

Constructs of happiness: lessons from Royal Addresses and Decrees.

<p>Author</p> <p>Tshering Wangchuk, Lecturer, Norbuling Rigter College.</p> <p>Key words:</p> <p>Gross National Happiness, constructs, Royal addresses and decrees, Druk Gyalpo</p>	<p>Abstract</p> <p>Gross National Happiness (GNH) is the guiding development philosophy of Bhutan and has been pivotal in charting the direction of Bhutan’s development journey. In this light, this paper will discuss the constructs of happiness by drawing lessons from the Royal addresses and decrees of His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo. The paper aims to contribute to our understanding of the constructs of collective happiness as a Nation and as Bhutanese.</p>
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Introduction

Gross National Happiness (GNH) is the brainchild of His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo. In 1979, on his return from a Non-Aligned Nation conference in Cuba, His Majesty declared to an Indian Journalist that “Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross Domestic Product”. Since this ground breaking declaration, the principles of happiness have permeated into the Bhutanese conscience and even inspired the world leaders to look at development from a fresh perspective. GNH has charted the direction of Bhutan’s development journey. It has shaped the socio-political, cultural, spiritual, environmental and governance landscape of Bhutan. The concept of GNH has also inspired the United Nations and the International realised Community: International Happiness Day is celebrated every year on 20 March since 2012 and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) align well with GNH. Further, economists discuss GNH as an alternative development paradigm. It is a topical theme for discussion among the academicians and scholars. The influence of GNH has traversed the borders of Bhutan. Within Bhutan, GNH is highlighted in the Preamble, Article 9 and Article 20 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan (Constitution of Bhutan, 2008, p. 18, 38). Efforts are made consciously to create enabling conditions for GNH to be realised by all sections of the Bhutanese society

Thus, this paper draws lessons from the decrees and addresses of the Fourth Druk Gyalpo from 1972 to 2006 and discusses the constructs of GNH as aspired by His Majesty for Bhutan.

Perception of Happiness

The concept of happiness is fluid. Based on a selected number of literature review, it can be concluded that happiness is determined by many externalities such as socio-cultural, political and spiritual frame of a society. For instance, happiness during the Renaissance meant freedom from political turmoil and wars (Lomas, Case, Cratty & Vanderwheele, 2021). As per Lomas et al. (2021) Thomas More’s book Utopia underscores creating a state which will work to promote the happiness of its people. This model aspired for a state free of any warfare or any other political disorder.

During the Enlightenment Period, Jeremy Bentham advocated the principles of happiness popularly referred to as hedonism, which considered an individual's happiness as the primary concern of every person. For his contemporary William Thompson, happiness of each individual is linked to the happiness of all, popularly referred to as eudaemonism (Kaswan, 2010). Today, the concept of happiness in the West is considered to be subjective and its pursuit to be mostly a "private matter" (Walker and Kavedžija, 2015).

In Bhutan, happiness was discussed since the period of theocracy. Givel and Figueroa (2014) mention that the *Tsa Yig Chenmo (bca' yig chen mo)*, the First Bhutanese Legal Code of 1652, as well as the Second Bhutanese Legal Code of 1729, mentions happiness. The *Tsa Yig Chenmo (bca' yig chen mo)* relates happiness with the role of a leader who will work towards achieving enlightenment of their citizens. Givel & Figueroa (2014) also states that the concept of happiness rooted in Buddhism gradually adopts a secular tone later in modern days:

In early Bhutan, happiness policy was congruent with the dual system of government promoting happiness through a spiritual path by grace of wise rulers. In the modern context, happiness policy has evolved to encompass a variety of other concerns such as the promotion of traditional Mahayana Buddhist values while meeting social and material needs. (p.18)

This change in perception of happiness since the establishment of the theocratic government in Bhutan by Zhabdrung underscores happiness as an outcome of fulfilling spiritual, social and material needs of Bhutanese people during different periods in the governance history of Bhutan. The adoption of different purposes and meaning of happiness helps us confirm concept of happiness as evolving.

Further, Wangdi (2016) mentions that the interpretation of happiness is culturally constructed and varies according to socio-demographic subgroups. He states that age groups, gender, and other social constructs influences the perception of source of happiness (Wangdi, 2016). For instance, the study conducted by Wangdi (2016, p. 60) highlights that respondents of 70 years and above perceived "health and wellbeing" as their main source of happiness while it was "financial security" for female. The study concludes that people have different perceived sources of happiness and what contributes to happiness is subjective.

Anchored on the examples from Namibian and French Constitutions, Dorji (2021) mentions that happiness adopts different political meanings. For instance, the Namibian and French Constitutions reflect happiness as Individual Right and the duty of the State to provide it. This finding helps us to understand how happiness is associated with different political values in different countries.

In Bhutan, the Preamble of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan proclaims that the role of the state is "...to ensure justice and tranquility and to enhance the unity, happiness and well-being of the people for all time". Further, Article 20 prescribes that "The Government shall protect and strengthen the sovereignty of the Kingdom, provide good governance, and ensure peace, security, well-being and happiness of the people" (Constitution of Bhutan, p. 34, 2008). The Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan places the role of the state in the framework of promoting happiness.

Occurrence of “Happiness” in Royal address and decrees

The paper studied 67 Royal addresses and 50 decrees to analyse the occurrence or mention of Happiness”. The analysis looked at the context in which happiness is mentioned by His Majesty.

The structural analysis reveals that happiness is mentioned in 16 Royal addresses and seven decrees. This reference to happiness in His Majesty’s addresses and decrees is a valuable source of information to understand how happiness is perceived.

Table 1.

Happiness mentioned in the Royal addresses

Sl no.	Theme	Frequency of occurrence	Year
1	Leadership	7	1972, 1972, 1974, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981
2	Buddhism	2	1972, 1979
3	Faith and loyalty	1	1972
4	Unity	2	1974, 1980
5	National Policy	2	1978, 1980,
6	Collective effort	2	1980, 2006

The structural analysis of the Royal addresses and decrees also show that Leadership is the most recurrent theme. It is mentioned seven times in the Royal addresses spanning from 1972 to 1981. This vividly points to the important role that leaders play in shaping the state of a nation and its citizens.

The other theme that is recurrent in His Majesty’s addresses and decrees is Buddhism. It is mentioned twice in the 1972 and 1979 addresses while it is spelled out in the decrees thrice between 1985 to 1999. Faith and loyalty, unity, national policy and happiness as collective goal are other themes that are highlighted in the context of happiness in His Majesty’s addresses. Dispensing justice, reforms, personal effort and assessment criteria are aligned to happiness in the decrees.

Table 2.

Happiness mentioned in the decrees

Sl no.	Theme	Frequency of occurrence	Year
1	Buddhism	3	1985, 1986, 1999
2	Dispensing justice	1	1989
3	Reforms	1	1984, 1993, 1998
4	Personal effort	1	1998
5	Assessment criteria	1	1986, 1998

Happiness in Royal Addresses and Decrees: A discussion

Leadership is mentioned the most in the Royal addresses. Thus highlights the indispensability of leadership to carve a stable nation where happiness of the people is a priority. In his 1972 National address in Thimphu, His Majesty illustrates the importance of leadership for people to realise happiness by using the case of the legacies of Their Majesties Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck and Jigme Dorji Wangchuck (Bhutan Times, 2007, p.1, p.6, p.12, p.30). The 1978 National Day address at Gelephu is one of the examples where the importance of leadership is discussed in the context of happiness. His Majesty expressed that “Long ago, when our country was plagued by wars, internal strife and poverty,...but when Ugyen Wangchuck came to the throne, there was for first time unity, prosperity and happiness, and a new era of great peace

and tranquility began” (Bhutan Times, 2007, p.30). Similar relationship between leadership and people’s happiness are also reflected in six other Royal addresses. This finding helps us to understand the importance of leadership to facilitate enabling conditions for people’s happiness.

Further, the Royal Proclamation to the People of Bhutan on 26 July 1972 also underscores an analogy of happiness grounded in the legacies of Druk Gyalpo Jigme Dorji Wangchuck. In this address, His Majesty states that “It is as if the sun of this country’s happiness has set at noon and night fallen during the day” (Bhutan Times, 2007, p.1). This analogy of sun setting at noon vividly illustrates the significance of leadership for people to realise happiness. Similar examples are highlighted in the 1972 Address during the closing of the 37th Session of the National Assembly where His Majesty refers to happiness in the context of the legacies of Third Gyalpo Jigme Dorji Wangchuck (Bhutan Times, 2007, p.6)

The relation between happiness and leader is also indicated in the 1972 Address in Thimphu when His Majesty talked about loyalty as one the preconditions for happiness. The Address to the opening session of the 37th Session of the National Assembly on 10 September 1972 emphasises on the importance of loyalty to create enabling conditions for happiness. His Majesty states that, “our condition of peace and happiness is due to the strong and undefiled sense of faith and loyalty which has existed between the ruler and subjects” (Bhutan Times, 2007, p.5). This association of happiness with loyalty is aligned with the fundamental Bhutanese Buddhist values of *Tha Damtshig (tha dam tshig)* which may be understood, in this context, as loyalty between the leader and his people.

The 1998 decree to the Speaker of National Assembly underscored His Majesty’s aspiration for the happiness of his people. His Majesty announced that he will dedicate his “body, speech and mind” (Nishimizu, 2007, p.103) to promote happiness of his people. This decree confirms that happiness and leadership are intertwined since leaders are the vital drivers and actors for people to attain happiness.

Some important decrees that called for reforms are the ones that called for change in civil service, instituting an elected Cabinet Minister and initiating family planning policy. In the decree issued to the Royal Civil Service Commission in 1993, His Majesty commanded to “review the system of management for more peace and happiness” (Nishimizu, 2007, p.61). Similarly, the 1998 decree to the National Assembly Speaker called for further reform of instituting elected Cabinet Minister where His Majesty expressed that this change “...will enhance our development and perpetuate our happiness and peace” (Nishimizu, 2007, p.106). Again in 1984, there was call for initiating family planning policy to promote happiness of the people. Appropriate reforms at critical junctures in the history of a nation are a necessity and an important construct of happiness. These reforms which were associated with happiness also emphasises on the importance of leadership for people to realise happiness.

The link between Buddhism and happiness is also mentioned in the decrees. The Address to the opening session of the 37th Session of the National Assembly in 1972 states that “The state of peace and happiness which our country has been able to enjoy up to the present is in general due to the fact the since ours is a Buddhist country ...”. (Bhutan Times, 2007, p.5). Similarly, in the 1979 National Day Address at Dungsam, His Majesty mentioned that Bhutan is enjoying peace and happiness as Bhutan is a Buddhist country (Bhutan Times, 2007).

Additionally, a decree was issued in 1985 for the creation of Special Commission and entrusting it with the sacred responsibility of promoting Bhutanese identity, culture and etiquette, and to address the problems related to culture. In this decree, His Majesty accentuated the importance of culture and religion. Aligned to the decree, Mathou (2000, p. 34) states that the influence of Buddhism in Bhutan persists as “Bhutan is a Mahayana kingdom”, with vital values such as “compassion, respect for life and nature, social harmony, compromise, and prevalence of individual development over material achievements” having direct bearing on policy making.

The relation between Buddhism and happiness mentioned in the decrees as well as Royal addresses indicate that Buddhism is one of the key constructs of happiness. It also indicates that the concept of happiness is rooted in Buddhism in the Bhutanese context, and therefore the necessity to promote it through collective effort for happiness to materialise for all.

Buddhism, besides being one of the constructs of happiness, is also the basis of the legal culture in Bhutan. For instance, introduction of 10 Pious Acts and 16 Virtuous Acts by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel are considered as first legal inspirations for Bhutan (Dubjur, 2015). Dubjur (2015, p. 7) states that “Dharma is Righteousness. Righteousness is Justice”. Further, Bhutan’s first Chief Justice Lyonpo Sonam Tobgay also states that Fundamental Rights such as Right to Life is compatible with the teachings of Buddha where one is to refrain from “soe-chekpa” or denying life (Tobgay, 2008, p. 23).

In this light, dispensing justice and establishing a professional judiciary system is emphasised as another construct of happiness. This is underscored in the 1989 decree which called for appointment of the judges where His Majesty stated that, “peace and happiness in a country depend on how properly, strongly and impartially the justices are dispensed (Nishimizu, 2007, p. 50).

In the 1978 National Day Address at Gelephu, His Majesty highlighted the need to design sound and relevant policies so that the effort to consolidate sovereignty to achieve economic self-reliance, prosperity and happiness for the Bhutan and its people is materialised (Bhutan Times, 2007). Drawing cue from this address, we can say that happiness is an outcome of a sound and relevant policy.

Further, what is inspiring is that His Majesty’s vision of happiness traversed the boundaries of Bhutan. In 1982, His Majesty shared his aspiration of a happy global society during the inaugural occasion of the establishment of a regional forum for South Asia Corporation. During the occasion, His Majesty remarked that “...if translated into reality, will usher in a new and happier era of mutual corporation and prosperity in our subcontinent” (Bhutan Times, 2007, p.62). The other Royal Addresses to the SAARC also make reference to happiness. For instance, the Address at the Seventh SAARC Summit in 1993 mentioned environmental conservation as “an issue that poses a formidable challenge to South Asia” (Bhutan Times, 2007, p. 139, p.140) which if not addressed soon will have negative implications on the attainment of happiness of people. The same Address also mentions about Bhutan’s belief in the principles of sustainable development and highlighted Bhutan’s commitment to strike a “harmonious balance between environment and development”. Further, the Address at the Ninth SAARC Summit in 1997 in Maldives, expressed that “...protecting the environment and preventing its degradation call for concerted action at the national, regional and global levels” (Bhutan Times, 2007, p.151). In the same address, His Majesty underscored

sustainable development goal as one of the most important national policies of Bhutan. This was a farsighted aspiration as Bhutan and many countries today are implementing SDGs under the aegis of United Nations.

The Royal Addresses of 1980 and 2006 mentions the strategies to realise happiness as a collective effort (Bhutan Times, 2007, p.54, p.190). The 1980 National Day Address at Mongar is an appropriate example. In his address, His Majesty stated that "...there are only few countries that enjoy the same peace, tranquillity and happiness that we in Bhutan do... If we are to enjoy this continued peace and stability, then all of us, the people and government must be fully prepared to make sacrifices, and unite as one to serve our beloved Palden Drukpa" (Bhutan Times, 2007, p.54). The 2006 decree on the stepping down of the Fourth Druk Gyalpo from the Golden Throne also stresses on collective effort as a strategy to attain happiness. His Majesty commanded that "While we prepare ourselves for parliamentary democracy in 2008, we must all pledge with our body, speech...and enhance unity, happiness and well-being of our people for all time to come" (Bhutan Times, 2007, p. 190). The Royal aspiration for collective effort to realise happiness makes every citizen a stakeholder and also resonates well with the present scenario where individualism is becoming a dominant way of life in Bhutan too. What can be deduced from this Royal aspiration is that the constructs of happiness such as unity, loyalty and leadership can take sound roots only through collective efforts.

His Majesty also commanded in the 1986 and 1998 decrees that happiness must be the assessment criteria for the success and achievement of positive outcome of any policy. In 1986 decree His Majesty commanded that "...it has been decided that the basis for the evaluation of the achievements of the objectives of the Sixth Plan is to see whether the people are happy and live a comfortable life" (Nishimizu, 2007, p. 12). What is remarkable is that His Majesty not only proposed the key constructs of happiness but also recommended strategy to attain it and the tool to assess it.

Conclusion

The discussion of Gross National Happiness mostly evokes four pillars, nine domains and its indicators. What we understand from the lessons that we draw from the Royal addresses and decrees is that the framework of GNH and its corner stones are the Royal addresses and the decrees.

The construct of happiness drawn from the Royal addresses and decrees are indicators of where we as individuals and as a society should focus on to attain happiness. We also understand that leadership is pivotal in activating other constructs of happiness and happiness itself. It must be mentioned again that His Majesty also commanded strategy to attain happiness as a collective effort and happiness as a tool of assessment for outcome of policies and development activities.

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