CHAPTER IV

HUMANISM
The English word 'Humanism' has been derived from the latin term 'Home' which means 'human-being'. The philosophy of Humanism preached that truth is human and truth is pragmatic. Historically speaking, the source of such philosophy in the West was first found in the teachings of the sophists in Greece in the 5th Century B.C. 'Man is the measure of all things' is the sum and substance of the teaching of protagoras who was the first sophist in Greek Philosophy. Humanism normally is held to be a religion. Some humanists claim it to be the major religion not only of western civilisation but of all mankind. The failure, until recently, of Humanists to institutionalise their doctrines and their refusal to organic, specifically ecclesiastical agencies, has given a false impression that Humanism is not a religion at all. Except for a few scattered examples such as Auguste Comte's religion of humanity, some left-wing unitarians and a few branches of the American Humanists Association and the International Humanist and Ethical League, Humanism is not essentially a church religion. Many humanists believe that it would be foolish to organise a separate and specialised institution for the purpose of saying and appreciating the fact that man
Humanism is a philosophy recognising that there is something ultimate and irreducible about each person, that each person has intrinsic value and is an end in itself which requires no external justification for its existence and its optimum self realisation. Humanists differ widely in their interpretation of the nature of persons and of humanity, "but all insist that to be human is to embody intrinsic value, and such being and value is irreducible."¹

Most humanists do not know that they are Humanists and many of them may not even know that they are religious, their's is a secular faith. The Humanist is more concerned with people than with anything else, recognise no master, reces or class ... accepts the findings, the methods and the world view of modern science. It believes that men possess the intelligence, the skills and the will to end war, build security in a free and just world.

In western countries, there has been a considerable growth in agnosticism in the last hundred years, and this could be said to have its focus in an ethic which

¹. A.J. Bahm, op. cit., p.96.
centres on human welfare, while rejecting the supernatural. In brief, it projects Humanism as an alternative to Christianity. During the same period, a new metaphysical creed has had startling political success i.e. Marxism. In East as well as in the West from which it had its origin Marxism presents itself as a rival of traditional religion. To answer to the question whether Humanism is a religion or not, it is to be seen what views it holds regarding the universe, the nature of man and the values. Regarding universe, Humanists are naturalistic. The universe is natural. It acts in accordance with its own nature and is not influenced by anything outside it. The universe includes everything, so there can be nothing external to it. However having said that the Humanistic view of the universe is naturalistic we cannot say much more about that nature, since Humanists do disagree about it. Some regard it primarily as materialistic, some as mentalistic, some as organic, some regard it as permanent, some as changing, some as both permanent and changing. These disagreements about the ultimate constitution of the universe which result in irreconcilable splits among humanists, do not constitute disagreements about the basic belief that the universe is essentially naturalistic. Secondly, with regard to the view about nature of man, Humanists are also naturalistic. In other words, man is
a product of nature. Moreover, Humanists agree that man is good, or that it is good to be a man, and that it is better for a man to be than not to be. Humanists recognise the existence of evil but evil consists in whatever prevents a man from continuing to exist and to grow. Each man has a nature that remains uniquely his own. In some fundamental sense, each man is unique having an irreducible ultimate value. Thirdly, regarding values, Humanists are likewise naturalistic. Each man is an end in himself. The ultimate goal or man is to be found, first, inside the universe and not outside of it, secondly, inside mankind. Each man's intrinsic value is his own, he does not borrow from other beings (e.g. God or Gods).

Early modern Humanism proposed through the Enlightenment not only during the Age of Reason, when men believed they could attain Utopia here on Earth if only they would become completely reasonable, but during the age of Romanticism, when men believed the world's original paradise could be regained if only men discarded the 'Chains of reason' enslaving free spontaneous wills in systems sanctioning moral, political and theological laws, humanistic ideals prevailed. Empiricism declared that all knowledge originates in sensory experience and hence is relative to human nature and human experience.
Deism rejects revelation and supernaturalism pleading for natural religion. David Hume refuted belief in miracles. J.S. Mill provided methods for inductive generalisations and supported utilitarianism, which propounded 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative expressed a rational law of human nature. Bahm points out his view, "Treat mankind, whether in yourself or in others, always as an end, never as a means merely." Auguste Comte's 'religion of humanity' even developed a catechism of the positive religion and worshipped men in positivistic churches. This movement had considerable influence in south America. American Pragmatists, such as William James and John Dewey extended the evolutionary viewpoint to explain the nature of truth, logic and science as well as theology. James observed Ideals are not fixed goals that enslave men but expressions of human needs growing out of unsolved problems.

Julian Huxley, a veteran Humanist considers life to be the essence of religion. He held that an undeveloped religion does impede human faculty. A

developed religion is one which is so organised that it helps to unify the diverse human faculties and to give each of them the fullest play in a common task. Huxley says, "as the progress of the history of religion is history of the purging of the religious emotion itself from baser elements." A religion which takes this as its core is a true religion. Huxley firmly believed in the religion of life.

Before discussing secular humanism it is proper to state in brief the main tenets of liberal humanism and integral humanism.

The liberal Humanism was basically a glorification of human reason. It holds that man is the measure of all things and he is subject to no authority except his own. It was not merely political or social theory but a new concept of man, a new vision of society built upon enlightenment of reason and material progress and as such it can be rightly called a form of Humanism with its absolute trust in the powers of human reason. It believed in unlimited progress of mankind through the dissemination of secular and scientific knowledge.

Liberal Humanism viewed man as a creature of this world endowed with unlimited potentialities which can be unleashed through the elimination of every form of superstition, including religious superstition. Equipped with scientific knowledge, liberalism sought to make proper use of the creative energies of man and thus create a new man and a new society. It was to be a realm of man without any reference to God. Cardinal Newman opposed liberalism saying that it was overstepping its bounds and presenting itself as a hindrance for the liberation of man. Newman appreciated the positive values of liberalism in political, social, economic and educational spheres of life. It was liberal Humanism underlying the liberalistic theory which Newman opposed. He held that liberalism did not limit itself to the secular, but also included the non-secular, substituting itself for natural and revealed religion.

As an alternative to liberal Humanism's partial and superficial view of man, Newman proposed his view of man as revealed by the experience of conscience and revelation. He saw man as a creature of God, dependent on him as his supreme lawgiver and creator. He conceived of man as being endowed with immense potentialities and yet plagued by sin and all its
dreadful consequences. It is only integral Humanism which can salvage man out of his fallen state. It was based on the encounter or communion with God. For Newman it is absurd to think of any reality outside the unique reality i.e. God who is the foundation of every being.

Liberal Humanism disowns the role of God in human life but Integral Humanism gives primary importance to God. Liberal Humanism of 19th Century has paved the way for secular Humanism of 20th Century with its formal rejection of God. The contemporary religious scene of the world gives the impression that man has finally come to a religionless and Godless state of existence.

The 'secular man' is commonly taken to be a man in the world and man of the world in contrast to the 'religious man' who professes to be a citizen of this world. It is a total vision of man that we call secular Humanism. The object of its faith is man himself. The secular man believes that science and technology have liberated him from the bindings of the past loaded with superstition.

There are several versions of secular Humanism but we shall be concerned here with the chief ones in so far as they reflect the general attitude towards
belief in God. The most significant forms of secular Humanism prevalent today are undoubtedly the Existential, the Marxist, and Scientific Humanism.

Existentialism views man as primarily a being in the world. Man is essentially a temporal being engaged in constructing the kind of being he should be. Man is the project and the projected. Unlike other beings man is thrown into existence in order to disclose the identity and meaning of the world. Heidegger speaks of man's 'thrownness', "Man is thrown into a world to exist there in his situation, but his whence and his whither are concealed from him." Heidegger's Being is not the God of theists and Christians and by making man the creator and Revealer of Being and Truth, he has paved the way for later existentialists who deny the existence of God.

Existentialism, as a form of Humanism had appeared in the later contemporary European thought. The names of Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, Shengler, are associated with this school. Historically speaking, this thought first found its expression in Europe during the first world

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war. The movement is said to have gained ground after the second world war. Human agony, insecurity of life, banishment of all human values have given an impetus to some young thinkers of central Europe to look within, to have an intuition of the inner life. This form of humanism posits that existence precedes essence. The reality of everyone's existence, according to this theory, proceeds from the inwardness of man and not from outside. Nothing is codified by mind from without. Objectified knowledge is far from the truth. 'Truth is subjectivity'. From the standpoint of Existentialism, man is all the time outside of himself, it is in projecting and losing himself beyond himself that he makes man to exist. On the other hand, it is by pursuing transcendent aims that he himself is able to exist. There is no other universe except the human universe, the universe of human subjectivity. The relation of transcendence along with subjectivity constitute existential Humanism. Further the theory says that this is humanism because we remind man that there is no legislator but himself. This humanism never turns back upon himself, but always seeks beyond himself.

Hence, it will not be inappropriate to say that on certain fundamental issues about the theory of man, Existentialism comes closer to the Vedantic concept.
The Vedantin will be one with the Existentialist in holding that subjectivity is nothing more than the self, the Atman, the psychical principle, the knower of all knowledge. Hence instead of saying that there is no other universe except the human universe, we should say, there is no other universe except the Universality of the self or Atman or pure consciousness or pure being (Existence).

"Existential Humanism situates man exclusively within time and space and admits a spiritual side to man's life but it is man's own spirit." Such spiritual aspect of man's existence has nothing to do with God or the supernatural. There can be no creator God, for this would entail the difficulty of a sovereign benevolent power forced to incorporate evil in his works. "Man will have nothing to accomplish in this world, for if God exists, then, perfection has already been achieved outside of this world." 

For Sartre"man is not only a being-in-the-world but also a being-in-freedom, being-for-itself." Man is


7. ibid.
essentially free in his essential. Jean Paul Sartre in his *Being and Nothingness* expresses the notion of freedom in the following words:

I am indeed an existent who learns his freedom through his acts, but I am also an existent whose individual and unique existence temporalises itself as freedom. As such I am necessarily a consciousness (of) freedom since nothing exists in consciousness except as the non-theistic consciousness of existing. Thus my freedom is perpetually in question in my being. It is not a quality added on or a property of my nature. It is very exactly the stuff of my being.6

Thus according to Sartre, absolute freedom is the very essence of man. Man has no finality apart from the expression of his freedom. Any external being such as God cannot be admitted since it would destroy man's absolute freedom. Belief in God would then be an abdiction of freedom which is suicidal for man's very being. Man is the centre and meaning of being. He is the only hero as Merleau Ponty puts it: "The contemporary hero is not Lucifer, he is not even Prometheus; he is man." 9


Marxism has introduced a new vision of man into the modern world. Marxist humanism sees man as a product of varied forces at work in society such as history, culture, politics and above all, economics. Primarily it is the economic forces that determine the quality of man. Economic exploitation of the worker by the privileged classes causes man's alienation from himself and from other men and such alienation is 'dehumanising'. Man must therefore be humanized through a new order of economic forces. The individual is the creation of the society and hence through a restructuring of society the new man freed from all alienation can be created.

Man's philosophy, religion, literature and arts are all shaped by socio-economic forces. His inner subjectivity, consciousness and morality are also the product of matter and subject to economic forces. According to Marxist Humanism it is the society that creates the total man through the manipulation of forces at work in a given society. By changing the socio-economic structures of the society in which man lives, he can be radically transformed. Marxist Humanism upholds the problem of God to the problem of man. Man is always striving for the better, and his inner dynamism springs from matter. Marxist Humanism
assimilates much of Christian messianism and Christian anthropology but gives them a totally different interpretation. Marxist Humanism rectifies the radical shortcomings of Christianity by focussing man's attention and his creative forces on the transformation of man's life on earth. Man is in a process of constant self-transcendence whereby he humanizes himself more and more. The Christianity has misinterpreted man's constant self-transcendence which is directed towards something other-worldly and this has led to his alienation from himself. Transcendence and creation are the attributes of man and not of an imaginary being called 'God'. The admission of any such being according to marxist Humanists is to deny man's exigency for constant self-transcendence and self-creation. Thus religious belief is self-destructive. Marxist Humanism is again an attempt to create a new man and a new society without reference to God and the Supernatural - it firmly believes in man's self-transcendence and capacity to create himself through the manipulation of forces at work in society.

Apart from the two forms of secular Humanism discussed above, there is another form which do not subscribe to a particular philosophical or political
or economic theory. It is more pragmatic in character. It offers mankind a new vision of life and the world without any reference to a transcendent entity. The factors which lead to such a secularistic attitude to life are varied— but they all have in common the rejection of the 'Supernatural'.

Scientific Humanism gives up all forms of dualism in man and the world, between the natural and the Supernatural, between temporal and Eternal, between relative, and absolute, and between material and spiritual, between the immanent and the transcendent. Scientific Humanism attempts to construct a new man and a society through a natural and undogmatic religion and morality adopted to the needs of man as he evolves through the ages to ever greater heights of 'humanization.' Its fundamental creed is belief in nature. Scientific Humanism places its complete trust in the evolutionary process of the world and of man. The religion which answers to modern man's needs and aspirations is the religion of Evolutionary Humanism. According to Julian Huxley, "evolutionary process has become self-conscious in man. Evolution thus enters upon a new path." Man is finally at the wheel of

the evolutionary process which is not haphazard, but planned. Religion itself is the result of an evolutionary process.

According to scientific Humanism, religion and morality arose out of man's attempt to articulate his feelings about the sacred and in this attempt he personified them into one God. Thus religion is looked upon as an activity of man who is subject to change and it has a positive and negative function. These various types of Humanism have one thing in common i.e. the rejection and denial of God and hence may be called secular Humanism. Secular Humanism looks towards the future with optimism and confidence supported by the testimony of its present achievements.

Secular Humanism is a vital force in the contemporary world. Negatively, Secular Humanism is a denial of any transcendent dimension of human existence and of the possibility of having any veridical knowledge about it. Positively it is a profession of absolute faith in man and in the universe. J. Macquarrie describes the secularist as follows:

The secularist, then is the man who affirms the temporal, this worldly character of existence. For him, indeed an expression like, other-worldly
could only be meaningless unless, perhaps, it stands for an illusory point of view. There is for the secularist, only this world, there is no other world."

It is argued that the secularist is opposed to religion because religion distracts his attention from the real world into an imaginary world of the supernatural. The secularists are considered to be empiricists. They hold that the natural sciences are the means of true knowledge. Concentration on being in the world has led to the conclusion that all we have is the experience of the finite objects of this world. This L. Gilkey says, has led to the impoverishment of the human spirit. "Secularism leaves significant and real areas of experience ignored."

Secular Humanism is concerned with man and society and nothing above or beyond it. Secular Humanism sees man as a challenge to man's freedom and belief in God. If there is a God man cannot order his life towards a better future. It was

J. Macquarrie who held that man cannot really be free to order their world and to build a better future for the race unless God is disposed and we take over complete responsibility for ourselves.

Secular Humanism is essentially denial of God and affirmation of man. As a result of total affirmation of man it comes to the conclusion that there can be no God and if there be a God, he can hardly be known and he has no role to play to the affairs of man. Secular Humanism denies all dualism between the temporal and the eternal. Everything is immanent within the universe and time.

The secular Humanism has much similarity with liberal Humanism. In both forms of Humanism man is the measure of all things. He is not only responsible to himself but also to the society. They both hold that reason is the only and the ultimate criterion of every judgment. Secular Humanism like liberal Humanism believes in the method of the natural sciences and rejects the very possibility of other form of knowledge which cannot be verified scientifically. They deny revelation as a source of knowledge. Both forms of Humanism show respect for human dignity, social justice and progress. Thus it values the dignity of the individual, his freedom, autonomy, his responsibility towards himself and the world.
It is worth noting that both the forms of Humanism had to meet severe criticisms. The severest criticisms of liberal Humanism was that it takes a partial view of man and that in denying the spiritual and divine dimensions of man's life, liberal Humanism was dehying man himself. Secular Humanism is now under unwarranted and intemperate attack from various quarters. Secularism and Humanism have been elipsed in Europe during the dark Ages, when religious piety eroded man's confidence in his own powers to solve human problems. They reappeared with vigour during the Renaissance with the reassertion of secular and humanist values in literature and the arts. Again in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with the development of modern science and a naturalistic view of the universe, this influence is found in Eighteenth century which is the Age of Reason and the Enlightenment.

The modern secular humanist outlook has led to the application of science and technology for the improvement of the human conditions. This certainly helped in reducing poverty, suffering and disease in various parts of the world, in improving transportation and communication and in ensuring better life for all. It has freed hundreds of millions of people from the stronghold of blind faith and superstition and has contributed to their education and the enrichment of their lives. It has given an impetus to the humans to solve their problems with intelligence and perseverance.
The secularist movement which had fast developed during a part of the 20th Century has now again started showing a variety of anti-secular trends. The frequent changes in the attitudes of man obviously leads one to suppose that it has become difficult for man to find a solution to the problems of life. The anti-secularist trends are the re-appearance of dogmatic authoritarian religions, fundamentalist, liberalist and the doctrinaire Christianity, a rapidly growing and uncompromising Moslem clericalism in the Middle East and Asia, the reassertion of orthodox authority by the Roman Catholic papal hierarchy, nationalistic religious Judaism, and the reversion to obscurantist religions in Asia. New cults of unreason as well as belief in astrology, reincarnation and the mysterious powers of alleged psychics are growing in many western societies. These religious activists are one of the factors responsible for much of the terror and violence in the world today but they stand on the way of solutions to the world's most pressing problems.

Some of the critics of secular humanism maintain that it is dangerous philosophy. The exponents of secular Humanism deny any changes which are based upon misunderstanding and misinterpretation. They lay down a set of principles. Secular Humanism is not a dogma or a creed. The first principle of democratic secular
Humanism is its commitment to free inquiry. Free enquiry requires that we tolerate diversity of opinion and that we respect the right of individuals to express their beliefs however unpopular they may be, without social or legal prohibition or fear of sanctions. The process of interchanging of the opinions is as important as the result. This applies not only to science and every day life, but to politics, economics, morality, and religion.

The secular humanists recognise the vital role of morality in human life. Secularists deny that morality needs to be deduced from religious belief or that those who do not espouse a religious doctrine are immoral. Secular humanists believe in the importance of the value of human happiness here and now. They maintain that it is possible for human beings to lead meaningful and wholesome lives for themselves and to serve their fellow human beings without the need of religious commandments or the role of the clergy. It should be noted that secular humanism is not so much a specific morality as it is a method for the explanation and discovery of rational moral principles.

Secular Humanists are generally sceptical about supernatural claims. They recognise the importance of religious experience which redirects and gives meaning
to the lives of human beings. They deny that such experiences have anything to do with the supernatural. They very much doubt the traditional views of God and divinity. The universe is more adequately understood by scientific enquiry. Secular Humanists may be agnostics, sceptics, atheists or rationalists but they find that the claims for the divine existence are based on insufficient grounds. They believe that men and women are free and are responsible for their own destinies and that they cannot look for some transcendent Being for salvation. They are committed to the use of the rational methods of enquiry, logic and evidence in respect of knowledge and truth. Scientific method, though imperfect, is still the most reliable way of understanding the world.

Secular Humanism places trust in human intelligence rather than in divine guidance. They attempt to approach the human situation in realistic terms. Human beings are responsible for their own destinies. They believe that it is possible to bring about a more humane world, based upon the methods of reason and the principles of tolerance, compromise, and elimination of difference.

Secular Humanism values the dignity of the individual, his freedom, autonomy, his responsibility towards himself and the world.
It pays highest regard to scientific method and places complete trust in man and his capacity for survival and progress.

Negatively, secular humanism with its denial of God, man's complete dependence upon God and need for salvation in God, creates a void in man which no material progress can fill.

It is worth mentioning here that the Humanism of Vivekananda brings a synthesis among the extreme forms of Humanism mentioned above. The Humanism advocated by Vivekananda may be called the 'Central Theory of Man.' Vivekananda's Humanism interprets God as man and not God in man, Jiva as Shiva. It is from this view point that service to humanity can be deemed as service to God. God, self, Brahman (Absolute) are names of the same Being. On the basis of the identify of God and self one can claim to understand the synthesis of Jñāna and Karma. This is the Key-note of Vivekananda's humanism, a synthesis of the transcendent and the immanent. What Sankara propounded as a metaphysical theory by dint of his scholastic dialectic was applied by Vivekananda to the individual in his social life. This practical Vedānta is the spirit of Vivekananda's socialism. The good of the society means the good of the individual.
Religion is a necessity in human life. This religion is not the aggregate of some dogmas and customs. It is the vision of God as man, a realisation of human values within. Vivekananda's humanism is, in fact, the essence of the humanistic philosophies of the world. He declares Men are the greatest God that ever was or ever will be. Here we get the highest conception of man where the dignity and glory of man has reached infinity. Humanism is defined as a philosophy that asserts the dignity and worth of man and his capacity for self-realisation through reason unaided by 'Supernaturalism.' It forms the substratum of man's entire philosophical thinking. The Greek Philosopher Protagoras declares that: Man is the measure of all values. But the pertinent question is which man is the measure of values? Does it mean the semi-physiological organism motivated by his carnal desires and a plaything of his impulses? Or man with a divine spark in him, noble, just and human in all respects and in full control of himself? The materialist preferred the first and the spiritualist the second interpretation. But 'man' occupies a place of central importance in both the schools. On the other hand, the humanist belonging to the materialist camp hold that a revolutionary activism is the key note of the humanism.
Karl Marx, one of the naturalistic thinkers of the modern age, holds that the unscientific religious outlook clouds man's consciousness, dooms him to passivity and fetters his creative energy and initiative. But Marx directed his criticism also against Feurbach, one of the leading naturalistic thinkers of the period, for his passivism. Hence a humanist of the materialist camp can also be a passivist. The synonymn of the term 'philosophy' in India is 'darsana' meaning direct 'perception'. Truth must not only be spoken of or heard but must be realised. Nothing short of direct realisation constitutes philosophy and this is activism.

According to Romain Rolland, further, "the enfeeblement and the ruin of so many religions lies in the fact that they have forgotten man,"¹³ and the message of Ramkrishna:

Jiva is Shiva, is a reminder that the living being is God - that whoever loves God must unite himself with Him in sufferings, in misery, even in errors and excesses, in the terrible aspect of human nature.²⁴

¹⁴. ibid.
Romain Rolland laid great emphasis on the sayings of Ramakrishna "If you wish to find God serve man."  

Vivekananda's Gospel of humanism is a gospel of revolutionary activism - activism is its life and soul. Speaking about Vivekananda's humanism E.P. Chelishev says:

It possess many features of active humanism manifested above all in a fervent desire to elevate man, to instil in him a sense of his own dignity, sense of responsibility for his own destiny and the destiny of all people, to make him strive for the ideals of good, truth and justice.

The humanistic ideal of Vivekananda is to certain degree identical with Gorky's Man. He describes his life as brief but dazzlingly bright, full of indefatigable activity and an impassioned desire to make his compatriots aware of their greatness and lead them onto the road of a new life. Romain Rolland rightly says that "He was energy personified, and action was his message to men."  

15. ibid.
Thus it is clear that religious humanism may at the same time also mean an intense activism. The materialist adopts an externalistic method consisting of social and political reforms while the method of the spiritualistic school is internalistic and leads to the elevation of men. Men has either to cling to the externalistic method, of experimenting with social and political institutions, or to turn inward to elevate himself. To this question of supreme importance a decisive answer was given by Vivekananda. "It is a change of the soul itself for the better that will cure the evils of life. It is only the spiritual culture and ethical culture alone that can change wrong racial tendencies for the better." The basis of all systems, social or political rests upon the goodness of men. Sorokin rightly observes that mankind had made unprecedented achievements in the field of science and technology. But now the achievements of science and technology, pose a potential threat to mankind and its values. He further says that the urgent need of our time is the need of men who can control himself and his lusts, who are compassionate to all their fellow men, who

can see and seek for the eternal values of culture and society and who deeply feel their unique responsibility in this universe. Sorokin feels the need of the hour was the absolute, eternal and spiritual values. The crisis of our age is the imminent danger of total annihilation in an atomic war. It is the inheritable outcome of the degradation of man under materialistic and sensate culture and the solution lies in the elevation of man. For this a switch over from materialism to spiritualism is of paramount importance.

Long before Sorokin wrote his thesis, Vivekananda declared in a prophetic tone: "The whole of western civilisation will crumble to pieces in the next fifty years if there is no spiritual foundation." 19

Nietzsche and Marx in the nineteenth century, and Kierkagaard and Jean Paul Sartre in the twentieth century took great pains to focus the predicament of the socially and spiritually alienated man and offered solutions of their own. Their philosophical endeavours were only incidentally theoretical, their major preoccupation being the practical solution of the

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problem, actual transformation of man and man's way of life. After the second world war, existentialism, attracted the attention of the world. There are both atheists and theists among the existentialists. Both the schools, however, directed their attention towards solving the mystery of human existence. They were influenced by Nietzsche, Kafka and by Neo-Vedānta.

According to Jean Paul Sartre, the leading exponent of the atheistic school, there being no God there is at least one being whose existence comes before its essence, a being which exists before it can be defined by any conception of it. "Man is nothing else but what he purposes, he exists only in so far as he realises himself, he is therefore nothing else but what life is."20 He believes in activism and declares that there is no reality except action. Thus man is what he makes of himself and man is responsible for what he is. "For man, there is no other legislator for him than himself,"21 assert the existentialist philosophers. This freedom is the essence of all values to him. To Vivekananda man is the highest God.

21. ibid.
He observes, "Never forget the glory of human nature. We are the greatest God that even was or ever will be." Vivekananda's humanism recognises the ordinary man's right to happiness in this world and fosters in him a sense of self-dignity. This reverence for the common man has for its basis the doctrine of divinity of man. "Not only man but his daily activities, his humble pursuits for earning his living were sought to be deified by Vivekananda." 'Work is worship' is his maxim in this respect. In the doctrine of the identity of the individual and the universe lies the solution to problem which baffles the modern man and which has also been the concern of Marx, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard and other modern humanists, viz. the problem of alienation. In Vivekananda's system the solution of the problem looks very easy since there is no alienation of man at all from his universe, both being identical in essence and both being manifestation of the same Reality. One must be aware of this unity and one then feels an affinity with the universe. A bond of union and love for all humanity lurks in the heart of the man who has realised the


unity beneath diversity. Finally, Vivekananda lays down one of the most vital truths of human life when he says, 'And all the responsibility of good and evil is on you.' The existentialist also emphasizes this. But what is new in Vivekananda is that he considers this doctrine of individual responsibility as one of great hope. "What I have done, that I can undo." Take the whole responsibility on your own shoulders, and know that you are the creator of your own destiny says Vivekananda. His theory of social revolution is the culmination of his theory of humanism which is based on two Vedāntic truths, i.e.: (a) The Divinity of man and (b) The Essential Spirituality of life.

It is evident from the above principles that Vivekananda's interpretation of Vedānta has a social revolutionary impact. It points to a privilege free and classless society where everyone enjoys the same human rights and where none can claim any special privilege. Vivekananda was opposed against every form of exploitation and injustice. The declaration of war against exploitation tyranny, and injustice is an important

aspect of Vivekananda's humanism. Vivekananda's classless society is different from that of Marx because in it every human interest will be guided and controlled, according to the principles of spirituality of life. In the Marxian scheme on the other hand there is no place for religion or spirituality. According to Marx, these are primitive in origin having no place in an advanced society. The basis of Vivekananda's classless society is spirituality since spiritual unfoldment is the goal of human life and since spirituality strikes at the root of all inequalities and exploitation. Thus the Vedantic doctrine of spiritual unity of the universe, according to Vivekananda, is the true foundation of equality of all men, of all classes and nations. It is evident that the doctrine of spirituality as laid down by Vivekananda is necessary not only to 'humanise' man, but also to form the foundation of equality, liberty and human rights. It constitutes the true foundation of socialism. It has been rightly observed by him, "No civilization can last unless it is based on religion, on the goodness of man." 25 Religion

25. Ibid., Vol. V., P. 212.
goes to the root of the matter. "He preferred to build his philosophy of social revolution on the solid rock of a sound world-view and a philosophy of activism, i.e. Vedānta." Vedānta is the only philosophy which emphasises perpetual renewal, perpetual progress, man's continuous struggle for the manifestation of the infinite Divinity in a philosophy of perpetual revolution. Vedānta was the foundation as well as the instrument which was to accelerate the process of revolution in history. He therefore proposed to infuse the Vedāntic truths - India's Oldest, highest, and broadest truths - into the very blood of the people all over the world. He emphasised on the "wonderful idea of the soul - its eternal right, its eternal strength, its eternal purity and its eternal perfection." R.K. Das Gupta observes, "No revolution, political or religious, in the history of the world was so rooted in such a comprehensive philosophy i.e. the philosophy of the Vedānta." Revolution remains half


done if it does not touch the essence of man and does not refer to his spiritual destiny. Neither Rousseau nor Marx highlight the essence of man as Vivekananda does. Vedānta, a philosophy of extreme dynamism and activism — of man’s perpetual march towards freedom is a philosophy of perpetual revolution. Hence revolution in the Vedānta as interpreted by Vivekananda is a novel concept. A true revolution can only start with a spiritual upheaval or a spiritual awakening of man and not otherwise. Vivekananda has stated profound truths which operate and transform human life and society, changing the destiny of mankind. His humanism is therefore, a gospel of revolution of a deeper significance which envisaged to change the entire fabric of human life and it aimed to usher in a new era and therefore its keynote is ‘radical activism.’

The merit of Vivekananda, is that he was one of the first in India to pay attention to the masses, the suffering and misfortunes of his compatriots. His humanism is an example of the most liberal form of religion which can be the religion of the day.

Throughout the history of mankind, if any motive power has been more potent than another in the lives of all great men and women, it is that of faith in themselves..
The old religions proclaimed that he who did not believe in God is an atheist, the new religion says that he who does not believe in himself is an atheist because Vedanta is the doctrine of oneness. It means faith in all. The humanism expounded by Vivekananda is intensely human and universal. It is something more than human, it derives its sanction and strength from the ever present and inalienable divine spark in all man and woman—this constitutes its uniqueness, Vivekananda accepts the human situation as we discover it in the present society. He also accepts the need for the manipulation of his socio-political conditions, up to a point, to ensure his growth and development. Vivekananda assimilated and modified the religious—philosophical ideas of the Vedanta, adopting them to the conditions of the new life. The voice of Vivekananda at the end of the last century reverberated in the enslaved, brutally exploited country where all human rights were trampled under foot, in country torn asunder by differences in caste, religions, and racial prejudices assiduously formed by the colonialists. He made Indian philosophy concern itself with the problems of the common man. Thus he calls for an all round development of man and the human society.