

# Humanism: A Short View in Western and Indian Backdrop

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## ABSTRACT

Humanism is a view of human beings leading a moral and democratic life in which every person has the right to give direction and shape to every aspect of life according to his wish. Human beings can determine right and wrong by humanistic theory by appealing to human virtues and dignity as well as rationality. The Humanity is a successful attempt to live mankind's life that does not consider any kind of moral or value power above humanity, it rejects religion and believes in human effort more than anything. It refers to the study of the activities of human life rather than the animal life and focuses on it and is devoted to the concerns of mankind. If humanism is understood in a specific sense, then it is devoted to all those studies at any time including the present which are related to the life, literature and, thoughts of ancient Greece and, Rome. Abraham Maslow Humanism works to determine the norms, ideals, and standards in human life and many human values are also followed by a human in life such as truth, non-violence, celibacy, and secularism.

**Keywords:** Humanism, Renaissance, humanities, Petrarch.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Humanism an Introduction

Humanism is a view of human beings leading a moral and democratic life in which every person has the right to give direction and shape to every aspect of life according to his wish. Humanity is a successful attempt to live mankind's life. One who believes that human beings are capable of finding solutions to their problems and they can also solve these problems through the scientific method. Human beings can determine right and wrong by humanistic theory by appealing to human virtues and dignity as well as rationality. The Humanism as we know does not support theism and at the same time does not accept real supernatural ideas. (Kumar.K)

Humanism does not consider any kind of moral or value power above humanity, it rejects religion and believes in the human effort. According to Collins humanism “rejects religion and promotes the advancement of humanity by man's effort.” Humanism refers to the study of the activities of human life rather than animal life and focuses on it and is devoted to the concerns of mankind.

### **Defined Humanism**

Some of the features of humanism that we can describe based on the above definitions are as follows:

1. Humanism seems to be linked to the interests, welfare, and needs of all human beings irrespective of any constraints such as nationality, creed, and caste.
2. It seems to be the study of the humanities in learning the liberal arts.
3. Humanism looks far away from religion.
4. The basic nature of man is good, it seems to point towards that.
5. The progress of humanity is possible only through the efforts given by reason. It seems that it is more important to solve the human problem by reason than religious beliefs.
6. Humanistic philosophy and approach that focuses on human thought systems and attitudes to life, placing human abilities, ideas, values, dignity, and interests as paramount.
7. Humanism believes in knowledge gained in human life only by scientific methods or in empirical shreds of evidence by the man himself and this is the reason why it does not believe in supernatural or divine things, due to which it becomes a semi-religious philosophy.
8. Humanists aim to bring liberal human values to the mass. These liberal human values are in themselves knowledge, affection, kindness, Co-operation, creativity, love of nature, enjoyment of life, democracy, secularism, social development, adventure, education, etc. (Oluwatosin Ajayi)

### **Renaissance Humanism**

The term humanism, which comes from the Latin concept of humanity, is similar to philosophy, art, history, and literature of the 21st century. The term was first used by Cicero to describe the values associated with education. The name was reused by the studio "Eumenisti" humanitatis during the Renaissance in the 14th century. The study of which was extended in the 15th century through the professors and students of humanity in classical literature. It includes many subjects such as moral philosophy, history, poetry, philosophy, rhetoric, grammar, etc. which was a branch related to classical studies. Humanism defined the educational and political ideal at the intellectual level. It is also seen as a word to enhance knowledge. Through this period human emphasized potential, majesty, and worth were emphasized and showed well. Renaissance humanists studied ancient philosophies, poets, and historians based on their belief that the center of the universe is a human. If humanism is understood in a specific sense, then it is devoted to all those studies at any time, including the present, which are related to life, literature, and thoughts of ancient Greece and Rome. A close look reveals that the word humanism do not hold any conflicting views in all the senses given above, rather all of them tried to understand the word "*Humanism*" by cooperation. ([Grudin](#)) We can learn about humanism by reading the humanist views of some of the thinkers given below-

### **Petrarch (20 July 1304-19 July 1374)**

Born in Florence, Italy, Petrarch was deeply interested in the Latin language and ancient Roman history. Petrarch is known as the "*First modern scholar*" and "*Father of Humanity*". He started the humanist movement in which he reconciled two of his great ideals- Christianity and the classical culture of ancient Greece and Rome, rationalizing. Cicero use to write letters in an elegant style that

drew Petrarch's attention to human concerns and encouraged him to become the first writer in modern literature. Petrarch often wrote his thoughts, feelings, and failures rather than writing on religious subjects like ancient scholars. He debated with his close friend Boccaccio and other poets to find out their views on what constitutes good literature. Petrarch's humanism can be known through his poems, stories, essays, and letters, and through all these ancient pagans was able to see and understand the Roman period. In his life Petrarch wrote more than 500 letters, most of whom were humanitarian. He also wrote letters to Cicero and Vergil. The Italian Renaissance had a lot of impetus in the field of literature and art, which reached its peak after the death of Petrarch. (Constitutional Right Foundation. "Human Glory Is Enough for Me: Petrarch.")

### **Giovanni Boccaccio (16 June 1313-21 December 1375)**

Boccassian humanism tried to unite the two different lives by its definition, be it the mysticism of Dante or the extraordinary perfection or sweetness of Petrarch. He was far more complete in all of these. An important part of Boccaccio's life was his humanism and through this, he gained his place in the history of literature. The "Decameron" is a world philosophy book written by Boccaccio in Italy in the 14th century. It is full of life's many situations, variation, seriousness, sadness, adventure, and heroism and is like a true mirror of life that tells the life of that time. So this book is full of human thoughts. Influenced by Petrarch's modernity, Boccaccio revived his labor and the teachings of the past, and his humanism developed the importance of a higher and intellectual love rather than a simple love of human nature. ([Headstorm](#). Book "The Open Court." pp.181-86)

### **Desiderius Erasmus (27 October 1469–12 July 1536)**

Erasmus of Rotterdam, who was a teacher and thinker, and who made a permanent mark in history due to his educational thought, attracted the attention of other humanists for five consecutive centuries. In his texts, it was difficult to separate educational and religious thinking from humanistic thinking. Erasmus dedicated his most famous work, "Moria Encomium" to Moore who was a good friend of Erasmus and who was bound by the love of antiquity and had a general interest in humanistic studies. The common feature of Erasmus's ideas was his universality in which he mentioned the general determinant of humanity. He translated and developed antiquity, biblical and patriotic literature into intellectual production so that scholars and clergy could take advantage of it and in this way, he devoted his life to humanism. ([Wronska](#))

### **Abraham Maslow (1 April 1908-8 June 1970)**

Abraham Maslow, was one of the inspiring and founding leaders of human psychology and the human environment. He was historically a well-known psychologist who made a significant contribution to the development of human psychology and because of this he further propounded the theory of human needs what people know as Maslow's hierarchy of needs. In this, he described human beings to be motivated by five levels of needs which includes:

- 1 Physical needs** like food, water, shelter, clothing, sleep, rest, breeding or delivery, etc.
- 2 Security requirements** like safety from the hazardous physical and social conditions, etc.
- 3 Related needs** like the need for adore, to be a part of a family group, peer group, friendship group, etc.

**4 Need for respect** like the need for status, identity, fame, the compliment, strong belief, etc.

**5 Need for self-realization** like the need for the development of innate brilliancy, achievement, modality, feasibility, etc.

Thus, the method given by Maslow emphasizes that these basic needs should be emphasized before any other community needs in human life and these basic needs essentially serve as a good foundation on which the needs of human society are laid. (Aruma)



*Fig 1: Maslow's Need of hierarchy ([Maslow Free Stock Images](#))*

### **Humanism from an Indian perspective**

From the conclusion of the Mahabharata, we learn that the secret of Brahma lies in accepting that “Man is the supreme creation of the creator of this universe.” The thinkers of the West also fully agree that human beings are the most wonderful and best among all the living beings on this earth and only that which is best able to express the totality. Philosophy also believes that nature is also infinite and eternal like this world, soul, and spirit. India, which is famous all over the world for its unique ancient civilization and culture and which focuses on humanism based on the philosophy of “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam” has been well defined in Sanskrit Literature. Ancient India, a country of rich culture, which is considered to be the most important of the values created by God, is a rich country, the wars fought here have also been based on values like the war fought in Kurukshetra was also a war fought for values. Dharmashastra, Vedas, Upanishads, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagavad Geeta, Viduranitisataka, Sukraniti, Chanakya's Arthashastra, Manusmriti, Ethics composed by Bharathari are works full of human and moral values. Humanism works to determine

the norms, ideals, and standards of human life and many human values are also followed in life of human such as truth, non-violence, celibacy, and secularism. (Sen)

We can know Indian humanism by studying the thoughts of some Indian thinkers given below-

### **Gautama Buddha (563-483 BC)**

Gautama Buddha, who emerge in ancient India in the 6th century BC is considered unique among the founders of all religions in special ways. He never claimed that he was almighty or a messenger of God, nor did he ever claim to be an all-wise teacher. Buddha regarded the experience as a source of self-criterion and desired to see both as one. Buddha used to give teachings based on simple and practical truth, i.e. *as we do so we become*. From his teachings, we get to know more about compassion, brotherly love, religion, and fairness. The Buddha, after accomplishing knowledge, propagated his realization with the hope of improving the interests of mortal well-being. Buddha's life was spent helping man's sorrows, concerns, and sympathies for humanity as well as his troubles. Humanism in Buddhism gives primary importance to the faculty of human supernatural aspirations, affairs, and well-being. Buddhism, along with spirituality, practices such lofty duties as compassion towards all, friendship and happiness, and indifference to the happiness of others (Kumar)

### **Rabindranath Tagore(7 May 1861-7 August 1941)**

Rabindranath Tagore was a famous verse-maker, author, instrumentalist, the soloist, religious philosopher, and also the founder of an empirical school at Shantiniketan. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in the field of literature for which he was the first non-European. He was a believer in humanity and an ardent admirer of the Buddha's doctrines as a disciple of the human religion. In his collection of essays on Sadhna, "The Realization of Life", he says that the Upanishad verses and the Buddha's teachings have always been a matter of the soul to me. His life was greatly influenced by the great epics of Ramayana, Mahabharata, and the mystic sages of the Middle Ages, and even exposed the most distinctive ideas of the Indian Renaissance in his writings. "The Sanskrit Buddhist Literature of Nepal" by Rajendra Mitra shaped Tagore's life as a true Buddhist follower. The social caste system, colorism, and the current of untouchability in human life caused great pain to Tagore like a Buddha because both had deep and equal love for humanity. Tagore said that to know our own life we have to know Dharma and also follow it in life. Tagore accepts the meaning of religion as the acceptance of spirituality.(Sharma)

### **Mohandas K. Gandhi(2 October 1869-30 January 1948)**

Mohandas K. Gandhi was born in Porbandar, a small village in the Indian state of Gujarat. If we see from a Gandhian humanistic point of view, humanism means paramount to human welfare. If one can best protect humanism, it is the spirit of liberty, equality, and fraternity that he has achieved. That's why no one should be harassed or discriminated on the basis of caste, birth, religion, wealth, or health, it will be against humanity. The violence of any kind was strongly opposed in Gandhism and instead offered love and non-violence. Gandhian humanism is based on some basic elements like Truth, Love, Sarvodaya, Service, Non-violence, and Satyagraha in which non-violence has been a central concept.

**According to Gandhian humanism we can see these basic elements:**

**Prem** Through empathy or love, we can pay attention to the thoughts or beliefs of others and discover the truth we need an open mind. We do not allow new ideas to enter our minds in life due to pre-filled assumptions and consider others to be ignorant. But through empathy, the doors of the closed mind can be opened and we are ready to listen and understand others. Love plays a very important role in the Gandhian plan of humanism. According to Gandhi, "God is love and truth is love."

**Sarvodaya** Gandhian humanism says that if I can praise one I should also be able to praise another. Our interdependence in life is like a three-legged race in which we want to win the race! If I am healthy and my partner is sick if my nutrition is good but my partner is starving if I am big and strong, while my partner is unequal, and I am free to run, but he cannot run, how can I win a race? So a fundamental basis of Sarvodaya humanity is the spirit of co-existence.

**Seva** It would not be wrong to say that service is part of love and service because through the love we can overcome the ego that comes into our life. Along with this, we can get away from our selfishness and greed and we are filled with a sense of sharing. Taking care of someone, sharing love, and sacrifice for him is a kind of service, so we are dedicated to the service of the one we love. Service is just a hollow word or slogan spoken with the lips without the feeling of love or service without love is only an autocratic mechanical duty. True love is reflected in the life of man through service. Regarding the "test of love", Gandhi said, "it is a penance which means self-suffering." and this service should not be conditional. In Bhagwat Gita, service is prescribed as a desire without any compensation. (Naidu)

**Satya** To know the truthful life of Gandhi, we can take support from his autobiography "The Story of My Experience with Truth" written by him. According to Gandhi, truth must be included in every domain of our life, whether it is our speech, thought, or action. Various forms of truth have been revealed in ancient scriptures and verses of Hinduism such as "Satyanasti Paro Dharma" that is there is no religion greater than truth. He believed that two sets of the same thing can be known as Truth and God. Initially, Gandhi accepted the concept of "God is Truth" but after some years he realized that it is appropriate to say "Truth is God". Gandhi a follower of Shankara, explains the difference between relative truth and absolute truth through his philosophy with the example of an elephant and seven blind men who try to express their opinion about the elephant by touching it. So the state of truth is also like the empirical knowledge acquired by some of these blind people in human life. Gandhi said that the absence of spiritual and moral development means the negation of truth. (Dezso)

**Ahimsa** Gandhi consider that non-violence is a cult because he believes that he must follow the ideal of non-violence in all walks of life to the best of his ability. Gandhi does not support non-violence only in the absence of violence. According to him, it is a positive situation which is love in itself. According to Gandhi, exceptions are not accepted in the ideal of non-violence and should not be reduced to any external weakness. Is violence possible in the spirit of love? Gandhi was once asked such a question, his answer was No, Never. Sometimes violence may have to be administered in the

spirit of love and Gandhian philosophy also allows this. Violence was never justified in Gandhi's philosophy, but sometimes he considered violence to be inevitable in life. (Haksar)

### **M.N.Roy (21 March 1887-25 January 1954)**

Narendra Nath Bhattacharya is also known as Manabendra Nath Roy. He was a famous 20th-century Indian philosopher, a radical activist, political theorist, and the Marxist revolutionary. Roy was the founder of the Communist Party of India which followed Western philosophy and Marxism in India. The radical humanism presented by Roy was based on the spiritual and material approach which studies Gandhian non-violence, morality, and truth. Roy's Marxist humanism was radical from a scientific and rational point of view but not fundamentalist. Roy's radical humanism has nothing to do with religion and at the same time, he completely rejects religious ecstasy. Roy learned from the failure of Marxism and Communism in Russia that man's freedom, his rationality, and the basic features of his nature, ignoring these, the solution to problems cannot be found only by searching for economic factors. That's why he considered freedom as the most basic urge for human beings. (SIBI)

The concept of New Humanism was introduced by Roy when he realized the need for a new humanistic approach to the modern problems of the modern age. New Humanism emphasizes the sovereignty of man and accepts the value of reason and morality as well as spiritual freedom. Roy emphasized bringing revolution through education which was advocated by the moderates and liberals at the beginning. He talks of achieving his humanist revolution gradually through education rather than violence or armed rebellion. According to Roy, "Individuals precede society and this should be the core idea of a new revolutionary social philosophy and individual liberty should be given priority over any organization." Initially, influenced by the philosophy of Karl Marx, Roy, upon deep reflection, found that Marxism was based on a particular class struggle. That's why he later stopped believing this theory. Roy said that when a man lives in society, how will he be able to live a life in solidarity by fighting with another class? (Mahakul)

### **Conclusion**

As a conclusion, we can say that life can be seen as a synonym for humanity because humanity has absorbed its existence in human life itself. Whether we talk about Petrarch, Erasmus, Cicero, or Buddha and Gandhi, the main aim of all is to elevate humanity. With their efforts, all of them tried to bring aliveness to human beings along with humanity in every sphere of life, whether it be art, literature, music, sculpture human values, medicine, etc. They did not see humanity as a by-product of man but called it an important part of human life.

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