Chapter 3

Evolution of M.N.Roy's Ideas, Activism and Emergence of Radical Humanism

3.1 Introduction

M.N.Roy was one of the most original, systematic though highly controversial personalities of the 20th century. He has been put up in rank of Lenin and Mao Tse-tung as a theoretician and has been called the most colorful man of all non-Russian Communists in the era of Lenin and Stalin (Maron 1966: 41). As a political thinker, Roy was passionately involved in great movements of nationalism, communism and humanism. He took an active and leading part in revolutionary movements in India, Mexico, the Soviet Union and China. Sibnarayan Ray, a close associate of Roy writes, 'in the wealth of experience, which went into shaping of his thoughts, he was altogether unique and had none to compare either in the past or in the present. From Socrates to Santayana, from Kung Fu-tze to Croce, I know of no philosopher, who possessed his sweep of experience (Ray 1959:28). Roy did not write any autobiography, which he thought was a very unreliable source of knowing objective truth (Roy 1940: 201). It was only after great persuasion that he wrote his memoirs, which cover only the formative period of his life (1915-1923). Autobiography of a man whose political experience ran over a dozen countries spread over three major continents and who wrote extensively in several languages which included, English, Bengali, Spanish, German, French and Russian is a subject matter of painstaking research work about which almost nothing had been done till recently.¹ One rich source of information on Roy is the material, particularly

¹ Sibnarayan Ray accepted the responsibility of editing the a selected works of M.N.Roy in six volumes (being published by Oxford University Press, New Delhi) as part of M.N.Roy Centenary Celebrations in 1987. Four volumes published so far contain the details of material related to life and works of Roy in chronological order.
the letters gathered by his wife Ellen Roy (1904-60), now preserved in M.N. Roy achieves in
the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library at New Delhi.

Roy was a penetrating and prolific writer and his books and pamphlets run over a
hundred titles as is evident by the publication of such a list prepared by Ellen in the weekly
Radical Humanist. Sibnarayan Ray points out that Mr. Patric Wilson brought out, under the
modern Indian project of the university of California at Berkeley, a ‘preliminary Checklist of
the writings of M.N. Roy, which contained 124 titles. In 1957 he produced a ‘revised
checklist’, which gave 133 items, but this too was very incomplete since it did not include
Roy’s voluminous contributions to periodicals and newspapers, his unpublished writings and
other relevant material (Ray 1987: 4). His works include statement of his revolutionary ideas
and programmes, commentaries on the major events of the time, theoretical inquiries and
formulations about human nature and the cosmos, knowledge and morality, history and
society, political economy and cultural change, critiques of Indian tradition, culture and ethos
and personal collections, correspondence, notes, reports, drafts and stenograms of his lectures
and seminars. They are records not only of his own extraordinary career but also of some of
the most momentous and dramatic developments of our age. Besides, they show his own
ideological development from revolutionary nationalism to communism and finally to
scientific, radical and cosmopolitan humanism, thereby illustrating three major phases and
aspects of the intellectual-cultural history of our age and often illuminating the subtle and
complex interconnections among them (ibid: 3). These three stages though different from
each other, figure along a continuum of a thought process of organic growth and
development. Freedom is the common thread that runs through all these stages. His ideas were a product of a quest – a quest for human freedom as he himself calls it, carried over a period of more than forty years. He himself observes, “when as a school boy of fourteen I began my political life, which may end in nothing, I wanted to be free. In those days, we had not read Marx. We did not know about the existence of the proletariat. Still, many spent their lives in jail and went to gallows. There was no proletariat to propel them. They were not conscious of class struggle. They did not have the dream of communism. But they had the human urge to revolt against the intolerable conditions of life. They did not know exactly how these conditions could be changed. But they tried to change them, anyhow. I began my political life with that spirit, and I still draw my inspiration rather from that spirit than from the three volumes of capital or three hundred volumes by the Marxist (Roy 1946: 183).

3.2. Biography and Nationalist Phase

Narendra Nath Bhattacharya¹ later to be known as Manabendra Nath Roy was born of Brahmin parentage at Arbelia, a small village in the district of 24 parganas on Monday 21 March 1887. His parental grandfather Bhairavandana Bhattacharya was the head of priest of the Goddess Ksheputeswari in the village of ksheput in Midnapore district of west Bengal. His father Dinabandhu had inherited this position and he also worked as a school teacher. Naren was the fourth child of second marriage of his father to Basanta Kumari. Roy was brought up and educated at Arbelia up to sixth standard. In 1898 his family moved to Kodalia, a village adjacent to Chingripota railway station. From 1898 to 1905 Naren studied at Hainabbi Anglo – Sanskrit school and later on joined the Calcutta National College, founded by Aurobindo Ghosh. He later studied at the Bengal Technical Institute, which

¹ R.K. Awasthi however maintains the three stages differ fundamentally from each other which however is not acceptable.

² At birth M.N. Roy was given the name Narendra Nath Bhattacharya along with zodiacal name.
offered courses in Engineering and Chemistry. Even as a young teenager Roy participated in nationalist, anti-British struggle as a member of the revolutionary movement in Bengal. In his early age Roy was attracted and inspired by religious reform movements of his time led by people like Ram Tirath and Swami Vivekananda. Influenced by the climate of militant nationalism in his times he was drawn into revolutionary movement. 1905 was a turning point in Naren’s life. His father died in May that year; partition of Bengal was formally announced in July and came into effect in October; leading to country-wide movement against it by various militant nationalist groups and secret revolutionary societies. Inspired by Anand Math, a famous novel by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (in which he powerfully evokes the idea of liberation of motherland) and Jatin Mukherjee, a well-known revolutionary, Roy joined the revolutionary underground organization ‘Anushilan Samiti’ which had been formed in 1902, and devoted himself totally as a whole timer to the goal of national freedom.

As a militant nationalist, Naren strongly believed in the necessity of armed insurrection as the means to overthrow the alien government and liberation of mother land, and thus believing in the cult of bomb and Pistol, making use of his knowledge of chemistry acquired at Technical institute, he was involved in bomb making activity in the Calcutta suburb. During his nationalist phase, he was arrested several times in connection with several political dacoities committed for securing money. Political robbery was considered justified as a means as long as the end was the country’s freedom. It would be beyond the scope of this work to render a detailed account of his early political career. Only a few important facts will be cited here. On 6th December 1907, the first officially recorded political robbery in

---

offered courses in Engineering and Chemistry. Even as a young teenager Roy participated in nationalist, anti-British struggle as a member of the revolutionary movement in Bengal. In his early age Roy was attracted and inspired by religious reform movements of his time led by people like Ram Tirath and Swami Vivekananda. Influenced by the climate of militant nationalism in his times he was drawn into revolutionary movement. 1905 was a turning point in Naren’s life. His father died in May that year; partition of Bengal was formally announced in July and came into effect in October; leading to country-wide movement against it by various militant nationalist groups and secret revolutionary societies. Inspired by Anand Math, a famous novel by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (in which he powerfully evokes the idea of liberation of motherland) and Jatin Mukherjee, a well-known revolutionary, Roy joined the revolutionary underground organization ‘Anushilan Samiti’ which had been formed in 1902, and devoted himself totally as a whole timer to the goal of national freedom.

As a militant nationalist, Naren strongly believed in the necessity of armed insurrection as the means to overthrow the alien government and liberation of motherland, and thus believing in the cult of bomb and Pistol, making use of his knowledge of chemistry acquired at Technical institute, he was involved in bomb making activity in the Calcutta suburb. During his nationalist phase, he was arrested several times in connection with several political dacoities committed for securing money. Political robbery was considered justified as a means as long as the end was the country’s freedom. It would be beyond the scope of this work to render a detailed account of his early political career. Only a few important facts will be cited here. On 6th December 1907, the first officially recorded political robbery in

---

The arms were to be stored initially in the sunderbans. But the promised arms did not arrive. On August 15, Naren was again sent to Batavia to make fresh negotiations, but again without success. In the meantime the British intelligence soon discovered the plans of the conspiracy and not long after jatin was killed in an armed encounter with police and military, popularly known as “the battle of Balasore” (Cox and Patrick 1971:6). This proved to be disastrous for the revolutionary movement. Naren, still believed that with the help of arms from abroad, the revolutionary movement could be revived and the mission of Indian independence could be accomplished. He went to Japan and then China. Thereafter he decided not to return to India and having spent a year and a half of wandering through Malaya, Indonesia, Indo-china, and Phillipines, Japan, Korea and China, in summer of 1916, he landed at San Francisco (Roy 1953:29).

He arrived in San Francisco on 15th June 1916, under the alias of Charles Allen Martin, a theology student from Pondicherry. Shortly after he went to Palo Alto, the site of Stanford university seeking refuge by Dhan Gopal Mukherjee, a younger brother of Jadugopal Mukherjee, a leading revolutionary friend of Roy in Bengal. Here he assumed the name of M.N. Roy. The new name assumed was to ‘wipe out the past and begin new life as a new man’. (Ibid: 22). Roy calls it his rebirth. It was the beginning of an exciting journey in a new world. It was here that he met Evelyn Trent, a bright and attractive graduate student with radical views. When Roy moved to New York a few months later, Evelyn went with him against the wishes of her father and family, and shortly afterwards they got married. She became his political collaborator and was a great asset to him in his work until their separation in 1926. Unfortunately Roy has not mentioned anything about Evelyn in his memoirs. At New York Roy became closely acquainted with the veteran Indian nationalist
leader, Lajpat Rai who later wrote in his diary in 1916, "The only one of the Bengali revolutionaries for whom I have had genuine respect is M.N.Roy" (Rai 1965: 218). In New York he contacted several Indian revolutionaries who were in league with the Germans. He however received no assistance from them in pursuing his plan to go to Germany. It was here that his transformation from revolutionary nationalism to international communism began. He often went to public meetings with Lajpat Rai. After one such speech of the nationalist leader, a member of the audience asked what difference it would make if Indians were exploited by "native capitalists" rather than by "foreign imperialists". Lajpat Rai replied, "it does make a difference whether one is kicked by one's brother or by a foreign robber." The reply struck Roy as inadequate, and for the first time he felt that there was something missing in the nationalist blueprint for freedom (Cox and Patrick 1971: 7). It was at New York public library that Roy first came in contact with the writings of Karl Marx and he got himself acquainted with political and economic issues of contemporary history and became attracted towards towards the socialist ideas. At this time however, his conversion to communism was far from complete as Roy himself recalls in Memoirs, he soon accepted socialism, except its materialist philosophy which was his last ditch (Roy 1953: 56). In 1917, U.S.A. joined the war in support of the British. A number of Indian nationalists suspected as German agents were arrested. Roy was indicted for violating the Immigration laws of U.S.A and illegal entry into United States. He was arrested but released with a warning, as New York police was not aware of his revolutionary activities. On 6. April the U.S. declared war on Germany, Roy wrote an 'open letter to President Wilson' and to avoid arrest he along with Evelyn, fled United States in May and reached Mexico in June 1917. "In Mexico we find Roy torn between loyalties. The lure of the old mission came in conflict with the pull of the new ideas.
They met the Germans who gave him a huge amount of money, about 50,000 Rupees, all in gold coins and the old plan of purchasing arms in China was revived. Roy actually started for China, though he gave up the project on the way, realizing that his mind was not in this "wild-goose chase". Along with this activity Roy plunged headlong into the socialist movement of Mexico" (Bhattacharjee 1971: 24). Roy writes: "the road from revolutionary anti-imperialist nationalist to communism was short "though he admits it took quite a long time to accept the materialist philosophy of Marxism. As Bhattacharjee (1971) points out the conversion of Roy to socialism can possibly be easily explained psychologically. He was convinced of the futility of the old quest for German arms, and lost faith both in German and Indian revolutionaries abroad. And also after the defeat of Germany a number of Indian revolutionaries abroad turned to Soviet Russia for help against British imperialism, and Soviet Union's willingness to help made their minds disposed towards communism. And moreover the moral fervor of socialism - the desire to abolish poverty and promote the welfare of the poor, ideal of social justice, its anti-colonialist stand, freedom of the subject etc. could easily be incorporated with the ideal of a nationalist revolutionary. Further, the acceptance of Socialism did not differ fundamentally from the type of political practice of secrecy, conspiracy and violence to which Roy was accustomed. "The idea of revolution", writes Roy, "associated with the heroic deeds of individuals armed with pistols or bombs, was fading in my mind. But the new idea of revolution taking its place also attached decisive importance to bloodshed and war" (Roy 1953: 114). Therefore Roy found little difficulty in changing his faith. The transition from nationalism to socialism was a big event in Roy's life which marked a sharp break with his nationalist past nurtured on orthodox Hindu philosophy and Brahmanical heritage. Now he tried to analyze Indian problems from a much wider
perspective and came to regard political independence as only a stage in the wider socio-economic revolution. Prior to this his ideas had a limited objective that of national independence and a narrow perspective. Overthrow of British rule was regarded as an end in itself. The kind of revolution he envisages after his conversion to Marxism was fundamentally different from the one he had worked for earlier as a militant nationalist. He now realized the preposterousness of minority revolution to be brought about by a small band of brave revolutionaries and strongly believed that total revolution could only be brought about by well-organized activities of larger masses or proletariat.

The factors which brought Roy in the thick of socialist politics were firstly the fertile ground provided by Mexico to Roy for revolutionary activities which was in the throes of an anti-imperialist, anti-feudal revolution when Roy reached Mexico and secondly his acquaintance with Michael Borodin as an agent of communist International. Roy spent two and a half years, in Mexico from where he continued to be in touch with revolutionaries in the states. The left wing politics of Mexico was in an amorphous and unorganized state. He frequently attended the meetings of various socialist groups in Mexico City. One of these was a small group called the Mexican socialist party with which Roy came in close contact. These were the years of Epic revolution in Mexico. After the failure of his efforts to secure arms from abroad for India’s Independence, Roy decided to work for the cause of freedom and social justice in his host country. For the purpose he learnt Spanish and in order to mobilize people he began writing and published several books and pamphlets on India in Spanish, contributed to journals and attracted the attention of liberal politicians and socialist workers, made friends with American radicals⁶ and established contacts with highly placed

⁶At this time, a large number of American pacifists, syndicalists and socialists of various shades had escaped to Mexico to evade compulsory military service, introduced soon after America joined the War.
government officials, winning the friendship and confidence of the then president of Mexico Venustiano Carranza which created an atmosphere favourable for the pursuit of his political activities. In Mexico Roy published the Spanish version of a pamphlet called “The high way Durable Peace” (which he had written in USA which he could not publish there) emphasizing that world peace was conditional not so much upon the overthrow of capitalism as upon the liberation of the colonies which impressed the president so much that he met the author, and remained friendly with him. General Carranza supported Roy’s idea of the formation of a Latin American League as against possible US encroachment.

Among Roy’s earliest Spanish publication from Mexico was his translation of the open letter to President Wilson included in the book La Voz de la India, and La India Su Pasado SU presente Su Porvenir, both published in 1918. They are fully representative of the revolutionary nationalist phase in his intellectual development (Ray 1987: 16).

Roy soon became a prominent figure in the Mexican Socialist party. He was in possession of a huge fund given to him by the Germans which he used to finance the socialist party organ ‘La Lucha’ which was transformed into a regular weekly of eight pages. Possession of this money must have proved advantageous to him in socialist circles despite being a foreigner he was elected as General Secretary of the Socialist Party in December 1918. Roy considered Mexico the land of his rebirth. The Russian revolution took place while Roy was at Mexico. He was so much influenced by in that he writes, “I was sucked up in that electrified atmosphere. It was a mutation in my political evolution: a sudden jump from derailed nationalism to communism”(Roy 1953: 59). It was at Mexico that he met Michael Borodin, an emissary of the Communist International. The two became good friends. Borodin’s friendship marked a turning point in Roy’s life; it is in him that Roy found a very
able mentor who explained to him the intricacies of the theory and practice of Marxism. As Roy writes, ‘he (Borodin) initiated me in the intricacies of Hegalian Dialectics as the Key to Marxism. My lingering faith in the special genius of India faded as I learned from him the history of European culture’ (Roy 1953: 195). Thus the few months of association with Borodin and a great deal of discussion with him on theory and practice of communism and philosophical aspects of Marxism completed Roy’s conversion from ‘militant nationalism’ through socialism to Marxism. It was at this time, that the foundations of his subsequent intellectual development were laid. As Ray writes:

Here he developed a taste for western culture, especially its music, literature and philosophy. The authorship of the books and essays in Spanish and English marked the beginning of that intellectual eminence which would distinguish him as a Marxist in the 1920s and as a radical humanist in his later years – India was and would always remain his main concern. But Mexico gave to his outlook and sympathies a strong cosmopolitan orientation. In India insecurity and hardship were his constant companions. Mexico taught him to appreciate the good things of life but did not weaken his resolve the readiness to risk every personal gain and comfort for what he believed to be the right cause (Ray 1987: 19).

After coming in contact with Borodin Roy tried to convert the newly founded socialist party into a communist organization. An extraordinary conference of the socialist party was held with Roy himself in the chair. The party, after a great deal of discussion endorsed the Manifesto of the first congress of the communist International and converted itself into the communist party of Mexico in November 1919. Roy succeeded in ousting from the party his opponent, the American Linn A.E. Gale, who split off and formed a separate communist party, but it was the party founded by Roy with Borodin’s blessings, which was given official recognition by the comintern. So the credit for finding the communist party, the first in the world outside Russia goes to Roy. Lenin personally invited him to Moscow, and he left with
Evelyn in December 1919 to attend the 1920 Comintern Congress as an official representative of the Mexican party. They carried Mexican diplomatic passports with their names given as senor and senora Roberta Alleny villa Gracia (Roy 1953: 426). Thus Roy left Mexico, which he described as the land of his rebirth. He wrote, "I left the land of rebirth as intellectually free man, though with a faith. But the philosophical solvent of the Faith was inherent in itself. I no longer believed in political freedom without the content of economic liberalization and social justice. But I had also realized that intellectual freedom—freedom from the bondage of all tradition and authority was the condition for any effective struggle for social emancipation" (ibid: 219). To Roy, the journey to Moscow was a ‘pilgrimage to the Holy land of Revolution’ (Karnik 1978: 69). On his way to Moscow he went first to Spain and then to Berlin, no longer in the quest of arms. Here he came in contact with many outstanding socialist and communist leaders like Bernstein, Kautsky, Radek, Ernest Meyer, August Thalheimer, Reinrich Brandler and others. Friendship with Thalheimer and Brandler was political as well as personal and the three remained together both inside and outside the Comintern. At last he reached Moscow early in May 1920 and thus began a new phase of his political career.

3.3. Marxist Phase: 1920-36

Roy, in the beginning of his Marxist phase i.e. the phase between (1920-30) was an orthodox Marxist. He believed in materialist interpretation of history, economic determinism and dialectical materialism without any reservations. Even though his main concern was liberation of Indian masses, he began to view the problem from an entirely different point of view. He tried to apply Marxist doctrines to the conditions of the colonial and underdeveloped countries, particularly India and deduced there from certain ideas regarding
the perspective, ideology, strategy and tactics of revolution in these countries. His concern no
longer was the mere liberation of India at political plane but he came to emphasize the
importance of a revolutionary movement against an oppressive social system.

M.N.Roy made his debut in the International Communist Movement at the Second
World Congress of the Communist International held at Moscow from July 19 to August 7,
1920. Lenin had prepared in advance a draft thesis on the national and colonial question,
which he circulated among delegates for comments. As a result of Roy’s response, Lenin
invited him to write an alternative draft. With some modifications both sets of thesis were
adopted by the Congress, Lenin’s as the main and Roy’s as the supplementary thesis. In order
to understand Roy’s ideas about the position and role of the bourgeoisie in colonial countries
like India it is necessary to discuss his thesis and compare it with that of Lenin.

In the preliminary draft, Lenin was in favour of giving assistance to the ‘bourgeois-
democratic liberation movements’ in the colonies. Roy made a distinction between different
types of bourgeois-democratic liberation movements—between those truly ‘revolutionary’ in
nature and those of a merely ‘reformist’ character based on differences in their class
composition. In the colonies like India he contented that the former represented the exploited
majority for whom the political independence would be made meaningful only if it is
associated with social and economic revolution. On the other hand the national bourgeois
democratic movement, with merely reformist character, was limited to the middle classes,
which sought compromise with the existing order. And therefore Comintern should support
the revolutionary mass movements and not the colonial middle class movements and
leadership. He had the Indian National Congress in mind. Lenin felt that the national
bourgeoisie could be a progressive force, particularly in the early stages of the nationalist
movement, but he agreed with Roy that continued alliance with this group, once its revolutionary potential had been exhausted, would be self-defeating. Therefore, in the revised version of Lenin's thesis, Comintern endorsed to support only revolutionary movements of liberation rather than all bourgeois-democratic liberation movements and Lenin substituted in his own draft the term 'national-revolutionary' for the term 'bourgeois-democratic'.

In this thesis Roy did not deny the anti-imperialist role of the colonial bourgeois but he was opposed to their leadership, which he believed should remain "in the hands of a communist vanguard" so that once the nationalist independence is achieved, "the masses of the backward countries may reach communism not through capitalist development" but peacefully under the leadership of the class-conscious proletariat of the developed capitalist countries i.e. the communist International. Therefore, Roy believed, the primacy should be given by Comintern, to form communist parties, which would organize the workers and peasants - i.e. the revolutionary masses in keeping with the Comintern's principle or 'revolution from below'. But how was the point at which communists most abruptly shift from a policy of 'revolution from above' to a policy of 'revolution form below' to be determined? i.e. at which point a communist party should break away from nationalist movement and seek support directly among the workers, peasants and petty bourgeoisie was never clearly formulated (Haithcox, 1971).

In his analysis of class forces in India, Roy exaggerated the ideological potential of the Indian proletariat and his thesis directly went to counter the force of nationalism under Gandhi's leadership. In his supplementary thesis he claimed, "the real strength of the

---

liberation movement is no longer confined to the narrow circle of bourgeois – democratic rationalists. In most of the colonies there already existed organized revolutionary parties (Roy 1920: 74) Lenin was more realistic as he urged temporary relations and even unions with nationalist movements. In his ferment faith in the class-consciousness of the proletariat, Roy resembled Karl Marx before 1848. Marx revised his views concerning the degree to which class-consciousness could arise spontaneously, solely as a result of 'objective conditions' (Haithecox 1971: 16). Lenin also lacked faith in the spontaneous development of class-consciousness, which he believed was dependent on organization, discipline, and indoctrination, which is a long-term process. Roy laid stress on developing independent communist parties in colonial countries, under emphasizing the task of mobilizing and organizing the proletariat. Lenin on the contrary was more realistic and his theory was compatible with a national struggle for independence. Nonetheless, Roy played a significant role in the formulation and conduct of comintern policy on the national and colonial question in the 1920s. Robert B. North and Xenia J. Edun have contended that 'Roy ranks with Lenin and Mao Tse-Tung in the development of fundamental communist policy for the underdeveloped area of the globe' (ibid: 12).

Another point that Roy stressed in his thesis was that a revolution in Europe depended on the course of the revolution in Asia bringing about the break up of the colonial empires but it was rejected by Lenin's Eurocentric view who firmly believed that proletarian revolution would begin in industrialized Europe rather than in Asia. Eurocentricism of Comintern leadership disappointed Roy and he decided to develop his Marxist analysis of contemporary India in his book 'India in Transition' which was completed in October and sections of it

---

8 Lenin's belief in the imminence of European revolution soon faded and we see a Fifth Comintern Congress, particularly, focused its attention on Asia which was assigned an increasingly larger role in the struggle to promote world communism.
were published in comintern’s journal, communist international in December. In 1922, the book was published in Russian, English and German and it won Roy, immediate recognition as a major Marxist classic. In his book Roy analyses the position and role of five classes in India: the landed aristocracy, the bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie, the peasants and the workers.

He recognized that the bourgeoisie in the colonial countries is objectively revolutionary in so far as it is anti-imperialist but in colonial countries it cannot play the same progressive role, which its counter part played in Europe. In fourth congress of communist international in November 1922, he said, “The bourgeoisie became revolutionary factor when it raises the standard of revolt against backward, antiquated forms of society, that is, When the struggle is fundamentally against the feudal order, the bourgeoisie leading the people. Then the bourgeoisie is the vanguard of the revolution. But this cannot be said about the new bourgeoisie in the Eastern countries, or most of them. Although, the bourgeoisie is leading the struggle there, it is at the same time not leading it against feudalism. It is leading the struggle against capitalism. Therefore, it is a struggle of the weak and suppressed and underdeveloped bourgeoisie against a stronger and more developed bourgeoisie. Instead of being a class war it is an internecine war so to say and as such contains the elements of compromise.⁹

In Europe feudalism was abolished by the bourgeoisie in favor of capitalism, a higher form of economy. But in India Roy pointed out that very often, the rich landholder and industrialist are combined in the same person (Roy 1922: 23). So here the bourgeoisie developed an alliance with and not in opposition to feudalism. Therefore the bourgeois-democratic revolution cannot take place under their leadership.

⁹See Impecor, volume II, December 22, 1922, p.989
In India in transition Roy points to the danger of national bourgeoisie coming to compromise with imperial bourgeoisie but in his later books like *The Future of Indian Politics, Our Tasks in India, Our Differences*, he clearly formulates what he calls 'decolonisation theory' which reveals the economic alliance between foreign imperialists and Indian bourgeoisie. His argument was that after the World War I, British imperialism, faced with serious crisis owing to its depleted resources, fall in actual production resulting in loss of world market to USA and Japan etc, was forced to give impetus to policy of industrialization reversing its old policy of keeping India industrially backward. Roy wrote, 'It is no longer profitable for British to hold India as a purely agricultural reserve. It will be more profitable to industrialise her. Industrialized India will offer a lucrative investment for British capital, cheap labour and easily accessible raw material will produce enormous profits, and the buying capacity of India will increase, thus helping British trade' (Roy 1926: 12). This is how British could survive as an imperialist power under the circumstances. As war had affected the accumulation of capital in Britain, British capitalists were forced to form an alliance with Indian bourgeoisie who had accumulated a considerable amount of wealth. This economic cooperation between British imperialists and Indian bourgeoisie believed Roy would pave way for political cooperation and he held the Indian bourgeoisie would not take part in any anti-imperialist struggle "except of the harmless parliamentary brand" (Roy 1938: 103). As a result of increasing industrialization in India the national bourgeoisie (which found itself competing with imperialists in the exploitation of the masses) was demanding a much larger share in the exploitation of India’s natural and human resources and for the purpose threatened to side with the masses. The degree of concessions brought about imperialist liquidation in proportion. In exchange for the imperialist concessions, the bourgeois would,
cluded Roy, dampen the revolutionary ardour of the masses to save imperialism from the process of liquidation. ‘The new economic policy of British imperialism in India sharpens the class differentiation and ripens the class struggle in the face of which nationalist struggle based on capitalist antagonism loses its importance’ (Roy 1927: 7). The anti-imperialist war will thus take the form of a class war rather than a national war for independence. He wrote, ‘the movement for national freedom has developed into a gigantic class struggle. In this situation the task is to confront the counter-revolutionary alliance of foreign imperialism and native reaction with the united army of all the oppressed and exploited classes’ (Roy 1931: 66).

Indian revolution, he believed will be jointly brought about by the petty bourgeoisie, the peasantry and the workers. Land aristocracy and bourgeoisie ceased to be revolutionary having entered into economic alliance with imperialism. Petty bourgeoisie, though potentially revolutionary, was in Indian situation saddled with reactionary social philosophy and leadership of Gandhi, which Roy bitterly criticized. Roy criticized programme of Gandhian economy, his economic doctrine with emphasis on Charkha and voluntary restriction of human wants, his opposition to industrialization, which he believed, was detrimental to the economic progress and hence to the cause of the kind of proletarian revolution Roy had in mind. He was also opposed to Gandhian technique of mass mobilization, his desire to unite all classes of Indian people, and his cult of non-violent revolution. He wrote, “It is ridiculous to say that we are ‘non-violent revolutionaries’ such a crowd cannot grow even on the soil of India. The expropriator will never give in without resistance nor will the British leave India out of respect for our ability to suffer”¹⁰. We propose to discuss Roy’s ideas of Gandhi at a

¹⁰ See Roy 1930, Private Documents, Nehru Memorial Library and Museum, Roy Papers, Cawnpur Case Evidence Exhibit No 13, p30
later stage. Here it is importance to point out that Roy strongly believed that petty bourgeoisie class in India, which could be a revolutionary force given the favourable circumstances, was in fact incapable of any independent revolutionary action under Gandhian leadership. Out of the remaining oppressed classes, peasantry and the worker, former believed Roy was too backward to be an independent political factor. Therefore workers were considered by him to be the most revolutionary factor as they will go into the struggle, because they have nothing to gain from the violent overthrow of British rule.

Thus the Indian revolution was led by working class, believed Roy, which was guided not by Gandhian philosophy but by the philosophy of dialectical materialism as propounded by Marx. Staunch Marxist outlook of Roy, his absence from the Indian National scene since 1915, and over zealousness on his part to provide leadership to the communist revolution in India from abroad resulted in his unrealism. He was unrealistic in so far as he exaggerated the numerical, ideological and revolutionary potential of the working class in India. He believed in the spontaneous development of the class-consciousness solely as a result of 'objective conditions'. He could not perceive the significance of the subjective factor i.e. the difficulties and problems involved in the process of mobilizing workers, making them into class conscious proletarian and organizing them effectively for the revolutionary purpose. The fact that this was bound to be a long-term process was not realized by Roy then. Subsequently as we will see, Roy's views with respect to the revolutionary potential of the Indian proletariat altered considerably over the years.

Secondly, Roy was unrealistic in so far as he negated the significant role of the nationalism in Indian politics, in his Marxian analysis of Indian Society. Being a Marxist he could think only in terms of class categories. He could not conceive of the whole country
emerging as a nation state as a consequence of united struggle of all classes, all castes, all
diverse section of Indian society against foreign imperialism. He wrongly tried to assign
economic motive to the whole struggle to the total neglect of Indian nationalism. This is not
to deny the importance of economic interpretation of Indian national struggle. But the forces
of nationalism in national liberation is too great a factor to be ignored as was done by Roy
then.

And again, Roy was unrealistic in assessing the significance of Gandhism in Indian
politics. As Bhattacharjee correctly observes:

Considering the conditions of India and the nature of British rule, Gandhism
appeared to be the most appropriate banner under which to launch the national
struggle for independence. For dependent people struggling for independence
the call for nationalism was irresistible and all talks of economic program and
class struggle appeared either as putting the cart before the horse or a betrayal
of the nation. Whatever might be the economic value of Gandhiji’s
constructive program, it has a great organizational significance. Roy analyzed
Gandhism but he ignored its political necessity for India. His concept of
organized insurrection was theoretically ill conceived and practically
untenable. His strategy based on an economic program of class interest and an
ultimate application of violence was most inappropriate for India. After the
First World War secret political activities lost all prospects in India and under
those conditions Roy’s programme of a secret communist party organizing the
people on a large scale with the ultimate objective of challenging violently the
British authorities in India appeared to be unpractical and futile’
(Bhattacharjee 1971: 50).

Roy however was an open minded intellectual who closely followed national and
international developments. He tried to analyze every system of thought critically and
believed in its constant re-examination in the light of new developments as is revealed by his
own ideological development. He began as a revolutionary nationalist, but soon discarded
nationalism as an antiquated cult and accepted Marxism. With the end of World War II and as
a consequence of it as we shall see later, he gave up Marxism and evolved scientific,
cosmopolitan, Radical humanism. Though he moved away from Marxism, his contribution
both as a Marxist theoretician and his contribution at the practical level to the development of communist international is immense. Lenin described him as the symbol of revolution in the East. Roy never accepted anything on its face value is revealed by the fact that on colonial issue he had the guts to differ with a stalwart like Lenin, who in those days was worshipped almost as a demigod by many communists. Roy-Lenin debate over the degree of support to be given to nationalist leaders as opposed to indigenous communist parties continued to haunt the international communist movement for a long time. The Indian communist leader and theoretician Dr. Gangadhar M. Adhikari points out that the roots of dispute between right CPI (Pro- Moscow party) and the left CPM (Pro Peking party) lies in the perennial controversy over the role of national bourgeoisie in our country and in our national democratic revolution in its various phases – the context being ‘national political independence (before liberation)’ and its extension, the struggle for ‘national economic independence (after liberation)’. The central problem has always been one of uniting with the national bourgeoisie, counteracting its ‘compromising tendency’ and at the same time, building an independent communist party (Adhikari 1964: 55-57).

Roy made a great contribution to the development of international communist movement. He was elected to the ‘National and Colonial Commission’, and was co-opted to the powerful bureau of executive committee of the Communist International. He was also appointed as a member of the Central Asiatic Bureau of the Communist International at Tashkent where he had gone with a view to spread revolution to the East. He gave training to a group of Muslim Mohajirins in communist ideology at Tashkent. Here an Indian military school was started with a view to train an army for Indian liberation. An important event at Tashkent was the formation of an emigré communist party of India on 17 October 1920. In
February Roy returned to Moscow and became the founder director of the communist university of the Toilers of the East on 21 April 1921, where he taught for a brief period.

Roy's manifestos to the Indian National congress began with its 36th session at Ahmedabad through his emissary, Nalini Gupta. He moved to Berlin and set up his headquarters there. Besides contributing regularly to Comintern journal Impeccar, on 15 May 1922 Roy started his own journal, the vanguard of the Indian Independence, which was banned by Government of India in September. Therefore it had to change its name and place of publication from time to time. It's name was changed to Advance – Guard, renamed The Vanguard in 1923, and finally The Masses of India in January 1925. Through this journal, and other writings and emissaries, by end of 1922, Roy had succeeded in forming small groups of communists in Bengal, Bombay, Madras, the United Provinces and Punjab and proposed to form an underground communist party of India, and a legal revolutionary mass party to include the 'left wing' of the Congress (Ray 1987: 22). At the Fourth Congress of the comintern (5th November – 5th December, 1922), Roy became a candidate member of the Executive Committee of the communist International. In 1924, at Fifth Congress (26th June-8th July, 1924) he was elected full voting member of the Executive Committee of the C.I. and candidate member for presidium. At the sixth plenum of the comintern Executive (February-March 1926) he was elected to the presidium and made a member of the comintern secretariat and orgbureau. He reached the peak of his influence in 1926, and was appointed to the editorial board of the CI, named chairman of the Eastern commission and was also elected member – secretary of the Chinese commission (ibid: 22-23). A few subsequent years he spent in visiting different countries for his propaganda work to develop the revolutionary movement in India. ‘He was expelled from one country after another. He could not find
refuge either in Switzerland, Sweden, Norway, Holland, Germany, Belgium, France or any other country ruled and governed by the capitalist classes' (Hindi Undated.: 67). During this period he had written several books what do we want (1922), One year of Non-cooperation from Ahmedabad to Gaya (with Evelyn Roy, 1923), political letters (1924), the aftermath on Non-cooperation (1926) and the Future of Indian politics (1926). This last book, after India in transition, became another important landmark in development of Marxian interpretation of contemporary India. In the meanwhile in 1924, a case had been started against him by Government of India, at Kanpur, charging him of establishing a branch of the Comintern in India and "to deprive the king-emperor of his sovereignty of British India." A warrant of his arrest was issued. In 1927 Roy was sent to China, as head of a delegation of the communist international to advise the communist party of China. Here it is not possible to describe even in outline, the intricacies of the Chinese politics.11

Comintern in mid 1920's focused its attention on China, where it was believed the first significant advance of communism would occur. It was thought, China would provide both the moral aspiration, and strategic base for Indian revolutionaries. The Comintern slogan was, "via revolutionary China to the Federal Republic of the United States of India".12 China was then in the throes of a revolution and the relations between Kuomintang (nationalist organization) and the communist party had reached a very critical stage. The thesis that the Executive committee of the communist International adopted on the Chinese questions contained contradictory directives. On the one hand the emphasis was placed on the program of agrarian revolution and on transformation of Kuomintang into "real people's party" and on

12 See Government of India, Home Department, Communism in India, 1927, p.99.
the other hand communists were instructed to remain and work in Kuomintang. But when Roy reached China he found that Kuomintang’s leadership consisted mainly of landlords and upper classes who were opposed to the idea of land confiscation and its redistribution. His friend Borodin who had been sent to China by the Comintern in 1923, was totally opposed to the program of agrarian revolution and did not want to alienate the right wing of the Kuomintang represented by Chiang Kai-Shek. On 12 April 1927, Chiang Kai-shek launched a coup against his communist allies, which resulted in death of thousands. Then came a split between right section represented by Chiang and Wuhan faction with communist support came to be known as left Kuomintang.

The Eighth plenum in view of the recent developments recommended the policy of close cooperation between the left Kuomintang and communists and at the same time to pursue a more radical agrarian program in the countryside. On 16th April the central committee of the CCP supported Roy’s program of advocating revolutionary agrarian program (which was not supported by Borodin). But two days later the resolution was retracted. At fifth congress of the CCP on April 27, 1927 Roy also advocated spontaneous peasant uprising by arming them, creation of a revolutionary army and creation of a mass base. These views along with preserving the alliance with left Kuomintang were adopted by fifth congress even though Borodin continued to oppose these views for fear of antagonizing Kuomintang military leaders. As Borodin had power of the purse Roy could not do much to accomplish his mission. Frustrated he referred the question to Moscow. Stalin’s telegraphed reply arrived on 1st June. Like the resolution of the eight plenum of ECCI and the Fifth Congress of the CCP, it tried to reconcile the irreconcilable, advising the Chinese communists to support land seizure by peasants and reinforcement of the leadership of the Kuomintang by
new leaders throw up by the program of agrarian revolution. This however was not possible under the circumstances. For each step forward in support of the nationalist, anti-imperialist revolution, it was necessary for the CCP to retreat two steps from the social revolution (Hartcox 1971: 71-72). Wang the leader of the left Kuomintang decided to break his alliance with communists and in July a reunification of the Wuhan (left) and Nanking (right Kuomintang) governments was affected on the basis of a purge of all communists within the left Kuomintang and its army (ibid: 73). Russian advisors including Roy and Borodin after the debacle were left with no alternative but to return to Moscow to face the wrath of Stalin.

The sixth world congress of communist International in 1928 was followed by the expulsion of Roy from it in 1929. Roy’s contribution of the Brandler Press13 and his support to the Brandler organization were mentioned in the official statement of the communist international as reasons of his expulsion.14 This factor cannot be accepted as the real cause as only after Roy was silently dropped without any formal notice of expulsion, did he raise his voice through the Brandler press.

Chinese debacle might have influenced the attitude of comintern towards Roy but Roy’s role in china was at no stage criticized by the comintern leadership and no evidence have been found to support the view that Chinese debacle had any direct bearing on Roy’s subsequent comintern career (Sibnarayan Ray 1987: 31). Robert C. North and Xenia J. Eudin have suggested that Roy was possibly sacrificed by Stalin “as major scapegoat for the China debacle... Some one had to assume the responsibility for Comintern failures, and although in these circumstances Stalin was undoubtedly as much as fault as anyone, Roy was held accountable (North and Eudin 1959: 332). Roy was not allowed to present his view. He

---

13 Brandler was a German communist, opposed to the policy of communist international.
14 See, Imperior, IX, 13 December 1929, p1470.
incurred Stalin's displeasure so much that he even refused to see Roy after he came back from China.

Another plausible reason for change of Comintern's attitude was the existence of Roy's opponents, enemies and rivals both inside and outside the Comintern and the damaging account submitted by Samyendra Nath Tagore to the Comintern authority in 1927 about the communist movement in India. Piatnitsky on whom Stalin relied heavily in struggle for power with Trotsky and who disliked Roy for his intellectual eminence welcomed Tagore's report regardless of its reliability. However no public charges were ever made against Roy on the basis of Tagore's allegations. The internal struggle of the Russian Communist Party, maintains Roy, also contributed to his victimization. Prior to Stalin, the Comintern allowed divisions, differences and open debates and Lenin tolerated Roy's views different from his own. But Stalin (between 1928-1938) tried to make himself as an undisputed leader. Some believe, Roy who was bedridden because of mastoiditis in a small hospital outside Moscow (instead of being hospitalized at Kremlin hospital where the members of the Comintern were usually sent) was able to get out of Moscow with the help of Swiss woman friend Louise Geissler as the tradition of the Moscow Trial had not yet begun. He reached Berlin never to return to Moscow.

Roy, against the advice of his German friends now decided to return to India, knowing fully well what was in store for him. He reached Bombay in December 1930 and adopted the name Dr. Mahmud. After his expulsion from the Comintern, Roy condemned the

---

15 Two charges leveled against Roy by Tagore were: misappropriation of the Comintern money and deceiving the Comintern authority by magnifying the number of communists in India.
CPI's attempt to swim against the nationalist tide as suicidal. He contended, 'In India the way to communism lies through the national revolution, rather than in opposition to it'.

Before his own arrival Roy had sent his agents to India to prepare the grounds for his arrival. Roy, who under Lenin had acquired the reputation of being a 'historical leftist', as a result of modification in his views in response to external changes, came to represent the right wing of the communist movement. When Roy reached Bombay he found his associates had made some headway in establishing a basis for his work there. They had gathered the nucleus of a group, later known as Royists who remained faithful to his ideas which evolved from Marxism to Radical Humanism not only till his death in 1954 but as we shall see later who continue to struggle to spread Roy's ideas even today as a part of program of Radical Humanist movement.

Roy after coming to India was able to avoid arrest for about seven months during which he traveled extensively in North India and propagated the idea of convening a 'constituent assembly'. He met a member of congress leaders, including Nehru, Patel, M.M. Joshi, Ambedkar, Subhash Bose etc. and attended Karachi session of the Indian National Congress at the invitation of Jawaharlal Nehru. Ultimately he was arrested on 21st July 1931 on the basis of warrant issued in 1924 and was sentenced to twelve years reduced to six years of rigorous imprisonment on appeal. He conducted his own defense but was not allowed to put forward his defense statement, which was smuggled out and published simultaneously under the titles 'My Defense' and 'I accuse' respectively by Roy Defense committee from Pondicherry and New York.

*Tayab Shaik, Brajesh Singh, Sunder Kababi and Dr Anadi Bahadur reached India with Roy's manifesto addressed to the, 'Revolutionary Vanguard of the Toiling Masses of India', urging Indian communists to emulate their French Jacobian forebears, whom he characterized as, 'the Marxists of their time.
Despite many restrictions Roy managed to remain in touch with the outside world through his letters, articles, manifestos often smuggled out from jail. In 1932 ‘Our task in India’ containing the program of the secret illegal organization, the revolutionary party of the Indian working class, was published by his associates. Roy had broken with Comintern not with communism so his intention was to organize a revolutionary communist party and in this regard apart from other hurdles, the main hurdle was the stiff opposition of the official communists. Despite all this, the Roysits were able to consolidate their position in the All-India Trade Union Congress. So Roy’s arrest did not mean end of Royism in India. During his confinement Roy’s health deteriorated. He developed serious trouble with his heart in 1932. His defense committee, which included Nehru, complained of the inadequate medical treatment. Referring to Roy, Nehru wrote that the life of “one of the bravest and ablest of India’s sons” was “sliding downhill to the brink”. It was a tragedy he said, “to see the waste of the lives of those who have the ability and the capacity to do so much for their country” (cited in Haithcox 1971: 201).

In jail Roy’s mind turned to philosophical questions. His friends in Germany, especially his future wife Ellen Roy constantly supplied him with the intellectual food in the form of books he wanted. He read works on the history of materialism including the writings of Marx and Engles, on the subject, as well as books on the latest developments in biology and theory of relativity as is evident in his letters to Ellen, published subsequently as Letters From Jail (1934). When Roy left prison he bought with him nine thick unfinished manuscripts volumes (approximately over 3000 lined foolscap-size pages) tentatively entitled “philosophical consequence of modern science”, which have not been so far published in his entirety. These writings in prison are in a way re-examination and re-formulation of Marxism
to which he had been committed since 1919. Though still retaining his faith in Marxism Roy, once out of jail on his release on 20 November 1936, changed his views radically on the perspective, strategy, tactics and ideology of the Indian revolution which as we shall see later would form the basis of eschewing communism altogether in favor of radical humanism which sought to reconcile materialism with individual freedom and free will.

Thus ‘the period between 1936 to 1946 forms another epoch in the evolution of the political ideas of Roy’ (Bhattacharjee 1971: 58). During this period he deviated significantly from his orthodox Marxist phase. No longer satisfied with the explanation of historical processes solely in terms of economic factors, he tried to assess the role of subjective i.e. cultural and ideational factors in bringing about revolution. After his release on 20th November 1936, Roy joined the Indian National Congress with a view to transform Congress into a revolutionary political party and was elected a member of the All-India Congress committee. He was accorded a warm welcome by Congress leadership. He met important leaders including Patel, Rajendra Prasad, Kriplani, who escorted him to famous Anand Bhavan, the Nehru’s home who in his presidential address at AICC at Faizpur welcomed him to the Congress fold as a ‘veteran soldier in India’s struggle for freedom’. However his trenchant criticism of Gandhi and his persistent call for alternative, more radical and secular leadership to Gandhi turned the established leadership of congress against him. Gandhi obviously had little to do with his long-term critic.¹⁸ When approached by Roy for financial help for his paper Gandhi replied with a post card suggesting that ‘he should render only mute service to the cause of freedom.’ The very first issue of the paper independent India,

¹⁸ Roy’s criticism of Gandhi can be traced as early as 1920 in the debate between Roy and Lenin at the Second Comintern in Moscow. Lenin had maintained that Gandhi, being a leader of anti-imperialist movement was revolutionary. But Roy held that, ‘as a religious and cultural revivalist he was bound to be reactionary socially and culturally... Even though he might appear revolutionary politically’, cited in Heathcox 1971, p.248.
carried an attack on Gandhi entitled ‘Science and Superstition’ which prompted Gandhi to remark Roy was his ‘enemy number one’ (Heathco 1971: 248).

While Roy was abroad, he had imagined the conditions in India in the light of Marxist theory rather than on the basis of any empirical evidence. By applying Marxist doctrines to Indian situation he had hoped that a party of workers and peasants was bound to develop as a formidable force, which would liquidate Gandhian reactionary leadership. But when he came to India in 1930 he was shocked to see a totally different picture. Anxious to have a close look at the Indian proletariat, about which he had heard and written so much he, attended workers mass meetings first at Bombay, the premier industrial city of the country. To his utter shock and disappointment, he found workers squatting on the ground least concerned of what the speaker was saying. He found, “most of the audience were dozing or actually sleeping. The only sign of life was thin wisps of bidi smoke here and there” (Roy 1942: 256). He realized how exaggerated his thesis were about the revolutionary temper of India working class and that resigned squatting masses without any rudimentary ideas of class-struggle and revolutionary awakening cannot make a revolution. These meetings, he said, “were not political events. They had no revolutionary significance than the mass pilgrimages, which have taken place in this country time immemorial. Only on these occasions, new gods are worshipped” (ibid: 257). Roy came to believe that the working class of India was culturally too backward to provide revolutionary leadership for reconstruction of Indian society,. Instead, the petty bourgeoisie, the much maligned class in Marxist literature, to which Roy himself contributed, was now recognized by Roy as the leader of the Indian revolution. This fact he attributed not to their economic position but to their cultural development and education. Roy’s prophecy regarding the inevitability of proletarian
revolution in accordance with his Marxist prognosis proved to be wrong in Indian case. Roy, observes Bhattacharjee, “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-differentiating it from the narrow and mechanical interpretation’(Bhattacharjee 1971: 62).

Now Roy tried to assess the role of the cultural and ideational factors in the explanation of historical processes he studied. He saw that the exploited masses, despite objective revolutionary conditions in India, did not move ahead and Gandhism contrary to his anticipation continued to remain as strong as ever. He therefore concluded, “the most important and decisive factor in a revolution is the subjective factor”(Roy 1942: 207). Success of revolution in addition to maturity of objective conditions depends on the subjective factors as represented by nature of leadership, its ideology, will, goals, strategies, the nature of masses, their values etc. Therefore, he tried to analyze and evaluate the Indian National Congress with reference to these factors. He also believed that in absence of any revolutionary theory, revolutionary activity is not possible and since leadership of Indian National Congress, which dominated by Gandhi was hostile to revolutionary ideas, the emergence of alternative was regarded by Roy as essential precondition for accomplishing the task of national liberation and socio-economic revolution in India. Roy came to emphasize the importance of education, cultural renaissance as early as 1937. In his presidential address of united provinces youth’s conference in Sitapur he said, “A political revolution takes place only as a prelude to a social renaissance. So, if politically the nationalist movement is revolutionary, its social purpose must be to clear away the established order of decayed institutions so that a new structure could be raised in the place of old. If the historical
necessity of a social renaissance is not admitted, political revolution becomes a matter of idle talk... The idea of complete political independence is not necessarily a revolutionary ideal. If the national state is going to be the instrument for the preservation of the established social order, or for the revival of older institutions, it will not be a political revolution but counter revolution---the overthrow of imperialism by a movement under the slogan 'Bank to Manu' or 'Back to village' will be a counter revolutionary revolution. If such a revolution succeeds politically it would establish an undemocratic regime on the model of fascist dictatorship".¹⁹

Thus for Roy the program of democratic revolution essentially combines the political and social aspects of nationalism. He made a clear distinction between revolutionary nationalism and revivalist nationalism in India. Roy condemned Gandhism as a philosophy of counter-revolution and therefore he denounced it totally and even equated it with fascism. Fascism, according to Roy is not merely a socio-political phenomenon but it has a definite philosophy. It is rooted in the reactionary philosophical system. He writes, "the philosophy of fascist dictatorship results directly from the modern schools of mysticism and spiritualism which represents reaction as against the scientific view of life"(Roy 1938:7). So Gandhism characterized by religious and spiritual content was inherently fascist. He went to the extent of saying, "Gandhi as a philosophical tradition has led to Hitlerism" (Ibid: 50).

Roy came to believe that to combat Gandhism the medieval mentality of the culturally backward masses must be changed i.e. the subjective factor must be created. The emphasis on education and ideational and cultural factors obviously could not be fitted into Marxist theory of economic determinism. This in fact was the beginning of the end of his Marxist phase, eventually giving rise to new social philosophy called New Humanism. As far as organizational character of Congress was concerned Roy was really impressed by the

¹⁹See M.N.Roy, article in Independent India, 30 May 1937, p.3-12.
Countrywide network of primary committees, which he believed could be used effectively as the basic units of future democratic state of India. But the major defect of Congress organization was that except propaganda of Gandhism, there was no real political propaganda to politically educate and mobilize the masses. What was required was not the mass of ignorant people but conscious, politically trained, active workers who could provide alternative leadership to Congress so as to democratize and radicalize it from within. Accomplishment of this task was not possible by remaining outside Congress, which happened to be the largest organization with strongest mass appeal. Therefore Roy joined Congress both for nationalist and socialist cause. Roy suggested two methods to bring about the necessary leadership. One was political which was intermediate, short-term method and second, long-term and more significant was intellectual or philosophical. The latter emphasizing the need for a renaissance movement in India eventually led him to launch Radical Humanist Movement, and it was emphasized by Roy till his death. This we propose to discuss in chapter Four. At political level being part of Congress Party, he suggested various measures, constitutional as well as educational, to activate and democratize the primary Congress committees. He tried to unite the leftist and more radical elements within Congress to counter the paralyzing grip Gandhism. The debate between M.N Roy and Indian socialists in the 1930s on the important question of the relationship between socialism and nationalism in Indian independence struggle continued for a long time. Failure to resolve this issue contributed to a large extent to the inability of socialists, Royists, communists and other left-wing groups in India to unite and offer alternative leadership to Gandhites in Congress Party. However, it is not possible to trace in detail the relationship of Royists with Congress socialist party and Communist party of India and reasons for their eventual split. It is
important to point out that Roy while in jail kept in close touch with Royists outside who were working closely with socialists and played an important role in early years of CSP. Jayaprakash Narayan has acknowledged that writings of Roy made an impact on his political thought. He described Roy’s works as “flaming political tracts, powerfully written, closely reasoned and attempting to tear to shreds the ideology of Gandhi’s non-cooperation movement”. Both Royists and CSP shared a common aversion to Gandhian ideas of nonviolence and trusteeship and both called for working within the congress party for the attainment of political freedom and ultimately economic and social reform by rescuing Congress from the conservative right wing, by educating and organizing the rank and file on the basis of concrete program of national revolution. Indian socialists, because of old animosities minimize the role of Royists in the formative years of CSP. But a study conducted in India by the U.S. office of strategic services during the war years observes that “there seems little doubt that Congress Socialist party was considerably influenced by Roy’s program. It has been said that both the Royists and communists tried to influence the congress program and that the Royists won” (Haithcox 1971: 230).

Given the ideologically political disparate membership of CSP, its premature emphasis on Socialism, its misplaced reliance on Nehru, its opposition to either contesting election or accepting provincial office under 1935 constitution of India (which Roy advocated), Roy suspected that CSP would degenerate in to ‘reformism’ i.e. ‘bourgeois -

---

20 Royists groups were active in Maharasthra, Gujrat, Punjab and Sind branches of CSP (Socialist Party). Musrenhas, Maniben Kara, R.A.Khedgikar, M.R.Shetty, Tayab Shaik, V.M.Tarkunde, H.R.Mahajani, G.P.Khare, B.K.Khadilkar, among others, held important offices in Maharashtra CSP. Y.B.Chavan who became India’s defence minister and later Home Minister was Royist sympathizer. In Gujrat CSP also there was a sizable group of Royists including Thakori Prasad, Dashmat Lal, Mohan Lal Thakar, A.K.Pillai in Kerala CSP was staunch supporter of Roy.

21 These works are: *Aftermath of Non-Cooperation* (see Roy 1926) and *India in Transition* (see Roy 1922)

Parliamentarianism'. Therefore he directed his followers to join CSP with the object not of merging with it, but splitting it and absorbing the 'real proletarian elements'.

Therefore soon after his release the relations between him and CSP became strained. Roy issued a series of public statements condemning CSP and in March 1937, a decision was reached to resign from CSP, in groups at intervals rather than en bloc.

Thus they earned undying enmity of a group, which with Nehru's sympathy, achieved a considerable influence in Congress. Roy denied his group the support of this effective group. As far as Roy's relationship with CPI is concerned, Roy had hoped for an eventual compromise with his old comrades. But that was not to be. Neither the communist leadership in Moscow nor in India wanted a person like Roy with independent thinking and ideas in their fold. Thus we see, Roy when he had come out of jail was a potential political force in India. He had sympathizers among various groups both leftists and rightists. Because of the aura of mystery attached to his name because of his close association with Lenin, Stalin and communist International, Socialists and other left wing elements were anxious to work with him. And six years of imprisonment by British for national cause earned him sympathizers within the nationalist element on Indian Scene. Referring to Roy's reputation Subhash Chandra Bose observes, "because of his revolutionary past—Mr M.N. Roy was a popular and attractive figure with a halo round his name. Young men flocked to him" (Bose 1952: 14).

But this popularity was however short lived. As a result of split with CSP and inability to reconcile with CPI, both socialists and communists began a systematic attempt to malign him in order to distort his image within the congress party. Because of his unabated criticism of Gandhism and Indian culture, which was a result of his cosmopolitan, internationalist

---

\[23\] Letters from M.N. Roy to Bombay associates, Dehradun, 12 March 1935, File Number 111/3, Roy Archives.

\[24\] Letters from M.N. Roy to Bombay associates, Dehradun, 29 October 1934, File Number 111/2, Roy Archives.
look inhibited from his Marxism philosophy. Roy was never able to establish his bona fides as a nationalist. Nehru had admiration for Roy’s personality and his ideas. On the relationship between socialism and nationalism they had very similar views. Roy in the beginning tried to use Nehru in his effort to radicalize Congress. But he soon became disillusioned with Nehru because of his unshakable loyalty to Gandhi and his readiness to compromise with right wing while proclaiming to be a socialist. He criticized Nehru’s hypocrisy most blantly, Nehru, he wrote is “a thoughtless, vain, egocentric, popularity-hunting demagogue, who is popular among the congressmen with a ‘modern look’ because his demagogy rationalizes Gandhi’s irrationalism, and supplies a pseudo-socialist veneer to reactionary nationalism…. His modernism serves the undemocratic and reactionary purpose of Congress. Therefore, his present place had been conceded to him by the real bosses of the organization” (Roy 1946: 12-13). This obviously made Roy very unpopular as Nehru had a large following. Subhash Chandra Bose, the most popular leader of the militant nationalism, opposed to Gandhian creed of nonviolence, remained the only factor Royists could have collaborated with. They supported Bose the then president of AICC against Gandhi at Tripura Congress in March 1939, where Pandit Pant introduced a resolution reaffirming delegates faith in Gandhian principles and practices and required the president to accept the wishes of Gandhi in formulation of working committee. Although socialists agreed with Bose, they remained neutral and abstained from voting. Communists actually voted in favour of the resolution. The left wing suffered a debacle. Royists condemned the socialists for abandoning the slogan of alternative leadership. Myron Weiner suggests, “had the entire left wing remained in the congress, it might have been possible to dislodge the conservative leadership”(Weiner 1957:54). At Tripura the socialists and communists chose nationalist unity under Gandhi
after than left wing hegemony under Bose (Halitco 1971:281). Roy, though supported Bose could not work with him as he was known to have a penchant for dictators and their ideologies, which was contrary to Roy’s way of thinking.

Thus we see Roy alienated himself and his supporters totally from all sections of the congress party, which naturally led to decline of their political fortunes. This casts grave doubts on the wisdom of Roy’s decisions and his strategies. Ray observes, “Indeed, his uncompromising radicalism separated him as a lonely figure, ahead of his time, who was unlikely to be very effective in the increasingly populist climate of the period” (Ray 1987: 37). Following the Tripuri Session, on May 1st 1939 the Royists together with few other like-minded congressmen decided to form a separate organization within the congress party called the league of Radical Congressmen (LRC).

3.4. League of Radical Congressmen Phase (1937-40)

LRC phase is very much a part of Roy’s Marxist phase as he strongly believed that Marxism must be accepted as an ideology, not of any class but of all human progress in our age. LRC was in fact the extension of the Royist Group within the Congress. It was born out of the crisis within congress organization for over a period of time. It was formed with the objective of “combating Gandhist ideology” and raising “the historic banner of Jacobinism”.25

According to Roy, the program of LRC was to be that of ‘national democratic revolution’ which found ideological expression in philosophical radicalism and political expression in Jacobinism. Since philosophical radicalism was the precursor of Marxism, he argued, it could be considered Marxism “as applied to pre-capitalist and Capitalist

conditions" such as to be found in India. Roy was a man of renaissance even during his Marxist phase and therefore he believed that political problems are always rooted in more fundamental problems, like, cultural backwardness, ignorance, and conservatism. Therefore the political program of LRC consisted of rejecting all those doctrines and dogmas, which encouraged above tendencies, which constitute major impediments to human progress and encourage authoritarianism. League was against any compromise either with imperialism or with conservative section of Indian society. Therefore combating the authoritarian leadership and democratization of congress from top to bottom through political education of primary membership constituted an important task of LRC. Roy believed that ignorant masses who looked upon congress as their deliverer must be educated and involved in an organized way in the struggle. He wrote "The congress must become a countrywide network of democratically elected committees leading masses in their day to day struggle of life. The creation of such a popular organization as the framework of a democratic state to rise out the mass struggle against imperialism, is the essential precondition for the election of the constituent assembly the instrument for the capture of power".

LRC also criticized congress strategy of legitimate and peaceful means for attaining independence. Roy dubbed it as "pseudo-moral dogmas" which regarded non-violence as something superior to political independence. Under the established regime Roy thought it was impossible to establish an atmosphere of non-violence in the country. He said, "this victory will be won, not enough through soul force but with blood and tears and will be maintained by blood and iron" (Roy 1922: 208). He held "If freedom is the sovereign right of

See, Independent India, 12 May 1940, p.247.
See M.N.Roy, article, Independent India, 1(1), 4 April 1937.
the people, every means should be good enough to assert that right." League criticized congress leadership for promoting capitalist interests and called for revolutionary changes in the existing economic structure. Keeping in view the interests of the working class LRC chalked out a program of national reconstruction emphasizing rapid industrialization with state aid, ownership rights of land to cultivators, and abolition of the Indian state simultaneously with the overthrow of imperialism. They criticized Gandhian medieval economies as Roy and his associates believed, "Solution of economic problems lies neither in the Utopia of revivalism, nor in the dream of the development of capitalist industry. Modern industry is essential. Replacement of handicrafts by modern machine production is a historical process. There is not other way to national prosperity and cultural progress is not possible without economic prosperity." LRC also called for a special attention to the baffling problem of communal unity. And for the purpose, even accepted and supported the demand of separate electorate for minorities and proportional representation on public services.

Subsequent developments were determined by the war, which broke out in Europe on September 1, 1939. England declared war on Germany on September 3, 1939. British government, without consulting Indian ministries, proclaimed India to be a belligerent country and imposed, a restrictive Defense of India Ordinance, granting special powers to central government. Response of the congress party was divided. Though the initial reaction of important leaders like Gandhi and Nehru was one of unconditional support to Britain in her war against fascist nazi Germany but later they changed their attitude. Gandhi due to considerations of non-violence and Nehru due to political considerations. In August 1939 the

---

28 See M.N.Roy, Phamplet, Our Differences, 1938
29 See, M.N.Roy, article, Independent India, 30 May 1937, p.12.
Swiet Union, in self-defense, entered into a pact with Germany, which Roy had argued in his writings and speeches, would be short lived. In November, the Comintern executive characterized the war as an imperialist war and instructed communist parties to oppose it. CPI felt that England's predicament should be exploited in the interest of achieving independence.

The Royists remained the only group, as we shall see later, who supported the war effort. In October congress ministries resigned from office and congress committee resolved to embark on a course of civil disobedience as soon as congress organization was deemed fit for the purpose. At Ramgarh session, in March 1940 Roy on insistence of some leftist congressmen, made a bid for the congress presidency. As expected, he was defeated by Abdul Kalam Azad by a vote of 1854 to 183. Shortly after Ramgarh session Gandhi made every congress committee to become a Satyagraha committee. The working committee recommended all those unwilling to take a pledge, to not to interfere with Satyagraha struggle by working independently, to resign from all executive positions. Royists bitterly criticized Gandhian Satyagraha. In May 1940 a study camp of the LRC was convened at Dehradun to critically analyze the national and international situation. At the camp LRC decision not to sign the Satyagraha pledge and to combat Gandhi's policies was reaffirmed. Royists were directed to resign from all executive committees of congress and to prepare to leave the party if needed. Not all agreed with it. V.M. Tarkunde who recommended LRC participation in Satyagraha movement for fear of total isolation of Royists argued, that the policy of LRC was based on misguided hope that congress organization can be radicalized 'by purely rational criticism'. Roy claimed that his followers constituted 'the only group in the lunatic asylum of Indian politics'. Tarkunde retorted, "leaders should be ahead of their following, but if they are

\[^9\] M.N. Roy's lectures at this camp were subsequently published under the title, 'Scientific Politics', in 1942.
Swiss Union, in self-defense, entered into a pact with Germany, which Roy had argued in his writings and speeches, would be short lived. In November, the Comintern executive characterized the war as an imperialist war and instructed communist parties to oppose it. CSP felt that England’s predicament should be exploited in the interest of achieving independence.

The Royists remained the only group, as we shall see later, who supported the war effort. In October congress ministries resigned from office and congress committee resolved to embark on a course of civil disobedience as soon as congress organization was deemed fit for the purpose. At Ramgarh session, in March 1940 Roy on insistence of some leftist congressmen, made a bid for the congress presidency. As expected, he was defeated by Abdul Kalam Azad by a vote of 1854 to 183. Shortly after Ramgarh session Gandhi made every congress committee to become a Satyagraha committee. The working committee recommended all those unwilling to take a pledge, to not to interfere with Satyagraha struggle by working independently, to resign from all executive positions. Royists bitterly criticized Gandhian Satyagraha. In May 1940 a study camp of the LRC was convened at Dehradun to critically analyze the national and international situation. At the camp LRC decision not to sign the Satyagraha pledge and to combat Gandhi’s policies was reconfirmed. Royists were directed to resign from all executive committees of congress and to prepare to leave the party if needed. Not all agreed with it. V.M. Tarkunde who recommended LRC participation in Satyagraha movement for fear of total isolation of Royists argued, that the policy of LRC was based on misguided hope that congress organization can be radicalized ‘by purely rational criticism’. Roy claimed that his followers constituted ‘the only group in the lunatic asylum of Indian politics’. Tarkunde retorted, “leaders should be ahead of their following, but if they are

*M.N.Roy’s lectures at this camp were subsequently published under the title, ‘Scientific Politics’, in 1942.*
On appeal to congress executive, the suspension was cancelled and he was permitted to resign. The LRC now decided to break with the congress, and in December 1940, Radical Democratic Party (RDP) was formed at an all India conference in Bombay.

35. Radical Democratic Party Phase (1940-48)

The inaugural conference of the RDP was held in Bombay from December 20-22, 1940 though its ideological foundation had already been laid in May 1940 in Dehradun camp. The RDP supported the anti fascist war and committed itself to the programme of national freedom and social emancipation. RDP was the only party, which could appreciate the international situation and foresee the dangerous consequences of the victory of the axis powers. Therefore during the first six years of its formation the primary issue was war and in these years RDP with its limited resources both financial and manpower, organized anti fascist propaganda by holding meetings, conferences and setting up anti fascist committees. In this regard Roy had to accomplish a tough task of convincing even his own close associates who happened to be either nationalists or communists by conviction that it was not an anti imperialist war and had dangerous consequences for the mankind as a whole. Anti imperialism can not be regarded as an end in itself. “Anti imperialism loses all revolutionary significance if it goes to the extent of preferring fascism”. 21

Thus we see RDP was born out of crisis, both at national and international level. The decision of Royists to abandon the nationalist movement and compromise with colonial power was a complete reversal of the policies pursued by them since 1930s. It had to function under highly unfavourable conditions and had to face many obstacles in terms of anti British sentiment of the country, its low numerical strength, dismal finances and pro fascist

---

21 See, Pamphlet, The New Path, Manifesto of the Radical Democratic Party, p.3
propaganda even by CPI which was being dictated by Soviet Union which did nothing to combat fascism until Hitler attacked Russia on 22 June 1941. Criticizing the dependence of an Russian communist parties on Russia Roy wrote, “the spirit of hero worship and the atmosphere of the catholic church which came to prevail in the Communist International, caused intellectual atrophy and political helplessness to the communist parties outside the Soviet Union” (Roy 1943a: 15), who failed to realize that freedom of anti Hitler coalition was a precondition for the attainment of greater freedom visualized by Communist International. “They forgot one of the lessons of history taught by Marx that a class frees itself by freeing the entire society of the time” (ibid: 9). However when Russia was attacked by Germany, the Comintern immediately instructed communist parties to support Great Britain. War makes, they say, strange bedfellows. The World War II made capitalists and imperialist countries like Britain, France and America ally themselves with communist Russia. After the defeat of invading Germany at Stalingrad in February 1943, the course of war began to favor the allies and on 15 May Stalin dissolved the Comintern on the ground that ‘this will result in a further strengthening of the united front of Allies.’

On Indian scene in August 1942, Gandhi launched the Quit India Movement’ which increased the already existent pro fascist sentiment in the country. Roy regarded it as a blackmail and great disservice to the cause of world freedom and opposed it vigorously. After England’s entry into war, the labour movement was divided on the issue of support to war. AITUC in which Royists had worked seriously, decided to remain neutral. They separated from AITUC and formed Indian Federation of Labour (IFL) in November with Roy as its General Secretary. Thus we see Roy was actively involved in the organizational work of RDP and IFL and editing of Independent India, which was an effective instrument of pro-war
propaganda. Through the study camps of RDP, his lectures in different parts of the country and his writings, Roy was trying to build up a mass organization. RDP stood for establishment of truly democratic system, rapid industrialization and radical reconstruction of Indian society and culture. Various activities carried out by RDP included launching of National Democratic Union as a broad based platform of all those elements who were united in their desire to support war and end the political stalemate created by congress, launching of IFL in order to launch worker’s struggle and lay down the mass basis of RDP, formation of defense committees particularly in West Bengal for ventilation of people’s problems, establishment of party units in various parts of the country. In September 1943 an office of RDP was opened in London and the headquarter of RDP and Independent India were moved from Bombay to Delhi. It came to be widely believed that victory of allies in war would also mean the beginning of the end of British rule in India. Now Roy in his speeches and writings pointed out to the dangers of post war transfer of power. For him political independence was not an end in itself. Social and economic revolution was of paramount importance, to Marxism Roy, for the improvement in the condition of common man. This was nowhere in sight, he therefore warned the people of an indigenous and neo-fascist polity and economy and urged them to opt for RDP as an alternative to congress, which would combine genuine political democracy with economic restructuring. The IFL in December 1943 appointed a committee comprising of G.D. Parikh, B.N Banerjee and V.M. Tarkunde, to draft a plan to Economic Development based on Ray’s ideas. This draft was adopted by a special conference of IFL held at Jharia in May 1944 and published as the People’s Plan. Apart from economic

---

*Among books published by Roy in 1940 were: The Alternative; Gandhism, Nationalism and Socialism. In 1942 he published: Freedom or Fascism?: War and Revolution; Scientific Politics; and India and War. In 1943 he published: The Communist International; Nationalism: Antiquated Cult; Indian Labor and Post-war Reconstruction; Nationalism; Democracy and Freedom; and Poverty and plenty.*
alternative Roy prepared the text of constitution of India, a draft that was released for public discussion in December 1944. As we shall see later Roy advocated the alternative system of polity emphasizing decentralization of power, growth of people’s committees as principal instruments to enable common people to participate directly in the decision making process.

The RDP with its banner of rational politics as against irrationalism and emotionalism of congress which Roy believed would lead only to a Fascist state, decided to contest the elections to the provincial legislatures in 1946 on a constitutional issue. For his purpose radicals raised the genuine issues of the election as against the deceitful demagogy as Roy called it, of the opposition and placed before the electorate a concrete program of public welfare. Roy always emphasized that appeal must be directed to people’s intelligence and reason rather than taking recourse to racial or communal appeals as was done by other parties. Needless to say RDP candidates were defeated in each case and the results confirmed the congress and Muslim League as two major political parties. Nationalists in their campaign against radicals used the fact that IFL had received a grant of Rs. 13000/- per month from government during the war as a political weapon.

Roy described the elections as ‘Typical Hitler Election’ which was neither free nor fair, demonstrating the dismal fact that India was moving towards fascism. Despite their crushing defeat RDP was quite optimistic about its future because of its profound confidence in the future of their cause – the establishment of radical democracy. But as the history reveals, Indian situation being what it is, ridden by orthodoxy, illiteracy, fatalism, backwardness, future did not and could not belong to RDP, which soon landed itself in a near disastrous position. Royists for want of experience overestimated their potentialities. They were over enthusiastic; over ambitious and their optimism regarding the future of their party

M.N. Roy, article, Independent India, volume X, Number 12, 24 March 1946, p.133.
was to the point of being unrealistic. That is the reason why the best judges of other people and developments in international situation proved to be poor judges of themselves. RDP was in fact more of an intellectual sect than a revolutionary people’s party with a mass base. Their scientific politics was beyond the understanding of a common man. In a country like India even today after over fifty years of independence, people can be mobilized only on the basis of agitational activities directly connected with the lives of the people. So how to reach the level of the masses or how to practice rational politics in a country where reason plays such an insignificant part in the lives of the people was and still remains the real problem?

The idea of freedom of the human individual has always remained central to Roy’s vision of society. He tried to evaluate every philosophical system in terms of ‘freedom’ granted by it to the individual. He tried to critically evaluate Marxism with a degree of freedom granted as the measure rod. He now interpreted Marxism as essentially a philosophy and the economic doctrines and Roy considered Roy considered political theories associated with it as of secondary importance. He accepted Marxism not as a mere technique or method of bringing about revolution (which interests the ruthless politician) but he accepted it as a system of thought, a philosophy which could provide a sound basis for reconstruction of entire humanity. He came to believe that, “The remaking of the world must be undertaken by philosophers, not ruthless politicians and their theoretical apologists. Otherwise there does not seem to be any guarantee against Marxist social engineering defeating its own end. If politically Marx, in his last analysis, was a Platonist, philosophically he never deviated from humanism.”

Roy accepted Materialist philosophy of Marxism and rejected metaphysical basis of philosophy. He tried to draw the philosophical conclusions of modern science and scientific

---

36 See, M.N. Roy, article, Marxism Way, volume 1, Number 3, 19.
theories and maintains that the verdict of science must be accepted as binding upon philosophy. According to him science precedes philosophy. "The function of philosophy is to explain existence as a whole. An explanation of existence requires knowledge of existence. Knowledge about different phases of existence is gathered by various branches of science. Function of philosophy is to co-ordinate the entire body of scientific knowledge in a comprehensive theory of nature of life. Function of science is to describe, that of philosophy is to explain. Therefore philosophy is called the science of sciences" (Roy 1947:31). Only possible philosophy believes Roy, is materialism, which provides an explanation of all aspects of the world (material world itself being an objective reality) without assuming any supernatural force behind it. He believed in monistic materialism having no room for idealism and dualism. World is conceived of as material substance, a physical entity, largely known and progressively knowable. "existence precedes thought, things, idea; matter; spirit"(Roy 1940: 184) Matter is primary and mind emerged out of matter. Roy was fascinated by Marxism as it deduced the laws of history clearly from materialism. Roy differentiates between materialist philosophy and economic determinism. Two are not synonymous. While being a materialist till the end, he denounced economic determinism, which cannot adequately explain every aspect of social evolution.

As we have seen earlier also Roy attaches importance to dynamics of ideas, which are not merely the reflection of economic infrastructure. Roy does not cease to be a materialist as has been pointed out by his critics by the fact that he attributes an independent existence to ideas. The charge that he becomes a historical idealist as contrasted to his old Marxian position of Historical Materialism is not tenable. What Roy in fact tried to do was as pointed out by Ray, was to balance the economic interpretation with a due recognition of ideational
and individual factors—or to use a term coined by Mannheim, to develop a ‘relational’ perspective of social change (Ray 1946:52).

Dialectics is another fundamental tenant of Marxian philosophy suggesting that class struggle is the lever of all progress. Roy though believing in the theory of class struggle points out that this alone cannot be the means of revolution. He writes, “a class less society will be stagnant, because according to Marxism, class-struggle is the lever of all progress. In a class less society, the dialectics of history will cease to operate; progress will come to a stand still, humanity will die. Marxism—is thus not the philosophy of freedom, but a sentence of death to mankind” (Roy 1947a: 64).

So, according to Roy Dialectics or opposition between classes, struggle etc. represents only one pattern, which in all probability is not the creative pattern. Along with class struggle, Roy began to refer occasionally to the cohesive factors in society and to humanity as a whole. “From an epistemological point of view there are other ways of apprehension, besides the dialectical — while, on the one hand, knowledge can be considered as a conflict of polar opposites tending towards synthetic development in a dialectical way, there is also other dynamic pattern of an infinitude of distinct apprehensions tending towards significant harmonization. This concept of plurality of distinct making various attempts to reach a harmony alone an offer us a proper picture of the process off social evolution — neither Hegel nor Marx properly appreciated the role of distincts as the major lever of progress” (Ray 1946:53), which Roy did. We see that in Roy’s mind the concept of humanity was gradually replacing the concept of class. The cultural progress of man, he emphasized would not have been possible if all cultures were simply class cultures to be replaced in course of time by another class culture. He points out ‘in so far as there is a relation of
identity that class and the entire society, the cultural values produced by it are production of
society as a whole” (Roy 1942:183).

Contrary to Marxian prophecy, the middle class points out Roy, has increased in its
political importance particularly since World War II. It has influenced major events in certain
critical periods. So Roy no longer concedes to the view that middle class represents status
quo. As we have pointed out earlier also Roy conceives of urban middle class as providing
leadership rather than the proletariat. Roy in his interpretation of Marxism emphasized the
element of freedom granted to individual in making of history. Marx believed in the dictum
that man is the root of mankind and wrote “The philosophers have only interpreted the world
on various ways: the point, however, is to change it”. This recognizes the freedom of man to
change his environment. So Roy accepted Marxism in so far as he found it to be progressive,
logical, revolutionary and above all humanistic and in so far as it provides for liberation of
human spirit not only from the vested interests for politico-economic life but also from its
own ideological inadequacies.

As a result of his own personal experience in late 1920s and subsequently the ugly
features of Bolshevik regime during 1930’s and early 40’s when it could not appreciate the
ture nature of rising fascism during inter war period, Roy became increasingly disenchanted
with moral and intellectual soundness of communism as a ideology. He wrote, “Both
Communism and Fascism stand for collectivism. The communist collective ego is the
proletariat a class; and the fascist collective ego is the nation. Both sacrifice the individual on
the altar of the collective ego. It makes no difference whether it is the class or the nation.
When communists establish a national state and become the prophets of patriotism, their
collective ego can hardly be distinguished from that of fascists. In either case it is
totalitarianism. So the dividing line between Fascism and decadent communism is very thin (Roy 1946: 142-143). Practice of orthodox communism in Soviet Union clearly shows how it leads to establishment of a totalitarian regime by denying basic freedom to human individual. Disgusted and disillusioned with the Russian experience where contrary to his expectations, he found that freedom for the common man had become even more remote under the dictatorship of few party officials than in bourgeois democracies, and much of the eastern Europe had been reduced into colonies of the Russian empire. Marxism said Roy had been degenerated into a closed and institutionalized system by its ardent followers and as a result, in actual practice instead of becoming a liberating doctrine it has become an enslaving doctrine defeating its original end. Precisely for this reason Roy abandoned it as it ceased to be an ideal, which could inspire him any longer. For a progressive reconstruction of society 'spirit of freedom' a necessary precondition has neither been reorganized by communism nor by bourgeois democracy (where freedom appears to be illusory) and this is the basic factor of present day crisis and therefore says Roy, "if freedom is the ideal of human life, we must look beyond communism" (Roy 1946:156).

Having rejected nationalism, bourgeois democracy and communism Roy offers a new body of principles, a new model of revolution for restructuring of society towards greater freedom and justice. These principles are contained in his famous 'Twenty Two Theses' or principles of Radical Democracy as he calls them. Roy at Dehradun organized a study camp from 8-15 may 1946, to discuss the ideas he had been forming in his mind. His lectures at this camp were published in December 1946 under the title 'New Orientation'. In these lectures Roy outlined the main features of 'Radicalism' as distinguished from 'Marxism'. Radicalism claimed Roy 'proposes to rescue Marxism from degeneration in orthodoxy' it does 'propose
vision of Marxism', is not 'identical' with it, nor are the two 'mutually exclusive'.\textsuperscript{37} Radicalism as formulated by Roy is against any kind of authoritarianism and is rooted in human urge for freedom and truth. We shall discuss it in details in the next chapter.

After much discussion and debate among Royists\textsuperscript{38} the 'Twenty Two Theses' were adopted at the Bombay congress of RDP in December 1946. The theses represented the principles of a new philosophy called 'New Humanism' and a new humanistic approach to politics, which differed, radically from the 'traditional politics' and its approach to various problems relating to our social existence. RDP however, was never a party anxious to capture power for its own sake. It regarded politics as a social endeavor to change social, economic, political and cultural conditions of existence. Roy time and again emphasized the need to base politics on reason and morality and strongly believed that it can be an instrument of cooperation and radical socio-cultural transformation only if it is rooted in scientific humanism. This is possible only through educating the individuals comprising the political organization in rational and moral conduct.

Humanist outlook of Roy differed from his earlier Marxian outlook in that it reduced the conception of class morality to a fiction and placed man in the center and attributed prime value to human freedom, respect for human personality and humanist values like mutual tolerance, fellowship, cooperation etc transcending class values. All disastrous consequences of politics were believed to be a consequence of divorcing politics from morality and regarding power as an end in itself. This brought his thinking closer to Gandhi whom Roy had criticized consistently and uncompromisingly since 1920. He conceded later that his profound concern for morality in politics and rejection of power politics constituted 'the abiding message of

\textsuperscript{37} Taken from M.N. Roy, New Orientation, 1946.
\textsuperscript{38} Among the prominent Royists who contributed in this camp were Laxman Shastri Joshi, Phillip Sprat, G.D.Purkh, Sib Narayan Ray, V M.Tarkunde, G.R Dalvi and Ellen Roy.
Gandhism. We shall discuss this aspect of Roy with regard to Gandhi at a later stage. Since the Bombay conference in 1946, leading members of RDP were busy propagating the basic philosophical principles of New Humanism both inside and outside the party. In the new way of Revolution suggested in 22 theses, the concept of freedom and democracy were treated not merely as political concepts but were regarded as essentially cultural in value. So one sees the shift in emphasis from political and economic to cultural problems gripping India which called for a Renaissance movement in the country suggested Roy.

The study camp of RDP was held in June 1947 in Dehradun basically to discuss the problems of putting the philosophy of New Humanism in the practice. Here Roy for the first time pronounced the view that the aim of capturing power was inconsistent with the ideal of freedom and that no party striving for power, whatever be the ulterior objectives, can be a means to establishment of a genuine democracy. So radicals who earlier could not conceive of politics without power realized that power and freedom could not go together. They now emphasized the need for a humanist cosmopolitan renaissance movement in the country and the need to create spiritually free men inspired not by lust for power but by will to freedom. Roy wrote, "It is dangerous to identify freedom with power. It is deceptive practice on the part of those who want power not to free the people, but to keep them enslaved, in the gilded chains of national independence, national glory and national greatness. Power is not a liberating factor unless it is widely diffused, so as to be in the possession of all". 39

RDP was for complete decentralization of the state and in 22 theses was contained their ideal of organized or radical democracy. RDP had put forward the program of creating a new state- a people's state in which people's committees were envisaged to function as schools of democracy and to be transformed into instruments of revolution. Power will

---

ultimately belong to people who will wield the power to run their own state, their economy, will guard their own interests and will not look to some savior or God or political party for their salvation. Thus we see RDP gradually abandoned the aim of attaining power and adopted a primarily educative and cultural task. It was realized that political party alone cannot accomplish this task which required a good deal of research and study beyond the capability of an average party worker. For the purpose, Indian Renaissance Institute was established at Dehradun in 1940 with Roy as its founder-director. With emphasis on renaissance work, the nature of work undertaken by RDP also changed. More emphasis was laid on study camps, intellectual debates and discussions, lectures etc. Since the summer camp of 1946 Roy was mainly occupied with development and elaboration of his ideas.

36. Launching of the Radical Humanist Movement 1948

In May 1948, the summer camp was organized by IRI to discuss the various theoretical and practical problems confronted by Radical in the course of development, propagation and application of Radical Humanism. On the basis of their political experience radical realized that political parties were in fact a serious hindrance to carry out the task related to human freedom. For a renaissance movement and democratic revolution a political party was now viewed as an unsuitable instrument and radical democracy as envisaged by their new philosophy was inconsistent with the institution of political parties. An immediate debate arose among radicals regarding the continuation of RDP. It was decided to place the draft statement regarding the dissolution of RDP in the forthcoming conference of RDP in December 1948 in Calcutta. After much discussion the Calcutta conference resolved to dissolve the party and felt that:

The progress and perspective visualized in the philosophy of New Humanism cannot be worked out through the limited instrumentality of a political party.
Politics by the widest stretch of its connotation, cannot comprehend those vital aspects of individual and social life, which are essential constituents of a renaissance movement. Hence the name of the movement must convey its more than political connotation—To convey this comprehensive, flexible and dynamic character of their philosophy and program of work, the life and work of radicals may be best described as The Radical Humanist Movement. Individual radicals and not any organized units shall be constituents of this movement, and these individuals through the work of education, of social renaissance shall build up various cooperative institutions to constitute the center of a moral and creative way of living.  

Thus the party was dissolved at All India Conference of RDP on 29 December 1948 at Calcutta and a comprehensive cultural, political movement to be described as Radical Humanist Movement was launched. A few of the old guards of the party were however unhappy with the decision to dissolve the party. Some attributed the fact of dissolution of the party to their defeat in 1946 and to their incapacity to continue as an effective political party which however was not the case as has been aptly put by Laxman Shastri Joshi who writes, "The decision to dissolve RDP was not born out of defeat, on the contrary it is a decision arising out of a desire for new triumphs on the higher plane of human freedom when the instruments created by man take the form of fetters on his creativity, it is the essence of human wisdom to discard them. The reorganization of RDP does not mean the renunciation of politics. Renunciation is an attitude arising out of total despair. The idea of reorganizing the party on the contrary is born out of the immortal desire to conquer the future".  

References


40 Taken from *Independent India*, 9 January, 1949
41 See Laxman Shastri Joshi, 'From a Party to a Movement', *Independent India*, 9 January 1949.
Bose, Subhash Chandra (1952), The Indian Struggle, 1935-42, Calcutta.


Rai, Lajpat (1965), Autobiographical Writings (edited by V.C. Joshi), Delhi and Jullander: Private publishers.


