



# Critique of M. N. Roy's Philosophical Methods: A Comprehensive Analysis

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## Abstract:

This paper critically examines the philosophical methods employed by the eminent Indian nationalist and political theorist Manabendra Nath Roy. Roy's approach to philosophy is characterized as eclecticism due to his attempt to accommodate diverse traditions such as Marxism, idealism, pragmatism, and existentialism within a single goal. In spite of having huge significance, it is also criticised because of its non-systematic approach, political biasness, and for non-clarity of expressions. Through a detailed analysis of Roy's philosophical writings, this paper aims to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of his methods and their implications for understanding his contributions to Indian philosophy and political thought.

**Key Words:** Eclecticism, Political-biasness, Marxism, Nationalism, Systematicity

## • Introduction:

Uniqueness of Roy's thought lies in his attempt to combine Marxism with humanistic values, which he articulated through his theory of "Radical Humanism." He argued for a revolutionary transformation of Indian society on the basis of socialist principles, while also advocating for cultural and intellectual freedom. Throughout his life, Roy remained deeply engaged in political activism – as a patriot he was involved in the Indian Nationalist movement at the first stage of his life and later participated in international socialist movements. His remarkable attempt to blend dialectical materialism with existentialism brings a revolution in the sphere of political thought. Roy's humanistic approach raises questions against the well-established notions like socialism, nationalism, and traditional humanism; also makes him a towering figure of the Indian enlightenment period. M. N. Roy's philosophical work holds significant importance in the history of Indian philosophy and political theory for several reasons. His theory is considered as eclecticism. Eclecticism refers to the practice of selecting and incorporating ideas, principles, or methods from various philosophical and intellectual traditions, without adhering strictly to any single school of thought.<sup>1</sup> Roy realized that attempt to synthesise diverse sources within a systematized framework often provides a broader

<sup>1</sup> Rosenthal, M. & P. Yudin, (ed.), *A Dictionary of Philosophy*, 1967, p. 132

understanding. So rather than sticking to any single philosophical system, Roy's insightful thought develops from so many diverse traditions. Roy's eclecticism allows him to integrate ideas from different philosophical traditions – both from east and west in such a manner that it can address the specific needs and challenges of Indian society. For example, he combines Marxist principles of class struggle, the outcome of historical materialism, with Indian nationalist aspirations to articulate a vision of socialism that is appropriate in Indian context. Similarly, Roy's emphasis on individual freedom and autonomy is the proof that his concept of social transformation is at least partially influenced by the thoughts of the existentialist thinkers. His holistic approach does not treat social change separating it from human existence. Let me discuss now about the ideas that are clubbed by M. N. Roy to strengthen his approach.

### **Synthesis of the ideals of East and West**

Roy's philosophical writings represent a unique synthesis of the philosophical traditions of east and west. His philosophical framework that is capable to address both the socio-political context of India and the global philosophical issues is founded on the Indian intellectual heritage in one hand and on Western philosophical notions in the other. His concept of a democratic system admits the necessity to ensure freedom for all, though believes that not the compulsion, but cooperation among citizens is the only possible way to hit the goal. M. N. Roy's philosophical work occupies a significant place in Indian philosophy and political theory by offering a distinctive Indian perspective on universal philosophical questions and by providing a theoretical framework for social and political transformation of India and beyond.

### **A unique perspective towards Indian Nationalist movement**

Roy's philosophical ideas play a vital role in shaping Indian nationalist thought during the early 20th century. He aims to provide a philosophical foundation to the Indian independence movement as in his understanding political liberation from colonial rule is not sufficient, but social and economic emancipations of the mass is also necessary. He realized the fact that the suffering of mass cannot be reduced through nationalist movement as target of this movement is only to transfer the political power from the British to the elite class of India. As a result status of the common people is not going to be improved by this movement. So his intention was to use this movement against both political and social suppression that the common people experience from the higher class of people. In his fusion theory Roy synthesizes Marxist principles with Indian nationalist aspirations. Roy's concept of "Radical Humanism" reflects integration of ideas from both idealism and pragmatism too. He argues for a human-centered approach to philosophy and politics, emphasizing the importance of individual freedom and creativity while also recognizing the pragmatic need for social and economic transformation. He analyses India's colonial experience through the lens of class struggle and historical materialism, while also emphasizing on the importance of cultural and spiritual renewal in the nationalist movement. Roy's work is particularly significant for its attempt to integrate Marxist principles with Indian nationalist aspirations. Connecting Marxist theory to the Indian context, Roy strengthens his philosophical perspective to handle the inimitable challenges facing Indian society including poverty, caste oppression, and religious intolerance. In this context Roy's philosophical writings make insightful critiques to colonialism and capitalism by highlighting their exploitative and

dehumanizing effects on Indian society. His analysis of imperialism and class struggle resonated with anti-colonial movements of India as well as of other colonized regions around the world. Roy's engagement with Western Marxist thinkers, such as Karl Korsch and Antonio Gramsci, demonstrates his willingness to incorporate insights from Marxist thought. He draws upon their analyses of state and revolution to develop his own theories of socialist transformation in the context of colonial and post-colonial societies. Roy's advocacy for socialism and internationalism reflects his commitment towards global solidarity among oppressed people. Through his writings and political activities, he promotes the idea of a world which is free from exploitation and imperialism. He emphasizes on the importance of cooperation among different nations and people to achieve social and economic justice. Roy's philosophical legacy continues to influence contemporary debates in Indian political thought, particularly regarding the relationship between nationalism, socialism, and democracy. His ideas have inspired subsequent generations of scholars and activists to critically assess the complexities of Indian society and to strive for a more just and equitable future. In his later writings, such as *Reason, Romanticism, and Revolution*<sup>2</sup> Roy tends towards existentialist viewpoint as he focuses on the importance of freedom, authenticity, and individual responsibility. He incorporates existentialist ideals into his critique of totalitarianism and advocates a more humanistic and democratic socialism.

These examples illustrate M. N. Roy's adeptness at integrating ideas from various philosophical traditions for the purpose of developing his own distinct philosophical perspective. Eclecticism in philosophy offers several advantages that contribute to the richness and depth of philosophical inquiry. Eclecticism in philosophy offers numerous advantages, including broadening the scope of philosophical inquiry, facilitating interdisciplinary dialogue, promote creativity and innovation, and enrich philosophical discourse. By embracing eclecticism, philosophers can explore a diverse range of ideas and perspectives, leading to a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the complexities of human existence and the world we inhabit. But it also poses several drawbacks, including potential inconsistencies and lack of coherence in philosophical system. In the next section I will discuss about the drawbacks of eclecticism, including its implications for M. N. Roy's philosophical system:

- **Lack of Coherence:**

In philosophy eclecticism leads to lack of coherence, as it involves synthesizing ideas from diverse traditions without necessarily establishing a consistent framework for integrating them. Without a clear method for reconciling conflicting viewpoints, eclectic philosophical systems may appear disjointed or fragmented. Without careful attention to the logical and conceptual coherence of their philosophical arguments, eclectic philosophers may inadvertently undermine the integrity of their philosophical systems. M. N. Roy's eclectic approach can be criticised due to lack of coherence as a philosophical system. Critics argue that Roy's integration of Marxism, idealism, pragmatism, and existentialism lead to inconsistencies in his philosophical arguments and conclusions as he is trying to combine the views that are contradictory to one another in several senses. Without clear criteria for assessing the truth or coherence of different philosophical

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<sup>2</sup> Roy, M N, Reason, Romanticism and Revolution, "New Humanism", 1989, p. 487-492

viewpoints, eclecticism may undermine the pursuit of philosophical rigor and precision. In eclecticism it is impossible to provide a single criterion for evaluating competing philosophical claims and to determine the validity of diverse perspectives. In Roy's philosophical writings, the eclectic nature of his approach sometimes makes it difficult to discern the epistemological foundations underlying in his arguments. Critics argue that Roy's failure to establish consistent epistemological principles undermines the reliability and credibility of his philosophical conclusions. They also think that Roy's eclectic approach occasionally leads to unresolved tensions between different philosophical perspectives, compromising the overall coherence of his philosophical system.

### **Tendency towards Superficiality:**

Eclecticism may encourage a superficial approach with philosophical ideas. Philosophers may prioritize breadth over depth in their exploration of diverse traditions. Without delving deeply into the underlying assumptions and implications of different philosophical perspectives, eclectic philosophers can be blamed for taking the risk to oversimplify complex philosophical issues. Critics of Roy's philosophical methodology argue that his eclectic approach sometimes treats philosophical concepts and theories superficially. Rather than engaging deeply with the nuances of different philosophical traditions, Roy's writings occasionally reflect a cursory understanding of complex philosophical ideas.

- **Lack of Systematicity:**

Systematicity in philosophy refers to the harmonization and coherence of ideas within a fixed philosophical system or framework. It involves structuring philosophical concepts, arguments, and theories in a logical and interconnected manner to facilitate understanding and analysis. A systematic approach helps philosophers to develop comprehensive theories that give explanations for all the complexities of the subject matter and provide a coherent basis for addressing philosophical questions. In the context of M. N. Roy's philosophical writings, systematicity refers to the extent to which his ideas are organized and integrated into a coherent framework. While Roy's writings cover a wide range of topics, including politics, ethics, metaphysics, and epistemology, critics have noted a lack of systematicity in his philosophical approach. Instead of presenting a unified and systematic theory, Roy's writings often exhibit a disjointed and fragmented structure where ideas and arguments appear in a scattered and disconnected manner. For example, in Roy's work *India in Transition: A Study in Political Evolution*, he discusses various aspects of Indian society and politics, including colonialism, nationalism, and socialism. While the book addresses important themes and issues, critics have pointed out the lack of a clear and consistent theoretical framework to organize Roy's arguments. Instead, the book reads more like a collection of essays or articles, with each chapter exploring a different topic without necessarily building upon or synthesizing previous discussions.

- **Political Bias in Roy's Philosophical Methods:**

M. N. Roy's philosophical methods were influenced by his political commitments, particularly his involvement in Indian nationalism and socialism. While Roy's political engagement enriched his philosophical analyses by grounding them in real-world concerns, it also raised questions about the objectivity and impartiality of his philosophical insights. One aspect of political bias in Roy's philosophical

methods is his tendency to prioritize ideological commitments over dispassionate inquiry. As a committed socialist and nationalist, Roy approached philosophical questions from a perspective shaped by his political agenda. This could lead to selective interpretation of evidence or arguments that aligned with his pre-existing beliefs, potentially skewing the analysis and conclusions of his philosophical work. Furthermore, Roy's political bias may have influenced the scope and focus of his philosophical inquiries. His commitment to Indian nationalism and socialism led him to prioritize topics and themes that were relevant to the struggle for independence and social justice in India. While this political engagement lent urgency and relevance to Roy's philosophical work, it also restricted the breadth of his inquiry and may have overlooked alternative perspectives or neglected certain philosophical issues. Another aspect of political bias in Roy's philosophical methods is the potential for dogmatism or ideological rigidity. Roy's adherence to Marxist principles and his identification with the Indian nationalist movement could have constrained his willingness to entertain dissenting viewpoints or the alternative ideologies. This ideological biasness may create hindrances in the path of open-minded exploration of philosophical ideas. Ultimately Roy's philosophical analyses lack the intellectual diversity. Roy's engagement with political movements and ideologies informed his philosophical perspective and influenced the themes, arguments, and conclusions of his philosophical writings. Roy's political bias for philosophical inquiry is at the risk of ideological distortion or oversimplification. Roy's commitment to Indian nationalism and socialism could have led him to prioritize certain political agendas or perspectives over others, potentially distorting his analysis of philosophical concepts or overlooking alternative viewpoints. This bias may have restricted the scope of Roy's philosophical inquiries and limited the diversity of perspectives represented in his work.

Specific instances where political bias is evident in Roy's philosophical writings include his treatment of issues such as colonialism, imperialism, and class struggle. In his writings on colonialism, Roy often framed the struggle for Indian independence within a Marxist framework of class conflict, identifying the role of capitalist exploitation and imperialist oppression in shaping colonial societies. While this perspective offered valuable insights into the material conditions of colonialism, critics argue that Roy's Marxist interpretation may have oversimplified the complexities of colonial power dynamics and neglected alternative interpretations of colonial history. Similarly, Roy's advocacy for socialism has influenced his analysis of social and economic issues, such as poverty, inequality, and exploitation. While Roy's socialist principles encourage him to criticise capitalist society and to form his proposals for socialist transformation, critics opine that his political bias may have led him to downplay the limitations or challenges of socialist ideology and to overlook alternative approaches for addressing social and economic injustices. Challenges of maintaining objectivity and impartiality in philosophical analysis, especially in the context of political engagement, include the difficulty of separating personal beliefs from philosophical inquiry. It invites the risk of confirmation bias or motivated reasoning, and the challenge of navigating the perspectives of the person regarding conflicting ideologies. Philosophers must strive to critically evaluate their own assumptions and biases, engage with diverse viewpoints and perspectives, and remain open minded to revise their conclusions in the light of new evidence and arguments. In the context of political engagement, philosophers should be particularly vigilant in maintaining intellectual honesty, rigor, and fairness in their

philosophical inquiries, recognizing the potential impact of political bias on the integrity and credibility of their philosophical analyses.

- **Synthesis vs. Originality:**

In the context of philosophical innovation, synthesis refers to the process of combining existing philosophical ideas, theories, or concepts from different traditions or sources to create new perspectives or frameworks. Synthesis involves integrating diverse viewpoints into a cohesive whole, often with the aim of addressing complex philosophical questions or resolving apparent contradictions. Originality, on the other hand, refers to the creation of new ideas, theories, or concepts that are not a mere derivation of existing philosophical thought. Originality involves the development of novel insights or perspectives that contribute to the advancement of philosophical discourse and knowledge. M. N. Roy's philosophical writings demonstrate both synthesis and originality in his approach to philosophical inquiry. Throughout his work, Roy synthesizes existing philosophical ideas and concepts from various traditions, including Marxism, Indian philosophy, existentialism, and pragmatism, to develop his own unique philosophical perspective. Roy's eclectic approach to philosophy and his engagement with political movements may have led some philosophers to question the depth or rigor of his philosophical contributions. Critics may argue that Roy's reliance on synthesis and his tendency to engage with philosophical ideas in a political context detract from the originality and intellectual integrity of his work. However, the enduring relevance of Roy's ideas and their impact on philosophical discourse suggest that his contributions represent a significant and lasting legacy within the philosophical community. Ultimately, Roy's approach to synthesis several notions from other theories reflects his commitment to address presents social and political issues through philosophical inquiry, demonstrates the potential for philosophy to engage with real-world concerns and inspire meaningful change. While Roy's contributions involve significant synthesis of existing ideas, they also contain elements of genuine originality, particularly in his application of philosophical principles to the context of Indian society and politics. For example, Roy's analysis of Indian nationalism and colonialism from a Marxist perspective offers a novel interpretation of historical and social phenomena that diverges from the traditional nationalist concept or from Marxist accounts. Similarly, his concept of Radical Humanism represents a creative synthesis of Western philosophical ideas with Indian intellectual traditions, offering a distinctive approach to address questions of social justice and human liberation. The implications of Roy's approach to synthesis and originality for his standing within the philosophical community are complex. On one hand, Roy's ability to synthesize diverse philosophical ideas and apply them to concrete political and social issues has earned him recognition and influence within both Indian and global philosophical circles. His work has contributed to broader debates in philosophy, politics, and social theory, inspiring subsequent generations of thinkers and activists.

- **Clarity of Expression in Roy's Philosophical Writings:**

Clarity of expression in philosophical writings refers to the ability to communicate complex ideas, arguments, and concepts in a clear, concise, and accessible manner. It involves using language that is precise, coherent, and understandable to readers, facilitating comprehension and engagement with

philosophical ideas. Clarity of expression is essential for effective communication of philosophical ideas, as it enables readers to grasp the meaning and significance of philosophical arguments and concepts, thereby fostering critical thinking and intellectual exchange. In M. N. Roy's philosophical writings, the clarity of expression varies depending on the complexity of the ideas being discussed to the intended audience. While Roy's writing style is generally characterized by its intellectual depth and richness, critics have noted instances where his prose may be opaque, verbose, or difficult to follow. For example, in his philosophical treatises such as *Reason, Romanticism, and Revolution* or *Science and Superstition*, Roy explores complex philosophical themes and arguments that may require careful reading and reflection to understand fully. However, Roy also demonstrates the ability to communicate philosophical ideas with clarity, conciseness, and accessibility, particularly in his more accessible works aimed at a broader audience. For example, in his essays and speeches on political and social issues, Roy often employs straightforward language and concrete examples to convey his ideas and to make them more accessible to readers without extensive philosophical background.

- **Conclusion:**

So it can be claimed that attempt to make a new theory combining several contradictory views also has significant drawbacks, including the risk of inconsistency, epistemological challenges, superficiality, and lack of systematicity. These drawbacks have implications in M. N. Roy's philosophical system too, raising questions about the reliability and coherence of his eclectic approach to philosophy. But that cannot dismiss the strengths of Roy's Philosophical Method of Eclecticism. Roy's ability to synthesize ideas from diverse philosophical traditions enriched his philosophical perspective and offered unique insights into Indian society and politics. Despite drawing from existing philosophical ideas, Roy's contributions included original insights and perspectives, particularly in his application of philosophical principles to the context of Indian nationalism and socialism. On the other hand, it is also true that weaknesses of Roy's philosophical methods in to some extent lack systematicity. His philosophical writings often lacked systematic organization, leading to disjointed or fragmented arguments and limiting that limits the coherence of his philosophical system. Roy's political commitments, particularly his advocacy for Indian nationalism and socialism, sometimes influenced the objectivity and impartiality of his philosophical analyses, leading to potential biases in his work. But as a whole it can be claimed that M. N. Roy's philosophical contributions offers valuable insights into the complexities of Indian intellectual history and the intersections of philosophy, politics, and social changes. By critically evaluating Roy's philosophical methods and their implications, scholars can deepen their understanding of his enduring legacy and its significance for contemporary thought and inquiry.

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