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The Political Philosophy of Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya and India's Cultural Identity

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Abstract

Cultural identity is a crucial and integral aspect of any nation. In relation to Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya, this refers to the authenticity and identity of the Indian nation. Upadhyaya discusses a culture that encompasses all aspects of life and its development. This research paper examines the unique features of Sanatan Indian culture, along with Deendayal Upadhyaya's insights and reflections. The article uses an explanatory method, aiming to highlight both the originality and richness of Indian culture, while underscoring Upadhyaya's commitment to preserving India's cultural heritage.

Keywords: Culture, Sanatan, Heritage, Vedic, Rigveda.

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INTRODUCTION

Indian culture is characterized by its ancient legacy and a profound history replete with inspiring principles and values. It is a privilege to be part of one of the most revered cultures globally, as demonstrated by *Vedic* wisdom. This culture is marked by a holistic, comprehensive, and spiritual viewpoint on reality, shaping a lifestyle that embodies this understanding. It advocates for the essential oneness of all beings, encompassing both animate and inanimate entities. At its essence, every form of existence is spiritual, filled with life and awareness. All that exists in the universe is interconnected by a shared origin and sustenance. Indeed, everything that has existed, exists now, and will come to be is a manifestation of the same '*Divine Being*,' as illustrated in the '*Puruṣa-Sūkta*' from the *Rigveda*. The '*īśāvāsyopaniṣad*' from the *Yajurveda* claims that every part of this continually evolving world is sacred and imbued with the '*Divine Essence*'. The '*Nāsadīya-Sūkta*' of the *Rigveda* depicts it as a singular, self-sustaining principle that appears in various forms, which are also perceived and articulated in different manners.

Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya introduced an important idea of *Chiti*, which encompasses individual awareness, collective national identity, and cosmic consciousness. *Chiti* grants self-identity and independence to all these facets. It serves as the energizing force behind them. Upadhyaya specifically highlighted the *Chiti* of a nation, referring to it as the essence of that nation. It is upon this foundation that a nation rises, develops, and gains strength and vitality. The strength and energy that drives a nation is identified as '*Virāt*'. It functions similar to vital breaths (*prāṇa*). This energy infuses vigor into every aspect of the nation. However, it must be directed by *Chiti*. *Chiti* is what awakens the *Virāt* of a nation. For a nation's survival and growth, it must possess this vital energy. Every nation should strive to preserve, safeguard, and enhance it. This belief is also echoed by Swami Vivekanand and Sri Aurobindo in their teachings.

WHY INDIAN CULTURAL IDENTITY IS UNIQUE

Indian culture uniquely encourages an attitude of "I and we" rather than a mindset of "I versus you." This concept reflects spiritual globalization, which has been valued and promoted by Indian sages throughout history. The 'other' should not be viewed as separate, external, or alien. The aspirational goal is to achieve a universal sense of '*self*,' fostering a connection with the entire cosmos. Within this framework of a global family, both individual entities (*pinḍa*) and their collective essence (*brahmāṇḍa*) coexist in a harmonious relationship. While a distinction exists between the two, they remain inseparable. This perspective stems from its inclusiveness and adaptability to embrace diversity. It showcases a remarkable harmony between the sense of belonging to the whole and the recognition of being an integral part of it, balancing relatedness with self-identity.

It is important to recognize the survival instinct within Indian culture, which possesses an intrinsic vitality and a timeless energy. This culture embodies a vitalizing and dynamic force that can assimilate and enrich itself with external influences without losing its essence. The diversity and consistency found within Indian culture are significant advantages. It is alive and possesses the strength to endure. Due to its organic nature and characteristics, it exhibits a harmony in diversity, promoting both individual identity and preservation, as well as fostering group unity and cohesion.

The *Identity* of India is deeply rooted in its rich and varied culture, which has served as a timeless foundation for the nation's illustrious history, vibrant present, and promising future. To truly understand Indian identity, one must examine the numerous cultural and sub-cultural traditions that have developed over time, shaping the lives and sensibilities of the Indian people. In the realm of Indian philosophical thought, the *Vedas* represent the original cornerstone of Indian culture. They advocate for the creation of a virtuous society (*vratī samāja*) and promote a healthy and resilient perspective on life. The *Vedas* have offered essential ideas and ideals, moral and spiritual values, beliefs and practices, along with patterns of both individual and social behaviour—based on profound insights into the nature of Reality—that possess universal significance and a remarkable ability to endure despite historical challenges. These teachings continue to nourish and inspire their followers and devotees. It would undoubtedly benefit all of humanity if these elevated concepts were expressed in their original clarity, allowing perceptive minds to assess and adopt them.

DEENDAYAL UPADHYAYA AND ESSENCE OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

Regarding the emphasis on national identity, Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya opposed the narrow form of nationalism inspired by Western ideals. His concept of nationalism was rooted in culture and based on the principle of dharma, which sustains the entire universe. He viewed the nation as a cohesive entity that should operate in sync and cooperation with the cosmos. Rejecting regional consciousness, he promoted a shared national identity that expands into a universal awareness. He highlighted the importance of national consciousness, asserting that political independence is important, but it only gains significance when linked to national identity and cultural sovereignty. Under foreign rule, a nation, akin to individuals, falls victim to various afflictions when its inherent instincts are ignored, damaged, or distorted. He proposed that unhealthy aspects should be removed while nurturing the healthy ones. He believed it was vital for us to contemplate our national identity. Without this identity, independence loses its significance and cannot serve as a means for progress and happiness. If we remain oblivious to our national identity, we will fail to recognize and cultivate all our capabilities. Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya stated, “the cultural freedom of the nation holds paramount importance because culture is akin to life throughout the entire body of the nation.” (Agnihotri, 2008, p. 33-34).

Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya also observed that “the lifestyle humans create in their efforts to master the elements of nature, as well as in their imaginative capabilities, constitutes their culture. Culture is never stagnant; it is always in motion. However, it possesses its own essence. While it flows continuously like a river, it retains unique attributes that are inherent to the culture of the society that fosters that cultural mindset and spirit, which is reflected in literature, art, philosophy, memory, scriptures, and the social constructs of different nations. This is evident throughout various historical and civilizational contexts. All these elements are impacted during periods of subjugation, causing the natural progression to be obstructed. Now that we are independent, it is essential to eliminate all barriers to our growth, allowing us to thrive based on our capabilities across all facets of the nation (Agnihotri, 2008, p. 33-34).

Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya's concept of harmony between nature and human nature highlights the relationship and reliance that exists between people and the environment. *Nature* and human nature can be seen as two connected threads within a magnificent tapestry. The natural world, with its breathtaking landscapes, varied plant and animal life, and complex ecosystems, serves as the foundation for our survival. Conversely, human nature includes our thoughts, feelings, and actions that define our individuality. Nature embodies the expanse of the environment, including elements, ecosystems, and all living organisms. In contrast, human nature pertains to the innate qualities and traits that characterize us as individuals. It underlines the idea that humans are an essential part of nature and should aim for a harmonious coexistence with it.

In his views on political philosophy, Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya emphasized the distinction between the state and the nation. This indicates a definitive separation in the functions and nature of the two entities. A nation is a natural construct that emerges independently; it is not fabricated, but rather, a nation establishes its own institutions. Comprising multiple institutions, the state is just one component; it holds significance but is not the ultimate authority. It should be rooted in *Dharma*, which is paramount. *Dharma* embodies the essence of the nation and ought to influence all its institutions. The core tenets of dharma are timeless and universally applicable, yet they are adaptable to evolving circumstances and contexts. He acknowledged the positive aspects of current democratic systems while discarding their flaws. In his opinion, democracy is the ideal governance model, provided it is founded on dharma. It ought to manifest as *Dharmarājya* or *Rāmarājya*, portraying a *dharmocracy* rather than a theocracy.

Although the contemporary idea of nationalism has developed within the specific historical framework of Western social progress, the foundational essence of Indian cultural nationalism is rooted in the universal and unifying worldview and life perspective informed by *Sanatana dharma*. The principles of *Varnashrama* dharma and *Purushartha*, which guided social, cultural, economic, and political organization during the *Vedic* period, were derived from this *dharma*-centered approach to life. The accumulated historical experience of the Indian people, who have lived for centuries under subjugation socially, culturally, economically, and politically, highlights that culture, as an essential element in fostering unity and solidarity among various social groups, has often remained an elusive aspiration. It is a social reality that a significant portion of the Indian population has traditionally been

excluded from the dominant aspects of Indian culture. The vibrant nature of *Vedic* culture diminished after the *Vedic* period, particularly following the decline of the *Ātmajñāna mārga*, which had been nurtured and preserved by the ancient *Guru* and *Rishi Paramparās*, coinciding with the rise of contemporary *Hinduism* and the *caste system*.

Sadly, the comprehensive and inclusive life philosophy of *Sanatana Dharma* has been misinterpreted and inaccurately represented to align with the growing demands of the caste-based framework in Indian society, which encompasses social, cultural, economic, and political structures. For an extended period, the caste system's restriction of knowledge and education for the majority of the Indian population has led to cultural, social, emotional, and mental divides among the people, resulting in social fragmentation and cultural deterioration. If culture is to act as a catalyst for social unity and cohesion, then the religious practices, traditions, and customs that contradict the universal and elevated vision of Indian culture, which have separated and isolated communities, must be recognized and demystified in accordance with the foundational principles of India's wisdom tradition. Additionally, various researchers and studies have raised doubts about the significance of cultural nationalism within the current Indian social context, which is marked by escalating conflicts and violence among different castes and social groups. With self-serving motives, they have attempted to present a skewed representation of India's ancient culture and civilization. Naturally, they have not succeeded in their malicious objective, as perceptive individuals have rejected their underhanded tactics; however, some continue to be more aggressive and active out of frustration. They require awareness regarding what "India that is *Bharata*" has been and will persist as, despite the deceitful efforts of misguided or ill-intentioned individuals. India boasts a rich and ancient history filled with profound ideas, and all these cannot be erased. Nevertheless, while reflecting on India's strong cultural heritage and civilizational accomplishments, there seems to be potential for fostering and advancing cultural nationalism, provided that spiritual leaders, religious figures, and political authorities work together to encourage cultural innovation and social transformation by revitalizing traditions and correcting deviations and distortions in religious beliefs and practices. *Indianness* is grounded in principles of cooperation and mutual respect, governed by a spirit of duties and responsibilities rather than demands and entitlements. Regrettably, this foundation is rapidly diminishing in contemporary times, highlighting an urgent need to revive, rejuvenate, and strengthen it.

Therefore, the concept put forth by Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya stresses the interrelation of all facets of existence, which encompass the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual realms. It advocates for individuals to harmonize their thoughts and actions with elevated ideals, fostering self-awareness, self-control, and ethical behavior. The aim is not solely personal wellness, but also the advancement of society and the environment. Furthermore, as highlighted by Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya in his doctrine of *Integral Humanism*, it has become essential, from both a national and a human standpoint, to reflect on the principles of *Bharatiya* culture. "It is truly remarkable that those who assert their mission to reform society by discarding stagnant traditions often succumb to some obsolete foreign customs" (Bakshi, 2018, p.75).

OBSERVATION AND CONCLUSION

It's important to recognize that India is a country characterized by its rich diversity, all intricately connected. The notion of "Way of Life" in the *Bharatiya Knowledge Systems* is fundamentally tied to the philosophy, spirituality, and cultural customs of India. It presents a comprehensive approach to living that highlights the interrelation of all life aspects and seeks to lead individuals toward a meaningful and harmonious existence. The *Bharatiya Knowledge Systems* focus on principles such as *Dharma* (ethical and moral values), *Karma* (the principle of cause and effect), and *Yoga* (practices for physical and spiritual growth). Within this framework, *Yoga* transcends mere physical activity; it represents a lifestyle that harmonizes body, mind, and spirit, along with *Ahimsa* (the significance of non-violence), truthfulness, non-attachment, *Seva* (selfless service), and reverence for the environment.

As Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya expressed in his *Integral Humanism*, it is crucial to reflect on our national identity. Without this sense of identity, independence loses its significance and cannot serve as a vehicle for progress and happiness. While we remain unaware of our national identity, our capacity for recognition and development remains stunted. Hence, the aim of this write-up is to revisit and assess culture as a means of promoting unity and national integration, while also examining the

historical factors that have hindered and undermined the creative continuity and advancement of Indian culture. Additionally, it intends to explore and propose ways to resume the stalled social evolution and achieve cultural creativity and awakening, thereby fostering unity and solidarity among people transcending caste and religion. Moreover, it is essential to analyze the cultural and religious attacks from foreign forces and modern Western civilization on Indian spirituality, society, religion, culture, economy, and political structures, as well as to recommend suitable measures to counter such influences and validate the rationality and spiritual science underlying Indian traditions, religious beliefs, and practices.

The political Ideology of Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya represents a deep and holistic worldview that draws from the *Dharmic* principles of *Hinduism*, *Buddhism*, and other native belief systems. At its core is a decentralized and spiritually grounded perception of the interconnectedness of all beings. This synthesis approach is in stark contrast to the rigid compartmentalization and individualism found in Western philosophy, offering a cultural blend that honours various traditions and systems of knowledge. Integral humanism can be viewed as a direct response to the imposition of Western materialistic concepts and the colonial suppression of India's rich cultural heritage. By incorporating indigenous ways of knowing, it challenges the presumed intellectual superiority of the West and reaffirms India's own path toward progress. Upadhyaya's idea of "*Chiti*," symbolizing the inherent spiritual essence of the nation, has emerged as a key component of India's post-colonial cultural nationalism and initiatives for social unity. The economic notion of the "third way" in integral humanism has shaped India's unique development model, which merges elements of socialism and capitalism to achieve self-reliance and social equity. As India navigates the challenges of the 21st century, the principles of integral humanism remain a vital touchstone, steering the nation's journey of self-discovery and nation-building. Its all-encompassing viewpoint, rooted in India's cultural heritage, continues to influence the country's efforts to foster a distinct identity that harmonizes modernity with its enduring spiritual and philosophical foundations.

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