

Understanding Lohia's Political Sociology: Intersectionality of Caste, Class, Gender and Language

ANAND KUMAR

Rammanohar Lohia contributed significantly to the formulation of an intersectionalist approach for understanding the inequalities, exclusions and exploitations in the power system of India. This was highly significant for interrogating the dynamics of power as well as the key determinants of the matrix of power – caste, class, gender and language. His perspective on the making of the Indian ruling classes and the power pyramid followed from an understanding of the linkages between these factors. Sadly, his model for building an egalitarian and prosperous social system through a set of interrelated socio-economic programmes, including preferential treatment of the backward sections, has found very few takers in its entirety.

There has been a debate for long among social scientists, political leaders, social reformers and policymakers about the nature of the stratification system and social change in India. It has been related to differences in the understanding of mobility patterns, systems of inclusion and exclusion, and the socio-economic and cultural organisation of power in modern Indian society. The debate basically revolves around questions of the relative significance of caste, class and gender. Attention is paid to the role of education, occupation, language, ethnicity, village communities, region, religion and the processes of modernisation (including urbanisation and industrialisation) in the power structure of India. From the perspective of political sociology, it is important that the debate includes analysis of the role and impact of colonisation, the national movement against foreign rule, social reform movements and democratisation. An assessment of continuities and changes from the colonial to the post-colonial period is one of the major characteristics of such exercises.¹

There are great differences among scholars about the impact of the forces and processes of social change on the nature of the Indian stratification system. But all analysts can be broadly categorised into two groups on the basis of whether they assume the dominance of a single principle, or perceive a dynamic intersectionality that leads to an “interlocking matrix of exclusion and oppression”. Here intersectionality is that sociological approach which suggests and seeks to examine how various social and cultural categories of discrimination interact on multiple and often simultaneous levels in the making of systems of power, contributing to systemic inequalities. The intersectionality perspective assumes that the classical systems of oppression in society do not act independent of each other; instead, these forms of oppression interrelate, creating a system of oppression that reflects the “intersection” of multiple forms of discrimination.²

The “prominent single factor” approaches (for instance, class-centric or caste-centric, or gender-based or ethnicity-oriented) are more prevalent than intersectionality perspectives, from among academicians to politicians. But Rammanohar Lohia (1910-67)³ contributed significantly to the formulation of an intersectionalist approach for understanding the inequalities, exclusions and exploitations in the power system of contemporary India.

This paper is an effort to present his approach and its significance for interrogating the dynamics of power as well as the key determinants of the matrix of power – caste, class, gender and language. It will underline Lohia's points of departure from the dominant approaches to the power dynamics of India and trace the evolution of his ideas between 1950 and 1967

This is a revised version of a presentation that was made at the Lohia Centenary National Seminar on “Wheel of History”, organised by Department of History, Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapeeth, Varanasi, during 23-25 February 2010. I am thankful to Yogendra Yadav for many valuable suggestions in the preparation of this essay.

Anand Kumar (anandkumar1@hotmail.com) is at the Centre for the Study of Social Systems, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

(Lohia 1955; 1964a; 1964b; 1966a, b and c; 1967; 1968). This will be followed by a presentation of his perspective about the intersectionality of caste, class, gender and language in the making of the Indian ruling classes and the power pyramid. The paper will conclude with a discussion of his “much misunderstood model” on the making of an egalitarian and prosperous social system through a set of interrelated socio-economic programmes, including preferential treatment of “the backward sections”.

Points of Departure

The Lohia view on the intersectionality of the four power factors of significance in the making of the Indian ruling class and the need for creating a social alliance and political front to achieve equality and prosperity was the first formulation in post-colonial India connecting all the major circles of exclusion – gender, caste, class and language. It presented a multidimensional, differentiated and graded view of the structure of inequalities and exploitations. His analysis also presented the new possibility of building an egalitarian and rejuvenated social order through unity and collective action. Lohia determined that nearly 90% of the Indian people were victims of one form or the other of deprivation and injustice (1964a). His approach was very different from other egalitarian and progressive theories because it provided a holistic and interconnected view of the present pattern of power and an optimistic vision of the future. Progress would become possible if the barriers created by caste, class, gender and language-centric perspectives that had been around since the 19th century were surmounted.

This was a self-conscious departure from the class-centric view of Indian Marxists. M N Roy, one of the pioneers of the Marxist approach, wrote in the early 1920s:

In recent years, by virtue of the increasing introduction of machine-made commodities and the growth of modern industry inside the country, caste has ceased to be a living social factor, its economic essence – the class division – stands naked. Neither the hollow shell of the decayed caste system, nor the lingering traces of religion and priest-craft, nor the great movement for national freedom, can hide the class-line which divided the whole social organism horizontally into distinct parts⁴ (1971: 96).

Seeing class as the base of social formation and factors such as caste, gender, language and religion as part of the cultural superstructure became the intellectual habit of later-day Marxists in India. Sixty years after Roy, and 30 years after the introduction of a democratic welfare state system, Marxist sociologist A R Desai (1983) stated that colonial and post-colonial capitalist developments had converted the castes in India into competitive groups. The original basis for their existence was no longer there.

While Lohia drew considerably on Mahatma Gandhi for his ideas on civil resistance, he did not invoke Gandhian views on caste and maintained a definite distance from his followers (Lohia 1963). Lohia asked for collective action beyond the focus on untouchability advocated by the Vinoba Bhave-led Sarvodaya movement to eliminate caste injustices. He wanted the country as a whole to step forward and pay serious attention to the major issues of caste, gender and poverty. He wrote in 1953, “Individual worship whether of Mr Nehru yesterday or Mr Vinoba today would lead nowhere. Every help is to be given Sri Vinoba’s work but it should not mean ignoring other tasks. Spade, jail, vote and

organisation are four methods and each one of them of equal importance. They are interrelated and in a big country like ours their use must needs be simultaneous” (1964a: 16).

Lohia’s concept was different from the caste-centric, anti-brahmin perspective of Periyar E V Ramasamy Naicker (1959). Lohia agreed with Periyar that there was the need to eliminate caste; mere reforms would not suffice. He visited Naicker when he was arrested for leading the anti-caste movement in Tamil Nadu in 1958. But he disagreed with anti-brahmin violence, and with the campaign against Hindi, the Constitution and Gandhi in the name of attacking the caste system. Lohia also saw no reason to be totally dismissive about the civilisational heritage of India because it had a strong tradition of rejecting the caste system (1964a: 74-78). Lohia argued that the tradition of mutually antagonistic world views represented by the orthodox and liberal streams of thought be recognised and utilised constructively. This vision was, in his view, represented by the iconic sages Vashishtha and Valmiki. He pointed out that there was a Vashishtha tradition which had extended from “mother-killer Parashuram to nation-killer Nehru”. But there had also been a flow of the Valmiki tradition of liberalism from Vishwamitra to Vishweshwaraya. Lohia was also not in agreement with the anti-Hindi line, proposing that the role of English be interrogated in the context of the powerlessness of ordinary Tamilians and other non-Hindi speaking millions of the southern states (1964a: 49-73).

Lohia’s analyses of the dynamics of caste and class and ways to eliminate them took a different direction to Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar’s because he paid greater attention to women’s oppression. His examination of the interconnectivity of caste and gender was close to that of social reformer Mahatma Jotiba Phule (1827-90). Lohia was an admirer of the brilliance and capacity of Ambedkar as a social revolutionary. He approached Ambedkar in 1955-56 to request him to consider taking on the national leadership of all forces committed to an egalitarian social order, particularly all socialists. He was not as pessimistic as Ambedkar about the possibility of creating a social coalition of all women, former untouchables, adivasis, the depressed sections among the Muslims and Christians, and poor dwijas to fight against the caste and class system. Ambedkar held that conversion to Buddhism was the best possible way of eliminating the caste system in India after independence.⁵

Evolution of Lohia’s Approach

Lohia’s views on identifying and eliminating the sources of inequality in Indian society unfolded through the 1950s during the course of various political movements and ideological debates. He focused on the challenge of achieving social change to promote a democratic ethos and socialist values in Indian society from 1950 onwards. It began with his analysis of the plurality of Hindu traditions in the context of the prevailing norms on property, caste, gender and culture in his essay *Hindu Banaam Hindu* (1950). This was followed in 1952 by a systematic analysis of his theory of social change in terms of the internal oscillation of class and caste and the external shift of power between regions and nations. (It was presented in historical and civilisational terms in *Wheel of History*, which was first published in 1955.) Then came his theory on the interconnectivity of the segregations of caste and gender in 1953.

An unexpected political crisis intervened at this time and Lohia had to leave the Praja Socialist Party (PSP) in 1954 and form his own Socialist Party (SP) by the end of 1955. The successful movement initiated by socialists demanding entry for Harijans to the Kashi Vishwanath Temple in Varanasi was the first testing ground for his ideas on caste and class. But he also experienced how caste equations had changed during the first decade of freedom and Congress rule when he fought his first election in 1957. Lohia was defeated in Varanasi and most of his party candidates suffered the same fate in Uttar Pradesh and elsewhere.

It was a period of intense debates around the recommendations of the First Backward Classes Commission Report submitted in 1955. Lohia made extensive contacts between 1955 and 1958 with the major anti-caste movements, socio-political organisations and leaders of the scheduled castes (SCs) and the backward classes (BCs) in north, west and south India, including Ambedkar, Periyar and R L Chandapuri. There was the merger of the Indian National Backward Classes Federation with Lohia's SP in 1957. All this gave him a new opportunity to stress the interconnectivity and intersectionality of the social, economic and cultural principles of power, which was being ignored by the new power elite under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru. It was followed in 1958 by his essay "Towards Destruction of Castes and Classes" (reprinted in Lohia 1964a), favouring preferential treatment of the backward sections and a new conceptualisation of the term "backward classes" to include the depressed sections among Muslims and Christians and all women. This was given more precise expression in his 1959 essay "A Note on India's Ruling Classes" (also in Lohia 1964a).

The Lohia line became the official stand of the SP at its third national conference through a resolution demanding 60% reservation of all key positions in public life for backward classes, constituting "women, Harijans, shudras, depressed Muslims and Christians, and adivasis", as a logical step towards destruction of the caste system. Then there was a national camp of socialists in 1960, which decided to establish the Association for the Study and Destruction of Caste and presented a declaration and a set of 22 issues for national debate as part of its agenda. It was the most systematic articulation of the Lohiaite perspective on the challenge of interrelated and mutually reinforcing inequalities created by caste, class, gender and language and the socialist way of responding to them. Lohia also found it necessary to take the issue beyond the party platform and organised conferences to create a wider awareness among all people. The first End Caste Conference was held in March 1961 in Patna, following the first Angrezi Hatao Sammelan in Ujjain in January 1961.

By 1964, all these efforts ensured the socialists were identified with the demand for 60% reservation for the backward and depressed classes (*Sansopa Ne Bandhi Ganth, Pichare Paye Sau Mein Saath* ("Samyukta Socialist Party is committed to 60% for backwards") was a leading slogan of the time), as well as getting rid of the tax on uneconomic landholdings, and the compulsion to study English in schools and use it in various spheres of public life. After enunciating a clear position on the political needs of the depressed and marginalised sections like women, dalits, shudras, the depressed sections among Muslims and Christians, and the adivasis,

Lohia's attention turned to the economic and sociocultural aspects of the problem. This included (a) tackling poverty through abolishing the tax on non-profitable landholdings (*Lagaan Mafi*), establishing price parity between agricultural and industrial goods (*Daam Bandho*), and restricting personal expenditure (*Kharch Par Seema*); (b) ending the compulsory learning of English in schools and colleges (*Angrezi Hatao*) and removing English signboards from public places and markets; and (c) helping women by providing them with drinking water and toilets (*Pani-Pakhana*). Several state-level and nationwide civil disobedience campaigns were organised to realise these goals between 1961 and 1967. All these issues found place of prominence in the election manifesto of the Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP) in 1967 and became well known after the first wave of non-Congress coalition governments came up in different parts of India (Kelkar 2009).

Lohia put forward his final formulation of a 11-point agenda for the goals of "equality and prosperity" in 1966 and propagated it during the election campaign for the general election in 1967, which resulted in a number of significant victories that brought non-Congress alliances to power as strategised by him (Pitti et al 1986). This formulation reflected his concern that no one aspect of inequality be disproportionately emphasised at the cost of other equally important aspects. The agenda included providing uniform and good-quality primary education; not taxing uneconomical agriculture; providing free or affordable irrigation to all fields; banishing English from public life; curtailing monthly personal expenses; banning the production of private cars; eliminating different classes on passenger trains; fixing a range of prices for food and other essential items; providing more opportunities for all disadvantaged groups; banning the ownership of more than two houses; and redistributing land and controlling land prices.⁶ While presenting this agenda before voters in the 1967 election, Lohia emphasised the need for unity between the poor *dwija* and the socially depressed and economically marginalised sections of society, which included women, the BCs, the SCs, and poor Muslims. He concluded his speeches asking people to reject the "old caste policy" that created a vertical solidarity of the castes, and move towards the "new caste policy" of the socialists that would bring about a horizontal solidarity of all poor people across the divides of caste, religion and gender (Pitti and Tripathy 1986: 378-430).

Intersectionality and Its Dimensions

As noted, Lohia's point of departure was his critique of the various approaches that reduced social inequality to just one dimension. In his theory about the "seven revolutions of our time", Lohia identified the main aspects of inequality, each of which deserved to be addressed in its own right. Of the seven revolutions, four pertained to aspects of inequality within a society – gender, caste, class and race (Lohia 1966b). Since racial inequality was not a major issue in the Indian context – though he noted that skin colour was an issue – Lohia's analysis of social inequality in India focused on the triad of caste, class and gender. In some of his writings, he tended to include language as the fourth dimension in India.

Before we proceed further, it is important to understand that Lohia often uses the words "caste" and "class" in a generic sense,

devoid of their specific Indian and European meanings respectively. He “de-colonised” and “de-Indianised” the concept of caste by according priority to the social values of equality, justice and mobility over the two traditional notions of defining it in terms of birth and religion. He also “de-Westernised” the concept of class by connecting it with social values and processes rather than economic indicators and material resources. This made it possible for him to go beyond the Eurocentric approaches of Karl Marx, Max Weber and the Indian Marxists (Lohia 1955). According to Lohia, class was the expression of the urge towards equality. Caste was the expression of the urge towards justice. He suggested that what distinguished caste from class was the immobility that had crept into class relationships, the inability of an individual to move into a higher caste and that of a whole caste to move to an improved status or income. Class was mobile caste; caste was immobile class. He further pointed out that every society or civilisation had experienced a movement from class to caste and vice versa. This mobility was at the root of almost all internal happenings. It was almost always inspired by the demand for justice and the equality, but the initial demands had until now been stifled in Indian society.

It is also significant that he considered it important to understand external or international processes in the context of the caste and class systems. Internal oscillation between class and caste were tied up with changes happening outside the contours of a society or civilisation. For, alongside this struggle of classes and castes was a struggle among nations. Prosperity and power regularly shifted from age to age; no people had rested supreme on the pinnacles of history. Thus Lohia proposed a significant departure from the Marxist understanding of human history and the process of class struggle. According to him, all human history had until now been an internal oscillation between class and caste and an external shift of prosperity and power from one region to another. The ingredients of a total historical situation at any time were class and caste on the inside and a rise or decline in power on the outside. The connecting link between these two motions, internal and external, of a society was supplied by the state of its organisational and technical efficiency (Lohia 1955; 25-42).

Lohia connected the two segregations of caste and gender, holding them primarily responsible for the decline in spirit of the Indian people and society. Gender inequality was pointed out to be the most difficult barrier towards progressing to an egalitarian social system. He refused to buy the argument that “with the removal of poverty through a modern economy, these segregations will automatically disappear”. This was a big mistake, he said, for “poverty and the two segregations of caste and sex thrive upon each other’s worms” (Lohia 1964a: 1). In Lohia’s view, there was a direct link between revitalising Indian society and giving equality to women in all spheres of life through preferential policies. It is not insignificant that his scheme of seven revolutions had man-woman equality as its first and foremost goal.⁷ Lohia identified four areas in the life of Indian women that needed immediate attention to “smash these abominable segregations of caste and sex”. They were (a) the slavery of the kitchen, and the lack of drinking water and toilets; (b) the hypocrisy involved in sex and marriage, including dowry, birth control and motherhood; (c) the need for greater equality between men and women in education and property

rights; and (d) preferential opportunities in the field of leadership, in politics, the armed forces, trade and government jobs. He underlined the need to make use of the institution of marriage to overcome caste and gender discrimination by promoting inter-caste marriages and offering government jobs to only such couples till there was a substantial change in the situation.

Lohia also wanted to look at the question of submissiveness among women and suggest solutions beyond the twin institutional frames of marriage and motherhood. He made many bold arguments in the 1950s and 1960s in favour of the right women had to divorce and remarry, of unmarried motherhood, of making birth control facilities available to all men and women irrespective of their marital status, and the right of women to choose their life partners without being confined by caste frontiers (1964a). He raised the issue of female sexuality and the notion of one-sided chastity in our cultural sphere. It was considered important in this analysis to remember the stories of Gargi, Maitreyee, Razia Sultana, Akka Mahadevi, Meera and Rani Laxmibai while assessing the declining status of women in the last few centuries. It also emphasised the need to remember the various examples of female excellence – in knowledge, spiritual attainments, leadership, bravery and creativity – in Indian civilisation.

Finally, Lohia underlined the role that English language-based education had played in the process of forming an elite India. Inability to appreciate this point led many observers to characterise Lohia as “anti-English” or even as a “Hindi chauvinist”. But he was trying to make society, particularly socialists, understand the need to eliminate the class-mass divide perpetuated through linguistic barriers since pre-colonial times. He pointed out that the ruling classes in India had been in the habit of keeping the masses out of the power discourse through linguistic means since ancient times, as reflected in the primacy of Sanskrit, followed by Persian and then English. He did not see any possibility of the healthy democratisation of power relations unless there was a campaign to promote the use of vernacular languages in the public sphere, including the economy, bureaucracy, legislature, judiciary and basic education. It was also an imperative of decolonisation because the use of English in public life was contributing to the continuation of mental colonisation and political feudalisation in independent India. This was an extension of the Gandhian emphasis on the promotion and use of Indian languages, which had been one of the key programmes of the Indian National Congress, to bridge the elite-mass gap and make the masses more capable and interested in the affairs of society (Kapoor 2008).

Understanding the Ruling Classes

This complex understanding culminated in Lohia’s depiction of the character of India’s ruling classes, “Three characteristics distinguish India’s ruling classes; 1 High caste, 2 English education, and 3 Wealth. The combination of any two of these three factors makes a person belong to the ruling class” (1959: 106). As a matter of principle, he did not include women among the “high castes”, for he believed that women were excluded from all ruling classes irrespective of their caste. Since he did not collapse one dimension into another, he could recognise different categories of Indian males such as rich and high caste, poor but high caste,

rich but low caste, and poor and low caste. And he did not confine “high caste” merely to dwijas. He was quick to recognise that there were also non-dwija powerful castes, especially in the southern and western states. His approach was different in two ways from the usual analysis of the Indian ruling classes – it was neither purely economical nor political. It was a combination of sociocultural, politico-historical and economical factors.

It presented a picture of a society which was being governed by just 1% of its members while the remaining 99% were powerless. In this analysis, there was a differentiation between the 10% of dwija men who were rich and English-educated and the 90% who were uneducated and poor. The poor and uneducated were termed “fake dwijas”, for they were trapped in the baseless arrogance of belonging to the upper sections only because of the vertical bonds of the caste system. This definition suggested that there were five major categories of “excluded and depressed” Indians – women of all castes and classes, the scs, the shudras, the depressed sections among Muslims and Christians, and the scheduled tribes (sts). He identified these five classes as the social groups whose coming together for equality could provide the impetus needed for basic socio-political and economic transformation of the country.

Two years later, he made an amendment to bring his theory in line with realities in southern and western India.

...I made a slight mistake in imagining that the anti-Brahminism of the south could be transformed into anti-caste...The Reddys, Nairs and Mudaliars are not at all backward castes, and they have never been backward. They are the Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Kayasthas of the north, with this difference that religion did not sanctify these castes (Lohia 1964a: 126, 143-44).

He also advised adding the Marathas of Maharashtra, and the Lingayats or Vakkalingayats of Karnataka to this list of powerful castes. This amendment pointed out the need for, and relevance of, sensitivity to regional variations while analysing the ruling classes in India.

What have been the socio-historical consequences of such a composition of the Indian ruling classes? Lohia's fivefold answer was presented in a declaration of the Association for Study and Destruction of Caste. First, it excluded four-fifths of the people of India from the scope of public life, making them indifferent to the nation's fate. Second, it had caused frequent enslavement of the country due to the disinterest of the lower castes. Third, it has resulted in unusually low productivity in agriculture and industry by making manual labour unattractive and exploitation and beggary honourable. Fourth, it had congealed society through an inbred specialisation of skills, habits and qualities, disjoining learning and life and destroying all sense of discrimination between right and wrong. Finally, the caste hierarchy had become the world's greatest insurance system in times of unemployment and other distress and cause for solidarity on occasions of birth, marriage, death, and festivity. Therefore it entered into all situations and calculations as nothing else in the country (Lohia 1964a: 113-18).

It would be useful to remind ourselves that there was a clear echo of Ambedkar's views in these conclusions drawn by Lohia on the social impact of the caste system and its related inequalities. According to Ambedkar,

The effects of caste on the ethics of the Hindus are simply deplorable. Caste has killed public spirit. Caste has destroyed the sense of public

charity. Caste has made public opinion impossible. A Hindu's public is his caste. His responsibility is only to his caste. His loyalty is restricted only to his caste. Virtue has become caste-ridden and morality has become caste-bound (Rodrigues 2002: 274).

What was different in Lohia's understanding of the Indian ruling classes? Unlike the other socialists and leftists of his time, he did not confine himself to the most frequently used single factor of class. At the same time, he was asking people to look beyond the caste-centric models of power relations that revolved around the domination of brahmins, which was popular among the ideologues of anti-brahmin and non-brahmin movements since the colonial times. Lohia observed that most of the anti-caste movements based on a brahmin-centric understanding of the caste system were more “anti-brahmin” than “anti-caste” and it was a wrong road to take, as had been done in southern and western India in spite of leadership by some of the best minds of the times.

Lohia classified the prevailing revolts against the major inequalities of caste, class and gender into three categories. In the first category was “wordy opposition”, represented by the Congress and the communists. This category sanctified the principles of rising standards of living and merit and expected mere equality of opportunity to solve the problem of caste. They were opposed to the principle of preferential opportunities. The second struggle against caste was led by select shudra groups, numerically powerful and overlords in their areas. They did not wish to give power to the lower castes, but only to the largest single caste among them. They did not therefore destroy caste, but merely effected a shift in status and privileges. They tended to assimilate themselves into the existing high castes and in this process, appropriate the baser qualities of the high castes. He named the Reddys and the Mudaliars in the south and the Marathas in the west in this category. The Ahirs and the Chamars of north India were also trying to follow the strategy of sectional elevation because of their numerical strength. But all this was of little significance to society as a whole because it was limited to an elevation in the status and power of one group within the caste system.

The third struggle against caste, the one he believed was “now on the agenda of India's history”, aimed

...to pitchfork the five downgraded groups of society – women, shudras, the scheduled castes, the depressed sections of Muslims and Christians, and the scheduled tribes into positions of leadership irrespective of their merit as it stands today. A restoration of self-respect through the abolition of caste, of course, when it goes side by side with economic uplift, can rouse them into the activity of full men and awakened peoples.

This crusade must never be confused with the niggardly award of preferential positions to a few scores among the lower castes. That only irritated the higher castes. They must be added by the hundreds and thousands. That would turn what at present is only a vote-catching, quarrel-making and jealousy-inspiring device into a crusade, Lohia wrote (1964a: 95-103).

Preferential Opportunities for Societal Rejuvenation

It was unfortunate that the Lohia line on “destruction of castes and classes” and “smashing the abominable segregations of castes and sex” is mostly associated with reservation for Other Backward Classes (OBCs). Lohia did recommend setting aside 60% of the

positions in government, political parties, business and the armed services for backward castes and groups. But for him these groups did not mean just the OBCs; his backward castes and groups included women, shudras, the SCs, adivasis, and the lower castes among the minorities. Besides, as noted earlier, preferential opportunities came for him as an integral part of a multifaceted model of social justice. An exclusive focus on the “reservationist” approach without stressing economic upliftment was identified by Lohia with the politics of dominant castes like the Reddys, Mudaliars and the Marathas. They had been successful in getting a share in positions of power for a small number of persons of the “caste colossi”, but failed to change the basis of the caste system. The Lohia model for destruction of caste and class and ending discrimination based on the segregation of sexes had four facets – religious, social, political and economic. It was an evolving model in which the principles of preferential opportunity for “backward castes and sections” and priority to the needs of the poor were critical.

Lohia was aware of the positive and negative aspects of the possibilities inherent in this radical programme. He listed five expected gains and five definite dangers of his programme around the principle of preferential opportunities. He expected, first of all, that by availing themselves of preferential opportunities for some years, traditional ability and *samskaras* (cultures/rites of passage) would evolve among the BCS as well and India would be strong in all its parts. Second, there would be no currency to the class and caste struggle of “old dogmatic types”, thus opening up the possibility of ending caste and class through non-violent and peaceful means such as propaganda, organisation and struggle. Third, the wheel of caste would be broken when the low-class *dwijas* began looking towards the backward classes instead of the superior *dwijas*. Fourth, the broadening of the talent pool would rejuvenate society and lead to a flowering of the brilliance of the Indian people. Finally, there would be the emergence of forces for a true struggle against the caste system on the agenda of Indian history. To quote Lohia, “India will know the most invigorating revolution of her history. The people will have become alive as never before ... For the first time, an experiment shall have been made in the simultaneous destruction of class and caste” (1964a: 104).

As Lohia was aware of the direction and consequences of several pre-existing policies, programmes and movements for the abolition of caste, class and sex-based discriminations and segregations, he thought it necessary to point out the dangers of such an endeavour. First, the preferential opportunity approach could speedily antagonise the *dwijas* before speedily influencing the shudras. The *dwijas* could succeed in heaping discredit on the policy and its impact before the shudras woke up to it. Second, the colossi among the lower castes could want to appropriate the fruits of this policy without sharing them with the other lower castes. The result could be changes of rank between a few castes while the system remained intact. Third, the policy could be misused by selfish persons among the lower castes for individual advancement. They could also resort to using intrigue and caste jealousies as weapons. Fourth, every single election or selection between a *dwija* and shudra could become an occasion for acrimonious exchanges. The baser elements among the downgraded

castes could use this as a constant cudgel. Fifth, economic and political issues could be obscured and relegated to the background (Lohia 1964a: 103-04).

What did Lohia do to minimise the dangers and promote the positive possibilities? He remained continuously engaged in explaining – and experimenting – about them to his fellow workers, followers and society at large till his last days (Mitra 1983). Lohia always argued for togetherness to bring about social, political, economic and cultural upliftment. It was necessary in his scheme of things to promote a variety of preferential opportunities while implementing redistributive policies regarding leadership roles, employment, wages, land, prices, education, language and family affairs. They were two sides of the same coin.

A Paradigm Shift

Let us summarise the story of the making of the Lohia model and its significance for understanding the political sociology of India in the context of the four major factors of the power pyramid – caste, class, gender and language. Lohia presented his formulations during the Nehruvian phase of post-colonial politics. It was also the beginning of the post-Ambedkar period of anti-caste mobilisation. The most important aspect of the Lohia line was “decolonising”, “de-Indianising” and “de-Hinduising” the caste question through underlining its complex linkage with class and gender. It moved the focus of the society beyond the dichotomy of legal and moral remedies inherited from the colonial era. It simultaneously “de-Westernised” the concept of class in the Indian discourse of power and social change. There was no need any more to wait for a sufficient growth in the numbers of the industrial proletariat or a progressive middle class to attack the structures of oppression as there was already the possibility of a strong alignment among the five marginalised, paralysed and depressed sections of modern Indian society, cutting across classes, castes, religions, languages and gender.

Lohia made a paradigmatic breakthrough by creating the discourse of intersectionality and the multifaceted nature of the matrix of power and discrimination in Indian society. It created a synchronisation of various interrogations about the nature of injustices from the point of view of women, dalits, adivasis, the working classes and the depressed sections among the Muslims and Christians in the early years of independent India. This synchronised view promoted togetherness for social transformations through not only state intervention but also a radical political will around an alternative agenda favouring preferential opportunities for the marginalised majority.

Making the issue of segregation of women a major issue was a very critical input from Lohia as it contextualised the post-colonial challenges before Indian society and Indian women’s movements. Inclusion of English education as a factor in the making of the Indian ruling classes highlighted the domain of politics of languages and the language of politics and its importance to linguistically marginalised or excluded people of rural and small-town India. Lohia was a very attractive thinker to creative writers in various Indian languages as he gave them a sense of self-confidence by voicing their concerns about the continuity of “mental slavery” in the fields of culture and literature.

Finally, it goes to the credit of Lohia that he presented the issues of caste, class, gender and language in terms of the imperatives of nation-building or national awakening. This gave him the moral basis for requesting upper-caste youth to come forward to endure “temporary injustice” for the larger needs of an awakened country and vibrant society. He also elevated the quest for justice of the victims of caste system and patriarchy to the challenge of coming forward to lead the whole of Indian society beyond the segregations of caste and gender and away from domination and discrimination based on them.

It cannot be denied that Lohia’s ideas only occasionally figure in debates and analyses on the political sociology of India, particularly

on the policy of reservation for OBCs (Bakshi 1993), in spite of it being one of the most holistic approaches. Why? Is it because he did not follow any of the established academic or political approaches and adopted a new line of thought and action? Was it also because his approach was so radical (as he believed in the equal irrelevance of American capitalism and Soviet communism) that it was beyond the capacity of the pro-freedom, pro-justice and pro-equality political camps and social coalitions to accept and follow in its totality? Did Lohia fail to influence most of them because the intersectionality emphasised in his approach was not very convenient to the fragmentary and disconnected mobilisations (Lohia 1966c) on caste, class, gender language or region-related injustices?

NOTES

- 1 There are a number of studies which are very relevant to understanding the basic features of the political sociology of India since independence. We cannot have an exhaustive list here. But a few references may be useful to have a broad idea about the major approaches and concerns. G S Ghuriye, *Caste and Class in India* (Bombay, Popular Book Depot 1950); A R Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism* (Bombay, Popular Book Depot 1948); three books by M N Srinivas, *Caste in Modern India* (1962), *Social Change in Modern India* (1966), *The Dominant Caste and Other Essays* (1987, all published recently in a single volume (New Delhi: Oxford University Press); F G Bailey, *Caste and the Economic Frontier* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1958); Andre Beteille, *Caste, Class and Power* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1966); S H Rudolph and L I Rudolph, *Modernity of Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1968; D G Mandelbaum, *Society in India*, 2 Vols (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1970; L Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1970; Rajni Kothari (ed.), *Caste in Indian Politics* (New Delhi: Orient Longman) 1970; Yogendra Singh, *Modernisation of Indian Tradition* (New Delhi: Thomson Press), 1972; and Paul R Brass, *Language, Religion and Politics in North India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1974.
- 2 Studying the reports as well as the recommendations of (a) the status and problems of the scheduled tribes (for example, the Bhuria Committee Report); (b) the occasional reports submitted by the National Commission for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (between 1990 and 2005); (c) the two national commissions on the backward classes, Report of the backward classes (Kaka Kalelkar Committee Report), (Government of India, Delhi, 1955), and Report of the Second Backward Classes Commission (B P Mandal Commission Report) (1979); (d) status of women, Towards Equality, (Government of India, Delhi, 1976); and (e) status of the minorities, Sachchar Committee Report (Government of India, Delhi, 2006) provide us a useful understanding of the limits of the “single principle factor” approach in making sense of the complexities of the political sociology of India. It is to be noted that there is no national study on the cost and consequences of the dominance of English in education, the economy and in governance.

The use of the intersectionality theory in sociology became well accepted through significant contributions by Patricia Hill Collins in the context of race, class and gender between 1986 and 2007. The need for an intersectionality approach has been indirectly brought into focus in the writings of a number of social scientists on India. For example, see M N Srinivas, *The Dominant Caste and Other Essays* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press) 1987; Francine Frankel and M S A Rao, *Dominance and*

- State Power in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990; D L Sheth’s articles in *Lokayan Bulletin* (Vol 12, No 4, January-February 1996) and *Lokayan Bulletin* (Vol 13, No 2, September-October 1996); Christophe Jaffrelot, *India’s Silent Revolution* (New Delhi: Permanent Black), 2003.
- Uma Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste: Through Feminist Lens* (Calcutta: Stree), 2006; Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan (ed.), *Gender Issues in Post-Independence India* (New Delhi: Kali for Women), 1999; and Gail Omvedt, *Dalits and Democratic Revolution* (New Delhi: Sage) 1994 are good examples of effective articulation of the reality of intersectionalities in power relations in the realm of gender, caste, and class.
- 3 For his biography, see Indumati Kelkar (2009). For a comprehensive compilation of his writings in the nine volumes of Rammanohar Lohia Rachanavali see Kapoor 2008. The 16 volumes of Lohia’s intervention in the parliamentary debates have been brought out as *Loksabha Mein Lohia* by Rammanohar Samata Vidyalaya Nyas, Hyderabad, between 1979 and 1986.
 - 4 See also, Desai 1983; Ajit Roy 1979: 306.
 - 5 According to Gail Omvedt, “But Lohia’s attention to women’s oppression went beyond that of Ambedkar (and in this sense he is perhaps comparable to Phule) and included an open attitude on sexuality that represented a break with Hindu *Pativrata*, puritanism” (1994: 273). Also see, “Correspondence with Dr Ambedkar” in Lohia 1964a: 29-37.
 - 6 The evolution of the Lohia model can be understood by consulting his writings on caste, class, gender and language between 1959 and 1967, *Nirasha Ke Kartavya* (1966) is based on his speech in the Samajwadi Yujvan Sabha national camp at Nainital in 1962, *Samata aur Sampannata* was published in 1966 in *Jan* (a Hindi monthly (ed.) Lohia) and is included in a collection of Lohia’s essays edited by Onkar Sharad (Allahabad: Lok Bharati), 1992, p 143.
 - 7 Lohia spoke and wrote continuously and consistently about gender issues in the context of the structure of social inequalities since early 1950s till the last year of his life. His more significant articles on this issue are *Hindu Banaam Hindu* (1950); “Two Segregations of Caste and Sex” (1953) in Lohia 1964a; “Draupadi Ya Savitri” in *Jati Pratha* in Lohia 1964 and “Auraten Aur Yoni-Shuchita”, *Jan*, January-February, 1967. It may be useful to compare his views about the need for women’s emancipation with Jotiba Phule as indicated by Gail Omvedt. For a selection, see Deshpande 2002.

REFERENCES

Bakshi, P M (1993): *Supreme Court on Mandal Commission Case, 1992* (New Delhi: Orient Law House).
 Chakravarti, Uma (2003): *Gendering Caste: Through Feminist Lens* (Calcutta: Stree).

Desai, A R (1983): *India’s Path of Development* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan).
 Deshpande, G P (2002): *Selected Writings of Jotirao Phule* (New Delhi: Leftword Books).
 Frankel, Francine R and M S A Rao (1999): *Dominance and State Power in Modern India*, 2 Vols (New Delhi: Oxford University Press).
 Government of India (1974): “Towards Equality: Report of the Committee on the Status of Women”, Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, New Delhi.
 Kapoor, Mastaram (ed.) (2008): *Rammanohar Lohia Rachanavali: 8* (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers).
 Kelkar, Indumati (2009): *Dr Rammanohar Lohia – Jeevan aur Darshan* (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers).
 Lohia, Rammanohar (1955): *Wheel of History*, Rammanohar Lohia, Samata Vidyalaya Nyas, Hyderabad.
 – (1963): *Sarkari, Mathee aur Kujaat Gandhivadi*, Rammanohar Lohia Samata Vidyalaya Nyas, Hyderabad.
 – (1964a): *The Caste System*, Rammanohar Lohia Samata, Samata Vidyalaya Nyas, Hyderabad.
 – (1964b): *Jati Pratha*, Rammanohar Lohia Samata Vidyalaya Nyas, Hyderabad.
 – (1966a): “Language”, Samata Vidyalaya Nyas, Hyderabad.
 – (1966b): *Saat Krantiyan*, Rammanohar Lohia Samata Vidyalaya Nyas, Hyderabad.
 – (1966c): *Nirasha Ke Kartavya*, Rammanohar Lohia Samata Vidyalaya Nyas, Hyderabad.
 – (1967): “*Naxalbari, Asansol Aur Kalkutta*”, January, July, New Delhi.
 – (1968): *Samajwad Ki Arthniti*, Rammanohar Lohia Samata Vidyalaya Nyas, Hyderabad.
 Michael, S M (1999): *Dalits in Modern India: Vision and Values* (New Delhi: Vistaar Publications).
 Mitra, Roma (1983): *Lohia through Letters*, published by Roma Mitra, New Delhi.
 Naickar, Ramasamy E V (1959): *The Ramayana: A True Reading* (Madras: Rationalist Publications).
 Omvedt, Gail (1994): *Dalits and Democratic Revolution – Dr Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Sage Publications).
 Pitti, Badarivishal et al, ed. (1986): *Loksabha Mein Lohia*, Vol 15, Rammanohar Samata Vidyalaya Nyas, Hyderabad.
 Rodrigues, Velerian (2002): *The Essential Writings of Dr Ambedkar* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press).
 Roy, M N (1971): *India in Transition* (Bombay: Nachiketa Publications).
 Roy, Ajit (1979): “Caste and Class: An Interlinked View”, *Economic & Political Weekly*, Annual number, February.
 Srinivas, M N (1966): *Social Change in Modern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
 Sundar Rajan, R (ed.) (1999): *Gender Issues in Post-Independence India* (New Delhi: Kali for Women).