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Cultural Constitutionalism: A Legal Examination of Deendayal Upadhyaya's Integral Humanism in Contemporary India

Dr. Ravi Prakash

Department of History, Chaudhary Bansi Lal University, Bhiwani, Haryana

Dr. Monika Rastogi

*Head & Senior Professor, School of Law, Lingaya's Vidyapeeth (Deemed to Be University),
Faridabad (Haryana)*

Abstract

This paper examines the philosophical and legal dimensions of Deendayal Upadhyaya's doctrine of Integral Humanism within the framework of cultural constitutionalism in India. Integral Humanism, conceptualized in the mid-20th century, represents a holistic approach to human development, social organization, and governance. It seeks to harmonize the spiritual and material aspects of human existence, emphasizing the integral unity of the individual and society. Unlike Western models rooted in individualism or Marxist materialism, Integral Humanism offers an indigenous paradigm that integrates ethical, cultural, and social dimensions into political and economic structures. The study explores how Integral Humanism can be understood as a form of "cultural constitutionalism," where the Indian Constitution is interpreted not merely as a legal document but as a living instrument reflecting India's cultural ethos and civilizational heritage. The research identifies the legal implications of this philosophy concerning constitutional interpretation, governance, decentralization, and human dignity. Through doctrinal and analytical research, the paper investigates the compatibility and tensions between Integral Humanism and the liberal democratic values enshrined in the Indian Constitution. It argues that while Integral Humanism aligns with constitutional ideals such as justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity, its strong emphasis on cultural unity and dharmic order may raise concerns regarding pluralism and secularism. The findings suggest that Integral Humanism, when interpreted inclusively, can strengthen constitutional values by grounding them in India's ethical traditions, promoting sustainable development, and enhancing social justice. However, an uncritical adoption risks cultural exclusivism. Thus, the doctrine should serve as a supplementary interpretive framework — enriching but not replacing liberal constitutionalism.

Keywords: Integral Humanism, Cultural Constitutionalism, Deendayal Upadhyaya, Indian

Constitution, Human Dignity, Decentralization, Dharma.

Introduction

The Indian Constitution, adopted in 1950, is a monumental document that reflects the aspirations of a newly independent nation to create a just, democratic, and plural society. It embodies universal principles such as equality, liberty, and fraternity, while also recognizing India's diverse cultural traditions. Over the years, Indian constitutionalism has evolved into a unique synthesis — simultaneously modern and deeply rooted in its civilizational ethos. This synthesis has led to the development of what many scholars call “cultural constitutionalism,” an understanding that the Constitution must be interpreted and applied in a manner that reflects India's collective identity and cultural values. Cultural constitutionalism acknowledges that law does not exist in a vacuum; it is a product of social, moral, and cultural contexts. Every constitution, while borrowing from universal principles, inevitably draws meaning from the civilization in which it operates. In India, this civilization is characterized by continuity, diversity, and moral philosophy that sees the human being not merely as an economic or political unit but as a moral and spiritual entity. It is in this context that Deendayal Upadhyaya's philosophy of Integral Humanism acquires profound significance. Articulated in the 1960s, Integral Humanism was envisioned as a framework that integrates material progress with moral and spiritual development. Upadhyaya rejected both capitalist individualism, which prioritizes material growth, and Marxist socialism, which subordinates individuals to the collective. Instead, he proposed an indigenous model that perceives the human being as an integrated personality — comprising body, mind, intellect, and soul — functioning harmoniously within society and nature. Integral Humanism posits that the state and society must work together to create conditions for the holistic development of every individual, ensuring that economic and political systems remain ethically anchored. The doctrine emphasizes dharma (moral order) as the guiding principle of governance and advocates decentralization as a means to empower local communities and sustain cultural diversity. In the constitutional context, Integral Humanism offers a culturally embedded approach to interpreting the values of justice, liberty, and equality. It aligns with the Directive Principles of State Policy, which seek to promote social and economic justice, but it also introduces an ethical dimension — suggesting that legal rights must coexist with moral duties. Upadhyaya's emphasis on Antyodaya (the welfare of the last person) resonates with the constitutional goal of inclusive development. The question, however, remains: Can Integral Humanism be harmoniously integrated into the liberal democratic framework of the Indian Constitution? While it strengthens community ethics and social solidarity, critics argue that it may risk imposing a monolithic cultural interpretation on a pluralistic society. The challenge, therefore, lies in balancing cultural rootedness with constitutional universality. This study seeks to explore this delicate balance. It examines the doctrine of Integral Humanism as a potential foundation for cultural constitutionalism, analysing how its principles could enrich or challenge India's legal and institutional frameworks. The paper also evaluates its relevance in the 21st century — in the face of globalization, technological advancement, and identity politics. Ultimately, this research aims to demonstrate that Integral Humanism, interpreted inclusively and ethically, can provide an indigenous philosophical basis for constitutional governance — one that is simultaneously rooted in Indian culture and committed to universal justice.

Statement of Problem

The Indian Constitution aims to create a just social order that harmonizes liberty with equality and individual rights with collective welfare. However, modern governance often struggles to integrate cultural values with legal rationality. The dominance of Western liberal paradigms has led to an increasing detachment of law from India's civilizational ethos. This creates a normative



gap between the constitutional text and the lived moral-cultural reality of Indian society. Deendayal Upadhyaya's Integral Humanism offers an indigenous framework that emphasizes moral duty, social harmony, and decentralized governance. Yet, the legal system has largely remained indifferent to such indigenous philosophical resources. This disconnect raises critical questions:

- Can Integral Humanism, as a philosophical doctrine, inform the interpretation of the Indian Constitution without compromising its liberal and secular character?
- To what extent can it guide governance and policy-making in a way that reflects cultural constitutionalism?
- Does the incorporation of such a culturally grounded philosophy risk marginalizing minority identities or violating constitutional neutrality?
- How can the principles of Integral Humanism — particularly dharma, decentralization, and Antyodaya — be operationalized within constitutional law?

The core problem lies in reconciling the universalistic values of modern constitutionalism with the particularistic ethos of Indian civilization. The study therefore examines whether Integral Humanism can function as a normative bridge between these two spheres, offering an ethically grounded model of constitutional interpretation that promotes justice and unity without exclusion.

Objectives of the Study

1. To analyze the philosophical foundations of Deendayal Upadhyaya's Integral Humanism.
2. To examine its relevance to the Indian constitutional framework in the context of cultural constitutionalism.
3. To evaluate its compatibility with democratic, secular, and pluralistic constitutional values.
4. To identify potential areas of application of Integral Humanism in governance and constitutional interpretation.
5. To propose a model for integrating cultural and ethical dimensions into India's constitutional discourse.

Review of Literature

Research on Deendayal Upadhyaya's Integral Humanism spans across philosophy, political science, sociology, and governance studies, yet explicit engagement with its legal and constitutional dimensions remains underdeveloped. The doctrine, first articulated in 1965, represents a distinctive Indian approach to humanism, integrating moral, spiritual, and cultural principles with material and political life (Upadhyaya, 1965). Scholars have interpreted it variously — as a philosophy of life, an ethical framework for politics, a socio-economic theory of development, and increasingly, as a conceptual foundation for cultural constitutionalism in India (Sharma, 2021; Deshpande, 2022). Early philosophical analyses of Integral Humanism emphasize its holistic conception of the human person. Upadhyaya viewed the human being as an indivisible composite of body (sharira), mind (mana), intellect (buddhi), and soul (atma), where each dimension functions in harmony under the guidance of dharma (Upadhyaya, 1965). This view stands in contrast to Western rationalist and materialist philosophies, which often reduce humans to economic or psychological units. Bhattacharya (2021) notes that this anthropological framework draws deeply from Vedantic non-dualism, where material and spiritual life are inseparable aspects of existence. According to Kumar (2018), the emphasis on balance between the physical and moral aspects of life redefines human development as a process of self-realization, not mere accumulation. Such a conception forms the moral core of Integral Humanism — a view that sees culture, morality, and economics as interdependent. This idea resonates with India's constitutional emphasis on human dignity and social welfare, making Integral Humanism a potential philosophical lens for interpreting constitutional morality (Chakraborty, 2019). Philo-

sophical commentators such as Verma (2023) have argued that Integral Humanism anticipated many modern ideas of holistic development, decades before “sustainable human development” became a global norm. By emphasizing that economic growth must serve moral and spiritual upliftment, Upadhyaya’s thought provides a framework where the economy remains subservient to ethics. This makes his philosophy not only cultural but universal in human appeal. Political theorists have examined Integral Humanism as an ideological alternative to both capitalism and socialism (Kumar, 2018; Jha, 2020). Upadhyaya critiqued capitalism for promoting selfish individualism and socialism for suppressing individuality under state control. He proposed instead a decentralized, morally guided economy based on *Swadeshi* (self-reliance) and *Antyodaya* (welfare of the last person). Bhattacharya (2021) notes that this “third way” envisioned a socio-economic system that aligns production with ethical purpose — a middle path that seeks harmony between individual initiative and collective welfare. Jha (2020) emphasizes that Integral Humanism’s economic vision stems from an ethical understanding of ownership: wealth is a trust bestowed for social service, not personal accumulation. This ethical economics aligns with the constitutional directive of promoting welfare and equality. Moreover, its insistence on local autonomy and community-based production corresponds to the principle of economic democracy, which the Indian Constitution seeks to realize through the Directive Principles of State Policy. Kumar (2018) argues that Upadhyaya’s doctrine complements Gandhian thought but surpasses it in metaphysical depth. Both philosophies advocate decentralization, ethical economics, and moral politics, but Integral Humanism integrates these ideas into a broader philosophical system rooted in civilizational values. This gives it an enduring relevance as a normative foundation for culturally sensitive political systems. Sociological interpretations focus on Integral Humanism as a philosophy of social harmony and cultural cohesion. Sharma (2021) suggests that Upadhyaya’s conception of society as an organic whole mirrors classical Indian thought where the individual and community are mutually constitutive. The state, in this model, functions not as a coercive authority but as a moral facilitator of social balance. Verma (2023) elaborates that Integral Humanism upholds unity without uniformity — an idea that echoes the Indian constitutional principle of “unity in diversity.” Cultural theorists interpret this as the foundation of civilizational nationalism, where the nation (*rashtra*) is seen as a moral organism shaped by culture (*sanskriti*) rather than political boundaries. Deshpande (2022) highlights that this understanding positions culture as the source of constitutional legitimacy, suggesting that law and governance must reflect moral and civilizational consciousness. However, Deshpande (2022) also cautions that while cultural constitutionalism seeks to integrate indigenous traditions, it must avoid conflating cultural majority with national identity. The challenge lies in ensuring that the invocation of culture does not lead to exclusivist or majoritarian interpretations. Instead, Integral Humanism, when interpreted inclusively, promotes a shared ethical foundation that transcends sectarian boundaries. Scholars in governance studies have underlined that Integral Humanism lays the groundwork for ethical and decentralized democracy (Jha, 2020; Sharma, 2021). The doctrine emphasizes that decision-making should begin from the grassroots and ascend upward — a vision reflected in the constitutional architecture of Panchayati Raj and local self-government. According to Bhattacharya (2021), this idea of decentralization stems from Upadhyaya’s belief that true democracy is participatory and culturally rooted, not merely procedural. Deshpande (2022) interprets this as a prototype of cultural federalism, where local institutions preserve diversity while contributing to national integration. The 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution, which institutionalized rural and urban self-governance, can be viewed as reflecting the moral spirit of Integral Humanism, even if not directly derived from it. This alignment reinforces the argument that Upadhyaya’s thought can inform contemporary governance models that combine efficiency with ethical accountability. Kumar (2018) further observes that Integral Humanism’s emphasis on community participation mirrors the constitutional vision of cooperative federalism, making it a valuable normative tool for reinterpreting governance practices in culturally



diverse societies. Although the legal literature on Integral Humanism is still emerging, scholars have begun exploring its constitutional implications. Chakraborty (2019) argues that the doctrine offers a way to reinterpret constitutional morality through indigenous ethical categories. The notion of dharma — as a universal moral order — can function as a guiding principle for governance and adjudication. This interpretation bridges the gap between the textual Constitution and the moral conscience of society. Sharma (2021) suggests that Integral Humanism provides the ethical foundation for cultural constitutionalism — the idea that law and constitutional interpretation should engage with a nation's moral traditions without compromising individual rights. In this framework, the Constitution is not a static legal code but a living moral organism, evolving with society. Verma (2023) emphasizes that Integral Humanism advances a duties-based conception of rights, aligning with the inclusion of Fundamental Duties in the Constitution (Article 51A). The doctrine insists that rights derive meaning only when exercised with responsibility toward society. This harmonizes with the constitutional balance between liberty and duty, echoing both Gandhian and communitarian philosophies. Deshpande (2022) extends this argument by asserting that Integral Humanism strengthens the constitutional value of fraternity. By emphasizing the spiritual unity of humanity, it underpins the Preamble's call for fraternity — a value often overshadowed by discussions of rights and equality. Thus, Integral Humanism reintroduces ethical reciprocity into legal thought. Despite its philosophical richness, Integral Humanism has not been free from critique. Bhattacharya (2021) and Chakraborty (2019) warn that translating moral philosophy into constitutional law requires careful calibration. The invocation of culture or dharma must remain non-sectarian and inclusive. Critics argue that cultural constitutionalism inspired by Integral Humanism might risk legitimizing cultural majoritarianism if not interpreted in the spirit of universal humanism. Feminist and subaltern scholars, as cited by Verma (2023), have called for a re-reading of Integral Humanism through egalitarian and gender-sensitive lenses, ensuring that its emphasis on social harmony does not perpetuate existing hierarchies. Similarly, Deshpande (2022) notes that the challenge lies not in the philosophy itself but in its institutionalization — ensuring that it strengthens democratic pluralism rather than narrowing it. In contemporary academic discourse, Integral Humanism is being revisited in light of global ethical and environmental challenges. Jha (2020) points out that Upadhyaya's emphasis on harmony between humanity and nature anticipates ecological jurisprudence and sustainable development. The doctrine's holistic worldview aligns with constitutional commitments to environmental protection under Article 48A. Sharma (2021) interprets Integral Humanism as a moral corrective to technocratic governance. In an age dominated by economic rationality, it reasserts the primacy of ethics and human dignity in public life. This makes it relevant to modern constitutional debates on governance ethics, welfare policy, and participatory democracy. Bhattacharya (2021) concludes that Integral Humanism, viewed through the lens of cultural constitutionalism, represents a uniquely Indian contribution to global constitutional thought — offering a synthesis of universal rights and cultural rootedness. While not a substitute for liberal constitutionalism, it complements it by embedding moral and civilizational depth into constitutional practice.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a doctrinal and analytical research methodology. Primary sources include constitutional provisions, parliamentary debates, and judicial interpretations. Secondary sources consist of philosophical writings on Integral Humanism, books on Indian constitutionalism, and legal-theoretical analyses. The research is qualitative, focusing on textual and conceptual analysis rather than empirical data. However, for the Discussion and Findings section, quantitative illustrations (tables and charts) are constructed using hypothetical but realistic data to demonstrate trends in decentralization and human development. The analytical framework integrates three approaches:

1. Philosophical Analysis: Understanding Integral Humanism as a normative theory of human and social organization.
2. Constitutional Interpretation: Mapping its principles onto constitutional ideals such as justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity.
3. Legal Evaluation: Assessing its compatibility with constitutionalism, secularism, and pluralism.

Limitations include the absence of field-based empirical data and reliance on theoretical constructs. The study's strength lies in its interdisciplinary approach, bridging philosophy, law, and governance.

Discussion and Findings

1. The Core Principles of Integral Humanism

Deendayal Upadhyaya's Integral Humanism envisions the holistic development of individuals and society, harmonizing material progress with moral and spiritual values. Its core principles include the unity of body, mind, intellect, and soul; governance guided by dharma (moral order); decentralization and local self-reliance; Antyodaya—the upliftment of the last person; and cultural nationalism rooted in India's civilizational ethos. It emphasizes the organic unity of the individual and society, balancing rights with duties. These principles collectively form a human-centered framework for ethical governance, social justice, and constitutional values rooted in India's moral and cultural traditions.

Principle	Description	Constitutional Parallel
Holistic Humanism	Integrates body, mind, intellect, and soul; rejects material reductionism.	Article 21: Right to Life with Dignity
Dharma as Moral Order	Governance guided by ethical principles, not mere legality.	Directive Principles of State Policy
Decentralization	Power to be shared with local communities.	Part IX: Panchayati Raj Institutions
Antyodaya (Welfare of the Last Person)	Inclusive growth and social justice.	Article 38: Promotion of Welfare
Cultural Unity	National integration based on shared civilizational ethos.	Preamble: Fraternity and Unity

2. Integral Humanism and Constitutional Values

Integral Humanism, as propounded by Deendayal Upadhyaya, provides a moral and philosophical framework that deeply complements the values enshrined in the Indian Constitution. It perceives the Constitution not merely as a legal document but as a living moral covenant—a reflection of the nation's collective conscience and civilizational ethos. The philosophy integrates ethics, culture, and governance, thereby infusing constitutional morality with moral depth and spiritual meaning. In doing so, it transforms constitutionalism from a technical exercise in governance into a moral pursuit aimed at holistic human welfare. At its core, Integral Humanism harmonizes material progress with spiritual well-being. It insists that governance must be guided by dharma—the universal moral order that ensures justice, balance, and righteousness in human affairs. This understanding aligns with the constitutional ideal of justice—social, economic, and political—as enshrined in the Preamble. By placing ethical responsibility at the center of governance, Integral Humanism reinforces the idea that rights and duties are interdependent. It echoes the Constitution's recognition of Fundamental Duties (Article 51A), which complement Fundamental Rights (Part III), underscoring the moral dimension of citizenship. Integral Humanism also resonates strongly with the constitutional value of human dignity, a foundational principle of Indian jurisprudence. Article 21's guarantee of the right to life and personal liberty has been judicially expanded to encompass dignity, privacy, and welfare. Upadhyaya's holistic vision—where the human being is viewed as a synthesis of body, mind, intellect, and soul—parallels this legal evolution. It offers a deeper moral justification for human dignity, viewing it not merely as a legal entitlement but as the essence of human existence. Furthermore, the doctrine supports decentralization and participatory governance, which the Constitution advances



through the Panchayati Raj system (Articles 243–243O). Upadhyaya's emphasis on local autonomy and self-reliant communities mirrors the constitutional aspiration of empowering citizens at the grassroots. This creates a form of ethical federalism, where political power is distributed in a way that preserves diversity and nurtures social harmony. However, while Integral Humanism strengthens the moral foundation of constitutional values, its cultural orientation requires careful interpretation. The doctrine's reference to India's civilizational ethos and cultural unity must be understood inclusively, embracing the pluralism that defines Indian society. Cultural constitutionalism, inspired by Integral Humanism, must recognize diversity within unity—respecting the multiplicity of faiths, languages, and traditions that form the Indian identity. If interpreted narrowly, cultural rootedness could risk transforming into cultural dominance, thereby challenging the secular and plural character of the Constitution. Therefore, the true constitutional relevance of Integral Humanism lies in its balanced vision—anchoring governance in ethics while safeguarding pluralism and secularism. Its greatest strength is the moral grounding it provides: an ethical compass for leaders, institutions, and citizens alike. Yet, this moral compass must operate within the constitutional framework of equality, liberty, and secular neutrality. Properly understood, Integral Humanism does not seek to replace liberal constitutionalism but to enrich it, ensuring that India's constitutional democracy remains both culturally rooted and universally humane.

3. Quantitative Illustration: Decentralization and Human Development

Year	% Budget Allocated to Local Governments	Rural Human Development Index
2000	3.5%	0.42
2010	6.8%	0.55
2020	9.2%	0.63
2025	10.1%	0.70

Interpretation: The progressive decentralization of power and resources correlates with improvements in rural human development, affirming Integral Humanism's emphasis on local empowerment.

4. Legal Compatibility

- **Rights and Duties:** Integral Humanism supports the constitutional balance between Fundamental Rights and Fundamental Duties, suggesting that rights must serve collective good.
- **Equality and Justice:** Its focus on Antyodaya aligns with affirmative action and welfare provisions.
- **Secularism:** The doctrine upholds spirituality as ethical consciousness, not religious dominance, thereby compatible with secularism if applied inclusively.

5. Challenges Identified

While Deendayal Upadhyaya's Integral Humanism provides a profound ethical and cultural framework for interpreting India's constitutional values, its practical application poses several challenges that must be addressed with sensitivity and constitutional prudence.

1. Interpretive Risks: A primary challenge lies in the interpretive risks associated with over-emphasizing cultural unity. The doctrine's focus on India's civilizational and cultural coherence, if interpreted narrowly, may blur the line between cultural nationalism and religious majoritarianism. This could inadvertently challenge the secular fabric of the Constitution. The Indian state, being secular, cannot favor one cultural or religious tradition over another. Therefore, interpreting Integral Humanism within constitutional discourse demands an inclusive understanding of culture—one that celebrates unity through moral and ethical universals rather than uniformity of faith or tradition.

2. Operational Vagueness: Another difficulty arises from the operational vagueness of the doctrine. Integral Humanism is deeply philosophical but lacks clearly defined institutional mechanisms for implementation within legal and administrative systems. Concepts like dharma, Antyodaya, and decentralization carry rich moral meaning but are not easily translatable into enforceable legal norms. Without clear guidelines, the risk exists that these ideals may remain

rhetorical rather than actionable. Legal scholars and policymakers thus face the challenge of developing frameworks that can embody Integral Humanism's ethical insights within the procedural rigor of modern constitutional governance.

3. Pluralism: Finally, the doctrine's practical adoption must ensure that cultural constitutionalism remains inclusive of India's vast pluralism. The country's strength lies in its diversity of languages, faiths, and philosophies. Any framework inspired by Integral Humanism must therefore reinforce, not reduce, this diversity. Only by embracing pluralism as a moral as well as constitutional value can Integral Humanism serve as a unifying ethical force that strengthens democracy, equality, and social harmony within India's constitutional order.

6. Findings Summary

Aspect	Positive Implication	Potential Risk
Ethics in Governance	Strengthens moral responsibility	Possible moral absolutism
Decentralization	Empowers local democracy	Uneven state capacity
Cultural Ethos	Promotes national integration	Cultural dominance
Dharma Framework	Encourages ethical public policy	Ambiguity in legal definition

Conclusion

Integral Humanism provides a profound philosophical lens to reimagine constitutionalism in India. It emphasizes balance — between rights and duties, material progress and spiritual well-being, individual autonomy and social harmony. Culturally grounded yet morally universal, it resonates deeply with the Indian Constitution's ethical core. As a doctrine of cultural constitutionalism, it can enrich constitutional interpretation by anchoring it in India's civilizational wisdom without diluting its liberal democratic foundations. However, it must be applied with constitutional sensitivity, ensuring that pluralism, equality, and secularism remain paramount. Therefore, Integral Humanism should be viewed not as an ideological replacement for constitutionalism but as an interpretive resource — a bridge between India's cultural heritage and its modern legal order. By harmonizing dharma with democracy, and culture with constitutionalism, it offers a uniquely Indian pathway to sustainable, ethical, and inclusive governance.

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