

M. N. Roy Memorial Lecture - 2001

**THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY: TOWARDS
A RADICAL HUMANIST SCENARIO**

By

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FOREWORD

M.N. Roy, a revolutionary, an outstanding intellectual activist in the communist movement and a colleague of Lenin, Trotsky and Borodin, was truly a great world leader who inspired men and women alike. His idealism, vigour and vitality for socio-political reform and evolving the ideology of New Humanism for the upliftment of spiritual and mundane was unparalleled. One seldom comes across such a versatile combination of an original thinker and an activist these days.

The Indian Renaissance Institute (IRI) was founded by its architects M.N. & Ellen Roys with the help of a group of dedicated like-minded friends. Every year, to commemorate Roy's birth on 21st of March 1887, IRI organises a lecture by a distinguished person. This year the lecture was delivered by Prof. Sibnarayan Ray, on the subject 'The Twenty First Century : Towards a Radical Humanist Scenario', on 21st March 2001. The function was chaired by the under signed.

In his thoughtful presentation Prof. Sibnarayan Ray stressed:

"What, however, should be quite clear is that the present critical situation demands a coming together of men of conscience, wisdom and enterprise who have to devote their intellectual and moral resources, singly and together, to finding and proposing practical steps that will hasten the much needed global renaissance. Whether this happens in due time will shape the next phase of the scenario of the twenty first century".

On behalf of the Indian Renaissance Institute and Indian Radical Humanist Association, I take this opportunity to thank Prof. Sibnarayan Ray, Shri S.R. Bommai and the distinguished guests for their presence today.

Dr. Gauri Bazaz-Malik

Chairperson

21 March, 2001

Indian Renaissance Institute

THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY : TOWARDS A RADICAL HUMANIST SCENARIO

M.N. ROY MEMORIAL LECTURE

Sibnarayan Ray

I feel honoured by the invitation to give this year's M.N. Roy Memorial Lecture. An outstanding personality of an epoch of world wars, revolutions and break-up of vast empires, M.N. Roy, I believe, still waits to be re-discovered as an illuminating thinker in the context of the perplexities, problems and possibilities of the twenty first century. In certain obvious respects he was a most strikingly representative figure of his turbulent times, but in others, probably less obvious, he was very much way ahead. As a revolutionary nationalist he had in his youth tried unsuccessfully to organize an armed insurrection in India (1915) against foreign rule. Later, after a period of wild goose chase in search of arms, he landed in Mexico, was converted to Marxism, and founded the Communist Party of Mexico (1919). Called to Moscow he debated with Lenin at the Second Congress of the Communist International, won his appreciation, and formed the emigre Communist Party of India at Tashkent (1920). During the twenties he rose to the very top of the Comintern hierarchy, laid the foundations of an underground Communist Party within India, played a central role in the communist movement in China, and won wide recognition as the principal theorist of a grass-roots revolution in Asia. In all these he powerfully embodied the two most dynamic and world-wide ideological movements of his age : militant nationalism and revolutionary communism.

But Roy was much more than an activist political revolutionary. He was at the same time a very original and analytic

thinker. He wrote not only such Marxist classics as *India in Transition* (1922), *The Future of Indian Politics* (1926) and *Revolution and Counter Revolution in China* (1930), but after his arrest and imprisonment he devoted nearly six years of solitary confinement in Indian Jails (1931-36) to writing a draft manuscript of over two thousand closely hand-written foolscap-size pages of his projected but unfinished work on "the Philosophical Consequences of Modern Science." Unlike his one-time colleague in the executive of the Comintern, Antonio Gramsci, whose six volumes of *Quaderni del Carcere* or Prison Notebooks (1926-37), carefully edited and published (1947-51) years after his death in the original Italian and translated into a number of major modern languages, inspired considerable rethinking among both Marxists and non-Marxists, Roy's jail manuscripts continue virtually to languish in the archives of the Nehru Museum in New Delhi. True, I have edited and included segments of this manuscript in the fourth volume of the *Selected Works of M.N. Roy*. However, in their totality, the nine bound volumes of closely written pages wait for a band of competent scholars to be deciphered, organized and edited with explanatory notes, and presented as a whole to the general and specialist public.

The turbulent years which followed Roy's release from jail in 1936 gave him hardly any time to continue his philosophical investigations and reformulations. He was fully occupied with building a genuinely radical democratic movement in India in contradistinction to both nationalism and communism. He recognised in fascism the greatest contemporary threat to civilization and saw its forces at work not only in Germany, Italy, Spain and Japan, but more or less actively in many other parts of the world, including India. Fascism, as he explained in his book with that title (1938), thrived on the irrational and atavistic drives in the human psyche. It was anti-rational and anti-libertarian; it

sought to subordinate individuals to reified collectivities like the Party, the State and the Nation, and used methods of brain washing and terror to enforce such subordination; it sought to centralise all power in a single authority investing it with the emotionally charged myth of the supreme, infallible leader, Der Führer. Racial arrogance, systematic and ruthless suppression of all dissent and inquiry, deliberate promotion of violence, hatred and aggressiveness, unscrupulous blurring of all distinction between truth and falsehood, right and wrong, reduction of all movement to goosestep — these dark and deadly features of this totalitarian ideology threatened to destroy the very foundations of civilizations. Unlike Gandhi or Subhas Chandra Bose, Roy fully recognized the dreadful implications of the catastrophe which was precipitated by fascist aggression, and consequently, after much deliberation, he gave his total support to the anti-fascist war (1940). He also anticipated that in the course of fighting against fascism, the old imperialist powers of West Europe would be thoroughly undermined. Their victory in war would be followed by the breakup of these empires, and consequently by political emancipation of the erstwhile colonies, including India. His prognosis in this respect was confirmed by developments in Asia and Africa during the late forties and early fifties.

The war also brought out into open the dark side of Communism as put into practice in the Soviet Union. In 1929-30, after the Sixth Congress of the Comintern, Roy had written and published a series of critical articles in the German Communist Opposition periodical *Gegen den Strom*, pointing out some of the fatal shortcomings of the Comintern and the Bolshevik practice. These essays, which led to his exclusion from the Comintern, have been translated from the German original into English and edited and published with an introduction and elaborate explanatory notes by me under the title *The Russian Revolution and the*

Tragedy of Communism (2000). However, it was the war and what happened in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe during the cold war which fully exposed the brutally totalitarian nature of communism. Disillusioned with nationalism, bourgeois democracy and communism, Roy now turned to the task of formulating an alternative philosophy of man which hopefully would inspire and provide guidelines for a just and peaceful reconstruction of post-war societies. The last eight years of his life were devoted to this intellectual undertaking, which resulted in the formulation and elaboration of what came to be known as radical humanism.

The first tentative outlines of this new philosophy emerged in the course of more than a week of intense deliberations at a Study Camp in Dehradun in May 1946. The outlines were mainly Roy's, but to their definitive formulation several others also contributed. I was a participant, and after the Camp Roy and Ellen invited me to be their guest for a while. For several days we discussed the outlines, and with his encouragement I set down in writing some of my own ideas which I had developed independently and contributed to the Camp deliberations. In December of the same year Roy's lectures at the study camp were published under the title *New Orientation*. My own formulation, segments of which Roy had serialised in *Independent India* almost immediately after the camp, was also published at the same time under the title *Radicalism*, with an introduction by Roy. Despite the difference in the age of thirty seven years between us, I became one of his closest associates, both intellectually and in organisational activities, and remained so till his death in 1954. In 1947 Roy came out with a brief systematic statement of his philosophy, under the title *New Humanism, a Manifesto*. The following year a more detailed exposition written jointly by Ellen Roy and me and titled *In Man's Own Image* was published, again with an introduction by

Roy. But it took some more time for Roy to write the most elaborate and definitive statement of his philosophy under the title *Reason, Romanticism and Revolution*. In June 1952 Roy was incapacitated by a serious accident. He had already sent me the complete manuscript, but because we never had adequate funds, I was forced to publish it in two separate volumes, the first in late 1952, and the second, posthumously in 1955. This was Roy's magnum opus of the post-Marxist period.

Despite our very close relationship and active collaboration over several years, I did not fully agree with all his formulations nor did he share some of my doubts or several areas of my interest. I can not say our differences were resolved, but I hasten to add that, whatever the difference, none among my contemporaries has had such a lasting and pervasive influence on my life and ideas as Roy. It is more than likely that there would be traces of Roy's thinking in this evening's lecture. However I wish to make it quite clear that for all my observations and speculations this evening I alone bear full responsibility.

II

It is admittedly premature and hazardous to try to envision the scenario of a century which has not yet completed even the first year of its life. I don't claim to have any mysterious power of prescience. What, however, encourages this undertaking is the awareness that division of history into centuries is patently arbitrary, that the flow of time know no such division, and that the present contains within it what has flowed into it from the past and many of the possibilities of what may happen in the future. With this awareness, what I propose to do here is to highlight what I consider to be some of the most striking features of the complex situation in which mankind is precariously placed at the start of the

new century, and try to suggest how this came about. I shall concentrate on the problems and hazards rather than on the achievements since I think that the first call on the present generation is to address themselves to the resolution of these problems and removal of these hazards. I consider all deterministic views of history to be unsound, and maintain that there never is a historic situation which does not present a plurality of alternatives. It will be up to the present generation to make the right choice, and there is a pressing need today for exploration, dialogue and experiments. My lecture is a small contribution to that process of exploration.

The first particularly disquieting feature of the contemporary scenario in the year 2001 is that despite spectacular advancement of science and technology in the preceding century, "three-fifths of humanity still live in a prison of poverty." This is reported by Mr. James Guestev Speth, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). According to this report, submitted and published in 1996, "more than a quarter of humanity — 1,600 million people are worse off today than they were fifteen years ago." In more specific terms, "in more than 100 of the 174 countries for which data has been collected, the per capita income is lower today than it was in 1980." It is not as if the total global income did not markedly increase during the last several decades. In fact between 1960 and 1993 total global income increased by six fold to 23,000,000 million or twenty three thousand billion United States dollars. But "the proportion of people experiencing decline in per capita income between 1965-1980 and 1980-93 more than tripled", while the proportion of people enjoying high rates of growth of income between the same two periods more than doubled. The process of concentration of wealth in few hands has gone unabated under the present systems of political economy. According to the UNDP report, today "the net worth of the 358

richest people in the world is equal to the combined income of the poorest 45 per cent of the world's population --- that is, 2,300 million people."

In the global scenario this economic disparity between the rich and the poor is most dramatically evident in the gap between the industrially developed and the developing countries, and according to the report this gap is widening daily. Between 1960 and 1993, the gap in per capita annual income between the industrial and developing world tripled from \$ 5,700 to \$ 15,400. But it is not simply a matter of polarization of the world between rich and poor nations. Within each nation sharp disparities exist and in most cases they have been growing, justifying the notion of a "fourth world" of poverty and privation which is not conterminous with the more well-known third world. Thus, for example, "in countries like Brazil and Guatemala the richest twenty percent earn more than thirty times the poorest. Even in economically highly developed countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, Switzerland and Australia the difference is about ten fold."

The UNDP report measured human development by combining three components, namely, life-expectancy at birth, educational attainment and inflation adjusted income. Measured thus, the range of disparity between the countries at the top and those at the bottom is truly staggering. At the top of the scale are countries like Canada, the USA, Japan, the Netherlands and Norway. At the bottom are Angola, Burundi, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Mali, Somalia, Sierra Leone and Niger. Out of 174 countries covered by the Report, India ranks 135 behind Mynamar and Pakistan. Thus on the global map, much of South and South-East Asia, a good part of South America and virtually the whole of sub-Saharan Africa continue more or less to remain areas of darkness, although in each one of these countries there

have arisen minority power elites of different sizes who possess wealth and enjoy standards of living readily comparable to what obtains in the industrially developed western nations.

While more than half the world's population continue to be denied fulfilment of many of their very basic human needs like proper diet, education, shelter, health facilities, security of employment or proper return for their labour or services, an increasing part of the world's resources goes into military expenditure, space research and production and supply of luxury goods. We see it quite pointedly at our very doorstep in India. Here more than fifty percent of the population are condemned to live under the poverty line, but there is a phenomenal proliferation of luxury supplies to meet the ravenous appetite of the nouveaux riches who have emerged as the power-elite of post independence India. While India's villages continue to lack doctors, hospitals, medicines, libraries and in many cases, even primary schools, the political leadership is unanimous in giving priority to making India a nuclear power, equipped with missiles, rockets, satellites, space-stations and the lot. Neither Gandhi, nor Tagore, nor M.N. Roy seem to have exercised the slightest influence on the course of development of post-independence India. Power, not welfare of the people, seems to have received top priority, based on an unstated consensus, irrespective of party or ideological affiliations. And it is not only the rapidly growing power of destruction and intimidation which is being concentrated in the name of defence in the hand of the state. Even the power-elite of a country like India which ranks 135th in the world in terms of development—industrialists, managers and technocrats, planners, political leaders and legislators; successful men in various professions and occupations; bureaucrats and ranking officials in various services and establishments and the list can be fairly long—our power-elite in short have virtually unlimited access to

goods, possessions, luxuries and services which would be the envy of their peer groups even in developed societies. Roy had written extensively on this phenomenon of poverty in plenty in pre-independence India. Fifty years later, as we enter the twenty first century, the situation seems to have grown more acute.

III

The population explosion which took place in the twentieth century is another dark feature of our contemporary scenario which has contributed to widening the gap between the rich and the poor. Until now very little has been effectively done to control it on a global scale. The disparity in the rate of population growth not only between the industrially developed and developing countries, but also between the relatively well-off minority and the deprived majority of the latter has tended to perpetuate the division. Virtually every country in the west have reached nearly a zero rate of population growth while in most parts of the non-western world it ranges between two and three percent. At the same time in the developing countries the urban educated upper and middle class elite groups have taken to family planning, but among the majority of the poorer people the number continues to grow apace. One obvious and well-known consequence is that in countries with a high rate of population increase, a good part of the resources is eaten up before it may be employed for development purposes, thus tending to perpetuate poverty. But it is less widely noted that as population pressure increases in the developing countries, the more enterprising and educationally skilled young members of the urban middle classes move in increasing numbers to industrially developed countries, denuding their countries of birth of its leadership potential. In India, for example, this process of a new voluntary diaspora has been rapidly gaining momentum in recent

years, and as the twenty first century scenario unfolds this brain drain threatens to acquire catastrophic significance. It is one of several disastrous consequences of what has lately come to be known as the globalization process.

I have already mentioned the increased diversion of resources to military ends. After the overthrow of the Bolshevik regime and disintegration of the Soviet Empire in the nineties of the last century, it was hoped that suspension of the protracted cold war between the two super powers would begin to ease the situation. But the number of states engaged steadfastly on acquiring nuclear capability has increased, and, of late, the new leaders of Russia seem to be keen on making a show of their nuclear weaponry and on winning the support of developing nations by assisting them in their over-ambitious nuclear programme. There is no indication that the newly elected government of the United States do not wish to ensure its nuclear superiority. Revival of the atmosphere of cold war thus would seem to be a feature of the contemporary scenario, and cold war today is not limited to the two super powers, but extends to several developing countries, including India and Pakistan.

While recollection of the horrifying experience of Hiroshima may hold back nuclear states from a suicidal collision course, the already existing nuclear power plants and the vast stockpile of nuclear weaponry remain a deadly legacy from the twentieth to the twenty first century. The fearful hazards of nuclear plants were exposed by the disaster at Chernobyl and the accident at Three Mile Island. Unless effective ways are found and adopted for totally safe disposal of nuclear weapons and highly radio-active nuclear waste, the twenty first century will live in the shadow of a potential catastrophe which has no parallel in the history of civilization.

No less serious is the threat of global warming, asphyxiation

and pollution which the twenty first century has inherited from the twentieth. The enormous increase in the burning of fossil fuels for industry and transport over the last more than one hundred years, and the simultaneous cutting down of trees and reduction in forest areas, have been releasing into the atmosphere carbon dioxide and other noxious gases which have very nearly reached a point that threatens survival not only of the human race but also of all forces and forms of life on earth. The ozone layer which protects life on earth is being rapidly eroded by the heavy concentration of the chlorofluo-carbons in the atmosphere. The consequences of global warming beyond a certain point will be cataclysmic. Already respiratory ailments have increased markedly in urban and industrial centres of habitation. I come from a city where more and more people find it hard to breathe; and I understand it is even worse in the capital of India. In the course of my recent travels in Europe and the United States I did not find the situation any better. At the same time not only air but also earth and water are getting fatally polluted. The ecological imbalance brought about particularly in the twentieth century by excessive human greed, intemperate consumerism, megalomaniac pursuit of power, misdirected technology and total indifference to the need for a harmonious relation between man and his natural environment, has created a desperate situation which demands immediate attention from men and women of the twenty first century.

Although neither Marx's prediction of the collapse of capitalism from internal contradictions nor of a social revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat has been corroborated by developments in any part of the world, his insight into the phenomenon of alienation sharply accentuated by industrial revolution and bourgeois culture, an insight shared also by some of his perspicacious contemporaries, has proved to be quite illuminating and relevant. Divorced from nature, uprooted from

tradition, atomised and isolated from community, deprived from any sense of creativity and fulfilment in his work, reduced into a cog or an insignificant and replacable factor of a process over which he has no control, the overwhelming majority of individuals in industrialised societies have virtually been converted into "other-directed zombies" who have lost whatever "inner orientedness" they ever possessed. The process of alienation gradually reduces both capitalist and worker into what Herbert Marcuse described as "one dimensional man". By undermining personal integrity and cultivating hypocrisy or "bad faith" as essential to survival and success, bourgeois culture has fatally eroded the individual's resistance to pressures of powerful propaganda and advertisement, and in the end produced the phenomenon of mass-culture and proliferating cretinism. The ideal of *l'uomo universale* which the European renaissance had placed at the centre of the newly emerging modern civilization was inexorably replaced by the actuality of "economic man", money-fetishism replacing humanity's proper pursuit of multi-dimensional development and creativity. The society and culture which the twenty first century has inherited from the twentieth have placed money and power at the centre of human pursuit, replacing integrity, love, sense of fulfilment, warm human relationship and other humane objectives. I have been a teacher for over forty years. As I look at the scenario today I find in the new generation of educated young men and women, both here and abroad, a fairly large number who have been brought up to seek material success at any cost, success measured primarily in terms of money and power; others who adopt methods of terror and violence in their blind hatred of the existing order; and still others, sensitive and confused, who drop out of the rat race seeking relief in drugs and hallucination; and then a majority resigned to accepting passively the situation as it is, without any faith in their ability to change its course. Certainly not an inspiring scenario.

IV

Two developments which became pronounced in the closing decades of the last century—globalization and revolution in information technology—are for good or evil, likely to gain in force and profoundly influence the course of events in the new century. Whether in the long run they prove beneficial or harmful will largely depend on our awareness of the hazards involved in both and on whether timely and effective steps are taken to remove, or at least substantially reduce, those hazards.

If the different communities of the present day world were situated on an equal position of strength, then globalization might have become a process leading to the emergence of a world civilization based on the cardinal principle of unity in diversity. Over many millenia, homo sapiens invented and developed a rich variety of languages and cultures, myths, beliefs and lifestyles. It is through a genuine appreciation of their distinctness and an imaginative and sustained effort towards promoting a process of peaceful osmosis among different cultures that the foundations of a true universalism may be laid. This would require a clear and conscious rejection of every unilinear view of history and a total repudiation of uniformity imposed by force. However, in the prevailing actual situation different communities do not possess equal strength, and, as I have already noted, during the last forty years inequality has kept increasing between industrially developed and developing nations. In the past, weak communities have been repeatedly invaded and conquered by strong and aggressive communities, and empires have been built which sought to impose the culture of the conquering community on the conquered. In fact, many small communities and cultures have been cannibalized or virtually exterminated by more aggressive cultures.

But till towards the end of the twentieth century, no power had arisen anywhere which could threaten to impose its cultural dominance over *all* countries and communities of the world. The writ of the rival empires of the west during what some scholars have called the Vasco da Gama period of history was limited to their respective territories and colonies, which, though extensive, were certainly not global.

Then partly owing to the pressure of the nationalist movements in the countries ruled over by them, but even more due to material and moral exhaustion caused by two world wars of unprecedented magnitudes of destruction, all these European empires crumbled and disintegrated in the forties and fifties of the twentieth century. This left two super-powers competing for global hegemony, but by the early nineties the Bolshevik dictatorship was overthrown in the Soviet Union and its satellites in East Europe, and the Russian empire fell apart. That left the United States as the only super power in the world, and thanks to its immense resources and the revolution in communication and information technology, it was now in a position to try for the first time in human history to impose on mankind a crude though vibrant global culture, made in its aggressive image, 'Globalization, which in effect is today a polite and ingeniously conceived alias for Americanization, threatens now to impose the cultural hegemony of the last super power by undermining other national and community cultures. It has already penetrated the urban periurban areas of developing countries. Its influence is rapidly growing not only on the countries in its backyard, namely Latin America, but also in Africa and South and South-East Asia. I stress here the threat of cultural cannibalism; but with it and behind it at work is the strategy of the multinationals to penetrate the vulnerable areas of the developing economies and of the American government to pressurise the polity of less resourceful states. Neither Russia nor even

communist China appears at present immune to its subversive infiltration. During my recent travels abroad I have seen how the countries of Western Europe are trying hard, singly and together, to protect their respective culture and traditions from the assault of American tastes and styles. Here in the cities and towns of India, among the upper, middle and lower-middle classes American cultural penetration continues apace. Islamic fundamentalism, with its aggressive intolerance and insane hostility to rational inquiry, bode no good to any one in the world, least of all to the Muslims themselves. But in the present context it may be seen as a form of blind and instinctive resistance to American cultural hegemony. It is an open question if the resistance will be undermined by the workings of petro-dollar. In any case, the process of globalization as it operates at present does not remotely promise the evolution of a world civilization in which the unity of mankind will be based on a harmonious diversity of communities and cultures. Instead a plurality of vulnerable cultures will be steamrollered into a mechanical uniformity which is certain to affect fatally the creative richness of homo sapiens.

While the spectacular gains already made by the ongoing info-tech revolution are being widely advertised and urban middle class youth are falling for them everywhere, little attention is being paid to its damage potential. The rapid advance of science and technology during the twentieth century has already taken a heavy toll everywhere of the study of humanities. In the universities and other educational institutions, literature, arts and philosophy have been pushed to the wall, attracting few gifted teachers and drawing mostly such students as have failed to gain admission to courses which promise better return in terms of money and influence. 'The decline in aesthetic and moral sensitivity which sadly marks the new barbarism of our times is closely related to this growing neglect of humanities.' By putting the highest stress on speed in

performance and by making maximum body of information available at minimum effort the info-tech revolution may eventually reduce its beneficiaries into unreflective extensions of the instruments and processes which dominate their daily life. Comics and quickies instead of classics, sending and receiving telegraphic messages instead of exploring the hidden resources of language to find accurate and felicitous expression for the complex inner workings of ones psyche, prompt conditioned reflexes rather than reflective and far-seeing responses to stimuli—these trends of the later part of the twentieth century may be greatly re-inforced in the twenty first unless wise and effective measures are found and adopted in time to restrain these trends and give to science and info-tech a humane orientation.

However, of all the revolutions launched in the twentieth century that in the relation of sexes strikes me as the most positive and potentially the most far-reaching. Virtually since the beginning of civilization men have assumed and exercised the role of predominance over women. Religious beliefs, political and economic systems, law and morality, family and other institutions have singly and together worked to perpetuate the female's subservience to the male. One of the very first expressions of revolt against this patently inequitous situation was Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* written and published in 1792 at the time of the French Revolution. It made small impact at that time, and not till the First World War did the political rights of women gain my recognition, even in the West. It is with the publication of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* in 1949 with its central statement that "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman," and its declaration of hope that "one day man and woman will unequivocally affirm their equality and brotherhood", that the great movement of women's liberation was launched. However, it was only in the last quarter of the twentieth

century that the movement began to gain momentum and spread in different parts of the world. Male resistance to the legitimate demand of women to equal rights in every sphere of life is stubborn and will not easily disappear. Where it is not brute force, ingenious arguments and cunning devices are employed to postpone enactment or make infructuous just laws intended to establish sexual equality. Besides, among majority of women, especially in educational and economically backward areas and sections of society, traditional beliefs and attitudes of subservience to men is still very widespread and quite deepseated. However, women have been indisputably proving themselves the equal of men in skill and performance wherever some breaches are made in the sexual *Lakshman rekha*. Many more battles have to be won, but I have little doubt that we are in the throes of one of the most far-reaching revolutions in history.

I wholeheartedly welcome this revolution, for I find it utterly unacceptable that our civilization even in the 21st century will continue to keep one half of humanity in perpetual subservience to the other half. The pursuit and achievement of sexual equality will involve radical changes in every sphere of life—in our institutions and laws, in our attitudes and beliefs, in the set and ordering of our primary values, in human relationships and division of labour. It will be absolutely necessary to evolve new institutions and codes which are in consonance with the right to sexual equality. Many of them are already in the melting pot. Creative imagination and cooperative efforts, exploration and experiment, reason and good will in abundant measures will be required for the men and women of the 21st century to prevent chaos and to lay the foundations of a sane and just world order.

V

These are some of the highlights of the present day scenario as I

see it at the beginning of the twenty first century. If it is not quite rosy, it is not static either. It presents challenges and sets out some of the pressing tasks for the new generation. I have already stated that history does not have a predetermined single direction. History is shaped by men and women, and the direction it takes depends on their response to the challenges and tasks.

I shall close this lecture by briefly suggesting some of the major tasks which I find implicit in the present scenario. Although they are vitally interrelated, it may be useful to specify them under three categories. First, there are the *cultural* tasks. It is essential to develop a new humanistic outlook which stresses the need for harmony in the relation between homo sapiens and its natural environment and seeks effectively to restrain the current process of ecological degradation. Secondly, there has to be a proper reconciliation between scientific inquiry and research and ethical considerations. Well-being and not access to power has to be the central objective of intellectual pursuit. The moral responsibility of science for the consequences of its application has to be made an essential part of the training in any scientific discipline. Thirdly, the crucial importance of certain perennial values both for personal integrity and growth and social stability and development has to be instilled from childhood onwards and this has to be cultivated and reinforced throughout one's life. These values are, in fact, crystallizations through millenia of experience of the basic and universal needs of human existence—values like truth and freedom, love and friendship, creativity and cooperation, security and justice, in addition to such tangible requirements of life as food, shelter, medicines etc. In the course of the last more than one hundred years belief in perennial human values has been systematically undermined by various forces so that we have reached a point where ethical relativism has lead to moral nihilism, and corruption, falsehood, hatred and violence, injustice,

loneliness, distrust and similar destructive elements have come to be accepted as normal. A cultural movement which seeks to restore humanity's faith in its creative self and its sense of moral obligation may start a new renaissance on a global scale. This is one of the first tasks facing the twenty first century.

The second set of tasks relates to the radical restructuring of political systems which, for all their variations, have at least in the modern age only quickened the process of concentration of power in the hands of highly organized elite groups. While the principle of the sovereignty of the people is loudly proclaimed, in actual practice all sources of effective power in the existing systems are brought under the control of the higher echelons of the bureaucracy, the political parties, the armed forces, the big financial-industrial institutions, the police,—all of them working more or less in tandem in a power-sharing system. In so-called democracies, checks are sought to be effected by the provision for distribution of powers, but the resistance to any check on the process of power-concentration is very strong and mostly quite effective. What seems to be urgently needed is to devise and give effect to alternative political systems where major part of both power and responsibility is developed to relatively small grass-roots organizations. This vision of decentralised democracy where local people have an effective and direct part in the decision making process was shared in common by M. N. Roy, Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi, even though they differed widely on many issues. The task would seem to be on one hand to launch a movement for decentralization of power and direct participation of the people on the basis of organized and intelligent grass-roots democracies and, on the other, to evolve a global confederal system with minimal power and authority at the top which would seek to promote cooperation and unity without imposing itself on member units. This two-fold process as it gains

in strength will not only substantially attenuate the power of central authorities within nation-states, but also effectively reduce the dominance of stronger states and regions over those which are relatively weaker. Guided by the cultural movement mentioned earlier, this may lay the foundation of a new civilization based on freedom, equality and mutual aid instead of power and coercion.

The third category is concerned with evolving alternative economic systems where highest priority is given to fulfilling the basic material needs of all human beings—providing every one with such essential tangibles as food, clothing, shelter, education, medicine or health service, water, electricity etc. Meeting such needs would be the first call on available resources and technological innovations. Given the scenario which I have already outlined where more than half the world's population "still live in a prison of poverty" and where economic inequality of different magnitudes blot the face of our civilization everywhere, making it possible to meet the basic needs of every one will be undoubtedly a tremendous task. This will require drastic reduction in expenditure on so-called "defence account" and space and nuclear research. It will also invite cutting down investment on production and supply of luxury goods, on competitive advertisements, on patently wasteful competition. In other words, the twenty first century has among its first tasks the bringing into being of an economy which places the well-being of every one as its central pursuit and which will be in consonance with a moral-intellectual renaissance and the evolution of a decentralised global polity.

I refrain from mentioning other tasks implicit in the present scenario, I readily admit that it is easier to outline the main features of the contemporary situation and point to the challenges and tasks presented by it than to suggest how the tasks are likely to be fulfilled. What, however, should be quite clear is that the present

critical situation demands a coming together of men of conscience, wisdom and enterprise who have to devote their intellectual and moral resources, singly and together, to finding and proposing practical steps that will hasten the much needed global renaissance. Whether this happens in due time will shape the next phase of the scenario of the twenty first century.

Announcement

Paperback editions of *Selected Works of M.N. Roy* edited by Sibnarayan Ray have been published by Oxford University Press.

Volume I	(1917-22)	600 pp.	Rs. 275
Volume II	(1923-27)	740 pp.	Rs. 295
Volume III	(1927-32)	696 pp.	Rs. 250
Volume IV	(1932-36)	674 pp.	Rs. 250

INTRODUCTION

Prof. Sibnarayan Ray, Emeritus Fellow Literature, Department of Culture, a prolific writer, scholar and a colleague of Com. M.N. Roy in his later years when Roy was finalizing his concept of the Radical Humanist Philosophy. Prof. Ray taught at the University of Bombay and California; he was Chairman of Indian Studies at the University of Melbourne. On his return he joined as Director, Rabindra Bhavan, Vishva-Bharti University. As Chairman of Raja Ram Mohan Roy Library Foundation, he took extensive working tours of the country to activate and stock its branches all over. Currently Prof. Ray edits 'Jigyasa' a Bengali quarterly of ideas, published from Kolkata since 1980. He is a Life Trustee and Research Director of the Indian Renaissance Institute. He is the editor of four volumes of the Selected Works of M.N. Roy. These have already been published both in Hard Bound and Paper Back by Oxford University Press. These have been edited by him and more are under preparation.

SELECTED WORKS OF M. N. ROY			
The following works of M. N. Roy have been translated into English by Prof. Sibnarayan Ray and published by Oxford University Press.			
THE LIFE OF M. N. ROY	1971	1971	1971
THE LIFE OF M. N. ROY	1972	1972	1972
THE LIFE OF M. N. ROY	1973	1973	1973
THE LIFE OF M. N. ROY	1974	1974	1974

Search for Our Abiding Heritage*

Those who have conceived the idea of Renaissance as a historical necessity, know fully well that the great thinkers of ancient India made valuable contribution to the common human heritage. There are two aspects of human thought. One is temporary. That aspect of thought is valid for one particular period of history, but loses its force in another period of changed social environments. But there is an abiding under-current throughout the history of human thought. In the absence of that, culture, progress, civilisation would be impossible. Whenever mankind comes to a dead end, to what appears to be a dead end, it naturally looks back, trying to draw courage and inspiration from the abiding features in past traditions. It is necessary to discover the abiding features of the culture and thought-currents of ancient India. If they can help us to visualise what is in store for us in the future, it will surely be worthwhile to dig in the past. We must dig deep in the mountainous heap of rubbish which has been built up as the bulwark of age-long stagnation, and which is mistakenly cherished even today as our heritage.

* From the writings of M.N. Roy in *Philosopher-Revolutionary*.
Edi. Sibnarayan Ray, p. 250, Ajanta Pub., 1955, New Delhi.