

The Concept of Green School in Bhutan for Holistic Education and Development

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Abstract

Green school as mentioned in Thakur S. Powdyel's book *My Green School: An Outline* (2014) was developed to support the initiative 'Educating for Gross National Happiness', conceived in 2009 by the Ministry of Education, Bhutan. This to realize the need for a holistic development of individuals and for the fulfilment of true purpose of education. However, the green school domain requires deeper understanding in correlation with the nine domains of Gross National Happiness philosophy to unsettle the hollowness and reductionism of modern education. Therefore, the paper attempts to explore how the process of holistic learning and wholesome education become the key to understand the principles of life, by analysing the concentric sense of the green school concept constituting eight dimensions represented as 'Sherig Mandala'. The inherent meanings of the elements of greenery categorized as natural, social, cultural, intellectual, academic, aesthetic, spiritual and moral have been closely examined to revitalize the claims of education.

Keywords: Green school, Sherig-Mandala, holistic education, Gross National Happiness, life & learning.

1. Introduction

The purpose of education and the educators' goal do not lie in a mass production of certified students to fit the job market 'assembly line' but carry the supreme responsibility to nurture the individuals as complete human beings with a sense of direction and moral uprightness that lends meaning and purpose to their lives. For an individual's early life of nearly twenty years spent in the process of learning is the most crucial period to shape the thinking pattern and behavior of learners that could set them on self-discovery to realize one's potential. In this case, Green schools operate as the most suitable medium for teachers and learners to develop such a holistic outlook toward life and learning with the aim to reclaim the core principles of teaching and learning. In the Japanese translation of the book *My Green School: An Outline* by Prof. Hosoda, the author's view has been quoted as (2018, as cited in Lewis, 2019), "It is not only my message that a green school tries to communicate. It is the message of my country, it is the message of Bhutan, because



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deep at the heart of a green school is the vision of development called Gross National Happiness, articulated and gifted to us and the world by His Majesty the Fourth King Jigme Singye Wangchuk" (p. 20). The concept, besides dealing with the idea of education through the natural environment, also has a major claim on an individual's life and learning on a moral level, thus, integrating the physical and psychosocial ambience. Powdyel (2014) rightly emphasizes that, "in the context of education, green is the necessary orientation of mind and heart in the cultivation of the useful and the graceful, true and the good"; therefore, "green is not just a color, but a metaphor that stands for anything that sustains life and living beings" (p. 11). In this regard, the field of education truly holds the privilege of being called the 'noble' sector due to its mission in cultivating the nobility of mind, heart and hands.

The fundamental idea of Buddhist monastic education in Bhutan was inward looking with an emphasis on meditative mind, deeper reflection, contentment and search of the self. However, the introduction of modern education since 1968 changed the focus from internal to external aspects resulting in deterioration of the value system. The claim is duly supported in the keynote address delivered during the workshop themed 'Educating for Gross National Happiness' held on 7th December 2009. The former Prime Minister of Bhutan, Jigme Y. Thinley, expressed that the modern education system undermines values like honour, loyalty and devotion and thereby serves to produce individuals driven by personal success and ambition (Ministry of Education, 2011). The shift did create a gulf in terms of split persona with a partial understanding of knowledge and self. In this scenario, the all-encompassing concept of Green School attempts to restore the process of learning that connects and rehabilitates one's self to an undivided persona. Prior to it, in order to reform the country's education system and to reclaim the true purpose of education with holistic values, in December 2009, the Ministry of Education of Bhutan, launched the nationwide initiative called 'Educating for Gross National Happiness', with a motto to infuse GNH principles and values in the school curriculum. According to Hayward & Coleman (2010), the educational reform initiative emphasized on creative and critical thinking, ecological literacy, practice of the ancient profound wisdom and culture, a holistic understanding of the earth and genuine care for nature, also giving rise to a need for concrete strategy thus resulting in the birth of the book chosen for study. The currency and relevancy of the ideas discussed in the book is seemingly evident in its continued translations in many Indian and foreign languages.

Thakur S. Powdyel the former Education Minister and an educator by choice, conviction and passion has been recognized for his dedication to education by the honour of outstanding awards such as the Coronation Gold Medal in 2008, the Gusi Peace Medal for life-time Contribution to Education in 2011, Global Education Award for Outstanding Contribution to Education in 2012, the International Award for Outstanding Contribution to Education in 2012 and the Institutional Award: The Honour of Druk Thuksey in 2012. He writes regularly on educational issues and on Gross National Happiness underpinning his ideas on educational integrity, national self-respect and moral literacy. Thus the model education system proposed in the book, *My Green School: An Outline*, is an attempt to produce green minds with an insightful understanding of life and learning expected to bring forth nobility of action contrary to today's education that has been reduced to a mere acquisition of knowledge and paper-degree.

2. Aim

The paper aims to synthesize the eight dimensions of 'Green School' with the nine domains of Gross National Happiness to emphasize the mission of education and its holistic outlook in opposition to the uni-dimensional mentalistic approach of modern education. In the process, the paper attempts to examine the concentric sense of the eight elements represented in the 'Sherig Mandala' and its integrated approach for a holistic learning, to emphasize the fact that only the nobility of mind, heart and hands would empower the learners.

3. Method:

In order to provide conceptual clarity about green school in Bhutan the cardinal elements of the model school proposed for Bhutan's education system will be analyzed in association with the core ideas of the nation's Gross National Happiness philosophy. As a qualitative study, the paper analyzes the strategies involved in green school for the wholesome development of a child so as to reinforce the implicit meaning and purpose of education. For this purpose, Thakur S. Powdyel's *My Green School: An Outline (2014)* has been used as the primary source and *Educating for Gross National Happiness: A Guide to Advancing Gross National Happiness* as the major secondary source. Other relevant books on education like *Educating for GNH: Nurturing Green School for Green Bhutan: A Guide to School Management*, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire and articles from *The Druk Journal* and *Centre for Bhutan Studies* were also consulted to construct scholarly arguments and to validate the findings.

4. Discussion:

Gyeltshen (2016), an educator in his doctoral thesis titled, 'Contemplative practices and learning: A holistic approach to education in Bhutan' defines 'holistic education' as a system that takes into account the affective dimension of learning as much as the cognitive dimension. While cognitive learning takes care of knowledge and skills for workforce development, affective learning promotes socio-emotional skills, spirituality and social-cultural values. Thakur S. Powdyel clarified that Green School is the GNH approach to education, which is simply another name for doing education's job the way it ought to be done (Ministry of Education, [MoE], 2011). In this direction, the end goal of both Green School and GNH are toward producing wholesome individuals in whom the affective and cognitive dimensions are fully developed. According to Saravanakumar (2017), an Indian educator, education is complete only when it leads to an all-round development of the individual that encompasses not only mental but also moral development. On close scrutiny, the eight cardinal elements of a Green School are at the heart of the effort called 'educere' meaning education, the function of which is not just to educate children to love, care, respect, and conserve natural resources as information-oriented learning but to practice the idea of nurturing nature, externally and internally in terms of outer environment and inner self to realize the meaning of interconnectedness.

Similarly, among the nine GNH domains, the education sector receives primary attention due to its ability to transform the ideal GNH philosophy into a practical reality. In the context of Bhutan, children and youth comprise 21.8 percentage of population; only if they are educated

holistically, they can become the change makers, and right education is crucial to realize this purpose. In nutshell, the proposition is, if the national objective has to be realized and if GNH as the guiding philosophy of the nation has to be successful, then education is the only means to meet the goals and the role of Green Schools is vital for the wholesome development of children that renders equal importance to all the dimensions. The idea of Green School has been founded on the principle that education must ensure to transfer the values contained in the eight dimensions onto the learners through curriculum and co-curricular activities in an atmosphere that provides respect, care, support, warmth, and delight which is the underlying facet that GNH aspires to achieve for the society and the nation at large.

'Sherig Mandala', literally meaning 'Education Circle', arranged in concentric layers, move inward in a phasic pattern from the periphery to the core starting with natural greenery and gradually moving toward the moral greenery emphasizing the fact that moral principles and values are the founding ideas of Bhutan's system of education. As a universal phenomenon, though natural greenery helps individuals to sustain on the physical level in a conducive environment, moral greenery is what the education fraternity needs today when the standards of education has become debatable. The paper claims that while the 3Rs, reading, writing and arithmetic, focuses only on the cognitive aspect of education, the eight cardinal elements concentrates on the whole person considering an individual as a combination of natural, social, cultural, intellectual, academic, aesthetic, spiritual and moral elements, for, according to Powdyel (2014), "what is learnt in the seats of learning should have a bigger purpose than is the case today" (p. 7). In the broadest term, the eight elements of a Green School will help to re-position one's attitude towards teaching and learning to develop a wholesome personality in the learners.



Fig.1 Sherig Mandala, the eight cardinal elements of Green School

Natural greenery:

By the suggestiveness of the term, 'Green School' is naturally or environmentally green wherein the physical ambience makes the exterior of the school a pleasant and welcoming space for children. Such natural environment also becomes the learning field, for learning to begin naturally

with inquisitive questions and meaningful inquiry. For instance, the petal arrangement in plants and flowers would be the means to study mathematical patterns and sequences popularly known as Fibonacci sequence. By observing the arrangement of leaves in a plant where the new leaves do not cover the older ones, children can learn about survival skills with the implied message that there is enough for everyone in the world. Philosophically, it shows one cannot obstruct another person's growth and life skills become an integral part of learning.

Regarding the physical atmosphere of a Green School, Jablonska (2017), an educator ascertains that the children understand the meaning of green only by conserving and learning with the environment. Thus, a naturally green school engages students in daily morning social work to tend a flower garden and vegetable patch that instills in learners the value about dignity of labour. Further, nurturing the school environment seems to overwhelm the heart and refresh the eyes and minds of learners thereby making nature a teacher. Teaching and learning also become joyful as students learn about growth, regeneration and sustainability of life and living from their firsthand experience with nature in the form of natural greenery. When children plant, grow, harvest and then consume the produce like vegetables and fruits from the school garden, they learn what self-reliance is. Thus, the green aspects of a Green School include nature and ecology, environment and sustainability, fulfilling the orientation of head, heart and hands.

Social Greenery:

A 'Green School' is a place where students and educators build a common space with a sense of community and shared home in children to learn, grow and develop into a responsible social being. Social greenery talks about building relationships and friendship, with a sense of understanding and a shared relation between school and community, teacher and student and parents and teacher to enable learners acquire values like cooperation and collaboration. Dum (2016), a research scholar in her article, 'Social value, children and the human right to education' argues that the younger generation for instance, lack the tolerance for people who are different and think different than them and as a result the future of young children can be compromised by the lack of social values in them. To address the issues causing social indifference and bias in youngsters, the aspect of social greenery teaches children to live and learn together respecting their uniqueness and commonness with social values. As adults, when such wholesome individuals enter the society, he or she would be able to release positive energy and can make the society a better place.

Cultural greenery:

In continuation, cultural greenery aims to cultivate cultural values, beliefs and norms, since culture is the way of life that defines the sense of self and identity by means of cultural markers. That's the reason educators need to create space for the expression and celebration of cultural experiences that would cultivate grace and ease in individuals because the kind of culture that children imbibe in school will be the standard for the society and the country. According to Ura et al. (2012), in their book, '*An extensive analysis of GNH index*', happiness is considered intrinsic to development, in the sense that no meaningful development can occur without cultural vitality

and growth along with a peaceful environment that allows spiritual nourishment. If material growth undermines the spiritual framework of societal values such as compassion and integrity, then the development is incomplete. Researchers, Drakpa and Dorji (2013) in their paper titled 'Green School for Green Bhutan: Relationship with Gross National Happiness in Chukha Dzongkhag' claim that a decline in traditional heritage and culture will lead to a general dissatisfaction in society. Nevertheless, a culturally green school organizes activities like traditional games, songs and dances to make children rooted to their cultural identity. Further, to negate the assumption that the process of learning is just an intellectual or cognitive function, the first three dimensions of Green School emphasizes on affective dimensions of learning in children by building their attitudes, behaviors, physical skills, socio-emotional skills and socio-cultural values to nurture the youngsters with hospitality, sociability and cohesion, that would serve as a strong basis for their holistic approach toward learning and life.

Intellectual & Academic greenery:

Upon this foundation, the intellectually green school develops in children a positive mental disposition to new ideas, knowledge, and information with exposure to thinkers and philosophers that would certainly enrich their cognitive domain. A school in general might have excellent facilities and abundant resources, but without vibrant ideas and circulation of profound thoughts, mere buildings and structures cannot render life be it to the school or to the learners. First and foremost, a Green School teaches children their relation to the environment and to the society with which the young minds cultivate positive energy and good will. Once they have learnt the importance of their cultural roots and understood the power of ideas then children will be in a position to open their books for real learning which will make them academically green. But, academic greenery in a green school is not only about learning different subjects, acquiring marks and moving to the next higher class, it is about learning to explore the ideas and values in each discipline with an openness of mind to seek and to value new discoveries and insights by examining their merits. Commonly, children might never ask why they learn poetry or calculus in their curriculum, but an academically green school would help children understand that each of these disciplines is a vast continent of ideas and information that give vitality to the many academic disciplines that they study in general. Freire (2005), a Brazilian educator in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* argues that education today suffers from 'narration sickness' where the narrating subject is the teacher and the listening objects are the students. Freire explains how the content of the subjects in the process of being narrated tend to become stereotyped, lifeless and petrified. In this subject-object teaching-learning process the teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable. This monotony is broken in an academically green school using a variety of teaching strategies like field trips, mix-pair-share, inside-outside circle and reading retreat that avoids confining teaching-learning within the four walls. Starting from its first aspect, the natural greenery, green school encourages exploration of the outside environment to bring the practical element into the teaching learning process, thus preventing children getting detached from reality as well as keeping them academically fit and sound.

Aesthetic greenery:

Academic greenery in turn would help children develop the aesthetic greenery of being optimistic. It is the quality of being able to appreciate a beautiful object or a piece of work for what it truly is. Promotion of aesthetic greenery is essentially important in the present era, when children and youth have become more or less compliant consumers to devour the unauthentic information circulated in the media, the influence of which is so strong that even fake and untrue things become true to them. Whereas, aesthetic greenery teaches students to value only what is truly good and worthwhile. Moreover, Freire refers to modern education as the 'banking concept' that allows students only to receive and store information and be passive, like money deposited in the bank. This misguided system prevents children from discovering their talents and aesthetic sensibilities. But an aesthetically green school enables children to be active and appreciative of the beautiful, the graceful and the tasteful with the ability to distinguish between appearance and reality. It is believed that with their refined aesthetic sense children can also relatively connect themselves to the spiritual, the metaphysical, and the unknown modes of being named as soul, spirit, or god or the infinite source of power. It paves way for spiritual greenery that develops peace of mind, concentration and good attitude in children and youth to make them better citizens.

Spiritual greenery:

Spiritual greenery would also help children to look into themselves. This particular dimension of life lifts them above their mundane selves and connects them to a higher level of consciousness that is their spiritual self which teaches them to moderate their ego and make them more humble and a spiritual being. Yocum et al. (2016), an educator in his research article on 'Exploring spiritual needs in classroom' explains that when students' spiritual needs are unmet, their emotional development will also be negatively impacted. Further, the negative spiritual ambience will affect their academic performance too. This statement confirms the importance of taking into account students' spiritual needs in the classroom to enhance their learning and for a wholesome development. For this purpose, a spiritually green school ensures the practice of mindfulness by means of meditation during morning assembly, and before lessons. The practice of mind training helps learners to get rid of negativity, stress, worry, fear and anxiety and make them gain better focus, concentration, positivity and receptive openness which will improve the efficiency of students. Such spiritual elements of the school contribute to the growth of the student in a holistic manner where morality becomes the yard stick to distinguish the categories of values like right and wrong, truth and falsehood, good and bad.

Moral greenery:

Moral greenery is considered the supreme element of a Green School because, "We define education as a process that gently draws the human mind to look for and to love what is true and good and beautiful" (Powdyel, 2014, p. 11). In a morally green school children would learn how morally upright values establish the law of good life, and pave the pathway for better societies and nations. Gyatsho (2019), a Buddhist educator claims that today ironically education is seen as

an avenue to facilitate the capacity to climb the social ladder and as a result, moral values like right over wrong and truthful over falsehood are not only ignored but also get reversed and in the absence of such moral values the future of students in particular and the nation at large will be compromised. Therefore, a morally green school will foster goodness over cleverness, cooperation over competition, fair-play over victory. In this sense, moral greenery stands at the heart of true education, and acts as the centrifugal force that marks the developments in other seven domains of Green School.

Importance of Education in GNH:

Akin to the eight dimensions of green school, the nine domains of GNH also focuses on the physical and psychosocial climate of the schools as they conceptually share a common motif to prepare individuals for the world as well as for life. Another underlying belief which binds the two principles together is that amidst the socio-economic, environmental, and political considerations, both the philosophies consider education as a means to find solutions to realize the meaningful purpose of life as well as to bridge the gap between individual and collective needs to attain holistic growth. Contrary to it, today's education system has become obsessed with acquisition and achievements; Miller (2005) calls it the disintegration of human wholeness. In the recent years, there has been an emerging global trend that drove education toward individual success and personal achievements with regard to social position, a five digit salary, acquisition of property in the form of land, house, vehicles and ownership which misdirected the mission of education thus undermining the common good and human flourishing by moral means. In this regard, Phuntsho (2000), a Buddhist scholar and historian, in his article 'On the two ways of learning in Bhutan' states:

Modern education is strongly influenced by materialism, and spiritual endeavors, if any, are marginal. A student is encouraged even at an early stage of learning to opt for subjects through which he or she can develop skills to earn a better living or choose professions that are financially lucrative and socially beneficial (p. 101).

In this sense, the goal of modern education has been narrowed by equating knowledge and skills only with career. As a result, the flourishing of a holistic human being, which is the true purpose of education, has been left behind and jeopardized. Therefore, the contemporary situation demands a kind of education that is focused not only on individualistic needs, but also consciousness of others' needs so as to share and collaborate in finding solutions collectively. Educators like William, Brien and LeBlanc (2012) in their article titled 'Transforming schools into learning organizations: Supports and barriers to educational reform' have observed that "the current education system will not be able to sustain its goals if it continues with the materialistic values as current needs of the students and the environment are different" (p. 2). The current educational needs with its unbearable pressure on the youth and on environment due to the innumerable but directionless choices and due to the exploitation of both renewable and non-renewable resources respectively is in dire need of reformation. On the whole, there is a lack of moral and spiritual guidance either to make a judicial choice or to distinguish between basic needs and wants, requirements and the luxury of goods and services. As a response to this current situation, the values contained in the eight cardinal elements of a Green School and the nine

domains of Gross National Happiness are considered important to restore the holistic values of the educational system pertaining to Bhutanese society in particular and the universal societies in general.

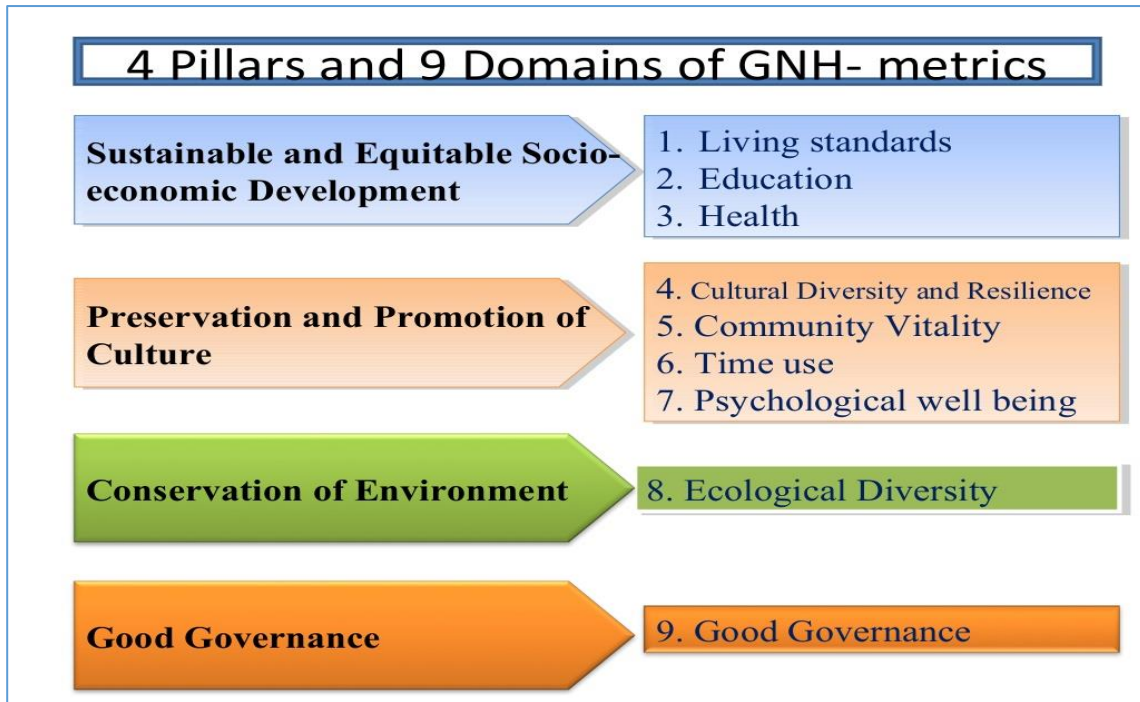


Fig.2 The 4 pillars and 9 domains of GNH

The discussion identifies a close alignment in the end goals of both Green School and GNH so as to produce holistically nurtured individuals for which education serves as the primary force. The eight elements of greenery in a Green School emphasize that schooling and education does not just mean getting good grades but rather they serve as the training ground to transform students into responsible citizens to secure their future as well the future of the nation. Similarly, the nine domains of GNH also concentrate on holistic development by encouraging individuals to acquire necessary life skills to combat challenges.

Compatibility between Green School and GNH domains:

Next to education, environment is an important domain that receives utmost attention in the concepts of Green School and GNH to emphasize the importance of interdependence as an indispensable factor of human existence. Since advancements in science and technology have made human beings exploit the environment for their personal benefits, children ought to be taught that human interaction with the environment is not only for food, fuel, and water but for sensory learning and to understand the value of giving and receiving. The findings of Dema (2018), in her paper, 'Educating for Gross National Happiness' is worth consideration as she has pursued to study happiness as the goal of education by looking at Bhutan and its educational philosophy, Educating for Gross National Happiness. She explains that children when engaged with nature can

accommodate a wide range of behaviors as Nature helps to improve children's mental health and cultivates social connectedness. Further the scholar suggests that, in subjects like science and social studies, concepts related to sustainability, interdependence and eco-consciousness could be embedded to connect learners with the real world experiences and build their resilience to tackle the challenges of life. For example, if asked where the water comes from, most of our children would instantly say it comes from a tap or a shower head. What children need to learn and be aware of is how the water gets to the taps in the first place. The scheduled field trips to learn the journey of water or river in itself will become a way of learning. It would enable children to understand the ecosystem, the vegetation and its habitats as well as the impact of human footprints. They could also learn about non-dominant values, in order to develop an eco-friendly attitude that does not breed the idea that one has to overpower nature.

Through the GNH domain termed Psychological well-being, a wholesome individual can be nurtured. The practice of this domain is akin to the spiritual greenery of a Green School wherein children would be in a position to find the meaning and purpose of life by connecting themselves to spiritual values like compassion and peace which is concerned with the inner life of individuals. The meaningful incorporation of values in the system can be demonstrated not only through narratives in text books but through good practices that will facilitate the formation of positive behavior, emotional quotient and strong character among the students.

Similar to the values emphasized by the cultural greenery component in Green School, the cultural domain of GNH promotes identity, non-alienation, diversity and dignity. The most ideal setting to emphasize these values in learners could be the educational institutions by imparting local wisdom and a sense of belongingness among boys and girls wherein cultural dimension is an educative asset as it contributes to the development of students' creativity, cultural identities and intercultural understanding. Inculcating values under the cultural vitality domain can be practiced by constituting language policies where children's individual dialect is allowed to be spoken in certain forums besides Dzongkha, the national language and English, the official language as well as observing national as well as local cultural festivals to ensure an intercultural understanding among children. The practice of such wholesome values in the education system would defy the shortcomings of the modern education, whatsoever.

Together, the eight cardinal elements of a Green School and the domains of GNH could broaden the horizons of education by removing the bottlenecks from the current system of education to bring about a meaningful reform, in the true sense. Today one could not live as an extended family, as families have become nuclear with just husband, wife and child with not more than four members in a household. Somehow education has not broadened the horizons rather it has narrowed the mind and made individuals exclusive and not inclusive. But a Green School is one large family with different kinds of people from different cultures, different languages, different attitudes, likes and dislikes coming together without friction which needs enormous maturity and a broad way of looking at life. Hence the values that the dimensions of greenery and domains of GNH attempt to cultivate are the nobility of mind, heart and hands to produce holistic individuals which closely resembles the ideals of APJ Abdul Kalam, the former Indian President, who envisioned an all-inclusive education of encompassment:

Where there is righteousness in the heart, there is beauty in the character, when there is beauty in the character, there is harmony in the home, when there is harmony in the home, there is order in the nation, when there is order in the nation there is peace in the world (Kalam, 2013).

Therefore, the right kind of education starts with the grooming of the heart to build righteousness in character and what is taught in schools has to be practiced at home and in all walks of life for a peaceful world order. In this transformative endeavor, schools play a key role in equipping children with the necessary intellectual, emotional, social and moral resources. A Green School stands as a learning model not only to build an ecologically sustainable society that teaches children the value of eco-literacy to co-exist with nature but also instills human values in children in the form of good thought, speech and action that would empower them with life skills to become well rounded individuals.

5. Conclusion:

The traditional notion perceived education as an end in itself in the individual's quest to remove ignorance and attain greater knowledge for its own sake. Whereas, modern education, dominated by reasoning, shifted the focus away from the heart and solely to the brain. Nevertheless, for a truly holistic education, it is necessary to connect the heart to the brain to achieve moral virtues than making moral endeavors marginal. However, even in a small country like Bhutan, the outlook and approach of modern education have created a lacuna, a sense of moral vacuity that brought about behavioral changes, different self-perceptions and expectations in the Bhutanese society which often do not match the opportunities that presently exist in the country. Nevertheless, the divergent attributes of monastic and modern education, finds a meeting point in the Green School model as both values and skills define a Green School that prepares individuals with moral strength to face unforeseen challenges and the crises of the modern world. Being an educator himself, Powdyel enlarged his vision from the initial step that every Bhutanese child has the 'Right to education' toward 'Right education', to make education holistic. Though the concept of Green School emerged as a strategy to support the philosophy of Gross National Happiness, it offers itself as viable alternative model to reorient the motif of contemporary education, by equipping itself with an all-inclusive purpose ranging from physical to moral. By equating the motifs of Green School and GNH, the paper has evaluated the conceptual meaning as well as the proximity of the two distinct philosophical thoughts of Bhutan to promote an inclusive education that could develop Bhutan and the world societies with efficient and skillful human resources for the times to come.

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