M. N. Roy - Father of Indian Communism

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Abstract : Manavendra Nath Roy ( M.N.Roy) known as the Father of Indian communism. He was the first revolutionary leader of India. He was born in 1887 in Arebelia, a village near Calcutta. Swami Vivekananda philosophy of life and national devotion of Bipan Chandra Pal played a vital role in developing the personality and viewpoints of M.N.Roy. From the very early age, Roy joined the extremist politics of India. While living in Mexico, Roy’s interest in terrorism began to decline and interest in communism developed. He took communism as the best way of life because he was very much convinced of Marxist philosophy of Materialism. Like Marx he also believed that the economic order is the best law of governing the social order. Unless the economic system is controlled on the line suggested by Marx and Engels, there is no way to end the exploitation of man by man. Hence M.N.Roy became the ardent advocate of communism. His sole ambition was to make India a communist country.

Key Words: Communism, terrorism, materialism

Introduction

M.N. Roy, whose real name was Manavendra Nath Bhattacharya,. He was born in 1887 in Arebelia, a village near Calcutta in the district of 24 parganas. His father, Dinabandu Bhattacharya was the head-priest of the temple of goddess Ksheputeshwari in the village. Ksheput in Midnapur district in south west Bengal. He was the fourth child of his father. Like Bengali Brahmins he was attracted to politics in his teens, and before he was twenty he was deeply involved in the struggle for independence. Bengal was a turbulent land at the beginning of the century.

Militant Nationalist

Of the congress men whom sought to influence the most important was Chitra Ranjan Das, a leading Bengali politician who in 1920 was president – elect of the congress. C.R.Das was a liberal humanitarian, acutely conscious of the poverty of the Indian masses and eager to do something about it. He felt that the nationalist movement should promote the economic welfare of the people, and not merely agitate for greater participation in government by limited Indian elite. Roy was also interested in another congresses man, a man with a single name, Sampurnanand, who was active in the congresses organization in the United Province. The third man on whom Roy pinned his hopes for influence within the congresses was Singaravelu Chettiar. He had some status in the congresses and, as has been shown, considered himself a communist. He was in direct contact with Roy and worked hard to distribute Roy’s propaganda among congresses members.

In New York he became the close friend of the revered Indian Nationalist, LalaLajapat Rai. At the same time he began to circulate among American socialists and anarchosyndicalists, for they were naturally sympathetic to the cause of Indian independence. Roy says that it was during this period he began to read Marx in the New York Public Library. But Marxist ideas evidently did not initially impress him, for his major writings during the next two years do not reveal their influence. The Indian revolutionaries begin to shift their operational head quarters from Berlin to Moscow to get easy help from the Russian communist leaders. In the words of Mishra “They were fast coming under Bolshevik influence and searching for what they called a peasant and proletarian revolution as the basis of the Indian struggle for independence…The experience of the Russian Revolution strengthened a conviction in socialism. It suggested the validity of a new class oriented economic approach to India’s political problem. A good number of young leftists like Tilak, Dange and Muzaffar Ahmad were committed to work for communism in India.

Towards Communism

Roy began his political life as a militant nationalist, believing in the cult of the bomb and the pistol and the necessity of an armed insurrection. He rose to high position in the communist movement. The high position empowered him with power and prestige. Roy
with his sincere and painstaking efforts established contact with the communist world, and attracted the attention of the fiery Indian revolutionaries and converted them into communists.6

**Communist Movement**

Communist Movement spread its influence gradually all over the world. The first experiment was conducted in Russia and its success led to its spread to other parts of the world including India.7 The genesis of the Indian communism was rooted in the extremist leaders of India who left the country and lived abroad due to hard and stiff attitude of the then government against them during the Freedom struggle.8

While living in foreign countries some extremist leaders established direct contact with the leaders of the Third International Communism who taught them to put emphasis on mass action through organizing a number of committees and organizations, such as Workers and Peasants’ Party, Trade Unions and Communist Cells. They suggested to the Indian extremist leaders to apply the methods of class – antagonism, strikes and maintenance of force and revolt against the bourgeois government with a view to making the Government ineffective on the one hand, and people on the other. Thus the Indian extremist leaders had two directives, firstly, to liberate India from the colonial power and secondly to establish a new economic order based on the Marxist line.9

The communist movement in India that emerged on national soil keeps on developing as it meets the requirements of the country’s socio-economic development. At the same time, the formation and development of the communist movement in India was a logical outcome of the epoch-making changes in the international scene. The victory of the Great October Socialist Revolution of 1917 in Russia and the deepening of the liberation movement in the former colonies and dependencies strengthened the communist movement in India.10 It broadened and deepened the national liberation movement and also intensified the struggle of the Indian working people for their vital interests and rights.11

Thus the early history of communism makes it clear that, it did not take root in Indian soil except by the infusion of foreign agencies, which supplied not only a new strategy but also unity of purpose and a frame work of organization that conformed to the requirements of the new goal

**ORIGIN OF COMMUNISM IN INDIA**

M.N.Roy initiated the process of transplanting communism in India by sending his trained emissaries to different parts of the country. He met a number of Indian Muslims abroad who had left their country as a protest against the British policy in regard to Turkey. These Muslims once kept in captivity were released by the Russian forces. Initially they knew nothing about communism. However, Roy convinced them. He made it very clear that they could achieve their mission and liberate India by adopting the path of communist revolution. Lastly, they agreed to carry the message of Marxism and Communist ideology to India. Nalini Gupta, Shamsuhuda and Ajodhya Prasad were the first communist emissaries who reached India through the sea route.12 Thus communism that began in the early 1920 got strengthened when Moscow trained Indian emissaries were sent out to spread the new ideology.13

**FORMATION OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA**

Communist party of India was formed in October 1920, in the city of Tashkent, capital of Uzbekistan in the Soviet Union, on the initiative of M.N. Roy. The first Manifesto of the communist party of India under Roy’s leadership was addressed to the 36th session of the Indian National Congress held in Ahamedabad in 1921. It was also supposed to guide the activities of the Indian communists. It also attracted the attention of the congress on mobilizing workers and peasants.14

He acknowledged that the congress was “the leader of the movement for national liberation “ and appealed for the adoption of a liberal economic program dedicated to raising the standard of living of the impoverished workers and peasants. Only by working for the economic betterment of the masses, the manifesto stated, could the congress hope to gain their support in the struggle for independence and thus become a real mass movement.15

Gandhiji’s constructive programme of eradication of untouchability, alcoholism, boycott of foreign cloth and its substitution by the Swadeshi handspun Khadi was endorsed by Roy. He was, sharply critical of what he called the exploitation of workers’ unrest by the nationalist for their political aim. He urged the Indian National Congress to enlist the support of the workers and peasants by including the redress of their immediate grievances in its programme.16

In September 1921, Roy sent Nalini Gupta to Calcutta. He founded a communist group
and placed it under Muzaffer Ahmed before returning to Europe in March 1922. Under Roy’s direction Shaukat Usmani, a resident of Bikaner, returned to India in December 1922 and formed communist groups at Benaras and Kanapur, where he was arrested on 9 May 1923. The formation of a communist group in Lahore was the work of Ghulam Hussain, a school master and editor of “Inquilab”. In July 1922, he returned to India with a large sum of money, which helped him to establish a communist centre at Lahore, where he started his journal to preach socialist views. 

Nalini Gupta and Shaukat Usmani, achieved a certain amount of success, and it was through their efforts that communist centres came into being in Calcutta and in the United Provinces (Benaras and Kaunpore). 

Subsequently most of these groups got united at Kaunpur in December 1925. They under the leadership of M.N.Roy founded All India Organisation under the name of the Communist Party of India CPI. Later, S.V.Ghate emerged as the General Secretary of the party.

The foundation of the Communist Party of India was an important event in the country’s political life and played a great role in invigorating the struggle of the Indian people for national freedom and social progress. M.N.Roy required making the communist party of India as a legal and national political party like the Congress and Swaraj parties. Roy discussed the matter with Singaravelu who had already formed a Labour and Kisan party of Hindustan in Madras. According to Roy the primary task of the party was to struggle for freedom and the question of social liberation was a secondary one. The question of national liberation was primary because “the release of all the forces of social production is the first step towards the ultimate realization of our programme which is the end of class domination.” The Unique contribution of Indian Communism in the beginning was that it paved the way for the growth of national movement by organising the workers and the peasantry to work for the cause of National Movements.

ROY’S PLAN

In 1922 pointed out in Advance Guard article the need for a definite programe. The “Program” was a comprehensive document which called for complete national independence, universal suffrage, abolition of land lordism, nationalization of public utilities, full rights for labour to organize, minimum wages in all industries, an eight hour a day, profit sharing in industry, free compulsory education, the abolition of standing army and “arming of the entire people to defend the National Freedom”.

HUMANISM

The crowning piece of his original work which is designed to be man’s ultimate fulfillment is New Humanism. Humanism is not a new concept. Medieval saints have sung in its praise. Tagore has glorified humanism in his Religion of Man, Marx has put humanism at the apex of his Materialist Philosophy but nobody other than Roy has built up his humanist Philosophy with flesh, blood and brain-thus democracy may be taken as the base, rationalism the centre and sovereignty its apex. Therefore it becomes a philosophy of life. Roy has travelled far beyond Marxism and he has formulated some fundamental principles on which his Humanism stands. The main plank is a sovereignty of man. Sovereignty is a comprehensive concept which includes freedom of man. It forbids the assumption of any other superior forces.

Another main plank is that humanism demands adequate emphasis on all pervading democracy as distinguished from Parliamentary democracy. All pervading democracy means democracy percolating into all layers of administration, all layers of society and all layers of individual life. The other important plank is rationality. For man his sole guide is the voice of reason and rationality of action follows from it. New Humanism connotes these three principles essentially and other guiding forces will follow from them.

Roy’s Publications

M.N.Roy’s special publications were “India in Transition” “India’s Problem and its Solutions”, “What do we want, Labour Party”, “Open Letter to C.R. Das and Programme for the Indian National Congress”. In a pamphlet entitled India’s problem and its solution he recommended communism as the only force that could liberate the suffering masses from exploitation. He spread the communist ideology among the masses through the communist newspapers “Vanguard”. Since June 1922, it was in circulation for several years. It was a source of truthful information for the Indian people about the 1917 October Revolution. In this issue Roy said “The Government maintained by violence and brute force cannot be overthrown without violence and brute.” The contents attracted the Indian journalists and were used by some of the Indian Newspapers. In July 1922, a pamphlet bearing the title” Communist Federal League” was published.
in Madras. By about the end of 1922, Communist ideas arising from communist literature and contacts with some communists abroad had made their appearance on the platform and the press in Tamil Nadu.29

In 1922, the following communist publications were in existence. “Atma Sakti”, “Dhumkatu”, “Desher Bani” in Bengal, “Socialist” in Bombay, “NavaYuga” in Madras, “Inquilab” in Lahore. A number of papers including the important “Amrita Patrika”(Calcutta), the “Servant”(Bombay) and the “Bande Madaram”(Lahore) published pro-Bolshevik articles. “The Nation” which was started as an English daily at Lahore on the 1st January declared itself opposed to imperialism and capitalism, in March it published communist literature.30

Through his writings, correspondence and emissaries he succeeded in converting some individuals in India to communism and establishing communist centre in Bengal, Bombay, Madras, the United Province and the Punjab. His articles and manifestos were frequently reproduced in Indian Newspaper and periodicals, quite often in vernacular versions in Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi and Bengali. As the records of the, Intelligence Bureau of the Government of India reveal, although nearly all Roy’s publications were banned by the Government they managed to reach people not only in the centre mentioned but also in Peshawar, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Hyderabad, Pondicherry, Orissa and other places. By the end of 1925 these efforts bore fruit in the founding of the Communist Party of India at Kanpur.

Conclusion

The contribution of M.N.Roy for the genesis and growth of Indian Communism was highly commendable. Amidst antagonism and opposition, he identified the extremists, transformed the dissatisfied Indian Muslims as extremists and founded the party. The object of the party was clearly visualized in the conference through the communist manifesto. That is foreign rule must be ended and national self Government was to be created. The political independence of the nation was to be followed by the economic emancipation of the masses. In the beginning, the Indian communists were appreciated by Mahatma Gandhi for their commitment and sacrifices which they had made for liberation of the country and betterment of the poor. Yet he disliked the violent methods applied by the communists to achieve their goal. In short, Indian communism owed its origin to the dedicated service of M.N.Roy. It was he who sowed the seeds of communist ideology in Indian National soil. Hence he was known as the “Father of Indian communism”

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