

Chapter VI

M.N. Roy: From Marxism to Humanism

Manabendra Nath Roy, whose earlier name was Narendranath Bhattacharya, is the exponent of Radical Humanism. His political career has undergone radical changes. It can be divided into three periods. In the early life, he was an anarchist and worked in close cooperation with the leaders of the *Yugantar* Group, a secret political organisation, of undivided Bengal. In the second period, he became initiated to communism. He was called to Russia and became the advisor of the Bolshevik Party on colonial problems. Towards the later period of his life, he gave up communism, and became an exponent of Radical Democracy. V. M. Tarkunde, in his introduction to Roy's *New Humanism*, has distinguished these phases in Roy's life. But there is another phase when Roy propagated the decolonization thesis. It is a draft resolution on the Indian question, the gradual decolonization of India, which will be allowed eventually to evolve out of the status of dependence to the Dominion Status.

Roy's political thought has two sides – the polemical and the constructive. The polemical part consists of a detailed criticism of different aspects of Marxism. The constructive position consists of an elaboration of his own social and political thinking.

About the historical background of Roy's criticism of Marxism, we may mention that in the late twenties there was a breach between Roy and the Communist International. Later, in his book, *The Russian Revolution*,¹ he made some pungent criticism of the Stalinist regime – Stalin's sectarianism and extreme leftism which precluded the possibility of international communism. The sociological and philosophical writings of Roy roughly between 1948-1954 indicate this progressive breaking away from his Marxist antecedents and affiliations. As a person Marx evokes great praise from Roy. He regards Marx as a merciless critic of social injustice in the tradition of the great Hebrew

prophets.² He regards Marx's impassioned moral plea for social justice as a legacy of the Jewish prophets. He admits that "Marx was a passionate Humanist; and, with a burning faith in revolution, he was also a romanticist".³ There was also the 'original moral radicalism' in Marx which was "completely forgotten by his orthodox exponents, who made a political Jesuitism out of their faith".⁴ Roy was particularly aggrieved when he found that Stalin denied the moral values of the progressive force, and was keen to spread military power to attain supremacy. Roy wanted to reinstate the 'humanist, libertarian, moralist' kernel of Marxism after freeing it from the dogmatism of economic determinism.⁵ So far as the teachings of Marx are concerned either Roy abandoned them or introduced substantial changes in them. In any case, he looked beyond communism.

In the critical part of his thought Roy concentrates on what he considers as the limitations of Marxism, namely, Marx's concept of history, the dialectical methodology of Marx, Marx's concept of surplus value and the complete marginalisation of the individual. This has the purpose of leading to the positive doctrine of New Humanism or Radical Humanism, envisaging the partyless democracy. We shall discuss Roy's critique of Marxism in some details because of its importance for understanding his positive doctrine.

In line with the humanist tradition of India Roy puts much emphasis on man and his freedom, the evolutionary character of it. In striking similarity to Tagore, whom he does not mention though, Roy says: "History is the record of man's struggle for freedom". The difference between the two is that Roy, though he recognizes the creative role of intelligence and seeks to replace the term 'matter' by 'physical being', subscribes to a materialistic conception of history and a materialistic worldview. History, he points out explicitly, cannot be considered as merely a succession of events. It is an organic evolution. Man is not the slave of any supernatural power. Man is also not to be taken as a biological entity. It is true that for Roy, ideas themselves are biologically determined, but once the biologically determined process of ideation is

complete, and ideas are formed, they continue to have an autonomous existence. How they come to acquire an independent existence of their own is not explained by Roy. But by recognising the independent role of ideas, Roy is able to maintain that even human organisms can engage the environment, and even can avoid competition among groups. "History, therefore, does not follow the Marxist pattern of dialectics, but is a movement from homogenous masses to the evolution of distinct individualities experimenting in various forms of harmonisation between themselves".⁶

The Marxist interpretation of history is defective, according to Roy, because it allows a very slender role to mental activity in the social process. History cannot be explained solely with reference to materialistic objectivism. The intelligence of human beings and their cumulative actions are very powerful social forces. In the Marxist philosophy of history, ideas are regarded as the epiphenomena of matter and consciousness is a late arrival in the scale of evolution. Although, some of the later Marxists tried to introduce the concept of interaction between ideas and social forces in place of the older theory of the dominance of the material on social reality, it remains true that in the Marxist philosophy of history the creative role of ideas is minimised and the upholders of the doctrine of primacy of ideas, for example, the socialists of Germany, were ridiculed as Utopians.

Roy seeks to put forward a theory of history consisting of two parallel processes: ideal and physical. Ideas have a life of their own and logic of evolution of their own. There is a reciprocal relation between ideation and social processes, but at no specific historical context there "can be a causal relation traced between social events and movements of ideas"⁷. Roy writes "Philosophically, the materialist conception of history must recognize the creative role of intelligence. Materialism cannot deny the reality of ideas. They are not *sui generis*; they are biologically determined; priority belongs to the physical being, to matter, if the old-fashioned term may still be used. But once the biologically determined process of ideation is complete, ideas are formed;

they continue to have an autonomous existence, an evolutionary process of their own, which runs parallel to the physical process of social evolution. The two parallel processes, ideal and physical, compose history. Both are determined by their respective logic or dynamics or dialectics. At the same time, they are mutually influenced, the one by the other. That is how history becomes an organic process".⁸ The theory of parallelism of ideas and the texture of objective society implies that no direct, specific correlation is possible between a system of ideas and a set of events. We may say that Roy subscribes to idealism, not in the sense of denying the objective reality of the material world but of having due regard for the fact that ideas have always played an autonomous role in history, is implied in the doctrine that man creates history.

Roy also criticises the Marxist economic interpretation of history. He says that before man became a *homo economicus* in quest of economic amenities he was guided by biological considerations. An anthropological study of the history of the primitive man indicates that the early activities and struggles of the human species were centered on finding out means of subsistence. These activities were directed and motivated by the urgent drives and urges which were biological in nature. Biology and not economics dictated the early activities of mankind. The theory of historical materialism is defective to the extent that it does not seek to explain and analyse the early history of man. Even in the later history of man there were diverse types of activity wherein mankind finds satisfaction but which could not be brought under the rubric of economics. Roy illustrates his point with reference to the emergence and growth of different ideologies in history. He points out, for example, that "A careful study of the economic conditions of the early Middle Ages shows that there was no causal connection between the rise of the trading class and the Renaissance; that humanist individualism was not a mere superstructure, nor a justification of any particular economic system".⁹ In support of Roy's contention we may bring in the case of Italy. In Italy itself, spectacular developments in literature and the arts were not complemented or followed by comparable developments in political economy or

the material conditions of the people. Italy was not a solitary instance. In Bengal, too, the impressive cultural achievements of the period from Rammohun Roy to Rabindranath Tagore did not lay the foundations of equivalent growth in political economy. How is one to explain or interpret this gap or dissimilarity of development between aesthetic-intellectual and material-economic elements? The Renaissance, Roy adds, was a phase in man's age-long struggle for freedom; it was a chapter in the cultural history of mankind which has its own logic and momentum – it was inspired more by the humanist, rationalist and scientific ideas of the ancient Greek civilization than by the economic interest and political ambition of the medieval trading class. No necessary relationship holds between economic determinism and philosophy of materialism. It is possible to be a materialist and accept divergent criteria of historical interpretation, for example, power determinism or climatological determinism or anatomical physiological determinism, because political power, climate and physiological system of the human species are also material forces. The relation between philosophical materialism and economic interpretation of history is not inevitable.

Roy thinks that the acceptance of the dialectical methodology introduces an idealistic element in Marxism. He says: "Misguided by the Hegelian schooling, Marx disowned the heritage of mechanistic naturalism and was carried away by the essentially idealistic concept of dialectics".¹⁰ The movement through thesis and antithesis is a characteristic of logical argumentation. It is ridiculous to say that matter and forces of production move dialectically. Roy says: "The dialectical materialism of Marx, therefore, is materialist only in name; dialectics being its cornerstone, it is essentially an idealistic system. No wonder that it disowned the heritage of the eighteenth century scientific naturalism and fought against the humanist materialism of Feuerbach and his followers"¹¹. Roy emphatically states that dialectic is a category of idealistic logic. "The idealism of the dialectic method cannot be suppressed".¹²

Roy was also critical of the theory of surplus value as advanced by Marx. Marx elaborates the theory of surplus value in Part III of the *Capital*. We shall outline Marx's theory of surplus value before we undertake Roy's critique of it. A commodity, says Marx, is a product of labour. It has a use and is produced for the purpose of exchange. A commodity, therefore, has a twofold nature: a use-value and an exchange-value. The use-value of a commodity is determined by expenditure of human labour. It is determined by the quantity of socially necessary labour time embodied in it. Further, Marx points out that money gets transformed into capital, when the capitalist and the owner of money is able to buy the labour power of the worker. Labour power becomes a commodity which is bought and sold. Labour power is used to produce a new power greater than its own. If, for example, the worker labours six hours to produce the value of his own labour power, then all the time he works for more than six hours to produce a surplus value. The capitalist buys labour power in order to use it for the production of commodities, of values, and of surplus value. The surplus value accrues solely from the expenditure of labour power, i.e., from the worker working longer than the time necessary to reproduce the value of his own labour power. The rate of surplus value measures the degree of exploitation of the worker. It is defined as the ratio of the total surplus value produced to the variable capital expended. In the capitalist production there is a constant drive to increase the rate as well as the mass of surplus value, i.e., to increase the exploitation of the worker. In short, Marx shows that the process of capitalist production is a process of accumulation of capital. A given capital does not only reproduce itself, but by the conversion of the surplus value into capital multiplies itself many times over.

Roy considers the theory of surplus value to be a fallacy. According to him, it is not peculiar to Capitalism as Marx thinks. All social progress depends on it and Roy also calls it 'social surplus' and 'lever of progress'. The Marxist demand for the abolition of surplus value is impractical and even suicidal; social surplus will disappear if production of surplus value is ever stopped; then, with

the disappearance of the lever of progress, society will stagnate and eventually break down. Roy, however, points out that Marx did not expressly prescribe the abolition of surplus value; though that must be done if 'exploitation' of labour was ever to cease. Marx held that under Capitalism, production of surplus value represented exploitation of labour because it is appropriated by one class. Roy holds that such appropriation by one particular class is certainly an undesirable system, and it must go. But the sanction for the demand must be moral and not economic; it is a demand for social justice. It could not be made in the context of an economic theory from which a political doctrine was deduced. Roy contends that surplus value is produced in the socialist economy of Russia also. Otherwise, the rapid industrial expansion there after the revolution cannot be explained; rapid expansion of industries implies quicker and larger accumulation, and hence larger margin of surplus value. Roy says: "It is implicitly admitted in Marxism that even under the socialist economic system social surplus will be produced; and it is explicitly demanded that, for the establishment of Socialism, the expropriator should be expropriated by the proletariat. That evidently means that, under the new order, the social surplus will be appropriated by the new ruling class – the proletariat, pending the advent of the utopia of a classless and stateless society"¹³. Thus, according to Roy, the creation of surplus value is essential for both capitalist and socialist systems. The demand for the abolition of surplus value is simply the politicalisation of an economic fact of production. Roy observes: "If production of surplus value represents exploitation of labour, then, labour was exploited also under Socialism; and it must be admitted that under the socialist economy of Russia labour is even more exploited – to produce larger surplus value to be accumulated into new capital".¹⁴ Class struggle is read into the economic state of affairs, and this paved the way of revolution in the sense of overthrowing the capitalist system of production.

Roy also casts doubt on the Marxist theory of the polarisation of the capitalist society into two classes and the consequent theory of class struggle. He says that Marx was not correct in his statement about the disappearance of the middle class. Roy accepts that the decline of capitalism spells also the destitution of the middle class, but he also regards Socialism as an ideology conceived by the middle class intellectuals. To put it in his words: "The decay of Capitalism economically ruined the middle class. The result was quickening of the will for the subversion of the *status quo*, which made no place for them, and the striving for a new order".¹⁵ Because of their economic destitution, the middle class was ready to join the proletariat in the fight for Socialism. But by Socialism, they meant not State Capitalism but a more equitable social order that was not exclusively based on economic conditions but on the appreciation of moral and cultural values as the positive outcome of human civilisation. In matters of decisive importance such as culture and education, the middle class remained a distinct social factor capable of influencing events. He remarks: "Socialism, indeed, is a middle class ideology. Detached both from the antagonistic camps – of capital and labour – and possessed of the requisite intellectual attainments, the middle class alone could produce individuals who saw beyond the clash of immediate economic interests and conceived the possibility of a new order of justice and harmony".¹⁶ Roy points out that Lenin saw the mistake of excluding the middle class, and tried to rectify it, but only in the field of organization. Theoretically, Lenin remained loyal to orthodox Marxism; he would not recognize the revolutionary significance of the middle class. If the economic determinism of Marxism is to be taken into consideration, the proletariat must be the most backward class. Yet, Marxism allots to the proletariat the role of leading society towards a new order, a higher civilization. The proletariat is still to develop their culture and morality; the middle class is thoroughly disregarded, and the communist movement has no use for capitalist culture and bourgeois morality. In such a situation there arises a vacuum; "...a new philosophy of revolution suitable for our age, is yet to arise as the beacon light for civilised

humanity”.¹⁷ Roy concludes that the economic dogmatism of Marxism and its cynical attitude to moral and cultural values alienated the middle class splitting the forces of revolution. “Selfish economism eclipsed the moral appeal of Socialism”.

Roy’s criticism of the Marxian view does not mean that he favours Parliamentary Democracy. Democracy has two forms, direct and indirect. Direct democracy was prevalent in the city states of Greece. In large states of today it is not feasible. We find indirect democracy or representative democracy. Representative democracy is of two forms, namely, Presidential and Parliamentary. In the U. S. A., there is Presidential Democracy. India, after independence, has adopted, like Britain, Parliamentary system of Democracy. According to Roy, representative government means the rule of the party. Parliamentary Democracy, he says, is benevolent despotism. In democracy, heads are counted to get majority opinion. But it does not give any freedom to the individual heads. Roy writes: “Democratic practice which is no more than mere counting of heads, in the last analysis, is also a homage to the collective ego. It allows scope neither for the individual nor for intelligence. Under the formal parliamentary system, unscrupulous demagogues can always come to the top. Intelligence, integrity, wisdom, moral excellence, as a rule, count for nothing. Yet, unless the purifying influence of these human values is brought to bear upon the political organization and administration of society, the democratic way of life can never be realised”.¹⁸ Mechanical counting of heads will cease to be the criterion of democracy. Moreover, democracy does not work when the heads have not the opportunity to raise themselves with sovereign dignity. Roy, therefore, becomes dissatisfied with both Marxism and Parliamentary Democracy because the former is a total eclipse of the individual by institutions and the latter, because of multiple party politics and unprincipled scramble for power. Neither the one party rule guided by the principle of centralization of power in a few hands as it prevailed in the U.S.S.R and the People’s Republic of China nor the Parliamentary Democracy as it prevailed in

the West will do. He maintains that a democracy to get rid of the defects of both Marxism and Parliamentary Democracy must orient itself to the humanistic values of radical type. This he finds in his conception of Radical Democracy, which is based on the ethical foundation of New Humanism or Radical Humanism.

Roy's understanding of nature, man, history and man's value-orientation are best indicated by these two words, 'radical' and 'humanism'. Humanism is a philosophy which affirms that man makes history, that every human being is the reservoir of creative potentialities, that unfoldment of these creative potentialities is the measure of personal growth and social progress, that all the achievements of the human species are the common heritage of mankind and not special possession of particular groups, that every individual is unique and valuable in himself or herself, that the protection and promotion of the freedom of every individual is essential to good society, that scientific temper and knowledge are the necessary conditions of human growth, and that the pursuit of truth requires both intellectual steadfastness and toleration of doubts and differences. These are incorporated in the twenty two theses of *New Humanism*, though they do not exhaust the implications of humanism spread out in the voluminous writings of Roy. They, however, serve the purpose of explicating what Roy means by humanism.

As a protagonist of human freedom, Roy asserts that freedom rests on the three pillars of individualism, rationalism and humanism. In these intellectual explorations, Roy was steadily moving away from Marxism towards a new philosophy of life. According to him, freedom is the fundamental principle which guides all of human aspirations and activities. Humanity consists of a basic urge for freedom from the bondage of natural phenomena and social limitations. Quest for freedom is a continuation of the biological struggle for existence and adaptation. The apparent antagonism among various doctrines and ideologies can be transcended only through a common concept of freedom. In modern civilization, an individual requires not only economic independence but

also deliverance from social and cultural regimentation in order to attain freedom. Without this, the inherent potentialities of man cannot attain manifestation. Depending on this the criterion of the progress of any social set up may be ascertained. The more the freedom given to the individual, the more advancement is achieved by society. Primary and secondary groups have been formed by individuals in course of their hankering for freedom from physical, physiological, and social obstacles. Cooperative social living is worthwhile only when it helps in unfolding man's rational, moral and creative potentialities. In the words of Roy: "The sum-total of the freedom actually enjoyed by its members individually is the measure of the liberating or progressive significance of any social order. Otherwise, the ideals of social liberation and progress are deceptive".¹⁹

The keynote of Roy's criticism of Marxism is the latter's negation of freedom and creativity of the individual. He is critical of the Marxian glorification of the social struggle without adequate attention to the worth and significance of the individual. Any political philosophy which underestimates the concepts of individuality and freedom as empty abstractions is bound to suffer from bankruptcy in the long run. The fate of men of flesh and blood cannot be successfully subordinated to an abstract collective ego for any political and economic experiment. Progress of society is fully functional upon human freedom. He says: "Society is a creation of man - in quest of freedom".²⁰ Elsewhere, he expresses the same conviction saying that "We find that society is the creation of individuals. The individual comes first; he is prior to society; society is the means of attaining an end, which is freedom and progress of the individual. But the end has been forgotten. A false conception of the place of man in society is the wrong juxtaposition of end and means; the divorce of ethics from political practice and social engineering. That in its turn is the cause of the present crisis. Unless we go to the root of this crisis, we cannot overcome this".²¹

In the *New Humanism: A Manifesto*, this theme of the sovereignty of the individual is mentioned again and again, and explains Roy's criticism of the cult of totalitarianism. To denote Communism, Roy repeatedly uses two terms, namely, State Capitalism and Totalitarianism. Totalitarianism was a new term when Roy started to use it, and the need for it arose from the emergence of a new thing, namely, a system of political organization which the world did not experience before the twentieth century. "Despotism" is a word which has many affinities with Totalitarianism. Despotism is a very ancient, very widespread and very familiar form of government. But while totalitarian government may well be called despotic, it is more than despotism. Roy considers the "totalistic ideology" as the main feature of Totalitarianism. Roy also sees terror as an important factor of totalitarian regime, but according to him, terror is to be seen in relation to ideology. Roy notes that one feature of the totalitarian regime is the extent in which political and social issues are fused together in such a way as to produce a community in which there is paradoxically very little in the way of either political or social life. The regime permeates everything: all groups, all institutions, even the family itself. Totalitarianism, as the very concept of totality implies, is a package. In other words, the most totalitarian regime is the one where the penetration of the regime into the individual is complete.

It is in this context that Marx's concept of alienation may be viewed differently from Roy's concept of alienation. However, in his writings, Roy does not fully develop his theory of alienation. Marx's concept of alienation is found in *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844 (discovered in 1820's). Marx wrote that man acts in society through objectivisation (externalisation) of aspects of the self via things he creates (reification) or conditions he transforms or spiritual values he puts down in writing or uses in speech, etc. If and when the creations of man win an autonomous existence, independent of man, man is not able to oppose the process. Alienation follows: man becomes an appendix to the world of matter; he becomes alien to himself as a subject (auto alienation), and his creation dominates him. Thus, goods produced by the worker become

independent of their producer and gain domination over him, his own labour power becomes an object. Marx believed that alienation can be abolished only under revolutionary conditions and in a revolutionary way. The abolition of alienation requires the abolition of private property; the abolition of capitalistic system will be tantamount to the abolition of alienation. Roy's thesis is that the abolition of private property does not necessarily mean the end of alienation in all forms of social life. Roy develops in this context both empirical and theoretical structures.

Roy reaches the above conclusion in an empirical way, on the basis of his experiences in the Soviet Union. His theory that a socialist state (Roy uses the word State Capitalism) will not be a state of universal happiness, but there will exist in it difficulties and conflicts in relation between people, and there may arise new sources and new stimuli, which will weigh upon human happiness even more strongly and more negatively than the present one. The socialist state would remain in a state of alienation.

Contrary to the Marxist thesis, even after the abolition of social classes the state will not wither away. It will continue to exist. There will exist a group of people or stratum fulfilling administrative functions. It will be even more numerous and more powerful than the old one, because the tasks of the state are bound to increase and become more complicated. Thus, the split which sets society at variance will continue to exist. It will no longer be a split in the old class lines, because the private property or private ownership of the means of production will disappear. Nevertheless, the danger of alienation arising from privileges of the ruling group will remain. Roy warns against imposing a general *obligatory* model of human happiness which would transform itself into terrible tyranny. Roy wanted to purge Marxism of its utopian elements and its inherent millennial expectations.

In his quest for freedom, Roy is opposed to centralisation of power which amounts to the negation of free initiative and autonomous choice. Political parties with their countrywide organisation and vast financial resources become

agents of centralization. Despite the quest for Sovietism, in the U.S.S.R., the centralising, dominating role of the Communist Party is the key factor, according to Roy, in Russian economics and politics. The Communist Party is the basic factor for centralization, acting as the counterpoise to the autonomy of the component units. Roy thus is opposed to the conception of political power as the sole instrument for effecting social change.

Humanism, we have seen above, is critical of tradition and the established order. Radicalism, on the other hand views tradition and the established order with complete distrust. It seeks to minimize the influence of the former and to replace the latter by an entirely new and more rational and moral system. One is a radical because one seeks change from the root and does not believe that the existing state of things can be really improved by pruning something here or tinkering with something else there. Radicalism views history as a constant struggle between freedom and unfreedom, knowledge and prejudice, justice and injustice. The radical is inspired by the vision of a society the realisation of which is believed to be within the competence of men and women. Such realisation requires overthrow of the oppressive system with its vested interests and repressive mores. The question that arises is whether violence is involved in the destruction of a regime which is itself based on violence. Roy does not commit anything on this point except that: "Any effort for a reorganization of society must begin from the unit of society – from the root so to say"²². Further on, he also speaks of the 'destruction of the *status quo*', describes the fight for freedom 'as the struggle between David and Goliath', its consequence 'as the destruction of the Frankenstein, and the taming of the Leviathan'. Understandably enough, these cannot happen without some amount of violence. Roy. However, never uses radicalism to harbour violence. Radical, for him, means total and not piecemeal. It takes into account every spect of social life. He goes on to say that "Radicalism thinks in terms neither of nation nor of class; its concern is man; it conceives freedom as the freedom of the individual"²³. His radical humanism is New Humanism. The word "new" has been significantly

used. Man has been treated from a new or novel point of view. Scientific outlook lies at the back of the concept of man. Its main thirst is on reason, ethics, freedom, sovereignty of man and human will as the most powerful determining factor of history. New humanism tries to go to the genesis of man and to examine the background out of which man emerges in nature. Whatever we call human nature, man's attributes and potentialities be strictly derived from the background of the evolving physical universe. It is "new", "because it is Humanism enriched, reinforced and elaborated by scientific knowledge and social experience gained during the modern civilization. Some of Roy's close associates, however, are of the opinion that "The radical is persuaded that application of force, guided by reason and morality and directed towards freedom and justice, can be kept within bounds, except where the upholders of the oppressive regime would rather destroy the society than concede defeat, even when they have completely lost credibility and public support. The radical would take the risk of temporary chaos and disorder than allow a fundamentally unjust and immoral state of affairs to continue indefinitely".²⁵

The synthesis of humanism and radicalism in Roy took shape during a Study Camp in 1946 at Dehradun where he was living then. The position outlined at the camp and subsequently developed and elaborated in the Twenty Two Theses in *New Humanism* and *In Man's Own Image*, offer reconciliation of humanism and radicalism. Now, the question is: As a radical humanist what kind of state does Roy envision? He is not in favour of an autonomous National State. He has the ideal of One World, or a World Government.²⁶ Such an ideal is not compatible with the idea of National States. The State, Roy envisages, will be a cosmopolitan State, "a cosmopolitan commonwealth of free men and women ... It will be a spiritual community, not limited by the boundaries of national States – capitalist, fascist, communist or of any other kind – which will gradually disappear under the impact of cosmopolitan Humanism. That is the Radical perspective of the future of mankind".²⁷ Democracy, for Roy, must have philosophical reorientation in the sense that "a government composed of

spiritually free individuals, accountable, in the first place, to their respective conscience, is the only possible guarantee for securing the greatest good to the greatest number”.²⁸ The ideal of Radical Democracy will be attained through the collective efforts of spiritually free men and women united with the determination of creating a new order of freedom. “Ultimately, the Radical Democratic State will rise with the support of enlightened public opinion as well as intelligent action of the people”.²⁹

From this it will be clear that Roy will not subscribe to the doctrine of the withering away of the state. State is an essential condition for the social living of man. Roy makes the incisive observation: “We must take it for granted that Karl Marx honestly believed that under socialism class distinctions would disappear, and therefore the State as a class organisation would wither away. But one cannot help feeling that that was a naïve belief; it was wishful thinking. How could a keen intellect be reconciled to such a belief? The zeal to prove that communism was not a utopia lured Marx away towards the uncertain ground of speculation, and he made dogma out of speculative thought. So long as a stateless society remains inconceivable, communism could not be anything but utopia. Therefore, for the sake of his ‘scientific’ socialism, Marx had to postulate the withering away of the state. Either, at the point, Marx came very near to anarchism – also a utopia – or he did not think hard enough. The state is the political organization of society. How could a complicated, centralized, industrial society be ever without a state? This question should have occurred to Marx while he was casting the horoscope of humanity”.³⁰ The same observation has been made by Roy in thesis no.9 of New Humanism. “The State being the political organisation of society, its withering away under Communism is a utopia which has been exploded by experience”.³¹

Now, let us clarify that the words like “spiritual” and “conscience” which Roy often uses in articulating the thesis of new humanism do not signify any abstract, mysterious, transcendental dimensions of man. These expressions suggest the creative activities of man in the quest for social harmony and

beneficent social accommodation. Man derives his sovereignty not from any transcendental, super-physical being but from his creative achievements in the understanding and partial conquest of nature. Although man's ultimate roots are derived from physical nature, he is not submerged by that.

In the 1940's, Roy lectured and wrote extensively on the future political system for India. In these years, he made scathing attacks on the organisational structure of the Congress party. Realising that it is neither possible to change the Congress nor to provide another viable alternative party to the Congress, Roy started emphasising the need of guided democracy in which the enlightened rational citizens would make the individual citizen fully conscious of their sovereign right, and enable them to exercise it intelligently and conscientiously. Roy is, thus, critical both of the dictatorship of totalitarian states and parliamentary democracy and settles for Radical Democracy. The former subverts the freedom of the individual by making it a clog in the huge state machine. The totalitarian technique of regimentation leaves no room for individual initiative. The political ideology of Radical Democracy envisages the political set up that will be an alternative both to Communism and Parliamentary Democracy. According to Roy, it will be a partyless democracy. In opposition to centralisation of power, he emphasizes decentralization. The totalitarian technique of coordination, organisation and regimentation must not be allowed to subvert the freedom of the individual. Parliamentary Democracy in operation too is no better. It is full of grave defects. The people are powerless between elections. In critical times, even the rule of law affords little protection. Accordingly, Roy wants a democracy where the human reason and human resources would be pooled for the reconciliation of individual freedom and social good.

Roy's criticisms of Parliamentary Democracy are incorporated in the theses nos. 12 and 13 of the Appendix of *New Humanism*. Thesis 12 states: "The defects of formal Parliamentary Democracy have also been exposed in experience. They result from the delegation of power..."³² Thesis No 13 says:

“Liberalism is falsified or parodied under formal Parliamentary Democracy”.³³ Roy formulates, hence, the notion of organised democracy where there would not be imposition of the commands of the Leviathan seated on the top but local people’s committees will handle the power. Formal Parliamentary Democracy reduces the electorate to a helpless, atomised conglomeration. Roy pleads for the doing away of democratic centralism. Roy says: “The alternative to Parliamentary Democracy is not dictatorship; it is organised democracy in the place of the formal democracy of powerless atomised individual citizens. The parliament should be the apex of a pyramidal structure of the State reared on the base of a countrywide network of People’s Committees”.³⁴ He feels that intensive activities in villages and workshops would be more fruitful instruments of social transformation than the acquisition of political power through party organisation and consolidation of power. The essence of democratic set up is to foster the notion of participant citizenship. It is with this end in view that in the draft on “Constitution of Free India” Roy proposes the setting up of Peoples’ Committees at the grass-root level. He proposes that parties should be replaced by local committees. The local committees will be established in towns and villages. “Realising that freedom is inconsistent with concentration of power, Radical Humanists will not seek to capture power. They will help democracy organise itself in Peoples’ Committees, which will eventually become the organs of democratic power. The People’s Committees will remain the principle focus of democratic power. Thus, becoming coterminous with the entire society, the Radical Democratic State, as the organ for its political administration, will cease to be an instrument of coercion. At last, Democracy – government of the people and by the people – will be possible”.³⁵ Roy’s democratic State will be broad-based. The people can have a hand in the government only when a pyramidal structure of the State will be raised on a foundation of organized local democracies. Roy allots wide power to the Peoples’ Committees. These Committees, to be elected every year, and consisting of one fiftieth of the total number of voters in the locality, were to perform the following functions:

- a. They will be the school for the political and civil education of the citizen,
- b. nominate candidates to seek elections,
- c. have the right to recommend the recall of the representatives of the particular constituency,
- d. demand a referendum on any legislative or executive measure.³⁶

These functions and responsibilities enable them to wield a direct and effective control on the entire State machinery. The political organization will exclude delegation of power which in practice deprives the people of effective power. It will be based on the direct participation of the entire adult population through the countrywide People's Committees. Roy hopes that those People's Committees would "transcend the limits of party politics. Individual men will have a chance of being recognized on their merits. Party politics and party patronage will no longer eclipse intellectual independence, moral integrity and detached wisdom".³⁷

To-day, politicians are talking of starting planning from the grass-root level without acknowledging their indebtedness to M.N.Roy. This may be substantiated by Roy's own words. He says that "Political parties need vote to come to power. It is easy to sway the people by appeals to their emotions and prejudices". One wonders whether the pyramidal structure of government will do away with the state and its mechanical character.

Roy is opposed to the tentacles of monopoly. The growth of monopoly not only makes the economy imperfect but also creates vast centers of financial and industrial power. Roy is against concentration of power in any form. Hence, he considers it essential to do away with monopoly capitalism. To him the only alternative left is some form of economy based on widespread decentralisation. He champions cooperative economy wherein production is to be carried on with the sole purpose of serving human needs; economic re-organisation such as will guarantee a progressively rising standard of living, would be the foundation of

the Radical Democratic State. For the unfolding of the intellectual and other finer potentialities of man progressive satisfaction of the material necessities is the precondition. It is in this respect that Roy comes closer to Gandhi's theory of decentralisation, though he is a severe critic of Gandhi's "religious obscurantism". Ideas of Roy, emphasising the decentralisation of political power, are also later on echoed by Jai Prakash Narain in the mid-seventies.

But what Roy ignores is that the conditions for the functioning of these committees for the aims specified by him do not obtain and given the restriction on the right of freedom and speech to "the enemies of the people", these committees could become the very authoritarian structures which he is so keen to demolish from the polity of the country. Despite his emphasis on the realization of the conditions under which democracy can become possible, Roy remains oblivious of the conflicting interests in the political-economy of the country in his draft Constitution. It may be argued that Roy's model of organised democracy fails to visualise the clashing individual and group interests on the fond hope that the interests of the 'rational' individuals would not really clash. If progressive satisfaction of material necessities is the precondition for the individual members of society in unfolding their intellectual and other finer human potentialities then in a scarcity-ridden society as ours, Roy's ideal appears to be utopian. However, we should admit that in order to bring about any change in the established order requires positing an ideal and ideals are regulative principles, corrective of the existing state of affairs and not constitutive of them.

We may observe that although Roy moves away from Marxism and criticises the Marxist theory of revolution, he does not abandon his revolutionary ideals. Up to the end he remains committed to the ideology of revolution. To his last major work he gives the name *Reason, Romanticism and Revolution*. Roy is able to complete this major theoretical undertaking in 1952 but actually from the thirties he began to see that cultural backwardness and psychological retrogression were among the principal obstacles to revolution. Without the

freeing of the mind of the common people from the powerful and pervasive influence of the authoritarian and obscurantist mode of thinking; without an awakening of the spirit of inquiry and self-affirmation, without, in short, a renaissance or a philosophical revolution, no revolution from below or grass-root democracy is likely to succeed. Unless this can be achieved the discontent of the masses is likely to be accentuated and utilised by unscrupulous political leaders to bring down an exhausted establishment to put themselves in the position of dictatorial power; but this may very well reduce whatever rights and liberties existed before, and usher in a totalitarian tyranny. This, in fact, happened in Germany, where the collapse of the Weimer Republic gave absolute power to the Nazis. Roy from the mid-thirties started to form the conviction that mass-discontent, mass-mobilisation and mass-struggle do not on their own ensure the replacement of an unjust regime by a just and democratic system. He stresses the fact that if the masses are not enlightened, if they continue to remain steeped in ignorance, if their energisation is brought about by stirring up their destructive passions, then a revolution will end in terror and dictatorship. A renaissance preceding a revolution may alone save the latter from the tragedy.

Roy's arguments, rather, convictions, are put forth in the two volumes of his magnum opus, *Reason, Romanticism and Revolution*. In the first volume of the book, Roy makes an objective study and critical assessment of the first phase of modern civilization from the Renaissance to the French Revolution. In the second volume, he has analysed the subsequent major developments of the last one century and a half, and on the basis of his detailed and comprehensive investigation he has diagnosed the crisis of the twentieth century, and offered his solution. Roy does not exclude revolution from the view of the future, nor abjure his commitment to revolutionary ideals, but he gradually reaches the view that social, political and economic revolution must be preceded by or must synchronise with a cultural or philosophical revolution if the hazards of centralisation and dictatorship are to be eliminated. He often uses the term "renaissance" to describe this philosophical revolution, revolution in the realm

of ideas and values. In Radical Humanism he tries to weave into a whole the two distinct phases of revolution and renaissance.

However, the reconciliation is not without problems and their consideration may be neglected only at the cost of intellectual integrity and effectiveness. The problem may not greatly trouble those who are either 'pure' humanists or 'pure' radicals. A humanist may be content to bring about re-awakening, here and there hoping this will eventually lead to a renaissance. For him, renaissance whether limited or widespread is its own justification. Pursuit of truth, beauty and virtue is its own reward. The radical, on the other hand, is not prepared to wait for a renaissance to take place. If the renaissance is limited primarily to aesthetic and intellectual efflorescence, if it takes centuries to spread among the common people or to bring about a social revolution, then renaissance to him is an elitist luxury. For him, renaissance or no renaissance, structural change in a short period is what matters most. So, it becomes difficult to reconcile humanism and radicalism, renaissance and revolution in practice, although in theory, such harmonisation may not be beyond comprehension.

Despite the ambiguities and confusions in Roy's political thought it may be pointed out that his faith in the individual as a thinking being and maker of his own destiny, the importance of a rational reconstruction of the social and economic institutions for achieving the liberation of mankind, both at the individual and the collective levels are convictions which distinguish him from the Gandhian and other revivalist political thinkers. But these distinctive features should not make us oblivious to the threat of the despotism of the enlightened minority which lurks underneath his utopian ideals. This is a real worry in view of the fact that in spite of the broad-based character of Radical Democracy, the Council of State will be constituted of members drawn from professional groups of engineers, economists, scientists, medical men, jurists, and other persons engaged in intellectual, artistic, literary and in any other creative vocation. So the effective control of the State will be in the hands of an elitist minority, until the intellectual and moral level of the entire community is raised considerably.

So the renaissance of our time even if it starts with a gifted few, must actively involve sooner rather than later the general body of ordinary men and women in whom lies latent the power to recreate themselves and their society. This may defeat the forces of unreason and unfreedom in the name of justice and collective good.

There is another point to be considered. In his conception of revolution Roy seeks to combine rationalism with the romantic view of life. Romanticism has been defined in a variety of ways. Roy writes: "Originally, it was a tendency in art: but the theory of art indicates an attitude to life and life is a part of nature. Therefore, from the very beginning, romanticism was a way of life and as such had a philosophical significance, even if that was not clearly realised and formulated until a later period. There cannot be a culture without a philosophy. The men of the Renaissance, particularly those who represented its artistic and literary aspects, were the first to take a romantic view of life. Historically, romanticism is a form of the revolt of man against the tyranny of the supernatural. Philosophically and culturally, romanticism is identical with humanism."³⁸ Sheer irrationalism, spinning a cobweb of morbid fantasy, mysticism and sloppy sentimentality, which are conventionally conceived as romanticism, is not romanticism according to Roy. Romanticism is not irrationalism. It is the faith in the sovereignty of man and in his unlimited creativeness. The cardinal principle of romanticism is that man makes history – he is the maker of his own destiny. In the history of ideas the age of romanticism is the age of reason too. Reason was not altogether ruled out by the founders of the romantic theory of aesthetics. Reason should be coupled with the visions of romanticism. Roy has the project of revolution as a becoming of man, revolution which is informed by reason and romanticism, law and freedom, intelligence and will. They are inextricably interwoven and are not mutually exclusive in the future of man. Revolution cannot be divorced from the romantic vision of the future of human life itself. But passions should not lead us astray. Quoting from Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* Roy avers that "...reason, perfected by reflection

must be the director of the whole host of passions. Reason must hold the rudder...”³⁹

New Humanism, Roy claims, reconciles the romantic doctrine of revolution, that man makes history, with the rationalist notion of orderly social progress. However, Roy is not very clear about how these opposites are to be reconciled in practice. Roy repeatedly speaks of education and science as preparing the emergence of an enlightened humanity. But the modalities of these were not worked out by him as did Tagore or Gandhi. Despite all these lacunas in his thought we must admit that it his is a great contribution to the history of political thought and philosophy of history. What is more it offers a constructive philosophy which may help mankind to overcome the crisis of modern age and usher in the free cosmopolitan society of the future.

Notes and References:

1. *Russian Revolution*, Calcutta: Renaissance Library, 1949.
2. *Reason, Romanticism and Revolution*, Vol. II, Calcutta: Renaissance Publ., 1955, p.219, also p.206.
3. *New Humanism: A Manifesto*, Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1939, 4th print (1981), p.17.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Sib Narayan , *Radical Humanism*, p.82.
7. *Reason, Romanticism and Revolution*, *op cit.*, p.309. For a refutation of the Cartesian psychophysical parallelism, see *ibid.*, p.267.
8. *Ibid*, Vol I, Calcutta: Renaissance Publ., 1952, p.11.
9. *Ibid.*, p.65.
10. *Reason, Romanticism and Revolution*, Vol. II, *op. cit.*, p.214.
11. *Ibid.*, p.186.
12. *Ibid.*, p199.
13. *New Humanism: A Manifesto*, *op. cit.*, pp.24-25.
14. *Ibid.*, p.25.
15. *Ibid.*, P.27.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*, p.32.
18. *Ibid.*, p.42. Also see *Reason, Romanticism and Revolution*, Vol. II, *op. cit.*, pp.278-279.
19. *Ibid.* , p.39.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Philip Sprata and M.N. Roy, *Beyond Communism*, p.87.
22. *New Humanism: A Manifesto*, *op. cit.*, p.36.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*, p.37.

25. Sib Narayan Roy, unpublished paper on “M.N.Roy, Revolution and Renaissance”.
26. Dante, *On World Government*. Dante wrote a tract on the world government, which will be a rule of God, based on unity and peace.
27. *New Humanism: A Manifesto, op. cit.*, p.37.
28. *Ibid.*, p.44.
29. *Ibid.*, p.48.
30. *New Orientation*, p.147.
31. *New Humanism: A Manifesto, op. cit.*, p.56.
32. *Ibid.*, p.57.
33. *Ibid.*
34. *Ibid.*, p.58.
35. *Ibid.*, pp.48-49.
36. *Ibid.*, pp.44-45. Also see the twenty two theses nos. 14, 16, 18 and 20.
37. *Constitution of Free India-A Draft*, Delhi: Radical Democratic Party, 1944.
38. *Reason, Romanticism and Revolution, op. cit.*, p.25.
39. *Ibid.*, p.100.