CHAPTER – 1

HUMANISM –
AN INTRODUCTION
1.1 Humanism: Dictionary Meanings
1.2 Humanism in Encyclopedias
1.3 Characteristics of a humanist
1.4 Humanism versus Religion
1.5 Humanism and Scientific Outlook
1.6 Empathy
1.7 Humanism and Humanitarianism
1.8 Humanism and Rationalism
1.9 Is Humanism Cosmopolitan?
1.10 Humanism and Social Reformation
1.11 Conclusion
This chapter deals with various possible ways of humanism. It tries to explain what humanism is, from different point of views. For a better and clearer comprehension of the term, this chapter is further divided into various subtopics. It is almost impossible to provide a final or single definition of the term ‘humanism’. Humanism has been understood and explained differently following varying perceptions and interpretations. This leads to complexities in defining the term ‘humanism’.

This thesis undertakes detailed study of humanism in three poets belonging to different times, social milieus and traditions – Kabir, a renowned revolutionary saint poet from 15th century India; William Wordsworth, a leading nature poet whose poetry is permeated more by Man than Nature from 18th century England; and Chaucer, the Father of English poetry hailing from 14th century England. Despite their geographical and temporal differences, each of them voiced the philosophy of humanism in their own way in their works. Nevertheless, the present study attempts to provide enough evidences of numerous aspects of humanism from their works. It is to be noted that the study does not take into account stylistic aspects of their works. It shall focus exclusively on the construct of humanism in their works. Further, an endeavour has been made to undertake comparative study of these three poets and humanism reflected in their works. The researcher has adopted
thematic cum comparative approach to study humanism from the poets’ perspectives.

1.1 Humanism: Dictionary Meanings

Purpose: The definitions given below shall help in comprehending certain aspects of humanism which might become helpful in comprehending the term ‘humanism’ as well as meanings attached to it.

According to Collins Dictionary Humanism is “The rejection of religion in favour of the advancement of humanity by its own efforts.” (Dooner et al. 265)

Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus takes the view that humanism is “An outlook or system of thought concerned with human rather than divine or supernatural matters.” (Elliott 361) Little Oxford Dictionary considers humanism as a “Non-religious philosophy based on liberal human values.” (Oxford Uni. Press 224)

Chambers Dictionary places humanism as “Any system which puts human interests and the mind of man paramount, rejecting the supernatural, belief in God etc.....” (Chambers 448)

Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary 8th Edition indicates that humanism is “A system of thought that considers that solving human problems with the
help of reason is more important than religious beliefs. It emphasizes the fact that the basic nature of humans is good.” (Hornby 760)

_The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition_ describes humanism as:

1. A system of thought that rejects religious beliefs and centers on humans and their values, capacities, and worth. 2. Concern with the interests, needs, and welfare of humans: "the newest flower on the vine of corporate humanism" (Savvy). 3. Medicine The concept that concern for human interests, values, and dignity is of the utmost importance to the care of the sick. 4. The study of the humanities; learning in the liberal arts. 5. A cultural and intellectual movement of the Renaissance that emphasized secular concerns as a result of the rediscovery and study of the literature, art, and civilization of ancient Greece and Rome. (Pickett 932)

_Collins English Dictionary – Complete and Unabridged_ considers humanism as:
1. (Philosophy) the denial of any power or moral value superior to that of humanity; the rejection of religion in favour of a belief in the advancement of humanity by its own efforts. 2. (Philosophy) a philosophical position that stresses the autonomy of human reason in contradistinction to the authority of the Church. 3. (Literary & Literary Critical Movements) (often capital) a cultural movement of the Renaissance, based on classical studies. 4. Interest in the welfare of people. (Kuether 1021)

According to -Ologies & -Isms. The Gale Group, Inc:

1. Any system or mode of thought or action in which human interests, values, and dignity are taken to be of primary importance, as in moral judgments. 2. a devotion to or study of the humanities. 3. a theory of the life of man as a responsible being behaving independently of a revelation or deity. Also called naturalistic, scientific, or philosophical humanism. —
humanist, n. — humanistic, adj.  (Gale Research Inc. 1639)

According to *The Sage Dictionary of Cultural Studies*:

1. humanism- the doctrine that people’s duty is to promote human welfare humanitarianism doctrine, ism, philosophical system, philosophy, school of thought- a belief (or system of beliefs) accepted as authoritative by some group or school. 2. the doctrine emphasizing a person’s capacity for self-realization through reason; rejects religion and the supernatural. 3. the cultural movement of the Renaissance; based on classical studies cultural movement – a group of people working together to advance certain cultural goals. (Barker 88)

In *Dictionary of Literary Terms* (McGraw Hill Book Company), Mr. Harry Shaw illuminates:

Any system of thought or action in which human interests, values and dignity are held to be dominant. Humanism implies devotion to the
concerns of mankind; it is an attitude of mind that concentrates upon the activities of man rather than upon the supernatural world, the world of nature, or the so-called animal kingdom. Historically, humanism was a Renaissance doctrine, born in fourteenth century Italy, which stressed the essential worth, dignity and potential of man as contrasted with an older view that man was wicked, worthless and doomed to destruction both in this life and that to come. Renaissance humanists, deriving their beliefs from study of ancient poets, historians and philosophers, came to believe that **man was indeed the centre of the universe and that he was capable of living a life of reason, dignity, morality and even happiness**. In a more specific sense, humanism involves devotion at any time, including the present, to those studies that deal with the life, thought and literature of ancient Greece and Rome. Advocates of humanism in literary history range from Petrarch, Thomas
After the careful perusal of all the meanings stated by the dictionaries mentioned above, it appears that they do not have conflicting views regarding the word ‘humanism’, rather they seem to create a mutually supportive understanding of the word ‘humanism’. Each tries to present some possible interpretations of the word. Some of the common features one can derive from the above definitions are:

- Humanism appears to reject religion.

- It seems to emphasize the fact that the basic nature of humans is good.

- It seems to believe that advancement of humanity is possible only through efforts aided by reason. Solving human problems with the help of reason is more important than religious beliefs.

- It appears to be an outlook, life stance, system of thought, and a philosophy that centre on human being. It puts human interests, values, dignity, capacities and worth of man paramount. Man is the measure of all things. Man is at the centre of the universe.
• Humanism seems to believe only in empirical evidence and scientific methods of acquiring knowledge, hence it does not believe in divine and supernatural matters and becomes a non-religious philosophy.

• The only focus and concern of humanists appears to disseminate liberal human values known as humanist values such as democracy, human rights, socialism, social development, secularism, dignity of the individual, spiritual liberation, knowledge, social justice, purity of means, affection, kindliness, creativity, cooperation, joy of life, love of nature, values, education, thrill and so on.

• It seems to concern with the needs, interests and welfare of all human beings irrespective of their caste, creeds, nationality or any other barriers.

• It appears to be the study of the humanities; learning in the liberal arts.

• It seems to be the cultural and intellectual movement of the Renaissance and Reformation that emphasized secular concerns.

• Instead of bothering about supernaturalism, divinity and God, it seems to believe in the supremacy of human values and powers.

• It appears to pervade in world literature in some or other way.

1.2 Humanism in Encyclopedias
Encyclopedia Britannica places humanism as:

the attitude of mind which attaches primary importance to man and to his faculties, affairs, temporal aspirations and well-being (from Latin *humanus*, “human”; cf. *hume*, “man”, *hominess*, “mankind”) often regarded as the characteristic attitude of the Renaissance in western Europe. The Greek and Roman classical writers regularly distinguished the human, as humane, on the one hand, from the bestial and on the other from the divine; but in making the latter contrast they usually stressed some pathetic aspect of the human, such as mortality or fallibility. Medieval Christianity, however, suggested that man’s life on earth was significant only in so far as it affected his soul’s expectation of God’s mercy after death, and it was against this belittling of his natural condition that the humanists of the Renaissance asserted the intrinsic value of man’s life before death and the greatness of his potentialities. As ecclesiastical influence
waned, the protest of humanism was turned against secular orthodoxies that subordinated man to the abstract concepts of political or biological theory. (Benton 1179)

The above description of humanism seems to focus on the following aspects of humanism:

1. Attaching paramount importance to man and his faculties, affairs, temporal aspirations and well being is a characteristic attitude of Renaissance in Western Europe. That is to say, man-centered attitude of humanism has its roots in Renaissance. The title “Renaissance Humanism” is applied to the philosophical and cultural movement that swept across Europe from the 14th through 16th centuries, effectively ending the Middle Ages and leading into the modern era.

2. The central focus of Renaissance Humanism appeared to be, quite simply, human beings. Humans were praised for their achievements — achievements attributed to human ingenuity and human effort rather than divine grace. Humans were regarded optimistically in terms of what they could do, not just in the arts and sciences but even morally. Human concerns were given greater attention, leading people to spend more time on work that would benefit people in their daily lives rather than the otherworldly interests of the Church.
3. Intrinsic value of man’s life before death and the greatness of his potentialities appear to be a matter of great concern for humanists. They do not appear to bother about rebirth, reincarnation etc.

*Encyclopedia of Science, Technology & Ethics* considers humanism as:

Humanism is a philosophy and way of life (a life stance) based on empathy, reason, and experience. To humanists, empathy- which is the starting point for a compassion and social action- is a product of human nature: the fact that humans are highly developed social animals. Reason is a product of human intelligence that, when combined with experience, leads to the scientific method. And humanists regard the scientific method as the only reliable tool for both acquiring and validating the knowledge necessary to realize the aims of human compassion. “To the twentieth-century philosopher Bertrand Russell, the whole concept could be summed up this way: the good life is one inspired by love and guided by knowledge. (Mitcham 944)
The above description appears to focus on the core aspects of humanism:

- Empathy, Reason and Experience appear to be the cardinal principles of humanist way of life. Empathy is the starting point for a compassion and social action. Humanity must take responsibility for making the world better. Along these lines, Humanist Manifesto II (1973) states: “No deity will save us; we must save ourselves.” It is the spirit of empathy with other human beings that plays a key role in harmonious human relationships. Love generates empathy and knowledge generates reason.

- It seems to be essentially a pro-science outlook. So, there is no place for supernatural belief in humanist thought. Humanism is a completely naturalistic and non-theistic worldview. Scientific temper and rational behaviour emanate the realization of the aims of human compassion.

- Humanism seems to accept the one and only method of acquiring and validating knowledge, that is the scientific method-reason coupled with experience and experiment brings enlightenment. Scientific temper and rational behaviour are the hallmarks of truly progressive people of truly progressive society.

The term humanism can be discussed in three phases (1) the origin of the Word and its contextual usages in the history; (2) The Ideas and ; ( 3) The Movement:
The Roman grammarian Aulus Gellius, who flourished in circa 160 C.E., noted (in Noctes Atticae [Attic nights] the dual usage of the Latin humanitas (humanity). One usage was comparable to the Greek concept of philanthropia and indicated an attitude of general benevolence or humanitarian sympathies, while the other was comparable to the Greek paideia and indicated the achievement of being humanized (humanissimi) through acquired learning in the liberal arts. Because this latter usage was seen as a capability that separated humans from animals – giving humans the power of independent judgment it had been favoured by the Roman orator and philosopher Cicero (106-43 B.C.E) and the Roman scholar Varro (116-27 B.C.E) as a civilizing force. (947)
Hence, originally the word humanism appears to have been used in the sense of benevolence, being humanized, unique quality of having the power of judgment. But during the Middle Ages, this usage was replaced by the notion that human beings appear to have been defined players within set hierarchies of the cosmic order, as maintained by the authority of the church, the empire, and the feudal system. In the fourteenth century, a few cities and communes seem to have gained political independence that gave birth to intellectual independence. And with it came a revival of the ancient Greco-Roman spirit. This perhaps took the form of a Renaissance literary and philosophic movement of scholars calling themselves ‘humanists’. These humanists, through revival of classical letters, appear to have focused on humanities and promoted religious tolerance, worldly ethics, a sense of history, and an interest in nature. Hence, these four became the cardinal principles of humanism. Later on, the movement of revival of letters became an impetus for the advancement of science, and thereby broadened the meaning of humanism. In 1853, a democratic organization appeared in England which was known as the Humanistic Religious Association of London. It declared “emancipation from the ancient compulsory dogmas, myths and ceremonies borrowed of old from Asia and still pervading the ruling churches of our age.”

(948) Around the same time, in France the pioneer sociologist Auguste Comte (1798-1857) formulated “a religion of humanity” out of his science-oriented, nontheistic philosophy of positivism. (949)
In 1867, a group of radical Unitarians and freethinkers in the United States formed the Free Religious Association and by the end of the century, many came to know about humanistic theism which actually was a mix of the most liberal Unitarianism, Universalism and Reformed Judaism of the time together with the free thought critiques of more traditional faith. Edward Howard Griggs who was one of the radical Unitarians, wrote a popular book, *The New Humanism: Studies in Personal and Social Development* in 1899. In this book, he advocated science (particularly Darwinism), “the Greek ideal”, Christian spirituality and social change (including women’s rights). This author has inculcated the idea for a new religion that would teach the divinity of common things and infinite significance of humanity.

Throughout the first three decades of twentieth century, Irving Babbitt (1865-1933), Paul Elmer More (1864-1937), and Norman Forester (1887-1972) developed academic humanism, literary humanism and the new humanism. They called for a return to a classics-based education, declared humanities superior to science, proclaimed human beings superior to nature and advanced a puritanical morality of decorum. (Mitcham 948) F.C.S. Schiller in England published *Humanism: Philosophical Essays* in 1903 and *Studies in Humanism* in 1907 and advocated a subjectivist form of pragmatism. (950)
Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) developed an existential humanism (950) and Jacques Maritain (1882-1973) a theocentric Catholic humanism. (950) Marxists and Social Darwinists (950) had also taken the humanist label.

Historically speaking, the word humanism has been used in different contexts so far. It appears that the word humanism has different usages. The origin of the current usage of the term humanism came into being for the first time during World War I when American Unitarian minister John H. Dietrich (1878-1957) having doubts concerning his earlier Christian convictions, adopted a naturalistic, prescience, ethical worldview linked to a progressive social outlook. He appears to have been in search for a name for this. By chance, he came across in 1915 an article by a positivist, Fredrick M. Gould published in British Ethical Societies. In the article, Gould used the word humanism to express a belief and trust in human effort. (Mitcham 951) This usage was clearly different from the Renaissance usage of the term. In 1916, another American Unitarian minister Curtis W. Reese used the word the religion of democracy. He argued that democratic religion is human centered in contrast to the authoritarianism of theocratic religion.

The Ideas
Corliss Lamont states in his noted book *The Philosophy of Humanism* that there are a number of historic ideas, trends, and movements as converging over time to create contemporary humanist thought: these being empirical science, ancient and modern philosophy of materialism and naturalism, free thought, liberal religion, democracy and civil liberties, Renaissance humanism and literature and the arts, in another words most of the Western intellectual tradition. William F. Schulz’s *Making the Manifesto* focuses on more proximate antecedents: nineteenth century science, the impact of Charles Darwin (1809-1822) and Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), cultural anthropology and the higher criticism of the Bible, free thought and religious modernism, progressivism and the social gospel, and the philosophies of pragmatism and critical realism.(951) Thus, it should be most appropriate to note that Humanism is not sum total of all these things because it continues to evolve.

Humanism’s epistemology is derived from the Instrumentalism (the view that the abstract concept of “truth” is best replaced by the more empirical concept of “warranted assertion”) of the American educator and philosopher John Dewey (1859-1952) (Lamont 87). Metaphysically it is naturalistic (the view that the universe is natural and that there is no supernatural). Because of the humanist’s commitment to reason, its worldly ethic is essentially altruistic. It involves elements of the Utilitarianism of the English philosopher John Stuart
Mill (1806-1873) which holds that acts are good only to the extent that they have practical social benefits that can be rationally decided. (88) Hence the humanist ethics are situational, i.e. changing with situations in a context of compassion as well as egoistically consequentialist (taking consequence into account from the standpoint of enlightened self-interest). In the social and political realm, this dichotomy seems to reveal the inherent conflict between individual liberty and social responsibility, leading to the conclusion that moral dilemmas are real and a necessary part of life and law. Democratic values - including social justice, the enfranchisement of the disenfranchised, and the open society, are central to humanism as an expression of the Golden Rule (Do to others as you would have them do to you). Human beings have capacity for empathy.

**The Movement**

In 1876, the Society for Ethical Culture was founded by Felix Adler. He was a Reformist Jew who was active in the Free Religious Association. His Ethical Culture was a new religion that promoted ethical behaviour and social service - deed above creed - with its values derived from new-Kantian principles. By around 1950, the various Ethical Culture societies in the United States and England had evolved Adler’s philosophy into humanism. As a result, the American Ethical Union became one of the founding member organizations
for the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), the world coalition of humanists. (954)

In 1916, from the pulpits of Unitarian churches, Reese and Dietrich started preaching the humanist ideas. Slowly humanism spread among Unitarians and it was further aided by the creation of the Humanist Fellowship at the University of Chicago in 1927, the founder of the *New Humanist* magazine one year later. In 1929, the Unitarian minister Charles Francis Potter founded the independent First Humanist Society of New York, a church that would eventually count among its members Albert Einstein and Helen Keller.(954)

In 1925, in India, Periyar launched Self-Respect, a humanist, political and social reform movement devoted to human rights and opposed to the caste system. Openly no theistic and critical of Hindu and other religious beliefs, it was and appears to remain a proponent of scientific and technological development. (955)

1933 was an important landmark in the Humanist Movement. It was the publication year of *A Humanist Manifesto*. It was the first major document to lay down the basic principles of humanism. It was signed by prominent
academic philosophers (including Dewey) clerics (Ethical Culture, Jewish, Unitarian, and Universalists), educators, journalists, scientists and social reformers. (955)

In 1941, a number of the manifesto signers founded the American Humanist Association and its magazine the *Humanist*. Both continue into the twenty first century, and organization has counted among its presidents the Nobel Prize winning geneticist Herman J Muller and the science populariser Isaac Asimov. After the World War II, a number of humanist organizations sprung up in Europe, India and elsewhere. This international growth led to the founding of the IHEU in 1952 at a humanist conclave in Amsterdam chaired by the English biologist Julian Huxley. In the early 2000s, the IHEU indirectly represents millions of humanists worldwide in national and local organizations on six continents. (956)

In his 1957 book, *New Bottles for New Wine*, Huxley coined the term *transhumanism* out of a recognition that humanity “is in point of fact determining the future direction of evolution on the this earth” (Mitcham 947) and therefore a term is needed to signify “man remaining man but transcending himself, by realizing new possibilities and for his human nature”. (947) Huxley’s word has been taken up by futurist-oriented humanists
engaged in exploring the possibilities of radical improvements in the human condition and human capabilities through the likes of cyberbio, and nanotechnology. To foster dialogue and advance this pursuit, the World Transhumanist Association was founded in 1998.

*Seligaman’s Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* discusses in detail the historical and philosophical aspects of the term humanism.

**Historical Aspects:**

The Encyclopaedia considers humanism as a movement which represented an extensive change - almost in the nature of a mutation - in art, literature and thought. It took place in Western Europe, the close of the Middle Ages and in early modern times. On its literary and intellectual side, this movement has been called humanism. Underlying it were the phases of a commercial revolution - an increase of trade, of wealth, of banking, of accumulation by rich individuals and taxation by government. The Encyclopaedia further notes that only in a consumers’ civilization such as the Italian, founded on wealth and leisure, could such a movement take place. The early humanists were the secretaries, librarians, teachers, sometimes the courtiers and officials, sometimes themselves the princes and prelates and great merchants of the cities and courts. Some Italian writers obtained enough fame in the later decades of the fourteenth century and during the fifteenth to exert a wide
influence on their own time and they have remained objects of literary and intellectual interest ever since. To the great majority of readers and students of later time, it is the writing and the interests of these men that constitute humanism.

Humanism appears to have gathered largely about an increased interest in the Greek and Latin classics. The infinite variety of content, the perfection of form and the freedom of thought of the ancient writers appears to have provided admirable material for the uses of an awakened and critical but not a profound and inventive mental activity. Before the advent of humanism, the antique lore appears to have been subordinate to the doctrine, the disciplines and the philosophy of the Christian church that had the upper hand. It was subordinate to the scholasticism that dominated the universities, to the superstition that appears to have permeated knowledge and to the predilection of the time for religious interests. But with the advent of the spirit of humanism, men studied classics in a different spirit, with a new appreciation for their literary beauties, their variety of subject and their less inhibited outlook on life. Largely outside of the church and at first apart from the universities, an ever increasing number of students, teachers, writers and officials immersed themselves in the study of the classics. Hence, the pursuit of classic eloquence appears to have been for a time the most conspicuous
element in humanism. It seems that the influence of the ancient writers have made it happen.

It appears to have been neither the form of the works of the humanists nor their subject that was most characteristic but it was their spirit which was most conspicuous. As compared with the piety or, at least, the ecclesiasticism of the Middle Ages, humanism was uninterested in theology. It was sometimes unregretful, and at other times, harshly critical of the church. In its very thought, it depended on no authority. Indeed so great seemed the departure of humanism from the Christian discipline of the Middle Ages that it was one of the sides quite indistinguishable from paganism. The freedom of the spirit of humanism seemed also to be a revolt from sacerdotalism (a belief that sacrifices for sin requires the intervention of a priest. That is, it is the belief that a special, segregated order of men, called the priesthood, are the only ones who can commune directly with God or the gods), a layman’s rebellion against the tyranny of the churchman, a declaration of the independence of thought from the restrictions of ecclesiastical authority. (Seligman 789) It is true that some of the humanists were themselves ecclesiastics. Religion and humanism seemed to be in constant conflict with each other because of their fundamental characteristics. Humanism was
bound up with emancipation of spirit and freedom of thought whereas the dictates of religions are authoritative.

Historically speaking, humanist visions seemed to be reactions to the evil drama they had witnessed at their own doorsteps - the Second World War, Fascism and Nazism. They realized that the breakdown of ethics and civilized values, the holocaust, the nuclear bombing of two Japanese cities etc... compromised western ideologies and religions. They did not appear to believe in restoring what had been, they seemed to have wanted to create something new, a humanist awareness and consciousness - that hand in hand with the newly established United Nations and the declarations of Human Rights, could secure democracy and peace for new generations.

Merriam Webster’s *Encyclopaedia of Literature* observes the following dimensions of humanism:

The learning or cultural impulse that is characterized by a revival of classical letters, an individualistic and critical spirit, and a shift of emphasis from religious to secular concerns that flowered during the Renaissance.
Renaissance humanism is traceable to the 14th century Italian poet Petrarch, whose scholarship and enthusiasm for classic Latin writings ("the humanities") gave great impetus to a movement that eventually spread from Italy to that of Western Europe. The diffusion of humanism was facilitated by the universal use of Latin and by the invention of movable type. Although humanism gradually became identified with classroom studies of the classics, it more properly embraced any attitude that exacted man’s relationship to God, free will and human superiority over nature. (Webster 886)

The above observations from various encyclopaedias illuminate the following strands of the term ‘humanism’:

1. Humanism appears to advocate individualistic and critical spirit;

2. It seems to neglect religious concerns and shows concerns only with secular values;
3. The origin of humanist movement appears to lie in 14th century in Italy. The Italian poet Petrarch was the first who sowed the seed of humanism in Europe; and,

4. Free will and human superiority over nature seem to be the primary concerns of humanism. That is to say man is the centre of the universe and man has the upper hand.

1.3 Characteristics of a humanist

In ordinary everyday language, a humanist seems to be a person who strongly believes in the welfare of all human beings irrespective of any caste, creeds, isms, politics, religions and any nationalistic barriers. He appears to insist on applying his reason to all problems in life, as opposed to relying on faith or insight or allowing himself to be guided by tradition or authority untested by reason. In the history of philosophy, however, the significance of the word ‘humanism’ seems to be very different. A humanist philosopher seemed to be one who took the view that reason alone, unaided by observation, can provide us with philosophical knowledge, which is true knowledge. (Bandiste 5) As opposed to the humanist philosophers, the empirical philosophers insisted that observation or experience of facts is the basis of knowledge. The two basic propositions of modern humanism appear to be belief in the capacity of reason to solve problems and an acceptance of the validity of experience as a guide and test of all rational thinking. Unlike all other
creatures and animals, man alone appears to have the power of reason. (6)
Man alone is or can be a rational animal. Humanism in this sense appears to
be a mental attitude which unreservedly accepts the supremacy of reason and
aims at establishing a system of philosophy and ethics verifiable by experience
and independent of all arbitrary assumptions or authority. All in all, a
humanist seems to be the one who advocates and practices humanist values.

Humanists believe that human experience is the source of all knowledge and
moral values. (7) The only knowledge we can have is human knowledge. And
all human knowledge is the knowledge of the world as we experience it. For
the humanist, knowledge and beliefs can never be final and dogmatic but
must always be limited, uncertain and open to question. A humanist seems to
be necessarily open-minded and always prepared to submit his own views and
beliefs to questioning and criticism. A humanist seems to be actively
concerned with human welfare in this world as opposed to a supposed
existence after death. Believing in human equality, a humanist appears to
insist on social justice and opposes all artificial barriers between man and man
based on colour, creed or circumstances of birth. The humanist outlook
pervades all aspects of this life and thought and his relations with his fellow-
men.
1.4 Humanism versus Religion

The cause of religious fundamentalism and persecution appears to lie in one’s identification with religious identity. Along with the birth a person gets the religious identity from one’s parents. A person is so much identified with it that S/he is not ready to leave this identity anyhow. According to humanism, religious identity should be replaced by humanism. Observed objectively, one would find that the various religions offer a view of life and a set of beliefs which arose from, and were determined by the specific historical situation existing at the time when they were propounded or took shape. (2) Religion arose as a response to man’s intellectual and emotional need for understanding the world and as a response to his search for significance in life. In this sense, a man’s religion was his philosophy of life and his philosophy of life was his religion which guided his thinking and behaviour and covered all aspects of life. (3) The various religions presented an explanation of the problems of existence and an interpretation of human experience in terms of knowledge and historical circumstances existing at the time when these religious arose.

However, the human concern and practical need which seems to have inspired the founders and propounders of the various religions seemed to have got buried under the dead weight of dogma and rigid rules of inter-
personal relationships which ceased to be in keeping with expanding knowledge gained through observation and experience. As soon as the faculty of reasoning was discarded, the various religions which were in fact philosophies of existence seemed to have become dogmatic creeds based on blind faith and authority which could not be questioned. Unlike religion, humanism seems to believe in the promotion of scientific temper. (Hiorth 65) Scientific outlook is the very basis of science. Science does not accept anything without evidence and accepts only after critical examination. Observation, verification, experimentation and proof are needed for science. Science is based on facts. Religion is full of fiction or imagination. In religion, nobody can question the religious scriptures. They are the words of Gods, considered to be true, come what may! Science has proved that many religious beliefs are untrue and misleading. Fiction or imagination does not carry science. Science is in search of truth. It makes a clear distinction between fact and fiction and fact and opinion. To a scientific outlook, nobody is superior or inferior but what is what. In religious outlook, it has always been the tendency of a religionist to consider his religion to be superior to any other. Religionist is governed by his faith and the principles and rituals of his faith whereas a humanist is governed by the attitude of welfare of all human beings and rationalism whereas the scientific outlook works as a stimulus to strengthen the attitude of live and let others live peacefully. (Bandiste 38) Religion opposes any deviation from its prescribed path. Every social reformer is a
humanist in the sense that he tries his best to inculcate scientific and rational thinking among people and questions the old values and outmoded religious customs. (7)

Religion is God oriented and Humanism is man oriented. (9) Thus, both are naturally in conflict with each other. Humanism has its roots in ancient Greek philosophy, generally associated with the pre-Socratic philosopher Protagoras, who set forth his system under the motto "Homo mensura", or "Man the measure." (7) The idea behind the motto is that man is the measure of all things; mankind itself is the ultimate norm by which values are to be determined. (7) Therefore, man is the ultimate being and the ultimate authority, making the system, in technical terms "Anthropocentric". This term is a simple compound word stemming from "anthropos" ("man", or "mankind") and "centric" referring to a centrality of focus. (Vijayam 4) One can immediately see the built in tension between this and other philosophical systems which are termed "Theocentric", having the view that God is the Ultimate Being, and which would derive its values from the ultimate authority and character of God. (4) Such is not open to reason and therefore unscientific.

A religionist appears, necessarily, to look to the past for inspiration rather than to the future. (5) He seeks wisdom in the teachings of religious prophets,
which are quite inadequate for many social issues of modern life. A humanist seems to believe in a morality of initiative and hope whereas a religionist seems to believe in a morality of submission and fear. A religionist feels that it is his duty to slip through the world so as to escape the so-called wrath of God. For humanists, this is our world and we are the maker of our systems. The power of thought is greater and powerful than any other human power. Hence, a humanist feels himself to be free and master of his own life. A humanist goes through life with much questioning whereas a religionist without much questioning. Bertrand Russell in his article on *Why I am not a Christian*, states:

> We want to stand upon our own feet and look fair and square at the world - its good facts, its bad facts, its beauties and its ugliness; see the world as it is, and be not afraid of it. Conquer the world by intelligence and not merely by being slavishly subdued by the terror that comes from it. The whole conception of god is a conception derived from the ancient Oriental despotism. It is a conception quite unworthy of free men... A good world needs knowledge,
kindliness and courage; it does not need a regretful hankering after the past, or a fettering of the free intelligence by the words uttered long ago by ignorant men. It needs a fearless outlook and a free intelligence. It needs hope for the future, not looking back all the time towards a past that is dead, which we trust will be far surpassed by the future that our intelligence can create. (6)

Hence, like Russell, a humanist seems to believe in strengthening a non-religious society. Humanism seems, constitutionally, to include militant atheism and vitriolic opposition to religion. (6)

1.5 Humanism and Scientific Outlook

Humanism seems to accept only the scientific method as this is the only method by which one can find the truth. Man’s knowledge which expanded as a result of observation and experience slowly became organized as science, which in time began to claim the whole of man’s experience as its field of study. Science is organized knowledge. It relies on reason in its search for facts. All theories of science must satisfy man’s reason. The methods of
science are experiment and observation and an acceptance of the validity of sense experience. The function of science is to accumulate factual knowledge of the universe including man. The discoveries of science came into conflict with the beliefs sanctified by religion, thus giving rise to conflict between science and religion. Bertrand Russell in *An Outline of Intellectual Rubbish* highlighted the conflict between science and religion. He wrote:

> Throughout the last 400 hears, during which the growth of science had gradually shown men how to acquire knowledge of the ways of nature and mastery over natural forces, the clergy have fought a losing battle against science, in astronomy and geology, in anatomy and physiology, in biology and psychology and sociology. Ousted from one position, they have taken up another. After being worsted in astronomy, they did their best to prevent the rise of geology; they fought against Darwin in biology, and at the present time they fight against the scientific theories of psychology and education. At each stage they try to make the public forget their earlier obscurantism, in
order that their present obscurantism may not
be recognized for what it is. (Russell 209)

Article 51-A (h) of the Indian Constitution also echoes similar statement:

It is the Fundamental Duty of every Citizen of
India to develop scientific temper, humanism
and spirit of inquiry and reform. (Singh 224)

Hence, humanists seem to prefer scientific way of finding truth to religious
way. The scientific inventions have fundamentally altered the character of our
global society. The practical advantages of the scientific inventions are
recognized in all human societies. Whatever may be their race, religion, region
or language, all are clamouring for the benefits of science and technology. It
appears that the spread of scientific temper in society is much more than the
spread of science or technology. Scientific temper is defined as under:

Scientific Temper is neither a collection of
knowledge or facts, although it promotes such
knowledge; nor is it rationalism although it
promotes rational thinking. It is something
more. It is an attitude of mind which calls for a
particular outlook and pattern of behaviour. It
is of universal applicability and has to permeate
through our society as the dominant value
system powerfully influencing the way we think and approach our problems - political, social, economic, cultural and educational.

(http://antisuperstition.org)

A humanist seems to believe that the results of human quest for knowledge are mainly threefold: scientific, artistic and philosophic. (Roy 71) The best foundation of modern civilization appears to be in man’s continuous scientific ventures to know more and more. As a result of this, science diverged into many branches and sub-branches. With the help of modern technology, man has entered into new domains of the objective world of macro and micro spheres. And this brought about a change in man’s understanding of things and events. Man appears to have become aware of the dangers of obscure and unscientific method of thinking. Albert Einstein said that the process and development depends upon the scientific and technological knowledge of a country. Hence the progress of humanity always corresponds with the scientific knowledge acquired from time to time. That is how science has been able to bring about revolutionary changes in various fields.

1.6 Empathy
It appears to be the natural tendency of humankind to give away what he has accumulated to his brothers. It is here the spirit of empathy - the concern - the welfare of other human beings, all living creatures and even the environment came into being.

It appears that there are two well-known approaches to understand others. One is to have sympathy for others and the other is to have empathy with others. In sympathy, we have pity for others. So, humanitarians sympathize with others. But in empathy, we place ourselves in the place of others. It is an ability to understand another person’s feelings, experiences, situations and circumstances. This is the best or the only way to have proper understanding of the situation. A humanist identifies himself/herself with others and experiences their sufferings. He would empathize with others and help them to the extent possible and that is the spirit of humanism applicable to one and all. This point is significantly emphasized in Encyclopaedia of Science, Technology & Ethics as “Humanism is a philosophy and way of life based on empathy, reason and experience.” (Mitcham 946)

Hence, empathetic concerns are basic to humanism, and consequently to humanist ethics. But, any technology that proves itself more harmful than good in regard to humanity and living nature will seem to be challenged by
humanists. This is why humanists have been active in efforts to protect the environment, outlaw certain weapons (nuclear disarmaments), ensure product safety, minimize negative social impacts evident in widespread technologies, and so on.

1.7 Humanism and Humanitarianism

Humanism and humanitarianism though they both might preach similar morality, both have a fundamental difference between them. Dr. D D Bandiste, in his remarkable book *Humanist Values: A Source Book*, offers the following essential difference between the two:

Humanitarians are mostly religious type of people who perform the various welfare activities in order to please God. Humanists also will perform these very activities, but they will perform them out of rational self-interest. Humanism banishes everything other-worldly from its domain, while eternal bliss of other-worldly nature is the highest objective of all humanitarian people. For the humanitarian, service to people is important because it is service to God; but the humanists consider
service to people valuable in itself, it is an end in itself.

The former consider that humanitarian works are a stepping stone for gaining the eternal spiritual bliss; for them ethics (morally good life) leads to religion; ethics is lower than religion. They feel that men should live like brothers since they all are children of the same God. For them, moral life is to be transcended and ‘higher’ goals are to be reached. For most of them God is the repository of all values. Values exist eternally in God. Naturally for them, values are absolute and eternal. I feel that such moral philosophies as are based upon religions should be called ‘Humanitarianism’. Gandhi, Tagore, Radhakrishnan, Vivekananda and all other medieval saints are humanitarians.
But then there are some other philosophies that are atheist, empiricist, naturalist and totally mundane in their outlook. They do not believe in any spiritual entity like the souls or God, nor do they believe in any absolute and eternal bliss. Yet on the basis of rational and enlightened self-interest they also speak of things like universal brotherhood. I feel that these philosophies should be called ‘Humanism’. On the other hand Karl Marx, Bertrand Russell, M.N.Roy, Taslima Nasreen, John Dewey are humanists. (Bandiste 1)

It is revealed from the above discussion that both humanism and humanitarianism seem to believe in human welfare but their intentions for doing benevolent activities are different. Even there is a greater difference between the activities they do:

The Humanist Movement is neither an institution nor an NGO. It is not a political party. It is neither a religion nor a sect. The Humanist Movement's actions are not part of Humanitarianism. The Humanist Movement,
indeed, has neither funds nor money. It is not a humanitarian organization. We believe in the human being, in the possibility for personal and social change. This is the foundation upon which we believe a truly human society can be built. This is why all new humanists get involved on a volunteer basis. (www.humanaid.net)

Unlike humanitarians, humanists are those people who work together to bring about the changes in such a way that these changes can be oriented towards a truly human society. This is the central activity of conscious humanism. Unlike humanitarians, humanists practise the ideal of humanizing the earth and form a universal human nation, *Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam* (one world, one family). In this universal human nation, every human being enjoys the same rights and the same opportunities because of the obvious fact that they are after all human beings. Humanists work simultaneously for personal development and social transformation. Humanism seems to be a sensible way to look and to behave with human beings and the world. It is an attitude that very well understands the intention and freedom of what is human and gets involved in the fight against discrimination and violence. In humanism, the most important thing appears to be to take charge of our situation, to give our
environment a truly human direction that can deeply renew the life of each man, of each woman and each child.

1.8 Humanism and Rationalism

Every man seems to be a philosopher in the sense that he seeks to comprehend the world as a whole as the basis of his knowledge. A philosophy of living is necessary for survival. Such a philosophy can be adequate to the extent that it is based on rational thinking applied to factual knowledge and valid experience that must result in human welfare. Humanists seem to be rational in their approach. Dr. D. D. Bandiste observes in this regard:

Humanists are rationalists, but certainly not in the sense of being spiritualists like Hegel or Shankaracharya. Being rational simply means being not dogmatic, being not parochial and being not swayed by irrational tendencies in us. Being rational also means being tolerant of others’ views, and having a broad, cool and a reasonable outlook.

(Bandiste 3)
Humanism as a mental attitude when applied to scientific knowledge can provide man with a philosophy for living which can be adequate for existence in the modern world. The humanist mental attitude seems to enable one to formulate for oneself a philosophy which is verifiable by experience and is independent of all arbitrary assumptions or authority. The philosophy of a person who accepts a humanist mental attitude can never be closed system of thought, it will but be an outlook on life which develops and enriches itself with the growth and progress of scientific knowledge. (5) This philosophy or view of life and interpretation of the problems of existence which is acceptable to rationalist seems to have come to be known as humanism. (5)

Modern humanism as distinguished from religious and other forms of humanism known in history seems to accept as its basis the rationalist mental attitude. It is, in fact, the result of the spread of rationalism, and the growth of scientific knowledge as applied to all aspects of human existence and experience. Modern humanism as a philosophy or an outlook on life seems to comprise of certain positive basic principles and beliefs which are acceptable to all those who call themselves humanists. Humanists may, of course, differ from one another in emphasis, detail or specific interpretation of experience. The basic and vital difference between principles and beliefs of humanists as opposed to those held by persons who accepts a religious mode of thought
(even though some beliefs may happen to be identical) is the ways in which they are arrived at. For a humanist, they should be arrived at through reason applied to scientific knowledge as opposed to being laid down by authority, faith, or through ‘revealed’ wisdom. In this very limited sense one can call Buddha a humanist.

1.9 Is Humanism Cosmopolitan?

M N Roy, a founder of radical humanism movement in India, regards humanism as cosmopolitan. He says:

Humanism is cosmopolitan. It does not run after the utopia of internationalism, which presupposes the existence of autonomous national states. The ideal of one world, or a world government, is not compatible with the continuation of national states. The one makes the other a pious desire or wishful thinking. A cosmopolitan commonwealth of free men and women is a possibility. It will be a spiritual community, not limited by boundaries of national state-capitalist, fascist, communist, or any other kind—which will gradually disappear.
under the impact of cosmopolitan humanism.

That is the radical perspective of the future of mankind. (Roy 67)

Hence, humanist stance seems to be a cosmopolitan outlook. It appears to respect the ‘otherness’ of others. Utopian attitude or a Nazi attitude seems to be an extreme. Humanism appears to be well balanced and down to earth. It seems to aim at achieving realizable goals. Social reformation and propagation of humanist values in a democratic way seem to be some of the inclinations of a humanist.

1.10 Humanism and Social Reformation

Human beings appear to have natural inclinations towards freedom, beauty, happiness etc. A human being wants to enjoy all this. So only an individual human being is happy or unhappy, and not groups. Happiness of any human being appears to depend largely on sufficiently favourable social conditions. According to religion, a religious person can be happy in any circumstances. Bertrand Russell in *New Hopes for a Changing World* says that a good person is always happy but that a happy person alone can afford to remain a good person. Obviously, conducive social conditions contribute immensely to
making individuals happy. Consequently, humanism becomes a reformist movement. It appears to want to mitigate the evils such as want, exploitation, repression, inequality, disease, ignorance, poverty, fear, tensions and wars, and to usher in such positive factors as self-reliance, knowledge, health, harmony, enrichment, beauty, peace, adventure and so on. Humanism seems to be a practical philosophy; it not only interprets the world but also improves it. Humanism seems to create enlightened, free, healthy and happy human beings in a free, enlightened, enriched and harmonious society.

Humanists appear to be fighting against undemocratic movements, religious fundamentalism at ethnic chauvinism. Humanism seems to be the ideology - the life stance - that appears to emerge on the world scene when the irrational thought systems have proven their insufficiency. Perhaps, the collapse of the credibility of fundamentalist religions will probably call for the rationality and tolerance of the humanist positions, and the increasing level of education and electronic media will make it easier than before to be informed about this alternative - that never will be distributed by missionaries and preachers, saduhs and mullahs, but by honest and serious dialogue between people of equal status and standing. Humanism must be seen with a positive alternative to totalitarianism, fundamentalism, irrationalism and racism. It is time for humanists to come out and wave their banners, march for freedom in
private and public life, fight injustice, expose the cheaters and the frauds, claim equal rights, protest against violence in family life as well as in communal clashes.

In spite of all this, man is still in the grip of religion and the superstitions it nurtured. If one wants to alter this situation, one should develop one’s potentialities, and follow scientific outlook and enter into a new phase of human civilization. This is the stance a humanist always keeps in his mind. The universe along with all its components is real and nothing extraneous to it exists. Man is after all an insignificant figment in it. But, curiously enough, man is aware of the orderliness of events around him and hence is capable of being rational. By virtue of his rationality, man is able to distinguish between truth and untruth, and virtue and vice. This enables man to choose truth and virtue. As a result of this, man can realize freedom not only from natural calamites but also from social evils and restrictions.

According to humanism, man seems to be the maker of his world and his destiny is in his hands and no supernatural element or god can probably alter or change his destiny but himself. He seems to be responsible and accountable for all his deeds and activities.
1.11 Conclusion

Humanism does not seem to be merely a philosophical or intellectual tradition, but also a plan of action. The efficacy of humanism appears to be intricately intertwined with its ability to tackle the real life problems that confront the people. In the twentieth century,

One has witnessed the rise and fall of many isms and the action plans associated with them. Many systems, institutions, ideologies, philosophies and the religious traditions appear to have lost their moorings and went in to the oblivion. They failed to live up to the expectations of the people. Hence, either they were rejected outright, or left way side, as they were not in tune with the rising expectations of the people. In this age of science, democracy, mass communications, spread of education and enlightenment, people are not ready to accept any ism or plan of action which will not cater to people’s needs and aims and aspirations.

Democracy seems to be the hall mark of progress and the battle cry of the twentieth century. Democracy withered many a storm and proved its ability to cater to the needs of the people in the twenty first century. Humanism and
democracy appear to be inseparable. They seem to aim at strengthening the
democratic and secular ramparts one guards. Humanism appears to strive for
further widening the scope and enriching the content of democracy.
Humanism seems to aim at devising ways and means to further strengthen
the democratic values, human rights, individual freedom and enhancing
democracy as a way of life. Humanism appears to be intensely political in its
action, social in its commitment and egalitarian in its outlook.
References


HumanAid. *Reciprocity, HumanAid* web, 8 Jan. 2011.

http://www.humanaid.net/reciprocity.htm. HumanAid©2002


*Scientific Attitude*. web of Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti web. 11 Feb. 2011. 17.34
