

# PAEDIA

**A Virtual not Virt-u-ous archive?**

**Amrit Srinivasan**

**PAEDIA\*** is a networking initiative based in Delhi, which seeks to create an archive of the knowledge and practices of the people of the Indian sub-continent, with particular focus on the local, the everyday and the collective. The intention is not merely to document and develop a database, but to make it available to a broad spectrum of professionals, policy-makers and corporates, active in India and abroad, so that they may learn from it. The new technologies of communication, data organisation and research will be primarily accessed towards this goal.

Formal learning in India today, whether located in the university or outside, has become indifferent to people and the processes of democracy and disruption that underlie knowledge innovation and social change. PAEDIA would like to make a difference, by providing ethnographic examples and insights into left-out lives, which display unusual, resource-efficient ways of knowing, making, serving, consuming, energising, networking and improving of the self. In the process, it is to be hoped, these experimental models will converse with the mainstream, gaining in public visibility and self-confidence.

**PAEDIA seeks collaboration with other institutions and initiatives in the achievement of its goals. At present, student research work, located in India, has already highlighted the everyday practice of the *wallahs* or indigenous service providers, community credit systems, household and street design, the producing-consuming body in the arts and crafts, as potentially valuable for professionals and educators to document and access. But these activities need technical and logistical support if they are to develop into a multi-media knowledge tool for the public at large.**

# **Development and the Freedom to Consume.**

- **“The American Way of Life is not negotiable” (George Bush 1992).**
- **“Patterns of consumption by the very poor, even when unsustainable in the short term, must be regarded as primarily survival consumption..To speak of such consumption as..requiring change, without considering the human condition that leads to such consumption, is not only unethical but also impractical” (GOI statement to UNCSD, April 1999).**

# **From Sustained to Sustainable Consumption.**

- **The anxiety of rich, industrialised nations to move towards sustainability now includes consumption patterns of the developing world:**
- **“..scaling up, current western patterns of consumption as the basis of development for, say, China or India is simply not a realistic option... Not only do the rich nations currently consume the lion’s share of natural resources, but it is the poorest nations that are least well-equipped to deal with the consequent environmental damage” (UNEP’s 2002 Global Status Report).**

# **What about the ground view from India ?**

- **Does it tally with the above understandings?**
- **Clearly, the minimalist consumption of resources in the developing world so far has not been seen as 'sustainable' but as an inability.**
- **Both ideologically and empirically, issues are different in the developing world.**

# **Consumption not Sustainability First**

**In India there is need to understand the realities of the extent and kind of consumption prevalent both today and potentially in the future which challenge its image trap of poverty. Only then can sustainable solutions be considered.**

**Recent economic analysis into consumption trends provides important insights and forecasts.**

**There is need also to examine traditions of minimal resource consumption in evidence today as possible solutions for the future and not as symptomatic of India's continuing 'poverty'.**

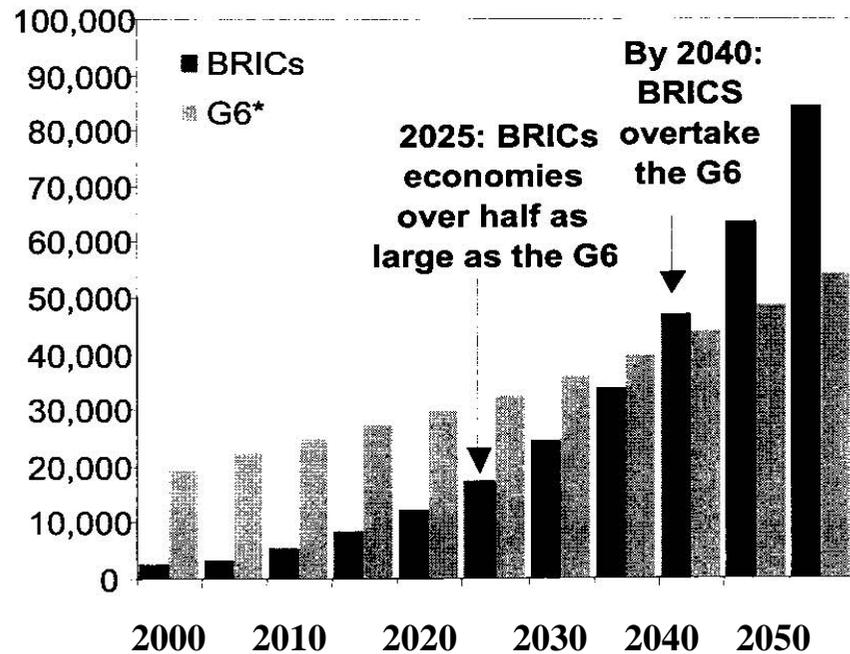
# **Reducing Consumption on Western terms - an Impossibility in India**

- **The irreversibility of global convergence**
- **The irreversibility of growth patterns set into motion**
- **Reduction seen as an infringement of the basic principle of equity**
- **How India's poor will consume remains however important to assess global consumption as a whole, because 350-400 m of the world's 1.26 billion poor people reside in India!**

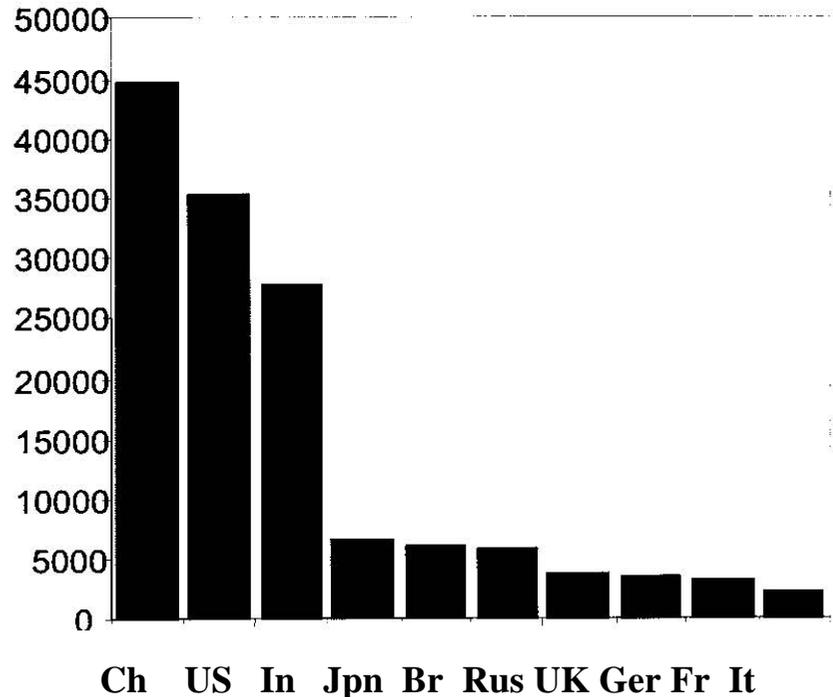
# The Goldman Sachs Report

The world's largest markets could look very different over the decades ahead

**BRICs Market Potential Outstrips the G6 in Less Than 40 Years**

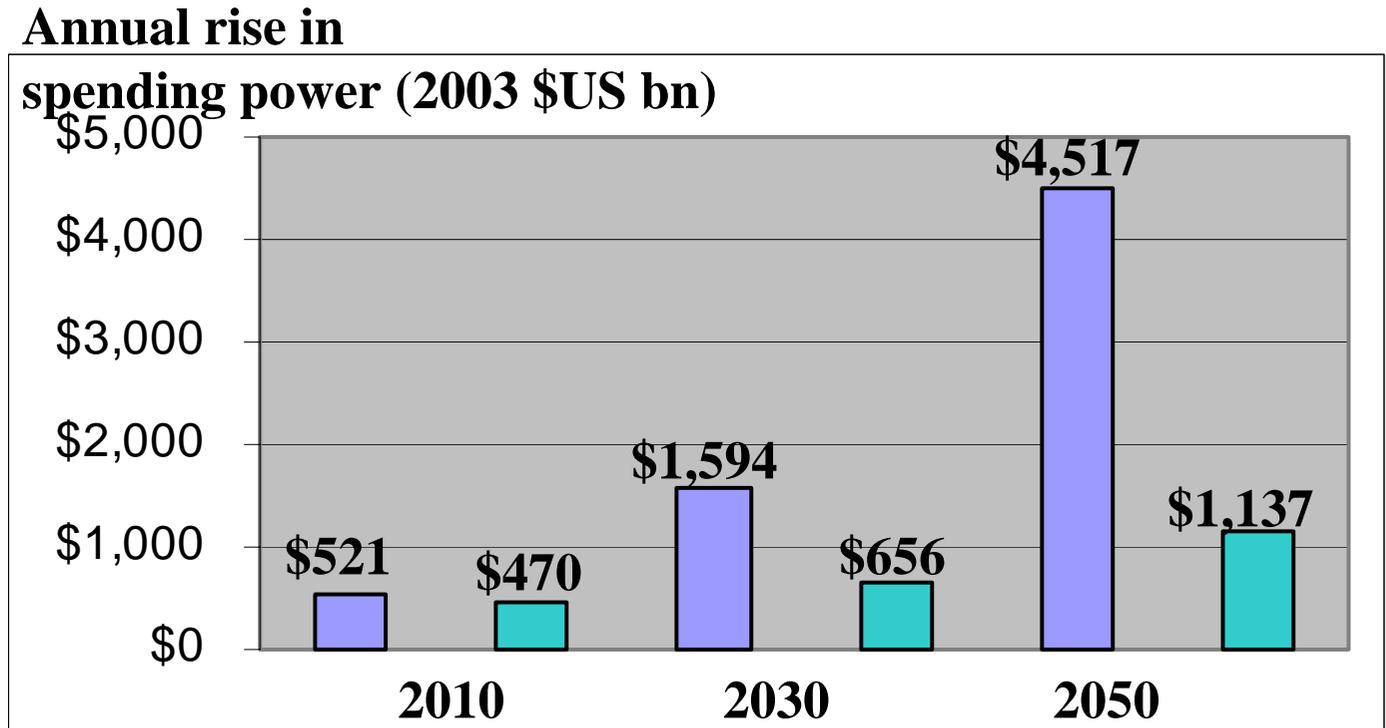
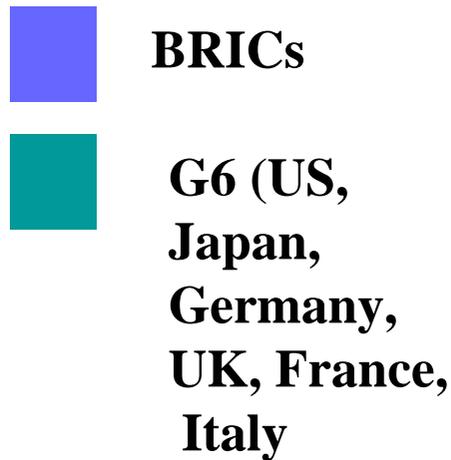


**The Largest Markets in 2050**



# Goldman Sachs Report - (contd.)

Within 10 years, new spending each year from the BRICs could be more than the growth from major developed markets



# Consumption Practices India

- Budgeting for the *Rites of Passage*
- The Wedding
- The budget of the lifetime: Saving and spending
- Consumption as Marking
- Consumption Events socially defined
- Prestation and gift culture
- Leisure: The birth and growth of
- Social Expressions of 'affluence' - embedded not conspicuous consumption alone

# Innovative Potential of Traditional Practices

- Household location
- Potential of life-Cycle study of consumption not only production
- significance of ‘invisible’ consumption - clothes care, hygiene, food consumption and housing unfrasturcture - because of sheer volumes of people (Ward & Shove)
- the *wallahs* and their PSS potential

# **Towards a Theory of Human Consumption**

- **Indian data very significant**
- **Co-existence of the contemporary resource-use efficient technologies such as ICT with traditional, informal sector services replete with environmentally sustainable potential**
- **Cultural practices encouraging sharing, pooling, lending and renting, recycling.**