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THE HUMANIST ELEMENTS IN HANNAH ARENDT'S THOUGHT

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Humanism lays stress on individual dignity, worth and capacity for self-realization through reason. It is a doctrine, attitude, or way of life centred on human interests and values. Humanism believes that human beings can act to give their own lives meaning by seeking happiness and helping others to make them happy. Humans, according to humanists, can shape their own values and lead good and meaningful life. Humanism is the claim that there is an essence of humankind, a comprehensive account of man's faculties, including his capacity for reason. Humanists tend to advocate for human rights, free speech, progressive politics and democracy. Humanism is opposed to the irrationality of nationalism and totalitarianism whether these can be part of fascism, or Marxist-Leninist communism. Hannah Arendt, a 20th century political philosopher, journalist and public intellectual, shares political and ethical world boldly and provocatively. She is a humanist thinker and her core teaching culminates in a unique kind of humanism. Her emphasis on humanism links freedom to what remains ineffable about being human. To Arendt, humanity refers to human dignity, freedom and plurality. She has tried to show that the core values of human rights and dignity cannot be sustained unless the "plurality" of human life and the importance of public realm are recognised explicitly. She believes that the modern political crisis is the crisis of humanism. Her humanism responds to the loss of the idea of humanity experienced in the rise of totalitarianism. The present study makes a modest attempt to discuss the meaning of humanism; to interpret Arendt's view on humanism and to seek, analyse and evaluate humanist elements in her thought.

Key Words; -Hannah Arendt, humanism, Freedom, plurality, totalitarianism.

INTRODUCTION

Hannah Arendt, one of the most illuminating, influential and provocative political philosophers of the 20th century, has been a fixture in political theory and philosophy. In Arendt's view, humanism is neither a "dishonest ideology" or "an exquisite justification for plundering" as Sartre maintains; nor she espouses "negative humanism- a humanism devoid of content as some thinkers claim. Rather, her humanism is concerned with the essence of human. The political humanism of Arendt honestly and provocatively unites two strands—the loss of the idea of humanity experienced in the rise of totalitarianism and that being human is an activity of citizenship. She is of the view that to deny one's citizenship is to deny one's humanity. She contends that righteousness, nobility, proper conduct -a philosophy of life which makes one worthy and progressive citizen. Arendt is keenly aware that her political ontology requires a human ontology. She asserts that politics requires humanism and if humankind has no essence, politics has no essence.

LIFE, WORKS AND LEGACY

A 'woman of 20th century' Arendt was born in Hanover, Germany on oct,14,1906 and departed for her heavenly abode on dec,4,1975 at the age of 69 years. Born into a German- Jewish family, she excelled in her education and her precocity impressed her teachers. An inquisitive and voracious reader from her childhood, she continued learning ancient Greek, writing poetry and absorbed French and German literature as well. Studied at the universities of Marberg, Frieberg and Heidelberg, she got her Doctorate degree in the year 1929 on the topic "Der Libesbegriff bei Augustine" (Love and Saint Augustine) under the supervision of Karl Jaspers. As the Nazi's rose to power, she was forced to flee to France where she spent over a decade and worked for the immigration of Jewish refugee children into Palestine. She divorced her husband Gunther Stern, in 1936 and married Heinrich Blucher, a philosopher, in 1940. She fled to America in 1941 with her husband and after ten years, she attained American citizenship in 1951. In New York, she soon became an integral part of an illuminated circle of writers and intellectuals. She lectured at a number of American universities including Princeton, Burkley and Chicago. Though she held many eminent posts, but was most closely associated with The New School for Social Research where she was a professor of political philosophy until her death. Arendt's writings cover many and diverse topics and relate to many progressive causes. Her main works include: - The Origins of Totalitarianism (1951); The Human Condition (1958); Between Past and Future (1961); On Revolution (1963); Eichmann in Jerusalem (1961); On Violence (1970); Crises of the Republic (1963); Men in Dark Times (1973); and The Life of the Mind, published after her death in 1978.

A political philosopher of enormous erudition, full of insights and exceptional originality, Arendt appreciates the nature and value of politics as no one has done before; brilliantly analyses the evils of modern civilization and lays the foundation of an ideal community based on participatory and deliberative democracy. Things look different after she looks at them. In fact, her legacy has been described as a cult. Arendt's place among handful of profoundly original and challenging political thinkers is secure and her writings continue to provide inspiration in the 21st and even in centuries to come.

DEFINITION OF HUMANISM AND THE CONCEPTION OF HANNAH ARENDT

The word "humanism" is derived from the Latin concept 'humanitas' which was first used by Cicero to describe values to liberal education, which is similar to 21st century arts, philosophy and literature. Humanism means many things to many thinkers. Jean Paul Sartre calls humanism a "dishonest ideology", "an exquisite justification for plundering". Franz Fanon states, "For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must make a new start, develop a new way of thinking and endeavour to create a new man."¹ In the words of H. J. Blackham, "Humanism is a concept that focuses on improving the social conditions of humanity, increasing the autonomy and dignity of all humans". According to the International Humanist and Ethical Union, "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 ethic based on human and other natural values in the spirit of reason and free inquiry through human capabilities. It is not theistic, and it does not accept supernatural views of reality."² Martha Nussbaum suggests that reason and moral capacity are the fundamental ingredients that can provide links of humanity."³ Humanism is.....a doctrine, attitude, or way of life centred on human interests or values; especially, a philosophy that usually rejects supernaturalism and stresses on individual's dignity and worth and capacity for self-realization through reason."⁴ In sum, humanists trust to the scientific method and rejects the idea of supernatural; makes decisions based on reason, empathy and a concern for human being and other sentient animals. Sir Arther Keith, J.B.S Haldane, Sigmund Freud, Sir Julian Huxley and John Maynard are the main exponents of humanism.

In Arendt's view, humanism is neither a "dishonest ideology" or "an exquisite justification for plundering" as Sartre maintains, nor she espouses "negative humanism" as some thinkers claim. Rather, her humanism is concerned with the essence of human. She is of the view that being human is an ability of citizenship;

that to deny one's citizenship is to deny one's humanity; that the core values of human rights cannot be sustained unless the plurality of human life and the importance of public sphere are recognised; and that no one can be called happy or free without participating and having share in public power. To her, human dignity needs a new guarantee which can only be found in a new political principle, in a new law on earth, whose validity must comprehend the whole humanity. In her famous work, "The Human Condition" humankind is defined by plurality. She argues that the dignity of human being simply rests on his politico-linguistic existence, namely, his capacity of speaking, judging and acting.

THE HUMANIST'S ELEMENTS IN ARENDT'S THOUGHT

Though due to the twin influence of Heidegger and Jaspers on her life and thought, some thinkers interpret Arendt as an anti-essentialist and anti-humanist, yet many others have traced humanistic line and elements in her works. The scholar of the present study argue that Arendt is a humanist philosopher in the sense that her account of politics requires positive humanism; that she has an account which distinguishes humans from animals; that that she takes human plurality not only as *conditio sine qua non* but also as *conditio per quam* of political life; that she equates human activity with citizenship; and that she is convinced that modern political crisis is the crisis of humanism. The humanist elements in Arendtian thought may be described as mentioned below:

First, Arendt's account of politics leads her to humanism. She is keenly aware that her political ontology requires a human ontology. She is of the view that politics requires humanism. If humankind has no essence, politics has no essence. She regards humanism as a pre-requisite for politics. Arendt's vision of politics aims at people coming together in their plurality and holds that the modern political crisis is the result of the crisis of humanism—moral and spiritual collapse. In totalitarian regime, she maintains, the victims of terror were systematically dehumanised by the ruling ideology, and then brutally deprived of their legal rights and their moral and existential dignity. Arendt and Ranciere turn to a human ontology, an account of mankind and, therefore, a humanism in order to ground their political theories.⁵ To Arendt, politics is a means of self-revelation, of thinking, acting and sharing a common world and common space of appearance. Politics, as she believes, is the realm of public mass exchange, interaction, and dialogue in which people come together, judge and act. She holds the view that politics provides the only guarantee to our sanity, confers meaning upon life and the highest form of happiness is to be found in the political activity alone. Politics is concerned with the appearance of the world and with 'how to make the world beautiful.' In fact, Arendt is the only political philosopher to offer an intensely political view of the world and advocates new culture based on a public way of life. Similar opinion about politics has been presented by L.S. Rathore who observes, "Politics is an endless journey towards the realisation of means and ends; and it is a quest for pastures a new to fructify men's hope and aspiration."⁶

Second, Hannah Arendt is a humanist in the sense that she has an account that distinguishes humans from animals. In her most influential work "The Human Condition", she offers her tripartite scheme:

- i. Labour: humanity as animal laborans;
- ii. Work: humanity as homo faber;
- iii. Action: humanity: as *zoon politikon*

Arendt refers to humanity as animal laborans in her first mode. Labour is an activity that corresponds to the biographical process and is commanded by necessity. It is an activity in which man enjoys a solipsistic, herdlike level of consciousness. To her, the mark of all labouring is that "it leaves nothing behind" and that the result of its efforts are consumed as quickly as the effort is spent.⁷ There is no freedom for man in this sphere. In short, labour does not create an objective world capable of providing man with a permanent home on earth.⁸ For this reason, Arendt is critical of Marx's elevation of animal laborans to a position of primacy in his vision of the highest ends of human existence.

Work, on the other hand, corresponds to the fabrication of artificial world of things. Arendt is of the view that work is neither completely public nor completely private. It produces more durable things in comparison to labour. It is qualitatively different from labour. The products of work constitute what Arendt calls the “world”—the ordered totality of man-made objects, so organised that it can resist the consuming process of the people dwelling in it and, thus, outlast them. In work, Arendt maintains, man emerges for the first time to self-consciousness. But since the world in which man moves is a world of Things, not of Man, he does not reach the highest level of human dignity and development. She is convinced that work-homo faber -does not equate with the realm of human freedom.

Action, which falls within the public realm, holds the highest place in Arendt’s tripartite scheme. Human personality, she believes, is perfectly developed by acting in public realm in action. Man reveals himself in relation to others through action. It is the primary source of meaning and values and gives moral significance to life. It is only in action and speech, in interacting with others, that man reveals his personality and unique identity. When one performs political action, he achieves human condition, i.e., *zoon politikon*. While labour is bound by the demands of animalities and necessities; work is governed by the human ends and intentions; action includes the life of politics, thought and idea. Her main contention is that freedom can be attained only through political action. She opines that action is speech and speech is action. D’Entreves puts it thus, “Action entails speech” and “speech entails action”.⁹ Arendt asserts that it is only in engaging in action that human being can truly be free and completely happy. Political action alone confers meaning upon life and paves the way for freedom and happiness. Thus, Arendt’s tripartite scheme of labour- work- action entails her inclination to humanism.

Third, the humanist elements in Arendt’s thought are apparent if we analyse her concept of pluralism. Her concept of human plurality is perhaps the most felicitous expression to be found in political theory. Plurality is central to her idea of action. Action reflects the most essentially aspect of the human condition—plurality which is fundamental to her thought ‘not ‘Man ‘but’ Men’ inhabit the earth. Human plurality, Arendt maintains, entails both equality and distinction. ‘If men were not equal, they could (not) understand each other...If men were not distinct, each human being distinguished from any other who is, was, or will ever be, they would need neither speech nor action to make themselves understood.’¹⁰ Action needs plurality in the same way that artists need an audience. Action ceases to be a meaningful activity without the presence of an acknowledgement of others. It requires appearing in public, making oneself known through words and deeds. Arendt contends that the based part in worldly affairs and requires a stage and spectators. She views action as a mode of human togetherness. It is an interaction that goes on directly among humans and it also corresponds to the condition of plurality. She argues that speech is a means to influence others and bringing about desired changes. That is why, she lays emphasis on debate and discussion, i.e., speech and action. In her view, the only vehicle of freedom is political action. Action is conditioned by freedom and plurality.¹¹ Speech and action constitute the very substance of political life. The *raison d’être* of politics is freedom and its field of experience is action.¹² Bhikhu Parekh observes, “She justifies political participation and political way of life not in terms of glory and historical immortality, but public freedom and happiness.”¹³ Based on plurality, politics is the place and activity of shared communication human based on the distinct perspective of equal human being.

Fourth, Arendt holds the view that to deny one’s citizenship is to deny one’s humanity. Arendt’s political concept is centred around active citizenship that emphasises civic engagement and collective deliberation. As a matter of fact, human rights emanate from citizenship of a country. Citizenship is important for developing a strong moral code in individuals. It is also significant for creating a self- supportive society while protecting democracy. Arendt believes that since human rights are deeply imbricated in the idea of citizenship, the loss of citizen rights may be seen as equivalent to losing human rights. A woman known for strong and firm opinion, Arendt tries to build new image of political space indicating new perspectives, notions and definitions based on participatory citizenship. She states that citizenship can be reaffirmed and political agency effectively exercised only by means of direct political participation. For Arendt, equality lies

only when citizens are able to meet one another, exchange their opinions and debate their differences as well as search for some collective solution to their common problems. She is concerned about how citizen participation can be improved and extended. Ranciere seems to be at one with Arendt when she observes, "Active citizenship enacts human rights, that is, citizen makes Man, and rights of Man are actually the rights of citizen."¹⁴

Fifth, Arendt develops an account of humankind in her concept of "the right to have rights." Arendt, who herself experienced statelessness, points out that it is the membership of a nation-state that gives human the "the right to have rights." The right to have rights is the right to citizenship, to membership of a political community. In the words of Earl Warren, the justice of the US Supreme Court, "Citizenship is man's basic right, for it is nothing less than the right to have rights." The notion of right to have rights arises out of the modern statist conditions and is equivalent to the moral claims of refugee or other stateless persons, or at least juridical personhood within the social confines of some law-dispensing states. She argues that "the right to have rights" should be recognised as a pre-condition for the protection of every human right. She further maintains that before individuals can enjoy any civil, political or social rights, they must first possess the right to be a citizen of a nation-state, or at least a member of some kind of organised political community. She asserts that only citizenship in a nation-state can reliably guarantee rights to individuals. In her view, the totalitarian disregard for human life and the eventual treatment of human beings as "superfluous" entities began when millions of human beings are rendered "stateless" and denied the "right to have rights". Statelessness or the loss of nationality status was tantamount to the loss of all rights. The stateless were deprived of not only of their citizenship rights; they were also deprived of any human rights. Statelessness, to Arendt, means no "right to have rights." Seyla Benhabib points out that "the right to have rights" is premised on a Kantian conception of each human being as a free rational agent and, hence, an end in itself. It is a right that each and every human being has simply by being "a member of the human species." Here Arendt embraces Aristotle's precept that "man is a political animal". She seems to be at one with Aristotle when she opines that one can be fully human only inside the nation-state as a citizen living a public life and seeking the common good. She argues that human dignity simply rests on individual politico-linguistic existence namely, his capacity of speaking, acting and judging.

Sixth, the humanist approach of Arendt may also be deduced from her reluctance to modernity. For Arendt, modernity is characterised by the loss of the world by which she means restrictions and elimination of public space of action and speech in favour of the private world of introspection and the private pursuit of economic interests. She observes that modernity means "break in our tradition." Modern life, she argues, is not only discontinuous, but new, strange and less and less human. The homogeneity and conformity of modernity have replaced plurality and freedom as well as the traditional standards and values. Modernity, to her, dangerously inflicts human power and also deliberately subverts human freedom and agency. Moreover, human beings are finding themselves suffocated and superfluous in the face of the modern population explosion and the increasing use of modern technology. This has given rise to the imagination of disaster, distress and desolation posing threats to humanity. The modern impulse to believe that "everything is possible" has "strangely interwind the good with the bad." She defends the importance of the public space and asserts that being human is the activity of citizenship. She concludes that humanity needs a new guarantee which can only be found in a new political principle, in a new law on earth, whose validity must comprehend the whole humanity.

Lastly, Humanism is an eternal, universal and inalienable principle possessed simply by virtue of being human. The guiding principles of humanism may be described as "Sarvey Bhavantu Sukhinah" (happiness to all) and, "Vasudhaiv Kutumbkam" (the earth itself is family). A humanist thinker must possess human virtues such as love, friendship, togetherness etc. These human values are to be found in the works of Hannah Arendt. Love is the connecting theme of her political thought. Amour mundi—love of the world – is said to be the original title of her classic work "The Human Condition." Being humanist, Arendt existed with others; cherished her relationship with her loved ones; and found this to be the root of her existence.

She observes, "I love my friends. This is the only love I am capable of." She was both loyal and generous to her friends. Friendship, for her, is an active mode of being alive. It is central to both her life and to her concept of politics. Hans Jonas describes her as having a "generous for friendship" and in her own words, "love for friendship." Arendt's aesthetic concept of politics, too, reveals her inclination to humanism. Her humanist line has been depicted in a scene of a biopic on Hannah Arendt by Margarethe von Trotta where her husband tries to leave house without interrupting her while she is writing. He says that philosophers should not be interrupted while they are thinking. To this Arendt replies, "But they cannot think without kisses."¹⁵

EVALUATION

On the basis of description mentioned above, it may be deduced that Arendt maintains, sustains and integrates her humanist ideas with active citizenship, human dignity and "the right to have rights." However, her humanistic concept is not free from limitations. To quote Seyla Benhabib, "Arendt is too hasty in concluding that only citizenship in a nation- state can reliably guarantee right to individuals. Changes in international law and politics since the publication of *Origins*, have created a forum above the level of the nation- state in which the rights of the human beings who are not citizens can be asserted and enforced with the increasing effectiveness." Besides, challenging Arendt's distinction between political and non-political life Ranciere observes, "Such a distinction precludes the possibility of claiming the right to have rights for those who are deprived of a political life and renders the right of man either 'void' or 'justification for humanitarian intervention.'"¹⁶ Moreover, criticising her concept of humanism, Duncan Stuart states, "Both these thinkers have a relationship to humanism that walks a fine line between a negative and a positive account of humanism. The twin influence of Heidegger and Jaspers thus complicate Arendt's own treatment of humanism."¹⁷

Despite criticisms, Arendt's intention to retain humanism is obvious. Her humanism intends happiness to all. She holds, "The objectivity of the world, its objects or things, character and human condition supplement each other because human existence is conditioned existence..." Arendt, like Burke, argues that rights arise from political society and are not the product of nature. She pleads for universal and inalienable right i.e., the right to have right. Anup Taneja rightly observes, "... "when we look at ourselves with the true awareness of humanity, we will see that same humanity in everyone else, and then we will realise that everyone in the world is a child of God."¹⁸ The connections between humanism science and secularization illuminate themes in Arendt's thought that have recently began to start scholarly attention. We may conclude in the words of James Renold, "She invites us to a path of redemption just as her early philosophy is one of love which focuses not on the suffering of the past, but the promise of the future, there remains an opinion in her work that human beings can become good when we chose to be.

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