

The Concept of Man in M. N. Roy's Radical Humanism: A Philosophical Study

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Abstract

Manabendra Nath Roy was an eminent philosopher of India in the 20th century. He was democratic and then a thorough-going follower of Marxism in his early life and later he established a new philosophy which is termed Radical Democracy or humanism. His philosophy is called radical humanism because it focuses completely on the situations of human beings and explains them with the help of scientific knowledge. In this new humanism, he has given the central position to man (human being) because it is the man who is rational as well as a moral being and is wholly responsible to make a better world for the entire humankind which is free from any kind of prejudice or superstitious belief, dogma, blind faith in some supernatural forces, etc. He lays great emphasis on the personality of the individual as a human being who bears three fundamental elements, viz. reason, morality, and freedom. In this article, an attempt is made to study the views of man which are depicted in Roy's radical humanism.

Keywords: *Radical, Humanism, Supernatural forces, Freedom.*

INTRODUCTION

Manabendra Nath Roy, a great revolutionist born on Indian soil on 21st March 1887 at Arbalia in Bengal, whose original name is Narendranath Bhattacharya. He was also a philosopher as well as a humanist who always tried to solve all the problems encountered in his life practically depending on reason and scientific knowledge. A great intellectual person, Roy uses his intellectual power for the upliftment of humanity and works throughout his life with the ideal of freedom. It is regarded that freedom is the basic inspiration as well as his passion for life. His entire life is gone through three different stages. In the first stage, he is a revolutionary and engaged in the national revolutionary movement in Bengal. In the second stage, he came in touch with Marxism in the USA, joined the socialist party of Mexico, and makes it the communist party. He has become the founder of the first communist party outside the Soviet Union. He is a prominent member of the Communist International and a powerful exponent of Marxism or communism during those days. In the last and final stage, he becomes a radical humanist. At this stage, he was a pronounced critic of communist theory and practice. He has realized that communism provides no solution to worldly problems. In communism, man is treated as a helpless being who works under the dictatorship of economic forces, and therefore, his personality is subordinated to the collective interest. Again, he feels that in Marxian philosophy, there is no place for the value of the intellect, morality, and dignity of man in the dynamics of the historical processes, and also overemphasizes the economic interpretation of history.

The main subject matter of Roy's philosophy is man or human beings and therefore, he criticizes all those theories and perspectives which did not take the individual as the central point of analysis. Another reason to oppose Marxism is its emphasizing more on other things than man and stresses the phenomenon of class struggle under which individual being lost their

individuality to become a part of one class or the other. At the same time, Roy denounces the framework of nationalism also since it subsumes the personality of the human being within the Meta construction of nation and nationhood. Thus, he changed his mind from Marxism to radical humanism which is regarded as his greatest contribution of him to Modern India. He describes his transition from Marxism to radical humanism or new integral humanism in the preface of his book Scientific Politics in October 1947.

OBJECTIVES

The present article tries to study M. N. Roy's view on the concept of man which is expressed in his Radical Humanism. It also focuses on some other topics related to man, such as his rejection of Marxism, traditional theories of human history, the opposition of religion, man's position in the physical world, the basic values of man, etc. Also, this article tries to attempt a critical analysis of Roy's Radical Humanism.

METHODOLOGY

To prepare this research paper, I have used the analytic, critical as well as descriptive method, and the data are collected from both primary and secondary sources.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Roy's radical humanism is contained in his *Twenty-Two Theses on Radical Democracy* is different from communism and works to a higher ideal for achieving human freedom. It is called humanism because it focuses entirely on the needs and situations of human beings which is strictly based on scientific knowledge. He himself maintains that "New Humanism is not an abstract philosophy, nor merely a social philosophy or a political or economic theory. It is a set of principles, which have relevance to all branches of man's life and social existence and show a way towards their recognition."¹ His humanism is flexible in nature and therefore it is not a closed system but a continuous process. It is based on the experience of mankind and developed through human knowledge. It is a scientific integral philosophy where a human being is not taken only in the context of society, but also of the whole universe. For him, this new humanism will not be a dogmatic system that claims finality and infallibility.

At the beginning of new humanism, Roy discards all those theories which upheld that the evolution of human history is an unavoidable and automatic process determined by economic forces or by any mystic entity. For him, man can never be an object of any determined forces or any other mystic entity. He accepts Protagoras dictum 'man is the measure of all things' as fundamental. His humanism revolves around the man who is the principal agent of all kinds of social progress and the object of all social organizations. An individual creates society, the state, different institutions, and accordingly the values for their welfare. He tries to refashion the world as an abode of human beings. He says, "Man has created something great, he is destined to create something still greater. That is our hope."²

Roy uses 'Radical' or 'New' with his humanism and differentiates it from other humanist philosophies. It is radical because it rejects many traditional and philosophical assumptions prevalent in Indian society and finds out the root cause of any problem of the origin of human beings. It is new because it is humanism enriched and developed by the scientific knowledge and social experience acquired by modern civilization. Humanism in the words of Roy is the old doctrine of human sovereignty and dignity reformed by modern science. He treats man as

a biological phenomenon and builds axiology on this foundation deducing all ethical values from it. His humanism is ethical-based and depends on the rationality of man. Man as man can be moral and he is conscious of his innate rationality.

The philosophy of Radical Humanism of M. N. Roy views the position of man as an utmost place because he knows that man can do anything with his rational capabilities along with the help of the advancement of scientific knowledge to make a better world for humankind. Moreover, Roy maintains that man is not just a human being who possesses rationality within himself but he is also responsible for bringing change to the whole humanity, to the whole universe. Though there is nowhere mentioned in his philosophy regarding man's nature as physical or spiritual, yet it is found extensively in his humanistic philosophy, known as Radicalism where it can be possible to deduce the concept of man. It is also accepted that his humanistic attitude is something different from both Indian as well as western humanism. Man in western humanism is a material or a physical being because it is mostly intellectual, economic, and political in its outlook. While, on the other side Indian humanism is primarily spiritual and therefore it does not accept man only as a material being but also man is a combination of spirit, mind, life, and body. It aims to fulfill all the aspirations of the individual, viz., physical, vital, mental, and spiritual.

But M. N. Roy accepts the concept of evolution and says that human being is a product of the physical universe which is law-governed. And man is an integral part of this universe. Man is rational and this rationality emerges from the background of the physical harmonious universe. So, it can be stated that reason is man's being and its personality is an echo of universal harmony. As a result, the reason is not an inherent metaphysical entity but rather something that emerges during biological evolution. Moral standards must thus take into account a man's life. Morality springs as an answer to man's quest for social harmony and beneficent social accommodation. The relation of man to the universe is organic. So, to posit an abstract man divorced from physical and social relationships is baseless. New humanism takes at its starting point, man as an ensemble of social relations. It refuses to make the concept of an eternal, unchangeable human nature as its central presupposition. Thus, the new humanism advocates for an evolutionary functional view of man by making him organic to the external cosmos, in contrast to abstract humanism, which argues for the transcendental autonomy of man.

Man is a biological being with a higher form of matter and a rational mind. Man has the capacity for reason, conscience, and—most importantly—freedom of choice. He is a member of society and of nature. Man and society are intimately connected, yet the latter is less significant than the former and without consciousness. Society does not know what is good or what is bad for it. Society is the means by which the freedom and liberty of man are guaranteed and preserved; man is the end Roy says that man is sovereign. He views freedom as the most important virtue since it is essential to human life.

Roy's New Humanism is founded on the dignity of the human being, concern for his welfare, all-around growth, and the improvement of social situations. He views himself as a radical humanist since his philosophy adopted a scientific method for figuring out what makes an individual and his role in the universe. There is a substantial difference between philosophy and religion, and a man cannot grow in philosophy unless he rejects traditional religious doctrines and theological dogmas. Again, he sees philosophy and science as having a very intimate relationship. He says, "A philosophy, to guide for all forms of human action, must have ethics, some morals, which must recognize certain things as permanent and abiding in

humanity."³ The world needs a philosophy of freedom. According to him, no social revolution can occur without a philosophical one. According to Roy, the main principle of philosophy is that man creates his own destiny.

Though M. N. Roy is a powerful exponent of Marxism or communism during his early life, later on, he becomes a pronounced critic of communist theory and practice. He realized that communism provides no solution to worldly problems and in communism, man is treated as a helpless being dancing to the dictates of economic forces, and his personality is subordinated for the collective interest. Again, in Marxian philosophy, it is seen that there is no place for the value of the intellect, morality, dignity of man in the dynamics of the historical processes, and also overemphasizing the economic interpretation of history. The main subject matter of his philosophy is the man and therefore, he criticizes all those theories and perspectives which did not take the individual as the focal point of analysis. One of the reasons to oppose Marxism is that it focuses on other things more than man, stresses the phenomenon of class struggle under which human being lost their individuality to become a part of one class or the other. At the same time, he denounces the framework of nationalism also since it subsumes the personality of the human being within the Meta construction of nation and nationhood. Thus, he has changed his mind from Marxism to radical humanism which is regarded as the greatest contribution of him towards Modern India.

Roy embraces humanism because it has always been based on the premise that man is superior to all other living things. Man's special ability to know, as opposed to being aware as a common biological function, gives him the power to establish freedom for the good of humanity rather than to reign over others. Men are treated equally in society. Additionally, it holds that both good and bad people, those who can cooperate and those who cannot, as well as those who can cause harm and those who cannot make up society. Within a plurality-based framework, they may all coexist. All should be protected, and the State should be so structured that the person becomes its own goal. The purpose of the State, science, technology, and other factors is to enable people to flourish. They cannot be permitted to rule over human existence since they are not ends in and of themselves. According to Roy, the humanists of the 19th century likewise highlighted the value of individuals and individual liberty, but they were unable to escape the illusion of subordinating people to various superhuman and supernatural entities. So, he argues that man is the center of that humanism that banishes such type of supernatural agency from the human world.

Roy's philosophy of humanism is materialistic which he borrowed from Marxian materialism. He continues his journey to be a materialist, but he feels that Marxian materialism is dogmatic and unscientific, then he interprets the word 'materialism' differently. Roy criticizes almost the empirical account of knowledge that Marxism provides when he found that the latter neglects the creative role of a human being. He also disagrees with the Marxist denial of individual autonomy. Marx did not give enough thought to the value and importance of the empirical individual.

Marx asserts and elaborates on the radical behavioristic theory that, as a result of man's conflict with nature, he undergoes a change in nature. Human nature cannot be described as steady or unchanging. Marx thus acknowledges that human nature is completely malleable. Roy, on the other hand, believes that there is a constant in human nature, contrary to the materialists of the eighteenth century. According to Roy, denying a constant aspect of human nature would entail denying ethics. Without acknowledging some constants in human nature that make the realisation of some permanent values essential, sane ethics cannot be established.

Roy acknowledges that the foundation for obligations and rights lies in something concrete and everlasting about human nature. Contrary to what Marx said, economic forces do not produce moral consciousness. Roy has introduced humanistic ethics that elevate human sovereignty and uphold the axiological order of freedom and justice in place of Marxist ethics. Additionally, Roy acknowledges that moral principles are lasting while Marx views them in terms of class conflict.

Roy regards matter as real and independent and the mind is the outcome of a matter. In his view, there is no difference between organic and inorganic matter. All living things are made of certain chemical substances. According to him, the mind is the result of highly developed matter. He explains the origin of life and the mind based on matter. Biological evolution takes place in the physical universe. "The origin of everything that exists is matter; that there does not exist anything but matter, all other appearances being transformations of matter, and these transformations are governed necessarily by laws inherent in nature."⁴ According to him, inanimate matter served as the foundation for the development of the human body, sensory organs, nervous system, brain, and the complete cognitive system. All living bodies are formed out of such chemical elements as carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, sulfur, potassium, sodium, etc. Thus, he believes that mind and matter are closely related. Roy corroborates his materialistic philosophy with the latest scientific knowledge.

Roy's radical humanism is individualism because it lays great emphasis on the personality of the individual as a human being. Man is the central agent and he possesses three fundamental elements, viz. reason, morality, and freedom. He claims that the reason is a biological trait and does not conflict with human will. He takes rationality as the unifying element present in every human being. He argues that the behaviour of every man is essentially rational, though sometimes it may appear to be irrational which is due to the differences in the basic patterns of life in different parts of the world. The innate rationality in the personality of every human being entails the capability of discovering and rediscovering the laws of nature to unfetter him from the hidden bondages which happen to be imposed on him for the time being.

Then, another significant trait of a man is morality. Roy contends that morality derives from the reasonable aspirations of harmonious and mutually beneficial social relations since it is rooted in fundamental rationality. With the creative value of morality, Roy aims at translating it into the reality of the collective and common good of the whole society. So he maintains that cannot be found on metaphysical absolutism but analytical discursive reason. So, morality must be based on the scientific application of human rationality. Humanist ethics, which are based on this inherent human rationality, were not created by a divine creator; rather, they are the result of biological evolution. He argues for a new humanism that is founded on natural reason and secular conscience since he believes that man's reasoning reflects his conscience. Roy states that

*Man with his mind, intelligence, and will, remains an integral part of the physical universe. The latter is a cosmos, law-governed system. Therefore, man's being and becoming, his emotions, will, ideas are also determined; man is essentially rational. Morality must be referred back to man's innate rationality. Only then, man can be moral, spontaneously and voluntarily.*⁵

The next and most important characteristic is human freedom or liberty. The potentiality of freedom is latent in man and the realization of it depends upon the awareness of man through his creative powers. For him, an individual is an end in itself and society is just simply a means to that end and everything is subordinate to individual freedom. He gives much importance to the reason and freethinking of a man. As man builds societies with certain goals in mind so that he doesn't have to adapt to anything, all social relationships—political, economic, ethical, etc.—must be modified to meet the essential criterion of promoting individual freedom or liberty. He states that the state, as well as the society, were created to maintain individual liberty, but unfortunately some devices are always trying to dominate man and suppress his freedom. He feels that religion, class, society, marriage family, etc. suppress individual freedom in various ways.

According to Roy, religion destroys liberty by enslaving the human mind through superstitions and supernatural practices. Marriage, family, and social status are all seen as impediments to human progress and freedom. Furthermore, class and society are the most significant impediments to individual freedom when society imposes those values and principles on an individual's existence, and as a result, man lacks his individuality in society and has little freedom at all. As a result, Roy contends that society can never be seen as an end in itself, but only as a means to an end. Man's quest for finding out the laws of nature provides certain clues to get rid of the restrictions imposed by nature and he becomes free. The quest for freedom and the search for reality are the two primary forces of human development. The aim of all reasonable pursuits, human and collective, is to achieve ever-increasing levels of freedom. He is of the opinion that human freedom is the standard by which social change is measured. As a result, the concept of freedom is closely connected to humanism, collectivism, and rationalism. The individual's use of reason in his quest for truth concludes the final analysis of the philosophy of humanism.

Education, according to Roy, is essential to humanism's goal of elevating man's position. He believes that by emphasizing the value of education, people can have a better understanding of how to react to a given situation rationally. He also maintains that such humanism can only be operationalized until the whole population is properly trained about rational thinking. However, he was never a supporter of compulsory primary education because compulsion often binds people, which is incompatible with freedom. The key goal of education should be a reasonable endeavour, and it should aid man in thinking rationally and deciding for himself how to solve problems. Only by education, a rational individual will be created. He believes that education should be empirical and it will make people self-reliant, intelligent, and unique, and they will be unable to be fooled by self-serving motivations. Humanism's ideal can only be made productive and worthy through education. He opposes aggressive and fast transformations and defends the values of reason, morality, and freedom among the people. Education has played a significant role in fostering enlightenment in people's minds and hearts over a long period. It aids man in confronting the facts and providing insight into how to react to a given situation rationally.

CRITICAL REMARKS AND CONCLUSION

It is found in the above discussion of Roy's Radical Humanism that he inculcates the supremacy of man above everything else in the world and instructs the whole of mankind to urge freedom, knowledge, and truth. He was a Marxist when he started his academic career, but over time, he gradually reformulated all of Marx's ideas. Even yet, his radical humanism is

only a moral restatement of Marxism rather than any original invention. Though Roy condemned Marx and called himself a radical humanist yet he could not shed away the influence of Marxism. Moreover, he could not provide convincing justifications for how the matter may create life. It is clear once more that his thought is rationalistic and that nothing can be accepted that cannot stand the scrutiny of testing and analysis. His whole theory is based on rationalism and everything should be decided by reason before being accepted but unfortunately, he has failed to define clearly and precisely the term 'reason'. He also fails to give any standard and acceptable definition of judging rationality and irrationality.

A critical analysis of both humanism and marxism led Roy to develop his methodology, which places everything in the context of scientific explanation. His philosophy is essentially materialistic but not mechanistic. It is monistic because, as a result of the logical conclusions of modern science, it regards matter as the supreme reality. His materialism also opposes subjective idealism as well as empiricism because it holds that reality exists even if there is no one to perceive it. Again, it is mistaken by him to state that materialism is the only possible philosophy which indicates that any system or any theory that is not based on the materialistic ground is excluded from the scope of philosophy. Therefore, his position on materialism does not serve the theoretical objective of explaining the error of all non-materialistic systems or the symptoms of religious revival. Since knowledge is limitless, no single prediction can provide the solution.

Roy struggles to uphold the ideals of hedonism in his new humanism. He is a materialist who believes that life is an end in itself and that the only reason to exist is to have the ability and resources to gratify all of one's natural needs. As a result, he virtually adopts the Benthamist philosophy of self-abnegation, simplicity, and the joy of satisfying one's desires. Instead, according to ancient Indian tradition, the conditions for a man's life's self-realization are not the satisfaction of his physiological demands and other aspirations, but rather the repression of his appetites, emotions, and needs. So, here, it is seen that Roy has opposed the dominant tradition prevalent in ancient India. Moreover, Roy's way of thinking is critical rather than constructive. He has not given any new thought system. He has not given any thoroughly work-out integral system of thought in the field of philosophy. He has only attempted to bring together many ideas and focus on the restoration of rationalistic philosophy, physical reality, humanistic ethics, and a passionate search for freedom. But, this synthesizes that finally emerges is neither very profound nor original.

Lastly, scientific humanism is a term used to describe Roy's radical humanism. Anti-religious or anti-religious humanism emphasises the value of the human being and sees the humankind as the pinnacle of evolution. According to him, man's supremacy originates from his creative accomplishments rather than some transcendental super-natural existence. He has a strong belief in human freedom. Freedom is the most important of the three basic human values, and it serves as the ultimate standard from which all other values may be logically deduced. Therefore, Roy rejects religion because he believes that it hinders the development of freedom. But, we cannot deny that religion has all along been responsible for cultural and intellectual development, and as such, it is essential for the development of human life. Also, he denies and criticizes the other institutions as an obstacle to freedom that deserves a rightful place in the society is undesirable. He has failed to explain how the human urge for freedom will not result in conflicts. It is natural that while struggling for individual freedom, collective freedom is bound to suffer and conflicts between the individuals are bound to come to the fore.

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