The Asian Thinker
A Quarterly Bilingual Peer-Reviewed Journal for Social Sciences and Humanities
Year-7 Volume: IV (Special), October-December, 2025
Issue-28 ISSN: 2582-1296 (Online)
Website: www.theasianthinker.com **Email**: asianthinkerjournal@gmail.com

34. Ethics from the East: The Role of Indian Knowledge Systems in AI Governance

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ABSTRACT

The intersection of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and ethics has become central in debates about the societal impact of technology. As AI systems influence critical sectors like healthcare, finance, and law enforcement, their ethical implications are global in scope, affecting individuals across diverse cultural backgrounds. While much of AI ethics has traditionally drawn upon Western philosophies such as consequentialism and deontology. Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) offer an alternative ethical framework rooted in principles of balance, interconnectedness, duty, and non-violence. This article paper seeks to explore how IKS, with its rich philosophical heritage from texts like the Vedas, Upanishads, and Bhagavad Gita, can inform the ethical development and deployment of AI. By integrating concepts such as Dharma (ethical duty), Ahimsa (non-violence), and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the world as one family), we propose an ethical framework that emphasizes inclusivity, human dignity, and societal well-being. IKS offers a pathway to an AI governance model that is human-centered, inclusive, and sustainable, addressing ethical challenges with a uniquely global perspective.

KEYWORDS: Artificial Intelligence, Ethics, Human centered-AI, Indian Knowledge Systems, Dharma, Ahimsa, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam

1. Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming industries worldwide, driving efficiency, innovation, and automation in healthcare, finance, transportation, and education [1]. The potential benefits of AI are immense; it promises enhanced decision-making, the ability to handle vast amounts of data, and the automation of repetitive tasks, all of which can significantly improve productivity and create new opportunities [2]. For instance, in healthcare, AI assists in diagnostic procedures and personalized treatments, while in finance, it enables real-time fraud detection and predictive analytics. However, the rapid expansion and integration of AI technologies into key sectors raise critical ethical concerns that must be addressed to ensure responsible development and deployment.

Among the foremost ethical concerns are privacy, accountability, and bias. AI systems often rely on massive datasets, much of which is personal information collected from users, sometimes without their full understanding or consent. This raises concerns about privacy and data security, especially when AI is used in surveillance or predictive policing. Accountability is another crucial issue, as the complexity of AI systems often makes it difficult to trace their decision-making processes, raising questions about who should be held responsible when an AI system fails or causes harm. Bias within AI systems is a persistent challenge, as these systems may inadvertently perpetuate existing inequalities if trained on biased data, leading to unfair or discriminatory outcomes[3-4].

While these ethical issues have been largely addressed through Western ethical frameworks, such as utilitarianism, deontology, and rights-based approaches, there is an increasing recognition that these frameworks alone may not suffice. Western ethical models, often individualistic in nature, may not fully capture the social and communal dimensions of ethics that are crucial in a culturally diverse world [5-7]. Furthermore, the influence of AI extends across global contexts, impacting societies with varied cultural values, belief systems, and social structures. This growing cultural and societal influence of AI calls for an inclusive ethical approach that reflects diverse worldviews and moral perspectives, especially those from non-Western philosophies[8-12].

2. Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) and Their Ethical Foundations

Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) comprise ancient Indian philosophical, spiritual, and ethical traditions rooted in texts like the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, and various classical Indian philosophies[13-14]. IKS provides a holistic ethical framework emphasizing interconnectedness, harmony, and moral responsibility. Key principles in IKS—such as Dharma (ethical duty), Ahimsa (non-violence), Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (universal inclusivity), and Karma (action and consequence)—offer a distinctly human-centered approach to ethics, which is highly relevant in the context of AI [15]. These principles encourage a balanced, ethical approach that considers the impact of actions on individuals, communities, and the natural world, making them particularly valuable for ethical AI governance.

- **2.1 Dharma (Ethical Duty):** Dharma refers to one's moral responsibility and ethical duty towards society. In the context of AI, Dharma emphasizes the responsibility of developers, businesses, and governments to create AI systems that serve the greater good, uphold justice, and ensure fairness. This principle encourages a sense of duty to prioritize human well-being over purely economic or technological advancement. An AI system guided by Dharma would emphasize transparency, fairness, and justice, ensuring that its applications benefit society rather than exacerbating inequalities or harming individuals [10].
- **2.2 Ahimsa (Non-Violence):** Rooted in the concept of non-violence, Ahimsa advocates for minimizing harm to all forms of life. In AI ethics, Ahimsa translates into a focus on user well-being, data privacy, and the ethical use of AI technologies. AI systems developed with Ahimsa in mind would aim to avoid harm, such as invasions of privacy or decisions that could adversely affect certain groups or individuals. This principle also encourages developers to avoid harmful practices and consider the

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social impact of their technologies, ensuring that AI contributes positively to society and respects human rights [12].

2.3 Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (Universal Inclusivity): This principle, often translated as "the world is one family," underscores the importance of inclusivity and equality. In AI governance, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam supports the idea that AI should be accessible to all, irrespective of socioeconomic status, ethnicity, or geographical location. This principle advocates for an AI framework that considers the needs of diverse communities and works to mitigate any biases that may result in unfair or discriminatory practices. By emphasizing global welfare and solidarity, this approach encourages the development of AI systems that respect cultural diversity and promote equity [8].

2.4 Karma (Action and Consequence): Karma is the principle of cause and effect, highlighting the long-term consequences of actions. In AI governance, Karma stresses the importance of accountability and the responsibility of AI developers and organizations to consider the long-term impacts of their technologies. An AI system guided by Karma would emphasize sustainability and responsibility, ensuring that short-term benefits do not lead to harmful long-term consequences. This principle also reinforces the need for ethical audits, transparency, and policies that hold AI developers accountable for the societal impact of their creations [13-14].

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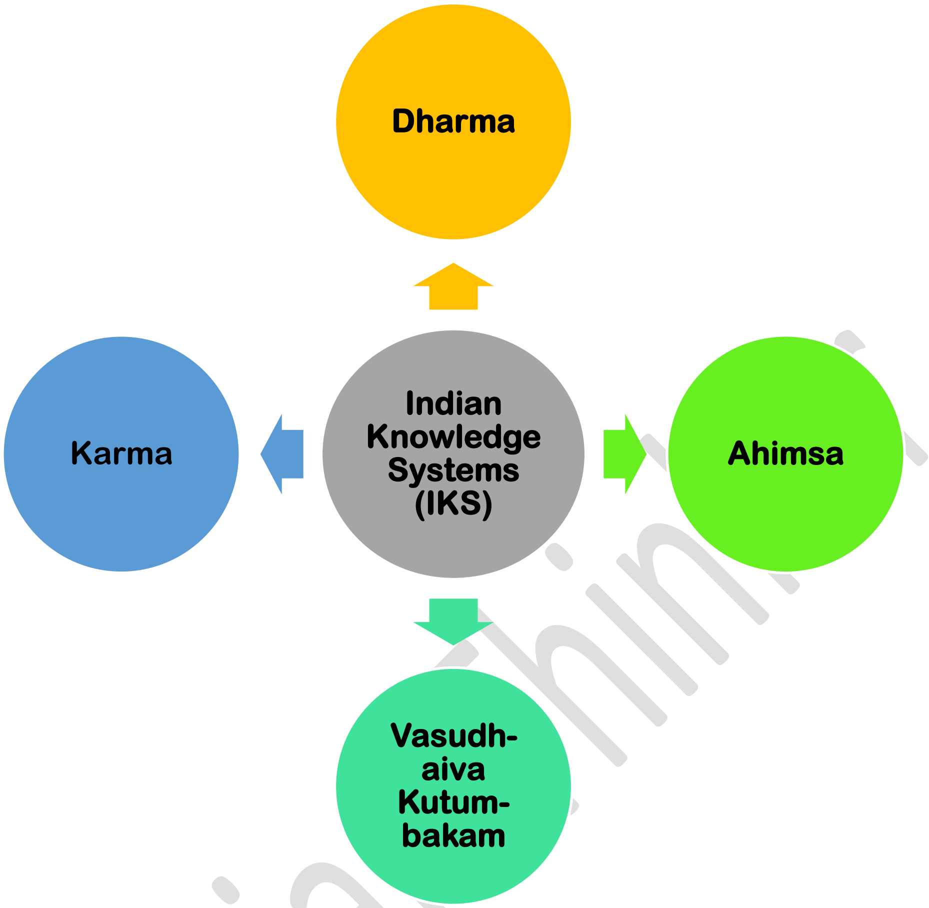

Figure 1. Indian knowledge system and its ethical foundation

3. Ethical Frameworks from IKS for AI Development

Building on these key concepts, we can derive a comprehensive ethical framework from IKS to guide AI development [8-10].

3.1 Holistic Well-being (Svasthya)

In Indian philosophy, well-being (*Svasthya*) is not limited to physical health but encompasses mental, emotional, social, and spiritual health as well. AI development should be aligned with the goal of promoting holistic well-being for individuals and society. This means that AI systems should not only be technically advanced but also designed to improve quality of life. AI technologies in healthcare, education, and environmental management, for instance, should aim to enhance the overall well-being of individuals and communities.

3.2 Balance and Harmony (Sattva)

The concept of *Sattva*, meaning balance and harmony, plays an important role in Indian philosophy. AI development should strive to maintain a balance between technological innovation and ethical considerations. For example, while AI can significantly improve efficiency in various sectors, it should not come at the cost of fairness, privacy, or inclusivity. AI developers must find a balance that allows for both technological progress and ethical responsibility.

3.3 Ethical Leadership (Rajadharma)

Rajadharma refers to the ethical responsibilities of leaders, especially those in positions of power. In the context of AI, ethical leadership is critical for ensuring that AI technologies are developed and used in ways that benefit society. Governments and corporations that are developing AI systems should be held to high ethical standards, ensuring transparency, accountability, and the protection of public welfare. *Rajadharma* emphasizes the role of leaders in setting ethical standards for AI governance and ensuring that the technology is used for the greater good.

4. Ethical AI Framework Based on Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS)

An ethical AI framework grounded in Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) aims to create a balanced approach that emphasizes societal welfare, compassion, inclusivity, and accountability. By incorporating principles from IKS, this framework moves beyond traditional, profit-driven approaches and advocates for a holistic model that respects human dignity and cultural diversity [7-8]. The following core areas illustrate how IKS can inform an ethical AI framework:

1. Ethical Duty and Responsibility (Inspired by Dharma)

Principle: Dharma in Indian philosophy refers to moral duty, ethical responsibility, and actions that support societal well-being. In an AI context, Dharma emphasizes that AI development should prioritize the welfare of society over the pursuit of profit or technological advancement for its own sake.

Application in AI: To integrate Dharma, policies must prioritize creating systems that serve collective welfare. For instance, AI tools in healthcare and education should focus on improving access, equality, and outcomes, rather than just financial profitability.

Guidelines:

- Develop AI systems that align with community welfare, prioritizing public good over corporate gains.
- Design policies that mandate socially responsible AI development, ensuring that AI serves to uplift and support society rather than deepen inequalities.
- Encourage developers to consider the broader impact of their systems, fostering an ethical commitment to avoid harm and advance societal well-being.

2. Harm Reduction and Compassion (Guided by Ahimsa)

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Principle: Ahimsa, or non-violence, advocates for minimizing harm to all living beings. In the context of AI, Ahimsa means ensuring that technology is developed with a conscious commitment to reducing harm, avoiding exploitation, and promoting user safety.

Application in AI: An Ahimsa-inspired approach ensures that AI does not cause physical, emotional, or psychological harm. For example, minimizing biases in AI algorithms reduces the likelihood of discriminatory practices that could harm marginalized communities.

Guidelines:

- Establish safety protocols to ensure that AI systems do not inflict harm, directly or indirectly, on individuals or groups.
- Create transparency in AI decision-making to avoid "black box" models that can lead to unintended harm due to unexplainable outcomes.
- Implement bias detection and mitigation practices, with regular audits to identify and correct potential harms related to discrimination or unfair treatment.

3. Inclusivity and Fairness (Based on Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam)

Principle: Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, often translated as "the world is one family," promotes universal inclusivity and equality. This principle aligns with the vision of developing AI that serves everyone, transcending socioeconomic, cultural, and geographic boundaries.

Application in AI: Inclusivity in AI means ensuring accessibility and fairness across different demographics, fostering social equity, and designing technology that benefits all members of society. This principle is particularly relevant in addressing biases and promoting a balanced representation in AI datasets and models.

Guidelines:

- Design AI technologies that are accessible to individuals from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, ensuring no one is excluded due to financial or geographic constraints.
- Mandate diversity in AI datasets to prevent biases, ensuring fair and equitable treatment for all communities.
- Promote user-centered design that takes into account the needs of underrepresented groups and marginalized communities, aiming for AI that reflects the values and interests of society as a whole.

4. Accountability and Sustainability (Grounded in Karma)

Principle: Karma, or the law of cause and effect, emphasizes the importance of responsibility and awareness of the long-term consequences of one's actions. In an AI framework, Karma encourages accountability and consideration of the extended impact of AI systems on future generations and the environment.

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Application in AI: Integrating Karma means that developers, organizations, and policymakers consider the broader, long-term effects of AI technology, including potential unintended consequences and societal changes.

Guidelines:

- Ensure accountability in AI development through strict ethical audits, impact assessments, and transparent practices.
- Prioritize sustainable AI technologies that consider environmental implications, reducing energy consumption and promoting eco-friendly practices in AI operations.
- Develop policies that enforce accountability for AI decisions and outcomes, holding developers and companies responsible for the social and ethical impacts of their systems.

5. Challenges and Opportunities

Integrating IKS into AI ethics poses challenges, including the difficulty of translating philosophical concepts into technical standards and potential resistance in global contexts accustomed to Western ethics [2], [5]. However, the inclusion of IKS offers unique opportunities to enrich the ethical landscape of AI, fostering a model that respects cultural diversity and promotes inclusive growth [8].

Aspect	Challenges	Opportunities
Conceptual Translation	- Translating IKS philosophical ideas (e.g., *Dharma*, *Ahimsa*) into actionable AI ethics guidelines can be challenging due to their abstract, context-dependent nature.	- Encourages interdisciplinary collaboration between philosophers, ethicists, and technologists to develop more culturally aware AI ethics frameworks.
Standardization	- Difficulty in creating standardized frameworks, as IKS principles are interpretative and may vary in application across different contexts.	- Provides flexibility for creating context-sensitive guidelines that respect local values while addressing global AI ethics concerns.
Resistance in Global Contexts	-Potential resistance from organizations and societies accustomed to Western ethical standards and	- Promotes cultural inclusivity in AI ethics by broadening perspectives beyond Western values,

	frameworks for AI governance.	appealing to diverse populations worldwide.
Scalability of Ethical Frameworks	- Adapting IKS-based ethical principles to scalable AI technologies may require complex adjustments and localized interpretations.	- Encourages the creation of adaptable AI governance models that align with specific cultural needs and values in diverse regions.
Operationalization of IKS	- Operationalizing values like *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (universal inclusivity) may be challenging in competitive or market-driven AI applications.	- Emphasizes a shift toward inclusive and human-centered AI systems that prioritize social equity and global welfare over purely economic interests.
Long-term Impact Measurement	- Applying principles like *Karma* (consequences) demands long-term ethical impact assessments, which may be complex and resource-intensive to implement.	- Reinforces accountability and foresight in AI design, promoting sustainable and ethically responsible AI development and deployment.
Educational Gaps	- Lack of widespread understanding of IKS values among developers and policymakers may hinder effective integration into AI frameworks.	- Provides an opportunity for educational initiatives and cultural training programs to build awareness of diverse ethical perspectives in AI.
Cultural Sensitivity in AI Design	- Ensuring culturally sensitive AI design may complicate product development, especially for global AI products designed for varied user groups.	- Fosters a more globally relevant, inclusive AI ethics landscape that respects cultural nuances and promotes universal human dignity.

6. Conclusion

The integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into the realm of AI ethics offers a transformative approach to the development and deployment of artificial intelligence technologies. As AI continues to shape industries, societies, and individual lives, it is essential to create a framework that not only innovates but also upholds ethical standards aligned with human dignity and societal well-being. The principles of Dharma (ethical duty), Ahimsa (non-violence), Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (universal inclusivity), and Karma (cause and effect) provide a uniquely holistic foundation that goes beyond Western ethical models, emphasizing compassion, responsibility, and interconnectedness.

Incorporating IKS principles into AI ethics encourages developers, policymakers, and corporations to adopt a broader perspective—one that values collective welfare and inclusivity. By embedding Dharma, AI systems can be guided by an ethical responsibility that prioritizes the greater good over short-term gains. Ahimsa inspires the development of AI systems designed to minimize harm, protect user privacy, and respect individual rights. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam underscores the importance of inclusivity and fairness, ensuring that AI serves diverse communities without discrimination. Finally, Karma highlights accountability, fostering an awareness of long-term consequences and advocating for sustainable practices.

The fusion of ancient wisdom with modern technology has the potential to create AI systems that are not only groundbreaking in their capabilities but also ethical, inclusive, and sustainable. This approach can enrich global AI ethics discourse, contributing to a more balanced, culturally informed, and responsible trajectory for AI. In a world where technology increasingly influences every aspect of life, adopting an IKS-based ethical framework represents a meaningful step toward AI that respects and uplifts humanity as a whole.

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