



Integral Humanism: Theoretical Issues and Challenges for Practice

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Abstract

Integral Humanism (IH), propounded by great Indian philosopher Deendayal Upadhyaya, opposes the materialistic and collectivist policies economically, socially and spiritually. This type of philosophy must be understood as a concept as the enhancement of the value of the person as well as the common good of every social subject. This present paper assess the epistemological perspectives which form the basis of IH and the practical performance difficulties of the outlook in contemporary socio political landscapes. By developing theoretical proposition, it is established that, despite the fact IH encompasses a plurality of options to standard ideologies to the practice of which numerous difficulties arise due to the complications of the contemporary governance, various types of the economies, and cultural diversities. At the end of the study, conclusions followed by recommended solutions and added research directions for minimizing the gap between the theory and practice.

Keywords: Integral Humanism (IH), theoretical analysis, governance, spiritual integration, practical challenges, socio-political application

Introduction

The philosophy of this Intellectual path is known as Integral Humanism (herby IH) developed by Deendayal Upadhyaya in the background of the global war of ideals between Capitalism and Socialism during the 1960s. It provides a blend of spiritual, social, and economic characteristics of human life in unity creating a single and whole view. In line with Upadhyaya, the philosophy has been regarded as a philosophical goal of achieving human rights in other comprehensive dimensions than the mere availability of material fortunes for the individual as well as the society at the spiritual as well as moral level. It fosters compatibility of individual



aspiration and social utility, supports such values as individual responsibility, moral management, and distributive of authority.

Modern people find the concept of IH relevant in discourses relation to sustainable development, good governance, and structures of society. Facing such global problems as socio-economic divides, environmental degradation and marginalized integration within societies this philosophy outlines the development model, which calls for something beyond mere economic progress. Recommended by a number of critics, including Kumar in his 2016 article, which pointed out materialistic nature of modern political and economic systems, IH is presented as an alternative to the absence of spirituality and ethicality in the existing systems that govern the modern world. As such, it postulates the cocktail of having both material wealth and boosting spiritual values as a solution for modern world crisis.

But its problems arise when IH is applied on practice level, although it looks quite inspiring as a theoretical concept. The aspects which make spiritual principles to govern, decentralization of power and maintaining cultural differences are a drawback for a world that is gradually going for globalization and centralized system of administration. In this context, this paper delves into these theoretical and practical dilemmas, setting forth the following objectives:

- 1) Reflect on the theoretical pillars which constitute the IH.
- 2) Discuss the challenges that can be politically observed in the process of implementing IH in current social political context.
- 3) Suggest ideas to these questions and advance questions for further research.

Methods

In doing so this paper adopts a review based approach to the concept of IH. The Deendayal Upadhyaya philosophical analysis is supported from primary materials such as books and articles written by Upadhyaya himself and is enhanced with secondary critiques by scholars such as Abraham (2019), Basu (1991), Chaturvedi (2023), Nath (2018), Raj (2021), Tomar (2022) & Tripathi (2019). Further, the policy documents where the IH has been implemented particularly in India are analyzed to explore its applicability.

The literature review is purposefully constructed to critically examine the available secondary literature on IH particularly those by Upadhyaya, Kumar (2016), Bharathi (1998), Dharmasenan and Kumar (2016) and others at length. These authors have done researches on the theories and the various aspects of IH to acquire both theoretical and pragmatic analysis of the subject matter as well as compare it with other ideologies such as socialism and capitalism. Other parts of the analysis also accommodate recent academic debates that re-evaluate the importance of IH in current socio-political situations.

Besides, in the methodological space, the study utilizes the comparative political philosophy research methodology by comparing IH with socialism and liberal democracy. This transposition is also engaged to debates in the ethical theories regarding in governance, especially the interjection of Spirituality and morality into practices of politics. It is hoped that this framework will explain why IH is so different and comprehensive, as well as examine how



it might respond to the difficulties of modern governance. By adopting this process, the paper seeks to aid in finding out how IH can help shape the modern political and ethical agenda.

Results

Theoretical Insights on Integral Humanism

The philosophical foundation of IH holds that human beings should not be reduced to mere physical entities but are guided by spiritual and non-material well-being. This point of view requires that the governance and the development frameworks take into account both spiritual and material aspects of life. The Internal Humanist, Deendayal Upadhyaya (1965) suggests that both systems of economic structure of western model, i.e. Capitalism and Socialism are assigning a partial view of man. He conveys his opinion stating that capitalism in his opinion gives too much importance to material interest where the interests of the because of individuals, societies and to some extent restricts the freedom of the individual whereas socialism gives much importance for material happiness of societies but in the process it limits the liberty of the individuals. In this context, we need to oppose such strategies with such interventions that would ensure that interest of the integral human being as well as that of the collective group and society are protected.

One of the key concepts within IH is therefore Dharma, which may be best translated as a moral duty that pervades individual's behavior as well as state politics. According to Dharmasenan and Kumar (2016) and Nath (2018), Dharma tailors IH from being economically and politically inclined perspective to covering the moral regime of governance as well as individual responsibility. This moral program is trying to explain matters of justice, politics, and human rights with the help of ethics in politics.

IH has the principle of Swadeshi, a decentralization economic principle that supports local procurement. This idea focuses on the idea of self-reliance and doing away with the Northwest's reliance on global capitalist structures that bring forth external paradigms to short-change local economies (Basu, 1991; Tomar, 2022). While Swadeshi is, therefore, a prescription for economic action it is also a philosophy of emancipation, independence at the cultural and political levels. Intended to promote self-sufficiency, IH contains the strategy to rejuvenate the community through local provisioning mostly conforming to their cultural and educational standards.

An important function of IH is another important principle: that of decentralization. Unlike most models of the humanistic approach, which centralizes the government thus concentrating power, IH decentralizes power to local levels for participatory democracy to accommodate the peculiar needs of each level. The concept of distributed management is in consonance with IH's general philosophy of opposing both capitalist and socialist methods of making everything uniformly similar and concentrated (Nath, 2018; Upadhyaya, 1965).

Moreover, IH has a religious component in the concept of the nation. This spiritual nationalism as conceived by Upadhyaya aims at integrating the Indian social structure by making people of different communities feel that they are part of a whole and are bound by responsibility for one another, respect for the other and respect for social order. It espouses cultural and spiritual



integration of the cultural group within the larger context of the nation-organic nationalism as opposed to the ethnic nationalism that is rife in the politics of the current era (Raj, 2021).

For all the theoretical coherence and comprehensiveness of these paradigms and the grand visions of human potential that they allege, there are practical problems involved in applying such visionary concepts in contemporary systems of governance. The following sections are a discussion of some of the main challenges that are likely to emerge when trying to practice IH in present-day society.

Challenges in Translating Theory into Practice

Despite of a deep theoretical base of IH we can distinguish several practical difficulties of its realization. These challenges stem mainly from the contradictions between the religious and the anti-structural, the local and the global orientations of contemporary political economy (Tripathi, 2019).

Integrating Spiritual Values in Secular Governance

According to Humanize AI, One of the limitations of IH relates to how it is possible to incorporate its spirituality into the politics of most countries today. As Chaturvedi (2023) notes, many of the current states, and especially those practicing democracy, have a clear line of demarcation between religion and politics. This separation is good for the state policies as it is neutral, but it stands in contrast with the tenets of moral and spiritual ethics that are at the heart of IH.

Dharma as the scriptural underpinning of ethical behavior for individuals and states is at odds with America's situation where modern liberal states advocate freedom for individuals irrespective of any scriptural and religious duty. Better still, the modern society is plural and having many religions and belief systems makes it even harder to implement the ethical components of the concept of IH for the purposes of governance. The enforcement of one spiritual or ethical system, on the other hand, may exclude and even antagonize other sectors of the population who hold other values, which in turn may result in conflicts.

Decentralization in Modern Governance Structures

As per the phrasely, IH supports a bottom-up distribution of sovereignty, as opposed to the standard modern approach to sovereignty, which concentrates a nation's powers in the national government. Though decentralization might be mistaken for populism in the local politics, this misunderstands the key impediment to its implementation in the real-world of modern governance structures. Contemporary states in fact centralize the political and economic power of their regions in federal or state legislatures. In theory, this approach enhances efficiency and the consistency and uniformity by which these powers are chosen.

Well-constructed decentralization reforms have been frequently thwarted by bureaucratic inefficiencies, corruption and political resistance to the actual devolution of power, Kumar (2016) points out. Local governments often lack the resources and expertise to carry out effective policymaking; the result is governance failures and uneven development along geographical lines. Richer regions are likely to do better under decentralization than poor regions unable to cope perfectly well with 'basic functions and services'.



Moreover, the modern, centralized nature of nation-states clashes with IH's desire to decentralize. The control over defense, finance and taxation will likely remain in the hands of government, meaning that economic and social provisions to local people cannot be as value-free as IH ideally wishes. So, a question remains unanswered just how far can the dream of IH be realized given the centralization of power in modern nation-states? (Bharathi, 998; Nath, 2018).

Economic Self-Reliance in a Globalized World

However, the political economy of Swadeshi or economic self-reliance is a major principle of IH and vulnerable in the current age of globalization. By integration, there is interdependency between countries who depend on exports, foreign direct investment, and transnational corporations on economic growth and development. Whereas Swadeshi of IH preach localization of economy and reduced relation with foreign systems, globalization hinders such policies (Dharmasenan & Kumar, 2016).

International market and reputed organizations tend to dominate the local markets through their lower prices effectively eliminating the local entrepreneurs and business. Moreover, from the cultural and economic point of view globalization has caused the standardization and erosion of indigenous culture and customs that IH wants to safeguard. That is why it becomes almost impossible to preserve Swadeshi ideas of self-sufficiency for communities in the face of globalization and competition, which leads to isolation and underdevelopment (Raj, 2021).

In an increasingly integrated world economy, efforts to achieve economic 'autonomy' can also lead to a decline in access to foreign credit, technology and markets – all of which are essential for growth. This economic seclusion often results in economic stagnation negating local industry development meaning that these communities cannot easily develop on their own.

Cultural and National Identity in Pluralistic Societies

The final cons of IH includes cultural and spiritual nationalism due to its adherence to humanism, ethics and moral values that are a problem in culturally and religiously diverse societies. Even though the philosophy gives a positive vision of nationalism based on ethic of reciprocity and responsibility the implementation of this vision in societies where several religious, cultural and ideological communities live can be challenging.

The struggle between participatory and antagonistic nationalism poses problems in the application of IH in rapidly changing societies. Although this perspective aims to merge communities that have ethical, religious and cultural values, the multicultural society means that existing groups tend to have visions of the nation different from the dominant one, and some can even feel discriminated.

Discussion

Theoretical Implications

IH is a convenient philosophical approach that offers an individualist and collectivist orientation that is lacking in confrontational ideologies of capitalism and socialism. Unlike for instance capitalism where individual freedom and economic prosperity are predominant, or socialism whereby group prosperity takes precedence over individual freedom, IH presents



possibilities of obtaining an equilibrium. It assigns ethical obligations to the individual personality and proclaims moral obligations for the state; it envisions an ethical organization of relationships wherein the self- and collective interests overlap (Tripathi, 2019).

In the IH paradigm, there is Dharma meaning right action with respect to both the individual and the government. The proclaimed focus on ethical behavior helps to deliver the philosophy above the mere economic or political concept, providing human populations with a set of moral guidelines for actions in any given sphere of human activity. Dharmasenan and Kumar (2016) claim that Dharma transforms IH into a philosophy that is not only just, equal and socially harmonious.

Nevertheless, the reliance of political vision on the spiritual values as a principle becoming an object of the potential problems for the resolution of its universality in secular societies. Chaturvedi (2023) explains that raising spirituality to the field of governance raises both ethical and practical concerns regarding spiritualization with governments, which is more pronounced where those governments upheld secularism as part of the governance policy. Aspiring to enforce one belief system in pluralistic societies undermines certain people or groups with other systems of belief.

Because of the secular structure of modern political systems which cannot afford to promote any specific form of religion or spirituality within the society, the application of this kind of humanism is challenging. In multicultural societies which have different beloved religious and moral systems the imposition of the religious solutions into the organizational structure of the government may be viewed by some citizens as the violation of their rights. Therefore, despite the fact that IH can be considered as a very suitable type of a positive ideology as opposed to the nomination of mere materialism, the explicitly spiritual component of the concept, provides for practical difficulties in modern, multicultural and secular societies.

Practical Implications and Challenges

There is, therefore, the following major practical problem of the organic federalism structure that IHM promotes. It empowers communities through decentralization and supports decision-making and economic actions within those communities. This decentralization is needed to weaken authority of the centralized government and to strengthen the people. But, in this case, this model faces several challenges (Nath, 2018).

Modern political systems irrespective of their capitalistic or socialistic orientation are included towards the conviction that modern democracies legitimize the concentration of political and economic decision making in the hands of national governments as a way of offering proper coordination and efficiency. This centralization is always contrary to the decentralized approach that the IH has as a major principle of governance that allows the communities to sustain themselves, and control their resources. Basu (1991) and Raj (2021) observation this power consolidates political authority and economic systems in the hands of central government, making it hard to realize the local self-governance and self-reliance which are the unavoidable pillars of IH.

On the other hand, the global economy as a model of market development and capital flows is diametrically opposed to the Swadeshi principle inherent in the IH concept. Global economy



integrated with trade systems and has interconnection by which merely localized systems can hardly survive on their own. Products and services produced within localized economics that follow Swadeshi principles often cannot meet costs of imported item, thus defying the concept of independence based on IH.

Furthermore, the religious calls for the IH theory can effectively work in practice, but it has severe problems in multicultural countries. These societies are often based on religious and moral diversities, thereby any attempt to impute the similar ethics or spirituality toward the governing of those societies is always a challenge. In the same manner, Kumar (2016) points out that using a single moral system has the effect of creating social exclusion, which is counterproductive for achieving the principle of IH of providing new opportunities for integration.

This issue is however made even harder in secular political systems where government is supposed to stop being religious and vice versa. Integrating spirituality in to governance may reform the spirit of secularism, which leads to conflict between IH moral principles and the technical efficiencies of modern governance system.

Potential Resolutions and Future Research

Dealing with these issues calls for strategies which apply the concept of IH to modern secular and pluralistic societies at the same time excluding the religious point of view and appealing to secular or pluralistic audiences. That is why one of the potential solutions is to work on the creation of the policy that would correspond to the ethical principles that can be inherent in every culture, including justice, equality, and sustaining, which are the principles familiar to humanity. These are the values, which can be a foundation for integration of the moral principles of IH to the governance while avoiding introduction of a definite theology (Raj, 2021).

Another field to be further discussed is the conflict between the decentralized government in IH and the centralized governments in modern states. Future research could explore forms of governance that will permit greater decentralization whilst maintaining overall central government control. These models could have referred to examples of decentralization in the policy area of rural development environmental conservation and the management of resources in particular communities.

In addition, taking into consideration the sustainable development goals (SDGs), the *Swadeshi* principle of self-reliance could be reinterpreted. Essentially, self-reliance which is today interpreted as disconnectedness from global economy, could be accustomed to global sustainability principles where individual nations engage in production for use, preserving natural resources and the health of their people. Further qualitative research incorporating case studies of how Swadeshi can be combined with contemporary concepts of sustainable development, in a context of local agricultural production, renewable energy, and craft-based industries, for example, might offer helpful lessons about how Swadeshi could work alongside global entanglements while maintaining appropriate levels of democratization.

IH has significant problems in contemporary societies which are dominated by the materialistic view of people's progress. The philosophy, which integrates the religious values with the



economic policies, has a problem with people who slogan profit maximization and efficient operation. In addition, the integral decentralization, for which IH calls, rarely harmoniously complements the centralization that characterizes most modern states and corporations, thereby limiting IH's functionality. Subsequent studies should explore how the principles of IH can be introduced into secular and multicultural democracies without violating the principle of the separation of powers. Focusing on essential practices such as compassion, justice, and human dignity is might assist IH in the formation of policies that are globally relevant and attractive for diverse society and political divide in specific societies.

Conclusion

Socio-political and economical views that dominate the current world offer a strong challenge through IH that calls for integration of spiritual, social, economic and other aspects of life that will create a society that balances the needs of the individual with those of the society. But there are difficulties in its implementation because of the lines of the current practices and problems of the modern world, the effects of the globalization process, and the differences of cultures.

Summing up, IH is a comprehensive philosophical vision of human life and reality; it contributes a perspective for each of the domains distinguished above. Nevertheless, it faces important challenges when applied to the modern environment. To tackle these, the imperative 'best practices' that would strategically augment the governance of modern society have to be concocted within frameworks that provide contextual application of IH's principles.

In spite of the fact that theoretical framework of the IH is sound, the method how this paradigm is to be realized in practice does introduce a number of problematic mediations – for example, between spiritualization and secularization and between de-centralization and re-centralization. Subsequent studies should focus on how it is possible to adapt IHI's key principles to the contemporary political and economic contexts with the hope of realizing the organization's holistic humanism aspiration in real-life situations.

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