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Self-Reliant India and Integral Humanism: An Ideological Framework of Deendayal Upadhyaya

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Abstract:
This paper examines the philosophical and ideological relationship between Integral Humanism, as promoted by Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya, and Atmanirbhar Bharat's contemporary policy vision. Integral Humanism is a conceptual approach to human development that integrates material, moral, and spiritual aspects, rejecting the extremes of Western capitalism and Marxist socialism. This study explores how this ideology enables India to pursue economic and social self-reliance in the 21st century. The paper uses qualitative and analytical methods to explore the conceptual patterns of Upadhyaya's thought, government policy, and literature, tracing its conceptual shifts in the context of the Atmanirbhar Bharat project. It also compares the practical relevance of Integral Humanism in determining human-centric, culturally grounded, and sustainable models of development with actual reality. They show that swadeshi, antyodaya, and gram swaraj share obvious similarities, but also reveal gaps between the ideals of philosophy and modern policy practice. The paper concludes that a truly self-reliant India will have to integrate technological progress and global engagement with the moral, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of human welfare that Upadhyaya's Integral Humanism envisioned.

Keywords: Integral Humanism, Deendayal Upadhyaya, Self-Reliant India, Atmanirbhar Bharat, Swadeshi, Antyodaya,

Introduction:

It is Atmanirbhar Bharat, the name of India's vision of development in the 21st century, as the most widely adopted definition of India's guiding ideology in the modern era. Rooted in the ideals of economic independence, pride, and human-centred progress, it calls for a growth paradigm that combines modernisation with moral and social responsibility. The philosophy of Integral Humanism, Ekatma Manav Darshan, was formulated long before this policy vision came into being by the philosopher and political thinker Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya (1916–1968), who worked on the foundations of an indigenous approach to holistic development. Upadhyaya envisioned a social order grounded in India's cultural heritage, moral values, and spiritual power. Integral Humanism advocates for the body, mind, intellect, and soul—not just in the individual, but in society. It focuses on Swadeshi as its primary factor of sustainable national progress, Antyodaya (rehabilitation of the last), and Gram Swaraj as the central component of rural self-government. Plus, today India is drawing on these ideas again, seeking to succeed independently in producing, innovating, and governing while remaining ethical and culturally strong. The ideologies of Upadhyaya's Integral Humanism serve as the ideological base for Self-Reliant India. It explores their philosophical intersections, practical implications, and the

transformative potential of integrating moral and spiritual dimensions into India's developmental policies.

Objectives and Methodology

The study aims to investigate the ideological underpinnings of Self-Reliant India through the lens of Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya's philosophy of Integral Humanism. More specifically, the study aims to:

1. Analyse the principles of Integral Humanism;
2. Explain its connection to the Atmanirbhar Bharat objective; and
3. Consider its relevance for modern-day policies related to the economy and society.

The research methodology is qualitative, primarily analytic, and uses secondary data from texts, journal articles, government documents, and speeches. The research utilises a thematic analysis tool to demonstrate conceptual connections and philosophical continuities between Integral Humanism and Self-Reliant India.

Review of Literature

Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya's idea of Integral Humanism was in part a reaction to Western development models, which he believed neglected the spiritual and moral dimensions of human existence. Upadhyaya (1965) believed that the ideal situation was to achieve harmony between material development and ethical and cultural values rooted in Indian philosophical understandings. In Upadhyaya's approach, he focuses on the relationship between the individual and society by combining dharma, artha, kama, and moksha —the four purusharthas (or objectives) of human life. Kumar (2017) explains that Integral Humanism describes an economically decentralised model co-constructed with Swadeshi and Antyodaya principles, which are related to Gandhian ideas of Gram Swaraj. In a similar vein, Sharma (2019) developed Upadhyaya's model as a third way beyond capitalism and socialism, emphasising both self-reliance and the moral responsibility of economic behaviour. In contemporary discussions, scholars are comparing Integral Humanism with the "Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan" (self-reliant India Mission). Singh (2021) argues that both are about developing sustainable development practices rooted in indigenous innovation and community empowerment. Additionally, according to Nanda (2020), the resurrection of Upadhyaya's philosophy in public policy discourse reflects India's shift toward culturally rooted governance. Critics like Rao (2022) warn that there remains a significant gap between philosophy and policy frameworks, especially in a globalised economy. Nevertheless, most scholars agree that, first, Integral Humanism remains helpful in rethinking and reframing India's development agenda for the 21st Century.

Integral Humanism and its Association with Self-Reliant India: Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya's philosophy of Integral Humanism (Ekatma Manav Darshan) serves as a rich ideological basis for the concept of Self-Reliant India (Atmanirbhar Bharat). Integral Humanism concerns the complete development of human beings through the synthesis of the material and spiritual dimensions of life; this is its essence. Upadhyaya (1965) argued that Western models of capitalism and socialism suffer from reductionism because capitalism emphasises material prosperity, whereas socialism elevates the collective at the expense of the individual. Integral Humanism seeks development through the balanced integration of body, mind, intellect and soul, in which personal well-being is similar to societal and national well-being.

The core components of Integral Humanism (Swadeshi, Antyodaya, Dharmic Economics, and Decentralisation) resonate deeply with the idea of Self-Reliant India. Integral Humanism is about economic self-sufficiency that does not put India apart from the world, but allows India to play a part in the world with confidence and from a place of strength (Kumar, 2017). This aligns with the idea of Atmanirbhar Bharat by promoting production, innovation, and entrepreneurship in India, alongside equitable, inclusive growth (Singh, 2021). Upadhyaya's notion of Swadeshi goes far beyond mere economic independence; it signifies an independent culture and intellectual independence. He proposed that in this highly interconnected world, India must look to its civilizational values rather than explore developmental models underpinned by Western development paradigms (Sharma, 2019). This view aligns with current efforts to advance local industries, traditional knowledge systems, and sustainable livelihoods. In addition, Antyodaya — i.e., the well-being of the last person in society — shapes the ethics of policy-making for a Self-Reliant India. If growth does not reach the last person, it cannot be considered advancement (Nanda, 2020).

Moreover, Integral Humanism posits Decentralised Democracy and Gram Swaraj, in which villages are the most basic units for the provision of public goods and development. The Atmanirbhar Bharat campaign, which emphasises rural empowerment and local manufacturing, represents the spirit of these suggestions (Rao, 2022). Self-Reliant India presents Upadhyaya's aspirations in the present-day context—merging economic autonomy with self-reliance in the moral, social, and spiritual domains. In turn, Integral Humanism has been transformed from a philosophical framework into a living framework for India's comprehensive, sustainable socioeconomic self-reliance in the global age.

Relevance of Integral Humanism to the Atmanirbhar Bharat Vision: The current concept of Atmanirbhar Bharat (Self-Reliant India), established by the Government of India in 2020, aims to position the country to become economically powerful, socially inclusive, and globally competitive while being true to its own traditions. This concept resonates with the vision of Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya of Integral Humanism, which holds that development must be based on moral, cultural, and spiritual self-reliance rather than just material affluence. Upadhyaya (1965) argues that actual progress is achieved only by balancing economic independence with moral responsibility; this notion serves as the ideological basis of Atmanirbhar Bharat. Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan consists of five pillars—economy, infrastructure, systems, vibrant demography, and demand —which are geared toward the end goal of internal strength and external resilience. This thinking aligned with Upadhyaya's vision of Swadeshi (self-reliance) and Decentralised Development (Kumar, 2017). Both approaches prioritise indigenous production, local entrepreneurialism, and the empowerment of rural people. For example, the “Vocal for Local” campaign advocates local manufacturing to advance economic self-reliance while remaining mindful of ethical and cultural norms implicit in Upadhyaya's Swadeshi notion (Sharma, 2019).

The ethical base of Integral Humanism, reflected in the principle of Antyodaya—the upliftment of the last person—finds expression in the all-encompassing welfare strategies contained in Atmanirbhar Bharat, including social safety nets, rural employment schemes, and MSME promotion (Nanda, 2020). By promoting change at the bottom levels, the policy agenda embodies Upadhyaya's idea that the well-being of its weakest members can measure a country's strength. A third significant overlap comes from the encouragement of Gram Swaraj and decentralised governance. Upadhyaya viewed villages as self-reliant units that contributed to the nation's development. Throughout the Atmanirbhar Bharat mission, through schemes focused on rural infrastructure and local production clusters, this vision is

operationalised within a relevant economic structure (Rao, 2022). Moreover, both ideologies highlight moral and spiritual integrity in relation to technology's capacity to promote development rather than purely profit-driven pursuits, as in most business engagements. Singh (2021) argues that Atmanirbhar Bharat takes Upadhyaya's philosophical visions and translates them into a governance framework by bringing together cultural rootedness and a global nature (Singh, 2021). Thus, the vision of a self-reliant India is not merely about self-reliance but a civilizational vision in which development, ethics, and human dignity coexist. Integral Humanism is, therefore, an approach that can still provide meaningful ideological direction for India to achieve sustainable and inclusive self-reliance in the 21st century.

Applicability of Integral Humanism in Shaping Contemporary Socio-Economic Policies

Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya's philosophy of Integral Humanism remains relevant in shaping synergy in India's current-day social and economic policies. His philosophy advocates holistic growth for both individuals and society by harnessing material progress alongside values such as ethics, spirituality, and culture. Upadhyaya (1965) anticipated a system that balances individual ambitions with collective interests, and an economy characterised by moral obligations and indigenous self-reliance. This ideology has since found contemporary administrative expression in the context of sustainable development, inclusive growth, and even decentralisation. Antyodaya, or uplifting the last person, is a fundamental facet of India's welfare-based socio-economic policy framework. The Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, Ujjwala Yojana, and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana are programs that uphold the Antyodaya principle by targeting vulnerable groups to ensure they have access to resources (Nanda, 2020). The fulfilment of Upadhyaya's vision is when genuine progress includes the entire society, especially the cohort most often excluded from conventional development.

Subsequently, Swadeshi, meaning economic self-sufficiency through domestic production versus foreign-invested production, can be aligned with modern-day policy platforms such as Make in India and Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan (Singh, 2021). These initiatives seek to reinforce domestic manufacturing, innovation, and entrepreneurial activity, thereby actualising the Upadhyayan notion of self-sufficient yet globally integrated economies (Kumar, 2017). Integral humanism also addresses decentralised governance and Gram Swaraj to promote local participation in development. Since local engagement is closely related to enhancing self-governance capacity, policies such as Digital India, Startup India, and the revitalisation of Panchayati Raj Institutions align with the principles of striking upadhyayan (Rao, 2022). Such policies represent a departure from centralisation, potentially making community-based solutions more prevalent and enhancing accountability in governance. Upadhyaya's emphasis on the conflation of ethics and economics provides a significant perspective on contemporary challenges with income inequality, environmental degradation, and cultural alienation (Sharma, 2019). With his notion of "Dharmic Economics" (Upadhyaya, 1973), he implores policymakers to infuse moral and ecological consciousness into policy design. Policy should prioritise human-centred development, not profit-centred development. Integral humanism then provides a timely philosophy to guide inclusive, sustainable, and culturally rooted socio-economic policies. It is important to note that the emphasis on material development, tempered with ethical development, supports any mission toward development in a technological and globalisation context; imminent missions should proceed and align with the general trajectory of human development.

Discussion and Suggestions for Social Implications: Integral Humanism, as an ideology, has significant social implications, fostering a balanced and inclusive society grounded in values in the

modern context of India. Upadhyaya's thesis argues for the coordination of the individual, family, society, and nation and states that authentic progress must balance economic development with moral and cultural advancement (Upadhyaya, 1965). Today, in a world of globalisation, rapid industrialisation, and consumerism, it has great utility as a normative corrective or guiding principle for the nation, ensuring that people's benefit is prioritised over simply amassing wealth. The concept of Atmanirbhar Bharat expands this idea into a path toward social upliftment that also endorses self-sufficiency, linking personal responsibility with the overall well-being of society (Kumar, 2017). Specifically, Integral Humanism contributes to a development model that promotes dignity, equality, and cooperation among individuals and society. Fundamental to the model is the notion of Antyodaya, which shows that a society's success is best summarised by the upliftment of the poorest and most vulnerable segments of the population. Moreover, development policies on education, health, and job security should focus on improving human outcomes rather than solely on economic growth (Nanda, 2020). The premise is to embrace a social welfare approach that fosters a transition for individuals and society while moving away from self-centred approaches and toward progressive methods of compassion, social justice, and inclusion. Integral humanism also supports dispersed economic and government systems. To ensure sustainable futures, Upadhyaya encouraged self-sufficiency (Swadeshi) and localised community governance. People can organise as collectives and highlight their needs and concerns through communal organising (Karigar Y A & Dhavaleshwar C, 2025). Local governance institutions can be strengthened, cooperatives encouraged, and women encouraged to participate in leadership roles to realise a human-centric governance approach, as outlined by Upadhyaya (Rao, 2022). In addition, the moral component of Integral Humanism can be applied to the process of social change. The educational policy framework should include moral and value-based educational programs that prepare responsible, educated citizens who can consider the social ramifications of their actions (Sharma, 2019). In summary, for India's Self-Reliant India initiative to succeed, the country must mainstream the ethical and social responsibilities embedded in the principles of Integral Humanism in practical applications. These behaviours will also cultivate a shared sense of responsibility, strengthening communities' capacity to work cooperatively. In doing so, India can expect to achieve a functioning, functional, socio-culturally integrated and spiritually fulfilled society, as contemplated by Deendayal Upadhyaya, and adequately serve the surrounding world.

Conclusion:

The concept of Integral Humanism, put forth by Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya, serves as a timeless ideological framework for India's vision of Self-Reliance (Atmanirbhar Bharat). Stemming from India's cultural and spiritual heritage, it prioritises the balanced emergence of the individual and society through the synthesis of material advancement and moral consciousness. The concepts of Swadeshi, Antyodaya, and Gram Swaraj articulated by Upadhyaya continue to influence contemporary socio-economic policies, emphasising inclusivity, sustainability, and localisation. Upadhyaya's philosophy underscores that real development cannot be achieved through mere economic growth; it must also encompass ethical governance, social justice, and human dignity. The Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative represents the modern-day application of Integral Humanism. It supports domestic innovation, self-reliance, and moral responsibility in economic life. By aligning state policy objectives with cultural principles, India can realise modernisation without risking ethical decay or alienation from their culture. The integration of Upadhyaya's holistic vision into governance, education, and economic planning can provide direction

for the nation toward a more equitable and compassionate model of development. Thus, a genuinely self-reliant India must be materially capable, morally anchored, and socially inclusive.

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