https://doi.org/10.31995/jgv.2026.v17iSI08.001

Human Values in the Digital Age: An IKS-Based Re-reading of Literature, Science, Culture, and Sanskar against AI and Consumerism

Arvind Pandey
Research Scholar (JRF)
Department of Education
University of Lucknow, Lucknow
Email: aarjjan@gmail.com

Dr. Jitendra Kumar Pal
Assistant Professor
Department of Education
Vidyant Hindu P.G. College, Lucknow

Reference to this paper should be made as follows:

Received: 15.02.26
Approved: 16.07.26

Arvind Pandey
Dr. Jitendra Kumar Pal

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Vol. XVII, Sp. Issue Aug. 2026
Article No.01, Pg. 001-009

Similarity Check: 02%

Online available at
https://anubooks.com/special-issues?url=jgv-si-apsmgpc-lkn-2026

DOI: *https://doi.org/10.31995/jgv.2026.v17iSI08.001*

Abstract

In the contemporary global landscape, technological progress and neoliberal economic policies are profoundly transforming human consciousness, social relations, and cognitive processes. This era, marked by the rapid expansion of digital capitalism, hyper-consumerism, and Artificial Intelligence (AI), has precipitated an unprecedented ontological and epistemological crisis for education. The proliferation of information has marginalized wisdom and discernment, as an instrumental rationality increasingly views the human being merely as a consumer or a data-generating unit. Consequently, education is often reduced to a utilitarian profession focused on measurable metrics rather than ethical formation.

This research paper presents a critical re-reading of the four foundational pillars of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS): Literature (Sahitya), Science (Vigyan), Culture (Sanskriti), and Refinement (Sanskar) within the modern digital context. The study analyzes Sahitya as an affective dialogue against virtual alienation, Vigyan as holistic wisdom subordinate to the cosmic moral order (Rta), and Sanskriti as a collective framework for balancing consumption with renunciation. Central to the paper is the conceptualization of Sanskar as a sophisticated psychological technique for disciplining mental fluctuations and countering algorithmic conditioning.

By synthesizing traditional Indian perspectives with contemporary technological critiques, the paper advocates for the restoration of education as a profound intellectual and ethical

**This article has been peer-reviewed by the Review Committee of JGV.*

responsibility. It concludes that a sustainable educational ecosystem must privilege wisdom over noise, depth over speed, and conscience over convenience. This conceptual framework provides a robust alternative for reclaiming human agency and dignity in an increasingly automated world.

Keywords: *Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), Artificial Intelligence, Digital Capitalism, Sanskar, Philosophy of Education, Consumerism, Academic Integrity.*

Introduction

In the contemporary global landscape, where technological progress and neoliberal economic policies are redefining every dimension of human existence, education and philosophy face an unprecedented ontological and epistemological crisis. The current era is primarily characterized by the rapid expansion of digital capitalism, hyper-consumerism, and Artificial Intelligence (AI). This is not merely an age of evolving tools or machines; it represents a profound structural transformation of human consciousness, social relations, and cognitive processes. In this techno-social environment, where the glut of information has marginalized wisdom and discernment, the erosion of human values has become a grave concern (Floridi, 2014). At the center of this crisis operates a mechanical and instrumental rationality that views the human being solely as a consumer or a source of data, reducing the entire ecosystem to an object of consumption (Zuboff, 2019).

Against this backdrop, this research paper advocates for viewing education not merely as a profession, but as a serious and responsible academic discipline. Presently, academic research is often reduced to a "race for metrics" and numerical growth in publications, while teaching has become a routine, mechanical delivery process. Consequently, it is essential to return to the core philosophical and sociological foundations of education (Biesta, 2006). This study emphasizes that education and research must be a practice of integrity, depth, and intellectual responsibility. By prioritizing conscience over convenience, depth over speed, and wisdom over noise, this conceptual paper presents a critical re-reading of the four foundational pillars of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), Literature (*Sahitya*), Science (*Vigyan*), Culture (*Sanskriti*), and Refinement (*Sanskar*), within the modern digital and consumerist context.

AI and algorithm-based systems have challenged human decision-making capacity and moral autonomy. Technologies are no longer neutral; they subtly direct our ways of thinking, our desires, and our social behaviors (Winner, 1980). When digital platforms commercialize human attention and emotions, the intrinsic value of the individual diminishes, leaving them as a mere unit subject to market forces. Amidst this digital reality, Indian philosophical visions provide a robust conceptual alternative. In the Indian tradition, the concept of knowledge has never been limited to establishing control over the external world or the accumulation of material wealth; its ultimate goal has always been internal purification, ethical perfection, and holistic welfare (Radhakrishnan, 1953).

Literature, viewed in the Indian perspective as a welfare-oriented connection of humanity rather than mere entertainment, serves as a strong counter-narrative to virtual alienation and superficiality. Similarly, the concept of science, which in the modern Western context is often restricted to the exploitation of nature and quantitative analysis, assumes a more holistic form in Indian epistemology. Here, Science is the path to truth that harmonizes the worldly and the transcendental, inseparable from ethical and ecological responsibility (Aurobindo, 1956).

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Culture and *Sanskar* are the most vital dimensions of this conceptual re-reading. In the modern digital age, where algorithms and AI constantly "program" human habits, one might speak of a negative or mechanical "digital conditioning." In contrast, the Indian concept of *Sanskar* is a highly sophisticated psychological process of conscious, moral, and value-based refinement of the mind and consciousness (Chatterjee & Datta, 1984). It assists the individual in rising above uncontrolled instincts to evolve into a moral agent. While hyper-consumerism traps humans in a cycle of endless longing, *Sanskar* and Culture show the path of sacrifice, restraint, and balance, which are indispensable for building a sustainable and just society.

Literature Review

Contemporary academic discourse has extensively examined the interconnections between Artificial Intelligence (AI), digital capitalism, and consumerism. This literature review aims to identify research gaps between Western techno-philosophical narratives and the Indian Knowledge System (IKS). The existing body of work can be categorized into three conceptual streams: the critique of digital capitalism and surveillance, the ethics of AI and education, and the relevance of value theory in Indian philosophy.

1. Digital Capitalism and Hyper-Consumerism

In the context of digital capitalism, the work of Shoshana Zuboff (2019) is foundational. Zuboff introduces the concept of "Surveillance Capitalism," arguing that modern tech companies utilize human experiences, emotions, and attention as raw material. In this process, human autonomy is eroded, and the individual is reduced to a data-generating unit. Complementing this, Byung-Chul Han (2017) provides a psycho-political analysis, asserting that power in the neoliberal digital age operates through seduction and algorithmically driven desires rather than coercion. This uncontrolled consumerism, according to Han, pushes humanity toward deep depression and isolation. Furthermore, Luciano Floridi (2014) discusses the philosophical impact of the information revolution, suggesting an ontological crisis where the boundaries between the virtual and the real are increasingly blurred.

2. Ethics of AI and Sociological Dimensions of Education

Technological advancements have profoundly impacted the fundamental nature of education. Philosophers like Gert Biesta (2006) have offered sharp critiques of contemporary educational systems, noting that education is now restricted to measurable outcomes and utilitarian goals. This shift transforms teaching into a mechanical distribution process, marginalizing intellectual and ethical responsibility. In the era of AI, this crisis deepens as machine learning models displace human moral decision-making. While Shannon Vallor (2016) attempts to develop a new value-ethic for technology, her approach remains confined to Aristotelian virtue ethics. Western academic concerns regarding AI often focus on utilitarian "alignment" problems, frequently lacking the deeper philosophical inquiry into consciousness and internal refinement.

3. Relevance of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS)

This is where the Indian philosophical tradition emerges as highly pertinent. S. Radhakrishnan (1953) and Sri Aurobindo (1956) established that the search for knowledge in

Indian thought is not limited to quantitative analysis but is a journey toward the expansion of consciousness and ethical perfection. Daya Krishna (1991) presents Indian philosophy as a living, critical tradition capable of offering logical solutions to contemporary problems. B.K. Matilal's (1986) epistemological studies clarify that in Indian logic and axiology, there is an inseparable bond between truth (*Satyam*), goodness (*Shivam*), and beauty (*Sundaram*).

In existing literature, Western scholars often analyze the concept of *Sanskar* merely as ritual. However, Edwin Bryant's (2009) critical study of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras proves that *Sanskar* is actually a sophisticated psychological technique for disciplining the fluctuations of the mind and purifying the cognitive unconscious. Similarly, in Indian aesthetics, literature (*Sahitya*) is not viewed as "art for art's sake"; Kapila Vatsyayan (1996) explains that Indian art and literature are media for strengthening the affective relationship between the human and the cosmic order.

A significant gap exists in the current body of knowledge. While there is a rich Western critique of digital capitalism and AI, and excellent classical research on Indian philosophy, a direct conceptual dialogue between the two is missing. Modern education requires original ideas that transcend short-term trends. When technology prioritizes convenience and speed, there is a necessity for a new conceptual framework centered on conscience, integrity, and depth.

This research paper seeks to bridge this gap. It does not merely describe how AI and consumerism erode values but utilizes IKS pillars to offer a robust critical alternative. This study is based on the premise that the victory of wisdom over noise and conscience over convenience can restore education to its true form, creating lasting value in the academic world.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this paper is based on a novel interdisciplinary synthesis of Western Critical Theory, the Philosophy of Technology, and the Metaphysics of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS). Analyzing human values in the age of digital capitalism and AI requires a multidimensional approach that goes beyond the mechanics of technical tools to uncover the epistemological and ontological assumptions driving them. This framework is guided by the core belief that the discipline of education is not a mere "profession" or a mechanical system of knowledge distribution, but a profound intellectual and ethical responsibility.

I. Instrumental Rationality vs. The Enframing of Technology

The first pillar of this framework is constructed from the Frankfurt School's critique of "Instrumental Rationality." Max Horkheimer (2012) elucidated that in the modern era, "Reason" has lost its objective and moral character, becoming a mere "instrument" for efficiency, control, and production. AI-driven digital capitalism represents the peak of this rationality, where human experiences are reduced to data points. In this environment, technical convenience is prioritized over conscience and moral autonomy. Martin Heidegger (1977) further defines modern technology as "Enframing" (*Gestell*), a process that views nature and human resources merely as a "standing reserve" to be exploited.

II. Relational Ontology and the IKS Matrix

As a counterpoint to this mechanistic worldview, the second pillar is derived from IKS. This framework utilizes the Advaitic concepts of *Vidya* (liberating knowledge) and *Avidya*

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(fragmented, utilitarian knowledge) to analyze the digital epistemological crisis (Radhakrishnan, 1953). While Western technical discourse often views the human as an atomized individual, Indian philosophy presents a "Relational Ontology" where truth and value are inseparable. The framework prioritizes "wisdom over noise" and "depth over speed."

III. The Conceptual Matrix of the Four Pillars

- **Literature (*Relational Aesthetics*):** Beyond being a genre, *Sahitya* is treated as the principle of *Sahit* (welfare-oriented coexistence). It serves as the dialogic space that expands empathetic capacities against virtual alienation.
- **Science (*Holistic Empiricism*):** Science here is not just quantitative measurement but is subordinate to *Rta* (Cosmic Order). This demands that technological development be accountable to ethical limits and ecological balance.
- **Culture (*Collective Ethics*):** Contrary to the hyper-individualism of digital consumerism, culture is seen as a collective moral structure that balances consumption with renunciation.
- **Refinement (*Sanskar*):** This is the axis of the framework. Addressing the lack of "subjectification" or moral formation in modern education (Biesta, 2006), *Sanskar* is established as an advanced psychological technique to discipline unconscious cognitive patterns (*Vrittis*) against algorithmic conditioning (Bryant, 2009).

This framework builds a bridge between Western techno-critique and Indian axiology. It posits that the challenges of AI cannot be solved by "coding" alone, but require a philosophical intervention at the level of consciousness to restore human agency.

Conceptual Analysis / Discussion

This section provides a detailed critical analysis of the four pillars of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) within the context of contemporary digital capitalism, AI, and hyper-consumerism. This analysis is rooted in the commitment to restore education as a serious academic discipline that privileges wisdom over noise, depth over speed, and conscience over convenience.

1. Literature: Affective Dialogue against Virtual Alienation

In the digital age, communication technologies have expanded information exponentially, yet paradoxically, this hyper-connectivity has pushed humanity toward deep psychological and social isolation. Algorithm-driven platforms and AI confine users within "echo chambers" where they hear only the echoes of their own thoughts (Sunstein, 2017). This virtual superficiality has blunted human sensibilities. In this context, the IKS concept of *Sahitya* presents a potent conceptual paradigm.

The word *Sahitya* is derived from the Sanskrit *Sahit*, meaning coexistence, totality, and welfare-oriented connection. Indian masters like Bhamaha and Anandavardhana did not view literature as mere entertainment, but as a medium to strengthen the affective relationship of the human being with the entire universe (Bhattacharya, 1975). When digital capitalism views the individual only as a "consumer" and commercializes emotions, *Sahitya* creates a dialogic space that protects human integrity. The study and creation of literature cannot be part of a "race for metrics"; it is a conceptual process of crafting ideas that transcend temporary trends to create lasting value.

2. Science: From Instrumental Rationality to Holistic Wisdom

Modernity has established science as a neutral tool for the conquest and exploitation of nature. AI represents the zenith of this instrumental rationality, where every human experience, behavior, and decision is reduced to data and mathematical models (Floridi, 2014). This mechanistic worldview separates science from ethics, leading to technological developments that often fuel destructive consumerism and ecological crises.

In contrast, *Vigyan* in Indian philosophy is not limited to physical or mechanical knowledge of the external world. Here, *Gyan* (knowledge) and *Vigyan* (specialized knowledge/science) are subordinate to the Vedic *Rta*—the cosmic moral order. The Upanishads clarify that knowledge which only establishes material dominance is a form of *Avidya* (ignorance/fragmented knowledge), while true science leads to internal liberation and wisdom (Radhakrishnan, 1953). In the digital age, Indian scientific vision demands that research not be limited to utilitarian goals or the numerical growth of publications. Scientific inquiry must be an exercise in intellectual and ethical responsibility, where knowledge is created for the holistic welfare of society rather than the expansion of surveillance capitalism.

3. Culture: Ethical Balance against Consumerist Erosion

Hyper-consumerism is the engine of the neoliberal digital economy. Byung-Chul Han (2017) describes contemporary society as a "Burnout Society," where digital technologies generate unlimited desires, trapping humans in an endless cycle of consumption. In this system, every relationship, emotion, and even knowledge becomes a "commodity." Culture is often reduced to superficial lifestyle symbols.

In the IKS tradition, *Sanskriti* (Culture) is not just a way of living; it is a collective and transcendental moral framework that refines human instincts into responsible social behavior. Indian culture establishes a subtle balance between *Bhog* (consumption) and *Tyag* (renunciation) (Iyer, 2000). While digital capitalism drives unlimited accumulation, Indian cultural values propound the principle of the Ishavasya Upanishad: *Tena Tyaktena Bhunjitha*—"Enjoy through renunciation." This vision clarifies that a sustainable educational ecosystem is built not through the fulfillment of infinite desires, but through self-restraint, contentment, and a consciousness of collective responsibility.

4. Sanskar: Conscious Moral Formation against Algorithmic Conditioning

The greatest threat posed by AI and digital platforms is the erosion of human agency and free will. John Danaher (2019) calls this "Algorithmic Cognitive Outsourcing," where machines make decisions for us and subtly shape our habits. This is a form of mechanical and negative conditioning. When education itself becomes a mere information-delivery system, the moral decline of students is an inevitable consequence.

The most effective solution to this crisis lies in the concept of *Sanskar*. In Patanjali's Yoga and Vedanta, *Sanskar* is not a mere ritual but a deep psychological technique for disciplining the *Vrittis* (fluctuations of the mind) and consciously refining unconscious mental patterns (Bryant, 2009). While digital algorithms target lower instincts, *Sanskar* awakens higher moral consciousness.

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The true meaning of teaching is the moral molding of a student's personality to protect them from "mechanical slavery." Through *Sanskar*, education becomes an intellectual responsibility that provides the individual with the discernment (*Viveka*) to know when to use technology and when to reject it based on their conscience.

Discussion: The Ontological Synthesis

This re-reading confirms that modern education must return to these foundational Indian values to regain its lost relevance. This is not a romanticized return to the past, but a necessary philosophical ground to face contemporary challenges. The synthesis between Western techno-critique and IKS suggests that the solution to AI challenges cannot be found in better algorithms alone. It requires an ontological shift.

Albert Borgmann (1984) critiqued modern technology for making life "frictionless," resulting in the erosion of human skill and moral grit. *Sanskar* provides the "friction"—the conscious effort of the will—required to maintain human agency. Furthermore, Langdon Winner's (1980) assertion that technologies have inherent politics reminds us that AI models reflect the consumerist values of their creators. Indian *Vigyan* and *Sahitya* offer the holistic and empathetic counter-balance necessary to ensure that technology remains a tool for human flourishing rather than a master of human existence.

Implications for Policy and Education

In the digital era, educational policies are increasingly driven by techno-economic metrics and utilitarian market demands. This neoliberal approach reduces education to a mere profession and students to "human resources" for the digital economy. Gert Biesta (Biesta, 2006) argues that while modern systems focus on "qualification," the dimension of "subjectification" or moral formation has been marginalized. The rapid expansion of AI and digital capitalism deepens this crisis, often ignoring the protection of human agency and moral autonomy (Zuboff, 2019).

Based on the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), the following policy shifts are essential:

- **Restoration of Academic Integrity:** Policies must move beyond the "race for metrics." Research should be viewed as a "practice of integrity" aimed at the purification of consciousness and social welfare rather than numerical publication growth (Radhakrishnan, 1953).
- **Human-Centric AI Alignment:** Instead of focusing solely on the technical alignment of AI, policy-makers must focus on "human alignment." Shannon Vallor's (2016) techno-ethical virtues should be integrated with the psychological techniques of *Sanskar* to restructure curricula.
- **Re-envisioning Science and Literature:** Science education must be liberated from instrumental rationality and linked to the cosmic and ecological order (*Rta*). Similarly, Literature (*Sahitya*) must be taught as a medium for "welfare-oriented coexistence" (*Sahit*) to foster empathy against algorithmic isolation.
- **Countering Digital Consumerism:** Institutional frameworks must resist the commercialization of student data. Integrating *Sanskar* as a conscious policy practice

involves teaching students to control impulsive reactions and algorithmic desires through self-restraint and critical thinking (Bryant, 2009).

Conclusion

The contemporary digital age, marked by surveillance capitalism and AI, has displaced human consciousness and created a profound ontological crisis. Analyses by Floridi (2014) and Zuboff (2019) reveal that the current techno-economic structure reduces humans to data-generating units. As Langdon Winner (1980) suggests, these digital structures are not neutral; they are embedded with values that prioritize mechanical control and hyper-consumerism.

As a solution to this civilizational crisis, this study offers a critical re-reading of Literature, Science, Culture, and *Sanskar*. The Indian philosophical vision proves that the ultimate goal of knowledge is the awakening of internal wisdom (*Prajna*) rather than external dominance (Radhakrishnan, 1953). The "mechanical control" warned of by Heidegger (1977) finds a robust counter-balance in the Indian cultural principle of "enjoyment through renunciation" and the conscious psychological molding of *Sanskar*. As analyzed by Bryant (2009), *Sanskar* is the refined method that breaks the unconscious algorithmic conditioning, re-establishing the individual as an autonomous moral agent.

The central conclusion for the academic world is that education must be saved from utilitarian decline. Research cannot be a mere race for metrics; it must be a commitment to intellectual honesty and truth. In the age of AI, the teacher's role is not just to provide information but to awaken the human conscience. This paper establishes that we must create dialogues that transcend temporary trends. When digital capitalism privileges noise and speed, the educational ecosystem must prioritize wisdom over noise, depth over speed, and conscience over convenience. This is the true duty of education and the only path to protecting human dignity in the modern age-+.

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