Great men have in all generations been anxious, above everything else, for the improvement of the lot of human beings all over the world. Sometimes, what happens is that even if the ultimate goal is the same, the means to achieve that goal could be many and varied. And this difference of approach even to achieve the same end can generate a lot of controversy. This is precisely what happened between M. K. Gandhi and M. N. Roy, the two great statesmen of modern times.

Although guided by the same star-independence for India - Gandhi and Roy set out on different courses. Both men had travelled in the Western world and both were deeply influenced by it, but only Roy actually became noticeably Westernized. Gandhi remained profoundly Indian. Until 1930, Roy conducted his struggle from abroad, using revolutionary techniques, learned from experience in Europe. Gandhi, on the other hand, fought in India using ancient ideas that he adapted to modern condition. While Roy sought Indian independence through violent revolution, Gandhi led the masses in disciplined non-violence.

Those who see Gandhi and Roy as diametrically opposites, both as personalities and as thinkers, are impressed by the following facts: Whereas Gandhi was a puritan, Roy was a hedonist. While one was a mystic, the other was a materialist. Gandhi always emphasized the role of religion in all human behaviour including politics. Roy was a rationalist – nay, an atheist to boot. As a deeply religious man, Gandhi wanted Indian society to change within its traditional framework.
While analyzing human nature, Roy says that rationality, morality and freedom are the attributes of human nature. Man by nature is moral and this urge to be moral cannot be traced to religion because it will thereby be negation of his sovereignty. There is no higher power than man’s reason. On the other hand, Gandhi believed in religion and holds that morality is derived from religion. Roy asserts that religion is the main hindrance in the way of realizing freedom. He accepted no authority above individual and no higher reality above individual. Truth and reason were the two supreme values in his philosophy of life. Nevertheless, the essence of Gandhi’s religion is morality.

Roy considered Gandhi his chief political adversary and dedicated a large part of his writings to the denunciation of Gandhi and his programme. Mahatma Gandhi, on his part, hardly mentions Roy in his writings and speeches. Even after Roy’s return to the political scene in India in late Nineteen thirties, Gandhi took scant notice of it.

It is generally believed that Gandhism and Roy's New Humanism are poles apart, as the former insisted on close relationship of religion and Politics, while the latter, a materialist, was a spokesman of a secular political philosophy. However, in spite of their divergent views on many problems, we find that the gulf between the two is not unbridgeable and their approaches to social and political issues are rather amazingly similar. Although Roy rejected religious approach and traditionalism of Gandhi and, instead advocated rationalism yet his approach basically to social problems was near Gandhian, as he, too, advocated decentralization of power and organized democracy and establishment of a moral order.
Individual freedom and the sovereignty of man are equally dear to both of them. Both have full faith in the unbounded capacity of human beings, in the unfoldment of human personality and in the dignity of man. For Roy, radicalism starts from the dictum that man is the measure of everything. Man is the root of mankind. Similarly, the ultimate inspiration for the idealism of Gandhi, like that for any other humanist, came from the great importance laid on basic human values. Humanism is the key point and also the enduring element of his philosophy.

Gandhi's spiritualism and Roy's New Humanism take them to the same destination. Their ideas about state, its nature and functions are quite similar. Their ideas are similar to the doctrines of the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries and these ideas are the basis of democracy. By reviving them, we can save ourselves from the danger of totalitarian principles of Fascism and Communism which have become a great menace to the freedom of the individual. Both fear that increasing functions of state, its power and importance would eclipse the individual in the collectivity of state, and individual would lose his priceless distinctiveness. So, both subscribe to such a type of political philosophy as would protect the individual from the coercive nature of state and give him maximum freedom in all aspects of life – in thought, action and deed. With this perspective in mind, the following are the main objectives of the present study:

I. To attempt a comparative probe in the political ideas of Mahatma Gandhi and M. N. Roy

II. To examine the views of Indian Communists on Gandhi

III. To analyze a Gandhian critique of Communism in general and M.N. Roy in particular
IV. To understand the rationale behind the Radical Humanism
V. To understand the journey of thought process from contrast to substantive convergence in M. N. Roy

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As far as Research Methodology is concerned, the study essentially is a library work. For the purpose of the present study, the research mainly depended upon the primary sources which included the Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, his Autobiography, Journals edited by him (Harijan and Young India), his own writings, compilations of his speeches and writings, Speeches and Writings of M. N. Roy, books and articles written by him and compilation of his own writings and speeches. However, the secondary sources have also been consulted wherever necessary. These include the books written by various scholars on the subject.

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CHANDIGARH

Hari Singh Verma

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