

Sustainable Fashion Consumption Practice Influenced by Spirituality

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Abstract

Purpose: To understand the extent of the negative impact of fashion on the environment and establish the fact that sustainability is not a new concept and as underpinned by various religious philosophies it is only through a conscious attitudinal shift that true sustainability is achievable. The paper also addresses the issue that spiritual ignorance and value degradation leading to over consumption has been the reason for the current global issues. Unless society understands the interconnectedness of all elements of the environment, true sustainability is hard to achieve, only surface level sustainability is achievable.

Design/methodology/approach: Exploratory research with Literature review.

Findings: This paper attempts to validate Eco-spirituality/ sustainability as established in various religious philosophies of the world. The Buddhist concept of oneness of life and environment indicates that the positive and negative conduct of the people has direct reflection in the environment. Its human hunger and greed, which is the reason for environmental disaster. Fashion is a reflection of excess need and greed.

Research limitations/implications: In-depth understanding of the various religions and philosophies remain under-researched. The steps taken by new age spiritual gurus in guiding society towards frugal consumption is unexplored. Paper does not validate that spiritual reconnect can have a direct bearing on fashion consumption or slow fashion or fashion business.

Social implications: Society as a whole can save the planet by conscious living and being fashion positive and reconnecting to their spiritual self. Sustainable economics will bring about Global peace and stability.

Originality/value: The Buddhist concept of oneness of life and environment is a new perspective of looking into an eco-spiritual way of life and consumption of nature's resources. Making conscious living fashionable through the lenses of spirituality could be a new dimension into understanding slow and sustainable fashion

Keywords: Spirituality, Sustainability, Fashion, Buddhism, Ecology, Eco-Spirituality, Slow fashion.

Article Classification: Literature review

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True Sustainability is not consistent with traditional views such as maximization and self-interest.

(Lucio Muñoz 1998)

Introduction:

The challenge faced by the world today is “how can we make sustainability fashionable?” Global consumption of fashion has led earth’s destruction to the point that it seems like an irreversible process. Although fashion or fashion industry is not solely responsible for this situation, it is albeit the second largest polluter after the oil industry. The consumeristic behavior of humans has reached such enormous level that the earth's resources and processes are unable to keep pace. The last few centuries have accelerated the pace of destruction through rampant industrialization and unbridled consumption.

Global warming and as a result climate change is a glooming reality faced in different parts of the world. Countries and industries can indulge in blame games and keep shifting the responsibility but one needs to remind oneself that the world does not work in silos. Everything is interconnected. The Soil, the Sky, the Air the water is a continuous whole. Any activity in any one part of the world is bound to have its bearing on the other parts.

Literature Review:

Human Impact on Climate Change

As per the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 2013, report human activity has been the dominant cause of the global warming since the mid-20th century. Since the Industrial Revolution, the release of large quantities of gases into the atmosphere has blocked the planet’s heat from escaping into space creating an artificial greenhouse effect. Over a half-trillion metric tons of carbon have been burned since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, according to calculations by University of Oxford scientist Myles R. Allen and the trillionth ton will be burned around 2040.

The IPCC reports that levels of atmospheric carbon dioxide rose faster from 1995 to 2005 than they did in 1960. According to NASA, the Earth has warmed since 1880 and most of this warming has occurred since the 1970s.

Effects of Rising Temperatures

- The top 2,300 feet of the ocean has gradually warmed by 0.302 degrees Fahrenheit since 1969.

- The breadth and thickness of sea ice in both the Arctic and the Antarctic has decreased significantly in the last few decades.
- Sea levels have risen 6.7 inches in the past century.
- As per IPCC report 2014, the sea levels could rise as much as three feet by the end of the century.
- The acidity of ocean waters has risen by approximately 30 percent.

As a result, our climate is becoming increasingly unpredictable. Scientists point to record high and low temperatures, more frequent extreme weather events, and significant changes in microclimates and increased coastal flooding. Things, which we are already experiencing firsthand across many countries.

Impact of Fashion and Textile industry on the environment.

Fashion is big business pegged at \$1.2 trillion, with more than \$250 billion spent in the U.S. alone. The advent of fast fashion means more styles mean more purchases — and that leads to waste created. Journalist Elizabeth Cline writes in her book *Overdressed: The Shockingly High Cost of Cheap Fashion* that disposable clothing is damaging to the environment and the economy.

Fashion Industry Statistics

- The global apparel market is valued at 3 trillion dollars and accounts for 2 percent of the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).
- Almost 75% of the world's fashion market is concentrated in Europe, USA, China, and Japan.
- The US is the largest importer of garments in the world; nearly 40% of apparels imported from China are sold in the US.
- Trade in clothing was about 4.2 million tons throughout the world in 2014.
- Much of this was re-useable clothing.
- Approximately 700,000 tons of used clothing collected each year is from U.K.
- According to EPA estimates, the textile recycling industry recycles approximately 3.8 billion pounds of post-consumer textile waste (PCTW) each year, which accounts for approximately 15% of all PCTW, leaving 85% into landfills.
- The average US citizen throws away 70 pounds of clothing and other textiles annually.

Waste

- The textile industry is one of the top three water wasting industry in China, discharging over 2.5 billion tons of wastewater every year.
- It takes about 5,000 gallons of water to manufacture just a T-shirt and a pair of jeans.
- According to the Environmental Protection Agency, textile waste generated in 2013 was 15.1 million tons of which 12.8 million tons were discarded.
- About 15% of fabric intended for clothing ends up on the cutting room floor.
- According to Christina Dean, Redress, China will soon make 50% of the world's clothing indicating a huge amount of textile waste generation. In Hong Kong, 253 tons of textiles are sent to landfill.

Recycle

- Consumers throw away on an average of 70 pounds shoes and clothing per person, annually.
- A few communities have textile-recycling programs, about 85% of this waste goes to landfills where it occupies about 5% of landfill space and the amount is growing.
- Up to 95% of the textiles that are landfilled each year could be recycled.
- Landfill space is expensive and hard to find.
- Using recycled cotton saves 20,000 liters of water per kilogram of cotton, a water-intensive crop.

Used Clothing

- The U. S. is the largest exporter of second-hand clothing. It exports over a billion pounds of used clothing every year.
- Over 70% of the world's population use second-hand clothes.
- Consumers in the United Kingdom have an estimated \$46.7 billion worth of unworn clothes in their closets.

The above facts corroborate to what Mahatma Gandhi had said that the world has enough for everyone's need, but not enough for everyone's greed.

What is Sustainability?

Sustainability is the need to develop sustainable models necessary for both the human race and planet Earth to survive. In 2000, by the Earth Charter included the idea of a global society “founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace.”

Economic growth and energy have always come at the cost of environmental degradation. With a growing world population old models of consumption and industrialization need to be looked at with a new approach. Business now need to place equal emphasis on the planet, people and profit referred to as the triple bottom line. Depending on the field, sustainability in various businesses is attainable through the following ways: In agribusiness, through concepts such as organic farming, urban horticulture, and permaculture. In manufacturing, through waste elimination, greenhouse gas reduction, finding the most efficient and profitable use of existing resources (such as oil, gas, ores, and forests) and creating energy-efficient infrastructures. In retail, through a focus on the supply chain, evaluating ways to minimize waste in packaging, facilitate energy use in stores, transport goods in eco-friendlier ways and recycle old products.

The Sustainable Society Index (SSI), assess each country in three “wellbeing dimensions”: Environmental Wellbeing, Human Wellbeing, and Economic Wellbeing.

What is Ecology?

Ecology is defined as the abundance and distribution of organisms, and the interrelationships between organisms and their environment. (Begon, Harper and Townsend 1996).

Ecology is of various types:

Molecular ecologists study how proteins are created, how they affect the organism and environment, and how the environment, in turn, affects them.

Organismal ecology deals with individual organisms and their interactions with other organisms and the environment.

Population ecologist studies the populations of the organism and their complex interactions with the environment and other populations.

Community Ecology: Different populations that live in the same environment create communities of organisms. Sometimes, organisms in communities begin to experience coevolution where two or more species evolve in response to each other.

Ecosystem ecologist studies the complex patterns produced by interacting ecosystems and the abiotic factors of the environment. They may study water, nutrients, or other chemicals that cycle through the ecosystem. Ecosystem ecology is a very complex and large-scale science that includes many disciplines.

Human Ecology is a giant field that analyses the human evolution and our interaction with nature.

Therefore, we see how ecology connects life with the environment and ensures the natural order of things are followed. Lack of understanding ecology has led to degradation of land and environment leading to extinction and endangerment of species. The lack of ecological know-how has led to deprivation and looting of these natural resources such as air minerals, space, and environment leading to scarcity as well as exploitation and competition. Poor understanding of ecology has led to the destruction of the nonrenewable energy sources like oil, coal, natural gas and pollution and destruction of the Ozone layer.

What is Spirituality?

Spirituality includes a sense of connection to something higher than ourselves, i.e., self-reflective existence with a quest for meaning, as opposed to an unexamined life. It is supposedly innate in every human, whether religious or not. Spirituality unites various religious traditions like Jewish, Christian, Islamic, Hindu, and Buddhist. If spirituality is the concept, religion is the application. Spirituality in the 20th century, however, is concerned with social and public values, in areas such as health care, economics, urban thought, politics, and the Internet.

What is Eco spirituality?

Eco-spirituality is the fundamental belief in the sacredness of nature, Earth and the universe. Eco-spirituality is as old as humanity and indigenous people have been practicing this since the beginning like the Native American and other indigenous people.

Eco-spirituality underpins the inextricable relationship of human beings to all other life forms in an interrelated, interconnected web. Eco-spiritual perspectives can be found in all the world's religious traditions and recognize the understanding of the human relationship to the planet, and the natural world.

Globally, more religions and spiritual traditions are becoming active in the environmental movement by going green and educating members about their spiritual duties and obligations to protect our natural systems.

Bron Taylor defines Dark Green Religion as "religion that considers nature to be sacred, imbued by intrinsic value, and worthy of reverent care" in his book *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future*. While Green Religion claims that it is a religious obligation for humans to be environmental stewards, Dark Green Religion is a movement that holds nature as valuable and sacred. Spiritual types of Dark Green Religion include forms of Animism i.e. the attribution of a living soul to plants, inanimate objects, and natural phenomena and of Gaianism i.e. the spiritual opinion that shares expressions with various religions such as earth religions and paganism.

Eco-spirituality as underpinned in various religion.

Eco-spirituality and Christianity:

Catholic scholar John F. Haught, in his essay, "Christianity and Ecology" argues that the universe is God's primary revelation, for it is still unfolding and revealing the nature of God through the nature of the earth. According to him, nature is God's promise and the earth is the incarnation of this covenant and says that abusing the environment becomes a sin, as a direct rejection of the promise of God.

McFague's Christic paradigm upholds that all bodies are united in webs of interrelatedness and interconnectedness. The whole cosmos is God's concern, not as our habitat, but as the Body.

Eco-spirituality and Islam

Islamic ecological ethics believe that all of creation belongs to God, and not to man, and to assume that non-human animals and plants exist to benefit man leads to environmental destruction and misuse. In Islamic belief, the parts of nature are in continuous praise to God, human destruction of these parts prevents the earth's natural and subtle means for praising God. The Qur'an acknowledges that humans are not the only creature to walk the earth. Muhammad when once asked whether there would be a reward for those who show charity to nature and animals. He replied, "For charity shown to each creature with a wet heart, there is a reward."

Eco-Spirituality and Judaism

While the Christian and Jewish traditions share scripture, the Torah is also describes and glorifies nature. For example, the principle of *bal tash-chit*, do not destroy, is exemplified in Deuteronomy 20:19. Do not

cut down trees even to prevent ambush; do not foul waters, or burn crops even to cause an enemy's submission.

The Judaic tradition insists that this is God's world and not our own. Rabbi Daniel Swartz says, "To take seriously the notion that we are but leasing the planet from God is to provide ourselves with specific behavioral guidelines. One who leases is called, in general, a shomer, usually translated as guardian. The specific type of lease we have on Earth is that of a sho'el, a borrower. Borrowers may use any part of what they borrow- but they must ensure that at the end of the term of the lease, and at any given moment during the lease, the property is at least as valuable as it was at the beginning of the lease."

Eco-Spirituality and Hinduism

God (Brahman) is the efficient cause and nature, Prakrti is the material cause of the universe. They are one in the same, i.e., they are the one in the many and the many in the one.

The most important aspect of Hinduism is the doctrine of ahimsa or non-violence. The Hindu belief in samsara, that is the cycle of life, death and rebirth encompass reincarnation into forms other than human and that it takes 84,000 lifetimes before one becomes a man. Each species passes through this process of samsara until one attains moksha, liberation.

According to the Rig Veda, all trees and plants possess divine healing properties, and popular belief upholds that every tree has a Vriksha-devata, a tree deity that is a manifestation of the Divine. Planting of trees is considered a religious duty.

Eco-Spirituality and Jainism

The global ecological crisis unsolvable until the spiritual relationship between humanity as the whole and its natural environment is established. Jainism called the religion of nature paves the way to understanding nature's utility and the essential nature of plants, worms, animals, and all sorts of creatures that have their importance for maintaining ecological balance. Jainism, therefore, says that the function of souls is to help one another (Parasparopagraho Jivanam-Tattvarthasutra, 5.21)

The basis of Jain ecology is spirituality and equality. Within Jainism, the term for ecology might be Sarvodayavada, or the concern for lifting up all life forms, as articulated by the prominent Jain philosopher Samantabhadra (third c. A. D.), Jainism holds that the entire world, including plants, trees, birds, animals, water, and so forth, is possessed of life, has an inherent worth and each must be respected. It is our prime

duty to protect all this. We are to treat others, as we want to be treated, and this refers not only to people but also to the planet. Jainism believes in the principle of the interdependence of nature and animals.

To maintain silence, to observe carefulness in speaking (Bhasasamiti), to protect the forest and plants—these are religious rules that apply even to the Jain laity to balance the community and ecosystem. Jain cosmology gives paramount importance to mountains, rivers, trees, and other natural resources. One needs to observe nonviolence strictly at any cost to protect the ecological atmosphere.

Eco-spirituality and Buddhism

The Buddhist concept of Esho Funi, the Oneness of Life and the Environment believes life and environment are interconnected or interrelated and at the most fundamental level of life inseparable. The principle of the Oneness of life and its environment views life as a total entity integrating the subjective living being and its objective environment. This means that one can change their environment by changing oneself. This seemingly simple statement has profound implications. Nichiren Daishonin, a 12th century Buddhist sage has written that the Environment is like the shadow, and life, the body. Without the body, there can be no shadow. Similarly, without life, the environment cannot exist, even though life is supported by its environment".

Central to the concept of Oneness of life and the environment is the law of cause and effect. Fundamental to this is whether we dictate, "to be the cause", of our environment, or have the environment dictate to us, in which we, "become the effect".

The concept of Oneness life and the Environment is validated by the science of quantum physics that shows that we cannot decompose the world into independently existing elementary units.

Dr. Daisaku Ikeda has also stated “Because of the concept of (esho funi), a barren, destructive mind produces a barren, devastated, natural environment. War is the most extreme example of this destructive impulse.”

It is difficult to foresee the long-term results of our actions, and hard to believe that one individual's choices can affect the state of the world. The abnormal climatic conditions that have become prevalent throughout the world, the great earthquake in Japan of a magnitude of 9.0, together with the tsunami that followed, caused tremendous devastation. The recent floods in Kerala, India, the hurricane Florence in the US have devastated the lives of people and rendered them homeless. The above conditions when viewed from the perspective of Buddhism, makes us question whether the happiness and unhappiness of the people are influenced by environmental circumstances, such as natural disasters, or whether the environment, itself, is

affected by the hearts and minds of the people. This question is truly significant for people today in our global society. People realize that due to their covetous nature, excessive greed for wealth and convenience they have gradually harmed their global environment. The recent disaster at the Fukushima nuclear power plant symbolizes this excess. The environment is the direct reflection of the positive and negative conduct of the people. If the hearts and minds of the people are tainted or evil, so is their land. Our hearts and minds solely determine whether the land is pure or impure. (Gosho, p. 46) (“Evil” means self-centered and shortsighted tendencies based on greed, arrogance, fear, and aggression.)

The single most positive action we can make for the society and the land is to transform our own lives, so that anger, greed and fear no longer dominate us. This means that the collective cause made by human beings start to reflect a more positive life state, in which the dignity of all lives is more important than satisfying a never-ending demand for profit. In this scenario, societies will learn how to develop a harmonious relationship with the natural world, taking only what the need to survive that is- sustaining ecological balance with the universe. Sensei says when people’s inner lives are misguided or unbalanced, the environment— human society, the ecosystem, oceans, atmosphere, and geography— is negatively influenced. The relation between our surroundings and us is dynamic and ever changing. We are continually exerting an influence on our surroundings while our surroundings are constantly influencing us. <https://www.facebook.com/SokaGakkaiSgi>

Life cannot exist apart from its environment, and life in turn profoundly affects its environment. A change in mankind must begin with a change in the awareness and inner resolve of individuals, which is the attitudinal shift required in today’s times to save the planet.

Conclusion

Ending global warming will be a massive undertaking. It will require the restructuring of our economic and political institutions, as well as a shift in awareness of our priorities to protect humankind, we must move away from indiscriminate resource extraction and the pursuit of wealth at the expense of others, towards a greater interrelatedness, sustainability, and cooperation with the natural processes of Earth. Our values, as well as our actions, must change including a shift in consciousness.

Eco-spirituality lies in observing nature closely, imitating it at our best, appreciating, and being one with the environment. If we observe nature closely, everything moves in a cycle. There is a closing of the loop in every aspect of nature. If we appreciate the smallest of the plant, it is no less than a sophisticated factory.

No doubt, we call factories as plants but do not follow the principles of a plant where every bi-product is a raw material for the next activity. There are zero wastes; there are no pollutants.

Nature has inspired everything, either directly or indirectly. Caterpillar inspired the space suit. Fashion, color, hues, motifs, design, everything has been inspired by nature so why have humans not ever thought of imitating the process of nature. Fashion has adopted the seasons based on nature. Spring, summer, fall winter all are in harmony with nature. Fiber, fabrics, dyes, chemicals all are the gift of nature. They are in perfect balance in nature. Only the disruption of balance makes it toxic or catastrophic. Nature is benevolent if only we maintain the balance. We see spirituality in tribal across the world who exploit nature only to satiate their need, not their greed. If they need honey, they only take half of the hive leaving the other half for the bees to rebuild. Such superiority in thoughts cannot be labeled as uncivilized.

The damage that we have done in centuries need to be undone in a few years as time is too short. While the business of fashion talks about consumerism, the ethics of fashion talks about slowing down, reusing, reducing, recycling.

Government policies and mandates cannot be effective unless every person who consumes fashion becomes a responsible consumer. It is then that the wheel will turn. Fashion and design schools must talk about the circular economy or circular design even before they talk about elements of design. It needs to be the starting point and inculcated as an essential element of Design. We need to build our lifestyles around this kind of design thinking. The shift in social change will bring about the economic change. Society has to change. The responsibility lies with the fashion leaders and influencers of the global society.

Just as a shift in consumer behavior in food is forcing the industry to change from junk towards healthy food, similarly an attitudinal shift in society will impel the fashion industry towards slow fashion, sustainable fashion, responsible fashion, Positive Fashion. It needs to start as a revolution beginning with a single individual.

In July 2017, French Environment Minister Nicolas Hulot announced a five-year plan to ban all petrol and diesel vehicles in France by 2040 as part of the Paris Agreement. In the similar spirit, all nations should come together to take a decisive call on banning certain fashion business practices and to establish legally binding obligations for developed countries to reduce their “**Fashion Emissions.**” ‘

There is a relationship between ecology and ethics that makes it clear that sustainability is not possible without a profound change of values and commitment to a lifestyle. It cannot be achieved merely as an expression of economic functionality nor as an expression of ideology alone. (Carroll, 2004).

Also new economics acknowledges that economy is embedded in society and culture that are themselves embedded in ecological life support system and that economy cannot grow forever on this finite planet .(Contanza,2012). A new economy needs to be conceived based on ecological economy where by the focus needs to be on growth of Sustainable well-being (SWB) and not merely improvement in material well-being or GDP growth. We can no longer manage our economy without understanding the completely interconnected world system as rightly pointed out in our religious philosophies eons ago! Fashion Sustainability needs to take step in the right direction.

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