



THE IDEOLOGY OF RADICAL HUMANISM: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF M. N. ROY

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



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DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.70096/tssr.260403047>

Abstract

This article examines the philosophical foundation, historical evolution, and socio-political implications of M. N. Roy's Radical Humanism, a distinctive intellectual contribution to Modern Indian political thought. Emerging from Roy's long ideological journey, from revolutionary nationalism to Marxism, then Communism, and finally to a scientific, ethical, and individual-centred worldview-Radical Humanism stands as a critique of both liberal democracy and authoritarian communism. This analytical study explores the key ideas of Radical Humanism, including individual freedom, rationalism, scientific temper, ethical politics, and humanist socialism. It evaluates the philosophical foundations of the ideology, its implications for democracy and social reconstruction, its relevance to contemporary Indian society, and critical responses from scholars. The study concludes that although Radical Humanism did not evolve into a mass political movement, it remains an important normative guide for democratic culture, ethical politics, and human emancipation. His Radical Humanism continues to be relevant as it addresses ongoing challenges in society, such as the struggle for individual rights, social equity, and the importance of rational dialogue in political and philosophical discussions. This ideology offers a compelling framework for understanding the interplay between individual progress and social progress.

Keywords: *ideology, morality, rationalism, humanism, democracy, communism, parliamentary democracy, human solidarity, secularism, development, emancipation*

Introduction

Manabendra Nath Roy (1887–1954), popularly known as M. N. Roy, occupies a unique place in the history of modern political thought. A revolutionary nationalist, an international communist leader, a Marxist theorist, and finally a philosopher of Radical Humanism, Roy traversed multiple ideological terrains throughout his life (Aich, 2019; Dasgupta, 2010). Among his intellectual legacies, Radical Humanism represents the most mature stage of his thought—an attempt to develop a scientific, rational, and ethical philosophy that places individual freedom and human dignity at its centre.

Radical Humanism emerged during the 1940s in the backdrop of global events such as the failure of fascism, the crisis of capitalism, the degeneration of communism, and the moral bankruptcy of colonialism (Roy, 1947). Roy argued that neither parliamentary democracy nor communist dictatorship could ensure human freedom, creativity, or moral development. Instead, he proposed a “radical” humanism, grounded in scientific reasoning, ethical autonomy, decentralized democracy, and human solidarity.

Significance of the Study

M.N. Roy's Radical Humanism is based on both a materialistic and a spiritual perspective. His materialism is grounded in a scientific approach. His spiritualism has nothing to do with religion. Human's rationality, according to M N Roy, is derived from natural reason, and human's moral awareness is derived from his rationality. Religious Supernaturalism is categorically discarded by M N Roy. After a detailed examination of Marxism's practical failures around the world, Roy lost faith in Marxism in his later years. Roy's radical humanism is an attempt to realize an ultimate solution to the world's fundamental problems. When Marxism's influence was waning, M N Roy was hailed as a precursor and brilliant visionary by people.

M N Roy began to re-examine communist perspective as a result of this, despite having previously adopted Communism as his philosophy. He could not agree with them because of the way Communism had taken root in Russia. He discovered that it was a tyrannical and slave like system. Stalin had completely discarded the moral leadership of Russia's progressive Armed forces. He did not hold any leaders responsible for Communism's deception. Roy sought to comprehend the origins of the Communist

Theory that Stalin and his leaders used to direct their actions. Finally, M.N. Roy discovered Communism's disrespect for man as an individual. "Man had been reduced to a powerless pawn in the hands of blind economic forces, as well as a minor component of a class's larger collectivism. Both independence and sovereignty were denied to him (Karnik, 1978)." He understood that neither Capitalism nor Communism could give a solution to man's trouble.

The objectives of this study

1. To provide a comprehensive analytical study of Radical Humanism by examining:
2. To evaluate the historical context of Roy's intellectual evolution
3. To know the Philosophical foundations of Radical Humanism,
4. To understand Key principles and components of the ideology,
5. To know Roy's critique of Marxism and liberal democracy,

By exploring these dimensions, this study aims to show why Radical Humanism remains a relevant intellectual framework for a democratic society with deep respect to the human values.

Methodology of the study

The study is mainly historical study with analytical in nature. The historical importance of this thought has been analysed through intensive study. The secondary data has been used to discover the facts of the study. Many books article journal newspaper government documents have been reviewed to complete this study. This article is mainly analytical and evaluative in nature. The data of the study has been collected from several primary and secondary data like books, journal, newspaper, govt, documents etc.

Historical Background

M. N. Roy's Intellectual Evolution-Understanding Radical Humanism requires tracing Roy's ideological journey, which unfolded in four major phases:

1. Revolutionary Nationalism (1905–1915): Born in Bengal during colonial rule, Roy was initially involved in anti-British revolutionary activities, particularly through organizations such as the Jugantar Party (Bandyopadhyay, 2004). His early political experiences shaped his sensitivity toward oppression and injustice.

2. Marxism and International Communism (1915–1929): Escaping British surveillance, Roy travelled through Japan, China, the United States, and Mexico. In Mexico, he co-founded the Mexican Communist Party, becoming the first Indian communist leader to gain international prominence (Sen, 2015). Later, Roy joined the Communist International (Comintern) and contributed to debates on colonialism, nationalism, and revolution. However, his disagreements with Lenin and Stalin on issues like colonial strategy and party authoritarianism led to his eventual exit from the Comintern.

3. Revision of Marxism (1930–1940): During his imprisonment in India (1931–1936), Roy undertook a critical re-evaluation of Marxism. He became convinced that:

- a) Marxism exaggerated the role of economic determinism
- b) Class struggle alone could not explain human behaviour
- c) Party dictatorship leads to tyranny
- d) Human freedom cannot be guaranteed by centralized power
- e) His prison writings reflect his transition from Marxist materialism to a broader scientific humanism.

4. Radical Humanism (1940–1954): After release, M.N. Roy formulated Radical Humanism as a political and ethical philosophy. He founded the Radical Democratic Party (RDP) in 1940 and later the Indian Renaissance Institute. Radical Humanism became his final philosophical legacy.

M N Roy had wide-ranging experience in Europe and had realized the political and economic flaws of parliamentary democracy. As a remedy for Europe's parliamentary democracy's drawbacks, communism supported a proletariat dictatorship and centralized arrangement. Under the tyranny of the party leader, Communism considered man a slave to the state. Instead of the proletariat's dictatorship, Russia was subjected to Stalin's totalitarianism. As a result, he considered looking beyond Communism and established a school of thought that would ensure human's total development and independence within political and economic institutions. As a remedy to the dilemma, M N Roy suggested organized democracy and a cooperative economy. Both organized democracy and co-operative economy should have a theoretical foundation for this. Radical Humanism, Roy's newly constructed philosophy, has the potential to establish the foundation for building democratic system and a cooperative economy (Roy, 1984).

He moved away from orthodox Marxism and developed a philosophy, called "Radical Humanism." Roy rejected the dogmatism of both communism and capitalism, advocating instead for a rational, human-related approach to politics and society. Radical Humanism emphasized individual independence, democracy, and the importance of scientific analysis in addressing social problems. He founded the Indian Renaissance Institute and the Radical Humanist Movement to promote his perspectives, which continue to motivate progressive thought in Indian people.

Philosophical Foundations of Radical Humanism

Radical Humanism is grounded in a combination of scientific rationality, materialist philosophy, ethical autonomy, and humanist values.

1. Scientific Humanism: Radical Humanism rejects supernatural explanations and emphasizes understanding the world through science, critical thinking, and empirical inquiry (Roy, 1944). Roy believed that human beings, as intelligent biological organisms, have the capacity to control their environment and build a rational society.

2. Ethical Naturalism: Human Morality is not rooted in religion or spiritualism, but in rationale. Roy advocated that “Man is moral because he is rational.” An ethical society is one where persons treat each other with mutual admiration based on this rational perceptive. M.N. Roy argued that morality does not come from religion or divine authority; rather, it emerges from human experience, social cooperation, and the need for collective survival (Mukherjee, 2011). This forms the basis of his ethics.

3. Superiority of the Individual: Unlike Marxism, which prioritizes class, or liberalism, which often prioritizes the market, Radical Humanism prioritizes the autonomous individual. Freedom, creativity, and dignity of the individual remain at the core of Roy’s philosophy (Chattopadhyay, 2017).

4. Freedom as Ethical and Political Goal: Roy believed that freedom is not merely the absence of restraint but a positive capacity for self-development. A free society must encourage critical thinking, scientific temper, and social responsibility. Freedom is defined as the progressive and unrestricted development of the individual’s potential. He considered freedom the supreme human worth, taking precedence over the joint goals of the nation.

5. Rationality and Scientific Temper: A key component of Radical Humanism is the promotion of scientific temper, which Roy viewed as essential for overcoming superstition, bigotry, castes, and authoritarianism. He argued that humans are innately rational, and this rationality originates from our biological struggle for continued existence. Reason allows humans to rule themselves and continuously improve society through science and modern facts. According to M.N. Roy, reason is a biological capacity in man because he is a natural living being. As a result, man is rational. Because man is logical, Roy deduces that he is moral. Roy believes that what is rational is moral and that what is reasonable is moral. His search for rationalistic humanism ethics based on materialism and morality arises as an answer to man's need for social peace and good social accommodation. (Ahamed, 2022)

Core Principles of Radical Humanism

The ideology developed by M. N. Roy can be summarized through several interconnected principles:

1. Radical Democracy: Radical Humanism advocates a form of democracy that is more participatory, decentralized, and ethically grounded than parliamentary democracy. Roy criticized parliamentary politics for corruption, factionalism, and manipulation by elites (Roy, 1950). He argued for: a) Local people's committees b) Direct citizen participation c) Decentralized political power d) Ethical leadership. This makes Radical Humanism a precursor to later theories of participatory democracy. Roy says “Economic liberation of the masses is an essential condition for their advancing towards the goal of freedom.” Without economic liberty and justice, all kind of rights are meaningless in real.

2. Ethical Politics: M.N. Roy insisted that politics should not be a struggle for power and position but a means to promote human welfare for the all round development of the country. Ethical politics must reject blaming, manipulations, violence, authoritarianism, exploitation, and corruption. Roy links morality with human beings, he realize human beings are moral because they are rational

3. Social Reconstruction through Education: M.N. Roy gave special emphasis to scientific, secular, and humanist education, believing that social transformation is impossible without intellectual transformation (Sarkar, 2018). ‘One nation, One education system’ that can give a strong foundation to fulfil desired human resource for our country.

4. Democratic Humanist Socialism: Although Roy rejected Marxist socialism, he supported a cooperative, democratic, and human-centred form of socialism, where production serves human needs rather than profit or state power.

5. Secularism and Universalism: Radical Humanism rejects religious orthodoxy, caste discrimination, and cultural chauvinism. Roy emphasized the universal nature of human rights and solidarity across national boundaries. Dogmatic religious culture and beliefs destroy to accept the conscious and rational steps to progress the overall development of an individual.

6. New Humanism: M.N Roy s New Humanism is a huge contribution to the history of political science .He thinks that modern crisis needed new orientation of human thinking, particularly in politics. New humanism is a philosophy of individual freedom based on reason and science, a rejection of party politics in favour of local democracy and a belief that moral revolution is necessary for social progress. To stop compulsive pattern of a man, we need to be conscious and critical thinker promoting human values to know the issues of the socio-economic and political aspects.

M.N. Roy's Critique of Marxism

M.N. Roy's shift from Marxism to Radical Humanism was shaped by a deep intellectual critique. Roy was a revolutionary; he was influenced by Marxism when he was in U.S.A. after some time he was criticized as a revolutionist... with time Roy became a critic of Marxism.

1. **Economic Determinism:**-Roy argued that Marxism's overemphasis on economic factors oversimplifies human motivations and reduces individuals to passive carriers of class interests (Roy, 1936).
2. **Dictatorship of the Proletariat:**-Roy opposed the idea of a vanguard party or dictatorship of the proletariat, arguing that it inevitably leads to bureaucratic tyranny rather than liberation (Bhattacharya, 1998).
3. **Failure of Soviet Communism:**-Roy viewed Stalinism as proof that centralized power cannot guarantee human freedom. He believed Soviet Communism betrayed the ideals of Marx and created an oppressive state.
4. **Ignoring Ethical Values:**-Marx's dismissal of ethics as bourgeois ideology made Marxism unable to address moral questions, according to Roy. Radical Humanism reinstates ethics as central to political life.

M.N. Roy's Critique of Liberal Democracy

M.N. Roy was equally critical of liberal democracy.

1. **Parliamentary Politics as Machine Politics:** Roy argued that parliamentary democracy is dominated by wealthy elites, political parties, and interest groups, which marginalizes ordinary citizens (Roy, 1947). It focuses on the systems and policies irrespective of human issues and values with deep negligence.
2. **Formal, Not Real, Freedom:** Liberal democracy guarantees political rights but fails to ensure social and economic justice. All kinds of discriminations, oppressions, and exploitations happen in this system without remedial policy.
3. **Mass Illiteracy and Social Backwardness:** In countries like India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, structural inequalities prevent meaningful democratic participation. Most of the people suffer from acute poverty and illiteracy. They cannot develop their skills and awareness to earn money to cost their economic burden.

Political Programme of Radical Humanism

M.N. Roy developed a concrete political programme based on Radical Humanism.

1. **Radical Democratic Party (1940–1948):** The RDP sought to implement democratic and ethical politics but dissolved when Roy felt that political parties inherently promoted corruption and power politics.
2. **People's Committees and Decentralization:** Roy proposed creating local committees for direct participation in governance. This anticipated later models of grassroots democracy, such as Panchayati Raj reforms.
3. **New Humanist Education:** Roy believed that scientific and rational education was essential for rebuilding Indian society. He emphasized: a) Critical thinking b) Secular values c) Scientific knowledge d) Humanist ethics
4. **Moral and Cultural Reconstruction:** Radical Humanism called for: Abolition of caste, Gender equality, Religious tolerance, Promotion of scientific culture among all to radically change the attitude of the society. Because we cannot develop human quality without progressive and rational attitude of an individual in society.

Relevance of Radical Humanism Today

Although Radical Humanism did not become a major political movement, its ideas remain highly relevant.

- **Crisis of Democracy:** Modern democracies struggle with corruption, polarization, authoritarian tendencies, and decline of ethical values. Roy's emphasis on ethical politics and participatory democracy offers valuable alternatives.
- **Rise of Extremism and Intolerance:** Radical Humanism's commitment to reason, secularism, and universal humanism serves as a counterweight to communalism and extremism.
- **Challenges of Social Inequality:** Roy's critique of capitalism and call for human-centred socialism address contemporary concerns about inequality, exploitation, and economic injustice.
- **Need for Scientific Temper:** In times of misinformation and pseudoscience, Roy's insistence on scientific temper is crucial for rational public discourse.
- **Global Human Rights:** Radical Humanism aligns strongly with modern human rights frameworks, especially its emphasis on individual dignity and freedom with justice.

Criticisms of Radical Humanism

Several scholars have raised critiques:

1. **Overemphasis on Rationality:** Critics argue that Roy's belief in universal rationality may ignore emotional, cultural, and historical dimensions of social life (Nandy, 1994).
2. **Lack of Mass Appeal:** Radical Humanism's intellectual nature made it inaccessible to the masses. It remained mostly confined to educated elite.
3. **Idealism over Practicality:** Roy's vision of party-less democracy is criticized as impractical in large and complex societies.
4. **Neglect of Economic Structures:** Some Marxist scholars argue that Roy underestimates the role of economic power and class exploitation.

Conclusion

M.N. Roy's idea of Radical Humanism represents one of the most original contributions to Indian political thought. Rooted in scientific rationality, ethical naturalism, and human freedom, it offers a compelling critique of both Marxist authoritarianism and liberal parliamentary democracy. Roy's emphasis on ethical politics, participatory democracy, human dignity, and scientific temper provides an enduring framework for addressing contemporary socio-political challenges.

Although Radical Humanism failed as a mass movement, its philosophical significance remains profound. It continues to inspire debates on democracy, human rights, secularism, and ethical governance. In a world marked by rising authoritarianism, inequality, and intolerance, Roy's Radical Humanism serves as a guiding light toward a more rational, humane, and democratic society.

Manabendra Nath Roy's Radical Humanism is a human-centric political way of life that places individual liberty, rationality, and moral activity at the centre of the Indian society. Developing from his disappointment with dogmatic Marxism and Authoritarian Communism, his concept of Radical Humanism asserts that the ultimate goal of any sophisticated society is the spiritual and material emancipation of an individual (Karnik, 1978).

Acknowledgment: No

Author's Contribution: *Dr. Paritosh Barman:* Data Collection, Literature Review, Methodology, Analysis, Drafting, Referencing

Funding: No

Declaration: The author has given consent for the publication.

Competing Interest: No

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