CHAPTER - II

Pre-Humanistic Thought of M. N. Roy
References and Notes
PRE-HUMANISTIC THOUGHT

M. N. Roy "Passed through three phases of political life. He started as an ardent Nationalist, became an equally ardent Communist and ended as a creatively active Radical Humanist"\(^1\). The pre-Humanistic thought of M. N. Roy covered all his activities and thoughts during the period of his life as a revolutionary of nationalist movement and as a communist.

Roy started his revolutionary activity at the age of 14. Under the leadership of Jatin Mukharjee, he was involved in a number of political offences and conspiracy cases. During that period of revolutionary activity, he traveled different places under different names. By that, time he had studied the basic books on socialism and communism and had became a socialist\(^2\). The study of those books enriched his ideas and thoughts, when Socialist Party transformed into Communist Party, he became the General Secretary of Communist Party of Mexico. It was his understanding of the socio-economic condition of Mexico, at the time of the First World War that brought about a change in his mind. The impact of the Russian Revolution and also his association with Borodin strengthen his socialist convictions and these influences had the
profoundest impact on his mind. The result of this impact was that his "ardent nationalism took a dramatic turn towards communism." 

Roy became a full-fledged communist when he was connected with the well-known communist leader Michael Borodin and accepted the materialist philosophy of Marx. When Mexico's Socialist party transformed into Communist Party, Roy became the General Secretary of Communist Party of Mexico and he became the founder of the first Communist Party outside the Soviet Union.

The years in Mexico brought significant changes and developments in Roy. Here he developed a taste for Western culture, especially its music, literature and philosophy. The authorship of the books and essays in Spanish and English marked the beginning of the intellectual eminence, which would distinguish him as a Marxist, in the 1920s.

During the period from 1917 to 1930, though he was a member of Communist Party, his activities and published works expressed him as a distinguished person, because of his original thoughts. He had several meetings with Lenin and he expressed his own view regarding different problems, which was not identical with Lenin. Prior to the second
conference of the Communist International met from 16 July to 17 Aug. 1920, Roy had several meetings with Lenin regarding the nature of the Nationalist movements in various colonial countries and the role of the local bourgeoisie in those movements. He differed with Lenin. Roy was of the view that bourgeoisie of a colonial country was not a consistently revolutionary class, as Lenin thought. But, the movement for National Liberation in colonial countries should be developed under the hegemony of workers and peasants led by Communists. Lenin asked Roy to prepare another thesis for the conference, as his knowledge was limited about the colonial countries like India and China.

At Lenin’s invitation, Roy drafted another supplementary thesis to Lenin’s thesis. Roy’s main points, in his supplementary thesis were - (a) a revolution in Europe depended on the course of the revolution in Asia bringing about the break up of the colonial empires; (b) In the colonies, especially India, there were two movements, one bourgeois democratic, limited to the middle classes, which sought compromise with the existing order, the other a mass movement which represented the exploited majority for whom political independence to be achieved and made meaningful required at the same time a social and economic revolution. (c) The Comintern should support revolutionary mass movements and not
the colonial middle class movements and leaderships. Roy pleaded for the Comintern's commitment to the principle of 'revolution from below'. Lenin placed both the theses, prepared by Roy and his own and the conference adopted both the theses.

At that time, he tried to create a communist group in India and to goad the Indian Nationalist movement along with revolutionary channels. He wrote several articles in 'Inprecor' (International Press Correspondence) and started a forth-nightly journal called 'Vanguard of Indian Independence.' But he changed its name to 'Advance Guard' because it was prescribed by the Indian Government and later on it was called 'Masses' for the same reason. He built up his contact with influential politicians namely Dange, Muzaffar Ahmed, Singaravelu, Saukat Usmani, Hasat Mohani etc. and urged them to form an underground Communist Party and an open people's party which would champion the economic demands of peasants and workers. As a result, the first Communist Party inside India was formed in December 1925, in Kanpur and Roy heartily welcomed the formation of the party.

By the end of 1926, Roy had reached the highest position of his career in Communist International. He was elected member of all four
official policy making bodies of Comintern- the Presidium, the Political Secretariat, the Executive Committee and the World Congress. In the seventh plenum of the Executive Committee of Comintern, Roy urged about the Chinese Revolution that it should be developed as an agrarian revolution based upon the economic demand of the peasant. His view was accepted by the Executive Committee of the Comintern and it was decided to send him to China with another representative Borodin. During this time, also his view was differed from Stalin. But later on the revolution was successful, as it was in essence an agrarian revolution. He returned to Moscow and completed his work ‘Revolution and Counter Revolution in China’.

In the tenth plenum of the Executive Committee of the Comintern held in July 1929, Stalin brought about same radical changes in the policies of the International Communist Movement and it was decided that in colonial countries, communist should have no truck with bourgeois nationalist parties. This meant that the Communists in India should severe their connections with the Indian National Congress. It was also decided that the socialist parties in Europe should be condemned as counter revolutionary and opposed by the communists, which meant that the united front between communist and socialist to oppose the rising
forces of Fascism should be disrupted. But Roy was against it and held
that in India, communist should work inside the nationalist movement in
order to radicalize it, on the basis of the economic demands of the
peasants and workers. To oppose Fascism, Roy was also in favour of the
united front. He wrote articles in support of his view which was
disfavoured by Stalin and as a result, Roy was expelled from the
Communist International in September 1929. “Several factors had
combined to cause Roy’s departure from the Communist International.
He was made the scapegoat for the Chinese debacle. The internal power
struggle in the Russian Communist Party, where he was taken to be an
associate of Bukharin, contributed to his victimization. In addition, Roy
has suggested that the desire of the British Communist Party to have
control of communist activities in India had something to do with his
downfall. Above all, Roy has maintained that his chief crime had been
that he claimed the right of freethinking. The real reason, for his
expulsion was his critical mind and independent spirit, which was not
prepared to be bound by rigid party discipline.”

Roy returned to India in 1930 and remained underground because
of the charge i.e. Kanpur Conspiracy case against him and other known
Communist during 1924. During that underground period, he contacted a
number of young revolutionary workers and guided them. Some of them are V. B. Karnik and Maniben Kara. At that time he also attended the Karachi session of the congress, he met Jawarhalal Nehru and helped in shaping the revolution on Fundamental Rights and the National Economic Programme, in which for the first time the Indian Congress adopted a policy of Socio-Economic reform. He was arrested and faced a term of imprisonment for six years i.e. from 21st July 1931 to 20th November 1936. He studies and wrote extensively in jail period. He conducted his own defense. But he was not allowed to make his defense statement in full, which were smuggled out and published under the title 'My Defense'. The main point in his defense was that the British Government in India was not a Government 'established by law' and that "the only law for oppressed and exploited people of Indian was law of revolt, the majestic law of revolutionary struggle for freedom". He explained that an economically backward country like India, Agrarian Revolution is the essence of National Revolution. Because to him land is the principal means of production in India and agriculture is the premier industry of the country. Therefore, the workers and the peasants and all over toiling elements of the population to gather constituting the ninety percent of the population of India must fight for the complete National independence.
During his period of imprisonment, he continued his political work. His monthly letters to Ellen Roy, who later became his wife, showed his voluminous reading in jail. At that time, he secured from Ellen in Paris and friends in India, a supply of books on science, philosophy and society and began to study fundamental questions, which his inquisitive mind had always attracted. It was the period of his self-development, which established his place as an intellectual and philosopher. "For his more serious study, Roy was allowed by his jailors one foolscap sized exercise book of 1000 pages at a time. At the end he walked out with nine of these closely handwritten volumes, tentatively titled The Philosophical Consequences of Modern Science." The prison writings have been published in many books namely Fascism, Historical Role of Islam, Materialism, Heresies of the Twentieth Century and Ideal of Indian Womanhood and also several booklets- 'Our Task in India', 'China in Revolt', Whither Congress' and 'Letters to the Congress Socialist Party'. He was released from jail on 20th November 1936 and joined Indian National Congress. He issued a public appeal asking the people to join the Indian National Congress in millions. He attempted to radicalize the Congress from below. Roy urged that Congress should be built up from the below by organizing village and taluka Congress Committees and
vitalizing them on the basis, of the socio-economic programme of
democratic freedom and agrarian reform\textsuperscript{16}. He had several meetings with
Gandhi and discussed on that point. Roy gave several important
suggestions so that there remains a contact between the primary
committee and All India Congress Committee. Through it, political
consciousness of the masses will be awakening in a large number\textsuperscript{17}.

Royist and communist became a major factor in the congress and
influenced to a great deal the drafting of the Election Manifesto for
election to Provincial Legislatures. For the first time, the congress put on
record that it favoured a Constituent Assembly. Immediately before
Faizpur congress was the issue of the acceptability of the 1935
Government of India Act which permitted legislators, autonomy in
provincial affairs. Roy declared, “A Constitution could not be wrecked
either by boycotting them but only by extra – parliamentary mass action
and the electoral propaganda should be utilized for that”\textsuperscript{18}.

Roy held that political independence was not the end; it was the
means to an end, which was a radical transformation of the Indian
Society. He pointed out that, changes of the social structure of India, of
that time was possible through the transfer of the ownership of land to the
cultivator, because in such case, the peasants would produce more and keep more and they could spend more money on consumer goods. Again, this demand for goods would in turn stimulate industry. To bring about such a major change the people of India would have to have political power and the authentic Government had to give place of a Government of the people and by the people. So, his view was different from socialism, which meant common ownership of the means of production. Socialistic method is not possible in the given condition of India. Therefore, Roy suggested that the only way, was to carry out the agrarian revolution and built up modern industry under the control of a really democratic state.

On this point, Roy’s views was different not from socialism but from Gandhism. Roy held, “a man remains a Capitalist as long as he exploits the labor of other man. He does not cease to be a capitalist by making only five percent profit instead of fifty percent. As long as he makes even five percent profits, he exploits, and there is no equality, no goodness, and no socialism. Similar is the case with landlords”. So, he held that we could not do two things at a time, as Gandhiji mentioned in his theory of Trusteeship, that is to change the heart of the capitalists and reconcile the interests of capital and labour. Roy disagreed with Gandhiji
that all men are essentially good. Roy summarized the contradiction as "Socialism says that the economic welfare of the masses can be better attained in an atmosphere of plenty. Gandhism says, the ideal can be best attained in an atmosphere of simplicity. The latter is a philosophy of poverty, the former is a philosophy of richness; richness, not is the vulgar material sense, but a philosophy of richness of life." Thus to achieve the programme suggested by Roy, which was differed from Socialism and right wing of Congress, an alternate leadership to that offered by Gandhiji and his associates was required. Roy wanted to organise this leadership and to 'radicalise' the Congress. For that, Roy would have welcomed efforts towards left wing unity. But such unity did not come about, either with Communist Party of India or the Congress Socialist Party.

On the basis, of the programme the colleague and followers of Roy started work in large number of rural and urban centers in the country, which made a rapid progress. However, it was disliked by a major section of Congressmen. Therefore, he organised his followers into a alternative body called League of Radical Congressmen, on May 1, 1939. The term 'Radical' signified not only leftiist economic ideas, but also philosophical radicalism that existed in Europe as a precursor to Marxism. After
established the branches of the League, an All India Conference was held in Poona in June. He was forever on the move, giving lectures, addressing mass meetings, setting up groups and units of the League.  

The Second World War commenced on 1st September 1939. Soon thereafter Roy prepared a thesis called 'India and War', which was adopted by the League of Radical Congressmen, in the middle of October and published as a booklet. It was a brilliant document in which Roy pointed out that the war was not a imperialist war, it was an anti-Fascist war and that it was necessary for the very survival of democracy throughout the world that the war efforts of the Allied Powers should be supported at all cost. Roy declared that if Fascism succeeds in establishing its domination over the whole of Europe then 'good bye to revolution and good bye to Indian Freedom as well'. He also confidently predicted that the defeat of Fascism will weaken imperialism and would bring India nearer to the goal of democratic freedom.

The Indian people were traditionally anti-British; they had little appreciation of the dangers of international fascism. Roy knew that under such condition his programme of war support was bound to be unpopular. This brought him into the conflict with the Indian National Congress,
because the Congress could not ask the Indian people to support the war effort unless the British Government agreed to set up a National Government of India with full autonomy over defense and foreign affairs. Roy disagreed with conditional support of Congress. He argued that if success in the anti-fascist war was necessary for our democratic freedom, we could not put conditions on our offer to help in success. Because of these differences, Roy and his followers left the congress and founded a separate party, called of Radical Democratic Party, in December 1940. "It was the characteristic of Roy that he decided to sacrifice his popularity for the shake of his principles and threw himself whole hearted by in the anti-Fascist cause."

The associates who followed Roy to the new party were either nationalist or communist; Roy considered them revolutionaries. He laboured hard to convince them of the soundness of his new line, which was the result of an unorthodox application of Marxism to the conditions prevailing in India. An important contribution made by radicals was keeping wheels of factories turning for war production. They held important positions in the labour federation, the AITUC, but under nationalist influence, this organization had adopted the policy of neutrality.
On August 1942, Indian National Congress launched "Quit India" moment. Roy regarded the "Quit India" movement as a great disservice to the cause of freedom. He charged that the congress leaders were out to render aid and comfort to Fascist. The Quit India movement subsided within about three months. At All-India Conference of Radical Democratic Party held in Lucknow, in December 1942, Roy declared that the Fascist Powers were bound to defeat in the war, and also that India will get national freedom as result of the socio-economic changes which were taking place in Great Britain and allied countries during the course of the anti-Fascist struggle. Both these anticipations proved correct, Even many historians are agreed that India got national freedom largely as a result of the liberating force generated by the defeat of International Fascism in the Second World War, and that was the reason for the vital disappearance of colonialism, not only in India, but through out the world.

After the war, Roy switched his attention to the post-war reconstruction of India. He prepared two basic plans—"The People's Plan for Economic Development of India" and "Draft Constitution of Free India", which contained the solution of country's economic and political problems. Roy gave priority to in the People's Plane to the development
of agriculture and small-scale industry. Production, under People's Plan was to be for use and not for profit and the objective of economic planning was to supply the primary needs of the people consisting of food, shelter, clothing, education and medicine. Again, according to the Draft Constitution of Free India was to be organised on the basis, of a countrywide network of People's Committees having wide powers such as initiating legislation, expressing opinion on pending bills, recall of representatives and referendum on important national issues. The idea of Peoples Committees, subsequently popularized by Jayprakash Narayan, was mainly, derived from Roy's Draft Constitution of Free India31.

The third All India Conference of the R.D.P., held in Bombay from 26th to 29th December, 1946 had been of more than usual importance because besides expressing its views on current political problems, the conference formulated, for the first time, the fundamental philosophical and political principles which determined the ultimate social ideals and immediate political practice of radical democrats32. Roy, also prepared a number of theses summarizing the philosophy, he was propounding. These theses came to be known as the 22 theses of Radical Humanism33. After 40 years of active political life, Roy then decided to quit politics. He announced in the same camp, “I am not quite satisfied any longer with
political activities. I can now do work according to my inclinations ....I feel that my leaving in the party” 34. Therefore, he founded the Indian Renaissance Institute as his platform of action. The Radical Humanistic phase of Roy’s ideological development heralded thereafter.

Roy had acquired and cultivated a new creed, a faith in world revolution through his philosophy and ideas. He thought that striving for freedom was much wider in its application rather than that of practical freedom. As an intellectually alert person, he had been attracted to Marxism, which he thought as rational in its logical approach and method. But as he believed in revolution which he thought as romantic view of life, he became critical of Marxism and established a new philosophy, Radical Humanism. Radicalism as Roy thought was a new approach, which was different from Nationalism, Socialism, Communism or other brands of political thought because it was philosophical. Roy was right in holding that “Politics and economics, being concerned with different aspects of life, must be guided by a philosophy of life”35, because all meaningful works must be based on sound theory.

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