

## General Introduction

The word 'humanism' first entered the vocabulary of intellectual discourse in the West during the Renaissance period when it was used to denote the revival of interest in the ancient writings of Greek and Roman philosophers. Ever since the conversion of Constantine to Christianity, the Christian Church had severely suppressed all alternative views and this extended to the ancient classical writings. This was a period of stagnation for European civilisation and has been rightly referred to as the **Dark Ages**. The attempt by the early humanists to go to a period prior to the triumph of Christianity in Europe may be regarded as the first tentative attempt to find an alternative to the stifling dogmas of Christianity. However, many of these early Humanists could not free themselves from Christianity and for the most part were concerned with interpreting Christian teachings in what they considered to be a more humanistic light. In fact, humanism progressed from the early start and by the nineteenth century was able to adopt a secular form completely freed from the Christian religion and indeed combating the principle dogmas of this religion. Early scientists like Galileo had indeed realised the conflict between the discoveries of science and Christian teachings. It was the triumph of the Darwinism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century which for many humanists clinched the issue between theistic religion and science.

However, humanism in the course of time takes manifold interpretations. In fact, the secular humanism as we are talking presently stands in sharp contrast to supernatural religion which is based on the existence of God. Its principal concern is the achievement of humanity, and it does so using the methods of

rational thinking and analysis. However, it differs from science only to the extent that it tries to construct an ethical code that is conducive to human welfare. It seems that some forms of science are completely value-neutral and are not concerned with evolving a system of ethical norms that should govern human conduct. Rationalism, which may be associated with humanism, is primarily concerned with the methodology of deriving valid propositions and is somewhat different from humanism. Scepticism, another trend usually associated with humanism, is concerned with refuting claims relating to supernatural or supernormal abilities and devotion to things. Thus, by definition, humanism is concerned with the human being and not with any external divine authority which stands in a superior position to man.

Humanism is a world view that addresses issues related to the well being of humans. The *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* tells us that humanism in the Renaissance sense “was quite consistent with religious belief, it being supposed that God had put us here precisely in order to further those things the humanists found more important. Later the term tended to become appropriated for anti-religious, social and political movements.” According to N.K.Devaraja, “Humanism is an attitude towards and an approach to man’s life and values regarded as phenomena confined to the earth.”<sup>1</sup> Humanism is concerned all about of man, man’s interests, faith in man’s reason and conscience for discriminating perception of truth and goodness. Humanism thus is a system of views based on respect for the dignity and rights of man which values his

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<sup>1</sup> N.K.Devaraja, *Humanism in Indian Thought*, Indus, 1998, p.16.

personality. It is equally concerned with his welfare and all round development. It endeavours to create favourable conditions for social life. Thus, humanism in the true sense of the term, is against fanaticism, regionism, intolerance, egoism, dogmatism, prejudices, injustice and disrespect for the views and knowledge of others. Humanism must deserve the freedom of the individual, the dignity and autonomy of the individual.

Historically, humanism had its distinctive beginnings with Protagoras's declaration that 'man is the measure of things'. However, Protagoras' position did not last long because in course of time it became too misleading. In fact, the centrality of human and human well-being that underlie the Protagorian dictum was soon to be drowned in subjectivism and individualism. Even though humanism took different interpretations in the course of history, but one thing that remained constant is that humanism is all about of human related issues. Every interpretation of humanism strives to make the point that man is the centre of the universe. In this sense, it can be said that humanism is opposed to transcendentalism and supernaturalism insofar as they are unconcerned about man and the social reality. Both Vivekananda and Gandhi said that 'service to man is service to God'. Even Pliny the Elder said, "A mortal's god lies in helping fellow mortals." What we insist here is that within the horizon of historicity humanism in its different facets recognises the dignity of man and the human value, takes notes of the person as an autonomous being endowed with free thinking and freedom of the will. We find this spirit of humanism in M. N. Roy, in Vivekananda, in Ambedkar and in every other philosophical approaches

of humanism. In a nutshell, it can be said that humanism came to signify the doctrines which assumed the centrality of man. Garhringer says, "A man becomes a humanist when he comes to see that bases of all moral thought is neither nature nor super-nature, but the specifically human."<sup>2</sup> Doctrinally humanism is the natural expression of human reason to assert itself as the supreme. It is thought that only such presupposition can explain the autonomy of the human agent and the fact of human creativity and initiative. Supplementing the views of Protagoras that 'man is the measure of all things', Dakin observes, "Man is not only the measure, but to an indefinable extent the master and the creator of reality."<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, every norm or an ethical paradigm presupposes a vision of reality. Humanism as a philosophy represents the view of the universe, the nature of man and treatment of the human problem. In this sense, humanism is necessarily unitary instead of dualistic, affirming the unity of mind and body; universal instead of particular, affirming the continuity of man with the rest of the life, and of life with the rest of the universe; naturalistic instead of super-naturalistic, affirming the unity of spiritual and the material.

Humanism thus attempts to develop true religion, i.e. the religion of all religions (universal religion) because religion *per se* does not mean sects or creeds that divide groups or societies, but is one which describes the way of making the righteous use of reason. Humanism ascribes the real dignity to man. It also infuses the cardinal values of love, tolerance, fellowship, sacrifice which make man truly human. Religion *per se* is bound to work towards real equality in the

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<sup>2</sup> Garhringer, R.E. " Liberalism and Humanism", *Ethics*, October, 1955, p.37.

<sup>3</sup> Dakin, A.K. *Man is the Measure*, Princeton University Press, 1939, p.24.

social plane in fighting out the man-made differences. It was the standpoint of Ambedkar, Vivekananda as well. Ambedkar embraced Buddhism and Vivekananda was talking about universal religion in this regard. A true religion is more humanistic than the so-called humanism. A humanism based on true religion is bound to embrace the whole cosmos within its fold. Vivekananda says, "Do not injure another, love everyone as your own self, because the whole universe is one. In injuring another, I am injuring myself, in loving another I am loving myself."<sup>4</sup>

In one sense, humanity means divinity. For Vivekananda, divinity is in the form of humanity. There is no division between humanity and morality. They are two sides of the same coin. Accordingly, humanity without morality is incomplete and morality without humanity is imperfect. There we find animal nature in man. According to Aristotle, man is a rational animal. There is no difference between a man and an animal if a man loses his own reason. Morality is a form of renunciation and morality reigns only within the religion of man who can suppress his own individuality and thereby reaches to the Universal Man. Man is truly represented something, i.e. the Being in the Heideggerian sense which transcends himself. In Tagore's term, it may be called the 'surplus in man's creativity'. He manifests his surplus in taking decisions and choosing to act in a certain way *not as a means to an end, but as an end in itself*. Even Sri Aurobinda emphasises the religion of humanity. The religion of humanity actually restraints man from oppression, cruelty and exploitation. Thus, humanity is an all round

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<sup>4</sup> Vivekananda, Swami. *Vedanta Philosophy*, Calcutta, 1982, p.12.

enterprise of human development and it has multifarious webs or facets. Humanism is not a one sided vision, rather one can assess humanism from multifarious ways. The word 'humanism' has a number of meanings and each meaning of the word constitutes a different type of humanism. The well known divisions of humanism are: literal humanism, renaissance humanism, philosophical humanism, Christian humanism, modern humanism, secular humanism, religious humanism, creative humanism etc. Literal humanism is a devotion to the humanities of literary culture. Renaissance humanism envisages the spirit of learning that has been developed at the end of the middle age with the revival of classical letters. Cultural humanism is the rational and empirical tradition that originated largely in ancient Greece and Rome, subsequently evolved throughout European history and presently constitutes a basic part of the Western approach to science, ethics, and law. Philosophical humanism is any outlook or way of life centered on human need and interest. Both Christian humanism and modern humanism belong to philosophical humanism. Christian humanism is a form of humanism that advocates the self-fulfilment of man within the framework of Christian principles. Modern humanism also called naturalistic humanism, scientific humanism, ethical humanism and democratic humanism is defined as a naturalistic philosophy that rejects all supernaturalism and relies primarily upon reason and science, democracy and human compassion. Modern humanism can be both secular and religious. Secular humanism is an outgrowth of 18<sup>th</sup> century enlightenment of rationalism. Religious humanism emerged out of ethical culture, utilitarianism and

universalism. Thus, modern humanism divides in two wings. Those who see it as philosophy are the Secular Humanists while those who act as religion are called Religious Humanists. Thus, from broad perspective, it can be said that any form of humanism would be either secular or religious in nature.

Secular humanism is a kind of humanism based on the trio-concepts, such as, liberty, equality and fraternity. Secular humanists deny the religious foundation in developing humanism. Secular humanists maintain that there is so much in religion deserving of criticism that the good name of Humanism should not be tainted by connection with it. The fundamental principles of secular humanism have been stated in many ways. Having said this, there is no complete agreement on this amongst Humanists and a good part of the humanist debate revolves around the correct enunciation and delineation of Humanist principles.

### **The Cardinal Principles of Secular Humanism**

- (i) The only relevant spheres of action for humans are humanity in a collective sense, individual human beings, and the physical environment or nature in which they operate. According to this maxim, there is no external divine agency between human beings and the physical environment in which they operate. The Buddha also repeatedly affirmed that humans have to rely only on themselves for their release from sufferings. There is no external authority or saviour to rely on. Humanism too asserts the ultimate responsibility of human beings. Nature in the sense of the physical world is the given datum

which humans have to operate in. Such humanism affirms compassionate action towards other human beings.

- (ii) Human beings are not subject to God or any divine agency. They have no obligation to love, fear or obey any such supernatural agent. Secular humanism rejects the notion of God, even though some humanists prefer to take an agnostic position on this question.
- (iii) All beliefs must be founded on reason and human experience. Where the progress of knowledge reveals that any belief is or becomes untenable, it should be abandoned. This, in fact, the cardinal principle of humanism. Here we have a clear statement of the scientific method advocated by humanists, rationalists and scientists. It is very opposite of the blind faith required by many religions, especially theistic religion.
- (iv) All human beings are entitled to inalienable human rights such as those enshrined in the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**. Even though humanists affirm human rights but there is no universally accepted code of human rights. The nearest is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but there are many specific rights mentioned there with which some humanists will not agree.
- (v) These human rights in here to humans from the time the human fetus becomes a viable biological entity capable of independent existence without physical or organic dependence on another human being. However, not all humanists agree with this perception. Some would

agree that it is the moment of birth that is the starting point of a new being while others will agree that conception should be the start of life.

- (vi) Humans do not have a right of dominion over animals and the environment, it being recognised that humans along with many other species of animals do change their environment by their very existence.
- (vii) Children shall not be subjected to physical and mental abuse, nor to religious or political indoctrination by parents or others. The rights of children should be codified in a charter of children's rights.
- (viii) Civil laws should be arrived at by a collective consensual process and should promote the common good, not the tenets of a particular religion or philosophy.
- (ix) Special privileges should not be given to any group on the basis of religious or philosophical belief, nor should any group be discriminated against on such grounds like race, ethnicity, beliefs, gender, age, etc.
- (x) There is no conclusive evidence that life exists after death. So humans should exert themselves primarily in terms of their present life.

On the contrary, religious humanists make sure that doctrine is never allowed to subvert the higher purpose of meeting human needs in here and now. Religious humanism gives due importance on 'faith in action'. Kenneth Phifer says, "Humanism teaches us that it is immoral to wait for God to act for us. We must

act to stop the wars and the crimes and the brutality of this and future ages. We have powers of a remarkable kind. We have a high degree of freedom in choosing what we will do. Humanism tells us that whatever our philosophy of the universe may be, ultimately the responsibility for the kind of world in which we live rests with us.”<sup>5</sup>

Synthesising both religious and secular humanism, one can summarise the basis of humanism in the following manner:

1. Humanism is one of those philosophies for people who think for themselves. There is no area of thought and that a Humanist is afraid to challenge and explore.
2. Humanism is a philosophy focussed upon human means for comprehending reality. Humanists make no claims to possess or have access to supposed transcendent knowledge.
3. Humanism is a philosophy of reason and science in the pursuit of knowledge. Therefore, when it comes to the question of the most valid means for acquiring knowledge for the world, Humanists reject arbitrary faith, authority, revelation, and altered states of consciousness.
4. Humanism is a philosophy of imagination. Humanists recognise that intuitive feelings, hunches, speculation, flashes of inspiration, emotion, altered states of consciousness, and even religious experience, while not valid means to acquire knowledge, remain useful sources of ideas that can lead us to new ways of looking at the world. These ideas, after they have

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<sup>5</sup> See Edwards, F. “What is Humanism”

been assessed rationally for their usefulness, can then be put to work, often as alternate approaches for solving problems.

5. Humanism is a philosophy for the here and now. Humanists regard human values as making sense only in the context of human life rather than in the promise of the supposed life after death.
6. Humanism is a philosophy of compassion. Humanist ethics is solely concerned with human needs and answering human problems – so both the individual and society- and devotees pay no attention to the satisfaction of the desires of supposed theological entities.
7. Humanism is a realistic philosophy. Humanists recognise the existence of moral dilemmas and the need for careful consideration of immediate and future consequences in moral decision making. Humanism is in tune with the science of today. Humanists recognise that we live in a natural universe of great size and age. Humanism is also in tune with today's enlightened social thought, committed to civil liberties, human rights. It is an expression of global consciousness and exchange of the products and ideas intentionally, and an open-ended approach to solving social problems,, an approach that allows for the testing of new alternatives.
8. Humanism is also in tune with new technological developments, willing to take part in emerging scientific and technological discoveries in order to exercise their moral influence on these revolutions as they are come about. Thus, humanism is a philosophy for those *in love with life*. Humanists take responsibility for their own lives and relish the adventure

of being part of new discoveries, seeking new knowledge, exploring new options, enjoy the open-endedness of a quest and freedom of discovery that this entails.

The concept of humanism is an integral concept which is intimately associated with human rights and human dignity. Humanism is the genesis of humans. To be a man is to be human. In this sense, it can be said that humanism is the intrinsic feature of man. But what is humanism? Humanism is the philosophy of human freedom. As humanism is solely and wholly confined to man, it therefore states that 'man is the measure of things in the sense that a man is an end in himself and not the means to any superior end.' Humanism also states that man is the maker of his future; he is the architect of his own and in this regard he enjoys freedom and autonomy of will. He by no means is controlled by any super-natural power. As he determines his own destiny, there is no need for divine will. Humanism thus preserves self-identity of humans and it does not require merging or sacrificing himself with any imaginary collective ego, such as, nation, community or a class.

It is important to note here that humanism is the philosophy of human freedom which is linked with the slogan that 'man is the measure of things'; man is an end in himself and is not the means to any superior end. Thus, it can be said that man is the maker of his fate, his future. He is no longer under the control of any supernatural power; his destiny is determined by himself and not by any divine will. Humanism also suggests that as man is an end in himself, he is not supposed to require merging into or sacrificing himself for any community or

class. Thus, following Kant, it can be said that freedom and autonomy of the will must enjoy every moral agent of becoming a human. Humanism finds it very well in the course of history that man's moral impulses as well as his rationality make it possible for him to develop into an autonomous moral entity. Humanism traces all the mental activities of man, including his will, reason and emotion, to his biological evolution. Humanism holds that man's struggle for the freedom is the basic and primary struggle for his existence; and the quest for freedom and search for truth constitute the basic urge of human progress.

Thus, humanism in one sense plays a vital role in creating a society of free and moral men and women. Humanism strives to build up and maintain a fully democratic society, democratic values of liberty, equality and fraternity and thereby pervades all aspects of social life. These values must be fully reflected in the production and distribution of economic goods and services which in turn governs the relation between various communities. The creation of such an allpervasive multidimensional democracy presupposes a radical transformation of society, a comprehensive culture and institutional revolution. Humanists cannot be true to their philosophy if their moral sense does not propel them to participate in such a revolutionary effort. Humanist, under these circumstances, has to be radical Humanism. Thus, in the **First Chapter** of this thesis, I propose to explain and analyse Roy's theory of humanism which is philosophically known as 'radical humanism' and it would be entitled **M.N.Roy as Radical Humanism.**

Radical humanism, so to speak, will be a participatory democracy where power will remain vested in the people and will not be concentrated in a few hands. It will be a cooperative- commonwealth where an economic inequality is strictly limited. The radical humanism of Roy is the revolutionary work guided by the principle that a cultural transformation must precede every worthwhile social revolution. The main task of radical humanism is to ensure education for all, to educate the people in the democratic values of freedom, equality, rationalism, co-operation and self-imposed discipline, and to set up appropriate institutions based on these values. Radical humanists will not form a political party and will not participate in power politics; rather they will work as the guides, friends and philosophers of the people. Instead of working as would be rulers, they will work with the objectives that the people themselves may secure interesting political power and economic well-being by virtue of their education in humanist values and participation in appropriate democratic organisations. The radical humanism of Roy does not believe that the world of freedom can be created through the establishment of a dictatorship; rather radical humanism as a open system of thought is always open to revision on the basis of fresh additions to human knowledge. Radical humanism of Roy encompasses both personal and social philosophy because Roy realises that the basic tenet of humanism is the centrality of man. It denies any discordance between its personal and social aspects. As a founder of philosophy of radical humanism, Roy distinguished himself both as a man of action and as a man of thought. In both the fields, Roy

lived an intense life. He started as an ardent nationalist, became an equally ardent communist and ended as a creatively active radical humanist.

Roy's radical humanism is intimately associated with the class conflict of Marxism. The creative role which Roy attributed to ideas was essentially in conflict with the Marxist theory of revolution. However, in the course of history, there we notice another **dynamic interpretation** of humanism associated with the name of B. R. Ambedkar. Roy's radical interpretation of humanism is predominantly concerned with ensuring economic and educational rights rather than social dignity; whereas Ambedkar's view on dynamic humanism is far more concerned with *social rights than economic rights*. Ambedkar, being a path finder of downtrodden people revolted against Hinduism, i.e. in short, against Hindu religion which according to Ambedkar in the name of *Dharma* or religion introduces caste system in the society through which the social curse of untouchability has been created. Ambedkar adopted a revolutionary and humanistic approach in the form of trinity principles. According to Ambedkar, any individual progress and social revolution, clarity of thought, commitment of mind, purity of heart, and sincerity towards implementation of the plan are the essential elements of humanism. He emphasises the inter-relation of the trinity principles, such as, liberty, equality and fraternity, as the basic features in human life. To understand and to know the depth of these principles is to acquaint oneself with new meanings and values of life.

The important aspect of Ambedkar's dynamic humanism is to ensure political as well as social rights of the down-trodden people of India. In this regard, at one

hand, he was critical about the dogmatism of Hinduism, i.e. about Hindu religion. According to Ambedkar, Hinduism is not a religion proper because instead of establishing just society or just community, it divides every individual in terms of caste. It creates division of labour among the Hindus on the basis of caste-system but not on the basis of the education and qualities of the individual. Moreover, the social curse of untouchability which paved way to treat human inhumanly has been created by Hindu religion. In this regard, Ambedkar was critical about Hindu *shastras*, particularly, *Manusmriti*. Ambedkar confesses that religion is a must for social emancipation of individual. At the same time, he was critical about God based religion. Instead of that, he wishes a kind of religion that would be scientific and rational where every people would be treated equally irrespective of caste and creed. He found that Hinduism as a religion fails to unify the Hindus; rather it created divisions among Hindus. It creates *himsa* among Hindus in terms of mere division of caste-system. Hinduism as a religion neglects one section of people and treats them inhuman. The untouchability was the creation of Hindus. Untouchability is the crisis of humanism. Humanism does not work in proper in an environment where social disease like untouchability is prevailing. Thus, Ambedkar as a messenger of the down-trodden people, revolted against Hinduism, burned a section of *Manusmriti* and at the end of his life converted himself with the millions of untouchables from Hinduism to Buddhism. Thus, in the **Second Chapter** of this thesis I propose to analyse and examine Ambedkar's view of humanism and it would be entitled as **Ambedkar on Dynamic Humanism**.

The other important aspect of Ambedkar's dynamic humanism is to ensure political rights to the down-trodden people. Ambedkar realised it very well that so long political rights will not be ensured, the fate of the down-trodden people will not revive. With this perception, he introduces different bills in the parliament when he was a law minister. He incorporated many provisions in Indian constitution which protect the political rights of the downtrodden people. Ambedkar felt it very well that political rights will ensure economic rights and equality of the down-trodden people. Economic rights will help to revive the social status. This is exactly the same what is being happened in Indian society. After the independence the social and economic rights of the untouchables uplifted considerably because of the political power. Thus, Ambedkar realised that social emancipation of the down-trodden people can be made possible by acquiring political power.

There is a strong perception that there is no point of relevance of humanism in religion. We do not agree with this perception. When Ambedkar was talking of humanism, he was insisting on religion. The religion in which he found the relevance of humanism is Buddhism. Therefore, in the **Third Chapter** of this thesis I propose to analyse and examine in what sense Buddhism as a religion can find its foothold in humanism and it would be entitled as **Buddhism and Humanism**. Interestingly, even though Buddhism is a religion, but there we observe *secularism in Buddhism*. Thus, in this sequel we develop humanism after Buddhism from secularistic point of view.



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The question then arises: can there be a non-secular form of religion where we find the relevance of humanism? Can the quest of spiritualism be an integral part of humanism? There we find views in favour of and against it. However, we think that there are many facets of humanism and anything should be treated as humanistic which is directly or indirectly linked with the well-being of humans. In this regard, the universal religion of Swami Vivekananda would be truly humanistic in nature. Vivekananda was a great humanist and there is no scope of debating over this issue. Therefore, the religion of Vivekananda must be humanistic in nature. Vivekananda was talking about universal religion which is neither Hindu religion, nor Islamic religion, nor Christian religion, nor at par with any other particular religion. Universal religion is the religion of all religions; universal religion is just like the Soul of all souls; the Hill of all hills. Therefore, in the **Fourth Chapter** of this thesis, I propose to analyse and examine humanism after Swami Vivekananda and it would be entitled as **Vivekananda on Vibrant Humanism**.

We think that humanism is an integral concept associated with the well-being of humans and there are multifaceted aspects of humanism. The humanism of M.N.Roy reflects upon the Marxist position of humanism in a new manner and that is why Roy's humanism has been complimented as *Radical humanism*. It is radical in the sense that unlike Karl Marx, Roy gives importance both means and ends of economic development of the proletariat. Then we have a different approach of humanism in Ambedkar's philosophy. Ambedkar mainly focuses on social justice of the down-trodden people of India and in this regard, he

advocates political and democratic rights of the down-trodden people in one hand and the ramification of Hindu religion on the other. In Buddhism we find the relevance of secular humanism. Finally, we find the complete form of humanism in Vivekananda's philosophy what we call it as *Vibrant Humanism*.

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