

The Role of Mahāvīra's Teachings in the World of Instant Gratification

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the timeless wisdom of Bhagavana Mahāvīra, particularly the principles of brahmacharya (celibacy/self-restraint) and aparigraha (non-possessiveness), and its profound relevance in today's contemporary world which is characterized by instant gratification and extensive consumerism. Instant Gratification means seeking pleasure and fulfilling desires immediately without looking at long term goals. This paper will study the current trends and modern addictions in the form of social media, gaming, drugs, alcohol, compulsive shopping, overeating, etc. which are based out of the desire to seek comforts, pleasures, avoid discomforts, address emotional voids, etc. This paper seeks to move beyond surface-level interpretations of Mahāvīra's teachings and uncover the deeper philosophical insights they offer. By doing so, it aims to demonstrate how these ancient values can serve as guiding lights in addressing some of today's most pressing emotional and psychological challenges highlighting that the teachings of Bhagavana Mahāvīra are not just historically significant but deeply relevant, even in our digital, fast-paced age.

Keywords: instant gratification, addiction, dopamine, jainism, brahmacharya, aparigraha

1. Introduction

Today's world is a world of instant gratification where everything is on one's fingertip. It is always tempting to seek pleasure and fulfil desires instantaneously. It is common tendency for any living beings to seek good things which gives pleasure, which satisfies one's desire and to want such things NOW. It is a tendency to satisfy desires immediately. Gratification means emotional reaction to the fulfilment of a desire or goal. However, being impulsive and choosing short term pleasure over fulfilment of long term goals is Instant Gratification. It tricks one's

mind to choose what it likes and which will give satisfaction rather than that which is good for oneself. The long term effect is the development of systemic impatience because everything starts being available so easily and quickly that patience level goes down. It is a practice where one forgets short term pain, and instead, indulge in momentary pleasures which may result in long-term discomfort and pain. Looking at the fast pace in which world is moving today and its increasing inclination towards instant gratification makes it imperative to think through its long term after effect including increased stress, anxiety, and lack of self-discipline and steps that can be taken in the direction to manage this issue. It is always said that teachings of great personalities are not temporary and useful in their period of existence but are eternal and advantageous in all ages and at all times. Teachings may be ancient but they are relevant even today and there is always a possibility of intersection between application of ancient teachings in resolving the contemporary issues. Bhagavata Mahāvīra, who is considered as the last Tirthankar of this Bharat Kshetra of this time period has also spread his wisdom and knowledge through his teachings. This research proposes and advocates the application of the principles of brahmacharya and aparigraha as a global solution to instant gratification having potential to minimize or negate its adverse effects.

2. Literature Review

Recently many studies and research has been done assessing the concept of Instant Gratification and its impact. An article on 'Instant Gratification quantified' by Arash Asady states that "technology has made each passing generation more impatient, so much so that Millennials have come to be known as the 'instant gratification' generation¹". The research in this area also directs that this behaviour of instant gratification is linked to the release of dopamine and the brain's reward system. A ground-breaking study on the long-term effects of delayed gratification in children by Walter Mischel highlighted the importance of self-control and its impact on future success. The study by Moffitt et al. (2011), titled "A Gradient of Childhood Self-Control Predicts Health, Wealth, and Public Safety," highlights that individuals who exhibited lower levels of self-control during childhood were more likely to face challenges with financial management in adulthood. There are several research proving the impact of Instant Gratification on financial stability, self-esteem, relationships, reduced patience.

emotional regulation, unhealthy behaviors, such as overeating, substance abuse, and lack of exercise, obesity, impacts attention spans, mental health, and decision-making, etc. The common solutions to overcome this issue include mindfulness, self-control, focus, long term goal analysis and delayed gratification. However, drawing a solution from the philosophical perspective has yet not been explored to that extent. On the other hand studying the teachings of Mahāvīra as enshrined in canonical texts helps in understanding how the fundamental principles laid by Mahāvīra for a lay follower have a far reaching impact on the mindset and overall conduct of an individual.

3. Methodology

A qualitative approach has been adopted to explore the role of Mahāvīra's teachings in addressing the challenges posed by instant gratification. The research is grounded in a thematic analysis of Jain literature and texts and a systematic review of existing literature on instant gratification. Peer-reviewed articles, published thesis, and scholarly works on instant gratification, self-regulation, and the psychological and societal impacts of immediacy and instant gratification were reviewed. This literature provided a theoretical framework for understanding the said phenomenon. Jain canonical texts like Tattvārtha Sūtra, Uttarādhyayana Sūtra, Upāsakadaśāṃga Sūtra, Ratnakaranda Śrāvakācāra, were referred to find intersection. The study employs an interpretive framework to understand the philosophical and practical implications of Bhagavata Mahāvīra's teachings in the context of modern challenges related to instant gratification. By integrating insights from canonical texts and scholarly works, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Bhagavata Mahāvīra's teachings can guide individuals in traversing the modern world of instant gratification.

4. Theoretical framework

4.1 Understanding Instant Gratification:

Instant Gratification is a behaviour that instigates impulsive action. One of the principle that works behind it is cravings for pleasure. It is also said that dopamine is responsible for such a behaviour. Dopamine is a hormone and a kind of neurotransmitter which affects body, brain and behaviour. It has an impact on pleasure, and cognition, or thinking. It has a significant role in reward system where one wants to do something repeatedly the thing that made one felt good. For instance, scrolling social media platforms like X, facebook, snapchat, Instagram, etc. aimlessly for so many hours a day with number of videos popping up one after the other

based on the tailored algorithm personalised as per user content requirements. The use of social media drives the brain via rewarding features of comments and likes on the posts, which may potentially create addictive habits and wanting to go the platform again and again. The neurotransmitter dopamine plays an important role in social media engagement.

The same applies to internet gaming and the research shows that the addiction to virtual gaming is rapidly growing, especially in the games where multiple player participate online from different parts of the world and play games. Also, there are games which allow monetary perks to the winner which again stands as an attraction to play such games again and again. The demand for gaming is increasing due to its ability to deliver instant new content, versions, characters, and adventures. Another important factor is that gaming world appeals to all personalities including emotionally sensitive, and introverted who see this as a place of acceptance. Going further, compulsive shopping or shopping addiction again is another problem attached to instant gratification. Where now everything is available on finger tips where you go on a shopping application on your phone, just select the item and place order. The item arrives at doorstep without even taking pains to go out for shopping and holding shopping bags. Some platforms provide services where things arrive in few minutes of order which sometime acts as a cause of ordering unnecessary things. Similar addictions can be seen in drugs, alcohol, overeating. All this is increasing as the rate at which the things are available is constantly increasing, the time taken to make such things available is also decreasing. This is resulting in more craving for happiness and pleasures being received from such activities. This is also impacting the patience level drastically. Where earlier there was time where one had to wait for one full week to watch the next episode of a television show, now the same can be seen anytime during the day as per convenience. Similarly, messages were sent through post, telegram, public phones earlier and now even a small kid has a personal phone to convey his message anytime and anywhere. This all seems to be comfort and giving pleasure but somewhere this has impacted our patience level and impaired our ability to look at long term goals by satisfying our short term needs and goals.

Although instant gratification results in pleasure and comfort it has various negative effects. It has psychological effects by increased impulsivity, weakening of self-control, reduced patience and tolerance to any delays and inconveniences, higher stress and anxiety levels and reduced attention span. It also affects the ability to engage in deep thinking with focus. It has social and relationship effects which create a mind set for superficial relationships where people

prioritize quick validation (e.g., likes and comments on social media) over meaningful, deep connections. Also, people expect instant responses and attention, leading to unrealistic relationship expectations. Looking at the financial effects, the desire for instant pleasure leads to impulsive purchases and excessive spending and lack of long-term financial planning.

4.2 Mahāvīra's Teachings on Brahmacharya and Aparigraha

Teachings of Bhagavana Mahāvīra is available in the form of Jain literature through various canons. Jainism extensively describes the way of life and practices to be followed to live an ideal way of living. This ideal way of living supports the goal of annihilating the existing karma, reducing and stopping the bondage of new karma and sailing through the ocean of transmigration to achieve permanent bliss. However, this ideal way not only serves the long term goal of any seeker of liberation but also acts as a catalyst in shaping a better present which is suitable for self, family and society as a whole. It guides the thought process, conduct and behaviour. Bhagavana Mahāvīra laid down *aṇuvrata* and *mahāvratas* as a code of conduct for living. *Mahāvratas* are the great vows prescribed for ascetics and *aṇuvratas* are five small vows of righteousness to be followed by lay follower or *shravak*. The five small vows for a lay follower are *ahiṃsā aṇuvrata* (limited vow of non-violence), *satya aṇuvrata* (limited vow of truthfulness), *acaurya aṇuvrata* (limited vow of non-stealing), *brahmacharya aṇuvrata* (limited vow of chastity *pardartyaga* / *sthula maithuna viramana vrata*) and *aparigraha aṇuvrata* (limited vow of non-attachment also known as *sthula parigraha pramāṇa vrata*). An individual's perception of what is right and what action is advantageous for the self is often designed based on the code of conduct and values one believes into. The code of conduct prescribed by Bhagavana Mahāvīra, if followed, play a vital role in shaping the overall human actions and decisions. Although all five together shape the overall conduct, this paper deep dives into last two *aṇuvratas* viz. *brahmacharya* and *aparigraha aṇuvrata* as a key to overcome instant gratification issue.

Understanding Brahmacharya beyond celibacy:

The verse 7.16 of the Ācārya Umāsvāmī's *Tattvārtha Sūtra* defines *abrahma* i.e unchastity as *मैथुनमब्रह्म*² which means *maithuna* is unchastity (*abrahma*). Jaina ascetics practice this vow of pure chastity, which they observe by keeping their body, speech, and mind completely celibate.

In the case of householders, there are prescripts to observe *brahmacharya* in home life; this

may be observed either by limiting sex to marriage, by being true to one's chosen companion, or by observing complete celibacy. They must observe chastity not only in action but also in the mind. In addition, even in marriage, one must practice restraint in seeking of all sorts of sensual pleasures. While conventionally this is associated with celibacy, brahmacharya encompasses a broader concept of self-control over all senses and desires. It's not only controlling sexual desires but also mastering the mind and body from being swayed by fleeting pleasures and addictive behaviours. It is about developing control over all sensual pleasures which extends to control over diet, speech, and mental impulses. The term Brahmacharya is made from – brahm which means pure soul and char which means movement. Thus, brahmacharya means to live in one's own pure self. The same is reiterated in Bhagavatī Ārādhana text as जीवो ब्रह्मा जीवन्मि³ meaning the soul itself is brahma (the pure consciousness). From niścaya naya i.e. the absolute or transcendental viewpoint niścaya brahmacharya means to believe, to know, and remain fully aware of pure soul and remain indifferent to all the other physical and mental non self-elements. From vyavahāra naya i.e. the conventional or empirical viewpoint vyavahāra brahmacharya means abstaining from enjoying the object of touch sense. In the narrow sense it refers to giving up of copulation. However, Brahmacharya includes abstaining from all kinds of pleasures associated with the sense of touch and not just copulation. Going further, it does not only mean abstinence from sense of touch alone but all five senses as the body hold other four senses in it. Thus, Brahmacharya is to overcome all five senses which is possible only by control of the mind. Our five senses are nourished by external stimuli. These stimuli's cause formation of desires in the mind. Gratification of each worldly desire results in karma bondage. Besides these desires can be nourished but never fulfilled And hence all our energies and concentration are diverted in their fulfilment. Realization of the ephemeral nature of worldly things; including one's own body, circumstances and even social relationships will result in disinterest in satisfying the sense pleasures. Essentially, the practice of brahmacharya is a matter of controlling desire and avoiding waste of life energy. It is not a physical self-control manual but it eventually seeks to bring peace and harmony in the soul. It places strong emphasis on brahmacharya as an abandonment of sensual desires and, above all, as a means to attain deep self-awareness and inner satisfaction.

Understanding Aparigraha

Parigraha is a Sanskrit word which means laying hold on all sides. It means indulging in possessiveness. As per verse 7.17 of the Ācārya Umāsvāmī's Tattvārtha Sūtra, मूर्च्छा परिग्रहः⁴ which means clinging or infatuation is attachment to possessions. In Jain philosophy, mūrccchā refers not merely to physical fainting but more profoundly to a mental infatuation or delusion arising from attachment to possessions. These possessions are both external (such as wealth, animals, or objects) and internal (such as desires and emotional attachments). The essence of mūrccchā lies in the thought "this is mine," which leads to possessiveness (parigraha). This form of delusion stems from passions. Parigraha, in its deeper philosophical sense, refers to a state in which one loses awareness of the true Self, becoming entangled in attachments whether through memories of the past or projections into the imagined future. It manifests as a disconnection from the present moment, often accompanied by strong likes and dislikes (rāga- dveṣa), emotional reactivity, and identification with external situations. This leads to a loss of inner control, as the self becomes increasingly influenced by external circumstances rather than remaining anchored in equanimity. There are two types of possessions - internal and external. The kaṣāya in the form of rāga (attachment) and dveṣa (aversions) of any living being is internal possession and the external things that are acquired and collected by such beings is external possession. Since internal possessions are the root cause of external possessions, it is actually the most important.

According to Ācārya Pūjyapāda's explanation in Sarvārthasiddhi, attachment to possessions (parigraha) is a source of endless suffering. Just as a vulture carrying a piece of meat is chased and attacked by other birds, a person burdened with wealth becomes vulnerable to theft and harm. In the pursuit and protection of material gains, one often encounters numerous moral and physical troubles. Like a fire that never tires of consuming fuel, the desire for wealth is insatiable, and no amount ever feels sufficient. Driven by greed (lobha), such a person loses sight of ethical discernment ignoring the distinction between right and wrong. This attachment leads not only to a spiritually lower rebirth but also to societal contempt, as the individual is seen as greedy and self-centered. Hence, detachment from possessions is essential for inner peace and moral integrity. According to Ācārya Kundakunda's Samayasāra, "इच्छा परिग्रहः"⁵ desire itself is seen as a form of possession. Thus, the desire itself to gain quick pleasures and the attitude of mind of instant gratification itself is parigraha and the result of instant gratification is also parigraha.

Aparigraha, in its deeper sense, invites us to rise above greed and the instinct to accumulate more than we truly require. It teaches the art of consciously detaching from material and emotional attachments, encouraging mindfulness in what we choose to possess—be it physical objects, thoughts, or beliefs. This principle urges us to reflect on our consumption habits by discerning between what we want and what we genuinely need, guiding us to adopt a life of thoughtful moderation. Parigraha pramāṇa refers to the controlled and mindful acquisition of possessions, ensuring that one does not accumulate beyond necessity. It promotes self-discipline rather than complete renunciation, making it practical for modern life.

As described above, in the digital age, the urge for instant gratification manifests in numerous forms compulsive shopping, social media addiction, binge-watching, and emotional eating. These behaviors often stem from an underlying desire to escape discomfort or seek pleasure, leading to a cycle of fleeting satisfaction and persistent craving. The unchecked growth of parigraha in this context fosters emotional instability, stress, and dissatisfaction.

5. Teachings of Bhagavana Mahāvīra as antidotes to Instant Gratification

In today's fast-paced digital universe, the trend of instant gratification is increasing rapidly. The mindset is inclined towards the desire for immediate satisfaction and pleasure without delay or effort. In our modern era of fast living, instant pleasure is everywhere around us through social media dopamine fixations, reckless consumption, or entertainment and food binges. Such external stimuli are enjoyable in the present moment but eventually leaves one wanting more. Contemporary distractions distract us from our real self, resulting in restlessness, discontent, and mental fatigue. A lot of our energy is wasted in pursuing transient pleasures distracting individuals with things that lack real usefulness, succumbing to sensory desires, or seeking other people's validation. Contemporary society supports the relentless pursuit by the element of instant gratification—through social media validation, or impulsive desires.

If brahmacharya is thought of as the 'proper utilization of energy,' it makes aware of the paths along which one's energy is flowing and whether this channelization is actually making achieve our inner peace. Instead of being trapped in a vicious cycle of repeated episodes of fleeting pleasures that drain our energy, we can turn our focus towards self-awareness, inner contentment, and living consciously. By doing so, we shatter the vicious cycle of instant gratification and move towards a state that is marked by true peace and enduring happiness.

Through reflection on brahmacharya in daily activities, one can integrate its knowledge and lead to an inner sense of fulfilment. In a world where instant pleasure is the standard and all are always attracted to sensory indulgence and extrinsic distractions, Brahmacharya acts as a catalyst to channelise the energy to the realization of inner peace, clarity, and purpose. The core principle of Brahmacharya is based on self-discipline, mastery of the senses, and mental rigor, which collectively facilitate the disruption of the pattern of behavior driven by impulses.

Real happiness is not gained through the temporary gratification of worldly pleasures, but it springs from the profound understanding that happiness lies within the soul. The concept of ultimate chastity (uttam brahmacharya) cannot be considered restraint, but rather a deliberate choice based on the understanding that temporary desires do not bring enduring satisfaction. This principle encourages mindful engagement with desires, especially those linked to the senses and pleasure-seeking behaviors from things around. Further, the vow of parigraha-pramāṇa calls for the conscious limitation of both internal and external possessions. It promotes a lifestyle of moderation where one limits accumulation to what is genuinely necessary. This principle helps in differentiating needs from wants, encouraging a more deliberate and intentional way of living, breaking the cycle of endless craving, which is often fueled by instant gratification whether through compulsive shopping, binge content consumption, or the chase for digital validation and cultivating inner contentment, as true satisfaction emerges not from having more, but from needing less.

6. Conclusion

From the analysis of the entire problem, it seems that applying the principle of parigraha-pramāṇa, individuals can distinguish between needs and wants, making intentional choices about what and how much to consume resulting in mindful consumption. In an age dominated by screens and notifications, aparigraha inspires digital minimalism reducing dependence on constant stimulation and pleasures from external approval. These principles empower individuals to reclaim control over their choices, cultivate discipline, and build resilience against the pull of instant gratification. These vows, when understood and practiced in spirit become timeless principles for creating a life rooted in awareness, balance, and genuine well-being.

7. Limitations

The study is limited by its reliance on textual analysis and literature review and does not capture the lived experiences of individuals practicing these teachings or analysis through experiment based model.

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