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Deen Dayal Upadhyay's vision of cultural nationalism: Insights for modern India

Dr. Deepak Kumar
Assistant Professor (OCFD), Gautam Buddha University, Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India
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Abstract
Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyay was renowned as a prominent philosopher and political thinker in modern India. His concept of cultural nationalism was deeply founded in Indian civilisational values and spiritual heritage. He gave an inclusive view point of national identity which is balanced Indian traditions and modernity as well that were taken in the concept of Ekatm Manavvad (Integral Humanism). According to him, the idea of cultural nationalism promoted a sense of pride to the civilian. In contrast to the Western concept of nationalism, which is mainly defined by materialism and exclusivity, he emphasized values of inclusivity and cultural and spiritual components as the foundation of national unity. He said that India's strength comes in its enduring ideals of Dharma tolerance, and social harmony which is serve unifying force across region, religion and caste. He also emphasized the importance of self-reliance and decentralization in governance.
Upadhyay's thoughts stand out as a scholarly and balanced approach in contemporary India, where debates on nationalism sometimes turn between extreme viewpoints. He stresses the importance of acceptance the realities and difficulties of the contemporary world while also reestablishing a connection with India's rich cultural legacy. This viewpoint promotes the formation of a national identity that unites the nation's citizens while simultaneously honouring its variety.
This study explores Deendayal Upadhyay's concept of cultural nationalism and its relevance to contemporary challenges such as social harmony, cultural preservation, and sustainable development. It emphasizes the need to build a strong and united nation that balances cultural values with current governance.

Keywords: Culture, vision, idea, nationalism, India, inclusive society, governance

Introduction

Deen Dayal Upadhyay (1916- 1968) was a famous Indian political theorist, philosopher, and main ideologue of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh. A towering personality- versed in different disciplines, he was able to give direction to national politics through his intellectual insight and deep understanding of Indian civilizational values. His idea and philosophy still remain relevant, and his contribution as an ideologue and a guiding force for an alternative model of governance and politics continues to define and determine the course of policies in the country (Singh M., 2022) [16]. His contributions to Indian politics and philosophy continue to be very significant, particularly his notion of Integral Humanism, which aimed to provide a balanced and holistic framework for individual and societal development. By doing so he strengthened the democratic value of the country as well (Kumar & Vineeta, 2024) [11].
Integral Humanism has its own nature which is aimed at classless, casteless and conflict free social order. He explained in his philosophy that human being wants neither capitalism nor socialism. There is only one aim of human and that is development and happiness of the Integral Human. He also supported the 'Swadeshi' movement of Gandhi and 'decentralization' to enlarge and reinforce our national economy (Singh, Bawa, & Sharma, 2016) [21].

His view of Indian Culture

The culture of any nation grows and develops under the different regions of that nation, ethics, customs and social values. we can easily understand that these different aspects put a mark on Indian culture as well. He believed that the real strength of India was its cultural-spiritual power, which constitutes the soul of India (Gupta, S., 2019) [9]. Though he is not against the acceptance of the Western ideas but does not consider them as the highest pinnacle of wisdom. He is a protagonist of Indian culture who believes that because of her peculiarity, India has to play a vital role in the world. He stresses, nation has also a life mission. In this context he says,
"Bhartiya Sanskriti connotes not simply elements that go to make a culture characteristic of a particular people, but also a world philosophy. It is this philosophy that can unite the divided world, and give it peace. The ideals of co-existence and world unity would remain merely tactical slogans unless imbued with this vital philosophy. It is our mission" (Singh S. 2020) [20].
Deen Dayal Upadhyay was not a politician by nature but he was a firm believer of Indian culture. his objective to enter in the politics was just limited to protection of Indian culture. India got independence in 1947. Britishers left a deep imprint of their culture, tradition, values education and language here. Thus independence was just confined only to the political sphere but it involves economical intellectual and educational independence that did not gain yet. He considered Indian culture unique from other cultures. Due to the following reasons.

1. It gave a message to humanity and VASHUDAIVA KUTUMBAKAM and never encouraged others jurisdiction.
2. India is one who gave message of unity and brotherhood to entire world. These two principles are generally not finding in any other ancient culture of the world (Kumar & Vineeta, 2024) [11].

His idea on Nationalism

He constantly reminded one and all about the virtues of Indian culture which included the spirit of nationalism,

patriotism, spiritualism, humanism and universalism. Building citizens character, service to the society, devotion and selfless commitment to the nation were the hall marks of the philosophy of Integral Humanism which he expounded, preached and practiced throughout his short-lived life. Though an ardent advocate of Integral Humanism, he felt disappointment that due to many evils creeping in our society, viz, western materialism, political corruption and greed, people have forgotten the basics of the basics of the Indian nation, its virtues and ethos (Gupta, S., 2019) [9]. He thus observed:

"All our ailments in today's political life have their origin in our avarice. Arace for rights has banished the noble idea of service. Undue emphasis on the economic aspect of life has generated a number of lapses…Instead of character, quality and merit, wealth has become the measuring rod of individual prestige. This is a morbid situation… It must be our general approach to look upon money only as a means towards the satisfaction of our everyday needs: not an end in itself…this transformation in our attitude can only be brought about only on the basis of the ideals of Indian culture (Gupta, S., 2019) [9]".

The Concept of Cultural Nationalism

The concept of cultural nationalism has for quite some time been on the centre stage of global debate and academic discussion. In all of its forms and aspects, culture is an essential component and tool of human growth. It is an attitude, a way of thinking, a way of life, and a collection of values, beliefs, behaviours, and endeavours that are held by many people. The store of information, beliefs, conventions, behaviour, morality, laws, and artistic, scientific, and technological endeavours, as well as the humanities and social sciences, make up this multifaceted whole (Bhatt, 2022) [25].

According to Upadhyay, cultural nationalism is based on the notion that a country is a cultural entity rather than just a geopolitical entity. He emphasised the significance of 'chiti', a Sanskrit word he used to refer to a country's spirit or fundamental character. He asserts that a country's culture is a representation of its Chiti, which serves as the basis for its identity and development (Watve, 2022) [25]. In Upadhyay's thought, India's cultural nationalism is distinct from the Western idea of nationalism, which often centers on political and economic aspects. For him, Indian nationalism was deeply intertwined with the spiritual and cultural legacy of the country. This perspective sought to harmonize the diversity of India's traditions, languages, and religions under the unifying principles of Dharma (Bhatt, 2022) [4].

India's distinct cultural identity is emphasised as the cornerstone of national development in Deendayal Upadhyay's cultural nationalism philosophy, which is based on Bharatiyata. He elaborates Bharatiya culture as holistic culture which looks at life as an integrated whole. He emphasised the promotion of modernisation though preserving India's rich spiritual and cultural legacy. He believes that diversity as a strength of India so he advocated for unification based on common civilizational and cultural ideals. By opposing the mindless emulation of Western ideas, he promoted Indian-inspired solutions that ensured development was in line with its cultural values (Meena, 2025) [17].

Integral Humanism: The Foundation of Cultural Nationalism

The principle of Integral Humanism serves as the philosophical cornerstone of Deendayal Upadhyay's vision. It emphasizes the holistic development of individuals and society through the integration of material and spiritual dimensions of life. Integral Humanism bases its comprehensive outlook on the framework of the four Purusharthas: Dharma (moral order), Artha (material prosperity), Kama (desire), and Moksha (liberation). Upadhyay draws upon this classical Indian tradition by invoking the Vedic principle that the individual reflects the universe, expressed in the maxim "Yat Pinde Tad Brahmande" (Das 2025) [8]. Integral Humanism rejects both unrestrained capitalism and rigid socialism, advocating instead a model of development rooted in Indian cultural ethos and values.

The main features of Integral Humanism comprise:

1. **Interconnectedness:** Identifying the inherent contacts among individual, society, nature, and the divine.
2. **Holism:** Embracing the multifaceted nature of human existence and promoting a balanced interaction among different aspects of life.
3. **Classless and Casteless Society:** Striving for a society where social hierarchy and discrimination are eliminated.
4. **Conflict-Free Social Order:** Aiming to create a harmonious and peaceful social order, where conflicts are minimized and resolved through cooperation and mutual understanding (Meena, 2025) [14].

Through Integral Humanism, Upadhyay provided a framework for cultural nationalism that is inclusive, sustainable, and deeply rooted in India's civilizational identity. He criticized the social and political philosophies of both capitalism and communism through his doctrine of Integral Humanism as both had disregard for the humanitarian aspects of personal life which he wanted to uplift through his philosophy (Kumari 2025) [8]. The central objective behind articulating this vision was to transform ideas into concrete action. As he asserted, "We do have a vision of a wonderful future for this country before our eyes; we are not mere visionaries, but karmayogis, dedicated to translating our vision into reality." According to Upadhyaya, postindependence Bharat needed to internalize the philosophy of Integral Humanism, a perspective closely aligned with Gandhi's Hind Swaraj. While works such as Lokmanya Tilak's Gita Rahasya examined the philosophical foundations for Bharat's renewal, Upadhyaya extended this discourse by addressing the next phase of the nation's journey- that of independent India. Central to his thought was the primacy of national identity, which he regarded as indispensable for achieving genuine independence and sustained national progress (Meena, 2025) [14].

Religion (Dharma) as the Integrating Principle

According to Upadhyay, cultural nationalism is the concept of Dharma and he describe it as the moral and ethical order of society. In Indian ideology, Dharma stands for universal values of justice and morality, in contrast to the Western concept of religion, which frequently refers to a collection of dogmas or institutionalised activities. According to Upadhyay, Dharma is what binds India's various groups together. He thought that upholding Dharma would

guarantee political stability, economic growth, and social harmony. He aimed to overcome sectarian differences and foster a sense of shared national duty by putting Dharma at the center of cultural nationalism (Narayan, 2024) [2].

Unity in Diversity

His vision of cultural nationalism celebrates India's diversity while highlighting the fundamental unity of its diverse civilizations. Unity in diversity, as well as the expression of difference in any form, are the key pillars of Bharatiya culture (Meena, 2025) [14]. He supported a cultural fusion that honours India's regional, linguistic, and religious variety rather than imposing uniformity. By acknowledging that several spiritual paths coexist within the framework of Dharma. In addition to endorsing Hindi as the country's official language, he emphasised the need of regional language preservation for India's cultural diversity. He also advocated for social integration by eliminating prejudice based on caste and empowering marginalised populations via economic and educational opportunities.

Economic Philosophy: Swadeshi and Self-Reliance

Deendayal Upadhyay's economic doctrine strongly stressed cultural congruence, decentralisation, and independence. He supported Swadeshi and promoted the use of indigenous businesses and resources to reduce dependency on foreign products and technologies. He encouraged decentralisation and increased the power of communities and locals to make decisions through Gramm Swaraj. Upadhyay prioritised small and mediumsized enterprises and agriculture as the cornerstones of India's economy in order to counteract an over-reliance on large-scale industrialisation. In order to create a more sustainable and inclusive economy, his plan also aimed for balanced growth, guaranteeing fair development between urban and rural areas (Singh, 2025) [18].

Upadhyay's economic thought aligns closely with his cultural nationalism. He championed the principle of Swadeshi, advocating for self-reliance and the utilization of indigenous resources. This approach was not merely about economic self-sufficiency but also about fostering a sense of pride and dignity in India's traditional crafts, industries, and agricultural practices. Further, he stated that self-sufficient industrial and agrarian communities help in our economic growth. He traces the idea of small units from ancient Bharat. In his writings, he traced the roots of the idea of small autonomous units to ancient Bharat (Meena and Dhayal 2025) [14].

The main characteristics of his economic philosophy comprise:

1. **Decentralized Economy:** Upadhyay proposed a village-centric economic model, emphasizing local production and consumption to reduce dependence on external markets.

2. **Sustainable Development:** In keeping with the traditional Indian philosophy of coexisting peacefully with the natural world, he emphasised the significance of striking a balance between economic expansion and environmental preservation.

3. **Human-Centric Approach:** His economic perspective is centred on human welfare, making sure that development benefits the most vulnerable and impoverished segments of society, in contrast to industrialised methods that put profit first.

Political Vision: Decentralized Democracy

Deen Dayal Upadhyay's political philosophy emphasises decentralisation, participatory governance, and ethical leadership. He advocated for devolving power to local governments so that communities can effectively address their own concerns. He highlighted integrity-based leadership and advocated for leaders who are dedicated to selfless service and possess a strong moral character. He emphasised the need of prioritising national interests over personal or political goals in order to establish long-term policies that benefit the country. He also proposed a Bharatiya political model based on Indian traditions and principles, rather than just duplicating Western institutions. Upadhyay's political philosophy aimed to apply democratic concepts to India's cultural environment. He argued that Western governance paradigms, when implemented wholesale, frequently failed to resonate with Indian circumstances. Instead, he argued for a system that builds on India's old political traditions, such as the Panchayat system, to establish a more participative and decentralised democracy (Singh 2025) [17].

Deendayal Upadhyay, a profound thinker and one of the prominent ideologues of modern India, presented a vision of cultural nationalism that has become foundational for the ideological framework of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the broader Sangh Parivar. His philosophy, rooted in India's ancient traditions and values, continues to offer insights into the challenges of modern nation-building. The key topics include cultural rootedness, balancing individual rights with responsibilities, ethical leadership, and putting the nation first. These ideas emphasize preserving cultural values, maintaining social duties, promoting moral leadership, and working for national unity and welfare (Singh 2025) [17].

Social Harmony: Antyodaya and Inclusivity

Upadhyay's worldview focuses on the harmonious blending of material and spiritual development, opposing the extremes of Western individualism and Marxist collectivism. He argued for a governance and development paradigm that reflects India's distinct ethos and cultural heritage. Bharatiya Culture as the Foundation of National Identity: Upadhyay saw Indian culture, with its diversity and inherent unity, as the base of nationalism. He contended that the nation's soul (known as chiti) is embodied in its civilisational principles, which include tolerance, pluralism, and dharma (Bhatt, 2022) [4].

He believes that India's identity is built on shared cultural and spiritual values, rather than religion or land. Decolonising the Indian Mind: He argued that India's intellectual and political leaders needed to break free from colonial mindsets and embrace indigenous perspectives. He contended that Western governance, economic, and educational frameworks frequently failed to resonate with Indian traditions and reality. Strength in Diversity: Upadhyay saw cultural nationalism as a unifying factor rather than one that homogenised. He celebrated India's cultural diversity while emphasising the importance of a common thread that connects all communities. Self-reliance (Swadeshi) refers to economic policies based on cultural nationalism. Upadhyay believes that self-reliance must be prioritised. He emphasised the growth of rural economies

and the empowerment of the marginalised within a framework that protects local traditions and resources. His suggestions for human development can be divided into numerous aspects (Thakur, 2023) [22].

Deendayal Upadhyay's vision includes the empowerment of society's most disadvantaged and vulnerable individuals, known as Antyodaya. He emphasised that genuine development ensures equality and dignity for all, rejecting societal inequalities and caste prejudice. In addition, he advocated for cooperation, mutual respect, inclusive progress, and the use of dharma to foster social peace. Antyodaya was more than just a theoretical concept; it was highly practical and policy-oriented. Upadhyaya emphasised that the ultimate measure of a nation's development is its ability to lift the most disadvantaged members of society. He famously claimed that the test of successful governance is whether the benefits reach the last person in line. This principle has subsequently been reflected in several welfare initiatives in India, including the Antyodaya Anna Yojana and the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana, which aim to provide food security and livelihood support to the most marginalized sections of the population (Sharma 2025) [15].

Relevance for Modern India

Deendayal Upadhyay's vision is still very relevant in dealing with contemporary challenges in India and the world as well. His concept of Swadeshi corresponds to modern calls for economic self-reliance and support for local enterprises, whereas his philosophy of Antyodaya corresponds to worldwide efforts to alleviate poverty and promote inclusive development. His emphasis on harmony with nature and decentralisation provides important insights into attaining sustainable development. Furthermore, in an era of globalisation, his emphasis on retaining cultural identity provides a framework for balanced modernisation that avoids cultural degradation.

India has embraced Upadhyaya's concept more and more in the twenty-first century, especially in areas like sustainable development, self-reliance, and cultural integrity. Integral humanism, which emphasises the peaceful development of people and communities, offers a thorough road map for societal advancement. This philosophy, which emphasises the integration of material and spiritual well-being for the advancement of society, is both balanced and firmly grounded in indigenous frames of thinking (Meena, 2025) [14].

Deendayal Upadhyay's worldview highlights the importance of cultural diversity and unity in variation as a way to foster national cohesion in the face of societal divide. In keeping with modern initiatives like Aatmanirbhar Bharat, which promotes the merging of innovation and traditional knowledge for advancement that is relevant to the present, he supports Swadeshi for indigenous development. His focus on spiritual harmony with the environment is in line with modern goals for sustainable development, and his emphasis on cultural sensitivity in governance offers strategies for fostering diversity and resolving communal estrangement. Furthermore, he thinks that India's cultural heritage might be employed as a worldwide soft power, as evidenced by occasions like International Yoga Day, which can influence India's standing outside (Singh 2025) [17].

Some critics believe that cultural nationalism has the potential to be exclusionary, marginalising minority cultures if not approached inclusively. Furthermore, given modern India's rapid globalisation and urbanisation, implementing his comprehensive humanism theory in concrete policies is problematic. Finding a balance between preserving local customs and embracing progressive global values remains a major challenge.

Conclusion

Deen Dayal Upadhyay's notion of cultural nationalism provides a deep and comprehensive view of nationhood that goes beyond basic political and economic considerations. By basing his ideas on India's civilisational ethos, he offers a framework for development that is both modern and profoundly rooted in the country's cultural legacy. In a world increasingly marked by cultural homogenisation and identity disputes, Upadhyay's philosophy emphasises the need of conserving and cultivating one's cultural soul. In order to ensure that India's progress is both sustainable and profoundly meaningful, his vision demands for a harmonious synthesis of tradition and modernity, individual and society, material and spiritual. Cultural nationalism, according to Deendayal Upadhyay, is an appeal for India to ground its advancement in its cultural values while adjusting to modern difficulties. It offers a framework for striking a balance between material success and spiritual fulfilment, tradition and modernity, and unity and diversity. India can create inclusive policies that are grounded in its civilisational wisdom by reviewing his ideas.

Deendayal Upadhyay's Integral Humanism philosophy, which embodies his vision, provides a timeless and comprehensive approach to society and human development. His theories offer a road map for creating a peaceful, independent, and sustainable society by combining spiritual principles with material advancement, emphasising cultural identity, and putting inclusivity first. Upadhyay's ideas offer hope and direction as India and the rest of the globe look for answers to today's problems.

Upadhyay believed that real development should not be measured only through technological advancement or economic growth, but through the overall well-being of both individuals and society. His ideas of Antyodaya, Swadeshi, and ethical governance strongly support the vision of Viksit Bharat by promoting inclusive development, self-reliance, and accountable administration. Combining these traditional principles with modern governance and innovation can help India achieve balanced and sustainable progress instead of focusing solely on material growth.

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