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REVISITING THE SOCIO-POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF DEENDAYAL UPADHYAYA

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ABSTRACT

Deendayal Upadhyaya remains a towering figure in the ideological history of modern India. His contributions to the socio-political discourse through the philosophy of Integral Humanism provided an indigenous alternative to Western political and economic models. Rooted in Indian civilizational ethos, his ideas emphasized the importance of cultural identity, ethical governance, and self-sufficiency. As India continues to evolve, his thoughts and principles offer valuable insights into addressing contemporary challenges. His advocacy for a development model that harmonizes material progress with cultural and moral values remains relevant today. By revisiting and applying his ideas in governance and policy-making, India can continue to build a self-reliant and prosperous future while staying true to its heritage.

Deendayal Upadhyaya was not just an intellectual or a political leader but a visionary who sought to integrate rich traditions of India with modern governance. His legacy continues to inspire generations of thinkers, leaders, and policymakers striving to create a Bharat that is both modern and deeply rooted in its cultural ethos.

KEYWORDS: *Capitalism, Democracy, Independence, Integral Humanism, Socialism*

INTRODUCTION

Deendayal Upadhyaya holds an undeniably significant place in the intellectual and ideological framework of contemporary India. His contributions to the nativist knowledge system of Bharat, especially in the 21st century, have been widely recognized and continue to inspire socio-political thought. His ideas and philosophy have left a lasting impact on many institutions and individual thinkers, who continue to draw inspiration from his work for the betterment of socio-political conditions.

Deendayal Upadhyaya was not merely a political figure but also a profound thinker, writer, and philosopher. His intellectual contributions can be found in his extensive speeches, articles, and books, which form a comprehensive corpus of his philosophy. His writings particularly emphasize the socio-political dimensions of the Indian knowledge system, advocating for a governance model rooted in indigenous traditions and values rather than foreign ideologies. His deep engagement with the problems of post-independence India enabled him to formulate an alternative vision for the national development, one that was deeply rooted in Indian civilizational ethos. His vision was not just about reviving past but about integrating traditional wisdom with contemporary governance models to create a uniquely Indian approach to nation-building. His emphasis on a self-sufficient and morally guided polity distinguished him from many other political thinkers of his time.

Unlike many intellectuals who remain confined to academic or ideological circles, Deendayal Upadhyaya was deeply engaged with the people of India. He was not merely a thinker or a strategist behind the scenes; he was an active leader who worked at the grassroots level, understanding and addressing the problems faced by ordinary citizens. His first-hand experience of the struggles faced by common people played a crucial role in shaping his socio-political philosophy. He recognized that India, despite gaining independence in 1947, continued to suffer from poverty, inequality, and governance challenges. The dominant political and economic models, borrowed from the West, failed to address the unique needs and aspirations of Indian society. His response to these challenges was a call for a governance model that was authentically Indian, rooted in the national historical and cultural identity.

The cornerstone of socio-political philosophy of Deendayal Upadhyaya is the concept of Integral Humanism. Introduced in 1965 as the guiding philosophy of Integral Humanism sought to provide an indigenous alternative to Western ideologies such as socialism and capitalism. Upadhyaya argued that both of these systems were inherently flawed when applied to India, as they failed to consider the cultural and spiritual dimensions of Indian society. Integral Humanism is based on the idea that human beings are not just economic entities but also social, cultural, and spiritual beings. The philosophy envisions a holistic model of development that balances material progress with ethical and moral well-being. It rejects both the excessive materialism of capitalism and the state-controlled economy of socialism, advocating instead for a decentralized economic system based on self-sufficient village communities.

According to Upadhyaya, governance and economic policies should be designed in a way that aligns with its native traditions and values. He emphasized *Dharma* (righteous duty) as the guiding principle of governance, ensuring that political and economic decisions serve the collective welfare rather than individual greed. His model of development focused on small-

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scale industries, rural self-sufficiency, and a harmonious relationship between the state and society.

When India achieved independence from British rule in 1947, the nation faced a critical juncture. Various ideological and political perspectives competed to shape the future of the country. While leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru championed a socialist and secular model inspired by Western thought, others, including Deendayal Upadhyaya, believed that India should chart its own path based on its unique civilizational heritage.

One of his main critiques of post-independence India was the blind imitation of Western ideologies. He argued that the adoption of socialist economic policies and secular governance models alienated India from its own roots. In his view, a nation could only progress if it remained connected to its cultural and spiritual heritage. He believed that economic and political systems should evolve organically from the national traditions rather than being imposed externally.

To bridge this ideological gap, Upadhyaya proposed a governance model based on Integral Humanism. He envisioned a decentralized polity where power was distributed among local communities rather than being concentrated in a central authority. He also emphasized the role of ethics and morality in politics, arguing that leaders should act as custodians of the welfare of masses rather than pursuing personal or partisan interests.

Socio-Political Vision for Modern India

The ideological landscape of independent India has been shaped by multiple competing visions that sought to define the national political, social, and economic trajectory. Among these, the dominant model was the Nehru-Gandhi Vision of India, which emphasized socialism, secularism, and state-led economic planning. Another significant vision was that of Dr B.R. Ambedkar, whose contributions, enshrined in the Indian Constitution, focused on social justice, individual rights, and an institutional framework ensuring equality and empowerment of marginalized communities. These ideological models heavily influenced governance and political structures in the post-independence era.

Apart from these dominant frameworks, sociologists and social theorists also contributed to shaping Indian governance and development policies, particularly in the areas of caste, social mobility, and economic transformation. However, alongside these established knowledge systems, another critical yet often overlooked vision was that of Deendayal Upadhyaya, whose Integral Humanism provided a distinctive framework for nation-building. His ideas sought to integrate the cultural and spiritual heritage with modern governance, offering an alternative path for national progress that was deeply rooted in indigenous traditions.

After independence, Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister, pursued a development model influenced by Fabian socialism, Western liberalism, and state-led economic planning. This vision, often referred to as the Nehruvian model, emphasized: a strong central government to drive economic and social progress; planned economic development through Five-Year Plans, modelled on the approach of Soviet Union; secularism, where the state maintained a neutral stance in religious matters while ensuring minority rights; and scientific temper and modernization, prioritizing industrialization, technology, and higher education. Mahatma Gandhi, on the other hand, had envisioned a decentralized model of governance based on village self-sufficiency (Gram Swaraj), non-violence, and moral politics. However, the vision of Nehru largely overshadowed Gandhian principles in practical governance.

Beyond political leaders, Indian sociologists and intellectuals played a significant role in shaping governance and public policy. Thinkers like M.N. Srinivas and G.S. Ghurye analysed complex caste structures, social mobility, and urban-rural transformations in India. Their contributions influenced policies on reservation, affirmative action, and rural development. However, their impact remained largely within academic and policy circles rather than forming a broad political ideology.

In this chain of visions or knowledge frameworks, concept of Integral Philosophy also deserves a position. As Upadhyay himself stated that after independence the model of governance was not much debated by the cotemporary leaders and thinkers. He said that, “What would be the face of the new Bharath after independence? In which direction were we to advance? These questions were not precisely thought out. It would not be correct to say that no thought was devoted to these aspects. There were people who even at that time had considered these questions…” Integral Humanism offers a uniquely Indian solution to governance and socio-political challenges, rather than relying on Western ideologies such as capitalism or socialism. Unlike imported political philosophies that often disregard the cultural and spiritual dimensions of Indian society, Integral Humanism is deeply rooted in Indian civilizational ethos and reflects its long-standing traditions of balance, harmony, and ethical governance.

His philosophy is not merely an adaptation of ancient thought but a modern vision that integrates traditional wisdom with contemporary governance. It is based on the principle that development must align with its cultural values and spiritual identity rather than blindly following external models. By doing so, Integral Humanism seeks to establish a socio-political order that resonates with the soul of the nation, or *Chiti*, ensuring both material progress and ethical well-being. At the heart of Integral Humanism lies the concept of *Chiti*, which Upadhyaya described as the collective consciousness or soul of a nation. Just as an individual has a personality, every nation has a distinct spiritual and cultural essence that defines its identity. The governance and socio-political systems of a nation must reflect this inherent nature rather than being imposed externally. Western models, such as Marxism and liberal democracy, often fail in India because they do not align with its *Chiti*. The socio-political system should be designed in accordance with its own historical and ethical values rather than adopting systems that emerged from different cultural contexts. *Chiti* represents the guiding principles that sustain national unity, self-reliance, and social harmony. By understanding and nurturing *Chiti*, Integral Humanism ensures that Indian governance is not mechanical or imposed but rather organic and

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natural, allowing society to flourish in a way that respects its past while embracing the future.

One of the most striking aspects of Integral Humanism is its harmonization of material and spiritual needs. Upadhyaya rejected both extreme materialism (as seen in capitalism) and extreme collectivism (as seen in socialism), arguing that human beings require both economic prosperity and ethical fulfilment. Materialism alone leads to greed, exploitation, and social division. Excessive spiritualism, without material well-being, leads to poverty and stagnation. The ideal approach is a balance, where material growth is achieved through ethical means, ensuring both prosperity and moral integrity. In this way, Integral Humanism aligns with traditional philosophy of Dharma, which promotes a life of righteousness, duty, and responsibility while also recognizing the importance of economic well-being *(Artha)* and fulfilment *(Kama).*

All the scholars argue that the notion of *Chiti* (soul of nation) is most original contribution of Upadhyay to the Indian knowledge system, this concept elaborates that each nation has its own soul called *Chiti. Chiti* for each nation is important not only for its government but also for its civil society, which is aware about the socio-political conditions of the nation. He further elaborated that *Chiti* is faith-neutral, in society, people have complete rights to follow any faith.
While Nehru, Gandhi, and Ambedkar shaped the mainstream political thought of modern India, Integral Humanism deserves recognition as an alternative but equally significant ideological vision. His emphasis on holistic development, ethical governance, decentralization, and indigenous knowledge systems provided an alternative to the dominant Nehruvian and Ambedkarite frameworks.

Culturally Rooted Human and Global Citizen
Deendayal Upadhyay placed significant emphasis on the multifaceted nature of society, recognizing that individuals interact with various cultural influences throughout their lives. He believed that culture plays a crucial role in shaping both personal identities and the collective consciousness of a nation. For him, no single culture should be regarded as superior or inferior; rather, all cultural traditions have intrinsic value and contribute to human development. He strongly advocated for cultural rootedness, asserting that a deep connection to native traditions and heritage is essential not only for individual growth but also for national progress. Upadhyay approached this idea holistically, illustrating the intricate relationship between personal identity and national consciousness. One of his key philosophical beliefs was that the universe operates under natural laws that govern all existence. He argued that by adhering to these fundamental principles, individuals and nations can develop a sense of global responsibility. Upadhyay viewed these natural laws as being deeply embedded in culture and society, evolving organically over time. He believed that cultures have developed their own ways of interpreting and aligning with these universal principles, and that these cultural frameworks should be respected rather than dismissed in the face of modernity or globalization.

Furthermore, Upadhyay emphasized that the first duty of the nation is to ensure the fulfilment of its citizens basic needs. However, he also stressed that once a nation attains self-sufficiency and prosperity, it has a moral obligation to contribute to the welfare of the world. In his vision, surplus resources, knowledge, and advancements should not be confined within national borders but should be shared with the global community for the greater good. This aligns with his broader philosophy of integral humanism, where the well-being of humanity as a whole is as important as the progress of an individual nation.

A significant aspect of his thought process was his balanced approach to cultural integration. He did not advocate for an outright rejection of foreign cultural influences, nor did he promote blind adoption of external values. Instead, he proposed a synthesis that embraces the best elements of both local and global cultures. He believed that for a nation or an individual to be truly global, it is essential to retain indigenous cultural identity while also being open to external influences. To him, global identity was not about abandoning native traditions in favour of foreign ideas but rather about harmonizing them in a way that maintains the essence of cultural roots.

Ultimately, Upadhyay envisioned an ideal human being as a global citizen who remains deeply rooted in his or her native culture while also engaging with the world in a meaningful way. He rejected rigid dichotomies that pit local traditions against global modernity, advocating instead for a fluid and inclusive identity. His philosophy presents an approach where individuals and nations thrive by maintaining their unique cultural character while also contributing to and benefiting from the larger global civilization.

Integral Humanism and Western Materialistic Models
The political philosophy of Deendayal Upadhyaya was holistic in nature and on other side, maintained the space of individual in society. He stated that materialism alone cannot govern the society and individual; to maintain our ethical values in society it is necessary to indulge aspects of spiritualism. Deendayal extensively focused on human as central force of this earth and argued that unless human beings themselves not follow positive transformation, any system cannot function to optimal levels. So, the balance of human being with society, material and spiritualism is unique to his thought of socio-political philosophy. He argued that every individual has its own material need in society, so it is the duty of government to fulfil their material needs, in return to that people are bounded to national security and service towards it. Upadhyay elaborated his thesis of Integral Humanism in 1965, that was the period when cold war between two world powers was happening, all countries of the world were divided into two camps – socialism and capitalism and at that time he articulated his third alternative and emphasized that India has its own unique culture and ethos which represents its own *Chiti* and Virat. He rejected models of western soil; as both the models were originating from Europe which was the father of colonial culture. Both the models are based on the idea of materialism and believes that materialism is a core agency in society, one system emphasized on the individual and focused on capital in individual hands and other system wanted all resources in the hands of state. He not only questioned the subordination of individual to the state in communist regime but was also serious about the exploitation

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of big capitalists and to solve this problem, he proposed the idea of having small investments and small industries. He continuously emphasized that at both levels-political and economic-we should be self-reliant, so that no outer force can harm our interest in any situation. Further, he also liked the focus of Gandhi on village as central site of Modern India, not only for decentralization of economy but also for the socio-political aspects of village, which contained the real culture of India from centuries.

Novel Thinking and National Identity

Upadhyay throughout his works emphasized that the problems of Indian people and political society can only be saved by adopting our national identity and providing solution drawn from our original thinking or from native knowledge system. The politics of 1950's shapes the future of India to some extent because Upadhyay argued that these years were seen as the foundational years for our nation and its future, the concepts like 'socialist democracy' introduced by the Nehru. The following lines of Upadhyay shows the crises: "The basic cause of the problems facing Bharath is the neglect of its national identity…. a majority of those who lead the Nation today, as well as those who take an active interest in the affairs of the country, are not sufficiently aware of this root cause. Consequently, opportunists with no principles reign in the politics of our country."

After India gained independence in 1947, Deendayal Upadhyay came to the realization that the modern models of governance and political economy adopted by the Indian state were fundamentally incompatible with the cultural and civilizational ethos of the nation. He believed that these models had their roots in the Western world and were shaped by the historical experiences of those societies. Since they originated in a different socio-political environment, Upadhyay argued that they could not be seamlessly applied to India, a land with its own unique traditions, values, and governing principles. One of his core beliefs was that every nation possesses a distinct soul, which reflects its cultural and civilizational identity. He asserted that a governance system should emerge organically from this identity rather than being imposed from external sources. According to him, when a nation loses its cultural identity, it effectively loses its soul, leading to a gradual erosion of its intrinsic values. For Upadhyay, the soul of Bharat lay in its ancient civilization and timeless ethos, which had evolved over thousands of years. He contended that governance and development models should be deeply rooted in this cultural foundation rather than imitating Western frameworks that did not align with Indian realities.

C.P. Bhishikar, a scholar and commentator on thoughts of Deendayal Upadhyaya, observed that after independence, Indiaan ruling elite actively encouraged governance models and policies that were disconnected from indigenous thinking. He noted that Upadhyay was deeply troubled by the way in which harmful ideological tendencies were nurtured by political leadership in post-independence India. Upadhyay felt that the Indian Constitution, economic policies, development goals, and overall social structure had failed to incorporate elements of indigenous wisdom. Instead, they were shaped by foreign ideologies, which lacked resonance with Indian historical and cultural experiences.

This perspective positioned Upadhyay as a radical thinker among his contemporaries. While many scholars acknowledge his critique of Western-centric governance models, they often overlook the deeper philosophical dimensions of his arguments. Upadhyay did not merely reject foreign ideologies; he advocated for an alternative vision rooted in civilizational history of the nation. He believed that Indian millennia-old traditions held the answers to contemporary challenges and that true national development could only be achieved by embracing indigenous models of governance, economy, and social organization.

His ideas remain significant in the ongoing discourse on Indian political and economic philosophy. His emphasis on cultural self-reliance and indigenous governance models presents a distinct approach that seeks to harmonize modernity with tradition, ensuring that national progress is aligned with the core identity on the nation.

Identifying the National Culture

Deendayal Upadhyay considered identity to be the most crucial aspect of any nation, believing that a strong sense of national and cultural identity forms the foundation of the existence of a nation. To illustrate this idea, he often cited the example of the Jewish people. Despite living among other communities for centuries and enduring relentless persecution and violence, the Jews managed to preserve their distinct national and cultural identity. For Upadhyay, their resilience demonstrated the power of a deeply rooted national consciousness, which enabled them to withstand external pressures without losing their fundamental identity.

According to Upadhyay, national sentiment is the defining element of a civilizational endurance and progress. Throughout history, the strength of a nation has been directly linked to the intensity of its collective national feeling. He saw politics as a key instrument in shaping and reinforcing this national identity, arguing that a positive political narrative and a deep love for the nation are essential for fostering unity and strength. He emphasized that Indian civilization has historically been deeply connected with the concept of the nation, with Bharat serving as an enduring symbol of this national identity.

In the context of modern India, Upadhyay strongly advocated for Bharatiya culture, seeing it as the guiding force that would determine the future of the country on the global stage. He believed that cultural consciousness was not just a historical relic but an active force that influences the national trajectory. For him, Bharatiya culture was not merely about traditions and customs but a dynamic and evolving identity that shapes the collective destiny of the nation.

Upadhyay also referred to the historical concept of change and continuity, which suggests that societies evolve over time while certain core elements remain constant. He argued that while history has witnessed transformations in political structures, rulers, and external influences, the fundamental essence of Indian civilization-its nationhood, culture, and societal values-

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has remained unchanged. From the invasion of Alexander in ancient times to the British colonial rule in modern history, Indian culture has played a defining role in maintaining the national identity.

For Upadhyay, this cultural resilience was not accidental but a testament to the strength of Indian civilization. He believed that this continuity of national identity, despite external invasions and challenges, was what made Bharat unique. Therefore, he urged modern India to embrace and uphold its Bharatiya culture, as it would serve as the decisive factor in shaping the role and influence of India in the world.

CONCLUSION

In the end of the article, we conclude that Deendayal Upadhyay socio-political philosophy is original thought of Indian knowledge system, his idea of Integral Humanism is peculiar work in his life, in 21st century India this idea become a guiding force for society and governance. His idea of balancing the material progress with spiritual growth along with the focus on the holistic development of communities and individuals, provides a basis for addressing modern day challenges. His vision-amidst the rapid economic growth which often oversee ethical considerations-stands as a reminder for us to give importance to values like self-reliance, sustainability and cultural preservation. His criticism of both the models of capitalism and communism, presents the need for us to look for indigenous path drawn from the Indian tradition.

Moreover, with the growing issues of inequality, environmental degradation and loss of cultural identity in contemporary times, the philosophy of Deendayal Upadhyaya inspires us to seek a more inclusive and people-centric approach to governance and development. Not only this, his idea of decentralization and self-reliant economy goes well with the ongoing discussions around the issue of sustainable development and highlights the need for empowerment at grassroot level. Although, his ideology may not align with all the contemporary problems but his ideas provide a valuable account of alternatives to the typical political ideologies of past and suggest a way ahead for future rooted in Indian cultural heritage. Hence, his thoughts not only inspire dialogue in socio-political realm but also provide a road map for a more just, equal and culturally conscious India.

His vision of a self-reliant and ethically driven polity is particularly relevant in the context of self-reliance. The call for economic self-sufficiency, promotion of indigenous industries, and emphasis on decentralized governance align closely with the ideas of Deendayal Upadhyaya. Additionally, his emphasis on a culturally rooted governance model has influenced contemporary political discourse, shaping policies that prioritize Indian traditions and values.

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