

NEW HUMANISM OF M. N. ROY: A POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:

This paper attempts to critically evaluate the concept of humanism of M. N. Roy from the point of view of post-colonialism. He tries to emphasize individualism more than society. Roy's conception of New Humanism basically upholds individual freedom based on reason and morality. His new humanism has two aspects: the critical and the constructive aspects. The critical aspect highlights the inadequacies of communism and the formal parliamentary democracy. The constructive aspect gives priority to the freedom of individuals, presenting a humanist interpretation of history, and outlining a picture of radical or organized democracy along with the way for achieving the ideal of radical democracy. The elements of postcolonialism that are found in his writings are decentralization of power in the political as well as economic realm but he has infused both the Indian and the colonial ideology in his new humanism to bring out 'renaissance' in India. There is a lot of emphasis on patriotism. Thus this paper traces out the reimagining of humanism by M. N. Roy from the postcolonial perspective.

Keywords: *New Humanism, Colonialism, Postcolonialism and Radical Democracy.*

Introduction

“New Humanism” of M N Roy is basically a conception of individual freedom based on reason and morality. His new humanism is comprised of the critical as well as the constructive aspect. The critical aspect highlights the inadequacies of communism and the formal parliamentary democracy of the west. The constructive aspect emphasizes on the individual freedom, at the same time attempts to present a humanist interpretation of history, outlining a picture of radical humanism and shows the paths to achieve the ideal of radical democracy.

M. N. Roy is one of the prominent Indian philosophers of twentieth century and a leading humanist of modern India. His political career began as a militant nationalist. Then he went on to become a communist of international rank. Finally he propounded his own philosophy known as new humanism or radical humanism. *According to him, a new humanism is renaissance rationalist humanism which is essential for realization of democracy.*

According to Roy, philosophy is the theory of life and it is supposed to solve the riddle of the Universe. He further goes on to state that philosophy was born of the efforts of man to explain nature and to understand his own being in relation to its surroundings. Therefore philosophy is to solve the actual problems of life in the light of past experience, so that the solution will give us an encouraging glimpse into the future. He envisaged that the need of the hour is a philosophy of freedom. *He was convinced that a philosophical revolution must be for any social revolution.* The salient feature of his new philosophy is that it must be a guide for all forms of human action abided by ethics. He also gives an important place to ethics in his philosophy. His cardinal virtue of his philosophy is that man is the maker of his destiny. According to Roy, no philosophical advancement is possible unless we get rid of orthodox religious ideas and theological dogmas. Therefore he has made a clear distinction between philosophy and religion in his thought. On the other hand, he has envisaged a very close relationship between philosophy and science.

The paper makes an attempt to critically evaluate the concept of humanism of M N Roy through tracing back the humanistic tradition from the time of renaissance. It further tries to highlight the elements

of postcolonialism that are found in his writings. Thus this paper traces out the reimagining of humanism by M. N. Roy from the postcolonial perspective.

Meaning of Humanism

The connotation of the term 'humanism' has been undergoing various changes from the time the term is coined. The central idea of humanism is to affirm that human beings have the right and responsibility to give meaning and shape to their own lives. Humanism intends to build a humane society through an ethics based on human and other natural values in a spirit of reason and free inquiry through human capabilities. Therefore it has a democratic and ethical orientation towards life.

Humanism is an attitude of thought in which human being is given primary importance. It was so vivid from the time of renaissance movement of the west, though the attitude has been prevalent in some of the early philosophical traditions too. Renaissance humanism was a reaction against the religious authoritarianism of medieval Catholic Church. It emphasized human dignity, beauty and potential. It had affected every aspect of culture in Europe including philosophy, music, art and literature. There was an emphasis on the value. It led to the protestant reformation movement in Europe. Finally it had brought about social and political change in the west. The age of enlightenment is said to be second round of revival of humanism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a reaction against the newly prevalent dogmatic authoritarianism of Lutheranism, Calvinism, Anglicanism and the counter-reformation. In the last two centuries, various elements of enlightenment humanism have been manifested in philosophical trends such as Existentialism, Pragmatism and Marxism.

Modern humanism is also known as “naturalistic humanism”, “scientific humanism”, “ethical humanism”, and “democratic humanism”. One of its leading proponents, Corliss Lamont had defined it as a naturalistic philosophy that rejects all supernaturalism and relies primarily upon reason and science, democracy and human compassion. Modern humanism has both secular and religious in its connotation.

Understanding Postcolonialism

Postcolonialism was evolved as an intellectual movement in the 1990s. Postcolonialism comprises of a wide variety of approaches. Therefore theoreticians may not always agree on a common set of definitions. But the basic assumption was that the colonial rulers are unreliable narrators. Hence, “*postcolonialism*” was termed after postmodernism. *Postcolonialism* is referred as a reaction to or departure from colonialism in the same way as postmodernism a reaction to modernism. The term *colonialism* may be referred either to a system of government or to an ideology underlying that system of government. Therefore postcolonialism as a reaction to colonialism represent an ideology which is nothing but a response to colonialism. In other words, the term 'postcolonialism' refers broadly to the ways in which the race, ethnicity, culture and human identity are represented in the modern era especially after many colonized countries gained their independence.

Postcolonialism also deals with such as those of slavery, migration, suppression and resistance, discrimination based on race, gender, place and analysis of the responses to the discourses of imperial Europe, such as history, philosophy, anthropology and linguistics. However the term is construed, there is as much focus on the discourse and ideology of colonialism as on the material effects of colonial subjugation. Because it has its source in past and continuing oppression, postcolonialism furthermore has affinities with multicultural, feminist, and gay and lesbian studies.

To sum it up, the term “*postcolonialism*” represents an ideology which is a reaction to colonialism. It tries to eradicate any universalism as universal standard of measurement that would promote Eurocentric values. It is concerned with economic, political and cultural inequalities that are prevalent due to colonialism. Therefore it examines the social and political power relationships. Broadly, it refers to the ways in which the race, ethnicity, culture and human identity are represented in the modern era especially after many colonized countries gained their independence.

Basic Tenets of New Humanism

Roy has changed his view from radical humanism to “new humanism”. Roy's radical Humanism is not simply a relation against Stalin's interpretation of Marx but instead it represents his vision of freedom and well-being. As he says, radical humanism is a philosophy of freedom based on modern scientific knowledge. It aimed at infusing and reviving ethical or moral outlook in the man. But he craves for “New Humanism” based upon natural reason and secular conscience.

Philosophy of Roy has an important social and political component in his new humanism. He emphasizes on freedom of will and morality. Hence his conception of new humanism was basically a constructed of individual freedom based on reason and morality. New humanism was to be a tool for social progress. Further, he observes as the quest for freedom is the continuation of biological struggle for existence at both the emotional as well as cognitional level.

His new humanism has both a critical and a constructive aspect. The critical aspect consists of describing the inadequacies of communism including the economic interpretation of history and of formal parliamentary democracy. On the other hand, the constructive part pays highest value to the freedom of individuals, presenting a humanist interpretation of history, and outlining a picture of radical or organized democracy along with the way for achieving that ideal.

According to Roy, freedom does not necessarily follow from the capture of political power in the name of the oppressed and the exploited classes and abolition of private property in the means of production. For Roy, creating a new world of freedom revolution must go beyond an economic reorganization of society. Therefore in his opinion, communism is inadequate.

Roy has discussed the shortcomings of formal parliamentary democracy in his twelfth and thirteenth theses. According to Roy, the individual citizens are powerless for all practical purposes and for most of the time. They have no means to exercise their sovereignty and to wield a standing control of the state machinery. These flaws are outcome of the delegation of power. Therefore he holds that the power must always remain vested in the people to make democracy effective and there must be ways and means for the people to wield the sovereign power effectively not periodically but from day to day. Therefore he proposes his ideal radical democracy.

Ideal of Radical Democracy

Roy holds that the individual citizens are powerless for all practical purposes, and for most of the time. As he views, they have no means to exercise their sovereignty and could not raise their voice against control of the state machinery. Therefore he envisages that the power must be always vested in the people and there must be ways and means for the people to exercise their sovereign power effectively at every moment but not periodically. Thus his ideal of radical democracy consists of a highly decentralized democracy must be based on a network of people's committee's through which every citizens must able to exert a standing democratic control over the state.

Obviously, he has not ignored the economic aspect of his ideal of radical democracy. According to Roy, the progressive satisfaction of the material necessities is the pre-condition for the individual members of society unfolding their intellectual and other finer human potentialities. Therefore there must be an economic reorganization that would guarantee a progressively rising standard of living and would lay the foundation for the radical democratic state. It is evident of Marxian influence in his thought by his emphasis on economic liberation. He holds that economic liberation of the masses is an essential condition for their advancing towards the goal of freedom.

For social revolution, he envisages the philosophical revolution must take place. Therefore it is obvious that he supported philosophical revolution. He called it as Indian renaissance taking inspiration from European renaissance.

For him, the renaissance is the indication for the modern civilization and the philosophy of freedom. He strongly believed that India must need a renaissance on rationalist and humanist lines.

According to him, this was a necessary condition for democracy to function in a proper manner. He refers it in his *Reason, Romanticism and Revolution*, in the first place, there must be a conscious and integrated effort to stimulate amongst the people the urge for freedom, the desire to rely upon themselves, the spirit of free thinking and the will never to submit to any external authority by exchanging their freedom for the security of the slave. *A new renaissance based on rationalism and cosmopolitan humanism is essential for democracy to be realized.*

He argues for Indian renaissance because philosophical revolution must precede a social revolution. He was opposed to blind faith and superstitions of all kinds rather supported rationalism. Therefore he rejected all allegedly supernatural entities like God and soul. Similarly, he opposed fatalism and the doctrine of *karma*. He unequivocally rejected the religious mode of thinking and advocated a scientific outlook and a secular morality. He wanted to delink philosophy with religion and associate it closely with science. He believed that science would ultimately liquidate religion. He considered the promotion of rationalism and atheism as part of his humanist movement.

Conclusion

M. N. Roy is not only critical of the west but he is also critical of east. He insists on appreciating the good and rejects the bad both in west and east. His criticism of the western communism and parliamentary form of democracy are the evidence of his postcolonialism in his writings. For him, freedom does not necessarily follow from the capture of political power in the name of the oppressed and the exploited classes and abolition of private property in the means of production rather he wants to create a new world of freedom revolution must go beyond an economic reorganization of society. Therefore in his opinion, communism is inadequate. His discussion on the shortcomings of formal parliamentary democracy in his twelfth and thirteenth theses is another important evidence for his postcolonialism in his thinking. He goes on to decentralization of power to every citizen. Thus he urges for freedom, encourage their self-reliance and awaken in them the sense of individual dignity, *inculcate the values of rationalism* and secular morality.

In his scheme of thinking, the education is to play a vital role. He is in favour of a rational and critical approach towards Indian cultural heritage, ancient traditions and thoughts. He emphasizes more on science. His new humanism would make people transcend natural as well as political boundaries.

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