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# Aparigraha- The Age Old Philosophy Of Indian Scriptures- The New Face of Global Consumerism in The Post Covid-19 Era

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**Abstract:** The aim of this paper is to capture the essence of the timeless wisdom imparted by Indian scriptures and philosophy and use its wisdom for answering the novel consumerism in the wake of COVID-19 and provide a sustainable solution to the materialism ridden society. This paper addresses the issue of the new face of consumerism during the onset of COVID-19 in the perspective of 'Aparigraha' as taught by the ancient scripture Bhagwad Gita. Across the world people and governments are grappling with the issue of nouveau consumerism which is laden with hoarding, exploitation of resources, greed and materialism. Since the outbreak of the pandemic COVID-19, there has been a slowdown in economy, downturn in the morale of people and stress is looming large among the masses. A new face of consumerism has already started emerging wherein people have become more conscious about their food habits, health, exercise and spending on consumables. In the COVID-19 era when the global economy has slowed down, the age-old philosophy as mentioned in verse 10 of Chapter 6 of Srimad Bhadwad Gita provides a ready solution.

**Keywords:** 'Aparigraha', Indian scriptures, Consumerism, COVID-19

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## INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has already started taking a toll on the physical and mental health of people around the world. On January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020 first case was reported in Japan, on January 20, 2020 in Korea, and in next few days the first case was reported in Kerala, India who was a student who returned from Wuhan (India Today, 2020) and since then till August 10, 2020, 2217649 cases have been reported with COVID with 1536259 recoveries and 636427 active cases (Statista, 2020). Within 10 days on August 21, 2020, India had 2,905,823 cases, out of which 692,028 were active cases, 2,158,946 cases recovered and 54,849 were deceased (Hindustan Times, Aug 21, 2020). Sharma and Nigam (2020) COVID-19 has been growing exponentially in India since July 2020. Sen and Singaravelu (2020) cases in India are growing faster than any other country in the world. Between August 2 and August 8, India recorded 57,152 new cases on an average. This pandemic has been reported to be a major stress factor affecting the mental well-being of people all over the world (Brooks et al., 2020) and it can lead to severe problems like acute depression, stress and anxiety (Statici et al., 2020; Gunnell et al., 2020).

The world is on the verge of falling into another phase of great depression (Kotler, 2020), economically and psychologically. The pangs of death and destruction can be witnessed everywhere all across the world. As mentioned by Kotler (2020), the consumerism will usher in a new era thus changing the very nature of Capitalism. People have already understood the importance of money and its utilisation.

Sheth (1991) there are five values associated with influencing consumers' choice behaviour: functional, conditional, social, emotional and epistemic; Consumer behaviour is the process of exploring information, buying, using, evaluating, and consuming of products and services (Valaskova et al., 2015) and macro consumer behaviour emanates from social issues for reaching out the individual factors i.e. the issues pertaining to micro consumer behaviour (Solomon, 2016). Flatters and Willmott (2009) consumers, by purchasing goods, try to derive satisfaction and joy out of it.

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Sheth (2020) revisited consumer behaviour after three decades and stated the three managerial implications on consumer behaviour that arise out of COVID-19; first is that the biggest and smallest of the store has become more resilient during COVID-19 and has ensured its reach to consumers' doorstep; secondly the stores are learning to manage the crisis that arise out of the tendency of consumers to hoard during this pandemic especially food essentials and medicines which is a serious concern as it may disrupt the demand and supply balance; thirdly consumers might continue using technology in the future also only if they find value in it or else they may return to their old habits. Thus, the investment of companies in upgrading their IT infrastructures will provide value or not is questionable as of now.

Looking at consumerism from a fresh angle needs a relook into the age old wisdom provided by the Holy Scriptures. Spiritual orientation influences consumption pattern of consumers (Belk et al 1989) in terms of how they relate to the materialistic orientation (Gould 2006). One must consider and be prepared to face the outcomes arising of one's consumption which induces us to hoard more and more whether we require those things or not (Ehrenfeld, 2008). Sheth et al (2011) coined the term 'mindful consumption' meaning that the consumers should be aware about the outcomes of their consumption and suggested a word of caution towards irrational consumption. Mindful consumption has two components, first is the behavioural component which deals with temperance in the consumption cycle and second is the mindful mindset of the consumers themselves in which they exhibit care for the community they live in and the nature. But 'how' to generate this mindfulness remains a question even today and demands further research. The authors provide scope for future research for exploring the question whether the age old spiritual knowledge provide us any answer for generating mindful consumption especially during a critical time like that of the pandemic COVID-19.

'Aparigraha' provide a feasible solution to this greed and hoarding tendency of consumers as it solely focuses on the functional utility of the product- if one actually requires a product and knows in how much quantity and also when is it required, he makes his purchase accordingly. Panduranga (2010) Aparigraha is the philosophy which teaches us to engage in non-coveting behaviour, thus being abstemious and restraining from greed, hoarding and accumulating things which we actually don't need certain products but buy them just to satisfy our childish vanity and for ostentation with an intent to pose superior to others.

### **Aparigraha**

Reading (2019) Aparigraha relates to minimising the material possessions in one's life and the one who practices. Aparigraha reaches stage where he can resist the desire for accumulation of materialistic possessions and imbibes simplicity based on the concept of minimalism and becomes eco-conscious. The Yamas and Niyamas build the foundation of Yoga. Lasater (1998) the Yamas represent the list of self imposed restrictions that affect one's relations with others and self. The complementary Niyamas suggest the to do list of principals. The five Yamas include Ahimsa (non-violence), Satya (truthfulness), Asteya (not stealing) Brahmacharya (moderation), Aparigraha (non hoarding or non possessiveness). The five niyamas are: Saucha (cleanliness), Santosha (contentment), Tapas (self discipline), Svadhyaya (Study of spiritual books or reflecting on life's higher purpose), Ishvara Pranidhana (devotion or surrender to the divine). Aparigraha leads to generation of a thought process as to whether acquiring any material possession is actually required or is it just a desire (Subrahmanyam and Gould, 2012).

The five Yamas complemented by the five Niyamas can provide a solution to the anxiety, depression and stress caused during COVID-19. The paper is based on one of the five Yamas i.e. Aparigraha.

### **Consumerism**

The individual buying behaviour is influenced by certain psychological processes like social influences and environmental marketing (Sheth, 1967). The highly discussed concept of conspicuous consumption given by Veblen in 1899 has drawn the attention of economists and marketers always. With the spread of consumerism among the middle class, across the world, the concept has gained momentum (Stearns, 2006). Dauvergne (2010) advertising has given further rise to consumerism and has led consumers to buy goods which they actually don't require but when they see actors and sports persons flaunting brands, they get drawn towards it.

Pretty (2013) consumerism is a fast spreading phenomenon which was born in West and was traditionally related with the wealthy class and the gap between rich and poor is being intensified rather than diminishing. A transformation in the concept of consumerism as understood by people, is required which do not impinge growth and also do not disturb the cycle of production and consumption and limits the burden on earth's resources. This new consumerism needs to break the age old linkage between materialistic possessions and progress (Wapner & Willoughby 2005).

Princen (2001) one of the three approaches for constructing an economic activity which are ecologically informed suggested that there are three interpretive layers of excess consumption: "background consumption, overconsumption, and misconsumption". If the consumers understand this, they will also be aware as to what is being consumed by them and at what stake. The novel notions of prosperity based on these modified concepts include consumption within limits (sufficiency), decent better by less consumption (sacrifice), retaining the possessions till they can be used optimally (attachment) and acknowledgement of the non-commercial sources of wealth bestowed free by nature (plentitude) (Princen, 2005; Pretty, 2013; Schor, 2010). Propensity to consume is influenced by epistemic values besides four other values; like an expensive wedding dress being purchased as a once in lifetime event or some products are purchased because they have seasonal value like Diwali or Christmas cards and gifts (Sheth, 1991). The desire of consumers to purchase goods which may have a momentary functional usage or simply driven by ostentation effect are against the concept of Aparigraha which suggests that one has to be abstemious in possession of materialistic products.

### **Consumer Behaviour during COVID-19**

The consumer behaviour is changing as never before. Mehta (2020) the consumer behaviour is not the same and is likely to change further during the COVID-19 pandemic with the orientation of consumers shifting from materialism to spiritualism and new models of consumer behaviour can come up in relation with culture, age, nationality and personality. Kotler (2020) a new age of consumerism will usher after COVID-19 as the world is reeling into another great depression with lakhs of people rendered unemployed, with millions of people who being slum dwellers live in dingy places and cannot adhere to the norm of social distancing. Stress and anxiety is looming large across the world which will finally lead to a shift in thinking of the people and their consumer behaviour as to what to purchase and how much to purchase. Sheth (2020a) the pandemic COVID-19 has lead the entire world to the new normal which eventually has drastically changed their buying habits. The consumers are unlearning the old ways and are adapting the new ones.

Sheth (2020, (b) and (c)) Consumers are imbibing newer habits overtime regarding what to buy and consume, when and where. They have started hoarding essentials like toilet papers and medicines and at the same time they have started postponing their discretionary demands for durable and expensive goods like cars and since there has been little research in the past on the impact of pent-up demand on economy it provides enough scope for future research in the area also. The demand for luxury holidays, tourism, dining outside, amusement parks and movies has come down drastically.

Greed is slowly and silently giving way to a new thought process which rears self-satisfaction. How long will this newly developed thought process sustain, still remains a question. There have been instances before us during all times and in all the countries related with the tendency to hoard. The former first lady of the Philippines, Imelda Marcos, owned 3,000 pairs of shoes that languished in storage since her exile from the Philippines (Kotler, 2020). During the CBI raid 10,500 saris, 750 pairs of slippers and 21.28 Kg of gold, 1250 Kg of silver jewellery form the former chief minister of a state in India (Shivashanker, 2016).

### **Consumerism as addressed by religion**

Mehta et al. (2020) the COVID-19 pandemic has given rise to an altogether new thought process wherein the consumers who are facing income cuts, loss of job are relooking towards their consumption pattern and are consciously shifting towards spiritual consumption meaning thereby buying only essential goods in the quantity as required which marks a major shift of consumerism from being driven by materialism to spiritualism.

Portin (2020) consumerism is beyond material possession of things. It is a moral attitude focusing on the good and leads to indifference towards any kind of suffering. It is something beyond the gratification of materialistic needs of the human beings. It propagates a practice which essentially formulates a person's outlook towards life.

Bauman (2007) the prime motive of human beings is to acquire and possess goods which ensure or promise to ensure high esteem or comfort and they long such materialistic products in this society of producers which is committed to the cause of “stable security and secure stability”, thus adhering its own long term welfare by producing goods. An individual’s religious motives are framed according to the desires for consumption of materialistic things but the permanent security which one wants to attain ultimately, can only be achieved by focusing on things which are beyond materialism and are immune to time.

Consumers must engage themselves in material possessions in the right manner which encompasses their faith and also their socio cultural background. Right engagement is required by individuals for material possessions so that they may consume them as a blessing and not as routine mundane products (Shepherd & Kay, 2019).

Husemann and Eckhardt (2019) Consumers, in their quest for material wellbeing nowadays are turning towards marketplace in search of spiritual well-being. Consumer spirituality is a set of interrelated practices and processes in which the marketers immerse the consumers with the help of their product offerings which not only offer the functional or material benefit, but also provide 'spiritual utility' to the consumers.

Kotler (2019) in his commentary, ‘The Market for Transformation’, highlights the consumers who are looking for market a service which can actually make the help the unhappy people looking for happiness. The modern life governed by VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) especially during this pandemic has lead people to look around for solutions. For this a three stage process is required involving both, the seller and the consumer. First, this transformation requires a willing consumer who is actually looking for transformation and assigns value to this physical and spiritual change; second, a spiritual practitioner is required for triggering the process of transformation; and third, is the market place where buyer and seller meet for meeting out this change.

In the materialistic world of today where life has become far more uncertain than ever before (Bauman, 2007; Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017), people are looking for spiritual solutions and meaning in their lives by creating a fine balance between materialism and spirituality (Husemann et al., 2016). Shepard and Kay (2019) consumers ought to use the materialistic possessions in the right way which can lead to a blissful experience in the usage of materialistic possessions used every day in mundane fashion; issues like why consumers are drawn toward products that address their spiritual quest as such products which have spiritual significance facilitate in managing concerns about randomness and uncontrollability. Rauf et al. (2018), religion and spirituality govern the consumption practices and also the desire of consumers to possess a product and their consumption practices are addressed by religious discourses as they teach the customers to mind their consumption practices and use the materialistic products which further them in their journey to reach the desired destination after life.

Redden (2016) the modern marketing era is governed by spiritual marketplace wherein the customers can choose from amongst a vast variety of options available. This movement has been woven around the consumption of products offered in the marketplace.

Arvidsson (2014) the marketers are increasingly focusing on exploring the actual role of markets so that they become more meaningful thereby satisfying the consumers’ quest for something that can offer them value beyond material benefits. This has given rise to an altogether different area in research trying to explore the intersection between markets and consumption with religion and spirituality.

The marketing researchers are further exploring the role of markets and consumption and the evolving field wherein consumption is re-evolving with an intersection with spirituality and religion (Redden, 2016; Mandel et al., 2016). Hartmann (2017) consumerism is something beyond providing materialistic satisfaction. It calls for a formative practice thereby shaping a person’s orientation and outlook towards life. Bauman (2007) the formation of religious aspirations of a person broadly depends his desire to consume.

Husemann and Eckhardt (2019) even the market offering are being intentionally designed in such a way so as to address to the consumers’ quench for spirituality so that they may realise their real self. Study further suggested that future research may be carried out on the means for shaping the future markets for addressing consumers’ search for spirituality, identifying the means to access consumers’ spirituality and further exploring consumer spirituality. These three areas of research thus suggested have found manifestation in the nouveau consumerism which ushered in the COVID-19 era.

The concept of Aparigraha as explained in Srimad Bhagwad Gita

The philosophy of Aaprigraha revolves around the proposition that one must not accumulate the things themselves and must dissuade others also from accumulation.

yogi                      yunjeeta                      satatamaatmaanam                      rahasi                      sthitaha                      |  
ekaakee yatachittaama niraasheeraparigraha || 10 ||

Prabhupada (1972) in verse 6 of Chapter 10 of Bhagwad Gita, a true yogi constantly engages in his self, establishes himself in solitude at a lonely place, with his mind and body subdued, free from all the expectations, and renouncing all the possessions. “Yatachittaama” here connotes a person who has firmly taken control of the consciousness of his physical and mental existence by practicing Karma Yoga which is the most significant quality for meditation, and is termed as Yogi. Lord Krishna emphasises on the control of senses in various

verses of Bhagwad Gita. It is probably the biggest qualification for meditation. Further, a true meditator requires to possess “niraasheehi” which means that he is not having any kind of expectation regarding anything from anyone as the materialistic possessions cannot render him the satisfaction which he is looking for and can only be attained if he satisfies his inner desire. This leads to development of quality of “vairagya” meaning thereby that any kind of possession is not desired by him. The last quality mentioned in the above verse is “Aparigraha”. The opposite term is “Parigraha” which implies to hoarding or storing of possessions. Aparigraha means renunciation of all the notions of “my” and “mine”. The burden of all the baggage revolving around these works should be dropped in the journey of life and the traveller should be free from all such thoughts of past as well as future. Similarly the meditator should give up the expectation of receiving any type of gift from others.

Katarnikar (2018) Aparigraha is a mental state of an individual having high integrity and strong moral character, and who is heading towards higher spiritual goals in life. Bali et al. (2019) ‘Aparigraha’ is the inclination of an individual towards becoming non-possessive, non-greedy, generous and non-envious. The significance of practicing Aparigraha for businesses needs to be explored further.

Taneja (2014) Yoga implies the ultimate unison of a person’s consciousness with the supreme consciousness and it leads to a state of fulfilment of physical, social, mental and spiritual well-being of an individual with the nature which is in dire contrast with the materialistic and economic growth objective of modern era which has led to environmental devastation and unrest in the society. It involves yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, and samadhi which are the eight rungs of Yoga whose practice leads an individual to the highest form of self actualisation. The philosophy of Asteya and Aparigraha motivate controlling of materialistic greed and conservation of natural resources thus saving the exploitation of resources which are a prey of the vitiated face of consumerism ridden with materialism.

Mehta (2020) arise of a critical situation like COVID-19 pandemic leads human beings towards non-routine behaviour. The lockdown across all countries- partial or full- led to instability and slowdown of economies and subsequently resulted in their downfall. Due to this economic instability, the behaviour of the consumers has also transformed. A paradigm shift has been reported from consumer materialism to consumer spiritualism which has necessitated the development of new consumer behaviour models.

## CONCLUSION

This brief paper points out the fact that human beings can stay happy and satisfied if they look materialism from the perspective of spirituality by pursuing Aparigraha. They need to have a deep understanding of their ‘real’ needs and have to understand the difference between needs, Insights from the Holy Scripture Bhagwad Gita provides with the solution. If only we can provide a new look to consumerism in the disguise of Gita’s wisdom in the form of the concept of Aparigraha, life would be easier, simpler and happier- which human beings ultimately aspire in their lives.

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