

THE SPIDERY WORLD

Intent of the Fab

- ✓ *To expose and explode some of the myths prevalent today in our socio-economical thinking such as “affluent society” “consumerism”, “omnipotence of science”, “indefinite progress” “Globalization”. Etc.*
- ✓ *To realize that in taking to consumerism and globalization and chanting the motto “produce more, consume more” we are following a suicidal course.*
- ✓ *To see that today, the real danger for the world is not capitalism or communism, or socialism, but consumerism. “Consumerist” societies carry within themselves the seed of destruction*
- ✓ *To recognize that the economical ideologies in vogue today, in practice are basically the same. All of them are based on world dominance, economic exploitation and cultural colonialism.*
- ✓ *To become aware of the tragic fact that modern man in his economical programs “cannibalize” on our planet. We are over-producing, over-consuming, and over-exploiting the earth’s natural resources.*
- ✓ *To realize that the only solution for world peace, justice and ecological safety lies in thrift, moderation, satisfaction of the basic needs of all , equitable distribution of wealth, rationalization of production, sustainable progress and proper husbanding of the world’s natural resources.*

These jotting can be useful for:

- ✓ *Religion and Moral Science classes.*
- ✓ *Value clarification sessions.*
- ✓ *Conscientization events.*
- ✓ *Ecological awareness sessions.*

A FABLE

Narrator: Spiders all over the world for thousands of years spun their webs out of their own “inner” resources. They were a happy and contented lot. Some of their webs were large, others tiny. Some were thin, others thick. Each spider spun his web according to his strength and ability.

One day, one of the spiders began spying upon the behavior of men, a species regarded by all as the most rational and progressive among all living creatures. Our spider saw with a secret envy how developed man was! How human of beings did for ever improve their situation. How day by day, they grew more civilized, richer and powerful.

One day, he was stunned when he watched in the T. V. a telecast of the President of one of the most powerful Capitalist countries of the world speaking to his fellowmen.

President: Dear Countrymen, and fellow-citizens: We, the Government, and I, your President, have solemnly pledged ourselves before our nation and before the world to make of you an “Affluent Society”, and to banish for ever from your midst poverty and hunger and want. We have embarked on the course of “unlimited progress”. The accumulated wealth of our industry and agriculture will fill your homes with riches, comforts and happiness. We shall provide you all with abundant goods and services. Remember: We have embarked on the road of “unlimited progress”!

Narrator: Next day, our spider was equally, if not more stunned, when he heard the telecast of another speech, this time of the President of one of the fastest economically growing Socialist States in the world:

President: Dear comrades and fellow citizens, we have solemnly pledged the nation and ourselves to a glorious revolution, whereby we shall make our nation rich, affluent and powerful and banish all poverty and suffering, hunger and want from your midst for ever! Our country has embarked on the path of “unlimited progress”. We shall produce more and more goods for all our people. The accumulated wealth from industry and agriculture controlled by

the State will be equally distributed to and shared by all the citizens. It will fill all our homes with riches, comforts and happiness. There will always be more and more goods and services for one and all. Remember we are embarked upon the course of “unlimited progress”.

Narrator: When our spider heard all that stuff, felt very, very small, even ashamed of the spidery world. He said to himself: Look at men, how clever, how determined they are to achieve progress. But we, wretched spiders! Where do we stand? We are now just where we were thousands of years ago! We have kept spinning the same webs for millions of years. Shame on us! We are underdeveloped, backward and unimaginative.

Narrator: Immediately our spider called an emergency meeting of the spiders and upbraided them:

Spider: My brother and sister spiders, fellow citizens of the spidery world, comrades. We are backward, underdeveloped and lacking both imagination and ambition. Just look at men, see how developed they are! Observe them carefully. They have pledged themselves to “unlimited progress”, to build an “affluent society”, to erect “prosperous and ever wealthier states”. They go ahead forging “a heaven on earth”! But, where are we? Shall we not follow in their footsteps and embark on the journey of unlimited progress? We, spiders, shouldn’t lag behind. Come on, comrades! We have to compete with men to build for us, an “affluent society”, a “spiders’ paradise”...

Narrator: Needless to say, all the spiders were touched to the quick and in an outburst of enthusiasm they shouted:

Spiders: Yea! Yea! You are right! We have to embark on that glorious course of “unlimited progress and endless development”. We too want to improve our lot and share in the blessedness of an affluent society, of a spidery paradise.

Narrator: After a heated debate the spiders adopted by absolute majority an image-boosting rally cry! On it they placed all their hopes. Spiders of the world be creative! Produce more, diversify, consume more! Hold on to the good life!

Narrator: The spiders began in right earnest: They decided that the first step in their way to unlimited progress would be to spin larger and stronger webs capable of stretching from tree to tree. Their spidery world, day by day, had to expand more and more. And they did it! With painful effort and exertion they brought out from their very entrails the resources needed to weave those newer, larger and stronger webs. It was a mighty feat! Looking from the top of the mountains you could see vast stretches of web covering and casting their shadows over whole forests, valleys and jungles. It was a real exploit of spidery science and technology. Yet, our spiders were not satisfied. They had pledged themselves to “unlimited progress” Not even the sky would set boundaries to their progress. In one of their meetings they shouted:

Spiders: Now, our next step is to expand our webs not from tree to tree, but from hill to hill, from mountain to mountain, from peak to peak; and after that, we shall stretch our webs from earth to heaven, from planet to planet, from star to star, and then beyond. Let us keep in mind our watch words: “unlimited progress” “spiders paradise”

Narrator: Again the spiders set out to build the biggest webs ever, the brightest, silkiest, toughest webs. They were seized by a consuming passion to spin the most extraordinary webs, the largest, laciest webs ever, ‘come what may’.

They set about their task in a frenzy of zeal, spending their inner resources with utmost prodigality. With an Herculean struggle and effort they brought out from their entrails more and more stuff to spin those webs. They dug out from the deepest depths of their being the very last ounce of strength left to them.

One day, when they had almost completed a gigantic web that encompassed the whole earth, they felt so triumphant. How proud they were of themselves!

Next day, however, when the sun rose in the sky, all the spiders were found dead; exhausted, dried up and withered in the biggest, most beautiful and luxurious webs any spiders could have ever dreamt of.

Short Introduction to an Interpretation of the Fable.

- *Modern consumerist society is symbolized by the world of the spiders A society based on the values of the market-place which revolve around a multiplication of purely material needs—cars, fridges, movies, tellies, videos, mobiles, beauty aids, whatever- needs which in reality are distractions and forms of escape from the serious business of living.*
- *They become less and less satisfying as they become more and more insistent, thus generating more product diversifications, sales gimmicks and a rigging of markets in a hopeless attempt to meet the apparently insatiable demands of a greedy consumers society.*
- *We see all around us a society **cannibalizing on itself** feeding on its own substance, sucking its own life-blood in order to survive its very superabundance , thus fostering within itself the seeds of decay and death.*
- *In the parable, the spiders stand for modern man spinning their webs from within their own entrails, and from the vitals and resources of the earth.*
- *The webs they spin are the “status symbols” our society worships*
 - ✓ *“the good life”,*
 - ✓ *a “lucrative job”,*
 - ✓ *“the happy home”,*
 - ✓ *“televised heroism”,*
 - ✓ *“escapist travel”,*
 - ✓ *“keeping up with the other Jones’*
 - ✓ *“elitist institutions”*
 - ✓ *“prefabricated pleasures”*

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What are the promises a ‘consumerist society’ makes us? Are they reasonable, feasible? Why? What are the ‘assumptions’ implicit’ in the’ consumerist ideology’? Are they justifiable?
2. Can a ‘consumerist economy and/or society’ of any political hue, make room for human, religious and moral values? Why?
3. Are the values underlining the consumerist mentality Gospel values? Why?
4. What have been the harmful results of the ‘consumerist philosophy’ in human society in the area of human relationships, both at the macro and at the micro levels?
5. Can a consumerist, globalize economy as it is conceived today, save humanity from violence, war, strife and exploitation? Why?
6. Could a world order based on love, justice and peace ever co-exist with our ‘consumerist value system’? Why?
7. To what extent, we - believers of any religion –have fallen prey to the consumerist mentality? What’s the harm thereby caused to our faith and practice?
8. In the managing of our educational institutions, works and ministries to what extent are we ruled by the values of the consumerist ‘credo’? Give examples.
9. What harm has the consumerism mentality done to our homes and family life?
10. What our consumerist societies do to the ecology of our planet?
11. Can a consumerist society - as it is understood today - be sustainable? Why?
12. Can we fight; rather can escape the ‘consumerist mentality’? To what extent? What means to adopt? What difficulties to overcome?

Thoughts for Study and Teaching.

Introduction;

- Like us, the spiders of the fable, were dissatisfied with things as they were, i.e. the webs they lived in. They wanted to spin bigger and bigger webs, better and better webs.
- We, also, want to create the best of all material worlds. So, we strive to create a web-world of our own by working harder and harder, showing a blind eye to the fact staring in the face, that there are limits to both, our resources and the earth’s.

- The bigger and better the webs the spiders spun, the bigger and better the webs they want to spin and inversely, the smaller and smaller were the resources they could count on, and the energies left to them. The closer they came to realize their dreams, the closer they were to their very destruction!
- Finally, in their all-consuming passion to spin the most extraordinary, the largest, the laciest, and the coziest webs ever, they over-exhausted themselves. They had nearly made it, *so they thought!* But alas! They were found dead from sheer exhaustion lying limp and withered in the greatest and finest webs ever!

a) **Man and His Needs. The Humanity of Man.**

- Man is not only an economic animal or a cog in the ‘consumerist’ machine; besides economical needs, he has personal, intellectual, emotional, aesthetic and spiritual needs and aspirations.
- In the consumerist society which makes of a man a ‘consumer animal’; love, service, co-operation, sharing, thrift, heroism, God and true human and religious values have no place.
- Through advertising, brain-washing and manipulation, modern society condemns man to perpetual frustration. It promises forever a happiness which it cannot give!
- At the very core of its ‘mystique’ or ‘ideology’, we find cut-throat competition, an all consuming greed to have more than others, lust for power and wealth, one-upmanship. It sets one man against the other: co-operation, sharing, fairness, concern, love have to place. In this ideology.
- To thrive in our world, a man has to see in everybody not a brother, not a companion, not a partner, but a competitor, a rival, an enemy to be conquered and subjugated.
- This criminal and heartless competition makes it impossible to live in peace and concord with one’s neighbor.

b) **Modern society is based and thrives on exploitation.**

- Modern society is based not on its vaunted ‘unlimited progress’ but, in point of fact, on its’ unlimited exploitation’ of the majority by and for the minority.
- The exploitation takes place increasingly at both, the national and international levels. Within each nation, a tiny majority gets richer and richer, and in the world at large, a small number of nations get richer and richer, while the rest become poorer and poorer.
- Modern society could be defined as the ‘unlimited’ progresses of the minority and the cost of the majority, which, every day is becoming larger and larger in proportion to the minority.
- It is a fact, that in consumerist societies, when the rich grow richer the poor grow poorer.
- The better-offs of society live on the life-blood of the worse-offs.
- The only way to maintain the illusion of ‘unlimited progress’ is to restrict the fruits of progress to an ever smaller and smaller section of humanity. For example, India produces every day more and more sophisticated goods. But for whom? Just for a tiny minority!

c) **Consumerism is all-pervading.**

- Someone rightly said: ‘Capitalism is dead, Communism is dead, Consumerism is ‘the’ in-thing today”
- To day, The Globalization – both of wealth and poverty – is the universal anthem!
- In all countries on earth of any political hue, ‘ideologies are secondary. What really counts is production and consumption.
- The richer nations of the globe, as on former days, are equally bent on world dominance, economic colonialism and world exploitation. Their economical ideologies and political manifestos are just ‘rationalizations’ to carry out their predatory practices
- The enemy we have to fight against today is not so much communism, socialism, capitalism, monarchy or any other “isms” but consumerism!
- Consumerism makes us slaves of production and consumption. We lose our identity and freedom. We become a means of production and consumption. Production and consumption are the –be- all and the –end-all of human life, we are the means!
- In other words, in consumerist societies man is for the product, not the product for man! All other values are sacrificed to that. This is patent in all societies; the only difference – and it is a superficial one – is in the mode of production and distribution of the product; in some cases is the state, in others is the corporate sector.

d) **Consumerism and Religion:**

- Communism, Socialism, Capitalism systems are atheist. Communism, in theory and in practice denies God, others do same but in practice.

- Communism can at least be credited with honesty; it practices what it preaches. Others at bottom are dishonest; they preach one thing and practice another.
 - In any system, credibility comes not from what it preaches, but from what it practices.
 - Our modern economical systems, de facto, degrade man; some deny his soul - his spiritual being -, others choke it to death.
 - Through advertisements and high-pressure sales tactics consumerism condemns man to perpetual frustration. It is forever promising him happiness and fulfillment; which in fact, are the only goods it can't deliver!
 - Modern consumerist societies are 'anti Christian' to the marrow. Christ taught us simplicity, detachment, poverty of spirit, contentment, humility. Our consumerist mentors teach us just the opposite.
 - Consumerism exploits the inherent weakness of man, - pleasure-seeking, desire for prestige, pride, exhibitionism, status, vanity, lust, greed - just to prod him to consume more and so forcing him to produce more
 - Being part of the world, we Christians and the Church itself, have, unfortunately, been infected by the values of the consumerist society; competitiveness, success, comfort, efficiency above all else, speed, acquisition of more and more gadgets, easy life, status, prestige, the mystique of numbers, etc.
 - It would be worth examining what values do we impart in our educational institutions, in our elitist schools, in our status oriented colleges, management institutes catering for the seekers of lucrative careers.. Are they the evangelical values or consumerist values? Ethical values or materialistic (market) values?
- e) **Consumerist Society is a throw-away society. The World's resources are squandered.**
- Our culture is a 'throw-away' one. We are wasting away in a most irresponsible way, the world's resources.
 - The earth has not enough resources to give all its inhabitants, what the consumerist prophets promise.
 - We are exhausting the resources and the energy of our planet. We have to opt for a planned economy. Not just consume more but save more.
 - The primary purpose of a planned economy should be to produce simple and durable goods to satisfy the basic needs of all, not to squander the resources of the earth for the pleasure of a few.
 - There is a limit to progress in economic expansion. The resources of the earth, whether we like it or not, are limited.
 - Our planet is limited and consequently, progress has, of necessity, to be limited, sustainable and rationalized.
 - The world's economy expansion at present could be compared to a balloon that is getting more and more inflated; obviously, no balloon can be inflated without limit! At last it will burst!

APPENDIX ONE Closing Prayer Session:

Consumerist values V/s Human and Gospel values'.

- **Quiet down.**
Some awareness or relaxation exercises will help.
- **Sing hymns or bhajans.:**
Suggested hymn: Seek First the Kingdom of Heaven.
- **Gospel reading:**
Lk. 12/13-22 The Rich Fool.
- **Comment on the Gospel text** against the background of a consumerist mentality.
Stress the words of Jesus: "A man's true life is not made up of the things he owns, no matter how rich he may be'.
- **Time for personal prayer and reflection.**
- **Spontaneous Litany** like the one suggested below. Ask the participants to add their own petitions.

▪ From the desire to possess more and more.	Free us, O Lord!
▪ From competition and rivalries.	Free us, O Lord!
▪ From luxuries and superfluties	Free us, O Lord!
▪ From illusions of instant bliss	Free us, O Lord!
Etc.	Free us, O Lord!
- **Time for spontaneous shared prayer.**

- **Final readings:**
 Ecclus. 31/1-8 “Gold is a pitfall. Every fool is caught in it”.
 James 5/1-6 “Warning to the rich”
- **Closure.**
 Say one Our Father.
 Sing; “The World stands in need of liberation”.

APPENDIX TWO

Consumerism as a Socio-political Phenomenon:

Translated from: “ Documentacion y Servicio. Carpeta No.13, Alfonso Francis and Jesus Mairal Centro Nacional Salesiano de Pastoral Juvenil, Madrid.

A) Consumerism.

1. What is it?

- A typical modern societal phenomenon
- Outcome of the evolution of Capitalism
- Born in U.S.A
- Spreading to all capitalist countries and now throughout the world even to the poorest and most backward nations.

2. Its Characteristics:

- Large urban population
- Economy is centered on the market and on industry
- The ‘per capita’ income keeps growing
- People buy lots of commodities, chiefly luxury goods
- Large numbers of poor people leave the countryside to live in hideous urban conglomerations called slums
- There is progressive loss and subversion of values. (Cfr. Sketch below)

3. Goals and motivations of the Consumers.

- To live as comfortably as possible. (Only material gains and goods are valued)
- To earn as much as possible with the least possible effort
- To engage in cut-throat competition and other sharp practices as the only means of self improvement
- To consume as many commodities as possible, even superfluous and useless to attain status.

4. How to become a consumerist society:

In Developed Countries:

- a. Large production
- b. To keep up the rhythm of production the market must be flooded with goods
- c. To create in people ‘needs and wants’, to foster in them a ‘craze’ for buying newer and newer things. (Whether they are better or worse, superfluous or essential doesn’t matter).
- d. ‘Propaganda’ and advertising will do the trick.

In Underdeveloped countries:

- Economic colonialism (foreign capital, foreign aid, foreign banks, factories, new industries, mines, exploitation of natural resources, with funds and technical know-how from abroad).
- To promote ‘tourism’ to entice much-needed foreign exchange. (Tourists find things cheaper there).
- Export of labor, import of their salaries as ‘foreign exchange’.
- Apparent, fictitious development
- People ape foreign tastes, styles and mores.

In semi-developed countries:

- When the public gets used to foreign tastes, styles and goods, it identifies itself more and more with the ethos of a consumerist society.
- Political and repressive measures only hasten this process.

B) Main weapon of the consumerist society: Publicity & Advertising.**a) All advertising tricks are allowed: The all important aim is A.I.D.A:**

- A = Attention (To call the attention of the public)
 I = Interest (To rouse interest)
 D = Decision to buy (To move the public to buy).
 A = Acquisition (Actual buying).

b) Ferocious propaganda which aims at making the public buy and accept:

1. The Concern: e.g. 'Adidas'
2. The Product: e.g. Shirts, bags.
3. The Advert : e.g. Trade Mark

c) Eroticization of publicity:

- The female form is exploited to the maximum advantage.

d) Manipulation of Public:

- Persuasion
- Wheedling tactics, manipulation.
- Tall promises – false or true doesn't matter.
- Hidden psychological techniques. Subliminal messages.

e) Means :

- All the Mass Media

APPENDIX THREE**Chief Characteristics of Consumerism****In a Summary Form****FIRST: ECONOMICAL ASPECTS:****1. Control over the Market:**

- a. Large, excessive production: automation, standardized production.
- b. Massive production of superfluous and secondary products. Wastage.
- c. Production of goods in order to generate more money, not to satisfy the basic needs of man.
- d. Increasing the acquisitive capacity of people.
- e. Higher 'standards of living'.

2 High degree of economic and political-organization:

- a. Concentration of economic power in the hands of a few monopolies, trusts, multi-nationals, cartels.
- b. Government interference: Centralization, socialization, controls of licenses and permits, nationalization of key sectors of the economy.
- c. Things curtailed. Collective bargaining power, healthy trade unionism, workers participation in management, freedom of expression, freedom to dissent.

- 3 **Employment of new techniques in marketing.**
- a. Strict regulation of sales, prices, standards, obsolescence.
 - b. Scientific or pseudo-scientific investigation to ensure 'product' satisfaction
 - c. New selling techniques: hire-purchase, credits, gifts, enticements and consumer response.

SECOND: *SOCIAL ASPECTS*

1. **Birth of Techno-structures.**
- a. The mighty power of managers and technocrats.
 - b. Tendency to gigantism in business and industry; huge behemoths of the machine age sprawling across and around the urban metropolis.
 - c. Exploitation of labor. Emigrant workers, shifting factories to where labor is cheap, exploitation of the 'Third world', exploitation of unemployment.
 - d. Board directors, technical experts and top executives run the whole show while the vast mass of workers, both white collar and blue collar, dance to their tune.

2. **Manipulation of public opinion.**
- a. Manipulation of the 'mass media' by a microscopic minority: T.V., Press, Radio.
 - b. Never were so many 'managed' by so few.
 - c. Cruel repression of political liberties under the pretext of democracy, elections, etc.
 - d. Legal or virtual denial of freedom of thought, expression and religion, imposition official ideologies.

3. **Creation of a bureaucratic society:**
- a. Police investigations and checks.
 - b. Control of persons: excessive legalism, identity cards, computerized cards for all.
 - c. Anonymity, lack of personal communication, lack of creativity, interference in the private life of individuals.
 - d. Super-specialization, excessive compartmentalization of knowledge, lack of global vision, apathy, lack of a critical mind, anti-holistic trends in medicine, psychology and the physical and social sciences.

THIRD ANTHROPOLOGICAL - MORAL - RELIGIOUS ASPECTS

1. Progressive dehumanization

- a. Unbalanced or lopsided growth of man. “Homo economicus” is born
- b. Destruction of personal freedom. Mass media become omnipotent. Man cannot choose, he has to accept what is given. Man loses his individuality, his self identity. Holism gives place to atomism.
- c. Degradation, inversion, loss of human values like truth, love, cooperation, goodness, simplicity, loyalty, friendliness, sharing, inner peace.

2. Materialistic world view

- a. Models of purely “material happiness” are being popularized
- b. Moral relativism, secularism, softening, opportunism, lack of convictions, loss of religion, loss of a sense of sin or moral evil, hedonism, actions motivated by expediency rather than principle.
- c. Opacity for anything transcendent, divine, idealistic, challenging, demanding, something that demands commitment, sacrifice, incapacity to see life “sub specie aeternitatis”

3. Exaltation of all that is instinctive, animalistic, materialistic in man

- a. Exaltation of violence, competitiveness, “the law of the jungle”, nationalisms, racisms, espionage, terrorism, political crimes, impinging on the rights of others etc.
- b. Exaltation of the erotic, as an evasion, publicity, for tourist attraction, as substitute for love and marriage commitment.
- c. Glorification of the lowest instincts in man, comfort; ease, revenge, gluttony, debauchery, cheap pleasures, drunkenness, drugs, etc.

APPENDIX FOUR Activities

Note

- ✓ *Activities, if possible, will draw the learning of the day deeper into the minds of the audience.*
- ✓ *Afternoon hours are best suited for activities.*
- ✓ *Through the activities, the participants will express in a graphic way the main ideas of the session.*
- ✓ *We suggest here below a few activities.*
- ✓ *You may request the participants to prepare them solo, or in smaller groups of their choice.*
- ✓ *After each presentation, hold a short evaluation and analysis of the same.*

Suggested Activities:

Symbolic Drawings: “Consumerism is exhausting the earth resources”, for instance,

- Cutting the branch I am sitting on.
- A farmer eating the seed he has to plant
- A thirsty person drinking his own blood
- Inflating a balloon indefinitely, till it bursts.

Anti-Consumerism Propaganda Campaign Preparing posters, slogan, captions, etc.

Just to counteract the consumerist mentality. For instance:

- Little is best!
- Small is beautiful!
- Stop buying more, use what you have!
- Waste not, want not!
- Have less and be more!
- Stop spending and start living!

Caricature of empty political speeches: For instance

- A Prime Minister promising the people a plot in the moon!
- Election promises. Everybody will be the ‘biggest’ Landlord’.
- Green revolution. “Food for all’ campaign.

Debates: For instance:

- Pros and cons of capitalism, communism, consumerism. Globalization.
- Pros and cons of prefabricated happiness and affluent society
- Thrift and wastage
- Who is responsible for the ills of society, man or the machine?

Futuristic prophesies: Describe, draw, design – some themes.

If the world goes the way it does, how will life be in the year 2100?

- The family
- The city
- Man/woman/Child

Role plays: Role play in small groups some scenes like:

- The joys of a consumerist man
- What a consumerist family does – the things they buy, the pleasures and problems they experience, .etc.
- How to make our homes ‘havens of happiness
- A capitalist and a communist meet in a five star hotel! While they both roll in the lap of luxury, they discuss the blessings of the consumerist society for the masses of tomorrow
- A ‘consumerist’ religious person preaches on the Beatitudes and the witness value of the vow of ‘poverty’.

Collages:

With cartoons, captions, news items and pictures from newspapers, reviews and magazines, build some ‘collages’ about the disastrous effects of ‘consumerism’ on human society such as psychological disequilibrium, economic disparities, exploitation and wastage of the earth’s resources.