

## A TRUE INDIAN NATIONALIST: A STUDY OF MANABENDRA NATH ROY

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### ABSTRACT

M. N. Roy (1887-1954), born Narendranath Bhattacharyya was an Indian revolutionary, communist revolutionary, Marxist, radical activist, political theorist and a philosopher in 20th century. In evolving the social philosophy of Radical Humanism, he considers himself as a humanist and not a completely Marxist, he integrated Radicalism with scientific humanism or New Humanism (Karnik: 1978; Roy: 1979; Sharma: 1965; Ray: 1998). He started his political career in the first decade of the twentieth century. He was an anti-colonial icon for a brief period in his life. Roy was deeply inspired by the writings of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya and Swami Vivekananda and also greatly influenced by V. D. Savarkar and his idea of Indian independence. M. N. Roy was a star in the mid-century internationalist firmament: writing a treatise alongside Lenin, plotting communist revolutions across continents and collaborating closely with some of the most iconic intellectuals of Europe and India. In his entire life, he transformed himself into three phases: revolutionary nationalist – Marxist – radical humanist. This paper will make an attempt to show M. N. Roy as a true Indian nationalist.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

As an idea, nationalism was developed during the nineteenth century. Nationalism provides foundation for the love of one's nation. This feeling is based on the shared history and mutual purpose for the future, which stand on solidarity and feeling of unity in a certain group. Nationalism was highly developed after the First World War. A better and clearer understanding of nationalism was increased during the end of European colonialism after the Second World War. In this time, nationalism became one of the most important driving forces of anti-colonialism movement in various parts of the world. A nationalist is a person who loves his or her country. What can he or she do for his or her country? M. N. Roy is such a person who possesses the characteristics of nationalism. He sacrificed his life for freedom of India and his various activities to the Indian national movement will be remembered for future generations forever. That is why, M. N. Roy is considered as a true Indian nationalist.

### 2. M. N. ROY AND NATIONALISM

Manabendra Nath Roy, popularly known as M. N. Roy, was a revolutionary nationalist of colonial India. He also realized as belonging to the same conversation as nationalist thinkers such as Aurobindo Ghosh, Rabindranath Tagore, Subhash Chandra Bose that solidarity can bring autonomy and freedom of India. All of them contemplated the requirements and possibilities of anti-colonial cosmopolitanism in India. As these thinkers articulated visions of difference and cultural autonomy, they also simultaneously imagined new circuits for travelling beyond the limits of group identity toward larger solidarities. Imagining the self beyond local or familiar bounds was deeply rooted in anti-colonial thought. Roy also wanted to build an anti-colonial network, colonial universal time and solidarity with European and American nations through culture, religion and various writings to overthrow the colonial imperial rule from all over the world.

M. N. Roy was born on 21 March 1887, at Arbalia, a village in 24 parganas district in Bengal, his early name was Narendra Nath Bhattacharjee and was known in this name till 1916. Though he adopted different names such as C Martin, Hari Sing, Mr White, D Garcia, Dr Mahmood, Mr Banerjee etc at different times in conducting revolutionary activities, he was known as Manabendra Nath Roy (M. N. Roy), the name he adopted at San Francisco to evade arrest. Manabendra Nath Roy's father Dinabandhu Bhattacharjee was a Sanskrit teacher in a minor English school in Arbelia village of 24 Parganas of West Bengal. His mother's name was Basanta Kumari.

Towards the end of the 19th century revolutionary nationalism began to spread among the educated middle classes of Bengal, inspired by the writings of Bankim and Vivekananda. Deeply inspiring by the writings of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya and Swami Vivekananda, M. N. Roy began his political carrier as a militant nationalist at the age of 14, when he was still student. He came in contact with the underground organization called *Anushilan samiti*, which had been formed in 1902 and when it was banned, he helped in organizing *Jugantar Group* under the leadership of Jatin Mukherji. He was actually a self-taught person. At this time, with his underground group, he experimented in bomb making and practised shooting in the Sundarbans. The group collected money by robbery for revolutionary purposes. After partition of Bengal in 1905, in December 1907 Bengal witnessed the first incident of political robbery at Chingripota under Roy's leadership, followed by more such acts, leading to his first arrest in 1909 (Mukhopadhyay: 2015). Naren and his group were involved in underground activities in Howrah-Sibpur area and were arrested in 1910

to face the 'Howrah-Sibpur Conspiracy Case, 1910-11'. During the trial period that lasted for more than a year, Jatin and Naren, in confinement, planned to arrange armed insurrection all over India. On release, Naren travelled in the garb of a sanyasi until 1914. The revolutionary organizations were extended to Far East, West America, and Germany where Indian revolutionary committees were formed.

They approached the German government for help and, at the outbreak of the First World War, an emissary from Berlin came to Calcutta and assured them of German military and financial help. Accordingly, Naren, under the pseudonym of Charles Martin, was sent to Batavia to negotiate the deal with the German Consul General in 1915. It was arranged that a shipment of arms and ammunition would be delivered in the Sundarban area. Naren took Jatin to Balasore to keep him in hiding. However, the cargo did not arrive. Naren went back to Batavia, this time under the name of Hari Sing, and found the German diplomats non-cooperating. He resolved not to return to India without arms. So, he pursued his mission by contacting the revolutionaries in Malaysia, Indonesia, Indo-China, the Philippines, Korea and Japan.

Naren went to Japan as Mr White to meet Rashbehari Bose in Tokyo. There he met the exiled Chinese President Dr Sun Yat-Sen. It was arranged with him that Naren would receive ammunitions from two Chinese governors near the Assam border on payment of a sum to be paid by Germany. He went to China and the German Ambassador in Peking decided to send Naren to Berlin to sign the contract with German authority. He arranged a passport for Naren showing him as Father Charles Martin who would go to France via USA to study theology in Notre Dame University.

Naren arrived in San Francisco on 14 June 1916. Next morning newspapers carried the news in banner headline 'a dangerous Hindu revolutionary, German spy, lands in USA'. Naren quickly left his hotel and went to Stanford University to meet Professor Dhanagopal Mukherjee, the younger brother of a co-revolutionary, who changed Naren's name to Manabendra Nath Roy. Dhanagopal introduced him as Manabendra Nath Roy to Dr David Jordan, the progressive minded President of the University. In Dr Jordan's house, Roy met Evelyn Trent whom he later married in New York where Roys took shelter in the house of Lala Lajpat Rai. There he met American 'slackers' and studied Marxism in the New York Public Library.

USA declared war against Germany in April 1917, and the police began to round up Indian revolutionaries in USA as German spies. To escape arrest Roy fled to Mexico with an introductory letter from Dr Jordan. Through Dr Jordan's letter, Roy got the opportunity to be introduced to the War Minister and the President of the Republic who arranged to make Roy's acquainted with the top ranking officials and leading intelligentsia of Mexico. The President assured him safety and provided a respectable residence.'

Roy delivered series of lectures and published articles on India and Monro Doctrine that created sensation. During this time, he learnt Spanish, French and German. In the anti-US stand of the President, Roy became his non-official advisor. By August 1918, he organised Socialist Party Conference in a grand style. During this time, many American slackers (journalists, artists, poets, scientists and philosophers) fled to Mexico to avoid conscription. President Carranza was delighted at Roy's popularity. Roy was virtually in power by proxy, so much so that the President asked him to nominate a labour minister as the representative of the socialist party.

Meanwhile, Michael Borodin, an emissary of Lenin, was sent to the Americas. He contacted Roy who introduced him to the Mexican President. This resulted in the diplomatic relations between Mexico and the USSR. Consequently, Borodin could communicate with Moscow and briefed Lenin, in detail, about the activities of Roy. Lenin invited Roy to participate in the Second World Congress of the Communist International (CI), to be held in Moscow during July-August 1920. Roy reached Berlin on his way to Moscow and during his stay in Berlin he gained valuable experience, particularly about the conflicts within the ideology of Marxism. He saw the defeat of German Communist Party and the rise of militarism.

In Moscow, Roy met Lenin and disagreed with his point of view in his thesis titled, 'On National and Colonial Question'. Lenin asked him to write his own thesis. Both the theses were debated intensively and presented to the Congress. The Congress accepted both the theses. After the Congress Session was over, Roy was placed in charge of Asian bureau of CI, with headquarters at Tashkent. He drove out British contingents from Masha of Khorashan in Iran by guerilla warfare. He established Bokhara Soviet through a bloodless revolution. He rehabilitated Indian Mohajerin of the KHILAFAT MOVEMENT, converted the educated section to Communism and established schools. Communist Party of India was formed in Tashkent on 17 October 1920.

Roy joined Third World Congress of CI in August 1921. CI published his India in Transition in four languages in 1922. He founded Toiler's University in Moscow. He shifted his headquarter to Berlin in 1923 and started a pen-revolution for India. He published periodicals titled The Vanguard of Indian Independence and sent copies to India

which the Indian government immediately banned. He published it under a different title Advanced Guard which also was banned. Next, he published The Masses, which also suffered the same fate.

During the lifetime of Lenin, Roy attained all the top positions of the CI. This was maintained for three years after Lenin's death in 1924. As a joint-secretary of Chinese Commission of CI he was sent to China to settle a dispute between the Communists and Kuo Minh Tung. Roy had differences of opinion with Borodin and the Chinese Communist party in settling the dispute. Ultimately, Chiang Kai Shek ruthlessly suppressed the Communist movement. On his return to Moscow, Roy fell ill and was taken to Berlin for treatment. In December 1929, in his absence, he was placed outside CI, for contributing to Communist Opposition Newspaper. While in Berlin, he wrote Revolution and Counter-Revolution in China and Decline and Fall of British Empire in German.

M. N. Roy came to India in 1930 as Dr Mahmud. He was captured in July 1931 in Bombay, tried in Kanpur Jail on the charge of sedition and sentenced to transportation for 12 years, which, on appeal, was reduced to 6 years hard labour in jail. During the period from 1932 to 1936, he compiled a monumental volume under the title Philosophical Consequences of Modern Science in several volumes. The following books were published during 1937 to 1945 from his jail volumes under the titles: Materialism, The Historical Role of Islam, Heresies of 20th Century, Science and Superstition, Man and Nature, From Savagery to Civilization, Nationalism: An Antiquated Cult, The Philosophy of Fascism, The Ideal of Indian Womanhood, Letters from Jail, Memoir of a Cat, Science and Philosophy and India's Message.

On his release in November 1936, Roy joined the Indian National Congress and organised the league of Radical Congressman. He supported Subhash Chandra Bose to become the President of INC. His differences on war policy with the Congress High Command made him and his followers resign from Congress and form the Radical Democratic Party. He supported the Allied Powers in World War II and vigorously supported war efforts because he considered declining imperialism a lesser evil to Fascism, which to him was a menace to mankind.

M. N. Roy wrote several books between 1940 and 1946: India and War, Alphabet of Fascist Economy, Draft Constitution of Free India, People's Freedom, Poverty or Plenty, The Problems of Freedom, INA and the August Revolution, Jawaharlal Nehru: The Last Battle for Freedom. He conducted study camps at Dehradun in 1940 and wrote The Scientific Politics. In 1946, after another study camp, he wrote New Orientation. He advocated election to be held on non-party basis to form Constituent Assembly, which would frame the constitution of Independent India on a federal basis and recognise the rights of the minority communities and the regions. He advocated complete decentralisation of power and the prevention of corruption.

In 1947, Roy critically analysed the events of USSR since 1917, in his monumental volume named The Russian Revolution. In 1948, he revised Marxism in his two books Beyond Marxism and New Humanism.

In 1948, he abolished Radical Democratic Party and founded Radical Humanist Association. He founded Indian Renaissance Institute and edited the quarterly journal The Humanist Way which was originally named as The Marxian Way. He wrote another significant book titled Reason, Romanticism and Revolution. He attempted to write his memoirs that he could not complete.

Roy succumbed to a severe attack of coronary thrombosis at midnight of 24-25 January 1954 in Dehradun. He married Ellen Gottsechalk in 1937 after his first wife Evelyn had left him in 1925. He had no children. The Amrita Bazaar Patrika depicted him as the 'lonely lion who roamed about the world'.

### 3. CONCLUSION

To sum up, Roy did whatever in his life was for India's freedom and nationalism. His revolutionary and political activities to the Indian national movement brought together Indian people. We have seen two different phases of Roy's political life- revolutionary nationalist and Marxist. In these two phases, Roy instigated the idea of nationalism on the one hand and wanted to spread the idea of Marxism on other hand throughout the world to liberate India. While Roy was traveling abroad to collect money and arms to overthrow the British rule from India, his writing various books, journals and news papers inspired people to unite against the colonial power all over the world. He loved India very much. He dedicated his whole life for freedom of India and freedom of human beings. So, Roy was a true Indian nationalist whose contribution to the Indian nationalism is unforgettable to us till date.

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