

## Article History

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## Navigating Consumerism: The evolving Landscape of Family Dynamics in Indian Society

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**Abstract:** *This study navigates into the impact of consumerism on family dynamics within Indian society. As India navigates a transition from traditional values to a more consumer-oriented culture, the study explores how this shift influences family roles, generational interactions, and social status. By examining the evolving nature of family relationships in the context of growing consumer culture, the research sheds light on the broader sociological implications of this transition. Through a detailed analysis of how materialistic values intersect with longstanding cultural norms, this study provides an understanding of contemporary changes in Indian society.*

**Keywords:** Consumerism, Collectivism, Material possession, family structure, Power relation

### Introduction

The final decade of the 20th century witnessed a significant shift in sociological studies, largely centred around the themes of liberalisation, privatisation, and globalisation (LPG) (Sharma, 2019). Initiated in 1991-1992, this process ushered in a new era marked by the rapid adoption of communication technologies, expansion of trade and commerce across national boundaries, and the exchange of cultural practices. One of the most notable outcomes of these

transformations has been the emergence of a new middle class, particularly within the urban setting of India. Globalisation, therefore, not only represents a broad and multifaceted concept but also encapsulates a profound process of societal change.

Among the most significant transformations is the rise of consumer culture and materialism, which has reshaped the values, relationships, and power dynamics within Indian families. Traditionally, Indian families characterized by collectivism, strong family bonds, and adherence to cultural norms, now Indian families find themselves navigating a complex terrain where material wealth and consumer aspirations challenge long-standing values and familial roles. Materialism, defined as the importance placed on the acquisition and possession of material goods, has become a central feature of today's culture. This shift driven by globalization, increased access to goods around the globe, and exposure to lifestyles created by capitalism.

### Research Question

1. How do Indian families manage the rigidities between traditional values and materialistic expectations?
2. In what ways does consumer culture shape family dynamics and relationships across different generations?

### Consumerism

Consumerism refers to a social and cultural phenomenon in which individuals' identities, values, and social relations are profoundly shaped by their consumption of goods and services. It extends beyond mere purchasing, as people often define themselves and their social status through material possessions. Driven by economic systems that promote the constant acquisition of goods, consumerism fosters a culture of materialism. In societies shaped by consumerism, individuals express their individuality, aspirations, and sense of belonging through the consumption of specific brands, products, or lifestyles. Materialistic values have three sides which includes acquiring material possessions as a sign of success, placing material objects in the centre of life and acquiring material things as a means of being happy through possessions (Belk, 1985).

Ward and Wackman (1971) defined it as an orientation emphasizing on possession and money for personal happiness and social progress. The goods people buy often symbolises class, taste, and social group membership, with luxury items being associated with higher status, thus reinforcing social hierarchies. Rooted in capitalism, consumerism is fuelled by the continuous production and consumption of goods, with companies and media perpetuating the desire resulting in a cycle of perpetual consumption.

### **Traditional values and materialistic expectations**

Tension between traditional values and materialistic expectations in Indian families arise from competing priorities and shifting social norms. Some key points of tension include:

1. **Collectivism vs. Individualism:** Traditional Indian values emphasize family cohesion, collective well-being, and respect for elders, while materialism promotes individual success, personal achievement, and self-advancement. Younger generations may prioritize personal financial goals, often at the cost of traditional family obligations, causing friction with older family members.
2. **Frugality vs. Consumerism:** Traditional values stress frugality, saving, and long-term planning, often focusing on investment in education or property for future stability. In contrast, materialism encourages immediate gratification, luxury consumption, and the display of wealth, leading to generational conflict over spending habits and lifestyle choices.
3. **Respect for Elders vs. Financial Independence:** Traditionally, elders hold authority in family decision-making based on their wisdom and life experience. However, materialism often shifts power towards younger, financially successful members, challenging traditional hierarchies and creating tensions over family roles and responsibilities.
4. **Cultural Practices vs. Modern Aspirations:** Festivals, rituals, and cultural practices, once centred on spiritual and communal values, are increasingly commercialized. Younger generations may view these events as opportunities for material display, while

older generations may feel that the spiritual essence is being lost, leading to conflicts over how to honour tradition.

5. **Education vs. Career Choices:** Traditional families may emphasize specific career paths like medicine, law, or engineering, seen as stable and respectable. However, materialism often encourages younger generations to pursue high-paying, global opportunities, sometimes at odds with these traditional expectations.

### **Dynamics of Materialism**

In a consumer culture, individuals and groups are often defined by the products they purchase and consume, and material possessions become symbols of success, happiness, and personal fulfilment. (Belk, 1985). The consumerism in India has mainly resulted by capitalism and modernity brought down by colonial legacy (Sharma, 2019). Edward Shil (1961) observes that the 'adaptive' and 'routinised' meaning of success, happiness and personal fulfilment, lacking creativity in India mainly due to colonial legacy (cited from (Sharma, 2019)).

Yogendra Singh argues that while values of modernity (the state of having modern ideas, rooted in scientific thought and rationalism) have been brought about by introducing egalitarianism and greater socio-cultural flexibility (Singh, 1973). These values of modernity shapes consumer culture influencing family relationships by redefining status, shifting priorities from collective well-being to individual desires with evolving dynamics of materialism.

Traditionally, family status and authority were based on age, experience, and the role within the household, with elders typically being respected for their wisdom and decision-making abilities. As younger members pursue their own material goals, family decisions become more self-centred. The promotion of personal fulfilment through the acquisition of material goods, often at odds with long-standing family values that prioritize the collective well-being of the household. Whereas, in a consumer-driven society, status is often tied to financial success and purchasing power. Younger family members who have higher earning potential or the ability to afford luxury goods

may gain influence, this may disrupt the balance of power within the family.

But further on the drawing by Inglehart (Inglehart, 1971) stipulated that after a certain level of affluence is reached and lower order needs have been met, materialism will peak and begin to decline as consumers turn to higher order needs. This may affect the patterns of family structure in Indian society with reference to consumerism, where after attaining certain levels of materialistic possession, will decline the younger generations needs towards consumerism. As we see that, despite arising of tensions in family structure due to consumerism, social cohesion which is a unique feature of Indian society has not been changed, otherwise the modes of social interaction (though internet) have been changed.

### **Interpretation**

Younger generations, particularly those with access to education and professional opportunities, are now able to move beyond ascribed social roles, gaining social and economic upward mobility that was less accessible in traditional society (Singh, 1973). However, the upwardly mobile younger generation, with its increased purchasing power, is more inclined toward spending rather than saving. The desire for instant gratification in terms of material possessions have led to a gradual decline in the values of thrift and financial conservatism. The increased focus on individualism, self-expression, and personal success has challenged traditional values around family, community, and collective consumption. Young adults are more likely to prioritize their own consumption patterns, sometimes at odds with their family's traditional views. This shift can create tensions within families, particularly between older generations who emphasize collective needs and younger generations focused on individual aspirations.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The evolving landscape of consumerism in India has instigated significant changes in the structure and dynamics of the family, warranting further exploration. As consumer culture becomes increasingly ingrained, the routine pursuit of material possessions is

reshaping societal institutions, including the family. The study of Indian families, once primarily focused on the prevalence of joint families and the emergence of nuclear families in urban settings, must now broaden its scope to account for the impact of consumerism, economic reforms, and globalisation.

The growing tension between traditional collectivist values and the rising materialistic expectations within Indian families. These dynamics introduce new challenges and dilemmas that necessitate a reassessment of the sociology of Indian families. By understanding how consumer culture influences family relationships across generations, we can better grasp the ongoing transformations in Indian society and the implications for its future.

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## Challenges Before Sociology As A Discipline In India: An Analysis

**Ambika**

**Abstract:** *In recent decades, sociology in India has evolved as a critical field of study, addressing diverse socio-cultural, economic, and political phenomena. However, the discipline faces significant challenges in terms of its theoretical frameworks, methodology, institutional support, and practical relevance. This paper critically analyses the major challenges confronting sociology in India, focusing on the colonial legacy, lack of indigenous theoretical perspectives, methodological constraints, limited interdisciplinary engagement, and issues of practical implementation. It further explores the importance of fostering a sociological imagination grounded in local realities and the need for reforms in the educational system to promote robust sociological research.*

**Keywords:** Western paradigms, indigenous theories, methodological challenges, interdisciplinary collaboration.

### Introduction

Sociology as a discipline in India has its roots in the colonial period, when Western education systems and intellectual traditions were introduced to the subcontinent. The initial development of sociology was largely influenced by Western paradigms, particularly British and European thought, which shaped early sociological studies. Indian