



Literature as a Protective Humanistic Resource: Student Distress, Technocratic Education and an Indigenous Humanistic Perspective

Dr. Uttam Kumar Mandal



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Abstract

Contemporary education across the globe has increasingly been shaped by technocratic rationality, prioritizing employability, measurable outcomes, digital efficiency, and market-oriented skills over holistic human development. While such orientations have enhanced technical proficiency, they have simultaneously coincided with a significant rise in student distress, manifesting as anxiety, alienation, burnout, and loss of meaning. This interdisciplinary paper argues that literature functions as a protective humanistic resource capable of mitigating student distress by cultivating sympathy, empathy, emotional resilience, ethical imagination, and a sense of purpose. Drawing upon literary studies, psychology, education, and philosophy, the study critically examines the limitations of technocratic education and reasserts the humanistic role of literature. The paper further integrates an indigenous Indian philosophical perspective through the thought of Sree Sree Thakur Anukulchandra, whose conception of art and literature emphasizes enthusiasm, disciplined joy, service, and aspirational becoming. The study contends that reintegrating literature into contemporary curricula is not merely an aesthetic or cultural necessity but a pedagogical and ethical imperative for student well-being in the twenty-first century.

Keywords: Literature, Student Distress, Humanistic Education, Technocratic Education, Indigenous Philosophy, Sree Sree Thakur Anukulchandra



Introduction

The twenty-first century has witnessed an unprecedented transformation in educational priorities. Across national and institutional contexts, education is increasingly governed by technocratic rationality, wherein learning is valued primarily for its efficiency, standardization, and utility in enhancing employability and economic productivity. Curricula are streamlined to meet market demands, assessment systems prioritize quantification, and digital platforms regulate pedagogical processes through data-driven metrics. Students are encouraged to perceive education as a technical investment yielding calculable returns.

While this orientation has generated efficiency and expanded access to professional skills, it has also produced unintended consequences. A growing body of research documents a sharp rise in student distress, including stress, anxiety, depression, emotional exhaustion, and a pervasive sense of meaninglessness (Reddy, 2023). These concerns are particularly visible in highly competitive and technologically mediated learning environments, where performance pressure eclipses reflective and affective dimensions of education.

Within this context, the marginalization of the humanities especially literature has intensified. Often dismissed as impractical or non-essential, literature is increasingly excluded from core curricula. This paper challenges such exclusion by arguing that literature constitutes a vital protective humanistic resource. By engaging the emotional, ethical, and imaginative capacities of learners, literature addresses dimensions of student well-being neglected by technocratic education. Integrating contemporary interdisciplinary research with the indigenous humanistic philosophy of Sree Sree Thakur Anukulchandra, the paper proposes a renewed framework for understanding literature's role in sustaining and nurturing student mental health and holistic development.

Technocratic Education and the Crisis of Student Distress

Technocratic education prioritizes efficiency, standardization, and outcomes that can be readily measured and monetized. Knowledge is valued in so far as it contributes directly to economic productivity, and learners are increasingly conceptualized as data points within human capital. Such an orientation exerts profound psychological pressure on students, who internalize performance metrics as measures of self-worth.

Empirical studies in higher education consistently demonstrate a correlation between performance-driven and technologically regulated learning environments and elevated levels of stress, anxiety, and burnout (Frontiers in Education, 2025). In India, similar trends have been observed across universities and professional institutions, where academic competition, digital overload, and uncertainty regarding employment prospects intensify mental health challenges (Das & Amiruddin, 2023).

Technocratic education also neglects the existential dimension of learning. When education is reduced to procedural efficiency and external achievement, students often experience alienation from their studies and from themselves. This existential distress characterized by loss of meaning, motivation, and belonging cannot



be adequately addressed through technical or administrative interventions alone. It requires educational practices that engage the inner life of learners.

Literature and the Humanistic Tradition

Humanistic education views learning as a process of cultivating the whole person intellectually, emotionally, ethically, and socially. Within this tradition, literature has historically occupied a central position because it engages fundamental human concerns: suffering and joy, conflict and reconciliation, identity and purpose.

Unlike technical disciplines that seek definitive solutions, literature thrives on ambiguity and interpretive plurality. Through narrative, metaphor, and character, literary texts invite readers to inhabit diverse perspectives and confront moral complexity. Such engagement fosters empathy, critical reflection, and emotional awareness which are essential for both personal integration and social coexistence (Nussbaum, 2010).

The systematic marginalization of literature in contemporary curricula represents a shift in educational values. When literature is reduced to an optional enrichment activity, education forfeits one of its most effective means of addressing ethical sensibility and emotional depth. Reclaiming literature as a core educational resource is therefore central to restoring balance between technocratic competence and humanistic understanding.

Literature as a Protective Psychological Resource

From a psychological perspective, literature functions as a protective resource by supporting emotional regulation, resilience, and self-understanding. Narrative engagement allows readers to externalize inner conflicts, recognize shared vulnerabilities, and process complex emotions in symbolic form. Characters in literary texts often confront adversity, ambiguity, and moral dilemmas, offering readers vicarious experiences of coping and growth.

Research in narrative psychology and bibliotherapy suggests that literary engagement enhances empathic capacity and social connectedness, countering isolation and emotional suppression (Azmi, 2025). Studies have also shown that reading literary fiction improves theory of mind, enabling readers to better understand the mental states of others (Kidd & Castano, 2013).

In the Indian context, growing attention is being paid to mental health within higher education policy and practice. National initiatives increasingly recognize the importance of preventive and supportive interventions alongside clinical care (Ministry of Education, 2025). Literature, by legitimizing emotional depth and introspection, contributes to such preventive frameworks by strengthening students' psychological resources.



Ethical Imagination and Moral Formation

Beyond its psychological benefits, literature plays a crucial role in ethical development. Technocratic education often emphasizes compliance, efficiency, and optimization, leaving limited space for moral deliberation grounded in lived experience. Literature, by contrast, situates ethical questions within concrete human situations, revealing the tensions between values, intentions, and consequences.

Engagement with narrative conflict cultivates moral imagination the capacity to envision the impact of actions on others and to deliberate ethically in situations that resist formulaic solutions (Thakar & Prajapati, 2025). Literature thus contributes to character formation not by prescribing moral doctrines but by fostering reflective judgment, empathy, and responsibility.

Such ethical sensibility is especially vital in pluralistic societies, where students must navigate cultural diversity, social inequality, and competing value systems. Literature provides a space for such navigation, enabling learners to engage ethically with difference and complexity.

An Indigenous Humanistic Perspective: Sree Sree Thakur Anukulchandra on Literature

An indigenous humanistic perspective on literature is articulated in the philosophy of Sree Sree Thakur Anukulchandra, who conceives art and literature as dynamic forces integral to human becoming. In his view, literature awakens enthusiasm and stimulates an unfolding of ideas that elevates the mind through a disciplined pleasure oriented toward service and success.

For Sree Sree Thakur, the joy derived from literature is not passive entertainment but an energizing force that propels individuals toward purposeful action. He emphasizes that literature operates through skill and means while generating an “uphill sensation” a metaphor for aspirational striving against inertia and inner stagnation. This conception aligns literature with effort, discipline, and ethical growth rather than escapism.

In the *Message* Sree Sree Thakur dictates:

“What makes one
luminous
with an enthusiastic unfoldment of ideas
that elate the mind
with a pleasure-push
to service and success
in the way of becoming
by means and skill
that operates
with an



uphill sensation,

is Art and Literature.” (Chakraborty, 189)

Such a vision directly challenges technocratic views that reduce literature to leisure or ornamentation. Instead, literature becomes a formative humanistic resource that harmonizes emotion, empathy, intellect, and will. When situated within contemporary educational discourse, Sree Sree Thakur’s philosophy offers a culturally grounded framework that resonates strongly with current concerns regarding student distress, resilience, and holistic development, as emphasized in the National Education Policy 2020.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interdisciplinary, and conceptual research design grounded in critical hermeneutics and narrative synthesis. The aim is theory-building rather than hypothesis testing, seeking to integrate insights from education, psychology, literary studies, and philosophy to reframe student distress under technocratic education.

A structured review of scholarly literature was conducted across major databases in education and social sciences. Textual and philosophical analysis was applied to selected theoretical works in humanistic psychology, critical pedagogy, and literary humanism. The writings and verse of Sree Sree Thakur Anukulchandra were examined through close reading and thematic coding to extract concepts relevant to education and wellbeing. These concepts were triangulated with contemporary educational theory to construct an integrative framework.

The study employs analytical generalization rather than statistical inference. The approach does not depend on causal effects of literature on distress; instead, it offers a theoretically grounded model of how literature can function as a protective humanistic resource.

Interdisciplinary and Policy Implications

An interdisciplinary approach reveals literature’s multifaceted value in addressing student distress. Educational theory emphasizes learner-centred pedagogy, reflective engagement, and meaning-making, all of which align naturally with literary study. Philosophical perspectives underscore the role of narrative in identity formation, while sociological approaches highlight literature’s contribution to cultural literacy and social awareness.

The findings of this study suggest that student distress cannot be effectively addressed solely through counselling services, stress-management workshops, or productivity training. Such responses treat distress as an individual pathology rather than as a structural outcome of technocratic educational culture. A more sustainable solution requires curricular and pedagogical reform that re-centres humanistic learning within higher education.



Higher Educational Institutes should institutionalize literature and the humanities as integral components of professional and technical education. Interdisciplinary modules that combine literary narratives with science, engineering, or management studies can enable students to reflect on ethical responsibility, social meaning, and personal identity alongside technical competence. Literature-based discussion fosters interpretive dialogue, emotional literacy, and critical self-awareness capacities directly linked to psychological resilience. Teacher education programs should incorporate humanistic pedagogy, training instructors to move beyond transmission-based teaching toward dialogic and reflective modes of instruction. Assessment frameworks should be diversified to include reflective writing, ethical reasoning, and narrative understanding, rather than relying exclusively on standardized performance indicators.

At the policy level, literature may be reconceptualised as a preventive mental health resource. NEP 2020's emphasis on holistic development, multidisciplinary learning, and Indian Knowledge Systems provides a conducive framework for such integration. Accrediting bodies and funding agencies can incentivize humanities integration by recognizing wellbeing, civic responsibility, and moral development as legitimate educational outcomes. In this way, literature shifts from a marginal cultural subject to a strategic resource for national educational resilience.

Pedagogically, this requires moving beyond rote literary analysis toward dialogic, reflective, and experiential approaches. Journals, discussions, and creative responses enable students to connect literary texts with personal and social realities, fostering both academic rigor and emotional growth.

Conclusion

The rise of student distress in the age of technocratic education reflects a profound imbalance in contemporary educational priorities. While technical competence and employability are essential, they are insufficient to sustain the psychological, ethical, and existential well-being of learners. This paper has argued that literature functions as a protective humanistic resource by nurturing empathy, emotional resilience, moral imagination, and a sense of purpose.

By integrating interdisciplinary scholarship with the indigenous humanistic philosophy of Sree Sree Thakur Anukulchandra, the study demonstrates that literature is not a peripheral luxury but a pedagogical necessity. Reclaiming literature at the heart of education can help cultivate not only skilled professionals but integrated human beings capable of reflective judgment, compassionate engagement, and purposeful living.

In an era marked by acceleration, uncertainty, and emotional strain, literature offers students a space of depth, connection, and aspiration. As such, it remains indispensable to any educational vision committed to human flourishing.



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