

SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY
PEER REVIEWED

HUMANISM: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO INDIAN RENAISSANCE

Shikha Sarkar

Introduction:

Humanism mainly associated with human benefits as a whole and these are the human rights, ethical value, freedom, free speaking power, overall growth of the human being. It highlights the dignity of man and makes the living noble. Humanism further says about the greatness of the human and calls to work for the wellbeing of human. Humanism is a philosophical stance that emphasizes the individual and social potential, and agency of human beings, whom it considers the starting point for serious moral and philosophical inquiry. Historically speaking, the Renaissance Movement of Europe originally introduced the word, humanism. It is derived from the Latin word ‘humanities’ which means culture. The word "humanism" derives from the Latin word humanities, which was first used in ancient Rome by Cicero and other thinkers to describe values related to liberal education. This etymology survives in the modern university concept of the humanities—the arts, philosophy, history, literature, and related disciplines.

According to different interpretation there are different kinds of humanism. Humanism is increased day by day such as- Philosophical humanism, Christian humanism, secular humanism. Which are as follows,

Philosophical Humanism is any outlook of life cantered on human need and interest. Sub-categories of this type include Christian humanism and Modern humanism.

Christian humanism is defined as- a philosophy advocating the self- fulfilment of man within the framework of Christian principles. This type of humanism is more human-oriented faith and is largely a product of Renaissance.

Secular Humanism is an outgrowth of 18th century enlightenment rationalism and 18th century free thought. The American Rationalist Federation, and many academic Philosophers and scientists, advocate this Philosophy.

In modern times many humanists have spoken about the humanism. Rabindranath Tagore and Vivekananda was one of them.

I am here trying to show the humanism of Rabindranath and Vivekananda and their similarity.

SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY
PEER REVIEWED

Tagore on Humanism:

The Bengal Renaissance can be said to have started with Raja Ram Mohan Roy and ended with Rabindranath Tagore. Even though Rabindranath Tagore was a great poet and an important thinker in Indian literature but his humanistic thinking was founded in his various writings and he influenced by various ways to flourish the concept of humanism. Tagore suggests that human nature comprises both a lower and a higher aspect. The finite aspect of man's nature Tagore describes that aspect of man which can be explained in terms of natural and environmental factors. The finite self is the natural or the ordinary man. According to Tagore, different kinds of desire that go to constitute the finite self. To fulfilment of these desires the finite individual performs his activities. Rabindranath was influenced by western civilization. He did not support the British rule's ideology directly. But he borrowed some aspects from them, especially Civilization. Tagore influenced by the Upanishad's. Through his music, he seeks the divine, paying no attention to his physical limitations. The entire cosmos brims with happiness, and Tagore uses the terms joy and love interchangeably in his writings. In this context, he referred to love as integrated essence where it is the unique state of becoming one with God. Though an abstract idea, the poet ended up claiming that love has to be personal where starting from the near ones it extends and mixes up with the entire universe- from the nearest possible contact through man to every creature, nature and ultimately the God. This not only resonates Upanishad realization but also conveys the Vaishnavite flavour of love towards God. Not in between men and women, the poet got the picture of God in nature and creatures. "*Sarvam Khalvidam Brahma*"¹ – is a matter of feeling for him, not any knowledge or theory. He fell for the Leela of God- infinite within finite, always playing in his life. He himself wrote in the preface of 'Sadhana' that he has been brought up in a family where text of the *Upanisads* is used in daily worshipness. Tagore influenced by the *bauls* and mystic saints. Tagore was deeply moved by the modest lifestyle of Baul singers who roamed, singing and dancing, perpetually immersed in the delight of existence. The Bauls held the belief that God resides in the heart of every individual. *Bauls* do not believe in on any particular forms of religion and they never use to go to any Church, temple and Masjid.. They form a way of life without any complicated religious bindings. They believe in man alone. Tagore was influenced by Buddhism also. He was

¹ Chandogya Upanishad, Chapter 3, Section 14, Verse 1 (often cited as 3.14.1 in academic translations like those by Swāmī Gambhīrānanda, R. E. Hume, or Patrick Olivelle).

SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

PEER REVIEWED

attracted to Buddhist concept of ahimsa. He was fascinated by Buddhist teaching of Maitry, *Upeksha* and *Karuna*. Tagore's humanism is a part of his feeling of unity with the whole world. Tagore concept of man is one man (Viswamanava) and his concept of world is one world (*Vasudhaivakutumbakam*). He says, "In my language the word religion has a profound meaning"². As the nature of the fire is fireness, the nature of animals is animality, like wise man's religion is his own innermost truth. True religion means man's humanity.

Vivekananda's concept of humanism:

Swami Vivekananda's philosophy is indeed deeply rooted in a combination of influences from both Eastern and Western thought, with a strong emphasis on humanism. Here are some key points from the text that further elaborate on his humanistic perspective and his view of human nature: Vivekananda was influenced by European philosophers like Hegel and Hume, but he didn't abandon Eastern philosophy. Vivekananda was a nationalist- but his nationalism was inclusive and humane. Vivekananda was strongly influenced by the Vedanta. He says, 'Man is God, he is narayana, especially the poor and ignorant. Perhaps Vivekananda was the first Indian thinker who is used the word Daridra-narayana. It means, God is manifested in the poor and the poor people are image of God, and asked us to serve them. Vivekananda's Advaita philosophy recognizes the unity of all religions into one universal Religion. The sole objective of 'universal religion' is respect for religious diversity and acceptance of religious pluralism. Vivekananda's universal religion was based on the belief that God manifests himself through all beings.

Social Equality and Oneness:

Vivekananda believed that Vedanta aimed to bring about social equality and oneness in society. His philosophy emphasized the unity of all religions and the divinity of man, which should guide all aspects of socio-political life.

Opposition to Caste Distinctions: He strongly opposed caste-based oppression and practices like child marriage, advocating for social reform and equality.

Empowerment of Women: Vivekananda also advocated for the empowerment of women, recognizing the importance of providing opportunities for them to utilize their abilities.

Material Well-being and Spirituality: Unlike Enlightenment humanism, which often focused solely on material well-being, Vivekananda believed that material well-being was a prerequisite for

² Tagore, Rabindranath. *The Religion of Man*. Macmillan and Co., 1931, p. 93.

SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

PEER REVIEWED

spiritual growth. He saw religion as having a positive role in one's life, helping individuals in all conditions, from servitude to freedom.

Bringing People Closer to God: While some forms of humanism distanced themselves from God, Vivekananda aimed to bring people closer to God through his concept of the "Divine in Man."³

Human Body and Spirituality: Vivekananda had a deep reverence for the human body, seeing it as the means through which one could attain spiritual perfection. He believed that humans had the potential to achieve a level of perfection beyond even that of angels.

Real Man vs. Apparent Man: He distinguished between the "Real Man" (the divine spirit within) and the "Apparent Man" (the limited, ego-bound self). The Real Man was seen as limitless, while the Apparent Man was bound by time, space, and causation.

Selflessness and Liberation: Vivekananda emphasized the importance of selflessness and surrendering the ego to attain liberation. He believed that when a person completely gave up their sense of self, they became one with God.

Inherent Divinity: He declared that every individual is divine, and to label someone as a sinner was a distortion of human nature. He saw all human beings as children of God, capable of realizing their divinity.

Vivekananda stresses the importance of the human body as a means to reach the ultimate goal, salvation. Vivekananda, after his vain search for various gods outside himself, comes back to realize that the God, whom he is searching for in hills and dales in every temple, in the churches and the heavens lies within himself. "I am He and He is I. None but I was God, and this little I never existed." He further claims, "The living God is within you, and yet you are building churches and temples and believing all sorts of imaginary nonsense. 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. The moment I have realized God sitting in the temple of every human body, the moment I stand in reverence before every human being and see God in him- that moment I am free from bondage, everything that binds vanishes, and I am

³ Vivekananda, Swami. Raja-Yoga. 1896. The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, vol. 1, Advaita Ashrama, 2007, pp. 120–280.

SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

PEER REVIEWED

free. He remarks in 'Practical Vedanta' You may build a temple in which to worship God and that may be good, a better one, a much higher one, already exists, the human body." ⁴

Daridra-Nārāyan:

For Swami Vivekananda 'Man is God, he is Nārāyan.' Swami Vivekananda said that everybody should be respected, including the poor. Vivekananda cried for the hungry, for the ignorant, for the suppressed, for the miserable of all nations and creeds. Indeed, poor people are not all respected and given importance. They are treated like senseless creatures. Perhaps Swami Vivekananda was the first Indian to use the word Daridra-Nārāyan. Its means, 'God manifested in the poor.' According to him, everything is part of God. Poor people are the image of God. To serve the poor people means you serve God. Vivekananda said that you have seen different people like- poor Indian, Chandal Indian, uneducated Indian that all are my brothers. He quoted- "*Bahurupe sammukhetomâr chârđi kothâ khujicha Ishwar / Jive prem kare jei jan, sei jan sebichelshwa*"⁵ that is to say, where do you search after God? He is present before you in myriad forms; One who loves all beings serves God. He further says, 'I have lost all wish for my salvation. I never wanted earthly enjoyments. I must see my machine in strong working order, and then knowing sure that I have put in a lever for the good of humanity, in India at least, which no power can drive back, I will sleep, without caring what will be next; and my I will be born again and again, and suffer thousands of miseries so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the total of all souls- and, above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species, is the special object of my worship.'

The similarities between Rabindranath and Swami Vivekananda about humanism that I have tried to find are-

- Both of them have accepted two different aspects of man.
- Tagore talk about the superiority of man over other aspects of creation.
- On the other hand, according to Vivekananda human body is higher than all other animals and all the angles.
- Both of them have seen God in man and tried to remove-suffering and ignorance of the people.
- Both of them have stressed on universalism and brotherhood.

⁴ Vivekananda, Swami. "Practical Vedanta." The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, vol. 2, Advaita Ashrama, 1997, pp. 291-332.

⁵ Tagore, Rabindranath. "Jibe Prem Kare Jei Jan". Gitabitan, vol. 1 (Puja), Visva-Bharati, 1931. Song no. 77.

SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

PEER REVIEWED

Tagore and Vivekananda easily determined what they want to understood by the term humanism. Here they want to mean that if you think good about man then you think good about God.

Concluding Remarks:

Humanism is defined as a progressive life stance that, without supernaturalism, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead meaningful, ethical lives capable of adding to the greater good of humanity. Compassion is a core value of humanism, and it's particularly relevant in healthcare. Healthcare professionals who approach their work with compassion are more likely to connect with patients, understand their needs, and provide patient-centered care. Ultimately, public health aims to promote health, prevent diseases, and improve the well-being of populations. Humanism's focus on compassion and empathy can contribute significantly to achieving these goals. Society needs to deals with following problems in participatory, consultative, supportive and rational manner: Casteism, inequalities, poor attitude towards rape and molestation, Child Labouré, mentally and physically challenges people, elderly population, Country through its parliament and political structure needs to deals with following problems in scientific, rational, parliamentary, and authoritative manner: Defective policies and program, poor implementation of laws, corruption, black money, divisive politics, etc. Health department needs to deal with following problems in rational, ethical, scientific, and responsible manners: Exploitation of patients, misconduct, discrimination with AIDS/HIV tuberculosis, poor, bankrupt, poor doctor-patients relationship, quackery, unscientific system of medicine, etc. No human being can be happy and improvement if she/he is not in peace and harmony. When humanism be accepted people are happy and develop. When you care for human beings, you start looking in all those factors which are accountable for human happiness and health such as environmental health preservation and protection of animals and birds. It can only happen when you have affectionate and universal humanism.

References:

1. Vivekananda, Swami. "The Mission of the Vedanta." *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 3, Advaita Ashrama, 1997, pp. 191–192.
2. Chandogya Upanishad, Chapter 3, Section 14, Verse 1 (often cited as 3.14.1 in academic translations like those by *Swāmī Gambhīrānanda*, R. E. Hume, or Patrick Olivelle).
3. Tagore, Rabindranath. *The Religion of Man*. Macmillan and Co., 1931, p. 93.
4. Vivekananda, Swami. *Raja-Yoga*. 1896. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 1, Advaita Ashrama, 2007, pp. 120–280.

SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

PEER REVIEWED

5. Vivekananda, Swami. "Practical Vedanta." The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, vol. 2, Advaita Ashrama, 1997, pp. 291-332.
 6. Tagore, Rabindranath. "*Jibe* Prem Kare Jei Jan". Gitabitan, vol. 1 (Puja), Visva-Bharati, 1931. Song no. 77.
 7. Swami Vivekananda (2009), (Kiran Walia, Comd.), My Ideal of Education, Kolkata: Advaita Ashram.
 8. Vivekananda, Swami. The Collected Works of Swami Vivekananda. 1989. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1994.
 9. Tagore, Rabindranath .2007. Gitanjali. Macmillian Indian Ltd.
 10. Tagore, Rabindranath. Sadhana: The Realisation of Life. The Macmillan Company, 1915.
 11. Tagore, Rabindranath. The Religion of Man, Published by Rupa.Co,New Delhi.
 12. Radhakrishnan, S. The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore. Macmillan, 1919.
 13. Lal, B. K. Contemporary Indian Philosophy. Motilal Banarsidass, 1973.
-