

Research Paper

Nurturing Sahridayatā (Empathy) in Primary Education: A Take on Integral Humanism

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the significance of cultivating empathy in primary education within the context of Integral Humanism by Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyay. It proposes a framework that integrates empathy-promoting activities with concepts from Indian psychology. It discusses the benefits of empathy for children's social and emotional development, aligning with Integral Humanism's values of fostering positive relationships, promoting healthy social interactions, and cultivating a sense of community. It further explores the *Trigunā* theory and *pañcakōṣa* model, explaining their potential contributions to understanding emotions and promoting well-being. Finally, the paper presents a range of engaging classroom activities categorized by the *Trigunā* they target, illustrating how these activities can cultivate empathy while potentially influencing different *kōṣa*'s. This approach resonates with Integral Humanism's ideals, nurturing individuals with well-developed emotional intelligence and empathy, ultimately fostering a more harmonious society. The paper is divided into the following sections: the first section introduces the topic and lays the groundwork for the discussion, the second section emphasizes the importance of empathy development in children, the third section puts forth the integral view of an individual, the fourth section draws on Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of Integral Education and proposes a framework for fostering empathy and finally, the concluding section summarizes the key points and offers potential future directions.

Keywords: *Empathy, Deen Dayal Upadhyaya ji, Integral yoga, Trigunā, pañcakōṣa, integral education*

Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay, a prominent Indian philosopher, sociologist, and politician, envisioned a unique, indigenous development model rooted in India's cultural heritage, called Integral Humanism. He found western political philosophies like democracy, nationalism, socialism, and equality to be incomplete and contradictory. He pointed out the conflicts arising from nationalism versus world unity, or democracy enabling capitalist exploitation. While acknowledging the value of India's cultural heritage, Pandit ji deemed simply reverting to the past ways of living as impractical. He emphasized the need to adapt to changing realities (Upadhyaya, 2002).

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The essence of integral humanism lies in the centrality of human beings, integrated approach, and viewing *bhārtiya* culture as prominent. He placed humans at the core of social, economic, and political development. This indigenous model would prioritize the well-being of the individual, considering all aspects – body, mind, intellect, and soul. Integral Humanism advocated for a holistic approach to human desires (Dharma, Artha, Kāma, mokṣa). These pursuits shouldn't conflict with one other but be pursued in a balanced way for a fulfilled life. Pandit ji saw India's cultural values as the foundation for achieving this harmony. He firmly believed that Indian thought emphasizes the underlying unity in diversity, unlike the compartmentalized approach of the West.

The key concepts in Integral Humanism include *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kāma*, and *Moksha*. *Dharma* refers to the ethical codes and principles that guide a civilized life, ensuring social order and progress. It complements the pursuit of material well-being (*Artha*) and legitimate desires (*Kāma*). *Artha* encompasses economic and political aspects. It emphasizes the importance of sufficient wealth to fulfill basic needs and uphold *Dharma*. However, acquiring wealth shouldn't become the sole purpose, as it can lead to moral decline. Integral Humanism acknowledges the natural desires humans possess (*Kāma*). However, it emphasizes fulfilling them in accordance with *Dharma*, ensuring responsible gratification that doesn't disrupt social harmony. While considered the ultimate goal, *Moksha* (liberation) shouldn't be pursued in isolation. Pandit ji believed that fulfilling one's duties and living a balanced life ultimately leads to *Moksha* (Upadhyaya, 2002; Rao & Paranjpe, 2023).

Thus, Pandit ji's philosophy cannot be observed as merely a political one but also as a synthesis of socio-economic and political frameworks aligning with *Bhārtiya* (Indianness). This indigenous model encourages the all-round development of an individual, which will thereby lead to the awakening of the spiritual being within each individual and ultimately, the nation as a whole. While speaking about education, Pandit ji pointed out that education is crucial for a well-functioning society. An uneducated person remains uncivilized, unable to contribute meaningfully. Just as we invest in growing trees for future benefits, education yields a return on investment through a more productive and responsible citizenry. Historically, India provided free education, recognizing its societal value. He put forth that education is a basic right and the emphasis on fees, even for religious practices, seems misplaced. Society should ensure basic necessities for all its members (Upadhyaya, 2002).

Empathy (*Sahridayatā*) can be a powerful force in supporting these goals. While diverse methods exist to foster empathy in primary education, this paper proposes a novel framework that integrates traditional empathy-building activities with concepts from Indian psychology, like the *Trigunā* theory and *pañcakoṣa* model, which offer a unique and potentially more holistic approach aligned with the principles of Integral Humanism. Empathy has been viewed from a different lens by western and eastern countries. The western concept of empathy appears to be a part of the Indian concept of *Sahridayatā* (empathy). The western concept of empathy was identified as having two types: cognitive and affective. Cognitive empathy involves understanding another person's thoughts and feelings. It's like "seeing the world through their eyes." This includes imagining oneself in another's situation and actively trying to grasp another's perspective. Researchers use terms like "perspective taking" and "imaginative reconstruction" to describe this process. It's a dynamic process that involves gathering information and responding to feedback from the other person. Affective empathy, on the other hand, is about feeling what the other person feels. It's about sharing their emotions and experiencing their joys and sorrows directly. This

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is sometimes described as "feeling with someone" or "walking in their shoes." (Cuff et al., 2014b; Weber, 2011; Zhou, 2022b)

The Indian concept of *Sahridayatā* (empathy) can be accurately understood by referring to a Yoga Sutra from Patanjali:

*Maitrī karuṇā mudītopekṣaṇama
sukha duḥkha puṇyapuṇya viṣayānāma
bhavaṃtāsa citta prasādānaṃ (YS 1.33).*

“Through cultivation of friendliness, compassion, joy, and indifference to pleasure and pain, virtue and vice respectively, the consciousness becomes favorably disposed, serene, and benevolent.” Here, *Sahridayatā* is not only viewed as cognitive and affective, but is also viewed as a mindful response. The Sutra explains how one must be delightful with the happy, to be sensitive to the sorrowful, affectionate to the virtuous, and indifferent to those who continue to live in vice despite our attempts to change them. *Sahridayatā* explains how one must put the concept of empathy in practical utility along with its cautions.

METHODOLOGY

The present paper is a conceptualization and model development of inculcating *Sahridayatā* in school children. The researchers did an initial inquiry to understand the concepts for the development of a model and the database is used as archives, springer, books, Wiley and Sage journals and Google Scholar.

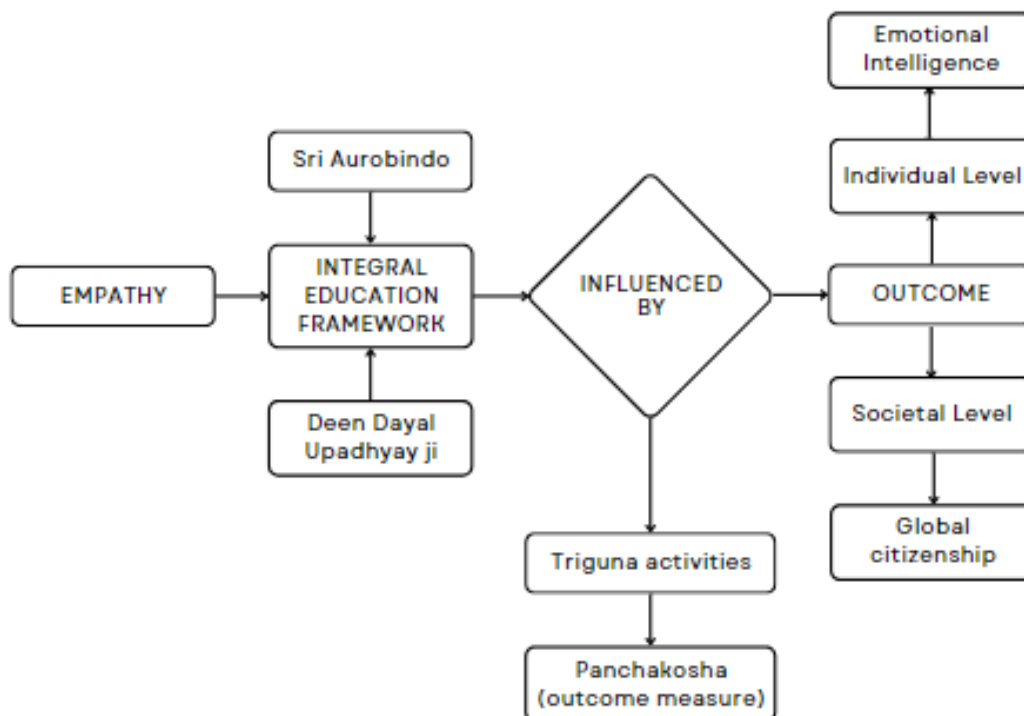
RESULTS

A core tenet of Integral Humanism is fostering social well-being and a sense of community. The framework cultivates empathy, a crucial skill for positive social interactions. By understanding and appreciating others' experiences (empathy), children are better equipped to navigate conflicts peacefully, communicate respectfully, and cooperate effectively. This fosters a more harmonious and inclusive classroom environment, aligning with Integral Humanism's goals. Activities like gratitude exercises and collaborative projects promote social connection and a sense of shared purpose. Children learn to appreciate the contributions of others and develop a sense of belonging within the Mirambika community (Cornelissen et al., 2013). This aligns with Integral Humanism's emphasis on fostering a spirit of cooperation and social responsibility.

In today's world, the framework built around the *Trigunās* and *koṣa*'s offers a more crucial and timely approach to education than ever before. Children today face a unique set of challenges – social media pressures, competition, anxieties in a fast-paced world, and even cyberbullying (Peck et al., 2014). This framework equips them with the emotional intelligence and empathy they need to navigate these complexities. By understanding and appreciating the perspectives of others (empathy), they can build stronger relationships, resolve conflicts peacefully, and communicate more effectively.

This framework also fosters a sense of global citizenship, a vital quality in our increasingly interconnected world. Empathy allows children to appreciate diverse cultures and perspectives, breaking down barriers and building bridges. In a world often marked by divisiveness and biases, this framework promotes inclusivity and compassion, fostering a more harmonious society.

Figure 1 Graphical representation of the proposed empathy-based framework on integral education



Finally, the focus on mindfulness practices and emotional regulation skills aligns perfectly with the growing emphasis on mental and emotional well-being in children. These skills can contribute to greater resilience and a stronger foundation for mental health, a rising concern among young people today. By addressing these critical needs, the framework built around the *Trigunās* and *koṣa*'s provides educators and parents with a powerful tool. It equips children with the emotional intelligence and social skills they need to not just survive, but thrive, in a complex and interconnected world.

DISCUSSION

Importance of Development of Empathy in Children

Empathy acts as a cornerstone for healthy social and emotional development in children, aligning with Integral Humanism's emphasis on social well-being. It fosters positive relationships by allowing children to understand and connect with others on an emotional level. This understanding translates to better conflict resolution, with children equipped to see different perspectives and communicate compassionately (Barnett, 1987). Empathy also builds a sense of community, encouraging prosocial behavior and a sense of responsibility for one another's well-being. Furthermore, by recognizing emotions in others, children become more attuned to their own, leading to emotional intelligence and self-awareness (Aldrup et al., 2022b; Sutherland, 1986b). This translates into a capacity for compassion and social responsibility, as children understand the impact of their actions and develop a desire to contribute positively to the world (Warren, 2013, Zhou, 2022b). In essence, empathy empowers children to become well-rounded individuals who thrive not just as individuals, but also as contributing members of a society – a core value of Integral Humanism

Integral View of the Individual

The *Trigunā* theory, originating in ancient Indian philosophy *Sāṃkhya*, proposes three fundamental natural elements or *gunās* that influence our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.

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These *gunās* are *Sattva* (purity or balance), *Rajas* (passion or activity), and *Tamas* (inertia or darkness). These *gunās* are not fixed categories, but rather act as a spectrum. A person can exhibit a dominant *gunā* at any given time, with the other two present in varying degrees (Putra & Sedlmeier, 2013). Let us explore how the concept of *Trigunā* connects to emotions and behaviors in children. A *Sattva*-dominant child might express joy in a balanced way, show empathy to others, and approach challenges with a calm and collected demeanor. A *Rajas*-dominant child might be very energetic and enthusiastic, but also prone to frustration, anger outburst, or competitiveness, whereas a *Tamas*-dominant child might exhibit laziness, sadness, or difficulty adapting to the surroundings. Every act is fueled by the dominance of the *gunās* but it is possible to engage in *satvik* activities and mold the *gunās* of children.

The *pañcakōṣa* model, a foundational concept in Indian philosophy which is mentioned in the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, offers a layered view of the human being (*Jiva*) that complements Integral Humanism's emphasis on the whole person. This model proposes five interconnected sheaths (*kōṣa*'s) that encompass our entire existence (Rao & Paranjpe, 2023). The outermost layer, the *Annāmaya kōṣa*, represents the physical body. The body is used as a tool to enhance inner awareness and expand direct knowledge and self-control. Integral Humanism recognizes a healthy body as the cornerstone of well-being, a necessary platform for further development. The *prāṇamaya kōṣa*, the sheath of vital energy or *prana*, governs our breath and energy flow. It represents the energy that surrounds and penetrates the physical body. Integral Humanism acknowledges the role of *prana* in vitality and overall health, recognizing the importance of practices that cultivate and manage this vital energy.

The *Manomaya kōṣa*, the mental sheath, houses the realm of thoughts, feelings, desires, and perceptions, emphasizes cultivating a healthy mind for emotional well-being and ethical decision-making. By nurturing this sheath of egoistic striving, we develop the capacity for compassion, empathy, and responsible action. It channels the way one thinks and interprets the patterns of activities that the senses perceive about an intelligible world. It represents critical thought, the creation of novel ideas and critical thought. The *Vijñānamaya kōṣa*, the wisdom sheath, is the seat of intellect, reason, and discrimination. Here, we acquire knowledge, analyze information, and make choices. It represents the intelligence or consciousness which is the discriminative part of the mind under the surface of the processing, thinking aspect of the mind. It's an organ of philosophical thought and metaphysical intuition. Integral Humanism values intellectual development alongside emotional and physical well-being. A well-developed *Vijñānamaya kōṣa* allows us to navigate the complexities of life with wisdom and discernment.

Finally, the *ānaṃdamaya kōṣa*, the innermost layer, is the seat of pure bliss and spiritual connection. It reflects the bliss characteristic of the true Self and is therefore also known to be the seat of joy. The real self, *ātman*, manifests itself as the experiencing witness which is at the center of the *jiva*'s awareness. This is acknowledged to be like the ubiquitous *Brāhmaṇ*, which is popularly characterized by being, consciousness, and bliss. Integral Humanism, recognizing the human search for meaning and fulfillment, sees this layer as the core of human potential. By nurturing this sheath, we connect with a deeper sense of purpose and experience lasting joy (Rao & Paranjpe, 2023). As Sri Aurobindo puts it, “*ānaṃdā*, a supreme Bliss eternal, far other and higher in its character than the highest human joy or pleasure, is the essential and original nature of the spirit. In Ananda our spirit will find its true self, in Ananda its essential consciousness, in Ananda the absolute power of its existence (SY 498–99).

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The *pañcakōṣa* model highlights the interconnectedness of these layers. Development in one area impacts the others. For example, physical health can affect mental well-being, while mindfulness practices can improve both. Integral Humanism aligns with this holistic view, advocating for the development of all five *kōṣa*'s for a truly fulfilled individual. By nurturing each layer, we can achieve a state of well-being that encompasses the physical, mental, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions of our being.

Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy of Integral Education and Empathy in Classroom

According to Sri Aurobindo, Integral Education, with roots in Indian civilization's profound understanding of the universe, emerges as a philosophy that goes beyond mere intellectual development. It emphasizes nurturing a student's soul and capacity for empathy, creating well-rounded individuals who can thrive in the world (Cornelissen et al., 2013).

At its core, Integral Education acknowledges the "*caitya puruṣa* or soul," a spark of supreme consciousness residing within each person. This philosophy aims to help students connect with this inner potential, allowing them to express their unique talents and purpose. It stands in stark contrast to traditional education systems that prioritize rote memorization and information transfer.

Integral Education champions a balanced approach, fostering development across all aspects of a human being – mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual. This holistic perspective cultivates well-rounded individuals equipped to navigate the complexities of life. Respect for individuality is another cornerstone of this approach (Cornelissen et al., 2013). Recognizing that each child learns differently and possesses unique strengths, Integral Education encourages diverse learning styles. Students are empowered to explore their individual interests and talents, fostering a sense of self-discovery and self-expression.

He criticizes the traditional education systems for several shortcomings. One major criticism is the overemphasis on content transfer. Current methods often focus on transmitting information from teacher to student, neglecting the importance of critical thinking, personal experience, and self-development. Additionally, the "one-size-fits-all" approach utilizing a single textbook fails to cater to the diverse learning styles and needs of each student. Furthermore, traditional education often overlooks the importance of nurturing a student's emotional and spiritual well-being.

A shift is proposed by Sri Aurobindo in both the content and methods of education to implement these integral principles. Curriculum content should be used as a tool for exploration, stimulating thought, reflection, and personal experiences (Cornelissen et al., 2013; Garnett, 2017a). A teacher must merely be a guide who facilitates exploration of the student's interest. This shift fosters a more engaging and meaningful learning experience for students. He also advocates for a combination of a core curriculum with self-directed learning periods. This allows students to pursue their interests at their own pace and level, fostering a sense of ownership over their learning journey. Project-based learning is another strategy championed by him. This approach encourages collaboration, problem-solving, and a deeper understanding of concepts through practical application.

Integral Education offers a promising approach to fostering well-rounded, compassionate, and responsible individuals. By integrating the development of the mind, body, and soul, it empowers students to excel academically and contribute positively to society. The philosophy serves as a call for further development and implementation of this powerful

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educational philosophy, and the Mirambika School, Delhi and Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education (SAICE), Puducherry are applications of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother's philosophy (Cornelissen et al., 2013).

To conclude, empathy acts as a critical building block for holistic development in primary education. It goes beyond simply understanding emotions; it fuels positive social interactions, fosters conflict resolution through perspective-taking, and cultivates a sense of community by encouraging prosocial behavior. By recognizing and responding to the emotions of others, children develop emotional intelligence and self-awareness. This, in turn, strengthens compassion, social responsibility, and a sense of interconnectedness (Bialystok & Kukar, 2017; Decety & Ickes, 2011).

The *Trigunās* and *koṣa's* framework, rooted in Indian psychology, offers a unique lens for fostering empathy in children. This framework aligns beautifully with Integral Humanism's emphasis on nurturing well-rounded individuals. Activities aligned with each *gunā* (*Sattva*, *Rajas*, *Tamas*) address various developmental aspects – physical, mental, emotional, and social – contributing to a sense of overall well-being. For example, *Sattva* activities promote calmness and connection to the environment, while *Rajas* activities encourage collaboration and healthy expression. This holistic approach fosters not just academic success but also emotional intelligence and a capacity for empathy.

While the potential of this framework is evident, further research is crucial. Studies could explore the long-term impact of these activities on children's emotional intelligence and social interactions. Additionally, research could investigate how to best integrate these practices into diverse educational settings. Practical challenges regarding how students who pass from integral education-based schools like Mirambika and SAICE adjust in the post-schooling fast-paced higher education and workplace can be explored. Thus, research can refine the framework and provide evidence-based practices for educators and parents.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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