Humanism and Modern Indian Thought

1. Humanism and Modern Indian Thought

There is a yearning in the human heart that is nourished only by philosophy and so man cannot live without it. Functions of philosophy have been varied for various people. Whether it seeks to satisfy the intellectual curiosity of man, or investigates into the character and status of values or suggests a way of life, philosophy remains an essentially human pursuit. Humanism is a world-view of any philosopher who is inclined to see man as the center and the goal of his philosophy. It is an outlook which recognises the value or dignity of man and asserts the centrality of human being. As it is stated by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, "In recognising the central importance of man in the scheme of things - and emphasizing his freedom and individuality, and creative power - his role in shaping and moulding his environment with a view of making a better and happier world, humanism preached the gospel of activism, full of hope and promise for the future of mankind - a philosophy likely to rescue man from the slough of despondency and vivify him with self confidence and faith in his own power as the shaper, not only of his own destiny, but as one who is also destined to play an effective part in the larger field of human welfare and progress."¹ Thus, humanism seeks to enrich man's

aims, values, goals and to realize his complete humanness by bringing him in
deep and intimate kinship and harmony with the life and society around him.

Humanism aspires for the upliftment of human beings in all fields - social, cultural, political or economical, and advocates that science and philosophy, art and literature, or anything that man has achieved by rational thinking and intellectual acumen must aim at the well-being of man. Its chief aim is to attain human freedom, joyous life with progress and prosperity without any kind of discrimination among men. It held that the panacea for all the evils lies in spreading the message of international friendship and essential brotherhood of mankind. Thus humanism is an attempt to explore the ways and means to bring about common welfare and progress of mankind through an enrichment of the lives of the individuals.

**Genesis and growth of humanism**

The word 'humanism' is derived from the latin word 'humanus' which means 'human being'. It means a system of thought concerned with 'human affairs in general. Its tradition is as old as Greek philosophy and the Sophists and Epicureans of Greece were perhaps the first among the humanists in history. Protogoras, a Greek philosopher of the fifth century B.C, is considered as one of the earliest humanists of the West, if not the father of humanism. He
proclaimed that 'Man is the measure of all things.' Though traces of humanistic tradition can be seen in the thoughts of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, the European Renaissance is regarded as representing a golden era of humanist revival.

The thinkers of the period of Renaissance were preoccupied with a serious concern for man and their studies were centered around the problems like the dignity of man, immortality of soul and the unity of truth. It was also an age of free thinking and creativity. The Renaissance saw the rise of humanism that recognised human reason, passion and values. It also asserted the intrinsic worth of man's life and the vastness of his potentialities. Breaking away from the authority of church, the Renaissance thinkers claimed freedom of thought and expression leading to the beginning of a great era of all round development of man. God, who had remained as the most powerful force in the medieval period, yielded place to the sovereignty of man. Man and his world reached the apex of evolution and it resulted in the greatest mental and intellectual revolution European culture has ever witnessed. There were fast developments in the humanistic thinking and it took different shapes such as Marxism, Existentialism, Pragmatism and so on.

The writings of Marx displayed his deeply humanistic outlook. He placed man as the central reality of the Universe and rejected the idea of a
supernatural power or deity. The universe would not possess any value, according to him, without man's presence. He treated human suffering as a serious problem which was in urgent need of solution in order to ensure safety to mankind. Marx considered capitalist system as responsible for man's alienation from his true being. What Marxism offered as a solution was the creation of classless socialist society where everyone would be free to work according to his ability and fulfill all his needs.

Existentialism is a philosophical outlook which regards the existing man as the center of philosophizing. It is an outlook which is passionately concerned about the existential situation of the individual and his problems. It claims itself to be a form of humanism in the sense that it is very much concerned with genuine human values and their realization through an authentic existence of the individuals. All existentialists place man above everything else and attach great importance to the individual freedom and responsibility. The concept of self in existentialism is usually explained in the light of man's freedom and dynamism. Thus while the Marxist humanism treats man as a species, Existentialist thinkers treat him as a distinct individual person. But the main idea that man must remain the supreme being was not belittled. F.C.S. Schiller also supported the saying 'Man is the measure of all things.' His Pragmatic Humanism tries to give us a humanistic interpretation of
Pragmatism. He recognises the dignity and role of man ad summum. He provided a solid basis for human volition, conduct and values. He also expressed the necessity of the power of reason to liberate man from his own sensuous nature. Pragmatic Humanism implies the supremacy of human interests which must be served by everything else including nature and its operation without the help of any supra-human agency. According to Schiller, the task of humanism was to raise the intellectual and spiritual status of man, in keeping with the increasing awareness of the universe around him, assimilating all the constructive aspects of science and philosophy. Thus, Existentialism, Marxism and Pragmatism deals with the problems of man and their chief interest centers around man. So they have a common denominator in humanism. We also come across numerous other forms of humanism developed by Western thinkers which includes evolutionary humanism, Religion of Humanity, Democratic Humanism and Scientific Humanism.

**Humanism and Indian thought**

Humanism was not confined to Western thought. The spirit of humanism was present in the Eastern thought also. It is not difficult to find the traces of humanistic ideas in the ancient Indian thought. The supremacy of man can be seen asserted in a number of instances in the ancient literature. The welfare of mankind was its central theme. The essence of Indian
humanism is 'Ayamatma Brahma' (I am Brahman) and the prayer consequent to it, *Lokasamasta sukhinobhavantu*. The four Vedas were concerned with the problems of man's day to day life, customs and rituals and they were expressed through the vedic hymns. The central purpose of the Upanishads, the concluding part of Vedic literature, was the upliftment of human life from the level of mere biological existence to a status of self conscious spiritual being. The *Bhagavad Gita* laid down the norm of Indian humanism through its concept of the fusion of the experical self with the Divine self or *Brahman*. In *Gita*, we see that humanism embraces mankind as a whole, which makes it a gospel of universal humanism.

Charvakas were humanists in the sense that they were thinkers who were exclusively concerned about man's life here and now. They confined their attention to the problems of immediate life. They denied existence of God, Soul, life after death etc. and advocated a hedonistic way of life. Jainas also had firm faith in man and his powers and asserted that man can work out his own way to the final bliss, without any supernatural assistance. According to them, even Gods were to be born as human beings before they can hope to get salvation. They considered man to be the way-in for *moksha* or liberation and prescribed scrupulous adherence to the three fold path of Right faith, Right Knowledge and Right Conduct as the means to attain the goal. Buddhism is
another form of humanism and it believed in the ability of individual to realize human values without supra-human aid. Buddha's only concern was man and his sufferings. The Four Noble Truths with its eight fold path furnish the basis of a genuine form of humanism. Even the idea of Arhathood of Buddhism has a distinctive value from the humanistic point of view because it can be realised under ordinary conditions in this very life. The universality of this form of humanism is also evident from the fact that it is open for all human beings, irrespective of caste, creed and sex.

The orthodox systems of the Indian tradition include the systems of Nyaya-Vaiseshika, Sankhya-Yoga, Mimamsa and Vedanta. All of them stress the importance of knowledge for the attainment of liberation and recognised perception, inference and testimony as the bases of knowledge. These were considered as simple ways of approach to the central question relating to the nature and destiny of man. These systems gave primary importance to the question of removal of man's sufferings, prescribing a way of life which would lead him to the goal without any necessary involvement of God.

From the above position we can see that humanistic elements were very much present in the ancient Indian thought. But it is only in the modern age that there was a definite awakening of the spirit of humanism in a more explicit and comprehensive manner. In the modern period there was a definite
upsurge of the spirit of humanism in India and as a philosophy it developed into a system based upon the essential dignity of man, and expressing deep concern for his welfare, his all-round development and the creation of favourable conditions for a happy social life. An important factor that contributed towards the development of modern Indian humanism was the Western influence on Indian culture and social outlook during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It was this humanistic revival which quickened the process of social change in India.

Renaissance in India did not mean the abandonment of one tradition and return to another, but the discovery of the full meaning and significance of a continuing tradition. So none of the modern Indian thinkers, for the sake of modernity, have departed from the mainsprings of Indian culture and tradition. What we really find in modern Indian humanism is a synthesis of ancient Indian values and modern Western science. The contemporary Indian thought shows a deep appreciation of the problems of human life and the destiny of man, and in this sense all modern Indian thinkers were humanists. Their humanistic ideas originated in the popular struggle against foreign domination, economic exploitation and social evils like caste, untouchability, sati, child marriage, infanticide and forced labour. So, as stated by Sri. Asianand, "modern Indian Renaissance represents not only the converging of the
nationalist mainstream of the pre-independence period but also reflects the
total throb of the Indian spirit, the civilisation's soul as personified by a large
number of national leaders from Ram Mohan Roy and Sri Rama Krishna to
Vinobhave.\textsuperscript{2} A brief look at the ideas of some of the important leaders would
substrate this view.

**Raja Ram Mohan Roy**

The intellectual movement generally known as Indian Renaissance was
headed by Ram Mohan Roy. He was the first religious reformer of the
nineteenth century and his efforts left a deep impression upon the social,
political and religious thinking of his days. His most significant contribution to
the beginning of Indian Renaissance was the establishment of an organisation
called Brahma Samaj. The principles of this society avoided all rigidity,
stressing the importance of universal brotherhood, and the belief in the unity of
God. In the social sphere, Ram Mohan Roy opposed all social evils like child
marriage, sati, bigamy and discrimination based upon caste. In religious field
he criticised dogmas, ceremonies and idol worship. Ram Mohan Roy may be
cited as an example of reformist thinking, as one who combined in himself an
appreciation of the virtues of tradition as well modernity. He pleaded for

\textsuperscript{2} Sri. Asianand. '1996...Whither India? Whither Mankind?' (New Delhi: Indian
scientific education along with oriental studies in India. The central aim of his reformation movement was to bring about the spiritual integration of mankind.

Love of all men irrespective of caste and creed, equality of all regardless of sex were some of the doctrines to which Ram Mohan Roy gave supreme importance. His efforts for the abolition of sati, promotion of widow remarriage and education of women were aimed at the upliftment of women in society. He has to be regarded as a major force in the evolution of modern India because of his championship of the ideals of human liberty and fraternity. He pleaded for scientific orientation of education because he wanted science to be used as an instrument for increasing human happiness and feeling of oneness among the people all over the world. Roy, thus tried to revive the basic doctrines of Hinduism such as love for all men irrespective of caste and creed and equality of all regardless of sex. As a humanist, he believed that mankind can be united only on this basis.

Ram Mohan Roy may be considered as the first leader of modern India who initiated new enlightenment and urge towards a future free from the chains of outworn customs and superstitions. He tried to liberate his countrymen from the shackles of orthodoxy, dead tradition, and blind practices with which Indian social, political and cultural life was rigidly bound. He boldly advocated the use of reason in religious and social practices against
blind loyalty to customs. His attempt at humanizing religion, his rational interpretation of the past and the extension of reason in understanding and solving the social and political problems were the beginning of a continuous movement of modernization in India.

Roy was the torch-bearer of the civilizing and enlightening forces of the West and the preserver of the best creative traditions of India. His broad outlook and education enabled him to combine the knowledge of the East and the West. Modernism, according to Brahmasamaj, should strive to eradicate the walls of distinction between man and man and lead the entire humanity to salvation. This humanistic message embodied in the 'Brahma dharma' was in fact derived from the old Vedanta insight. Roy wanted to evolve a synthetic social philosophy on the basis of Vedanta and Islamic monotheism. He thought that this ideal synthesis of important religions entails a kind of spiritualistic activism, a pantheistic humanism and internationalism. He stood for the unity of entire human race. The movement initiated by Ram Mohan Roy by its emphasis on the wellbeing of man as the sole justification of social and religious institutions and practices made an epoch making step towards the process of humanisation.

The Indian Renaissance movement which started in the nineteenth century and spread to the different parts of India came to a stage of maturity
and fruition in the twentieth century. The most prominent Indian thinkers of this period include Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, M.N. Roy and Jawaharlal Nehru. All these eminent thinkers of modern India dealt with the problem of man's nature and destiny in an integral and comprehensive way. They prescribed unselfish service as the way to attain final destiny. They pointed out that man cannot attain his highest goal until and unless the human society as a whole does not enjoy freedom both in the secular and spiritual spheres of life.

**Swami Vivekananda**

Among the modern Indian thinkers, Vivekananda served as a link between the Renaissance and the modern period. He was the most effective exponent of the Vedanta in the modern age and developed it into a very strong and inspiring philosophy which impressed every great man of his time as well as the general masses. His single aim was to retrieve Indian society from the apathy and inaction into which it had sunk, and to infuse life, hope and vigour into all sections of community. With a message of love, tolerance, and service to mankind, Vivekananda could infuse a new hope in man. He realized that the crises of India were due to the decline of Vedic religion and the 'Indians' apathy towards the spirit of humanism. So he made up his mind, to re-establish the Vedic - *Upanishadic* tradition in such a way that it proved itself to
be truly relevant to the modern era. His philosophy may be called Neo-Vedanta, which was scientific, humanistic, universal and in tune with the demands of our modern age. Thus his reconstruction of Indian philosophy was an attempt to interpret the doctrine of Advaita as an answer to life's problems.

Vivekananda stood for the universalism of Vedanta, accepting the upanishadic teaching that creation represents the sport or lila of God. His advaita philosophy recognises the unity of all religions and asserts the basic principles of the divinity of man, and the essential spirituality of life. This truth, he thought, should guide all fields of the socio-political life of the people. His views on society were essentially and practically humanistic and it was based on his tremendous faith in the power of man. This aspect of humanism can be seen in the whole philosophy of Swami Vivekananda. Hence his philosophy may be considered as a form of humanism. He opposed the oppressions on the basis of caste distinctions and the practice of child marriage. He strongly urged for providing opportunities for women in order to enable them utilize their abilities. His philosophy was a message for social action with an emphasis on unselfish service. This was made clear by Dr. Devaraj when he pointed out that "the spiritual humanism of Swami Vivekananda advocates identity of humanity with divinity. It is clear in his utterance that each soul is
potentially divine and the aim is to realise that divinity. It defends the purity of human nature, regards man as God, attacks social, economic and religious evils in the society and inculcates faith and strength in the individual."\(^3\)

In a fast moving world like ours, Vivekananda stressed the absolute necessity of religion. According to him, religion must ensure the dignity of man and happiness to all the members of the society. Since different religions have the same goal, he stood for the unity or fusion of all religions into one Universal Religion. Instead of withdrawing from the actual struggle of life, such a religion would lead the people in the fight against human suffering. The object and function of religion is nothing but service to man which is as spiritual an act as the realization of God.

The Universal Religion of Swami Vivekananda is based on the extracts of different religious truths freed from dogmas, sacraments, rites and ceremonies. Vedanta, he thought, as the most suitable philosophy to establish harmony between different religions. It alone could become the basis of Universal Religion and it embraces all human beings from the lowest to the highest. Its motto should be universal selfhood. His conception of Universal Religion was based on the belief that God manifests himself through all beings.

\(^3\) Dr. P.I. Devaraj. 'Spiritual Humanism of Swami Vivekananda - a new religion to humanity' (Thrissur: Drishya Books, 1997) p.67.
Through this idea, he wanted to raise the dignity of man in the world. He preached tolerance and religious universalism as the motto for all sincere believers in God. He emphasized the practical aspect of religion and asked the people to worship and offer to the poor what they offered to the image of God in the temple. He wanted to convince his fellowmen that genuine religion consisted in the service to mankind. His aim was thus to strengthen the humanistic trend of religion which exalts man as the true abode of divinity.

Swami Vivekananda was against casteism and untouchability. Following the tradition of the social reformers of the Renaissance period, he strongly advocated the elimination of inequalities based upon caste system. Since no society can exist without some sort of social stratification, Vivekananda advised that the present caste system may be maintained only if we could eliminate casteism. The idea underlying the caste system, according to him, should be to evolve every individual of the society to the level of the best human individual. Like other social thinkers before him, Swamiji severely condemned untouchability and considered it as the chief evil of casteism. It was against the essential spirit of Vedanta which preaches equality of all selves. He was against everything that narrows, restricts or separates one man from another. Therefore, he pleaded against untouchability and casteism.
Besides casteism and untouchability, the main evil in Indian society, as diagnosed by Vivekananda was the lower status of women. In the Vedic age, the status of Indian women was no less than that of men. But after that, there was a gradual decline in the status of women in India and at the time of Vivekananda it was no better than the status of untouchables. Therefore he wrote "In India, there are two great evils, trampling on the women and grinding the poor through caste restrictions." Vivekananda, thus waged a movement for the regeneration of Indian masses, particularly the backward classes including untouchables and women. The aim of his reform movement was to enable the lower groups of society to evolve in to the spiritual level of the higher group.

Like the Renaissance thinkers, Vivekananda considered the individual as the center of society. A nation is great because of the greatness of its individuals. Therefore Vivekananda asked Indians to develop self reliance and self-confidence. Real freedom, according to him, is the spiritual freedom which includes individual as well as social freedom. His attempt was to restore individuality without losing the innate spiritual nature of man and through this to realize the ideals of equality and freedom, in their fullness and perfection.

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With the perfection of individuals, society and its individuals are bound to progress. The salvation of the country depends on the strength of the individual and the realization of divinity within him. On the foundation of individual freedom, Vivekananda wanted to reconstruct society towards the realisation of such ideals as love, tolerance and unity. His Chief concern was India and the problems of Indian social system. Perhaps, before Vivekananda no Indian philosopher expressed such a deep concern over the reality of poverty and the necessity of its eradication. Inspite of his emphasis on spirituality, he did not disregard the value of national needs. He said "material civilization, nay, even luxury is necessary to create work for the poor. Bread! Bread! I do not believe in a God who cannot give me bread here, giving me eternal bliss in heavern! ...."5 He launched the struggle for the material uplift of the masses with a missionary zeal and religious fervour. The Ramakrishna Mission which resulted from the inspiration of Vivekananda developed into a humanitarian organization with the sole motive of service to mankind and alleviation of human suffering. Vivekananda was successful in cultivating a conviction about the prevailing social injustice and inequity and the urgent necessity of removing them. This was his distinct service.

Rabindra Nath Tagore

Tagore has been one of the most important humanists that India has ever seen in the sense that he valued man above everything else. He enriched and provided new dimensions to the Renaissance spirit. He gave man the central place in his social thought, in his religion in his poetical works and his educational and economic thought. He accepted the Western definition of humanism which demands that man should be the supreme concern. Faith in the supremacy of man and the concern for the fullness of his individuality constituted the essence of Tagore's humanism. He recognised man as the crown of creation. He goes to the extent of even converting God into human personality and interpreted Him in human terms. Thus we see that he was not satisfied with a mere recognition of man's paramount status in the scheme of things, but defined Reality, Truth and even God in terms of humanity.

Rabindranath Tagore played a significant role in discovering the Indian ethos and attempting a synthesis of the old and the new. An extension of this attempt towards synthesis of the old and the new was building up of a bridge of cultural understanding between the East and West. As it is stated by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, "to him (Tagore) progress and reform consist in conserving the ancient ideas and building upon them. Preserving the soul of
the Indian style, we may adopt whatever is good and noble in the West." The unity of East and West meant the unity of spiritual and scientific knowledge. He wanted this reconciliation for the sake of guiding human race in order to enable them to evolve common culture and universally acceptable ethical standards. Thus we find in Tagore a link between the ancient wisdom of India and the modern civilisation.

The essential humanism of Upanishads formed the basis of Tagore's Religion of Man. His humanism aims at a harmony or unity between man and man, man and nature, man and the Universal Spirit and his religion consisted in realising the universal spirit in man. His religion considered man to be necessary for God as much as God is necessary for man. Thus he tried to establish the essential unity of humanity and divinity. Tagore regarded religion to be an attitude of love, which meant love is the highest form of religion. According to him, worship of God meant loyalty and service to the mankind and believed that service of mankind as the best way to serve God. For God, according to him "is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the path-maker is breaking stones. He is with them in the sun and in shower.

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and his garment is covered with dust. Put off thy holy mantle and even like him come down to the dusty soil"\(^7\)

Tagore had a humanistic approach to social problems also. He was a severe critic of caste system and repeatedly declared that caste system and its attendant practice of untouchability were among the darkest blots of Indian society. While Mahatma Gandhi was the leader of anti-untouchability movement in India, Tagore as a writer and poet exposed the malady in all its details. Through his different literary works he also protested against the evils of child marriage, the *purdah* system, *sati* and other evils which existed in society during his days. He condemned domination of male over female and wanted to give equal status to women in society. Thus Tagore visualised a society based on perfect harmony, and co-operation, and free from exploitation. The society was intended according to Tagore for the perfection of man and for the full realisation of the divine in humanity.

Tagore held that freedom was the pre-condition for life and progress according to him, "real freedom is of the mind and the spirit. It can never come to us from outside. He only has freedom who ideally loves freedom himself and is glad to extend it to others. He who cares to have slaves must

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chain himself to them: he who build walls to create exclusion for others build walls across his own freedom; he who distrusts freedom in others looses his moral right to it. Sooner or later he is lured into the meshes of physical and moral servility.”

Perfect harmony in relationship provides perfect freedom and the arrangement of inter dependence is the origin of freedom. So freedom is not something found outside society but is possible only within society. It should remove the barriers erected by the power of money, organised propaganda and the caste system. According to Tagore, freedom in its true sense is the liberation of the mind of man and the realisation of spiritual unity. This emphasis on human freedom is the basis of Tagore's Religion of Man, humanism and his faith in democracy.

Tagore had firm faith in democratic values. He not only accepted it as the only form of government which can provide freedom to individual, but also practised it as the philosophy of his life in dealing with all people around him.

Tagore also contributed a lot in reviving village industry and infused a spirit of self-reliance among villagers. Besides encouraging cottage industries Tagore made special efforts to encourage agriculture in the villages and laid emphasis on co-operative movement in agriculture. In his opinion, the

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problems of industrialization can be checked by co-operation and so he made all efforts to improve farming on co-operative basis.

Tagore's political thought may be described as cosmopolitan Universal humanism and he pleaded for internationalism. He was convinced that co-operation and friendship between nations were absolutely necessary for the progress of mankind. He asserted that no nation could solve its own problems unless the problems of humanity as a whole are solved. Pointing out to internationalism as the need of our time, Tagore maintained that for its own safety, each nation should work for universal welfare. It was to meet this end that Tagore established the reputed institution 'Viswabharathi.'

Tagore's message of love and universal brotherhood, and his ideals of Universal Man and one world are expressions of his humanistic attitude. But the uniqueness of his humanism consisted in raising humanity to the level of Ultimate Reality. He firmly held that all human concepts derive their meaning and significance only when they are related to human values. We may agree with R.K. Sinari as he says, "In Tagore India found an artistic genius of international repute, an upholder of the unity of all religious and spiritual values,
Mahatma Gandhi may be considered as one of the greatest humanists in modern times. He had firm faith in the goodness of man and infused new hope in man through his message of love, tolerance and service to mankind. It was his faith in the goodness of man that formed the basis of his humanism. He was a revolutionary reformer who fought against the social, religious and political evils of his times. As in the case of Vivekananda, Gandhiji was a worshipper of 'Daridranarayana' (God in the poor masses). While Vivekananda preached Neo-Vedanta for the regeneration of Indian community, Gandhiji presented practical means to actualize the lofty ideals of vedanta. He borrowed considerably from Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity and Islam. The writings of Tolsto.y, Ruskin and Thoreau moulded Gandhi's views on non-violence, civil disobedience and bread labour.

Gandhi held that the ultimate aim of man is the realization of God. The only way to find God, according to him is to see Him in His creation. Service of God and service to humanity were therefore one and the same for him. In

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his own words "the immediate service of all human beings become a necessary part of the endeavour simply because the only way to find God is to see Him in His creations and to be one with it. And this can only be done by service of all. I am part and parcel of the whole and I cannot find Him apart from the rest of the humanity."10 Gandhi, therefore held that the greatness of man depends on the extent of service he renders to others.

Gandhi was essentially a man of religion. His religion had its basis in truth and non-violence. He considered that all religions were true and had their basis on the same principles of truth and non-violence and that every religion propounds the law of love or Ahimsa. So all religions were to be considered as different paths leading towards the same goal. One should, therefore, have the attitude of respect and reverence towards all religions, since a true understanding of one's own religion would reveal the heart of other religions too. The principle of sarvadharmanasamanattva expounded by him points towards an appreciation of viewpoints of others while adhering to one's own convictions.

Again, Gandhiji identified God with Truth or Reality. Reality or God, according to him, is truth and truth is manifested in non-violence. Man's ideal

is to achieve God through truth and non-violence For Gandhi, non-violence was the first and last article of his faith. According to him, Truth and Ahimsa are so inter-twined that it is impossible to disentangle and separate them.

Gandhi's humanism had no limitations in respect of race and nationality. The basis of his religion was love and truth and he wanted to create a social order free from class and caste distinction. He considered untouchability as a crime on the basis of these principles and so he wanted to eradicate it. Gandhi, throughout his life, waged war against this evil and for the upliftment of the so called untouchables. Gandhiji wanted every individual to be inwardly transformed in order to bring about a true equality in the economic sphere. He had also firm faith in the equality of men and women. He believed that women can help men to a great extent through giving her infinite love and exhibiting her infinite capacity to suffer.

As Gandhiji was a politician with unshakable religious convictions he was of opinion that politics cannot be separated from religion since according to him both had the same ideal of service to mankind. Through 'Satyagraha', Gandhiji introduced non-violence to in the field of politics. This meant personal suffering inorder to convert the evil-doer. Gandhi insisted that such a method was based on truth and non-violence and he applied this technique quite successfully for the realization of India's freedom. The efficacy of
satyagraha may be debated but we cannot deny the fact that Gandhiji achieved wonderful success through this method in mobilising the rural masses, who had remained untouched by the national movement until his advent as a national leader. Through non-violence, non-co-operation, and civil disobedience he tried to achieve his goals. The idea of civil disobedience was taken from Thoreau. It is a protest against unjust laws. Another instrument of satyagraha is non-co-operation. Explaining non-co-operation as a method of political action, Gandhi said, "Non-violent non-co-operation is the method whereby we cultivate fresh public opinion and get it enforced when there is complete freedom of opinion that of the majority must prevail."

Another significant and novel instrument of political action developed by Gandhi was fasting. This is a weapon which very much depends upon the soul force of the person wielding it. Gandhi could use this weapon for a number of time quite successfully.

The ideal government according to Gandhi was democracy and he advocated a system of 'Panchayati Raj' with complete decentralization of political power because he believed that only such a democratic set up could provide equal opportunities for all to take part in the affairs of the State. He pleaded for decentralization and wanted to establish political organization of

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11 Gandhi, M.K. Young India November 24, 1921.
the country on non-violent lines through village communities. In his scheme it was not an ascending order but a horizontal circle whose circumference is ever widening, from individual to community, nation and ultimately to the entire humanity.

Gandhiji's economic theory was also quite humanistic. He wanted the people of India to practise using of indigenous products which would promote indigenous industries. It would lead to more and more self dependence. According to Gandhi, machinery and large scale industrialism, the chief symbol of urban civilization, are not suitable in the Indian context. His antipathy to machinery was due to the fact that it replaced human labour and thereby increased unemployment and poverty. It also promoted the exploitation of the poor by the wealthy. The social and political institutions created by urban civilization cramp the spirit of man. So Gandhi preferred the simple rural civilization with its religion, spirituality and love of nature. It, according to him, would promote real happiness and contentment and increase the capacity for service. Here the individual would be of supreme consideration. The theory of trusteeship developed by Gandhi was also a significant aspect of his humanism.

Like Karl Marx, Gandhi also aimed at a stateless and classless society, but he held that this stage has to be achieved through non-violent revolution.
The Gandhian ideals of economic independence, decentralized democracy and secular polity still continue to exercise considerable influence on Indian society.

**M.N. Roy**

In modern India, the element of reason and rationalism was recognised and emphasized prominently by such thinkers as Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Swami Vivekananda. But none of them could postulate a comprehensive philosophy for the individual and the society on the sole basis of reason. This task was accomplished by M.N. Roy. In the twentieth century most of the philosophers in the East and the West drew attention to the moral crisis in human society and warned of the danger. Thoughtful persons everywhere realised that the development of atomic power has led humanity to a stage where even its existence is at stake. They pointed out that the human race is passing through a critical stage whose problems require an urgent solution. M.N. Roy analysed the crisis and tried to unravel its reasons. His analysis was based upon reason and experience of the entire human race. Pointing out the failures of past philosophers, M.N. Roy arrived at what he called Radical Humanism, which, according to him, is the only solution for the crises faced by human society.

Before 1940, M.N. Roy adhered to Marx's philosophy whole heartedly.
But later he said the contradictions between Marx's humanism and the collectivist form of organization and practice inherent in Marxism, and sought to reassert the humanist ethos. Roy's reaction to Marxism has to be viewed as the expression of an intense struggle between the humanistic values which he cherished to practice and the practice of Marxism in Russia after the revolution. As it is stated by Dr. Devaraj in one of his articles, "Roy who was a Marxist in his early life became a reformist and ultimately came to the conclusion that Marxist materialism was dogmatic and unscientific . . . It dehumanized humanity according to Roy." His retraction from Marxism does not mean that he did not accept the humanistic elements in Marx’s teachings. Roy thought that a Marxism, based on the principle of class struggle was inimical to the cause of freedom. He realized that orthodox Marxists had made Marxism a rigid and dogmatic creed. What was therefore needed was a 'new' philosophy. Roy spent the last years of his life formulating and popularising this 'new' philosophy which he termed 'Radicalism' or 'Radical Humanism'.

Radical Humanism is neither materialism nor idealism but a scientific philosophy with an emphasis upon the freedom of the individual. As a humanist, M.N. Roy did all his political thinking from the point of view of

human society. He says, "Radicalism thinks in terms neither of nation nor of class; its concern is man; it conceives freedom as the freedom of the individual. Therefore, it can also be called New Humanism, new, because it is humanism enriched, reinforced, and elaborated by scientific knowledge and social experience gained during the centuries of modern civilisation."\(^{13}\) Roy's humanism is thus based on the supremacy and dignity of man. It is a doctrine of human sovereignty supported by modern science. Roy proclaimed the primacy of man without resorting to any super-human or super-natural hypothesis.

Roy held that the essence of human existence is the urge for freedom. It was recognised by him as the supreme value from which all other human values were derived. He tells us that "the purpose of all rational human endeavour, individual, as well as collective, is attainment of freedom, in ever increasing measure."\(^{14}\) Radical Humanism considers equality and liberty as equally necessary. The easiest means of social change, according to it, was to make men and women moral. It laid emphasis upon radical changes in the present set up in order to usher a bright future. Man himself was the revolutionary means to make human beings free.


According to Roy, since the individual was to be of supreme importance, his freedom should not be sacrificed in the name of the welfare of the society. Freedom of the society must be the freedom of the totality of individuals. Society is the creation of man, therefore its only proper aim is to help the evolution of the individual. Social relationships should be so co-ordinated that the individual gains maximum freedom for his evolution. The collectivity, according to Roy, is not prior to individuality. Individual was his prior concern. The only purpose of society and State is to make room for maximum liberty to the individual. Explaining liberty as the aim of human life Roy said, "Freedom is the progressive disappearance of all restrictions on the unfolding of the potentialities of individuals as human beings, and not as cogs in the wheels of a mechanised social organism."\textsuperscript{15} Thus, according to the third principle of Radical democracy, the freedom of the individual is the only aim of the collectivity, that is, the State. Man is the representative of society and requires social relationship for the development of his capacities.

Roy held that the dignity and freedom of individual were being endangered by dictatorship as well as parliamentary democracy. These two challenges have relegated the individual to a position of insignificance. Arguing against dictatorship, Roy stated that there is no possibility of

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid. p.17.
achievement of freedom or diminution of State power in it. Planned economy, under political dictatorship disregards individual freedom on the pleas of efficiency, collective effort and social progress. In parliamentary democracy, elections have become an instrument of delegation of the sovereign power of the individuals. Because of parties, politics has become a scramble for power and parties do not appeal to reason of the individuals but to the sentiments of the masses. The adherence to party politics implies the denial of democracy. It is a denial of the political intelligence and creativity of all men, of the sovereignty of the people. Thus both dictatorship and parliamentary democracy do not find place for human values. Roy suggested that a proper form of government can be established only on the basis of human freedom as its aim. For this he offered an alternative in Radical Democracy. In this scheme, every citizen will be informed and consulted in the functioning of the government. This is possible because in it power goes to the people's committees and not to the parties.

On the economic plane, Roy suggested the scheme of co-operative economy. Under this system, co-operatives will be the basic units. It is not based on competition but on co-operation in which on the one hand the producer and the consumer co-operate and on the other hand the relationship between producers are not determined by competition but by co-operation.
Thus this system reduces the national waste to the minimum. It is the only economics on the basis of which co-ordination may be achieved among various producing units and the economic transaction between different nations.

Along with other contemporary Indian thinkers, Roy also accepted the ideal of the unity of the world in spite of diversity. Each nation may be different according to its indigenous circumstances. But an inclination towards internationalism is also necessary. Humanism does not distinguish among human beings on the basis of nationality, race or class. It does not admit any permanent dividing line between different nations. The world envisaged by M.N. Roy "will be a spiritual community, not limited by boundaries of National States - capitalist, fascist, communist or of any other kind - which will gradually disappear under the impact of cosmopolitan humanism. That is the radical perspective of the future of mankind." New Humanism of M.N. Roy, therefore, is not only scientific but is also an integral philosophy in which human affairs are considered in the context of the whole cosmos and not just within the context of Nation. Thus we see that this kind of humanistic movement was not only meant for India, but for the whole world. This was explained by Roy in the last principle of Radical Humanism thus: "Radicalism

\[16 \text{ Ibid. p.35.}\]
starts from the dictum that man is the measure of everything' (Protagorus) or 'man is the root of mankind' (Marx), and advocates reconstruction of the world as a Commonwealth' and fraternity of free men, by the collective endeavour of spiritually emancipated moral men.\textsuperscript{17} 

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Ibid.} p.59.