



## **Pratidhwani the Echo**

A Peer-Reviewed International Journal of Humanities & Social Science

ISSN: 2278-5264 (Online) 2321-9319 (Print)

Impact Factor: 6.28 (Index Copernicus International)

Volume-VI, Issue-III, January 2018, Page No. 260-266

Published by Dept. of Bengali, Karimganj College, Karimganj, Assam, India

Website: <http://www.thecho.in>

---

## **M. N. Roy: Journey from Marxism to Radical Humanism**

**Dr. Satarupa Pal**

*Assistant Professor in Political Science, Rampurhat College, Birbhum, west Bengal*

### **Abstract**

*M.N. Roy inspired by revolutionary terrorism, tried again to procure arms from China and that also did not succeed. Roy escaped to America where he was introduced to socialist ideas and later on he participated in the formation of the Communist Party of Mexico. He also participated Second Congress International. It is noteworthy that as a representative of the Communist International, he led a delegation to China in 1926. In 1930 he returned to India. During 1940, M. N Roy founded his own party called as the Radical Democratic party seeking to provide a combined platform involving peasants, workers and petty bourgeoisie. By 1948, he dismantled his party and founded a new movement for a radical or new humanism.*

*The core of the Radical humanism of Roy lies in lying greatest emphasis on the personality of the individual as a human being. His characterized humanism based on three elements reason, morality and freedom.*

*At this outset, this paper tries to explore that Roy's political journey from Marxism to radical humanism allowed him to conceptualize radicalism to different perspectives. Also ushers freedom of marginalized sections in the democracy.*

***Key Words: radical humanism, freedom, reason, morality, democracy***

---

M. N Roy, born Narendranath Bhattacharyya was an Indian revolutionary, radical activist and political theorist and a philosopher in 20<sup>th</sup> century. In evolving the social philosophy of Radical Humanism, he considers himself as a humanist and not a completely Marxist, he integrated Radicalism with scientific humanism or New Humanism (Karnik: 1978; Roy: 1979; Sharma 1965; Ray: 1998).

Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century revolutionary nationalism began to spread among the educated middle classes of Bengal, inspired by the writings of Bankim and Vivekananda.

He started his career as a militant political activist and left India in 1915, had a mysterious personality in the history of anti-colonial extremism. The political life of presents that anti-colonial rebellions played vital role in an effort to serve arms from Germany for an uprising in India World War I. Later on, he became a political activist whose life took to the United States, Mexico, Russia and Germany and through several pseudonyms and political

variations. As a member of the Communist International, he pondered Lenin on national liberations and operated in the upper levels of international communism, this was followed by his tragic failure in organizing the communists in China in 1927 and subsequent expulsion for the Comintern and then he moved towards radical humanism (Haithcox: 1971).

Communist movement Roy began his political career as a militant nationalist, considering in the cult of the bomb and the pistol and the requirement of an armed insurrection. He acquired to high position in the communist movement. Roy made sincere efforts to establish contact with the communist world, and attracted the attention of the scorching Indian revolutionaries and committed them into communists.

M. N Roy introduced the process of displacing communism in India by sending his trained representatives to representatives to different parts of the country. He met a number of Indian Muslims abroad had left their country as a remonstrance against the British policy in regard to Turkey. The Muslim once kept in imprisonment was released by the Russian forces. Initially they were not aware of communism. Roy convinced them. He made it clear that they could accomplish their mission and liberate India by the path of communist revolution.

Roy was a founder of the Mexican Communist Party and the Communist Party of India. He was also a representative to congress of the Communist International a Russia aide to China. Following the rise of Joseph Stalin, Roy left the mainline communist movement to pursue an independent politics.

In 1940, Roy was instrumental in the establishment of the Radical Party, an organization in which he played a leading role for much of the decade of the 1940s. Roy later moved away from Marxism to become an advocate of the philosophy of radical humanism. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century revolutionary nationalism began to expand among the sophisticated, motivated by the writings of Bankim and Vivekananda.

### **M. N Roy's views on New Humanism and Radical Humanism**

#### **New Humanism**

Roy efforts to trace the quest for freedom and search for truth to biological struggle for existence. The basic idea of the first three these of Roy is individualism. According to Roy the central idea of the twenty two theses is that political philosophy must start from the basic idea that the *individual is prior to society, and freedom can be enjoyed only by individuals.*

Quest for freedom and search for truth, according to Roy constitute the basic urge for human progress. The purpose of all rational; human endeavour, individual as well as collective, is attainment of freedom in ever-increasing measure. Roy refers back the quest for freedom to human being's struggle for existence, and he regards search for truth as a corollary to this quest. Reason according to Roy, is a biological instinct, and it is not opposed to human will. Morality, which originates from the rational desire for harmonious

and reciprocal social relations, is rooted in the innate rationality of man (Mahakul:2005; Roy:1947).

**Radical Democracy:** Roy's ideal of radical democracy as outlined in these fourteen to twenty-two consists of a highly decentralized democracy based on a network of people's country's through which citizens wield a standing democratic control over the state.

Roy has not ignored the economic aspect of his ideal radical democracy. He argued that progressive satisfaction of the material necessities is the pre-condition of the individual numbers of society unfolding their intellectual and other essential human potentialities. According to him, an economic reorganization, which will guarantee a progressively rising standard of living, is the foundation of the Radical Democratic state. Economic liberation of the masses, says "is an essential condition for their advancing towards the goal of freedom".

The ideal of radical democracy will be attained, according to Roy through the collective efforts of mentally free men united and determined for creating a world of freedom. They will function as the guiders, friends and philosophers of the people rather than as there would be rulers, consistent with the goal of freedom, their political will be rational etc.

Roy categorically asserts a social renaissance can come only through determined and wide spread endeavor to educate the people as regards the principles of freedom and rational co-operative living revolutions, according to Roy, requires a rapidly increasing. Social revolutions, according to Roy, requires a rapidly increasing number of men of the new renaissance, and a rapidly expanding system of people's committees and an organization combination of both. The programme of revolution will similarly be based on the principles of freedom, reason and social harmony.

**From Marxism to Radical Humanism:** Roy was a born revolutionary. He was influenced by Marxist when stayed in USA. He was one of the learned person of Marxist in world. Later on, some differences arose between Roy and Stalin and Roy was criticized as a revolutionist. .... With time, Roy became critic of Marxist. In later years, he transformed his philosophy from Marxism to radical humanism which was called new humanism. It was great contribution of Roy in the arena of modern political thought.

Roy participated Communist International in China in the year of 1926. Roy returned to India in 1930 with the sole goal of participating in the nationalist struggle. During the 1930-40 period, he was involved in the nationalist struggle.

It is noteworthy that Roy's political journey ---from Marxism to Radical Humanism--- allowed him to conceptualize radicalism in different perspectives. His critical alternative to Lenin's draft thesis on nationalism and colonialism is based on his attempt to understand Marxism in the perspective of colonialism. Opposed the ideology of the Indian National Congress, he believed that the future of Indian liberation movement depended on the participation of the neglected society. While commenting on the new basis of the national

struggle, Roy thus commented” the future of Indian politics will be determined by the social forces which still remain antagonistic to Imperialism even in the new era dominated by the “ higher ideals of Swaraj within empire” ( Roy 1920: *The Future of Indian Politics*). However, draft thesis on national and colonial question demonstrates, that mass movements in the colonies are growing independently of the nationalist movements (and) the masses distrust the political leaders who always lead them astray and prevent them revolutionary action’ (Original Draft of Supplementary Theses on the National and Colonial Question’, reproduced in Ray *Selected Works of M.N. Roy*, 1917-1922, Vol. I, 2000: 167).

Further he underlined that the growing importance of the proletariat in political movement against imperialism.

- **Critique of Gandhian Thought and Action:** This overall assessment of the national and colonial question have provided the basic theoretical framework to Roy in assessing Gandhi and his political ideology. M. N. Roy provided perhaps the best and well-argued Marxist critique to Gandhi’s social and political ideas. Apart from his ideological conviction, the larger colonial context seemed to have obviously cast significant influences on Roy’s radicalism that sought to redefine the ideological goal of the national bourgeoisie in India. So, Roy was significantly different from other radicals because of his attempted mix of nationalism with what he drew from Marxism. In other words, this conceptualization, drawn on nationalism and Marxism, brings out its innovative nature identifying ‘both the astonishing daring of Roy’s radicalism, and a tragic heteronomy within its historical consciousness’(Kaviraj 1986:213). Gandhism was, according to him, the most important of all the ideologies of class collaborations within the nationalist movement. Sharing Gandhi’s criticism of capitalist civilization , Roy was, however, critical of the alternative that Gandhi provided simply because it was neither ‘realistic’ nor ‘practicable’. He further argued that ‘one need not be a sentimental present order of society in the countries where capitalism was unavoidable and ‘will not collapse because sentimental humanitarians find it full of cruelty and injustice, [ but because] of its own contradictions’ (Ray *Selected Works of M.N. Roy*, 1917-1922, Vol.I, 2000, 348-349). Gandhi’s role was significant in conceptualizing the adverse economic impact on India of capitalism that was introduced into India in the form of large capitalist industries at the cost of handicrafts and other indigenous efforts. Later on Gandhi mobilized people in the 1919 anti-Rowlat *Satyagraha*, Roy mentioned,

.... By inaugurating the campaign of satyagraha (passive resistance to evil), an active vent was given to the opposition, which could thus transcend the limits of mere indignation meetings and passing revolutions of protest. Devoid of any other weapons to fight the British government, the Indian people were provided with a way of making their energy felt by the opponent. (Roy 1971: Chapter VIII, reproduced in Ray *Selected Works of M.N. Roy*, 1917-1922, Vol.I, 2000, 369-70).

It is noteworthy that Gandhi made clear departure from the past. Despite the limited goal of Satyagraha due to its inherent weakness, it had ‘ penetrated the villages, it had

rudely shaken the resignation of the masses of Indian people' (Roy 1971: Chapter VIII, reproduced in Ray *Selected Works of M.N. Roy, 1917-1922, Vol. I, 2000, 368*).

Roy was critical of the ideology of non-violence and *satyagraha* for being politically restrictive; and yet he found in Gandhi the most important leadership that extended the constituencies of nationalist politics by involving peripheral section of the society.

The cult of non –violence was a convenient tool for both Gandhi –led nationalist political forces as well those supporting imperialism. It was clear to Roy that non-violence was turned to protect to contain the revolutionary fervor of the masses. By drawing attention to the sudden withdrawal of noncooperation movement, Roy sought to prove the point. According to him, Gandhi called off the movement because he apprehended a revolutionary outburst challenging the ideological basis of the Non-Cooperation movement. However, critical of Gandhi's *Swaraj* that was doomed to fail because 'the time is gone when the people could be inspired by a vague promise of *Swaraj* (Roy, *Selected Works of M.N. Roy, 1923-1927, Vol. II, 2000:156*), Roy further outlined the programme a revolutionary nationalist party in the following ways:

1. Nationalist in independence: complete break from the empire; a democratic republic based on universal suffrage.
2. Abolition of feudalism and landlordism.
3. Nationalism of land; none but the cultivator will have the right of landholding.
4. Modernization of agriculture by state aid.
5. Nationalization of mines and public utilities.
6. Development of modern industries.
7. Protection of workers, minimum wages, eight-hour day, abolition of child labour, insurance and other advanced social legislation.
8. Free and compulsory primary education.
9. Freedom of religion and worship.
10. Rights of minorities.

However, the programme suggests, Roy provided a critical alternative to the Congress –led nationalist movement that was more 'reconciliatory' and less 'revolutionary'. These programmes are mere reiteration of what he wrote in his *India in Transition* in 1922 while outlining the meaning of *Swaraj* (Roy: 1923).

**Roy's views on organization:** Roy's views on Communist Party of India emerged as a national force only in 1935. Prior to this, most of its units existed as regional groups. In the *Future of Indian Politics*, Roy examined in detail the need for an organization which would be unspecified and general character. The Communist party of India formed in 1925 was not capable of mass mobilization. Moreover, most of the socialist and communist were either languishing in prisons or were isolated from each other. The CPI was endowed with the power to influence the unspecified party. The open, legal mass party would facilitate collective action. The illegal communist nucleus would direct this legal and mass front. Roy also asserted that the programme of the informal party would be the minimum

programme of the CPI. This was the beginning the Workers and Peasant party i.e WPP in various parts of the country. The WPP as mass legal platform, allowed them access to cultural and political groups, like the trade unions and so on.

All in all, the other two items are removal of untouchability and campaign against drinking alcohol, might have propaganda value, but were hardly effective, as Roy underlined, for two reasons: first, given the historically well –entrenched prejudices against those identified as untouchables, ‘no amount of ethical propagandizing’ would strike at the foundation of such age old practice (Roy, *India’s problem and its solutions*,; Reproduces in *Ray Selected Works of M.N. Roy, 1917-1922, Vol.I, 2000: 553-54*).

It is to be noted that M. N. Roy’s thought is an attempt to conceptualize his response drawing upon Marxism and his specific experiences in the context of Indian nationalist movement. Gandhi was a constant referent for obvious reason. In fact, he tried to participate the neglected section of the society. As shown, it was during the Non-Cooperation Movement, the constituencies of the INC went beyond cities and educated middle class. M. N. Roy seemed to have captured this moment of colonialism in India provided a theoretical framework that largely drew on Marxism.

**Conclusion:** We have seen there are two distinct phases in the evolution of M. N Roy ‘s political life, first, instead of blindly following Marxism while seeking to grasp colonialism and nationalism in India, Roy reinterpreted Marxism in creative manner.

By suggesting that the nationalism forces needed to be strengthened colonies, he provided the most critical inputs to the Marxist who failed to grasp the historical importance of the ‘indigenous bourgeoisie’ in a particular historical context. It is noteworthy that New Humanism of Roy presents a fresh perspective on the system of life prevalent in India during the times of the national movement.

Apparently, the most outstanding feature of New Humanism seeks to be reassertion of certain values as basic to the realization of a good life for the people. Hence, rooted is in the individualism of human beings, the bases of reason, morality and freedom which have been stressed to be characteristic of life of the people in modern times. The theory of New Humanism as a comprehensive and somewhat all inclusive theoretical construct, Roy seeks to advocate a model of life having a distinct imprint on all aspects of human life. Thus, the political fields, he calls for the setting up of an organized democracy which would be a party less polity where the run of policies would be inherently humanistic. On the whole New Humanism or Radical Humanism urged for all inclusive society in near future.

## References:

1. John Patrick Haithcox, *Communism and Nationalism in India; M.N. Roy and Comintern Policy, 1920–1939*. Princeton.
2. Karnik V.B.(1978), *M.N. Roy: Political Biography*. Bombay: Nav Jagriti Samaj.

3. Kaviraj, Sudipta. (1986 ) ‘ The Heteronymous Radicalism of M.N. Roy’ , in Thomas Pantham and Kenneth L. Deustch (eds) , *Political Thought in Modern India*, New Delhi: Sage Publications.
4. Mahakul B. K.(2005). "Radical Humanism of M.N. Roy," *Indian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 66, no. 3 (July 2005), pp. 607-618.
5. Ray Sibnarayan(1998)., *In Freedom's Quest: Life of M.N. Roy (Vol. 1: 1887–1922)*. Calcutta: Minerva.
6. Ray, Sibnarayan (ed) (2000) *Selected Works of M.N. Roy, 1917-1922, Vol. I*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
7. Ray, Sibnarayan (ed) (2000) *Selected Works of M.N. Roy, 1923-1927, Vol. II*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
8. Roy,Samaren (1970), *The Restless Brahmin: Early Life of M.N. Roy*. Bombay: Allied Publishers.
9. Roy.M.N. (1920). *The Future of Indian politics 1887-1954*, London : R. Bishop.
10. Roy.M.N. (1923). ‘ Definition of Swaraj’, *The Vanguard of the Indian Independence*, II(3[11April]).
11. Roy.M.N. (1947). *New Humanism: A Manifesto*, Calcutta: Renaissance publishers.
12. Roy.M.N. (1971). *India in Transition*, Bombay: Nachiketa Publications.
13. Sharma, B.S. (1965). *The Political Philosophy of M.N. Roy*. Delhi, National Publishing House.