



A Study of Grandmothers' Timeless Knowledge and Practices Supporting the Sustainability Framework

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Abstract

Indian grandmothers think of saving first, spending later and that is the reason why our economy has sustained. "Wisdom is more precious than knowledge", they say, and when we speak about household affairs, our grandmothers are wiser and smarter than most of us. Quick with a remedy, whether it is an illness or a sour relationship, they can handle it all. We strive for optimum utilisation of resources today, but our grandmothers were sustainable decades before responsible consumption was talked about. Grandmothers made sustainability a part of their life, a way of living and that can be seen in every little activity they did – using leftover rice to make tadka wala rice the next morning, stitching a torn piece of cloth instead of purchasing a new one, using cloth bags instead of plastic ones, buying groceries from local vendors instead of big MNCs, among many others. They are an epitome of SDG 12, which is responsible consumption and production. Rethink, refuse, reduce, reuse, repair and recycle – the popular 6R framework of sustainability encourages us to be aware of our consumption habits in order to minimize waste and ensure utilization of resources to their fullest potential. This paper aims to understand, respect and apply the scientific temperament of our forefathers and their sustainable lifestyle.

Keywords: Grandmothers; Responsible Consumption and Production; Resources; Sustainability; 6R Framework of Sustainability

Introduction

As the world population continues to grow, production and consumption patterns of individuals and businesses continue to impact the environment. India has the world's largest population which, along with urbanization, generates a great deal of waste. This has led to India becoming one of the most polluted countries in the world. While the concerns over the environmental pollution have been raised and attempts to curb the impact have been taken, it is crucial to find long-term solutions. This is where the concept of sustainable development comes into the picture.

The United Nations defines Sustainable Development as "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". While this definition was first presented at the Brundtland Commission in 1987, Indian grandmothers have been living a sustainable lifestyle since a long time before that. Whether it is using leftover rice to make tadka wala rice the next morning, stitching a torn piece of cloth instead of purchasing a new one, using cloth bags instead of plastic ones or buying groceries from local vendors instead of big MNCs, Indian grandmothers follow eco-friendly practices in every little activity. Rethink, refuse, reduce, reuse, repair and recycle is talked about today, but they have blended in SDG 12 and the 6R framework for sustainability very unknowingly, effortlessly and normally into their lives. This research paper addresses this very issue and aims to understand, acknowledge and apply the timeless knowledge of Indian grandmothers in order to strive for a sustainable future.

Literature Review

A well-known story from Buddhist teachings highlights the idea of mindful use of resources and avoiding waste. In this story, a disciple asks Buddha for a new robe as his old one is worn out. After receiving the new robe, the disciple does not discard the old one but uses it in different ways over time—first as a bedspread, then as a curtain, later as

kitchen cloth, floor mops, and finally as wicks for an oil lamp. This gradual reuse shows how an item can serve multiple purposes before being completely discarded. The story conveys the simple yet powerful idea that nothing is truly useless if we are willing to find value in it. It reflects early thinking around responsible consumption, reuse, and sustainability, long before these ideas became part of modern environmental discussions. The message encourages a lifestyle where resources are respected and used thoughtfully, rather than being wasted.

Our planet has provided us with an abundance of natural resources. But we have not utilized them responsibly and currently consume far beyond what our planet can provide. We must learn how to use and produce in sustainable ways that will reverse the harm that we have inflicted on the planet. SDG 12 (Responsible consumption and production) is meant to ensure good use of resources, improve energy efficiency and sustainable infrastructure, provide access to basic services, create green and decent jobs, and ensure a better quality of life for all.

India generates 62 million tonnes (61,000,000 long tons; 68,000,000 short tons) of waste each year. About 43 million tonnes (70%) are collected, of which about 12 million tonnes are treated, and 31 million tonnes are dumped in landfill sites. With changing consumption patterns and rapid economic growth, it is estimated that urban municipal solid waste generation will increase to 165 million tonnes in 2030. An Integrated Resource Efficiency Approach is an ideal strategy towards realising the larger goal of circular economy. This is based on the 6R principle that optimises material consumption at every stage of the value chain to make it circular.

The '6 Rs' are Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Refuse, Rethink and Repair. These are all terms related to ways we can lead a more sustainable life and lessen our impact on the environment:

Rethink – Before you buy another product, rethink – do I really need it?

Refuse – 'Refuse' means refraining from buying and using things that you don't need.

Reduce – Reduce refers to cutting down the amount of materials we consume.

Reuse – Before buying new items to replace the old, ask yourself if they can be reused or repurposed before you discard them.

Repair – It's easy to replace items when they break or wear away, but before we do, we need to consider if they can be repaired.

Recycle – If we must discard something, it can usually be recycled, and the materials can be reused to make something else.

Grandparents are pivotal in transmitting sustainable values to children, acting as cultural, ethical, and environmental guides. By bridging the past and the future, they serve as custodians of principles that encourage sustainability. Through nurturing respect for resources, promoting ethical behavior, and fostering environmental consciousness, grandparents contribute significantly to shaping children into mindful stewards of the planet. They are probably the epitome of living sustainably. Just because something is the way it has always been done doesn't automatically mean it's the better way to live. However, it turns out grandmas really did know best.

Objectives

- To examine the sustainable practices adopted by grandmothers for grocery and food management at home
- To understand the traditional ways of handling clothes
- To study the green practices with respect to homes
- To appreciate the responsible production and consumption habits of Indian grandmothers
- To examine if Indian grandmothers support the sustainability framework laid down by SDG 16

Methodology

Primary data

The questionnaire method was used in the research to gain a qualitative understanding of sustainable practices adopted by Indian grandmothers. The questions included a combination of descriptive and objective questions. The descriptive questions allowed to explore grandmothers' unique ways of effectively managing food, clothing and their homes. The objective questions helped to find out the proportion of grandmothers following various eco-friendly practices.

Scope of the research

Sample size: 48 participants

Sampling technique: Non-Probability Judgement and Convenience Sampling

Data collection method: Google Forms were circulated via online networking channels. Demographic coverage:

Grandmothers and women aged 60 +

Geographical extent: India

Secondary data

The study draws findings from multiple websites, news articles, blogs and research papers to support the interpretation of primary data. News articles offered real-time statistics, while websites and research papers provided the background and context for the study.

Limitations

- The study focused on grandmothers, who are not as technologically advanced. Hence, an aided filling of the questionnaire was administered.
- The questionnaire was published in English, which may pose a language barrier for grandmothers who speak their mother tongue or native language.

Analysis

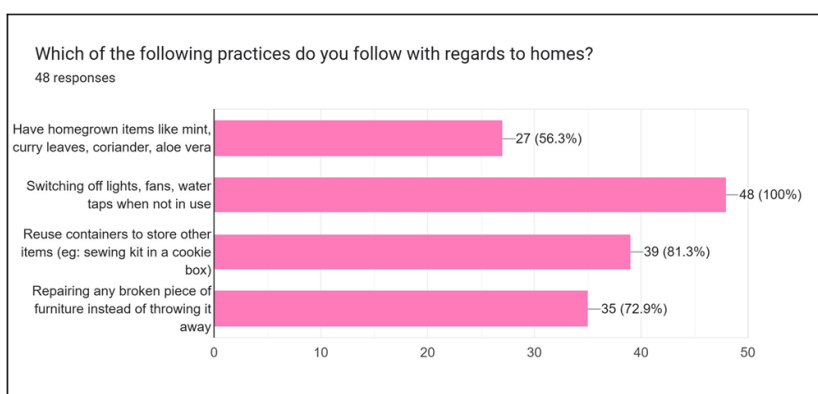
6Rs	FOOD	CLOTHING	HOME
RETHINK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Vegetables wrapped in cotton cloth ● Make a chart of things to prepare for the whole week ● Cloves in uncooked grains to keep them insect free ● Buy fruits and veggies in bulk to save money ● Buy from local vendors rather than supermarkets ● Blanch and freeze seasonal leafy vegetables for later use ● Make tomato puree and freeze in the form of small cubes and use during summer days 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Using organizers in cupboards to segregate for easy access ● Planning outfits in advance ● Removing old clothes from the wardrobe after buying new clothes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Separate garbage ● Getting flowers from the Marketyard (local vendors) ● Natural light and cross ventilated window ● Prepare chemical free biocleaner at home for floor cleaning ● Thermos instead of reusable cups, steel plates, ● Using EV/cycles for shorter distance ● Choose plants suited to the local climate and seasons
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Make ataa at home instead of using ready-made ataa 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Using tea leaves to clean utensils and then add that back to the plants or soil
REFUSE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No outside food ● Having ginger honey syrup then putting the same ginger remains in the tea ● Having lunch leftovers for dinner 	—	—
REDUCE	—	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Not being a compulsive buyer ● Buying clothes only when needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● RO waste water used to water plants ● Carrying a napkins to avoid tissues
REUSE	—	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Donating to ashrams ● New clothes worn in functions first, then at home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Natural fertilizers like cow dung
REPAIR	—	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sew some clothes 	—

RECYCLE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Making compost out of vegetable waste and using it for plants ● Water used in cooking or washing vegetables is used to water plants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cotton clothes are converted into pochaas, pillow covers, quilts and curtains 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reused old wooden platform to make a swing
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Is slow fashion better than today's fast fashion?

Grandmas do not delve into fashion, but they sure have an opinion on today's fashion. They prefer fashion which is timeless and never gets out of trend. Slow fashion focuses on quality, durability, and timeless design. Clothes are made to last longer, which reduces waste and the need for frequent purchases. It also promotes ethical labor practices and environmentally friendly production methods. Fast fashion, on the other hand, emphasizes low cost and quick trends. While it makes clothing affordable and accessible, it often leads to overconsumption, poor quality, environmental pollution, and unfair working conditions. You have to change according to times, but also make sure that expenses are not overlooked for the sake of fashion. Overall, slow fashion encourages mindful buying and responsible consumption, making it a better choice for the environment and society, even if it may cost more initially. All-in-all, yes, slow fashion is generally better than today's fast fashion, especially in terms of sustainability, ethics, and long-term value.

The following charts provide further insight into the data analysis.



Findings And Concluding Observations

- Consumption is driven by needs

Whether it is food, clothing or home - products are bought just as and when needed. Practices like planning meals in advance, buying clothes only when required and refusing any unnecessary purchases shows that consumption is need-based. This saves the resources to a great extent.

- Minimum wastage in all aspects

Food wastage is minimized by consuming leftovers. Water from washing fruits, vegetables and utensils is offered to plants, which essentially saves the wastewater. Reusing, donating, recycling, repairing and similar practices extend product life and reduce waste generation, which is a key component of SDG 12.

- Efficient utilization of natural resources

Freezing seasonal produce and making ataa at home from wheat grains demonstrates efficient food management. For the home, natural fertilizers are used to make compost for plants, which enhances plant growth. Wastewater is reused to water plants. Natural sunlight is used rather than bulbs which saves energy.

- Supporting local communities

Products are purchased from local vendors rather than large chains and big brands. Buying fruits and vegetables from nearby stores supports local farmers and sellers. Repairing clothes from local tailors supports livelihoods. Sourcing home decor or plants from local markets ensures that the local handicrafts and precious art are preserved and promoted.

- Sustainability as a lifestyle

The practices followed are a part of their daily routine, which ensures long-term change towards a healthier future. Indian grandmothers have made sustainability their lifestyle, rather than a one-time action. This also encourages the following generations to adopt a green lifestyle.

Suggestions And Future Scope

- Reviving the timeless knowledge and traditional practices of our forefathers by acknowledging, learning and adopting their models and methods.

- Studying the means and practices of global cultures and integrating them in the systems to strive for a green future.

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