
GANDHIAN IDEA OF GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS

Vijay Chauhan*

ABSTRACT

Samuel Butler once wrote, "True greatness wears an invisible cloak, under the cover of which it goes in and out among men without being suspected. We live in an age of stark contradictions. The world enjoys technologies of unimaginable sophistication; yet has at least one billion people without enough to eat each day. The world economy is propelled to soaring new heights of productivity through ongoing technological and organizational advance; yet is relentlessly destroying the natural environment in the process. Countries achieve great progress in economic development as conventionally measured; yet along the way succumb to new crises of obesity, smoking, diabetes, depression, and other ills of modern life. These contradictions would not come as a shock to the greatest sages of humanity, including Aristotle and the Buddha. The sages taught humanity, time and again, that material gain alone will not fulfill all our deepest needs. Material life must be harnessed to meet these human needs, most importantly to promote the end of suffering, social justice, and the attainment of happiness. The challenge is real for all parts of the world. The purpose of this research is to bring closer Gandhian thought and the concept of Gross National Happiness as political mantras and ideologies to see if a better alternative socio-political system can be established for a better and safe humanity. Rather than weighing one against the other, strategy will be to use the unique Bhutanese approach to development as a counterpoise to Gandhian ideologies.

*Department of Political Science, SD College, Ambala Cantt.

1. INTRODUCTION

We live in an age of stark contradictions. The world enjoys technologies of unimaginable sophistication; yet has at least one billion people without enough to eat each day. The world economy is propelled to soaring new heights of productivity through ongoing technological and organizational advance; yet is relentlessly destroying the natural environment in the process. Countries achieve great progress in economic development as conventionally measured; yet along the way succumb to new crises of obesity, smoking, diabetes, depression, and other ills of modern life. These contradictions would not come as a shock to the greatest sages of humanity, including Aristotle and the Buddha. The sages taught humanity, time and again, that material gain alone will not fulfill all our deepest needs. Material life must be harnessed to meet these human needs, most importantly to promote the end of suffering, social justice, and the attainment of happiness. The challenge is real for all parts of the world. Gross National Happiness and Gandhian Ideology can provide alternative development paradigms to the current development model which has ‘collapse’ built into the system. The purpose of this research is to bring closer Gandhian thought and the concept of Gross National Happiness as political mantras and ideologies to see if a better alternative socio-political system can be established for a better and safe humanity. Rather than weighing one against the other, strategy will be to use the unique Bhutanese approach to development as a counterpoise to Gandhian ideologies. Gross National Happiness is based upon four key substratum - **cultural preservation, environmental conservation, good governance, and economic Self-Sufficiency** - all of which must support the ultimate goal of happiness but for Gandhian ideology happiness meant the happiness of the society as a whole and was indicated primarily, by its moral standard and secondarily, by its physical and economic well-being. This happiness can also mean – a perfect balance among individual, society and nature. The philosophy of GNH is only 10 words long: “Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross National Product.” But it is perhaps the shortest statement with a profound significance not only for Bhutan but for the whole world. The actual meaning of GNH can be inferred from His Majesty’s speeches, decrees, proclamations, policies and development programmes and projects, which were all meant towards increasing the happiness or wellbeing of the people. As His Majesty the King said, “GNH has come to mean so many things to so many people but to me it signifies simply -Development with Values”¹The

1729 legal code, which dates from the unification of Bhutan, declared that “if the Government cannot create happiness (*dekid*) for its people, there is no purpose for the Government to exist.”². The term "gross national happiness" was first coined in 1972 by Bhutan's former King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, who has opened Bhutan to the age of modernization, soon after the demise of his father, King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk. He used the phrase to signal his commitment to building an economy that would serve Bhutan's unique culture based on Buddhist spiritual values.³ Proposed policies in Bhutan must pass a GNH review based on a GNH impact statement that is similar in nature to the Environmental Impact Statement required for development in the U.S.⁴ The Bhutanese grounding in Buddhist ideals suggests that beneficial development of human society takes place when material and spiritual development occur side by side to complement and reinforce each other. The four pillars of GNH are the promotion of **sustainable development, preservation and promotion of cultural values, conservation of the natural environment, and establishment of good governance**. At this level of generality, the concept of GNH is trans-cultural—a nation need not be Buddhist in order to value; sustainable development, cultural integrity, ecosystem conservation, and good governance. Through collaboration with an international group of scholars and empirical researchers the Centre for Bhutan Studies further defined these four pillars with greater specificity into eight general contributors to happiness—**physical, mental and spiritual health; time-balance; social and community vitality; cultural vitality; education; living standards; good governance; and ecological vitality**. Although the GNH framework reflects its Buddhist origins, it is solidly based upon the empirical research literature of happiness, positive psychology and wellbeing. the concept has a much longer resonance in the Kingdom of Bhutan⁵ The conventional development model often mistakes ends for means and means for ends. In GNH, means and ends are separate and clear. Everything else is a means towards achieving the ends, which is happiness. It is a holistic concept which considers all dimensions of development as equally important, meeting holistic needs of human being such as psychological, emotional, spiritual, physical, social, and environmental. GNH is about breaking narrow walls built around sectors in government or economy which result in fragmented reality of life and ensures that development in one sector does not result as cost in another sector by aligning sector rules or by having one macro-goal to all sectors. It is about balancing the spiritual and material aspects of development of both within and outside institutions and persons. In Bhutan this balance is epitomized by the dual system of governance

on which the Bhutanese state was founded in the 17th century, and the present social, cultural, political and religious structures and institutions are legacies of the past. It tries to harmonies inner skills of happiness with outer circumstances. “GNH stands for preservation and renewal of a holistic range of wealth or capital.”⁶ The word ‘wealth’ is a narrow word since it conveys material and tangible things. All forms of capitals (economic, natural, social, human, cultural, and spiritual) are valued and measured in GNH. The increase of this whole range of capitals actually measures the genuine progress of societies. So GNH preserves, develops and accounts these resources for pursuing collective happiness in a holistic way. The existence of inequity in Bhutan is clear from a common Bhutanese expression “One may be equal in human births not in merits”.⁷

In India, indigenous concept of G.N.H.I is Gandhian ideology which rooted in the eternal human values handed down to us over centuries such as **Truth, love, Righteousness, Non-violence and Tolerance**. These values have been taught and retaught by the Upanishads, the Gita, the Buddha and Christ, Gandhian ideology only reiterated them and accommodates a number of social, economic, and Political issues like Untouchability, Communal violence, Rural poverty and the status of women in society. In all these things, Gandhi stressed that means are as important as ends.⁸ Gandhi viewed life as a whole, and not in its isolated compartments. According to the Indian scriptures, there are four aspects of an individual's life: *Artha* (money), *Kama* (desire), *Dharma* (righteousness), and *Moksha* (liberation). These aspects are interrelated, and, therefore all should be harmoniously developed. Money is required to satisfy the basic requirements of life, however, it is not the end in itself. Man's aim is not to multiply worldly desires and engage his whole life in acquiring wealth to satisfy all his desires. The goal of life is to control desire and transform it, through righteousness, into liberation. Similarly Gandhian ideology argues for the liberation of man from the cyclical order marked by artha, kama, dharma and moksha. According to him, true happiness lies in the all round development of a human being's personality, and in living a full life. Gandhi's ideas on economic development are a part of his general philosophy of life. With practical experience and his unique experiments, Mahatma Gandhi has emerged as an economic reformer and not a professor of economics.⁹ Gandhian economic development model are based on **Sawraj, Swadeshi, Trusteeship, No free Trade, and Ethics**. As J.B. Kripalani has rightly pointed out Ghandhi did not recognize the separation of economics from ethics (affected by mainstream economists). On the contrary, he wanted to

achieve an ethical ordering of the economic life of society.¹⁰ He wrote: "I must confess that I do not draw a sharp or any distinction between economics and ethics. Economics that hurts moral well-being of any individual or nation is immoral and therefore sinful".¹¹ Gandhian economic goals are not materialistic or individualistic but ethico-spiritual and community oriented. It is clear that this approach, though unacceptable and revolting to the mainstream economists, is thoroughly consistent with Gandhi's vision of a new humanity. Gandhi rejected 'economism', which believed in the creation of a paradise of material plenty, in raising the standard of living understood as maximizing consumption and optimizing the pattern of production. He considered the gospel of the creation of economic abundance a delusion and a snare. He considered the craze for material affluence created by the industrial development paradigm unrealistic, unnecessary, undesirable and counter productive.¹² Gandhi doesn't give any theoretical model regarding economic development but gives some basic tenets based on which we can decipher what kind of economic structure is the need of the hour. Following are the basic tenets -

- Contrary to the popular perception, voluntary reduction of wants is an indication of development and not the desire to satisfy unlimited wants.
- Each person is not always bent on "Maximizing" his/her profit but wishes that he/she gets enough to save for a rainy day after meeting the day to day requirement.
- Co-operation and not competition is a better principle of life It is inappropriate to look down upon physical labor.
- There is latent talent in all individuals. Each person must have access to enough resources so that his/her basic livelihood needs can be taken care of.
- Too much dependence on the "state" is fatal.¹³

Based on these principles, Gandhiji has given the concept of constructive work and strongly advocated that above mentioned are necessary social inputs without which economic growth is not possible. Gandhi never equated happiness with economic prosperity and physical pleasure alone. His concept of the welfare of society was totally opposed to the utilitarian concept, viz. the greatest good of the greatest number. Gandhi said, "A votary of Ahimsa would strive for the greatest good of *all* and die in the attempt to realize this ideal. He would be willing to die so that others might live. He would serve the rest by dying himself. The greatest good of all, inevitably included the good of the greatest number, and, therefore, he and the utilitarian would converge

on many points. But ultimately they would have to Part Company and even work in opposite directions. The utilitarian to be logical will never sacrifice himself. He believed firmly that the individual and the society were contributory to each other's happiness To Gandhi, the individual was as important, if not more, than the society, as he firmly believed that the happiness of the individual formed the constituent part of the happiness of the society. So, for him, social welfare meant the conscious submission of the individual and a voluntary contribution of one's possession to the society, which consisted of *all*, not a majority and, in return, the social system, built upon the principles of non-violence and democracy, was to give a complete guarantee for the maximum development of the individual's personality.¹⁴Coming to the political thought of Gandhi, we have to remember certain dispositions of Gandhi. First of all, Gandhi was not a system builder in an academic sense. For all his sayings were pouring from his deep feelings and sincere realization of the truth. Without going into disputes, it can be agreed that he was not committed to any exclusive school of thought. His speech and pen had generally come from responses from particular situation. But when we go into the depth of Gandhi's Philosophy, we feel that there is no dichotomy in Gandhi's perception. It can be said that Gandhi considered politics as an instrument for the uplift of mankind in social, economic, moral and spiritual spheres. To Gandhi politics itself was his religion. Gandhi had a vision of transforming the socially and morally degenerated and separated individuals in a manner where individuals can enjoy their freedom in a spirit altruism. To understand Gandhi's politics it is also necessary to understand Gandhi's concern for the cleavage between state and civil society. The community life is fast diminishing and civil society could not formulate any mechanism to control it. Gandhi was concerned since his days of Hind Swaraj that the Western civilization had been hedonistic, in the sense of self-pleasure centered, pragmatic in the sense of immediate material benefit and individualistic in the sense of egocentric in the sense of sovereign individual oriented. As we knew Gandhi was a God-oriented man. But to him Truth is God and as in other spheres of life, politics should also be a search after truth and this search must be understood by Gandhi, is for raising general conscience of the people. Every individual must be free from pangs of hunger must prevent exploitation and oppression. He would then be in a position to work for his own development through the performances of duties. A universal morality would emerge which would create an atmosphere for healthy political life. We should accept self-transformation as a continuous process. He is emphatic in saying that politics bereft of religion is a death trap which

kills the soul. By spiritualization of politics, Gandhi meant something larger than our day to day life but not excluding world of day to day experiences. A community of persons on the process of self-realization be able to resist the corrupting influences of existing interests. According to Gandhi this is not just a philosophical dream far from realities of political life. Many great philosophers right from Plato could not reconcile the dichotomy between reality and ideal. From Gandhian point of view, we should into distrust the capability of commoner to rise above passion and self-interest and we can evolve a modus operandi by which a new kind of politics might emerge as Gandhi envisioned.¹⁵

CONCLUSION

This indigenous conceptual model of G.N.H.I is more practical and more humanistic at the same time non aggressive, non-competitive in nature. Gandhian Ideology and G.N.H.I are essential for the Socio-economic-Political development. Both concepts have followed a multi-dimensional approach to development: aimed at spiritual and material balance and harmony. But, every alternative development approach is also a challenge. While accepting the reality of globalization and cultural change, it is always endeavor to select the most beneficial aspects of it. To make the correct choice of greatest present and future tasks; and to believe, very profoundly, that it is a challenge that every country must take up and confront the challenge of increasing human happiness boldly and creatively.

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