

## Society, Human Freedom and the Search for Peace

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**Abstract:** Only philosophy can look into the present day issues from an impartial, objective, fair and dispassionate angle. Peace is a condition of society under which people are able to resolve their conflicts without violence and can work together to improve the quality of their lives. The essential fact is that man naturally belongs to a society and that without it he cannot exist at all. Value system is the backbone of a civilized society. Value is the criterion to make man 'human'. Every morning when we read newspaper we are confronted with some sad news like violence, crime, military action, rape etc. In these modern times it is clear that one's precious life is not safe. Universal humanism is essential to solve global problems. We have to remake our mind and thoughts to pave the way for a better tomorrow. For world peace we have to make an attempt to restore moral values. Life has no remote external agent to introduce coveted change, rather life undergoes change by him who 'lives' that life. Man has the power within him to make a significant change in his life as well as the lived world.

**Keywords:** Human Values, Man, Society, Morality, Freedom, Remaking of mind, Human relations, Faith in man.

Philosophy is a theory or attitude that acts as a guiding principle for behaviour. Philosophy is not only an academic inquiry or an intellectual discipline alone; it is an approach, an outlook and a way of life. Philosophy has two sides - theoretical and practical. Only philosophy can look into present day issues from an impartial, objective, fair and dispassionate angle. From very ancient times philosophy goes hand in hand with ethics or moral philosophy with some code of conduct for the betterment of individual as well as society. Each of us live as a part of society and a unit of society is the individual. Every individual needs peace to live in society as well as the world at large.

Roughly speaking, peace is the situation where people are able to resolve their conflicts without violence and can work together to improve the quality of their lives. Not only that in a peaceful situation, man can solve all conflicts by non-violence and love. Non-violence is not a weapon of the weak. It has two aspects – individual and social. It fosters co-operation and cooperative progress. Progress without co-operation is never possible. Co-operation is possible only when there is no violence. Non-violence is an active force by which a peaceful world may

be attained. The problem of the attainment of peace has become the prime concern of mankind down the ages.

The modern world is facing a multidimensional crisis, a crisis that poses challenge to each and every aspect of our life. So peace is far away. For peace, first we have to attempt for restoration of moral values among the people living in society. The term 'value' is one of the commonest in our present day speech and writing. But we do not seem to be very clear as to what it is and how it is inculcated. It is a big philosophical question. According to M.N.Roy, a Marxist philosopher and the propounder of New-humanism, ".....we come to believe that values appeal to our feelings rather than to our understanding, that the process involved in value-formation is emotional rather than intellectual. There is the constant controversy regarding the categories of facts and categories of values, whether the values derive from facts, and regarding the source and sanction of moral obligation."<sup>1</sup> Value system is the backbone of a civilized society. People with human values only can prove helpful in the formation of a 'civilised' society. The inculcation of human values in man is most necessary requirement of the human society.

So value is the criterion to determine man as a human. Only man is able to build up a value-based society. Value-based society may build up a man's universe. We can found world peace only in man's universe. With the manifold crisis of the present day, we must hope that the world of tomorrow will be, a society of man based on non-violence and LOVE.

In this paper, I intend to discuss *Society, Human Freedom and the Search for Peace* which is ingrained in and expressed by the Nature of Man, Sociality of Man, Morality of Man, Freedom of Man which ultimately leads to World Peace.

## I

Man is the centre of the universe. Man as a free living and thinking being in this world holds a highest position. Ups and downs, rise and fall of the human civilisation – all have been brought out by man. Man is the maker of his own fate. Man is the measure of all things.

Man is a species-being. Man is also a social being. It means that he knows that he is a man and behaves like other men. Man is conscious of his membership in his community. He is also conscious of his behaviour as social being. Being a species-being man is not only conscious of himself as man, but also conscious of being a member of a certain community. His idea of

himself is the idea of a being living and working in a community of a certain kind. He is not only conscious that he is a social being having and maintaining certain relations that are socially defined and behaving in a socially defined way, but also he is conscious that he is doing so. Hence, consciousness presupposes "sociality" of man. As consciousness presupposes social intercourse, it also assumes the currency of language to help man to communicate with other members of society. Marx says "Consciousness is from the very beginning a social product and remains so as long as men exist at all."<sup>2</sup>

As a species-being man treats himself as the present, living species, as a universal and consequently free being because his activity is free activity.

Man is free in the sense that he is free to make choices among the alternatives, free to contemplate over them and to contemplate over the situation he is facing in such activities. He is free in the sense that he has the ability to become an initiator of change in nature, in himself and in society. Man can do everything.

Man is not merely a creature of nature but he embodies the principle of 'unity' in himself. Man is a distinct creature, not because he is able to meet his biological needs, rather, it is because of the fact that there is a surplus factor in man's consciousness i.e. in his thinking, feeling and willing which transcends his inner self from his biological boundary. Man's creativity lies in his capacity to channelise his life-force and energy towards joyous creativity and all-embracing humanity. It is because of this that man's identity is bipolar. One pole is formed by man's biological nature and the other pole, by his spiritual nature. The first one is called the finite aspect of man and the second one is his infinite aspect. Both the aspects are combined in man. Rabindranath is very clear about this in his book *Sādhanā*. He writes, "AT ONE POLE of my being I am one with stocks and stones. There I have to acknowledge the rule of universal law. That is where the foundation of my existence lies, deep down below. Its strength lies in its being held firm in the clasp of the comprehensive world, and in the fullness of its community with all things.

But at the other pole of my being I am separate from all. There I have broken through the cordon of equality and stand alone as an individual."<sup>3</sup>

Rabindranath says that the finite and infinite characters co-exist in man. One is incomplete without the other. The finite entity contains the infinite. The concept of infinite has a spiritual

angle, but it also implies the transcendence of finite nature of man to reach societal outlook. In fact, man's bio-polar nature has made him social and promoted him to form society in the history of civilisation.

## II

The essential fact is that man has always belonged to a society and that without it he cannot exist at all. When we speak of society as related to the individual, we have in mind no special type of society – it may be the society of a tribe, the family or any other group in which man has lives. Man fulfilled his desires in society. Man flourished his unfolded many possibilities in relation to society. So society is origin of man. In this context Pascual Gisbert says, "That man has not only a *capacity* for social life but also an *intrinsic need* of it, is a self-obvious fact. Emotional development, intellectual maturity, the necessity of a certain amount of material goods and comforts for the full exercise of his liberty and progress in self-perfection, are unthinkable without society. No human being is known to have normally developed in isolation."<sup>4</sup>

It is true that the life of the individual is relative throughout to the social unity to which he belongs. It is none the less true that it is in the personality of individuals that the social unity is realised. According to Mackenzie, ".....though it is an error to think of an individual as having a life of his own independent society, it is not an error to think of the individual life (realised within a social unity) as an absolute and supreme end in itself."<sup>5</sup> In view of this supreme end, individual man's existence is always related to other man and meaningful in relation to society.

Emphasising on the social status of man Karl Marx has given importance to the society of man not to individual man. Yet he does not underestimate the role of individual man in his revolutionary thought to change the world. He rightly observes that in order to change the class-divided social system the struggle of individual human being was not sufficient. Intended change might be possible only by the struggles of collective human beings. Nevertheless in the situation of the struggle of united mass the free development of every individual member of a society should not be ignored. As we read in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, "In the place of old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all."<sup>6</sup>

Ernst Fischer thinks that according to Marx, ".....man is a unique individual."<sup>7</sup> This

uniqueness of man is as much a communal being as a unique whole. An individual being is incomplete without collective people of society. An individual being enjoys his freedom and rights, and manifests the potentialities within only in a society of collective people, only being related with another individual. So individual and society of collective people is the two sides of a same coin one is meaningless without the other.

But today we have conquered distance. We are no longer living as isolated individuals. Man should be related to other man and society of collective people. However, let us not forget the truths that the centre of all consciousness lies within the individual, no matter whether it is individual consciousness or collective consciousness. To realise the dream of world peace it is necessary to refine the individual thoughts and consciousness. This kind of refinement may be possible only through the awakening morality of man.

### III

No doubt man is a part of nature, and it follows from this that all the urges of man, including those which lead to moral behaviour, have a natural origin. Morality thus has a biological origin. According to V.M.Tarkunde, "A human individual could not have survived except in the society of his fellow beings, and it was therefore necessary that he should be possessed of these impulses which contribute to social harmony."<sup>8</sup> Since the biological origin, rational purpose of moral values is to enable individual human beings to have a cooperative social existence.

The term 'morality' or the 'moral code' is sometimes taken for those rules of behaviour which are admitted at large in a community. In this sense it is equivalent to the *mores* whose content is purely social and mostly coincides with custom, fashion, and attitude. Its sanction comes also from society and is as manifold as are the social ways.

The human world is the moral world. This is not a blind belief rather a truism. Denial of morality leads man to a horrible life. Man cannot live properly in his world without morality. Morality is the basis of human society and man's universe.

Moral development does not mean freedom from action rather his deliverance depends on an unselfish devotion to work. Man must enjoy freedom of attitude towards his inward standpoint. In fact, all the existing things are dependent upon each other. Nothing is independent in this world. Nilima Sharma, a commentator of contemporary Indian Philosophy, rightly says, "Man's moral life develops through law. Man can be morally perfect by purification and

refinement and not by repudiating the law.”<sup>9</sup>

Human beings are nothing else but what they make of themselves. It follows that everyone is wholly and solely responsible for everything he does. Responsibility in Sartre’s moral philosophy has also another dimension. In choosing for himself man is implicitly choosing for others. That is to say, as he is solely responsible to him for his free action, he is also responsible to others for this. Sartre, the existentialist philosopher, writes, “The essential consequence of our earlier remarks is that man being condemned to be free carries the weight of the whole world on his shoulders; he is responsible for the world and for himself as a way of being.”<sup>10</sup> What is meant by this dimension of responsibility is that whenever I am doing any action with my free choice, I am prescribing the same course of action to the rest of humanity. The most important factor of man’s rise in the world is morality, because his moral consciousness provokes him to be free from his present existence. By exercising freedom man can step up his position.

#### IV

Freedom is not a negative concept. It is a positive one. Freedom does not consist merely of freedom from restraint. It includes freedom from want and insecurity. Freedom can be equated with the individual’s ability to live as a human being, as a being endowed with intelligence, emotion and imagination. As V.M.Tarkunde says, “ The urge for freedom, derived from the basic biological urge for existence, is the basic human value. It is the value for which all other values are derived.”<sup>11</sup>

Man is born free. As an individual, man can apply his freedom in every step of his life. Descartes, the father of modern western philosophy, thought that the question of freedom is fundamental to man. Man has freedom to accept universal rules of the world by reason. According to him, man is not perfect, he is not infinite. His imperfection and finitude awakens the desire for perfection and infinitude in his mind. So in the philosophy of Descartes we find freedom as a moral category.

Freedom is the fundamental right of man. To Kant “the notion of ‘right’ derives from the concept of freedom as applied to the external relations among persons.”<sup>12</sup> Going to apply his freedom he has to face many obstacles and oppositions. Although, freedom is our guiding force to reach our goal. Freedom always related to responsibility. Whenever I am doing any action with my free choice, I am prescribing the same course of action to the rest of humanity.

Only man can take responsibility. Only man may enjoy freedom. Man is born free. Freedom is the first condition of his every action.

V

In today's world we see that certain issues are constantly being highlighted and labeled as the most significant problems of our time. For example, some people are emphasising the threat of global warming and climate change. No doubt these are the problems. But we should concern about the security, it is the most crucial demand of our time. Mirza Masroor Ahamad rightly observes, "There are some who are extremely concerned about the escalation of various conflicts and the increasingly volatile state of the world. If we analyse the situation objectively, we realise that world peace and security is needed the most in our time. Unquestionably, with each day that passes the world is becoming increasingly unstable and dangerous and there are a number of potential causes of this. For example, the financial crisis and economic instability that has affected many parts of the world may be one major factor."<sup>13</sup>

In fact, today man's world is not peaceful. Everyday when we read newspaper in the morning we are confronted with some sad news like violence, crime, wars, rape etc. Man's precious life is not at all safe. Science and technology have worked wonders in many fields, but the basic human problems remain. Degradation of human values is a major cause of this situation. We all know "Present era is the era of science, information and communication technology, computer and the internet. The science and technology has changed our way of life. In older era, human beings were dependent on each other, but in this technological era man is more dependent on Machines. Such social change has changed the concept of human values."<sup>14</sup> There is no doubt about the increase of our material progress and technology, but somehow this is not sufficient as we have not yet succeeded in bringing about peace and happiness in the world.

In the present-day distressed situation only universal humanism, advocated by Rabindranath and other thinkers can save us. Universal humanism which includes compassion and selfless love are the pillars of world peace. These human qualities are already ingrained in man's infinite nature.

The most sublime aspect of the infinite is its desire to go beyond itself. This aspect of man never likes to restrict itself to any boundary. He loves to believe that there is nothing impossible for man. He may fail in his attempt, but failure sometime becomes the driving force. This tendency of man is called the 'surplus mentality'. A man endowed with this mentality believes

that he is destined to reach a loftier goal.

There is selfishness in man's nature, but, it is also true that there is a space in his heart to do something good for others. There is no task which is completely impossible for man. So he can transcend his physical or finite boundary. He may attempt and fail again and again, but even failures promote him to make renewed efforts.

Rabindranath thinks that for the establishment of harmony, equality and peace in human society what is needed is to awaken the 'ideal man' – the spiritual man – the infinite in man. According to him, this 'ideal man' in man leads him to be related, united with all other man and even with nature. From practical point of view this relation or unity is materialised only by selfless love. Only love can protect the human race from the world-wide discrimination, war, violence. As Tarit Kumar Sen says, "In this strife-torn world with nations harbouring mutual distrust and suspicion among themselves and rivalling one another in the race of power politics, in a state of cold war, Tagore's message of universal love and international brotherhood acquires added significance and suggests the only way out of the eternal conflict afflicting mankind and threatening world peace."<sup>15</sup>

How can man be protected from the evil hands of man? How can this nice world be saved from the man-satans? These are the burning questions of present day. Today, man's greatest enemy is man.

The natural environment has been very much poisoned and is being damaged day by day. The cruelty on nature has reached such a stage as many world-lover intellectuals are thinking that this planet will not be inhabitable in near-future. Human relation has been so much stained as reciprocal hatred, scuffling and even blood-shed are the normal happenings of everyday. Deadly weapons are stored in the armouries of different countries, even every day new weapons are being discovered, so that one can destroy the human civilisation any time at his will. Man's private relation has been poisoned by vile competition. Every one disbelieves every other, every one suspects every other. Man can rescue himself from this recklessly distressed condition only by the force of love.

So if we want peace in the world, we must feel love towards humanity. We have to restructure our mind and thoughts to create a better world in future. For that we have to take an attempt to restore moral values in our life. For renewal of human values and attainment of lasting happiness, we need to look to the common humanitarian heritage of all nations the world over. Life has no



remote external device to bring about a coveted change. It can be attained only by purging the individual mind of the impurities. Man has the power within him to make a significant change in his own life and his lived world.

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