

Context, Discourse and Vision of Lohia's Socialism

RAJARAM TOLPADI

Five aspects of Rammanohar Lohia's socialist pursuit stand out, bearing testimony to his status as a rare and original thinker. They could prove to be important to any project reconstructing the normative domain of Indian politics. Globalisation, as an imposing ideological phenomenon, may have punctured our dreams of socialism by fostering the triumph of social Darwinism. However, the normative elements that constituted Lohia's socialist vision have not disappeared. The values of socialism have resurfaced in different forms and on different occasions, expressing distrust, discontent and resentment against the all-encroaching power of globalisation. Significant protest movements in India and elsewhere against subtle or brazen forms of domination and exploitation ensure that the outlook for radical democracy remains alive.

No man's thought should be made the centre of a political action; it should help but not control. Acceptance and rejection are varying forms of blind worship.

– Rammanohar Lohia
(*Marx, Gandhi and Socialism* 1963, p 1)

Rammanohar Lohia occupies a distinctive place in the intellectual and political history of modern India. As an imaginative thinker and inspiring leader of the socialist movement in India, he was able to influence a generation of people who were prepared to lay down their lives for the causes he represented. The astuteness of Lohia's ideas and the passionate zeal with which he advocated them made him a legend during his own lifetime. However, Lohia always found himself amid controversies of one kind or the other that made him unacceptable to a large number of his colleagues. So, if there were a large number of people who admired and adored Lohia, there were also a good number who criticised him. Nonetheless, Lohia's position as a profound thinker and inspiring leader remains, to a large extent, undisputed. He is one of those few thinkers of modern India who recognised, with astonishing clarity, the difficulties and complexities involved in transferring the ideology of socialism from Europe to non-European cultural locations. Lohia knew very well that socialism, as an ideology and a movement, owed its origin to Europe. Therefore, its pursuit elsewhere posed a huge theoretical challenge. Political theorists have described this process as a transfer of political theory (Chatterjee 1986a). Lohia readily accepted this challenge and invested a significant part of his intellectual energy in the task of transferring the political theory of socialism from Europe to the larger non-European world.

However, decades have passed since Lohia disappeared from the centre stage of Indian politics. The context of culture and politics in India and elsewhere has changed, and changed drastically. Globalisation has brought in a new culture, including in politics, compelling us to face new challenges, frame new tasks and adopt new strategies. What do Lohia and the intellectual legacy that he represents have to offer us in this regard? Do Lohia and his ethically and culturally anchored socialist vision still hold some water? What are the ways through which contemporary India can appropriate Lohia? What aspect of Lohia should be, or could be, recovered and reconstructed to equip ourselves to face the challenges of our time? This paper attempts to return to the complexities of Lohia's socialist pursuit, recover and reconstruct his central ideas and recast them to fit the changing context of our time.

Ideological Differences

It is now widely acknowledged that the socialist discourse represented by Lohia was the product of a complex historical

Rajaram Tolpadi (rtolpadi@rediffmail.com) is at the Department of Political Science, Mangalore University.

phenomenon in India, often described as the socialist movement. The socialist movement in India was a specific form of left nationalism. It grew, ideologically and politically, as an integral part of the nationalist struggle led by the Indian National Congress. The Congress Socialist Party (CSP), the official organ of Indian socialists until the attainment of political independence, came into being in the Gandhian era of the nationalist struggle.¹ It was basically seen as an inner group of like-minded people within the nationalist Congress, which believed in the necessity and desirability of radically transforming Indian society. Being deeply disappointed by the constitutionalist drift that the nationalist movement had taken, the CSP sought, on the one hand, to turn the movement into an anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggle and, on the other, to incorporate ideas on the socio-economic transformation of India in the nationalist agenda. In spite of a large number of problems and differences with the Congress leadership, the socialists tended to work within the organisational and political structure of the Congress as they considered their link with the nationalist struggle to be historically crucial. The socialist leadership felt that any kind of disassociation from the Congress and the nationalist struggle that it represented would be suicidal. Such a disassociation, they thought, would have far-reaching implications on the prospects of a radical agenda for India. The tension-filled relation between the socialist leadership and the Indian National Congress was best expressed by Acharya Narendra Deva in his presidential address to the foundation conference of the CSP. He observed,

We do not isolate ourselves from the great national movement against British imperialism, which today the Congress symbolises. We admit today that the Congress has defects and weaknesses. Yet, it can easily be the greatest revolutionary force in the country. We should not forget that the present stage of the Indian struggle is that of bourgeois democratic revolution and therefore, it would be a suicidal policy for us to let ourselves off from the national movement that the Congress undoubtedly represents (1984: 14-15).

In spite of the strong bond of anti-colonial nationalism, the CSP leadership was far from being a cohesive ideological unit. Beneath the surface, there existed ideological differences among those who constituted the socialist leadership. Their divergent intellectual inheritance of socialism made the CSP a platform for contesting perceptions of socialism. Writing about the composite character of Congress socialism, Haithcox said,

Socialism at that time was in vogue among young educated Indians, but it more clearly represented an ill-defined sentiment than distinct ideology. The leadership of the CSP in the 1930s reflected the divergent nature of Indian socialism. Among the party's 10 most influential leaders, no less than three disparate political orientations were to be found. Jayaprakash Narayan and Acharya Narendra Deva were Marxists, M R Masani, a former member of the British Labour Party, and Ashok Mehta were Democratic Socialists. Achutha Patwardhan and Dr Rammanohar Lohia shared Gandhi's faith in governmental and economic decentralisation and non-violent revolution as applied to both the nationalist struggle and class conflict (1971: 219).

Owing to the influence of leaders like Narayan and Narendra Deva, the CSP managed to style itself as a party committed to Marxian socialism. However, such a commitment to Marxism was not shared by everyone within it. There were people within the

party like Mehta and Masani, who represented the aspirations of democratic socialism, and those like Lohia and Patwardhan, who tried to recast socialism by infusing it with the ideals of Gandhian politics. So, the CSP ideology was always a delicate balance across different and conflicting perceptions of socialism. To quote Haithcox once again,

The platform and the policies of the party represented a tyrannous balance between the various contending points of view of its leaders. The party was described as Marxist but not Marxist-Leninist. The latter would imply a commitment, which was not shared by all, to the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat. As a compromise the party was not affiliated either with the Second (socialist) or the Third (communist) Internationals. Marxists did not constitute a majority within its leadership cadre, but they were the most influential group among the party rank and file. Consequently, the CSP pronouncements were heavily loaded with Marxist terms, which gave the party a radical appearance (1971: 219-20).

The mixed social and ideological character of the party and the ambiguity in its theoretical articulation did not, however, prevent it from sensitively responding to a wide variety of crucial issues to do with Indian social and political life. It was able to grasp the subtle and subversive dimensions of the colonial regime and their impact on vital issues concerning the identity of India as a nation and society.

The period following independence witnessed significant changes in the ideological balance of the socialist movement in India. They were partly due to differences and shifts that had occurred in the leadership and partly due to the changing ideological and political scenario of independent India. The Socialist Party, after severing relations with the Congress, sought to carve out an independent destiny of its own. As it was basically a composite group, constituted by divergent ideological and social interests, the differences among the leadership over a broad spectrum of issues came to the fore. These differences revolved around issues such as the extent to which the Congress had to be supported or opposed, the appropriate model of economic development and modernisation for the country, the way in which the Socialist Party had to be organised and the limits to which parliamentary politics had to be pursued. The result was that the party became a hotbed of ideological contestations (Mohan 1984: 54-60). These ideological contestations, quite often, manifested themselves in personality clashes as well.

Lohia's Rise to Leadership

The two decades following independence saw the eclipse of two of the most influential leaders of the socialist movement, Narayan and Narendra Deva, and the emergence of Lohia to political prominence. Lohia's emergence as the single most important leader of the socialist movement significantly altered the trajectory of socialist activity in India. The period that marked Lohia's rise, the latter part of the 1950s and the early part of the 1960s, was characterised by hectic activity as far as the socialists were concerned. Lohia, in particular, spearheaded a large number of activities of social and cultural significance that gave a great deal of credibility and respectability to socialist politics. He, through his innovative ideas and inspiring leadership, enabled the Socialist Party to acquire a new image – one characterised by enthusiasm, vigour and radicalism.

The influence of Lohia's leadership on socialist politics during the period following independence was marked by a relentless effort to provide what he called the doctrinal foundation to Indian socialism (Lohia 1963a: 320-62). He argued that socialism in societies such as India was living on borrowed time. To him, it drew its economic aims from communism and its general aims from capitalism. Lohia strongly held that the socialist project in India should seek autonomy, both in theory and practice. In this context, he was in sharp opposition to all ideological trends in socialism, Marxist or non-Marxist, within or outside socialist politics, which, according to him, did not recognise and overcome the subservient state of theoretical postulations and political strategy. Lohia's critical attitude towards Nehruvian policies, communist practice and right wing politics signalled his zeal to provide an autonomous doctrinal foundation to socialism in India.

However, the ideological vigour and political vitality that socialist politics exhibited for a brief period did not last long. It not only found itself embroiled in controversies and factionalism, but also disintegrated and fell apart without being able to resolve its internal differences.

Rejection of Derived Notions

Lohia, from the early years of his association with the CSP to the later years of his involvement in Indian politics, was deeply sceptical of all forms of ideological straitjacketing. It was always his profound conviction that socialism was basically an open-ended project signifying possibilities of different and even contrasting interpretations. He recognised that the socialist agenda in non-European societies that had been colonised – such as India – might imply a radical departure from its European models. Given this understanding, Lohia, very consciously, did not align himself with any group within the CSP that, according to him, inherited derived notions of socialism. Some of his writings published in the *Congress Socialist* (the official journal of the CSP) during that period clearly reflected his non-dogmatic approach to the question of socialism (Lohia 1984b: 386-88).

Lohia's deep-seated suspicion of derived models of socialism and his urge to look out for alternative modes of socialist activity eventually led him to engage in a twofold intellectual project. One, of providing a systematic and comprehensive critique of the dominant western interpretations of socialism; and two, of exploring alternative sources – cultural and intellectual – on the basis of which a more indigenous model of socialism suitable for non-European societies such as India could be evolved.

During the course of his attempt to provide a systematic and comprehensive critique of the dominant western models of socialism, Lohia realised that Marxism happened to be the most theoretically formidable and politically powerful among all its forms. He also recognised that Marxism as a totalistic doctrine betrayed immense possibilities for contradictory applications. Therefore, he engaged in a critical scrutiny of Marxism in terms of its most significant dimensions. However, Lohia's project of providing a comprehensive critique of Marxism remained incomplete. He wrote about this in the following way,

During the open rebellion of 1942-43 against British rule, when Socialists were in prison or being hunted and Communists waged their people's

war in companionship with foreign masters, the doctrine of Marxism appalled me with its wide range of contradictory applications. To recover its truth and demolish its untruth became one of my desires. Of the four aspects planned, economics, politics, history and philosophy, I was half way through the economic when the police got me (1963b: 1).

“Economics after Marx”, despite being incomplete, stands out as Lohia's most important intellectual statement. As a crucial document it not only laid down a theoretical foundation for the kind of socialism that he aspired to represent but also set a political context for its pursuance. What Lohia tried to do, in part successfully, was to provide a critique of the Marxian critique of capitalism, on the basis of which an alternative understanding of capitalism could be launched. Therefore, “Economics after Marx” calls for close scrutiny. Lohia observed,

Marx's initial fallacy was to have examined capitalism in the abstract, to have wrenched it outside of its imperialist context. Marx was not unaware of imperialist exploitation and his disciple, Lenin, was even more keenly aware of it. But, imperialism is with both Marx and Lenin a tumour of capitalism, an odorous after-growth and this has at best awakened an unintelligent concern for the colonial races. Marxism has therefore not been able to give a consistent theory of capitalist development. Its picture of capitalism is that of a West European entity, with the later additions of the American and Japanese forms, more or less wrenched out of the world, more or less developing internally. All the dynamic of capitalism is placed within its internal structure, in the contradiction between the value and the use-value of labour-power, between the working class and the capitalist class of the self-evolving structure. Marx's capitalism was that of a self-moving West European circle, no doubt, causing great repercussions in the outside world, but the principle and laws of its own movement were exclusively internal. Marxism to this day remains stuck in this picture, no doubt formulating laws about these outside repercussions, but is wholly unable to state the basic interacting principle of the two, internal and external, movements of capital (1963b: 16).

Surplus Value and Colonialism

The inbuilt error of Marx's understanding of the nature of capitalist development, according to Lohia, arose from the fact that Marx's understanding was situated in the historical context of the western experience of capitalism. He held that since Marx was observing capitalist development from within the western historical context, he was unable to grasp its external or imperialist dimension. Lohia argued that the development of capitalism in the west needed to be understood with due reference to the systematic process of colonisation and pauperisation of non-western societies in Asia, Africa and Latin America. To him, there had always been a close linkage between the process of accumulation of wealth in western capitalist societies and the process of colonisation. Therefore, he pleaded that any complete theory of capitalist development should, once and for all, establish the connection between the process of concentration of wealth in developing western capitalist societies and the process of pauperisation of colonial societies. He argued that Marx, while examining capitalism from within the west European historical context, saw imperialism as merely an after-growth. Lohia then held that the question as to whether capitalism is ever possible without imperialism could be well answered with a strict understanding of history, which showed that there can be no capitalism without imperialism. Thus, in opposition to the Marxist description of imperialism as an

after growth of capitalism, he proposed the formulation of the twin origins of capitalism and imperialism by redefining the Marxist conception of surplus value.

Surplus value, which makes up the entire profits and high earnings of the capitalist system, is derived mainly from colonial farms, fields and mines. The inner imperial circle of the capitalist structure revolves in a way as to draw with great suction the labour-yield of the outer colonial circle. One can quite graphically describe the movements in a colonial economy through the past two centuries to now. Four distinct rings inside this circle are discernible. The outermost, and now perhaps the broadest, band is composed of landless labour in agriculture and the suction here has been the strongest. The second, almost equally broad, band of the peasantry, factory workers and such lower middle class as the small trader and the primary school teacher has been sucked at just a slightly less intensive rate. Then comes the rather thin ring of the middle classes which alternates between sucking and being sucked. Last comes the almost invisible streak of monopoly capitalists which appears at a late stage and acquires completely the capitalist quality of seizing the labour-yield of others. This outer colonial circle with its four rings moves as an adjunct of the inner capitalist circle to which it is attached in political and economic slavery. The suction does not abate and throughout, but more particularly at the point when exhaustion is reached, the outermost bands of landless labour and small peasantry are piled up with the dried bones of starvation and famine. The colonial economies become one vast village to the capitalist economies. The town-village relationships of exploitation inside a country are as nothing compared to this deciding town-village relationship in which three-fourths of mankind is transformed into a village for the benefit of the rest (1963b: 26).

Though Lohia subsequently gave up his intellectual ambition of providing a larger critique of Marxism as such modes of enquiry ceased to interest him, he constantly returned to examine aspects of Marxism that he viewed as crucial. Marx's theory of history, for instance, was his frequent concern. In one of his articles, "The Materialist Conception of History", Lohia subjected Marx's theory of history to a critical scrutiny (1955a).

In keeping with his argument in "Economics after Marx", Lohia attempted to demonstrate the fallacy in Marx's understanding of history. To him, Marx's theory of history like his analysis of capitalism was deeply entrenched in an understanding of historical developments as Europe had experienced them. Therefore, he was inclined to think that Marx offered, both methodologically and substantially, a Eurocentric historiography. Lohia held that since Marx was conceptualising history from a European standpoint, the logic of non-European history was made subservient to the larger logic of European history. The consequence of looking at history as a linear process of development with Europe as its centre was to him disastrous. For, it foreclosed all possibilities of the non-European world taking a lead in revolutionary action and transformation. Lohia reiterated that the theory of history that Marx propounded would invariably establish European supremacy.

The effort of Marx was, after all, a colossal construction of the mind to keep the smile on the visage of Europe ever dancing. It was a peerless attempt of the European spirit. What European mind would be able or want to drag up by its roots this highly spiritual effort at Europe's everlasting glory? Like most other modern doctrines emanating from Europe, the materialist interpretation of history is also a doctrine in the service of the status quo, at least that part of the status quo which means European glory (1955b: 20).

Having examined Marx's critique of capitalism and his theory of history, Lohia proceeded to analyse the normative substance of socialism that Marx had put forward. He realised that Marx, owing to his incorrect description of capitalism and lopsided theory of history, failed to offer a critical utopia universally acceptable. To Lohia, both Marx and the ideology of communism that he initiated attempted only to replace capitalist relations without disturbing, in any substantive sense, the capitalist mode of production. Therefore, he was convinced that communism, by no stretch of imagination, could be something that two-thirds of the world could aspire for. Lohia observed,

Communism inherits from capitalism its technique of production; it only seeks to smash the capitalist relations of production. Communism claims to be the continuator and developer of capitalist technology, when capitalism is no longer able to do so. What capitalist technology has meant to two-thirds of the world has not been digested in communist theory (1963a: 324).

In a nutshell, we can draw three interrelated arguments from Lohia's reflections on, if not systematic critique of, Marxism. One, that Marx's analysis of capitalism is incomplete; two, that his theory of history is Eurocentric; and three, that the normative agenda of Marxism is totally unacceptable and entirely unsuitable to the non-European world, which has inherited a colonial past.

Lohia's critique of Marx's critique of capitalism as well as his theory of history has two major dimensions that are of huge significance to socialism in non-European and colonially subjugated societies. In the first place, Lohia's critique is a pointer to the possibility of multiple perceptions of capitalism. It drives home the significant fact that different and equally valid understandings of capitalism are possible and that perceptions of capitalism from the periphery could be fundamentally different from the perception of capitalism from the centre. In the second place, Lohia's critique foresees the possibilities of a challenge to capitalism not from the centre but from the periphery. This, in consequence, enhances the chances for socialism in the colonially subjugated non-western world.

Reconstructing Gandhi

Lohia's clear recognition of the unsuitability of European models of socialism to societies such as India increasingly brought him closer to Mahatma Gandhi as a possible intellectual source for socialist reconstruction in India. He began to believe that the success of a socialist experiment in India would depend largely on the country's capacity to reconstruct and appropriate Gandhi. Among the wide range of ideas that Gandhi propagated and which Lohia held, two stand out as very important in terms of their revolutionary potential – one, the idea of civil disobedience or satyagraha; and two, the idea of economic and political decentralisation. Lohia believed that if Gandhi's idea of non-violent civil disobedience became a guiding principle of socialist action, the idea of economic and political decentralisation could well become a blueprint for a socialist utopia in India. In other words, if properly perceived and incorporated, satyagraha could be the method and decentralisation the objective of Indian socialism. Lohia wrote,

Whatever may have been the inadequacies of Gandhism as a governmental doctrine of doing good, it was unmatched in all history as a

people's doctrine of resisting evil. Civil disobedience both as individual's habit and collective resolve is armed reason and anything else is either weak reason or unreasonable strength. Such civil disobedience is Gandhiji's direct gift to mankind (1963c: 17).

Lohia's reconstruction of Gandhi needs to be distinguished from and juxtaposed with the wide variety of invocations of Gandhi in post-independent Indian politics. Lohia himself was aware of such multiple appropriations of Gandhi and their implications. He, therefore, felt it theoretically necessary and politically imperative to distinguish his engagement with Gandhi from that of others. His characterisation of the sarvodaya movement's appropriation of Gandhi as *ashram Gandhivad* and the Indian state's invocations of Gandhi as *sarkari Gandhivad* were instances that revealed his eagerness to demonstrate the authenticity and radicalism of his efforts in recasting the ideas and ideals that Gandhi represented (Lohia 1963c: 2). Lohia's central concern in reconstructing Gandhi was not to salvage Gandhism but to squeeze out of it elements that would help in reconstructing Indian socialism.

However, what needs to be recognised quite clearly is that Lohia's vision of an alternative theory and practice of socialism in India evolved in the context of Indian politics. It was pursued in the political milieu of independent India along with a number of other allied activities and amid a situation of dominance, challenge and opposition. It was also a response to a number of ideological and political developments predominant in post-independent India. One of which was the emergence of Jawaharlal Nehru as the head of the Indian state and his attempt to pursue a welfare model of socialism. The second was the ideology of Indian communism based on a centralised concept of politics to usher in socialism.

Nehru's conception of state-sponsored socialism prompted Lohia to distinguish his variety of socialism from that of the prime minister. Nehru, according to him, basically pursued an unproblematic western model of economic development in India making use of socialist rhetoric. The main objective of his endeavour, according to Lohia, was twofold. One, consolidating the process of capitalist development in India; and two, subjecting civil society to the overall supervision of the state. All through his political career since independence, Lohia consistently criticised the Nehruvian project of modernity and development disguised as socialism. He characterised the Nehruvian pursuit of socialism as *sarkari samajvad* and urged his socialist colleagues to keep an ideological and political distance from Nehru. The idea of non-Congressism that Lohia tried to develop during the 1950s and 1960s in Indian politics was an expression of his total distrust of the model of modernisation and economic development that the Congress stood for under Nehru. Lohia strongly held that the Congress-Nehru agenda of modernisation and development in India would not only pave the way for capitalist consolidation but also create a leviathan state under whose brute power all creative social and cultural initiatives would be decisively curtailed. To him, the communist practice in India was not substantively different from that of Nehru as it also depended on a centralised notion of economic production and political authority (Lohia 1968).

In response to the Nehruvian project of modernisation and development, Lohia conceived a comprehensive notion of economic

and political decentralisation based on a radical and creative re-reading of Gandhi. To him the Gandhian concept of decentralisation was a holistic vision implying decentralisation at every level. Lohia believed that political decentralisation could not be achieved without economic decentralisation. Huge machines in the economic sphere were to him the counterpart of a big and centralised state in the political sphere. Lohia, therefore, envisioned the "small-unit machine" to represent economic decentralisation and the "four pillar state" to signify political decentralisation (Lohia 1963a: 326).

Lohia envisaged that socialism in India, with the principles of economic and political decentralisation at its core, had to be pursued through a long-drawn process of struggle in which ordinary people were the main actors. This long-drawn struggle was to be against all forms of centralised authority – indigenous or alien. Such a socialist pursuit, based on a struggle of the people as ethical entities, he considered, would be an alternative to the derived pursuit of socialism, whether Nehruvian or communist. Thus, in opposition to state-centred or state-monitored theories of socialist practice, Lohia envisioned a people-centred socialism. This socialism was premised on his trust in the capacity for collective or communitarian action against all structures of oppression – social, economic, cultural and political.

Taking on Caste and English

As an integral part of his socialist endeavour in India, Lohia responded constantly to a large number of issues or challenges that involved either subtle or brazen forms of domination and exploitation. Out of them two stand out. One, his response to the question of caste in India; and two, his opposition to the dominance of English (Lohia 1964a: 1966). Lohia's concept of socialism, with the idea of struggle as its methodology, incorporated, quite centrally, his resentment against the hierarchy of caste and the ascendancy of English in India. He eventually developed concrete arguments and powerful agitations to take on both issues.

Lohia's critique of the caste system in India and the process through which he evolved an agitation against caste and gender discrimination needs mention. Interestingly, he maintained that the hierarchy of caste and gender discrimination in India stemmed from the same ideological perspective. He argued history showed that in India the process of segregation on caste and gender lines had taken place simultaneously and therefore, the principle that operated in these two forms of segregation were the same. Hence, the agitation he envisioned to liquidate caste discrimination would invariably represent voices against gender discrimination as well (Lohia 1964b).

The interlinkage that Lohia established between the hierarchy of caste and gender discrimination was an important theoretical leap forward in the ongoing discourse on caste in India. By establishing such an interlinkage, Lohia was able to unravel the complex ideological map of Indian society. The interlinkage also provides us clues to understand the complex and subtle ways in which brahmanism as an ideology operated and established its hegemony in India. Lohia's symbolic identification of Vasista and Valmiki as two contrasting traditions present in Indian social life

are interesting markers in understanding the complex ideological history of Indian society (1964c).

The most significant part of Lohia's reflections on the problem of caste in India was his unequivocal recognition of caste both as a discriminating social structure as well as a disabling cultural phenomenon. He also quite emphatically recognised that the nature of caste hierarchy and exploitation in India differed from region to region. Therefore, Lohia held, region-specific alignments and arrangements of castes had to be highlighted. He, undoubtedly, was one of the few thinkers in modern India who clearly saw the possibility of caste alignments, interests and identities turning into effective constituencies of political mobilisation (Sheth 2002). Therefore, he relied heavily on backward class mobilisation, in association with other depressed constituencies, for effective socialist action and transformation in India.

Likewise, Lohia's reflections on the question of language and his anger against the supremacy of English are remarkable as they draw our attention to crucial cultural issues involved in the formation of identities, whether national, regional, communitarian or individual. He strongly held that the dominance and continuance of English in India as the language of education, administration and public affairs clearly revealed our continued subservience to the authority of our erstwhile colonial masters. He considered that the battle against English was an integral part of the socialist struggle towards the attainment of complete decolonisation. In a collection of articles on language, Lohia comprehensively addressed the problem of language by examining different arguments for and against English in India. He, then, recognised that language was not merely a vehicle of communication but more importantly an aspect of self-identity and expression. It is important to note that Lohia did not put forward a conventional and uncomplicated mother tongue argument. Instead, he saw the language question as an important cultural issue.

The basic question involved is "what is modernity"? Is it such a thing which could come only through English? Modernism is an attitude towards men and matters that today's men have developed with the advance of science and technology, an attitude fundamentally based on reason, knowledge and truth and not on sentiments, superstition and orthodoxy. It is a dynamic and not dogmatic approach to the questions of human involvement. To an Indian, English does not provide this.

It besets him with hypocrisy; it turns an Indian into a bundle of complexes, a man with no human personality, an imitating headless monkey (1975: 105).

Lohia wove together all those struggles and agitations that he envisioned into one normative frame. *Saat krantiyan* (seven revolutions) was that normative platform of an alternative variety of democratic political action that aspired to achieve socialism deeply rooted in the historical and cultural ethos of Indian society.

Contemporary Relevance

What has this lost but refreshing chapter of agitational politics in India to do with contemporary India? In what way does it help in understanding the context of India in an entirely new setting of globalisation? Do Lohia and the critical utopia of socialism that he represented make sense to us today? The answers to these queries can neither be simple nor straightforward. Intellectual legacies would be of no use to us if we accept them unproblematically. It requires a complex and tedious intellectual and political effort, on our part, to appropriate them adequately to meet the challenges of our time. This would invariably lead to the difficult job of deciding what is redundant and what is relevant in any intellectual-political tradition. Lohia and his intellectual legacy are no exception to this. We need to be circumspect and sympathetically traverse through Lohia to decide what has to be accepted, reconstructed or rejected.

There are at least five crucial aspects of Lohia's intellectual engagement that deserve our special attention. A critical rereading of those aspects might help us in redefining our normative priorities.

In the first place, Lohia appears to have been a rare socialist thinker who exhibited exceptional sensitivity towards the hazards of derived ideas or ideologies, socialist or otherwise. He consistently held that mechanical imitations of models of political action worked out elsewhere would cripple the prospects of any society attaining autonomy and self-determination. He believed that societies should evolve their own authentic models of political practice based on an understanding of the specificities – historical and cultural – of their context. Post-colonial studies have gone into this issue extensively. Thinkers like Partha Chatterjee have discussed the problems of derivative discourses

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with exceptional clarity (1986b). In the light of this, Lohia's search for authenticity assumes great significance.

Second, Lohia's unequivocal opposition to Euro-centrism becomes all the more significant in the context of the subtle forms through which colonial hegemony is continued. His attacks on Euro-centric models of socialist enterprise, therefore, have to be viewed in the context of the struggle of erstwhile colonies to achieve intellectual, ideological and cultural decolonisation.²

Third, Lohia's critical attitude towards modernity and development particularly reflected in his critique of Nehru and Indian communists, deserves sympathetic consideration. He believed that socialism was not merely a just economic arrangement aimed at equitable distribution of wealth, but also an enabling cultural setting that helped people achieve freedom, equality and justice. Therefore, Lohia considered the Nehruvian agenda of modernisation and development (shared by the communists in India as well) as a mad rush for modernity without being aware of its darker side. On the contrary, he envisioned an alternative socialist civilisation that attempted to arrive at a critical, democratic and open-ended paradigm of modernity deeply anchored in the historical and cultural context in which it has to be practised. The contemporary debate on modernity suggests that there is more than one paradigm of modernity and that different societies could evolve different models of modernity.³ Lohia's effort was a refreshing move in that direction.

Fourth, Lohia was deeply apprehensive of the parliamentary mode of politics in which the socialist pursuit was caught up in post-independent India. He strived hard to convince his socialist colleagues of the limits of the parliamentary politics and make them realise the necessity of pitching socialism beyond electoral politics and parliamentary practice. Lohia's critique of parliamentary democracy in India and his efforts to enlarge and

deepen democracy are still a significant contribution to the ongoing discourse on democracy (Sheth 2002).

Finally, Lohia's emphasis on the moral dimension of socialism is immensely significant. To him, socialism as theory and practice claimed its legitimacy from a moral yearning for what he called *samata* or equality. If there was any one central principle to which socialism could be reduced, according to Lohia, it was equality. Equality, to him, was the central ethical principle and a critical utopia around which the entire complex of the theory and practice of socialism revolved. It is interesting to note that Lohia was trying to offer an ethical-moral perspective of socialism in an age when socialism was constructed as a causal theory (Nandy 1995).

These five aspects of Lohia's socialist pursuit could be legitimately argued to be thoughtful, visionary insights. They could prove to be important to any project reconstructing the normative domain of Indian politics. Globalisation, as an imposing ideological phenomenon, may have punctured our dreams of socialism by fostering the triumph of social Darwinism. However, the normative elements that constituted the socialist vision have not disappeared. The values of socialism have resurfaced in different forms and on different occasions, expressing distrust, discontent and resentment against the all-encroaching imperial power of globalisation. Significant protest movements of the people in India and elsewhere against subtle or brazen forms of imperialist domination and exploitation have ensured the prospects of socialism remain alive. The increasing demand of the people in India and other parts of the world for social justice, economic parity and democratic participation are hopeful signs for the resurrection of socialism. Socialism, in its original sense, may not be the ideology of the future. But the idea of radical democracy definitely is. If this be so, thinkers like Lohia have played a significant role in envisioning the world of the future.

NOTES

- 1 The emergence of Indian socialism during the Gandhian era of the nationalist movement explains to a great extent the ideological and political difficulties that the socialists in India confronted. Even those within the CSP who had an unmistakable commitment to Marxism were no exception to this. Socialists in general wrestled with Gandhi and tried to negotiate his ideas with that of socialism. For some, Gandhi was acceptable both ideologically and politically, while for some others, his ideas were in sharp contrast to the ideas that socialism represented. Lohia writes vividly about this Gandhi-socialist entanglement in one of his early writings. See Lohia (1984a).
- 2 After the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, new perspectives on the Occident's intellectual designs of establishing hegemony over the Orient have come up. This, in turn, sheds new light on colonialism's effort to ensure its domination over its colonies. Lohia's endeavour, in this context, assumes significance as he showed exceptional sensitivity to the Orientalist premises of our contemporary engagements. See Said (1979).
- 3 Marxist thinkers like Raymond Williams also recognise that socialism, by its very nature, opens possibilities for multiple interpretations and modernity could be pursued differently in different societies. See Williams (1985).

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