



Deendayal Upadhyaya and the reimagining of Indian political economy: Insights from Integral Humanism philosophy

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Abstract

Deendayal Upadhyaya's impact on modern Indian history and political thought is immense. As a committed nationalist, he pioneered an economic agenda for Indian Nationalism, laying out his vision in two seminal works published in 1958: *The Two Plans: Promises, Performance, Prospects* and *Bharatiya Arthniti: Vikas ki Ek Disha*. His economic philosophy emphasized decentralized, labour-intensive industrialization, advocating for small-scale production and investment. He proposed an alternative economic plan that focused on domestic production, self-reliance, and the development of inland waterways and roads. This approach was rooted in his concept of Integral Humanism, which sought to integrate individual and collective life, emphasizing the importance of social harmony and cooperation. His thought continues to shape Indian political discourse, with his emphasis on self-reliance, decentralization, and social harmony remaining relevant today.

Keywords: Cottage industry, industrialization, swadeshi

Introduction

The contributions of Deendayal Upadhyaya to modern Indian history and political thought are profound, especially in shaping the ideological foundation of Indian nationalism through his vision of Integral Humanism. His work aimed to offer an indigenous framework for Indian socio-economic and political development, countering Western models of capitalism and socialism. He not only promoted the idea of a decentralized, labor-intensive industrialization, but also suggested the eliminating of the Planning Commission (The decision-making body for Indian economic policy). He was more inclined towards the alternatives to economic policies which would emphasize more on small industrial production and investment (*Chhote Udyog* and *Chhoti Punji*) and trade, which will eventually raise the level of output of Jana Sangh Base while maintaining its primacy. Moreover, he was of the belief that urban migration for work uprooted the families and led to decline of values, for which he suggested the development of inland waterways and roads as this can help in avoiding the clumping of migration in cities. He critiqued the socialism and stated that socialism was not alternative of capitalism but reaction against it and it failed to establish the importance of human being.

His alternative approach to economic policies was part of culturally nativist project. Although, he was against the use of foreign goods but unlike Gandhi, he was in favour of machinery per se. He wanted to contribute to the holistic vision of development by appeasing the small trader base through the use of small industrial production which will modernise the era. His idea of nativism extended the belief of viewing the foreign trade with scepticism and the idea that the foreign aid from superpowers compromised the nation's sovereignty.

Holistic human development

His vision focused on the holistic human development with special attention to the holistic nature of human existence, which included other important factors like material, ethics, and spiritual dimensions. Deen Dayal not only focused on the material dimension of development but also considered

the spiritual dimension. This new insight of Deen Dayal, which covered the holistic development of humans, provides an alternative not only for India but for the world. His political and economic thought critiques both capitalism and Marxism at the same level and provides a new alternative for post-independence India. His philosophy teaches us that Western liberalism, which focused on individualism, impacted the whole political economy, but we should focus on all aspects of human existence and apply the model of Integral Humanism. His serious commentaries on socialism provided new critique of Marxist thought from an Indian perspective, especially in post-independent India. He stated that socialism prioritizes the state and its ultimate control over all aspects of life, but his philosophy of Integral Humanism advocates a balanced approach towards the state, urging us to support the state in the interest of the nation while also questioning the state in the interest of the nation. In his philosophy, the nation is paramount, beyond all else, but in Marxism and capitalism, the position of the nation is not clearly mentioned.

Idea of decentralization

The thought of Upadhyay clearly mentioned that economic alternatives are purely part of nativist socio-economic reforms that are rooted in the native culture of Bharat. So, to cover a larger population of a country like India, it is mandatory to provide jobs to most of the residents. Therefore, the project of decentralization of industries is a big step towards it. So, in the viewpoint of Upadhyay, the government should leave all sectors because this is the policy of socialism, where the state captures all sectors, society become a state centric where role of individuals and society become negligible. Upadhyay was very serious in his writings about the excessive concentration of wealth and power in hands of few large corporations or state-run enterprises. For him, decentralized economy means growth of local production, consumption and exchange. His thought deeply engages with idea of decentralization, even family was seen as a small production unit by him, in which whole family should work and participate. On another hand, large-

scale industries not only provided mass employment and needed urban migration, but according to Deendayal, the phenomena of migration to urban areas also devalued Indian core ethics. Further, Deendayal stated that policy makers are prisoners of belief that only central-heavy industries should provide solution to our economic problem.

In his works, he understands the surplus value as the core problem of capitalism and Marxism, for instance in capitalism, industrialist creates large capitals and in Marxism, state create capital but the situation of worker in both systems remains same, in both systems entire production is not distributed among the workers, therefore, the idea of decentralization provides the solution, for instance in small scale units, workers can take direct part in management of capital and surplus value. Upadhyay celebrated the innovations of modern sciences and its machines but he was serious about the notion that machine is an alternative of human, he stated that worker remains important in industry and machine is not an alternative of it but a companion of it. He very simply teaches us that “instead of the usual exhortation “Every worker must get food”, we must think of “Everyone who eats must get work”, as the basis of our economy. No doubt charkha has to be replaced by machines but not necessarily automatic machines everywhere. Full employment must be a primary consideration”.

Swadeshi: A new perspective

The concept of Swadeshi is an old-fashioned term but in the works of Upadhyay the concept of *Swadeshi* is deeply excavated and discussed in every aspect. Deendayal uses this concept as fundamental core for the reconstruction of our economy as he believed that our independence was achieved through help taken from the west, in every area, be it thinking, management, capital, methods of production, technology, or the standard and forms of consumption. He considers this as an impediment in the road to progress and development. Therefore, he insists on looking at the positive content of the “swadeshi”. He argued that natural aspects of economic structures are important for any nation, he also warned us that too old economic institutions are not much important for our India but natural aspects that are rooted in our society will work for the betterment of our Bharat. From knowledge system to economic structures every aspect of society should be rooted in Bhartiya Culture, here the duty is to reform and make it dynamic and not to protect it, in this way Upadhyay handled difficult complexities of Bhartiya Culture. This ability of balancing out the complexities of indigenous culture can be understood from the following quote of Upadhyay:

“We shall have to end a number of traditions and set in reforms which are helpful in the development of values and of national unity in our society. We shall remove those traditions which obstruct this process. Whereas one need not mourn the limitations of the human body, one must undergo the required social operation if any part of the body has cancerous growth. There is no need to amputee healthy limbs. If today, the society is gripped with evils like untouchability which lead men to treat other human beings as lower than themselves and thereby threaten the national unity, we shall have to end such evils.”

The thought of Upadhyay critiqued self-centredness approach towards the nation and promoted idea that everyone should serve the nation without any biasness or

selfishness. Upadhyay focused on problem of untouchability in India and provided valuable suggestions to solve it, he further stated that “we will produce not only sympathy towards our brethren, but a sense of affection and oneness with them”. He focused on such institutions, which can truly reflect ‘*Chiti*’. In the words of Upadhyay ‘*Chiti*’ is a nation’s soul. The strength and energy in nation is called “*Virat*”, which is channelled by *Chiti*.

Core objectives of economic system

Upadhyay main core thoughts on economic system are entangled in his objectives of Integral Humanism. He stated that in our nation every individual should have assurance of minimum standard of living and he or she should prepare for the defence of the nation. After maintaining its own minimum standard of living, it is duty of nation to contribute to the universe according to their own *Chiti*. He further states that this vision can only be achieved by providing meaning employment to every able citizen. He emphasised on using the principles of various factors of production and check on its availability to develop machines for Bharatiya technology. This would further help the individual to grow by protecting the indigenous culture and values of life, which he insists can not be violated except at the risk of great peril. He always believed that all this including the ownership, state, private and other forms of industries should be decided on realistic basis.

Nation at first and philosophy of Dharma

He was a dire believer of unity and saw it as a symbol of Hindu Nationalism, which became the base for his various policies. He wanted the labour to not divide the society by following the divisive class politics proposed by the Marxist ideology, rather, pursue the goal of development of an integrated society based on the principles of *Dharma*. According to Upadhyay, in Bharat, natural principles are termed as *Dharma* – the laws of life. Such laws are known as the principles of ethics. Upadhyay very deeply criticised western models. He proposed the concept called Self-reliance (*Atmanirbhar Bharat*) in which not only economic but socio-cultural notions of indigenous land are also important and he criticised western knowledge system. Deendayal Upadhyay argues that Indian values should be included in life of all the people of the universe. Deendayal states that economic theories of the west which were produced on foreign land are responsible for the degradation of the human being and only philosophy of Integral Humanism and focus on Indian culture can lead the human to a good life as Indian culture considers the whole life and whole creation as a complex idea.

Conclusion

Deendayal Upadhyay vision for Bharat is the road map for us to attain our glory which transcend all past glories. His Bharat centric approach critiques both the models of capitalism and Marxism. Both the western centric models are not suited for Indian social conditions, so this Bharat centric model originated from our indigenous knowledge system and is suitable to our land. This multi-dimensional approach provides holistic development model which include all aspects of cultural, spiritual, and economic traditions. His ideas provide road map for 21st century Bharat to attain the position of world power and *Atmanirbhar Bharat*. His thoughts like economic

democracy, Swadeshi, decentralization and self-resilience are helping our policy makers for future growth.

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