

## The Ideological Capture of Indian Academia: A Critique of the Humanities and Social Sciences at JNU

Ramaswami Subramony<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

This article is a comprehensive critique of the ideological transformation of Indian higher education, particularly in the humanities, social sciences, and English departments of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). It argues that the institution, originally founded to promote intellectual freedom and critical inquiry, instead became a centre of ideological orthodoxy that systematically erodes India's civilisational consciousness. Drawing on the writings of scholars such as Makarand R. Paranjape, Kapil Kapoor, Rajiv Malhotra, and Shankar Sharan, the article traces how Western theoretical frameworks — Marxism, post-colonialism, feminism, and cultural studies — have replaced indigenous epistemologies rooted in dharma, śāstra, and viveka. However, there have been attempts to reverse after the political change in India in 2014, and the post-2014 Vice chancellors have attempted to change the eco system of JNU and make it nationalist. Through six sections, the article analyses the institutional and epistemic mechanisms of this transformation traces the ideological formation of JNU's humanities and its departure from India's civilisational ethos. Section 2 examines the spread of textbook Marxism and the systematic politicisation of pedagogy. Section 3 analyses the resulting erosion of civilisational memory and the moral confusion it breeds. Section 4 critiques the role of English departments and Marxist historians such as Ania Loomba, Romila Thapar, and Bipan Chandra in institutionalising Eurocentric and materialist narratives. Section 5 explores the broader cultural fallout — the diffusion of ideological deracination into media, art, and politics — resulting in moral relativism and civilisational fatigue. Section 6 focuses entirely on Shankar Sharan's writings and YouTube lectures, notably *JNU ka Sach* (2016) and *Marxism and Indian Academics* (2020), which offer a systematic diagnosis of how Left ideology captured JNU through control of faculty appointments, syllabi, and research funding. Taken together, these analyses demonstrate that the crisis in Indian academia is not merely institutional but civilisational. The replacement of truth-seeking with ideological activism has produced a generation estranged from its cultural roots. The article calls for a civilisational reset — a reintegration of Indian knowledge systems into modern education and a renewal of the humanities as a space for ethical and metaphysical inquiry. The proposed remedy is not rejection of the West but an epistemic balance that allows Indian civilisation to interpret itself on its own terms. Only such a re-anchoring can rescue the university from moral exhaustion and restore it to its original function: the pursuit of wisdom.

**Keywords:** JNU, Humanities, Social Sciences, Marxism, Post-colonialism, Ideological Capture, Indian Knowledge Systems, Cultural Deracination, Academic Left

### Introduction

When Jawaharlal Nehru University was founded in 1969, it was envisioned as a crucible of national reconstruction, an institution where free inquiry would flourish in the service of a newly independent nation reclaiming its intellectual autonomy. Yet, over the decades, this noble dream curdled into something deeply ironic. The humanities and social sciences departments that were expected to decolonize Indian education became instead the laboratories for re-colonizing the Indian mind. The university's founders wanted to shape a self-confident generation grounded in India's civilizational heritage yet conversant with modern thought; what emerged was a culture of deracination, cynicism, and intellectual mimicry. The irony is almost tragic: the very departments that should have embodied the spirit of Indian self-awareness and renewal came to represent the most sustained assault on India's cultural continuity. Within a few decades, Jawaharlal Nehru University's

humanities, social sciences, and English departments became synonymous with ideological capture — a space where Western theories of power, class, gender, and identity were worshipped as the new Vedas, and where the timeless insights of the Upanishads or the sutras of Panini were treated as irrelevant, regressive, or, worse, dangerous.

### Main Essay

In his extensive critique of Indian academia, Professor Kapil Kapoor, former Pro-Vice-Chancellor of JNU, described this transformation as “the production of

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1. Professor & Head, Department of English & Foreign Language, Guru Ghasidas Vishwavidyalaya

alienated minds, Indians proficient in the idioms of Western thought but strangers to their own civilisation” (*Sabda, Text and Interpretation in Indian Thought*, 2004, p. 22). Kapil Kapoor’s lament was not nostalgic but diagnostic. He saw, from within, how the English departments of India — and especially those at JNU — became transmission belts of borrowed epistemologies. Students emerged with impeccable command over Foucault and Derrida but could not interpret a single verse of Kalidasa or Bhartrhari without Western mediation. What was presented as intellectual sophistication was, in fact, dependency disguised as theory. In the name of critical thinking, young Indians were trained to despise the metaphysical and ethical frameworks of their own culture. As Makarand R. Paranjape would later observe, JNU became “the ideological laboratory of India’s secular elite” (*JNU: Nationalism and India’s Uncivil War*, 2016, p. 18). For him, the problem was not merely political but pedagogical: an entire generation was being conditioned to believe that to be progressive meant to be anti-traditional, anti-national, and anti-civilizational.

This ideological drift was not accidental. It arose from the uncritical importation of Western critical theories into Indian academic life. Marxism, structuralism, post-colonialism, feminism, and psychoanalysis were received not as intellectual tools to be adapted but as moral certainties to be obeyed. In the classrooms of JNU, to quote Marx or Gramsci was to be enlightened; to quote Sri Aurobindo, Swami Vivekananda, or Dr Radhakrishnan was to be branded reactionary. Such binaries, enforced by peer pressure and faculty culture, replaced intellectual freedom with ideological conformity. As Shankar Sharan notes in his essay “Marxism and Indian Academics” (2020, p. 4), “In India, Marxism succeeded not by the power of truth but by the control of institutions.” He exposes how Marxist and Left-leaning academics infiltrated not only universities but school textbooks and public discourse, ensuring that every narrative of Indian civilisation was filtered through a lens of class struggle and oppression. This institutional colonisation of consciousness is what Rajiv Malhotra calls the “production of secular sepoys” — Indians who, though racially and geographically rooted here, intellectually serve Western paradigms (*Breaking India*, 2011, p. 233). In JNU, one finds this phenomenon in full maturity. The postcolonial Indian academic now mimics the Western critic who once mimicked the coloniser. The loop of dependency is complete.

The result of this intellectual monoculture is visible in the moral and cultural sensibility of students. They enter university brimming with curiosity about their country and leave convinced that their traditions are oppressive, their religion regressive, and their history a tale of shame. The humanities, which once cultivated the

refinement of mind and empathy of spirit, now breed suspicion toward the very notion of dharma. The social sciences, instead of studying society to improve it, often reduce it to a field of ideological experimentation. What is celebrated as “critical thinking” is in fact a new orthodoxy — an orthodoxy of negation. In this climate, civilizational pride is condemned as chauvinism, while self-contempt is praised as intellectual virtue. As Paranjape observes in *Decolonizing the Indian Mind* (2018), “Our intellectual decolonisation cannot be achieved through Western tools, because those tools presuppose our inferiority.” Thus, the self-hatred bred in the colonial era has been modernised in the name of critical theory. The same grammar of subordination continues, only now the master is not the British official but the Western theorist whose words are treated as scripture.

The ideological orientation of JNU’s humanities has also altered the very meaning of education. In the traditional Indian view, *vidyā* was that which liberated (*sa vidyā ya vimuktaye*). It led the student from ignorance to knowledge, from bondage to freedom. But at JNU, education has been redefined as activism — the student is taught not to seek truth but to manufacture slogans. The classrooms have become arenas of political rehearsal, the teachers moral referees in battles of ideology. Paranjape recounts how, in the 2016 campus crisis, students who shouted “*Bharat tere tukde honge*” were defended not as misled youth but as heroes of dissent. The institution that once sought to nurture national reconstruction now seemed proud of producing disaffection. The revolt against colonial power had morphed into a revolt against civilisational selfhood. The cry of “Azaadi” no longer referred to spiritual liberation, as in the Upanishads, but to a materialist rebellion against the very concept of the Indian nation. The Left, once a critique, became a creed.

Professor Kapil Kapoor has rightly warned that “when a nation’s intellectual class loses faith in its own civilisation, its universities become factories of self-hatred” (*Indian Knowledge Systems and Cultural Values*, 2003, p. 41). The crisis of Indian academia is therefore not merely institutional or pedagogical but existential. A civilisation that has survived millennia of invasions and disruptions now faces an insidious internal erosion — an erosion not of temples or texts, but of meaning. The Indian mind, fractured by colonial rule, was never allowed to heal; post-independence education deepened that wound by replacing the English missionary with the Marxist professor. In both cases, the native intellect was treated as something to be reformed, purified, corrected — never respected on its own terms.

JNU’s example is emblematic rather than exceptional. It reflects a larger malaise across the Indian university system, where imitation has replaced

introspection and ideology has replaced philosophy. The task of national regeneration, therefore, must begin with a fundamental reform of the humanities. For India to truly decolonize, it must re-anchor its universities in the soil of its own civilisational thought. The challenge is not to reject the West but to transcend dependency — to use reason, not reverence, when engaging foreign theories. The humanities must once again become the guardians of dharma, not its detractors. The first step toward that renewal is to expose the ideological fortress that has taken root in institutions like JNU, a fortress built not of stone but of syllabi, jargon, and unexamined assumptions.

### **Textbook Marxism: How Ideology Captured the Classroom**

The transformation of Indian higher education into an ideological factory did not occur through open revolution but through gradual infiltration, syllabus by syllabus, textbook by textbook, and training programme by training programme. The humanities and social sciences departments at JNU became the nucleus from which this infiltration radiated outward, influencing the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), state education boards, and university curricula across India. This intellectual capture was systematic. It operated through what Shankar Sharan aptly calls “the silent institutional colonisation of consciousness” (*Marxism and Indian Academics*, 2020, p. 4). By taking control of syllabus committees, examination boards, and research fellowships, Marxist and Left-leaning academics converted academic legitimacy into ideological authority. They replaced the study of Indian civilisation with the study of its supposed failures, re-interpreted history as a continuous class struggle, and reduced dharma to a pre-modern superstition. Thus the Indian classroom, from the school to the university, became the battleground of a cultural civil war fought with the weapons of theory.

This process can be traced in the evolution of JNU’s own curriculum. In the 1970s, when the School of Social Sciences was established, its orientation was not neutral but overtly ideological. The founders saw themselves as heirs to the European Enlightenment and as moral guardians against “reactionary traditions.” The first generation of professors introduced Marxist historiography, materialist sociology, and critical pedagogy as normative frameworks. By the 1980s, these perspectives had become institutional orthodoxy. Rajiv Malhotra’s analysis of post-colonial Indian academia explains the mechanism well: “The control of discourse replaces the control of territory. Whoever defines the narrative defines the future” (*Breaking India*, 2011, p. 229). In JNU, the narrative was defined by a small but powerful circle of Left intellectuals who wrote the textbooks, supervised the research, and controlled journal publications. Once these gatekeepers established

themselves, dissenting voices were gradually excluded. A scholar rooted in Indian knowledge systems was seen as a “Hindutva sympathiser,” while a Westernised Marxist was hailed as “progressive.” The terms of legitimacy were thus reversed; scholarship was judged not by intellectual rigour but by ideological alignment.

The cultural consequence of this monopolisation has been devastating. Textbooks in history, sociology, and political science began to erase or distort episodes that did not fit the Marxist narrative. Ancient India was portrayed as a landscape of caste tyranny, medieval India as a golden age of syncretism, and modern India as a theatre of class struggle culminating in the Nehruvian state. The continuity of India’s civilisational ethos— its philosophical unity, its cultural pluralism, its ethical vision— was fragmented into antagonistic categories. In the humanities classrooms of JNU, the Mahabharata became a feudal allegory, the Ramayana a patriarchal text, the Gita a political manifesto, and the Upanishads “metaphysical escapism.” The student who questioned this reductionism was ridiculed as communal or unscientific. Shankar Sharan documents how “students were encouraged to view Hindu philosophy as myth, Islamic invasions as social reform, and colonial rule as progressive modernisation.” (*Marxism and Indian Academics*, 2020, p. 6). Through this inversion of values, the study of culture became an exercise in cultural humiliation.

The Left’s control over the humanities also reshaped the moral universe of the Indian student. The traditional Indian concept of shiksha— education as the unfolding of inner potential— was replaced by a concept of education as political mobilisation. The classroom ceased to be a space for reflection and became a rehearsal for revolution. Makarand R. Paranjape, who spent decades in JNU’s Centre for English Studies, observed this transformation with alarm. “We were producing activists, not thinkers,” he recalls in *JNU: Nationalism and India’s Uncivil War* (2016, p. 45). “The young were being trained to deconstruct everything— family, faith, nation, language— but never to reconstruct.” The outcome was a generation fluent in the vocabulary of grievance but illiterate in the language of gratitude. They could deconstruct a poem but not feel its beauty, analyse a ritual but not understand its symbolism. The very capacity for reverence — which in the Indian intellectual tradition is the basis of inquiry— was pathologised as fanaticism. The new humanities prided itself on suspicion; to believe in anything, even in truth, was to commit an ideological sin.

The textbook Marxism of JNU also influenced the visual and performing arts, film studies, and cultural criticism. The same theoretical vocabulary— power, patriarchy, subalternity, hegemony— invaded the study of

literature and aesthetics. Bharata's *Natyashastra*, Abhinavagupta's *Rasasutra*, and Anandavardhana's *Dhvani* theory, which offer profound insights into human emotion and artistic experience, were neglected or misread through Western lenses. Instead of teaching students to appreciate art as a means of self-refinement (*samskara*), the new curriculum taught them to view art as propaganda. A poem was not a revelation of truth but an instrument of class ideology. The spiritual and ethical dimensions of art were excised, leaving behind a sterile formalism. The consequence was visible in student politics itself: a coarsening of discourse, the disappearance of humility, and the rise of performative outrage. The humanities, once the custodian of sensibility, had become the factory of anger.

This ideological conditioning has had measurable sociological outcomes. Many of the students trained in this intellectual culture became journalists, NGO professionals, and teachers who, in turn, reproduced the same framework. The cycle of indoctrination perpetuated itself through cultural capital. Rajiv Malhotra calls this the "institutional ecosystem of Western thought," in which Indian academics act as "intellectual middlemen" translating Western theories into Indian contexts without critical adaptation (*The Battle for Sanskrit*, 2016, p. 33). This mimicry not only stifles creativity but also perpetuates epistemic dependency. The Indian mind, instead of engaging the world from its own metaphysical foundation, approaches itself through borrowed categories. Thus, what appears as progressive scholarship is, in fact, the continuation of colonial epistemology under socialist banners.

The damage extends beyond the classroom into the moral psychology of the nation. A people repeatedly taught that their civilisation is oppressive cannot love it without guilt. A youth trained to see faith as false consciousness and family as patriarchy becomes incapable of reverence. What the Left calls emancipation is, in fact, dispossession. The result is not freedom but nihilism— a freedom from meaning itself. As Paranjape observes in *Decolonizing the Indian Mind* (2018), "The Left has replaced religion with resentment, dharma with discourse, and faith with fashion." The consequences of this intellectual deracination are now visible in the national life of India— in the mockery of tradition on social media, in the disdain for Sanskrit learning, in the apologetic tone of public intellectuals when speaking of Hindu culture. This is not merely cultural amnesia; it is a programmed self-erasure.

Yet, despite decades of ideological dominance, resistance is emerging. Scholars like Kapil Kapoor, Rajiv Malhotra, and Shankar Sharan have begun to expose the academic monopolies that have kept Indian thought on the margins. Their work signals the beginning of what

Malhotra calls "the home-team renaissance" — an attempt to reclaim intellectual sovereignty by re-embedding the humanities in India's civilisational soil. The rise of alternative publishing platforms, independent journals, and civilisational institutes represents the first tremors of a paradigm shift. But the entrenched Left establishment still controls the university machinery, the peer-review process, and the global funding networks that reward ideological conformity. For change to be meaningful, it must involve not only new textbooks but new teachers— scholars grounded in dharma, capable of engaging the world without apology or imitation.

The history of JNU's humanities is thus a parable of modern India's intellectual tragedy: a nation that won political freedom but surrendered cultural sovereignty. Its classrooms became battlegrounds of borrowed ideas, its textbooks monuments of self-doubt. The Left achieved what colonialism could not — the internalisation of inferiority. To restore the health of India's mind, the humanities must be purged of dogma and reoriented toward truth. The next chapter will explore the deeper consequence of this ideological monopoly — the erosion of cultural memory, the breaking of civilisational continuity, and the moral vacuum that has followed.

### **Shankar Sharan and the Anatomy of Ideological Capture: The Case of JNU**

Among the few Indian scholars who have confronted the intellectual domination of Marxism and Left ideology within the country's universities, Dr. Shankar Sharan stands out for his moral courage and clarity. A Hindi scholar, educationist, and member of NCERT's academic fraternity, Sharan writes not from the vantage of Western academic fashion but from a rooted Indian civilisational consciousness. His book (*JNU Ka Sach*, 2016) and his later essays such as *Marxism and Indian Academics* (2020) constitute an unflinching exposé of how Jawaharlal Nehru University — once envisioned as a centre of intellectual excellence — degenerated into what he calls "an ideological cantonment." In his public lectures, including widely viewed YouTube talks like "Jawaharlal Nehru University as a Tool of Communist Takeover" (2021, Indic Talks channel) and "*JNU ka Sach — Shankar Sharan in Conversation*" (2020, *Bharat Vichar Manch*), he argues that the university is no longer a seat of learning but a workshop of ideological production, training students in resentment rather than reflection. His work represents a rare convergence of insider observation, civilisational critique, and empirical witness.

In *JNU ka Sach*, Sharan traces the genealogy of this institutional drift. The university, he notes, began with a noble purpose: to democratise knowledge and provide advanced research opportunities to meritorious students. But, by the late 1970s, the Left had realised the power of academic institutions as instruments of cultural

hegemony. Professors influenced by Marxist historiography and Western radicalism gradually occupied decision-making positions. The recruitment committees, funding agencies, and peer-review boards became monopolised by the same ideological fraternity. Once the appointments were controlled, the syllabi followed. Sharan writes: “In JNU, the student learns quickly that he must repeat certain phrases— class struggle, patriarchy, communalism— if he wishes to succeed. The examination rewards conformity, not creativity.” (*JNU Ka Sach*, p. 41). This, he explains, is how indoctrination disguises itself as scholarship. The purpose of education— to awaken discrimination (*viveka*)— has been replaced by the mechanical recitation of Marxist scripture.

His critique is not limited to the political behaviour of the campus; it extends to the epistemological assumptions that shape its teaching. In both his book and his talk “JNU as a Tool of Communist Takeover”, Sharan dissects the Marxist epistemology that dominates the humanities at JNU: the belief that material forces determine consciousness, that spiritual ideas are superstructures, and that religion is necessarily oppressive. Such reductionism, he insists, is alien to the Indian mind, which has always seen consciousness as the primary reality. “To reduce civilisation to economy,” he says in his lecture, “is to invert the natural order of life. Bharat built temples, not factories, because it knew that prosperity without purpose is ruin.” The standing ovation that followed this line in his 2021 talk speaks to the resonance of his message in a generation hungry for intellectual authenticity.

In *Marxism and Indian Academics* (2020), Sharan documents the infiltration of Marxist methodology into history writing and humanities syllabi. He notes: “Marxists replaced the British colonial periodisation with their own, but the contempt for India remained the same. They called it progressive to despise Hindu civilisation, and modern to ridicule its metaphysics” (p. 6). His analysis of the Cambridge School of historians and their Indian disciples reads like a forensic report on cultural subversion. He provides examples of textbooks that portray the Vedic age as primitive, Bhakti as proto-revolutionary, and colonialism as developmental. “The trick,” he writes, “was to change the language but keep the inferiority complex.” (p. 8). This is precisely the kind of critique that Makarand R. Paranjape echoes in *JNU: Nationalism and India’s Uncivil War* (2016), where he describes JNU as “a university whose brightest students can deconstruct Derrida but cannot translate a single Sanskrit verse” (p. 102). Sharan and Paranjape, though coming from different linguistic traditions— Hindi and English— converge in their conclusion: that JNU’s intellectual culture has turned inwardly colonial.

In his YouTube conversations, Sharan deepens this theme of “intellectual colonisation.” In the 2021 talk “Jawaharlal Nehru University as a Tool of Communist Takeover”, he explains that the Left in India succeeded not by persuasion but by institutional occupation. “They took control of entry points— selection committees, student unions, and journals. Once inside, they decided what counts as knowledge. Anything that affirmed Indian civilisation was marked communal, anything that denied it was progressive.” This systemic control, he argues, explains why debates on campus are illusory; they occur within parameters set by the Left itself. In another video interview, “JNU ka Sach— An Insider’s View”, he laments that even after global socialism’s collapse, “our universities remain the last bastion of dead ideas.” When asked why the JNU model persists, Sharan answers bluntly: “Because ideology pays. It gives power without accountability, and prestige without performance.” Such statements, though uncomfortable, encapsulate the moral rot he identifies— the replacement of merit with ideological loyalty.

Sharan’s linguistic style — austere, unembellished, almost surgical— gives his critique a particular gravity. Unlike the postmodern verbosity of the scholars he criticises, his prose carries the moral clarity of conviction. His Hindi writings aim at a larger readership beyond the English-educated elite, democratising the discourse on decolonisation. This accessibility has made him one of the most influential intellectuals of India’s civilisational revival movement. His YouTube presence has extended his reach to younger audiences alienated by the jargon of academic theory. When he declares, “Bharatiya buddhijeevi apni sabhyata ke viruddh sikhaaye ja rahe hain” (“Indian intellectuals are being taught to despise their own civilisation”), the line circulates widely because it captures a sentiment long felt but seldom articulated.

Yet his work is not merely reactive. Sharan proposes a vision of reform. He insists that the humanities in India must return to their civilisational foundations— the integration of knowledge and virtue. “We need universities that teach the Upanishads beside Aristotle, not departments that quote Marx to dismiss both,” he said in a 2022 interview. His call for intellectual pluralism challenges both the Left’s hegemony and the Right’s anti-intellectualism. For him, decolonisation is not revenge but recovery— a restoration of intellectual sovereignty. He argues that Indian education must cultivate *viveka* (discernment), *shraddha* (respect for truth), and *sambandha* (relation to one’s roots). Without these, education becomes mechanical, culture becomes ornamental, and civilisation becomes hollow.

Sharan’s critique of JNU has drawn predictable hostility from the academic establishment, but it has also

provoked serious introspection among younger scholars. Many of his YouTube lectures have comment sections filled with students confessing that his words made them “see the university differently.” This is significant because it shows that ideological indoctrination, while deep, is not irreversible. His influence now extends beyond polemic; it has become pedagogical. In the closing of the programme JNU ka Sach, Sharan said, “The task of the teacher is not to produce dissenters but seekers. When truth is treated as opinion, civilisation perishes.” This aphorism could well serve as the epigraph to the intellectual crisis of our age.

Through his writings and talks, Shankar Sharan has performed a crucial service to Indian academia: he has named its disease. He has reminded the nation that universities, if divorced from their civilisational soil, become rootless and restless. His work stands as both diagnosis and prescription— a diagnosis of ideological capture, and a prescription for intellectual integrity. He exposes the hypocrisy of an elite that preaches freedom but punishes faith, that celebrates diversity but enforces conformity, that derides Indian civilisation while living off its tolerance. Against this tide of cynicism, Sharan reaffirms the classical Indian conviction that knowledge must serve truth, and truth must serve the good. His voice, calm yet uncompromising, restores to the word scholarship its lost relevance.

### **The Erosion of Civilisational Memory: How the Humanities Unmade India’s Cultural Mind**

The deepest damage inflicted by the ideological domination of the humanities and social sciences at Jawaharlal Nehru University and similar institutions lies not in their politics, but in their slow, methodical erasure of civilisational memory. Memory, for India, has never been merely historical recall; it is the very medium of being. To remember is to participate in continuity. A civilisation rooted in the oral transmission of truth— in śruti, in smṛti, in paramparā— sustains itself through acts of remembrance, through the unbroken chain of teachers and students, of ideas and ideals. When that chain is deliberately broken, what collapses is not merely the past but the very axis of identity. Over the last fifty years, the Indian humanities, under the spell of imported theories and ideologies, have undertaken precisely such an act of rupture. By rejecting their own intellectual ancestors, they have cut themselves off from the source of meaning, leaving in their place a sterile landscape of jargon, grievance, and borrowed categories.

In the classrooms of JNU and its ideological satellites, civilisational continuity has been rewritten as oppression. The Vedas, instead of being seen as repositories of metaphysical insight, are presented as instruments of social control. The Manusmṛiti is invoked not to understand the evolution of jurisprudence but to caricature an entire civilisation as hierarchical and unjust.

The Mahabharata and Ramayana are stripped of their symbolic and ethical depth, treated instead as patriarchal myths. The Upanishads, whose subtle monism inspired both Eastern and Western philosophy, are dismissed as abstract speculation detached from social reality. Every text that once bound India to its spiritual inheritance is now treated as a problem to be solved, not a wisdom to be explored. This hermeneutic hostility has ensured that Indian students can graduate with degrees in philosophy, history, or literature without ever encountering a serious study of Shankara, Bhartrhari, Abhinavagupta, or the Dharmashastras. The entire intellectual landscape that produced India’s moral and artistic genius has been rendered invisible.

Rajiv Malhotra, in *The Battle for Sanskrit* (2016, p. 33), calls this phenomenon “epistemic digestion” — a process by which Western scholars absorb the knowledge of other civilizations, strip it of context, and repackage it in alien categories, thereby erasing its origin. What began as Western academic appropriation has now been internalised within Indian universities. Our scholars no longer need foreign colonisers to misread our texts; they do it themselves, armed with the latest vocabulary of subalternity and gender theory. The tragedy is that this erasure occurs not out of malice but out of mimicry. The Indian academic, taught to regard his own culture as a site of guilt, adopts Western frameworks to earn moral legitimacy. The resulting discourse is schizophrenic — outwardly radical, inwardly derivative. This is what Paranjape calls “the self-hatred of the colonised elite” (*JNU: Nationalism and India’s Uncivil War*, 2016, p. 87). The more they speak of liberation, the more they echo their intellectual masters.

Shankar Sharan has described this inversion of values with characteristic precision. “Our education,” he writes, “teaches the Indian child that his gods are myths, his saints are superstitious, and his civilisation is oppressive; it teaches him to pity his ancestors and to worship his colonisers.” (*Marxism and Indian Academics*, 2020, p. 9). This is not rhetoric but observation. The ideological regime that governs the humanities today is sustained through shame. Students are taught to feel embarrassed about their heritage, suspicious of their traditions, and superior in their alienation. The Indian who knows his culture is treated as provincial; the one who despises it is celebrated as global. This perverse moral economy rewards self-denial as virtue and punishes pride as sin. It has created, in Malhotra’s words, “a class of secular sepoy — intellectual soldiers trained to fight their own civilisation.” (*Breaking India*, 2011, p. 233). They dominate media, academia, and public discourse, shaping opinion and policy through a lens of inherited contempt.

Nowhere is this erosion of civilisational memory more visible than in the study of history. The Left's dominance of academic historiography since independence has ensured that Indian history is written as a chronicle of oppression rather than achievement. The continuity between the Vedic, classical, and medieval ages is erased; the creative synthesis of cultures is replaced by narratives of perpetual conflict. The achievements of Hindu civilisation in philosophy, art, architecture, science, and ethics are downplayed or attributed to external influences. The moral imagination that sustained Indian society through centuries of invasion and upheaval is dismissed as reactionary mythology. The student who emerges from this historical training is not a patriot but an orphan, cut off from his lineage, bereft of gratitude, armed only with resentment. He knows Marx's Capital but not Chanakya's Arthashastra; he can discuss Gramsci's hegemony but not Yajnavalkya's dialogue with Gargi. He may call himself critical, but he has lost the ability to discriminate — to exercise viveka — between truth and ideology.

The consequences of this cultural amnesia extend beyond academia. A society that forgets its memory loses its moral compass. Ethics in India was never a matter of commandments but of conscience — of dharma, the inner law that harmonises individual duty with cosmic order. When this concept is caricatured as social conservatism, the foundation of moral life collapses. We see the results everywhere: in the rise of nihilistic politics, in the decay of family structures, in the cynicism of public life. A civilisation without memory becomes a civilisation without measure. The humanities departments that were meant to cultivate ethical reflection have instead normalised moral relativism. The postmodernist celebration of "multiple truths" has dissolved the distinction between truth and falsehood, between art and propaganda, between freedom and licence. What was once the path of knowledge has turned into a desert of opinion.

Yet, amidst this desolation, certain voices have tried to restore continuity. Scholars like Kapil Kapoor and Makarand Paranjape insist that recovery must begin with remembering — remembering not as nostalgia but as re-rooting. Kapoor's lifelong work on Indian linguistics and hermeneutics demonstrates that the Indian mind always sought synthesis, not division. "Our tradition," he writes, "never separated knowledge from value, or learning from life. The purpose of study was not to question for its own sake but to understand what is real." (*Sabda, Text and Interpretation in Indian Thought*, 2004, p. 11). This vision of knowledge stands in stark contrast to the critical cynicism of contemporary academia. Paranjape, likewise, calls for "a decolonisation of consciousness," urging universities to replace imported theories with indigenous

frameworks. In his essay "Decolonizing the Indian Mind" (Swarajya, 2018), he declares that India's intellectual future depends on recovering "the courage to think with her own categories." This courage, he implies, is not arrogance but authenticity — a willingness to be oneself without apology.

The erosion of civilisational memory is not irreversible. Memory, unlike material wealth, can be revived through attention. The same institutions that have propagated alienation can, if transformed, become instruments of renewal. The recovery of India's intellectual selfhood must begin with the recognition that truth is not the monopoly of any ideology. The humanities must be freed from the tyranny of Western frameworks and restored to their natural purpose — the cultivation of wisdom, empathy, and insight. This reclamation requires more than curricular reform; it demands moral reorientation. Teachers must become transmitters of memory, not technicians of ideology. Students must learn to see the past not as a burden but as a foundation. The Sanskrit concept *smṛti* — remembrance — must once again become central to education, for in remembrance lies resurrection.

What is at stake in this struggle is nothing less than the survival of India's soul. If a civilisation's continuity resides in its collective memory, and if that memory is erased by its own universities, then it faces cultural suicide. The long night of ideological colonisation can end only when India rediscovers the luminous intelligence of her own tradition — the unity of knowledge and virtue that once made her the spiritual teacher of the world. The next chapter will turn to the most insidious instrument of this cultural erasure — the English department — and examine how literature itself was weaponised to sever Indians from their linguistic, aesthetic, and moral inheritance.

### **The English Department as a Tool of Cultural Deracination: Western Theories and Marxist Historians**

The English department, more than any other academic space, became the transmission belt for India's intellectual deracination. What began in colonial universities as a project of "civilising the native" through English literature continued, after Independence, in the more insidious guise of post-colonial criticism. In Jawaharlal Nehru University, this metamorphosis took a particularly ideological form: the English classroom became a theatre where Western guilt narratives were performed by Indian actors. Instead of freeing the Indian mind from colonial epistemology, the new English studies deepened dependency by teaching students to view their own civilisation through the eyes of the European critic. The canon was simply replaced, not re-imagined. Instead of Milton, Shakespeare, and Eliot as the unquestioned

authorities, students now studied Foucault, Derrida, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Ania Loomba — each of whom, though critical of colonialism, continued to define the Indian in Western terms. The theoretical vocabulary of “othering,” “subalternity,” and “discourse” became the new scripture, its mastery the passport to intellectual legitimacy. Thus, as Professor Kapil Kapoor observed, “We unlearned English only to learn it again as theory; we changed masters, not paradigms” (*Sabda, Text and Interpretation in Indian Thought*, 2004, p. 23).

Among those most influential in institutionalising this Westernised pedagogy was Ania Loomba, whose *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (Routledge, 1998) remains a staple text in Indian universities. Loomba’s book, now widely circulated as gospel in JNU and allied departments, presents post-colonialism as a progressive critique of empire, yet the epistemological frame she operates within remains deeply Eurocentric. Her entire method presumes that Indian civilisation, like other colonised entities, can only be understood in relation to the West — as its victim or as its mimic. There is no autonomous Indian subject in Loomba’s world, only a derivative one reacting to colonial power. Her casual conflation of Hindu philosophical tradition with patriarchy and feudalism reveals how deeply she is shaped by Western feminist and Marxist templates. What passes as post-colonial theory is, in effect, an extension of colonial epistemology into the idiom of guilt. The Indian student, after reading Loomba, does not emerge decolonised but further disoriented — taught to interpret his civilisation as a pathology needing Western diagnosis. Postcolonialism, as taught in JNU’s English department, thus became not a liberation from colonialism but its intellectual afterlife.

The historical departments of JNU, meanwhile, ensured that the student’s temporal imagination was equally colonised. The triumvirate of Marxist historians — Romila Thapar, Bipan Chandra, and Irfan Habib — fashioned an entire national narrative around class struggle and materialist determinism. In their writings, the rich metaphysical and ethical texture of Indian civilisation was flattened into sociological categories. *The Penguin History of Early India* (Thapar, 2002) reduces the Vedic age to an economic system and the Mahabharata to an ideological contestation of elites. Bipan Chandra’s *India’s Struggle for Independence* (1988) interprets the freedom movement primarily as a class realignment rather than as a moral awakening. The moral dimension of figures like Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, and Lokmanya Tilak is either omitted or trivialised. In these historiographies, dharma vanishes, replaced by dialectic; sacrifice gives way to surplus value. The historical imagination is recoded into a Marxist schema where ideas are superstructures and spirituality is false consciousness. The effect is devastating: generations of Indian students

have been taught to regard their saints as reactionaries and their sages as ideologues.

Makarand R. Paranjape, in *JNU: Nationalism and India’s Uncivil War* (Rupa, 2016), offers a rare insider’s witness to this environment. He writes: “What was once the pursuit of truth has been replaced by the performance of ideology. The English Department and the History Centre became twin citadels of the Left — one produced slogans in prose, the other supplied footnotes” (p. 45). His observation, at once witty and tragic, captures the inversion of purpose within JNU’s humanities. The English department, supposed to refine aesthetic sensibility, now produced political polemicists fluent in jargon but tone-deaf to poetry. The History department, supposed to reconstruct the past, turned into a tribunal judging it. Paranjape recounts the hostility he faced from colleagues for merely invoking India’s spiritual heritage or defending the idea of nationhood: “To them, any mention of Bharat as a civilisational reality was evidence of communalism. Their secularism demanded amnesia.” (p. 89). Such testimonies reveal the daily coercion of academic life under ideological uniformity — the moral bullying disguised as critical thinking.

Shankar Sharan, in his searing essays on JNU and Indian academia, amplifies this diagnosis. In *Marxism and Indian Academics* (2020) and *The Myth of the Left Intellectual* (2019), he documents how institutional Marxism, having lost relevance globally, survives parasitically within Indian universities through government subsidies and ideological networking. “Nowhere in the world,” Sharan writes, “does Marxism enjoy state patronage except in India’s cultural ministries and universities. Here, failure has become qualification; the more detached from reality, the higher the prestige” (p.7). He names JNU as the epicentre of this intellectual inversion, where Left scholars dominate selection committees, control grants, and ensure the reproduction of their worldview. In another essay titled *JNU: Intellectual Decay and Political Arrogance* (2018), Sharan warns that “the university which was meant to be a laboratory of ideas has become a battlefield of slogans. Its students are not taught to think but to hate.” His words echo Paranjape’s lament, yet they come from a different vantage — that of a scholar observing the corrosion from outside the elite circle. Together they offer an anatomy of the institutional pathology that has replaced scholarship with propaganda.

The impact of such ideological capture on English studies is profound. Literature departments no longer teach the joy of language, the moral imagination, or the play of aesthetics. Instead, they teach suspicion — of author, of text, of tradition, of truth. Every poem becomes a conspiracy of power; every novel an allegory of oppression. Ania Loomba’s frameworks, combined with

the Marxist historicism of Thapar and Chandra, have created a generation of Indian students incapable of reading their own literature without apology. The Ramayana must be taught as patriarchy, the Gita as political manipulation, the Mahabharata as class conflict. A student may complete an MA in English without reading Subramania Bharati or A.K. Ramanujan, but not without mastering the difference between Edward Said and Spivak. The internalised inferiority of colonialism has been reborn as theoretical sophistication. To quote Paranjape again: “Our universities have replaced the coloniser’s whip with his words; the chain is now made of jargon” (JNU, 2016, p. 102).

The tragedy is that this ideological regime has become self-perpetuating. Journals, conferences, and peer-review networks reward conformity. To question Loomba’s Eurocentrism or Thapar’s Marxism is to risk professional ostracism. The result is an intellectual monoculture masquerading as pluralism. Rajiv Malhotra describes this as the “Indian Left’s academic cartel,” which polices discourse under the guise of secularism (*Breaking India*, 2011, p. 241). Students exposed to this cartel emerge fluent in critique but barren in creation. They know how to dismantle meaning but not how to generate it. They have mastered the rhetoric of oppression but forgotten the grammar of reverence. What the English department once called “close reading” has been replaced by ideological coding — the ability to detect the prescribed set of oppressions in every text. The teacher, once a guide to beauty and insight, has become a political commissar.

This distortion of the humanities has exacted a terrible price. India’s young, among the most intelligent in the world, are being educated out of their own identity. Their intellectual selfhood has been outsourced to imported frameworks and domestic gatekeepers. The civilisational memory described in the previous chapter is now actively suppressed through pedagogy. The Left, having lost moral authority in the world, clings to it in Indian classrooms. Its most loyal missionaries are not foreign professors but Indian ones who, like Ania Loomba and Romila Thapar, mistake abstraction for analysis and ideology for illumination. The task of the coming decade, as thinkers like Paranjape, Shankar Sharan, and Kapil Kapoor insist, is to dismantle this cartel — not by censorship but by competition, not by silencing but by scholarship. India’s intellectual freedom will not come from banning Marx but from recovering Manu, not from rejecting theory but from restoring tattva — truth grounded in experience. Until then, the English departments and social-science faculties of our great universities will remain palaces built on borrowed metaphors, echoing the accents of empire while proclaiming emancipation.

The next section will turn toward the broader social and political consequences of this academic deracination — the moral relativism, permissive values, and civilisational exhaustion that have seeped from the campus into the culture at large, corroding public life and weakening the moral imagination of the nation.

### **From the Classroom to the Nation: The Cultural Fallout of Academic Deracination**

The ideas that germinate in universities rarely remain confined to their classrooms. They leak, they spread, they mutate — and eventually they become the unseen grammar of public life. The deracination that took root in the humanities and social sciences of Jawaharlal Nehru University has now diffused across India’s media, arts, bureaucracy, and politics, producing a culture where self-doubt passes for sophistication and civilisational cynicism masquerades as enlightenment. What was once an academic fashion has hardened into a national temperament — a posture of ironic detachment from one’s own heritage. The young journalist who mocks the temple tradition, the filmmaker who sneers at dharma, the bureaucrat who quotes Marx with pride but cannot read a single line of the Gita — all are the children of this pedagogy. The Indian mind, once luminous with synthesis, is now fragmented by ideology. The humanities, meant to cultivate empathy and self-understanding, have become instruments of alienation.

The long-term consequence of this academic culture is a corrosion of moral and civilisational confidence. The postcolonial university taught the Indian youth to feel ashamed of their inherited values — chastity became repression, fidelity became patriarchy, devotion became superstition, and faith became fanaticism. The Left intellectuals who dominated the academy insisted that liberation meant the rejection of all restraint. Thus, permissiveness was enthroned as freedom. In literature, this took the form of unbridled relativism; in social life, it translated into the erosion of sanctity; and in politics, it appeared as moral opportunism disguised as secularism. The Left’s creed of suspicion has dissolved the distinction between right and wrong, sacred and profane, truth and propaganda. In its zeal to destroy every hierarchy, it has destroyed the very notion of order. Makarand R. Paranjape remarks on this cultural collapse in *JNU: Nationalism and India’s Uncivil War* (2016, p. 145): “A generation taught only to question can no longer discern what is worth defending. When all truths are relative, treachery becomes a point of view.” His words echo like a prophecy fulfilled in the moral confusion of contemporary India.

The diffusion of this ideology beyond the campus has reshaped India’s intellectual landscape. Many journalists, filmmakers, and writers who now dominate public discourse are products of the same educational

apparatus that produced JNU's academic culture. Their contempt for the civilisational ethos of India is not accidental; it is the logical outcome of their training. When the humanities define enlightenment as dissent and morality as repression, the result is a nation embarrassed by its own existence. The film "The Kashmir Files" (2022) exposed this cultural hypocrisy. The massacre of Kashmiri Pandits — one of the darkest chapters of modern Indian history — was ignored or rationalised by the very intelligentsia that prides itself on "speaking truth to power." The film's success was not merely cinematic; it was civilisational. It forced the public to confront the silence of the so-called liberal elite, a silence manufactured by decades of ideological brainwashing. What the historians refused to record, the filmmakers revealed. The classroom's denial had produced the nation's amnesia.

Shankar Sharan's writings on Indian academia illuminate this process with unflinching clarity. In *Marxism and Indian Academics* (2020), he observes: "The Indian Left has turned universities into factories of moral inversion. The students who should have become citizens of a civilisation are turned into critics of their own nation. They are taught that loyalty is fascism and that betrayal is courage" (p. 12). His description is not metaphorical. The generation that entered universities in the 1980s and 1990s now occupies positions of power in the cultural industries. Their worldview, shaped by Ania Loomba's postcolonialism and Romila Thapar's Marxism, governs what is published, filmed, and taught. Thus, the colonial mission of civilising the native has been continued by native intermediaries themselves. As Rajiv Malhotra wrote in *Breaking India* (2011, p. 255), "The coloniser's greatest success lies in breeding natives who think like him." This intellectual mimicry has become so normalised that it no longer appears as mimicry at all; it is the water in which our academic fish swim.

The moral fallout of this intellectual regime is visible in the breakdown of meaning itself. The youth, deprived of a coherent cultural narrative, oscillates between nihilism and narcissism. The older generation, confused by the rhetoric of "progressive" scholarship, retreats into silence. The public sphere, stripped of reverence, degenerates into outrage. The Indian elite — educated in Western categories but inhabiting an Eastern society — lives in a condition of cognitive dissonance. They preach pluralism but practice dogma; they condemn nationalism but worship Western power; they mock religion but seek spiritual therapy in foreign retreats. This schizophrenia is the direct offspring of academic deracination. A people who have been taught to despise their gods will eventually despise themselves. When every value is deconstructed, only emptiness remains.

The irony is that this collapse of meaning is now defended in the name of freedom. The JNU model of intellectualism — perpetual dissent without purpose — has become a badge of honour in urban India. To be educated is to be cynical; to be patriotic is to be naïve. Kapil Kapoor foresaw this inversion two decades ago: "A civilisation perishes not when its temples fall but when its teachers lose faith in truth. The Indian university has become a monastery without monks — a place where knowledge is worshipped only in theory" (*Indian Knowledge Systems and Cultural Values*, 2003, p. 39). His diagnosis is now a social reality. The young Indian, deprived of intellectual roots, drifts between borrowed ideologies and borrowed pleasures, unable to distinguish between liberty and license. The moral exhaustion of India's elite — visible in art, media, and politics — is the final consequence of the university's betrayal of dharma.

Yet, even within this desolation, the stirrings of renewal can be felt. A new generation of thinkers — some trained within the very universities they critique — is reclaiming the intellectual space once monopolised by the Left. Makarand Paranjape's writings, Rajiv Malhotra's civilisational scholarship, Kapil Kapoor's linguistic and philosophical work, and Shankar Sharan's cultural critiques represent the front line of this counter-revolution. They call not for censorship but for balance, not for exclusion but for inclusion of indigenous frameworks. They ask a simple question: can Indian civilisation not be studied on its own terms? Their answer is an emphatic yes. The task now is to re-found the humanities — to rebuild the disciplines of literature, history, and philosophy on Indian foundations. This does not mean rejecting Western thought but integrating it into a broader, civilisational synthesis. The Upanishads must stand beside Plato, Bhartrhari beside Saussure, Kautilya beside Machiavelli, Abhinavagupta beside Aristotle. Only such intellectual pluralism can restore balance to the academy.

If India fails to reform its humanities, the cost will not be merely academic but existential. The nation that forgets its mind will lose its soul. The battle for India's future will not be fought in parliaments or streets but in classrooms — in what is taught, what is silenced, and what is remembered. The civilisational renewal that the twenty-first century demands must begin with epistemic self-respect. The humanities must cease to be laboratories of deracination and become once more temples of wisdom. The duty of the scholar is not to destroy meaning but to reveal it; not to sneer at tradition but to understand it; not to imitate but to illuminate. Only then can the Indian university rediscover its purpose — to educate, in the deepest sense of the word: to lead the soul from darkness to light, from borrowed cynicism to native clarity, from intellectual servitude to spiritual freedom.

## Conclusion

The six sections of this study collectively reveal the anatomy of a civilisational crisis disguised as academic progress. The ideological capture of JNU's humanities and social sciences — through the dominance of Western theories, Marxist historiography, and post-colonial frameworks — represents not simply a pedagogical shift but a profound inversion of values. A university that was meant to educate the intellect has ended up un-educating the soul. The Indian student, once envisioned as an inheritor of millennia of philosophical and ethical reflection, is now trained to deconstruct his inheritance and distrust his own civilisation. The English departments teach him to read his scriptures as myth, the historians instruct him to regard his ancestors as oppressors, and the social-science syllabi convince him that faith and nation are illusions. What began as a project of enlightenment has turned into an enterprise of estrangement.

In the preceding sections, figures such as Makarand R. Paranjape and Kapil Kapoor testify from within the academy to the corrosion of intellectual integrity, while Rajiv Malhotra exposes the global networks of “epistemic digestion” that perpetuate the West's interpretive monopoly. Yet it is Shankar Sharan's diagnosis that gives this critique its sharpest edge. His *JNU ka Sach* and his numerous lectures strip away abstraction to reveal the mechanism of ideological power: the capture of the institutional gatekeeping apparatus that defines what counts as knowledge. Sharan's insistence that Marxism in India survives only because of state patronage and academic inertia unmasks the moral bankruptcy of an establishment that mistakes cynicism for scholarship. He stands as the moral conscience of the Indian university, reminding us that education without truth becomes propaganda, and freedom without faith degenerates into nihilism.

The larger implications of this crisis extend far beyond JNU. When universities lose their sense of the sacred, nations lose their sense of the self. The erosion of civilisational memory in the academy translates into cultural amnesia in the public sphere — a phenomenon now visible in the moral relativism of Indian media, the superficial cosmopolitanism of the elite, and the loss of seriousness in public debate. The humanities, having abdicated their duty to refine the moral imagination, now produce citizens without conviction. This spiritual vacuum is the greatest danger to India's future, for a civilisation without faith in its own continuity cannot sustain freedom.

Yet the very articulation of this crisis signals the possibility of renewal. The rise of alternative scholarship — by Paranjape, Kapoor, Sharan, and Malhotra — indicates that the monopoly of ideological thought is beginning to crack. The path forward is not repression but reform, not iconoclasm but integration. India must re-

anchor its humanities in the philosophical soil of dharma, satya, and viveka. This does not mean isolation from global thought but participation in it as an equal, no longer as a colony of categories. The Indian university must rediscover its vocation as a sanctum of wisdom, where the Upanishadic call “*tamaso mā jyotir gamaya*” — “from darkness lead me to light” — guides the search for knowledge. However, there have been attempts to reverse this trend in JNU after the political change in India in 2014, and the post-2014 Vice chancellors have attempted to change the eco system of JNU and make it nationalist.

In conclusion, the struggle for India's civilisational selfhood will be won or lost not in the streets but in the seminar rooms, not in manifestos but in syllabi. To reform the humanities is to reclaim the nation's memory; to reclaim that memory is to secure its future. The crisis of JNU is therefore not merely academic — it is the mirror of India's soul. Its redemption will come when the Indian mind once again dares to think in its own idiom, guided not by the resentments of ideology but by the serenity of truth.

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