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Royists of Karnataka

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“Radicalism thinks in terms neither of nation nor of class, its concern is man, it conceives freedom as freedom of the individual. The individual should not lose his identity in the collective ego of the nation or of the class. The Nation–State, in practice, makes no greater concession to the concept of individual freedom than the Class –State of the Communists and also of the socialists. And no modern democratic state has yet outgrown nationalist collectivism”

These were the profound utterances of Manabendra Nath Roy (1887-1954) as a political thinker of modern India and a Radical Humanist extraordinaire. Humanism was receiving widespread public attention in the West through such publications as A Humanist Manifesto in 1933, which talked of a new 'religion' that would replace all other religions based on allegations of supernatural powers. It outlined the vignettes of a worldwide egalitarian society based on voluntary mutual cooperation. But there was

another non-European visionary who had provided a perspicacious exegesis of 'humanism'. Unbeknownst to most Westerners, 'humanism' was proceeding on a parallel track in India, largely due to the efforts of philosopher and political activist M. N Roy. He integrated Radicalism with Scientific Humanism or New Humanism. His political and intellectual credos were founded on reason and morality and not on any dogma. Roy's basic premise was that in any revolutionary social philosophy, sovereignty of man must be recognized. He was of the view that neither Capitalism nor Parliamentary system could solve the problems of mankind. For him, New Humanism, reconciling social organization and individual freedom was the only alternative. Roy's philosophy of Radical Humanism is considered to be his most important contribution to Indian democracy. Roy was vehemently critical of Parliamentary democracy and reiterated that “Parliamentary democracy, the government for



the people can hardly be a government of the people, because the majority in power still rules by law and not by conscience. In order to make the common man realize that he has a unique place as a sovereign, a foundation of organized local democracies must be laid.”¹

The Radical Humanist, the journal which was formerly published as Independent India, was the instrument of Radical Humanist Movement in India. Founded in 1937 by M.N Roy, it was a weekly journal of international affairs that also focused on humanism and the humanist movement in India and abroad. M.N Roy was the journal's founder editor, and he was also the journal's long-standing editor. The journal published articles, comments, notes, reports, news, book reviews and correspondences. Prominent writers and thinkers contributed to this journal. The journal has an illustrious legacy of editors starting from M.N Roy and his wife Ellen Roy, Sib Narayan Ray, Vasant B Karnik, Amritlal Bhikku Shah, Govind Parekh, V.M Tarkunde, R.A Jahgirdar, G.R Dalvi, R.M Pal, Mahipal Singh and Rekha Saraswat. As Dr Innaiah Narisetti points out in his Foreword to the Selections from Radical Humanist Volume-I, April 1970 to December 2005, selected, compiled and edited by Mahi Pal Singh, published by the Indian Renaissance Institute (E-version published on 6th April 2019) “One great thing about The Radical Humanist is that despite facing an uphill task and financial crisis, it has never stopped. It has never compromised on human values, ethical norms, and above all freedom.”

M. N Roy's social philosophy of Radical Humanism had a tremendous appeal to many exponents of civil liberties and democratic freedom among the intelligentsia in Karnataka. Interestingly many of them were academics, activists and creative writers. Foremost among them was Gowrish Kaikini (1912-2002) the father of eminent Kannada writer Dr Jayant Kaikini, who wrote under several pseudonyms as 'Vaishwanara', 'Gourishankara', 'Aduge Bhatta' and 'GVK'. As a Litterateur, Gowrish Kaikini authored several books which exemplified the spirit of radical humanism. Notable among them were Navamanavathavada, Nasthika Mattu Devaru, Manovignanada Roopureshegalu and Satyarthi. 'Belaku' was a magazine that he edited exclusively to showcase radical humanist writings. But this world view seemed to pervade his entire oeuvre and the corpus of his writings. In keeping with the credos of Roy, Kaikini wrote for several local newspapers and magazines as he believed that these needed to be strengthened to fortify the democratic fabric. Some of them were Janasevaka, Sirsi Samachara, Munnade, Nagarika, Jeevottama, Grama Jeevana, Nudi Jenu, Sahachara, Samanvaya, Rayabhari, Sugunamala. Besides writing columns for these local newspapers and weekly magazines, he was famous for his columns in mainstream newspapers and magazines like Udayavani, Samyukta Karnataka, Karmaveera, Kasthuri, Tayinaadu, Prajawani, Kannada Prabha etc. In the words

of his son Jayant Kaikini, his father Gowrish Kaikini has penned more than 12,000 pages. Dr M.G Hegde has made a herculean effort to collect, compile and edit the works of Gowrish Kaikini but a revaluation and re-appraisal of his radical humanist prose is something that has not been undertaken so far and translation of some of his finest writings into English is the need of the hour.

Badekkila Krishna Bhat, a freedom fighter and a pleader from Bhadravathi in Shimoga district was another dyed-in-the-wool Royist, radical humanist who tirelessly wrote for many newspapers like Karmaveera, Tayinaadu, Prapancha etc. He also had a prolific literary output. He translated M N Roy's book into Kannada as Navamanavathavada which was published by M N Roy Centenary Committee, presided over by late S R Bommai, who was then the chief minister of Karnataka in 1987. B. Krishna Bhat also authored a unique life sketch of M N Roy titled Amoolya Chethana in 1989² published by Kannada Sangha of St Philomena College, Puttur in Dakshina Kannada. This publication was the first of its kind in South Canara. M.N Roy's life was marked by many exciting adventures. It was an exceedingly colourful life of a revolutionary and in his lyrical Kannada prose B. Krishna Bhat delineates the valiant struggles of Roy, dodging the British, giving the slip to the police, eluding them and masterminding the conflux of insurrectionary revolutionaries within and out of Bengal, the ingenious ways through which Roy generated the funds for these operations and his herculean efforts to obtain weapons in order to successfully execute his rebellious operations. These exploits of M.N Roy would give anyone an adrenaline rush according to B. Krishna Bhat. Besides these two works Krishna Bhat also wrote a unique intellectual biography of M N Roy in 1987 published by IBH Prakashana³. In this biography, Krishna Bhat describes Roy as a veritable human missile, who crisscrossed continents with ease, leaving his footprints wherever he travelled, endeavoring to impart a new twist to the destinies of the nations he visited.

Krishna Bhat recounts in flawless Kannada prose how Roy established a new political party in Mexico, thereby inspiring Lenin. Roy also had the rare opportunity of rubbing shoulders with Russian revolutionaries like Vladimir Lenin, Trotsky and Borodin. For Krishna Bhat, Roy was a visionary who had arrived as the harbinger of a refreshingly new and an invigorating world view that would resuscitate the world tottering on the brink of tumultuous political upheavals. Hailed as a saint among the revolutionaries, in his biography, Krishna Bhat admirably traces the trajectories and vicissitudes of Roy's life, his gradual evolution from extremism into humanism.

In another unique work titled Nagarikathe,⁴ his disquisitions on the evolution of humanism, B. Krishna Bhat acknowledges his indebtedness to Roy, leaning substantially towards Roy's ideologies as he outlines the saga of the human civilization and western rationalism Krishna Bhat also



published his views on the philosophy of materialism in his work Bhautika Darshana in 1987⁵. His work Communism—Ninne, Indu Matthu Naale (1972)⁶ was hailed as a great work on the nature and evolution of communism in which he had forecast the breakdown of communism.

The two eminent novelists of Navya movement in Kannada literature, Yashwant Chittal and Shanthinath Desai were also deeply influenced by the radical humanist credos of Roy and their creative works engaged deeply with the conflict of the present age as between totalitarianism and democracy, between the all devouring collective ego- nation or class and the individual struggling for freedom which Roy so lucidly discussed in his “Constitution of Free India — a draft” published by Radical Democratic party, Delhi in 1946.

A re-narration of the critical perceptions of these writers through an intellectual biography, elucidating their world views supplemented by English translations of their writings would vouchsafe exciting insights into how the philosophy of radical humanism made its inroads into the Kannada

heartland and would be an important contribution to the intellectual and cultural history of the evolution of political philosophy of Radical Humanism in Karnataka. It could fill the void in the realm of intellectual biographies of ideologues who engaged with humanist philosophy and made it intelligible to the general readership in Kannada.

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