

Madhu Dandavate Lohia's Quest for a New Dimension

"He glorified the chains and jails of his captors into the shining ornaments of martyrdom".

This was the eloquent tribute paid to Gandhi by the Negro leader, Mrs. Mary Bethune. How appropriate would this homage be in the case of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia as well! Dr. Lohia more than any one else wielded most effectively the Gandhian weapon of satyagraha, even after independence, to fight every form of injustice against the oppressed and the neglected. If Leon Trotsky, one of the leaders of the Russian Revolution professed the theory of "permanent revolution", Dr. Lohia preached and practised the concept of "permanent civil disobedience" as a peaceful rebellion against injustice. To the overcautious "pragmatists" both of them appeared as "visionaries" or to use term of the uncharitable critics "eccentrics". However, was not the Father of our Nation who showed obsession for 'Swadeshi', Satyagraha' and 'non-cooperation', dubbed as a "fadist" and "eccentric"? The history records ample evidence to show that revolutionaries whom their contemporaries dubbed as 'eccentric' were held by the succeeding generation as great beacon of lights.

Immediacy in Struggle and Organisation

On the question of dynamics of action the traditional debate has been as to whether action should precede the organization or whether organisation should be a by-product of the programme of action. In his presidential address at the national convention of the Socialist Party held

in May, 1952 at Pachmarhi, Dr. Lohia added a new dimension to this debate by propounding the theory of "immediacy in struggle and organisation". Those who mechanically applied their mind to the problems of organisation and indefinitely waited for the struggle to ripen at the highest stage of organisational work completely missed the opportunity to join the mainstream of the nation's struggle. The best instance is that of the RSS which for years harped on perfecting a disciplined organisation in search of the "opportune moment" for launching a struggle for independence. In this process the RSS remained completely isolated from the current of nation's freedom struggle. The other extreme is that of the adventurist actionists who considered organisation as the subsidiary part of the militant struggles and hoped that sharpening of people's struggles would itself throw up the necessary organisation with the militant outlook. Dr. Lohia exposed the futility of both these extreme viewpoints and pleaded in his theory of "immediacy" that organisation and action must continue as parallel currents. The preparations for organisation are to be linked up with the perspective of a programme of action and even in the midst of the most militant and dynamic action, the claims of organisation are not to be sacrificed. A careful study of revolutionary movements the world over has vindicated the correctness of his perspective, so ably put forward by Dr. Rammanohar Lohia.

Militancy Construction

In the early years after the Second World War, when the Socialist Party had commendable strength in the field of organisation as well as action, Dr. Lohia revealed a mind which was most constructive and refreshing. He strongly pleaded for "constructive militancy" and "militant construction". In his own inimitable style he described "spade, prison and vote" as the symbols of this new perspective of action and construction. It was Dr. Lohia's imagination that, when the mammoth Janwani march of the people proceeds to the Rashtrapati Bhawan to

present to the President of India the charter of demands it should do so after passing through hundreds and thousands of villages on its way undertaking mass constructive activities like digging wells, building bunds and cleansing the tanks with a direct involvement of the villagers in this mass constructive work. It was a novel scheme indeed in which people on the march reconciled the spirit of struggle with the spirit of robustness to recapture once again that spirit of constructive militancy. That would be the most meaningful tribute to the memory of late Dr. Lohia.

Search for Identity

Ever since the formation of the Congress Socialist Party in 1934, the socialist movement in India was in search of ideological identity. In the initial stages, the vague generalisations of Marxism dominated the ideology of the party. Many developments in the socio-economic field in Europe and elsewhere had challenged the validity of some of the basic postulates of Marxism. The history had posed many questions that remained unanswered by Marxism. Unfortunately, the socialists too had not displayed an enquiring mind to examine some of the fundamental formulations of the Marxian theory. The situation remained fluid till the Second World War. The period of the Second World War represented a period of ideological churning in the socialist movement. The process continued even in the post-War years. It cannot be denied that Rammanohar Lohia with his fresh mind made the most valuable contribution to this process of re-thinking in the socialist movement.

Marxism Re-examined

In his well-known article "Economics after Marx", written during the Second World War Dr. Lohia sharply analysed the basic premises of the Marxian thought. His approach was most non-doctrinaire. He emphasised that no individual's thought could be made the sole frame of reference for the ideology of a movement. That summed up his attitude

to Marx as well as to Gandhi. "I want the winds of all cultures to blow freely about my house, but not to be swept off my feet by any", said Mahatma Gandhi. These words of Gandhiji were the corner-stone of Dr. Lohia's approach to the ideological problems of the socialist movement. He showed the willingness to assimilate in the socialist movement those elements of Marxism which had stood the test of time. However, he did not blindly accept some of the postulates of Marxism which were proved to be irrelevant in the new situation. Dr. Lohia, therefore, accepted broadly Marx's scientific method of interpreting history but at the same time he realised the limitation of this interpretation. Dr. Lohia emphasised that economic factors do contribute to the development of history but human will too was a factor to be reckoned with. In his own picturesque way he stated that "logic of events" as well as "logic of will" govern the path of human history.

Dr. Lohia seriously contested the claim of Marxism that revolution would take place at the highest level of economic and industrial development in a society. The facts that revolution took place in an economically backward country like Russia and it was bypassed in an industrially developed society in England and America confirm Dr. Lohia's analysis more than the predictions of Marx.

New Technology

The thread which Dr. Lohia had left in his article 'Economics after Marx' was later on picked up by him in his presidential address delivered at Pachmarhi in 1952. He showed kinship between the techniques of production both under communism and capitalism and claimed that they were irrelevant to two thirds of the underdeveloped world that had high density of population, inadequacy of capital, large unemployment. Dr. Lohia brought out the most glaring fact that communism borrowed from capitalism - its conventional production techniques; it only sought to change relationship among the forces of production. Such a process, Dr. Lohia emphasised, was completely

unsuited to the conditions prevailing in India. He, therefore, pleaded for a small unit technology and the corresponding decentralised economy which is not to be confused with the Gandhian economy based on village self-sufficiency. Dr. Lohia's insistence was on research and innovation to invent a new small unit machine run on electricity or diesel that could be taken to the remotest villages in India so as to fulfil the twin claims of providing jobs to the rural population as well as augmenting production. Dr. Lohia claimed that such a small unit technology would be able to overcome the difficulties created by inadequacy of capital and the technique being labour intensive it would also eliminate, to a great extent, the concealed rural unemployment.

Preferential Opportunity

The traditional socialist thought based on pure "economic determinism" could not provide solutions to the problems of tradition bound Indian society which was marked not only by sharp class distinctions but by caste stratifications as well. The social exploitation resulting out of these caste stratifications had plagued the Indian society for centuries and strait-jacket theory of class struggle could not provide answers to complex questions created by our society. Dr. Lohia's greatest contribution to the socialist movement is his concept of a total revolution that would envelop the economic as well as social fields. He strongly pleaded for the viewpoint that Indian society oscillated between class and caste and unless the submerged castes and communities were liberated, the task of revolution in India would never be complete.

Even in the midst of fierce opposition from the upper caste orthodoxy, Dr. Lohia strongly espoused the cause of "preferential opportunities" for the backward castes and communities. Since these weaker section of the society have developed a lag for centuries, mere equality of opportunity would not help in lifting up the oppressed sections from the miserable depths of degradation to which they have sunk. The concept of preferential opportunities to the weaker sections

has been widely accepted today as an integral part of socialist thinking in India.

The scientific core of Marxian thought has been destroyed by the doctrinaire and dogmatic Marxists while Gandhiji's ideals have been buried by the Gandhians who have reduced the Gandhian way of life to a mere ritual. The socialists in India must ensure that Dr. Lohia's valuable contribution, which has introduced a new dimension in socialist thought and action, does not meet the same fate.

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