



## GREEN CONSUMERISM AND SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION

By Shivi Chhaberiya  
From Symbiosis Law School, Hyderabad

### Introduction

The term “green consumerism” has been in vogue since a very long time. When the people or rather consumers started to look for things like “value for life” or “impact on environment” not only “value for money” while buying things, the companies also started marketing their products as environment friendly or planet safe to attract the new section of consumers known as “green consumers” and thus the whole concept of “green consumerism” came into being. The term green “describes people, products, or activities that are environmentally responsible”, such responsibility means that consumers try to mitigate the effects of the “production, use, and disposal of the products they buy”<sup>1</sup>. The practice of green consuming is trending because it is a means of addressing “environmental concerns without compromising the market driven economy”. Sustainable consumption means that the consumers buy products which have a less adverse impact on the environment so that the future generations can also benefit from the resources we have now. The concept of “green consumerism” and “sustainable consumption” are interlinked as both emphasize on the judicious use of resources and awareness among consumers to buy products that will not contribute to the

deterioration of the environment. Only by following the practice of green consumerism can, the goals of “sustainable consumption” be achieved.

The Consumer Protection Act 1986 which was introduced as a means to protect the rights and interests of consumers and for the same purpose several consumer councils were, established at the central and state levels. Section 6 cl. (a) of the same act states that “the consumer has the right to be protected against the marketing of goods [and services] which are hazardous to life and property”<sup>2</sup>, which means that any such product that is harmful to the life of the consumer will not be sold or marketed, but this is exactly what is happening in the current market practice. To fulfill the demand of the general public, mass production is followed due to which the industrialization is increasing rapidly, more and more land is being used for factories, forest land is being roped in production purposes to build factories or for sourcing raw materials, therefore the need for green consumerism is even more in today’s date as there are some grave environmental threats which can be significantly curbed by the practice of “sustainable consumption”. This paper shall in detail discuss about the concepts of “green consumerism” and “sustainable consumption”. It shall also discuss about the movement in India and the contribution of the consumer forums and councils to it.

### Scope of the study

The scope of this paper shall be narrow, while discussing the meaning and the concept of

<sup>1</sup>Pettit, Dean & Jerry Paul Sheppard, “IT’S NOT EASY BEING GREEN: THE LIMITS OF GREEN CONSUMERISM IN LIGHT OF THE LOGIC OF COLLECTIVE ACTION”, *Queens Quarterly*, 328-350, 99 (3), (1992).

<sup>2</sup> THE CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT, NO. 68 OF 1986, § 6 (a).



green consumerism and sustainable development; it shall also look into the concept of sustainable development as defined by the United Nations. Environmental pollution and climate change are affecting the world as a whole today and “green consumerism” together with “sustainable consumption can prove significantly effective in reducing the environmental deterioration. With the same objective this paper shall also study extent of awareness about “Green consumerism” and the legislations that promote “sustainable consumption”.

### **Research methodology**

To understand the meanings and concepts of the terms “green consumerism” and “sustainable consumption” various books, articles, journals, and research papers have been referred. Further various reports and indexes have also been looked into, to examine the position and situation of India in following the sustainable development goals. Therefore this paper follows Doctrinal method of research to understand the concepts and analyze the situation of “green consumerism” in India.

### **Research Objectives**

- To understand the concept of “Green Consumerism” and “sustainable consumption” their origin, meaning and concept.
- To analyze the relation of “Green Consumerism” with “Sustainable Consumption”.
- To examine the importance of “Green Economy”, this includes green and

sustainable consumption and production respectively, as tangents of “sustainable development”.

- To examine the Indian laws and policies regarding the same matter of “green consumerism” and “sustainable consumption”.

### **Literature review**

*It's Not Easy Being Green: The Limits of Green Consumerism in Light of the Logic of Collective Action*, Dean Pettit & Jerry Paul Sheppard<sup>3</sup>, In this paper the authors have closely examined the collective logic patterns of humans and have proposed reasons as to why one would incline towards green consumerism and why one would not. They have also analysed the limits of green consumerism in respect of the same, to examine its relevance as a solution to the environmental problems. Thus, this paper focuses on the problems green consuming can face due to “voluntary” behaviour of individuals.

*Sustainable Consumption and Production: An Effort to Reconcile the Determinants of Environmental Impact*, Stefano Pogutz and Valerio Micale<sup>4</sup>, this paper aims at providing a critical review of the sustainable consumption and production policy and how the concept evolved. Initially it analyses the policies for sustainable production and then the role of technology played in sustainable production. Then through the result obtained from the first analysis it further examines the consumption pattern in different business and societies. Lastly it provides a theoretical framework to modify the consumption

<sup>3</sup> Dean Pettit & Jerry Paul Sheppard, *IT'S NOT EASY BEING GREEN: THE LIMITS OF GREEN CONSUMERISM IN LIGHT OF THE LOGIC OF COLLECTIVE ACTION*, 328-350, *The Queen's Quarterly*, 99 (3), (1992).

<sup>4</sup> Stefano Pogutz & Valerio Micale, *SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION: AN EFFORT TO RECONCILE THE DETERMINANTS OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT*, 29-50, *Society and Economy*, 33(1), (2011).



pattern of the societal model. It provides an in-depth analysis of the IPAT equation while focusing on two factors related to consumption and production i.e. affluence and technology. It states that many attempts are being towards having a green economy by governments across the world, as the consumers are becoming more ware about the effects of their consumption pattern on the environment and thus they are shifting to a more green approach towards their shopping.

***Making Sense Of The Green Economy, Federico Caprotti and Ian Bailey<sup>5</sup>***, this paper aims at providing a clear definition of green economy while stating some critical issues about it that are pertinent and suited to geographical analysis. Firstly it tries to criticise the growth focused, neo-liberal and techno-centric definition of green economy. Secondly it attempts at appraising the strategies that are created to make "green economy" the centre of social and environmental change. It further discusses about the spatial complexities that could arise in the transition to "green consumerism". Therefore it tries to give "green economy" new dimension by approaching it geographically and trying to define it as a political and socio-economic phenomenon. It further contends that "green economy" is a concept that offers a strong content driven set of ideas for socio-economic progress in the wake of environmental crises, not excluding the development factor, thus these qualities make for the ideas of "green economy" potent

to applied in the future and for redefining the pattern of consumption and production.

***Green Consumerism in India: The Challenges Ahead, Gurjeet Singh<sup>6</sup>***, this research paper deals with the concept of green consumerism in the wake of the introduction of the consumer protection act 1986. It tries to highlight some of the issues connected with it and the challenges that the Indian consumer movement and its proponents might face in the future. It describes the meaning and concept of "green consumerism" though to produce a much large effect the contribution of individuals have to be combined with the efforts of social and political institutions. It states around six main challenges that could be faced by the movement in India while simultaneously giving solutions for them. The paper concludes by stating some more questions upon whose answer, the success of the green movement lies.

### **Green Consumerism & Sustainable Consumption: Meaning and Concept**

Broadly speaking green consumerism is the pattern of consumer behavior which involves awareness about the consequences of such a pattern on the environment<sup>7</sup>. "Green consumerism is the use of individual consumer power to promote less environmentally damaging consumption, without compromising on the wants and needs of the consumers"<sup>8</sup>. The followers of such a pattern are known as green consumers, these consumers have accustomed

<sup>5</sup> Federico Caprotti & Ian Bailey, MAKING SENSE OF THE GREEN ECONOMY, 195, Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography, 96( 3), (Sept.,2014).

<sup>6</sup> Gurjeet Singh, Green consumerism in India: the Challenges ahead, Shaping The Future By Law: Children. Environment And Human Health, 270.

<sup>7</sup> Gurjeet Singh, Green consumerism in India: the Challenges ahead, Shaping The Future By Law: Children. Environment And Human Health, 270.

<sup>8</sup> Suresh Mishra & Sapna Chadah ed., CONSUMER PROTECTION IN INDIA ISSUES AND CONCERNS, Indian Institute of public administration, New Delhi, 2012.



themselves to such a lifestyle which involves the least degrading effect on the environment. The consumers who can be termed as green consumers are those who “rationally” choose their products which have less or no packaging or have a recycled symbol on the packaging etc. These consumers are of common belief that such a purchasing pattern can significantly contribute to the environment change policies. Due to the changing consumer pattern many brands have started advertising their products as “Green Products” so as to attract the new pool of customers who are known as “Green Consumers”.

The main driving force behind the changed behaviors of consumer while buying things is mainly because of the awareness among the consumers about the implications of their “over-consumption on the environment”<sup>9</sup>. Green consuming has become a means through which “people can address their environmental concerns without compromising on the market driven economy”<sup>10</sup>. But as all good things come with a hefty price tag, the habit of practicing “green consumerism” requires many sacrifices from the consumer which can eventually lead to reducing the utility of the consumers<sup>11</sup>. Firstly all such “green products” can cost the consumers more than they may pay for the same type of the product. Such relatively high cost can be due to the more cost of production or manufacturing of the product which is environment friendly. Therefore to further this concept of green

consumerism it is assumed that a person who is environment friendly is willing to pay some extra price for the “green” products. Secondly the consumers have to put in a little more effort while practicing “green consumerism”, i.e the goods purchased have to be disposed of in the same “eco-friendly” manner to practice “green consumerism” in complete manner.

Thirdly consumers have to sometimes accept an imperfect good in substitute for a perfect good<sup>12</sup>, it may not always be the case that a producer that is producing the goods in an eco-friendly manner is producing the goods that are best suited to the utility of the consumers. Fourthly the consumers may have to reduce their consumption in order to fully conserve the natural resources, some of the authors have contended that such a consequence may be as a sacrifice to the consumer but in today’s world there modern alternatives being made of almost all kinds of goods that can be substituted for normal goods and which don’t have such implications on the environment as the previous goods.

“Sustainable consumption is defined as consumption that demands less of the ecosystem services that the Earth provides, and is less likely to impair the ability of future generations to meet their own needs as a result”<sup>13</sup>. This concept was first defined in the Oslo symposium on Sustainable Consumption, as the consumption of those goods that are essential for maintaining the

<sup>9</sup> Supra note 3.

<sup>10</sup> Dean Pettit & Jerry Paul Sheppard, *IT'S NOT EASY BEING GREEN: THE LIMITS OF GREEN CONSUMERISM IN LIGHT OF THE LOGIC OF COLLECTIVE ACTION*, 328-350, *The Queen's Quarterly*, 99 (3), (1992).

<sup>11</sup>

Id.

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

<sup>13</sup> GreenDex 2009: Consumer Choice and the Environment- A world wide Tracking Survey [https://www.nationalgeographic.com/greendex/assets/GS\\_NGS\\_Full\\_Report\\_May09.pdf](https://www.nationalgeographic.com/greendex/assets/GS_NGS_Full_Report_May09.pdf).



quality of life, while at the same time “minimizing the use of natural resources, toxic materials and emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle, so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations”<sup>14</sup>. This consumption requires that the consumption of the current as well as the future generations improve, while “maintaining the services and quality of resources throughout”<sup>15</sup>. It focuses on those strategies of consumption through which those products that “foster highest quality of life, the efficient use of natural resources”<sup>16</sup>, while not deteriorating the environment, and promoting “social development”.

The goals of “green consumerism” such as clean air, clean water, and ethical treatment of all natural goods is a collective good that is to be shared by all<sup>17</sup> i.e. these goals can only be achieved by the collective contribution of all, all being governments, institutions, individuals etc and by cutting down on the consumption by sustainably consuming.

### **United Nations Program of “Sustainable Development”**

After the Second World War the rise of industrialization led to new economic development throughout the world. The consumer behavior changed significantly due to the industrialization process. People

started to consume more, with the advent of mass production, more new advertising schemes and increased income people started to spend more on products which eventually lead to massive surge in consumption. This led to widespread environmental disruption and degradation. In 1980s there was a sudden rise in the “environment conscious” consumers in England, due to this degradation<sup>18</sup>, various brands started to advertise their products as “eco-friendly” or “recycled” to attract the new class of consumers that had emerged. There was new movement started in England regarding the degrading effects of such products on the environment<sup>19</sup>, this new class of consumers was environment conscious and thus the whole movement of green consumerism was started.

The concept of sustainable development was introduced for the first time in the Brundtland Commission of the United Nations as the development that “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”<sup>20</sup>. Moreover initially the focus was put on “sustainable production” as the tangent of “sustainable development”, the contention as put forward by the OECD was to modify the “transformation processes or substitution of materials input in order to moderate the

<sup>14</sup> Norwegian Ministry of the Environment, Sustainable Consumption Symposium Report, Oslo Symposium on Sustainable Consumption, 19, (Jan. 2004).

<sup>15</sup> E Salim, THE CHALLENGE OF SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AS SEEN FROM THE SOUTH, 20, Oslo Symposium on Sustainable Consumption, (Jan. 2004).

<sup>16</sup> A. Tukker & M.J. Cohen et al., THE OSLO DECLARATION ON SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION, 9–14, Journal of Industrial Ecology, 10, (2006).

<sup>17</sup> Supra note 10, at 332.

<sup>18</sup> Suresh Mishra & Sapna Chadah, CONSUMER PROTECTION IN INDIA ISSUES AND CONCERNS, Indian Institute of public administration, New Delhi, 2012.

<sup>19</sup> *Id.*, at 232.

<sup>20</sup> World Commission on Environment and Development, OUR COMMON FUTURE, Oxford University Press, (1987).



environmental impact per unit of output produced”<sup>21</sup>. However there was a change in this policy which was noticed in the “*Rio de Janerio*” and the “*World summit on Sustainable Development*” of 2002, wherein the concept of sustainable development was linked to sustainable consumption, it was determined here that “the processes of consumption and production were equally detrimental to the environment”<sup>22</sup>.

United Nations in its 2012 conference on Sustainable development had “Green Economy” as of its central themes, wherein it was held as the catalyst that would promote the national policy development and international co-operation among countries<sup>23</sup> to fulfill the seventeen goals of sustainable development<sup>24</sup>. As a matter of concern it was highlighted that “unsustainable patterns of production and consumption where they occur remains fundamental in addressing environmental sustainability”<sup>25</sup> and also the need for sustainable use of all natural resources. To recognize the same the sustainable development goals were developed wherein every member country was exhorted to make legislation while keeping in mind those goals.

Accordingly recognizing the importance of “green consumerism” and “sustainable consumption” goal 11 and 12 were added in

the SDG’s which talk about sustainable cities and communities and reasonable consumption and production respectively. These goals further highlight the importance of “green consumerism” in today’s world where climate change has started to affect our surroundings, sustainable consumption is the only way we can mitigate the effects of climate change. As if the consumption rate is abated so will be the production and thus the little we consume, the more it will be in resonance with the “eco-friendly” norms.

### **The “Going Green” movement in India**

India is home to the second largest population in the world and is an emerging market in the world economy. Indian consumers unlike their counterparts are more environmentally conscious, therefore the wave of green consumerism in India is not undermined. Indians are more likely to think about factors like “value for environment” before they buy any product. A survey which analyzed the number of green consumers in India showed that around sixty percent of Indian consumers prefer making green choices<sup>26</sup> and ninety five percent who do so claim to do it for the environment<sup>27</sup>. Due to this new trend within the Indian consumers the companies have also started to market their products with the objectives of “eco-

<sup>21</sup> OECD, TECHNOLOGIES FOR CLEANER PRODUCTION AND PRODUCTS, OECD Publishing, (1995).

<sup>22</sup> United Nations, Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, (1992), [https://www.un.org/en/events/pastevents/UNCED\\_1992.shtml](https://www.un.org/en/events/pastevents/UNCED_1992.shtml), accessed on 10 February, 2020.

<sup>23</sup> Federico Caprotti & Ian Bailey, MAKING SENSE OF THE GREEN ECONOMY, 195, Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography, 96(3), (Sept., 2014).

<sup>24</sup> These 17 goals are as follows 1) no poverty, 2) zero hunger, 3) good health and well-being, 4) Quality Education, 5) gender equality, 6) clean water and sanitation, 7) Affordable and clean energy, 8) decent work and economic growth, 9) industry, innovation

and infrastructure, 10) reduced inequalities, 11) sustainable cities and communities, 12) responsible consumption and production, 13) Climate change, 14) life below water, 15) life on land, 16) peace and justice strong institutions, 17) partnerships for the goals. UN Sustainable development Goals, Sustainable development goals, accessed on 3<sup>rd</sup> March, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>.

<sup>25</sup> Sustainable development goals, A/RES/66/288 - The Future We Want, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=1225>

<sup>26</sup> Supra note 8.

<sup>27</sup> Supra note 18.



friendliness” besides concern for a cleaner environment is an important dimension of corporate social responsibility<sup>28</sup> which all the companies have to fulfill under sec. 135<sup>29</sup> of the companies act. Furthermore “right to live in a pollution environment” is also an implied right under Art 21<sup>30</sup>.

The rise in the public interest litigation regarding “environment related issues” began in the 1970’s. After the case of *M.C. Mehta v. Union of India*<sup>31</sup>, there was a sudden rise in the number of PIL’s being filed for environmental issues<sup>32</sup>. A number of legislations were passed after this case e.g. “the Environment (Protection) Act of 1986<sup>33</sup>” and “the Public Liability Insurance Act”<sup>34</sup> after the case of *Union Carbide Corporation v. Union of India*<sup>35</sup>, the public insurance liability act. The Supreme Court however has developed a “detailed doctrinal framework for the resolution of environmental questions, while lying emphasis on sustainable development”<sup>36</sup>. The principle like “polluter pays” and the absolute liability of “rogue industries” in cases of environmental pollution by

hazardous substances was developed by the Supreme Court in view of safeguarding the environment in *M.C. Mehta v. Union Of India* and *Indian Council for Enviro-Legal Action v. Union Of India*<sup>37</sup> respectively.

According to a report released by the United Nations sustainable development program India ranks 115<sup>th</sup> in terms of sustainable development goals out of 162 listed for it<sup>38</sup>. This shows that in the recent years India has been giving emphasis on the sustainable development goals stated by the United Nations. Governments are becoming more environment conscious than they were before, various schemes have been evolved by the government in respect of the same. Yet india has a long way paved before it to become completely “green” conscious. One of the major problems that can arise in the implementation of “green consumerism” in India is that India being a developing country may not have the techno-legal framework that is required of the implementation of the same<sup>39</sup>. Another problem that may arise is the packaging of the products, as a large amount of waste is produced from the packaging

<sup>28</sup> Supra note 7.

<sup>29</sup> The Companies Act, 2013, no. 18, 2013. Section 135 of this act states that every company which is registered under the Companies Act has to follow Corporate social responsibility towards the community and the environment.

<sup>30</sup> Article 21 of the Indian constitution states that no person shall be deprived of his life and liberty except by a due process established by law. INDIA CONSTI., art 21, 1950.

<sup>31</sup> AIR 1987 SC 1086 (India).

<sup>32</sup> Tahir Ashraf Siddiqui, ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION, LEGALFRAMEWORK AND CHALLENGES: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND ITS PRACTICE INCONTEMPORARY INDIA,1110-1123, Proceedings of the Indian History Congress,70, Indian History Congress, (2009-2010).

<sup>33</sup> Under this Act, the central government has the power to make all necessary measures fro protecting,

preventing, controlling and mitigating environmental pollution. These measures include increasing the standards or quality of the environment and marking off those areas in which industries, operations discharge pollutants. The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, no. 29, § 3 cl(1).

<sup>34</sup> This act aims at providing insurance as a immediate relief to the victims of the accident caused by any hazardous substance. The Public Liability Insurance Act, 1991, no. 6, 1991.

<sup>35</sup> AIR 1990 SC 273.

<sup>36</sup> C. M. Abraham, Environmental Jurisprudence India, 138, Martinoff Nijhoff, (1999).

<sup>37</sup> AIR 1996 SC 1446.

<sup>38</sup> Sustainable Development Solutions Network, Sustainable Development Reports Dashboard 2019, accessed on 28<sup>th</sup> Feb., <https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/#/>.

<sup>39</sup> Supra note 7.



itself, a new system for packaging shall be evolved maybe something on the lines of the “Green Dot” system that would help people to analyze which product is more eco-friendly.

Given all of the above problems, one of the major problems that would occur is that to completely follow green consumerism one has cut down on the consumption as every kind of consumption has its take on the environment<sup>40</sup>, according to a report by the united nations India is one of those countries which don't have relevant legislation on “sustainable consumption”<sup>41</sup> therefore given the population in India, to motivate everybody to significantly reduce their consumption will be a huge task.

### **Conclusion**

Going green is the need of the hour, with climate change and increasing global warming it is important for everybody to consume wisely while keeping the environment in mind. Green consumerism can also lead to the depletion of green sources therefore to reduce the effects of human consumption on the environment it is essential to sustain one's consumption i.e. to make sure we consume wisely and use the policy of 3r's in our daily lives. In countries like United States of America, Australia, France etc. there is a growing trend of tiny houses among the people. These houses are fully self sustaining form producing their own energy to water treatment plants to even producing their own manure from decompost. These tiny houses come within five to six hundred of square footage are completely environment friendly. Such a

system not only reduces the carbon footprint on earth but also is an excellent example of how one can practice sustainable consumption. Many other brands like Levis, The Body Shop and Vilvah etc. are using the method of sustainable consumption within their manufacturing processes. Levis makes their denim fabric from the used plastic bottles, whereas Body Shop uses recycled bottles for packing their products, Vilvah which is an Indian skincare recently changed their packaging bottles from plastic to reusable metal bottles. A school in Guhawati has successfully made bricks out the used plastic bottles which can be used for construction purposes also.

The consumer needs to be made aware of the growing need of green consumerism, almost all the brands which manufacture shampoo and other such hair care products use sulphate in such products whereas such use of sulphate over the period of time increase the risk of having cancer in a person and it is also harmful for the environment. Most of the companies owing to the recent surge in the green consumers have started marketing their products as “environment friendly”, but little do these companies actually are providing such products. One such example is H&M which has a separate line of clothing under the name of CONSCIOUS which has clothes made from recycled fabric, but upon closer inspection most of these clothes are made from “viscose”, this fabric is made by using wood from ancient or threatened forests and to top it off 70% of the wood pulp is wasted or incinerated while only 30% is used to make clothes<sup>42</sup>, thus clothes that are marketed or brought by the people thinking that they

<sup>40</sup> Supra note 8, at 236.

<sup>41</sup> United Nations Department Of Economic And Social Affairs, The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2018,

<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2018/goal-12/>.

<sup>42</sup> Al Jazeera, Earthrise: Ecosystem Alert: Protecting Lands in Peril, June 5, 2019,

<https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/earthrise/201>



are environment friendly actually to do more harm than good. In the view of the same there needs to be better dialogue between the consumer organizations and the environment groups to provide the consumer with the correct information about the various products available in the market. The increasing population means an increase in the consumption which means more depletion of resources. Therefore there is a need for a new legislation which shall define the consumption pattern each family shall follow and the installation of such sustainable measure in each house, office and institutions shall be made compulsory such as solar panels or reusing water by treating it, or generating their own fuel by “Gobar gas plants” where food has to be prepared in mass. Furthermore every company has corporate social liability under which they have to fulfill some duties towards the society also. Thus all companies should strive to follow the policy of reusing their own bottles again for their packaging, denim fabrics should essentially be produced by used plastic bottles, instead of using sanitary pads people should be encouraged to use menstrual cups which can be used for a period of five years and are more easily decomposable than pads. E-commerce giants like Amazon, Flipkart, Myntra, etc. use excessive plastic while delivering their respective shipments such excessive use shall be monitored closely and they should be fined on exceeding a stipulated amount of plastic. Furthermore the manufacture of single use plastics shall be banned completely. Stricter measures are required for the implementing the policy of sustainable consumption. Consumers now days have become more environment

conscious but still there is a large untapped space to cover from being green consumers to becoming sustainable green consumers.

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