

A Cultural vision that lives beyond his memory

- *H.S. Shivaprakash*

Kannada Poet and Playwright

When I was in Nagpur last week, my friend Sri Prakash Dube invited me for a talk at Lohia Vichar Manch. I was at first hesitant to say accept. I was no expert on Lohia. But later it dawned on me that one need not be an expert to speak about Lohia. As someone born in Karnataka and somewhat active in Kannada literature and concerned about the socio-political, scene, how could I escape his influence? So on that evening I ended up speaking on Lohia instead of talking about literature as suggested by the organisers. Incidentally, 2009 also happens to be Lohia's centenary, I was told.

In spite of being in the opposition, and never in power, Dr. Rammanohar Lohia had a far-reaching impact on several parts of North India and Karnataka. After his passing, though many of his successors made it to seats of power, they had abjured their leaders by then. Now distributed into different parties with different ideologies, they have become stand pointless. There may be other opinions in this matter. No leader-whether Gandhi, Lohia or Periyar could escape the curse of bad followers. At the same time, but for Lohia, we could not have seen a glorious leader like Shantaveri Gopalagowda in Karnataka. Neither can we underestimate the strength that the JP movement gathered from Lohiaite sources.

My concern is the present. What has Lohia to offer to us at the disturbing dawn of 21st century? First worldism, Fundamentalism and terrorism; these are the three great dangers now threatening our collective lives. This is where Lohia's values can help.

In spite of being extremely well-informed about Western cultures and philosophies, he remained Indian to his roots. His great love for Gandhi notwithstanding, he was not Indian in a naive sense. It is his India-centered analysis of history that gave him deep insights into the role of caste in the shaping of our society. He was capable of using Brahmin, shudra polarity in a very creative and sophisticated way in the understanding of culture and politics. Unlike Gandhi, his mentor and like Nehru, his chief antagonist he was a rationalist and agnostic. At the same time he was highly sensitive to deep cultural meanings of certain religious symbols like Rama, Krishna and Shiva. For instance he argued that the way Shiva carried around the dead body of his beloved Parvati right across the world is a great tribute to the magnitude of human love. In one of his essays on yoga written in prison, he dwells on the human and psychological significance of yoga. Despite being a secularist humanist, he was sensitive to spiritual matters. His indignation against casteist and other forms of exploitation never diluted his emphasis on non-violence. The emphasis he places on peaceful non-parliamentary modes of struggle was able to inspire the historic Kagodu Satyagraha in post Independent Karnataka.

What is even more impressive was his great sensitivity to aesthetic matters. His essay on beauty and colour of skin is a splendid example of his refined tastes. A great friend of writers, Lohia inspired and impacted great luminaries of Hindi and Kannada literatures - Phanishwar Nath Renu and Ananthamurthy for example. I cannot

imagine how distinct classics of Kannada literature like Ananthamurthy's Samskara or Purnachandra Tejaswi's Abachurina Post Office or P.L. Nakesh's Sankranti could have been written without insight derived from Lohia. Neither could a seminal institution like Ninasam in Karnataka have been born without Lohia's profound influence on its founder K.V. Subbanna, whose contribution was invaluable in making Lohia's works available to Kanada readers I cannot think of any other 20th century Indian

leader other than Gandhi who touched the hearts of our creative artists as Lohia did.

I am sure that Lohia's cultural vision will outlive the politics he inspired. How does one sum it up?

Indianness without bigotry
Modernism without materialist greed
Socialism without violence
Secularism without blindness to spirituality
Progress with cultural creativity.

"The New Indian Express" 29-11-2009

'Lohia champion of the poor'

Glowing tribute to socialist leader on his birth centenary

Hyderabad : Former Chief Election Commissioner J.M. Lyngdoh and other speakers paid rich tribute to socialist leader Ram Manohar Lohia on the occasion of his birth centenary celebrations, at a function organised here on Tuesday.

Describing him as one of the tallest leaders on the Indian political scene. Mr. Lyngdoh said he was a quintessential revolutionary and a champion of the poor.

True democrat

Lok Satta president Jayaprakash Narayan said Lohia wanted to eradicate casteism, create equal opportunities for all and opposed centralisation of power. He regretted the present trend of promoting casteism and turning people into vote banks. Former Uttar Pradesh Governor B. Satyanarayan Reddy, TRS leader Nayani Narasimha Reddy, Managing trustee of Ram Manohar Lohia Samatha Trust Sharad Pittie and centenary celebrations committee president K. Pratap Reddy also spoke.

"The Hindu" 24-3-10

Dear Friend,

I am happy to inform you about the impressive centenary celebrations Lohia Samata Vidyalaya had @ Bengaluru. The venue was Gandhi Bhavan. On 20th morning Keshavji inaugurated he celebrations. Dr. H.C. Mahadevappa, a staunch Ambedkarite and former Health Minister, released Indumatiji's new edigion on Lohia. Devanur Mahadevea delivered the main speech on the inspiration of Lohia in launching the Dalit and the farmers' movement in Karnataka and how they are qualitatively different from similar movements elsewhere in the country. I delivered the keynote on the importance of Lohia today. Jasvir Sing gave a critical analysis of the NREG and highlighted the shortcomings while suggesting remedial measures. Ms. Anasuya presided.

The afternoon session was on Lohia and plural society. Very interesting presentations were made on Sufism by Prof. Rahamat Talikere and on Budhism by Apoorva D'Silva. Prof. K.B. Siddaiah who presided ove the session touched on the contribution of Lohia to Kannada literature.

We hope to publish the proceedings in Kannada

Hope to hear from you.

-Ravi Varma Kumar