Chapter 1

Introduction

Twentieth century has, in a way, been the century of both social movements and sociology\(^1\). Hence social movement must constitute an important area of sociological studies. But curiously enough, such studies have been rather deficient until recently. Lately however, particularly during the last three decades, this area has become a growing field of study due to the growing realization of its increasing importance. India has been the home to various diverse social movements advocating protests, dissents, reforms and even radical or revolutionary changes demanding fundamental changes in the existing institutional structures and relationships. Many of these movements have attracted the attention of scholars in India and there have been a number of historical and sociological studies (Rao 1978; Gupta 1980; Dhanagare 1983; Shah 1977, 1990, 2002; Singh 2001; and Oomen 1977, 2004) on social movements in the last three decades. Whilst much of research attention by social scientists has been focused on prominent historical and political actors such as Gandhi, Nehru, Jaiprakash narayan, Ambedkar or socio-religious actors such as Vinoba Bhave, Rajaram Mohan Roy among others, other important actors such as M.N.Roy and the Radical Humanist Movement (RHM) initiated by him has somehow remained outside the research ambit of scholars. From the perspective of contemporary history, RHM in its various forms and manifestations remained a guiding philosophy for various groups and different streams of thinking particularly during the emergency period in 1975-77, which witnessed the emergence of organizations like Citizens For Democracy (CFD) and People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) in various parts of the country and also many non-governmental organizations.

\(^1\) For instance the Great October Revolution, decolonisation and national liberation struggles, among other social and political developments which, in varying ways have led to social transformation, have been studied as part of social movement studies by social scientists.
(NGOs) in last two decades. The radiating effect of RHM on secular, rational and
democratic streams of thinking and political processes can be seen both amongst groups,
institutions and individuals working at different levels in different parts of the country. In
recent years, whilst attention of some social scientists has been directed at the new social
movements in the areas such as science, environment, ecology, forestry, gender issues
(Guha 1991; Agarwal 1985) and social and political issues related to marginalized
sections like dalits as is reflected in subaltern studies, M.N.Roy’s philosophy and the
RHM launched by him has not attracted the attention that it deserves by social scientists
in India. ²

I propose to carry out a sociological study of hitherto neglected movement that
was launched in our country soon after attainment of political freedom in 1948 by Roy as
I strongly believe this to be a peculiar movement of prime importance for independent
India in more senses than the simple one of submitting a dissertation for a Ph.D degree.

M.N.Roy can be considered as one of the seminal thinkers and a visionary of the
twentieth century. He was a man of many dimensions and has contributed immensely in
the realm of philosophy, rational thinking, politics and social activism. He was the
exponent of a philosophy, which has come to be known as ‘Radical Humanism’. The
message and insight of this philosophy is that man is an end in himself, and is not a
means or the fodder for organizations, institutions and prevalent values in the society. Its
distinguishing feature was the freedom of man as individual, as the creator of society,
institutions and values and he alone must have the power to change them. When the
creator becomes the victim of his own creations, the age of dogma and superstition
begins and human society degenerates. On the basis of his analysis of Indian society and
culture he came to the conclusion that roots of the political, economic and social malaise

² Somewhat extensive review of literature on social movements and its relevance to the Radical Humanist
Movement can be seen in the Chapter 2 on Nature and Types of Social Movements.
in India lay in the religion-based traditional culture of India and therefore no significant political-economic-social progress could take place in India unless a cultural renaissance precedes it. His philosophy is basically an integration of secularism, humanism, cosmopolitanism, rationalism, democracy and enlightened individualism. It starts from the assumption that philosophy concerns every domain of life-world and has, therefore, to be the business of every person. According to Roy, the whole life of an individual or any group of individuals must be guided by this philosophy. Therefore based on this philosophy he initiated a movement in our country called ‘Radical Humanist Movement’ in 1948, soon after attainment of our independence. Roy called it basically a twentieth century Renaissance Movement in India. Like many other movements on Indian scene, RHM can also be understood in the historical background of national liberation movement against British rule in India. The goal for Roy to begin with, like many others, was liberation of India, which as we shall see, with his growing experience and his expanding knowledge culminated into liberation of man. When Roy was a young man of seventeen, he worked for Indian liberation through the organization and development of the revolutionary movement in India. Its aim was direct and limited; its purpose was to end British rule by securing foreign aid and arms. His first few years of association with the Communist International, were also directed to that goal but soon with evolution of his ideas as a result of experience he gained over the years in Mexico, Russia, China and again in India, his life’s mission could be seen as a crusade against tyranny and oppression of every kind encompassing not just the political aspect but also economic, social and cultural oppression as well. He moved beyond the narrow limits of nationalism and dialectics of Hegel and Marx and ultimately acquired a dimension where he could harmonize all differences in the grand harmony of humanism. For him man is supreme and always bigger than the forms and institutions he adopts from time to time.
In this study firstly, an attempt will be made to bring to light the importance and relevance of ideas of M.N.Roy as embodied in his philosophy of radical humanism which were developed by him in a cosmopolitan perspective and secondly, the sociological study of the radical humanist movement will be made within the parameters of social movements studies in general.

1.1. Significance of the Study

In Indian context, most of the studies on social movements with few exceptions are descriptive in nature based on the secondary data. Many of them do address themselves to the issues leading to the emergence of movements and at best provide a good deal of information about the chronology of events that took place in the course of the movements. However they do not address themselves to the more basic and important features like the role of ideology, organizational structures, strategies and communication channels, leadership in mobilizing people. It is precisely with reference to these features that I wish to study the RHM. I propose to examine the genesis of the movement, its philosophy and nature, its leadership and organization, its history and social role, its strengths and weaknesses, and its future prospects.

Therefore the various reasons for which I have chosen this movement for the present study are: First, I am more interested in the field of social dynamics than in that of so-called social statics concerning the discipline of sociology. Second, I consider the studies of social movements very vital for understanding and tackling the dynamics of a society. Third, the sociological studies of social movements have so far not been either many or very adequate, but have lately been assuming increasing importance almost all over the more developed countries of the world. Fourth, such studies have been very deficient in our country both in number and quality. Fifth, I consider the Radical Humanist Movement a seminal movement in our country.
Most of the earlier social movements were confined to small geographic domains and their focus was on limited issues but today thanks to communication revolution and globalization, new social movements are growing in number and interconnectedness and are becoming increasingly transnational and are contributing to the process of social transformation in newer ways. RHM on Indian scene can be seen as one such transnational movement. The bewildering diversity and multiplicity of social movements in India in time and space cannot be explained by any macro theoretical framework as some theorists have attempted. Till recently sociologists in India have tried to explain all kinds of movements within the parameters of either structural-functionalist or Marxian framework which is no longer adequate to explain a host of new social movements that have emerged in post independence era more particularly during last two decades. A review of literature on social movements shows that scholars in order to explain the social movements in the changing scenario have put forward a number of alternative theoretical frameworks. An attempt will be made to discuss various theories and locate the radical humanist movement within the theoretical framework of social movements in general.

1.2. Objectives and Hypotheses of the Study

The objective and purpose of this study, apart from preparing a dissertation for a Ph.D. degree, is a six-fold one: First, to promote sociological studies of social movements in India. Second, to draw the attention of the social scientists and other socially more active persons to this socially significant but neglected movement, and more particularly to the (class) character and functioning of its leadership. Third, to bring to public attention, in an academic manner, the strains within the Indian social system and the particular kind of solutions of these strains that have been indicated by this movement. Fourth, to enrich an understanding of social dynamics in contemporary India.
Fifth, to enrich the understanding of the very concept of social movement. Sixth, to test in a very broad manner six hypotheses about social movement: (i) Social philosophy and ideology are of crucial significance in the emergence and growth of a social movement. It emerges gradually in specific social, political and historical contexts; (ii) The personality of the founder and the charismatic leadership plays a key role in the emergence and early development of a social movement; (iii) It does not spread significantly without an effective organizational structure to promote it; (iv) It starts declining if the organizational structure and its functioning is not appropriately institutionalized and the membership does not increase over a reasonable period of time; (v) It is likely to be led astray by newer and newer members who do not share its original zeal and missionary spirit; and (vi) It is unlikely to be popular in the short run if it represents social heresy.

It is important to point out, however, that the subject under study is too vast, complicated and delicate to be very adequately handled by me single-handed within the limits of the time, energy and financial resources at my disposal. In fact, such studies should be rather inter-disciplinary. Obviously, my effort has to be a very modest one. It is in a spirit of utmost humility, therefore, that I am undertaking it. Naturally, my difficulties are bound to impose several limitations on my study, its findings and its likely contribution. Yet it is not likely to be an entirely fruitless venture. The contribution expected from it may be stated as under:

First, the sociology of a significant but hitherto less noticed social movement in our country would be promoted to some extent. Second, some new light will be thrown on the current crisis of contemporary Indian Society and Culture. Third, a few hypotheses concerning Social Movement in general will be broadly tested with reference to the Radical Humanist Movement, and some new hypotheses will be developed for use by scholars, in future studies of social movements with the object of constructing a general
theory of social Movement. Fourth, the very concept of Social Movement will be enriched to some extent.

1.3. Methodology

1.3.1. Sociological and Historical Methods (Prosopography)

This study was undertaken to enhance sociological understanding both from theoretical and empirical perspectives. While the former concerns the formulation of a theoretical framework relating to radical humanist movement within the framework of social movements in general with a view to understand its leadership, organizational and social and functional aspects, the latter concerns mapping and exploring the emergence and growth of radical humanist movement in India, its organizational structure, leadership role, ideological moorings and spread of its organizational units. Methodologically speaking, even though the basic sociological theories and concepts of Weber, Marx, Merton, among other sociological thinkers, were very useful in formulating the theoretical framework of social movements relevant to radical humanist movement, Indian sociological writings, as referred to above, were instrumental in framing different aspects of social movements such as the role of leadership, social and psychological, organizational and functional factors. Further, even though the study is basically a sociological study of a radical humanist movement, it had drawn substantially from historical perspectives and methods, particularly, from what is known as the prosopographical methods. Lawrence Stone has provided a useful definition of prosopography:

Prosopography is the investigation of the common background characteristics of a group of actors in history by means of a collective study of their lives. The method employed is to establish a universe to be studied, and then to ask a set of uniform questions—about birth and death, marriage and family, social origins and inherited economic position, place of
residence, education, amount and source of personal wealth, occupation, religion, experience of office and so on. The various types of information about the individuals in the universe are then juxtaposed and combined, and are examined for significant variables. They are tested both for internal correlations and for correlations with other forms of behaviour or action.\(^3\)

Further Bourdieu (1983, 1984) has given certain basic elements of prosopographical method, which are as follows:\(^4\):

(a) Prosopography is the study of individuals belonging to the same field;

(b) It is based on a comprehensive collection of data on these individuals, e.g., their social origin, educational background, trajectories, their positions in the social space and in the field, their standpoints, in particular their position-taking in matters crucial to the field, and their resources in different respects—especially their holdings of symbolic capital specific to the field;

(c) The same set of data should as far as possible be collected for each and every individual; and

(d) The main object of study is not the individuals per se but rather the history and structure of the field.

Even though the present study adopted the method of prosopography for collecting and analyzing the data, it however does not boast of employing any statistical method with variables etc. As a methodological tool, it was useful as an analytical tool for interpretive understanding of collective biography, which is the core element of prosopography. Further methodological aspects relating to the study is dealt in the next section.

\(^3\) Taken from the website
http://www.google.com.au/search?hl=en&q=PROGRESS+OR+VERSION%3F+Current+Issues+in+Prosopography+An+Introduction+by+By+Katharine+vb+Keats+Rohan&spell=1

\(^4\) See Broadly (2002) whose pre-print article was useful in understanding Pierre Bourdieu and French notions of prosopography. It may be also noted that Robert K. Merton is also one of the exponents of this method. He extensively used this method in his study of Royal Society and in analyzing the subject of science and society in the 17th Century England for the origins of modern professionalized science.
1.3.2 Analytic Model of the Study

It now remains to spell out the analytic model, the field of investigation and the research design and procedure of the proposed study.

In the history of sociology, many analytic models have been adopted for studying social phenomena. Some of these models have been more popular than others. The use of a particular model has usually depended upon the nature of inquiry involved. It has also been usual to undertake one scientific study by using one model only. The nature of the study proposed here is, however, such that the genesis, history, structure and functioning of RHM cannot be adequately explained in terms of any single theoretical framework. Recourse has to be taken by me to the use of a combination of a number of perspectives, as mentioned above, appropriate to my study.

As such, mainly the historical perspective i.e. prosopography will be used to unearth the genesis and the history of the movement. The structural-functional model will be used to examine its organization. Partly the behavioral model will be used observe the overt activities of some of the radical humanists. And mainly the normative model will be used to assess the social philosophy of the movement both in itself of this synthetic model is more likely to give a much better and deeper understanding of the movement than any other way.

1.3.3. Field of Investigation

It is primarily a movement of a number of educated elites. It has assumed a greater significance only in a number of cities such as Calcutta, Delhi, Bombay, Dehradun, Patna, Meerut, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Lucknow etc. Hence the field of this study will be the radical humanists, their group activities and organizational units functioning in the cities. As the study aims to explore the role of leadership and their functioning, the main leaders and activists will be identified from the records of
membership of the Indian Renaissance Institute and the Radical Humanist Association, the list of the subscribers to *The Radical Humanist* and of the participants in the annual conferences of the movement, and the record of the organizers of the Renaissance Publishers.

### 1.3.4. Research Design, Sources of Data and Procedure of the Study

The research design and procedure for handling the field under investigation with the help of the analytic model to be adopted by the study may broadly be spelled out as under:

a) The study will tap both primary and secondary literature relevant to radical humanists and their movement. The primary sources of data and material will be collected mainly from the M.N.Roy Archives in the Nehru Memorial Library at Teen Murty House, New Delhi; Indian Renaissance Institute, Dehradun; and National Archives of India, New Delhi. It may be pointed out that M.N.Roy and Ellen Roy have written a large number of books, pamphlets, articles in a number of journals and reports during their life time. Besides, there are a large number of private papers of these leaders in the possession of leaders and professionals of the radical humanist movement. This study has collected a good deal of private collection of papers and material of Roy and his associates from late Professor R.S.Yadava, Meerut College.

In terms of secondary literature, apart from the published literature and journals both from outside and inside sources of the radical humanist movement and their organizational units, the information revolution has greatly facilitated to tap the information and material from websites created by activists (for instance Dr Innaiah) and International Humanist Associations.

b) As the total number of the known, living and important radical humanists in the country is not likely to be very large, something like a census method aided by the
opinion of main activists will be used to contact them all in one way or another. Further, all members of the national executive of the Radical Humanist Association, the key office-bearers of the Indian Renaissance Institute, the editors of The Radical Humanist, the publishers and sales managers of the Renaissance Publications, and some of the more prominent dissenters within the Movement will be personally interviewed with the help of an interview schedule.

c) As mentioned earlier, prosopographical method will be used to analyze the activities of more than a dozen top leaders of the movement in the category of both the dominant and the dissident leadership.

d) Some data will be collected by means of participant observation in some of the Study Camps and Conference of the Movement and non-participant observation of some of the activities of some of the radical humanists.

e) It is possible that some of the facts collected by adopting the above-mentioned techniques may not wholly tally with each other. Hence a crosschecking will be made of the data collected by various techniques in order to discover any contradictions and to resolve them by referring them to the more knowledgeable living radical humanists and by logical construction.

f) The hypotheses of this study will then be verified with reference to the explanations and generalizations concerning this particular movement.

g) If possible a few new hypotheses will also be developed for use in further studies of social movements by research scholars.

1.3.5. Limitations of the Study

This study is undertaken within the limitations of time and resources and limited purpose and objectives of the Ph.D project. The study covered the period of 1940s to 1990s to map the emergence and growth of radical humanist movement. Given
the limitations of resources and time, the study was confined to trace the growth and status of radical humanist movement in the contemporary period of 1990s through field investigations mainly confined to the cities of Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi, Hyderabad and Jaipur. Further, it was not possible to cover the complete universe of people involved in the radical humanist movement. The study was confined to mainly leaders, activists and regular members who attended study groups and workshops of the movement. The activists of the movement are involved in very diverse range of activities in the social and political domains. They are also working through a wide range of NGOs and organizational units, which is beyond the scope of the present study to cover. This study was however confined and limited to the activities directly related to promoting the ideas and ideology of M.N. Roy concerning radical humanism. Further, the study identified a number of radicals of the movement who were against the formation of any organization and any collaborative activities with like-minded individuals and organizations for fear of losing their identity. These individuals were mainly located in various regional and rural parts of India. Given the limitations of time and resources it was not possible to contact and include these activists in the study.

Another major limitation for analyzing the quantitative data for mapping the organizational structure and growth of the radical humanist movement relates to access and availability of data. It may be pointed out that various organizational units of the radical humanist association do not maintain any regular membership drive and records which are updated from time to time. Given this limitation it was not possible to precisely present quantitative data and information on the precise number of people involved at national and state levels. In all its ramifications, the radical humanist association and movement has been functioning as a loosely structured network of individuals and groups in the movement.
1.4. Overview of Chapters

The subject matter of the present thesis can be divided into seven chapters including this introduction. In chapter 2, we will discuss briefly the conceptual problems related to understanding of social movements as reflected in different expressions of collective behavior and social movements. It will also include examination of the various theories of social movements both old and new. And finally an attempt will be made to locate Radical humanist movement in the general framework of social movements.

Chapter 3 will be devoted to evolution of Roy’s ideas, which are dynamic as we will see, he possessed a remarkable capacity of infinite adjustments and in the dynamic world, his capacity to move with a vision was a rare quality. He was so alive and alert to the changing scenario that he acted and reacted quickly in tune with the spirit of his times. Dimensions of his thinking and action enlarged constantly with his ever-expanding experiences acquired in dynamic world. Ultimately he acquired a dimension where he could harmonize all differences in the grand harmony of radical humanism. So chapter 3 will be devoted to evolution of his ideas, activism and emergence of radical humanism.

As it is Roy’s philosophy that forms the basis of RHM, chapter 4 will be devoted to exploration of twenty-two theses and analysis of Indian society and culture as propounded by Roy.

Social movements emerge in the context of the historicity of a given social setting. Therefore they can only be understood by adopting a historical perspective. As the emergence of RHM can be seen as a consequence of the dialectics between Roy’s past experience, the then prevailing existential conditions and vision of a better futuristic society, it can only be understood by adopting a historical paradigm. Therefore chapter 5
will deal with the historical phases of RHM covering the various phases both during Roy's life and also after his death to the present period.

In chapter 6 we will try to present the actual functioning of the RHM. For the purpose an attempt will be made to sociologically analyze the leadership of RHM as nature of leadership plays a crucial role not only in the process of launching of any movement but also in sustaining it. As the movement is not localized and is spread over a number of states and the radical humanists have also been functioning in tandem with several other groups and organizations and it can also be understood as a transnational movement, in this chapter I intend to see the functioning levels of radical humanists and trace the linkages of RHM with other groups and associations across different Indian states and beyond, at international level as well.

Finally in the concluding chapter 7, the study will attempt to present firstly, an overall assessment of RHM including its limitations and future prospects; and secondly it will be important to reflect on the relevance of Roy's ideas in the contemporary social setting.

References


