

Relevance of Rama Manohar Lohia Today

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History is always dispassionate about personalities and detach from emotional connect. It is proved time and again that individuals and personalities are mercilessly thrown in to oblivion when their work and ideas are menace to the contemporary society and brought to limelight those whose sacrifices for the wellbeing of mankind are eternal though they might have desolated during their lifetime. The relevance of the ideas and opinions of some Intellectuals may be far reaching and visionary during their lifetime might be felt incredible by their contemporaries but that does not mean they remain lay waste forever. There is another group of evangelists whose profession is to make irrelevant ideas significant and earn a living whether they are useful or useless to common people. Religion and faith based on hypocrisy and hegemony might make a few ideas always appear in public domain but with little relevance to aid the victims of unkindness of time. We have in India some great men like Mahatma Phuley, M.N.Roy, Ambedkar, Ram Manohar Lohia etc in the modern times whose ideas are found relevant whenever the society is dragged in to chaos and bigotry. Lohia whose 105th anniversary is celebrated on 23rd March is an occasion to review some of his ideas along with one of our greatest patriots Bhagat Singh who was hanged by the imperialists on 23rd March.

There are interesting happenings that are significant in the recent past to remember Lohia. The collapse of Soviet Union experiment, the crisis in Europe, the emergence of neoliberal policies along with the resurrection of fundamentalism, control of caste and corporate media and the inconsequence of the poverty of Indians in public debates call for a reflection on the ideas of Lohia once again. Though some scholars have published fascinating papers and books on Lohia during the centenary year in 2010, it is an occasion not burdened with any obligations to remember him as a custom, but to really understand his relevance today.

Unlike several other Indian leaders, Lohia did not go to England for his higher studies as he abhorred the Anglo-Saxons (though Germans do come under Saxons, they never claim so). He was trained by one of the foremost economic historians of his times Sombart and his contemporaries included the famous Schumaker whose 'Small is Beautiful' derived ideas from Gandhi and Buddha. His approach to the study of Indian problems is indigenous and critically drawn from Indian philosophical thought. It is very illuminating to read his 'Marx, Gandhi and Socialism' one of his very important contributions to Indian thought, Lohia used several examples from Indian thinkers like Shankara to illustrate his point. He was very critical about Marx being at the same time being a Marxist and used his theory of surplus value for his analysis. His major criticism against Marx was that he had used his European background for the study of Asian or Indian problems that are different. He was of the opinion that his lack of knowledge about the Asian society made him to draw extreme generalizations that did not allow him to draw meaningful conclusions and in a way made him irrelevant in the Indian context. One of the examples that he used to attribute to Marx is about the economic crisis and the appropriation of appropriators. This did not happen in the capitalist advanced countries of Europe, but only occurred in Asia and Russia. In fact this criticism is taken by some of the followers to an unconstrained extent to denounce Marxism. Lohia's criticism about Soviet Union of Stalin era did not last long. It is here I think we need to revise some of our reflections on Lohia to make him relevant.

The critics and admirers of Lohia should not hesitate to recognize that the limitations of Marx and Soviet model and even China do not exist anymore to extend the logic. If we do not realize this fact we would be fighting only with a shadow. Similarly the Marxists who were critical about Lohia's approach to Communism may consider the changed circumstances in the World and the relevance of Socialist programme advocated by Lohia and the need for a reassessment of his ideas to bring all the progressive forces on one platform to fight capitalism and its Siamese twin fundamentalism.

The frequently cited metaphor of Marxism by most of our Indian activists and intellectuals is about the base and super structure. It is gone to such an extent that some of the materialist interpretations of history has rejected the blatant reality of caste and hoodwinked intellectuals like Ambedkar and Lohia as those who squandered time and resources on a super structure issue that will blow off once economic emancipation of the poor is achieved. We know now what has really happened to that interpretation today. That is why some critiques attribute this wrong or injudicious interpretation as mischief played by those who really belong to the other camp but tactically worked with the left to give vigor to the fundamentalists. It may not be precisely the matter of fact of the criticism, but some of the interpretations and marginalization of Lohia and his ideas by the mainstream left have caused great damage to the foundation of democracy, secularism and socialism in India.

We have seen four decades of left active participation in the parliamentary form of democracy and their demands , activities, implementation of policies etc that are in no way different from what Lohia advocated? Then where is the point of departure? It may be in the analysis and interpretation of Marxism. Now the objective and subjective conditions and the assumptions about India have changed. It seems both the left and the socialist groups have lost precious time and energy in coming to terms to mitigate the miserable conditions of the poor and the socially deprived. Is it because of the lack of realization of this phenomenon, the space kept open ended is now occupied by the opportunistic and hegemonic compradors?

Lohia has spelt out his socialist agenda in terms of 6 programmes as 1 maximum attainable equality, 2 social ownership, 3 small and indigenous technology, 4 four pillars of state, 5 decetralisation of industry, and 6 world parliament and government. These goals perhaps Lohia thought could be achieved through his seven point revolution or 'sapta kranti'. They are; equality between men and women, shun colour discrimination, annihilation of caste and status based on birth, revolution against colonialism, revolution against private capital, revolution against armaments and creation of world parliament.

Unfortunately very few left thinkers seem to have taken these ideas very seriously and never interrogated them. However, his ardent followers are also to an extent responsible for this apathy who failed to raise these issues for public debate at all India level. The followers of Lohia were confined to Hindi belt and a few pockets of social groups, though they were supported by the bahujan majority (may be due to the Lohia legacy).

Some of the intellectual contributions of Lohia are found to be still valid after the emergence of North Atlantic hegemony which Lohia detested during his lifetime. Let us look at three of his important ideas like capitalism and Imperialism, limited personality of Rama and capitalist production relations. Lohia unlike the Indian Marxists was one with the Latin American scholars who have developed ideas as to how imperialist centre of USA was responsible for underdevelopment of the periphery. Lohia has questioned Marx's formulation that imperialism comes in at the final stage of capitalist expansion. He did not agree with it and said that British imperialism was responsible for the development of British capitalism and both are interrelated. He was perhaps anticipating the Latin American scholars like Wallerstein, Gunter Frank, Cardoso, Arrighi etc when he said that the exploitation was like the village being exploited by the town. Though Lenin has elaborated on Imperialism as a continuation of Marxist analysis, interestingly both M N Roy and Lohia gave a different analysis to this as far as India is concerned. This needs to be further studied to make Lohia relevant today.

The greatest price the Marxists and the so called materialists of India have paid for disregarding the potential of Hinduism to derail the agenda of socialists can be seen in terms of tolerating it. It was Lohia who has taken the Hindu ethos to task by questioning the limited personality of Rama and making him as their ideal. Lohia being a critique might have in the process pricked Gandhi's Ramarajya? The Indian Intellectual class due to their control over media and public discourse has never allowed any indigenous thinker to come to limelight who questioned their social hegemony. They have been doing it from time immemorial and we could see it in the case of Phuley, Ambedkar, Periyar, Lohia and several others during the last century. We are witnessing the same in the

contemporary period as well with the support of technology and at the same time diabolically even questioning its credence?

One of the important contributions of Lohia in the area of mode of production debate is his criticism of Marxist overemphasis on the destruction of production relations rather than the productive forces. It is seen that the collapse of Soviet Union could be related to the continuation of productive forces that became necropolis of socialist regime and the development of bourgeois class who diverted social surplus to USA and Western Europe and ultimately pulled down the system. It is to be examined to what extent Lohia was right in this prophecy.

The recent debate in the Parliament about color and gender discrimination and targeting Sharad Yadav a Lohiate seem to have been distorted in the media. But the fact of the matter is that Lohia spoke about the beauty of black people and explained the splendor of the personality of Draupadi. He was right in saying had the African blacks rather than the British whites were our colonial masters, black color could have taken the place of white in our public discourse. You can see this now in our electronic media and the ad industry with which our self styled protectors of Indian culture are comfortable eulogizing white and European color and blondness. This reminds that their primordial relations with Anglo-Saxon and Aryan link being displayed in their subjugation to white power but glossed over by their caste media. In order to hoodwink some of these ideas they bring a pet black cat from the opposition camp.

Lohia was one of the ardent supporters of democratic decentralization and power to the victims of caste system. Perhaps it was in this context he has encouraged the lower castes in the positions of party and power politics to provide adequate representation to the real proletariat. Unlike the Marxists who proclaim the nonexistence of caste and the presence of class in India, Lohia being an indigenous thinker correctly strategized his political move to bring equity and equanimity (samta and samtvam) in a caste ridden Hindu society. In this process Lohia is far ahead of his caste man and mentor Gandhi and also Marxists. Sadly

both the groups are now considered as irrelevant and there is wide spectrum of scope thrown open for building a united struggle to make India a democratic socialist and secular country with all the left and democratic forces coming together. The life and mission of Lohia would definitely enrich all of us in this direction. (excerpts of a Speech delivered at Sundarayya Vignana Kendram, Hyderabad on 23 March 2015).