International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development
www.allsubjectjournal.com
E-ISSN: 2349-4182
Received: 05-10-2026, Accepted: 04-11-2026, Published: 19-11-2026
Volume 13, Issue 4, 2026, Page No. 149-153

The contemporary relevance of Deendayal Upadhyaya's Integral Humanism in India

Dr. Gajendra
Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi, India
DOI: https://doi.org/10.66856/ijmrd.2026.13.4.13423

Abstract
Deendayal Upadhyaya's Integral Humanism is a unique perspective on development that integrates material welfare with intellectual, social, ethical and spiritual needs. It was first presented in four lectures in April 1965 and challenges the economic models that view people merely as consumers, workers or as part of a class. This article explores its significance for India's public policies since 2014, including financial inclusion, basic amenities, health, agriculture, manufacturing, digital governance and environmental responsibility. It employs a qualitative analysis of primary writings, constitutional principles, academic scholarship and official programme descriptions to differentiate between philosophical similarity and policy success. It suggests that the concept of Antyodaya or concern for the poorest of the poor, can be used as a yardstick of inclusion, but claims made by the government need to be tested independently. When read in conjunction with constitutional equality, democratic accountability, dignified employment and ecological limits, Integral Humanism might be relevant, it is therefore analytical, rather than a statement that any one government has realized its ideals.

Keywords: Integral Humanism, Antyoday, Deendayal Upadhyaya, social justice, inclusive development, public policy

Introduction

Development is more than an increase in national income. It also includes health, education, safe livelihoods, social relations, political freedom and environmental security. The Indian experience demonstrates that these dimensions are not mutually exclusive, but can be combined with insecure jobs, unequal public services and regional disparities in public services. A philosophical approach is helpful when it not only questions the extent of economic growth, but also who is included and who is left behind (Sen, 1999 [31]; UNDP, 2020).

Integral Humanism was presented by Deendayal Upadhyaya in four lectures in Bombay from 22nd to 25th April 1965 [36]. He raised doubts about the importation of political and economic systems without making them suitable to Indian social conditions. He condemned the economization of human beings and advocated for the balanced development of the person and society (Upadhyaya, 1965) [36]. His arguments came in a specific political and cultural context and must be read in a historical rather than a timeless policy sense.

Union governments headed by Narendra Modi have been encouraging programmes on banking access, housing, sanitation, clean cooking, drinking water, healthcare, farmer support and domestic production since 2014. Some objectives are similar to themes of Integral Humanism such as Antyodaya and self-reliance. However, similarity does not mean that a policy was developed from this philosophy or that it has been successful in meeting its objectives. This article explores the potential link and its drawbacks. The main thesis of this work is that Integral Humanism can only inform critical questions regarding public policy when it is combined with evidence, constitutional rights and social differences.

Methodology and Conceptual Approach

The research method applied in this study is qualitative, which is based on textual analysis and policy analysis. The main source of this philosophy is the four lectures of Upadhyaya (1965) [36]. and more general literature on human development and justice (Ambedkar, 1936/2014; Sen, 1999; UNDP, 2020) [1, 26, 31]. The analysis is selective, meaning it does not attempt to measure the impact of the ideology on the nation or make causal links between an ideology and specific government actions.

The discussion in the paper is guided by three distinctions. First, an ideology is not a scheme of administration. Secondly, programme coverage is not synonymous with the quality and actual use of services. Third, the success that is claimed in the public eye is not the same as what is measured independently. This way, it is possible to speak of political continuity without sounding academic or praising or condemning it.

Main concepts of Integral Humanism

Upadhyaya explained that a human being is a whole person having physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual aspects. Economic resources are required but wealth is not enough to meet all human needs (Upadhyaya, 1965) [36]. In some ways this understanding is consistent with the capability approach, which assesses development based on the substantive freedoms people have, not just income (Sen, 1999) [31]. Both methods have different intellectual bases, however, and it should not be confused.

The second principle is the relationship between individuals and society. Upadhyaya saw families, communities, local associations and the state as interwoven institutions. The state is significant but should not take over all social functions (Upadhyaya, 1965) [36]. A modern version would foster local involvement, mutual organizations and responsive government. However, the presence of community traditions does not necessarily mean that justice is being achieved but social practices can also reinforce caste, gender and other hierarchies. The accountability of institutions is still very important (Ambedkar, 1936/2014) [1].

Antyodaya focuses on the marginalized sections of the economic and social life. It is linked to Upadhyaya's political legacy and offers a test. Do public services extend to the least resourced and least institutionalised? This question focuses on landless workers, informal households, persons with disabilities and those living in remote areas. Kumar and Gajendra (2021) [13] situate Upadhyaya's perspective in relation to Ambedkar's thoughts on social justice, thereby uncovering points of concern and divergence.

Lastly, Integral Humanism connects economic organization to meaningful work, locally appropriate production and responsible resource use. Upadhyaya attacked models that make man a tool of economic systems (Upadhyaya, 1965) [36]. The relevance of this argument today is contingent on whether industrial and technological change enhances wages, security, skills and opportunities, or simply boosts output.

Financial Inclusion and Digital Welfare

Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) was introduced in August 2014 to increase access to basic banking, financial literacy and related services. The Department of Financial Services' vision is to include unbanked people in formal finance and to provide access to payments, insurance and other products (Department of Financial Services, n.d.). The scheme can be analysed in the context of Antyodaya as the exclusion of the poorer households from the banking system can hinder the access to benefits or safe savings. (Department of Financial Services, n.d.; Press Information Bureau, 2024) [29].

Direct Benefit Transfer systems can help to increase the traceability of welfare payments and decrease some intermediaries. But an account or digital identity is just a facilitating condition. Local banking points, grievance procedures and control over the money received are also important aspects of inclusion, as is accessibility. A woman could have an account but not be able to use it on her own. A rural person could have to travel a long distance or have connectivity issues. Hence, the administrative counts should be complemented with account activity, transaction costs and failed payments (Department of Financial Services, n.d.; Sen, 1999) [31].

This is also true of digital public infrastructure. It can reduce the expense of reaching large populations, but reliance on documentation, devices or authentication can be a disadvantage to those who have limited connectivity or literacy. An Antyodaya based evaluation should therefore safeguard offline alternatives and evaluate exclusion errors. Technology can only be used to promote integrated human development if it increases the scope of practical freedom, not the number of conditions for exercising basic rights.

Basic Amenities and Human Dignity

Health, safety, time use and dignity are impacted by housing, sanitation, clean cooking and drinking water. These needs are being met through various government initiatives like Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, Swachh Bharat Mission, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana and Jal Jeevan Mission. Their goals may be associated with Upadhyaya's emphasis on the linkage between material and social welfare (Upadhyaya, 1965) [36]. They are also similar to the wider human-development perspectives that stable living conditions facilitate education, participation and productive activity (UNDP, 2020) [12].

However, providing an asset is not the same as delivering a reliable service. A finished home might not have a drain or a job. Water, maintenance and safe waste disposal are needed for a toilet. If LPG refills are not affordable, then it is not a guarantee of continuous use of clean fuel. A tap connection is only worth having if water is safe and regular. These differences are significant in remote villages, in informal urban settlements and in communities that are not receiving equal public investment.

A serious Antyodaya evaluation would involve government records, household surveys, independent audits and local feedback. It would question whether women's unpaid work has reduced, if there has been a change in disease exposure and if households are able to sustain the services they provide. This type of assessment is more reflective of the philosophy's focus on the whole person than on infrastructure totals.

Health, Nutrition and Social Protection

The Ayushman Bharat and its Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana aim to lower the financial burden on eligible beneficiaries for hospitalisation. This objective is in line with the proposition that health is an integral part of human development. Diseases can lead to loss of income, school dropouts and increased household debt. Access to treatment is therefore pertinent to both material security and human dignity (Sen, 1999; UNDP, 2020 [31, 34], National Health Authority, n.d.; World Health Organization, 2010) [38].

However, formal health assurance does not ensure timely and appropriate care. Whether a person can use an entitlement depends on the presence of trained workers, facilities, medicines, diagnostics and transport. Hospital treatment insurance is not a replacement for primary care, prevention, nutrition and public health preparedness. A narrow focus on claims processed can miss those who do not go to a hospital. The most robust understanding of Integral Humanism would evaluate financial protection and the quality of life of the care received.

These problems became apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic. Informal workers and migrants had disrupted incomes, and many households had access challenges to treatment, schooling and mobility. The lesson for Antyodaya is that welfare should be portable, flexible and available in times of crisis. Social protection should be judged on its effectiveness in averting hardship among those who are most vulnerable to a shock, rather than just on the speed of administrative delivery.

Farmers, Rural Livelihoods and Self-Reliance

The PM-KISAN scheme is a direct transfer scheme that gives eligible farmer families who own land Rs 6,000 per year in three installments (PM-KISAN, n.d.). This support can be used for short-term household and farm needs and is an indicator of material security in rural areas. However, the landholding criterion of the programme also demonstrates the importance of the definition of the beneficiary. Even if they are in serious economic insecurity, tenant cultivators, sharecroppers and landless agricultural workers may not be directly supported under this scheme.

Transfers are not a solution to agricultural distress. Farmers also need access to working irrigation, storage, extension services, and access to fair markets and resilience to weather

risks. Rural development should not leave people permanently vulnerable, but rather enable them to be productive and independent, from an Integral Humanism perspective. A meaningful assessment would be made by comparing effects by farm size, region, gender and tenancy status. It would also take into account the availability of rural non-farm employment and the possibility of small producers to join value chains (Upadhyaya, 1965 [36]; PM-KISAN, n.d.). (Banerjee & Duflo, 2011) [3].

The concept of self-reliance is also applicable to the current policy of Atmanirbhar Bharat. Self-reliance does not necessarily mean isolation from international trade, and domestic manufacturing and diversified supply chains can enhance resilience. It is dependent on innovation, competitive capacity and decent employment for its social value. An industrial programme that increases production but does not enhance the security of workers or opportunities for small businesses would meet only part of the broader vision of the philosophy.

Social Justice, Constitutionalism and Pluralism

The connection between Integral Humanism and constitutional democracy needs to be carefully discussed. Upadhyaya stressed the need for social cohesion and a cultural perspective of collective life (Upadhyaya, 1965) [36]. Ambedkar, on the other hand, emphasized on enforceable rights, the elimination of caste inequality, and the political significance of liberty, equality and fraternity (Ambedkar, 1936/2014). While Kumar and Gajendra (2021) [1, 13] show the usefulness of a comparison of these thinkers, their views should not be reduced to a single doctrine. (Ambedkar, 2014; Government of India, 1950; Sen, 2009) [1, 11, 32].

A policy can be socially harmonious and yet exclude disadvantaged citizens. Therefore, appeals to shared culture need to be considered in the context of constitutional equality and the experiences of marginalised groups. Social solidarity is good if it is used to promote equal citizenship, it is problematic if it is used to suppress dissent or minority rights. Similarly, a welfare recipient is still a citizen with rights, and has the right to challenge decisions and to seek remedies.

A constitutionally based understanding of Antyodaya would thus demand transparency in eligibility, protection from discrimination, effective grievance redress and meaningful participation. It would take into account the differences in caste, gender, disability, religion and region, but not assume that the aggregate welfare figures reflect these differences. These protections do not undermine the concept of integrated development, they make it possible to coexist with democratic pluralism (Ambedkar, 1936/2014; Sen, 1999) [1, 31].

Ecology, Decentralisation and Evaluation

The balance between people, society and the wider order of life is a concern of Integral Humanism, which can be applied to environmental policy. Poor health and livelihoods are caused by air pollution, water scarcity, extreme heat and ecological degradation, especially for poorer households. UNDP (2020) states that human development should be viewed in the context of pressures on the planet. This view reinforces the argument for measuring the ecological costs of growth, not as a separate from welfare. (Dasgupta, 2001 [8]; UNDP, 2020).

Long-term well-being may be supported by renewable energy, efficient transport and water conservation, but there are choices to be made regarding land, resources and employment. A just transition should take into account impacted communities and workers, environmental review and fair rehabilitation. It is not about whether a project is sustainable, it is about whether the benefits and burdens of a project are fairly distributed.

Decentralisation is also key. Local governments, cooperatives and civil organisations can identify service failures not captured by central dashboards. However, if local involvement is not genuine and representative, then strong groups can make decisions. Local institutions should be accompanied by independent audits, disaggregated statistics and accessible public information. These practices make the general ethical statements of Integral Humanism into questions that can be explored by researchers and citizens. (Ostrom, 1990; Bardhan, 1996) [4, 27].

Decentralisation is an important institutional dimension of Integral Humanism, particularly in translating the principle of Antyodaya, the upliftment of the most marginalised, into effective governance. Local governments, cooperatives, self-help groups and civil society organisations possess contextual knowledge that centralised administrative systems may overlook. Their participation can help identify service-delivery failures, exclusion errors and region-specific development needs. This perspective is consistent with Ostrom's (1990) [27] emphasis on community-based governance and Bardhan's (1996) [4] analysis of decentralisation and institutional accountability. However, decentralisation can also reproduce existing inequalities if local institutions are dominated by socially and economically powerful groups. Independent social audits, transparent beneficiary selection, disaggregated data and inclusive participation are therefore essential safeguards.

From Philosophical Principles to Measurable Indicators

The worth of a political philosophy is enhanced by the ability to state its claims in the form of questions that can be answered with evidence. Integral Humanism has a number of such questions. The first is access, who has access to a programme and who is not on the programme's list? The second is effective use. Does a formally available service get used when a person needs it? The third is agency, does the programme provide meaningful choices to the beneficiaries? The fourth relates to distribution: do gains accrue to social groups and regions? The questions are based on the capability approach which emphasizes what people can do and can not. (Sen, 1999) [31]. These dimensions draw upon Sen's (1999) [31] capability approach, which evaluates development through substantive freedoms and opportunities rather than resources alone.

In terms of financial inclusion, researchers could look at account activity, distance to a banking point, failed transactions and the control that women have over household funds. The measures for housing and sanitation would be safety, maintenance, water availability and regular use. Access to care, quality of care, cost of care and risk of poverty after illness would be important measures of health. However, the focus of PM-KISAN should not be limited to the amount of transfer, but should also be on the situation of small farmers and those who grow crops on land they do not own (Department of Financial Services, n.d.; PM-KISAN, n.d.).

In healthcare, Ayushman Bharat–PMJAY had generated approximately 42.48 crore beneficiary cards and authorised 10.98 crore hospital admissions by December 2025. However, effective healthcare access also depends on hospital availability, treatment quality, geographical accessibility and out-of-pocket expenditure. Likewise, PM-KISAN requires evaluation beyond financial transfers, particularly regarding small farmers, tenant cultivators, sharecroppers and agricultural livelihood security. These examples illustrate the distinction between administrative achievements and substantive improvements in human welfare.

The Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), with approximately 59.67 crore accounts, including 33.28 crore women's accounts as of October 2026, demonstrates expanded financial access. Nevertheless, meaningful financial inclusion must also be evaluated through account activity, access to institutional credit, transaction failures and women's control over financial resources. Similarly, PMAY-G, which had enabled the completion of approximately 3.12 crore houses nationally by January 2026, should be assessed through housing quality, sanitation, drinking water, electricity and security of tenure rather than construction figures alone.

The other is comparison over time and across regions. An increase in a national indicator may hide an increasing gap between districts. Comparisons should thus be made between rural and urban areas, between various income groups and historically disadvantaged communities. Programme performance should be compared to a credible baseline and alternative explanations, if possible, rather than assuming that all improvements were attributable to one intervention. Administrative progress can be tracked by identifying failures through household surveys, field interviews and independent research. (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2024).

A further requirement is comparative and longitudinal evaluation. National improvements may conceal inequalities between states and districts. Programme outcomes should therefore be examined across rural and urban areas, gender groups, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and income categories. Baseline comparisons, household surveys, beneficiary interviews and independent field research can help establish whether reported improvements are attributable to specific interventions or broader socio-economic changes (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2024).

Democratic accountability and social equality are equally significant. Citizens must have accessible information about entitlements, eligibility and grievance-redressal mechanisms. Ambedkar's critique of caste hierarchy in Annihilation of Caste (1936/2014) [1] provides an important framework for examining whether social harmony is accompanied by equal rights, dignity and substantive participation. Social cohesion cannot substitute for addressing structural inequalities (Kumar & Gajendra, 2021) [13].

Finally, policy evaluation must distinguish between governmental intentions, administrative outputs and actual social outcomes. It should also incorporate historical comparisons with welfare programmes existing before 2014 to identify policy continuities and changes in implementation. Long-term sustainability, employment quality, environmental protection and livelihood resilience must complement conventional development indicators.

Thus, Integral Humanism can be examined as an empirically assessable framework for evaluating public policy. Its relevance ultimately depends not merely on expenditure, infrastructure or beneficiary numbers, but on whether development expands human capabilities, strengthens social institutions and ensures dignified, equitable and sustainable living (Upadhyaya, 1965; Sen, 1999; UNDP, 2020) [26, 31, 36].

Critical Discussion and Conclusion

Integral Humanism remains relevant because it does not accept the notion that development can be quantified by production, consumption or administrative size. It is useful to have a vocabulary for asking who benefits from public policy, as is provided by its attention to integrated human needs, meaningful work, community life and Antyodaya (Upadhyaya, 1965) [36]. This framework can be applied to several programmes that have been expanded since 2014 under the leadership of the Modi-led Union governments, such as banking inclusion, provision of essential amenities, health protection, rural income support and domestic productive capacity. This relationship should be carefully expressed. Programme announcements do not necessarily indicate successful outcomes and philosophical compatibility does not indicate ideological origin. Intended design is set by government sources, evaluation needs credible data on use, quality, exclusion, cost and long-term effects. A policy that affects millions of people can still miss those who need it the most. Likewise, economic self-reliance can be of little human value if jobs are precarious or environmental harm is externalized to vulnerable populations.

The most constructive contemporary reading of Integral Humanism is therefore critical and constitutional. It questions the availability of services for the poorest, the dignity of workers, the expansion of freedom through technology, the voice of local communities and the viability of the environment for future generations. It also demands equality under the law and room for dissent. When read in this manner, Integral Humanism is not a blueprint for government. It is a series of moral issues that are relevant based on the public evidence, democratic accountability and the real improvement of human lives.

Acknowledgment

The Scholar, Dr. Gajendra, is the awardee of the ICSSR Post-Doctoral Fellowship. This paper is largely an outcome of the post-doctoral fellowship sponsored by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR). However, the responsibility for the facts stated, opinions expressed, and the conclusions drawn is entirely of the author. I am also very thankful to my colleague Dr. Nikhil Kumar who has provided review of this paper.

References

1. Ambedkar BR. Annihilation of caste. Navayana, 2014. (Original work published 1936).
2. Anand S, Sen A. Human development and economic sustainability. World Development,2000:28(12):2029–2049. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0305-750X(00)00071-1
3. Banerjee AV, Duflo E. Poor economics: A radical rethinking of the way to fight global poverty. PublicAffairs, 2011.

4. Bardhan P. Decentralised Development. Indian Economic Review,1996:31(2):139–156. Available from: http://www.jstor.org/stable/29793744
5. Béteille A. Society and politics in India: Essays in a comparative perspective. Athlone Press, 1991.
6. Gajendra D. Deendayal Upadhyay ke drishtikon se vitranatmak nyay ka punaravalokan: Ekatma manavvad aur iski samakaleen prasangikta. International Journal of Sociology and Political Science,2024:6(2):59–64.
7. Chambers R. Rural development: Putting the last first. Longman, 1983.
8. Dasgupta P. Human well-being and the natural environment. Oxford University Press, 2001.
9. Department of Financial Services. Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY). Ministry of Finance, Government of India, n.d. Available from: https://financialservices.gov.in/
10. Dreze J, Sen A. An uncertain glory: India and its contradictions. Princeton University Press, 2013.
11. Government of India. The Constitution of India. Legislative Department, 1950. Available from: https://legislative.gov.in/constitution-of-india/
12. Government of India. National education policy 2020. Ministry of Education, 2020. Available from: https://education.gov.in/
13. Kumar P, Gajendra. Deendayal Upadhyaya's philosophy of Antyodaya: A way to protect from economic and social injustice in Covid period. International Journal of Multidisciplinary Education and Research,2021:6(4):44–48.
14. International Labour Organization. India employment report 2024: Youth employment, education and skills. ILO and Institute for Human Development, 2024. Available from: https://www.ilo.org/
15. Kumar P, Gajendra. B. R. Ambedkar and Deendayal Upadhyaya on social justice: A comparative study. International Journal of Sociology and Political Science,2021:3(2):38–42.
16. Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. National health policy 2017. Government of India, 2017. Available from: https://mohfw.gov.in/
17. Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs. Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana—Urban. Government of India, n.d. Available from: https://pmay-urban.gov.in/
18. Ministry of Jal Shakti. Jal Jeevan Mission. Government of India, n.d. Available from: https://jaljeevanmission.gov.in/
19. Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas. Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana. Government of India, n.d. Available from: https://www.pmuy.gov.in/
20. Ministry of Rural Development. Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana—Gramin. Government of India, n.d. Available from: https://pmayg.nic.in/
21. Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. Household consumption expenditure survey 2022–23: Fact sheet. Government of India, 2024. Available from: https://mospi.gov.in/
22. Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. Periodic labour force survey annual report 2023–24. Government of India, 2024. Available from: https://mospi.gov.in/
23. Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation. Swachh Bharat Mission—Grameen. Ministry of Jal Shakti, Government of India, n.d. Available from: https://swachhbharatmission.ddws.gov.in/
24. National Health Authority. Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana. Government of India, n.d. Available from: https://pmjay.gov.in/
25. Nussbaum MC. Creating capabilities: The human development approach. Harvard University Press, 2011.
26. Gajendra. Understanding Social Justice through Deendayal Upadhyaya: A Humanitarian Approach. Our Heritage, 2020, 68(30).
27. Ostrom E. Governing the commons: The evolution of institutions for collective action. Cambridge University Press, 1990.
28. PM-KISAN. PM-KISAN scheme. Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Government of India, n.d. Available from: https://pmkisan.gov.in/
29. Press Information Bureau. Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana: A decade of financial inclusion. Government of India, 2024. Available from: https://pib.gov.in/
30. Rawls J. A theory of justice. Harvard University Press, 1971.
31. Sen A. Development as freedom. Oxford University Press, 1999.
32. Sen A. The idea of justice. Harvard University Press, 2009.
33. Stiglitz JE, Sen A, Fitoussi JP. Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, 2009. Available from: https://www.stiglitz-sen-fitoussi.fr/
34. United Nations Development Programme. Human development report 2020: The next frontier—Human development and the Anthropocene, 2020. Available from: https://hdr.undp.org/content/human-development-report-2020
35. United Nations Development Programme. Human development report 2023/2024: Breaking the gridlock, 2024. Available from: https://hdr.undp.org/
36. Upadhyaya D. Integral humanism: Four lectures delivered in Bombay, 22–25 April 1965, 1965. Available from: https://deendayalupadhyaya.org/speeches/
37. World Bank. World development report 2016: Digital dividends. World Bank, 2016. https://doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-0671-1
38. World Health Organization. The world health report: Health systems financing—The path to universal coverage. WHO, 2010. Available from: https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241564021