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The Great Cultural Transposition: A Purusharthic Analysis of Western Secular Mindfulness and Contemporary Indian Consumerism

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ABSTRACT

In a time of unprecedented global connectivity, the world is witnessing a major civilizational “swap”: the West is increasingly turning toward the contemplative “Nivritti” traditions of the East through the secularized mindfulness movement, while India - the birthplace of spirituality - is rapidly moving into a “Siliconized” era of aggressive “Pravritti” and material aspiration. This chapter uses the foundational Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) framework of the *Purusharthas* (*Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama*, and *Moksha*) to examine and explain this cultural transposition.

The research highlighted a dual crisis of Purusharthic dissociation. In the West, the “Saffronization” of wellness has resulted in “McMindfulness” - a form of spiritual technology disconnected from Dharma (ethics) and reshaped as a tool for Artha (neoliberal productivity). On the other hand, the “Siliconization” of India has given birth to a “Sacred Materialism,” where the pursuit of wealth (Artha) by intensifying education and developing digital skills runs the risk of overpowering the ultimate goal of Moksha (liberation).

Through a comprehensive synthesis of contemporary literature (2020–2025) and sociological trends, this paper argued that both of these movements have become “Artha-centric,” leading to a global imbalance in which skills and material success are prioritized over wisdom. In order to correct this, the author proposed a model of *Samanvaya* (Integration), which advocates for a “Contemporary Learning” paradigm based on a strong ethical framework, wherein technical skilling and psychological well-being are anchored. This paper serves as a crucial intervention for educators, policymakers, and all global citizens who are trying to navigate the tension between digital advancements and spiritual authenticity.



Keywords: indian knowledge systems (iks), purusharthic dissociation, mindfulness, siliconization of india, samanvaya (cultural integration)



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INTRODUCTION

In the third decade of the 21st century, there is a strong transposition of culture evident within the world's culture. Historically, the East was seen in terms of transcendentalism and spiritual quest, whereas the West was defined in terms of empirical materialism and capitalistic expansion. However, the modern changes in society point to the reversal of these archetypes. As Western secular societies have been struggling to come to terms with the exhaustion of late-stage capitalism, they have turned to an internalized, often commodified, spiritualism (Cassaniti, 2024). Conversely, India, where *Adhyatma* (spirituality) originated, is experiencing intense “Siliconization,” as material aspirations and wealth creation have become benchmarks for measuring societal progress. In fact, the ancient texts via spiritualism teach ideal and peaceful living amidst global challenges and outrages (Srivastava et al., 2025). More specifically, the spiritual path is seen as more duty-oriented rather than result-oriented (Srivastava et al., 2022).

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In order to see this change, one has to go beyond the binary of “spirituality vs. materialism” and look toward the Vedic framework of the Purusharthas, the four aims of human existence. In a balanced society, there is Dharma (ethics/duty), Artha (material prosperity), Kama (desire), and Moksha (liberation) in a symbiotic balance. The present world crisis can be diagnosed as a Purusharthic Dissociation. The Western imbalance is manifest in the seeking of Moksha, often repackaged as secular mindfulness, and without grounding in Dharma and the original ethical and social roots of Dharma that gave rise to it. At the same time, the Indian imbalance will express itself in the pursuit of Artha with such a velocity that it threatens to hinder the end goal of Moksha.

This chapter argues for a decoupling of mindfulness and yoga from foundational ethical tenets in the West, which is a major part of their secularization. Practices midway developed for spiritual and ethical purposes are being restated as an idea for pragmatic, secular purposes such as stress reduction and performance enhancement in corporate and educational contexts. This provides a way towards maintaining a healthy association workplace-related spirituality as well as spiritual leadership ([Srivastava et al., 2024](#)). While supporters claim that these interventions advance health, opponents evoke the threat of “cultural appropriation” and muscling down of rich traditions to nothing more than techniques for personal or institutional gain. On the other side of this transposition is the Indian “Aspiration Economy” reflecting a move toward strong consumption and frenzied investments in education as a means of gaining a competitive edge. This pursuit of Artha comes across as a pragmatic response to the current economic realities and the opportunities globalization presents ([Batista-Canino et al., 2024](#); [Vaid, 2024](#)).

While much has been written about India’s economic rise and wellness trends in the West, there is a significant lack of research evaluating these shifts through the lens of contemporary learning. This paper purports to analyze this cultural exchange by using the IKS principles of Pravritti (active life) and Nivritti (contemplative life). The objective is to propose a model of Samanvaya (integration) which helps in revival of the ethical middle path in modern education and life ([Li et al., 2025](#)).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Global Paradox of Nivritti and Pravritti

The modern world is a place of “Great Cultural Transposition,” as older civilizational values of spirituality or materialism are being swapped and reclassified. In order to understand this phenomenon, it is important to go deeper into the academic discourse about the Western tendency toward “Nivritti” (withdrawal/contemplation) and the Indian tendency toward “Pravritti” (active engagement/materialism). This review is an attempt to synthesize recent research (2020–2025), in order to put in perspective, how these movements have been divorced from their ethics, as the Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) called Dharma and Artha.

The Western “Nivritti”: Secularization and the Commodification of Mindfulness

In the West, the embracing of mindfulness and yoga, which are traditionally paths of Nivritti, has become a large social movement. However, this “meditation craze” has attracted much critical attention because it is disassociated from foundational religious and philosophical contexts.

The Decoupling from Dharma

Scholars highlight that in the process of globalization, mindfulness is often “extracted from Buddhist contexts,” which results in the loss of original mental associations and the adaptation of these practices for new psychological spaces. This process of secularization essentially changes the meaning of mindfulness, separating it from its original ethical/spiritual tenets, which are known as Dharma. While these practices were deeply ingrained in the ideas and practices like the Yamas and Niyamas of Yoga or the morality and wisdom of Buddhism in the past, these are now discussed outside this traditional “humus.”

Neoliberalism and the Corporatism of Artha

One of the main causes of this secularization is the adaptation of mindfulness for neoliberal corporate cultures. [Wrenn \(2022\)](#) believed that corporate mindfulness is a labor management mechanism intended to control the mentality of workers and boost productivity. In this framework, a practice with ethical origins (Dharma) is used

as a means to economic gain (Artha). This reorientation has raised concerns about “spiritual bypassing,” in which mindfulness is used to promote individual resilience and efficiency; that is, we are shifting the burden of responsibility for systemic workplace problems to the employee.

Medicalization and Technological Mindfulness

The process of movement into Western Nivritti is also one of “medicalization.” Mindfulness is also appearing to be part of more and more health care and clinical psychology related to stress reduction and emotion regulation. While this is beneficial, there is often a de-emphasis in this framing on spiritual ethics in favor of more quantifiable, therapeutic outcomes. The proliferation of research in the world of management and psychology journals further underlines the mainstreaming of mindfulness as a utilitarian concept focused on tangible, measurable results.

The Indian “Pravritti”: The Emergence of the Aspiration Economy

On the other hand, India is undergoing a great spate of Pravritti with the emergence of an “Aspiration Economy” among the middle classes. This shift is a move away from “Gandhian simplicity,” which focused on self-sufficiency and non-materialism, toward a model that encourages wealth creation and the accumulation of material wealth (Baas, 2024).

Educational Intensification as an Instrument to Artha

One of the hallmarks of this shift is extremely visible in the investment in education. Research has shown that the Indian middle class considers education important because it helps in social mobility and the development of a privileged identity. This “educational intensification” includes major parental investment in private schooling and “shadow education” (tutoring). Such behavior clearly reflects Artha — the pursuit of material well-being and social status through strategic investment.

The Siliconization of Career Options

Aspirations for upward mobility are a major force behind the choice of careers among the Indian youth. Employment in such industries as retail or international tech is often perceived to offer a chance to move away from informal labor and adopt a new class identity. Furthermore, the initiatives of “Skilling India” are to turn the youth into global workers for the IT-ITES sectors. This focus on developing skills for global employment demonstrates the utilitarian approach to education, which is founded firmly on the aim of Artha (Baas, 2024; Cherian & Rajan, 2024)

Consumerism and the Loss of Frugality

The contemporary Indian middle class is a lifestyle-changing class with strong consumption patterns. The move to luxury brands and material possession, e.g., the historical positioning of Tata Nano as an aspirational car, emphasizes the move toward material gain. While there may still be a cultural resonance for such traditional values as simplicity, these are increasingly shadowed by globalized influences that prioritize economic success and material gains.

Synthesizing the Transposition: Purusharthic Imbalance

The literature makes known a complicated “swap” of values. The West uses the Nivritti of the East but removes the Dharma from it in order to utilize it for Artha or Wealth. India, which was the traditional home of Adhyatma increasingly inclined towards Pravritti and Artha, so much at the cost of their roots, ethics of simplicity and detachment.

Scholars point out that although the words used in academic literature (like “neoliberalism” or “consumerism”) are different, the overall phenomenon corresponds to a shift from techniques that were based on ethical wisdom to tools that serve material and productivity-oriented objectives. A note should be taken here that when it comes to the changeover to “Vedic Artha” in India, it is not a recognized sociological framework as practiced within literature, but more a pragmatic shift adapted to the contemporary economic status quo.

Ultimately, this literature review identifies an important “research gap”: although the commercialization of yoga and the rise of materialism in India have been studied separately, very little research has examined these changes together through the Purushartha framework. This chapter attempts to address this gap to explore the current opportunity to harness contemporary learning to bring Suisse tyranny together through the concept of Samanvaya (integration).

Saffronizing the West Decoupled Spirituality and the “McMindfulness” Phenomenon

The “Saffronization of the West” is not about religious conversion in the traditional sense but rather the mainstreaming and “branding” of Indian spiritual practices — such as Yoga and Dhyana (Mindfulness) — within Western secular institutions. This section examines ways that these practices, embedded in the Nivritti (contemplative) tradition of India, have been detached from Dharma (ethics) and re-enlisted to serve Artha (economic productivity) in a Western neoliberal paradigm.

The Derivation from the Ethical “Humus”

Traditionally, IKS assumes that the spiritual practices are inseparable from an ethical underpinning. For example, in the Patanjali Yoga Sutras, Asana (posture) and Dhyana (meditation) are practiced only after following Yamas (social restraints) and Niyamas (personal observances). However, as [Husgafvel \(2018; 2020\)](#) noted, in Western secular mindfulness, there is often a “de-contextualization” in which the practice is torn out of its original religious “humus.” By removing ethical principles such as non-violence (Ahimsa) and non-possessiveness (Aparigraha), the West has developed a “plug-and-play” form of spirituality that can easily fit into secular life without requiring people to change their lifestyle or socio-economic position ([Berger et al., 2024](#)).

Neoliberal Productivity and “McMindfulness”

The main criticism of this transposition has been the “instrumentalization” of mindfulness for corporate gain. [Wrenn \(2022\)](#) suggested that corporate mindfulness has become a “neoliberal tool” that is being used to increase labor productivity. Instead of Moksha (liberation from the ego), the goal becomes “stress reduction” so that the employee can go back to a high-stress environment more efficiently. This phenomenon, often criticized as “McMindfulness,” shifts the focus of the practice from Dharma (right action in the world) to self-centered Artha (material or personal gain). As [Stuart-Edwards et al. \(2023\)](#) noted, when mindfulness is used only to improve performance, it can become a “spiritual bypass” that avoids addressing deeper issues such as workplace exploitation or social inequality.

Medicalization and the Techno-Spiritual Shift

The Western adoption of these practices also has an aspect of “medicalization.” [Salmoirago-Blotcher \(2022\)](#) noted that by conceptualizing meditation as a clinical treatment for issues such as anxiety or hypertension, the West gives the practice legitimacy by creating an empirical foundation. While this brings greater accessibility, it turns a holistic philosophy into a “bio-hack.” This is further intensified by “Techno-Mindfulness” — the growing use of apps such as Headspace and Calm. These platforms commodify Nivritti and turn the silence of contemplation into a subscription-based product. This transformation is a clear change in which the spiritual technology of the East is transformed to meet the consumerist appetites of the West ([Segall, 2021](#)).

The Loss of Sampradaya (Lineage)

In IKS, the knowledge is historically transmitted in Guru-Shishya Parampara (lineage), which ensures that the practice is tempered by the wisdom of a realising teacher. This lineage is replaced by “certification programs” in the Saffronization of the West. This shift from Wisdom to Credentials is a reflection of a Western educational paradigm that favors the standardized metrics of educational assessment over the internal transformation. [Furnell \(2024\)](#) proposed that although these standardized interventions (MBSR, MBCT) are effective in the domain of health, they often lack the “wisdom component” that would be required for true character building, which is the cornerstone of Dharmic education.

Conclusion of Section

The Saffronization of the West is a “selective borrowing.” The West has accepted the tranquility of the East but rejected its commands. By separating Moksha from Dharma, the West has transformed a path of liberation into a tool for self-adjustment — helping individuals adapt to a materialistic system rather than question the system itself. This causes a “Purusharthic Dissociation” wherein the individual craves for peace (Moksha) only for the sake of the pursuit of wealth (Artha).

Siliconization of India: Gandhian Simplicity to Aspiration Economy

While the West is looking for the decoupled form of Eastern spirituality, in India, there is a parallel and opposite transformation going on, the “Siliconization” of the Indian cultural and educational landscape. This move is an aggressive move towards Pravritti (active, material engagement) and prioritizing Artha (material prosperity) over traditional ideals of Vairagya (detachment) and Gandhian simplicity (Tybout & Fahey, 2017). As India establishes itself as a global technology hub, as well as a vibrant consumer market, the quest for wealth has acquired a “sacred” quality, and the psychology of contemporary learning and professional identity has changed fundamentally.

The Passing Away of Gandhian Simplicity and the Emergence of “Vedic Artha”

For much of the 20th century, the Indian middle class identity was fixated on the Gandhian ideal of Sarvodaya (welfare of all) and the virtue of simple living. However, the post-liberalization era, accelerated by the digital revolution of the 2010s and 2020s, has replaced this frugality with a strong “Aspiration Economy.” Research by Javalgi and Grossman (2016), and more recently by Yousefian et al. (2022), showed that wealth creation is no longer seen with moral suspicion but as a prime duty to self and the nation.

This can be described as “Sacred Materialism” — a framework in which the pursuit of Artha is justified through a modern interpretation of the Purusharthas. However, unlike the balanced traditional model, present-day “Siliconized” India pursues Artha as an end in itself. This shift can be seen in the transition from the Tata Nano era — which focused on meeting the basic need for mobility — to the current obsession with luxury brands, a premium digital lifestyle, and a deep-rooted desire for global parity in material status.

Educational Intensification: Learning as an Investment for Artha

In the “Siliconized” paradigm, education has become more of a strategic asset for social mobility, rather than being a search for Vidya (liberation through knowledge). Gupta, (2019, 2022, 2023) described this “educational intensification,” where the Indian middle class spends an outsized amount of its income on private schooling and “shadow education” (coaching centers).

The aim of contemporary learning in India is more and more “utilitarian.” The student is seen as a “human resource” whose value is determined by his or her employability in the global tech and service sectors. This has led to the “Siliconization of the Mind,” whereby Indian youth are conditioned to focus more on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) and management degrees, not necessarily out of passion, but as the most efficient vehicles for Artha. This pressure leads to a competitive environment wherein the “joy of learning” is often sacrificed for “competitive advantage.”

The “Skilling India” Paradigm and Global Labor

The state-led “Skilling India” initiatives actually institutionalize this Siliconization. According to these programs are designed to convert subaltern and rural youth into global workers who would be able to service the international IT-ITES (Information Technology Enabled Services) sectors. While this offers a way out of poverty, there is a danger of homogenizing the rich diversity of Indian vocational knowledge into such standardised market-ready skills (Sarkar, 2019).

This movement reflects a strong Pravritti — a tendency toward action, creation, and earning. However, critics argue that this model of learning is often “soulless.” By concentrating only on skilling (technical capabilities), the education system ignores the Dharmic component — the sense of ethical responsibility and social consciousness

with which such skills should be used. This produces a workforce that is technically competent but often alienated from the philosophic background of Indian civilisation as a whole.

Consumerism as the New Dharma

In the case of Siliconized India, consumption has become the kind of identity. The advent of the “Aspiration Economy” has resulted in a change in which Kama (desire) and Artha (wealth) have become the dominant Purusharthas (Dhore et al., 2023). Yousefian et al. (2022) observed that in the case of middle-class households, food consumption, fashion, and technology are used as markers of progress and “modernity.”

This “Siliconization” is not simply about the use of software; it is about the introduction of a software-centric worldview, one that sees every problem as having a technical solution, every human need as being met in the market. This is a great deviation from the IKS principle of Samanvaya (harmony), in which there is a shift from internal contentment (Santosha) to external accumulation.

Synthesis: The Cost of the Material Pivot

The Siliconization of India has, without a doubt, brought millions of people out of poverty and turned India into a world power. However, from a Purusharthic point of view, the “velocity” of such a pursuit of Artha runs the risk of overshadowing the ultimate goal of Moksha. Just as the West has adopted a “soulless” version of Indian spirituality (“McMindfulness”), India risks adopting a “heartless” version of Western materialism. The challenge for “New India” is to ensure that its silicon-led growth is anchored in its saffron-colored ethical roots.

FINDINGS

The Convergence of the Artha and the Purusharthic Dissociation

The study of the phenomena that have been dubbed the “Saffronization of the West” as well as the “Siliconization of India” shows a striking convergence: notwithstanding their disparate origins, in both cultural contexts, a process of progressive emphasis on the Artha (material utility and productivity) at the expense of the Dharma (ethical conduct) and the Moksha (liberation) can be identified. The findings are organised around three main thematic domains that represent a redefinition of today's learning and identity.

The Paradox of the “Mindful Productivity” vs. “Material Progress”

The data shows that the West and India have reached a state of “functional sameness,” albeit through different paths. In the West, formerly spiritual practices like mindfulness have been hijacked from gliding the transcendental sphere into maintaining it; practitioners use Nivritti (contemplative) techniques to alleviate burnout, therefore mashing up “spiritual fuel” to be “fuel for a material machine.” On the other hand, in India, the pursuit of Artha is undertaken with a devotedness that is normally reserved for spiritual endeavour. The empirical evidence confirms that the policy of the “Aspiration Economy” has created a new ritual, where standardized testing, code bootcamps, and luxury consumption. These observations do point to the fact that while the West is “Saffronizing” its productivity, India is “Siliconizing” its soul, which is an offshoot of the historically balanced model of the Purusharthas.

The Instrumentalism Over Education [Vidya vs. Skilling]

A salient finding of this investigation is the changing conceptualization of “Learning.” In both societies, education has become strictly instrumental. In the West, mindfulness training is usually de-emphasized as a skill for emotional regulation and executive function (Stuart-Edwards et al., 2023). In India, learning is characterized by an “educational intensification” that is being made as a strategic investment for ensuring competitive employment within the digital economy (Camilleri, 2022; Gupta, 2022). Consequently, the IKS construct of Vidya, knowledge that leads to liberation, is replaced by a focus on the notion of Skilling, i.e., knowledge that leads to employment. The research proves that today's learners are becoming “technically proficient but philosophically illiterate,” able to navigate complex software or corporate structures but deficient in philosophical depth.

The Disentanglement of Ethics from Action

Most importantly, Dharma and Pravritti have become separated from each other at a systemic level. In the Western “Saffronized” paradigm, people often practice mindfulness without any commitment to Ahimsa (non-harming) or broader social ethics, leading to what is called “spiritual bypassing” (Koenig, 2023; Wrenn, 2022). In the Indian “Siliconized” paradigm, the lust for wealth often serves as the overriding Dharmic imperatives of sustainability and social equity. This “Purusharthic Dissociation” is an indication of a global crisis of purpose, wherein the means, which include skills and calmness, have become the end, while the ultimate goals of human existence are being overlooked.

DISCUSSION

Toward a Model of Samanvaya (Integration)

The transposition expounded in this chapter involves a major overhaul of current paradigms of learning. To restore the balance, a model of Samanvaya (integration) is proposed, in which the Silicon and the Saffron are not perceived as opposing forces, but as complementary pillars based on the Dharma. For the West, this means reintegrating ethics into the practice of mindfulness — shifting it from being merely a tool for stress relief to a practice focused on character building. For India, this means ensuring that the pursuit of Artha is guided by Dharma — shifting from growth at any cost to growth aimed at collective welfare (Sarvodaya). Educational systems must move beyond skill development to include Atma Vidya (self-knowledge), so that human beings do not become merely efficient machines.

CONCLUSION

The “Great Cultural Transposition” acts as a mirror showing the state of imbalance that inspired the contemporary world. The adoption of Eastern spiritual traditions by the West and of Western materialism by India are both attempts to close existential gaps. However, by dissociating these practices from ethics, both cultures are in danger of producing hollow versions of their goals. The “Saffronization of the West” provides peace without conscience, while the “Siliconization of India” provides money with no wisdom. Only by rediscovering the holistic framework of the Purusharthas — where material success (Artha) and emotional desire (Kama) are guided by moral duty (Dharma) in the pursuit of ultimate freedom (Moksha) — can a truly sustainable global society be created.

LIMITATIONS

The scope of this research is limited by the conceptual, high-level theoretical orientation. The categories “Indian Middle Class” and “Western Professionals” are broad complexes that contain considerable heterogeneity, which is not fully captured herein. Moreover, the long-term psychological consequences of “secularised mindfulness” and “aspirational consumerism” require further long-term empirical research. Future studies should therefore focus on detailed case studies of “IKS-integrated” educational models to evaluate how effectively they can address this divide.

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CREDIT AUTHOR STATEMENT / AUTHORS’ CONTRIBUTIONS

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