The Confluence of Gross National Happiness and Policy Need in India

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Abstract: Maxim for maximization, happiness such notions been the center point of economic theories since years. The happiness movement represents a new paradigm where social, economic, and environmental systems are structured to encourage human well-being in a sustainable environment. In the South Korea, Dubai, Seattle in Washington, Singapore, China, Canada, Thailand, U.S. Happiness indicators are being used to collect data and the government is starting to explore their application to policy. In the 1970s, Bhutan instituted a policy called Gross National Happiness, which aimed to be a holistic approach in determining what should be prioritized in order to maximize happiness for both individual and society. As the idea of Gross National Happiness shapes up, it is important for Indian policy makers to engage with it in a proactive manner. This Paper presents and suggests a new strategy, which aims to explore a need for happiness policy in order to promote sustainable development in India. It will help to explore importance and relevance of GNH in incorporation of policy formation.

Key words: Development, Happiness, policy research

Introduction

“yavat jivet sukham jivet, bhasmibutasya dehasya punaragamanam kutah.” (Charvaka philosophy) means “as long as you live, live happily, once the body is reduced to ashes, how can it come back again!” Happiness is the ultimate goal of humans because it is the only goal that is sought “for itself and never for the sake of something else” (Aristotle). The Hindu philosophy of prarabdha karma amplifies the inter-temporal importance of happiness by stating that happiness is a consequence both of actions performed in the present and past lives (Srivastava and Misra, 2003). Happiness is becoming more and more important and today Gross national happiness is becoming a scale of promotion and prosperity at rapid growth substituting gross domestic product.

There is a fundamental issue that what contributes for happiness and wellbeing and it has been debated in all cultures for ages. Material wealth and affluence, fulfilment of one’s desires, human relationships, development of one’s potentialities and individuality, one’s own psychological state, faith in a religion and spirituality are some of the variables considered as relevant and significant in this context. However, their importance varies from culture to culture as indicated in many studies, which reflect the socio-cultural differences in the conceptualization of subjective wellbeing (Diener, 2000).

Joshi (2002) has observed that an upwardly mobile society that enables its citizens to achieve a high level of material comfort may not provide mental and spiritual succour. According to him individuals in a society can attain fulfilment, happiness and sense of achievement without owning a Mercedes. Hence, a society’s development indices should not be counted as high, even if it is affluent, if it fails to impart human values to its individuals. Therefore, he contends that any development parameter should reflect the influences of body, mind, intellect and soul, which are the four components of human personality.

A few studies in recent time show that economically poor and rich nations do not differ significantly in the index of life satisfaction. For example, a study by Diener & Diener (1995) shows that the mean life satisfaction scores and purchasing power parity (PPP) of poor and rich nations did not show any linear relationship. India with a score of 5 for PPP on a scale ranging between 0-100, obtained mean life satisfaction score of 6.70 on a scale ranging from 1 (dissatisfied) to 10 (satisfied). Similarly, Nigeria with a score of 6 on PPP obtained the mean life satisfaction score of 6.59 and China with PPP score of 9 has a mean of 7.29 on life satisfaction. On the other hand, USA with a PPP of 100 has obtained 7.73 on life satisfaction, Switzerland with a PPP of 96 has got a mean life satisfaction score of 8.36 and Bulgaria with PPP score of 22 has scored 5.03 on mean life satisfaction. Similarly, Indian and Chinese college students did not differ much from their counterparts in affluent countries, in terms of how often they think about life satisfaction and happiness, or how important is life
The original four pillars of GNH philosophy are:
1. The promotion of sustainable development
2. Promotion of good governance
3. Eradication of poverty
4. Protection and promotion of culture and heritage

These pillars are designed to support the overall goal of creating a society in which the happiness of the collective is the primary focus. It is based on the belief that material wealth alone is not sufficient to bring happiness, and that more is needed to ensure a balanced and sustainable development. The concept of GNH reflects a holistic approach that values both objective and subjective measures of progress, emphasizing the importance of non-quantifiable dimensions of development. It takes into account the need for growth that is equitable, sustainable, and inclusive, enabling citizens to lead the good life.

The Rise of Happiness in Economics

Over the centuries, happiness has been relegated to the private realm, while provisions of many other goods and services of public nature were brought to the fore of the public realm. These goods and services have even begun to substitute collective happiness as ends in themselves. Like the concept of justice, happiness is a public good, and although it is experienced subjectively, happiness is influenced by a frame of reference. In that sense it is partly relative to a person’s experiences with respect to others and with respect to the past. However, and more importantly, it is relational in character. Happiness is more relational than relative because the quality and depth of relationships with others influences our happiness far more than a comparative possession of a commodity. It reaches beyond the pleasure-threshold of commodity possession.

However, things changed dramatically with the evolution of welfare economics. From Adam Smith to Arthur Cecil Pigou (one of the founding fathers of contemporary welfare economics), Alfred Marshall, Vilfredo Pareto, , Paul Samuelson many economists have been giving importance to happiness in their theories, research or views.

Since the 1970s things have changed once more. Along with a greater optimism about the possibility of interpersonal comparison of utilities, an increasing number of economists are getting interested in happiness. Furthermore, moral philosophers have never ceased to be interested in happiness, and more recently, with a trend similar to that of economists, psychologists too have carried out intensive research on happiness. As a result, happiness is at the moment at the core of a comprehensive research programme which involves not only economists, but also philosophers, psychologists and social scientists in general.

The economics of happiness is supposed to support the old wisdom according to which money, after all, is not that crucial to people’s happiness. Happiness economics study the relationship between individual satisfaction (well-being) and socioeconomic conditions to help governments design better public policies. Richard Easterlin was the first modern economist to re-visit the concept of happiness.

The United Nations resolution 65/309 on happiness – which was co-sponsored by 68 countries – was adopted by consensus in July 2011. The ‘happiness resolution’ stated that gross domestic product (GDP) alone is not an adequate measure of human prosperity and that “a more inclusive, equitable and balanced approach is needed to promote sustainability, eradicate poverty, and enhance wellbeing.”

Gross national happiness

Until the mid-1970s there was no formal policy, anywhere in the world, that placed happiness at the heart of a ruling philosophy. In 1972 the phrase “gross national happiness” or (GNH) was coined by Bhutan’s fourth Dragon King, Jigme Singye Wangchuck at a conference in 1972. Later in January 2010- Center of Bhutan Studies launches the Bhutan GNH Index furthermore GNH was accepted by 193 countries in the United Nations (2011) as the new economic paradigm.

GNH is premised on the belief that happiness is the ultimate desire of every individual, and by extension, the responsibility and purpose of the state is to create the necessary conditions that enable citizens to lead the good life. As such, GNH supports the notion that happiness pursued and realized within the context of the greater good of society offer the best possibility for sustained happiness of the individual. To this end, GNH stresses collective happiness to be addressed directly through public policies in which happiness becomes an explicit criterion in development projects and programmes.

It is based on the conviction that material wealth alone does not bring happiness, or ensure the contentment and wellbeing of the people and that economic growth and modernization should not be at the expense of the people’s quality of life or traditional values. It is a holistic development philosophy which balances physical and spiritual wellbeing of the people and values both objective and subjective measures of progress. It takes into account both objective, quantifiable and subjective, non-quantifiable dimensions of development. Overall, GNH means the creation of a society or nation in which collective happiness is the goal of governance. The purpose of government is to create more collective happiness.

The original four pillars of GNH philosophy are:

1. The promotion of sustainable development
2. Preservation and promotion of cultural values
3. Conservation of the natural environment
4. Establishment of good governance

**Good Governance** is considered pillars for happiness because it determines the conditions in which citizen thrive. While policies and programs that are developed in a nation are generally in line with the values of GNH, there are also a number of tools and processes employed to ensure the values are indeed embedded in social policy. **Sustainable and socio economic development** a thriving GNH economy must value social and economic contributions of households and families, free time and leisure given the roles of these factors in Happiness. **Preservation and promotion of culture** happiness is believed to be contributed to by the preserving the Bhutanese culture. Developing cultural resilience, which can be understood as the culture’s capacity to maintain and develop cultural identity, knowledge and practices, and able to overcome challenges and difficulties from other norms and ideals. **Environmental Conservation** is considered a key contribution to GNH because in addition to providing critical services such as water and energy, the environment is believed to contribute to aesthetic and other stimulus that can be directly healing to people who enjoy vivid colours and light, untainted breeze and silence in nature’s sound.

These four pillars divided into 9 general contributors (Givel 2015), which articulate the different elements of GNH in detail and form the basis of GNH measurement, indices and screening tools.

- Living standards
- Education
- Health
- Environment
- Community Vitality
- Time-use
- Psychological well-being
- Good Governance
- Cultural resilience and promotion

From 2007 to 2014 Thailand, Canada, South Korea, United Kingdom, Dubai, Seattle in Washington, Singapore, China, Canada, launched their happiness index. Many governments around the world are considering measures of happiness as alternatives to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the purpose of guiding economic policy making.

**INDIA and Gross Nation Happiness:**

The understanding of GNH at present remains vague in India. Ideas do play an important role in informing policies. India is an ancient civilization and a reservoir of the world’s major religions, cultures and environmental heritage. It also has tremendous scientific, technological and economic strength. As India transforms into a superpower, the changes that are likely to come in the next decades are unimaginable. When this happens, the use of traditional measures for progress and growth for a nation of such diversity, vast area and population may not be adequate. India may need its own version of GNH indicators that incorporates the unique character and composition of its people. Such a measure will help to ensure that India’s immense diversity is addressed, so that the rewards of development will be shared equally, social capital preserved, environmental and cultural heritage strengthened and the nation becomes stronger and more united, even as it undergoes an explosion of rapid economic growth and change. We are still deeply rooted with many social problems like as poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, child labour, population, lack of healthcare facilities and other issues like people are not happy with policies, a lot of anxiety, unhappiness, lack of inner peacefulness of people, the controversies, race to richness. Loosing work culture, loosing identity, corruption, also ecological degradation many more such problems are here. Presently a few key initiatives are being taken in India towards happiness movement.

We need a three layer happiness policy where not only government can take decision before making any policy by taking feedback of local citizens but also as the same time government can check whether the policy implemented in right way or not. it can be on central, state or panchayat level.

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- Meghalaya govt. planned to adopt GNH concept
- While Goa govt. in their vision document 2035 decide to work on GNH concept with having four pillers as Cultured Goa, Sustainable Goa, Well Governed Goa, Happy Goa.
- Indian government in their policy initiative towards environment cleanliness, to present a better picture of India and to make it a good
place to live, using different ways like Swachhata Abhiyan,
✓ Odd-Even Formula,
✓ Policies to avoid depression, suicidal behavior of students in coaching institutes in kota, where happiness has been placed centered in policies.
✓ In April 2016 Madhya Pradesh government also shown interest to work on gross national happiness concept and create an Ananda ministry
✓ A few private spiritual organisations solely working in this directions like Paavan chintan dhara, Art of living, patanjali yog piitha, ishayog foundation, brahmukumari university,Gandhian peace foundation, Jaipur peace foundation

While Venezuela, Ecuador, UAE, Bhutan has happiness ministries we officially haven’t given priority on this important aspect. This is the right time to efficiently work on this for government of India.

Conclusion

This happiness approach focuses on human behaviour or consumption management which is the demand side of sustainable development. Many governments around the world are considering measures of happiness as alternatives to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the purpose of guiding economic policy making towards growth and development.

This paper suggests holistic approach of happiness for development and growth through various measures that provides inner happiness as a foundation for a nation to make policies. As a result, this paper purposes the new concept towards policy initiative.

References