CONCEPT OF HUMANISM

The English word ‘Humanism’ has been derived from the Latin word ‘Homo’ which means ‘human being’. The etymological meaning does not always supply the correct information regarding gradual application of the wider and different aspects of its meaning.

As a matter of fact, the word ‘humanist’ has varied from age to age to cover a range of attitudes and opinions from Democritus to Erasmus in Europe and from the Upaniṣads to M. N. Roy in India.¹

There are different forms of humanism. These forms may be broadly divided into two classes. In one class, the existence of God or Supernatural being is not admitted. This is humanism without God or Supernatural being. In the other, the existence of God or Supernatural being is admitted. This is humanism with God or Supernatural being. The concept of humanism is not an innovation in India. It is an old concept which is traced back to the Vedas and the Upaniṣads. In India and abroad many more classes of humanism are found in different forms advocated by different great philosophers of different countries including India.

¹ Ganesh Prasad Das’s article entitled ‘Humanism: Percepts and Practice’, in ‘Understanding Philosophy: Eastern and Western Perspectives’ (proceedings of the 77th session of the Indian Philosophical Congress), edited by Dr. Manjulika Ghosh, 2005, p 72
The original version of Humanism upheld at least fifteen affirmations, only a few of them may be mentioned:

1. The universe is self-existing, not created.

2. Man is a part of nature and a result of evolution.

3. There is no supernatural or cosmic generation or sanction of human values.

4. The varieties of ‘new thought’ like Theism, Deism and Modernism are outdated.

5. The ultimate end of human life is complete realization of human personality. Its development and fulfilment lie here and now.

6. All associations and institutions exist for the fulfilment of human life.

*Humanist Manifesto-I* asserted that man is a part of nature; he is not part of any supernatural being. In accordance with this Manifesto, Man is a creator of his own life. If man likes to spoil his own life, he can do it without learning towards any supernatural entity.

According to the American Humanist Association, humanism is a progressive life stance. By rejecting any

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2 *ibid.*, p 76

3 *Humanist Manifesto I* (The *Humanist Manifesto I,II and III* are from *The Humanist Vision*, The Humanist Philosophical Circle, Bhuvaneswar, 1981)
supernatural being, humanists affirm our ability and responsibility to lead meaningful life. Every human being has some responsibility and right, to give meaning and shape to their own life. Humanism is an ethical philosophy, which is considered to help in progress of our character and mentality. We can live moral happy life on the basis of our needs and experience. So man is the maker of his own fate.

Ganesh Prasad Das referred to 'Humanist Manifesto II', then signed by 117 individuals appeared in The Humanist, September/October, 1973. It came with the hope that science and technology would open the door for 'an abundant and meaningful life' and that the next century 'can be and should be the humanistic century'. The modified and the mitigated version of spiritualistic humanism is naturalistic humanism, which seeks to 'fuse reason with compassion in order to build constructive social and moral values'.

Humanism puts human interest and the mind of man paramount, rejecting the supernatural, belief in God etc. Humanism lays much stress on devotion to human welfare. It is man-centred philosophy. The Bengali poet Chandidas aptly says that, 'Sabār upare mānuṣ satya tāhār upare nāi'. Greek philosopher Protagoras said, 'Man is the measure of all things'. As a matter of fact humanism rejects all types of supernaturalism. It does not believe in the existence of God, Soul, heaven, hell etc.

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4 Ganesh Prasad Das’s article entitled ‘Humanism: Percepts and Practice’, in 'Understanding Philosophy: Eastern and Western Perspectives' (proceedings of the 77th session of the Indian Philosophical Congress), edited by Dr. Manjulika Ghosh, 2005, pp 77-78.

There is no place for miracles in it. It tries to explain events around us scientifically. In this sense all materialists, naturalists, atheists and all adherents of the scientific outlook are basically humanists because they are opposed to any supernatural activity.

Humanism is a rational and democratic philosophy. It also proclaims that as human being every man has some problems which he can solve with his responsibility and potentiality. It also points out that as a rational being he can investigate to answer the questions through science, art and culture.

Like everything, humanism also has described two sides – positive and negative. The positive side of humanism brings forth the idea that the world is not self creation, it is self existing and man is the part of it. Therefore man is the maker of his own world and is capable of changing it according to his will. The negative side is the denial of any supernatural power or disbelief on the existence of Almighty or disregard to religions.

The word ‘Humanism’ is as pious as the spirit of the earth, the all embracing identity to give shelter to all living and non-living things into her very heart. To deal everyone with respect, everything with care, love and sympathy is the philosophy of man in depth, adhyātma-vidyā which is expressed by Vedānta and the modern world called this unique term as science of human possibilities. It is the spiritual core idea of the immortal literature of India, the Upaniṣads, many more thousands years ago created by great sages for human welfare.
Swami Ranganathananda observes that all the human possibilities, including the spiritual, lie hidden, lie asleep in the child and Vedānta teaches to bring out all these enormous possibilities. In the words of the Kaṭha Upaniṣad (I.iii.12) which Vivekananda loves most among the Upaniṣads:

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\begin{align*}
Eśa\ sarvēśu bhūteṣu \\
Gūdh'ātmā na prakāśāte \\
Drisyate tvagryayā \\
buddhyā Sūkṣhmayā \\
sūkṣhma-darsībhīh
\end{align*}
\]

This [infinite] Ātman is present in every being, but lies hidden and does not manifest; but It can be realized by those subtle seers through their sharp and subtle intelligence.⁶

Protagoras of Abdera (480–410 BC), the Greek sophist philosopher, says, “Man is the measure of all things.” By this he means that everything is relative to the disposition of the subject.⁷

W. T. Stace points out that by man Protagoras did not mean mankind at large. “He meant the individual man. And by measure of all things he meant the standard of the truth of all things. Each individual man is the standard of what is true to himself. There is no truth except the sensations and impressions of each man. What seems true to me is true for me. What seems true to you is true for you.”⁸

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⁶ Swami Ranganathananda, Swami Vivekananda: His Humanism, 2005, pp 13-14
⁷ E. I. Watkin (translated), An Introduction to Philosophy, 1946, p 23
⁸ W. T. Stace, A Critical History of Greek Philosophy, 1950, p 114
Socrates corrected the mistake of the sophists by admitting that the truth must be my truth, but mine in my capacity as a rational being, which means, since reason is the universal, that is not my private truth, but universal truth which is shared by and valid for all rational beings.9

W. T. Stace tried to prove the hollowness of what Protagoras said. An individual may take a thing to be true if it appears to be true to him. But that is false in its application to our judgment of future events. It may appear to a man that he is going to be Chief Justice next year, but instead he may be imprisoned by next year.10

Stace further stated that final human perception is truth; man is the measure of all things in his character as a percipient being. Then the lowest brute also may be measure of all things since they are also percipient beings.

If truth is what appears to an individual, it loses its objectivity. The distinction between truth and falsehood is then blamed, as the same thing may appear to be true and false at the same time to different persons.11

**HUMANISM IN WESTERN HISTORY**

The philosophical basis of humanism can be traced back to Lao-tse and Kung Fiu-tse who is better known by the name Confucius. More than five hundred years before the time of Jesus

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9 ibid., p 153
10 ibid., p 178
11 ibid., p 179
Christ, Confucius taught reciprocity while Leo-tse taught to return good for evil. Confucius formulated a Golden Rule of reciprocity, "what you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others."12

After his death his sayings were collected and written down in the Analects. According to Confucius "It is only the truly virtuous who can love or hate others.... To be poor without murmuring is difficult; to be rich without pride is easy...... The superior man is catholic and not a partisan – he does what is proper to the position in which he is, he does not desire to go beyond it."13

D. M. Dutta refers to Schiller who 'confesses, humanism tends more towards idealism than to realism'. As he says, "If, nevertheless, it may seem that the balance finally inclines somewhat, to the 'subjective' side, because, after all, it is still held to be possible that every individual soul may some day 'awake' to find the reality of its world with all its works abolished for it overnight, the fault lies, not in our theory, but in the actual facts."14 But humanism is not, as we saw, solipsism. For, it recognizes that the pragmatic truth and the pragmatic reality must be socially acceptable; hence it cannot be merely personal.

Existentialists like, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sarte, Jaspers etc., are interested in the meaning and problems of existence, particularly man's own inner existence. "They attach the greatest value and importance to the individuals rather than the universal, and more particularly to the existence of the human individual, as

12 Gerald L. Berry, Religions of the World, Barnes and Noble Books, New York, 1956, p 52
13 ibid., p 52
14 D. M. Dutta, The Chief Currents of Contemporary Philosophy, 1961, p 227
inwardly perceived, felt, enjoyed. Suffered, willed and lived rather than to the intellectual concept of humanity as a class, society or state or community.”

The reality of every one’s existence proceeds thus from the “inwardness” of man, not from anything that the mind can codify, for objectified knowledge is always at one or more removes from the truth. “Truth,” said Kierkegaard “is subjectivity.”

In existential humanism, “We remind man that there is no legislator but himself; that he himself, thus abandoned, must decide for himself; also because we show that it is not by turning back upon himself, but always by seeking, beyond himself, all aim which is one of liberation or of some particular realization, that man can realize himself as truly human.”

To trace back to the western humanism we may rightly refer to the ancient Greeks and Romans. Greek humanism was actually limited to its own citizens and excluded the non-Greeks and the slaves from its blessings. Roman humanism was broader, but did not also extend to the slaves. Both were secular and non religious. Then came Christianity, preaching its own humanism, based on its narrow theology, first to the peoples of the Roman Empire and, later, to peoples of Europe as a whole. But this Christian humanism also was exclusive; it was limited to the believers in its own narrow creed and dogma; it did not extend not

15 ibid., p 509
16 Jean Paul Sarte, Existentialism and Humanism (Translation and Introduction by Philip Mairet), 1948, p 6
17 ibid., pp 55-56
only to non-Christians, but also to its own dissidents in creed and to all scientists and rationalists.¹⁸

The French philosopher August Comte was the worshipper of humanity. He said, nothing is more adorable to us than humanity. The traditional thought is that God is the giver and man is the receiver. Such an idea could be successful if man could be considered as God.

If the human history is analyzed, it is found that, from the very beginning, man is extremely helpful towards each other. The human languages, the human clothes, the human machines are all invented by human being for human benefit and progress. So man is man’s God. That is Comte’s Human God. Pringle Pattison comments that it was one of Comte’s boasts that the new God of his religion, as contrasted with the abstract deities of theology and metaphysics, was positive, verifiable like a scientific fact, an object which one could, as it were, directly see and touch.¹⁹

To Comte, man is not any specific human being at a definite space or time. He thinks of Ideal Humanity which he would like to indicate by the capital letter H. To attain ‘H’, man struggles to work better and this is continued endlessly from generation to generation towards achievement of perfection. Thus, to Comte, Humanity is God in his Godless religion.

Western humanism has a long history with huge ups and downs to take shape into modern outlook. Ancient western humanism finds its root into Greek civilization. But their

humanism was narrowly limited only to Greek and Roman population barring the huge population of slaves. In treatment, of course it was secular and non religious. With the advent of Christianity that is preaching its own humanism based on its own theology took under its grip first the Roman people and then the whole Europe gradually. For its limitations it was refused by its own dissidents in creed, scientists and rationalists.20

Humanism demands that human problems are to be understood and human initiatives of benevolence, compassion and mercy are to be set in place. Ideas of equality, fraternity, liberty and humanism have become very popular now-a-days. Besides like Human Rights Commission expose and address violations of human rights. Sometime even we see that countries often rail against the violations of other countries but fail to recognize those committed by themselves.

**INDIAN HUMANISM**

Indian humanism was advocated by different great persons. It was just revival of humanistic spirit of the ancient Indian culture and religion to integrate humanity into a single fold on the basis of universal brotherhood. Its emphasis lies on tolerance and respect for life and the conviction that God could be understood in terms of all living beings.

In India so many reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy, Bankimchandra, Vivekananda etc., attacked the priesthood and also adopted humanistic approach in all their endeavours. They

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realize that if our society are to be reformed, the hold of priesthood, outmoded and ignorant must be removed from their. They declared that there is no need foe an intermediary between God and man. They revolt against the abuses of priesthood whereas Swami Vivekananda inspired the people to follow their own religion, whatever and they should not quarrel about the modes and forms of worship.\(^{21}\)

**Rammohan Roy (1772-1833)**

The unique Indian Humanism was shouldered by many of Her sons who flourished its essential spirit to every nook and corner of the globe. Among these geniuses, Rammohan is one of the most remarkable names. Since the time of Akbar, the attempt to fuse all different religions into one has been made in India to bring unity in huge diversity. Rammohan though born into an orthodox Hindu family, wished to establish a informal institution for common prayer of men belonging to any caste and creed. Thus Rammohan initiated the middle path between the two extremes of revived orthodoxy and radical revolt against Hinduism. His logic, rationalism to the examination of religious dogmas, rituals and customs built the foundations of all faiths. Irrational customs, irrelevant religious rites and ceremonies marred the original meaning of religion to discipline the mind to gain the mastery over evil passions and selfish impulses.

As a result, Brahmo Samaj was born under his leadership and guidance in 1828 that denies idolatry or sacrifices of any kind of life or eating and drinking or reviling of other religions. His

services to the Hindu people were inestimable, for he impelled them to study the bases of their religion by putting confidence in them and made them realize to regard the treasures of spiritual experience as in the Upaniṣads which gave them their unique position in the community of people. Moreover his wide study helped him to understand the spirit of Hindu religion and social philosophy to fight restlessly against the inhuman practices and the unification of the existing religions of the world for peace and happiness of the entire human race.

Humanism was nascent in Rammohan. He was the champion of humanism, a man of open mind to appreciate anything which contributed to the unity and happiness of human race. Being a man of cosmopolitan outlook, the unity of the Godhead and the Brotherhood of Man were his missions.

Recognition of human values, considerations of humanity in solving social problems was his prime concerns in the interest of a better integrated humanity. He was rightly called a citizen of the world which was admitted by hundreds of erudite.

A. R. Dasai comments that Rammohan Roy was essentially a democrat and a humanist. In his religio-philosophical and social outlook, he was deeply influenced by the monotheism and anti-idolatry of Islam, Deism of Sufism, the ethical teachings of Christianity, and the liberal and rational doctrines of the west.

As a humanist Rammohan felt that mankind could be united if the basic elements of major religion like Christianity,

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22 Bhabatosh Datta, *Bangali Manase Vedanta*, 1986, p 22 (Translated from Bengali)
Buddhism, Islam and Hinduism come together for mutual understanding and tolerance. According to Buch, “He tried to interpret and assimilate into himself the highest elements of Islam, Christianity and Modern Rationalism or Humanism, and transformed them all into a single creed which he found in the ancient Upanishadic philosophy of his own community. Thus in him India is reborn not as a slavish repetition of orthodox Hinduism nor as an apish imitation of Christianity or Islam but as a genuine revival of a pure theistic and rational humanitarianism, inherent in essential Hinduism.”

According to Brajendra Nath Seal, Raja Rammohan Roy was a cosmopolite, a rationalist thinker. He had a universal outlook on human civilization and its historic march.

K. C. Vyas expressed the same view “Raja Ram Mohan Roy’s socio religious activities bring out clearly that he was a great humanitarian.” In the words of his biographer Sophia Dobson Collett, “Ram Mohan Roy stands in the history as the living bridge over which India marches from her unmeasured past to her incalculable future. He was the arch which spanned the gulf that yawned between ancient caste and modern humanity, between superstition and science, between despotism and democracy, between immobile custom and a conservative progress, between.....polytheism and ....theism. He was the mediator of his people, harmonizing in his own person, often by means of his own solitary sufferings, the conflicting tendencies of

24 M. A. Buch, The Development of Contemporary Indian Political Thought, Vol 1, p 61
25 Sir Brajendra Nath Seal, Raja Rammohan Roy Centenary Commemoration Volume, 1934, p 49
26 K. C. Vyas, The Social Renaissance in India, 1957, p 26
immemorial tradition and an inevitable enlightenment... He embodies the new spirit which arises from the compulsory mixture of races and faiths and civilizations.... He embodies its freedom of enquiry, its thirst for science, its large human sympathy, its pure and sifted ethics, along with its reverent but not uncritical regard for the past, and prudent....discrimination towards revolt.”

Ram Mohan Roy’s only aim was to reestablish the glory of ancient Indian culture. His great personality and indomitable spirit, helped him to establish the theism of the Vedānta though he was not interested in Vedāntic monism as advocated by Śamkarāchārya.

According to Prosanta Kumar Sen, “His Vedantism, far from encouraging aloofness from the realities of life, was combined with an intense philosophy – lokasreya, in his own language. Broad-based on the consciousness of Oneness of God was the consciousness of the oneness of humanity, pointing to universal well-being as one of the cardinal principles of his practical faith. Thus his Vedantism escaped being a sterile doctrine.”

Rabindra Nath Tagore said that Rammohan vitalized our national being with the urgency of creative endeavour through his dynamic power of his personality and his uncompromising freedom of the spirit, launched it into the arduous nature of self-realization. He was the great path maker of progress at every step

28 P. K. Sen, Biography of a New Faith, 1950, p 130
and he initiated us into the present era of worldwide co-operation of humanity.  

He fought against everything that arrests and denaturalizes the healthy relations of the whole human race. This was what politics meant to him. To him, this is another name for philanthropy. Jeremy Bentham treated him as his collaborator in the service of mankind. In a report submitted to a Committee of the British Parliament, Rammohan besought ‘any and every authority’ to devise some method of alleviating the miseries of the agricultural peasantry of India and thus discharge their duty to their fellow creatures and fellow subjects.  

**Vidyasagar (1820-1891)**

Vidyasagar was an immortal personality of humanism. He is an eternal example of a noble man with an iron self confidence. His patriotism revolves round on reformation of education, freedom for human being, development for girls’ education, liberty from the curse of widowhood and a society free from the bondage of useless traditional customs and superstitions.

Following the modern rational European Humanism, he tried to build up a new Bengal. Vidyasagar felt it deeply that the progress of motherland depends on women’s education, women’s freedom and establishment of equal right for both men and women. He fought tirelessly against all odds, all wrongs, all falsehood to awake the noble spirit of humanism. There is no

30 Kalidas Nag’s article on Brahma Samaj, published in the *Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol IV, 1956, p 621
narrow, restricted superstitions outlook in his patriotism for his broad mentality for liberal humanity. His humanism embraces both the national and international spirit cordially without any malice.

Michael Madhusudan Dutta, the renowned Bengali poet wrote about Vidyasagar, ‘Vidyasagar tumi vikhyāta bhārate karuner sindhu tumi, sei jane mone dina je diner bandhu’. Vidyasagar you are famous in India for your ocean like knowledge, everyone knows your ocean like compassion and kindness and you are extremely benign and gracious friend of the poor.

In Bengal, Vidyasagar is more popularly known as ‘ocean of kindness’. His charity and benevolence knows no bound. Deep humanism and kind heartedness for everyone are the root cause of his social reformation. He inherited all these golden qualities from his mother Bhagabati Devi who herself was extremely kind and sympathetic towards everyone. Vidyasagar was extremely devoted to his mother. Vidhyasagar drew all his encouragements to supersede every obstacle, every hindrance from his mother and succeeded to bring a new dawn of social programme.

To Vidyasagar, service to man is the real religion. He did not recognize the ritual-dominant religion. Nevertheless he did not have trend of denial of the sanatan dharma, he used to write ‘Sri Hari Sahaya’, ‘Sri Durga Sahaya’ etc., on his letter heads. But his
thought of religion was centred around the ideal of service to humanity.\textsuperscript{31}

**Bankimchandra (1838-1894)**

Bankimchandra opposed the orthodox religion. He always try to solve the social conflicts and wants to create a ideal society. Bankimchandra was inspired by humanistic thought. Both the oriental and western philosophies met in religious thoughts of Vidyasagar and Bankimchandra.

Bankimchandra valued religious ceremonies. Nevertheless he was influenced by thoughts of Comte. Ramakrishna mixed divinity or spiritualism with humanism of Vidyasagar and Bankimchandra.

The humanist ideals were for him religious percepts and the meaning of all religion, its ‘eternal source’ which he called dharma.\textsuperscript{32} According to Bankimchandra “Dharma is humaneness, love for the people and doing of good, sanctified by devotion (bhakti) to God and bringing to man peace and personal happiness….Dharma is not in the Veda but in the doing of good to the people, Devotion to God, love for mankind and peace in heart — this is What is dharma.”\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{31} Swami Purnatmananda’s article ‘Swami Vivekanander Dharmanabhabna’ published in ‘Pashchim Banga’; Special issue on Swami Vivekananda, January 2008, pp 108-109 (Translated from Bengali)
\textsuperscript{32} Swami Vivekananda Studies in Soviet Union, Translated from the Russian by Harish C. Gupta, 1987, p 112
\textsuperscript{33} Bankincharna, Dharma Dhatvata: Dharma evam Sahitya [Essence of Religion: Religion and Literature], Bankim Rachanavali [Works], vol II, p 589
Bankim Chandra Chatterjee was influenced by the thought of the positivism of Comte and Mill. David Brookman opined that positivism, for Comte, supplied complete satisfaction to all the tendencies of the many-sided nature of man by concentrating our feeling, our thoughts and our actions around humanity, the only true great Being of which we are wittingly the necessary members.34

Accordingly, Bankimchandra rejected the notion of a revealed religion and asserted that religion is a philosophy of life which finds its concrete and objective expression in the strong and earnest direction of the emotions and desires towards an ideal object, recognized as of the highest excellence, and as rightfully paramount over all selfish objects of desires.35

Here the influence of J. S. Mill is evident – it is man’s conception of the intended subjective perfection which precedes the nature of the ideal object. And Bankimchandra, in his Dharmatattva (True Nature of Dharma) defined the subjective ideal as ...The perfect and complete development of all human faculties.36 Thereby he concluded that “.... religion is man’s essential quality, denoted by the word ‘humanity’ (manusyatva), but it is at the same time pattern of conduct, an ideal whose realization man is obliged to strive for.”37

34 David Brookman, Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan (In the Commentarial Tradition of India), 1990, p 18
35 R. Antoine, ‘A Pioneer of Neo-Hinduism-Bankimchandra Chatterjee: 1838-1894’, in India, No 18 of studies in Indian History of the Indian Historical Research Institute (Bombay: St. Xavier’s College, ), 1953, p 7
36 ibid., p 12
37 ibid., p 12
Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941)

One of the greatest seers, sages and devotees of India is none other than Rabindranath Tagore who, with the eyes fixed on the future of mankind, explored political, social and religious areas of human relationship.

Rabindranath was profoundly influenced by Lord Buddha. Being influenced by Buddha, Tagore said that man must come out of the shell of his individuality with a view to meeting with the greater self of humanity. So long as man remains confined within the barrier of his narrow individuality within the arena of material desires, joys and sorrows, he is unable to realize the universal man failing to achieve relief from the misery of the world.

In his own words, he defines his love for humanity, “In the vessel of man’s affection, I test His divine nectar.” His love for humanity is exposed several times in almost all his writings. In ‘Patraput’, one of his poems (poem No 15) bears the message “Today I complete my worship - From world of God into the world of Man.” Rabindranath does not seek God in a lonely place, nor in a forest, but finds him where he is united with the soul of humanity.

Tagore’s religion was the religion of Man in which the infinite is defined in humanity. Instead if worshipping a transcendent God which is enclosed only in temple, mosque or church, Rabindranath worshipped man, the ‘Manab-Brahma’. In one of his letters dated 14th June 1931, Tagore said that his God does not reside in temple, image, or in Baikuntha, but lives in man
where hunger, thirst and sleep are real. Rabindranath’s man is not self seeker, the ego-centred, insular entity, but to the large man, the cosmic man (*oi mahāmānabh āse*), enriched with inherent divinity.

Rabindranath was actually a product of composite culture. He was greatly influenced by both the Eastern and Western cultures. Thus he was touched by the humanism of the Upaniṣad, the Gītā as well as by the humanism of the West, especially the love of freedom and the large hearted radicalism of the European world.

Rabindranath adopted the Bhagavad Gītā, the ideal of karma yoga and advised men to treat the world as a field of spiritual spheres. It quotes from 'Gitanjali' in order to show Tagore’s lofty humanism.

*Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads! Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark Corner of a temple with doors all shut? Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee!*  

*He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the path maker is breaking stones. He is with them in Sun and in shower, and his garment is covered with dust. Put off the holy mantle and even like him come down on the dusty soil.*  

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38 Rabindranath Tagore, *Gitanjali*, XI, 1935 (English)
As a matter of fact the ultimate truth before Tagore was to promote international amity and understanding and fulfil the highest mission of the present age, the unification of mankind into a single nest — into a one world.

Love is the highest form of religion in Tagore as he tried to humanize religion. The religious person of Tagore must reside in human world to work sincerely in making it a fit place for the habitation of God. So worship of god means loyalty and service of the mankind. The philosophical foundation of Tagore’s humanism is a hidden relationship — a feeling of kinship between man and God — between the individual self and the supreme personality.

As a unique humanist, Rabindranath tried to raise humanity to the level of ultimate reality. His message of love, peace and universal brotherhood, his ideal of universal man and one world will continue to inspire humanity in the future.

Tagore’s humanism is brilliantly expressed when he said “My religion is the religion of Man in which the infinite is defined inhumanity.” In the same book he further declared “Whatever name may have been given to the Divine Reality, it has found its highest place in the history of our religion owing to its human character.”

Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948)

According to Gandhiji to serve humanity is to serve God. He had a deep faith in man. “Gandhiji had overflowing love for

39 Rabindranath Tagore, The Religion of Man, 1961, p 96
40 ibid., p 205
humanity. All his life, he fought against inequality between man and man. The essence of the humanistic spirit is deep love for the people. His humanism inspired him to serve the suffering and the sick. He was a humanist because he had faith in the redemption and regeneration of man. According to him, no human being is so bad as to be beyond redemption, no human being is so perfect to warrant his destroying him whom he considers to be wholly evil. Gandhiji's adherence to the absolutism of truth and non-violence made hostile to the destruction of life in any form. God is organically bound up with mankind and all living beings. Gandhiji treats all persons as belonging to one family, i.e, human family. To serve humanity is to serve God. Each person is to be cared for in this task."\(^{41}\)

Gandhiji stressed on ceaseless actions done for poor and lowly by individual gives him the scope of salvation as he believed that god resides not in a temple or in Himalayan caves but in human beings. To quote Gandhi, "And as I found that God is found more often in the high and mighty, I am struggling to reach the status of these. Hence my passion for the service of the depressed classes. And as I cannot render service without entering politics, I find myself in them."\(^{42}\) "And so doing in all humanity I hope some day to see God – Truth – face to face."\(^{43}\)

Humanism takes an important role in Gandhian Philosophy. But Gandhi advocated for spiritual humanism and not for economic and material humanism.

\(^{41}\) V. P. Verma, *The Political Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi and Sarvodaya*, p 59

\(^{42}\) *Young India*, 11\(^{th}\) Sept, 1924, p 288

\(^{43}\) *ibid.*, 3\(^{rd}\) Dec, 1925, p 422
Gandhiji boldly fought against untouchability and believed if untouchability was really rooted out than it would not only purge Hinduism of a terrible blot, but its repercussions would be worldwide. He also traced to fight against untouchability, which is the impure of humanity.44

Gandhiji frankly acknowledged that his mission was not merely brotherhood of Indian humanism and freedom of India. He wanted to realize and carry on the mission of the brotherhood of man through the realization of freedom of India.45

Gandhiji dedicated the major portion of his life to the service of man. Service to the poor was the most important thing for Gandhiji. He was greatly influenced by the life and teaching of Swami Vivekananda. Vivekananda’s conception of daridranārāyaṇa, worship of man as a God, was adopted, elaborated and practised by Gandhiji himself. He said that daridranārāyaṇa is one of the millions of names by which humanity knows God who is unnamable and unfathomable by human understanding, and it means God of the poor, God appearing in the hearts of the poor. This is one of the fundamental teachings of Gandhi.46

Buddhadev Bhattacharjee argued that Gandhi’s humanism was rooted in traditional Indian humanism. It was, in a fundamental philosophical sense, based on the spiritual experience of the ‘oneness of being, It was in this nature of Indian humanism not to turn the mind and achievements of Man away

44 D. R. Bali, Modern Indian Thought: Rammohan to Jayaprakash Narayan, 1984, p 20
46 D. K. Dutta, Social, Moral and Religious Philosophy of Gandhi, pp 24-26
from the Absolute. Gandhi would not die until humanity itself dies as Gandhi’s voice was the voice of eternal revolt against oppression and injustice – the eternal voice of humanism.

B. R. Nanda mentioned the name of M. N. Roy, who in his communist as well as Radical Humanist phases had been sharply critical of Gandhi’s ‘religious approach to politics’, confessed later that he had failed to detect the secular approach of the Mahatma beneath the religious terminology and that essentially Gandhi’s message had been moral, humanist, cosmopolitan.

Aurobindo (1872-1950)

In 1907, Sri Aurobindo said “India awakes not for herself but for humanity.” He prescribed yoga for the manifold ills of humanity. During his lifetime he advocated for freedom of man, unity of mankind and the divinity of man. By dint of his own spiritual perfection he represented the type of transformed humanity of the future. The basic principle underlying the religion of humanity is, “Man must be sacred to man regardless of all distinctions of race, creed, colour, nationality, status, political or social advancement.”

Fraternity is the basis of the religion of humanity. Without its growth, the ideal of human unity cannot be achieved. This

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47 Buddhadev Bhattacharjee, *Evolution of the Political Philosophy of Gandhi*, p 494
48 *ibid.*, p 506
50 Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, 1950, p 8
fraternity among human beings is based on the fact that liberty equality and unity are the eternal traits of the human soul.\(^{51}\)

Aurobindo thought that the religious practice of yoga could help man in his spiritual progress and human life in its reformation. Yoga could be applied to all human beings in spiritualization of the whole range of human emotions and be the “justification of the cosmic labour towards love and joy in our humanity.”\(^{52}\)

To Sri Aurobindo, the object of yoga is not physical liberation, but the liberation and transformation of the human being. It is supposed to bring down a divine nature and a divine life into the mental, vital and physical nature and life of humanity.\(^{53}\)

Regarding the contribution of Aurobindo, Eric J. Sharpe told, “His main contribution...... besides awakening Hinduism to a sense of dignity with regard to its rich traditions, is prophetic in constructing the vision of a super-humanity wherein the discords, strifes of today will be done away with, a new race of men will arise who will have mastered the art of living in union with God and men.”\(^{54}\)

According to Sri Aurobindo, the human life and mind are forms of the Supermind. The supermind can be explicit, and can open and manifest existence in them. The human life becomes the life divine. Thus he conceives of the evolution of divine

\(^{51}\) R. N. Sharma, *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, 1996, p 180

\(^{52}\) Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, 1948, p 248


humanity, and rejects the materialistic, mechanistic and Marxist approach to humanism.\textsuperscript{55}

\textbf{M. N. Roy (1887-1954)}

M. N. Roy’s humanism is without God like Karl Marx’s humanism. He was a passionate humanist. According to M. N. Roy “As a philosophy, Marxism is the outcome of the development of thought from the dawn of history, therefore, it is the heritage of humanity, it is the ideological equipment belonging to everybody for a better world.”\textsuperscript{56}

Though he was attracted to Marx, he did not ultimately stick to his philosophy. According to M. N. Roy, modern man’s intellectual history comprised of philosophical movements and development in the west from the time of the Renaissance which marked the beginning of the modern age; and the crisis made evident by the rise of fascism, communism and different varieties of moral nihilism and intellectual obscurantism which characterized the first half of the twentieth century. Radical humanism, Roy believed, drew its support from what was valuable in the history of modern philosophy and from the findings of twentieth century science, and it suggested a way out of the moral, intellectual and institutional crisis of our times.\textsuperscript{57}

M. N. Roy was a rare personality of Modern Indian thinkers. His new humanism is a recent philosophy. His humanism is a human philosophy because its main theme is man

\textsuperscript{55} R. S. Srivastava, \textit{Contemporary Indian Philosophy}, 1983, p 155
\textsuperscript{56} M. N. Roy, \textit{New Orientation}, 1946, p 166
\textsuperscript{57} Shibnarayan Roy(edited), \textit{Selected Works of M. N. Roy}, Vol 1, by 1987, p 52
and his welfare. According to him "New scientific or integral Humanism is the fundamental principle of this new philosophy of life. There is nothing altogether new in it. Humanism is as old as History.....Since its newness is derived from modern scientific knowledge, the more appropriate name is scientific Humanism."58

According to D. D. Bandiste, M. N. Roy’s "philosophy was based on his vast study, minute observations, sharp intelligence, vast travels and incessant activities of a revolutionary nature. He carried on a relentless struggle against exploitation, injustice, repression, social inequality, insecurity, ignorance, superstitions, corruption, helplessness, fanaticism, parochialism and dictatorial and totalitarian tendencies rampant all over the world. He wanted to create a moral, educated, cooperative, aesthetically-oriented and spiritually-enlightened human society. Roy has not only a vision of a free society of free individuals, but he has also suggested a path and methods to actualize that vision."59

**Radhakrishnan (1888-1875)**

After studying Radhakrishnan’s Philosophy one may imagine that being a spiritualist, Radhakrishnan is opposed to any kind of humanistic assertions. It is also true that Radhakrishnan had intension to call himself a humanist. But it is also a fact that fortunately elements of Humanism crept into his philosophical ideas and ultimately find a humanistic shape to his philosophy of man.

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To Radhakrishnan, humanism and spiritualism are not incompatible with each other. Instead of being opposite to each other, each of both the religion and humanism need the characteristic gifts and graces of the other.\(^{60}\) He again says that one must believe in the equality of men in the soul. It is true that one cannot fall in love with a telephone directory. Love of humanity must be defined in terms of the men and women coming into contact with.\(^{61}\) Greatness of man does not depend in his property or social condition but it lie in his kindness, love and sincerity towards others.

The world is in urgent need of re-education and not political or military unification. Training is required for an individual to think in terms of humanity as a whole and not in terms of this or that particular clan or country.

Radhakrishnan is optimist about the immersgence of such humanity in this world. In Radhakrishnan words, “We are living at the dawn of a new era of universal humanity. There is a thrill of hope, a flutter of expectation as when the first glimmer of dawn awakens on earth.”\(^{62}\)

Radhakrishnan mentioned in his ‘Eastern Religion and Western Thought’ that a new humanism is on the horizon. P. T. Raju describes Radhakrishnan’s new humanism in this way, “There is a strong desire that Indian philosophy should be made more humanistic and applicable to the constantly changing complexities of life in this world. But a consistent philosophy

\(^{60}\) S. Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religion and Western Thought*, 1939, p 11
\(^{61}\) S. Radhakrishnan, *Search for Truth*, 1977, p 33
\(^{62}\) Radhakrishnan, *East and West*, p 130
which expresses and works out this attitude has still to be written; moreover, while being humanistic, it will still be spiritual: for true humanism is spiritual and cannot be opposed to spirituality. And it will be critical humanism: for it is only the critical method and approach which can give due recognition to all important truths, however apparently conflicting they may be."

According to Radhakrishnan, “Humanism is the religion of the majority of the intellectual to-day. Most of us who profess to be religious do so by habit, sentiment, or inertia. We accept our religion even as we do the Bank of England or the Illusion of progress. We profess faith in God but are not inclined to act on it.”

CLASSIFICATION OF HUMANISM

Humanism may be classified according to its different shades of meaning and focal areas, as follows:

1. Renaissance Humanism – It is the spirit of learning that developed at the end of Middle Ages with the revival of classical letters and renewed confidence in the ability of human being to determine for themselves truth and falsehood.

2. Philosophical Humanism – Philosophical humanism is totally life-centred humanism. It derives the human need and interest. Christian humanism and Modern humanism are included in the

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64 S. Radhakrishnan, _Eastern Religion and Western Thought_, 1939, p 16
philosophical humanism, because Christian humanism is also human oriented. It believes in the self-perfection of human being.

3. Christian Humanism – It is limited to the believers in its own narrow creed and dogma.\textsuperscript{65} It is defined by Webster’s Third New International Dictionary as “a philosophy advocating the self fulfilment of man within the framework of Christian principles.” This more human-oriented faith is largely a product of the Renaissance and is a part of what made up Renaissance humanism.

4. Modern Humanism – Modern humanism is called by different names, such as naturalistic humanism, scientific humanism, ethical humanism and democratic humanism. It is related with the science, art, culture and reality. It describes worldly events to its own view. Modern humanists do not rely in any external power as is the creator of this universe. Modern humanists are neither theists nor atheist, they are only realists.

5. Literary Humanism – Literary humanism is based on the human life. It always involved in the humanities or literary culture. Literary humanism also tries to develop the human and human society through the literature and culture.

6. Naturalistic Humanism – This type of humanism is the most popular in the west. It is also known as scientific humanism. It is also regarded as secular humanism due to its stress on secular values and democratic humanism. It asserts that man does not have to depend on any supernatural or divine agency because he has got the scientific ways at his command and disposal.

\textsuperscript{65} Swami Ranganathananda, \textit{Swami Vivekananda: His Humanism}, 1981, p 21
Tagore and Radhakrishnan would consider such a view as an extremist view, 'as it fails to take into regard such situations of life and such experiences that are beyond the reach of science and yet are able to sustain man and give him hope and strength'.

7. Religious Humanism – Religious humanism believes that the universe is self-existing and is not created. Religious humanism and secular humanism are basically same, because they do not rely on any other supernatural power. Religious humanism only believes in human nature. It is related with the art, culture, science, philosophy, love, friendship and so on.

8. Spiritual Humanism – Spiritual humanism is contrary to secular humanism. It is always doing good to others and rendering loving service to the divine, seeing its presence in all beings. Spiritual humanism embraces the whole of humanity, regardless of race, culture, country, religion or social affiliation.

9. Secular Humanism – Secular humanists do not believe in God or any supernatural entities. They explain every event from the non-religious point of view. Secular humanism believes that, as a human being, he has power to think freely.

**HUMANISM OF BUDDHA**

There are systems of Indian philosophy which do not believe in existence of God. Nāstika system like Buddha, Jaina, Cārvaka do not believe in God in addition to their disbelief in the authority of the Vedas. Āstika Darśana like Sāṁkhya, Mīmāṁsā do not

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66 H. P. Singh, *Religious Philosophy of Tagore and Radhakrishnan*, p 19
believe in the existence of God, though they believe in the authority of the Veda. These systems express their views for the upliftment of human beings, for the welfare of human beings and surrounding world. Although they do not believe in the existence of God. They are purely humanistic in nature.

Lord Buddha did not take much interest in the discussion of intricate metaphysical questions regarding the world, life and soul. He had an intensely practical outlook. He was a great lover of mankind and was profoundly moved at the sight of the sea of human miseries. That is why, after his enlightenment, he decided to spend the rest of his life in preaching the four noble truths for the salvation of men from the clutches of worldly sufferings.

The humanist Buddha after realizing 'Bodhi' or 'Samyak Jñāna', returned to human habitation leaving behind his self meditated deep forest or solitary hill life and dedicated his life for the wellbeing of mankind. The teaching and message of Lord Buddha is a solace for mankind. As the source of this universe he does not speak of God.

Buddha was dedicated to the motiveless service to mankind. 'Be good and do good' — is the principle of his life. He feels that our life is fool of misery, because we are selfish. He was firmly convinced that no priestly religion or dogmatic faith existing at his time could solve the problem of life. So he was out to discover the ethics of life for the eradication of human suffering. Goodness is the name of the godliness in Buddhism.
HUMANISM OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

Vivekananda says that man is the chief concern and centre of all our thoughts and activities. This line of thinking is rooted in philosophical traditions of India, China, Greece and Rome. The central theme in western philosophy is human search of the dignity of individuals, in Chinese philosophy codification of social ethics and in Indian, specially Vedāntic and spiritualistic philosophy – integration of man with the cosmos, giving man the capacity to see life as a whole. This holds a non-sectarian view, belief in human freedom, dignity, responsibility and reason to attain the eternal and permanent Reality that lies both within and without. The humanism of Vivekananda is metaphysically rooted in the Vedāntic vision of man as ātman and is thus essentially rational, spiritual, universal and integral.

This is opposed to Christian ideology that dooms man to passivity and to begging God for favours. Religious ideology is placed by Vivekananda at the service of the country’s national interests. He says that the colonists build here a series of churches, while the Eastern countries need bread and not religion. This would soon make all men confirmed atheists rather than superstitious simpletons.67

Swamiji’s love for others was not common human love but entire identification with others. So his humanism was much deeper and more comprehensive than the common ideal of humanism, Seeing Śiva in Jīva. From Sri Ramakrishna,

Vivekananda received the message of rendering unfailing service to human being, serving Jīva as Śiva through the unique power of love; from Śaṅkarācārya he learnt the message of tattvamasi or aham Brahmasmi, or Jīva Brahmaiva nāparaha.

According to Swami Vivekananda, "The only God to worship is the human soul in the human body. Of course all animals are temples too, but man is the highest, the Taj Mahal of temples. If I cannot worship in that, no other temple will be of any advantage."\(^6\) Swami Vivekananda realizes the Vedantic truth through his own experience and his master's teachings. He wanted to utilize Vedānta for the good of humanity. Swamiji lamented for not being used Vedānta for practical use. So he made use of the Jīva Śiva aphorism upheld by Vedānta and revalidated by his guru Sri Ramkrishna. The Vedānta, as a religion must be intensely practical. So he called his religion 'Practical Vedānta'.

One can perceive God and serve humanity and conversely one can realize God by service to all living beings, who also are embodiments of Brahma. Vivekananda beautifully expresses his sentiments in the following poem:

"The God is here before thee now,
Revealed in all these myriad forms;
Rejecting them, where seekest thou
His presence? He who freely shares

\(^{6}\) The Message of Vivekananda, Advaita Ashrama, 2007, p 35
His love with every living thing
Proffer true service unto God." 69

Swami Vivekananda learnt from Ramakrishna, that the worship of God through symbols ultimately leads a devotee to the realization of complete oneness with the Brahman. Vivekananda’s humanism may be regarded as spiritualistic humanism or Humanistic Advaita – which regards man as God, criticizes social, economic and religious evils of society and advocates for faith, fearlessness and strength in the individual.

To elevate man Vivekananda identifies him with God. In the words of Swami Vivekananda, “Man is the highest being that exists, and this is the greatest world. We can have no conception of God higher than man, so our God is man, and man is God. When we rise and go beyond and find something higher, we have to jump out of the mind, out of the body and the imagination and leave this world; when we rise to be the Absolute, we are no longer in this world. Man is the apex of the only world we can ever know. All we know of animals is only by analogy, we judge them by what we do and feel ourselves.” 70

Swami Vivekananda again says, “The moment I have realized God sitting in the temple of every human body, the moment I stand in reverence before every being and see God in

69 Swami Nikhilananda, Vivekananda: A Biography, Ramakrishna Vivekananda Centre, 1953, p 27
70 The Complete works of Swami Vivekananda, VII, 1994, pp 30-31(Henceforth it is abriviated as C.W.)
him – that moment I am free from bondage, everything that binds vanishes, and I am free.” 71

Romain Rolland rightly mentioned his famous phrase: Daridra Nārāyana (the beggar god)..... ‘The only God that exists, the only God in home I believe....my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races’. 72 It may justly be said that India’s destiny was changed by him, and that this teaching reached throughout Humanity.

71 ibid., II, p 321
72 Romain Rolland, The Life of Vivekananda: And the Universal Gospel, 1944, p 337