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# CONTENTS

| Sr. No. | TITLE & NAME OF THE AUTHOR (S)  | Page No. |
|---------|---|----------|
| 1.      | A STUDY OF VOCATIONAL MATURITY OF COMMERCE STREAM ADOLESCENT STUDENTS IN RELATION TO PERSONALITY AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT<br><i>DR. SIMRAN KAUR SANDHU &amp; VANDANA AGGARWAL</i>   | 1        |
| 2.      | A STUDY OF GREEN CONSUMERISM AND FACTORS INFLUENCING GREEN PURCHASING BEHAVIOUR<br><i>VIJAY PRAKASH ANAND</i>   | 4        |
| 3.      | BANK RISK MANAGEMENT AND ROLE OF RESERVE BANK OF INDIA-A STUDY<br><i>DR. GIRISH KUMAR PAINOLI &amp; DR. G. S. GAUD</i>  | 8        |
| 4.      | EFFECTS OF HUMAN-WILDLIFE CONFLICT ON FOOD SECURITY: A CASE OF KWALE COUNTY, KENYA<br><i>HASSAN, MOHAMED KEINAN &amp; MOSES. M. OTIENO</i>  | 11       |
| 5.      | COST OF CAPITAL, CAPITAL STRUCTURE AND VALUE OF FIRM<br><i>DR. H. J. GHOSH ROY, DR. A. S. BOORA, DR. GARIMA DALAL &amp; DR. SONIA</i>   | 18       |
| 6.      | A CONCEPTUAL STUDY ON BLUE OCEAN STRATEGY<br><i>N. SANTOSH KUMAR &amp; DR. M. K. PURUSHOTHAMA</i>   | 26       |
| 7.      | A STUDY ON THE INFLUENCE OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE ON EMPLOYEE WORK BEHAVIOR IN NESTLE, CHENNAI, INDIA<br><i>S.SUSENDIRAN &amp; DR. T. VETRIVEL</i>   | 29       |
| 8.      | ORIENTATIONS: A CAPACITY BUILDING TOOL FOR IMPROVING KNOWLEDGE AND PERCEPTION OF HEALTH WORKERS REGARDING NON SCALPEL VASECTOMY<br><i>DR. RAKESH MEHRA, CHANDER PAL THAKUR, SWATI MAHAPATRA, CHAHAT NARULA &amp; DR. TAPAN JYOTI KALITA</i> | 33       |
| 9.      | WILLINGNESS TO PAY FOR TANK MAINTENANCE: A STUDY ON TANK IRRIGATION IN THE DRY ZONES OF WEST BENGAL IN INDIA<br><i>SEBAK KUMAR JANA</i>   | 37       |
| 10.     | MGNREGA: A BOON TO RURAL WOMEN IN HIMACHAL PRADESH<br><i>DR. SATINDER SINGH RANDHAWA</i>  | 40       |
| 11.     | EXAMINATION AS A DETERRENT: A CASE STUDY ON EXAMINATION PHOBIA AMONG HIGHER AND SENIOR SECONDARY LEVEL STUDENTS OF MORADABAD CITY<br><i>DR. CHANCHAL CHAWLA, DR. SONIA GUPTA &amp; TUSHAR MAHAJAN</i>                                       | 45       |
| 12.     | SOCIO-ECONOMIC SEGMENTATION OF THE HOUSEHOLDS OF AUTO RICKSHAW OWNERS: A CASE STUDY OF TRIPURA<br><i>MANISH DAS &amp; NIRMALYA DEBNATH</i>  | 50       |
| 13.     | A STUDY ON THE ROLE OF PERFORMANCE AND IMAGE OUTCOME EXPECTATIONS ON INNOVATIVE BEHAVIOUR IN THE WORKPLACE<br><i>DEEPAK BABU &amp; SIBY JOSE</i>  | 56       |
| 14.     | MEASURING STUDENTS' EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES: A CASE ON OMAN AND BAHRAIN<br><i>SUHAILA E. ALHASHEMI</i>  | 64       |
| 15.     | DETERMINANTS OF FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT INFLOWS INTO INDIA: A FACTOR ANALYSIS<br><i>DR. S. JAYARAJ &amp; ADEWALE ADENIYI-KIE</i>  | 76       |
| 16.     | A CRITICALITY TESTING ON HUMAN RESOURCE AND TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT FACTORS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A PERSPECTIVE FROM INDIA<br><i>MEETA MANDAVIYA</i>  | 83       |
| 17.     | OPERATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF RECRUITING LESS THAN THE REQUIRED – A CASE OF GSRTC<br><i>DR. MEHUL G. THAKKAR</i>  | 87       |
| 18.     | FOREIGN POLICY OF INDIA AND THE STATE OF SIKKIM: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE OF TRANS-NATIONAL BOUNDARIES IN NATHULA REGION<br><i>DHANRAJ RAI</i>  | 92       |
| 19.     | REGULATING NATIONAL HIGHWAYS IN LIGHT OF THE CHANGING SCENARIO<br><i>ABHINAB GHOSH</i>  | 96       |
| 20.     | THE STUDY OF RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EARNINGS MANAGEMENT AND THE ISSUANCE OF BONDS AND RENT EXCHANGE IN COMPANIES LISTED IN CAPITAL MARKET OF IRAN<br><i>SEYYED SAEB MOUSAVI &amp; MOHAMMAD REZA POURALI</i>                                   | 98       |
| 21.     | A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF WOMEN LEADERS OF CIVIL SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS IN AMHARA REGION, ETHIOPIA<br><i>GASHAW MOGES YIMER</i>   | 103      |
| 22.     | IMPACT OF PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM ON FOOD SECURITY OF RURAL AND URBAN POOR<br><i>SAWALE SANGHARSHA BALIRAM</i>   | 109      |
| 23.     | RELATIONS BETWEEN THE COOPERATIVE AND SOCIALIST MOVEMENTS IN THE FORMATIVE YEARS<br><i>VINCENT DODOO</i>  | 113      |
| 24.     | BALANCE OF PAYMENTS CONSTRAINT GROWTH: AN ARDL APPROACH<br><i>ASLI SEDA BILMAN &amp; MEHMET CETIN</i>   | 118      |
| 25.     | POTATO PRICING: A SOLEMN DILEMMA FACED BY THE FARMERS OF BANGLADESH<br><i>ABDULLAH ISHAK KHAN, FARZANA AFROZ &amp; MOHAMMAD MOHIUDDIN</i>   | 126      |
| 26.     | THE ROLE OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS (NGOS) IN SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT<br><i>ANILKUMAR B KOTE</i>  | 133      |
| 27.     | EXPORT OF INDIAN AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS: PRE AND AFTER TRADE REFORMS<br><i>PREETI SHARMA</i>   | 138      |
| 28.     | TRENDS IN AGRICULTURAL WAGES: AN INTER-DIVISIONAL ANALYSIS IN CHITTOOR DISTRICT OF ANDHRA PRADESH<br><i>DR. E. LOKANADHA REDDY</i>  | 146      |
| 29.     | TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT: AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION OF ISO CERTIFIED COMPANIES IN HYDERABAD<br><i>P. AVINASH GOYAL</i>   | 155      |
| 30.     | AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF CONTRIBUTION PENSION SCHEME ON RETIREES' BENEFITS IN NIGERIA<br><i>OLA OYE CLEMENT OLATUNJI &amp; OLOLA OLAYEYE ADUWO</i>  | 158      |
|         | <b>REQUEST FOR FEEDBACK</b>   | 165      |

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**A STUDY OF GREEN CONSUMERISM AND FACTORS INFLUENCING GREEN PURCHASING BEHAVIOUR**

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**SHRI RAM MURTI SMARAK INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS SCHOOL**  
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**ABSTRACT**

With the 'triple bottom line' or the three pillars of business - people, planet and profit; gaining more attention day by day, green is becoming the new mantra of success in any business. On the other side, a new trend of green consumerism is also emerging, in which consumers are becoming more aware and concerned about the environment and looking for environment friendly products. This paper deals with the concept of green consumerism and the factors influencing green purchasing behaviour. To understand the green purchasing behavior, this paper takes the help of Theory of Reasoned Action by Fishbein and Ajzen, which assists in explaining the influence of antecedents on purchasing intention. Then this paper deals with the factors influencing green purchasing behaviour like environmental attitude, environmental concern, social influence, self-image and man-nature orientation.

**KEYWORDS**

Green Marketing, Marketing, Green Consumerism, Sustainable Marketing, Consumer Behaviour, Green Purchasing Behaviour.

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

With the 'triple bottom line' or the three pillars of business - people, planet and profit; gaining more attention day by day, green is becoming the new mantra of success in any business. On the other side, a new trend of green consumerism is also emerging, in which consumers are becoming more aware and concerned about the environment and looking for environment friendly products. Now the consumers are interested more and more in environment friendly products and companies are also doing their bit by adopting green production process, using recyclable paper and other packaging material and going for paperless offices. Thus it is creating a virtuous circle of consumption and production, which is driving the green culture.

**1.1 GREEN CONSUMERISM**

Green consumerism is defined as "an attempt by individuals to protect themselves and the planet by buying only green products on the shelves" (Ottman, 1992). Green consumerism started with the Brundland Report, which highlighted the awareness of the global ecological crisis (Gosden, 1995). Green consumerism is now growing and being adopted by more and more consumers. Renner (2002) has also said that what consumers are demonstrating is that, they want more environmentally acceptable choices than the market has been delivering. The Body Shop, a British company won the UK "Company of the Year" Business Enterprise Awards in 1987 for "riding high on a wave of green consumerism" as an outlet for "cruelty-free, minimally packaged, natural ingredient soaps" (Gosden, 1995). Now more and more companies are joining the green league of business.

**1.2 GREEN CONSUMER**

Business Dictionary.com (2009) has defined, green consumer as a person who is mindful of environment related issues and obligations and is supportive of environmental causes to the extent of switching allegiance from one product or supplier to another even if it entails higher cost. In an article in BSD global.com (2007), it has been stated that green consumers "are sincere in their intentions, with a growing commitment to greener lifestyle; almost always judge their environmental practices as inadequate and do not expect companies to be perfect in order to be considered 'green'. Rather, they look for companies that are taking substantive steps and have made a commitment to improve".

In marketing, it's very important to understand the consumer behavior and it becomes especially critical in the case of green products (Widger, 2007). In the last ten years, the demand for green products have risen sharply. It has also been reported by the Natural Marketing Institute that the USD\$200+ billion Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability (LOHAS) market is expected to double by 2010 and quadruple by 2015 (Widger, 2007). If consumers exhibit a high degree of environmental concern and channel it into some pro-environmental purchasing acts, it is likely that profit-driven enterprises will be strongly motivated to adopt the concept of green marketing in their operations.

Consequently, it is also found that this buyer seller interaction will lead to further advancement of green marketing (Othman, 1992; Salzman, 1991). Due to this, there is a lot of research work undertaken all across the world (Chan & Lau, 2000; Soonthonsmai, 2001; Tanner & Kast, 2003; Kamal & Vinnie, 2007; Lee, 2008). But, green consumer behaviour differs from country to country. That's why it is important understanding the consumers' view towards green issues and in turn it will help us in understanding their behavior towards green purchases. Again to understand the green consumer behavior, one needs to understand the purchasing intentions of the consumers.

**1.3 GREEN PURCHASING BEHAVIOUR**

Lee (2004) has defined green purchasing as "the purchasing of procurement efforts which give preferences to products or services which are least harmful to the environmental and human health". While Mostafa (2007) has defined green purchasing behaviour as the consumption of products which are: beneficial to the environment; are recyclable or conservable; are sensitive or responsive to ecological concerns. To understand the green purchasing behavior, the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975, 1980) becomes the basis, which assists in explaining the influence of antecedents on purchasing intention.

**1.3.1 THEORY OF REASONED ACTION**

Theory of Reasoned Action was established by Ajzen and Fishbein in 1975 and modified in 1980. The theory studies human behaviour and develops appropriate interventions. Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) said that "attitudes could explain human actions". The key assumption of this theory is that individuals are usually rational and they make systematic use of information available to them. "People consider the implications of their actions before they decide to engage or not engage in a given behaviour" (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). The framework takes into account the behavioural intentions, rather than attitudes as the main predictors of behaviour.

According to the theory of reasoned action theory, an individual's or person's intention is guided by two basic elements i.e. attitudes and subjective norms, which predicts actual behaviour (Miller, 2005). Attitudes are the sum of beliefs about a particular behaviour weighted by evaluations of these beliefs (Miller, 2005). Miller (2005) has also defined subjective norms as it "looks at the influence of people in one's social environment on his/her behavioral intentions; the beliefs of people, weighted by the importance one attributes to each of their opinions, will influence one's behavioral intention". Generally, whenever our attitudes lead us to do one thing, we do something else. But on the whole, both the factors - attitudes and subjective norms influence our behavioral intent.

Ajzen (2005) indicated that a person may form an intention to engage in certain behaviour and this intention remains a behavioral disposition until he gets an appropriate time and opportunity to translate the intention into action. However, many theorists agreed that the disposition most closely linked to a specific action tendency is the intention to perform the action under consideration (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Triandis, 1977; Fisher and Fisher, 1992; Gollwitzer, 1993). Thus except for any unforeseen events, people are generally expected to do, what they intend to do.

### 1.3.2 PREDICTING BEHAVIOUR FROM INTENTION

It has been proven with many studies that intentions can accurately predict a variety of corresponding action tendencies. Many empirical studies have shown a significant positive relationship between environmental intention and behavior (Maloney and Ward, 1973; Chan and Yam, 1995; Li, 1997; Chan and Lau, 2000). Besides, Ajzen (2005) also indicated that behaviour tends to become routine or habituate with repeated performance. However, research till date suggests that even when this is the case, intentions continue to be good predictors of behaviour (Ouellete and Wood, 1998; Sheeran and Orbell, 1999). That's why consumer actual purchase can be more accurate in examining consumers' actual behaviour.

### 1.3.3 FACTORS INFLUENCING GREEN PURCHASING BEHAVIOUR

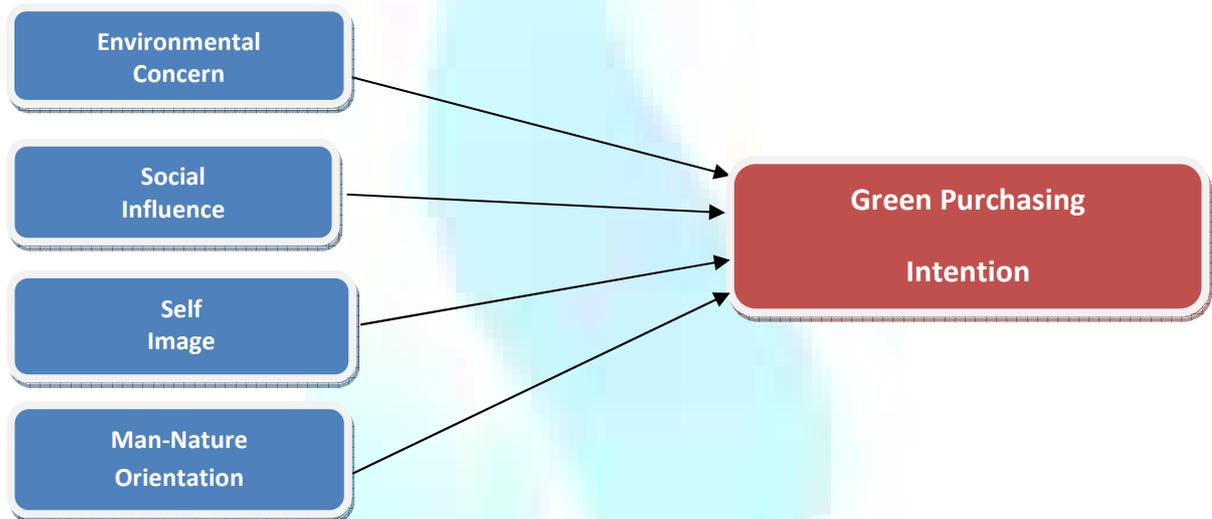
According to Ajzen and Fishbein (1975 & 1980), Theory of Reasoned Action tells that a person's behavioral intention depends on the person's attitude about the behaviour and subjective norms. If a person intends to do a behavior, then it is likely that the person will do it.

In this paper, green purchasing intention of consumers has been considered as the dependent variable, while environmental attitude, environmental concern, social influence, self-image and man-nature orientation has been taken as an independent variable.

The meaning for the terms used in the paper is as follows:

- **Green purchasing intention:** Intention to "selectively choosing products with less environmental impact when purchasing goods" (MOE, 2007)
- **Environmental Concern:** The degree of emotionality, the amount of specific factual knowledge and the level of willingness as well as the extent of actual behaviour on environmental issues (Maloney and Ward, 1973)
- **Social influence:** Changing of belief or behaviour after observing the attitudes or actions of others (Skouteris *et al.*, 2005)
- **Self image:** Perceptions of self as a certain kind of person, with certain traits, habits, possessions, relationships and ways of behaving (Schiffman & Kanuk, 1997).
- **Man-nature orientation:** The relationship between human beings and the natural environment (Chan, 2000).

FIGURE 1: FACTORS INFLUENCING GREEN PURCHASING INTENTION



### 1.3.4 PAST STUDIES ON PURCHASING INTENTION

In the past, a large number of studies have been undertaken deliberating the purchasing intention. Smith (1965) had presented an interesting article on the use of purchase intentions to evaluate the effectiveness of automobile advertising. Similarly, for a new product model, Silk and Urban (1978) had purchase intention as one input. Pessemier and Lehmann (1972) used purchasing intentions for brand preference and choice. Sewall (1978) used purchase intention to segment markets for proposing new (redesigned) products.

It has been a routine feature by marketing managers to make strategic decisions on both new and existing products on the basis of purchasing intention data. Generally companies use purchasing intentions in concept tests for new products as well as product tests to direct attention to whether a new products merits launch. In addition, it also helps managers to decide in which geographic markets and to which customer segments the product should be launched (Silk and Urban, 1978; Urban and Hauser, 1993).

The Theory of Reasoned Action has also been applied in a number of purchasing intention researches, which are related to green purchasing behaviour. Follows and Jobber (1999) also predicted environmental responsible purchase behaviour and environmental responsible purchase intention to have strong correlation. Follows and Jobber (1999) argued that consumers, who were aware about the environmental consequences, were more likely to intend to engage in green purchasing. In their research, they also found that green purchase intention was formed, as the end result of an evaluation or trade-off between the environmental and individual consequences.

Thus behavioral intention, specifically green purchasing intentions is adopted as the dependent variable for this study.

### 1.4 ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN

Environmental concern is found to be a strong attitude towards preserving the environment (Cosby, Gill and Taylor, 1981). Environmental concern is also defined as a global attitude with indirect effects on behaviour through behavioral intention (Gill, Crosby and Taylor, 1981). Environmental concern is also known as "ecological concern", which refers to the degree of emotionality, the amount of specific factual knowledge, and the level of willingness as well as the extent of actual behaviour on pollution-environmental issues (Maloney and Ward, 1973).

Many a times, environmental concern is found to be the most important determinants motivating the attitudes of purchasing intention for ecologically sound products. It indicates that consumers, who are environmentally concerned, are more likely to form positive environmental attitudes. Taylor and Todd (1995) also found that ecological concern had a causal effect on intentions.

Thus it can be argued that environmental concern can be the main antecedents, which influence pro-environmental behaviour.

### 1.5 SOCIAL INFLUENCE

Social influence is an important determinant in purchase decisions. Generally an individual is influenced by the behaviour of others (Bearden *et al.* 1989). That's why, companies use celebrity endorsers and the product gets consumed in social settings. If one checks out the Cadbury's Dairy Milk ad, the celebrity endorser Amitabh Bachchan is shown in a social setting of a family or friends through its 'Kuchh Meetha Ho Jaye' ad campaign. Thus, it can be assumed that attitudes towards buying decisions are strongly influenced by their social environments, which include family, friends, and peers.

It is also found that individuals learn general behaviours and attitudes from past experiences. Previous research has also indicated that consumers learn or model behaviours, values, attitudes and skills through the observation of other individuals or through observations of electronic or print media (Bandura, 1977).

From this observation, it is obvious that adolescent shopping behaviour are developed and affected by socialization agents, which include family, peers, media and schools (Moschis, 1981; Ozgen, 2003). Many recent studies have analyzed how parents and /or peers influence the consumption attitudes of individual consumers (Bush et al., 1999; Carlson et al., 1994; Keillor et al., 1996; Lacznia et al., 1995). These influences are critical consumer socialization agents among adolescents and may often impact whether or not the young will buy certain products or brands. Shopping patterns of young consumers will be changed depending on the relative presence or absence of interfamily communication about consumption matter and adolescents' media use (Sidin et al., 2008). Overall, socializing agents are critical in affecting adolescent purchasing decision and their consumption patterns will later influence their consumer behaviour as adults. Now a days, social media has also become a big influencer, which impacts purchasing intentions. Business Wire conducted a survey to study online, traditional and social media influence on buying decisions in 2009 and it has found that 57% of 18 to 24 years olds and 48.5% of 25 to 34 year olds. This reflects the growing state of social media as a main input in buying decisions. Social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter are increasingly used by marketers to reach consumers.

**1.6 SELF-IMAGE**

'Self concept' or 'self image' is an important determinant of individual behaviour, which affects the purchasing behaviour of the consumer. It is concerned with how we see ourselves and how we think other people see us. Individuals tries to create a personal image, that is in sync with the reference group. This 'inner picture' of the self is communicated to the outside world by the purchasing behaviour. 'Self-image' is influenced by social interaction and people make purchases that are consistent with their 'self-concept' in order to protect and enhance it (Lancaster & Reynolds, 2005).

Every Consumer has a self image. Each and every one of us has a perceived self-image as a certain kind of person with certain traits, habits, possessions, relationships and ways of behaving. Consumers frequently try to preserve, enhance, alter or extend their self-images by purchasing products or services and shopping at stores believed to be consistent with the relevant self-image and by avoiding products and stores that are not (Schiffman & Kanuk, 1997). 'Self-image' is also defined as the perceptions individuals have of what they are like (Goldsmith, Moore & Beaudoin, 1999).

Recently some researchers found that self-image dimension can be useful in studying motivations to become pro-environmentally (e.g. Mannetti et al., 2004; Stets & Biga, 2003). For example, Mannetti et al. (2004) found that an individual's personal identity of being an environmentally responsible person contributes significantly to the explanation of intentions to recycle. On the other hand, Stets and Biga (2003) revealed that identity factor is important in influencing environmentally responsive behaviour.

Moreover, the image of an environmentally-friendly person could project a good image of oneself to others. Furthermore, consumption is a non-verbal form of communication about the self. Buying goods in order bolster one's self-image may be a motivation in most buying behaviour.

**1.7 MAN-NATURE ORIENTATION**

Values are enduring beliefs that guides a given behaviour for being desirable or good. It includes valuing the environment also. Environmental values are very important for a marketer, as it may lead to influence the green purchasing behaviour. Values guide the formation of attitudes and actions (Rokeach, 1973). Hoyer and MacInnis is of the view that people's attitudes are affected by their thoughts (the cognitive function) and feelings (the affective function) and thus, influence behaviour as well as purchasing behaviour.

As attitudes can be measured accurately with instruments like Likert scale, it is learnt that attitudes are much more complex than we had realized (Hills, 2002). However, we all have so many attitudes, which are changing so readily and it is different so much, over a period of time. Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) has defined a value as: "A conception, explicit or implicit, distinctive of an individual or characteristic of a group, of the desirable which influences the selection from available modes, means and ends of action". Their theory later on became popular as the Value Orientation Theory.

The Value Orientation Theory consisted of five dimensions relating to human activities and their relation to them. Kohls (1981) provided a brief introduction to these dimensions as below in figure 1. One of the dimensions of value orientation used in this study is of great importance and that is man-nature orientation, which concerns man's relation to his natural environment. There are three potential types that exist between human and nature: man's mastery over nature, man's subjugation to nature and man's harmony with nature (Berry, 1992). In the Western countries, people tend to view themselves as separate from nature. However among Asian people including Indians, it is viewed that man lives in harmony with nature (de Mooij, 2004). Man is part of nature and therefore, man should not try to overcome or master nature, but has to learn to adapt to the environment (Yau, 1988). In other words, man should live harmoniously with the nature. In African countries also, the same is followed.

**FIGURE 1: DESCRIPTION OF FIVE COMMON HUMAN CONCERNS AND THREE POSSIBLE RESPONSES (based on Kohls, 1981)**

| Concerns/ orientations   | Possible Responses   |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|
| <b>Human Nature:</b> What is the basic nature of people?                       | <b>Evil.</b> Most people can't be trusted. People are basically bad and need to be controlled.   | <b>Mixed.</b> There are both evil people and good people in the world, and you have to check people out to find out which they are. People can be changed with the right guidance. | <b>Good.</b> Most people are basically pretty good at heart; they are born good.   |
| <b>Man-Nature Relationship:</b> What is the appropriate relationship to nature | <b>Subordinate to Nature.</b> People really can't change nature. Life is largely determined by external forces, such as fate and genetics. What happens was meant to happen. | <b>Harmony with Nature.</b> Man should, in every way, live in harmony with nature.   | <b>Dominant over Nature.</b> It the great human challenge to conquer and control nature. Everything from air conditioning to the "green revolution" has resulted from having met this challenge.     |
| <b>Time Sense:</b> How should we best think about time?                        | <b>Past.</b> People should learn from history, draw the values they live by from history, and strive to continue past traditions into the future.                            | <b>Present.</b> The present moment is everything. Let's make the most of it. Don't worry about tomorrow: enjoy today.  | <b>Future.</b> Planning and goal setting make it possible for people to accomplish miracles, to change and grow. A little sacrifice today will bring a better tomorrow.                              |
| <b>Activity:</b> What is the best mode of activity?                            | <b>Being.</b> It's enough to just "be." It's not necessary to accomplish great things in life to feel your life has been worthwhile.   | <b>Becoming.</b> The main purpose for being placed on this earth is for one's own inner development.   | <b>Doing.</b> If people work hard and apply themselves fully, their efforts will be rewarded. What a person accomplishes is a measure of his or her worth.   |
| <b>Social Relations:</b> What is the best form of social organization?         | <b>Hierarchical.</b> There is a natural order to relations, some people are born to lead, others are followers. Decisions should be made by those in charge.                 | <b>Collateral.</b> The best way to be organized is as a group, where everyone shares in the decision process. It is important not to make important decisions alone.               | <b>Individual.</b> All people should have equal rights, and each should have complete control over one's own destiny. When we have to make a decision as a group it should be "one person one vote." |

Previously also, it has been found through research that man-nature orientation is one of the influential factors on environmentally purchase behaviour. Actually culture is so 'automatic' and 'natural' that its influence is often taken for granted (Schiffman & Kanuk, 1994). Thus it's very important for the marketers to

understand the culture of their target consumers and then seek to change consumers' attitudes. In turn, they can influence consumers' decision making and behaviour.

## 1.8 CONCLUSION

On the whole, green consumerism is going to dominate the business in the future. As consumers are becoming more aware and concerned about the environment, they are definitely going to do their bit by adopting environment friendly products in their consumption pattern. Thus environmental attitude, environmental concern, social influence, self-image and man-nature orientation are needed to be understood to understand the green purchasing behaviour.

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