CHAPTER – II

M. N. ROY’S POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

An historical account of Roy's political ideas shows that his social and political ideas changed from time to time owing to his new and still newer experiments with political truths. As a nationalist-anarchist in the beginning, emotionally involved in the aim of seeking national independence by the utilization of terrorist means, then a socialist connecting the issues of national liberation with social problems and soon after an orthodox communist striving for the radicalization of Indian politics on the lines of Marxism. Thereafter, he became a critical Marxist questioning the inadequacies of the fundamental tenets of Marxism in their application to the conditions of a poor and backward country like India and yet interested in giving a Marxist orientation to the character of the Indian freedom struggle by radicalising the Indian National Congress. Thereafter, he set up a political party of his own after his failure in this long - cherished direction. Finally, Roy became a radical humanist preaching the gospel of a new social order based on the ideals of 'integral humanism' having no party system and a limited state working as the co-ordinator of the free and voluntary co-operative societies of the enlightened and freedom-loving people. Roy's social and economic ideas changed from one centre to another. Marxism, however, covered the best and the most active period of his political career and it remained with him till the end, no matter its form was drastically sophisticated so much so that it...
became like its total abandonment at the hands of its most orthodox champion.¹

Sometime in early 1901, young Naren met Sivnarain Swamij, reputedly a fugitive from the abortive Revolt of 1857, who believed that Hindu society had degenerated because of caste divisions and many other ills it had imbibed through centuries of stagnation. Sivnarain Swami was trying to find men whom he could train for the resurrection of Hindu society. He was impressed by young Naren's dedication and gave him lessons in yoga as well as revolutionary politics.² Yet the soul of the restless young man was not satisfied. He went from one sadhu to another, from one ashram to another, while practising yoga. One day, Naren told Harikumar, one of his friends, "the sun is the giver of all energies and I want to know what this primal force is".³ It was during this quest for truth and knowledge that Naren came to the famous Vaishnava sadhu of the time, Ramdas Babaji, and began taking lessons from him. Ramdas Babaji, like Naren's former guru Sivnarain Swami, was so impressed by young Naren's dedication that he too wanted to make him his chief disciple and a sanyasi.⁴ But religious or spiritual truth alone did not satisfy Naren. One night, in the winter of 1903, he told Harikumar and Saileswar Bose, "We have to do something."⁵

⁴ Ibid., p. 255.
⁵ Ibid.
three friends decided to leave their homes before dawn the next morning to find the meaning of truth. Naren went to Arbelia and met his cousin Avinash Bhattacharya. Avinash had already joined the revolutionary centre, East Club, founded by Jatindranath Banerjee. On his return, Naren called his friends and organised a similar centre at Changripota. This group later became a strong base of Jatin Mukherjee and played a vital role in organising an armed uprising in the wake of World War I.

His father died in May 1905, when Naren was a high school student. The same year, Bengal was in a state of intense political ferment. The immediate cause was the decision of the British Viceroy, Lord Curzon, to partition Bengal. The revolutionary movement in Bengal "worked on the top of what is known as the anti-partition agitation". Young Bengal, under the impact of resurgent Hindu militancy, chose the path of violence in opposition to the moderate policy of meetings and petitions. Their idealism was provided by Bankim Chandra and Swami Vivekananda. At the annual session of the Indian National Congress in 1905, Sister Nivedita, Vivekananda's ablest associate and a product of Irish nationalism, urged that the attainment of political freedom should be the objective of the Indian people instead of individual mukti (salvation). For the first time, Bankim Chandra's poem, Bande Mataram, was sung at the opening of the Congress session; and

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6 Tegart, Charles, Terrorism in India, (Speech at the Royal Empire Society on 1 November 1932), p. 7.
8 Ibid., p. 255.
Aurobindo wrote the pamphlet, Bhawani Mandir, laying down the ideals and methods of the impending revolution.

Naren arranged a public meeting against the partition of Bengal in Kodalia and requested the new headmaster of the school for permission to hold the meeting in the school compound. When permission was refused, Naren decided to organise a procession in honour of the guest speaker, Surendranath Banerjee and hold the meeting outside the school. But a new government circular prohibited students from participating in anti-partition meetings and demonstrations. Naren and his seven friends, including Harikumar and Saileswar were expelled from the school. Naren told Harikumar, "The British cannot be driven out through meetings and demonstrations. They have to be driven out by force." About this time, Ramdas Babaji again sent for Naren and Harikumar to persuade them to seek a spiritual path. "He talked with us the whole night," wrote Harikumar, "but his words fell on deaf ears. We had decided our course. Vivekananda's path was our path. Our god was our country. We had now before us the vision of Bankim Chandra's mother that she would become."

Naren and Harikumar then met Swami Saradananda of Belur Math who used to take classes on the Gita in the Anushilan Samiti, the major centre for revolutionaries founded in 1902. They were introduced

12 Ibid.
to the Samiti's Secretary, Satish Bose, and they joined the Samiti as active members. In 1905 and 1906 Naren and Harikumar lived in the central office of the Samiti at 49 Cornwallis Street (now renamed Bidhan Sarani).\(^\text{13}\) They soon expanded this group and formed a branch of the Samiti in Changripota. Naren also took an active part in expanding the Organisation of the Anushilan Samiti in different parts of Bengal. When Nalini Kar, a close associate of Jatin Mukherjee, first met Naren at the Samiti's central office in 1906, Naren had just returned from Malda in north Bengal where he had gone for organisational work.\(^\text{14}\) The following year, Naren was sent by the Anushilan Samiti to Jeypore in Orissa to organise relief work in Ruriahat camp. He was in charge of twelve centres. One of his fellow-workers, Aswini Roy remembers: "One day, I observed that Naren did not eat anything at the end of the day's work. After all the volunteers had finished their meal in the evening, I saw Naren walking up to the top of the dam wall. Here he sat in the posture of a yogi fixing his gaze on the moon. When he came down, I asked him why he did this. After repeated requests, Naren told me, "Aswini, I am born in a poor family. There are so many great men in different parts of the world. I will never be able to meet them. So, I look at the moon hoping that through the moon I may have some communication with them."\(^\text{15}\) Naren also wrote articles while in the Anushilan Samiti. He used to visit Kalinath Roy, then sub-editor of The Bengaire (later editor of the Tribune, Lahore) and Panchanan Majumdar.


\(^\text{15}\) Ibid., p. 4.
of New India.\textsuperscript{16} We do not have much evidence of his journalistic writings of that period, but according to one insider, in 1907, he wrote an article 'Bharater Raja Ke?' (Who Rules India) in Jugantar, the revolutionary journal founded by Barin Ghosh, Avinash Bhattacharya and Bhupen Datta. In that article, Naren is said to have written: "The voice of the people is the voice of God" and concluded that "it is only the people of India who can choose their ruler. The British have imposed their rule over India by force, and it is the birthright of the Indian people to defy and throw off the rule of the British from the country."\textsuperscript{17}

Sometime in 1907, Naren met Jatin Mukherjee and the two soon became very close. Describing this as a turning point in his life, M.N. Roy later wrote, "At that time, I did not know what was the attraction... later on, I realised what attracted me: it was his personality. Since then, I have had the privilege of meeting outstanding personalities of our time. These were great men. Jatinda was a good man and I still have to find a better."\textsuperscript{18} Soon after the meeting, Naren and Harikumar went to Ghedapahar hills in Bankura in south-west Bengal to learn the techniques of bomb-making and rifle shooting. They soon organised a group of about forty to fifty revolutionaries who believed in 'direct action'.\textsuperscript{19} In the latter part of 1907, a series of political dacoities and terrorist activities took place inspired by the three journals, Sandhya,

\begin{itemize}
  \item[] \textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
  \item[] \textsuperscript{18} Roy, M. N., “Nationalism and Non-Violence”, Radical Humanist, 17 April 1949.
  \item[] \textsuperscript{19} Roy, Samren, M. N. Roy: A Political Biography, op. cit., 1997, p. 5.
\end{itemize}
Jugantar, and Bande Mataram. The first such dacoity was committed by Naren at Changripota railway station on 6 December 1907. Naren absconded, but was arrested when he came home following his mother's illness. She died in January 1908.

Around this time, revolutionaries threw a bomb at the carriage of Mr. and Mrs. Kennedy who were returning home from the club in Muzaffarpur, under the mistaken notion that the 'notorious' Magistrate Kingsford was in the carriage. This led to the arrest of Khudiram Bose and the discovery of the underground conspiratorial centre at Manicktola in eastern Kolkata. In November 1908, Nandalal Banerjee, an officer in the Intelligence Branch of the Bengal Police was shot dead by Naren for arresting Kshudiram. Kshudiram was hanged. This was followed by the arrest of Aurobindo, Barin and others in connection with the Alipore Conspiracy case. According to an Intelligence report, Naren "was said to have lived with Aurobindo Ghosh, but on the latter's arrest in 1908, he left for Murshidabad." Aurobindo's retirement from active politics after his acquittal and the long imprisonment of Barin Ghosh and his group, followed by the ban on the Anushilan Samiti brought about some disruption in the ranks of the revolutionaries. It was at this time that Naren and Jatin Mukherjee began organizational work and revolutionary activities and became close associates. Two centres were established, one was the Sramajibi Samabaya headed by Amarendra Nath.

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20 Sandhya was edited by Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya, Jugantar by Barin Ghosh’s Associates and Bande Matram by Aurobindo Ghosh.
21 Independent India, 17 April, 1949.
22 History Sheet No. 687 of Narendra Nath Bhattacharji, Bengal File No. 324 of 1909 prepared by L. N. Bird, Special Assistant, Intelligence Branch, CID.
Chattopadhyay\textsuperscript{23} and the other in the name of S.D. Harry and Sons from where Harikumar Chakravarty began to operate. Naren committed several dacoities to raise funds for political activities. It was from this time that Naren rose in the hierarchy of leadership. With his untiring energy, he contacted different leaders and groups to forge co-ordination and was preparing for guerilla warfare to drive the British out of this country. Nirvan Swami, who met Naren frequently in those days and was conducting the defence in the Howrah Conspiracy case, said that "Naren's political thinking was much ahead of others... Naren held socialistic views and never mixed religion with politics." Further, "Naren used to talk about what kind of government he wanted in replacement of the British rule and talked in terms of a people's government."\textsuperscript{24} Another fellow-revolutionary, Bhupati Majumdar, (who later became a minister in the West Bengal government after Independence) remembers "Naren was our leader in those days and talked politics in a much more advanced way than most of us. Naren had very radical ideas about rural economy.\textsuperscript{25}

More than a quarter of a century before India attained the coveted goal of national independence, the tempting vision of an earlier possibility had called a generation of young men to fruitless adventures. On the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, Indian revolutionaries in exile looked towards Germany as the land of hope, and rushed there full of great expectations. By the end of the year, the news reached in India that the Indian Revolutionary Committee in Berlin had obtained

\textsuperscript{24} Calcutta Weekly Notes: CWN, Vol. XV, p. 596.
\textsuperscript{25} Roy, Samren, M. N. Roy, A Political Biography, op. cit., p. 4.
from the German Government the promise of arms and money required to declare the war of independence. The news spread like wild fire, to affect the Indian soldiers of the British army also. Revolution was round the corner and independence was within reach.

“The job of finding money for initial expenditure, entrusted to me, was soon done according to plan,” writes M. N. Roy in his memoirs. “Then we were confronted with the problem of getting the promised arms into the country. Our transporting them all the way from Germany was out of the question. A messenger went to Berlin, with the proposal that the Germans should deliver the arms to us in a neutral country nearest to India. We chose the Dutch East Indies, and before the end of 1914, I left for Java - my first trip out of the country. I returned within two months, with some money, not much; but as regards arms, the coveted cargo of the Golden Fleece - it was a wild goose chase - they failed to arrive, because, as it was discovered later, the whole plan was a hoax, a veritable swindle.”

But his youthful enthusiasm, thoughtless optimism and, above all, the faith in the liberating mission of Germany, were to be so easily daunted. He resolved to try again; a new plan was made; and he left India for the second time early in 1915, in search of the Golden Fleece, determined not to return without the precious cargo which, he fondly believed, was floating somewhere on the Pacific Ocean. As it happened, he did not return until after sixteen years.

A full story of his experience during those years would not be of much use in the present study. However, the study of some important

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incidents will be of immense importance to peep into his mind which help him to grow and evolve his ideology.

He made yet another attempt to bring overseas help from Indonesia. The plan was to use the German ships interned in a port at the northern tip of Sumatra, to storm the Andaman Islands to free and arm the prisoners kept there, and then land the army of liberation on the Orissa coast. The ships were armoured, as many big German vessels were, ready for war time use. They also carried several guns each. The crew was composed of naval ratings. They had to escape from the internment camp, seize the ships and sail. The skeleton crew left on board each ship could have the steam up. Several hundred rifles and other small arms with an adequate quantity of ammunition could be acquired through Chinese smugglers who would get then on board the ships. The plan failed because the Germans would not play such a serious game. At the last moment, the money for the purchase of arms was not forthcoming, and the German Consul General mysteriously disappeared on the day when he was to issue orders for the execution of the plan. However, Roy did manage to extract a fairly large sum of money from them, and remit it to India so that our expedition could be financed.

Thereafter, in disgust, but still full of hope, he went to Japan. Rash Behary Bose was there with an identical mission. Roy thought that Bose would help him. But he was rather surprised to find that he now believed that his mission of liberating India would be accomplished only in consequence of the bigger mission of Japan to free Asia from White domination. He was still a full-blooded nationalist, and as such believed
in the doctrine of racial solidarity. Nevertheless, he could not forget the
fact that Japan was Britain's ally. How could we rely upon her helping
us in our struggle against British domination? Rash Behary smiled
benevolently upon his ignorance of diplomacy: Japan had joined the war
on the side of the Entente Powers with a purpose; she should not be
embarrassed even if Indian revolutionaries were persecuted in Japan.

It all sounded very impressive, but did not carry conviction. Given a safe and comfortable political patronage, one might wait,
pending the fruition of the devious Japanese diplomacy; but could we
leave in the lurch the comrades who were waiting, neither safe nor
comfortable, somewhere in the tribal regions on the Indo-Chinese
frontier? Nor was a share of the patronage enjoyed by Rash Behary
offered to Roy.

Thrown back upon his wits, he looked up the Chinese nationalist
leader Sun Yat-sen, who had taken refuge in Japan after the defeat of the
1913 July uprising of Nanking, called the Second Chinese Revolution.
He expounded more authoritatively the doctrine of Japan's mission to
liberate Asia, wisely advised patience and perspicacity. At home in
India, he had heard so much of the great Chinese leader, and, given to
hero-worship, hailed him as an avatar. Face to face with him, he found it
rather difficult to go down on his knees humbly; the prejudice of
cultivated faith - of hero-worship - was challenged by the loyalty to
comrades in the self-same faith and, if not as yet consciously, by the
native intelligence of a born heretic. The predisposition to believe and
the heretical tendency had struggled in him ever since his early school
days. But that is again another story.
Sun Yat-sen believed in the liberating mission of Japan. He argued that it was in Japan's own interest to help other Asiatic peoples to free themselves from the domination of European Powers. Next to Japan, he trusted America. But the anchor of his faith was Christianity. He actually said that the peoples of Asia should embrace Christianity as the condition for their political liberation and social progress. Roy was as yet too young to argue these points. His appeal for help rested on the common ground of the solidarity of Asia against the White race.

But Roy's faith in racial solidarity was shaken rudely by the refusal of the prophet of Asiatic nationalism to help India against Britain. Sun Yat-Sen's reason was purely opportunistic. He could not do anything against the British because Hong Kong was the base of his operations in South China. As regards his own country, he was all in favour of giving the Japanese a free hand. The argument was: Let them drive the European Powers out; then China and Japan would come to an agreement on the basis of the unity of race and culture. It appealed to Roy's nationalist prejudice, but was a little jarring to common-sense. Writes, M. N. Roy, "And I could not but be resentful when the plausible argument was applied to India also; once Japan had driven the White Powers out of Asia, India's turn to be freed would come, after China. Meanwhile, we must wait patiently."  

After that time (end of 1915), the Chinese provinces of Yunan and Szechuan bordering on Burma and India were in revolt against Yuan Shi-kai's plan to restore monarchy with himself as the emperor. The revolt was hailed as the Third Chinese Revolution. He took it for granted

27 Ibid., p. 6.
that the inspiration came from the Chinese exiled leader. He suggested that a practical alliance of the Chinese and Indian peoples in their common struggle for freedom would be established if some arms from Yunan and Szechuan were passed on to our people across the frontier. Sun Yat-sen proposed that he should approach the German Ambassador in China with a demand for five million dollars to purchase the entire store of arms and ammunitions at the disposal of the rebels in Yunan and Szechuan. If the money was available, with it he was sure to win Yuan Shi-kai's supporters and thus bring about his downfall. Consequently, the object of the Third Revolution would be attained, and the redundant stock of arms and ammunitions handed over to him, at any place on the frontier. It was agreed that he should immediately go to Peking to make the proposal to the German Ambassador; if he succeeded there, on hearing from him, Sun Yat-sen would send his emissary to Yunan with the instruction according to the deal. Thereafter, he was to proceed to take over the precious cargo, having paid for it, to Sun Yat-sen personally at Shanghai. He would come there to open his offensive against Yuan Shi-kai with silver bullets.

Roy further recoded, “I had to leave Japan in any case, and China was the only place to go. From the day I had landed at Nagasaki, I was under strict surveillance. I had the address of a man in Tokyo, who was to arrange my seeing Rash Behary. I saw him after days of the most elaborate conspiratorial preparations. Yet, the police knew all about it. When the Chief of Police called at the hotel to enquire about the object of my visit to Japan, he asked if I had seen my friend Mr. Bose. On my replying in the negative, he smiled with the characteristically Japanese polite insolence. After a couple of days, Rash Behary's secret messenger
informed me that I was going to be served with a notice to leave Japan within 24 hours, and that I should leave immediately if I wanted to escape practical extradition to Shanghai. Of course, I wanted to do so; but how? Rash Behary with all his high connections, did not offer any advice or help.28

He had nothing more to do in Japan. In the meantime, he had seen Sun Yat-sen and made the deal proposed by him. He must go to China anyhow; so, why not leave immediately? He had previously chosen the route to travel overland through Korea. It was very difficult to shake off the Japanese bloodhounds. The next afternoon he went to the biggest department store. Even there, foreigners had to take off their shoes at the entrance in exchange for cloth shoes, so that the dirt from the streets did not soil the spotless matting which covered the stairs, corridors and halls of the large seven-storey building. He did not return to recover his shoes, went out by another entrance and straight to the railway station. After an hour or so, the train from Shimonoseki left. It seemed that he had succeeded in putting the four sleuths off the track. The ridiculous grin pasted on their faces was getting on his nerves. Early next morning, he crossed over to Pusan and took the train for Seoul, having purchased a through ticket for Mukden. His plan was to switch off the main track at Seoul, go to the port of Chimoolpo and travel across the Yellow Sea to Shanghaikwan or Tientsin. The latter place was my destination. Rash Behary had informed me that an important leader of the Gadr Party was living in the German Concession there. But to make it doubly sure that the Japanese were no longer on my track, I decided to give a little more twist to my route. I had booked the passage

28 Ibid., p. 8.
for Shanghaikwan, but left the ship stealthily at Dairen, took the train for Mukden and changed there for Peking. The short voyage on the Yellow Sea in mid-winter was hard. It was a Japanese cargo ship; accommodation and food were bad. In the train to Peking, I relaxed with the relief that I was no longer hounded.

Finally, he returned to Peking with a concrete agreement concluded at Hankow with an accredited emissary of the Yunan leader in the presence of the German Consul. There was no intermediary; the money was to be paid by the Germans, if they so desired, directly to the party in actual possession of the arms. The latter, in his turn, undertook to deliver the goods, across the frontier, in the tribal area in the north-eastern corner of Assam. They were enough to equip an army of several thousands. There was an additional tentative agreement: on further payment, the Indian revolutionary army would be regularly supplied from the fairly large arsenal at Chengtu, capital of the Szechuan province, bordering on Tibet. There is a passable road over the pass at Sadiya.

By the beginning of 1916, there was practically no military force to defend the British power in India. The Indian officers of the skeleton army stationed here and there were eager to join a popular uprising. The Revolutionaries had established contact with them all over the country already in the middle of 1915. The situation was fully appropriate for an armed uprising. But at the crucial moment, Germany failed to keep its promise; and Roy realised that they had never meant to give us any considerable help. While admitting that the final version of the plan was quite reliable and strategically sound, the German Ambassador regretted
his inability to spend such a large sum of money. Thereupon, he enquired what was the cost, in men and material, of winning one battle in the War in Europe. The patronising junker did not expect such an insolence from a youngster belonging to a non-white race. He only infuriated Roy by suggesting that he did not know what he was talking about. “I told that I knew that, if the British lost India, they might lose the war also. Was five million dollars too much to win the possibly decisive battle? Of course, I added, I would not win the battle of India for Germany. That seemed to settle the issue.”

“The Ambassador was visibly amazed, and tried to mollify me. He suggested that I must immediately proceed to Berlin to submit the plan for the consideration of the Supreme War Lord and his General Staff.” While bidding farewell, he asked: "Tell me, young friend, do you really believe that you will be able to rule your country without foreign help and advice?" Roy snapped back: "Well, don't you think that the privilege of helping us in future should be earned by helping us to win freedom?" He laughed away his dismay, wished me luck and asked another question: "How many young men like the one I have just met are there in India? I replied with honest modesty that I was a solitary representative of a very large party of such revolutionaries.”

On 15 June 1916, Naren Bhattacharya, under the pseudonym Rev. Charles Martin, landed in San Francisco and a day later, joined Dhangopal Mukherjee at Palo Alto, the locale of Stanford University, where Dhangopal was probably a graduate student. The host was a younger brother of a close revolutionary colleague, Jadugopal.

29 Ibid., p. 13.
30 Ibid.
Mukherjee, and had come to America via Japan in 1908 at the age of sixteen. Stanford was the place where Hardayal had lived and established contacts with the Anarchists. Dhangopal was also under their influence for a while.\footnote{Mukherjee, Jadugopal, Biplabi Jibaner Smriti (Memoirs of Revolutionary Life), Calcutta, 1956, p. 635.} He was still in his twenties but had attracted attention as a poet and writer of children's books. Dhangopal was well thought of at Stanford, and Naren made several important contacts. One of these was the pacifist Chancellor of the University, David Starr Jordan, and the other a 'young and attractive' graduate student, Evelyn Trent, possibly a contemporary of Dhangopal at Stanford. A third was Arthur Upham Pope, who taught philosophy at the University of California at Berkeley. He was introduced to these new friends as Manabendra Nath Roy, the new name he adopted.

The adoption of a new name was probably prearranged when he left India and was to be a signal for his revolutionary colleagues to know that he had safely arrived in USA. His new name, Manabendra Nath, was synonymous to Narendra Nath. The adopted surname was significant. It was not a caste name as was 'Bhattacharya' though many Brahmins used it. 'Roy' was symbolic of a break with orthodoxy, though at that time the significance might have been submerged under considerations of expediency the need to cover up his trail as an exile. The change can be interpreted as a subconscious shift away from Hindu nationalism, for the Roys in India were those who had associated themselves with the Muslim state the British had supplanted.

Roy was not neutral; he counted upon German aid for liberating India, yet he expected the USA to treat him as neutral and not hamper...
his activities. But as in Japan, the American police took their clue from their British counterparts. In addition, there were American restrictions on immigrants from Asia, which probably hurt Roy's feelings and affected his activities. In the circumstances it would have been quite in order if Roy had misinterpreted the questions raised by American radicals about Indian capitalists exploiting the Indian working class after Independence as a mere ruse to avoid involvement. That could have been the nationalist reaction, and was in fact the reaction of his senior, Lala Lajpat Rai, then in the USA to seek support from American liberals for the cause of Indian freedom. Yet those questions raised by the American radicals had set Roy thinking and studying:32 the nationalist moorings were loosening.

In such a situation, Roy stayed for some time at the residence of Lala Lajpat Rai. The Lala recorded in his diary: “In the meantime came M.N. Roy. He was represented to me as a revolutionary who had fled to take refuge in the U.S. But what interested me most was that during his stay in California, he had fallen in love with an American girl who reciprocated his sentiment and asked to marry him. Her people would not listen to the proposal and the girl had consequently left the protection to follow Roy and share his fate. The girl happened to be a graduate of Leland Stanford University and had a brother in New York employed in some business firm. The Hindu boys in New York were disposed to consider M. N. Roy as a traitor to the cause in so far as he had fallen in love with the girl and consequently impaired his usefulness to the country. Some of them denounced him and some insulted the girl when she one day went to his place to make enquiries about her lover.

The minute the story was broken to me I expressed my sympathy with Roy and his girl. I opened my rooms to them and we began to exchange views. Roy was in dire need and I gave him in all 350 dollars out of which 50 were earned by Mrs. Roy in doing some work for me.33

However, by mid-February, the American government was gearing up to join the war against Germany and Roy's movements became increasingly difficult until he was arrested on 7 March 1917.34 Agnes Smedley, who was also arrested and interrogated in the Hindu-German conspiracy case and knew Roy in New York, her autobiographical novel, The Daughter of Earth, describes an Indian revolutionary, "very dark, thin, tall and handsome, and a very poor". She notes that "British spies were following all Indians. Someone had entered his room while he was away the day before and had searched it."35

As soon as he obtained bail, Roy decided to escape to Mexico where the revolution was young and anti-American feeling high. The escape was not to evade the charge but because he knew that he would be taken to San Francisco in connection with the conspiracy case there and would most likely be deported to India for trial and imprisonment.36 He obtained a letter of introduction from David Jordan addressed to the Mexican socialist, General Alvarado. The refuge in Mexico gave Roy

33 Lala Laj Pat Rai's Diary, 1914-17, preserved in the National Archives, pp. 40-41.
36 Roy, M. N., Memoirs, op. cit., p. 64.
time to think without the compulsion for immediate action under which he had lived during the previous thirteen years. It renewed contacts with the Germans but proved the impossibility of attempting any action in India; instead, it opened the possibility of mobilization of Latin American states against the USA and strengthening the socialist movement in Mexico. None of these, however, was as crucial to Roy's development as the meeting with Michael Borodin in the summer of 1919.

Before meeting Borodin, Roy had begun to accept socialism but had reservations about materialism. He ascribed his acceptance of materialism to discussions with Borodin. The truth, however, was that in conversations with Mexican academics and Germans, he was discovering a new world - the world of paintings and music, an awareness of art, of the presence of a spiritual life other than rituals and devotion - and slowly the belief that India was spiritual and Europe materialistic was being eroded. Mexico was more Europeanised than India, and European culture which had seemed remote at home became more palpable. Discussions with Borodin helped him to appreciate the history of European culture and how it had evolved. That was the core of the materialism he imbibed while in Mexico. He was to build upon this subsequently. As Roy later wrote: "Mexico was the land of my rebirth. It is true that before coming there, I had begun to feel dissatisfied with ideas and ideals of my earlier life. But it was during my stay in Mexico that the new vision became clear and the dissatisfaction with a sterile past was replaced by a conviction to guide me in a more promising future. It was more than a change of political ideas and

37 Ibid., p. 195.
revolutionary ideals, I acquired a new outlook on life; there was a revolution in my mind - a philosophical revolution which knew no finality." The stay in Mexico meant being freed from vows and commitments undertaken as a young man of seventeen. This freedom accrued slowly over more than two years, but the cumulative effect was great, and Roy felt that he was free and heir to the entire human heritage without being hampered by national loyalties or boundaries. Roy described his stay in Mexico as "having lived through a couple of centuries of cultural history." He was obviously implying thereby his rejection of the hesitations and limitations of nineteenth century Bengal.

For the sake of convenience, the political ideology of M. N. Roy can be divided in the following phases.

First Phase (1901-16) - Roy as a Romantic Revolutionist

During this phase, Roy thought and acted like a nationalist-anarchist or a terrorist committed to the cause of achieving national liberation by the overthrow of the foreign rule. Like some ultra-extremist young leaders of Bengal, he drew inspiration from the cultural nationalism as emphasized by writers like Bankim in his Anand Math. The epics of the Mahabharata and the Bhagwad Gita were accepted by him as the gospel of a militant faith, since these taught him "to ignore the conventional modes of morality and inspired him to take up arms against those whom he held in love and reverence, but that he must do so in a spirit of detachment and as a matter of fulfilment of duty. The yogi, the detached person, purged of personal desires and

38 Ibid., p. 217
possessing a clear vision is free to adopt whatever means he sees best to suit his ends.”

Roy began his political career at a time when the political, administrative and economic changes introduced in India by the British rulers had not only created objective conditions favourable for the rise of a nationalist movement in the country but, in particular, had turned the province of Bengal into the storm centre of nationalist extremes. The process of misdeeds initiated by Viceroy Lytton had its culmination in the partition of the province of Bengal at the hands of Viceroy Curzon in 1905. Foreign events like defeat of Italy at the hands of the Abyssinians in 1896 and of Russia at the hands of Japan in 1904 strengthened the hands of the ebullient nationalists to face the challenge of the foreign power by militant methods. The result was that a section of the youthful nationalists abandoned faith in the philosophy of liberalism and their burning conviction in the superiority of the Indian culture "made the anti-British struggle of the militant nationalists ruthless- and uncompromising, their sole object being the attainment of complete national independence."  

Roy appreciated the new line and thus joined the under-ground revolutionary movement operating on the extremist philosophy of Sri Aurobindo. Thus, we find him involved in the prosecution of freedom movement by terrorist methods having their manifestation in the form of 'dacoities' what he termed 'actions', and securing arms from foreign

powers like Germany to overthrow British colonial rule. His itinerary from one country to another of the South-East Asian and Far Eastern regions 'in search of golden fleece' till he reached the United States bears testimony to this fact. What informed Roy and his terrorist comrades was the maxim that 'end justifies the means.' Violence and falsehood were justified by him in the fulfilment of aims. This phase continued till he was thoroughly disillusioned and born like a 'new man' in the campus of the Stanford University of America in 1916, Roy called it his 'rebirth' and at the same time, well recalled that his disappointment 'was not an unmitigated evil' but a 'blessing'. As he adds: "It helped me to turn my back upon a futile past, futile because, it was narrow visioned, and to peer, still hesitatingly, into the unknown future of a new life which happened to be full of worthwhile adventures, rich experiences and ultimately disappointments also. It was the beginning of an exciting journey in a new world."41

From the standpoint of the evolution of his social and political philosophy, we may say that Roy had nothing as such during this phase, for his deep involvement in the cultural nationalism coupled with his 'Brahmanical Heritage' prevented him from thinking in wider terms of nationalism and internationalism. His concern was limited to the attainment of national liberation from a colonial rule by any possible means. The social and economic factors of a movement could find no place in his thought and he lived like having a very limited objective and no less a limited perspective. It was in the United States that he acquainted himself with the political and economic issues of the contemporary history and became mature enough to understand that the

German promise of sending arms to India was 'a hoax, a veritable swindle'. It led him to accept socialism, without its materialist philosophy, that was his 'last ditch' and that he defended still for quite some time.

Second Phase (1917-30) - Roy as an Orthodox Communist

The story of the evolution of Roy's thought in this phase really begins after his conversion to socialism. It shows that a desire to abolish poverty and exploitation in order to promote the welfare of the downtrodden people coupled with the liquidation of colonial rule was not alien to the ideal of a revolutionary nationalist. It should be treated like a 'continuation of the same pursuit, though with a broader perspective. The ideal of social justice could easily be incorporated into his inherited hierarchy of values in whatever philosophy of life he might have in those days. As he adds: "The idea of revolution associated with the heroic deeds of individuals armed with pistols or bombs was fading in my mind. But the new idea of evolution taking its place also attached decisive importance to bloodshed and war."

The phase of remaining torn between two loyalties - emotional attachment with romantic revolutionism and attraction towards the new gospel of socialism - was too short and he could combine the two in a way that the lure of his old mission had a transformed character. It was to become a socialist and work for the liberation of the motherland from outside. The triumph of

42 Ibid., p. 4.
43 Ibid., p. 9.
45 Radical Humanist, March 29, 1953.
the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and his contact with Borodin, who taught him the intricacies of Marxism, drove him home the impression that the "road from revolutionary anti-imperialist nationalism to communism was short." 46

From 1917 onwards Roy stood on the threshold of a new period in the history of the evolution of his ideas. It relates to his first conversion to socialism that shows him like a changed man. He accepted orthodox Marxism without reservation and very soon had a thorough grasp over the theories of dialectical materialism and class struggle. Consequently, he developed an entirely new approach to the question of Indian national revolution. It was for this reason that Roy could not agree with the thesis of Lenin presented at the Second World Congress of the Communist International held at Moscow in 1920. While Lenin favoured the idea of according support to the revolutionary bourgeois-democratic movements in the colonial countries, Roy stressed the importance of social struggle as distinguished from national struggle in the colonial countries of Asia and suggested that the communists should not lend support to the bourgeois-democratic movements as such but only to the revolutionary elements inside the national movement.

As a keen and conscientious student of Indian history and politics, Roy could prevail upon Lenin with the force of his argument. The result was that Lenin appreciated the idea of Roy and suggested simultaneous adoption of both theses. Thus, the view of Roy could prevail that the programme of overthrowing the alien rule was the first step towards a revolution in the colonies. Roy thought that the

co-operation between the native bourgeoisie and proletariat might be necessary, but he expressed his opposition to the attempt of the bourgeois-democratic nationalist movement to control the other one. Though he appreciated the anti-imperialist character of the bourgeoisie, he laid emphasis on the problem of the leadership of the national movement. He argued that the leadership of the anti-imperialist movement should remain in the hands of the ‘Communist vanguard’ so that by the advent of national independence, the masses in the backward countries could reach communism not through capitalist development but peacefully under the leadership of a class-conscious proletariat of the advanced capitalist countries, that is the Communist International.

In order to give a practical orientation to his thesis of two distinct movements in the colonial countries, Roy advanced the proposal of forming communist parties there that would capture the leadership of the freedom movements and, at the same time, requisition the support of all freedom-loving and anti-imperialist forces. Like Lenin, he advanced this argument that a revolution could not be made to order. While referring to the peculiar conditions of India, he argued that the proletariat was numerically, culturally, politically and organisationally very weak and as such, its conditions could improve only after a bourgeois-democratic revolution had taken place. For this reason, he emphasised, the real task in India was not to bring about a proletarian revolution but a bourgeois-democratic revolution as a prelude to the ushering in of a real people's movement. Roy, therefore, dubbed Gandhi as a religious and social revivalist and supported his contention by describing the sudden suspension of the non-violent non-co-operation movement in 1922 by the 'Dictator of the Congress' as a compromise with the bourgeoisie.
The fact that by this time Roy had developed his thought finds its manifestation in his ‘India in Transition (1922)’ wherein we find a masterly interpretation of the Indian history from a Marxist standpoint. Here he showed clash of interest between Indian capitalism and British imperialism, the former trying to bring about industrial development and the latter struggling to maintain India as a source of raw materials and as a market for finished goods. What is of special attraction here is his thesis that with the change in the situation after the first World War, an era of co-operation between the native bourgeoisie and English imperialism began as the alien power shattered by the effects of the great war had not been able to retain its powerful hold. Forced with the new conditions, Roy argued, the foreign power would gradually liberalise its control and give more and more scope to the development of the native bourgeoisie. This came to be known as Roy's theory of de-colonisation. Referring to the historic August 1917 Declaration of Montague, the then Secretary of State for India, (wherein he had assured of the gradual development of self-governing institutions in this Country) and the Montford Reforms of 1919, Roy came to lay down: "The plan of British Imperialism is to encourage the Indian bourgeoisie and to terrify them with the cry of the Bolshevik propaganda."47

Apart from interpreting various political and economic concessions granted by the British government to the native bourgeoisie after the first World War as a clear attempt to split the revolutionary movement, the alien rulers were trying to establish an understanding with the Indian capitalist class in order to counteract the impact of the

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Russian revolutionary movement upon the growing power of the freedom struggle in India. Roy thus showed his seriousness about radicalising the leadership of the Indian National Congress. For this sake, he sent a programme for the consideration of the Gaya Congress of 1922. His charter of the social and economic programme for complete national independence of India had these important items:48

1. Abolition of landlordism
2. Reduction of land rent to a minimum
3. State aid for the modernisation of agriculture
4. Abolition of indirect taxes and a progressive income tax
5. Nationalisation of public utilities
6. Development of modern industries under state aid
7. Eight-hour day and fixation of minimum wages by legislation
8. Legalisation of labour organisations
9. Workers' councils in big industries
10. Profit sharing to be introduced in all big industries
11. Free and compulsory education
12. Separation of state and religion, and
13. A national militia to replace the standing army.

Facts illustrate that the mind of Roy remained firm on interpreting the events of contemporary history from the standpoint of orthodox Marxism. He looked at contemporary developments, through the spectacles of class war and tried to radicalize the nationalist movements going on in the poor and backward countries of Asia by infiltrating in them the ideology of a Marxian revolution. He, however,

48 Roy, M. N., One Year of Non-Co-operation from Ahmedabad to Gaya (Calcutta: Renaissance), 1951, pp. 105ff.
remained largely unconcerned with the new developments taking place behind the curtain in Soviet Russia with the result that his thesis of decolonization became a handle in the hands of his critics to bend him with. Undaunted by the stand of his critics, he adhered to his diagnosis that the British imperialism was forced to adopt this policy of making more and more concessions to the Indian bourgeois class in order to overcome the post-war economic crisis. The result was that Roy was accused of having 'opportunist illusions' at the Sixth Congress of the Communist International held at Moscow in 1928 and that led to his expulsion from the Comintern. The Sixth Congress rejected his theory of decolonisation as not only untrue to the economic facts in India but more particularly because of its political implications that there was the probability of India gradually gaining independence with the help of imperialism.49

Despite the fact of his expulsion from the Comintern, Roy remained firm in his position. He kept on emphasising the need for a united front with the petty-bourgeoisie whom he considered 'revolutionary' and chided the leaders of the Sixth Congress of taking to 'left sectarianism'. He reiterated the point that the bourgeois class in the colonial countries was objectively revolutionary in so far as its anti-imperialist character was concerned, but in a positive way it could not play the progressive part that its counter-part played in the Western countries. He boldly stuck to the point that it was only under the leadership of a political party representing the workers and the peasants that national revolutionary struggle could come to a final victory in these

countries. It all shows that Roy thought like a true and staunch Marxist.
"This was pure Marxism glorifying class struggle to the exclusion of patriotism."\textsuperscript{50}

\textbf{Third Phase (1931-39) - Roy as a Critical Marxist}

Though expelled from the Comintern, Roy neither abandoned his faith in Marxism, nor did he leave hope of his readmission after some time when Stalin would come to realise the authenticity of his decolonisation theory. For this sake, he appreciated Stalin until he had another dose of frustration in 1934 when the Russian dictator did not admit his mistake of denouncing the Indian comrade despite his swinging back to the united front policy. What is, however, of special significance in this regard is that during this period of forced seclusion, as observed by L. P. Sinha, Roy "pondered over some of the assumptions of Marxism and started modifying some of them especially those in respect of the strategy and tactics of revolution."\textsuperscript{51}

Roy now looked towards the Indian National Congress in order to radicalise it on the Marxian lines. He thought that the structure and organisation of this nationalist organisation should be utilised for the purposes of a revolution so that the Gandhian ideology be replaced by the Marxian theory of revolution. With this aim, he returned to India incognito and attended the Karachi Congress of 1931. After his release from jail in 1936, he joined the Congress that afforded him an occasion to fulfil his long-cherished ambition. He criticized both the Congress

\textsuperscript{50} Grover, D. C., M. N. Roy: A Study of Reason and Revolution in Indian Politics (Calcutta: Minerva Associates), 1973, pp. 11-12.
Socialist Party (formed within the Congress in 1934) and the Communist Party of India for regarding the Congress as 'a party of the bourgeoisie' instead of regarding it as 'a movement of classes and sub-classes'. Instead, he suggested the idea of a united front and a united leadership of the petty bourgeois intelligentsia and the proletariat to replace the present leadership of the Congress, since the proletariat by itself was not capable of playing the role like its counterpart in the European countries.

Repudiation of the Gandhian leadership became the main burden of Roy's utterances. He dubbed all great leaders of the Congress like Tilak, C.R. Das and Mahatma Gandhi as 'reactionary' and 'revivalist' and instead, claimed for himself the credit of representing the leftism in India. In 1939, he formed a radical group within the Indian National Congress for this purpose. A noticeable change in the evolution of the political thought of Roy could be discerned at this stage. Now he introduced the element of ideology as the most important, rather the decisive factor in the prosecution of a revolution. He criticised the leadership of the Congress in the name of its attachment with and commitment to a reactionary ideology since 1920 and went to the extent of adding that the extremism in this organisation was anything but a violent form of reaction. Therefore, one important task that he assigned to his group of radical Congressmen was to wage an ideological war against orthodox nationalism based on traditionalism, spiritualism and anti-West feelings. Roy, who till 1938, was a vehement critic of Gandhi and his leadership, who described non-violence as 'subtle intellectual device for concealing the capitalist exploitation of the country' and hit at the 'bankruptcy of Congress under Gandhi's leadership that had turned
this nationalist organisation into a 'spinners' 'organisation', came to assert emphatically in 1939 that the 'real enemy was not a state but a rampant ideology'. Looking at the gathering shadows of the Second World War, he said that a decisive victory against Fascism could be had only by defeating this pernicious creed on the home fronts of the belligerents. Curiously, he described the Indian National Congress as a Fascist organisation and took a position that entailed the severance of his connection from the national organisation.

It should be pointed out that during this phase, Roy could remain neither like an orthodox Marxist looking at every political development through the spectacles of class war, nor could he emerge as its vehement critic in the wake of his practical experiences in this country. Roy's lessons that he had in Soviet Russia, his deep study of the totalitarian developments that took place there under the iron leadership of Stalin, and his anguish at the condition of the Indian workers and peasants who did not respond to his criticism of Gandhi, all had their definite impact upon the surface of his thought after 1940. It would be too much to say that, after his release from the jail, Roy had taken a 'neo-Marxian' position and that his views had started becoming more and more liberal.

The fact is that Roy was not yet disillusioned enough to realise that the dictatorship of the proletariat was replaced by the dictatorship of the party leaders in the Soviet Union, or that a group of radical

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52 Varma, V. P., Modern Indian Political Thought, op. cit., p. 446.
Congressmen could shake off the faith of the workers and peasants in the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. As a skilled theoretician, Roy thought in terms of striking a balance somehow between the two antagonistic positions. For this reason, he took to the line of Lenin, i.e., updating the Marxian interpretations in the light of newer development. A clear recognition of the fact that what he had thought about the character and role of the Indian proletariat while he was abroad and what he came to see on his return to his home country left him convinced with the fact of a wide gulf between what he had imagined and what he now found. The way out was the reinterpretation of Marxism in the light of actual conditions obtaining in India. By this time, Roy "was too objective to quarrel with facts and too much indoctrinated by Marxism to give it up easily. To come out of the dilemma, Roy gave a new interpretation to Marxism - a broader understanding of Marxism as he called it - differentiating it from the narrow and mechanical interpretation."\(^{55}\)

**Fourth Phase (1940-1946)--Roy as a Modified Marxist**

What Roy termed the 'broad understanding of Marxism virtually entailed 'the beginning of Marxism'.\(^{56}\) This period "began with an amusing spectacle. Roy was busy, very enthusiastically, to prove as sound strategy what until yesterday he characterized as a tactical

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blunder." Not his criticism of the Congress as a Fascist organisation and thus his support to the British government during the Second World War but his emphasis on the education of the people and the role of ideas in the successful accomplishment of a revolution took him away from the world he had so long lived in. His stress on the role of ideas or his emphasis on the importance of a cultural renaissance could not be fitted into the framework of Marxian determinism. And the more he tried to solve the dilemma, the more he became away from the world of Marxism, whether orthodox or official. The new interpretations of Roy amounted to the very negation of the essential spirit of Marxist philosophy that he could hardly realise at that time. The result was the abandonment of Marxism but not of materialism, and its eventual replacement by a new philosophy called 'integral' or 'scientific humanism'.

Guided by the hard realities of his own life, Roy could not keep himself like a true Marxist and, though still trying to cling to the same creed, he started interpreting Marxism as essentially a philosophy and the political and economic theories associated with the same in a new vein without realizing that his modifications were amounting to the very destruction of Marxism just as the modifications of John Stuart Mill had amounted to the mutilation of Benthamite utilitarianism. Various modifications made by Roy in Marxism can be enumerated thus. First, he stressed the point that Marxism was a human heritage and not the philosophy of any particular class. Instead of keeping his attention confined to the role of a class, Roy looked at the wider canvas of the

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humanity as a whole. In a way, he started thinking in terms of looking at the factors that play a cohesive role in social organisation. Second, he took Marxism as a product of the rationalist thought rather than a class ideology. As such, Marxism was not a rigid or an immutable doctrine. It changed from time to time in relation to the problems and issues of the age. Last, he emphasized the role of man in the making of human history. As such, he termed the economic interpretation of history as vulgar and, instead desired, to call it materialistic interpretation of history.

One may say that during the period of 1940-46, Roy's modifications of Marxism amounted to his own contributions in this regard. The fact remains that this period should be interpreted as an age of transition. It was a period in which a great man was creating himself 'anew'. The classical Marxism was yielding place to a modified Marxism that would soon yield place to the very negation of Marxism whether orthodox, or official, or modified. It ultimately led to the 'new humanism' of Roy that amounted to the very negation of Marxism. The inglorious defeat of Roy's Radical Democratic Party in the elections of 1945 forced him to think afresh in an entirely new direction. The ushering in of a cultural renaissance in the country became an obsession with him. Here he found an utopian solution to all he had strived for so far. As an academic recluse of the first rank, he presented the picture of a new social order giving fullest possible scope to the urge of human freedom. What engages our attention at this juncture is Roy's stern criticism of the fundamental tenets of Marxism that shows their

substitution by the tenets of his Radicalism in a way that he looks like not a rescuer but a destroyer of the creed of the Prophet of Scientific Socialism - a fact that he is not prepared to acknowledge owing to his still lingering loyalty for Marx in the heart of his heart. In his 'Preface' to the New Orientation of 1946, he hastened to add: "Radicalism is not a derivation from Marxism, much less a negation. But it does propose revision of Marxism. Radicalism proposes to rescue Marxism from degeneration into orthodoxy."59 Not only this, he affirms that all critics of Marxism "are not necessarily anti-Marxist" and that his Radical Democratic Party "was born out of a critical attitude towards Marxism."60 In a bid to make his position clear as a rescuer of Marxism, he says: "I do not want to be a bastard of Karl Marx. I want to be his spiritual descendent, only in that sense can Marxism be the philosophy of the future and claim to be the only system of human thought which defies the danger of dogmatism and can develop with the development of human society."61

Unjustified are all such pretensions of Roy. The fact is that he 'gives up Marxism.'62 Roy's 'physical realism' not merely gives a basically different character to the philosophy of materialism; it leaves no place for dialectical materialism that is the basis of Marxism. If there remains anything common between Marx and Roy, it is that iconoclastic spirit that is the fundamental requirement of a revolution. However, Roy's fundamental criticisms of Marxism "are nothing but the attempts

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60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
to pull down the new icons set up by the Marxist iconoclasts themselves.” It is a different thing that writers have sought to discover certain points in the philosophy of New Humanism that lead them to say that even in his humanist phase, Roy accepted some of the propositions of Marxism. A plausible observation is that of Prof. R.K. Awasthi: "Marx understood human society as a new development in the history of the world and applied the method of dialectics to the study of its specific laws of motion . . . Roy gave up this position and the result was that a hard-boiled materialist cosmologist, Roy, ended as a historical idealist. As a mechanist-materialist, Roy could not sustain his materialism and consequently he most enthusiastically criticised Marx's historical materialism which he once held so near and dear to his soul."  

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64 Varma, V. P., "Marxism and M.N. Roy", op. cit, p. 289.