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## Balancing Self-Satisfaction and Moderation: The Ideal Economic Philosophy in the Nepalese Context

Shivlal Bhusal<sup>a, \*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Central Department of Economics, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal

\*Corresponding author Email: [shivabhusal123@gmail.com](mailto:shivabhusal123@gmail.com)

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**Abstract:** Intellectuals since ages past have started searching for an ideal society that has continued to the present day. Plato in the West built his perfect society based on rational human decisions to secure economic well-being. In the East, Buddha, Mahabir, and Kautilya have enlightened ethical aspects of economic decisions. The course of history, rational thinking as the guiding force in the evolution of civilization, has played some part in the process, however, the basic worries about human emotions and security concerns today are not so different from those of the cavemen. Both Eastern and Western understandings seek to distinguish between harmful and beneficial economic activities in various approaches and try to make human beings ethically mature. A thorough comparative study integrating practical ethical values in economic activity is still lacking. Applying epistemology and metaphysics, this paper has attempted to analyze the philosophical comparison that examines the economic philosophy of the ancient Indian subcontinent influenced by Buddhism, Jainism, and Vedic perspectives on the economic concept of wisdom and moderation. Drawing on live evidence and literature, it has attempted to compare these two philosophies on economic behavior, highlighting the basic interpretations in the Nepalese context, described as the Philosophy of Himalayan Communities. It has been found that the cultural teaching inherited by traditional practices has integrated economic well-being into a broad philosophical model of balancing self-interest and moderation, with the interplay of objective and subjective concerns having relevance in the modern context.

**Keywords:** Buddhist Economics, Human Behaviour, Moderation Self-Satisfaction, Well-Being, Nepalese Context

### 1. Introduction

Human activities are self-motivated and dynamic expressions of intention, emotions, and motivation directed by values, reasoning, and situations. The men termed "Manussya" addressing human beings, have been attributed and explained to various origins and interpretations. It is linked to the mythical progenitor of humanity in the East, and Buddhist texts explain its derivation as "Manussya -man," emphasizing the advanced mental state of humans compared to the more basic or undeveloped mental faculties of other animals. This philosophy explains human beings as the uppermost, due to the enormous potential of the mind (Clark & Chalmers, 1998). Western philosophy analyzes the human through ideas of rationality, and self-awareness. Thinkers like Aristotle and Plato recognize human capacity for reason, ethical decision-making, and balance. Examining the behaviors of early humans offers a basis for understanding the historical progress of economic carry-out of the shift from very survival-oriented activities to more concerted and organized methods. In the Stone Age, people hid in caves, and everyone looked upon the next group of caves with hesitancy, and competition for territoriality, food, and survival. Lack of proper understanding, emotion, danger, and fear surround them. Gradually they understand each other's difficulties, develop ideas to compromise, try to minimize the threat of shortages and search for safe shelter to overcome fear. Their needs and wants increase as they advance the standard of living. Human beings have developed the idea of production, storage, exchange, and distribution to fulfill their respective consumption needs and create a society as we are today (Polanyi, 2001). As civilization advances, philosophers of the time strive to innovate and analyze the basic activities of mankind.

Self-satisfaction, the core of conventional economics can be defined as the subjective state of being where an individual's understanding and perceptions are fulfilled. It can be viewed as a part of the pursuit and purpose of an action, whereas moderation is the practice of restraint or balance that exists as a guiding principle of access and



shortage. Bringing line into human actions in normal and ethical rules, endorsing equilibrium in self and social contexts, moderation can lead to self-satisfaction by fostering balance and reducing the chaos by extremes. To explore human behavior, western philosophers took economics as a separate science and developed a philosophy dealing with the economic behavior of mankind known as the economics of self-satisfaction. This model attempts to explain human economic behavior by distinguishing that human beings have unlimited wants constrained by scarcity. Scarcity dictates choice, and choice comprises an opportunity cost. The ultimate aim is to attain maximum satisfaction, (Robbins, 1935). These core concepts are encapsulated in a model that calls the basic actions of our lives from an economic perspective, known as the common principle of economics. It addresses the complex art of economics in a simplified form. The analysis made by Eastern philosophers about the nature of human activity is to some extent different from the Western view. Buddhists and other Eastern thinkers, with their spiritual approaches, emphasize the duality of ethics and human desires. They delve into underlying factors such as human emotions, fear, desires, morals, ethics, etc., that determine human activities, submitting thoughtful insights into human desire, psychology, and economic dynamics. From their perspective, economic behaviors cannot be isolated from other fields of action.

Throughout history, rational thinking has played a role in shaping the evolution of civilization. However, if we critically examine our so-called advanced society, it becomes clear that our fundamental need for security remains much the same as it was for early humans (Harries & Rodríguez, 2023). While our societies have grown more complex, emotional impulses still drive us more than reason. In recent times, many scholars have written on economics and behavioral theories. However, they all approach the form of a capitalist's (classical) point of view or a socialist line of thought. Neither of these systems pays attention to nor considers the inner development of man as a crucial element in the growth of society and neither has recognized the rapid decline in human values and social behavior through all classes, eroding the basics of morality and paving the way for the ultimate downfall of the entire edifice (Mastroianni, 2023). Genuine concerns can be seen in the writing that if the current trend of moral decline persists, it may sooner or later become difficult to distinguish human behavior from that of animals (Lodge, 2013, Wright, 1996, Payutto, 1994). It would be a profound tragedy if humanity stayed to embrace even one of the many inhumane traits associated with lower animals. Essen (2010) argues that the dominant forms of economic thought and practice must be reunited with ethics that are more thoughtful of the human-nature base.

The behavioral aspect of economics should incorporate their analysis of how everyday people think about the values they hold, and how their values shape their fulfillment of the lacks they have. Where do they find joy, when do they fear, and do emotions affect what they do? These fundamental concepts must be applied to human actions and develop an ideal thought process to rational and emotional behaviors. We can imagine the beginning of human society. In the face of such problems, the science of conventional economics suggests adopting a rational approach. Nonetheless, rational decisions have been based on insight into the forces that make us irrational. The essence of craving is that no material possessions can provide permanent satisfaction, and understanding the sense of security of fear can inspire a deep compassion for all living creatures. Accordingly, a moral perspective on economics employs the vital doctrines of wisdom, compassion, and self-discipline, offering a true path to enhancing harmony. Ethical principles can be an alternative model rooted in spiritual, environmental, and socio-cultural values. Eastern philosophy, particularly through a Buddhist perspective on economics, seeks to explain the distinction between harmful and beneficial practices in economic behavior and related practices in production and consumption, ultimately striving to foster ethical maturity in humanity. These Eastern ways of economic thinking embrace not only rational but esthetical as well as emotional aspects of the social-scientific study of mankind in search of an ideal society.

Contemporary economics emphasize personal well-being through consumerism, which leads to material excess with overuse and exploitation of nature. In contrast, the Eastern tradition and spiritual philosophy focus on moderation, community well-being, and sustainability. The partial analysis of economic behaviors grounded in conventional philosophy emphasizing *ceteris paribus* and rationality often overlooks the emotional, and psychological aspects shaped by inner desires, fears, and the sense of security. These models provide structured rational frameworks but fail to account for the irrational forces inducing human choices that limit the applicability of theoretical contexts rather than real-world complexities. They also fail to address ethical, social, and ecological considerations. On the other hand, the economic teaching provided by religious philosophies provides a more ethical perspective that emphasizes more emotional, moral, and sentimental values and seems to be more effective in convincing, but



cannot provide a framework that is inclusive and faces the challenges in stability and practicability in the modern context. Nepalese society is small in size and influence, its traditional practices and spiritual philosophies are rooted in wisdom, compassion, and ethical values that offer the solutions often absent in two different economic paradigms, balancing the strengths of both economic frameworks with their practices. However, the growing influence of Western consumerism challenges these indigenous practices. Nepal's Indigenous tradition of self-help and helping others, like volunteerism and charity, cooperatives, community life, living with nature, and sustainable use of resources, are associated with their theologies. This article addresses the philosophical and moral foundations of economic behavior in Eastern traditions, and how they differ from the principles of mainstream economics in shaping human economic behavior and well-being, particularly in the Nepalese context. Utilizing live examples from the cultural practices of the Nepalese community, the paper attempts to analyze how these practices moderate two schools of thought described as the "Philosophy of Himalayan Communities" in modern philosophical discourse. It also examines the importance of this awareness in building a foundation for mature ethics and the practice of moderation.

## 2. Methods and Materials

Applying epistemology and metaphysics, this paper attempts to analyze the philosophical comparison that examines Eastern philosophy, particularly with the economic philosophy of the ancient Indian subcontinent influenced by Buddhist, Jainism, and Vedic perspectives on concepts of economics, and compares them with mainstream conventional economics. Comparative philosophy has long been a debated field of study, some scholars argue that all philosophy is inherently comparative, challenging the notion of comparative philosophy as a distinct sub-discipline (Weber, 2013). The question may arise about the variances in different philosophical understanding and their significance. The scholarship of comparative philosophy should explore the causes of differences and their shaping by incorporating social conditions and analysis of cultural influences on the development of ideas. Blocker (1999) compares Indian, Chinese, and Western philosophies as equal in all aspects and treats the strictly philosophical arguments as roughly similar across cultures. He presents the larger cultural contexts in which they occur as considerably different. While each philosophical perspective is unique, there are enough commonalities to make meaningful comparisons across traditions. Simply documenting human social actions, provides detailed descriptions that capture physical behaviors but also delve into the context and interpretations of those involved (Geertz, 2017). To uncover the complex layers of meaning within cultural activities, a more nuanced understanding that allows outsiders to grasp the implications of these practices should be made.

Debate and discussion are made with the literature on contemporary Western economics and Eastern philosophy with Buddhist teaching. The difference between the two philosophical approaches to key economic concepts such as consumption, production, distribution, and wealth accumulation has been analyzed. The paper compares the idea of conventional economics and explores the behavioral practices that the Nepalese communities have practiced solely or by integrating both philosophies. However, there may be obstacles to applying this concept in practice. The intermingling features of cultures and religions together may make it difficult to gain acceptance, particularly from perspectives and differing spiritual viewpoints, for a theory rooted in Eastern or Western thought. Similarly, categorization and quantification of all the behaviors influenced contemporary economics heavily, focusing on positive economics. Emphasizing modeling and quantifiable data, pay less attention to normative, ethical, or human sentiments. Therefore, in the second section, the study goes further with real-world examples from the Nepalese community that are used to moderate different schools of thought labeled as the Philosophy of Himalayan communities in modern philosophical discourse. Ethnographic observation of the activities and their cultural practices has been done systematically, and a thorough analysis of the economic behavior, the institutions they framed, and their worldview has been done. An attempt has been made to find out why their activities are near to Eastern philosophy or neo-classical analysis. The study of issue-specific literature aligned with philosophical grounds has been taken. Representative opinions survey of volunteer workers and charity contributors, cultural groups, common property resource user groups, and pilgrimage tourists were taken to find their real-life observations, to find out why the philosophy of the Himalayan community is seen as having intrinsic economic implications that assess the relevance of integrating socio-economic and moral analyses in the context of the Nepalese community. Head or committee/team members were selected as respondents. A survey of community-based institutions like Cooperatives, Vehar, Guru Kul, pilgrimages, Volunteer organizations, and other common management groups has been conducted



to know how Nepalese values and institutions are associated with Buddhism and Eastern philosophy. Socio-cultural practices, and conservation modalities with associated theologies in shaping the culture of economic behavior and well-being, have been observed. Needed information was collected through field observations of community-based institutions, key informant surveys, and focus group discussions (FGDs), to understand the Nepalese home-grown practices blending two broad philosophies.

### 3. Debates and Discussion

Economists and intellectuals thousands of years ago started a search for an ideal human society. Plato and his followers explored perfect society on the assumption that early humanities grew from rational decisions to secure well-being. Confucius in China teaches the behavior of people seeking wealth should be restrained by the idea of justice (Jingfeng, 2018). Buddha has significantly impacted South Asia, China, Japan, and other areas of Asian civilization for ethics and moderation. Mahabir (Sharma, 2012), and later Kautilya with Vedic tradition enlightened the people about ethical economic behavior in South Asia. These ideal philosophies and economic ideas have long been practiced in value-based cultural behavior handed down by traditional patterns into economic systems. Blending cultural practices with economic organization, these approaches are intensely rooted in local socio-cultural contexts, aligning with core societal values.

All these traditions underscore a common understanding of human potential and self-examination. However, if we closely look at and explore human behavior throughout human civilization, the primary societies were likely unified more by their profound emotional desires for cordiality and security than by any deliberate or rational philosophy. So, the analysis of human behavior must admit the emotional factors like fear, passion, and irrationality to shape the analysis close to socio-economic behavior, the choices people make to survive and thrive. An instinctive desire for self-protection often drives these decisions. Fear and irrationality, while not inherently negative, are ordinary aspects of human nature. However, they frequently lead to some of our most extreme socio-economic behaviors. Modern materialistic societies leave us with few options other than to exploit resources and contest survival forces towards greed, which leads to misuse, and overconsumption. It seems to have overwhelmed economic happenings in these dynamics, harming our societies and the environment. These aspects urge economists and philosophers to develop thoughtful models to help humanity overcome fear, greed, and hatred. Yet, it is rare for economists to address the essential issue of fear and the emotional need for security that underpins human behavior. However, some economists examine the basic question of fear and the emotional need for security that drives human beings to wise decisions. Their theoretical models provide rational solutions to problems largely driven by irrational factors, making their economic ideals viable only in theory or within the confines of textbooks.

#### 3.1 The Way of Economic Thinking

The economic thinking led by ancient philosophers Plato and Aristotle later formed a science in the industrial age (Payutto, 1994). Like other specialized sciences, economics has developed into a focused and complex discipline in the era of specialization. It has become a distinct and often restricted field of study, with limited integration into other domains or aspects of human activity. Ideally, science should offer solutions to humanity's complex and interconnected problems that have identified the existential threats that humanity faces, knowledge is often ignored, contested, or slowly acted upon (Club of Rome, 2024). However, in the broader spectrum of human activity, conventional economics represents only a partial perspective, leaving emotional, moral, social, and environmental aspects largely unaddressed. Much like other sciences, economics aims for objectivity, but in doing so, it often overlooks subjective values such as ethics and morals. For example, a conventional economist might claim that drinking a bottle of whiskey and eating a necessary meal have the same economic worth since both satisfy the consumer's desires. While this reasoning aligns with standard economic principles, it exposes a narrow perspective in its apparent objectivity. Traditional economics tends to focus on immediate steps within the natural causal process, highlighting specific aspects of interest while neglecting the broader implications. They fail to consider the ethical consequences of doing economic business.

Economics is a human science, and it is believed that human science should save human beings from life-threatening dangers. Economics has limitations in covering the humanitarian, moral, and emotional aspects like fear and security, greed, and desire. The Industrial Revolution and the mechanical exploitation of natural resources in



the quest for money have caused man to separate from nature and himself in the contemporary era. The disruption of social harmony and environmental degradation, resulting in a decline in physical, mental, and social well-being, and an unfriendly and adversarial approach toward nature. Mankind must reevaluate their moral and ethical principles and embrace a lifestyle based on these to confront this dilemma. The man may lessen the damaging effects of social and ecological degradation and build a clean environment by leading a moral and ethical lifestyle. Humanity will only stop spoiling the environment when individuals adopt a simple and moderate lifestyle. This seems to be the sole solution to the ongoing ecological crisis and the social problem of alienation. By living in this way, people will develop a non-exploitative, non-aggressive, and gentle attitude toward nature. They will be able to coexist harmoniously with the environment, using its resources to meet only their basic needs, as the study by Gupta (2024) concludes, a just, healthy, and safe planet is essential. Nepalese culture backed by Eastern philosophy with Buddhist teaching instills, that nature should be utilized like a bee gathering pollen from a flower, without harming its beauty or depleting its fragrance while creating honey from that is collected (*Sigslövada Sutta*). Sustainable economists also use this bee-pollen metaphor in the sustainability discourse to show that human advancement and environmental safeguarding are not mutually exclusive but are united for the prosperity of both (*Patel et al., 2021*). Human beings should be able to fulfill happiness in life without causing harm to the social and natural environment they live in. By looking only at the material side of things, economics is out of step with the general truth of how things are connected as they are. Everything in this world is naturally connected and interconnected. Unilateral scientific solutions are bound to fail and the problem worsens. Environmental degradation, for example, is the most obvious and dangerous consequence of an industrialized, specialized approach to problem-solving. So, economists are reviewing their specialized methods, motivated by the important environmental impact of unimpeded consumerism, and are shifting towards a stronger emphasis on social and ecological realization.

While conventional economic theories scrutinize one isolated section of the reason and impact process, the universe manifests itself in an unthinkable substantial array of reasons, situations, movements, and reactions. A single focus on the linear analysis of the economic instances can cause problems because nature unfolds in all directions. Happenings and outcomes aren't restricted to isolated spheres. One movement offers upward thrust to the outcomes of the other. In this way, movement and response are intertwined to shape the intriguing, important reasons and circumstances that economists recognize as reality. The economic study of Eastern philosophy with Buddhist teaching comprises a variety of subfields, which collectively embrace all aspects of the social-scientific study of mankind. It is limited to questions concerning the commercial economy or monetary aspects of human activity. There is a growing effort to integrate socio-cultural and moral factors into the assumptions and analysis of economic behavior. These developments create a new foundation for a mutually beneficial exchange between the study of society's economic aspects and the insights, logic, and problem-solving potential of spiritual worldviews. Nepalese tradition of economic teaching is similar to Schumacher's (1973) analysis that economics is not a self-contained science, but several interdependent sciences cooperating towards a common goal of social, personal, and ecological well-being.

### 3.2 Basic Economic Practices and Well-Being

Consumption is a key goal of economic activity; the essential question is about the true purpose of consumption. Whether it is for the satisfaction of desires or the attainment of well-being. Interpretation varies between conventional economic theory and Eastern philosophy with Buddhist teaching. Conventional economics views consumption as the use of goods and services to satisfy demand and the resulting satisfaction is the primary goal. In contrast, Buddhism distinguishes between right and wrong consumption, right consumption satisfies the desire for true well-being, while wrong consumption seeks pleasing sensations or ego-gratification. For instance, food consumption is necessary for well-being, but if it only brings temporary satisfaction, fails in its purpose (*Payutto, 1994*). Interestingly, economics, a field that focuses on human well-being, often endorses wrong consumption that contradicts its objectives. For example, drinking in a nightclub is considered more economically valuable than charity or labor used as a volunteer for humanitarian work. Production is often seen as the creation of new things, but in reality, it involves changes in the state of existing materials. This process creates a new state by destroying the old one. Production is only justified when the value of what is produced exceeds the value of what is destroyed in the process. The exchange typically involves a transfer with an expectation of reciprocity. Unlike satisfaction with receiving something tangible in return, Buddhism holds that satisfaction can be attained even when one gives without



expecting anything material (Long, 2021), but should not demand another form of reciprocity. For Buddhist non-production is always preferable where production leads to the depletion of human ethics, natural resources, and environmental harm. To Wiese (2011) the very heart of Buddhism is the wisdom of moderation. There is neither excess nor overconsumption or overproduction, instead of moderation and the pursuit of well-being behavior. When economic activity is driven by the pursuit of desire, it becomes open-ended and lacks a clear definition, as desires are limitless.

The current debate on well-being often represents rational agents who attain well-being through deliberative decision-making. This analysis is rooted in a neo-classical method that involves balancing individual preferences with objective criteria of rationality, continuity, transitivity, etc. However, scholars like Griffin (1986) argue that true well-being can be derived from satisfying informed, rational desires associated with general human goals. This concept opposes the conventional concept of consumer sovereignty by ranking and ordering preferences that prioritize desires as ends in themselves. Despite debates on whether well-being is subjective (based on an objective set of values), a consensus holds that well-being depends on subjective well-being through factors such as personal activity, socio-cultural interconnection, and access to nature. This understanding supports Buddha's teachings that offer a balancing of the mind, body, and environment, guided by the four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. To Buddha, true well-being can be achieved by eliminating suffering (*dukkha*) through inner peace and freedom such as mindfulness (*sati*), ethical conduct (*Sīla*), and mental discipline (*Samādhī*) emphasizing the interaction among personal agency, environmental and social contexts. The divide between ethics and conventional economics is obvious, even in the thought of economists like Amartya Sen (1987) and Housman (2006).

The Middle Way concepts of "the right amount" and "knowing moderation" can be seen as synonymous with balance equilibrium (Payutto, 1994). Finding this sweet spot is key to aligning genuine happiness with the feeling of satisfaction. In contrast to the classical notion of consumption leading to maximum satisfaction (Matthew, 2016), Nepalese practice focuses on moderate consumption leading to well-being. Moderate means not harming oneself or others. From the Buddhist point of view, the economic principle refers to the three interrelated aspects of human existence: self, society, and sustainability of the natural environment. Buddhist economics emphasizes the need for harmony and correct relationships across all domains, ensuring that economic activities do not harm self, society, and the surroundings (i.e., person, people, and planet). With rising environmental concerns in developing countries, activities involving toxic chemicals and fossil fuels are seen as harmful to both individual and environmental health. Such practices, which reflect a lack of wisdom, are viewed as a major problem for humanity, rather than progress. Wisdom calls for science and technology to shift their focus toward what is natural, harmonious, non-violent, refined, and beautiful. For economics to meaningfully address human challenges, all economic activities must promote well-being and support the pursuit of a virtuous and fulfilling life. (Schumacher, 1973). Nepalese cultural practices integrate economic well-being into a broad philosophical model of becoming well, emphasizing the interplay of objective and subjective concerns as the critiques of well-being discourse focused too heavily on the business case, neglecting broader well-being aspects (Griffin, 1986; Diener *et al.*, 2003; Painter-Morland *et al.*, 2017). The subjective well-being encompassing happiness, peace, fulfillment, and life satisfaction is influenced by personality traits, life circumstances, and socio-cultural factors. Cultural variables, including wealth and societal norms, shape how well-being is experienced and valued.

### 3.3 The Philosophy of Equilibrium with Moderation

The Nepalese philosophy emphasizes the wisdom of moderation, which contrasts with the open-ended pursuit of satisfying endless desires in conventional economic thinking. While traditional economics seeks maximum satisfaction where scarcity controls desires, advocates for well-being along with SDG-12 (UN, 2024) focus on activities that create a natural balance and prevent overconsumption and overproduction. Moderation leads to more sustainable and harmonious outcomes. Buddhist teachings about the Middle Way (Payutto, 1994) are the idea of balance or equilibrium. The Middle Way advocates for a balanced approach, for instance, time can be divided between working for consumption and engaging in meditation. The optimal balance occurs when meditation helps reduce the desire for overconsumption, leading to satisfaction with less work and fewer material goods. In economic terms, this balance is achieved when the marginal productivity of labor in producing goods equals the marginal benefit of meditation in reducing consumption without diminishing overall satisfaction. Residing in the rural part of Nepal, work and leisure are complementary parts of the same living process and cannot be separated without destroying the joy



of work and the bliss of leisure. The right amount and knowing moderation may be considered synonyms for balance or equilibrium (Schumacher, 1973; Payutto, 1994). Needs are essential clothing for protection, food to prevent hunger, shelter for safety, and medical care for illness. When one clearly understands that these are means to an end, one can distinguish between 'needs' and 'wants.' Confusing the two can lead to the mistake of treating consumption as an end in itself rather than a means to fulfill basic needs. Peter (2007) focused on the Buddhist view of Sustainable consumption, emphasizing an optimal approach that achieves a high level of human satisfaction through relatively modest consumption, enabling individuals to live with ease and minimal stress. Sustainable consumption forms that can bring about and sustain a better quality of life and well-being for humans and the living environment. They do not believe in measuring the standard of living based on consumption levels and highlight achieving maximum well-being through minimal consumption rather than maximizing consumption. Community people become happy to share with others what they have. To them, higher consumption cannot equate with 'better off' or happiness.

### 3.4 Nepalese Homegrown Practices Blending Two Philosophies

The blending of mainstreamed economic thought with Eastern teaching on economic behavior encompasses integrating the maximization of self-satisfaction, productive efficiency, and market dynamics with values, mindfulness, compassion, sustainability, and non-material well-being. Contemporary economics and Buddhist teaching acknowledge that human desires are limitless. As Dhammapada (Verse 251) states there is no river-like craving, illustrating how human wants can never be fully satisfied and ignorance leads to blind craving. Tanah, causes individuals to struggle in navigating their lives (Bodhi, 2003; Rahula, 1974). Schumacher (1973) suggested that an optimal consumption pattern provides high satisfaction with minimal consumption that aligns with Buddhist principles. In conventional economics, scarcity is defined as the condition where human wants consistently exceed the available supply of time, goods, and resources. However, Nepalese cultural practices view scarcity as stemming from greed and ignorance. Without the guidance of knowledge or wisdom, people are driven by their desires, struggling to satisfy their cravings in a challenging world. As wisdom grows, unnecessary desires become more apparent and dominant. Human beings are unquestionably self-motivated and self-interested; however, all self-interest may not be the same as greed and reflects the pursuit of well-being, which is completely different from material goods measured in quantity. Ballve (1963) writes, "Man is, to be sure, an egoistic being; but egoism is not the same as avarice; it is, rather, the desire for well-being and well-being is not always expressible in terms of material goods". By this statement, he tries to highlight human nature with the distinction between egoism and greed. Egoism refers to the inherent drive for personal well-being as a fundamental human trait. However, well-being is a multifaceted concept and human motivations can incorporate a wider range of intellectual, emotional, psychological, and social dimensions. None of which are measured in terms of material gains. All human activities are not to promote their self-interests as mainstream economic theory assumes. In contrast, people act by behavioral rules of thumb, and behavioral rules are the product of evolutionary processes, and evolution works on the usual (Aumann, 2019).

Nepalese traditional practices guided by Eastern philosophy, and Buddhist teaching, offer an explicit alternative. Contrast to the conventional economic mindset which focuses on maximizing profit, the instrumental use of nature, and self-interest that promotes the idea that "bigger is better" and more is best. Conventional economics often prescribes measuring the standard of living by the level of annual consumption, assuming that a person who consumes more is "better off" than someone who consumes less, which is irrational. In contrast, Nepalese conventional teaching focuses on a more balanced and sustainable approach. Behavioral economics with Eastern teaching represents a minimizing framework where suffering, desires, violence, instrumental use, and self-interest must be minimized (Zsolnai L., 2007). Consumption is merely a means to human well-being, where the goal should be to achieve maximum well-being with minimal consumption. This approach can be encapsulated by Schumacher's phrases "small is beautiful" and "less is more, ". Traditional development paradigms focus on objective indicators like GDP, neglecting subjective aspects of human nature, society, and the environment. In contrast, Nepalese traditional practices of economic activities prioritize spiritual well-being, with wisdom and mindfulness as key elements for achieving true happiness and sustainable development. However, less focus is given to the quantitative measure of national income accounting. True happiness comes from relieving the suffering of others, living in harmony with nature, and realizing the potential of one's mind (William, 2019). Based on these presumptions, the objective of the basic doctrines and values of Eastern philosophy is guided by Buddhist, Vedas, and some other homegrown



indigenous cultures. The Nepalese economic model can be differentiated as shared prosperity in a sustainable environment with the least amount of suffering.

### 3.5 Institutional and cultural practices

Every society holds a unique worldview that reflects its people's values, particularly regarding how their socio-economy should operate. In Nepal, Buddhism, Vedic Hinduism, and people from different ethnic and religious identities are deeply intertwined with homegrown indigenous culture. Though we can see the differences between the two philosophies, many people view Buddha as a Hindu god and Buddhist teaching as their philosophy of life. Regarding the basic questions raised in the statement, Nepalese cultural and spiritual practices are deeply intertwined with their homegrown philosophies, reflected in rituals, traditions, and ways of living. Making a proper balance of self-satisfaction with moderation, they maintain the ideal philosophies with daily practices evident in mindfulness, communal support, and respect for nature. The cultural blending has led to shared spaces for community well-being and the well-being of the ecosystem that can have universal applicability. Some examples that Nepalese society follows differently from mainstream economic thoughts can be illustrated as: volunteerism and charity, cooperatives, and community life, "I and You" relation with nature, shared resources, and duty for sustainability, and spiritual tourism for world peace.

### 3.6 Socio-cultural cohesion rather than self

Spiritual and moral traditions remain vibrant in Nepalese society. Shaping their identity and delivering the basis for a healthy spiritual core, essential for the individual, society, and whole environment, is their culture, which helps for the continuity of harmony with the ethnic group, people of a minority, and civil society as a whole. Though the Hindu community makes up the great bulk of the country's population, Nepal is home to many different religious groups, and many caste/clans, ethnic groups, and linguistic and religious groupings have ancestral roots there.

Observations and opinions from participants support that each religion, ethnic, or linguistic group in the community has developed their shared economic culture in a different form such as volunteerism and charity, cooperatives, and common property regime. Most of them are common and some are different, but they all value and respect the traditions and culture of the others. Society has practiced harmony among the diversity of religions, castes, and cultures. The joint family system is the most important beauty of Nepalese culture, which is the first school where every child learns the basic values of life and a sense of belongingness. Each religious group traditionally practiced enhancing their religious and cultural teaching, such as the Hindu tradition has transmitted higher knowledge and enlightenment to their students and followers through the Guru Kul. A teacher of Gurukul at Devghat said that "this style of the education system for 5000 years, we provide yogic powers and build them up into a moral and spiritual power of the student." Madrasa and churches historically played a significant role in shaping communities and individuals with values and tradition, but "now they are also serving as a prime model of how religious education can go hand in hand with secular values"- a teacher of the Madrasa explains. From very ancient times Nepal was famous for Buddhist Bihara/Maha biharas. These Bihara vibrated with the intellectual activities of Nepalese and foreign Buddhists and were the centers of knowledge propagation (Bajracharya, 1995). In recent days they have also assumed the role of shared economic, cultural, and ritual centers, where regular ritual activities and celebrations are performed. One of the key informants argues that "The central aim of all spiritual centers is to facilitate the all-round and holistic development of the community and support for the learner's personality, be it intellectual, moral, physical, or mental development." This kind of practice holds more importance amidst continuous changes that undervalue the shared culture, and the recognition of people's historical, spiritual, and moral values.

### 3.7 Living in a harmonious culture and associated theologies

Theology has a significant role in shaping people's understanding of the world, ethics, and human purpose. Nepalese society highly values dharma/dhamma, which in different religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam is understood as living in harmony with one's nature amidst change. Various religious and ritual practices and social activities, such as building temples, schools, rest houses, and water sources, contribute to the socio-cultural, economic, and ecological environment. Buddhist scholars see Dhamma as related to natural truth and the teachings of Buddha. Volunteerism and charity are deeply rooted in Nepalese culture. It involves community service like building



wells, and resting places, and contributing labor to public works, reflecting a tradition of philanthropy and public service. Many Nepalese aspire to engage in such acts during their lifetime. Bhusal (2013) pointed out that digging and constructing a waterspout (kuwa/Pokhari/pandhero), building and maintaining a shady side resting place (chaupari) or a rest house for pedestrians (pati / paua), or contributing free labor (Jhara/shramadan) to public works, are all traditional acts of volunteer-ism, good kind-heartedness, public service, and charity. These forms of work existed in social, cultural, philanthropic, and religious groups (Dhungel, 2002). One key informant's report that, "most people in the rural community want and try to perform such service in their lifetime, whatever they can."

Nepal has a rich cultural tradition of informal community-based cooperatives, such as savings and credit associations known as Dhukuti, grain savings (Dharmabhakari), and labor exchange systems called Parma. Additionally, the Guthi system offered a platform for collaborative efforts to maintain various socio-cultural practices and preserve tangible and intangible heritages. Co-operatives are autonomous, member-driven democratic organizations where people voluntarily unite to meet their shared economic, social, and cultural needs, which are common community practices. Jointly owned and democratic control with the values of self-help, self-responsibility, equity, and solidarity are considered. Cooperative is acknowledged as the third pillar of the Nepalese economy. Many of these traditional cooperative systems continue to prosper in rural areas of Nepal. A pilgrimage is an ancient practice in the form of travel, where people make a journey to the place of their belief to experience spirituality. Pilgrimage, today may have taken on a renovated form with tourism. Participants argue that "the guest is god in the home (Atithi devo bhava) is a common culture and belief in Nepalese society" as a part of hospitality. The tourism industry in Nepal, with immense scope, is one of the most flourishing industries for people's livelihood and employment.

### 3.8 Environment protection and common management

The concept of sustainable development emphasizes the importance of creating strategies that foster economic and social progress without leading to environmental degradation and over-exploitation. It involves meeting the current needs while preserving the resources and opportunities necessary for future generations (Khetjoi et al., 2020). Reflecting this perspective, the Nepalese community has a longstanding tradition of practicing common property resource management and community forestry for sustainable use. Traditionally, most of the grassroots communities in rural areas have developed their way of production, reuse, and waste management, which are eco-friendly and sustainable challenging modern technology. The common philosophy of Nepalese cultural teaching is that humans and nature are together. Participants of FGD agree that- "there must be a feeling of togetherness and an 'I and you' relation rather than an 'I and It' with nature".

These real-life economies are not merely derived from foundational texts but are deeply rooted in the daily lives of people who practice these principles. Applying concepts like self-respect, self-help, respect for the coexistence of communities and all living beings, and the pursuit of genuine happiness may have the philosophical implication that economic systems should be designed not just for material prosperity but for human flourishing in a broader ethical and spiritual sense. Practices emphasizing moderation and actions aligned with eco-friendly principles often exist alongside standard textbook theories. Exploring these ideas reveals significant similarities between conventional economic theories and philosophical teaching. These theoretical and practical differences with textbook theories may have relevance in building new concepts, theories and policies and should not be overlooked.

## 4. Conclusion

Nepalese cultural teachings and institutional applications are more rooted in traditional practices influenced by Eastern or Buddhist perspectives. Realizing the truth of interdependence, self-centered responses should be replaced by lovingkindness, compassion, and self-control. From this perspective, economics cannot be viewed in isolation from other fields of knowledge. It represents one facet of the interconnected universe, addressing its dynamic nature and striving to alleviate human problems and minimize the suffering of all living beings. These perspectives from East or West are not an isolated science, but one of several interconnected disciplines working together toward the collective goal of self, society, and environmental well-being. We should see the world as a mix of market and non-market practices, valuing outcomes based on the well-being of nature and humanity, with self-interest balanced by common interest and harmony.



Regarding the basic questions raised in the statement, Nepalese cultural and spiritual practices are deeply intertwined with their homegrown philosophies, reflected in rituals, traditions, and ways of living. Making a proper balance of self-satisfaction with moderation, they maintain the ideal philosophies with daily practices evident in mindfulness, communal support, and respect for nature. The cultural blending has led to shared spaces for community well-being and the well-being of the ecosystem that can have universal applicability. Nepalese traditions and culture emphasize ethical responsibility. Emphasizing collective well-being and social harmony over market efficiency, maximization, and self-interest, they uphold values of social justice, equity, and sustainability. These home-grown practices of blending two philosophies showed that integrating ethical and spiritual principles into modern economic frameworks helps to foster a balanced and sustainable approach to human well-being. This kind of fusion of economic models can promote prosperity, social cohesion, and environmental stewardship.

Further research is suggested that would focus on practical models blending human ethical and spiritual principles in rational analysis.

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### Does this article screen for similarity?

Yes

### Ethics approval

No ethical clearance certificate is applicable for this present study.

### Conflict of Interest

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare. There is also no financial interest to report. The author certifies that the submission is original work and is not under review at any other publication.

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