



Original paper

Culture, Gross National Happiness and Disasters: Strategies for preparedness and Management of Disasters in Bhutan

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Abstract Disasters are inevitable especially those caused by natural calamities. The severity of a disaster depends on the preparedness of people and their mindset to deal with such calamities positively instead of creating chaotic situations out of them. The externalities cause disasters that result in crisis situations and many times they are environmental as well. There are ways through which an environmental imbalance can be avoided. However, individuals need to be taught how to deal with calamities through their rich cultural values. Bhutan is a country of rich cultural heritage. This constitutes one of its greatest strengths. According to Gross National Happiness (GNH) literature, cultural heritage is considered one of the four pillars of GNH.

Public Policy initiatives have to be designed in such a way that individuals are encouraged to engage themselves in decision making and implementation of the decisions with honest intentions so that such prescribed guidelines are followed strictly to avoid crisis situations. In order to mitigate the influence of the calamities, individuals have to be oriented towards such occurrences at other similar places so that there is proper preparedness in the minds of individuals.

This paper is divided in four parts. The first part deals with the importance of culture and cultural values. The second part discusses the concept of GNH. The third concentrates on disasters and the aftermath, and the fourth part tries to link culture and GNH with disaster management and suggests measures to follow for preparedness for occurrences of disasters or/and to deal with its victims.

Key words Disaster, GNH, Well-Being, Bhutan, Cultural Values.

1. IMPORTANCE OF CULTURE AND CULTURAL VALUES

Culture plays an important role in shaping the mindset and guiding the pathways people follow. It has an inherent value to deal with all circumstances irrespective of their nature. The cultural wisdom is so rich in its content and practices that whenever people are having problems or encounter difficult situations they look for solutions through their spiritual value system. It is in this context that culture as such becomes so important to be protected. The responsibility to protect it lies with different stakeholders, more so with the

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respective governments to spread its importance through proper educational modes and through public policy systems. The decision makers involved in public policy must study the impact of such prospective policies on the culture and should make sure that such policies do not in any way go against cultural wisdom of different religions prevalent and different sects/tribes or groups of people.

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

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

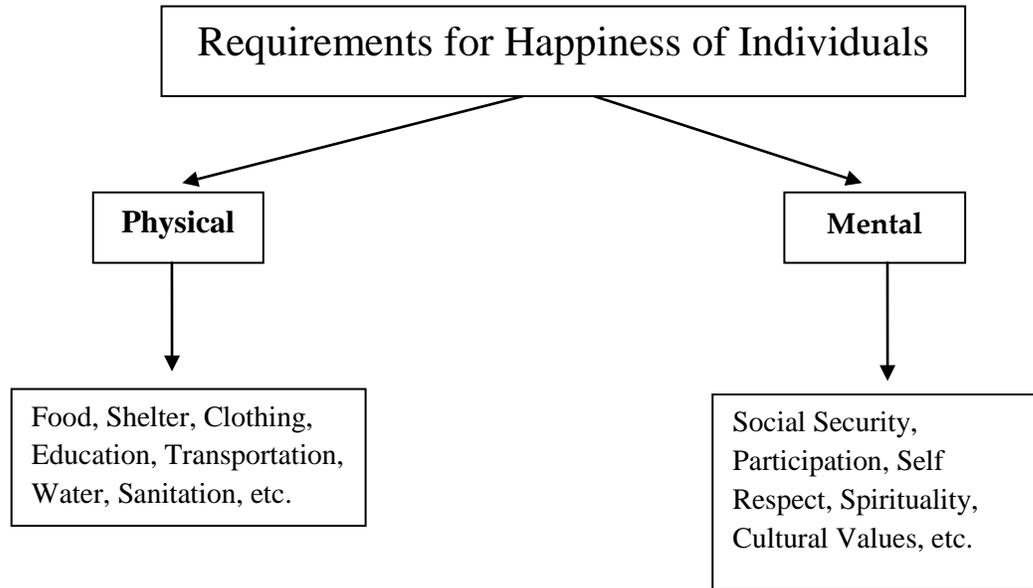
2. CONCEPT OF GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS (GNH) IN BHUTAN

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

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

have to be put to minimize suffering. GNH is about minimizing suffering and maximizing happiness. The premise of GNH includes cultural preservation and creative experimentation apart from technological and material development.

Figure 1



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

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

The concept of GNH has evolved from the basic constituent features of Bhutanese society in the

beginning of the twentieth century, when the social fabric was being woven. Buddhism, which surrounds feudal set of values, forms the basic constituent features of Bhutanese society (Shrotryia 2006). The official documents and publications in Bhutan show that their development objectives lie in the happiness and satisfaction of their people rather than the growing GDP. The discussion during the 7th Round Table Conference held in 2000⁴ at Thimphu concluded one very interesting thought according to which the underlying idea of happiness within GNH concept is the 'capacity to make choices for oneself'. Mathou (2000) puts modernisation and preservation of national heritage as two merged rhetoric 'under the catchphrase of GNH (p 240)'.

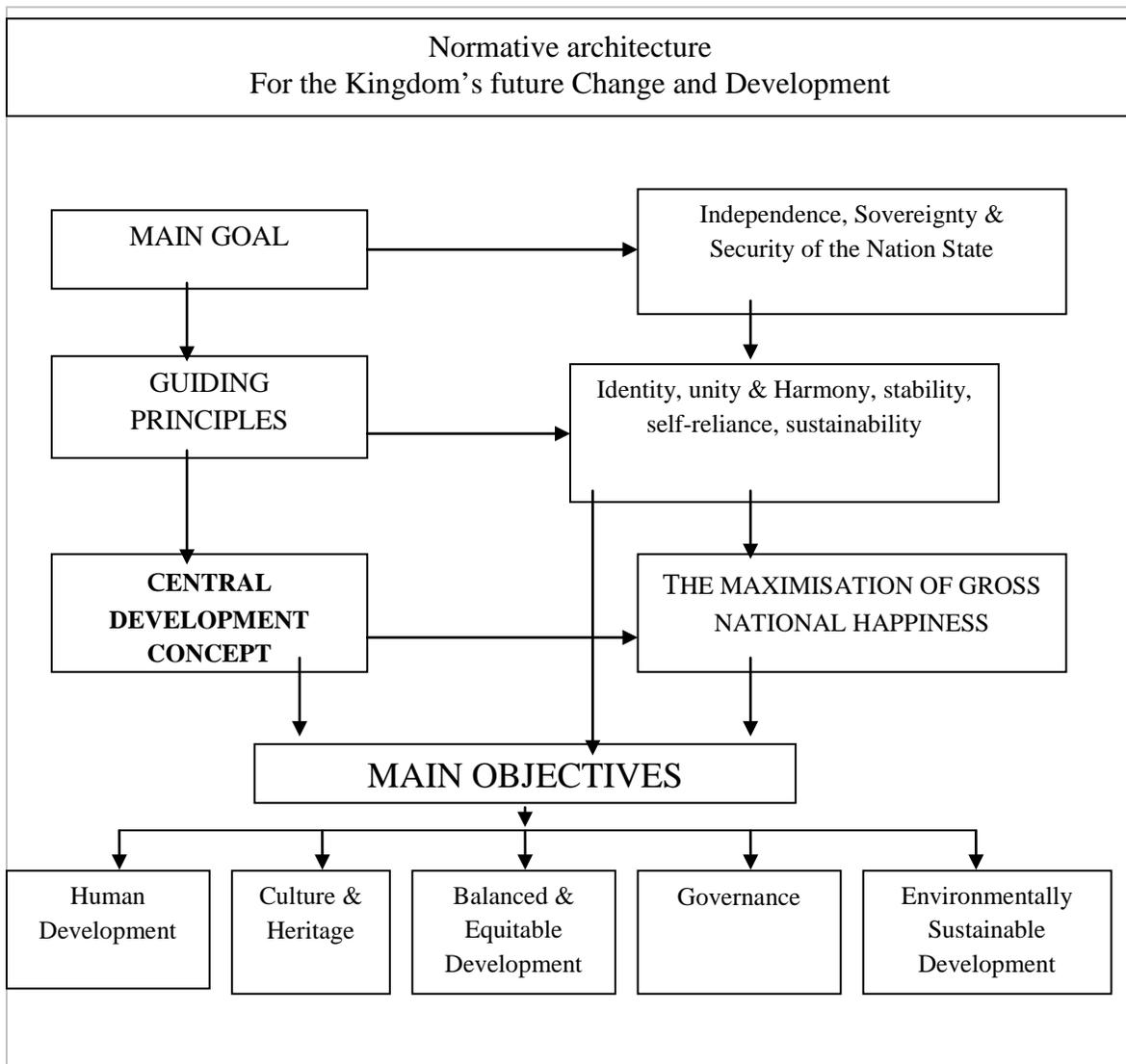
Orville (2002) writes that the King Jigme Singye Wangchuk once told Barbara Crossette, South Asia correspondent of New York Times that "Being a small country, we do not have economic power. We do not have military muscle. We cannot play a dominant international role, because of our small size and population and because we are a landlocked country. The only factor we can fall back on ...which can strengthen Bhutan's sovereignty and our different identity is the unique culture we have. ...happiness takes precedence over economic prosperity in our national development process". The kingdom has concentrated on maintaining its unique culture in all these years which is evident from the fact that as a nation there is a dress code and *driglamnamjha* (code of conduct) which is strictly followed. The residents proudly follow it in their public life.

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

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

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

Figure 2



Source: RGOB 1999 - Bhutan 2020, p 15

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

Table 1. Priority Areas in the Planning documents of Bhutan

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

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

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

and its changing social, economic and political environment.

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

Bhutan has developed in isolation and the development philosophy viz. GNH, has allowed this tiny nation to sustain development. There is absence of extreme poverty and negligible unemployment with large availability of renewable a natural resource base such as forests and hydropower. It has maintained its culture par excellence and has ensured that the development approaches are in no way contrary to the local conditions. It does not believe in the policy of isolation now and the initiatives taken by the government prove that the kingdom is trying to learn lessons from other nations and is prepared with a strong base for the challenges ahead. ‘We can continue to be cautious, but being cautious does not mean shutting our eyes, ...shutting our eyes and cloistering ourselves as we did at one time during the policy of isolation which served us once. But then we took the conscious decision to strengthen our sovereignty through involvement in the world. That means some intrusion, and we are prepared for that’ these words were told to Orville while his interaction with Jigme Thinley. Further Orville (2002) mentions on his own that ‘Bhutan has passed an important milestone in convergence with the outside world.’ Bhutan’s all-encompassing and penultimate goal of development is the maximization and realization of GNH. ...GNH has also been enshrined as an important principle of state policy under Article 9 of the Constitution (10th FYP, p. 17). GNH is a phenomenon which has transpired the citizens of this nation to put forth their efforts to maintain peace, tranquillity and sovereignty (Shrotryia 2006). The King of Bhutan believes that GNH is Development with Values⁸. The Planning Commission of Bhutan has been renamed as GNH Commission in 2008 with an objective of spearheading the planning process and to scan through the national policies as to their impact on the well-being of its people. GNH has become a global topic because of new institutional structure and decision making processes that better reflect it. Political parties’ manifestoes also have GNH in their agendas and prospective candidates swear by GNH to garner the much needed popularity and votes (Samal 2010). The nobel laureate in economics, Joseph Stiglitz while his visit to Bhutan has appreciated the framework of GNH and the concern of the RGOB towards the cause of GNH.

The relationship between culture and GNH has been studied in the earlier part of this paper. Bhutan’s basic strength lies in its ability to maintain, sustain and develop its cultural values for the cause of GNH. It has also been possible since the nation is a Buddhist nation and Buddhism as a religion teaches some of the basic tenets of well-being of people and the religious values give lot of importance on the psychological well-being which in return creates a sound framework of practical thinking to deal with all type of situations and to cope with all calamities.

As mentioned before environmental conservation is one of the most important parts of the whole concept of GNH. The initiatives taken up by the RGOB in this regard are also worth praising as they have put in place different kinds of laws and regulations⁹ in order to make sure that at no cost they make compromise on this. Further, the approach to deal with disasters and to get prepared is also driven by this

fact that they are committed to conserve the environmental resources. Hence they are expected to get prepared for any disaster which affects environmental resources as well as human lives. The next part of the paper discusses different types of disasters and their aftermath.

3. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CULTURE AND GNH WITH DISASTER MANAGEMENT

There are different types of disasters occurring. There are disasters which are avoidable (predictable) and there are ones which are unavoidable (unpredictable). Generally avoidable disasters are not talked about much since there is generally proper preparedness for them; hence dealing with them becomes easier. But for the ones which are unpredictable, unavoidable and inevitable, one needs to get prepared and plan things accordingly so that their impact can be minimized. In general, they are caused by externalities and related to the four elements namely, earth (landslides, earthquakes, etc.), water (drought, flood, etc.), fire (forest fire, thunderstorms, etc.) and wind (cyclones, volcanoes, etc.). These are also known as natural disasters. Theoretically, all disasters are the reactions of some action. The Bhopal tragedy in India in 1984 which took human lives of more than 2500 people and affected more than hundred thousands of residents around the place could have been avoided had proper measures been taken before hand. One recent study (Ambraseys and Bilham 2011) reported that 83% of all deaths caused by the collapse of buildings during earthquakes (in the past three decades) occurred in countries considered to be unusually corrupt. The study discusses the issues involved in the use of poor raw material in the construction of such buildings due to corrupt practices.

The occurrences of disasters are found from the time immemorial in different natures. *During primitive age when disaster occurred people perished in larger scale. Mass movements in the Shaanxi Province, China during the year 1556 killed 830,000 people and again in the year 1920 killed 200,000. In this modern age also as was in the past, the Global wind pattern affects the landscape and people of both the northern and southern hemispheres. Climate often changes dramatically and over 99 percent of all species that have ever lived are extinct. Severe weather causes about 75% of the yearly deaths and damages from natural disasters.* (quoted by Vadivel and Rav 2010)

As far as Bhutan is concerned, a study was undertaken by UN on Disaster Management Analysis in Bhutan in May 2005, which mentions that *there are no comprehensive and official historical records tracking earthquakes and damage caused...though mention is made of destruction of/damage to ancient religious buildings, minor cracks in several buildings, and landslides on highways caused by tremors...available documents do not refer to anything on property and human life losses, except for the earthquake in 1980 with epicentre in Gangtok, India... and from an account by Shikya-rinchen (1710-1759) that makes mention of a major earthquake that occurred in Western Bhutan in the spring of 1713* (UNDMT 2005). The occurrences of glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) are also found in the records and studies have indicated that there is potential threat of GLOF at around 24 glacial lakes in Bhutan. The UNDMT (2005) classified the hazards into two categories, major and minor hazards. Earthquakes, floods, GLOFs, landslides and forest fires are included in major hazards whereas outbreaks of pests and epidemic diseases, droughts (local level water stress), wind, storms, hail and lightning are put in the category of minor hazards.

Although natural hazards are natural by their very nature, their impact can be minimized through proper planning and risk management measures. This paper is written with an intention of relating the development philosophy (GNH) of the nation with its culture and uses it for dealing with the disasters and its affected individuals. The Buddhist philosophy of the middle path also guides the basic framework of dealing with disasters as well as to get prepared. It is also to guide the public policies in this regard. The next chapter suggests such strategy so that the aftermath is dealt in a better way rather than creating a panicky situation whereby giving birth to lot of negative thoughts and energies.

4. MEASURES FOR DEALING WITH THE CRISIS (DUE TO DISASTERS)

The earlier parts have noted the importance of culture, GNH and the nature of disasters occurring at different places, more specifically in Bhutan. Culture and its preservation is one of the most important priorities of the Government in Bhutan which is reflected in its policy documents as well as in the noble concept of GNH (fig 2). Disasters especially the ones which are natural are inevitable and that is where the cultural and spiritual teachings help us deal with them in a more positive way. All calamities teach us lessons and these lessons have to be properly documented and should be shared with people at different levels. At times it really becomes difficult to convince the affected people as when they merely think of such an incident the whole event finds a place in their experiencing self¹⁰. It is in this context that the French philosopher, Maurice Blanchot's statement becomes important. He says:

The disaster, depriving us of that refuge which is the thought of death, dissuading us from the catastrophic or the tragic, dissolving our interest in will and in all internal movement, does not allow us to entertain this question either: what have you done to gain knowledge of the disaster? (Blanchot 1995, p. 3).

The first noble truth of Buddhism (state religion of Bhutan) is the understanding of Suffering and if an individual is able to understand the suffering, one can overcome it as Suffering is the truth and we all face it in one or the other form. The disasters result in suffering of different kinds to different people and if one strongly believes and follows Buddhism, one can derive lot of strength to deal with this suffering. The precondition here is the understanding of the Suffering; one has to be aware of this. Once the understanding is established one has to find out the cause of suffering and try to put efforts to remove such cause so that one is able to deal with it more positively. In the process of trying to remove the cause of suffering one comes across the Second noble truth which is the origin or cause of suffering, which is Attachment. The belief that suffering is caused because one feels attached, so if a sense of detachment is pursued one starts believing in the karma more strongly and derives strength. This is difficult to practice though, but if practiced much of the suffering in the aftermath of a disaster can be dealt with. And hence the Third Noble Truth is the cessation of the suffering. The path to deal with suffering is the Fourth Noble Truth and through following the middle way one can deal with suffering in a better way.¹¹

Disasters result in chaotic conditions, stress, conflict and confrontations. To deal with the disaster related stress, critical incident stress management techniques could be followed (Shrotryia 2003). It is very difficult to deal with these outcomes, especially at individual levels because of different limitations, non-availability of resources and psychologically the loss of hope. The physical loss cannot be recovered but mental conditions can be oriented through different initiatives and actions of the government, social-interest groups and other agencies. The stories of people who overcame disasters successfully need to be documented and should be shared with the disaster hit people. The spiritual practices and the ultimate goal of human life, viz., happiness, has to be conveyed to the victims and their counterparts so that they are able to derive positive energy to deal with the prevalent situations successfully. In this context it is worth mentioning of a barber in Tamilnadu (a state in India which was worst hit) who lost all his family members and his house in a tsunami, while he was found helping others even after knowing that he had lost his near and dear ones. He was asked about the pain and his future course of action. He said that what was to happen has happened and he is thankful to God that he is left with his two hands intact and with these two hands he would start his life over again. This type of attitude shown by disaster hit individuals provides lot of encouragement to others to accept their fate.

The role of spiritualism is immense in this regard. 'Buddhism is historically the most important religion – historically not philosophically – because it was the most tremendous religious movement that the world ever saw, the most gigantic spiritual wave ever to burst upon human society' (Vivekananda 2000, p. 14). According to Buddhism there should be partnership of nature and man for development and Bhutan has

followed it religiously as co-existence of nature and man is considered not as an enemy of nature but a friend. Research studies have also found that social and cultural values influence what is considered risky (Douglas and Wildavsky 1982; Covello and Johnson 1987), hence cultural values can be used as a set of tools to deal with risky situations like those of disasters.

As most affected individuals are poor and underprivileged, the role of government and other concerned agencies become more important as they can build appropriate infrastructure for the victims and allocate some relief grant to them for rehabilitation purposes. Multidisciplinary and holistic approaches can be followed to understand their problems and to design proper relief measures through the emergency teams. The role of counsellors, volunteers, priests, etc., is very important at the site of the disaster as well as to de-stress the victims. Proper legal frameworks and their compliance need to be assured through some mechanism, and non-compliance penalties in case of man-made disasters like the one that happened in Bhopal (India) in 1984, which was quite avoidable (Hazarika 1987) need to be established. A capacity building initiative including health related facilities should be initiated at different levels of functioning. Involvement of community and creating awareness, sharing of disaster related database, education, training, and orientation would also help the concerned governments to develop policies in this direction. As such education has a positive direct effect on happiness (Gerdtham and Johannesson 1997). Development of social networks and use of social capital to deal with conflicting situations would be of great help to the concerned agencies.

A culture of planning and coping has to be developed amongst the potential disaster prone areas, which should be developed as a policy at the national level. Apart from this the culture of disaster reduction also is an equally important factor for enhancing sustainability as it was identified in a study conducted by UNCRD (United Nations Centre for Regional Development) which also concluded that Community Based Disaster Management (CBDM) should be considered as one of the most important approaches to deal with disasters. Furthermore, UNCRD is advocating for CBDM for disaster management planning under overall organizational mandate of sustainable regional development and human security (Pandey and Okazaki n.d.).

In the year 2006 the RGOB through its Disaster Management Division under the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs introduced a National Disaster Risk Management Framework (NDRMF) with a theme of Reducing Disaster Risks for a Safe and Happy Bhutan (RGOB 2006) where they clearly mention that - *the RGOB has set the goal of achieving Gross National Happiness through all-round socioeconomic development as a priority national objective. In view of the geo-physical location of the country in one of the most seismically active regions of the world and the peculiar geo-climatic conditions affecting the landmass and its people, the RGOB recognizes the national priority of safeguarding the painstakingly built developmental gains, the socio-economic infrastructure, the fragile eco-system and the lives, livelihoods, property and community assets of the people from the vagaries of the destructive forces of nature. The Government has recognized the importance of developing a comprehensive disaster risk reduction strategy for minimizing the impact of both natural and man-made catastrophes.* (p. 5)

The commitment towards developing a happy Bhutanese society based on the premise of GNH drives the NDRMF to make sure that through the mechanism that is proposed the well-being of the citizens is prioritized as this document mentions (RGOB 2006, p. 26) - it would be appropriate to develop national risk transfer mechanisms covering large-scale natural disasters as well as the small individual/personal disasters too in keeping with the RGOB's endeavours to secure GNH for its citizens and to cover the risk posed to the community at large.

As it is difficult to predict disasters, it is also difficult to deal with its aftermath. Man-made disasters can be avoided and proper mechanisms to that effect have to be in place. The priorities have to be defined clearly so that such occurrences are avoided. However natural disasters are inevitable and proper preparedness for that can reduce their impact on infrastructure as well as on human lives. The religious practices shall also play an important role to deal with the aftermath. For a country which concentrates on

people's happiness through GNH policies as compared to GDP, which follows a strong religious preaching of Lord Buddha, it should not be that difficult to deal with the conflict and confrontations arising out of disasters. The contribution of GNH as a driving force for dealing with the disasters and formulating appropriate strategies cannot be ignored. The priority of well-being and environment conservation as highlighted in the national policy documents in Bhutan provide an illuminating thinking that with the religious values as that of Bhutan (Buddhism) and development philosophy called GNH, a nation can develop a better mechanism to deal with all kinds of disasters.

No one ever appreciates disaster. We tend to learn from each event and happening as the scars in our remembering self¹² keep haunting time and again at opportune moments. We need to develop a framework which helps us to forget such events. It is where I get reminded of, what Blanchot mentions philosophically:

The disaster is related to forgetfulness – forgetfulness without memory, the motionless retreat of what has not been treated – the immemorial, perhaps. To remember forgetfully: again, the outside (Blanchot 1995, p. 3).

ENDNOTES:

1. See:http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_heritage
2. See:http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=34050&URL_DO=DO_PRINTPAGE&URL_SECTION=201.html
3. See:http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/savifadok/volltexte/2009/329/pdf/GNH_Ch5_TSPowdyel.pdf
4. It is mentioned in 'Development Toward Gross National Happiness – Seventh Round Table Meeting on 7-9 November 2000 Thimphu, Bhutan that these three factors (continuous culture, environment and Vajrayana Buddhism) have been of the greatest influence over Bhutan's development. It is of strength for Bhutan that it has never been colonized or conquered, so the culture has been maintained continuously in all the times. The prevalent Buddhist culture considers nature and man as friends and there is a special symbolic relationship between the people and nature. Since Bhutan follows Vajrayana Buddhism it gets its reflection in the development policies of the country. (Development Towards Gross National Happiness, 2000 (Seventh Round Table Meeting on 7-9 November) Royal Government of Bhutan, Thimphu, Bhutan)
5. *Geog* is a Bhutanese term for an administrative unit which consists of several villages,
6. As 4 above.
7. As quoted by TS Powdyel in his paper 'Foundations and scope of GNH: some reflections' published by CBS(conference proceedings) 2004 Pp 597-614 (www.bhutanstudies.org.bt/publications/GHN-papers-1st_29-31.pdf)
8. As quoted by Mr Karma Tshiteem, Secretary, GNH Commission while addressing a gathering at Royal Institute of Management on July 1st 2010.
9. The National Forestry Policy 1974, The National Environment Strategy (following *the middle path*), The Environmental Assessment Act 2000, Regulation on the Environmental Clearance of Projects 2002, Environmental Discharge Standard, The Mines and Minerals Management Act 1995, Bhutan Water Policy 2003, Forest and Nature Conservation Act of Bhutan 1995, Revised Forest and Nature Conservation Rules of Bhutan 2003, The Land Act 1979 and many similar laws have been passed by the RGOB in order to conserve the environmental resources (for details see *UNDMT 2005*).

10. Daniel Kahneman (2011) describes two selves, one as *Experiencing Self* and another one as *Remembering Self* (p 399-401)
11. The author lived in Bhutan for 9 years and on many occasions observed that the residents are very much religious minded. Priests play a very important role in their lives both for individuals as well as for organizations. The noble truths of Buddhism as mentioned are observed being followed by many Bhutanese families. Acceptance of occurrence of a bad event as the act of God, putting efforts to know and understand the reason of such event, displaying a calm behavior on a natural disaster and avoiding taking extremes i.e., following middle path in resolving issues has been observed by the author in many cases. The author feels that Buddhism as a religion, is a strength of this nation which provides them with strong mechanism to deal with the disasters.
12. Same as 9.

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