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GNH and Education

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Abstract: *Education is seen or expected to shape the character of a society. And yet, it finds itself in a situation where it tries to respond to or adapting the changes that take place in the society. This paper attempts to discuss on how both education and society influence or interface with each other, mainly from the perspective of history. The paper also highlights the important role played by the Buddhist monasteries in the development of education. Finally, some issues have been identified for discussion*

01 Introduction

The Society, people, parents, brothers and sisters, peers and others are all teachers and educators besides the formal teachers of schools. Therefore, it is pertinent to discuss briefly influence of the society.

The society has gone through different levels or stages of changes from Feudalism (Feudal Society) through Fordism (Industrial Society), to Post Industrial Society or Information Society. Given that each of these societal changes has its own salient features, education was and is influenced by the changes in the Society, and education was and is responsible for bringing about changes in the Society. Without changing society, we will not change education, and without changing education we won't change society. Trying to change one without changing the other can lead to lack of equilibrium or to ineffectiveness. GNH is about educating the whole society and its values are universal.

Charles Handy in his book titled "Gods of Management" aptly ascribes one of the Greek gods or goddesses to each of the different levels of societies in terms of

principles of management and leadership. For example, the god of Zeus is ascribed to the Feudal Society and the god of Apollo to the Industrial Society which saw the birth of bureaucracy and so on. Similarly, education has seen the shift in its purpose or focus as the society has gone through metamorphosis.

02 History of monastic education: what can we learn?

During the period of the feudal society characterized by kingships, chieftains and theocracies and, in case of Bhutan Chilas, Ponlops, Choeje Dungje or Khochhe Poenchen, monasteries and churches were the main centres of learning. Obviously, the focus of education was on spiritual pursuits, which included the training of mind and character formation or what I love to say 'spiritualization and civilization'.

Buddhist monasteries had played an important role in the development of education and in the civilization process of mankind. We all know that the period from 320 BC to 500 AD was called the Buddhist period in the Indian History (Singh, 1990, p: 4), and for over fifteen hundred years, Buddhism was in vogue, and developed a comprehensive system of education (Keay, 1992, p:88). The history of the Buddhist system of education is particularly that of the Buddhist monasteries or 'Sanghas', which means 'harmony' (I stress harmony) where monks gathered together in harmonious pursuits of the way to enlightenment (Komatsu, 1989, p: 149). Education, either secular or sacred, was in the hands of monks and, learning was therefore centred around monasteries (Mookerji, 1947, p: 394; Singh 1990, p: 47). Kings and wealthy citizens patronized and promoted Buddhist education in their kingdoms and countries and by the turn of 7th century AD, monasteries had firm roots throughout the Indian sub-continent.

A brief discussion on the Nalanda Monastery will shed light on the functions of a monastery as a centre of educational importance. By the way there were other Buddhist institutes of higher learning which were of Nalanda's standing. Nalanda became educationally important and famous with the rise of Mahayana Buddhism at the beginning of Christian era. Students not only from all parts of India but also from foreign countries such as China, Korea, Japan, Mongolia, Ceylon and Tibet came to this centre of higher learning "to put an end to their doubts and became

celebrated” (Mookerji, 1947, pp: 563-564). Over one hundred subjects taught in a day included subjects like Philosophy, Law, Astronomy, Medicines as well as Yoga-Sastra. According to Hiuen-Tsang, who also studied in the Institute said that there were 10,000 scholars and students in any given day. So engrossed in their studies or scholarly works, they wished the days were longer. And there was no word of rebellion or complaint amongst 10,000 residents. This is something our modern education system can ponder over.

The Governments during the Buddhist era used to hire the services of monks to design and supervise the construction of bridges and other infrastructures. Even in Bhutan till recently, painting of tapestry/murals (thangka), embroidery, sculpture, traditional boot making, traditional tents and many such others were the monopoly of the monks of monasteries. Given that they were monks, they had no desire to make wealth but to provide services to the people, which was one of the aims of their education. Till the introduction of western styled education mainly in 1950s although the first school in the modern sense was opened in 1914 in Bhutan, monasteries and temples were the only centres of learning. The monasteries still play an important role in providing education including some skills in traditional arts and crafts.

The people in Bhutan by nature are religious. It is difficult to distinguish between social and religious activities in Bhutan. They are intricately interwoven. Although people in general in the past would not have received formal education in the monasteries, they would have received some teachings or moral lessons from their participation in various religious activities or rites. They were and are taught the law of karma, ten virtuous deeds or Ten Commandments, ten negative deeds and sixteen principles and precepts of Buddhism for lay people. So much so, they would not react to abuses by some neighbors saying that it was either his karmic law or the one who offended him would face the consequence of the misdeeds now or in the future life. A Bhutanese is, therefore, forgiving and forgetting, which is prerequisite for harmony in a community. Harmony contributes to the development of social solidarity in a community and people become happier, more creative and innovative and also productive and conscious members of the community. This is the crux of GNH, as I understand.

03. Introduction of western styled education: conflict between two sets of values

The British system of education came to Bhutan via India. The history tells us that there were two main purposes of western styled education introduced in India by the British: one was to train Indians to work for the East India Company as clerks or low level assistants and the other was to evangelize the local people through missionary schools. The birth of Babuism as a result of introduction of bureaucracy brought in by the Industrial revolution was the result of the kind of education provided in the British India. Education or schooling was perceived as the road to become a Babu. It was not inclusive of the purpose of education to make a man a better or civilized or a GNH person.

While there are some common core values between the oriental or Asian and western education systems, differences or conflicts of values, especially culture cannot be over estimated. According to Anthony Gidden and other sociologists, cultural aspects are the unifying phenomenon. In other words, culture, which includes language, binds the people in a community or a nation together. In one of the UN Studies some years ago, it was mentioned that the African Continent is plagued by a plethora of problems mainly stemming from socio-cultural dimensions. During the colonization and aggressive evangelization process done through diverse modes of education, the African cultural values were submerged and suppressed. Whenever some elements of their own culture surfaced in the form of political identity, conflicts broke out as is prevalent and evident even now. There was no assimilation or interfacing of both cultures through education process. Two sets of cultural values remained as separate entities, although the western one prevailed over the local one. The Bhutanese experience is slightly different in the sense that Bhutan, which was never colonized, has been making concerted efforts through persistent policies to preserve and promote our cultural heritage both at the school and the societal level. In the name of culture, we do not intend to make Bhutan a cultural zoo but therefore we talk of living and dynamic culture.

The colonizers transplanted their education system in the colonized countries irrespective of the soil conditions of the host countries. The carrot provided by the western education was so attractive for socio-economic benefits that every parent would aspire and strive to send their children to schools. It can, therefore, be deduced that the purpose of education as perceived and pursued by individuals was and still is to selfishly climb up the social and economic ladder rather than becoming a better person to serve the nation like the monks of monasteries in the past. As our Prime Minister keeps saying that the greed or selfishness of individuals or communities or nations is the root cause for the problems facing the world today.

04. Elitist to mass education: impact on cost and quality

Education during the period of the feudal society used to be accessible to a small group of privileged people, who used to govern the rest of the people. Education was elitist in nature, although elitist schools, which are exclusively for rich people, still exist. Subjects like Theology, Law, Logic, etc. were very popular. With the advent of industrial revolution (Industrial Society), education became accessible to majority of people and therefore shifting the nature of education from elitist to mass education. We now talk about universal education. All these have impact on cost and quality of education.

05. Focus on sciences at the cost of humanities and arts

The sending of Sputnik by the Russian to the space and the focus by German universities in the nineteenth century on library and laboratory had forced many governments of developed countries, especially the United States of America, to reform their education systems emphasizing the sciences, which I believe was done at the cost of humanities and arts. All these have the immense impact on the societal values. In early nineties, the Harvard University made it mandatory for science students to take 8 to 9 credits of Humanities subjects to create human scientists and engineers, and students of Arts and Humanities to take some science subjects to appreciate the contribution of sciences to mankind. The 1980s also saw the focus on the vertical specialization of subjects to the extent of one professor from the University of Standford during the workshop in the University

of Bristol in 1983, which was attended by Ivan Illych, said: If a patient went to an ophthalmologist, the patient would be sent back because the patient was suffering from the left eye and the doctor was the right eye specialist.

The post second world war saw the emergence of red bricks universities in the United Kingdom including universities of agriculture and, polytechnics or skills-based universities. All these came with the costs to the governments, thus affecting the quality of education to a large extent for want of resources. The resource cake is now shared by many educational institutions.

06. Economic development: making people more greedy

Then came the economic growth and development characterized by ruthless promotion of principles of consumerism and materialism, making people more greedy and selfish. Coupled with this negative impact of economic development is the process of robotization and mechanization of human beings. This is not to demean the importance of the economic development, which is one of main means to achieve GNH. Our King keeps reminding us about the need to have a strong and dynamic economy in order to achieve GNH. Economic development, from the perspective of GNH, should be seen as a creative process rather than aggressive accumulation of wealth. For me GDP or GNP is one of the key indicators of GNH.

07. How to harmonize the principles of capitalism and communism: GNH way?

People say that communism has failed as the economic growth model. Capitalism is not doing well either. Here, I would like to quote what the former foreign minister of Czechoslovakia said in UNO in 1983: "Capitalism knows how to create wealth but does not know how to distribute wealth. Communism knows how to distribute wealth but does not know how to create wealth." I believe that economy of GNH should be the combination of both in the sense that we should know how to create wealth as well as how to distribute wealth on the basis of equity and justice. This was echoed by our Prime Minister in his opening address. Our education system and Society together should gear up towards this end. While drafting our Party Manifesto based on GNH, we were mindful of the fact,

we would be perceived as socialists. Thus, we have mentioned 9% economic growth as the top priority amongst various policies and programmes reflected in the Manifesto.

08. Some issues for discussion on education

- As already alluded to, the purpose of education, I believe, is to make a man a better person who can fit in and contribute to his society for the harmonious living and economic prosperity. In other words, the development of individual personality wholly through spiritualization and civilization process has been the main aim of education. The recent years have seen the shift in the purpose and focus of education, although there has been stress on the wholesome education, which includes knowledge, skill and attitude as well as Dalor's four pillars of learning, Educating for GNH for me is an attempt to redefine the purpose of education. Here, I am talking about the symbiotic relationship between an individual and a society. A GNH society creates a social milieu where an individual develops a positive social, economic, psychological and spiritual state of mind, leading to productive and innovative contributions to the society.
- In Bhutan, Buddhist monasteries were the main centres of learning or education as late as 1950s. Some parents still opt for monastic education, mainly for spiritual reason. There is a comprehensive system and structure of monastic educational institutions ranging from primary through secondary to tertiary levels, although relevance and employability other than spiritual pursuits are becoming concerns. Before the advent of modern education, graduates from monastic schools used to work in civil administrations or in the entire government machineries. Even now, graduates from tertiary monastic institutes are employed as teachers to teach the national language and in judiciary and other organizations. Notwithstanding the relevance, some lessons can be learned from the monastic education process.

- The concept of relevance and employability of education is quite often promoted at the cost of wholeness of education. Ivan Illych in his book 'De-Schooling' would ask that why we should send children to schools if they were to work as waiters or waitresses in hotels. In this context, he questioned the purpose of schooling. The issue here is as to how we should balance between relevance/employability aspect of education and spiritual and moral values of education. GNH approach is perceived to strike the balance. In the past, all textbooks were selected or written in such a way that societal core values were taught through hidden curriculum while languages and skills were taught through open curriculum. The selection of a story titled "the Imp and the Crust" by Leo Tolstoy in the Radiant Readers series is an example of teaching the bad effects of alcohol. As regards the employment, there is a need to educate the society as well as students to respect the dignity of labour. The influence of Babuism is very visible in the Bhutanese society as a result of modern education, therefore not respecting the dignity of labour.
- Some elements of Guru-Chela relationship such as respect for teachers and love for students have now become ever more necessary for the true teaching and learning to take place. Even for the spiritual pursuit to enlightenment, Buddha felt it necessary to have in place the principles and precepts or rules and regulations and therefore the introduction of Vinayana, which governed all the monks including scholars and teachers living in a Sangha. One of my friends recently remarked sadly that these days teachers fear of students while a few years ago it was the other way round. Some elements of fear stemming from respect for teachers on the part of students are of great importance.
- In the absence of the essence of Guru-Chela relationship, a teacher teaches for the sake of teaching and a student learns for the sake of learning. The only common and shared goal both of them have is passing the examinations, especially the external examinations, which is the only key performance indicator used for the performance of schools. The United

- We should design and develop curriculum that will capture the teaching of GNH values through hidden curriculum but not through the open mode so as to avert the perception of indoctrination and dogmatization.
- Televisions, video games and such others have both direct impact on the quality of family life and inculcation of reading habits in students.
- Rapid economic growth has littered the pure minds of many Bhutanese. Materialism and consumerism have now begun to rule the roost of the core traditional and Buddhist values, which I have described above. The by-product of the socio-economic development is that the people, especially the youth, have started indulging in social vices and ills that were unheard before in a still serene and small Kingdom of Bhutan.
- Over and above all, sustainably and substantially provided resources are the key to improvement of quality of education including the production of GNH graduates. Due to the sheer size of schools and educational institutions, governments including in the developed countries are finding it difficult to provide necessary resources. In fact, public educational institutions have always been the victims of budgetary cuts, especially during the economic recession. Bhutan is no exception.
- Creation of Bhutan a knowledge-based and IT based society would require resources.
- Relevance of Edward De Borno's book on "Lateral Thinking" to GNH and educational values.

Keeping the above problems in mind, the Prime Minister has initiated the conduct of a series of conferences and workshops on "Educating for GNH". My colleague Aum Sangay Zam, Secretary of Education, who is here, will be happy to share with you the purpose and the outcome of those workshops.

Dhamapada:

Peace comes from friendship.

Friendship comes from understanding.

Understanding comes from wisdom.

Wisdom comes from knowledge and experience.

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