



INTEGRAL HUMANISM AND THE SDGs: A PATHWAY TO BALANCED HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



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Abstract

Deendayal Upadhyaya, an Indian political thinker and philosopher, developed the concept of Integral Humanism as a holistic framework for governance and development. He envisioned a society where economic growth, social justice, cultural values, and spiritual well-being coexist in harmony. Integral Humanism emphasises *Antyodaya* (upliftment of the last person), decentralised governance, self-reliance, and a balance between material and spiritual progress. This paper explores the relevance of Integral Humanism in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by aligning its core principles with poverty eradication, economic sustainability, social equity, and environmental conservation. The study examines how the vision of Upadhyaya offers an indigenous model for sustainable development, distinct from Western capitalist and socialist frameworks. Through case studies and policy analysis, it highlights practical applications of Integral Humanism in governance and economic planning.

Keywords: *Antyodaya; Decentralisation; Self-reliance; Sustainable Development Goal; Social Justice*

Introduction

Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya was an influential thinker, philosopher, and political leader. His ideas shaped the socio-economic policies of post-independence India. The most notable contribution of Deendayal Upadhyaya was the philosophy of Integral Humanism, introduced in 1965, which provided a distinctive framework for national development. This philosophy emphasised a holistic approach to human progress; it advocated for a balance between material, spiritual, social, and cultural well-being. Upadhyaya argued that India should not blindly adopt Western development models, as they often focus on economic growth at the cost of social justice or state control at the expense of individual freedom. Instead, he proposed a self-reliant and decentralised economic model rooted in Indian traditions and values.

Integral Humanism was built on the principles of *Dharma*, *Antyodaya* (the upliftment of the last person in society), decentralisation of power, cultural rootedness, and integral growth. Deendayal Upadhyaya rejected the approach of excessive materialism of capitalism and the rigid state control of socialism. He believed that a successful development model should preserve ethical and cultural values, which ensures economic self-sufficiency. He envisioned a system where local communities, particularly villages, played a central role in governance and economic decision-making. This approach aimed to empower individuals and reduce dependency on centralised structures that promote a more inclusive and sustainable form of development.

The United Nations adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 as a global agenda to address pressing economic, social, and environmental challenges. These 17 goals seek to eradicate poverty, ensure quality, education and healthcare, promote gender equality, foster economic growth, and protect the environment, among other objectives. The SDGs aim to create a just and equitable world by integrating economic, social, and environmental dimensions of development. India, as one of the largest developing nations, has embraced the SDGs and aligned them with national policies to promote sustainable development. The Indian government has implemented various programs to achieve these goals, such as rural development initiatives, self-reliance programs, and environmental conservation efforts.

This research explores the relationship between the philosophy of Integral Humanism of Deendayal Upadhyaya and the Sustainable Development Goals. It examines how the core tenets of Integral Humanism align with the objectives of the SDGs and how this Indian philosophical framework can contribute to sustainable development. While modern development

paradigms often prioritise economic growth and technological advancement, Integral Humanism offers a more balanced perspective that integrates social equity, economic self-sufficiency, and cultural preservation.

By analysing Integral Humanism in the context of SDGs, this study seeks to highlight the relevance of the vision of Deendayal Upadhyaya in contemporary policymaking. His emphasis on self-reliance, decentralised governance, and environmental responsibility provides valuable insights into achieving sustainable development. In a rapidly globalising world, where economic disparities and environmental challenges are increasing, the principles of Integral Humanism offer an alternative development model that focuses on the well-being of all individuals. This study aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on sustainable development by presenting Integral Humanism as a viable approach to achieving the SDGs. Through a detailed exploration of the philosophy of Deendayal Upadhyaya and its practical implications, this research underscores the need for development policies that are ethical, inclusive, and deeply rooted in cultural and social values.

Objectives of the Study

1. To analyse the core principles of Integral Humanism and their relevance to modern development.
2. To examine the alignment between Integral Humanism and the SDGs, particularly in areas such as economic self-reliance, social justice, environmental conservation, and governance.
3. To assess how Upadhyaya's vision can influence policy-making in India for inclusive and sustainable development.

Method and Materials

This study employs a qualitative methodology to examine the philosophy of Integral Humanism as proposed by Deendayal Upadhyaya and its relevance to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Primary sources, including the speeches of Upadhyaya, his writings, and policy proposals, were analysed alongside archival materials such as historical records, government reports, and policy documents to understand the practical applications of his ideas in the development framework of India. To assess the alignment of Integral Humanism with global development objectives, the study also reviews United Nations Sustainable Development Reports, which provide insights into SDG progress, key challenges, and policy recommendations. Additionally, key Indian government policies inspired by Integral Humanism were examined to highlight their impact on poverty alleviation, rural development, and decentralised governance. By integrating primary sources, government policy analysis, and international development reports, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Integral Humanism can serve as a framework for sustainable and inclusive development in India.

Understanding Integral Humanism

Integral Humanism, as proposed by Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya, is a holistic philosophy that envisions a balanced and inclusive development model rooted in Indian traditions and values. It emphasises that development should not be limited to material progress alone but should also incorporate spiritual, ethical, and cultural aspects to ensure the overall well-being of society. He introduced Integral Humanism as an alternative to Western ideologies like Capitalism and Communism, which he believed were incomplete and failed to address the true needs of human society. His philosophy is based on five key principles: *Dharma*, *Antyodaya*, Decentralisation, Cultural Rootedness, and Integral Growth. These principles collectively form a sustainable and inclusive development framework, which aligns closely with the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the United Nations in 2015.

Core Principles of Integral Humanism

Dharma (Ethical Governance and Social Responsibility): The concept of Dharma in Integral Humanism is not confined to religious practices but represents righteousness, moral values, and ethical governance. Upadhyaya believed that governance should be guided by ethical principles rather than materialistic ambitions. He emphasised that policies and leadership must prioritise justice, fairness, and the well-being of all citizens and ensure that development remains equitable and inclusive.

Antyodaya (Upliftment of the Last Person): *Antyodaya*, meaning the rise of the last person in society. It is one of the most significant aspects of Integral Humanism. Deendayal Upadhyaya believed that the true development of a nation can be measured by how well it supports its most vulnerable and marginalised populations. He argued that economic policies should first uplift the poorest sections of society rather than focus solely on industrial and urban growth.

Decentralisation (Local Governance and Self-Reliance): Integral Humanism strongly advocates for decentralisation of power and the empowerment of local communities. Upadhyaya argued that centralising economic and political control leads to inefficiency and excludes grassroots participation. Instead, he proposed a self-reliant village-based economy where decision-making happens at the local level. It allows the communities to manage their own development based on their unique needs and resources.

Cultural Rootedness (Preserving Identity in Development): Deendayal Upadhyaya believed that economic and social progress should not come at the cost of cultural heritage and national identity. He believed that Western models of development often disregarded the cultural traditions of different societies. This leads to the alienation and loss of identity. Integral Humanism advocates for a development approach that respects and integrates indigenous knowledge, traditions, and lifestyles while embracing modern advancements.

Integral Growth (Balancing Material and Spiritual Well-Being): Integral Humanism envisions development as a multi-dimensional process that balances economic prosperity with spiritual and ethical well-being. Deendayal Upadhyaya criticised capitalist systems for prioritising economic gain at the expense of human relationships and moral values, while he found communism too restrictive in its economic structure. He proposed a system where both material needs and spiritual fulfilment are considered equally important.

Concept of Sustainable Development within the Framework of Integral Humanism

Sustainable development is a widely discussed concept in modern economics, governance, and environmental studies. It refers to a model of progress that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Traditionally, sustainable development focuses on three main areas: economic growth, social equity, and environmental protection. However, the philosophy of Integral Humanism of Deendayal Upadhyaya offers a broader perspective on sustainability. His approach integrates economic well-being, social justice, cultural preservation, and spiritual growth. It ensures that development is balanced, ethical, and inclusive.

Integral Humanism does not limit sustainability to just environmental protection or economic expansion. Instead, it sees development as a harmonious process where human values, ethics, and cultural traditions play an essential role. Upadhyaya rejected the extremes of Western capitalism and socialism, both of which, in his view, focused either too much on materialism or excessive state control. Instead, he envisioned a system where economic progress, social well-being, and ecological responsibility work together to create a sustainable and self-reliant society.

This idea of sustainability is deeply rooted in the traditional wisdom and community-based practices of India. Unlike development models that depend on large-scale industrialisation and global markets, the vision of Deendayal Upadhyaya encourages local economic self-sufficiency, decentralised governance, and responsible resource use. His ideas align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which aim to create a world that is socially just, economically viable, and environmentally sustainable.

Social Justice and Inclusive Growth

A key principle of Integral Humanism is *Antyodaya* or the upliftment of the last person in society. Upadhyaya believed that true progress is not measured by the wealth of a few but by the well-being of the most disadvantaged. Sustainable development, in this context, means ensuring that every individual, especially those in rural and marginalised communities, has access to resources, opportunities, and a dignified standard of living.

One of the major challenges of modern economic development is the growing gap between the rich and the poor. Large-scale industrialisation and urbanisation have often led to unequal resource distribution, displacement of indigenous communities, and environmental degradation. The model of Deendayal Upadhyaya emphasises rural development, self-sufficient villages, and localised economies. It ensures that development does not benefit only urban elites while rural populations struggle for basic needs.

This vision aligns with SDG 1 (No Poverty), which seeks to eliminate poverty in all its forms, and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequality), which promotes inclusive policies that uplift marginalised groups. Furthermore, SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) is reflected in the belief of Deendayal Upadhyaya that development must be ethical, transparent, and based on justice.

Economic Self-Reliance and Decentralisation

Integral Humanism strongly advocates economic self-reliance as a means of sustainable development. Upadhyaya criticised models that made developing nations dependent on foreign markets, multinational corporations, or centralised state planning. He believed that a sustainable economy should be built on local industries, small enterprises, and self-sufficient villages, reducing external dependencies and fostering community resilience.

Modern globalisation has created many opportunities, but it has also led to economic instability, environmental exploitation, and loss of traditional livelihoods. Many rural economies suffer because they are unable to compete with large corporations that dominate industries. The approach of Deendayal Upadhyaya suggests that economic policies should focus on empowering local businesses, encouraging small-scale industries, and promoting self-employment. This model would not only create jobs but also prevent excessive urban migration. It reduces the stress on cities and ensures balanced regional development.

Decentralisation is another crucial aspect of the vision of Deendayal Upadhyaya. He believed that economic decisions should be made at the local level, involving communities in planning and implementation. This is in contrast to centralised governance systems, where policies are made by a distant authority, often without understanding local needs and conditions. A decentralised system allows villages, small towns, and grassroots organisations to play an active role in their own development.

These ideas align with SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), which promotes sustainable economic progress, and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), which emphasises local industrial growth. Moreover, SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) supports the call for balanced development of Deendayal Upadhyaya, reducing the overburdening of urban areas by empowering rural regions.

Ecological Sustainability and Responsible Resource Use

Upadhyaya recognised the interdependence between human well-being and the environment. He warned against unchecked industrialisation, which prioritises short-term economic gains over long-term ecological balance. Unlike modern capitalist economies that rely heavily on mass production, consumerism, and resource exploitation, Integral Humanism promotes a development model that respects nature and ensures responsible consumption.

Environmental degradation, including deforestation, pollution, climate change, and depletion of natural resources, is a major global concern today. Many development projects have led to the destruction of forests, rivers, and agricultural lands, causing irreversible damage to ecosystems. The model of Deendayal Upadhyaya suggests that economic activities must be conducted within ecological limits, ensuring that natural resources are not over-exploited.

Sustainable agriculture is one area where the idea of Integral Humanism is particularly relevant. Upadhyaya advocated for traditional farming techniques, organic agriculture, and self-sufficient food production rather than dependence on chemical-based industrial farming. Agricultural practices can become more sustainable and environmentally friendly by encouraging crop diversity, water conservation, and soil protection. These principles align with SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) and SDG 15 (Life on Land), which emphasise protecting water sources, forests, and biodiversity.

Renewable energy is another aspect of sustainable development that fits well within the vision of Deendayal Upadhyaya. Modern economies depend heavily on fossil fuels, leading to pollution and global warming. Integral Humanism supports alternative energy sources like solar, wind, and bioenergy, which are not only sustainable but also empower local communities by reducing dependence on imported fuels. These principles align with SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) and SDG 13 (Climate Action), which promote sustainable energy solutions and strategies to combat climate change.

Responsible consumption and production practices are also crucial to sustainability. SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) encourages ethical business practices, reduced waste, and sustainable use of natural resources of which are in line with the call for a non-exploitative and balanced economic model of Upadhyaya.

Cultural and Ethical Foundations of Sustainable Development

Integral Humanism emphasises that economic and environmental sustainability cannot be separated from cultural and ethical values. Upadhyaya argued that development should not lead to cultural erosion or loss of moral principles. Many modern economies have become highly materialistic, often neglecting human relationships, ethics, and community well-being in the pursuit of wealth.

For development to be truly sustainable, it must be rooted in cultural traditions and social ethics. The philosophy of Deendayal Upadhyaya supports education systems that integrate moral values, respect for nature, and community responsibility. This aligns with SDG 4 (Quality Education), which emphasises inclusive and value-based learning. Additionally, SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) reflects the belief of Upadhyaya that sustainable development requires collaboration between governments, communities, and institutions. Strong partnerships at the local, national, and global levels can ensure policies and actions that uphold the principles of Integral Humanism in development planning. Through this framework, Integral Humanism presents a sustainable, equitable, and culturally rooted model of development, offering valuable lessons for achieving the SDGs in a holistic and inclusive manner.

Practical Applications of Integral Humanism in Governance and Economic Planning

Integral Humanism has significantly influenced various policies and initiatives in India. This section highlights practical applications of the philosophy of Deendayal Upadhyaya in governance, economic planning, and social development.

Antyodaya and Rural Development

The principle of *Antyodaya*, or uplifting the last person in society, has been a guiding force for many government programs. The *Antyodaya Anna Yojana* (AAY), launched in 2000, embodies this idea by providing highly subsidised food to the poorest families. Similarly, the *Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana* (DDU-GKY) focuses on skill development and employment generation for rural youth. It ensures economic self-reliance at the grassroots level.

Decentralisation and Local Governance

Deendayal Upadhyaya emphasis on decentralised governance is reflected in the Panchayati Raj system. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 strengthened local self-government; it empowered the villages to make decisions regarding their development. This aligns with the vision of Integral Humanism of self-sufficient local communities managing their own resources and development priorities.

Economic Self-Reliance and Sustainable Development

Policies promoting self-reliance, such as the *Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan* (Self-Reliant India Mission), draw inspiration from the philosophy of Deendayal Upadhyaya. This initiative encourages domestic manufacturing, entrepreneurship, and innovation, reducing dependence on external forces. Additionally, schemes like the *Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana* (PMMY) support small businesses and self-employed individuals, fostering economic independence.

Social Welfare and Inclusivity

Integral Humanism advocates for an inclusive society where every individual has access to basic needs and opportunities. Schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), which provides financial inclusion for the underprivileged, and the Ayushman Bharat health insurance scheme, aimed at ensuring healthcare for all, reflect this principle. These initiatives address economic disparities and enhance social justice.

Environmental Sustainability

The vision of Deendayal Upadhyaya of balanced development extends to environmental sustainability. Programs like the *Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act* (MNREGA) include ecological conservation projects such as afforestation, water conservation, and sustainable agriculture. These initiatives ensure that economic progress does not come at the cost of environmental degradation.

Relevance of Integral Humanism in Contemporary Policy

In the modern world, many nations face challenges such as poverty, unemployment, environmental crises, and economic inequality. Policies that focus only on economic expansion without considering social and environmental impacts often lead to long-term problems. The concept of Integral Humanism provides a balanced approach that aligns with the principles of sustainable development.

India, for example, has taken several steps towards sustainability through rural employment programs, organic farming initiatives, and renewable energy policies. However, there is still a need to integrate the vision of Deendayal Upadhyaya more deeply into governance. Strengthening local economies, encouraging ethical industries, and ensuring the fair distribution of resources are key steps in achieving truly sustainable development.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations focus on eliminating poverty, reducing inequalities, and protecting the environment. The philosophy of Integral Humanism of Deendayal Upadhyaya Humanism aligns well with these goals by emphasising inclusive growth, responsible resource management, and social justice. Governments can adopt his principles to create policies that are not only economically beneficial but also socially and ecologically sustainable.

Conclusion

The concept of sustainable development of Deendayal Upadhyaya, rooted in Integral Humanism, offers a comprehensive framework for addressing modern economic, social, and environmental challenges. His emphasis on social justice, ecological sustainability, economic self-reliance, and ethical governance provides a holistic approach to development. Unlike conventional models that focus primarily on economic growth, Integral Humanism integrates human dignity, cultural heritage, and environmental responsibility into policymaking. As the world moves toward sustainable development, his vision remains highly relevant. By adopting his principles, societies can achieve a development model that not only fosters economic prosperity but also ensures fairness, equity, and ecological balance. His ideas serve as a guide for policymakers seeking to create long-term solutions that benefit both current and future generations.

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