

# Deendayal Upadhyaya's Integral Humanism and the Indian Knowledge System: A Philosophical Synthesis

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the deep conceptual connections between the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), the *Advaitic* ontology of non-dualism and the Integral Humanism of Deendayal Upadhyaya or Ekatma Manav Darshan. The Indian philosophical tradition introduces reality as a unified entity, which is interdependent and intrinsically unified, which can be also seen in Vedanta, Sāṃkhya or the *Purusharthas* system. Upadhyaya takes this metaphysics into a socio-political paradigm which focuses on the organic unity of individuals, society, nature and the cosmos. His holism in the holistic development is based on the spiritual and ethical precepts and this can be seen as a reaction to the materialist ideologies of the West. Through a methodological analysis of the main ideas of non-dualistic ontology, integral anthropology, and the dharmic approach to the organization of society, the paper shows that Integral Humanism reflects and replicates the insights of the Indian Knowledge System to the modern system of governance and human development.

**Keywords-** Advaita Philosophy, Indian Knowledge System (IKS), Integral Humanism, Purushartha Framework, Samkhya Metaphysics, Upadhyaya's Philosophy.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) is a rich civilization that has developed over the course of over 5000 years of time and includes philosophy, science, medicine, arts, and governance (Sahoo et al., 2025). IKS is founded on classic scriptures including the Vedas, Upanishads and the classical darshanas, which expresses a worldview based on advaita or ontological oneness of being. According to this non-dualistic vision, everything is interrelated and human beings are a part of the cosmic order as opposed to individual people (Karmanya Gurutvam, 2024). IKS is holistically oriented and insists on the harmonious connection between the physical, mental and intellectual, and spiritual aspects of life, which is reflected in its work in the field of metaphysics, ethics, medicine, architecture and socio-political philosophy.

Such a vision of an integrated reality is given a strong political redefinition in the philosophy of Integral Humanism (Ekatma Manav Darshan) of Deendayal Upadhyaya, presented as a series of lectures in 1965. In its turn, the ethos of civilizational life in India, which Upadhyaya believed was based on dharma, unity of being, and organic community life, had to shape the way the contemporary nation developed (Upadhyaya, 1965). His criticism of the Western models of politics, which was not only excessive individualism of capitalism but also reductionist materialism of socialism, focused on the idea that the only conceivable Indian model of development would be one that takes into account the integral man, the unity of

body and mind of intellect and soul of soul in a continuum. Upadhyaya had it that failure to do this holistic anthropology contributes to social disorder, moral confusion and economic imbalance which is resonated in numerous lectures (Upadhyaya, 1965).

In line with the views of Upadhyaya, recent interpretations also focus on the fact that IKS is a multidisciplinary body of knowledge that was developed on the principles of a holistic inquiry, sustainability, and ethical governance. To illustrate this point, (Sahoo et al., 2025) emphasize the fact that the classical Indian paradigm unites the fields of epistemology, ontology, and practical wisdom with the help of systems like Ayurveda, Yoga, Vastu Shastra, and the Shad-Darshanas, which show that it is a very unified civilizational method of cognizing the world and human nature. These traditions collectively establish a vision of life as based on interdependence and mutual support a vision that Upadhyaya redefined into an alternative political philosophy derived out of harmony, decentralised forms, and principled governance.

Also, the study of indigenous and traditional knowledge systems (Rao, 2006) places IKS in a world discourse of community based knowledge, sustainability and local decision making. Indigenous Knowledge (IK), which is tacit, experiential, and context-specific, is methodologically and philosophically related to IKS, especially with respect to its focus on lived experience, ecological balance and common good (Rao, 2006). These similarities highlight the fact that IKS and Integral Humanism are connected not only by the cultural heritage but also by the common interest in knowledge that helps to maintain human life in the balance with nature.

Getting IKS and Integral Humanism into a dialogue, this paper will prove that the philosophical framework proposed by Upadhyaya is not a twentieth-century feat of its own but a deliberate rebirth and rejuvenation of the civilizational wisdom of India. Upadhyaya renders philosophical concepts, like non-duality, the dynamic relationship of spirit and matter, and the Purushartha schema, into practical theories of polity and development and expresses a native paradigm, as opposed to imports of a Western sort. This association is important to the current discussion of sustainable development, cultural identity, ethical statecraft and the comprehensive human well-being in present day India.

## II. THE INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM OF THE ADVAITA WORLDVIEW

Advaita-worldview is one of the most profound metaphysical underpinnings of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS). IKS, as a knowledge system of civilisation, takes reality to be fundamentally unitary, relational, and interrelated, an appreciation of which is found not only in Vedanta, particularly, the school of Advaita, but is found throughout in the Upanishads, in the Smriti literature and in the classical school of darshanas (Sahoo et al., 2025). This conception does not only influence the classical Indian metaphysics, but also informs the modern concept, like that of the Integral Humanism, which also holds the same view of unity of existence and organic continuity of life, society and cosmos (Upadhyaya, 1965).

### 2.1. Ontology of Non-Dualism

Advaita Vedanta holds that *Brahman*, the ultimate reality is single, infinite, non-dual, and indivisible. The principle of unity is regularly stated in the Upanishads, and in phrases like: “*ekam eva advitityam*” and “*sarvam khalvidam brahma*” (All this is actually Brahman). Sankara believed that diversity only exists at an empirical level because of *avidya* (ignorance) but at *paramārthika* (absolute) level, all living beings have a single ontological essence (Deutsch & Dalvi, 2004). This metaphysical position directly tells the IKS view that reality cannot be divided into separate units, rather it is a relational and connected entity (Karmanya Gurutvam, 2024). Sahoo et al. (2025) emphasise that the Indian epistemology has been long interested in the principle of unity in the diversity, focused on the interdependence and complementary nature of different systems of knowledge.

Upadhyaya in his doctrine of Integral Humanism, redefines Advaitic ontology in the socio-political realm and argues that the individual, the society, and the universe are not separate entities but manifestations of a single reality (Upadhyaya, 1965). Such metaphysical transfer into social theory enhances the philosophical legacy between IKS and the contemporary Indian political theory.

### 2.2. Holistic Anthropology

Vedanta thinks of a human being as a unity of body (*śarīra*), mind (*manas*), intellect (*buddhi*), and soul (*ātman*). This stratified anthropology is as expressed in the classical literature like the *Taittirīya* Upanishad which illustrates *pañca-kōśa* (or five sheaths) model, *annamaya*, *prāṇamaya*, *manomaya*, *vijñānamaya*, and *ānandamaya kōśa*, which is a holistic model of the humane existence (Olivelle, 1998). This intermodal knowledge is a stark contrast to the anthropological models of the West that tend to isolate the physical, rational or psychological aspects in isolation.

Health, knowledge, ethics and spiritual realization are interconnected in the IKS, and not separated into distinct faculties, but in a continuum. The two prominent IKS Ayurveda and Yoga engage mind, body, and consciousness as three systems that are interdependent (Sahoo et al., 2025). Upadhyaya directly builds on this Vedantic anthropology, in the view that when one or more of the dimensions are neglected, a non-balanced and unwhole picture of the human person is obtained (Upadhyaya, 1965). He renews the classical Indian idea of human totality in a contemporary developmental paradigm by reaffirming the so-called integrity of the man.

### 2.3. *Interconnected Cosmos*

The Indian Knowledge System conceives the universe as a living organic system in which every object, energy and element exist in a relationship network of interdependence. The Rigveda describes the creation as an organism whose various parts are represented by the *Puruṣa* and would become the elements of the cosmos and social orders. In the same vein, the Bhagavad Gita expresses a mutual relationship (*yajna*) of humans, nature, and the divine, which does show that harmony is maintained with an interdependent action.

This ecological and cosmological interdependence has also been recorded in the Indigenous Knowledge (IK) systems across the globe, which has stressed on the local, experience-based and relation-based knowledge enshrined in the ecosystems (Rao, 2006). The Indian traditions explain this interdependence using the concepts of *ṛta* (cosmic order), *dharma* (principles of sustenance) and *yoga* (unity), which creates the complete conception of the interdependence of human, nature, and cosmos.

In modern thought, Upadhyaya (1965) appeals to this worldview to suggest that society has to be structured as an organic whole in which every institution plays the role of an interconnected part of a body and that it cannot and should not compete, instead it should be complementary and cooperative. Sustainability, balance and harmony with the natural world are also the focus of the modern IKS literature (Karmanya Gurutvam, 2024).

## III. *PURUSHA-PRAKRITI BALANCE AND UNITY OF EXISTENCE OF SĀMĀKHYA*

One of the oldest systems of philosophy of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) is the *Sāṃkhya* system that bears the name of the sage Kapila. Although typically dualistic, the metaphysical perspective of *Sāṃkhya* is essentially geared towards balance, complement, and interdependence, and thus is very compatible with the holistic approach to the world, which is inherent in *Advaita* and, subsequently, in the Integral Humanism of Deendayal Upadhyaya (Sahoo et al., 2025).

### 3.1. *Purusha and Prakriti: Complementary Principles*

*Sāṃkhya* assumes two types of realities that are eternal, *Purusha* (pure consciousness) and *Prakriti* (primordial nature). In contrast to the dichotomy, *Sāṃkhya* presents the existence as a result of the dynamic process between these principles. *Purusha* is the disseminator of awareness, and *Prakriti* is the material substratum that is defined by the three *gunas* - *sattava*, *rajas* and *tamas* (Larson et al., 1987). The cosmos evolution, mind, senses, and ethical states are the results of metamorphosis of *Prakriti* in the presence of *Purusha*. This system of relational ontology formalizes the IKS belief that mind, matter, and consciousness are mutually conditioning constituents of reality, which depend on each other.

### 3.2. *Philosophical Implication on IKS*

IKS relies on continuation between material and spiritual worlds. The conceptual duality is therefore not in any way a contradiction of non-dualism; on the contrary, it is instead an analytical pattern that explains empirical phenomena, and at the same time provides an underlying oneness which can be realized through the yogic revelation (Olivelle, 1998). This unity of *Purusha* and *Prakriti* is the philosophical structure of such disciplines like Yoga, Ayurveda and classical Indian psychology. Sahoo et al. (2025) argue that the six Darshana including *Sāṃkhya* are what create the composite intellectual space in India since they have metaphysical, epistemic, ethical tools that do not operate alone but interact with each other.

### 3.3. *Relation to the Idealism of Humanism*

Upadhyaya holds emphasis on organic unity of the classical Indian thought and says that human existence is created by interaction of physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual aspects of being- an opinion which is close to the *Sāṃkhya* synthesis of *Purusha* and *Prakriti* (Upadhyaya, 1965). He denounces western models that either tend to excessively materialize human existence (capitalism, Marxism) or tend to excessively intellectualize it (liberal rationalism), while proposing a model where material wellbeing and spiritual development are not in conflict but proceed hand in hand. This equilibrium of supports the idea of Upadhyaya that the materialistic (*Prakriti*) and the ethical and spiritual consciousness (*Purusha*) should govern the world through a balanced order. In line with this, Integral Humanism applies *Sāṃkhya* metaphysics through modern statecraft, which makes policy based on harmony, complementarity and interdependence.

### 3.4. *Eco-Indigenous Comparisons*

According to Rao (2006), systems of Indigenous Knowledge all over the world reflect similar ideals of interdependence and balance, and focus on co-existence rather than exploitation. The *Sāṃkhya* focus on the vibrations of the *gunas* is in line with ecological paradigms, and the fact that human behavior should be sensitive to cosmic and environmental law.

## IV. *PURUSHARTHAS: THE CLASSICAL MODEL OF INTEGRAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT*

The Purushartha paradigm: Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksha is one of the seminal works of Indian philosophy in the history of the world intellectual movements. It states a detailed vision of human intentions, and it combines ethical, material, emotional, and spiritual goals. In IKS, the Purusharthas are not only the personal goals, but also the model of the structure

of the harmony of the society, and thus are used to guide governance, economics, and social organization (Sahoo et al., 2025).

#### 4.1. *Dharma: Ethical Foundation*

Dharma is the regulative norm that maintains order among people, society and universe. Dharma is based on Vedic and *Dharma Sastric* tradition and is righteousness, duty and moral coherence. There is a group of texts, the Manusmriti and the Mahabharata, that portrays Dharma as that which support and maintain life. As Karmanya Gurutvam (2024), confirms, the tradition of the Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) has always been prospective of ethical behaviour and environmental balance as the foundation of knowledge and practice. Upadhyaya is a supporter of Dharma as the most important pillar in Integral Humanism, which states that without a state and economy guided by Dharma, governance turns into raw competition of power (Upadhyaya, 1965).

#### 4.2. *Artha and Kama: Material and Emotional Well-Being*

Whereas Dharma controls actions, Artha or material prosperity and Kama or emotional satisfaction deal with the secular aspects of the human life. Classical traditions like the Artha Sastra and the Kama Sutra codify these areas on the reasoning that stable and emotionally contented communities are the key to stability and the well-being of humankind. However, Artha and Kama have to be sought within the moral boundaries described by Dharma, thus, making materialistic pursuits not to destroy societal balance and natural harmony.

#### 4.3. *Moksha: The Spiritual Apex*

Moksha or liberation is the final stage in the development of a human being. According to the Upanishads, Moksha refers to the dissolution of ignorance and understanding of the identity of the self with Brahman (Olivelle, 1998). This final objective is what brings Indian anthropology to the level of materialist paradigms and in this case complies with the statement of Advaita stating that existence is united.

#### 4.4. *Purusharthas and Integral Humanism*

Integral Humanism follows in the footsteps of the Purushartha model by stating that the development should simultaneously consider all of the four dimensions of human existence. According to Upadhyaya, the western development paradigms over foreground Artha (economics) and fail to focus on Dharma and Moksha, thus creating an imbalance in civilizations (Upadhyaya, 1965). His theory of the Integral Man is a modern redefinition of the Purusharthic ideal, in which he attempted to reconcile:

- material well-being (*Artha*),
- emotional-cultural enhancement (*Kama*),
- moral basis (*Dharma*), and
- spiritual enlightenment (*Moksha*).

This interpretation makes IKS metaphysics congruent with contemporary governance, which has made the Integral Humanism stand as a very important criterion between ancient wisdom and contemporary nation-building.

#### 4.5. *Contemporary Resonances*

The modern IKS research recognizes the *Purushartha* model as one that assists in such areas as sustainability, social morality, community growth, and holistic learning (Sahoo et al., 2025). Its focus on balance appeals to the Indigenous Knowledge traditions of the world, which place value on relationality, reciprocity and ethical utilisation of resources (Rao, 2006).

## V. UPADHYAYA INTEGRAL HUMANISM AS AN INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM CONTINUATION

One of the few most outspoken contemporary presentation of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) in a modern socio-political context is the doctrine of Integral Humanism (*Ekatma Manav Darshan*) developed by Deendayal Upadhyaya. Developed in the middle of the twentieth century as a reaction to the ideological problems of Western capitalism, Marxism, and secular modernity, Integral Humanism is deeply rooted in Indian civilizational worldview, directly based on Advaita Vedanta, the Purusha-Prakriti complementarity of *Sāṃkhya*, on the *Purushartha* model, and on the holistic anthropology entrenched in classical literature (Sahoo et al., 2025). Upadhyaya does not develop a new philosophy; he only recovers indigenous principles of metaphysics, which had been relegated during the colonial regime and re-transfers them to the governance requirements of a contemporary state of nation.

#### 5.1. *Integral Humanism a Restatement of the Organic Unity of Advaita*

The most important aspect of Integral Humanism is the claim that existence is an organic unity. Upadhyaya specifically denounces the atomism of life into separate segments economic, political, cultural, and spiritual a trait which he says the western methods of analysis have brought on (Upadhyaya, 1965). On the contrary, he suggests a model of interconnection of the individual, society, nature and cosmos, as a manifestation of the same underlying reality, reflecting the dictum of Advaita, which is the dictum of Advaitic dictum, (*ekam eva advitiya -yam*).

This vision is based on the Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) perception of reality as holistic, relational and interdependent a vision continuously emphasized in Vedantic, Ayurvedic, Yogic, and ecological traditions (Karmanya

Gurutvam, 2024). Similarly to the argument that several forms hide the existence of oneness in Advaita, Upadhyaya suggests that several divisions in the society, the existence of classes, and individualistic character arise when the society loses the memory of its unity. Integral Humanism reduces the Advaitic vision to something more practical and does not offer it as a collection of abstract metaphysics but as a policy guide, a policy of social cohesion, and national development.

### 5.2. *The Idea of the Integral Man and Vedantic Anthropology*

Upadhyaya theory of the Integral Man echoes Vedantic opinion that the human being is a combination of:

- *Śarīra* (body)
- *Manas* (mind)
- *Buddhi* (intellect)
- *Ātman* (soul)

Such a stratified understanding of the human person is congruent with the *pañca-kōśa* model that is expressed in the *Taittiriya* Upanishad (Olivelle, 1998). The Indian thought demands a whole personality unlike the Western paradigms that rely on the material or psychological aspect. Upadhyaya uses such anthropological inclination to criticize the contemporary models of development that dehumanize human being to become a unit of economy or a political being. According to his writing, a failure to pay attention to the spiritual and ethical aspects creates a lack of balance, the feeling of alienation, and disorder within society (Upadhyaya, 1965).

### 5.3. *Society as Organic Whole*

One of the pillars of the Integral Humanism is that society is not a contract, as argued by Hobbes or Rousseau, but rather an organic entity, a living organism, and so is the metaphor of the Purusha Sukta. This is in line with the Indigenous Knowledge traditions where community, the environment and the cultural practices develop in interdependence (Rao, 2006). Sanghatmak Samaj by Upadhyaya stresses:

- Social harmony (*samrasāta*)
- Complementarity over conflict
- Shared duties and not rights of competition.
- Community-based institutions that are decentralised.

Sahoo et al. (2025) state that this communitarian orientation has strong grounds in the Indian socio-philosophical traditions, especially, in the Dharma-shastras, Panchayat organizations, and Vedic environmentalism.

### 5.4. *Dharma the Control over the State*

According to IKS, *Dharma* is given a central position in the process of life, the ethical, cosmic, and social order. The main responsibility of the king in classical thought is known as *rajdharma* and includes not only the role of a ruler but the role of preserving the moral order (Dvivedi, 1917; Menon, 2009). Upadhyaya also uses Dharma as the basis of his political ethics on the basis of which he states that a state without Dharma turns into a coercion or exploitation machine (Upadhyaya, 1965). For him, Dharma ensures:

- Justice,
- Social harmony,
- Ecological balance, and
- Ethical economics.

This is in contrast to the Western secular political theory where ethics and metaphysics are isolated in the statecraft.

### 5.5. *Economic thought: dharmic and swadeshi economics*

Upadhyaya is a critic of capitalism (atomistic individualism) and socialism (materialistic collectivism). Rather, he bases the economic life on:

- *Swadeshi*
- Trusteeship
- Livelihood security
- Decentralisation
- Ethical limitations to consumption.

These principles are reminiscent of IKS sources, the *Arthashastra*, *Dharmashastra* and traditional guild structures (*śreṇīs*). They also coincide with the Indigenous Knowledge systems that highlight on sustainability, community ownership and ecological stewardship (Rao, 2006).

### 5.6. *Modern Relevance: A Civilizational Model of Development*

Modern academics argue that the Integral Humanism of Upadhyaya provides a civilizational alternative to the Western paradigms especially in:

- Sustainability,
- Social cohesion,
- Ethical governance, and
- Holistic development of human beings.

Integral Humanism is an amalgamation of classical Indian metaphysical knowledge, and modern socio-political requirements, and is an elaboration and renewal of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) as opposed to a discontinuity with them.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The connection between the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) and the Integral Humanism of Deendayal Upadhyaya points out an immeasurable continuity between the civilizational worldview of India and its possible ways of defining how contemporary governance, social organization, and comprehensive development should happen. The above discussion shows that IKS, based on the metaphysics of Advaita, the logical findings of the moral structure of the Purushartha, introduces reality in the form of an unconditionally whole, interdependent, and naturally harmonious. These traditional lessons are updated by Integral Humanism by Upadhyaya, in order to render the metaphysical postulates a consistent socio-political philosophy applicable to the vicissitudes of the modern nation-state. Advaita draws emphasis on the non-duality nature of being, whereby people, society, nature, and cosmos are individual and separable manifestations of the same ultimate reality. This perception of the world serves to inform the spiritual, epistemological, and ecological practices not just in India, but globally (Sahoo et al., 2025). The conception of the integral man expressed by Upadhyaya based on the holistic anthropology of Vedanta also opposes reductionist view of human being as an economic or political agent. His insistence upon harmonising body, mind, intellect, and soul, reflects the *pañcha-kosha* model of the Upanishads (Olivelle, 1998), and is a philosophical redress to materialistic developmental models.

The Indian civilizational imagination has at the level of society traditionally imagined community in the organic form of a living organism. The principles of relationality, interdependence, and ecological balance, which are discussed by Rao (2006) in connection with the Indigenous Knowledge (IK) systems, are also closely connected with the principle according to which Upadhyaya discusses the *Sanghatmak Samaj* (organic society). Denying the idea of social-contract theories based on conflict or atomistic self-determination, Upadhyaya returns to the theme of Indian focus on social obligations (*kartavya*) and moral responsibility based on Dharma. Dharma comes out in IKS and Integral Humanism as an overall standard of governance, economy, and social behavior. Although the western tradition tends to distinguish political authority and ethics, the Indian tradition is firm in its view that political governance should be rooted in Dharma, which means justice, moral order, and general well-being (Karmanya Gurutvam, 2024). Upadhyaya rekindles this tradition and contends that a Dharmic state is a guarantee of social peace, economic fairness and ecological custodianship and as such, it is not caught in the traps of unconditional sovereignty or utilitarian rule. Another important intermediary between IKS and Integral Humanism is the *Purusharthas* system. This model offers a comprehensive plan in human aspirations by incorporating Dharma, Artha, Kama as well as Moksha. Upadhyaya redefines these objectives to respond to developmental problems of postcolonial India by cautioning against models that put more emphasis on Artha (economic gain) at the cost of Dharma and Moksha (ethical and spiritual flourishing). His request to have a balanced development conforms to IKS viewpoints on sustainability, ecologic peace, and well-being of man (Sahoo et al., 2025).

Upadhyaya in his presentation of Swadeshi, decentralised, ethical consumption, and livelihoods (community-based) is equivalent to indigenous and pre-modern economic activities that have been reported in IKS literature. His economic vision is very similar to the ancient *śrenī* (guild) system, the focus of the Arthashastra on maximising local resources and the ecological ethics of Vedic philosophy. Such continuity points out that Integral Humanism is not some ideological innovation but a civilizational recovery brought up to the current socio-economic realities. On the whole, this paper confirms that Integral Humanism is a philosophical linkage between the ancient knowledge tradition of India and its current requirements of development. It disputes the reality that modernity has to be equated with western models, providing a different alternative, that is locally based, culturally situated and ethically sound, instead. The joint analysis of *Advaita* and *Purusharthas* and Upadhyaya socio-political theory proves that IKS has strong resources to respond to contemporary issues on sustainability, identity, development, and social justice. With the ecological disasters, cultural homogenisation and existential dystopia of our age, this integrated worldview expressed by IKS and implemented by Integral Humanism gains greater and greater importance. It expresses a model in which economic success is moderated by moral restraint, technological advancement is balanced with environmental care and personal ambitions are incorporated in the quest of social coexistence. Hence, the rejuvenation and modernization of IKS in the frameworks of such constructive ideas to the world as Integral Humanism offer a bright intellectual and practical direction of forming the more humane, sustainable, and culturally-rooted future of India and of the global community as a whole that is seeking alternative approaches to the main paradigms.

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