Chapter I

Introduction

An intellectual of international eminence, M.N. Roy was the most gigantic and prominent figure of 20th century Indian politics. His more influential and well-known contemporaries were Lenin, Gandhi, Trotsky, Mao and Nehru. His life was romantic, experience vast, thoughts profound and unorthodox and his activities daring and bold. He was the most controversial figure of modern India. He was very much different from others who dominated the scene of Indian politics of the time. He was definitely the most learned thinker India has ever produced. He had a penetrating insight and profound knowledge of science of history and society.

He was not an arm-chair philosopher. His close associate V.M. Tarkunde wrote, “He distinguished himself both as a man of action and as a man of thought. As a man of action, he was a devoted and dedicated revolutionary. As a man of thought, he developed into a profound and original social philosopher.”\(^1\) He had few peers in the diversity and richness of his revolutionary experience. He was a penetrating and prolific writer who authored books in Spanish, German, French, Russian and English. Although, he had very little formal education, he wrote extensively, and some of his works may be adjudged to be of a very high standard both for authenticity and for scholarship such as *India in Transition; Revolution and Counter Revolution in China; Reason, Romanticism and Revolution*, etc. However, he wrote very little about himself or his own life. Even his close associates in public life knew little of him, and that is why some scholars\(^2\) and critics dubbed him as the ‘Mystery
Man’ of Indian politics. One of his admirers drew explicit attention to this aspect of his life. Roy did not write any autobiography, which he thought was a very “unreliable source of knowing objective truth.” One of his close friends wrote, “We had often asked Roy to reduce his experiences to the written word. He had resisted saying that it was always dangerous to be autobiographical.”

M.N. Roy was born in the village Arbelia near Calcutta on Monday 21st March 1887. At his birth he was given the name of Narendra Nath Bhattacharya together with the Zodiacal name (Rashinam) Girinder Nath. The name by which he was internationally known, M.N. Roy (Manabendra Nath Roy), was adopted by him in 1916 at Stanford. From police records and other sources it is known that in the course of his hazardous career as a revolutionary he adopted many pseudonyms e.g. White, Charles A. Martin, Manuel Mendez, Gracie, Richard, Mahmud. In India he was generally known as Narendra Nath or, in short, Naren (although he had a family nickname, Dona).

Roy’s father, Dinabandhu was the head-priest in the village Ksheput in the Midnapore district of West Bengal. However, large size of family forced him to search for other sources of income. So he took employment as a Head-Pandit (teacher of Sanskrit) in a junior school at Arbelia—a village in the 24 Parganas near Calcutta. Dinabandhu married twice and had a large family of ten children. Roy was the fourth child of the second marriage and third male child of his father.

Talking about Roy, A.K. Hindi said, “Like the teeming millions of India, he grew up into his boyhood only to find himself in a world of chaos and confusion, misery and unhappiness.”

Roy spent the first eleven years of his life at Arbelia where he studied up to the sixth standard. In 1898 the family moved to Kodalia, a village adjacent to the Railway station Changripota, also in the 24 Parganas and only a few miles from the metropolis. Changripota, though a village, had produced
important personalities, who represented the new spirit of enlightenment and reform in nineteenth-century Bengal. Among the men of the Bengal Renaissance from Changripota were Dwaraka Nath Vidyabushan (1820-86), the distinguished founder-editor of the journal Somprakash, and his even more famous nephew, Sivanath Sastri (1847-1919), leader of Sadharan Brahma Samaj, who made a strong impact on the educated youth of contemporary Bengal.¹⁰

From 1898 to 1905 Roy studied at Harinabhi Anglo-Sanskrit school. Even as a school boy he participated in various political activities of the national movement. The year 1905 brought about a change in Roy’s life. His father died in May that year; then ‘Partition of Bengal’ was formally announced in July and came into effect in October, provoking a country-wide movement against it. Roy began his political career in 1905 as a nationalist believing in the methods of terrorism and violent revolution for the liberation of his motherland India, which was politically enslaved by a foreign power—the British rule. Under the inspiring leadership of Jatindra Nath Mukherji he became a nationalist revolutionary and risked his all. He actively participated in the national agitation and wholeheartedly devoted himself to the single aim of seeing India free from the British rule. Roy’s revolutionary activities seem evident from the fact that he was arrested in 1910, in connection with the Howrah Conspiracy Case and was again behind bars for a political dacoity in Calcutta in 1915.

Roy left India in 1915 in search of arms for national liberation. He paid a visit to Java, China, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Germany, the Philippines and Manchuria and at a later stage even USA. In these countries he came in contact with many intellectuals and politicians of all shades and went on augmenting his study in several subjects. It was in America that his ideas began to take shape. While in New York, Roy came in contact with the radical and socialist
political activists of America and had long discussions with them which prompted him to study at the New York Public Library. Here he undertook a thorough study of the various branches of natural and social sciences. He also read Karl Marx. Here he also attended a workers’ meeting addressed by Eugene Debts, then Secretary of the Socialist Party of America. These contacts and readings played a crucial role in bringing about a change in his political ideas and making him drift towards socialism. Here he addressed an ‘Open Letter to President Wilson.’ In America, Roy also met Evelyn Trent and they were married in New York. In the year 1926 they separated.

Roy did not stay in America for long and he left for Mexico in 1917. He found that Mexico was in the course of a revolution led by Obregon and Caranza. Roy was soon sucked up in that atmosphere. It brought about a change in his political ideas. Roy spent the next two and a half years in Mexico. He took an active part in Mexican social revolutionary movement and was soon in the front rank of the movement. The first conference of the Socialist Party of Mexico met in December 1918 and Roy was elected unanimously as the General Secretary of the New Party which was named “Regional Socialist International.” Marxism and Marxian conception of revolution became his new attraction. Roy had the distinction of founding the Communist Party of Mexico.

In November, 1919, Roy was invited by Lenin to visit Russia. He met Lenin in May, 1920 and he had some differences of opinion with Lenin on the national and colonial questions in the Second World Congress of Communist International held in 1920. Roy found Lenin’s thesis to be theoretically sound but differed from him on the question as to how was the colonial national liberation movement to be supported? Roy gave his own theses. Ultimately both the theses were adopted. Almost immediately after the Second Congress of the Comintern a Provisional All India Central Revolutionary Committee was formed in Moscow with Roy elected as its chairman. He was sent to Tashkent
where he formed the Communist Party of India on 17 October, 1920.

It was not that he had lost track of events in India while abroad. He was following political events in India, studying them from the Marxist point of view. After a great deal of study Roy wrote a book, *India in Transition*, in 1922.

Meanwhile, Roy had moved to Berlin where he set up his headquarters. In May, 1922 he published the first issue of his journal *The Vanguard of Indian Independence* which, under changing names and with varying periodicity, continued to appear under his editorship till April 1928, and served as the main source of guidance and inspiration to communists and other radically inclined groups and persons in India during the 1920’s. By the end of 1922 Roy had succeeded through his writings, correspondence and emissaries in forming small communist groups in Bengal, Bombay, Madras, the United Provinces and the Punjab.

At the Fourth Congress of the Comintern (5th November 1922 to 5th December 1922) Roy became a candidate member of the Executive Committee of Communist International (ECCI) and his views on Eastern Question were upheld. In the next few years his rise in the Comintern hierarchy was remarkably rapid. At the Fifth Congress (26th June to 8th July 1924) he was elected full member of the ECCI and candidate member of the Presidium; his views on the National and Eastern Question received Stalin’s support. At the Sixth Plenum of the Comintern Executive (February-March 1926) Roy was elected to the Presidium as a full member, and made a member of the Comintern Secretariat and the Orgbureau. He was also appointed to the editorial board of the Communist International and named chairman of the Eastern Commission. At the Seventh Plenum (November-December 1926), besides continuing to occupy these high and powerful positions he was also elected member secretary of the Chinese Commission. Sibnarayan Ray has...
rightly observed, "By the end of 1926 he thus quite clearly belonged to the
highest echelon of the Comintern hierarchy."12

However, Roy was in turn expelled from Germany, Switzerland and
France. During this period, Roy published three books on the Indian political
situation. They were: One year of Non-Cooperation, The Aftermath of Non-
Cooperation and the Future of Indian Politics. Besides these books, he wrote,
innumerable letters, statements and manifestos in the journals The Vanguard of
Indian Independence and The Masses.

He was sent to China in the year 1926, as the Chief Representative of
the Communist International to guide the revolution along with Borodin, one of
the representatives, of the most devoted and most profound Marxists of the
world. He stayed there till 1927. Roy penned down his experiences and
understanding of the Chinese situation in Revolution and Counter Revolution in
China.

By 1927 Stalin had started his peculiar tactics for the liquidation or
expulsion of all persons of independent thinking from the Russian Communist
Party and the Communist International. Roy was one of the victims of those
tactics. He was turned out from the Comintern in 1929. A.L. Narasimha Rao
wrote that “for an independent minded person like Roy it was not possible to
continue too long in an organization like the C.I. which insisted on discipline
and blind obedience and a ban on independent thinking.”13 It is true that during
Second Congress Lenin tolerated the divergent views of Roy. But during Stalin
era, such people were expelled from the organisation.

Roy came back to India in December 1930. After coming to India he
met a number of prominent people like Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallab Bhai
Patel, Bhulabhai Desai and many others. He also met Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and
the great Trade Union Leader N.M. Joshi.14
Roy also attended the Karachi Congress on receiving an invitation from Nehru. He was arrested in July, 1931 in Kanpur Conspiracy Case and was kept in jail for six years. During these years (1930-1936) he did not sit idle but read a lot of books on History, Philosophy, Science, Law, etc. He devoted himself exclusively to intellectual work. Some of the important books he read in jail were: Max-Weber's *Work on Asiatic Religions*; Van Dine's *The Criminal*; Wawell's book *History of the Inductive Sciences*; Leckey's *History of European Morals and History of Rationalism*; Draper's *History of the Intellectual Development in Europe*; Zeller's *Greek Philosophy*; Unberweg's book *History of Philosophy*; Lyall's work *Antiquity of Man*; Taylor's *Primitive Culture*; Broad's *Scientific Thought*; Bertrand Russell's book *The Analysis of Matter*, etc. He also read the books on theoretical physics and biology.  

Roy used his prison years in writing notes on a variety of subjects and especially on the 'philosophical consequences of modern science.' He was allowed only limited sheets of writing paper each day which had to be lodged with the prison authorities after they had been used. Despite many restrictions, he wrote extensively. At least nine large volumes of manuscripts were written by him during imprisonment which have not been so far published in their entirety. These volumes include "statements of his revolutionary ideas and programmes, commentaries on the major events of the time, theoretical inquiries and formulations about human nature and the cosmos, knowledge and morality, history and society, political economy and cultural change, critiques of Indian tradition, culture and ethos, and personal recollections, correspondence, notes, reports, drafts and stenograms of his lectures and seminars." Thus his jail life was a blessing in disguise for his mental evolution. The prison years ruined his iron constitution, but his invariable spirit continued to be strong and active even in solitary confinement and terrible privation. Despite severe restrictions Roy managed to keep in touch with his
political associates both in India and abroad by smuggling out letters, instructions and articles. Some selected portions from the manuscripts were published as separate books like *Materialism: an Outline of the History of Scientific Thought* (1940); *Science and Philosophy* (1947); *Heresies of the 20th Century* (1939); *Science and Superstition* (1940); *Fascism: Its Philosophy, Professions and Practice* (1938); *The Historical Role of Islam* (1939); *Idea of Indian Womanhood* (1941); *India's Message* (1950), etc.

Roy's writings in prison reveal many aspects of his personality like his warmth and loyalty, courage and compassion, fortitude and openness of mind, sense of humour and style, his moments of agony and despair, and the abundance of his ardour which could never dry up even under terrible pressure.

On his release from jail, he joined the Indian National Congress (INC) to the consternation of Indian Communists and was elected a member of the All India Congress Committee (AICC). Soon he formed the League of Radical Congressmen as a wing of that organization. But Roy's role inside the Congress was that of a dissenter. While agreeing with the major aims and objectives to win political freedom, he refused to put Mahatma Gandhi on a pedestal. In result, not only did he antagonize the High Command but also forfeited the sympathy of the rank and file of Congressmen, as well as the masses. He had only the support of his small loyal band of Royists.


On the outbreak of the Second World War, there arose a fundamental difference between Roy's group and the Congress leadership on the issue of India's participation in the British war effort. Unlike the Congress, Roy supported the British Government and condemned the famous 1942 movement as a sabotage movement, for which he suffered great reverse in terms of
popularity. He developed certain notions which were quite alien to the stream of national thinking at that time. Indeed many people indicted him as a traitor in his attitude to 'Quit India' resolution of the Congress. His analysis of the war and consequent divergence of opinion led to his break with the Congress, and, in December 1940, Roy founded the Radical Democratic Party. In July 1945 he brought out a quarterly Journal “The Marxian Way.”

It was in the early forties that Roy questioned some of the fundamental tenets of Marxism, questioning that led to the evolution of his own system of thought, which he called Radical Humanism.

In the middle of 1940, Roy met his friends and disciples at a Political Study Camp at Dehradun. The discussion of this camp led to the formulation of certain principles of revolutionary theory and politics. It was at this camp that Roy rejected the cult of Nationalism and deviated from orthodox Marxism. After six years, he held the Second Political Study Camp. During these six years Roy turned more and more away from Marxism and was devoted to the evolution of the principles of his new philosophy of Radical Humanism. In formulating Radical Humanism, Roy the thinker went beyond Marx the philosopher. Once he realized that his earlier and partly subjective efforts to justify the findings of the Master were of no avail to him in his overriding quest for freedom, he gave them up stoutly.

Further experience convinced Roy that a political party was not a suitable instrument for creating a free society; and so in December 1948, the Radical Democratic Party was dissolved and he launched a new movement known as Radical Humanist Movement. He changed the name of Independent India to The Radical Humanist in April 1949 and of The Marxian Way to The Humanist Way in August 1949.

Thus, we have seen that Roy's views passed through various stages of evolution. It can be held that in the evolution of his ideas, Roy passed through
three successive stages: Nationalist, Marxist and Radical Humanist. Till his death on January 25, 1954, he remained a great explorer of ideas and warrior for progressive movements. It is not surprising that due to his chequered career, he had more critics than admirers. This was inevitable because of his absorbing spirit which was looked upon with either awe or suspicion even by his admirers. K.C. Jena said that the unfortunate element in the whole episode was that his critics were not prepared to study him rationally and impartially.17 There has been a great injustice done to his originality and genius. Amongst his admirers was Jawaharlal Nehru. He was impressed by Roy’s intelligence. He wrote, “I was attracted to him by his remarkable intellectual capacity.”18 Lala Lajpat Rai also wrote about him in 1916: “The only one of the Bengali revolutionaries for whom I have had genuine respect is M.N. Roy.”19 Roy had “rare combination of the love of freedom, unimpeachable integrity, a sense of loyalty, the courage of conviction . . . with complete detachment from the game of power politics through which this struggle often expresses itself... There was something of the universal man in him . . . Few leaders have been able to realise men’s creativity as Roy could do without resorting to Shamanism of any kind.20 His last letter to Stalin was an evidence of this fact.21 Sudhindranath Datta while paying homage to M.N. Roy wrote, “He hated injustice and inhumanity, although he recognised development and decay to be inseparable from the process of life; and after having sat on the same council as Lenin and Stalin, Gandhi and Nehru, he voluntarily retired into the wilderness, because he found that to the majority of his fellow revolutionaries social change meant mere transference of power without any real diminution of man-made misery.”22

A number of studies have been undertaken on M.N. Roy. It will be important to catalogue research and books written on Roy to delimit the scope of the present study.
A.K. Hindi\textsuperscript{23} has highlighted Roy’s earlier revolutionary thought with special reference to his stay in the United States, Mexico and Soviet Russia. He has also dealt with Roy’s views on the Chinese Revolution. This is followed by a discussion on Roy’s disagreement and expulsion from the Communist International. However, this book is mainly concerned with Roy’s ideas and activities till 1930.

\textbullet\, Samaren Roy’s book\textsuperscript{24} has dealt with the early life of M.N. Roy. The author has made an effort to describe the militant nationalist movement that developed in Bengal between 1905 and 1916, in which Roy played a vital role, and its impact on Roy’s later life. However, the discussion in this book is limited to Roy’s activities till 1916 only. The author has concluded the book with the discussion on Roy’s attempt, in collaboration with Germans, to import arms for waging an armed struggle against the British rulers in the wake of the First World War and his daring missions to Batavia and the countries in South-East Asia in search of arms.

The book written by V.B. Karnik\textsuperscript{25} has made an attempt to present an exhaustive and authentic political biography of Roy covering his activities during different stages of his career. But it has hardly added any new information. However, this study is useful for its extensive quotations from Roy’s works. The book is mainly descriptive in nature and fails to analyse political ideas of Roy.

Prakash Chandra in his book\textsuperscript{26} has dealt with the political philosophy of M.N. Roy. He has divided Roy’s life into three phases, that is, Nationalist Anarchist, active but critical Marxist and Radical Humanist. The author has dealt with Roy’s materialistic metaphysics and epistemology and has tried to show as to how his ethical views were the direct outcome of his metaphysics. This is followed by an examination of Roy’s views on human nature and the philosophy of history. Prakash Chandra has tried to show as to how his
historiography differed from the Marxist interpretation of history.

The author has further examined the cooperative system of economy advocated by Roy. He has also made an attempt to deal with Roy's system of political organisation which entailed abolition of political parties, organised democracy and political decentralization. This is followed by a discussion on Roy’s concept of revolution and the technique of political and social change advocated by him. Finally the author has discussed the feasibility of Roy’s suggestions for bringing about world peace and co-operative commonwealth.

It is observed that Prakash Chandra’s work is only narrative and not an analytical piece of work and does not provide any new insight into Roy’s ideas. Although the author has dealt at length with the various aspects of Roy’s philosophy of New Humanism, he has not gone into any detailed examination of the political ideas of M.N. Roy during the Marxist period.

Gene D. Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller²⁷ have made an attempt to study Indian Communism. For this they have felt it necessary to examine Roy’s role and activities, because between 1920 and 1928 Roy not only directed Indian Communist activity from abroad but he also interpreted India to the Comintern and thus played a major role in determining its strategy for India and for other colonial areas.

The authors have also analysed Roy’s career in the Communist International. They have analysed the strategy that Roy outlined for the promotion of revolution in India and have revealed the contradiction between his own views and official Comintern policy. This is followed by a discussion on Roy’s role in China and his subsequent expulsion from the Comintern. The authors have further taken up Marxist analysis of Gandhi. They have argued that the first communist writer to present a detailed Marxist analysis of Gandhi was M.N. Roy.
Sada Nand Talwar has dealt with the various political ideas of M.N. Roy. He has discussed Roy's views on Marxism, National Colonial Revolution, Radical Humanism etc. He has devoted a chapter on the structure of Roy's political ideas and he has described Roy as a 'Romantic Revolutionary' (1907-1915), as a 'Marxist-Revolutionary' (1917-1946) and as a 'Radical Humanist' (1947-1954). However, the author has failed to examine the reasons for the shifts in M.N. Roy's ideas.

J.B.H. Wadia's book has highlighted many fascinating aspects of Roy's personality. It has revealed hitherto unpublished incidents and anecdotes about Roy which show his versatility of mind and also his deep interest in sports, music, dance, drama, films and literature apart from politics, economics and philosophy.

The author has dwelt on the relationship that existed between Roy and his colleagues, friends and admirers. While highlighting Roy's attitude towards Veer Savarkar, Stalin, Subhas Chandra Bose, Indian nationalists and Congress Socialists, Wadia has given a vivid picture of Roy's personality.

Haithcox's Work has traced the development of Communism and Socialism in India from the Second Congress of the Communist International in 1920, which dealt with the issues of Communism and Nationalism in colonial and semi-colonial countries, to the defeat of the Left-Wing of Indian National Congress, or Congress Party in 1939. The author has highlighted such crucial issues as Roy-Lenin debate on colonial policy at the Second Congress of the Communist International, the role of M.N. Roy in the development of the Indian Communist movement, Roy's activities in China, and the circumstances surrounding his expulsion from Comintern. Haithcox has also explored at some length such topics as the role of the Royists and the Communists in the development of the Indian trade union movement, the decolonization controversy of the Sixth Comintern Congress, and the efforts of M.N. Roy—
following his expulsion from the Comintern—to challenge Stalin’s policies in India in the 1930’s and to pursue an independent line of action.

In this connection the author has explored the influence of Roy and his followers within the Congress Socialist Party during its early years, the activities of the Roy group within the Indian nationalist movement on behalf of trade-union unity, and Roy’s programme to radicalize the Congress Party by working within the nationalist organization.

O.P. Goyal in his book has devoted one chapter to the ideas of M.N. Roy. He has discussed and analyzed three important aspects of M.N. Roy’s political thought. The author has first taken up Roy’s position as a Marxist. This is followed by his treatment of Roy’s criticism of Marxism and development of a new philosophy variously described as Radical Humanism, Scientific Humanism or New Humanism. Thirdly, his views on partyless, powerless politics have been discussed.

In the book Contributions of Manabendra Nath Roy to Political Philosophy, Krishna Chandra Jena has given a brief life-sketch of M.N. Roy. After this the author has examined Roy’s concept of freedom, and has argued that Roy considered freedom as a biological problem. He has also discussed Roy’s differences with Lenin, Stalin and Marx. The author has tried to explain that M.N. Roy differed from Marxism and Communism on ideological, philosophical and practical considerations. This is followed by a discussion on Roy’s views on Democracy. Jena has tried to show that Roy believed in the essential qualities of Democracy. The author has argued that Roy was not a blind admirer of the system. On the other hand, he made a critical study and analysis of the problems which are usually associated with democracy and the various democratic institutions. It is observed that Roy’s understanding of Communism made him realize the weakness of totalitarianism as a political method. He therefore accepted democracy as an escape from totalitarianism.
Jena has further examined Roy's concept of Radical Democracy.

The author has also analysed Roy's views on spiritualism, materialism, individual, state, socialism and internationalism. This is followed by a discussion on Roy's views on different aspects of Indian problems viz., economic, social, political etc. Finally, Jena has discussed the development of the philosophy of New Humanism.

The book *Roy, Comintern and Marxism in India* has made an attempt to describe as to how Marxism came to India. Believing that at the initial stage of Marxism in India Roy played a pivotal role the author has given a brief outline of Roy's early activities before he became a Marxist—to show as to how his concept of underground revolution got mixed up with the Marxian concept of proletarian revolution and led to left sectarianism. In the second chapter Roy's socialist activities in Mexico have been discussed. The rest of the book has been devoted by the author to trace out the course of left movement in India. The author has observed that one of the errors committed by the Marxists in India was their exclusive reliance on foreign advice. However, he has argued that the advice received from abroad was out of tune with the situation existing in India.

In the book, *Modern Political Thought: Gandhism and Roy's New Humanism*, Kiran Saxena has tried to make a comparative and critical study of Gandhism and the New Humanism of M.N. Roy. The author has argued that though Gandhism and Roy's 'New Humanism' originated from absolutely different foundations, still in their conclusions differences got narrowed and ironed out. According to her the ideals of Gandhism and New Humanism were the same although they were supported by unlike methods. She has further argued that Gandhian philosophy was not purely Indian in its outlook, and his religious thinking had been influenced by western thinkers like Tolstoy, Thoreau, Ruskin and Emerson. Similarly according to the author Roy's 'New
Humanism’ was also not original. The whole philosophy was the reinforcement of the doctrines of the eighteenth century liberalism and French Enlightenment. The little alterations that Roy made were also borrowed from American New Humanism.

The author has observed in this book that Gandhism and New Humanism should be given credit for drawing attention to the growing tendencies of authoritarianism which were the outcome of the complexities created by modern civilisation, and which had placed man in a helpless and hopeless position. However, Kiran Saxena has concluded that the suggestions made by both of them as a panacea for modern ills were preconceived notions which were hopelessly inadequate to meet the present crisis.

The book edited by Sibnarayan Ray, is composed of articles contributed by various eminent scholars. Robert C. North in the article ‘M.N. Roy and the Revolution in Asia’ has revealed Roy’s role in Communist International from the Second Congress to the Sixth Congress.

In the article ‘The 1927 Comintern Failure in China and M.N. Roy’ John P. Haithcox has examined the Chinese debacle of 1927 in the light of contemporary records and documents and has given his own view of Roy’s role in China. Sunder Kabadi, in his article has put down his recollections of Roy during 1929-31. Stanley Moron in his essay ‘The Political Philosophy of M.N. Roy’ has provided a selective account of Roy’s political thinking since his release from jail. Dennis Dalton in the article ‘Gandhi and Roy: The Interaction of Ideologies in India’, has provided an interpretation of Roy’s intellectual development vis-a-vis Gandhi.

J.C. Johri has divided his book into two parts. In the first part the author has analysed Roy’s political activities during the early phase, Marxist phase and later phase. He has made an attempt to discuss Roy’s efforts to secure arms for the national liberation and his visits to various countries for this
purpose. This has been followed by a discussion on Roy's activities in Mexico and his conversion to communism. He has also described Roy's activities as a Marxist. In the last chapter of the first part of the book he has described Roy's activities in India.

In the second part of the book the author has dealt with the social and political ideas of M.N. Roy. In this part the author has explained in a very brief manner the evolution of Roy's ideas and divided them into five phases. In the first phase (1901-1916) the author has examined Roy as a 'Romantic Revolutionary.' In the second phase—which according to the author lasted from 1917-30—Roy has been discussed as an 'Orthodox Communist.' During the third phase (1931-39) Roy has been viewed as a 'Critical Marxist.' In the fourth phase—from 1940-46—Roy has been treated as a 'Modified Marxist.' And in the fifth phase (1947-54) the author has analysed Roy as a Radical Humanist.

Johri has concluded his discussion of Roy, agreeing with the observation of D.C. Grover that, while Roy's political philosophy had no chance in India, many of its ideas were necessary to buttress individual liberty in a society which was in danger of losing it by a failure to comprehend the sources of its own present democratic purpose. If liberalism survives in India Roy should be remembered periodically as its most disinterested champion.

Samaren Roy in the book *M.N. Roy and Mahatma Gandhi,* has attempted to make a comparative study of political, social and philosophical ideas of two great thinkers of modern India—M.N. Roy and Mahatma Gandhi. He has argued that these two Indians held diametrically opposite views about politics and society. According to the author Gandhi used religion and tradition to arouse the masses and succeeded in building up a mass upheaval for political gains. On the other hand, Roy abhorred religion and tradition and tried to build up a new leadership in India steeped in modern values so that independence
may lead to the establishment of a society based on the scientific and philosophical achievements of the West. While Roy stood for modernization, which in essence meant westernization of Indian society and politics, Gandhi stood for the established Indian social order. The author has further argued that Gandhi wanted political change with minimum and marginal social change. But M.N. Roy’s contention was that our independence would be hardly satisfying without radical social changes. However, the major difference between Gandhi and Roy, according to the author, was that Gandhi was a practical politician and a realist. His life style and moves were aimed at achieving success. Roy, on the other hand, was an idealist who retained the spirit of uncompromising adherence to principles and non-attachment to personal power.

The book, *India’s First Communist* by Samaren Roy examines Roy’s role from 1920 to 1948. First a discussion has been made on Roy’s political activities, when he was abroad. This is followed by examining his role and position in Indian freedom movement, after he came back home. However, the author has ignored Roy’s political activities and ideas, in the early period, i.e., from 1905 to 1920 and then from 1948 to 1954.

B.S. Sharma in his book has tried to reconstruct Roy’s political ideas at different stages and to examine his claim for ‘Radical Humanism’ as a system of philosophy. He has discussed the position of M.N. Roy as a National Revolutionary, as a Marxist and as a Radical Humanist. He has also examined Roy’s views on organized democracy and revolution. However, his main concern has been the ideas of M.N. Roy on Radical Humanism.

It is observed that Sharma’s book has given a brief account of the different phases of the political ideas of M.N. Roy. But it has made no attempt to study the underlying causes that led to the various changes in his political outlook.

R.K. Awasthi in his book has undertaken a critical study of M.N.
Roy's social and political ideas. He has demarcated Roy's ideas into three distinct periods and has maintained that these periods were fundamentally different from each other. He has argued that from the point of view of sources and inspirations, contents and ideas, conclusions and methods there was nothing in common in these three phases. They did not naturally lead one to the other, nor could they be viewed as inevitable stages in the process of natural development and growth. He has examined the characteristics of these three periods of history of Roy's ideas and has tried to show that the new philosophy of Roy was a negation of Marxism and consequently, it was a new, violent and most conspicuous mutation in Roy's ideas.

S.M. Ganguly's work has aimed at investigating the main trends of the Left-Wing in the national movement in India, with M.N. Roy as the focus of the study. It has covered the period from non-cooperation movement in 1920, when M.N. Roy issued 'An Indian Communist Manifesto' from Berlin, till the advent of India's independence in 1947. The author has described M.N. Roy as the forerunner of Marxian politics in India. The author has also highlighted Roy's attempt to radicalize the Congress. Ganguli has expressed the opinion that Roy's attempts to radicalize the Congress did not achieve much success owing to disunity among the radical elements.

In a comprehensive and critical manner the author has analysed the backdrop leading to the formation of Communist Party of India, Congress Socialist Party, Forward Block and the League of Radical Congressmen which was later renamed as the Radical Democratic Party. He has also examined, the currents and crosscurrents of left unity and divergence during the decade preceding the national independence.

In the book *M.N. Roy and Radical Humanism* the author has presented a systematic study of the philosophical views of Roy which he developed in the later part of his career. The author has first taken up a brief discussion on the
life of M.N. Roy and the various stages of evolution of his ideas. After this the
author has lucidly explained the intricacies of the philosophy of Radical
Humanism. Finally an attempt has been made to compare Radical Humanism
with other social philosophies.

In the book, *The Political Ideas of M.N. Roy and Jayapra
kash Narayan* the author has made a systematic comparative analysis of the
political ideas of the two outstanding socialist thinkers of modern India—M.N.
Roy and Jayaparaksh Narayan—with a view to identifying, besides the well-
known traits, some of the subtle nuances and the less conspicuous though
immensely significant features of their thought contents. Because of its focus
on ideas, this study has precluded intensive treatment of the so very well-
known differences of biographical evolution of Roy and Jayaparaksh Narayan,
though their multi-dimensional and epoch making personalities in the context
of their changing political faiths and concepts, during the course of their lives
have been analysed and compared by the author. The author has shown that
their journeys in the spheres of political ideas (from Revolutionary Nationalism
to Marxism to Radical Humanism—Roy; and from Nationalism to Marxism to
Total Revolution through Democratic Socialism and Sarvodaya—J.P.) though
long and varied were nevertheless circuitous. The author has also made an
effort to describe how both changed and revised quite a few of their ideas from
time to time in the light of their experiences. On the basis of a comparative
study of their political ideas, the author has arrived at the conclusion that there
were more similarities than differences between these two outstanding political
philosophers of modern India. The author has substantiated his point by arguing
that the ideological development of both the political thinkers was somewhat
similar. Besides this, freedom and truth were the beacons of light in their
journeys in the spheres of political ideas. The ideal to both was individual
freedom and autonomy. Both were critics of the functioning of parliamentary
democracy. Both renounced party-politics. Finally, their thought and concern went beyond narrow national problems and issues.

M. Shiviah, in his work has attached importance to the institutional aspect and the ideas of M.N. Roy on the Radical Democratic state. He has compared Radical Democratic State with the current theories of State: Socialist, Welfare and Sarvodaya. Attempting a discussion on the relation of New Humanism to Marxism, Shiviah has admitted that the framework, categories and idiom of thought of Marxism provided an indispensable clue to Roy’s intellectual development, Yet with all this indebtedness New Humanism, according to him, represented a distinct system of thought with its distinct philosophical basis, theories of history, man, society and the state. He asserted that in all these respects New Humanism was different from Marxism. As to the Radical Democratic theory of state, the author has concluded that it did not approve of either the Marxist or the Democratic Socialist state.

The book edited by Verinder Grover is a systematic piecing together of articles contributed by M.N. Roy himself and other scholars and specialists to the various journals of national and international repute. This book is divided by the author into three parts. Part one of the book deals with the various articles written by M.N. Roy, some published during his lifetime and some posthumously. Part two is a collection of his memoirs published in the Radical Humanist during different periods. Part three consists of articles written by various authors who have tried to delve into Roy’s philosophy. Samaren Roy in his article ‘M.N. Roy in America’ has described Roy’s activities in America. The author has revealed the various important contacts which Roy made in U.S.A., and as to how these contact were helpful in influencing his ideas. Samaren Roy has also given a brief account of Roy’s activities in Mexico. Another author, L.P. Sinha in his article ‘Political Ideas of M.N. Roy: An Historical Analysis’ has divided the political ideas of M.N. Roy into five
phases i.e., Romantic Revolution, (1912-16); Orthodox Marxism, (1917-29); Modified or Unorthodox Marxism, (1930-36); Transition to Radical Democracy (1937-39); Radical Democracy (1940-46); and Radical Humanism (1947-54). The author has discussed in a nut-shell the political ideas of Roy in these phases. The editor of the book, Verinder Grover, has also devoted one article to M.N. Roy in which he has discussed Roy's role as a fighter for freedom. According to Grover, Roy devoted all his life against different forms of slavery—spiritual slavery being the worst of all. The author has argued that Roy's love of freedom made him an anarchist-nationalist. However, when Roy saw the limitations of that ideology, he became a communist, and finally, when Communism too revealed its totalitarian character, Roy became a radical humanist. However, Verinder Grover has concluded that the different phases of Roy's life were not sharply separated from one another; rather they led logically and naturally one to the other, and were but stages in a process of organic growth and development.

Sushanto Das, a junior colleague of M.N. Roy, has written his book in order to depict the main events in Roy's remarkable life and to present a summary of the main ideas developed by him. The book consists of two parts. The first part highlights the main activities and shifts in Roy's stormy career. In part two of this book the author has made an attempt to express Roy's ideas, mainly in the Radical Humanist phase, by representing a mixture of extracts and summaries from Roy's writings and lectures. Thus the author has tried to express Roy's ideas, as far as possible, in his own words.

Dipti Kumar Roy has surveyed the role of M.N. Roy in Indian politics during the period 1930-48. According to the author the political career of Roy during this period may broadly be divided into two stages, the period before the formation of the Radical Democratic Party in December 1940 and the period after its formation.
The author has observed that the radical politics of M.N. Roy before the formation of the RDP was based on two fundamental principles: replacement of Gandhian leadership, by a revolutionary leadership, and a method of organized struggle against imperialism for the capture of power through the constituent assembly.

Dipti Kumar Roy has tried to clarify the radical politics of Roy by comparing it briefly with the leftist politics of India of that time. He has highlighted Roy's differences with the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) and the Communist Party of India (CPI).

The author has argued that in the second stage of his political career, that is after the formation of the RDP, Roy’s politics took an entirely different form. The scheme of organized revolution lost its relevance in the context of the anti-fascist war. Dipti Kumar Roy has observed that though Roy’s arguments in support of the anti-fascist war appeared plausible, his views on the international civil war seemed absolutely untenable. The author has observed that when the post-war developments did not take place according to the ideas propounded by Roy, he began to think of a new way, and ultimately developed a new philosophy.

However, the author has observed that though many of Roy’s predictions about the post-war world proved wrong, in one case, he was remarkably accurate and that was about the disappearance of British imperialism from India. The most significant contribution of Roy to the political life of India during this period, according to the author, was the introduction of the Renaissance movement. The basic idea underlying the Renaissance movement was a rational search for the truth. He was able to create a group of free thinkers in India by his Renaissance movement.

G.P. Bhattacharjee in his book, *Evolution of Political Philosophy of M.N. Roy* has first of all analysed Roy’s participation in national politics. This
is followed by a discussion on ‘Roy and Marxism.’ The author has examined this aspect in two phases. The first phase has covered the period from 1920 to 1930 and the second phase has covered the period from 1936 to 1946. He has argued that Roy’s Marxist outlook did not enable him to realise the significance of Gandhism in Indian politics.

G.P. Bhattacharjee has also tried to survey the different aspects of the philosophy of Radical Humanism formulated by M.N. Roy. He has made an attempt to explain the reasons as to why inspite of his remarkable intellectual power, strong personality and almost legendary political career Roy could not capture the imagination of the Indian people. Finally, the author has pointed out the major contributions of Roy in the realm of political thought.

A.B. Shah has examined the philosophical foundations of New Humanism as formulated by M.N. Roy primarily in his Twenty-two theses of 1946-48 and, secondarily in Reason, Romanticism and Revolution. The author has examined Roy’s philosophy of New Humanism from the standpoint of science in order to decide whether its assertions were compatible with the findings of natural and social sciences.

In view of the implications for social change that Roy drew from his philosophy the author has also considered it necessary to examine it from the social viewpoint. A.B. Shah has first of all examined the main principles of New Humanism. This is followed by a discussion on the assumptions underlying those principles. Finally the author has taken up a critical analysis of Roy’s philosophy of New Humanism.

Niranjan Dhar’s book has covered political thought of Roy from 1930 to 1954. The author has first of all discussed Roy’s conception of politics and has argued that Roy’s conception of politics evolved with his philosophy of life.
This is followed by a discussion on Roy’s views on the Indian Revolution. According to the author after his conversion to Marxism Roy’s thoughts began soaring to new heights and he tried to develop systematic thoughts on India’s struggle for independence. Niranjan Dhar has compared Roy’s viewpoint of “revolution from below” with Lenin’s viewpoint of “revolution from above.” The author has added that subsequently, when the Second World War was going on, Roy evolved a new concept of revolution—revolution by consent.

Niranjan Dhar has also examined Roy’s thoughts on the Second World War and Fascism and has observed that after the War the situation in India developed more or less on the line as visualized by Roy.

The author has further discussed Roy’s position as a critical Marxist and his development of a new philosophy called Radical Humanism. He has also highlighted various aspects of the philosophy of Radical Humanism.

The author has concluded that in course of his long political life Roy’s profoundly original mind found brilliant expression in the analysis of not only national and international situations but also of such political theories as Gandhism, Nationalism, Fascism, Socialism, Communism and Marxism. According to the author Roy was, however, not a destructive critic, his criticisms were always accompanied by highly constructive proposals. Above all, his scheme of organized and partyless democracy was a definite contribution to the technique of government.

D.C. Grover has made an attempt to study Roy’s political philosophy especially in the Indian context. Starting with a critical examination of Roy’s thesis on national and colonial question, the author has discussed Roy’s contribution to Indian Socialist thought and has shown as to how for Roy, the struggle for national freedom was a prelude to the social emancipation of the working class. This is followed by a discussion on Roy’s exposition of Indian
materialism. Grover has argued that Roy's restatement of Indian materialism has attempted to put Indian thought in proper perspective. He has further argued that as a scientific philosophy of Indian politics, Roy's restatement of materialism did not seek to restrain and circumscribe activity, but aimed at the liberation of action through the directive agency of intelligence.

Finally, the author has examined Roy's philosophy of Radical Humanism along with his views on human nature, society and state, ethics and politics and politics without power. Grover has concluded that pilgrimage from Communism to Humanism represented the liberal metamorphosis of Roy. His sole concern was to realize freedom. According to the author as his conception of freedom developed a richer and more complex meaning his political philosophy underwent a corresponding transformation.

Roy's Humanist philosophy has been explained by Ellen Roy and Sibnarayan Ray in their jointly written book *In Man's Own Image*. This book has been divided into three parts. The first part of this book is concerned with Roy's views on man's place in nature and society. The second part is devoted to the discussion on man's place in history in Roy's philosophy. The third part of this book is related with Roy's picture of a free society. On the whole this book is an exposition of Roy's philosophy of Radical Humanism. However, the authors have not made a critical analysis and assessment of Roy's philosophy of Radical Humanism.

The book written by B.N. Das Gupta has dealt with the life and thought of Roy. But it is all too brief and sketchy. The author has not made a detailed examination of the life and thought of Roy, who was at once a revolutionary, philosopher of freedom and an activist for the best part of his life. In this book the author has made just an aerial survey of the different aspects of Roy's life.

V.M. Tarkunde who was associated with Roy from 1936 and was the
General Secretary of Radical Democratic Party (RDP) from 1944 to 1948, has presented in his book the basic framework of the philosophy of Radical Humanism. The author has made an attempt to discuss the personal and social aspects of the philosophy of Radical Humanism and its political and social practice. He has also dealt with its relevance to the contemporary situation in India and abroad.

The author has observed that most of the countries in the Third World were under despotic authoritarian regimes, except a few like India which continued to have a weak and unstable form of political democracy. Even here the scene was characterized by glaring economic and social inequalities. He added that in countries under communist dictatorship there was relatively less economic inequality but this had been achieved at the cost of curtailment of individual and political freedom. He has argued that communism had already collapsed in most of the communist countries because of its dictatorial character and its inability to provide a decent standard of living to the people. In these circumstances, according to the author, it was necessary in these countries to democratise and humanise all political, economic and social institutions.

J.K. Khanna has discussed the divergence and convergence of ideas of M.N. Roy and M.K. Gandhi in his book. The author has tried to correlate M.N. Roy's political ideas as expounded in his philosophy of New Humanism with those of Gandhi's. The author has first made an attempt to discuss M.N. Roy's criticism of Gandhian ideology in the 1920's and early 1930's. After this an effort has been made to highlight, as to how Roy, who was once a great critic of Gandhi, consciously or sub-consciously moved towards Gandhi by evolving some political ideas in his theory of New Humanism which were analogous to those of Gandhi's views.

R.L. Nigam in his book has presented a brief account of the life of
M.N. Roy whom he considered as the prophet of the new order. This is followed by a discussion of twenty-two theses which depict Roy’s philosophy of Radical Humanism. The author has observed that Roy’s characterization of the contemporary crisis into which total human experience had culminated was generally shared on all sides. The lament over loss of morals and erosion of values in public as well as private life was almost universal. According to the author, Roy was not unique in his call for the restoration of moral order as the corrective to the human situation of the day. He was unique in his diagnosis of the causes of that loss and in his faith in man’s capacity to take his affairs in his own hands.

R.L. Nigam has further argued that man’s essentially rational nature or his biological property to reason on which Roy’s forward-looking view of humanity rested, was confirmed by many biologists and other scientists. Moreover, he has argued that Roy did not look upon the contemporary crisis in local or regional context merely. He had studied and analysed it in its full magnitude and in all its dimensions. Thus, the author has concluded that one could not dismiss Roy’s ideas as irrelevant.

In the book, *Marxist Theory and Nationalist Politics: The Case of Colonial India*, Sanjay Seth has examined the two most important and influential ideologies—Marxism and Nationalism—of the modern age. Seth in his work has tried to investigate some of the forms which Marxism’s engagement with Indian nationalism took.

The author has divided the book into two parts. In the first part Seth has explained the evolution of Marxism, and has revealed as to how it came to extend its theoretical and political scope to the East, and how and why the colonial question came to be seen as a national question. Part two of this book has focused upon Marxists understanding of a particular colonial nationalism. It has examined the encounter of Marxism with Indian nationalism.
In all there are six chapters in the book two in the first part and four in the second part of the book. In the first chapter, the author has examined the way in which Lenin created a conceptual space within which it became possible to think of colonial nationalism. In the second chapter he has traced this further, looking at how the colonial question came to be considered as pre-eminently a national question within the International Communist movement, and how colonial nationalism came to be regarded as an ally of the proletarian revolution. In this chapter he has also examined the Roy-Lenin Debate on national and colonial question. In chapter three the author has examined the writings and articles of M.N. Roy in the 1920’s. He has explained how the general framework, within which the East was to be approached, established by the Comintern, first came to be applied to India by Roy; and also how, in the process, Roy sought to amend that general framework. The theory and practice of the first Communists and Left organisations in India have been examined by the author in the next chapter. In chapter five he has analysed the politics of the united anti-imperialist front. In the sixth chapter the author has discussed the content and historical meaning of Nehruvian socialism and his efforts to combine socialism with nationalism.

It is observed that though the above mentioned works are important in their own way, so far a detailed examination of the development of the political ideas of M.N. Roy has not been done, which is being taken up in the course of the present study.

This study will be mainly based on textual analysis. Since study of the texts written by the thinkers is necessary for understanding their ideas, the main basis of this thesis will be the method of textual analysis. Those scholars who advocate textual approach argue that concentration on pieces of writings, ‘texts’ is sufficient for the understanding of the ideas contained in them. They insist “on the autonomy of the text itself as the sole necessary key to its own
meaning. So primary data will be collected from Roy's original writings, documents, addresses, letters and personal diaries written by him from time to time. Beside these secondary sources related to Roy's thought will also be examined.

But exclusive concentration on text, is inadequate to gain insight into a thinker's views. The textual approach assumes the existence of "timeless elements" of "perennial interest" in the past works of thinkers, which the researcher hopes to distil from his texts, and in cases, even to learn from them. But as Quentin Skinner has argued, "any attempt to justify the study of the subject in terms of the 'perennial problems' and 'universal truths' to be learned from the classic texts must amount to the purchase of justification at the expense of making the subject itself foolishly and needlessly naive." Any statement, he said, "is inescapably the embodiment of a particular intention, on a particular occasion, addressed to the solution of a particular problem, and thus specific to its situation in a way that it can only be naïve to try to transcend."

Consideration of social context helps us to have a better understanding of the text. One can have a better understanding of a thinker's ideas by grasping what sort of society the given thinker was writing for and trying to persuade. Ernest Gellner argued, "Concepts and beliefs do not exist in isolation, in texts or in individual mind, but in the life of men and societies. The activities and institutions, in the context of which a word or phrase or set of phrases is used, must be known before that word or those phrases can be understood, before we can really speak of a concept or a belief."

Sometimes social assumptions are not explicit or fully formulated in the theories themselves. They tend to be beneath or beyond the notice of both philosophical and historic critics. This raises a general problem of interpretation. It is desirable to go beyond the study of text in order to determine the meanings of the terms in a given text. Pure textual study also
does not enable the researcher to understand the hidden or oblique references that the thinkers may be making, or to see if the thinker is weaving irony into his arguments. For these again it is necessary to examine the social context in which the thinker is writing:

Thus, an integrated approach would be followed involving the study of both text and the social context in which the text is written.

In the next chapter the researcher will trace the development of Roy’s ideas from a Nationalist to a Marxist. It will be followed by a discussion on Roy’s views as a Marxist in chapter three. Main concern of the fourth chapter will be to examine the development of Roy’s ideas during the period 1930-46, leading to his philosophy of Radical Humanism. This will be followed by a discussion on Roy’s philosophy of Radical Humanism in chapter five.
Notes and References


3 Abraham S. Erulkar wrote about Roy: “One of the things on which it is difficult to elicit information from Mr. Roy is himself and his own life... To me, this silence does not at all appear deliberate. It is quite natural of a personality merged in the current of history, constantly struggling to influence its course. This exceptional identity of the man with his work naturally precludes the possibility of any expression about himself except in terms of his work.” Ibid.

4 It was only after great persuasion that he wrote his Memoirs which covers the formative period of his life and career. For details see Ibid., pp. 201-202.


7 As he was known nationally and internationally by this name, so throughout the research work the researcher has used this name.


11 Ibid., p. 15.


14Ibid.
21Roy wrote ‘I cannot reconcile myself to the idea that democracy, loyalty, and honesty should have no place in the catalogue of Bolshevik Virtues.’ see Ibid., p. ix.
26Prakash Chandra, Political Philosophy of M.N. Roy (Meerut: Swarup and Sons, 1985).
31O.P. Goyal, Contemporary Indian Political Thought (Allahabad: Kitabmahal, 1965).
32Krishna Chandra Jena, Contributions of M.N. Roy to Political Philosophy.
33Kiran Maitra, Roy: Comintern and Marxism in India (Calcutta:


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55 J.K. Khanna, *Gandhi’s Influence on Recent Indian Political Thought* (New Delhi: Ess Ess Publication, 1982).


59 Ibid., 50.

60 Ibid.