

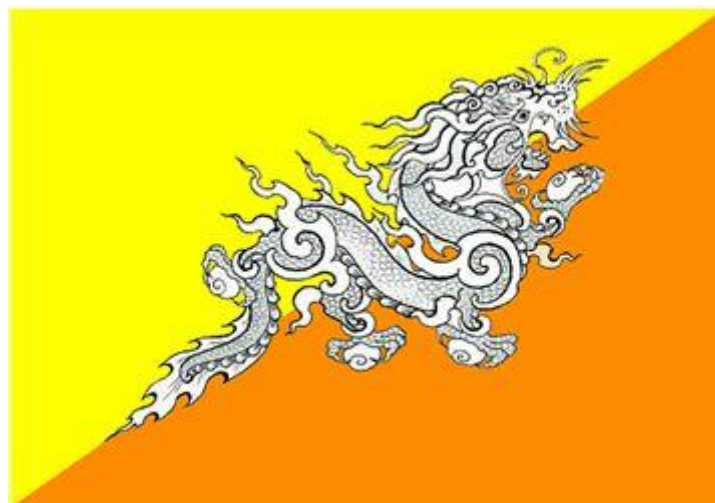
Amongst The Most Happiest People
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ONE day, I read in the newspapers that the people of Bhutan are the most happiest people on this Earth. It was also reported, that, in a survey conducted, it came to light that 52% of the Bhutanese people were happy, 45% very happy and only 3% not very happy. Business Week Magazine ranked Bhutan as the happiest country in South Asia. Contrastingly, India ranks a very low 142 in the Sixth Edition of the Global Peace Index (GPI), which rank nations according to their level of peacefulness. It has also barely escaped being slotted as one of the ten least peaceful nations by two positions. Also, the latest report in the "Lancet" medical journal, reveals that, India is the suicide capital of the World !

What a disparity ? Our tiny neighbor, Bhutan, is the happiest country and India is the suicide capital of the World ! Instantly, the story of "**The Club of 99**" flashed in my mind. The story is of a certain King who chanced to see a carpenter happily singing and doing his work. The perplexed King confided to his Minister about this strange sight, and said that even he the King could not be happy, then, how could an ordinary carpenter be happy? The wise Minister, thereupon, counseled that the carpenter was yet to become a member of "The Club of 99"! The curious King wanted to know what "The Club of 99" was ? The Minister advised him to get a small pouch containing 99 gold coins. This was then planted at night in front of the main door of the carpenter's house. Early at dawn, the carpenter on opening the main door saw the pouch. To his amazement he saw and counted 99 gold coins, but his mind reasoned that some thief had stolen 100 gold coins and in panic abandoned it on his doorstep. The missing one gold coin must have fallen somewhere nearby. He searched all over the place for that elusive one gold coin. Very soon, he asked his wife and children to join in the search. The carpenter became angry that nobody could locate that single gold coin. That day he never sang while doing his work, and the Minister informed the King that hereafter the carpenter would never sing while doing work, because, his mind was in pursuit of that single gold coin. He had unwittingly become a member of "The Club of 99"!

I was amazed as to how an entire nation could be happy? So, I decided to spend my last LTC (Leave Travel Concession) amongst the most happiest people, for, has Osho not said "**Live with people who are blissful, so that you can have a little whiff, a taste.**" So off I went to Bhutan, in search of happiness.



The first striking feature is that the people have pride in their religion, culture, heritage

and traditions and this made their national pursuit of Gross National Happiness an attainable goal. Everybody, young and old wear only their traditional national dress, I saw only personnel from Army, Police, Immigration and Customs wearing Western style uniforms.

I set about my enquiry as to how the people boasted that they were the happiest. Very soon I identified their motto:-

WE STAND FOR

A peaceful Buddhist Kingdom, ruled by the Druk Gyalpo and administered by a democratically elected, ethical government, where people live in harmony with each other and Nature, guided by compassion, disciplined consumption, social responsibility, equality of opportunity, justice and spirituality.

The key ingredient in their above motto is "**disciplined consumption**". What is this? Mankind's current plight is caused by the present unsustainable western lifestyle, which emphasises on high consumption levels. According to estimates by some experts, if the present consumption levels continue to go unchecked, **then by 2050, we will need eight and half (8.5) planets, more to absorb our carbon dioxide emissions, six planets to meet steel requirements, three and half (3.5) planets, to meet our timber demand and three and a quarter (3.4) planets to sustain cement supply!**

What has led us to this obnoxious state of affairs? This is because, it is based on a fundamentally flawed concept of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) based economic system adopted by Bretton Wood's institutions some 60 years ago.

What does GDP do? GDP emphasises on limitless production and consumption. The more we produce and consume, the more the GDP grows. The more trees we cut, the more fossil fuel we burn, and the more greenhouse gases we emit, the more the GDP grows. Basically, so long as money is transacted or spent, even crime, pollution, war and diseases are counted as economic gains and accounted in GDP. Rising GDP is reckoned as synonymous with prosperity, growth and well being. The world is now recognizing that the GDP concept is misconceived, inherently flawed, and destructive. Commenting on the world's economic crisis, Thomas Friedman said "**What if the crisis of 2008 represents something much more fundamental than - deep recession? What if it is telling us that the whole growth model we created over the last 50 years, is simply unsustainable economically and ecologically and that 2008 was when we hit the wall - when Mother Nature and the market both said "No More"**". Humanity is now using up natural resources at 50% faster rate than Nature can regenerate. So bleak is the picture...."**that the bulldozer and not the atomic bomb may turn out to be the most destructive invention of the 20th Century"** -(Philip Shabecoff).

Despite Rio, despite Kyoto, despite Copenhagen, CO2 emissions continue to rise higher and higher because of GDP growth model. According to the journal **Nature Climate Change**, China has become the world's largest emitter of CO2 (Carbon dioxide), that China could be under-reporting its annual carbon emissions by as much as 1.4 billion tonnes a year - roughly the amount that Japan as the fourth largest emitter of CO2, pumps out each year. The problem is acute in as much as politicians, bureaucrats and industrialists collaborate to understate their emission data to claim success with pollution reduction measures. Misleading data is released in order to win accolades in a system where only economic growth is accepted as the sine qua non of success. Hence, the desperation of governments universally, to technologise, financialise, privatise and commodify every resource of the Earth. This has led to CO2 emissions increasing in

alarming proportions. In the 1990's it rose on an average by 1.1% per year, since 2000, it has increased by more than 3% per year and in 2011 it rose by 5.3%. Global obsession for higher and higher GDP is taking our planet to a disastrous end. This writer is reminded of a famous saying :



CREE NATIVE AMERICAN PROPHECY

"Only after the last tree has been cut down,

Only after the last river has been poisoned,

Only after the last fish has been caught,

Only then you will find that money

Cannot be eaten".

cannot be eaten."

That is why, the Bhutanese Prime Minister described the present growth path as **"Mankind is like a meteor, blazing itself towards self-annihilation along with all other innocent life forms."** The International Energy Agency says that **"Rising fossil-fuel energy use will lead to irreversible and potentially catastrophic climate change."** It further warns that "without immediate action, as early as by 2012, all CO2 emissions will be 'locked in' by existing power plants, factories, buildings and other infrastructure".

As I write this article, I read a report dated June 26th 2012 in the newspaper, Indian Express, that, a giant tortoise, the last of the Pinta Island subspecies, died of unknown causes at Ecuador's Galapagos National Park, and this species has become **extinct**. In this context, it would be apt to quote from the

Midarsh

"When God created the first Man he took him and led him round all the trees of the Garden of Eden and said to him : Look at my works, how beautiful they are ! Take care that you do not corrupt and destroy my universe, for if you destroy it no one will repair it for you."

George Monbiot rightly expressed **"When the worlds' ecological debt comes due, no World Bank or IMF bailout package will save the day."**

Genuinely concerned about the dire consequences of all these on the very survival of mankind and the whole planet, Bhutan moved a resolution at the 65th Session of the UN General Assembly proposing a new economic paradigm. Accordingly, the resolution

Resolution on **Happiness: Towards a holistic approach to Development**, co-sponsored by 68 countries, was adopted by consensus by all the 193-member states without a single dissenting vote !

The 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.

As mandated by UN General Assembly, Bhutan hosted a High Level Meeting on the theme "**Happiness and Well Being: Defining a New Economic Paradigm**" on 2nd April this year in New York.

The new sustainability-based economic paradigm is envisioned to ensure a fully sustainable balance among natural, social, cultural, human and built capital assets, and is proposed to be structured around the four dimensions of: (i) Happiness and Well Being; (ii) Ecological sustainability; (iii) Efficient use of resources; and (iv) Fair Distribution.

These are also supposed to be consistent with the goals of the Earth Charter, the Millennium Development Goals and the emerging Sustainable Development Goals.

The UN High Level Meeting has now decided to commission a team of experts to elaborate these four dimensions to be considered by the 68th session of the General Assembly in 2013.

This is to be followed by a new "Bretton Woods" Convention to be held in 2014 for formal international adoption of the new system, and then finally, the world is to formally begin adopting and implementing the new economic paradigm by 2015.

Bhutan has proposed Gross National Happiness as an alternative development paradigm. The motto is "**Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross National Product**", thereby setting Bhutan on a holistic development path that seeks to integrate sustainable and equitable socio-economic development with environmental conservation, cultural preservation and promotion, and good governance. The above philosophy is reminiscent of Bishnoi philosophy which advises "**All living things have a right to survive and share all resources.**" Similarly, the Ubuntu philosophy of the African tribes can be summed up as "**I am what I am because of who we all are.**" Ubuntu speaks particularly about the fact that you can't exist as a human being in isolation. It speaks about our inter-connectedness. What you do affects the whole world. When you do well, it spreads out, it is for the whole of humanity.

A tiny country is showing the way to the world to find a new sustainability based economic paradigm to save the planet, and discover a new route to happiness. For this "**we have to respect the lives of animals, the vegetable and mineral realms and the earth itself**" - (*Thich Nhat Hanh.*)

In Hindu Scriptures, Lord Vishnu is the preserver and conservator of the Universe. In conservation, nothing is created or destroyed; thus it is conserved and eternal. The eternal and the transient together make life meaningful.

Gross National Happiness (GNH) is based on the concept that the ultimate purpose of our life is to seek inner happiness. And this happiness can be achieved by balancing the needs of the body with those of the mind within a peaceful and secure environment. The

role of a state, in this context, is to promote those conditions, through public policies and laws, which will enable people to pursue happiness. In short, GNH is a sustainability-based, wellbeing centric and an inclusive economic model.

Over the years, the concept has been elaborated by Bhutan into four pillars, nine domains, 72 indicators and a defined statistical measurement matrix, and these are being actively used as screening tools for Bhutan 's development policies as well as legislative bills.

Bhutan has greatly benefited from adopting the path of GNH philosophy.

(i) Bhutan is today popularly known as the heaven on the earth or the last Shangri - la, and spiritualism is a way of everyday life;

(ii) Bhutan has a forest cover of 81% out of which 50% are protected parks and reserves.

(iii) It is also the only country in world that has committed at COP-16 in order to remain net carbon sink in perpetuity;

(iv) Bhutan 's people enjoy free health and education, rising life expectancy, and 99.90 % children go to school. It will also be the first 100% organic farming country.

After discovering the secret of the Bhutanese, I cross over into India and enter the State of W.Bengal. I am distressed to read that every four minutes, one person takes his life in India and the number of suicides have increased in 2011 by 0.7% to touch 1,35,585. W.Bengal has reported the highest number of suicide victims in 2009, second highest in 2010 and highest in 2011. What a startling contrast! On this side of the border suicides galore and on the other side happy, contented people. As my car traverses through the Bengal countryside, the sights are all too familiar - paddy fields being filled up, trees being cut in hundreds, sand mining in river-beds, plastic rubbish everywhere, all in the name of "infrastructure development". I can only ruminant - infrastructure development to perdition !

What is the reason for our desperation? Indians have forgotten their traditional sacred view about Nature. The Bhagawad-Gita exhorts us not to try to change the environment, improve it or wrestle with it. The Vedas enshrine a holistic and poetic cosmic vision, unique in their perspective of time and space. The Vedic hymn to the Earth, the **Prithvi Sukta** in the **Atharva Veda** is the most evocative environmental invocation - **Mata Bhumi Putroham Prithivyah: Earth is my mother, I am her son**. A covenant is made that mankind shall secure the Earth against all environmental trespass and shall never allow her to be oppressed.

Several thousands of years ago, our venerable Vedic Rishis expounded the concept of Gross National Happiness.



Consider the following Vedic dictum, can there be any better exposition of Gross National Happiness:

Lokah samastah sukhino bhavantu	May all beings in this universe to happy
Sarvesham svasti bhavatu	May prosperity and welfare be unto all beings
Sarvesham Sarvesham Santir-bhavatu	May peace be unto all beings
Sarvesham purnam bhavatu	May plenitude and fullness be unto all beings
Sarvesham mangalam bhavatu	May auspiciousness and blessedness be unto all beings
Sarve bhavantu sukhinah	May all be happy
Sarve Santu niramayah	May all be free from disease, pain and suffering.
Sarve bhadrani pasyantu	May all behold that which is auspicious.
Ma kaschiddukhah bhavet	May not sorrow fall to the lot of any one.

लोकाः समस्ताः सुखिनो भवन्तु

lokāḥ samastāḥ sukhino bhavantu

(low-kaah'-ha suh-muh-staah'-ha soo-khee-no' bhuh'-vun-too)

This is a great cosmic message that can transform the thinking of entire mankind. Indians should disseminate this cosmic message and herald a new world order.