

The Study of Humanism in Philosophical Thought: An Analysis

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Abstract: Humanism as an idea and doctrine has western origin. It came up as a movement against the pessimistic attitude developed with man as the consequence of the second world-war. The sixteenth century humanism is known as renaissance humanism which attempted in reminding man regarding his potency and creativity to face the life with optimistic attitude. But humanism in the doctrinal form came up as the reaction against religious authoritarianism and supernaturalism in twentieth century (1907) in the writings of Schiller (F. C. S). It was followed by other notable humanists like, Falconer (1924), A.H. Dakin (1939), Garhringer (1955), Julian Huxley (1961), Corliss Lamont (1965) etc. In the same century two Indian thinkers have also advocated in support of humanistic doctrines, namely, scientific humanism and new humanism. The former has been advocated by J. Nehru (1946) and the later by M. N. Roy (1981). The paper aims at the exposition and analysis of such two Indian humanistic doctrines.

Keywords: Democracy, Socialism, Human potency and dignity, revolution, Scientific temper.

I. INTRODUCTION

Indian thought and tradition are highly spiritualistic. That is why when the question of the development of humanistic doctrines is raised the picture of classical India or medieval India does not come to fore front. But there has been conspicuous development of humanistic thoughts and recommendations for humanistic doctrines in Indian soil found especially among few of the contemporary Indian thinkers of twentieth century. Humanistic doctrines recommended by Jawaharlal Nehru and Manabendra Nath Roy are known as 'Scientific Humanism' and 'New Humanism' respectively. The aim of this paper is to reflect upon the basic features of their humanistic doctrines and also to bring out a critical estimate of these two doctrines.

Nehru's Scientific Humanism

It is an established truth that Nehru has advocated in support a humanistic doctrine. Nehru did not admit the possibility and supremacy of any supernatural reality and also he had no reliance on faith factor. His basic understanding was that man has the potentiality to face his problems and man alone is the maker of his destiny. Thus, there is no doubt that he had inclination for humanistic ideology. The term 'scientific humanism' appeared in his book "*Discovery of India*"ⁱ specifying his category of humanism.

Nehru's choice for humanism is not accidental one. It was the best possible alternative for him as against the preferences for the metaphysical idealisms or sticking to sciences only for the cause of social developments. Both are having their functions at different levels. But for the real growth of the society there is the necessity of humanism for Nehru. He has clearly said that "Whatever ultimate reality may be and whether we can ever grasp it whole or in part, there certainly appears to be vast possibilities of increasing human knowledge, even though this may be partly or largely subjective, and of applying this to the advancement and betterment of human living and social organization."ⁱⁱ For him the antagonism between science and morality is not there. Rather those can be combined for human good. Nehru had the distinct plan of combining the moral values with progressive scientific attitude to diminishing the danger to humanity. In this context Praharaj makes it clear that "There is nothing unscientific about ethical or aesthetic enquiry, they are not merely speculative and subjective. But science and ethics have relevance to human situations. The significant difference between these, is that whereas science is based on experimentation, ethical or aesthetic pursuit, is mainly grounded in observational-cum-valuational procedures."ⁱⁱⁱ Regarding the limitations of science he has said that science has treated man to be mere an organism. Similarly the belief in supernatural agency has also carries the difficulties like developing narrow out-look of intolerance, 'superstition, emotionalism and irrationalism'.

Nehru agrees with the common understanding about humanism that it stands for exploring human potential for the cause of human welfare and human dignity. Man has to shape his own destiny by following that kind of ideals which can practically help human beings in his peaceful dignified existence. For this purpose, Nehru feels that neither metaphysics nor religion can help man. Even he says that it is not the invention of science which can help in this regard. He considers

that the proper attitude should be emphasizing on human potentialities along with the scientific spirit. Then we can reach at a new kind of approach, which can be called scientific humanism. He writes that “We have to function in the line with the highest ideals of the age we live in. These ideals may be classified under two heads. Humanism and scientific spirit, scientific spirit is different from scientific method. There is a growing synthesis between humanism and scientific spirit resulting in a kind of scientific humanism”⁴

Scientific temper

Nehru did not attach any importance on the reality of the self or on the reality of the material world. For him there should not be any other reality other than the existence and sustenance of human race itself. Peaceful existence of mankind is the ideal goal before mankind. Be it a philosophical doctrine or a scientific discovery, if it has nothing to do in solving problems concerning peaceful existence of man then it is useless or irrelevant. He has suggested that inventions of science if completely unconcerned with moral considerations and future of man then it will be dangerous. Remaining unconcerned with ethics scientists may treat man to be an object of the world or mere a part of the nature. Such scientists will also remain unconcerned with human values. Science should not aim at the random search after new truths. In this background the attitude for social development should be there and concern for social values should also be there. Therefore, he suggests that when moral considerations are mixed with scientific attitudes it can be treated as ‘scientific temper’. Scientific temper along with humanistic goals will lead to scientific humanism. According to him such a doctrine can be a useful one to guide the establishment of a good society.

In this context it is important to point out that Nehru has shown his concern for a definite form of Govt. i.e. a democratic form of Government which will help man to decide with whom the political power should remain. Further he feels that since equality, especially economic equality is an extremely important factor for the peaceful existence of man the need of a socialistic pattern of the society cannot be ignored. Thus, we can see that he has shaped his socio-political thought such a manner that one can find proper foundations of scientific humanism in it. Thus, in the humanism of Nehru socialism and democracy are seen foundational factors. Democracy and Socialism happen to be the two postulates of scientific humanism of Nehru.

Socialism and Democracy

Nehru’s emphasis on a socialistic pattern of the society is evident. Nehru has opted socialism to remove most of the human sufferings; so he has clearly said that socialism is not merely to act against the capitalistic attitude but also proposes a social reconstruction. For him here the dignity of the individual is reconciled with the economic and social justice which leads to democratic socialism. Obviously, it depicts the presence of humanistic elements in his approach. His view is ‘socialism is not something more than an economic doctrine, it is a philosophy of life and such also it appeals to me’ shows to what extent he has shown his concern for the causes of humanistic living and society.

Nehru’s conception of democracy happens to be a stepping stone to his scientific humanism. Scholar, T. Patnaik⁵ considers that both socialism and democracy are two postulates of humanism. But according to Nehru democracy is “a mental approach applied to our political and economic problem” shows to what extent democracy is supportive of humanism. It can be well imagined that if human dignity and potency can be best utilized and protected then it would be democracy. It may be noted that democracy assures the freedom, liberty and the rights of individuals. It is only in a democratic set up men are free to plan their life style, choose professions and utilize their creativity in constructive manner. Above all in democracy the power lies in hands of common man that helps in the protection of human interest. In this context Mohanty rightly suggests that through democratic socialism Nehru wanted “There should be a new civilization in which every man will develop a socialist outlook i.e. ‘to live and to let others live’ and a new society in which competition and conflict will be replaced by co-operation, equality and justice.”⁶

It can be said about Nehru’s doctrine of humanism that its primary aim is the pragmatic approach to human problems. He has not taken resort of theoretical speculations or developed a blind craze towards the scientific discoveries. He has developed a strong optimism through his scientific humanism to restore human dignity by the help of best possible practical means.

M.N. Roy’s New Humanism

M.N. Roy preferred to name his doctrine to be ‘new humanism’ but scholars have understood it to be ‘radical humanism’. Roy when felt that the communist manifesto could not succeed in achieving its goal he tried to suggest the method of minimizing the human miseries protecting the interest of the mankind through his doctrine of humanism. He has held that “The era of proletarian revolution heralded by Communist Manifesto and believed to have been actually inaugurated by Russian Revolution, has thus opened up the perspective not of a higher civilization; the perspective is positively apocalyptic.” In this context Praharaj write that “But he was not pessimistic for the failure of the Communist Manifesto. His strong sense of optimism and his original thinking was in search of a method which can reconstruct the society by minimizing human miseries. As a social philosopher it was his prime aim to bring changes in the existing society, where

the interest of the entire mankind can be protected. It was his consideration that such a state can be achieved only through a radical measure, i.e., the revolutionary method, for the purpose he has declared an alternative manifesto which is termed as 'New Humanism' by him." Thus, he thought that social change is possible through a revolutionary method, he has used the word 'radical' for his alternative manifesto 'New Humanism'.

His emphasis on science was extremely clear from his statement "Science in higher thing than philosophy. But philosophy needs not to be degraded, if it is conceived as the sum total of scientific knowledge."⁷ For this reason few have said his theory to be 'scientific humanism'.

According to him scientific knowledge is the only means of finding rational knowledge. There is nothing secret or mysterious about the living organisms. He says that "The mystery of man has been solved by modern biology. Man is the outcome of biological evolution. Man's rationality and moral sense, which are causally connected, are the expression of cosmic harmony."⁸ Thus science can analyze all phenomena about living beings. Biology does not sanction the presence of a soul in the body. So, there is nothing spiritual in man. He has dealt with the concept of man in relation to its place in Nature. He has strongly denied the spiritualism and promotes in support of the utilization of the scientific knowledge to safe guard human society, human race and human surroundings. The survival of the human race and Nature is of prime importance for man which can be possible through scientific means. That is why some scholars have preferred to treat his radical or new humanism to be scientific humanism.

Philosophical revolution

According to him social revolution is essential for the freedom of the individual. The social revolution is the philosophical revolution for him. For him philosophical revolution does not suggest any extraordinary measures for the philosophical analysis of concepts. Rather philosophy should be the utilization of the scientific knowledge in proper manner for the betterment of the society. This is the adoption of a new philosophical method to which he called the new humanism. The traditional metaphysical issues about truth, reality, etc. are no more metaphysical, rather epistemological. Those should be a part of human knowledge. But as those are least helpful for better way living of man, to create better hope for man and to bring solutions to the living problems of human beings, such intellectual exercise should not be encouraged widely.

He considers that man is essentially good and rational. Had it not been so no social change would ever be possible? The rationality of man can catch the messages of philosophy to give up selfishness and self-interest. Due to ignorance man is unable to utilize it properly. Those qualities are not permanently present with man. Man can utilize those qualities only when he realizes the relation between man and the society.

II. CONCLUSION

Man, initially lack proper philosophical education. He can obtain the philosophical knowledge that constitutes the knowledge about man's place in the society and Nature. This new-social-philosophy is new-humanism elements. Out of the two theories of humanisms developed in India in twentieth century one is by name scientific but the approach is sociological and in the other 'scientific' does not occur whereas the approach is based on scientific knowledge. Nehru was really in search of some living philosophy which he saw with the scientific humanism. One of the significant aspects of Nehru's approach that he has attempted to bring a "balance between the body and the spirit and man as the part of the nature and man as part of the society"⁹ On the other hand in Roy's humanism there is the strong denial of spiritualistic background and a definite recommendation of scientific knowledge. His doctrine because of the denial of metaphysics, spiritualism and over emphasis on nature and scientific knowledge there is no problem to be treated as science based humanism or scientific humanism.

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