

# Consumerism and Environmental Crisis in Indian Philosophical Perspective

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## Abstract:

Until now, humans have extracted resources from the environment solely for their own consumption, without considering other environmental elements or the environment's overall health. Humans have utilised their intellect to exploit natural resources for personal comfort and pleasure, disregarding the future. Factors such as the excessive rise in daily consumption within consumerist societies, urbanisation, development, deforestation for housing, and industrialisation—which lead to toxic gas emissions and global warming—are the primary causes of environmental degradation. At its core, consumerism advocates for unrestrained consumption. Various discourses in Indian philosophy suggest ways to mitigate environmental degradation, as Indian philosophy does not subscribe to consumerism. It posits that if one performs actions without attachment to the fruits of consumption—acting selflessly—one is not bound by the consequences, whether good or bad. In Indian philosophy, Kama (desire) or consumption is regarded as a major obstacle to attaining liberation. Renunciation, not consumption, is the guiding principle of Indian philosophy. One should remain content with only what is necessary for sustenance. Excessive consumption can have profoundly detrimental consequences for future generations. Human desires are virtually limitless, and people often seek to fulfil them by exploiting natural resources, resulting in environmental degradation and abuse. This unsustainable consumerist mindset has raised serious concerns about environmental sustainability and the ability of future generations to meet their needs. If unchecked, such patterns of consumption may threaten the quality of life and even the survival of generations to come.

**Keywords:** Environment, Action, Consumption, Renunciation

Human activities can lead to consequences of such magnitude and severity that they distort natural conditions. Alongside these, natural phenomena—such as floods, droughts, earthquakes, and rising temperatures—also alter the environment, prompting changes in human life. In particular, the catastrophic consequences of World War II—including the loss of life and widespread destruction—compelled philosophers, ethicists, and technologists to re-examine their roles. The use of atomic bombs during the war demonstrated that the resulting harm affects not only humanity but the entire environment; biodiversity declined, species faced extinction, and food chains were disrupted. Furthermore, environmental degradation resulted

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from industrial smoke, pesticide use, dam construction on rivers, deforestation, and the expansion of human settlements and factories. The environmental balance was shattered, plunging the environment into a dire state. Human ambition escalated, driven by the insatiable desires of a consumerist society; the relentless pursuit of consumption and material progress fuelled conflict and aggression. The prevailing environmental crisis is a direct result of human attitudes and mindsets regarding the natural world.

The primary objective of Indian philosophy is to discover a path for living beings to attain liberation from worldly suffering and to provide guidance on how to lead one's life. In seeking the path to freedom from worldly attachments, philosophers have identified a root cause: Avidya (ignorance or lack of true knowledge). Under the influence of this ignorance, humans mistake falsehood for truth, non-knowledge for knowledge, and the non-self for the self; they perceive things that are actually sources of suffering as sources of happiness. The root of this ignorance is the craving for material enjoyment (bhog-vasanā). This craving stems from the desire for sensory gratification; as the desire for consumption intensifies, human suffering inevitably increases. Because human desires are endless. Under the influence of ignorance, people are driven by cravings and passions, enduring various forms of suffering. True knowledge (tattva-jñāna) is the means to liberation from such suffering. However, mere knowledge is insufficient; one must also withdraw oneself from objects of enjoyment. Yet, total abstention from enjoyment would make sustaining life impossible. Therefore, while action is prescribed, the renunciation of action itself is not mandated. What must be abandoned is the attitude that the doer alone has the right to the fruits of their actions. Instead, even while enjoying worldly objects, one must maintain the awareness that such actions are performed for the sake of the Divine. In other words, by surrendering the fruits of all actions to God, the fear of reaping karmic consequences is eliminated. Liberation is impossible if one acts while remaining enslaved by desires; the fruits of such actions compel one to undergo repeated births. This embodiment of the soul is termed 'bondage' (bandhana). The state existing between the soul's bodily bondage and its ultimate liberation constitutes the individual's empirical life. If the consequences of actions are not experienced in this life, they must inevitably be endured in a future life. Although such discussions in Indian philosophy are primarily rooted in scriptural wisdom, they certainly have practical applications; Indian philosophers have applied these theories to reality and lived their lives accordingly, urging others to follow the path of truth.

Hedonism is a doctrine found in both Eastern and Western philosophical discourses. In Indian philosophy, this doctrine resonates within the ethical framework of the Charvaka school. According to the Cārvāka doctrine of Dehātma-vāda (materialism), the body itself is the soul; there is no eternal, liberated soul distinct from the body. Consequently, the Cārvākas advocated pursuing personal happiness without concern for consequences—even if it meant incurring debt to indulge in pleasures (as expressed in the maxim: "Live happily as long as you live; drink ghee even by incurring debt"). In their view, this life is the only life; there is no future existence. One should not wait for a potentially superior happiness in the future at the cost of the happiness available today. Thus, it is better to embrace immediate, short-term pleasures than to pursue the uncertain prospect of long-term happiness. In Samkhya philosophy, the two fundamental principles are Prakriti (Nature/Matter) and Purusha (Consciousness/Self). According to them, the existence of Prakriti (Nature) is solely for the enjoyment of the male.

Nature, or *Prakṛti*, possesses no intrinsic value in itself; rather, intrinsic value belongs to the self, or consciousness (*Puruṣa*), while nature derives its value from its relationship to the conscious self. In Sāṃkhya philosophy, Prakṛti is an object of enjoyment. But man is the consumer. In the dualistic framework of Sāṃkhya philosophy, nature possesses primarily instrumental value, serving the purposes of the conscious self, rather than intrinsic value in its own right. In Advaita Vedānta, Brahman alone is ultimately real, while the individual self and the phenomenal world are understood in relation to Brahman. The world is regarded as *mithyā*, meaning that it does not possess independent or ultimate reality apart from Brahman. From the empirical or practical standpoint (*vyāvahārika*), however, the world and nature are experienced as real and continue to have practical significance. From the ultimate spiritual standpoint (*pāramārthika*), they have no independent existence, since Brahman is the underlying reality of all things. Thus, the objects of nature are not separate from Brahman but are understood as dependent upon and grounded in Brahman. The world or nature has instrumental value and cannot exist independently of Brahman, as all natural objects are manifestations of Brahman. Man, however, forgets his essential identity with Brahman and, in the practical state of existence, considers himself to be the knower, the doer, and the consumer. Consequently, he develops desires and attachments toward worldly objects, seeking pleasure and satisfaction through their enjoyment. AS a consumer, man continually pursues the enjoyment of worldly objects, seeking satisfaction through their possession and use.

We are dependent on the environment at every moment of our lives, and this dependence is virtually limitless, as we obtain all the essential resources required for our survival and daily needs from nature. The air we breathe and the water we need to quench our thirst are among the most fundamental resources provided by the natural environment. However, with the growing prevalence of consumerist and luxurious lifestyles, human demands on nature have increased excessively. As a result, natural resources have been exploited on an unprecedented scale to satisfy human desires and material needs. With the advancement of science and technology, humans have increasingly sought to extract, process, and artificially reproduce resources derived from nature, not merely to satisfy basic needs but also to enhance comfort, consumption, and material enjoyment. However, nature did not take long to give the result of this type of reaction of human behaviour towards it. People consider nature as a storehouse of material resources available for their enjoyment. People consume and waste resources from this storehouse as they wish, without considering any other species or future generations. Through this attitude and behaviour, people have destroyed the balance of the environment. “Environmental philosophers identify this view of man as the root cause of environmental problems. They believe that environmental degradation has not occurred due to science or technology, or due to lack of information, or due to lack of funds for research. Environmental degradation has occurred due to the basic beliefs of modern man and the pursuit of a better life.”<sup>1</sup> “It is said that the main problems of the world arise from the difference between the way nature works and the way man thinks about nature.”<sup>2</sup>

Human beings have altered the environment extensively and often uncontrollably to serve their own interests and ensure the survival and development of their species. Rather than living in harmony with natural ecosystems, they have continuously transformed them to suit human needs and preferences, creating increasingly human-centred environments. Unlike other

organisms, which participate in interconnected food chains and ecological processes, human beings have become powerful agents of ecological disruption, occupying a central position in the ecosystem while simultaneously disturbing its natural balance. Driven by anthropocentric interests, human beings have excessively appropriated the resources and ecological space of other components of the ecosystem for their own benefit. In the pursuit of comfort, consumption, and material prosperity, they have exceeded their basic needs and exploited natural resources beyond sustainable limits. Consequently, the rights and interests of other living beings have increasingly been neglected, contributing to the degradation of ecosystems and the disruption of ecological balance. Moreover, by destroying forests by releasing carbon in an unplanned manner, destroying the food chain by hunting animals, even doing fish farming in fisheries for food, polluting the canals, soil, and climate, destroying the habitats of other species, killing them, so far humans have been trying to subjugate the environment by considering themselves as the main component of the environment. At the root of this general human attitude towards nature is the desire for arbitrary behaviour. As a result, the discussion of ecology between humans and their environment has reached its final stage. “This change in the situation of industrialised countries has occurred as a result of the Second Industrial Revolution or the recent development of industrial factories, while in developing countries this change has occurred as a result of the isolation of humans from their natural habitat. In both cases, this change is man-made. The root of this change lies in human attitudes and behaviour, so recent environmental science has called this man-made crisis a moral and philosophical crisis.”<sup>3</sup>

This kind of traditional view of nature and environment (especially in the West) is basically anthropocentric. In this view, all good and evil, ethics and morals are judged by keeping human interests at the centre. In an anthropocentric approach to environmental ethics, nature, including non-human animals, is regarded primarily as a means for fulfilling human needs and achieving human ends. Only human beings are considered to possess intrinsic value, while non-human animals and other elements of nature are assigned merely instrumental value. From this perspective, humans are regarded as having a primary right to protect and pursue their own interests, whereas non-human animals are not accorded the same moral status. Consequently, human beings are not considered to have any direct moral obligations toward other animals, and no moral equivalence is recognised between humans and non-human animals. These speciesists cannot; they have no value or dignity. This type of anthropocentrism believes that nature exists only for human consumption. This doctrine holds that the preservation of nature is not solely the responsibility of human beings; rather, other living beings also have a role and a place within the ecological system that must be respected. Anthropocentric speciesism, however, tends to regard human beings primarily as consumers and the various elements of the environment as resources to be consumed for human purposes. As a consequence of this attitude, human beings, who regard themselves as possessing intrinsic value, are increasingly confronted with an existential crisis. By placing their own interests above the integrity of the natural world, humans have brought about profound environmental changes that they themselves are increasingly unable to adapt to. The very way of life through which human beings have pursued comfort, security, and material prosperity has ultimately contributed to environmental conditions that threaten their own well-being and survival.

The main proponent of the theory of consumerism in Western philosophy is often identified as the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus. Epicurus has frequently been characterised as a physical hedonist because of his emphasis on pleasure as a central component of human happiness. Over time, consumerist thought has become increasingly intertwined with materialist philosophy. In contemporary society, the pursuit of happiness is often closely associated with material prosperity, sensory pleasures, and the accumulation of worldly possessions. This tendency has been further reinforced by a form of romantic individualism that encourages individuals to prioritise personal desires and pursue whatever they believe will provide pleasure and satisfaction. Consequently, human happiness has increasingly come to be understood in terms of consumption, personal gratification, and the unrestricted fulfilment of individual desires. According to the consumerist worldview, reality is effectively divided into two elements: the consumer and the object of consumption. Human beings are positioned at the centre of nature as consumers, while the various elements of the natural world are regarded primarily as resources available for human use and consumption. This attitude is reflected in the assertion: “I will be the lord of nature, and she shall be my servant. I will influence her according to the measure of my capacity, but she will not influence me.”<sup>4</sup> Such a worldview tends to regard the environment primarily as a provider of resources to satisfy human needs and desires, even when those resources are extracted at an excessive and ultimately unsustainable rate. Francis Bacon similarly expressed an instrumental conception of nature when he stated, “Our main object is to make nature serve the business of man.” The environmental degradation resulting from such human activities is widely regarded as a major contributing factor to the contemporary environmental crisis. The term “environmental crisis,” or “environmental problems,” encompasses a range of interconnected issues, including climate change and global warming, biodiversity loss and species extinction, the depletion of mineral resources, and the degradation and reduction of forest resources. These problems are closely interconnected and are intensified by patterns of excessive resource extraction, production, consumption, and waste. Scientific research provides substantial evidence that the Earth’s climate is changing and that global temperatures are continuing to rise. The IPCC’s *Synthesis Report*, published on 20 March 2023, highlights the rapid increase in greenhouse-gas emissions and warns that continued warming will result in increasingly severe consequences for human societies and natural ecosystems. The report further indicates that, without substantial reductions in greenhouse-gas emissions, global warming is likely to reach or exceed 1.5°C during the twenty-first century, with the risks increasing as cumulative emissions continue to rise. The consequences of climate change can directly affect ecosystems and may undermine the stability and resilience of ecological systems. If current trends persist, environmental degradation could reach levels at which the functioning of particular ecosystems is severely disrupted. The IPCC therefore emphasises the urgent need for collective action by all countries to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions and limit the risks associated with climate change. Deep and sustained reductions in emissions are essential during the coming decades, alongside efforts to achieve net-zero carbon dioxide emissions. The effects of rising global temperatures are already being experienced in different parts of the world. If current trends continue, the consequences of climate change are likely to become increasingly severe. Prolonged and intensified heat waves can cause widespread illness and mortality among human populations and other living organisms. Rising temperatures can also accelerate the melting of glaciers and

ice sheets, contributing to sea-level rise and thereby posing serious threats to coastal communities, ecosystems, and infrastructure. These developments demonstrate that the environmental consequences of excessive consumption are not merely theoretical but constitute an increasingly significant threat to ecological stability and human well-being.

Climate-related disruptions to agriculture may reduce food production, thereby increasing the risk of food insecurity and, in the most severe circumstances, famine. At the same time, the depletion of groundwater reserves is likely to intensify, contributing to water scarcity and creating serious challenges for human populations, agriculture, and other forms of life. Furthermore, the excessive exploitation of natural resources has placed increasing pressure on the availability of non-renewable mineral resources. Coal reserves are being depleted through continued extraction and consumption, while petroleum and other fossil-fuel resources are likewise finite and subject to increasing pressure. The growing scarcity of these resources highlights the unsustainable character of prevailing patterns of production and consumption. If such patterns continue, future generations may inherit significantly depleted resources and may be unable to enjoy the same level of access to them as present generations. Forest resources and forest land are also under increasing pressure. In the process of economic development and modernisation, forests are cleared to establish factories, settlements, agricultural land, and other infrastructure. Mountains are cut down to construct roads and facilitate other development activities, while pesticides and chemical fertilisers are used extensively in agriculture to increase crop production. In many countries, forests and mountainous areas are being transformed to accommodate housing, industry, transportation, and other forms of construction. At the same time, the excessive use of agricultural chemicals places additional pressure on soil, water, biodiversity, and surrounding ecosystems. Collectively, these activities have contributed to the increasing degradation of the natural environment. Many of these environmental pressures are closely associated with population growth. Rapid population growth increases demand for food, water, housing, energy, land, transportation, and other resources. Consequently, population growth can intensify pressure on natural ecosystems, particularly when it occurs alongside resource-intensive patterns of production and consumption. Population researchers have therefore expressed concern about the potential consequences of rapid population growth, particularly where inadequate infrastructure, limited resources, and weak environmental governance make it difficult to meet the needs of expanding populations. Under such circumstances, population growth may become a significant challenge to a country's long-term economic, social, and environmental development. The world may therefore be approaching a critical juncture as population growth, consumerism, and economic development continue to interact. If current patterns persist, the growing demand for natural resources may increasingly exceed the capacity of ecosystems to regenerate and sustainably support human societies. The continued consumption of natural resources to satisfy present needs also raises an important ethical question concerning intergenerational justice. Future generations may inherit not only depleted resources but also a degraded environment, reduced biodiversity, and diminished ecological resilience. A significant proportion of the global population can be described as belonging to a growing consumer class. The characteristics associated with this group include high levels of consumption, the frequent purchase of processed foods and other non-essential goods, residence in relatively large houses, the use of

private automobiles, reliance on consumer credit and debt, and the accumulation of material possessions beyond basic requirements. This pattern of consumption is not confined to developed countries; substantial consumer populations have also emerged in rapidly developing economies, including China and India. Gary Gardner, former director of the Worldwatch Institute, similarly drew attention to the close relationship between patterns of consumption and many of the world's environmental problems. Climate change provides a particularly important example, as energy-intensive and resource-intensive patterns of consumption contribute to greenhouse-gas emissions, resource depletion, and environmental degradation. Excessive consumption can also contribute indirectly to biodiversity loss by increasing demand for land, energy, minerals, agricultural products, and other natural resources. Consumerism can weaken traditional conceptions of human values when consumption itself becomes an end rather than a means to human well-being. Its central tendency is toward continuous consumption and the constant acquisition of new goods, including products that may not be necessary for a dignified or fulfilling life. This tendency can encourage individuals to associate happiness, social status, and personal success with the possession and consumption of material goods. In his 1899 work *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, economist Thorstein Veblen examined the relationship between consumption, social status, and the display of wealth. His concept of “conspicuous consumption” helps explain how the acquisition and public display of goods can function as markers of social distinction. From this perspective, consumption is not motivated solely by practical necessity; it may also be driven by the desire for prestige, recognition, and social status. Such forms of consumption can further intensify the demand for natural resources. Growing awareness of the finite nature of natural resources has increasingly influenced environmentalists and advocates of sustainable development. One of the fundamental assumptions underlying modern consumer society is that natural resources can be continually extracted to satisfy expanding human wants. A related problem is the failure to recognise the substantial waste generated by excessive and unnecessary consumption. Sustainable development therefore requires not only technological innovation and improved resource management but also a critical examination of patterns of consumption and the values that sustain them. Similarly, in his 1954 book *The Challenge of Man's Future*, scientist Harrison Brown examined the long-term relationship between population growth, resource availability, technological development, and human civilisation. His work contributed to wider discussions concerning the possibility that uncontrolled population growth and unsustainable resource consumption could generate serious social, economic, and environmental challenges. These concerns remain relevant to contemporary debates about sustainability, particularly because the environmental crisis cannot be understood solely in terms of population numbers. It must also be considered in relation to patterns of consumption, technological choices, economic structures, and the unequal distribution of resources and environmental impacts.

Human life involves both enjoyment and renunciation, which may initially appear to represent two contradictory paths. Excessive indulgence can gradually lead individuals towards materialism, whereas renunciation can provide life with a deeper sense of meaning, purpose, and spiritual fulfilment. A continuous pursuit of sensual pleasure and material gratification cannot, by itself, provide lasting happiness or contribute to the cultivation of higher human

values. Genuine happiness may instead be understood as arising from moderation, self-restraint, and the capacity to renounce unnecessary desires. Except for the Cārvāka school, several Indian philosophical traditions sought, in different ways, to establish a balance between worldly enjoyment and renunciation. The ancient Indian Chaturāśrama system provides an important example of such an approach. It divides human life into four stages, each associated with particular duties, responsibilities, and spiritual objectives: Brahmacharya, Gṛhastha, Vānaprastha, and Sannyāsa. The Brahmacharya stage emphasises education, discipline, character formation, and preparation for the responsibilities of adult life. The Gṛhastha stage involves the fulfilment of familial, social, and economic responsibilities and recognises the legitimate place of worldly life. The Vānaprastha stage represents a gradual withdrawal from worldly attachments and responsibilities, while Sannyāsa signifies a more complete renunciation of worldly attachments and a greater orientation towards spiritual liberation. Thus, the Chaturāśrama system can be understood as an attempt to harmonise worldly responsibilities with spiritual development. Rather than treating worldly life and renunciation as mutually exclusive throughout human existence, it presents them as dimensions that can be integrated into a broader conception of human development. Such a perspective provides an important contrast to consumerist approaches that equate happiness primarily with the continuous satisfaction of material desires.

Rabindranath Tagore likewise emphasised the importance of harmony between human beings and nature. In his reflections on *Tapovan*, he presented the ideal of an unhindered union between humanity and the natural world through renunciation. For Tagore, the relationship between human beings and nature should not be based merely on the domination of nature or the unrestricted exploitation and enjoyment of its resources. Instead, it should be grounded in a profound sense of unity and interconnectedness with the natural world. Human consciousness, from this perspective, should recognise its intimate relationship with the entire web of life and with the natural elements that sustain existence. The sun, fire, wind, water, earth, and sky, together with plants, animals, birds, and other forms of life, should not be regarded merely as objects of human use. They constitute an interconnected natural order of which human beings themselves are an integral part. Such an understanding challenges the purely instrumental view of nature and encourages an ethic of restraint, reverence, coexistence, and responsibility towards the environment. In this sense, the philosophical ideal of renunciation need not be understood as a rejection of life or of all forms of worldly enjoyment. Rather, it can signify freedom from excessive attachment and uncontrolled desire. By limiting unnecessary consumption and recognising the intrinsic value of the natural world, human beings may cultivate a more balanced relationship with both material existence and the environment. This perspective offers an important philosophical foundation for reconsidering contemporary consumerism and for developing a more sustainable conception of human happiness.

In the *Bhagavad Gītā*, the control of worldly desires is presented as an important condition for spiritual and moral development. Desires and passions are associated with suffering because attachment to sensory objects can lead individuals towards craving, frustration, and further attachment. The *Gītā* therefore encourages individuals to exercise control over the senses and to avoid excessive attachment to objects of enjoyment. However, it does not advocate the

complete rejection of all forms of worldly enjoyment. The fulfilment of basic needs is recognised as a necessary aspect of embodied existence. The central teaching is therefore not the total abandonment of action or worldly life, but the regulation of desire and attachment. The *Gītā* emphasises the performance of one's duty rather than the renunciation of action itself. An individual should perform their prescribed duties without attachment to the fruits of their actions and should dedicate those fruits to God. When actions are performed without selfish motives and without attachment to personal gain, they become detached from the desire for particular consequences. In this state, the individual relinquishes the egoistic claim to be the ultimate knower, doer, or enjoyer and instead performs action in a spirit of surrender to the divine. Such action is not motivated merely by individual gratification but is directed towards the maintenance and welfare of the world (*lokasaṅgraha*). Thus, the *Gītā* advocates a balanced approach in which human beings fulfil their responsibilities while exercising self-control, restraining excessive desires, and remaining detached from the fruits of their actions. This philosophical perspective has significant implications for the problem of consumerism. If human beings learn to distinguish between legitimate needs and unlimited wants, consumption need not become an end in itself. The principle of non-attachment can encourage individuals to use material resources responsibly without allowing possessions and sensory pleasures to become the primary measures of happiness. In this respect, the *Gītā* provides a philosophical basis for moderation and responsible action rather than either unrestricted indulgence or complete withdrawal from worldly life. Jain and Buddhist philosophies similarly recognise human beings as participants in the material world while emphasising ethical principles that regulate desire, consumption, and action. These ethical disciplines are regarded as essential to spiritual development because they enable individuals to exercise self-control even when objects of desire are readily available. According to Jain philosophy, liberation of the soul is attained through the cultivation of right faith, right knowledge, and right conduct, collectively known as the Three Jewels (*Ratnatraya*). Jainism therefore prescribes the Five Great Vows (*Pañca Mahāvratas*), particularly for monks and nuns: Ahimsa (non-violence), Satya (truthfulness), Asteya (non-stealing), Brahmacharya (celibacy or restraint of sensual desire), and Aparigraha (non-possession or non-attachment). Among these principles, Aparigraha is particularly relevant to the critique of consumerism because it calls for restraint in relation to possessions and attachment to material things. By limiting attachment and unnecessary accumulation, it encourages a way of life based on moderation and self-discipline. Buddhist philosophy likewise identifies craving and attachment as fundamental causes of suffering. The Buddhist analysis of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) explains how suffering arises through a chain of mutually conditioned causes and conditions. Craving (*taṇhā*) and attachment (*upādāna*) play a crucial role in this process. The cessation of suffering therefore requires the weakening and eventual cessation of craving and attachment. From this perspective, uncontrolled desire for objects of consumption cannot provide lasting satisfaction because the gratification of one desire often generates further desires. Buddhist ethics consequently emphasises the Five Precepts (*Pañca Sīla*): abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, and intoxicants. These principles provide a moral framework for regulating individual conduct and cultivating self-discipline. Although the Five Precepts are not exclusively environmental principles, their emphasis on restraint, non-harm, and responsible conduct has important implications for the relationship between human beings and

the natural world. Both Jainism and Buddhism place particular emphasis on the principle of non-violence. In Jainism especially, *Ahimsa* extends beyond the avoidance of physical harm to include a profound respect for living beings. In Buddhist ethics, non-harming is closely connected with compassion (*karuṇā*) and loving-kindness (*mettā*). Thus, non-violence can be understood not merely as the absence of physical aggression but as an ethical orientation grounded in compassion, respect, and concern for the welfare of other beings. It challenges the idea that nature and other living beings exist merely as objects for human use and consumption. Taken together, these traditions offer an alternative to an ethic of unlimited consumption. The *Gītā* emphasises detached action and self-control; Jainism stresses non-possession, restraint, and radical non-violence; and Buddhism identifies craving and attachment as sources of suffering while cultivating compassion and ethical discipline. Although these philosophies emerge from distinct religious and metaphysical frameworks, they share an important ethical insight: human well-being does not depend upon the unlimited satisfaction of material desires. Rather, moderation, self-restraint, non-attachment, and respect for other forms of life can contribute to a more harmonious relationship between human beings, society, and the natural environment.

In environmental ethics, the concept of sacrifice should not be understood in the sense of complete self-denial or the total abandonment of personal interests. Rather, sacrifice may be understood as a willingness to limit some aspects of one's own consumption and enjoyment for the sake of other human beings, future generations, and non-human forms of life. In the context of environmental protection, this means recognising that present generations cannot legitimately consume natural resources without considering the needs and interests of those who will inhabit the Earth in the future. Some degree of restraint in present consumption is therefore necessary to preserve the ecological conditions required for the continued survival and well-being of all forms of life. Environmentalists consequently advocate forms of development that recognise ecological limits and seek to regulate excessive consumption and demand. International climate agreements provide examples of attempts to establish collective limits on greenhouse-gas emissions. Under the Kyoto Protocol, developed countries that assumed binding targets committed themselves to reducing their combined greenhouse-gas emissions by at least 5 per cent below 1990 levels during the first commitment period of 2008–2012. The agreement represented an important early attempt to establish differentiated responsibilities for reducing greenhouse-gas emissions. Subsequent international climate commitments have also sought to strengthen national efforts to reduce emissions. At the 2021 Leaders' Summit on Climate, the United States announced its intention to reduce net greenhouse-gas emissions by 50–52 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030, while Japan announced a target of reducing greenhouse-gas emissions by 46 per cent below 2013 levels by 2030, while continuing efforts to achieve a 50 per cent reduction. Such commitments demonstrate growing recognition of the need to reduce emissions; however, the effectiveness of climate policy ultimately depends not merely on the formulation of targets but on their implementation, enforcement, and the extent to which they produce sustained reductions in actual emissions. The problem of climate change therefore raises a fundamental ethical question concerning the extent to which human beings are willing to restrain present consumption for the sake of future existence. If unlimited consumption is treated as the

principal objective of human life, protecting the environment will inevitably require confronting the conflict between immediate gratification and long-term ecological sustainability. Humans may therefore need to accept certain limitations on excessive and unnecessary consumption in order to preserve the conditions necessary for the survival and flourishing of both present and future generations. Such restraint need not mean abandoning a good or comfortable life; rather, it requires distinguishing between genuine human needs and forms of consumption that are excessive, wasteful, or environmentally destructive. Environmental protection also raises the question of how individual interests should be balanced against the interests of others. Human beings naturally tend to prioritise their own immediate interests. One may therefore ask why an individual should sacrifice comfort or luxury for the benefit of people whom they do not know, future generations who do not yet exist, or non-human animals that cannot reciprocate their concern. From a purely self-interested perspective, there may appear to be little reason to surrender present benefits for the sake of others. However, an environmental ethic cannot be based solely on immediate self-interest. Human beings are dependent upon ecological systems, and the consequences of environmental degradation ultimately affect societies as a whole. Moreover, the fact that future generations cannot presently reciprocate does not eliminate their moral significance. Nor does the inability of non-human animals to provide benefits to human beings justify treating them merely as instruments of human consumption. Environmental responsibility therefore requires a broader conception of moral consideration that includes future generations and, to an appropriate extent, other forms of life. This also raises the question of responsibility for environmental degradation. Those who have contributed disproportionately to pollution and resource depletion may have a greater responsibility to participate in environmental restoration and to bear the costs associated with reducing environmental harm. At the same time, effective environmental protection requires cooperation among individuals, communities, industries, and states. The objective should therefore be to establish a fair distribution of environmental benefits, burdens, and responsibilities. From this perspective, sustainable development requires a balance between legitimate human enjoyment and the interests of other people, future generations, and the natural environment. Human beings need not completely abandon material enjoyment; rather, they should retain what is necessary for a dignified life while reducing unnecessary consumption and waste. The principle of intergenerational justice requires that present generations leave sufficient ecological resources and environmental quality for future generations to meet their own needs and pursue a meaningful life.

At the individual level, environmental responsibility can begin with relatively simple changes in everyday consumption. One important approach is environmentally responsible or sustainable consumption: the use of goods and services in ways that minimise environmental harm while taking into account the needs and interests of others. Individuals should therefore become conscious of the environmental consequences of what they purchase, use, and discard. In this context, the principle of the three Rs—Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle—provides a practical framework for responsible consumption. Reduce means limiting unnecessary consumption and avoiding excessive demand for material goods. Reuse means extending the useful life of products rather than discarding them prematurely. Recycle means recovering materials from waste and returning them to productive use wherever possible. Together, these

practices can help reduce resource extraction, energy consumption, waste generation, and environmental pollution. Although these principles appear simple in theory, putting them into practice is considerably more difficult. Consumer culture, advertising, social expectations, convenience, and patterns of economic production often encourage individuals to consume more than they genuinely require. Environmental protection therefore cannot depend solely on individual goodwill. It also requires environmental education, practical knowledge, appropriate public policies, responsible production systems, and institutional support for sustainable choices. Consequently, protecting future generations from environmental degradation and the consequences of uncontrolled consumerism requires more than abstract ethical principles. It requires the development of practical environmental knowledge and the cultivation of responsible habits. The transition from an ethic of unlimited consumption to an ethic of sustainable consumption depends upon recognising that present human freedom and enjoyment must be exercised within the ecological limits of the Earth. In this sense, environmental responsibility is not simply a sacrifice of present happiness but an attempt to redefine happiness in a manner compatible with the continued flourishing of human beings, future generations, and the wider community of life. This version also makes your central philosophical point stronger: environmental sacrifice is not total renunciation; it is the ethical limitation of unnecessary consumption so that present and future beings can share the Earth's finite resources.

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