

# CONSUMERISM ON THE RISE AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF INDIAN TRADITIONAL VALUES: A PERSPECTIVE FOR CHANGE

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## Abstract

*The Industrial Revolution ushered in an era of unprecedented production and consumption, giving rise to a global culture of consumerism closely tied to the dominance of capitalism. While capitalism has significantly enriched state economies, it also challenged the ethical and moral standards of living. This present paper explores the significance of the ancient Indian texts and their potential synergy for individual and state welfare. Focusing on the value of artha (material prosperity) within Indian classics, this paper emphasizes that wealth is viewed only as a means to live a good life, never as an end. The exploration includes insights from Purusharthas, the four goals of human life, the significance of Karmayoga in the Bhagavad Gita, and the moral teachings found in the Eightfold Path of Buddhism and Upanishadic wisdom. In analyzing capitalism's role in creating economic inequality, the paper advocates for a holistic approach guided by the principle of loka-samgraha (welfare of everyone) from the Bhagavad Gita. The present paper is an attempt to contribute to the discourse on fostering individual, state, and societal well-being.*

**Keywords:** Consumerism, Purusharthas, Karmayoga, Eightfold Path, Loka-samgraha

## Introduction:

Consumption is an enduring and inseparable facet of existence, transcending temporal boundaries and historical contexts. It represents a fundamental element of biological sustenance, a shared attribute among humans and all living organisms. When distilled to its archetypal manifestation in the metabolic cycle—comprising ingestion, digestion, and excretion—consumption emerges as a timeless phenomenon intrinsic to the very essence of life. From the dawn of living entities, this act of taking in, processing, and releasing has persisted, unquestionably ingrained in every form of existence chronicled in historical narratives and ethnographic investigation<sup>1</sup>

Over time, the significance of consumption has evolved beyond being solely a survival imperative or a basic aspect of existence. In the contemporary context, it wields transformative influence over the dynamics of human life. Presently,

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<sup>1</sup> Bauman. Z. *Consuming Life*. Polity Press, 2007, p. 25

consumption extends beyond the biological imperative and has become a pivotal force shaping how individuals navigate the world. It establishes patterns in interhuman relations and exerts influence over elements of style and social life, contributing to the intricate tapestry of modern societal dynamics. As Colin Campbell<sup>2</sup> notes, in the modern era, consumption has transcended its traditional role, becoming a daily pursuit that imbues purpose into the lives of the majority. This transformation is notably marked by the rise of consumerism, a phenomenon that gained prominence during the expansive reach of the Industrial Revolution, it emphasizes the notion that continuous consumption of goods and services is always a desirable goal. With the evolution of our innate ability to "want" into a more nuanced capacity to "desire" and "long for," consumption has assumed a profound significance. The allure of experiencing heightened emotions associated with desire has, at times, exerted a compelling influence, overpowering our sensibilities and shaping the fabric of contemporary existence.

In an era marked by escalating consumerism, there is a pressing need to counteract its effects on our daily lives. Redirecting our focus towards Indian traditional values becomes imperative, given that Indian literature and philosophy are not merely theoretical but deeply intertwined with practical life. The Vedas, Upanishads, and revered scriptures like the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and *BhagavadGita* abound with social, ethical, economic, and political principles that have served as guiding beacons for humanity, fostering a better world for all.

The Vedas, as the oldest scriptures, serve as primary sources of moral ideas and beliefs. Subsequently, the *Smritis* imparts wisdom and sets moral standards for living, necessitating a re-evaluation in the contemporary world. Central to these teachings are two essential concepts: *kartavya* (duty or what is to be done) and *akartavya* (avoidance or what is not to be done).

Indian values, deeply rooted in ancient wisdom, aim to make an individual's life easier and ethical. Concepts such as *Purusharthas*, *Varna ashram dharma*, *nishkama karma*, and the *lokasamgraha* principle originated within this value system, emphasizing social welfare. This focus on societal well-being is not confined to Hindu texts but extends to Buddhist ones as well. The overarching theme is that actions performed without attachment to outcomes benefit both society and the individual.

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<sup>2</sup> Colin Campbell is an Emeritus Professor of Sociology at the University of York, UK. One of his most notable works related to consumerism is "Consumption and Consumer Society: The Craft Consumer and other Essays"

The Indian tradition underscores that moral standards should be set by those who have conquered passions, harbor no selfish interests, and work exclusively for the preservation and welfare of society (*lokasamgraha* and *lokakalyana*). Indian literature, steeped in these principles, paves the way for a life characterized by virtue. This study seeks to explore and integrate such concepts into our daily lives, fostering a joyful and peaceful environment for all.

### **Consumer Values and the Wisdom of *Purusharthas*:**

In the contemporary world, our surroundings are inundated with a plethora of auspicious objects for consumption. The landscape is characterized by a proliferation of goods, services, and commodities, offering a diverse array of options for enjoyment and fulfillment. It is not an exaggeration to assert that present-day humans find themselves more surrounded by tangible objects than by fellow human beings.

This prevalence of objects, ranging from material possessions to various services, underscores the intricate tapestry of consumer culture that has become a defining feature of modern life. The abundance and diversity of these items contribute to a society where individuals can indulge in a wide spectrum of experiences, each with its unique appeal and purpose.

In this context, the emphasis on material acquisition and consumption has become a notable aspect of contemporary living, shaping both individual lifestyles and societal norms. The sheer abundance of objects vying for attention reflects the complexity of choices individuals face in their quest for satisfaction and meaning in a world characterized by conspicuous consumption<sup>3</sup>.

In the modern world, prioritizing the accumulation of possessions has surged to the forefront, disrupting the equilibrium between wealth and life. Globally, wealth has taken precedence, necessitating an evaluation of the importance of '*purusharthas*' to restore a balance between financial pursuits and the essence of life.

According to Indian ethics, '*purusharthas*' encompasses the overarching life goals that individuals are expected to achieve throughout their lifetimes. These fourfold pursuits are *artha* (wealth and power), *kāma* (sensual pleasure), *dharma* (righteousness or religious duties), and *moksha* (liberation).

In the pursuit of *artha*, the accumulation of wealth and power is acknowledged, but it needs to be harmonized with the other dimensions of '*purusharthas*'. *Dharma* emphasizes righteous conduct and religious duties, providing a moral compass for

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<sup>3</sup> Baudrillard. J. *The Consumer Society- Myths and Structure*, Sage Publications, 1998, p.25

navigating life's complexities. Simultaneously, *kāma* encourages the enjoyment of sensual pleasures in moderation, fostering a balanced approach to life.

The ultimate aim, *moksha*, seeks liberation from the materialistic aspects of existence, guiding individuals towards spiritual fulfillment. By comprehensively understanding and incorporating these '*purusharthas*,' individuals can strive for a more harmonious and purposeful life. This holistic framework offers a nuanced perspective on achieving a balance between the allure of wealth and the deeper essence of life, presenting a pathway towards a more meaningful existence<sup>4</sup>.

In an era dominated by the voracity of capitalism, where money exerts unparalleled influence, the wisdom embedded in *purusharthas* assumes paramount importance. Jean Baudrillard contends that capitalism's rapid evolution has propelled the world into an insatiable machine of production and consumption, an assertion made in 1988 that continues to resonate today. This relentless cycle of production and consumption has, for many, become the primary and ultimate pursuit.

However, in stark contrast to this prevailing ethos, Hindu ethical values diverge, asserting that *artha*, or the accumulation of wealth, should not be the central objective for an individual. The teachings embedded in *purusharthas* provide an alternative perspective, urging a more nuanced approach to life that transcends the relentless pursuit of material gain. In a world consumed by the capitalist machinery, these ancient ethical values offer a counterbalance, encouraging individuals to consider a broader spectrum of life goals beyond the relentless drive for production and consumption. Indeed, wealth and power, encapsulated by the term *Artha*, stands as one of the initial objectives emphasized in Indian ethics, an achievement deemed essential for an individual. However, it is crucial to understand that while *Artha* encompasses wealth, property, and health in Hindu scriptures, it does not claim the status of the ultimate or primary goal.

*Artha* is presented as an objective that a householder (*grihastha*) must accomplish, underscoring the responsibilities and duties associated with the material aspects of life. The pursuit of wealth and power is acknowledged as a vital facet of an individual's journey, especially during the householding stage. Devoid of *artha*, the attainment of subsequent goals becomes unattainable; even the pursuit of *kāmais* contingent on it. For the destitute, harboring aspirations for *moksha* is implausible, as their primary and ultimate objective is securing financial resources to fulfill basic needs, such as meals. This suggests that Indian ethical ideals do not prohibit the

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<sup>4</sup> Lochtefeld. J. *The Illustrated Encyclopaedia Of Hinduism*, Vol 1, Rosen Publication Group, 2001, p. 19

possession of wealth; however, there is a limit to acquiring wealth solely to enhance one's own life.

In his book "The Hindu View of Life," Dr. S. Radhakrishnan elucidates that *artha* is an inherent drive in human existence, fueling the innate human will to amass property for the sake of wealth and power. According to Radhakrishnan, this urge is fundamental to human nature. Furthermore, he asserts that the desire for accumulation cannot be eradicated unless there is a transformation in the mindset of individuals<sup>5</sup>. Hence, Indian ethics underscores the importance of acquiring money for survival. However, possessing and accumulating wealth are not deemed illegitimate in Indian literature, recognizing it as a prerequisite for pleasure. The understanding is that happiness is contingent on having the means to procure necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter. Nevertheless, this pursuit of wealth is expected to align with the righteous path outlined in Indian texts, following *Dharma* principles, which constitute the third *purushartha*.

*Dharma* serves as the binding force that aligns an individual with the moral life, emphasizing ethical disciplines. While the initial two aims, *artha*, and *kāma*, facilitate the attainment of worldly prosperity and sensual pleasure, the third goal, *dharma*, introduces disciplined control over the limitless and unrestrained satisfaction of the senses<sup>6</sup>. Inherent in human nature is a propensity towards greed and an attraction to sensual pleasure. However, it is crucial to recognize that the gratification of the senses is not the ultimate goal of human life. *Dharma* acts as a check on these innate tendencies, making it the primary goal that each individual should strive for. Whether or not an individual aspires to attain salvation, *dharma* remains essential for leading a life rooted in morality and ethics.

*Dharma* stands not as an independent *purushartha* like *artha* and *kāma*, but as a guiding principle that must be diligently followed to regulate these two pursuits effectively. Only those endeavors related to wealth and pleasure that align with *dharma*, or righteous actions, are considered legitimate. Beyond personal pursuits, *dharma* plays a vital role in upholding the social fabric by ensuring stability and harmony. It provides a set of norms that guide society, facilitating a disciplined and harmonious collective existence.

*Dharma* forms the bedrock of Indian texts, where it is perceived as the obligatory path that must be followed to attain salvation. Within the *Smritis*, *Sadharana dharma*, *Varna dharma*, and *Ashrama dharma* are three distinct types of *dharma*

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<sup>5</sup> Radhakrishnan. S., *The Hindu View of Life*, p. 55

<sup>6</sup> Op, cit., Tiwari, *Classical Indian Thought*, p.203

delineated. *Varna dharma* assigns specific duties to the castes of *Brahman*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya*, and *Shudra*, while *Ashrama dharma* delineates tasks to be undertaken at various life stages – from *brahmacharya* to *grihastha*, *vanaprastha*, and finally *sanyas ashram*.

In contrast, *Sadharana dharma* encompasses values and obligations that are meant to be practiced by everyone, transcending distinctions of varna or ashram. Manu outlines ten *svadharma* within *Sadharana dharma*: *dhriti* (patience), *kshama* (forgiveness), *dama* (self-discipline), *asteya* (non-stealing), *sauca* (cleanliness), *indriyanigraha* (control of senses), *dhi* (intellect or wisdom), *vidya* (learning), *satya* (honesty), and *ākrodha* (absence of rage). While virtues like honesty, *asteya*, and *kshama* contribute to social harmony, the other virtues focus on fostering personal morality, intended to be pure at an individual level<sup>7</sup>.

The ultimate objective or value of life for an individual is the attainment of *Moksha*. All individuals are encouraged to strive towards this transcendent goal, considering it as the pinnacle of their life's purpose. While *kāma* and *artha* are acknowledged as pursuits of value, they do not constitute the ultimate objectives. An individual is advised to focus on the paramount goal of *moksha*, ensuring a sound mind and body to achieve the necessary attainments for a balanced and regular life.

From a spiritual perspective, *moksha* is defined as a state that, once reached, liberates an individual from all forms of pain. It is characterized by positive thinking, representing an uninterrupted state of tranquility, contentment, and joy. This spiritual quest towards *moksha* underscores the holistic well-being of an individual, transcending the temporal pursuits of pleasure and material prosperity.

### **Buddhist Ethics: Guiding Principles for Moral Living in a Consumer Society**

Buddhism transcends mere religious practice; it is a profound way of life. To navigate life's challenges with greater ease, adherence to the teachings of Buddha is paramount. The core of Buddhist ethical guidance lies in the elevation of virtues, which hold a pivotal role in shaping one's conduct. Within the realm of social morality, Buddhism places significant emphasis on humility, generosity, love, gratitude, compassion, forgiveness, honesty, and justice. These virtues form the bedrock of a morally upright societal framework. Simultaneously, individual morality is cultivated through the virtues of self-control, temperance, contentment, kindness, celibacy, patience, and purity. In essence, Buddhism provides a comprehensive framework for ethical living, intertwining principles that nurture both social harmony and personal integrity. Beyond individual virtues, Buddhism expounds its greatest ethical discipline

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 83,84

through the Eightfold Path, a guiding framework identified by Buddha himself as the route to the ultimate goal of *Nirvana*.

Buddha's foundational insight revolves around the pervasive nature of suffering in all facets of existence. He contends that the alleviation of suffering can only be achieved by comprehending its underlying causes. According to Buddha's teachings, the three fundamental sources of suffering are greed (*lobha*), aversion (*dosha*), and delusion (*moha*). These three mental states are identified as the roots of human suffering, and the Eightfold Path serves as a transformative journey to overcome them<sup>8</sup>. Indeed, according to Buddhist teachings, greed represents the self-centered craving for pleasure and material possessions, often accompanied by an intense desire for prestige, power, and status. This insatiable thirst for accumulation can become a central focus, leading individuals away from a path of contentment and spiritual fulfillment.

Aversion, another root cause of suffering, manifests in various forms such as negation, irritability, hostility, fury, and even violence. It is the rejection or strong aversion to certain experiences, people, or circumstances, which can breed negativity and hinder one's path to inner peace.

Delusion, characterized as the evil side of the mind in this context, refers to a state of confusion, misperception, or ignorance. It clouds one's understanding of reality and perpetuates a distorted view of the world. Overcoming delusion is a crucial aspect of the spiritual journey in Buddhism, as it paves the way for clarity, wisdom, and a deeper connection with the true nature of existence.

By acknowledging and addressing these three fundamental causes of suffering—greed, aversion, and delusion—individuals can undertake the transformative journey of the Eightfold Path, working towards liberation from the cycle of suffering and the realization of *Nirvana*<sup>9</sup>.

The three roots of suffering—greed, aversion, and delusion—spawn various causes of pain and sorrow. In a consumer society, these roots prominently influence human behavior. Greed propels an intense pursuit of status and prestige, triggering a fervent desire for societal recognition. Yet, greed rarely exists in isolation; the yearning for status often arises from aversion, accompanied by negation and jealousy. These emotional responses ultimately redirect focus towards material possessions.

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<sup>8</sup> These three states are collectively called as '*Kilesas*' in the Pali language usually translated as 'defilements'.

<sup>9</sup> Bodhi. B. *The Noble Eightfold Path\_ Way to End of Suffering*, 1999\_2009, p.7

Ignorance is the underlying force behind these dynamics, as individuals perceive the transient aspects of the world as enduring realities. Buddhism, in contrast, asserts the momentary nature of the world, emphasizing impermanence. This perspective challenges prevalent societal norms, where the quest for material wealth and social standing is often based on a misunderstanding of the impermanent nature of existence. By comprehending and addressing these fundamental causes of suffering, individuals can gradually liberate themselves from the entanglements of greed, aversion, and delusion, embracing a path that transcends transient pursuits and aligns with the impermanent reality of the world<sup>10</sup>.

In a consumer society, objects serve as symbols of prestige and comfort. However, their acquisition is not solely based on their practical utility but also on the sign value they represent. This emphasis on the symbolic aspect of possessions is a primary cause of suffering in contemporary consumer culture<sup>11</sup>. According to Baudrillard, objects have lost their clear connection to a specific purpose or necessity. He characterizes consumption as a contemporary tribal myth, having transformed into a new moral landscape where individuals experience heightened psychological and social pressures related to mobility, status, and competition across various domains such as finance, prestige, culture, and more.

The Buddha's teachings on embracing life with minimal material pleasures hold particular relevance in the present context. The Eightfold Path, encompassing principles such as right view, right intention, right action, right effort, right livelihood, and right mindfulness, serves as a foundational guide for leading a life governed by moral values. In a society dominated by capitalism, these teachings advocate for a mindful and ethical approach to one's actions and choices, urging individuals to prioritize spiritual and moral well-being over excessive material pursuits. Hence, certain aspects of the eightfold paths require our specific attention, and they are elaborated upon below.

### *Right View*

The right view stands as the precursor to the entire path, guiding all other factors within it. Its importance lies in its ability to offer an understanding of our starting point, our destination, and the paths leading to that destination. Without the right view, embarking on any endeavor carries the risk of veering into aimless and undirected efforts. It serves as the compass, ensuring a clear understanding of the

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<sup>10</sup> Buswell. E. R., *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*. Volume 1,2, Macmillan Reference, USA, 2004, p. 330

<sup>11</sup> Op, Cit, Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society*.

context and purpose, thus preventing the pitfalls of unguided action<sup>12</sup>. Exactly, the importance of the right view becomes evident in practical scenarios like starting a business. When the goal is to earn money for a better living, having a clear and morally directed understanding of the path to take is crucial. The right view guides the entrepreneur in making ethical choices, ensuring that the pursuit of financial success aligns with moral principles. It sets the foundation for making informed decisions that not only contribute to personal success but also adhere to a framework of ethical conduct, promoting a harmonious and virtuous approach in the pursuit of one's goals.

### *Right Intention*

The next step in the Eightfold Path is the right intention or right thought, which serves as the cognitive counterpart to the right view. Right intention involves using the mind in a manner aligned with the goals set by the right view. This aspect consists of three components: the intention to give up, the intention to be kind, and the intention of harmlessness. These three intentions stand in contrast to three types of wrong intentions that share similarities: intentions driven by desire, bad will, and harm.

Each positive intention counteracts the negative intention associated with it. The intention of renunciation opposes the intention of desire, the intention of goodwill counters the intention of bad will, and the intention of being harmless stands in opposition to harmful intentions. By cultivating these positive intentions, individuals can navigate away from harmful mental states and foster a mindset that contributes to personal well-being and the well-being of others.

### *Right Speech*

Following the right intention, the next step in the Eightfold Path is right speech, which emphasizes the commitment to never speak falsehood and consistently convey the truth. Right speech involves refraining from engaging in lying, backbiting, using harsh words, and indulging in idle chatter. Moreover, it advocates for ensuring that our discourse is free from ill will and self-interest. This ethical foundation in communication aligns with the broader principles of the Eightfold Path, promoting honesty, kindness, and mindfulness in the way we express ourselves. Indeed, the act of lying can be driven by various emotions, such as greed, hatred, or delusion. When greed is the motivating factor behind telling a lie, the intention is typically to gain personal benefits for oneself or for those closely associated, such as acquiring money, power, respect, or admiration. Buddha's teachings explicitly discourage such deceptive practices driven by selfish desires.

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<sup>12</sup> Op, Cit., Bodhi. B. *The Noble Eightfold Path*, p. 10

The ethical framework of Buddhism emphasizes the importance of truthfulness and discourages actions that arise from harmful motivations. By understanding the root causes of dishonesty and cultivating right intention and right speech, individuals can strive to align their actions with principles that contribute to personal and societal well-being, rather than seeking personal gain at the expense of truth and integrity.

### *Right Action*

Proceeding from the right effort, the subsequent aspect is the right action, encompassing the five precepts known as *Panchsheela*. These ethical guidelines serve as principles for upright conduct:

Not to kill but to practice harmlessness and compassion (*ahimsa*): This precept underscores a commitment to non-violence and the cultivation of compassion towards all living beings.

Not to steal but to exercise charity and generosity (*asteya*): This precept encourages honesty and generosity, discouraging theft and promoting acts of giving.

Not to commit sexual misconduct but to maintain chastity and self-control (*brahmacharya*): Emphasizing ethical and responsible behavior in matters of sexuality, this precept advocates for chastity and self-discipline.

Not to engage in deception but to practice sincerity and honesty (*satya*): This precept promotes truthful and sincere communication, discouraging deceit and falsehood.

Not to consume intoxicating beverages or substances but to exercise temperance and mindfulness: Encouraging moderation, sobriety, and mindfulness in lifestyle choices, this precept promotes mental clarity and overall well-being. Adhering to these precepts facilitates the cultivation of a lifestyle grounded in ethical conduct, compassion, and mindfulness, aligning one's actions with the principles of the Eightfold Path. Buddha prohibits intentional killing, recognizing it as an act driven by the negative forces of greed, hatred, and delusion. The guidance extends to the prohibition of taking what is not given, encompassing acts of stealing, robbery, snatching, fraudulence, and deceitfulness. Moreover, Buddha's teachings emphasize the prohibition of sexual misconduct, particularly with close family members such as mother or sister, and stress the importance of obtaining consent from others before engaging in any intimate or sexual acts. These ethical guidelines underscore the principles of compassion, honesty, and respect for others within the framework of the Eightfold Path.

### *Right Livelihood*

The concept of appropriate livelihood, as expounded by Buddha, holds paramount importance within the framework of earning wealth. This aspect is considered crucial within the context of the Four Noble Truths. Buddha's guidance emphasizes ethical considerations in wealth acquisition, discouraging illegal and violent methods and advocating for a peaceful and just means of obtaining wealth. The teachings explicitly forbid five types of livelihood: the sale of weapons, commerce in living beings (including breeding animals for slaughter, the slave trade, and prostitution), the manufacture and butchery of meat, trade in poisons, and trade in intoxicants.

Buddha goes on to highlight various dishonest means of earning money, categorizing them as immoral livelihoods. These include lying, betrayal, soothsaying, fraud, and usury. A wrong way of living, according to Buddha, involves actions that violate one's moral principles, both in speech and behavior. This ethical framework encourages individuals to consider the impact of their livelihood on themselves and others, promoting a path of integrity, compassion, and adherence to moral principles.

The Thai treatise emphasizes the concept of "rightness" in the realms of actions, persons, and objects within the context of business ethics. Righteousness in action entails employees performing their tasks diligently without degrading the company or its products, while owners are urged to treat their workforce fairly and avoid exploitative practices. Rightness regarding persons underscores the importance of respecting and caring for individuals, extending to customers, co-workers, and superiors. Employers are encouraged to organize tasks based on merit, provide fair compensation, and foster a positive work environment. "Rightness towards objects" necessitates honesty and accuracy in business dealings, discouraging deceptive practices, misleading advertising, and false claims about the quality or quantity of products. This holistic approach reflects a commitment to ethical conduct, aligning with broader Buddhist principles of right action, compassion, and truthfulness.

The intertwining of enlightenment and morality within religious teachings, such as the Eightfold Path, serves as a guide for individuals aspiring to lead not only spiritually fulfilling lives but also morally upright and healthier lives in the broader sense.

### **Philosophy of *Karmayoga* in *Bhagavad Gita*:**

Man's fundamental nature is intricately tied to action, known as karma. From the moment of birth, a human is inherently engaged in various activities, whether it be speaking, moving, eating, or excreting – all considered as forms of action. However,

the driving force behind many human actions is often rooted in the desire for material gain, particularly driven by greed for monetary wealth.

Throughout history, humans have practiced various forms of worship, appealing to a diverse array of deities with the hope of receiving tangible benefits. These benefits range from a bountiful harvest and healthy livestock to timely rains. The underlying motivations behind these requests, whether in the past or present, primarily revolve around the pursuit of a comfortable life and the attainment of pleasure. Even the aspiration for heavenly realms, as seen in diverse religious traditions, is often fueled by the anticipation of experiencing joy and pleasure.

In the Vedic traditions, these conditions were considered mandatory, and ethical principles were applied to the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of discomfort. It reflects a fundamental aspect of human nature – the perpetual seeking of pleasure and the instinctive aversion to discomfort – both of which drive the actions and aspirations of individuals throughout their lives<sup>13</sup>.

Additionally, within the realm of human action, there exists a dual nature comprising both exterior and internal components, referred to as purpose and intention, respectively. In this framework, the internal aspect, or intention, is considered superior. Indian tradition places a profound emphasis on the underlying motive behind any action, recognizing that the motivation is paramount.

The philosophical underpinnings of Indian thought delve into the delicate analysis of *rāga* and *dvesha*, identified as the two fundamental causes influencing human conduct. It is the interplay of these two factors that occasionally lead individuals to engage in actions that may be perceived as morally or ethically questionable. The guiding principle within Indian traditions is to steer actions away from being dictated solely by attachments (*rāga*) and aversions (*dvesha*). Instead, the emphasis is placed on cultivating a sense of non-attachment, known as *anāsakti*, or the practice of selfless action, referred to as *nishkāmata*. This perspective encourages individuals to act without being unduly swayed by personal desires or aversions, fostering a state of equilibrium and ethical conduct in all endeavors<sup>14</sup>.

Lord Krishna elucidates the true essence of Karma in the *BhagavadGita*, terming it as Karma yoga. Arjuna queries Shri Krishna, questioning, "If knowledge is superior to action, why have you instructed me to undertake certain actions?"<sup>15</sup> In response, Krishna clarifies that there are essentially two main paths in the world: the

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<sup>13</sup> Singh. B. *The Essence of Bhagwad-Gita*, Arnold-Heinemam, 1981, pp. 61,62

<sup>14</sup> Op, Cit, Tiwari, *Classical Indian Thought*, Introduction.

<sup>15</sup> Yati. N.C. *Bhagwad Gita*, chapter three, verse I

unitive way of wisdom followed by the Sāṁkhya, and the unitive way of conduct practiced by the Yogis. Moreover, since these two paths are interdependent, abstaining from action even momentarily is impossible. The inherent modalities established by nature compel everyone to act involuntarily. Krishna, however, asserts that individuals who solely pursue the gratification of sensual desires and mental pleasures are considered lost souls. On the contrary, those who exercise control over their senses with the assistance of their minds and perform actions without attachment are the ones who achieve success in life. Avoiding action to escape its consequences is not the path to follow; instead, one should engage in necessary activities as they are essential for progress and a contented life in this world. However, each action should be undertaken without attachment. The cultivation of various virtues for ethical well-being is endorsed by Indian traditional beliefs. For instance, fostering qualities like *indriyanigraha* (control of senses), *anāsakti* (lack of attachment to objects), *niṣkāmata* (control of desires), and *cittashuddhi* (purity of mind) is deemed equally crucial for the development of moral character. These virtues stand alongside qualities such as love, compassion, forgiveness, friendship, and brotherhood, collectively contributing to the holistic and ethical growth of an individual<sup>16</sup>. Behaviours driven by attachment inevitably lead to sorrow, not only for the individual but also for others. This pattern is starkly evident in societies where actions are intertwined with prestige and status, often resulting in the suffering of the working class.

Karl Marx also critiques such capitalist societies, where the pursuit of wealth and prosperity becomes synonymous with exploitation. A prime example of capitalist society as given by Marx is colonialization, which he says is a unique instance in human history. Countries like Britain, France, and Portugal expanded their colonies across various regions worldwide with the primary goal of amassing wealth. These colonies provided a market for burgeoning industries and, through monopolistic control, facilitated greater capital accumulation. The riches obtained through looting, enslavement, and exploitation in these colonies were transported back to the mother nations, where they were transformed into capital. This historical narrative encapsulates the consequences of attached behavior, illustrating its impact on both local and global scales<sup>17</sup>. Marx argued that even in contemporary times, the majority of wealth is concentrated in the hands of capitalists. He maintained that capitalists continue to retain the lion's share of the profits generated through production, perpetuating economic inequality and class disparities in society. According to Marx's critique of capitalism, this unequal distribution of wealth and the exploitation of labor

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<sup>16</sup> Op, Cit., Tiwari, *Classical Indian Thought*, p. 2

<sup>17</sup> Marx. K. *Capital*, Progress Publishers, 1977, p. 478

remain persistent issues, contributing to the ongoing challenges of economic and social inequality.

The current dominance of capitalists is attributed to their affiliative behavior, according to the perspective presented. While the accumulation of wealth itself is not inherently condemned, the moral stance centers on the immorality of exploiting others and hoarding resources exclusively for personal gain. The narrative emphasizes that abstaining from action or giving up on responsibilities is not the optimal strategy for societal improvement.

Instead, the advocated approach is to actively engage in actions that contribute to the preservation and enhancement of social order. This is encapsulated in the concept of *loka-saṃgraha*, underscoring the belief that genuine societal progress occurs through actions that uphold and strengthen the collective well-being of the community.

The *BhagavadGita* advocates a set of virtues and responsibilities for individuals. These include practicing *ahimsa* (non-injury), *satya* (truthfulness), *akrodha* (avoidance of anger), *priyavacana* (speaking in a kind and pleasant manner), *dayā* (compassion and love for all creatures), *svarthatyaga* (avoidance of egoism), and *paranindatyaga* (refraining from speaking ill of others). Additionally, the *Gita* proposes that individuals contribute to societal well-being by fulfilling responsibilities such as *lokasthiti* (maintenance of social order), *lokasiddhi* (preservation of social customs), *lokasaṃgraha* (upholding social equilibrium), *lokakalyāna* (advocating for social welfare), and *lokayātra* (contributing to social growth). These principles guide individuals toward a path of ethical conduct and active participation in fostering a harmonious and progressive society.

### **Wisdom Beyond Wealth: Narratives on Self-Realization and True Happiness**

The Upanishads are revered as knowledge treatises, offering profound insights into spiritual and philosophical concepts. In contrast to the Vedas, the Upanishads extensively develop ideas such as *karma*, *samsara*, and *Moksha*. They particularly emphasize the paramount importance of knowledge. Ignorance is identified as the greatest obstacle in human life by the Upanishads, and it is deemed crucial to eradicate this ignorance through the wisdom imparted by the Upanishads themselves. The pursuit of knowledge is recognized as a transformative path leading to a deeper understanding of fundamental truths and the ultimate goal of liberation (*Moksha*).

According to the Upanishads, *Brahman* is recognized as the ultimate reality of the universe, and *Atman* is considered an integral aspect of this ultimate reality. The primary objective for individuals is to attain *Moksha*, the liberation from the cycle of birth and death, which is achieved through understanding one's essential self in union

with *Brahman*. This knowledge, however, is not solely acquired through intellectual means; it requires purity of character and conduct.

The *Katha* Upanishad underscores this notion, asserting that true knowledge of *Brahman* is not accessible to those who have not abandoned unethical conduct. The pursuit of *Moksha*, therefore, is intricately linked with moral and ethical refinement, emphasizing the holistic development of an individual's character and conduct on the path to spiritual realization<sup>18</sup>. Indeed, the *Brihadaranyaka* Upanishad supports the idea that attaining oneness with *Brahman* is not possible for individuals who have not cultivated qualities of peace, self-discipline, tranquility, endurance, and inner composure. These virtues are seen as prerequisites for the spiritual journey, emphasizing the significance of mental and emotional equilibrium in the pursuit of a deeper understanding of the ultimate reality, *Brahman*. The Upanishads consistently underscore the interconnectedness of ethical conduct, mental discipline, and spiritual realization on the path to self-discovery and the realization of oneness with the cosmic reality<sup>19</sup>.

The Upanishads, revered as repositories of profound wisdom, offer many facets that contribute to a more meaningful existence. Within these sacred texts, one encounters the compelling stories of Nachiketa, a young child, and *Maitreyi*, the wife of the rishi *Yajnavalkya*, both choosing the wealth of supreme knowledge over material possessions.

The story of Nachiketa, found in the *Katha* Upanishad, unfolds with his father performing a religious sacrifice and offering various gifts. Curious about the nature of these offerings,<sup>20</sup> Nachiketa questions his father, who, in a moment of frustration, responds by saying that he would be sacrificed to the God of Death, *Yama*. True to his commitment, Nachiketa arrives at the gates of *Yama*, where he is granted three boons. Intrigued by the mysteries of death, Nachiketa, for his third boon, seeks knowledge about its purpose and aftermath.

*Yama*, attempting to divert him from worldly temptations, offers riches, a long life, and dominion over the entire planet. However, Nachiketa, recognizing the transient nature of material wealth, remains steadfast in his quest for supreme knowledge. He asserts that worldly pleasures are fleeting, and material possessions cannot provide lasting satisfaction. Nachiketa resolutely chooses the wealth of wisdom and understanding, refusing to be swayed by temporary allurements.

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<sup>18</sup> *Katha* Upanishad., 1.2.24

<sup>19</sup> *Brihadaranyaka* Upanishad, 4.4.23

<sup>20</sup> *Katha* Upanishad, Chapter 1, phrase I

In this narrative, the Upanishads impart timeless lessons on the value of prioritizing spiritual knowledge and enlightenment over ephemeral material wealth, showcasing the enduring pursuit of truth and the profound significance of choosing the path of supreme wisdom. Even the longest life is short with all of these things. I do not need any of those. When it comes to money, a man can never be pleased since he always wants more, and money won't aid him after he passes away. So please enlighten me with the utmost wealth in the world, the one I asked for.

In another profound tale featuring the sage *Yajnavalkya* and his wife *Maitreyi*, a noteworthy discussion unfolded<sup>21</sup>. As *Yajnavalkya* prepared for his life in the Sanyas ashram, he decided to divide his property between his two wives, *Katayani* and *Maitreyi*, and asked them to choose their respective shares<sup>22</sup>. However, *Maitreyi*, known for her wisdom, expressed dissatisfaction with the material possessions offered.

Intriguingly, *Maitreyi* questioned the true source of happiness, pondering whether wealth and possessions could provide lasting comfort and joy. She raised profound inquiries about the potential of riches to grant immortality or perpetual happiness. She questioned whether ownership of the entire planet and all the wealth in the world could make her the happiest person. *Yajnavalkya*, acknowledging the limitations of material wealth, responded that while money can offer comfort, it cannot ensure true and enduring happiness. He affirmed that self-knowledge and understanding oneself lead to genuine contentment.

Recognizing *Maitreyi's* profound inquiry and determination to seek true happiness, *Yajnavalkya* blessed her with the highest level of self-knowledge. This knowledge, he conveyed, would bring her happiness at every stage of life, emphasizing the transcendent value of inner wisdom over external possessions.

Indeed, these narratives from the Upanishads serve as powerful illustrations of the teachings that material success is not the ultimate goal and that lasting happiness cannot be found in external possessions. The Upanishads emphasize the transient nature of material wealth, highlighting the impermanence of ownership and the cyclical nature of worldly pursuits.

The profound wisdom conveyed in these stories reinforces the central idea that everything, including the concept of wealth, is inherently rooted in a person's thoughts and understanding. The inevitability of succession in ownership, as exemplified by the

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<sup>21</sup> Krishnananda. S. *The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, Fourth Brahman.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., Chapter 2, verse I

transfer of property upon one's death, underscores the ephemeral nature of external possessions.

The Upanishads, through these narratives, guide individuals toward the realization that the ultimate objective is to know oneself. The pursuit of self-knowledge is presented as the pathway to enduring satisfaction and true happiness, contrasting with the fleeting and transitory nature of wealth. These timeless teachings continue to inspire contemplation on the deeper dimensions of life and the quest for inner fulfillment beyond the material realm.

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, the examination of Indian ideals presents a profound contrast to contemporary life manipulated by the relentless desire for more goods and commodities, commonly known as consumerism. The Indian value system, rooted in the balance of *Purusharthas*, the Eight-fold paths, and the principles of *Karmayoga*, underscores that a good life is not solely dependent on material wealth. The traditional Indian perspective treats wealth as a means to live life, emphasizing its role as a first step towards individual and collective well-being.

The conflict between the money/consumption-oriented value system and the non-materialistic-based ideals prompts individuals to make a choice. However, the complexities of societal structures, influenced by politics and the economy, pose challenges in striking a balance between these two systems. Yet, the essence lies in understanding the pragmatic ideas inherent in traditional systems, particularly those of Indian origin. Embracing our duties with a sense of responsibility and contributing to the well-being of others can lead to a more fulfilling and harmonious world, transcending the confines of self-centered pursuits. Ultimately, the quest for a meaningful life and happiness requires aligning with values that prioritize collective welfare and the enduring principles of humanity.

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