

## Happiness Index and Role of State

**Dr.Ashutosh Saxena**

Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Christ Church College, Kanpur, India  
Email - asaxena2k3@rediffmail.com

**Abstract:** Community and cultural connections always enhance people's wellbeing. The time has never been more opportune to reorient the goal of development towards genuine human happiness and well being of all life. The present paper attempts to focus on importance of happiness among people living in a state and role of state in enhancing the happiness level among people in general. The issue of happiness is more relevant today amidst the on going debate between happiness and economic development. The Bhutanese Gross National Happiness (GNH) index has been taken here as model of reference. Certain suggestions have been prescribed in the last as what India can do to adopt Index of Happiness.

**Key Words:** State, Happiness, GNH, Sustainable Development.

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

According to Aristotle, the great Greek philosopher, the idea of goodness is the goodness of mankind that is moral and ethical development of all individuals. Accordingly, the aim of state is to achieve this idea of goodness. Earlier, Plato and later on St. Augustine subscribed to more or less same idea about the aim of state. These philosophers always took state as a moral institution and not as a mere materialistic institution. The 'Value' index, in the context of moral and ethical framework, has been was the central issue among most of the early Greek Philosophers

During medieval period and with the emergence of modern nation state system, the strengthening of state through power politics and policies of imperialism emerged as prime objectives of state and, in turn, welfare and wellbeing of individuals in any form, materialistic or non - materialist, became secondary only.

Coming straight to modern times and particularly Post Globalization era: what is the aim of state and in particular, what the role is of state vis a vis individuals, is indeed very pertinent question to answer and study. The issue is more relevant in the context of Indian Republic because we, Indians, are in the phase of transformation from agrarian to industrial to technological and digitalization.

Ultimately, the issue is

- (i) where are we heading?
- (ii) Will state decide our fate and destiny and objectives of life?
- (iii) Are we entirely governed and driven by globalization and world forces and ultimately become the part of that race which is not in our hands?
- (iv) Can we collectively, independent of state, develop some vision for ourselves?
- (v) Are we really Happy and satisfied today

And a debate has started between Happiness and economic development.

*The issue is relevant today, as it is, indeed, disturbing that India stands at 122<sup>nd</sup> place in the index of happiness according to the World Happiness Report published by United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions network in 2021. Countries like Pakistan, China, Bangladesh and Nepal are ahead of India.*

### 2. Global Interest in Bhutan's Gross National Happiness (GNH)

*The old model is broken. We need to create a new one... In this time of global challenge, even crisis, business as usual will not do... It is time to recognize that human capital and natural capital are every bit as important as financial*



capital. It is time to invest in people... Clearly we must unite around a shared vision for the future – a vision for equitable human development, a healthy planet, an enduring economic dynamism. – Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary General.

### **3. Parameters of Happiness and why India is lacking behind :**

- Happiness is a holistic term which includes economic, social, political, psychological and other dimensions. In general Social Security backup, good medical and living facilities, economic wellbeing, greater expectancy of healthy life, cohesive social network and pollution free environment are supposed to be key indicators of a happy society, It is the responsibility of a democratic republican government to make all efforts to continuously work upon improving all these dimensions, but sometimes these dimensions are self-contradictory and inversely correlated. For example economic, scientific and technological development will decrease the social and personal relations. Increase displacement, Migrations and lack of interpersonal relations. All these are fallout of technological and industrial development. And this ultimately leads to unsatisfied life and thus lack of happiness. Thus a sustainable Happiness model needs to be developed.
- Idea of Happiness is also an ‘x’ issue. People in common have to decide what gives them more happiness: ‘Peaceful and comfortable co-existence’ or ‘Fight and Tensions among themselves’. Ego satisfaction or sacrifices for others. Love for all or hatred ness towards others. State can act a facilitator and can play a positive role and develop ‘Common Model of Happiness; across political lines.

It is an ironical fact that sometimes a poor person is happier than a rich person. Powerless person is happier than powerful person. So called advance person is less happy than a least developed tribal in remote area.

Actually, Happiness can be said to be a more or less a mental State. It is good that people have all means and ways to lead a dignified, safe, secured and meaningful life and State plays a major role in this process. This will definitely add to happiness but the happiness index encompasses something more than this. Happiness, infact, is self-oriented and more in performing your duties than demanding from state;

We must ask to ourselves: Are we performing our full duties/responsibilities towards our family, profession, friends, and society and to ourselves and if the inner conscience says yes to all this: one is closer to be happy.

It is noteworthy here that Andhra Pradesh is the second state in the country after Madhya Pradesh to start a Happiness Index Department. “**No government can be rated as successful or achieve desired results unless happiness prevails in society. We have to work towards achieving the dream goal of making Andhra Pradesh a happy state,**” Chandra Babu Naidu, CM, has often been quoted as saying.

Mr Chouhan, who holds a philosophy master's degree, has previously said that "happiness does not come into the lives of people merely with materialistic possessions or development, but by infusing positivity in their lives so that they don't take extreme steps like suicide in distress". And for all this, Organizations of Strong Civil Societies has to be promoted.

THE term "**Gross National Happiness (GNH)**" was coined by the fourth king of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, in the 1970s. The GNH's central tenets are: "sustainable and equitable socio-economic development; environmental conservation; preservation and promotion of culture; and good governance".

### **4. What India can learn from Bhutan's Gross National Happiness (GNH) :**

- Bhutan was the first country Indian Prime Minister Modi visited after assuming office in 2014. There must be something special about Bhutan besides being India's neighbor. Yes, there is very special reason why informed people go to Bhutan, that is its development paradigm of Gross National Happiness (GNH).
- Bhutan pursues holistic happiness, not GDP growth. It is the only country in the world that does not measure its progress in terms of economic expansion measured as GDP growth. Its development model is easily the most sustainable and is the envy of the world. No wonder the UN and global community looks towards it as a role model of sustainable development.
- Bhutan's holistic view of development has the potential to transform humanity's relationship with nature, restructure economies, change attitudes to food and wealth, and promote caring, altruism, inclusiveness and cooperation.
- Bhutan's former Prime Minister Jigme Thinley of Bhutan describes contemporary economic growth as empty because

- It is not adding value to human lives. It is a growth just for the sake of growth fueled by greed.
- Insatiable human greed – to accumulate wealth. It is clear that there is no sustainability in chasing ever increasing consumption in the name of progress.



-Today's global economic activities are only fueling the global warming and climate change processes which are posing a serious threat to the existence of humanity.

Bhutan was excluded from the 2021 report due to a technicality: Each country's scores are based upon detailed Gallup polls, but Gallup did not conduct polling in Bhutan during the required timeframe. However, the report's writers made a special effort to pay tribute to Bhutan, saying it "once again provided an inspiring example for the world about how to combine health and happiness. They made explicit use of the principles of Gross National Happiness in mobilizing the whole population in collaborative efforts to avoid even a single COVID-19 death in 2020, despite having strong international travel links." Impressive indeed. If Gallup begins polling in Bhutan, Northern Europe's hold on happiness may soon have competition.

World Happiness report published in 2021, Finland tops the list followed by Denmark.

### **5. What is Gross National Happiness (GNH) :**

GNH is a "multi-dimensional development approach that seeks to achieve a harmonious balance between material well-being and the spiritual, emotional and cultural needs of our society." Founded on the belief that happiness can be achieved by balancing the needs of the body with those of the mind within a peaceful and secure environment, it requires that the purpose of development must be to create enabling conditions through public policy

The idea of GNH was first proposed in 1972 by Bhutan's former king, **Jigme Singye Wangchuk**. Since then enhancing people's happiness has been the prime goal of the government. In 1999, the Center for Bhutan Studies (CBS) was established as an autonomous research institute for the purpose of '*promoting and deepening the understanding of Gross National Happiness (GNH)*'. It also helps policymakers define development strategies to promote the GNH.

### **6. The Idea of Gross National Happiness is Spreading across the World :**

The United Nations has been showing special interest in this development model. Here is the chronology of United Nations interest in the holistic development leading to enhanced human happiness.

- I. In December 2009, Bhutan's commitment to remain Carbon neutral was emphasized at the UNFCCC 15<sup>th</sup> Session of Conference of Parties (COP15) in Copenhagen in December 2009, through the "Declaration of the Kingdom of Bhutan – The Land of Gross National Happiness to Save our Planet." Bhutan's 2010 economic policy also reaffirmed its "green growth" stand.
- II. In July 2011, the UN general Assembly adopted the resolution (65/309) titled "Happiness: Towards a Holistic Approach to Development" initiated by Bhutan. This resolution states that:  
*"Happiness is a fundamental human goal and universal aspiration; that GDP by its nature does not reflect that goal; that unsustainable patterns of production and consumption impede sustainable development; and that a more inclusive, equitable and balanced approach is needed to promote sustainability, eradicate poverty, and enhance wellbeing and happiness."*  
Adopted by 193 members, it marked the first historical step towards globalizing the concept of gross national happiness (GNH) followed by Bhutan and gave some hope to nations and societies striving for sustainable development.
- III. Following up on the above resolution, in April 2012 Bhutan convened a high level meeting on "Well-being and Happiness: Defining a New Economic Paradigm" in New York. It brought together over 800 distinguished participants from around the world, indicating the universal recognition that development must be holistic and inclusive and must be focused towards enhancing well-being and happiness of people.
- IV. Then in June 2012 the UN declares March 20 to be observed as the International Day of Happiness.
- V. In July 2012, Bhutan establishes a Steering Committee and an International Expert Working Group (IEWG) to draft the proposed New Development Paradigm (NDP) to be submitted to the UN for international debate.
- VI. In Nov/Dec 2012, Bhutan's leadership role for environmental protection was recognized at the UN climate summit in Nov/Dec 2012 in Doha, Qatar.
- VII. In September 2013, Bhutan submitted its report titled 'Happiness Towards A New Development Paradigm' in the UN General Assembly. It hopes that the report will influence the UN's Post-2015 development agenda.

So, what is this gross national happiness (GNH), currently the hottest topic of debate in the international development circles?



### How is GNH different from other Development Models?

The idea of happiness engrossed in GNH is distinct from the western understanding of the term, ‘happiness.’ as has been put it aptly:

*“We have now clearly distinguished the ‘happiness’ ... in GNH from the fleeting, pleasurable ‘feel good’ moods so often associated with that term. We know that true abiding happiness cannot exist while others suffer, and comes only from serving others, living in harmony with nature, and realizing our innate wisdom and the true and brilliant nature of our own minds”*

Unlike the other development models, GNH is more comprehensive and has a holistic approach to development by having incorporated the innovative dimensions like *Psychological well-being, Community Vitality, Time Use and Cultural Diversity & Resilience* otherwise undermined in the other policy making frameworks. So this makes GNH a more realistic measure of progress which ensures a consistent alignment between what an individual aspires from development and what the Government does in the name of development.

The GNH paradigm concludes that economic growth is not an end in itself but rather a means to achieve more important ends – happiness.

Other initiatives, particularly in the West, revolve around plugging the inherent flaws in use of the GDP as a measure of progress. For instance, the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) takes into account over 20 things ignored by the GDP. It differentiates economic transactions that add to well-being from those which diminish it. It includes estimates of the economic contribution of various social and environmental factors which the GDP doesn't see. Analysis of the historical data indicates that the economic growth in the US has been practically stagnant since the 1970s.

### 7. India and Gross National Happiness (GNH) Framework :

India being a country with spiritual roots where people still adore beauty of mind rather than muscle power, the non-material dimensions of GNH – *Psychological well-being, Community Vitality, Time Use and Cultural Diversity & Resilience* – have a direct relevance. After all well-being and happiness are subjective experience; material facilities and surroundings may only create a conducive environment to enjoy satisfaction and happiness. In fact, all material development must promote some mental/emotional experience of enhanced well-being – else they are useless. Observation from around the world suggests that opportunities for wellbeing, life satisfaction and happiness are greatly enhanced when people:

- Live in safe neighborhoods where they can trust their neighbors rather than in high crime areas where they are afraid to come out on the streets at night;
- Have ample economic (job) security to provide the necessities of life to their families rather than live in poverty with the constant stress and uncertainty of acquiring food, shelter and clothing;



- Are healthy rather than physically or mentally sick or disabled;
- Have clean air to breathe, safe water to drink, green spaces for recreation, and healthy natural resources rather than live as “environmental refugees” in a world of depleted and degraded resources;
- Are knowledgeable rather than ignorant;
- Have strong social networks and a sense of belonging to culture, community and nature;
- Have sufficient leisure time to indulge in yoga and meditation for good mental/physical health;
- Have freedom to participate in the political and democratic processes;
- Have good, efficient, accountable and transparent government.

The GNH paradigm can provide the necessary conditions to enable people to pursue their potential far beyond the material acquisitiveness of the current (GDP growth) paradigm. GNH is a multi-dimensional Approach. It is a balance between material wellbeing and spiritual, cultural and emotional aspects of personality. The idea is gaining popularity across the globe and many countries including Canada, Australia, France, Brazil, USA, Mexico have adopted happiness index models in one way or other. In India too two states Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh have established departments of Happiness in their states. But, Bhutan remains leader and pioneer in this direction followed by Countries like Finland and Denmark.

## **8. What India Can do to adopt Index of Happiness**

- Happiness is subjective and more a mental state, but efforts can be made to quantify it as far as possible.
- This happiness approach is different from '**Benthanian Model of Maximum Happiness of Maximum Numbers**'. J S Mill had added qualitative inputs in the calculus of happiness, but the proposed model is more comprehensive and all inclusive;
- It is important to mention here that the happiness is not dependent on State alone. State being most powerful institution has important and decisive role to play but ‘non-state actors’ and ‘self-motivation’ are other key inputs in inducing Happiness .
- Based on Bhutanese approach, The Indian index of happiness may include (There is nothing new in it, it is only synchronization of various dimensions) :
  - Material wellbeing: including Education, health, employment and other economic and social activities required and necessary for a decent and dignified living. Social security system is also part of it. State has lot of public policies in this direction and there is scope for a lot more policies. But two things must be remembered here:
    1. Policies should be implemented honestly, timely and with commitment.
    2. There should always be scope for need and not for greed.
  - Community feeling or community vitality: we cannot enjoy happiness, when others suffer. A strong civil society is must to create a social security backup system
  - Living in harmony with nature: Contributing in creating ecological balance. We naturally feel happy when we breathe in clean environment. It is our collective responsibility to protect, preserve and stop pollution in all possible manners.
  - Preservation of culture and Identity.
  - Time use and management. It has been proved through researches that proper utilization of time reduces stress level and increases confidence.it helps in creating better work-life balance, gives more time freedom, opens higher levels of productivity, things in life become simpler and easier and improves energy level.
  - Psychological wellbeing: Psychological wellbeing is primary requirement for bringing happiness. Happiness is a mental State. A poor may be happier than a rich .This has many dimensions, some of these can be mentioned here:
    - Community living: which we are quitting today.
    - Lack of loneliness: Most of us are experiencing loneliness in today’s life styles. One can come out of self-created shell of FB and WhatsApp. Meet people, interact with people. The formula of '**Open up yourself**' will definitely boost up levels of happiness.



India must seriously consider putting into practice a framework similar to Bhutan's GNH ideology and later on being adopted by so many countries including many European countries,. Fortunately, today India has a dynamic leadership of Modi Government, which has the capacity to make things happen. All it has to do is to get rid of the follow-West mind-set.

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