have not only emerged as exemplary in democratic practices but have also projected their face as excellent combination of diversities still maintaining social order, culture unity, brotherhood and political stability.

Size of a country or its location is not wise reason while aiming stability and unity in a country, rather the matter lies at how rulers and actors get in touch with people while addressing national interests and subjugating external threats. Additionally, happiness is not an issue having links with cultural differences. Few researchers have said people remain happy in their cultural group while others say not. Trevor Philips says people are happy if they are with people like themselves<sup>14</sup>. However, World Database of Happiness by Erasmus University Rotterdam has different results from its research that diverse countries have been happier in average. Denmark, Switzerland, Austria, Iceland and Finland, all having diverse societies, top the list

of happiest countries. What the reality is people want to get attached with his or her cultural identity while still willing to intermingle with other cultural groups. This means, individuals must have the right to follow his or her culture despite living in diversity.

The claims made by the RGOB that Bhutan cannot resist diversity do not hold any rationality. In reality, experts in their researches have clearly stated happiness matters with the perception of each individual and their affinity to their culture and religion passed through generations.

Three refuge of Buddhism, Buddha (omniscient), Dharma (the spiritual law) and Sangha (the order) have been politically misinterpreted to mean Tsa-Wa- Sum or three elements of King, Country and People in Bhutan to suit ruler's interest. Any criticism of these three elements is considered treason and is subjected to death sentence or life imprisonment.

It is surely disappointing revelation for Buddhist followers world over that the Buddhist principles are being misinterpreted to serve the political ends of the Bhutanese ruler and that their great religion is being defamed.

History is a witness that identity has not withered away, rather the conditions under which diverse

ethnicities share a common social space have withered away.

### **Creation of one-tribe country: Utopian idea**

Bhutan inherits a heterogeneous history having multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious identity in the past yet the intensity of diversity is not as high as its neighbors. Historians have mentioned over dozen ethnic groups in the country, most distinguishing themselves from others only through cultural behaviors. Beside three major ethnic groups – Nepali, Sarchop and Ngalung – tribal groups such as Brokpa, Monpa, Doya, Tota, Bumthaps etc are the aborigines of the country. Though they have some links with Ngalung or Sarchop cultures, there are fundamental characteristics that differentiate them to be separate ethnic groups.

For centuries, Bhutan did not see any communal or ethnic clashes, nor are there any records of wars evoked by ethnic differences. A small uprising in early 1950s was the result of influences generated by the waves of political changes seen in India and Nepal due to interlink between the residents of southern Bhutanese to these countries. Isolation of northern Bhutan caused by the barriers of high

Himalayan ranges were major causes for lack of political influences on Bhotes.

Since 1960s, the Bhutanese government began making gradual changes in its policy for ultimate removal of other ethnic groups if they fail to assimilate into the Bhote culture. Bhote tradition, derived from the Drukpa Kagyukpa sect of Mahayana Buddhism, has its roots in feudal Buddhism, which with its central theocratic doctrine of Drukpa revivalism, is imbued with exclusive preference for Drukpa culture and mores and prejudiced against the Hindu culture.

Rulers yarn to make Bhutan culturally homogenous for which they unfurled various policies like 'One Nation One People' or Driglam Namzha and assimilation through inter-group marriages. Instruments such as Citizenship Act, Marriage Act and waylay census exercise carried exclusively in southern districts were meant to discourage southern Bhutanese to stay in the country. In other sense, this was part of the mission for assimilation – Bhutanization or else exclusion – eviction.

Bhutan stresses the need for a distinct 'national identity', but does not envision forging this identity to encompass the diversity of nation's cultures. Catchphrase like Bhutanese nationalism was driven in for debate to justify its racial policies of

annihilating culture, religion and language of Nepalis, Sharchhops and other minority ethnic, religious and linguistic groups.

Beauty of happiness lies in the harmony in diversity, love and respect to values and culture of other groups and tribute to friendship that exists in multi-culture societies. Respect brings harmony and peace and harmony brings happiness. As we walk the way to global village, absolute control by single ethnic group means demoralizing human values and waylay to democracy and peace.

Nationalism and national identity is not a product of fundamentalism rather product of harmonious existence of all those living within a territory. Geographical borders add little to our sense of nationalism when the world speaks of global village.

Bhutanese are forced to accept that Drukpa, state and Buddhism are synonymous. Rulers meticulously intertwined the monarchy with Buddhism so that the institution is imbued with a sacred and exalted place in the Bhutanese psyche. Bhutan projects other ethnic groups, religions and cultures as unwanted cultural elements of the foreign lands, which could rise as obstacle to its movement for revival of conservative Drukpa dichotomy.

Buddhism does not stress the importance of the rule of law, the government and communities, nor does it stress the importance of the humanities and arts, and it argues against science and technology as a means of improving life. Knowledge is not a necessary condition of a good life. Buddhism also lacks the idea of democracy. In short, this Buddhism is another negative philosophy of life, and is even more negative than classic Taoism<sup>15</sup>. In this view, we expect less that Buddhism is source of happiness philosophy.

'One Nation One People' policy and driglam namzha are the most vital instruments that government of Bhutan has in hand as part of the assimilating cultures and values of other ethnic and cultural groups. An edict issued for driglam namzha states that 'all persons not following this directive will be answerable to the concerned Dzongdags who have been vested with full authority to implement this policy'.

Through these, the regime attempted to teach people how to eat, how to sit, how to speak, how to dress and how to bow down before authorities in line with the tradition of north-west Bhutan.

Under this campaign teaching of Nepali language spoken by the Lhotshampas was lifted from the school curriculum by the end of 1980s. Failure in

Dzonkha resulted in the denial of promotion to next higher grade in schools, entry to Civil Service or denial of citizenship.

Throughout southern districts, where Nepali had been taught since the beginning of modern education system in this nation, all curriculum books for Nepali teaching were burnt in school compounds and Nepali language teachers were given compulsory retirement from government job. Headmasters and principles for all schools in the districts were replaced by Dzongkha speakers, without taking account of their educational qualification and other criteria set to take up that position.

In late 1990s, the regime initiated further steps to assimilate the southern culture. Residents from northern districts were forced to resettle in southern districts that remained vacant since the mass eviction. Names of many places were tuned to match the Dzongkha tone. This is part of the Drukpa revivalism movement that started in early 70s. The extreme expression of Drukpa revivalism and Buddhist fundamentalism has been manifested in the change of the name of places to wipe out the cultural traces of Nepali speakers from the state memory. Thus, the Nepali names of places like Chirang, Sarbhang, Samchi and Pinjuli in southern

Bhutan were replaced with Bhote sounding names like 'Tsirang', 'Sarpang' 'Samtse' and 'Penjoreling'.

Thus under this cover the Bhutanese regime contrives to not only to maintain its stronghold in national sphere of life but also to ensure that there won't be even small inroads into its fundamentalism from other cultures.

The government and the GNH campaigners must understand that one cannot live one's own spirituality while rejecting others' who do not share the same convictions. In a civilized society, the state does not infringe on the individual's rights to culture and religion. Religion is a medium of communication between an individual and God, a basic spiritual necessity inherited from the birth of an individual until his death. Bhutanese administration has no business to interfere in the religious affairs of its individual citizen. Bhutanese citizens must not be subjected to the parochial mindset of the regime depriving them from enjoying their human rights, freedoms and democratic aspirations, while the whole world enjoys them.

## **Economic prosperity and happiness**

Material welfare or economic prosperity, not necessarily, but has an important part to play in the overall well being of human existence. Human wants are elastic. The more you have, the more you desire. And it is precisely the luxury you prefer to have. The post World War II societies have grown their special attachment with monetary value because the cultures have developed in a way that a wealthier person maintains better privilege in social circle. Unless exceptional, there are hardly any people today who say he is happy with hand-to-mouth or with rags.

Researches revealed that richer counties are happier than poorer in average and wealthier section of people is happier than poorer, which implies the level of income has relation with happiness. But there have not been any indications if there is any kind of relation between increases in per capita income and average happiness level. So, monetary wealth adds to happiness up to a certain level, not beyond that.

Living in an environment of economic and psychological security seems to have a powerful impact on a society's happiness level. The fact that both of these attributes tend to go with high levels of economic development largely explains the

strong zero-order correlation between GNP per capita and happiness<sup>16</sup>.

Privileges and respects that billionaires get today have supplemented human desire for being wealthier. The consumerism and market economy that grew unprecedentedly in the last 50 years have instilled wants in human society. However, by mid 1980s, economists have begun their search for other side of quantitative economics, not just becoming wealthier. Questions are raised if material welfare has all in all capacities to make people happy.

Economics of happiness combines the techniques built by economists and psychologists. Psychologists came first to test the wellbeing and happiness in human being, and economists joined them later. The pursuit of happiness had been the subject for early economists such as Aristotle, Bentham, Mill or Smith as well. However, the quantitative economics that developed after the Second World War pushed the idea under shadow. As the capitalist and communist form of economic system failed to add happiness to people, an alternative measure was sought. The state was made more responsible to fulfilling the needs and aspiration of the people and new form of economics called 'welfare economics' was brought in debate that incorporates the values and principles of

happiness for citizens. Economic growth and Postmaterialist values seem to have strong impacts on a society's relative happiness level<sup>17</sup>.

Some economists relate the idea of happiness with utilitarianism. In Walrasian sense, people's choice of preferences of one over the other is linked with the notion of happiness. Happiness economics relies on more expansive notions of utility and welfare, including interdependent utility functions, procedural utility, and the interaction between rational and non-rational influences in determining economic behavior<sup>18</sup>.

Bhutan, where happiness ideology is claimed to have germinated, still counts its growth in terms of market value. Government's annual reports on national economic indicators so far have not attempted to measure the national happiness. The campaigners say, it is time for us to measure how happy are we rather than how much wealth we accumulated, yet during annual budget session, government presents the economic status of the country in terms of Gross Domestic Product. In the year 2007-08, government report says Bhutan attained 8.5 percent GDP growth rate<sup>19</sup> while other INGOs mark the GDP growth rate of the country as high as 17 percent<sup>20</sup> but government has not said anything about the degree of happiness that Bhutanese citizens have now.

Despite considerable attention from the international community and experts appreciating the way to measure the status of a country in term of GNH, the claimant founder Bhutan is still to implement the idea into reality. Instead, Thailand that hosted the third international conference on GNH last year, has begun measuring the happiness of its people.

Bhutan's 23 percent of the population live under extreme poverty – earning less than 1 dollar a day. The number would rise sharply under the new criteria as the poverty line has been raised to 1.25 dollars earning a day. Trade has drastically moved to positive lines, precisely due to commissioning of the Tala plant<sup>21</sup>, yet incomes from this have rarely reached the poorer classes of the people. Development activities have hardly increased while benefits, allowances and salaries of those at higher position in the government job have been swelled up. Demands for luxury goods have increased sharply while the country's dependency for daily consuming goods continues to grow.

Additionally, Bhutan still speaking against consumerism makes continued attempts to join the world's largest forum that aims to widen the idea of consumerism. It is expected, Bhutan would become the member of World Trade Organization (WTO) by end 2009.

Under this circumstance, it is more doubtful if Bhutan could liberate itself from the world of consumerism and wealth and take its path to happiness.

## **Democracy and happiness**

There are numerous facts that contribute the happiness of a country but it is difficult to isolate the impact that political system has on happiness. Democracy has not only become a political system but part of social behavior as well. Irate violence we observed across the globe is the lack of well functioning of the democracy. Political instability makes democracy weaker. We have observed that more stable the political system is and more functional the democracy, happier are the people.

Movement for democracy around the world is the pursuit of people for happiness. Politics determines the maturity of democracy and democracy determines the participation of people in the governance. A study by Frey and Stutzer establishes political participation is an important determinant of citizens' well-being<sup>22</sup>. According to them, there are two possible reasons why a higher degree of direct democracy may raise individuals' sense of well-being. First, due to the more active role of citizens, politicians are better monitored and

controlled, and government decisions are subsequently closer to the wishes of the people. Second, the institutions of direct democracy extend the opportunities to get involved in the political process. Experimental evidence suggests that people value this procedural effect in addition to the actual outcome of the activity. Democracy and happiness are closely co-related.

Democracy is the institution that maximizes human freedom. Every person may not be conscious of the linkage between free choice and happiness, but those who feel, they have relatively high levels of control and choice over how their lives consistently report higher levels of life satisfaction than those who don't. Free choice tends to make people happier. This is a driving force in the process of human development.

The claims are that happiness policy in Bhutan began as early as 1970. However, the democratic transition initiated by King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk faced set back with the enthronement of the fourth monarch. Most legislative authorities of the parliament were confiscated, cabinet of ministers was made more powerless and against the spirit of democracy, power was centralized to Tashichodzong.

Indian writer Bhabani Sen Gupta, whom Bhutanese royal family sponsored to write book against southern Bhutan uprising, has a long list of countries without democracy to question the demand for democracy and human rights raised by southern and eastern Bhutanese. She begins with the maxim that Bhutanese rulers, with specific focus on King Jigme Singye Wangchuk, have begun the gradual process of establishing grass root democracy but ends with question why Bhutan needs democracy if many countries not<sup>23</sup>. In Bhutan, by the end of 1970s, the culture of electing national assembly members through popular votes, family representative attending gatherings and raising their hands for person they favor, turn into the culture of pick-and-sent. In almost all districts, the political leaders were nominated by local administrators and in some instances few villagers are called to say yes to the nominee. After 1990, participation of southern Bhutanese in the political sphere came to a complete halt. Their involvement in decision making process, governance and village life was also substantially marginalized. The eastern Bhutanese faced similar actions by its severity fainter.

Democracy is not for exclusion but for maximum participation. Democracy is for accepting chaos of views and practices. Democracy means promoting pluralism and enhancing tolerance to others' way of

life and opinion. Democracy means sponsoring personal liberty, autonomy and self expression. Since the beginning of 1980s, Bhutan evolved for zero tolerance to multiculturalism, multiple views and pluralism in all aspects. Participation in governance and politics was based on the merits of loyalty to rulers.

Research by Freedom House has proved that changes for democratic system are not only the factor for people to be happy. It is rather the stable democracy and enjoying fullest liberties. For example, people in Russia were found not fully happy during its transformation from a communist state into democratic nations in late 1980s. Similarly, the transition of Hungary from a communist nation to democracy and open market economy, even as smooth transition as claimed in Bhutan, made not all people happy in early 1980s. As of 2006, a huge increase in Romania's level of democracy – rising nine points on a scale having a maximum of twelve—has not brought a significant increase in happiness<sup>24</sup>.

Mexico displays a pattern in which happiness and democracy levels move in tandem, with both variables showing a significant increase in 2000, the year in which one-party rule by the PRI finally ended through free elections while the democratic transition in Argentina that began well before in

Mexico did not cheer the citizens much. In Belgium move from unitary system to federalism also led to decline in the happiness level of the citizens.

With the establishment and expansion of the European Union, the democracies in most countries of the continent begin to show stability and maturity. Those who ranked low in the happiness index during the entry years have gradually improved their places in the list as the people enjoy the democracy fruits.

Freedom House has marked China as the most authoritarian state but WVSs show that level of happiness among the Chinese people is higher than those states who abandoned communist rules. China has gradually moved to market economy without liberalizing its political system and has achieved tremendous results in economic prosperity. If democratic institutions are the facts behind happiness, China should have the unhappiest citizens in the world. The fact is the stable political system. Some even say, it is not the democracy that makes people happy but the happy people make democracies. But it does not mean that democracy matters not. It matters.

Yet, new evidences from World Value Surveys support the hypothesis that societies' level of happiness is closely linked with flourishing of

democratic institutions. In the last 35 years of survey, Danes have always said they are very satisfied with their life. Deep malaise in Weimar Germany led to collapse of democracy, but a rising sense of well being linked with West Germany's post war economic miracle helped legitimize her newly established democratic institutions<sup>25</sup>.

Democracy, human rights and good governance are themselves an integral part of the idea and the meaning of progress and they therefore should be measured in their own right<sup>26</sup>.

Economic growth helps foster trust between citizens and the state, and trust is essential to democracy. That's why in nations such as South Korea and Taiwan, a spurt of economic growth has preceded democratic reforms<sup>27</sup>.

Bhutan has come late to join the intuition of democratic practices, thus having less fruits to bear for happiness. Most media reported when democratic transition initiated in Bhutan that people are not happy with the move and prime minister said the democracy in Bhutan is the gift of royal family<sup>28</sup>. This leaves spaces for speculations over survival of democracy and multi party political system in the country ultimately the existence of happiness in Bhutanese society in question.

## **Measuring Happiness**

Abstractness is characteristic of the social sciences. Since happiness study is part of the social science, it is harder to measure how happy you are. Level of happiness changes in short periods-victory and success bring happiness in you while loss brings you distress and sadness.

Social scientists say they have discovered to measure the extent of happiness in human kind. Their findings point out that our levels of happiness change throughout our life.

Positive psychology suggests that we need two vital ingredients if we want to achieve more lasting happiness: we need to be really engaged and engrossed and finding meaning of our life. Scientists explained this as doing interesting or worthwhile job or a project on which we really believe in.

However, the researchers' claims are not much relevant. Work really does not make people happier in all aspects. More works make you workaholic and unhappy. That's what has been the recent trend. People take long breaks from their jobs to travel abroad which they think makes them happier.

Professor Martin Seligman of the University of Pennsylvania explains some exercises for happiness such as disputation, which involves challenging negative thoughts and analyzing whether you need to be as negative, playing to your strengths and counting your blessings for the things that go well in your life.

There are efforts made in science to find ways to control happiness in the brain artificially. Traditionally, drug designers had prescribed ecstasy in a pill but neuroscientists today manipulate happiness in the brain.

In 1950s and 1960s psychologists through several experiments, including the experiment of Peter Milner and James Olds in 1954, pinpointed the happiness zones in the brains of rats and eventually in human patients.

In the 1960s, psychiatrist Robert Heath of Tulane University in New Orleans carried out experiments on human brains where he put electrodes deep into his patients' brains to cure depression, pain, and addiction. But search for today is not the happiness stimulated by drugs or artificial means but a brain that can react to worst and good situations.

Most people progressively become less happy as they grow older and this reaches a saturation point at 40s, which has been marked by the researchers

as the most miserable part of the life. Beyond that, people regain their happiness again.

Males are happier than females during teens but females overtake after that. Additionally, low level of happiness congests females in average life span compared to males. Both of them are happy when they are married than they are single. Kamp Dush and Amato describe in a large sample of Americans under the age of 55, that on average married people are happier than cohabiting people, cohabiting people are happier than the ones that are steady dating, steady dating people are happier than multiple daters, and the multiple daters are happier than the non-daters<sup>29</sup>. Scholars through such various experiments have developed formula which they claim can measure the degree of happiness in a person in a certain period of time. The formula can be summarized as:

$$\text{Happiness} = P + (5 \times E) + (3 \times H)$$

According the researchers, P stands for Personal Characteristics, including outlook on life, adaptability and resilience; E stands for Existence and relates to health, financial stability and friendships and H represents Higher Order needs, and covers self-esteem, expectations, ambitions and sense of humor.

The formula was worked out by psychologists after interviews with more than 1,000 people. Each person who completes the questions ends up with a rating out of 100. The higher the score, the happier they are.

Sex and victory are factors that make men happy while being with family and losing weight make women happy. Romance, pay rise and hobby featured higher for men than women.

In fact, there is no such perfect formula that brings lasting happiness in human mind because it has been passed through our genes that makes us return to our set points of happiness. With this conception in mind, it is no wonder that Schopenhauer thinks that happiness is impossible to achieve for a long time but temporary happiness seems to be a real possibility, although perhaps only for the happy few<sup>30</sup>.

Lionel Ketchian of Happiness Club says you can be your own happiness doctor. His formula is 'DOC' which stands for Decision, Obstacle and Choice<sup>31</sup>. Thus, your decision to be happy is negatively affected by obstacles and controlled by your choice.

Happiness = Decision  
– Obstacle + Choice

He says decision brings power and changes you from passive to powerful. Without decision to be happy, no one can ever be happy in life. So, the first thing to do is to decide to be happy. Anthony Robbins puts it well: "It's in your moments of decision that your destiny is shaped."

Any decisions are liable to have obstacles that relegate happiness in you. You run up against an obstacle to lose happiness. The simpler way is to take any obstacle to be normal phenomenon that occurs to all. That will help you not

Questions on which the equation is based

1. Are you outgoing, energetic, flexible and open to change?
2. Do you have a positive outlook, bounce back quickly from setbacks and feel that you are in control of your life?
3. Are your basic life needs met, in relation to personal health, finance, safety, freedom of choice and sense of community?
4. Can you call on the support of people close to you, immerse yourself in what you are doing, meet your expectations and engage in activities that give you a sense of purpose?

Add the scores for question one and two together to find your P value. The score for question 3 is the value for E, and question 4 for H.

The questions should be answered on a scale of one to ten, where one is "not at all" and ten is "to a large extent". Add the scores for question one and two together to find your P value.

From *Happy Formula*, BBC

relinquish your power. The last part is to add choice. The choice you make determines the level of happiness and power you acquire. Your choice, not your problem will determine how happy you will be even if you need to make choice to live with problem you cannot get rid of.

Thus, your acceptance to problem will bring back you power of happiness and you will be back to control the scale. Lionel's justification is similar to the Greek philosopher Epictetus (55-135 AD) who had said, "There is only one way to happiness and that is to cease worrying about things which are beyond the power of our will."

You can think of the happiness formula with Decision as the highway, and Obstacles might be the weather, traffic and construction delays or accidents. Consider Choice to be your steering wheel. As long as you stay on the highway and have taken hold of the steering wheel, you have the ultimate control over your destiny. The obstacles along the way increase your driving proficiency, and make you a better driver. By taking control, you are able to see that what other people call problems are really just life's little bumps in the road.

## **Selling the idea**

Bhutan's efforts so far are concentrated on selling the idea of happiness to the western countries. The idea of happiness resists consumerism while consumers for Bhutan's GNH have been the western societies who thrive on consumerism. Interestingly, Europe, the first land where thoughts of happiness philosophy germinated centuries back and America that incorporated the idea of happiness its independence declaration, are now pretending to learn from Bhutan about importance of happiness in human life.

The idea of Gross National Happiness did not get enough attention from present day scholars until the US media took initiatives to write on it.

Today, Bhutanese regime makes most of its effort to sell the idea but is less concerned that it has to be practical within the country. Within Bhutan, GNH debates circle only around select urban centers, more specifically in Thimphu despite the fact that people in the remote parts of the country live under extreme poverty and happiness has no signs in their lives. In that sense, happiness principles that Bhutan talked today penetrated the New York society but failed to meet Bhutan's poor populace.

The packages that Bhutan today sells of happiness do not speak anything about democracy and human

rights. Happiness does not prosper in absence of democracy and human rights, be it not necessary criteria. Liberty and freedom are not all, but essential components of human well being, for which civilization has so far directed to.

### **Question over founder of happiness philosophy**

On January 10, 2005 Nadia Mustafa wrote in Time weekly, "When Jigme Singye Wangchuck was crowned king of the Himalayan nation of Bhutan in 1972, he declared he was more concerned with 'Gross National Happiness' than with Gross Domestic Product."

Few writers today claim the happiness ideology is the product of Bhutanese king and project him to be the philosopher who crafted middle path for capitalists and communists. In his address to the nation during his coronation on June 2, 1974, he said Bhutan will grow from strength to strength and achieve peace, prosperity and happiness.

In fact, he used the term peace, prosperity and happiness in few of his addresses to national and international occasions. Peace, prosperity and happiness is a cliché of the political leaders we have been used to with from centuries. I scanned over seven dozens speeches King Jigme Singye has

given in his life on important occasions and nowhere he mentioned that his attempt was to find a new ideology of happiness. It was once in 1978 that he said the national policy will be to achieve happiness for people and the country<sup>32</sup>.

He rather in his addresses has stressed the need of economic growth, which according to present GNH campaigners is not the mission of the happiness ideology. They stress on economic development over economic growth for happiness to achieve.

In his most addresses to the SAARC summits, King Jigme Singye has laid emphasis on market economy whose basic aim is achieving maximum profits. He cited the over a billion population in this region and sought effort for taping the vast market of South Asia that can help create 'New International Economic Order'<sup>33</sup>.

Additionally, there are no records so far that this philosopher has ever delivered any speech underlining the principles, objectives and prospects of his ideology. Additionally, he does not have any article published or a book written to his credit.

The search for happiness had begun in the ancient age. Various philosophers have discussed the idea in their writings. However, the search for wider aspect of the subject did not get mainstreamed as

has been today. The story of happiness begins as early as the day of Aristotle as mentioned earlier. The prominent philosopher is Epicurus.

Epicurus outlines the view that pleasure and pain are jointly exhaustive: the absence of pain is itself pleasure. This implies that there is no intermediate state: For we are in need of pleasure only when we are in pain and when we are not in pain then we no longer need pleasure<sup>34</sup>.

The freedom from pain, which is, as we have seen, in itself a pleasant state, consists in the lack of pain in the body—aponia—and the non-disturbance of the soul, a state Epicurus called the tranquility of the mind—ataraxia<sup>35</sup>. He said people must be away from any form of trouble to achieve longer happiness.

Epicurus was an ‘unimpeachable ascetic who taught that “genuine pleasure” was not “the pleasure of profligates,” but rather the simple satisfaction of a mind and body at peace’<sup>36</sup>.

When the mind is free from fears, the body is content with natural satisfactions. You can achieve this state of happiness if you accept the four basic truths of Epicureanism, the so-called ‘four-part cure’<sup>37</sup>

1. Don't fear the gods
2. Don't worry about death
3. What is good is easy to get
4. What is terrible is easy to endure

There are various other philosophers that mentioned that foremost objective of the human existence will be to find the highest degree of happiness. But they differ on the way how it can be achieved and is still the issue of debate.

In 1776, American declaration argues for 'certain inalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and Pursuit of Happiness'<sup>38</sup>. In the U.K. interest in happiness was brought to widespread attention with the moral philosophy of Jeremy Bentham (1789) who argued that the purpose of politics should be to bring the greatest happiness to the greatest number of people<sup>39</sup>. The search for happiness in other parts of the Europe started as early as 1970s when the European Union started conducting Value Surveys in 1973, which continues still today. The European leaders have since those days stressed the need that primary objective of the government must be to provide subjective wellbeing to the citizens.

There are number of philosopher who begun studying happiness philosophy before Bhutanese King Jigme Sinye Wangchuk. Earlier stated, there were attempts to find through rat-experiments if happiness can be injected in human brains. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi says he started his research on happiness some 50 years ago<sup>40</sup>. Abraham Maslow, Martin Seligman, Ed Diener among others have spent their lives studying happiness philosophy.

Under these evidences, it is questionable to the claims of Bhutanese pro-monarchy scholars if King Jigme Singye Wangchuk was the founder of happiness philosophy.

## **Conclusion**

The Bhutanese regime destabilized the society in late 1980s to such a critical condition that consolidating happiness again here would take a long walk. Harmony and unity flourished in Bhutanese society until the late 1970s have now almost knocked off balance that building similar society under multiculturalism requires another few decades. Unless, the racist policies and legal instruments formulated in those decades are declared void, campaign for happiness around by Bhutanese politicians will bring little or hardly any cheers to nationals.

Three primary ethnic groups of the country are not in eye-to-eye with each others. Easterners and southerners still feel suppressed while ruling class see them with suspicion. Without filling up this gap, building confidence for harmonious living and inculcate trust, formation of happy Bhutanese society will be a distant dream.

The seminars and conferences so far Bhutan organized have been successful on building theoretical foundation for GNH. What it really makes to general people if practical approaches are not brought out that bring happiness and cheers to grim faces in distant villages.

With no systematic approach to operationalize the concept of GNH and a significant portion of population still under poverty or in a state of unhappiness in refugee camps in Nepal, it's clear who it (GNH) really makes happy: the regime.

## Endnotes

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# **GNH and Child Rights**

**By B. M. Dhakal**

## **Introduction**

Bhutan a landlocked country in the central Himalayas remained isolated from rest of world for centuries. Once ruled by Dharma Raja under the clauses of Tibetan Buddhism, it took over seven decades for Wangchuk rulers to open the door to outside world. Until 1970s the civil and political life in Bhutan went unnoticed behind closed doors.

With primitive fashioned government and semi-nomadic agrarian society Bhutanese populace lived in state of unconsciousness or sub-consciousness having no sense of civil rights. Children and women lived even at worst condition. The following text aims to analyze the situation of child rights in Bhutan in the light of GNH-a highly acclaimed philosophy believed to be superior to GDP.

## **Population dilemma**

Bhutan government does not have authentic figure of its population and varying estimates of the total population can be seen in the government publications. The department of immigration though carries out census at regular intervals, it

does not have scientific enumeration of the census data. There is no official figure of age-wise population or age-sex composition of population. So it is difficult to make a precise study on the situation of children on the grounds of their education, economic and social participation and development.

The population of the country prior to 1990, as the government claimed and presented in all world forums, was 1.3 million. This figure drastically dropped to an estimate of 600,000 in post 1990 period after the exodus of over 100,000 people from southern and eastern Bhutan. The UNICEF country report 2002 has mentioned the population figure of 657,000, which seems to be again a rough estimate. The same report has mentioned the annual growth rate of population to be 2.5 percent which is one of the highest in South Asia. According to this PGR, it would take just 28 years to double the population after 2002. There is no separate figure for children below fifteen years.

It is anomalous to have the decrease in total population of the country with such high growth rate at hand.

## **Recognition of child rights**

Rights of children are neither guaranteed nor the children given the awareness regarding the exercise of their rights. The pre-1990 era in Bhutan was not the period when the public could talk about their rights. At the time when citizens were not able to exercise minimum fundamental human rights, specializing on child rights was a distant goal. The UNICEF report has boasted of Bhutan being one of the first countries to ratify the Convention on Rights of the Child (CRC) on May 23, 1990. At the time when Bhutan did not have written constitution that could guarantee and safeguard the rights, ratification by the representative of the government did mean nothing to the Bhutanese children.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) recognizes the right of children to survival, to develop to its full potential and to be protected against abuse, exploitation and neglect.

The violence faced following the pro-democracy movement of 1990 is now a tell-tale. The military deployed to subdue the people's demand of human rights created the fear of persecution, terrorized the families with girl child and single women and produced the nightmares of gang rape. Minors were subjected to various forms and degrees of the physical, mental and psychological tortures along

with their parents. Children who arrived in the refugee camps with their families in 1991-92 have such horrifying experiences of violence.

While presenting Bhutan's second country report to the committee on the rights of child, Minister of Education Thakur Singh Powdyel, who also happens to be the chairperson of National Commission for Women and Children, mentions erstwhile king's message on the occasion of International Year of Child, 1979 which in essence was child right-promoting making them to live in environment without fear. But for the same king, it took over three decades to allow the constitutional recognition of fundamental rights in the kingdom. The constitution of Bhutan unveiled on March 26, 2005 and finally signed by the King on July 18, 2008 has mentioned three clauses specifically pertaining to rights of children.

Principles of state policy in clause 15 states-

*The state shall endeavor to provide education for the purpose of improving and increasing knowledge, values, and skills of entire population with education being directed towards the full development of human personality.*

Similarly clause 16 speaks about the free education to be accessible to all and Clause 18 states the

protection of child against all forms of discrimination and violence.

Child rights in Bhutan are grossly violated by the enactment and subsequent amendments of Marriage Acts. The first marriage act enacted in 1977 considered all children born in Bhutan as Bhutanese irrespective of their parent's nationality. In 1980 marriage act was amended and enforced with the retrospective effect from 1977. This act brought punitive measures against Bhutanese who married non-Bhutanese. The children born to Bhutanese fathers and non-Bhutanese mothers were not granted Bhutanese citizenship and scrutinized in the recurrent census after 1985. These children were not allowed equal access to free education, health, vocational training and economic opportunities. Even their stay in the Bhutanese territory was taken potential threat. So there was intended violation of child rights – the right to get love, care, protection, education, health and other social services. The same act continues to govern the citizenship rights of many Lhotshampa children till today.

After CRC, Bhutan has signed and ratified some other international treaties and summits like World Summit for Children (1990), World Declaration and Plan of Action for Children's Survival, Protection and Development (1991). Agreeing to such noble goals

at international levels took place when the government was directly involved in arrest, rape, detention and coercion of minors out of suspicion. It is therefore worth contemplation and fierce fully objectionable to what GNH should mean to all. At the time of making agreement to those summits, the country's parliament was guided to make decisions to close down schools, health units, asks No Objection Certificate to enroll in schools and so forth. So it received no recognition in the legislative or judiciary, in whatsoever gravity the treaties and summits required the child rights to be protected by the state parties. The national plan of action for children is said to be developed and incorporated in 7th and 8th five year plans, but with no substantial change in attitude of the assembly members, bureaucrats, police, judicial bodies and now the political parties is observed.

Bhutan has submitted two reports to the committee on the rights of child; first in 2004 and the second in September, 2008. The reports seem to be more manipulative and emotionally guided rather than the actual CRC implementation without a supreme law existing practically in the country.

The UNICEF report of 2002 has quoted the chief justice Sonam Tobgay referring the three pillars of CRC as non-discrimination, the best interest rule and participation to be inherent in Buddhist values.

"These social, cultural values protect the dignity, equality and fundamental rights of children." Had it been so, Bhutanese children would not have faced so much of violence and even branded as terrorists since very early.

Fundamental rights of children in monastic schools, who are practically the true followers of Buddhism renouncing their worldly life, are even at its worst. Children are reported to face thrashing by whip, sexual abuse by the senior lamas, isolation, and hectic schedules of prayer and religious observations, overburdening the juvenile brains that culminates to their one dimensional mental growth. There are at least 114,000 students enrolled in 343 monastic schools across the country. The water and sanitation coverage in monastic schools is worse. According to UNICEF there is only 23.9 percent water and 20.8 percent sanitation coverage in the monastic schools. It indicates a poor living condition and basic rights of these children are not considered at all or recognized in any of the document so far prepared.

### **Access to education**

UNICEF report -2002 further mentioned the gross primary school enrolment as 72 percent with 45 percent proportion of girl children. The figures are

quite attractive and probably of upper limit in south Asia. However for a mountainous country like Bhutan with limited infrastructures 72 percent enrolment in primary level is beyond achievable. The same report has figured out that about three out of ten children of school going age do not have opportunity to go to school. In its vision 2020 for development of health and educational sectors, RGOB has the target to achieve universal primary school enrolment by 2002. By this year, only 45 percent of girl children could be enrolled in schools including the poorly managed community schools.

Taking a glimpse of picture cited in the UNICEF report, it can be easily understood how far the presented facts are reliable. It reads---Bhutan has to go long way to catch-up with fast moving world. Schools are few and scattered across the rugged countryside, no electricity, adequate drinking water or sanitation. Children walk several hours a day to their class in rain or snow or through forest path infested with leeches.

The following piece of story from the same report will explain the situation of children's access to education:

*Its five o'clock but already dusk in a small remote hamlet nestled in the mountains north of Punakha in western Bhutan. The autumn light is fading but after a*

*hard day's work in the fields harvesting rice, twenty-one villagers aged 10 to 29 years crowd into a windowless room no longer than 10 ft by 20ft, sit down on the dirt floor and open their reading books. Ugen and Tshering ten year old boy and girl in the class could no longer go to formal education as their parents did not enroll them at right age. Great distance from the nearest school and poverty, the need f children to help in the house, if not in the farm, are common reasons why enrolment rates have been low.*

Right to education of children in southern Bhutan was grossly violated during 1990 and continues after that. Referring to the Kuensel of October 13, 1990, the RGOB had shut down 66 schools in the country located in the Lhotshampa dominated districts. Many of these schools –primary, junior and high schools were closed till last year. A few of them located in the administrative centers were opened for allowing the children of government officials, army and police continue their schooling. Some primary schools located in the isolated interior villages of south and central Bhutan are not yet permitted to operate even at the community initiatives.

Children of the families whose members were 'doubted' of being involved in 1990 uprising or have 'left' the country, were denied if admission in

schools then opened. There were cases of children seeking admission in private schools of Assam and West Bengal along the Indo-Bhutan border or take to schools in Kalimpong hills. The details of these children could not be included in the report for the reasons of their security, as they are still scrutinized by the authority.

## **Dropouts**

Schools in Bhutan bear usual tradition of producing a lot of dropouts even from the primary level. School dropouts from grade six and below do not have opportunity to avail any training to enter job market, because of their low qualification. They retreat to the primitive farming making redundant labor in agriculture. The board examination of grade six, eight and ten throw out students from their higher level of education by marginalizing them to low-paid jobs, stating they are not qualified for higher studies. According to Kuensel dated November 5, 2005, there were about 10,000 cases of school dropout during the ninth plan period. Similarly, dropouts at pre-primary level rose to 216 in 2007 from 21 in 2006 and at seventh grade the figures rose from 581 in 2007 to 673 in 2008. Additionally, in 2007, 257 students left schooling before attending their grade ten exam and 691 in

2008. In total, 2,200 students left schools before completing their five years of schooling. The dropout rate beyond grade nine stands at eight percent. On the other side, there are a number of unidentified cases of school dropouts simply because of their inability to afford 'Gho' or 'Kira' as compulsory school uniform or other necessities. To quote the UNICEF report:

*A 13 year old Pem Dorji of grade six in Phongmey Primary School in remote eastern Bhutan had to almost give up his study, for not being able to afford school uniform and other accessories. UNICEF supported him to continue his study.*

Presenting the second report to the Committee on Rights of Child (September 22,2008), Minister of Education Thakur Singh Powdyel stated the unhindered progress of achieving the MDGs in terms of improving access to primary education, primary health care and improvement in girls enrolment. As per the Minister's report the government is focusing on expansion of education, developing child-friendly schools and active career guidance and counseling in schools. In the tenth point of his report, he has mentioned of the integration of child protection issues in the five-year plans.

The report has admitted the constraint of financial resources to implement the CRC. The minister agrees that there are no adequate teachers to handle the children with special needs and there is limitation of resources to collect and analyze data. As a concluding point to the report he states, 'As we enter a new phase in the history of our country, the best interest of the child will continue to serve as one of our main guiding principle for action.'

### **Health of children**

Free health services available in the country are not accessible to all. Basic health units established at the grass-root level to cater the primary health needs of the public are often far away for the children to get the services at prompt. Infant Mortality Rate, according to the UNICEF report is 60.5 per 1000 live births, indicating poor health care services to the infants and expectant mothers. Though the royal government expressed its commitment to the goals – health for all and education for all by 2000, it is not materialized even seven years later to the target year. Most of the child deaths occur due to the preventable diseases like ARI and diarrhea. There are many people living out of reach of medical facilities.

Primary health care in the country is furnished by 29 hospitals, 172 BHUs and 465 outreach clinics. There are 11 emergency obstetric centers in the country that are too meager to provide the delivery or post delivery assistance. This contributes to unrecorded infant and maternal death.

In the consideration of second periodic report submitted by state parties under article 44 of the convention, it is mentioned that Bhutan lacks the comprehensive system of vital registration, because of which it is difficult to get a true picture of what people are dying. There are also high number of malnourished children; 34 percent of underweight, 54 percent of stunted growth and 7.8 percent of wasting. Malnourishment is linked to food insecurity. The health survey of 2002 has reported 42 percent of exclusive breast feeding. Prevalence of anemia is common among male and female.

The poor health condition in the isolated ethnic communities is attributed to their practice of seeking advice first from the traditional lama for rituals. It is admitted by the national health survey-2000 that one-fifth of the population do so. Less than five mortality and infant mortality can be expected to be even higher than calculated, given the low adult literacy, particularly the women literacy.

Service provided by the district hospitals is not satisfactory. "One third of the district hospitals have only one doctor ", is what the document of CRC has commented on the second periodic report submitted by Bhutan. There is urgent need to equip the BHUs with more staff and materials, need to increase the female health workers if service delivery mechanism to meet the health needs should approach GNH.

### **Children with disabilities**

Children who need special care were by far the most neglected by the state and the family too. The families to which children are born with deformities lack knowledge to take care of them or even have difficulty to identify the type of deformities. Treatment and rehabilitation practices of disabled children were non-existent in the country until the close of millennium. There is again no official figure of disabled population. The government estimate is 3.5 percent while WHO estimate is about 7-10 percent.

As an attempt to provide skills and rehabilitate the disable ones, Drak Tsho vocational training center was established in 2001. Whether the single training center can manage to accommodate the need of all handicapped can be judged only by the

detail survey of disable population in the country. Schools are not equipped to cater the handicapped children, and no mechanism exists in the legislative or judiciary to protect their rights.

### **Children born of night-Hunting**

Bhutanese women and girls, both educated and non-educated, in the east and central Bhutan continue to face a typical sexual exploitation called night-hunting. Women and unmarried girls become pregnant by the sexual relationship with strangers, whom the female herself cannot often identify. Children born to the parental home of girl and she has to look randomly for a male partner who can accept her with fetus or newborn infant. Legal status to such children is provided arbitrarily. The social recognition of the child is at stake. This is another form of child right violation that continues to go unnoticed and unrecorded in any legal and formal documents. (Refer Kuensel dated October 1, 2008 for further reading on the notoriety of night hunting).

### **Exercise of child rights**

Bhutanese children cannot be expected to be aware of their rights when the state has had no intention to

educate them about the exercise of juvenile rights. With the transition to democratic way of governance and endorsement of written statute, the children can hope to get some of their rights guaranteed. Documents in black and white, though prepared to consider child rights soon after 1990, and government representative sign on the international documents, it mattered none to the children in terms of practicing the rights. Wide range of child rights issues are seemed to be addressed in the documents prepared to present at CRC or CEDAW. Do child rights forums exist in schools of Bhutan? Or are they actively playing advocacy roles to sensitize the children and concerned stakeholders? These questions seek independent study on the status of children living now in Bhutan.

At home, in most rural part of Bhutan, children are overburdened with domestic labor helping their parents to look after the minors, tend cattle, sowing and harvesting crops or carry loads to the far-off market places. Means of entertainment are scarce for such group of children.

Travelling and excursions outside Bhutan for exchange of knowledge and information, interaction with children of democratic countries, learning values of democratic way of living etc. is out of reach for Bhutanese children. They are living,

in a way, behind the closed doors and open ground surrounded by wall.

Children's access to media and their right to information are severely limited. Child-friendly publications are non-existent. Kuensel is not available to all children and it is not the appropriate media for children. Launching of some FM stations provide little platform to the children and increase their participation in the show. This need to be further expanded and wider participation of children ensured. Private media is heavily censored, so they fear publication of child or juvenile rights issue.

### **Connecting GNH to child rights**

Quite a good volume of texts and literatures have been developed so far for explaining gross national happiness, yet no concrete parameters are set or tools devised to measure it universally. Bhutanese ministers and bureaucrats are constantly blowing the trumpet of GNH, at home and abroad. Three international conferences on GNH have taken place and the fourth one is in the pipeline for this November. Happiness to individuals is the fruit of complete physical, social, cultural and on top, economic satisfaction. A human being born on earth loves to live a free life with the possession of civil,

political and cultural rights; the freedom to exercise these provides inner sense of deep satisfaction and happiness. Many experts have even tried to measure happiness using various techniques but have concluded that happiness cannot be measured universally with the same parameters.

In the foregoing discussions, indicators of happiness applied to children are analytically dealt to bring about the true basis of happiness as applied or not to the children of Bhutan. Gross National Happiness for the children can only be ensured if the government practically translates the commitments it has made and actual freedom to children to exercise their rights. In the contrary, the children in the country are facing major setback in the process of getting education for all-round development, often coerced and threatened, in exploring their inner talents and participating in the national spheres of life. They are still unaware of the constitutional rights, and other acts/action plans/legal measures adopted by the government to protect them from discrimination, violence, injustice and exploitation. The duty of the state machinery to inform the children and allow exercising their rights is not completed.

In context to health and education status of children, the situation is grim. The government is not in a position to meet the basic health and educational

needs, let alone the need to expand the existing framework of education and health services. When the ministers are talking about GNH to be inherent in Buddhist doctrines, infants and under-five children need more attention to promote their health condition and save from imminent death. GNH can be realized only through the measures to prevent common diseases, malnutrition, promote safe motherhood, makes education accessible to all children without restrictions.

The woeful pictures of children in remote interior parts of Bhutan and children who faced state violence or even categorized as terrorists in verification are making a mockery of GNH.

Children who faced marginalization with respect to the participation in mainstream national polity or avail the opportunities provided by the state, can in no means owe allegiance or contribute to the process of GNH in future life. If child rights are not protected or institutionalized at national level and local level, there can be no human resource development and consequently no GNH.



# **Women rights and Gross National Happiness**

**By Deki Yangzom**

## **Introduction**

Bhutanese fanatically fantasy describing parents, "Kepai Yab dhang Tampai Yum", men as inseminator and women as the child bearer, better known as "Drinchen gyi pha dhang Jamchong wai ma", the grateful father and the compassionate mother, which in the scientific term, women are "Creator of the Universe with the Universe in herself".

Women have a mother's touch of softness, a daughter's duty and wife's love and concern. Women communicate and manage conflicts better than men. They have deeper understanding and sense of human interactions with the quality of emotionally intelligent and more sensitive than men.

The ethnic communities and different geographical and cultural regions exhibit a wide variety of social values that also have an impact on the situation in the context of Bhutanese women. But, it can be said without reservation that Bhutanese women from all groups and areas are exploited, oppressed and deprived of their right to exposure. The trends in the situation of women reveal a pattern of violation of the rights of women. Rights of women contained in several international human rights instruments are systematically violated in a myriad of ways.

The Royal Government of Bhutan ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Kinds of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) on August 31, 1981 with some reservations. On April 9, 1981, the National Women's Association of Bhutan (NWAB) was formed as non-governmental organization (NGO) for the first time with aims and objectives to improve the socio-economic conditions of women throughout the country. Even after crossing two and half decades of establishment of the NWAB, it never got the right to debate or raise voices on discrimination against women besides running the organization on a mere slow footing with meager guided plans limiting to cosmetic social activities that failed to penetrate into rural areas, where prevails underprivileged women society ever suppressed with numerous forms of abuses.

Had the provisions of CEDAW been incorporated by the government in the country's legal system, the need for the independent Women Commission at the national level would not have been felt so acutely. If an independent commission is established by an act through parliament, it will not only prove a milestone in women empowerment but also fulfill the commitment made by the RGOB to CEDAW. There are sizeable numbers of women who are well qualified enough to hold higher responsible positions. In the absence of all-powerful body like commission, women's voices fade into a mere cry in the wilderness and thus remain muffled and choked. Unless adequate number of women is represented in policy formation, decision-making and

in the important political positions, their existing dismal will only promote low women socio-culture.

International instruments and conventions in relation to women include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. In the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995, the RGOB among 181 countries had reaffirmed its commitment to human rights instruments, in particular the CEDAW.

All women should take their part, through participation in general community struggles, set up their own women's organizations and networks, locally, regionally and nationally breaking away the barrier to freedom of the formation of NGOs, which continues even after recent so-called democratization.

The situation of women in Bhutan today are the poorest, most violated, most oppressed; most scorned and most exploited.

## **Gender**

Gender relations focusing women's issues, as autonomous causes for empowerment and equality are still new to the socio-political framework of Bhutan. A section of the “modern” educated Bhutanese men and women seem to have begun to feel that the gender is an issue in Bhutan, although with a degree of subtlety. They are cautious about “sweeping conclusions” and call for more analysis on the perception of gender equality.

There is no institutional and state sponsored discrimination against women but there definitely is subtle form of gender bias in the system of society in Bhutan. The delicate parts of the gender bias existing in the society, which most people don't bring it to the surface is also less reported by the media. Although there is no gender inequality like in some Muslim societies, there are gender "undercurrents" that needs to be studied in our context. The moment we talk about gender, people raise eyebrows and people seem to take gender solely to mean women. The gender issue is an issue that confronts and includes men, women, children, community, culture and society. It is extremely important for everyone to understand what gender is all about?

Women's quantitative participation in mainstream procedures cannot automatically lead to their advancement and gender equality. The level and nature of participation is equally important to determine whether women are able to share development gains. The perception of women voters at a time when voices of equality dot the cityscape and their level of awareness on whom to vote make the issue of increased women's political participation of paramount importance. This becomes more pertinent because the psycho-social constitutions of femininity, which takes the forms of disciplinary power, connect women to subservience. The cultural logic that spotlights values such as cooperation is internalized by them. The values of normalcy and deviancy are established by the society perpetuating the idea that politics is too rational and it is

normal for women to follow the male at this juncture. Thus, the question of women and politics and the meaning of participation are inseparable from the broader framework of unequal relationship between women and men in all spheres of life that has further been internalized by women.

The biggest challenge for women in Bhutan are the “more subdued and indirect forms” of bias at home and in the work place. When a girl gets pregnant, she is expelled from the school in disgrace. What about boys or men who are fathers and allowed to study?

A gender pilot study on women in six Dzongkhags in the country, carried out by the Planning Commission, the central statistical office, and the UN agencies, concluded that “although the government does not allow over gender discrimination, gender gaps do exist in education and literacy, employment and decision making.

According to Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC) secretariat’s reports 2001, there was not a single woman holding posts in grade-I. With 29 men in grade-2 and 56 in grade-3, there were just two women in both the grades. Out of the 1,572 civil servants in grade-8, only 403 were women. It is evident that men and women continue facing problems of gender imbalance in this century as Bhutan is male dominated society. It has a lot to do with the influences of faith. Women by tradition believe men nine times higher by birth. Women are marginalized and deprived from social upliftment. Gender inequality thus prevails with us. There are no

efforts at the government levels to uplift women as equal partners in the mainstream of development.

I believe that gender equality and peace are integral and inseparable categories of Human Rights. Women's participation in all public policy making is a general necessity for a peaceful and just world and women's participation on peace and security are necessary for human survival.

Bhutan signed Millennium Declaration in 2000, committing to eliminate gender parity in primary education by 2005. According to the statistics book 2003, 48 percent enrolment in primary is girls and 52 percent are boys.

Official mouthpiece Kuensel dated November 22, 2003 reported on Bhutan's first report on the implementation of the CEDAW presented to 30th session of the Convention on New York in January 12-30 2004: "Bhutanese women do encounter a more subdued form of gender bias at home and in the work place". The report stressed the importance of creating awareness among the people about women's situation, discrimination, rights and opportunities and the other aspects of gender equality.

Bhutan fully accepting the CEDAW as the International bill of Human Rights for women, committed itself in removing any remaining social, cultural and economic barriers to promote full equality of women (Kuensel, November 22, 2003).

Kuensel on March 27, 2004 reported on CEDAW Expert committee recommendations of a meeting of the Convention on CEDAW in New York when Bhutan presented its first CEDAW country Report in January 04, that 'Women should be protected by the constitution, their advancement made a policy decision, comprehensive gender disaggregated data compiled and legislation enacted'.

The concern of the committee was more focused on the data collection and the legal aspects because the argument was that without any legal basis nothing would carry weight. Therefore, the emphasis was more on the establishment of legal aspects. The CEDAW Expert committee identified 33 areas where Bhutan could bring about greater gender equality. The CEDAW committee said that without organized sex-disaggregated statistics it would be nearly impossible to identify the problems accurately and implement policies and measures. The committee pointed out the lack of specific anti-discrimination legislation to prohibit discrimination based on sex marital status, family responsibility and pregnancy or potential pregnancy and on preventing sexual harassment at work. It was suggested that Bhutan should under all circumstances undertake awareness raising and sensitization of the judiciary and other law enforcement authorities about the convention.

According to a report on Gender Pilot Study conducted by the government and the UN system, they covered 200 households in urban areas and 2 blocks each in six

districts. Researchers said they had no access to certain districts in the south due to security reasons.

The report showed gender gaps in education/literacy, employment and decision-making. It revealed that, as economic options widened and households moved away from subsistence based activities women were not perceived as capable and equal partners in the new economic opportunities. In the rural areas, 80 percent of women could not read and write. The female literacy rate among the rural areas was 18 percent. The report stated that only 4 percent of the rural women had joined the formal education system and out of these 85 percent leave schools after grade VI. The reasons for dropping out were help needed at home, failure in exams, marriages and school expenses. The study indicated that women had less access to services. More men had access to training programs given their “relatively high mobility and interaction with outside market and resources”. The report also stated that women were active in the meetings at the village levels, but their participation decreased in the higher levels of governance. Basic reason being due to low level of literacy among the women coupled with lack of exposure and social perceptions where people feel that men would be more effective participants in public decision-making forums. Bhutanese women are shy by nature in the meetings and thus women are not taken seriously as decision makers.

I believe that women should be supported to enhance participation in the decision-making forums. To begin

with, conceptual framework of building a common understanding on the concept of gender equality within the system at all levels needs to be built whereby gender mainstreaming is possible.

According to UN data female work 60 hours per week whereas men work only 40 hours. This means women do more duty from home to office but their works are hardly accounted. Thus, discrimination begins from home and stretches to the working fields as well. In the traditional Bhutanese society, all the house activities like, cooking, nursing of children and tending domestic animals like piggery, dairy, poultry and kitchen gardening besides other domestic works rest with females, with males supposedly engaging in the external works.

Furthermore, Bhutanese women find themselves living within traditional and largely patriarchal societies, which dictate that the woman is subordinate to the man, from the time of birth as they preset females to be inferior to males, thus developing a clear notion of being subordinate to males. In some societies, girl child is viewed as child bearers and responsible to serve her father, her brother and during women hood, her husband and her family, including her in-laws. In most cases, women do not have any property rights, or if they do, they cannot inherit these rights. Women play a primary role in production, which are largely in subsistence agricultural communities.

## **Health (Safe Motherhood)**

Health is the core of human life. Human life cycle is a very complex phenomenon so people of different ages are to be informed according to their needs and limitations. Awareness campaign and legal provisions should be conducted to remove awful social stigma.

According to the joint health sector review 2004, only 9 of the 29 hospitals in Bhutan are capable of providing emergency obstetrics care including the caesarian. The risk of pregnant women not accessing to antenatal care is more in rural areas because of lack of awareness and the far away locations of health care facilities. As of April 2004 there are not even 2 doctors for 10,000 people in Bhutan. But if the government, our laws and we as citizens do not think about safe womanhood, will it be possible to make our dreams about safe motherhood a reality? For example, take Zhemgang Dzongkhag, where about 18,000 people live and about 65 percent are women, there are over 207 fatherless children in four geogs of the Dzongkhag. The Dzongkhag also faces the problem of increasing cases of teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted disease among women. Zhemgang has the highest number of HIV/AIDS cases. It is one of the least developed and one of the poorest Dzongkhag in Bhutan. Villagers live below the national average income of Nu 40 a person a day. Bhutanese women are victims of visitors from the center or government officials and such other demonic desires that lure the innocent and ignorant girls making them victims of sexual harassment. In such situations, do we think that our

Bhutanese women will enjoy safe motherhood when they are not given the right to be safe women? The RGOB has committed to UN to safeguard the rights of Bhutanese women and to remove the obstacles for obtaining their rights. Women in Bhutan face greater health risks than men, particularly, childbirth causes greater stress on women who are undernourished, anemic and suffering from iodine and vitamin A deficiencies. The majorities of women still give birth at home and are not attended by trained health workers, thereby increasing the risks further. Bhutanese women after delivering the baby have no time for rest as they have to do work in the house as well in the field. They hardly take rest in the bed for a week, which makes them weaker and much older than their age because of the exhaustion from work after delivery. Most of the couples are ignorant about reproductive health so they suffer from various types of STDs. The disease is mostly kept secret and they go to the doctors when it becomes worse.

The Safe Motherhood awareness generating programs should primarily focus on husbands, mother-in-laws. They should concentrate on birth preparedness and complications relating to childbirth.

A range of barriers limit women's access to maternity care in Bhutan. Cost and a weak transport infrastructure are two key factors. Many expectant mothers die on their way to hospital because of delays. Others die after arrival, denied prompt treatment by an overstretched system.

To highlight on the HIV/AIDS sector, there is need for immediate exercise to curve down the epidemic with priority projects to educate both men and women for preventive measures breaking away social dogmas and other barriers.

There were 18 Bhutanese commercial sex workers in Phuentsholing. As of April 10, 2004 Bhutan detected HIV/AIDS among 46 officially. Of them 8 died (4 women, 4 men). Infected age ranges between 20-40 and 12 infected HIV through sexual contact of 45. There are 30 married people among the infected. Most of them are in their 20s and 30s and one was a 15 years girl. The infection trends in Bhutan, like in other countries, were that the husbands brought home the HIV virus. 19 females mostly housewives infected with the disease out of 46 cases. Some HIV positive men did not practice safe sex with their wives and had, in the process, transferred the virus. Infected people were encouraged to reveal their HIV status to their spouses and, "despite a nerve-racking process" unprotected sex with commercial sex workers and unfaithful partners appear to be the main reason behind the rise in HIV infection in Bhutan. (Kuensel, March 09, 2002 and April 10, 2004)

### **Violence against women and law**

Domestic violence is not new to Bhutanese society although it is not as prominent or as serious as in some societies. Most domestic violence cases do not reach the police station because it is seen as a family matter. More

than 90 percent of the cases do not reach the court. But cases involving serious injuries or when the offender is guilty of repeated violence, it is referred to the court. The causes of violence are adultery; jealousy, financial constraints, alcoholism and lack of trust that give rise to domestic problems. Dependency on their husbands, hope for improvement, love and fear that the family will fall apart are some of the factors that prevent victims from seeking help from others. Many women are submissive and never share their feelings with their friends fearing her husband might know about the gossip. Frequent abuse makes them immune and after sometimes, it becomes a part of their lives – in psychology "learned helplessness". Bhutan's country report on CEDAW states that "there exists a culture of silence among women and their families when it involves rape and domestic violence against women". In rural Bhutan men feel that it is natural to beat the women to keep them in the right track (which means at his will) and such traditions continue ingraining in their children's psyche to be alright to behave like their parents to solve the problem.

In many Bhutanese households, physical torture on wives is common and polygamy and polyandry too prevails in some regions. These practices are brutal and seldom recognized as crimes and go without criminal punishment.

Bhutanese women constitute 48 percent of the National Population and are deprived of their fundamental human rights, their rights to be an equal, first-class citizen of the

nation. Such blatant and openly discriminatory policies are a direct attack on the very concept of human rights and equality. If a child fails to be educated at educational institutions just because of not having a national identity, then the life of the child in question changes drastically. It is not logical and definitely not in the national interest, which needs urgent attention of the parliament to rectify the errors in the supreme law of the land. The failure to grant equal citizenship rights to women and their children is a pressing matter of national urgency that has implications far deeper than that which greet the eyes at first glance.

If we are to progress as a nation and as a decent human being, government must bring about radical changes to its legislation, so that social justice is given as a bedrock principle and not merely as an empty declaration.

### **Connecting Gross National Happiness**

In the meeting for Asia and the Pacific, 30 October ~ 1 November 1998 Seoul, Republic of Korea, Jigmi Thinley said, “Happiness is a shared desire of every human being. It is possibly the ultimate thing we want while other things are wanted only as a means to its increase”.

With wide range of disparities of justice to women and gender in general, the government’s advocacy and campaign of “Gross National Happiness” makes no sense. It has perhaps drawn attention of the international community, who fails to see Bhutan developing in the

form of a “Human Zoo” praising the “Treasure of Rich Natural Environment”, which Bhutan is proud about and enjoys privileges of being supported for its sustenance. The popular banner of GNH has actually created psyche among the privileged society who relentlessly continue fascinating underprivileged diverse society with “One Nation, One People” dogmatic “Guided Freedom” and makes all out efforts to convince world community about the transformation of Bhutan into parliamentary democracy, which in reality is no more than changing the container with the same brew. With over one hundred thousand citizens displaced and living refugees’ life, and gross discrimination of policies in the socio economic development, the GNH is fascinated by the limited handful in the privileged group of people.



## **Debate**

### **'Only 12 dozens Bhutanese are happy'**

**Moderator:** Welcome to all listeners who have been waiting for radio program Saranarthi Sarokar. Today we have invited three guests to prepare this episode. They are Gopal Gurung, K. B. Khadka and Pratap Subba. With these three people, who have played leading role since 1990 for establishment of democracy and human rights in Bhutan, we shall talk about the Gross National Happiness. You are welcome to this show once again.

**Guests:** Thanks

**Moderator:** I shall like to introduce our listeners about Gross National Happiness before going ahead with the discussion. The ideology is claimed to be formulated by Bhutan's fourth monarch Jigme Singye Wangchuk. The ideology has been much talked after its first international conference in 2003 in Thimphu. It has become the issue of debate in world forums after the second international conference in Canada (2005) and third international conference in Thailand (2007). World social scientists are deliberating whether this principle can be brought into practice for measuring human development. Today's discussion will focus on if the GNH is relevant in Bhutanese and international contexts at this hour. I shall begin with Pratap Subba. Being a Bhutanese national, how happy are you now?

**Pratap Subba:** The situation within the country is not conducive to be happy. And as I live a refugee life here,

there is no point to be happy. I am not satisfied with the idea scholars are trying to find measuring rod for happiness in people. There is vast economic diversity among people in the world. I think, our king has formulated policy while sitting at his palace. It would have been more practical had he consulted the people who live in worst conditions in rural areas.

**K. B. Khadka:** The idea of GNH is subtle to listen. GNH is possible in those societies where peace exists and various ethnic groups live together in harmony. One-sixth of the country's population live as refugees and other large population have the challenges to meet their two meals a day. In urban areas, the government officials drive on santro and bolero and the rulers who survive through taxes paid by poor people. In this context, I think those living a luxury life around the world were amused by the idea of GNH. The word gross also means twelve dozens. So, only 144 people in Bhutan should be happy.

**Moderator:** Now I ask Gopal Gurung: how happy are you as a Bhutanese national?

**Gopal Gurung:** If you see the graph, I had never been happy in my life (like many Bhutanese). People live in the most remote parts of the country. Power lines of 11,000 volts runs up from their houses but underneath these houses remain dark in evenings. Though the idea of GNH is good, but it has been poorly implemented in Bhutan.

**Moderator:** Before I turn to K. B. Khadka, I would like to add a context here. In 2006, a group of socialists claimed that Bhutan is happiest among Asian nations and eighth in world. So, how can you say Bhutan is not happy when you are not?

**K. B. Khadka:** I think, the socialists have failed in their researches, because Bhutan should have been placed at the top of the list. In a society, where people cannot speak what they feel due to fear of prosecution, where you carry out survey among limited people in Thimphu having close links with royal family or influential leaders, how can you find there are still few people who are not happy?

**Moderator:** Might be the experts surveyed among the people living in luxury in Thimphu. Do you see any other reasons behind that?

**Pratap Subba:** It is understandable that people did not speak frankly even if they are unhappy under the absolute rule of the king. I still feel awkward to say Bhutan is happy. Repeatedly the borders (with India) are closed. Movements of people between the two countries are restricted. How is happiness measured? I wonder, whether it is measured by enough two meals and day's work. There are various ways how you can be happy: people cannot be happy only with money. They can build palace but cannot buy dreams and sound sleeps. I have not understood if GNH means the happiness of building a palace or having sound sleep in ramshackle huts in villages. However, the concept is praiseworthy if it is practically implemented.

**Moderator:** Mr Gurung, do think the philosophy of happiness can practically be implemented in Bhutan today?

**Gopal Gurung:** The government has to be committed for its implementation. Bhutan does not have any factsheet how much grants and donations it receives from donors. Bhutan is such a small even it terms of its population that donations are enough to run the state. Yet, Bhutan has big potential of internal revenue – hydropower and cash crops. Even the stones in Bhutan get their value. Government projects the per capita income of individual Bhutanese of about 300 US dollars. However, the residents in villages are unaware of this. It is far to expect happiness in people when they have not felt the winds of development. There is no rationality that people, whose children walk hours to reach schools, remain happy with the way they live. If the government sincerely distributes the foreign donations for equitable development of the country, happiness can prevail. In addition to that the regime must also exploit the internal economic potentials. The gravity of corruption prevalent in Bhutan is incomparable to any other countries. Hundreds and thousands are spent for a single visit of king. If such unfathomable expenses are diverted to the welfare of rural populace, this new concept (GNH) can meet its objectives.

**Moderator:** Gurung talked about development for happiness. Development is part of the GNH along with protection of culture, preservation of environment and economic development. By the end of 2008, Bhutan said

it attained 8.5 percent GPD growth rate and is considered the most harmonious society in South Asia. The income generated through sale of many hydropower plants can help build infrastructure development in the country.

Let me turn to Pratap Subba. In recent years, there have emerged little sparks of rebellion in Bhutan. If Bhutan and all Bhutanese had been very happy, why do you think such waves of armed rebellion came up?

**Pratap Subba:** The indications are to show all people in Bhutan are not happy. Whoever might have done that, the reality is absence of happiness in Bhutan. They might be happy with the concept of king but there might be other factors which make them unhappy.

**Moderator:** Mr Khadka, you had raised two things earlier – the sociologists failed because Bhutan should have been the happiest country in the world. Secondly, you said only those in the upper strata of the Bhutanese society are happy. How do you bridge the contradiction?

**K. B. Khadka:** I already said, they did not reach all places. Surveys might have been carried out in the areas already prescribed by the government. Let's consider, the surveyors are allowed to reach the villages. Here, everyone is clear, these villages are scrutinized to speak against the regime. We all Bhutanese know, the local administration orient the local villagers how to speak and what to say whenever visitors come to villages.

**Moderator:** What is the basis of your claim?

**K. B. Khadka:** There is no freedom in Bhutan, there is no democracy and there is no right to expression. People have to obey what the absolute regime tells, speak only those things which are instructed. We don't know the exact scenes how survey was carried out but the fact is, schedule for such foreign groups are prepared by the government and there are ample rooms for the government to prepare the grounds.

You can see the level of liberty. Only those who served in the government earlier were allowed to register their parties, others denied. This might have infuriated rebellion. We have read the news about United Revolutionary Front under the leadership of Karma, which could have been run by residents from within the country. The rebellion is the birth of compulsion and circumstances. It is not the result of someone's whims. The international experts might rethink of their assumptions on Bhutan after these incidences.

If the government really wants a conducive ground for GNH principle flourish in the world, it must at the earliest repatriate all those evicted in 1990, allow them enjoy their religions and cultural rights and create environment whereby people from all sections of life can appreciate the endeavor of the king towards bringing happiness in the country. Let it not be like the 'One Nation One People' policy.

**Moderator:** Do you mean GNH could invite division in Bhutanese society like what One Nation One People policy did in 1990?

**K. B. Khadka:** One of the components of the GNH is social harmony. Do you believe Bhutan has maintained it? The government has different policy to look at the Nepali speaking population in southern Bhutan still today.

**Moderator:** I ask Gopal Gurung, what is your study on social harmony in present Bhutan?

**Gopal Gurung:** Social harmony in Bhutan – before or after 1990 – does not exist as has been claimed by the government. And it is constantly eroding due to the behavior of the government. We have seen and faced what disaster 'One Nation One People' policy brought. All Bhutanese are not happy even inside Bhutan and I fear GNH might also bring similar consequences.

See the recent elections. The government denied registering Bhutan National People's United Party just because government saw majority of the party members are Nepali speakers. So, people under the banner of this party are not happy. It gave no hints that Bhutanese people can enjoy their democratic rights even after Bhutan endorses party politics.

**Moderator:** Mr Subba, what people expect from the government towards their culture, religion and customs?

**Pratap Subba:** In early days, people from all (ethnic groups) used to come together for Hindu rituals. Not politicians just pretend they respect Hinduism; smaller functions used to be- organized in Thimphu. People expect government would support to their cultural life,

help build temples and churches for them. Before we came to Nepal, villagers need to receive permission from local authorities to use a small function or use a loud speaker. People cannot derive pleasure or happiness when they had to undergo scrutiny even to pray gods.

**Moderator:** Now we shall see the international dimension of the GNH. Let me begin with Khadka. But let me insert a point here. In his recent visit to Bhutan, a senior official of the World Bank said GNH might be another measuring rod for development like HDI and it could be expanded as Gross International Happiness. Do you think the principle will get world recognition through WB?

**K. B. Khadka:** WB deputy director visited Bhutan and could have observed a silent society; no violence, no rallies, no protests. He might have seen lines of people along the Thimphu highway to welcome him. That could have injected him Bhutan has perfect social harmony. It is not impossible that it would get world recognition at a time the same king and same ministers are ruling the country. We can do nothing against it. However, it would be imperative to accept the principle of social harmony from a country which fails to harmonize its internal disputes. Can an idea of ruler who failed to bring harmony in his country does good for international community?

Yet, human being does mistake. Father, as head of the family must admit his mistakes and commit not to repeat such mistakes. King must participate in all religious

festivals; encourage people to use their own language to bring harmony. There was time in Bhutan where Nepali speaking students are restricted to next grade if they fail in Nepali exams. How good was that? The king must realize that 'conflict born in Bhutan due to my interest to force other people to follow my religion and speak my language'. The international community must pressurize the Bhutanese king to maintain ethnic harmony and peace in the country before embarking on propagating the idea to world.

**Moderator:** I like to ask Mr Gurung. The debate of GNH and resettlement of Bhutanese refugees came together in world forums. On one side, US government is taking over half of the Bhutanese refugees, and on the other side the same country is in mission to popularize the concept of GNH. Do you find any links here?

**Gopal Gurung:** In 1990 people spoke for their rights. To suppress the voices, Bhutan government used all means. Government levied taxes and the same money was used to evict them.

I think, third country resettlement is a temporary solution of the crisis. For a permanent solution and maintaining stability and to bring the theory of GNH into reality, the only option is repatriate the refugees. All donations must be sincerely utilized for the welfare of the people.

**Moderator:** Mr Subba, can you trace the link of resettlement process and Bhutan's interests to internationalize the idea of GNH through US society?

**Pratap Subba:** Happiness blossoms in motherland, not in a foreign land. Had the Bhutanese regime initiated to repatriate the refugees, the thought of GNH could become practical in Bhutanese context.

**Moderator:** One conclusion we have drawn today: GNH would get materialized well if Bhutanese refugees are repatriated and all Bhutanese nationals are entitled to liberty, freedom and equality.

**Guests:** Certainly.

**Moderator:** Our discussion ends here. I thank my guests K. B. Khadka, Gopal Gurung and Pratap Subba for their participation. Let me thank LWF for sponsoring Saranarthi Sarokar and our Jhapa correspondent Arjun Pradhan. Today's episode of Saranarthi Sarokar, jointly produced by Pathivara FM and Bhutan News Service ends here.

# **The Surveys speak of Happiness among Bhutanese**

We have taken samples from two kinds of surveys to measure the happiness among Bhutanese nationals: the first is through our site where questionnaire was uploaded for readers to fill. It was only for the Bhutanese nationals. The online survey saw 3692 respondents. The responses for each question from these respondents have been presented here in percentage for easy reading. We have not made any interpretation of the survey results and are left for the readers to take the glance on how happy Bhutanese people are.

We have also collected some survey results from other newspapers operating from within the country. Results of those surveys relevant to measure the happiness level are given at the bottom.

## **From the online survey**

### **1. Place of birth and current residence**

Place of birth: (the survey was only for Bhutanese nationals)

Current residence:

Bhutan = 69 percent

Nepal = 11 percent

Other = 11 percent

Not mentioned = 9 percent

**2. Your age:**

0-14 = 0 percent

15-24 = 13.6 percent

25-34 = 31.8 percent

35-44 = 45.4 percent

45-60 = 9.2 percent

60+ = 0 percent

**3. Educational qualification and profession**

Most respondents mentioned they have university level education.

**4. Are you satisfied with your profession?**

a. Yes = 40.4 percent

b. No = 59.6 percent

**5. Do you think there is need of change in system of your office?**

a. Yes = 53.6 percent

b. No = 46.3 percent

**6. Do you think you get adequate payment for your service?**

a. Yes = 26.1 percent

b. No = 73.8 percent

**7. Your observation on political changes in Bhutan**

a. Good = 20.4 percent

b. Ok = 56.8 percent

c. Not up to expectation = 22.7 percent

**8. How are political parties in the parliament doing?**

a. Good = 22.2 percent

b. Ok = 46.6 percent

c. Not up to expectation = 31.2 percent

**9. Your observation on improvement in governance after 'democratic' government took over the job**

- a. Good = 20.4 percent
- b. Ok = 52.2 percent
- c. Not up to expectation = 27.4 percent

**10. Do you think parties lived up to their commitments expressed during the election campaign?**

- a. Yes = 22.2 percent
- b. No = 77.8 percent

**11. Are you satisfied with the education system in Bhutan?**

- a. Yes = 47.7 percent
- b. No = 52.3 percent

**12. Are all your children attending school?**

- a. Yes = 62.8 percent
- b. No = 37.2 percent

**13. Which schools/colleges provide better education?**

a. Government owned = 45.4 percent

b. Private = 54.6 percent

**14. Do you have enough access to health facilities?**

a. Yes = 56.8 percent

b. No = 43.2 percent

**15. Where do you visit when you need urgent medical services?**

a. Private clinic = 35.5 percent

b. Basic health unit = 13.3 percent

c. Government hospital = 51.2 percent

**16. Government's decision to ban tobacco**

a. Good = 93.5 percent

b. Not good = 6.5 percent

**17. Do you think government responded adequately to farmers troubled by recent monsoon havocs?**

a. Yes = 33.3 percent

b. No = 66.7 percent

**18. Prevalence of corruption in politics, bureaucracy**

a. Increasing = 43.9 percent

b. Decreasing = 29.2 percent

c. As it was = 26.9 percent

**19. Do you have business license?**

a. Yes = 11.6 percent

b. No = 88.4 percent

**20. Is business sector growing well in Bhutan?**

a. Yes = 54.7 percent

b. No = 45.3 percent

**21. Tick three areas that government needs to improve its performance**

- a. Health = 5.4 percent
- b. Education = 10 percent
- c. Dzongkhag and Dungkhag Adms = 11.6 percent
- d. High Court = 10.8 percent
- e. District courts = 3.8 percent
- f. Insurance = 12.4 percent
- g. Ministries and departments = 13.1 percent
- h. Druk air = 11.6 percent
- i. Communication services = 10 percent
- j. Political interference in bureaucracy = 11.3 percent

**22. How fast do police reach the incident site after you inform them?**

- a. Fast = 20 percent
- b. Moderate = 32.5 percent
- c. Slow = 47.5 percent

**23. Do you think new government improved security situation of the country?**

- a. Yes = 40.9 percent

b. No = 59.1 percent

**24. Your first source of information**

a. Radio and TV = 30.9 percent

b. Newspapers = 50 percent

c. Friends = 9.5 percent

d. Neighbors = 9.6 percent

**25. Do government officers give information that you ask?**

a. Yes = 33.3 percent

b. No = 66.7 percent

**26. Are you satisfied with the water supply government has provided?**

a. Yes = 70 percent

b. No = 30 percent

**27. Do you have access to enough means of entertainment facilities?**

a. Yes = 32.5 percent

b. No = 67.5 percent

**28. Are you satisfied with the government decision to sell all hydropower to India?**

a. Yes = 62.7 percent

b. No = 37.3 percent

**29. Are you satisfied with the works of government officers?**

a. Yes = 33.3 percent

b. No = 66.7 percent

**30. Mention three subjects/issues that make you happy**

Health, education, political stability, peace and harmony, economic growth, media and press freedom, democracy and liberal society, entertainment, sports and adventure, solution of refugee stalemate, reading and writing and salary increment were some of the major issues mentioned in the survey by viewers on what makes them happy. 50 percent of the submitters avoided mentioning what makes them happy.

## **From Other Newspapers**

**Are you satisfied with the DPT's 100 days in the office?**

11 July 2008 (Bhutan Observer)

- No (54%, 133 Votes)
- Yes-very much (24%, 59 Votes)
- Yes-a little (22%, 55 Votes)

**Is the (Bhutanese) Justice System just?**

8 September 2008 (Bhutan Observer)

- No (82%, 194 Votes)
- Yes (19%, 44 Votes)

**Is the new (DPT) government transparent enough?**

3 September 2008 (Bhutan Observer)

- No (63%, 146 Votes)
- Yes (37%, 87 Votes)

**Is there lack of government support in promoting sports in Bhutan?**

9 August 2008 (Bhutan Observer)

- Yes (87%, 185 Votes)
- No (14%, 30 Votes)

**Should the political parties be funded by the state government?**

8 July 2008 (Bhutan Observer)

- No (63%, 67 Votes)
- Yes (33%, 35 Votes)
- May be (5%, 5 Votes)

**Do you regret now how you voted then in the last general elections?**

16, September 2008 (Kuensel)

- Yes 46.63% (630)
- No 43.89% (593)
- Can't say 9.47% (128)

**Should the pay rise be restricted to the lower cadre civil servants only?**

2 September 2008 (Kuensel)

- Yes 31.02% (495)
- No 65.04% (1038)
- Can't say 3.95% (63)

**To what extent will the Right to Information make the government transparent?**

26 June 2008 (Kuensel)

- To a large extent 67.93% (375)
- To a small extent 14.49% (80)
- Not at all 11.96% (66)
- Can't say 5.62% (31)

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