

# 9 M.N. Roy

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To examine the circumstances leading to the transformation of M.N. Roy from Marxism to Radical Humanism.
- To assess Roy's critique of Gandhian thought and action.
- To describe Roy's ideas on Radical Humanism.

Inspired by revolutionary terrorism, Manvendra Nath Roy (1887–1954)<sup>1</sup> was politically baptised when he was entrusted with the task of receiving a German steamer carrying arms for the revolutionary terrorists. This 1914 attempt to smuggle arms in ships failed and the plan for an armed insurrection against the British was aborted. He tried again to procure arms from China and that also did not succeed. Inducted into the revolutionary terrorist movement in Bengal, Roy appeared to have endorsed the 'terrorist' methods in the nationalist campaign for freedom. This was however short-lived. As he himself realised, these revolutionary organisations were crushed and prevented 'from constituting any serious danger because they relied more upon conspiracies than upon revolutionary social forces' (Roy 1971: 210). 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. It was his involvement in the Communist Party of Mexico which gave him an opportunity to participate in the Second Congress of the Communist International. In 1927, he redefined Lenin's draft thesis on the national and colonial question that immediately made him a celebrity in the political circle. While elaborating his views on national and colonial question, he argued,

[I]t will be necessary to examine which social class is the most revolutionary in the respective country so as to make the contact with this social class and in this manner to rally the entire people and to support it in its struggle against Imperialism. If we do not consider the problem from this viewpoint, we will make no headway at all.... The only way to fulfill the great task of [revolution] is through the organisation of the exploited classes to become the revolutionary

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parties of the people. ('On the National and Colonial Question', reproduced in Ray 2000b: 305–06)

## FROM MARXISM TO RADICAL HUMANISM

As a representative of the Communist International, he led a delegation to China in 1926. Soon he fell out with the Communist International leadership and was expelled from the Comintern in 1929. 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 movement. The honeymoon was over by 1940 when Roy founded his own party known 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.

As evident from this small biographical account, Roy's political journey—from revolutionary terrorism to Radical Humanism—allowed him to conceptualise 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 context of colonialism. Opposed to the ideology of the Indian National Congress (INC), he suggested that the future of Indian liberation movement depended on the participation of the neglected sections of society. While commenting on the new basis of the national struggle, Roy thus exhorted, 'the future of Indian politics (of national liberation) will ... be determined by the social forces which still remain and will always remain antagonistic to Imperialism even in the new era dominated by the "higher ideals of Swaraj within the Empire"' ('The Future of Indian Politics', reproduced in Ray 2000b: 513[Chapter 12]).

He was convinced, as his draft thesis on national and colonial question demonstrates, that 'the 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 from revolutionary action' ('Original Draft of Supplementary Theses on the National and Colonial Question', reproduced in Ray 2000a: 167). While pursuing this argument further, he also underlined the growing importance of the proletariat in political movements against imperialism. Critical

of 'the bourgeois national democrats in the colonies' (Ray 2000a: 167), Roy was in favour of supporting the:

... revolutionary mass action through the medium of a communist party of the proletarians [that] will bring the real revolutionary forces to action which will not only overthrow the foreign imperialism but lead progressively to the development of Soviet power, thus preventing the rise of native capitalism in place of the vanquished foreign capitalism, to further oppress the people. ('Original Draft of Supplementary Theses on the National and Colonial Question', reproduced in *ibid.*: 168)

## CRITIQUE OF GANDHIAN THOUGHT AND ACTION

This overall assessment of the national and colonial question appears to 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 of Gandhi's social and political ideas. What was evident in the Congress in the 1920s, especially following the appearance of the Mahatma, was clearly articulated by Roy while commenting on socio-economic circumstances of India under colonialism. In articulating his views, Roy stands apart because of his attempt in conceptualising nationalism from the Marxist point of view. 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. This also gave a peculiar theoretical twist to Roy's conceptualisation of radicalism underlining the impact of both nationalist and Marxist ideas. In other words, this conceptualisation, 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. Since it

'will fall victim to its own contradictions' (Roy 1971: Chapter VIII, reproduced in Ray 2000a: 346), the Indian national movement, actuated by the spirit of non-violence was bound to fail. The inability of the Mahatma to comprehend the changing nature of social and political forces opposed to the prevalent nationalist movement remained at the root of its failure. Sharing Gandhi's criticism of capitalist civilisation, 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 humanitarian nor a religious fanatic in order to denounce the present order of society in the countries where capitalism rules' (Roy 1971: 348–49). Capitalism was unavoidable and 'will not collapse because sentimental humanitarians find it full of cruelty and injustice, [but because] of its own contradictions' (Ray 2000a: 348–49). Illustrative of 'the satanic western civilisation' (Roy 1971: 369), the British rule in India provided the most obvious missing link in India's growth as a national economy. Gandhi's role was significant in conceptualising the adverse economic impact on India of capitalism that was feverishly introduced into India in the form of large capitalist industries at the cost of handicrafts and other indigenous efforts. Not only did he articulate the devastating nature of western capitalism, he also radically altered the nature of the anti-British political campaign of the moderate and extremist varieties. While analysing the success of Gandhi in mobilising people in the 1919 anti-Rowlatt *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 resolutions 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. Gandhi postulated that the Indian people would 'refuse to obey these law and such other laws', but at the same time 'faithfully follow the truth and refrain from violence to life, person and property'.... For the first time in its history, the Indian national movement entered into the period of active struggle, and in doing so it had to call upon the masses of the people. (Roy 1971: Chapter VIII, reproduced in Ray 2000a: 369–70)

So, Gandhi was a clear departure from the past. Despite the limited goal of *satyagraha* due to its inherent weaknesses, it had

'penetrated the villages, it had rudely shaken the resignation of the masses of Indian people' (Roy 1971: 368). There was no doubt that Gandhi contributed to the articulation of this mass movement which Roy characterised as 'a huge popular upheaval', caused essentially by 'economic exploitation not alone by imperial capital, but by native agencies as well' (ibid.). Roy, therefore, concluded that 'the imminent popular upheaval', inspired by Gandhi and organised on the principles he devised, was 'a social outburst, the rise of a socially revolutionary force uncompromising, unrelenting, implacable, which would mark the commencement of the inevitable class war' (Roy 1971: Chapter VIII, reproduced in Ray 2000a: 368). As evident, Roy was critical of the ideology of non-violence and *satyagraha* for being politically restrictive; and yet, he found in Gandhi the most effective political leadership that extended the constituencies of nationalist politics by involving peripheral sections of the society.

For him, non-violence was a cloak:

... to serve the interests of those who have built castles of social privilege and economic exploitation. If the end of nationalism is to glorify the privileged few, then non-violence is certainly useful; but to nationalism of a broader kind, which is the expression of the desire of the entire Indian people, it is a positive hindrance. ('The Cult of Non Violence: Its Socio-economic Background', reproduced in Ray 2000b: 156)

The cult of non-violence was a convenient tool for both Gandhi-led nationalist political forces as well those supporting imperialism. Hence, Roy predicted that both these forces 'will bury their hatchet [in due course] in order to carry on the crusade against those forces of revolution which menace the security of vested interests' (ibid.). The idea of non-cooperation that drew on non-violence was just a cloak to pursue the narrow vested interests at the cost of the majority. Quoting an editorial in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, Roy argued that Gandhi did not invent the strategy of non-cooperation. What he did was simply 'to find an organised and outer expression to the latent discontent in the country. Gandhi saw the danger of this latent discontent. He did not want that this discontent should be left to itself and burst out in fatal physical revolt or

revolution.... This was the true inwardness of his campaign' ('The Cult of Non Violence: Its Socio-economic Background', reproduced in Ray 2000b: 154). It was clear to Roy that non-violence was tuned to protect the vested interests and non-cooperation was the best strategy to contain the revolutionary fervour of the masses. In other words, this strategy was ideologically governed and dictated in order to 'thwart the development of dynamic revolutionary forces which threaten to push Indian nationalism dangerously farther than the so-called politically minded middle class desired it to go' (ibid.). By drawing attention to the sudden withdrawal of the non-cooperation 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. In his words, 'with one single breath, the Mahatma thus blows up the beautiful castle built so laboriously during all these years of storm and stress' ('The Release of Gandhi', reproduced in Ray 2000b: 182–83). Not only did he stall a revolutionary upsurge, he also became an instrument at the hands of the colonial power to contain movements threatening its very foundation. As Roy put it, Gandhi was immediately released as soon as the movement was withdrawn simply because the government understood that 'he will be a very valuable asset in the coming game of "change of heart"' (ibid.: 182). Furthermore, in releasing Gandhi, the government was not generous but calculative because 'none will appreciate this act of generosity more than the Mahatmaji who will pay it back [in some form or another] when required' (ibid.: 183).

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*' ('The Cult of Non Violence: Its Socio-economic Background', reproduced in Ray 2000b: 156), Roy further outlined the programme of a revolutionary nationalist party in the following ways:

1. Nationalist independence: complete break from the empire; a democratic republic based on universal suffrage.
2. Abolition of feudalism and landlordism.
3. Nationalisation of land; none but the cultivator will have the right of landholding.

4. Modernisation of agriculture by state aid.
5. Nationalisation 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.

As 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*. In the aftermath of the Non-Cooperation Movement, the Congress, as Roy believed, appeared to have lost its revolutionary potentials because of two reasons: (a) the Congress lacked a revolutionary leadership, and (b) it had lost support of the masses. While suggesting the means to strengthen the Congress, Roy recommended that in order to regain its strength, 'the Congress should go to trade unions and the peasant *Sabhas* (meetings), listen to the grievances discussed there and incorporate them into a truly constructive programme which will draw the wide masses once more within the folds of the Congress party to fight under its command for *Swaraj*' (Roy 1922: 3, reproduced in Ray 2000a: 541). Critical of Gandhian *swaraj* as it evolved in the aftermath of the 1919–21 Non-Cooperation Movement, Roy was convinced that this Congress-led movement was bound to fail since it aimed at protecting exploiting classes ignoring 'the political rights of the workers and peasants' ('Appeal to the Nationalists', reproduced in Ray 2000b: 324). As a Marxist, he also felt the need to join hands with the proletariats elsewhere otherwise these movements would remain just ripples. He, therefore, suggested that 'the revolutionary nationalists should, therefore, not only join hands with the Indian workers and peasants, but should establish close relations with the advanced proletariat of the world' (ibid.). By attributing the abject poverty in India to the British policy of 'forcibly making India an agricultural adjunct to industrial Britain' ('India's Problem and its Solution', reproduced in Ray 2000a: 555),

Roy was, for obvious reason, critical of the dominion status within the empire. Hence, he argued that:

... neither self-government realised progressively by Non Cooperation will change the economic condition of the toiling [masses].... Therefore, the interests of the majority demand *complete separation from all imperial connection and the establishment of a Republican State* based on the democratic principles of *Universal Suffrage*. ('Definition of Swaraj', reproduced in Ray 2000b: 101, emphasis in the original)

Roy made a thorough analysis of Gandhi's constructive programme which, he felt, was absolutely inadequate for India's 'economic salvation'. The constructive programme was announced by the Congress Working Committee on 12 February 1922 at Bardoli immediately after the events at Chauri Chaura where violence broke out in wake of the Non-Cooperation Movement. Gandhi had a significant role in articulating the constructive programme since the Bardoli resolution vested in him the full powers of the All India Congress Committee. In order to ensure the economic well-being of the masses, the constructive programme included (a) *charkha*, (b) *khaddar*, (c) removal of untouchability, and (d) fight against drinking alcohol. While the first two programmes were essentially economic in nature, the rest were social problems with economic implications. There was no doubt that the campaign against the removal of untouchability and drinking alcohol made people aware of the adverse implications of these social evils. But the *charkha-khaddar* programme was, as M.N. Roy was convinced, doomed to be a failure for its obvious adverse economic consequences on the consumers. Two basic requirements for its success were (a) *charkha* must be introduced into every house and (b) *khaddar* must be worn by all. These conditions could never be met since *charkha* was not as popular as was conceived and the price of *khaddar* was higher than that of the mill-made cloth. Given the cost of *khaddar* that was beyond the capacity of Indian workers and peasants, this campaign was bound to fail. Taking into account the average income of the Indian workers and peasants, argued Roy, *khaddar* could never become an attractive proposition in the nationalist campaign. Their paltry income never got them 'the minimum quantity of clothing' they needed; they also 'cannot be expected to go naked rather than wearing "the unholy" foreign stuff' ('India's Problem and its Solution', reproduced in Ray 2000a: 553–54).

Roy also reminded Gandhi that the forcible application of home-spun during the *swadeshi* movement was responsible for the decline of this movement. 'Sentiment can keep a movement going for a certain length of time', Roy further underlined, 'but it cannot last forever unless fed with more substantial factors' ('India's problem and its Solution', reproduced in Ray 2000a: 553–54). Similarly, Gandhi's insistence on *charkha* was based on a hollow economic logic. In other words, not economically viable, the fate of *charkha* was equally sealed. As he explained, since its high price was daily restricting the sale of *khaddar* and also the market for home-spun yarn, its manufacture thus gradually became economically unviable. So, the future of *charkha* was uncertain since *khaddar* never became an automatic choice for the masses due to its inherent limitations. Unless *charkha-khaddar* was made economically viable, 'propaganda for the revival of cottage industry does not prepare the people for a purely political movement' (ibid.: 554).

The other two items, namely, 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 propagandising' would strike at the foundation of such an age-old practice (ibid.: 554). What was required was a constant campaign, coupled with changes in the mode and relations of productions redefining interpersonal relationships by challenging 'the prejudices' as harmful for India's evolution as 'a healthy polity' (ibid.). Likewise, it was difficult, if not impossible, to counter effectively, simply by sermon, the drinking habit that provided the poor with a handy device 'to drown their sorrows in unconsciousness' (ibid.).

Roy's analysis of Gandhi's constructive programmes clearly suggests that they were basically verbal, couched in sentiments, rather than effective programmes involving the masses. In view of the serious weaknesses, these programmes failed to achieve the goal that the Mahatma so assiduously set for the masses. According to Roy, these programmes 'should be such as to appeal to the immediate interests of the masses of the people' (ibid.: 555). For him, the non-payment of taxes that already had galvanised the peasants in UP, Bengal and Punjab into action should be pursued with zeal. Advising the Congress to adopt the agenda of the masses, Roy recommended that 'the preparatory work consists of demonstrating

practically and not by sentimental humanitarian cant, that the Congress is the leader of the worker and peasant population. [Only then] Civil Disobedience can be inaugurated with all the possibilities of a revolutionary development' ('India's Problem and its Solution', reproduced in Ray 2000a: 555). As demonstrated, Roy carved a space for himself by providing a critique of Gandhi's social and economic ideas. Despite his admiration for Gandhi who infused a new zeal to India's struggle for independence, Roy was perhaps one of those few, who were never swayed by the charisma of the Mahatma when it involved social, economic and political issues affecting the masses. Hence, his critique remains a significant intervention underlining both the weaknesses and the natural strength of the ideology that the Mahatma sought to articulate as an activist-theoretician.

What is clear in M.N. Roy's thought is an attempt to conceptualise 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, political radicalism acquired a completely different connotation with the growing participation of the so-called peripheral sections 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 and provided a theoretical framework that largely drew on Marxism. In other words, by seeking to capture 'neglected voice' of the people, Roy performed a historical task along with those radicals striving to involve the subaltern in the nationalist movement. Whether his radicalism was politically viable in that particular context is debatable, though there is no doubt that his ideas were ideologically refreshing simply because it took into account the growing revolutionary ferment among the masses. Like his radical counterparts in the nationalist movement, Roy put forward a well-argued theoretical model that explained the predicament of the Gandhi-led nationalist leadership due to its failure to comprehend the mass fervour confronting both the colonial power and also the indigenous vested interests. Yet, Roy's analysis of Gandhi from a strictly Marxist point of view, though creative, failed to understand 'the cultural power of Gandhi', and its ability to fashion weapons of political struggle out of unorthodox material. This led him to

misconstrue what, in retrospect, was the strength of Gandhi's politics as 'an impotent mysticism'.<sup>2</sup>

## **RADICAL HUMANISM**

As the ultimate theoretical construct of M.N. Roy, the philosophy of Radical Humanism or New Humanism represents the zenith of an intellectually bewildering journey spanning over a period of over 30 years. It appears to be rather unfortunate for an intellectually sound and fertile mind that Roy was to have meandered into so many diverse directions that no systematic, consistent, pragmatic and acceptable theory could be evolved having obvious followings amongst the Indian masses. The genesis of the concept of New Humanism lies in the frustration of Roy with the subtle characteristics of the Marxian philosophy like its feeble ethical moorings and overemphasis on the economic interpretation of the history to the substantive, if not total, disregard to the value of the intellect in the dynamics of the historical processes. Thus, initially Roy tried to evolve a radical perspective on humanism which still had a lot to owe to Marxism. However, dissatisfied even with his radical incarnation, Roy made the final move of propounding a theory rooted in integral scientific humanism which he called as the 'New Humanism, new, because it is Humanism enriched, reinforced and elaborated by scientific knowledge and social experience gained during the centuries of modern civilisation' (Roy 1947: 42).

The core of the Radical Humanism of Roy lies in laying greatest emphasis on the personality of the individual as a human being. He was very critical of all those theories and perspectives which did not take individual as the focal point of analysis. For instance, his opposition to Marxism stemmed from, among other things, its undue stress on the phenomenon of class struggle under which the human being lost his individuality in order to become a part of one class or the other. At the same time, he denounced the framework of nationalism also apparently due to the fact that it also subsumes the personality of the human being within meta constructions of the nation and nationhood. He was categorical in propounding that 'Radicalism thinks in terms neither of nation

nor class; its concern is man; it conceives freedom as freedom of the individual' (Roy 1947: 36).

The philosophy of New Humanism, in fact, clamours to act as the liberator of man from the advertent or inadvertent fetters which were put on him by various theoretical constructs over a period of time in history. Espousing the radicalism in the innate qualities of man, New Humanism discounts any claim that man draws his self or independent status from any super-physical being. Rather, it reiterates the fundamental doctrine of Radical Humanism that human beings derive all their virtues and prowess from their creative attainments in unravelling the mysteries and partial conquest of nature. Roy, therefore, argues that if man stretches out his abilities and ingenuities to move out of the circumference of nature, how can he be subordinated to something which itself is very artificial and man-made enough to be undone time and again. Hence, what remains permanent is the solid personality of man consisting of physiological units on the one hand and rational intellectual faculties on the other.

The human being, as the central agent of the New Humanism of M.N. Roy, is supposed to be characterised by three fundamental elements of reason, morality and freedom. Given the diversity in the nature and characteristics of the vast majority of people, Roy takes rationality as the unifying element in every human being echoing the notion of harmony in the universe. Taking every man as essentially rational, Roy convincingly argues that the behaviour of every person in the world is rational, though it may appear to be irrational at times owing to the differences in the underlying patterns of life in various parts of the world. The innate rationality in the personality of every human being dovetails on him the capability of discovering and rediscovering the laws of nature in order to unfetter him from the hidden bondages which happen to be imposed on him for the time being.

Morality constitutes another significant trait of man as conceptualised by M.N. Roy. However, Roy is quick enough to discard the notion that morality is based on intuitional and transcendental pillars. Applying the canons of Marxian training, Roy argues that morality stems out of the scientific application of human rationality to the dynamics of social relations and mutual adjustments of people with one another. Given the innate unifying and creative

value of morality in society, Roy asserts that it aims at translating into reality the collective and common good of the whole society.

Freedom, to Roy, epitomises the crux of the biological struggle for self-protection and multiplication of the human beings in a somewhat hostile nature. In other words, the human being's quest for finding out the laws of nature and the dynamics of the functioning of the cosmos has the ultimate objective of providing certain clues to him to enable him to get rid of the restrictions imposed by nature. The product of this enterprise is freedom for man. Therefore, the notion of freedom, argues Roy, consists of the inalienable elements of humanism, individualism and rationalism (Roy 1945: 61). The application of rationality by the individual in his search for knowledge culminates, in the final analysis, in the idea of humanism.

The cumulative impact of the elements of reason, morality and freedom on human beings has been to provide a cosmopolitan perspective to the theory of New Humanism. As Roy (1955: 310) succinctly points out, 'New Humanism is cosmopolitan. A cosmopolitan commonwealth of spiritually free men will not be limited by the boundaries of national states—capitalist, fascist, socialist, communist, or of any other kind—which will gradually disappear under the impact of the twentieth century renaissance of Man.' The cosmopolitanism of New Humanism goes beyond the notion of internationalism, as the latter is based on the assumption of the fledging existence of various nation-states in the world. However, New Humanism presupposes the antagonism between the vibrancy of nation-states and the concept of cosmopolitanism. The realisation of the dream of cosmopolitanism, therefore, becomes conditional to the fact that nation-states are neutralised, if not decimated, as the formidable actors in the world (Roy 1947: 50).

Elaborating the economic dimensions of New Humanism, Roy pleads for economic reorganisation of the society free from exploitation of one man by another, leading to the establishment of cooperative economy. For this, he pinned his hopes on planned economic development with the virtues of cooperation and decentralisation underpinning the system. Thus, the communal pattern of social growth, as envisaged by Roy, would have yielded the maximum individual freedom to all men in the society. However, Roy was prudent enough to factor the role of state in the economic activities of men and considered it as some sort of necessary evil.

In fact, the conduct of economic activities in the society in a communal manner was disturbed by the origin of private property. The obvious probability of the ensuing disagreements amongst the individuals necessitated the creation of some sort of regulatory mechanism to maintain a minimum order in the conduct of the economic activities of the people. Thus, Roy maintains that the advent of the mechanism of state is neither due to a social contract nor superimposed on the society. On the contrary, it happens to be a historical and natural phenomenon arising out in the context of the need for a common instrument to ensure the security and order for all in the society. Over the years, the concentration of power in the hands of the state is taken by Roy as a perversion of the role designed for the qualified administrators who arrogate to themselves maximum powers to lord over the people. Opposing it vehemently, Roy seeks to reorganise the structure and functions of the state based on the doctrines of democracy, decentralisation and pluralism. Like the classical liberals, Roy also argues for minimal interference of the state in the activities of the people and the emergence of a number of other equally important and autonomous social institutions who would act in tandem with the state to ensure a free and contended life for the people.

The notion of 'organised democracy' (Roy 1947: 12) is to be the hallmark of the political dimension of the New Humanism of M.N. Roy. Being a democrat to the hilt, Roy, nevertheless, despised the classical parliamentary form of democracy as prevalent in the West. To him, democratic political setup must be the facilitator of a participative citizenry in the country, which the liberal parliamentary democracy seemed to have failed miserably. At the same time, Roy also denounced the communist democratic systems characterised by the notion of democratic centralism and asked for dismantling of the same. His conception of organised democracy, therefore, was expected to serve the very people who would lie at the root of the democratic system of the country as it would not be structured in the top-heavy model where the higher-ups would wield the stick over the lower rung of leadership. On the other hand, the functional vibrancy to the system would be provided by the local people's committees lying at the root of the democratic system as they would remain the source of power for the higher levels of the democratic institutions.

New Humanism believes in the value of humanist politics also, which means, in simple terms, politics not for power but for the purification and rationalisation of the political life of the people. Roy was fully convinced of the debasing property of the politics being practiced during his time through the medium of political parties. He maintained that party-based political activities in the country are aimed at getting the most out of the people for serving the interests of a privileged few in the society at the cost of the masses. Thus, politics has become a corrupting instrument whereby people enter the arena of politics to make quick riches for themselves. To get rid of this malaise in the Indian political system, he, therefore, advocated the abolition of political parties and the conduct of the political activities in the country not on the basis of parties but individual perspectives on the issues of the common man which would lead to the spread of humanist politics in the society.

The social fabric of New Humanism is designed by M.N. Roy out of his subtle conclusion that class struggle could not be the only reality in a society (Roy 1947: 26). Rather, Roy noted that no society could sustain itself without some sort of cohesiveness existing amongst the people. At the same time, Roy also discarded the classical Marxian formulation of the existence of only two classes—haves and have-nots—in the society. In order to provide for an educated, rational and mobile class which could have acted as the buffer between the two seemingly antagonistic classes, Roy accorded a prized status to the middle class in his social perspective of New Humanism. Even despite eulogising the role of the middle class as the moderator of the social cohesion in society, Roy was emphatic to give the primacy to the individual rather than the class in the social formation of New Humanism.

Finally, the medium of fructifying the ideal of New Humanism, to Roy, would not be anything else than education. Implying the broadest possible connotation of the term education, Roy was of the opinion that it was futile to talk about revolution being brought about through the means of class struggle or violent means. To him, education could be the slow but sure emancipator of the people from the shackles of the anachronistic and irrational system of life. Hence, Roy pleads for the denunciation of the idea of violent and quick revolution to defend the virtues of rationality, morality and freedom amongst the people, creating the background for

the ushering in of a new era of evolved revolutionary life. The enlightenment going deep into the minds and heart of the masses through the methodology of education would be far more indelible and everlasting than ideological intoxication in a short span of time. Education would be able to bare the truth in the face of people and give them a perspective on how to respond to a particular situation in a rational manner. Thus, Roy stresses that the whole scheme of New Humanism would be operationalised only when the masses are adequately educated in rational thinking, so that they are able to look for plausible revolutionary solutions to the problems plaguing the society.

A critical evaluation of the philosophy of New Humanism of M.N. Roy reveals certain discrepancies in the entire scheme of things. To begin with, the idea of New Humanism was advanced by Roy in the face of his utter dissatisfaction with the theoretical constructs of the ideology of Marxism over the years. Indeed, most of the characteristics of New Humanism are in the nature of discarding the prevalent conception of the Marxian analysis and evolving a counter argument rooted in reason, morality and freedom of the individual. What, however, is incongruent in this regard, is that Roy could not resist the temptations and trappings of his longstanding training and association with the ideology of Marxism, as a result of which he could not completely free himself from the allurements of the Marxism which he still found to have 'the positive outcome or early intellectual efforts to evolve a philosophy which could harmonise the processes of physical nature, social evolution and the will and emotions of the individual man' (Roy 1944: vii). A concrete reflection of his clinging to the basic postulates of Marxism is his idea of New Humanist Revolution which, despite remaining almost antithetical to the classical Marxian notion of revolution, remains articulated in terms of 'revolution' in the typical Marxian tone.

Another crucial aspect on which the philosophy of M.N. Roy is found amiss has been its feasibility analysis in the face of prevailing socio-economic and political circumstances in the country. For instance, as part of delineating the political framework of the theory of New Humanism, Roy calls for the abolition of political parties and the conduct of political activities in the country in such a way so as to evolve a model of humanist politics. Such assertions,

despite being intellectually congruent and morally high sounding, fall flat in face of their practical value for the country. For instance, it has not been illustrated through concrete examples by Roy as to how a modern democratic system of government could be run without the existence of political parties as the primary instrument to articulate the varying opinion of the people in the society, which, in final analysis, becomes the basis of policies and programmes of various parties.

## CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

As the discussion suggests, there are two distinct phases in the evolution of M.N. Roy's political ideas: first, instead of blindly following Marxism while seeking to grasp colonialism and nationalism in India, Roy reinterpreted Marxism in a creative manner. By suggesting that the nationalist forces needed to be strengthened in colonies, he provided the most critical inputs to the Marxists who failed to grasp the historical importance of the 'indigenous bourgeoisie' in a particular historical context. This was undoubtedly an innovative idea which was useful in organising the masses against colonialism, especially when the communist parties remained politically peripheral. Similarly, New Humanism of M.N. Roy appears to be a fresh perspective on the system of life prevalent in India during the times of the national movement. Apparently, the most astounding feature of New Humanism seems to be the reassertion of certain values as basic to the realisation of a good life for the people. Hence, rooted in the individualism of human beings, the philosophy of New Humanism rests on the eternal values of reason, morality and freedom, which have been stressed to be the underlying characteristics of the life of the people in modern times. Presenting 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 the aspects of human life. Thus, in the political field, he calls for the setting up of an organised democracy which would be a partyless polity where the run of politics would be inherently humanistic. Economically, New Humanism seeks to provide for a cooperative economy where production would be carried out with the sole

purpose of serving human needs under communal ownership of the means of production. Similarly, the social order under New Humanism would be marked by the prevalence of a deep social cohesion amongst the people as against the notion of class struggle, which has been found to permeate the society under Marxian scheme of things. Yet, what seems to be lying as the bedrock of the philosophy of New Humanism is the notion of education which, to Roy, would act as the liberator and emancipator of human beings leading to the onset of a New Humanist Revolution in the final run. Thus, despite the comprehensiveness and refreshing perspective of the theory of New Humanism, what is tragic on the part of it is that it has found very few takers in India. And it appears that the same tragedy visits almost all aspects of the intellectual enterprises initiated by M.N. Roy all through his life.

## NOTES

1. In contrast with other communist leaders, M.N. Roy appears to have received adequate scholarly attention. One of the most detailed account of Roy's political ideology is Haithcox (1971); for a general study of the growth of the communist movement in India, see Overstreet and Windmiller (1960).
2. Sudipta Kaviraj (1986: 229) thus argues, 'Gandhi's politics were not wholly mystical; rather, even its mysticism was often deliberate, its irrationalities carefully thought-out.'

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