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ijirset@gmail.com



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A Linchpin between the Relevance of Bondian and Gandhian Philosophy to Humanism

Shameena Bano

Govt. Co. Ed. Polytechnic, Raipur, Chhattisgarh, India

ABSTRACT: Humanism, as a theistic and pragmatic philosophy, first emerged around 2000 BCE in India, during the era of the Vedas and Upanishads. In the modern context, figures like Mahatma Gandhi and Ruskin Bond hold a significant place in the discourse of contemporary philosophy. Their philosophies emphasize love, joyous service, and the greater good of humanity, making profound contributions to spiritual and social thought. Gandhi and Bond's humanism acts as a transformative force, capable of shifting an individual's mindset from obsession to peacefulness, stagnation to creativity, fear to love, and scarcity to abundance. This philosophy encourages opening oneself fully to receive and share the many blessings of life, ultimately benefiting all. The greatness of any artist or thinker is measured by how well they balance the values of creative expression with the broader values of humanity. Both Gandhi and Bond understand religion not just as a set of rituals but as an embodiment of personal integrity and societal unity. For them, free will is the freedom of the "rational self," reflecting a deeper understanding of self and society. This paper will explore the humanistic philosophies of Mahatma Gandhi and Ruskin Bond, focusing on their thoughts, experiences, and experiments in shaping a humane society.

KEYWORDS: Universal Values, Education, Peace, Social Thought, Love, Sacrifice, Truth,

I. INTRODUCTION

Mahatma Gandhi and Ruskin Bond who occupies a prominent place in the realm of contemporary philosophy. One can find their humanism is like a gear shift that can move one's mental mechanism from obsession to peacefulness, from being stuck to being creative, from fear to love, from lack to abundance, it works on one's ability to open wide one's channel, wide enough for all good things that could make their way towards one and all. The greatness of an artist is measured by the balance maintained between the values of creation and the values of humanity. It's true that both understand religion as connoting the individual's integrity and society's solidarity. Free-will is freedom of the "rational self" for them. This visualization renders reality in more realistic ways, revealing the underlying truths of society and self. Humanism implied dignity of man and his privileged, positioning the world. According to Andrews, "Morality is not a matter of outward conformity, but of inward fulfillment. His integral humanism is indicated by the seven social sins: (1) politics without principles; (2) wealth without work; (3) commerce without morality; (4) knowledge without character; (5) pleasure without conscience; (6) science without morality; and (7) worship without sacrifice. The eleven vows recited in his Ashram prayer began with Truth and Non-Violence as foundational for the integration of moral, social, political and economic values. Non-Violence should be a creed rather than a policy. Gandhi's Truth meant freedom of self-actualization for societal development." (Andrews, Mahatma Gandhi at Work 24)

II. VARIOUS INTERPRETATIONS OF HUMANISM

Humanism as the philosophic attitude regards the interpretation of human experience as the primary concern of all philosophizing and claims the adequacy of human knowledge. It claims/asserts that the man is self-sufficient and is able to understand the world phenomena and works out at a certain social order without the help of God. It is an attitude towards and an approach to man's worldly life, and its values. It is characterized by interesting in man, concern for man and faith in man's reason and conscience for discriminating perception of truth and goodness. As Humanists from International quote,

"Humanism is a democratic and ethical life stance which affirms that human beings have the right and responsibility to give meaning and shape to their own lives. It stands for the building of a more humane society through an ethics based on human and other natural values in a spirit of reason and free inquiry through human capabilities. It is not theistic, and it does not accept supernatural views of reality." <https://americanhumanist.org/>.

By giving to all science and literature a reference to human life and its purpose, philosophy connects itself with literary humanism. According to 'The Humanist Magazine', Humanism is a rational philosophy informed by science, inspired by art, and motivated by compassion. Affirming the dignity of each human being, it supports the maximization of individual liberty and opportunity consonant with social and planetary responsibility. It advocates the extension of participatory democracy and the expansion of the open society, standing for human rights and social justice. Free of supernaturalism, it recognizes human beings as a part of nature and holds that values-be they religious, ethical, social, or political-have their source in human experience and culture. Humanism thus derives the goals of life from human need and interest rather than from theological or ideological abstractions, and asserts that humanity must take responsibility for its own destiny (<https://americanhumanist.org> ›)

III. GANDHIAN AND BONDIAN HUMANISM

Gandhi's great contribution to word humanism consists in conceiving a religion that centers almost wholly around man and his welfare here in this world. Religion, according to them, should pervade all this activities, such as to understand upliftment of the downtrodden, equitable distribution of economic fruits to the poor and empowering these sections of the society, to understand the development of women and their empowerment and to have ethical & spiritual outlook of Gandhi in promoting universal human well being. One can say, their humanism is integral, discussing all the aspects of human life and differ from Romantic Humanism as well as Radical Humanism and so far as synthesizes the two of them. Same as one can see, Bond's heartfelt love for the quiet heroes and the have-nots pulls, at the reader's heartstrings. He equates all great and small creatures with divinity and spirituality. Therefore, His God is the God of small things. His work is characterized by a faith in the essential goodness of man and a world in which the animate and inanimate worlds have their own place. It is this trait of humanity which illumines in his stories "Nishkama Karma" or work without desire or motive, where he becomes the mouthpiece of the have-nots, the downtrodden and the oppressed.

Bond believes in the integration of faith and action. (Swamivivekananda, BhagavadGita). In Bhagavat Gita, Krishna says, "Great is the person who works on the path of Karma Yoga, the path of consecrated action." To consecrate means acting in a manner which makes life pure and whole, that is, work of the highest value. (Levy, The Beauty of Yoga in Life 7). A lot of the humanistic touch is seen in Bond's Dust on the Mountain: Collected Short Stories. Ruskin Bond is not only a writer's writer, but he is also a greathuman being. He believes that the present is pregnant with the future. If you do good things in the presents, you will reap the fruits of success. It is the law of nature and life. Joseph Wronka has rightly remarked:

Man is the most fortunate creatures and consequently worthy of all admiration ...To (man) it is granted to have whatever he chooses, to be whatever he wills...When he came into life the Father conferred the seeds of all kinds and germs of every way of life. Whatever seed each man cultivates will grow to maturity and bear in him their fruit. (Wronka, Human Rights and Social Policy in the 21st Century 59) Bond's short stories are a powerful medium for humanism. His writing is a testimony to the fact that if innocence and sincerity are given the chance to rule, a better world is possible. Bond is not likeable and full of empathy and compassion. The have-nots in the true sense are real haves. He analyses this problem by delineating realistically the situations of different characters. Throughout the modern period, the creative, compassionate, cooperative aspect of humanity gradually emerges in spite of being immersed in masses of exploitive, divisive, murderous and anti-social forces of society. The richness of the human spirit dazzles. Ruskin Bond's works are gospels of humanism.

IV. ACTION ORIENTED GOAL: IN SEVEN MAIN FIELDS OF SOCIAL LIFE

Gandhi wanted people to put into practice morality in the seven main fields of life. He enumerated following seven Social Sins:

1. Politics without Principles.
2. Wealth without work.
3. Commerce without Morality.
4. Knowledge without Character.
5. Pleasure without Conscience.
6. Science without humanity.
7. Worship without sacrifice.

1. Politics without Principle: As Plato says “either true and genuine philosophers find their way to political authority or powerful politicians by the favor of Providence take to true Philosophy”. (<https://www.bu.edu> › wcp ›) In Indian tradition The Kings Rama was the symbol of a king dedicated to Principles. The two main principles, which were followed by Gandhi and advocated for the society, are “Truth and Non-violence” Whereas Bond accepts India in its diversity of perception and thought. Bond does not take a stand on issues, or advocate different religious or political viewpoints and says, “I have never been bothered about what party is in power because my loyalties are to a country and not to a political party.” (<https://www.bu.edu> › wcp ›) Neither the races nor multifarious religions attract him. It is the atmosphere that Indian culture has bequeathed to the world that captivated him. And in the long run its history and diversity that counts.

2. Wealth without work: Gandhi quotes from Bible, “In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat thy bread”. (<https://biblehub.com> › genesis) It means that body only needs food; one should labour for it with the help of one's body only. Moderate labour makes one healthy and creative. Gandhi supported equal wages for all kinds of work. His sought of thought made him a champion of economic democracy no less than political and moral democracy. Bond quotes from The Bhagavad Gita also declares that he who eats without offering sacrifice eats stolen food. A Similar feeling is given by the Bond Life, including all its powers of love, of joy, and of admiration. That country is said to be the richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings; that man is richest who, having perfected the functions of his own life to the utmost, has also the widest helpful influence, both personal and by means of his possessions, over the lives of others”. (Ruskin, 125-26).

3. Commerce without Morality: The third dicta deal with the idea of Trusteeship by Gandhi. Business man has to act only as a trustee of the Society for whatever he has gained /profit from his business or from the Society. Everything finally belongs to the Society. “Trusteeship provides a means of transforming the present capitalist order of society into an egalitarian one”. (<https://www.mkgandhi.org> ›) Similarly, Bond writes Commerce without morality is a social sin because all of humanity is impacted when business is conducted without a moral foundation. Fairness and a regard for all parties in every transaction is the only way our systems and democracy can work.

4. Knowledge without Character: The fourth dictum deals with knowledge. Gandhi's focus more basic education system for all around development of individual and his character. True knowledge leads to the one's development/ growth of character where individual evolves his 'Rational self'. Character and knowledge, together are the twin objective of true education. No doubt character development as well as education must go hand in hand. Effective education should include an effort to appraise progress in the direction of character building. Knowledge without right character proves to be dangerous for the country, society and individual, in fact for the humanity as a whole.

5. Pleasure without Conscience: Conscience of a ‘Rational Self’ is evolved with consideration of whole mankind, particularly the poorest of all. “Whenever you are in doubt or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test: “Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen and ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him”.)

(<https://www.mkgandhi.org> ›) This will lead to the balance of the use of natural resources also. Bond gentle voice of conscience and noble heart reflects in every expression and description. An important humble incident in bond's life was when he happened to see a boy sleeping in the street:

I passed by, my head down, my thoughts elsewhere- that is how we of the towns and cities usually behave when we see a fellow human being lying in the gutter „, And then I stopped. It was almost as though the bright moonlight had stopped me. And, I started myself with question, “Why do I leave him there? And, what am I doing here anyway?” I walked back to the shadows where the boys slept and looked at him again..... Something was pressing me on, urging me to shake the boy out of slumber. (Bond, Stranger in the Night 120)

Bond describes the sleep of the boy: “It was the sleep of one who was protected by his own innocence” (Bond, Stranger in the Night 120). So Bond's humanism comes out easily and freely when he sees people in sorrow and pain. He is not just sympathetic, but empathetic too. Bond's stories are related to the first hand experiences which spring from his own consciousness and life.

6. Science without Humanity: Science and humanity together give the way for welfare of all society and its people means progress and growth. Gandhi held that Science without the thought of the welfare of humanity is a Sin. Vinoba

Bhave has said "Science should progress in the direction of Spirituality" Science and technology have changed the face of everyday life. Instead of understanding that the technology is striving to serve, we become victims of our own technocracy. One can see highly educated people climbing to the scientific ladder of (success and promotion/ profit) an evolution, an occasional "revolution" in science, but they are missing the rung called humanity and leaning against the wrong wall (inequities and injustices)

7. Worship without sacrifice: In Religion, worship has no value; but if one is not ready to sacrifice for Social service/cause; it is sin to worship without sacrifice. Gandhi's everyday prayer, His prayer is addressed to one's better self, the conscience, the true self as depicted in the Bhagvad Gita. Gandhi supported the concept of Ethical Religion and not dry and dead ritualism. He saw the biggest threat to Religion not from the atheists, but from the dogmatists, fundamentalists and ritualists. He considered poverty, exploitation, oppression, hunger, inequality barriers of caste, class and creed, as man-made and showed a way out of it through an integral Philosophy of life. Bond also believes that pain and sorrow is great for the sufferer, though they appear petty and small to others. Bond feels and understands the situation of the sufferer. There is no Religion higher than Truth and Righteousness. Gandhi views life in its integral wholeness. According to him "human life is a synthetic whole which cannot be divided into separate watertight compartments religious, moral, political, economic, social, individual and collective. All the seemingly separate segments are but different facets of man's life. They act and react upon one another". (<https://www.bu.edu/wcp>)

V. THE INTEGRATED PLEDGE FOR SOCIETY

Gandhi attached to the vows; in Community centre as a part of his morality have integral implication of Moral, Social, Political and Economic Values, these vows, not in a ritualistic manner, but work as a way of entering more deeply into the truth. There are following vows to the "Asramites" from Yeravada Jail.

- Non violence,
- Truth,
- Non-stealing ,
- Chastity / celibacy,
- Non possession,
- Bread labour,
- Abstemiousness in diet,
- Fearlessness,
- Tolerance for all religions,
- Self-sufficiency for products,
- Elimination of un-touchability. (<https://www.mkgandhi.org>)

VI. THE UNIVERSAL LOVE: NON-VIOLENCE (AHIMSA)

Gandhi quotes, "All well constructed societies are based on the law of Non-Violence that the families are bound together by ties of love and so are groups in the so called civilized society. Only they do not recognize the supremacy of the law of non-violence." Even "Satyagraha" is perceived by Gandhi as non-violence in action. (<https://www.mkgandhi.org>) Ahimsa being the law of love, it consists not in claiming, but in giving. Gandhi used non-violence not only at the individual level, but also on the social level for abolition of un-touchability, picketing, and non-cooperation. On the political level he brought about liberation without the use of violence Gandhi firmly believed that non-violence must be lived in day-to-day life. "It is not like a garment to be put on and off at Will. Its seat is in the heart and it must be an inseparable part of our being. It should become a creed rather than a policy; and to be a creed, Non-violence has to be all- pervasive." (<https://www.mkgandhi.org>) Similarly, Bond aims to foster the spirit of humanism cooperation, understanding, and making the world the happiest place to live on. Bond's essential humanism seems to be in live and let live and let love". He did not believe in the discrimination of human beings on the grounds of caste, colour, or creed. He This is the spirit which fires the "Untouchable," a straight forwards piece, neither childish nor juvenile. No excesses, no flourishes and very spare. It is the first short story written by Bond, and that was published in The Illustrated Weekly of India in 1951 which earned him Rs. 50 as his first award. In the story, "Untouchable" his mother had told young Bond, „Don't play with the sweeper boy, he is unclean. Don't touch him, Remember, he is a servant." (Bond, Dust on the Mountain 1). As young Bond was the son of a sahib" and

convention ruled that he must not play with servant children where the gardener, water carrier, cooks, ayahs, sweepers, and all the children get collected in the colony. Due to the caste consciousness, these children were instructed not to play with the sahib children. Young Bond seems to be insensitive to the upper and lower caste and frequently mix with all races, especially with those who are termed as an “Untouchable.”

Bond's elementary passion for humanism could not perceive such discrimination, caste and class difference. Bond deliberately goes and plays with the sweeper boy, as a revolt against this insensitivity and an unlimited joy of encountering the sweeper boy. Especially, this sweeper boy helped the narrator to overcome fear and accompany him when he was alone in the dark night. Bond says, “I moved towards him and my hand touched a cold shoulder... I sat down, my back against the wall; beside the untouchable, the outcaste... (Bond, *Dust on the Mountain*1).

Gandhiji had many ideas about uplifting the downtrodden Sudras, the untouchables, whom he called Harijans, “Children of God.” Their condition in India is both highly inspiring and alarming: They should cultivate the habit of cleanliness, so that no one shall point his finger at them. Some of them are addicted to the habits of drinking and gambling of which they must get rid.” (Anand, *Untouchable* 138). Undeniably, Gandhiji's approach presented a solution for the un-touchable.

Discrimination on account of caste is against the tenets of humanity. Respect for humanity and man's dignity will promote the spirit of humanism. Bond condemns the society, which is ridden by caste, colour, and class consciousness.

Bond takes up the role of the crusader, like Charles Dickens,. His aim is to prick the conscience of the society by playing upon its feelings and presenting scenes of insensitivity that inflicts society and makes it sordid and inhuman. All his writings quiver with an outraged social conscience, tenderness, pity, and empathy. This is something new in the gospel of humanitarianism. As Philip Stanhope says, “The true measure of a man is whatever is worth doing at all, is worth doing well.” (Stanhope, 4th Earl of Chesterfield *Brainy Quote*). Bond focuses on the dispossessed and marginalized sections of society and tries to bring their problems to light. The reader must be able to understand the plight of the innocent creatures who suffer for no fault of their own, but simply because they were born in that particular class of the downtrodden. Bond is against dogmatic and discriminatory religion, which has hampered the development of mankind and has brought untold suffering. Therefore, he fosters the feeling of humanism, and understanding. To correct the world order Bond prescribes thinking of the individual and his emancipation, only then can something be done for the betterment of the world. With this purpose in mind, he as an active participant delves into the feelings of others, he easily enters into the hearts and emotions of others because the measure of a man is the way he bears up and understands others' misfortunes. Gandhi's truth is similar to Vedic Rta: the cosmic and moral order, and ultimate principle of the Universe» therefore he identifies God with truth. “To me God is Truth and Love, God is ethics and morality, God is Humility, and truthfulness.” (<https://www.mk gandhi.org>)

Gandhi was conscious of what truth is and followed a path of humanism. Gandhi's aim was to evolve a moral man in a moral society. Truth and Non-violence are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to separate them. They are like two sides of a coin or rather a smooth unstamped metallic disc. It has no obverse, or the reverse.

Nevertheless, non-violence is the means Truth is the end. For Gandhi, truth is not only truthfulness in word, but also in thought and deed» not only the relative truth of our conception but the absolute truth, the Eternal principle, that is God. In this way, Existential meaning of God is Truth. Gandhi's truth meant freedom of self-actualization for societal development.

VII. TOLERANCE/ EQUALITY FOR ALL RELIGIONS: SAMANATA: SARVA-DHARMA

For the humanists, the attitude of tolerance is derived from their conviction of the fundamental harmony of all the religious beliefs of mankind and so the possibility of a universal love and religious peace. Gandhi realized earthly city was ‘Ramarajya’ and tried to maintain throughout his life. The vow of tolerance of all religious beliefs in Gandhi's everyday Prayer, and the cooperation he received from the people of all faiths, confirm his genuine tolerance. Gandhi's religion, was not narrow as sectarian. “He did not want his house to be walled in on all sides, and windows to be stuffed. He wanted the cultures of all lands to be blown about his house as freely as possible.”

(<https://www.mkgandhi.org>) Even though Bond is of British descent he does not write from Eurocentric perspective. He knows and writes about the country as an insider. Bond says, "Oh, India, my India, for all your dust there is a blossom". His compassionate heart feels the agony of the destitute. Bond's heartfelt love for the quiet heroes' and the have-nots pulls at the reader's heartstrings. He equates all great and small creatures with divinity and spirituality. "Let all be happy and comfortable "Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah" (Shashikant, Sanskrit Maxims for Contemporary Life). Therefore, His God is the God of small things. It is this trait of humanity which illumines in his stories "Nishkama Karma" or work without desire or motive, where he becomes the mouthpiece of the have-nots, the downtrodden and the oppressed. Bond believes in the integration of faith and action. (Swamivivekananda, Bhagavad Gita). Similarly, Bond's love for India is enshrined in the form of Padma Shri Bushan for a pivotal role in the development of children's literature. No doubts, People are rushing after power and money, engulfing both leisurely hours and open spaces. There is no sensitivity, love or compassion. The competitive world hardly has any time to hear and recall the memory. Bond often raises questions on the apathetic approach of the modern materialistic world towards the suffering masses. Bond shows immense warmth and understanding for those who are marginalized and neglected in society.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Gandhiji and Bondian humanism is marked by a strong optimism by which the evils could be removed to make this world a better place to live in. They worshipped God through the service of man and looked upon all human beings as, but the manifestations of God Himself. Their humanism meant his utter devotion to the human interest. Ruskin Bond's noteworthy comment, through his characters here, demonstrates that the scale of values, intentions, weighs higher than actions. As Gandhi ji says, "If a man commits a bonafide mistake and confessed it with a contrite heart before his Maker, the merciful Maker sterilizes it of all harm. (Prathapan, Mahatma Gandhi on Prison Reforms)

To quote Urdu poet and critic Mazhar Imam:

Rooh abhi tak zinda hai,
Isliye toh insaanayat rakhshanda hai, The conscience is still alive,
and that's why the humanity is still bright with hope. (Mazhar, M.
Shama aur Shavar)

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