

Many Lohias? Appropriations of Lohia in Karnataka

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Analysing Rammanohar Lohia's reception in the spheres of party politics, social movements and literature in Karnataka, it emerges that his impact on electoral politics in the state was not all that substantial. However, some key policy innovations such as Devaraj Urs' land reforms and pro-backward class policies in the 1970s owed a debt to Lohia. He was also a major influence on social and literary movements in the state. Besides inspiring some of the key leaders of the farmers' movement, Lohia contributed to the distinctiveness of the dalit movement in Karnataka. His ideas on caste, language and individual freedom also inspired the leading lights of Kannada literary modernism. And no historical study of the Kannada language movement can discount the attraction Lohia's strong support for regional languages had for proponents of Kannada.

How is a multifaceted political figure like Rammanohar Lohia appropriated by different constituencies? What do their different interpretations reveal about their own political and aesthetic choices? How does their institutional location regulate the "Lohia" they disseminate? This paper asks these questions by analysing Lohia's reception in the spheres of party politics, social movements and literature in the state of Karnataka. Though popular imagination connects Lohia's influence to a few north Indian states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, he shaped the imagination of democracy in some of the most creative individuals in Karnataka. The ideal of caste equality, the virtues of economic democracy and a decentralised administration, the "equal irrelevance" of capitalism and communism, and the political necessity of de-privileging the English language – in short, the ideas with which Lohia tried to evolve a model of Indian socialism – informed the activist consciousness of many influential politicians, social activists, intellectuals and artists in Karnataka for more than five decades.¹

This paper is an attempt to fill a gap in the existing literature, for there is no study on the implications of Lohiaite activism in Karnataka.² In doing so, it uses an archive that has not received adequate attention from social scientists. Essays from commemorative and felicitation (*abhinandana*) volumes, interviews, and small publications found in personal collections make up much of the material used here.³

Political Parties and State Policy

The image of Lohia in Karnataka is intimately linked with his brief, but dramatic, involvement with the Kagodu farmers' satyagraha. Between mid-April and August 1951, landless tenants struggled against their landlords over the terms of tenancy at Kagodu, a village in Sagar taluk of Shimoga district. Their struggle acquired political intensity with the mobilisational efforts of socialist leaders in the state like Shantaveri Gopala Gowda (1923-1972). Lohia joined the satyagrahis at Kagodu on 14 June 1951. He was arrested and sent to a jail in Bangalore for a short period. His association with this protest gave it countrywide publicity.⁴ Although the satyagraha did not have radical consequences in terms of altering landlord-tenant relations in Kagodu or fostering a support base for the Socialist Party (SP) in the state, it was an important precursor to subsequent activism in the region centred on tenancy reforms and an agricultural land ceiling. The Kagodu satyagraha continues to be remembered as the first farmers' protest in post-independence Karnataka.

The Kagodu satyagraha brought political gains for the SP in Shimoga district and its neighbouring areas. This region was to remain the only SP stronghold in the state until the demise of the

I am grateful to Yogendra Yadav for his encouragement and valuable suggestions for revising this essay. In the absence of an organised archive on Lohia, I have had to rely on the help of more individuals than I can acknowledge in this short note. Konandur Lingappa and Babu Heddurshetti generously shared their knowledge of socialist politics in Karnataka. Siddalingaiah clarified the importance of Lohia for the evolution of dalit activism in Karnataka. Conversations with H T Rajendra, U R Ananthamurthy, Devanoora Mahadeva, R P Venkatesh Murthy and Manu Chakravarthy have also helped in writing this essay. Diwakar Hegde and Chandrashekar Aijoor lent me books and were always willing to help track of individuals for me to contact. Prof Hanumantha, Krishna Byregowda, Gauri Lankesh, Deepa Ganesh and Vikas Kumar helped me locate useful material. I am grateful to all of them.

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party in Karnataka. Admired widely for his integrity and courage, Gopala Gowda was the first important SP legislator in Karnataka.⁵ He was elected to the state legislative assembly from different constituencies in Shimoga district in 1952, 1962 and 1967. His speeches demanding land reforms, decentralisation of power, nationalisation of the Kolar Gold Fields and the consecration of Kannada as the language of the state administration gave Lohiaite ideals an airing in the state legislative assembly (Gowda 1971). His struggle to provide security of tenure to tenant farmers was an important factor behind the 1961 land reform legislation introduced by Congress Revenue Minister Kadidal Manjappa (Tejaswi 1996: 171).⁶

The SP in Karnataka never gained mass support. In the 1952 state assembly election, the party won three seats while its ally, the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Paksha, won eight seats in Mysore state. When Lohia's protest against a police firing on estate workers in Travancore led to his expulsion from the Praja Socialist Party (PSP) and the rebirth of the SP in 1955, the split affected the socialists in Mysore state as well. Only leaders such as Gopala Gowda, J H Patel and others who were drawn to Lohia's personality during the Kagodu satyagraha declared their affiliation to the SP. The majority of the PSP members supported Lohia's expulsion on the grounds of indiscipline. In 1956, the PSP had a larger support base in the expanded Mysore state because the PSP-SP split had little impact on the party's structure in the newly added regions of Bombay-Karnataka, Coastal Karnataka and Hyderabad-Karnataka. The socialists as a whole remained a marginal political force in Karnataka and within them, the party led by Lohia was always smaller in terms of electoral success.⁷ A big chunk of the PSP leadership shifted to the Congress following the latter's stunning victory in the 1970 parliamentary election. The subsequent merger of the PSP and the SP did not do much to improve the SP's electoral fortunes – the newly united party won just three seats in the election to the state legislature in 1972.⁸

The SP's poor performance was attributed to the absence of serious organisational attempts to build a base for itself in the state. Its electoral influence was restricted to Shimoga district except for an occasional election victory outside the region. In 1973, on the occasion of four decades of socialist activism, K G Maheshwarappa, the state president of the united SP, regretted the destructive effect personal egotism and factionalism had had on the socialist struggle in the state (Maheshwarappa 1973: 2). Later in the decade, important second-generation SP leaders such as J H Patel moved to the Janata Party after the SP merged with it in 1977, while S Bangarappa and Kagodu Thimmappa shifted to the Congress in the late 1970s and early 1980s.⁹ But socialist politics had a great impact through the influence it wielded on the mainstream politics of the Congress. The 1974 land reforms of Congress Chief Minister Devaraj Urs, which conferred landownership on tenants, hijacked a key plank of socialist activism in the state. The pro-backward class policies of the Urs government also owed a debt to the long-time socialist policy of favouring reservations for the disadvantaged sections.

Interviews with two senior socialist leaders suggested that both the SP and the PSP were embittered about parting ways.¹⁰ Although the two parties agreed on many policy issues, their

strategies for realising them and their styles of articulation differed. Whereas the PSP favoured Kannada as the language of administration, the SP linked the issue to Lohia's slogan of *Angrezi Hatao*. Similarly, while the PSP broadly favoured reservations for the backward classes, the SP demanded a clear 60% reservation for scheduled castes and tribes (SCs and STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), minorities and women. The SP also affirmed its commitment to the backward classes through the appointment of a Muslim as its state president.¹¹ While both the SP and the PSP supported reservations for women as a means to achieve gender equality, the former demanded that internal reservation be observed, along with the backward class criteria, in the quota set aside for women in the party.¹² Leaders of the PSP were at the same time critical that Lohia, a vociferous critic of the personality cult in politics, had himself become the victim of such a cult within the SP.

Social Movements of Farmers and Dalits

Lohia's thoughts had a relatively poor impact on the state's party politics but they influenced social movements in Karnataka in a big way. In the mid-1960s, the Samajvadi Yuvajana Sabha (SYS), a forum of socialist youth activists that grew out of the activities of the Kannada Yuvajana Sabha in Mysore under the leadership of M D Nanjundaswamy (1936-2004) and K P Poornachandra Tejaswi (1938-2007), attempted to rescue Lohiaite ideals, which they felt were being abused by the SP. Important dalit intellectuals such as Devanoora Mahadeva and Govindaiah were also active in SYS activities in Mysore.¹³ Many of these socialists came together under the Nava Nirmana Samiti, a forum formed in the wake of Jayaprakash Narayan's (JP) activism in the 1970s. Tejaswi wrote, "The cultural basis of JP's struggle seemed a natural extension of socialism to those of us working in Lohia's Socialist Party" (2009: 121).

Although Lohia did not find much support among labour activists in urban areas,¹⁴ he was an inspiration to farmers' organisations, especially the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha (KRRS), which launched a powerful farmers' movement in the 1980s.¹⁵ Nanjundaswamy, the influential leader of the KRRS, saw no distinction between the socialist movement and the farmer's movement he helped build. Indeed, he saw the latter as the second phase of the SYS' activities (2008: 100, 161). He wrote that Lohia's *Marx, Gandhi and Socialism* had helped him achieve political clarity on returning to Mysore after his legal training in Germany (2008: 156). The appeal of Lohiaite metaphysics to him was also evident in an editorial he wrote on the occasion of Lohia's 75th birth anniversary. For Lohia, he said, a consciousness that perceived time as both momentary and eternal, and viewed the self as equal to all the other elements constituting the world but as less permanent than the other elements, meant cultivating individual responsibility.¹⁶ It was important for activists to understand this, Lohia felt, because they would then relinquish the desire to become superior to others and readily abdicate power in any situation (Nanjundaswamy 1989: 56).

Lohia's thought mattered more to the upper levels of leadership in the KRRS. Although workshops and public rallies were frequent, efforts were not made to inculcate a distinct sense of the

party's ideology in its cadres. The KRRS did not initiate any clearly spelt out Lohiaite programmes. Although the welfare of farmers did emerge as an independent political issue through the efforts of the KRRS, it was not backed by a sharply defined ideology. As it happened, in the mid-1980s, the ruling Janata Party waived farmers' loans and cultivated the image of a pro-farmer party. Nanjundaswamy noted on many occasions that the KRRS was a part of the socialist movement. However, it did not function with the multidimensional socialist concerns of Lohia. Its focus was mainly on farmers' economic well being without an accompanying concern for the issues faced by dalits and religious minorities. Its leadership remained with the Vokkaligas and Lingayats, the two dominant castes of the state. At the time of the 1989 assembly election, the KRRS and the Dalit Sangharsha Samiti (DSS) made a brief attempt to unite on a political platform. But the latter remained sceptical of the KRRS' moral commitment towards caste equality and decided to back the Janata Party instead.

It is true that the KRRS never paid serious attention to the issue of caste equality or the problem of communalism.¹⁷ Barring the hundreds of "simple" (*sarala*) weddings organised under its auspices, its protests and programmes mainly revolved around safeguarding the economic interests of farmers. Its activism against the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) proposals and agribusiness multinational corporations (MNCs) such as Cargill Seeds in the 1990s, which won it countrywide publicity, was mostly a critique of the threats that international economic forces posed to farmers' livelihoods and the ecology.

Despite criticism for it being a movement of landed farmers that did not take the issue of caste inequality seriously,¹⁸ it cannot be denied that the KRRS helped foreground farmers as a political constituency in Karnataka. Though successful in pressuring the government to waive farm loans and the interest on these loans, and more broadly, shoring up farmers' self-confidence, the KRRS did not evolve into a stable pressure group. A reason for this is said to be the KRRS decision to contest the assembly election in 1989, in which it won only two seats and exposed itself as a party without much political clout.¹⁹

However, socialist leader Kishen Pattanayak credited Nanjundaswamy for saving the socialist movement at two crucial junctures (2008: 93-95). After Lohia and Gopala Gowda passed away, Pattanayak argued, it was Nanjundaswamy who kept socialism alive in Karnataka by mobilising the youth under the SYS. This continued even at a time many "opportunistic socialists" moved to other parties. The second juncture was when farmers' leaders like Sharad Joshi began to support capitalist globalisation in the 1990s. Nanjundaswamy continued to reject the legitimacy of capitalism, declaring, "No room for patents or copyright in socialism" (2008: 190). Splintered into factions, the KRRS now lacks its former strength, which is tragic when one considers the deepening agrarian crisis in the state.

B Krishnappa and Devanoora Mahadeva, two of the three founders of the DSS, the first major dalit organisation in the state, had been active Lohiaites. Krishnappa, who taught Kannada literature in a college in Bhadravati, had strong intellectual ties with socialists from the neighbouring town of Shimoga. An active associate of the SYS, he led protests against Sanskrit radio

programmes at the All India Radio regional station at Bhadravati and organised numerous inter-caste marriages. In the late 1970s, his Lohia-derived anti-communism made him dissuade dalit activists from supporting Samudaya, an influential communist theatre movement in Karnataka.

In the words of Siddalingaiah, the other founder of the DSS, Mahadeva was a "pucca Samajavadi" before the Samiti came into being.²⁰ Mahadeva recalled that he first learnt of Lohia from articles that appeared in newspapers the day after the leader died. He was later greatly impressed by Lohia's "hunger for equality" and "creativity" (Mahadeva 2010). Since the days of his association with the SYS in Mysore, Mahadeva had maintained political ties with his socialist friends. In 2005, he was involved in the establishment of the Sarvodaya Karnataka, a political party that aimed to build an unusual coalition of farmers and dalits.²¹

Siddalingaiah observed that the Lohiaite convictions of these leaders had played an important part in tempering the hostility of dalit activists in the state towards Mahatma Gandhi. In 1982, the DSS asked its followers to boycott Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi* because Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar did not figure in the film. Mahadeva defied the boycott and wrote a critical appreciation of Gandhi in his essay "I Watched *Gandhi* or Two Measures Short of the Sky." After watching the film, he agonised for days over whether he would have sided with Gandhi or Ambedkar if he had lived during their time. He decided that he would have probably been on Gandhi's side, while arguing with him, on behalf of Ambedkar, that he should understand the latter (1999: 120). "The truth of Lohia's observation that Gandhi would have become a figure as great as Christ had he remained true to his threat that India's partition could happen only over his dead body," he wrote, and Gandhi's wish to be reborn as an untouchable without making any effort to assume "the body, mind and thoughts" of an untouchable kept him two measures (*genu*) short of the sky (1999: 121).²² Mahadeva closed the essay by noting that the contemporary predicament of dalits required them to seek many ways of liberation, and that even Gandhi could provide a way for them in such a situation (1999: 122).

Siddalingaiah, who had worked with Nanjundaswamy as a co-secretary of the SYS in Bangalore in the early 1970s, leaned towards Marxism. The Lohiaite and Marxist backgrounds of the DSS founders, Siddalingaiah pointed out, ensured that their activist concerns never lost sight of the oppressed among the non-dalit sections of society. Instead of advocating caste conflict, they directed their activism against the state. Their large ideological canvas opened up a space for them and progressive activists from the upper castes to interact with each other. While the problem of untouchability remained at the heart of their concerns, Mahadeva recalled, they expanded their political and ethical concerns to include the humiliated (*avamanitha*) communities from among non-dalit castes (Mahadeva 2010).

Although a few of the KRRS leaders were influenced by Lohia, their organisational endeavours were mostly focused on the economic difficulties faced by farmers in the state. Lohia's larger concerns of caste and gender equality and Hindu-Muslim amity were not reflected in either KRRS programmes or the party's relations with other movements. The Left-Gandhian ideas of Lohia

contributed to the DSS' empathetic identification with the subordinate classes among non-dalits, its goodwill towards Gandhi and its abdication of violence as a means of seeking social justice. Lohia's arguments of economic democracy, however, were not prominent in the DSS' ideological vision. In an essay encouraging the DSS to form a political party, Pattanayak expressed concern that the organisation was risking ignoring the importance of struggling against capitalism through its excessive focus on issues of caste and the policy of reservation (2000: 171-172).

The Kannada Literary Sphere

Lohia's contribution to trends in Kannada literary modernism was rich. He mattered immensely to three of the most charismatic writers of the *Navya* (modernist) movement in Kannada literature – U R Ananthamurthy, P Lankesh (1935-2000) and Tejaswi. All of them were from Shimoga, a place rife with socialist discussions in the post-Kagodu satyagraha period. Very prolific, they created a large body of work in the form of novels, short stories, literary criticism, political essays, poetry and plays. More than 15 acclaimed Kannada films have been based on their stories. Kannada critic D R Nagaraj has noted that the cultural views of these writers have been “so powerful” that their influence can be seen in the conceptual vocabulary of even post-*Navya* writers (2002: 4).

Ananthamurthy encountered Lohia through his circle of contacts in Shimoga, particularly Gopala Gowda.²³ He explained why he was attracted to Lohia and, using the symbolic metaphors of the socialist leader, observed that the essence of Rama and Krishna were both combined in him (1971: 232-238). Like Rama, Lohia had a restricted self that affirmed itself through unequivocal acts within the space of a democracy. And, like Krishna, he had the boundless self of a creative artist. Lohia was a special individual who tried to be alive to the rich dualities of life's challenges while being committed to fundamental transformations in Indian society. He wanted to be outside history, like an artist. But believing in time's vicissitudes, he also aspired to bring about revolutionary changes. The presence of both these elements did not permit Lohia to be dogmatic. His profound contribution, Ananthamurthy argued, came out of his attempt to steer between a vacuous liberalism and a reductionist fundamentalism.

Ananthamurthy recalled Lohia's keenness to discuss D H Lawrence and the 12th century Veerashaiva *anubhaavis* in Karnataka when he first met him in Mysore in 1963. He was struck that Lawrence's aloofness from socialist politics did not come in the way of Lohia's appreciation for him (1971: 235). Ananthamurthy went on to say, “...his [Lohia's] thoughts have been invaluable for my writing, and for my understanding of Kannada literature itself.” He later acknowledged that Lohia had given him confidence that he could write in his language and helped him decide not to write in English.²⁴ Ananthamurthy noted, “Lohia made it possible for me to be a critical insider” (2010). Alongside a Marxist analysis of the relations of production, he said, Lohia made room for the Ishopanishad's ethic of abandoning the desire for wealth. Lohia's perspective, which kept both the structural and personal dimensions of politics in view, enabled Ananthamurthy to relate to tradition and religion as a critical insider. Many of his stories and

essays, especially his novel *Bharatipura* (1973), critique the epistemic limitations of the modern liberal imagination of reform in Indian society and invite us to explore the grounds of social critique internal to a culture.

Tejaswi also acknowledged Lohia's profound influence on him. “Lohia's thought transformed the way I lived and thought and my styles of understanding and expression, in short, my entire personality” (2009: 12). For him, Lohia was the only “original *mimamsakara*” (philosophical investigator) of the truth of his times. Although there were fine thinkers like Periyar E V Ramasamy Naicker, Ambedkar and Swami Vivekananda on the intellectual horizon, only Lohia appeared “theoretically complete” to him (Tejaswi 1996: 223). After completing his studies in Mysore, Tejaswi moved to a village to become an agriculturist. Lohia, he said, “opened his eyes to the mysterious, strange India” he found there and helped him realise the lack of connection between the education system and India's realities. It made him strive for a simple literary style, free from mystifying intellectual devices (Tejaswi 2009: 13). Tejaswi's fictional world is full of “ordinary” individuals with a logical intelligence at odds with modern rationalism. Despite his own rational convictions, his portrayal of non-modern characters is compassionate and tender.

Tejaswi's father, the great Kannada writer, Kuvempu (1904-1994), was a staunch advocate of adopting Kannada as the medium of instruction in universities. In 1963, Lohia visited Kuvempu in Mysore to invite him to preside over an *Angrezi Hatao* meeting in Delhi (Tejaswi 1996: 172). A few years after Lohia's death in 1967, Tejaswi and Nanjundaswamy compiled and translated passages from Lohia's major works and published them as a short book, *Lohia* (popularly known as *The Red Book*). In his foreword to this book, Kuvempu noted that Lohia's unique socialism had emerged from a careful scrutiny of the theories of western economics and political science through Gandhi's doctrines of truth, ahimsa and sarvodaya. During the 1970s, Tejaswi, along with other socialists, organised numerous public discussions around *jati vinasha* (the destruction of caste), the importance of rejecting the English language, and the need to avoid extravagant marriage ceremonies, to name but a few of the issues tackled.

Lankesh admitted, in his foreword to the Kannada translation of Lohia's *The Caste System*, his astonishment at the “experience, scholarship, sincerity and humanism” that the writer brought to discussions of “caste, gender and class” (1986: ii). He also admired his attempts to address matters to do with international relations. His thumbnail sketch of Lohia said, “He was a born dreamer... He smiled even during painful moments... He recognised the anti-life qualities of Yama-like seriousness and the comic side of historical events” (1988). Like Ananthamurthy, Lankesh admired Lohia for being an idealist with a sense of historical irony, a combination which made for a richer engagement with politics. His characterisation of love between an upper-caste girl and a lower-caste boy in his major novel *Mussanje Katha Prasanga* (1978) bears traces of a Lohiaite orientation to caste relations.²⁵ A robust socialist sensibility informed much of the political discussions in the pages of *Lankesh Patrike*, a hugely successful political and literary weekly that Lankesh founded in

1980. (He was its editor till his death in 2000.) This weekly, which was run without advertisement support, set a trend in critical journalism in Karnataka.

Lohia was not perceived as a Hindi chauvinist by Kannada intellectuals; instead, he was seen as a supporter of regional languages.²⁶ K Lingappa, a former SP member of the assembly and one of the earliest Lohiaite youth activists, observed that Lohia saw Hindi as one of the national languages and not *the* national language (2010). Lingappa was among the first to start a pro-Kannada movement in the state in the mid-1950s. In 1956, following the “unification” of Karnataka, language activists were animated by an impulse to establish the institutional primacy of Kannada in the state. In 1957, Lingappa founded the Kannada Yuvajana Sabha (KYS) in Mysore, which made organised efforts to secure the primacy of Kannada’s status in Karnataka. Its members decided to arrive at Lohia’s programme of *Angrezi Hatao* through endorsing the cause of Kannada (Govindaraju 1999: 21-23). The KYS youth activists regrouped under the SVS in the mid-1960s. In 1967, J H Patel, the only SP Member of Parliament from Karnataka, delivered a speech in Kannada in Parliament and became the first politician in India to speak in a language other than English or Hindi there. This highly publicised event was a symbolic but triumphal affirmation of Lohia’s arguments in favour of regional languages.

Lohia’s Divergent Careers

This paper has attempted to track Lohia’s presence in three institutional spheres in Karnataka: the SP; the farmer and dalit movements; and in Kannada literary modernism. The figure of “Lohia” performs different functions in each of these spheres. These spheres of Lohia’s influence, however, were not insular and separate from each other. Discussions in one sphere spilled over into the others, while some individuals moved between these spheres.²⁷

Some of Lohia’s key ideas figured prominently in the manifestoes and legislative assembly speeches of SP politicians – anti-Congressism, the importance of the decentralising power, land reform, reservations for the backward castes, SCs, STs and women, and the need to reject English and encourage regional languages. All of these were valid policy issues. Lohia’s ideological seriousness, which was evident in their interventions in the state assembly, speeches and other writings, separated the SP politicians from both the ruling Congress Party and their rival Socialist Party, the PSP.

Lohia’s multifaceted political thought was reduced to the issue of protecting farmers’ interests in the KRRS. Many of the KRRS activists had earlier been with the SVS. Although the programmes of the KRRS did not explicitly invoke Lohia, Nanjundaswamy viewed the farmers’ struggle as a socialist movement. However, the KRRS rarely addressed the issue of caste equality in its discussions. Nor did it make any attempt to include lower-caste or dalit individuals in the party structure. The party’s organisational structure and support base, which mainly consisted of members of the dominant castes, did not provide space for addressing issues of caste inequalities and violence. The absence of a gesture of solidarity with other oppressed groups during the course of

its organised protests made obvious Lohia’s reduced, one-dimensional presence in the KRRS.²⁸

Although two of the three founders of the SVS had been Lohiaite activists in the SVS, Ambedkar became more important than any other thinker-activist for them in building an independent dalit movement. Their earlier acquaintance with Lohia’s thoughts, however, encouraged them to make an ethical space for the marginalised sections among non-dalits. This important ideological gesture, combined with the absence of anti-Gandhi sentiments and the rejection of violence as a means for seeking social justice, have contributed to the making of a distinct dalit movement in Karnataka.²⁹

The varied appropriations of Lohia in the Kannada literary sphere reveal how a writer’s political-aesthetic disposition makes for a certain kind of engagement with other thinkers. Lankesh and Tejaswi agreed with Lohia’s emphasis on the primacy of an individual’s freedom in the face of community demands. Meanwhile, K V Subbanna, a distinguished theatre personality and an admirer of Lohia (he translated Lohia’s *Interval during Politics* to Kannada), found virtue in the practice of self-sacrifice to serve the higher interests of a community. Poet Gopalakrishna Adiga’s fascination with Arnold Toynbee’s cyclical theory of history led him to translate Lohia’s tract *Wheels of History* into Kannada. Tejaswi and Lankesh were in open admiration of Lohia’s proposals for ending caste discrimination through inter-caste marriages and a rational dismissal of religious superstitions. But Ananthamurthy was sceptical, seeing hubris lurking in the liberal modernist aspiration to destroy tradition. He stirred controversy by saying that caste could also be seen as a source of knowledge and creative talent. Some of the most passionate debates about caste equality and cultural freedom in Karnataka have unfolded within the intellectual legacy of Lohia.³⁰

While it is a truism that a thinker is read in multiple ways, an active methodological attention to the institutional realities that regulate the modes of appropriating political discourse is imperative for the sociology of modern political thought in the country. The large upper-caste presence in the KRRS’ organisational structure and support base did not allow a Lohiaite like Nanjundaswamy to make the ideal of caste equality part of the farmers’ struggle. Another example also illustrates the regulatory power of institutional realities. Lankesh and Tejaswi, who were independent of state institutions, were freer in their styles of expressing anti-establishment views. For instance, Lankesh observed that Lohia seemed “a mad man” in “the milieu of prostitution (*vyabhichara*) created by the Congress” (1981). Similar rhetoric was hard to find among intellectuals based in universities.

In the Lohiaite spirit of rejecting the cult of personality, it would help to place Lohia alongside other major thinkers in the same space of normative political discourse. For instance, during the period of Lohia’s popularity, Gandhi’s ideal of sarvodaya was being revived through Vinobha Bhave’s Bhoodan movement and Ambedkar’s perspective on caste equality came to greater prominence through dalit activism. The emergence of these parallel perspectives repositioned “Lohia” across discursive planes in time and space. Lohia’s relevance or irrelevance was explained and re-explained with the arrival of other political discourses on

the land question or the caste question. Such a methodological stance discourages isolated focus on a particular political discourse. It enables us to capture the dynamism inherent to fields of discourse and helps avoid conferring a linear evolutionary character to the study of the social life of ideas.

A careful attention to the variations in Lohia's reception allows us to disaggregate "the public" and identify its discursive sub-arenas and their modes of discourse and key political stakes. Interpreting political ideas in their dynamic conjunction with various institutional forces avoids reifying them. Further, recovering the multiple appropriations of a thinker makes space for recognising differences in the moral and political concerns across various constituencies. Such a stance is also open to a diversity of archives and the challenges they pose to the empiricist protocols of social science.

Conclusions

Lohia's impact on electoral politics in Karnataka was not all that great. Leaving aside a small group of politicians such as Gopala Gowda, who were steadfast in their Lohiaite convictions, others such as Bangarappa and J H Patel, who became chief ministers of the state after moving out of the SP, did not leave behind a Lohiaite legacy. However, some of the key policy innovations seen in the state such as Urs' land reforms and pro-backward class policies owed a debt to Lohia. In addition, Lohia had a major effect on social and literary movements in the state. Besides being a decisive influence on some of the key KRRS leaders, he contributed to the distinctiveness of the dalit movement in Karnataka. His ideas

on caste, language and individual freedom, to name but a few, inspired the leading lights of Kannada modernism to produce highly creative work. And any historical study of the Kannada language movement has to seriously consider the attraction Lohia's strong support for regional languages had for Kannada language activists.

Lohia contributed a new language, symbolism and style to public discussions in modern Karnataka. Like their guru, the state's Lohiaite leaders possessed sharp wit and a talent for metaphorical political thought. Their creative acts at anarchy ensured that politics did not remain dull. Gopala Gowda once waved a black flag at the former Maharaja of Mysore during the annual Dasara celebrations. Many years later, in accordance with Nanjundaswamy's plan, Nagaraj, the literary critic, and Siddalingaiah, the poet, showed up at an Indira Gandhi rally in rented suits, posing as upper class individuals, and shouted slogans against her. Anecdotes about the defiance of Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officers and the police by KRRS activists are legion.

Lohia's influence in Karnataka proves, again, that the impact of political leaders cannot be measured by electoral success alone. Nor need it be done in their lifetime. Some of the most vibrant political and intellectual work in Karnataka unfolded within the compass of Lohia's legacy. Considerations of social science knowledge alone need not drive our interest in Lohia and the enormous impact he has had on our institutions. His ideas aimed at creating a modern political philosophy for India are still a living source for evolving a political ethic for our time.

NOTES

- All the excerpts used in this paper from Kannada sources have been translated by the author. The department of Kannada and Culture, government of Karnataka, has published six of 10 projected volumes of Rammanohar Lohia's collected works in Kannada. The blurb of these volumes states that Lohia had a "great influence" on the "political and literary worlds of Karnataka".
- A recent book attempts to reconstruct the socialist interlude in Karnataka through interviews with surviving socialist leaders (Peerbasha 2007). While this book is a welcome effort at archiving the history of socialist politics in the state, it does not aim to analyse it.
- The facts that I have drawn from these sources are in keeping with the empiricist protocols of social science. It is important to note that these facts are rarely present by themselves. They nestle amid sentences praising the virtues of the individuals being honoured. A genre by themselves, commemorative and felicitation volumes are a rich source for interpreting political normativity in Indian society. Hundreds of them exist for numerous political figures in different parts of the state. Which virtues are being singled out for praise? What visions of a utopia do they contain? What do they tell us about the "political" in our society? I raise these general questions here with the hope of suggesting a promising research task and defer a detailed engagement for a later occasion.
- For a historical account of the Kagodu satyagraha, see G Rajashekar 1980. For a critical review of this book, see Hanumantha 2009.
- The list of contributors to *The Shantaveri Gowda Commemoration Volume* (Nagavara and Anandamurthy 1997) reads like a Who's Who of Karnataka's political and literary world.
- A recent book observes that the Devaraj Urs' land reforms resulted from his resolve to strengthen K Manjappa's 1961 land legislation (Raghavan and Manor 2009; 43).
- In the 1957, 1962, and 1967 state legislative elections, the PSP and the SP won, respectively, 18, 20, and 20, and zero, one and six seats. Both the parties fared poorly in parliamentary elections. The SP won a parliamentary election only once (1967), whereas the PSP won one and two seats, respectively, in the 1957 and 1967 parliamentary elections. For detailed statistics of these elections, visit the Election Commission of India web site at <http://eci.nic.in>.
- The PSP and the SP had merged once before in 1964 to form the Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP). The merger, which lasted only four months, broke down to make way for the emergence of the PSP and the SSP as separate parties. Although the SP became the SSP after 1964, I have referred to it as the SP throughout the paper.
- For a useful collection of essays on J H Patel and S Bangarappa, see Srinivas 2001 and Kambar 2007.
- Interviews with Konandur Lingappa, former SP MLA from Shimoga, 26 February 2010 and with Babu Heddurshetti, former SP state general secretary, 4 March 2010.
- Azeez Sait was the SP state president in 1968.
- Although Lohia was passionate about gender equity, women leaders were not prominent in the SP.
- B Krishnappa, Siddalingaiah and Devanoora Mahadeva founded the Dalit Sangharsha Samiti in 1974.
- S Venkataram was the lone trade union leader in Bangalore from the SP (more details about him are at <http://www.svenkataram.com>). Before it broke up following the SP-PSP split, the Hind Mazdoor Sabha, the socialist trade union, had the support of a major share of the unionised labour in Bangalore.
- For a monograph on the KRRS, see Assadi 1997.
- Nearly two decades later, he pointed out that Lohia's understanding of time valued a consistent relationship between the means and ends. "When you say that every moment is also infinite, you cannot then say that you will say a falsehood today but establish the truth tomorrow" (Nanjundaswamy 2008; 157). He had expressed similar ideas as early as 1974 (Nanjundaswamy 1974).
- It rarely identified itself with issues of caste inequalities and violence. For instance, it was inactive during the protest that followed seven dalits being burnt alive in Kambalpalali, Kolar district, in 2000.
- For the KRRS' inadequate consideration of dalit issues, see Devanoora Mahadeva's tough interview with Nanjundaswamy (Nanjundaswamy 2008; 143-148). Although socialist leader Kishan Pattanayak toured Karnataka in 1981 pointing out the need for farmers' groups to build ties with the Dalit activists, the KRRS was indifferent to it (Murthy 2010).
- For a brief discussion of the electoral career of the KRRS, see Kripa 1995.
- All the quotes in this section are from my unpublished interview with Siddalingaiah (2010). Most of my observations in this section rest on this interview. Unless otherwise noted, all the quotes in this section are from Siddalingaiah.
- It is difficult to be optimistic about the Karnataka Sarvodaya Party since its leaders are not making efforts to build a support base in the state.
- The Kannada word *genu* refers to the rough distance between an outstretched thumb and outstretched little finger.
- Ananthamurthy's novel *Awasthe* (1978) deals with Gopala Gowda's intellectual and political character.

- 24 Ananthamurthy's unpublished interview with the author, 2 March 2010. An episode of interest: Gopala Gowda had narrated the story of *Samskara* – Ananthamurthy's controversial novel about decadence in orthodox brahmanical society – to Lohia, who then persuaded his socialist friend, Pattabhi Ram Reddy, to make it into a film in Kannada (Ananthamurthy 1980; 133-134). The 1970 film inaugurated Kannada new wave cinema.
- 25 Kannada writer Nataraj Huliya made this observation in a personal conversation.
- 26 In a recent debate, Yogendra Yadav argued that Lohia was not a Hindi chauvinist. He used the example of Kannada intellectuals to support his argument (Yadav 2009).
- 27 For instance, Mahadeva and Siddalingaiah, the founders of the DSS, are two major literary figures in Kannada.
- 28 Examples of such protests include the KRRS' opposition to the Dunkel Draft and its protest rallies in the early 1990s demanding a joint resolution of the Cauvery waters sharing issue by the farmers of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.
- 29 The activist imaginations of Mahadeva and Siddalingaiah also drew from the literary traditions of dissent against caste inequality, right from the 12th century *vacana* poetry of the Veerashaivas to Kuvempu. Therefore, their activism was affiliated to a humanistic conversation subscribed to by many non-dalit Kannada literary figures.
- 30 Either as Lohiaites or moral supporters of Lohia, many academics in the three major universities of Karnataka, Mysore University, Bangalore University and Karnatak University (Dharwar), have disseminated his thoughts among generations of students. Consider, for example, Chandrashekhara Patil and Siddalinga Pattanashetty at Karnatak University; Ananthamurthy and Kalegowda Nagavara at Mysore University; and G S Shivrudrappa, Marulasiddappa, D R Nagaraj and Ki Ram Nagaraj at Bangalore University.

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