



HUMANISM, VALUES AND EDUCATION IN M. N. ROY'S PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract:

Radical Humanism means prioritizing the welfare of human beings in all circumstances. New Humanism of M. N. Roy is based on mechanistic cosmology and materialistic metaphysics. New Humanism acknowledges the worth of moral and spiritual freedom, reason and ethics. But by spirit, it opposes the teleological conception of the universe. New (Radical) Humanism is Roy's attempt to effect one more revolution in the life of man. Man is the only being on the earth who has the capacity to make revolutionary changes in himself as well as in the objective world. This is amply evident in the numerous revolutions effected so far in the various spheres of human life. According to Roy, education should cater for an all-round development of the person. Not only should the person's physical, mental, intellectual, aesthetic, moral and spiritual abilities develop through education, but his out-look also widens. An educated person should be aware of the social, global and even universal problems and responsibilities; he must be morally sensitive. This paper fundamentally deals about the core concepts of Radical Humanism, the importance of values and also the significant role of Education in the society.

Key words: Radical Humanism, Materialism, Marxism, Freedom, Values and Education.

Introduction

Manabendra Nath Roy (21 March 1887 – 25 January 1954), born Narendra Nath Bhattacharya, was a Communist, Indian revolutionary, radical activist and political theorist, as well as a noted philosopher in the 20th century. The study of human personality has a significant place in M. N. Roy's Philosophy. His outlook is humanist and rational widely known as Radical Humanism. According to Roy human personality is a joint product of heredity and environment. Regarding human personality he believes that "Although not everything about human personality is at present completely known, it comes in the category of the unknown but not in the category of the unknowable".¹

Psychological studies have proved that Human personality is a unique organization of various traits of personality. Every individual's personality is different from that of the others. This is so because personality is a joint product of heredity and environment, and these two are not identical in the case of any two individuals. Heredity of no two individuals is identical; not even of children born of the same parents. And the environment in which they are born and brought up is also not identical for any two individuals. Environment is of two types: Physical and Cultural. Cultural environment includes the family, relatives, neighbours, school, society, friends and others along with their psychological make-up regarding ideals, values, cultures, religious, habits and in fact, the general ethos obtaining at the time. If we take into consideration all these details, it is obvious that heredity and environment of no two individuals are identical. Since every individual is unique, his assessments, evaluations and aspirations are all unique for each individual. Different individuals, therefore, respond differently even to similar stimuli. Every forceful objective factor can mould the person depending upon the importance of the event to the person. The moral, cultural and social factors that are once part of the objective world gradually become part of the individuals' personality. The process of moulding of personality goes on right up to the death of the person. The heredity factors of personality are the type of body the person has with its structure and function, the body chemistry, the temperament, intelligence etc. The social factors mould these inherited factors. Later on, the individual becomes a combined unit of inherited and acquired factors. Therefore, Human personality always



changes, evolves and develops. In this context Roy concludes that "not that human nature does not change: The fact rather is that to change is human nature. There is no unchanging element in man. Just as the objective world is continuously changing, the subjective world, or rather the individual, is also continuously changing"ⁱⁱⁱ

Since human personality is a bundle of various personality traits, it will be wrong to consider it to be indivisible. A rude shock can even break the personality. A person might undergo a drastic change even in old age. Death of a dear person or loss of a very dear possession might drastically alter the personality. The result is that we find a different person in the same body. With great difficulty the original personality can be restored.

M. N. Roy's Concepts of Radical Humanism

Man is a Rational Being

"Man is innately a rational being. Rationality is his very nature. Rationality means the capacity to learn, think, remember, argue, ask questions, solve problems, the ability to foresee etc. Rationality is present in every existence of the universe"ⁱⁱⁱⁱ It is because of the developed condition of the human brain that we find in man the capacity to have a wide outlook, to imagine the distant past, the present and future; to think about subtle and minute things; to have a microcosmic as well as a macrocosmic outlook. These are parts of human rationality. Human creativity is blossoming tremendously. Man has built religions, culture etc. Man can cherish ideals like liberty equality, fraternity, justice and brotherhood. He can build moral and other systems. All this has become possible because of the rationality of man. It is because of this rationality that man is in continuous search of a better explanation of life. He is also trying to better life itself.

Man's rationality as compared to the rationality of the other animals is so high that for a long-time man alone was considered to be a rational being. Animality and rationality were then supposed to be opposed to each other. Now we know that this is wrong. We now recognize that life or animality is the basis of rationality Animals too are rational in their own way and to the extent their brains are developed. Yet it will be wrong to consider man to be only rational. We have to recognize that man is not only a rational being but that he is also a biological being. An important fact emerges from this i.e., for a satisfactory life both the needs, the rational as well as the biological must be properly satisfied. It is not enough that man be just fed, housed and clothed. He is not just an economic being. For a truly satisfactory life, along with the biological needs, his rational and spiritual needs must also be satisfied.

To say that man is a rational being, only means that as compared to other living being man is more rational. Even now the quality and quantity of rationality that man possesses is not very high. His rationality must increase. Moreover, all people are not equally rational. The quality of a person's rationality depends upon the condition of his brain. Apart from rationality man has other tendencies like selfishness, greed, anger, wickedness etc. It is possible that in some persons some one of these tendencies occupies a central position and then even rationality is its slave. Hence, we have to say that rationality must be strong enough to reform the other tendencies and widen their scope. We have in us some harmful tendencies as well as some helpful tendencies. Unfortunately, at present man's rationality is a slave to his destructive and selfish tendencies in order to prevent this rationality must be strengthened. Because of rationality man has developed an infinite capacity to enrich his life in various ways. This capacity of enrichment is part of the innate nature of man.

Man is a Moral Being

According to Roy, man is innately moral. He believes that rationality is and should be the basis of morality. Since man is a rational being, man is a moral being also. Roy feels that a rational person, a reasonable person will feel that whatever is good or bad for himself will be naturally good or bad for all other persons too since they are like him. Such an approach is the beginning of morality."^{iv} A reasonable person need not be coerced into doing something and avoiding something else. He will do good things voluntarily. Since man is rational naturally and morality



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is based upon rationality, man is moral also by nature. Since rationality can be found even in animals. Some traces of morality can be found even in animals.^v Thus morality has a rational and a biological basis. Morality is a sort of self-created code of conduct. Rationality is the basis of our morality.

Since rationality is the basis of morality it is evident that man is the creator of his values. Although rationality is inherent in the entire existence itself, the problem of values does not arise until rationality matures up to the human level. Man creates his values. It is preposterous to think that man's values exist irrespective of the existence of humanity. Values are a man created phenomenon. When Roy says that man is the creator of values, his idea is that man as an individual is the creator of values and not man as a species or man as a society. He is against the "group" explanation of values. An individual is a person, he has brain, he is rational, he can visualize, idealize. Hence, it is possible for an individual to be the creator of values. But since society is not a person the capacity to create values cannot be attributed to it. Only an individual can give us new ideas, a new outlook and new values, and of course subsequently they may be accepted by society. Values are accepted by society but they are created by individuals.

Man is a free Being

Another salient feature of human personality according to Roy is that Man has an innate to be free. The quest for freedom and search for truth are basic motivations of Man. According to Roy this innate tendency of quest for freedom can be found not only in all human beings but also in all animals and even in lower beings and material objects.^{vi} But it will appear there in different forms. At the animal level it is found in the form of the struggle for existence; while at the material level it is found in the form of conservation of energy. Seen in this light, the tendency to be free can be found in all existences only that in man it is clearly manifest. Nobody wants bondage slavery, repression or exploitation. Every one whether he be an individual or a group innately desires to be free.

Roy wants us to keep this basic nature of man in mind and then plan for social reconstruction accordingly. In an ideal society, every individual member of society will have the least limitations on his creative potentialities. According to Roy, the degree of freedom enjoyed by individual members of society should be the criterion to judge the progress of that society. Simply because a country is free from foreign domination does not necessarily mean that the people inhabiting it are free as individuals. Roy is of the opinion that man is born neither free nor bound; only that man has an innate tendency to be free. But that does not mean that man is destined to be free; nothing is predestined. Man's future will depend on the efforts he puts in and the of social institutions he builds. Roy does not agree with the French Philosopher Rousseau that man is born free but society binds him.^{vii} Such a view puts the society and the individual in positions antagonistic to each other. Roy considers such a view to be false since we do find the development of happy and harmonious social relations. The social constraints are to be taken selectively. It does restrict the anti-social elements but it also protects good people from social hazards and even helps their creative and constructive talents to blossom.

Man is the maker of History

M. N. Roy finds that along with the existence of rationality and morality, there is in man an innate tendency to cooperate with his fellow-beings. Man is not a lonely being, Man builds societies, he lives in societies. Roy feels that without this cooperative tendency man would have perished long ago. Had it not been for this tendency to cooperate, natural forces and wild animals would have wiped man out of existence.^{viii} Roy hopes that if the basic factors of man i.e., rationality, morality and the tendency to cooperate are made the basis of future reconstruction we can have a society where the individual is safe and the society just and harmonious.^{ix} On the strength of man's innate rationality man can be said to be the maker of his fate. This is true on the individual as well as the collective plane. This has become evident from man's advance in scientific knowledge; technology and his recent conquest over the forces of nature.

No doubt there are limitations of natural as well as social upon what man can do, yet the thing to be kept in mind is that no one other than man himself is the maker of his fate. He will reap the consequences of his actions be they foolish, wicked or wise. It is up to man to so act at present that he can have a desirable type of future. People forget this innate



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capacity of man to make his own fate and wrongly believe that somebody other than they themselves will redeem them. People will just do nothing themselves; they will just surrender themselves to their supposed redeemers. This is not a tenable position. Man can do much, he has done much and if he so chooses he can do much more in future. Man may not always succeed in his attempts but still the fact remains that the power to make or mar one's fate rests in man himself. The truth is that man makes his own fate. Man must proceed with confidence. Life based upon self-confidence is what is necessary at present.

Hence, it can be said that man makes history. It is in the power of man to effect revolutions. Before the dawn of human civilization, the changes that took place were because of the process of evolution. It was a natural process. It was a sort of drift. But man with his intellectual powers is able to give a deliberate turn to the otherwise natural process of change. Man makes revolutions. All this is involved in the iconostasis nature of man, in his nature to ask questions. Human history is full of such revolutions.

New (Radical) Humanism is Roy's attempt to effect one more revolution in the life of man. Man is the only being on the earth who has the capacity to make revolutionary changes in himself as well as in the objective world. This is amply evident in the numerous revolutions effected so far in the various spheres of human life. How vastly different is modern man's life as compared to the life of not only the primitive man but even to the life of man just a few hundred years before. Man has created numerous institutions, he has created numerous Gods, he even demolished them. Had the religious type of God actually existed, there would have been no freedom for man to make history. It is because such a God is not there that, according to Roy, Man is free to do what he likes. It is in man's nature to create revolutions. It is in this sense that man is the maker of history.

Human Values in M. N. Roy's Philosophy

Value is that which has importance for whose possession the individual and society endeavour, that for which they live and for which they can make sacrifice. Economics makes a quantitative interpretation of value. For it, value is that which has practical utility and can be exchanged. Objects satisfying desires are valuable. Ethics interprets values qualitatively. Value is of assistance in the preservation and development of life. It directs towards self-realization and self-development.

Existence of values in the society is unthinkable in the absence of human beings. According to Roy, it is the individual human being who creates values and not the society. Society is not a person; it does not have a living brain of its own. Hence it cannot think or create values. Anyone who can give a lasting turn to the general direction of preferences, creates values. Socrates, Buddha, Nanak are some such individuals who have given a new turn to our preferences, i.e., they have given us new values. Roy does not subscribe to the theory of relativity of values. He fears that relativity of values might even lead to nihilism of values.^x To avoid such an eventuality Roy maintains that values are absolute. Values are absolute in the sense that once created they become independent and impersonal. They out-live their creator and do not remain on individual phenomenon but become a social phenomenon.

Freedom, according to Roy, is the highest of all values. Along with freedom, Roy accepts truth and knowledge also as values. He considers them to be valuable on their own count. They are not used as instruments for achieving something higher than them.

The general nature of the human beings is that every human being innately and acutely desires to be free. The quest for freedom and search for truth are the basic motives of man.^{xi} It is because of these innate tendencies that everyone wants to be free from all limitations and bondage imposed upon him. This urge for freedom, like rationality, we have received from biological evolution. Consequently, Roy feels that our values too are biologically rooted i.e., inherited from our biological ancestors. For example, the quest for freedom has been present at all levels of even pre-human existence. At the gross material level, it is found in the form of conservation of at the animal level it is found in the form of struggle for existence, and at the human level in the form of quest for freedom. Roy gives to freedom a universal status, and a real existence. By freedom, he means the actual removal of the limitations on the innate



potentialities of the moral agents. Each one of us is born with certain constructive tendencies and creative ability. Due to various inhibitions and limitations, persons are not able to develop these tendencies to the maximum. Thus, not only is society deprived of their useful contributions but even the individuals concerned feel frustrated. These limitations and inhibitions could be of various types such as misery, exploitations, injustice and inequalities.

Freedom according to Roy means domination of individual factors over the objective ones in any given situation. When the individual factors dominate, the individual is able to do what he wills. On the other hand, when a person is bound by objective factors either he is not able to do what he likes or he has to do what he does not like. Since the freedom means the domination of individual factors, it is clear that the individual's freedom cannot be the same in each situation. It is wrong to think it in the terms of "once free always free" or even that a person will be equally free in all spheres of his life. The amount of freedom available to the individual will vary from situation to situation. And yet one thing is true i.e., everyone wants to be freer than what he has many things. Roy is only pointing out that the basic urge to be free, to be freer than before, is at present. Whether he achieves this goal or not is a different matter. Success depends upon is always there.

Every ethical act includes ends and means. Every act has an end i.e., that which is the intention of the person in performing the act. That which we want to reach, is our end. Thus, ethics discusses the good and bad of the ends of people. It tells which end is right and which is wrong. Those acts which assist in attainment of end are right while those which hinder it are wrong. But the question which arises here is whether the end justifies the means. What is the place occupied by the purity of means in human conduct?

For Roy, "ends and means should be treated on the lines of cause and effect. Ends and means are not physical objects co-existing simultaneously and independent of each other".^{xii} Moral objectives emerge from morally relevant efforts. Naturally the type of goal reached will depend upon the type of efforts put in. Ends and means should be considered something like cause and effect. Cause and effect do not exist simultaneously and independent of each other. Effect emerges from the cause. Cause is an antecedent and effect is a consequent. The cause determines the effect. Similarly, the type of means used will decide the type of the effect or end we will have, it is something like the nature of the seed that determines the nature of the tree that will follow. No one argues that the use of good means will result in evil ends. However, quite a few persons argue that use of evil means can give morally good results. Users of evil means generate an evil type of chain reactions in life, use of good means will create a good society. While use of evil means will create only an evil type of society. As are the means used, so will be the ends achieved. As we sow so do, we reap. Roy rejects the Marxist view that end justifies the means, and insists upon using only morally good means for achieving our ends.

Roy concludes that use of evil means creates only evil persons and evil societies. Hence, Roy opposes all use of evil practices. He even opposes such maxims as "war for peace", "surrender for liberation". No doubt Roy too wants revolution to take place but his methods of bringing about the revolution are pure and morally good. In Roy's rationalist view there is no place for immoral doings. The means to be adopted must be such that they are in conformity with the goals visualized. Every step taken should convince each citizen that he is becoming progressively more free, more happy, more enlightened and more enriched than before. Thus, we find that "ends justify means" is not only a false but also a socially dangerous doctrine.

In addition to freedom, Roy considered knowledge and truth also as values. Knowledge according to Roy pertains to only our worldly happenings. It consists of the varied information gathered by human beings through empirical means. Knowledge according to him things in the world. Thus, to know them and their relations completely is an infinitely long and never-ending process; in this sense knowledge is infinite. Knowledge means information regarding physical as well as social events. This knowledge will never be complete or final. The truth available to man will never be absolute. There is no end to the acquisition of knowledge, and it is impossible for anyone to acquire that infinite knowledge. Knowledge liberates men from their parochial outlook, from superstition blind faith, prejudice and ignorance.



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With the acquisition of knowledge these miseries will vanish. And in this sense and to this extent knowledge can be said to be a liberating force. It would be wrong to expect our knowledge to be one hundred percent pure and true. Truth is the content of knowledge. If what we know corresponds with the facts then our knowledge is true, and if it does not so correspond then it is false. Roy subscribes to the correspondence theory of truth and accepts truth and knowledge also as values. Roy reserves the status of values for only freedom, truth and knowledge must make men cultured. He simply cannot accept that a cultured man can be a cheat".^{xiii}

M. N. Roy on Education

Roy considered Education as one of the important values of human beings. Education makes a man a rational being in the true sense of term. Education is the most superior means of developing man from the animal level to the level of human beings. From the moral view, it is incumbent upon every person to receive the best education suited to his abilities. Man's moral objective of self-improvement would prove elusive without education. By developing his powers, education makes man capable of self-realization, in society every person should get an opportunity to develop his mental and spiritual powers through education.

"Education should cater for an all-round development of the person. Not only should the person's physical, mental, intellectual, aesthetic, moral and spiritual abilities develop through education, but his out-look also widens. An educated person should be aware of the social, global and even universal problems and responsibilities; he must be morally sensitive".^{xiv} Roy does not call a person educated if his aesthetic and spiritual sensibilities are not developed. Education is meaningful only when the creative faculties, of persons are properly developed in an integrated way. Education should be child oriented and not nation-oriented, state-oriented, or religion-oriented. The emphasis should be to create good individuals. If the individuals are good, the society will be good. The dignity of the individual should never be encroached upon.

Development of a scientific outlook and a critical faculty in students should be one of the chief aims of education. The emphasis should always be upon learning rather than upon teaching. Students must be eager to learn. Development of a critical faculty must be one of the chief aims of education. Development of a scientific outlook is an important constituent of the intellectual development of a person. Development of all those aspects of a person should be the aim of education.

Conclusion

We have seen the important features of human personality according to Roy. This is the foundation of Roy's ethics and social philosophy. It is with such human beings that he wishes to build a new humanist society. Freedom, rationality and morality are the basic constituents of the humanist way of life; and liberty, equality and fellowship are the social ideals to be realized by the individuals. For this purpose, Roy bases social life of the individuals on their innate tendencies of rationality morality, quest for freedom, search for truth and cooperation. He believes that if proper attention is paid on these innate tendencies of man and proper social, political, economic and educational institutions are built, we will be able to create individuals who are free, rational, truthful, instinctively moral and are full of fellow feeling nature. We have seen Roy's views regarding human personality. If his suggestions of Radical humanism are followed, there is a possibility of evolving a just society where the individual is sovereign.

Nothing is predestined. The future of Man depends upon the type of efforts man puts in, because the man is the maker of History, Roy has given some suggestions regarding improving of our social life. We can notice that if his suggestions are followed, there is a possibility of evolving a happy, enriched, enlightened and harmonious society, where the individual is free, enlightened and sovereign, where the individuals contribute their mite for leading the society towards a desired and desirable direction and where the social values of freedom, equality and fellow feeling are experienced by individual citizens in a sufficiently high degree. The task is not only odious but also revolutionary. There are surely very many obstacles in it. Yet the possibility of success is there because man is the builder of his destiny. To



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conclude this, individuals should strive to achieve the democratic ideals in order to visualize the revolutionary legacy of the radical humanism. And thus, man remains the maker of his destiny which is both historical and social.

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