

Dr. LOHIA: TOWARDS 'NEW SOCIALISM'

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Once Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia said, "I have nothing with me except that the common and the poor people of India think that I am perhaps their own man." Indeed, Lohia was a dedicated and kindly individual, a man of people who lived and worked for them. Although he will ever be remembered as a forceful exponent of decentralized socialism, a fiery propagandist of a 'New Socialism' and an ardent support of Hindi, his real worth lay in the sympathy and affection which he had for the Indian masses. He was gentle in manner and wore an unostentatious and simple look. In him were combined many great qualities- humanism and compassion of Buddha, sacrifice and affection of a prophet and courage and rage of Samkara. If he proved a terror for the men in power, he was a source of inspiration and courage for the poor.

In 1928 while Lohia was a college student in Calcutta, he started taking an active part in the freedom movement of the country. He organised and led the college students to boycott the Simon Commission that had come to India to inquire into the working of the Reforms of 1919, and to negotiate with the Indian leaders on the further constitutional reforms. And it was in this year that he came into close contact with Jawaharlal Nehru, who had come there to preside over the Youth Conference. He also came in touch with Subhash Chandra Bose, but it was Nehru who left a deep impression on him. Nehru too was much impressed by his sharp mind, his talent for speaking and his fervent nationalism.

In 1929 Lohia left for Berlin for higher studies from where he returned to India in the beginning of 1933, after having earned a Ph. D. degree in Economics. In 1934 a socialist party, known as the Congress Socialist Party, was organised within the Congress. The party started its Weekly, the *Congress Socialist*, to disseminate the socialist ideology among the Congress workers and the Indian masses, the editorship of which was entrusted to Dr. Lohia due to his logical and progressive approach to the economic and political questions of the day. In 1936 he was made Secretary of the Foreign Department of the Congress on the recommendation of Jawaharlal Nehru. He held this post for about two years. In 1938 he was included in the Executive Committee of the Congress Socialist Party. From 1939 to 1946, Lohia's life was one of continuous struggle against the British Government. During this period he worked under the guidance and leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and passed about four years behind bars. In February 1947, the Congress Socialist Party held its session in Kanpur under the chairmanship of Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia. At the Kanpur Session the party decided to drop the word 'Congress' from its name and assume a new status and title as an independent Socialist Party.

In the post-Congress period, Lohia constantly pressed for adopting new objectives based on new assumptions. Consequently, the socialist leaders resolved to eschew doctrinaire political thinking in favour of pragmatic and empirical analysis of India's problems as a necessary first step in evolving a new democratic socialism.

In 1952 there was a merger of the Socialist Party with the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party (KMPP), with the result that a new socialist party, known as Praja Socialist Party, was formed. As the President of the P. S. P., Lohia pleaded for a greater incorporation of Gandhian ideas in socialist thought. He asked the Indian socialists to understand the importance of a decentralized economy based upon the resuscitation of cottage industries. He seemed to be against both capitalism and communism on account of their fad for big and heavy machines. According to him, both the systems are wasteful and hence unsuitable for India. In contrast to them, Gandhi's ideas and action, Lohia strongly pleaded, may act as a filter through which socialist ideas would flow and get rid of their dross. He said, "Nobody would be happier than I if Gandhi's ideas were also to influence the other two systems, capitalism and communism, but one may reasonably doubt that this can be done."¹

Developing his argument in favour of Gandhian economy, Lohia explained that the world today was in the grip of two systems and the third one was in the making. He argued: "Capitalism and communism are almost fully elaborated systems, and the whole world is in their grip, and the result is poverty and war and fear. The third idea is also making itself felt on the world stage. It is still inadequate, and it has not been fully elaborated, but it is open."² Lohia called this idea the true socialist idea. This socialist idea, according to him, is to be based on Gandhi's ideas of decentralized economy and village government. He, therefore, urged the importance of small machines which would utilize the maximum labour power with small capital investments. This type of thought-orientation was not liked by many of his colleagues. About a year after (in June, 1953), Asoka Mehta put forward his thesis of the 'Political Compulsions of a Backward Economy' in which he tried to maintain that the ideology of the Congress was coming near to that of the socialists, and hence he urged for an ideological alliance between the Congress and the P. S. P. Lohia, as a counterbalance to it, presented his 'Equidistant Theory' and asserted that the socialists were still as much equidistant from the Congress as they were from the communists. He, therefore, did not like the P. S. P. to have an alliance with the Congress on policy matters. However, he saw no harm in making an electoral adjustment with the Congress under special circumstances.

Disapproving his party's policies of alliance and adjustments with the Congress in Travancore-Cochin, he demanded the resignation of Pattom Thanu Pillai's socialist ministry in the face of police-firing in 1954 on a linguistic issue. When the Praja Socialist Government refused to resign, there came a split and a new Socialist Party of India was formed in 1955 under the leadership of Dr. Lohia. In the later years, efforts were made to bridge up the differences between the Praja Socialist Party and the Socialist Party of Lohia in order to propagate the ideals of socialism and work for a socialist order in the country. But there were three conditions on which Lohia was not ready to make any compromise with the P. S. P. leaders. These were: No alliance with either the Congress or the Communist Party (as maintained in the Gaya thesis of the party); complete internal democracy or freedom to discuss internal differences publicly; and disciplined functioning of the party. It was on these issues that he had left the P. S. P. Till his death, the unity, between the two socialist parties could not be made possible due to his unreconciling attitude. Lohia was a man who preferred to break with rather than to compromise with anybody at the cost of his policy and principles.

Lohia not only contributed to the development of socialist movement in the country, but he also reflected on certain questions of political importance and thereby tried to build up his own socialist theory. Contemplating the process of history, he tells in his famous work, *Wheel of History* (1955), that history appears to move in an inexorable cyclical order and that it moves without emotion. He dismisses Hegelians' and Marxists' interpretations of history, for their answers do not provide us with a definite clue to the workings of history. He writes: "For, those who profess to give us a law or even some inkling of a process as to how man has developed through various periods must be able to indicate why peoples and classes have risen and fallen. If there is no answer to that, it would be futile to speak of a law of history. To describe symptoms is not to indicate causes".³ According to Lohia, no fixed law can be established about the purpose or design in history. While thinking over the history of man, he remarks that "it would be well to remember that historical enquiry has still to concern itself with the discovery of facts and that some of these are undiscoverable. The conflict in testimony and facts is also not resolvable at all in some cases. When such is the condition in relation to facts of outward phenomena and events, what to speak of those subtler motives and feelings, which influenced the great men of history but dwelt either in the sub-conscious or have not been communicated to us and which are a vital key to the designs and purposes of living."⁴

But still the history moves in a cyclical order. Lohia's notion of history corresponds to the Aristotelian cyclic theory. He disagreed with the notion of straight linear historical advance. According to him, while there may be no universal validity in the findings of most of the cyclical philosophies of history, they are certainly more objective than the earlier philosophies of linear progress and have greatly leavened historical study. Lohia found himself in agreement with Spengler, Northrop, Sorokin and Toynbee—the exponents of the cyclical theory of history in the West. Like them, Lohia also believed that "the rise and fall of peoples and civilisations has ever taken place and, as students of history, we must have all concerned ourselves with the rise of the British Empire, the fall of the Pharaoh Empire, the rise of the Gupta Kingdom and the fall of the Roman Empire and so forth..."⁵ In the course of cyclical movement, a country may reach the zenith of civilization and may also go down to *nadir*, perhaps, to rise again.

Lohia further tells in his *Wheel of History* that human history is characterized by a tussle between crystallized castes and loosely cohesive classes. The internal oscillation between class and caste is the chief factor of historical dynamics. He writes: "Castes represent conservative forces of stagnation, inertia and prescriptive right, while classes stand for a dynamic force of social mobilization. Thus all human history, according to him, has been 'an internal' movement between castes and classes."⁶ This internal struggle between the castes and classes and between motives and civilizations will go in the history till the evil in man and society is not prevented from breeding. And he hoped that "the world might through intelligent design try to achieve a multi-coloured harmony of human race."⁷

Lohia came to believe that industrialization and mechanization of agriculture would not do much good to the human race as they would further accelerate the struggle for power on both national and international levels. Hence he advised the socialists to organise the state and society on the pattern Gandhi suggested in order to maintain steady progress in society and achieve harmony of human race. He stressed the need of original thinking and initiative on the part of Asian socialists. He advised them to frame their policies in the context of a civilization emerging from centuries old despotism and feudalism.

Discussing the problems of Asian socialism, Lohia tells in his speech, delivered at Rangoon to the preliminary meeting of the Asian Socialist Conference on 26th March, 1952, that in Asia where economic problem is still to be solved the European type of socialist democracy is of little use. The Asian masses will be willing to sell their democratic rights if they are convinced that they can procure bread through some economic system. And an attempt at traditional rationalization in Asian countries "would be inevitably followed by an economy similarly constituted as either the capitalist or the communist pattern."⁸ Both capitalism and communism believe in the progress of the same type of economy. The only difference between a capitalist and a communist is that while the former encourages private property, the latter converts it into public property. Rationalization ultimately leads to unemployment. "Once you set about rationalization, hundreds of millions of people in India, as also in other Asian countries, will be thrown out of employment."⁹ As it cannot solve the problem of poverty in Asia, he stressed the need of rationalization with machines which do not need much capital.

Lohia came to believe that the methods adopted by European socialists for economic and political reconstruction were not suitable to Asian countries, particularly to India and Indonesia. A new method must, therefore, be sought. He writes: "The peasant must learn intensive agriculture and he must be persuaded to enter into co-operative farming of one type or another. Such machines should be made available to him as do not cost much capital. He must develop initiative and, therefore, maximum state power, both legislative and administrative, should belong to him in his village community. Communist redivision of land is a hoax to begin with and a futile cruelty in the end. Socialist redivision of land, because it is coupled with decentralization of power, will produce good economic results as well as a new way of living."¹⁰ According to him, European socialists have always been trying to define socialism in terms of universal concepts, although they have achieved some successes. Their socialism is a gradual and constitutional socialism. Asian Socialism cannot afford to be that. According to him, the whole Asian situation is such that its application must be drastic whether in agriculture or industrial processes or in the process of nationalization. Capitalism is incapable of achieving economic re-construction because of private capital. On this point Lohia was in complete agreement with Karl Marx. But he did not trust the communists because he thought that they had always attempted to employ gross economic poverty for insurrectional pressure on the state. Asian socialists must understand this situation to fight against injustice.

Summing up the main objectives of Asian socialism, Lohia tells that it should strive for the attainment of such concepts as the democratization of administration, small capital outlay such as small machines, socialised property and maximum attainable equality. And the method he suggested for their realization corresponds to the Gandhian method of mass action. He dismissed communist class struggle as immoral and violent because of its faulty analysis of capitalism. Socialist class struggle, according to him, "must correspond to the aims of decentralized society, which alone can now produce good economic and spiritual results."¹¹

Lohia considered the mixing of dogmatic religious and political considerations a bane of Asian politics, because it leads to the development of sectarian and communal outlook. In the absence of any settled democratic tradition, terror and assassinations, often, assume the role of political technics. Another discouraging feature of Asian politics is the emergence of a new class of bureaucrats and technocrats. As these diverse trends make possible the rise of a class of such leaders who try to remain in the saddle through theatrical and demagogic devices, he stressed the urgency of a comprehensive and original social philosophy to meet the situation.

As an exponent of decentralized socialism, Lohia wanted to organise the state mostly on the lines Gandhi suggested. The socialist state, according to him, must aim at the decentralization of both economic and political powers. He called his socialist state a four-pillar state.¹² In this state, an attempt will be made to synthesize the opposite concepts of centralization and decentralization. Its four pillars—the Village, the *Mandal* (the district), the Province and the Central Government, will be so organised as to work on the principle of functional democracy. The main features of this state, according to Lohia, will be: (1) One-fourth of all governmental and plan expenditure shall be through village, district and city panchayats. (2) Police shall remain subordinate to village, city and district panchayats or any of their agencies. (3) The post of collector shall be abolished and all his functions will be distributed among various bodies in the district. As far as possible, the principle of election will be applied in administration, instead of nominations. (4) Agriculture, industry and other property, which is nationalized, will, as far as possible, be owned and administered by village, city and district panchayats. (5) Economic decentralization, corresponding to political and administrative decentralization, will have to be brought about through maximum utilization of small machines.¹³

Lohia argued that men would do mad things if their hunger for equality was not appeased. Industry must, therefore, be socialized and economy planned. Social ownership and control must be decentralized to the maximum possible extent.

The world, liberal as well as proletarian, has hitherto known only the two-pillar state. Constitutional theories are being evolved and their elaborate applications continually reconstructed in order to achieve division of the state's functions and powers into its two limbs, the federating centre and the integrating units. But democracy, according to Lohia, can warm the "blood of the common man only when constitutional theory starts practising the state or four limbs, the village, the district, the province and the centre. Organically covered by the flesh

and blood of equalities already indicated, this constitutional skeleton of the four-pillar state can bring to democracy joyous fulfilment.”¹⁴ He also felt the necessity of creating a fifth pillar in the form of a world government. This is necessary for bringing about peace in the world. All those, who desire for a world peace through a world government, “must aspire to achieve a world view of equality and against class or caste or regional inequalities.”¹⁵

Lohia was gradually convinced that the traditional and organised socialism was “a dead doctrine and a dying organisation.”¹⁶ In its place, he urged for a new kind of socialism. While discussing his “New Socialism,” he states that equality, democracy, non-violence, decentralization and socialism are the five supreme principles, not alone of India’s politics but also of all world action. ‘New Socialism’ must aim at the attainment of these principles. With this aim in view, he outlined a programme which would gradually pave the way for the establishment of a ‘New Socialism’ in the world.

First of all, Lohia tells in his *Marx, Gandhi and Socialism*, the socialist doctrine needs to be retold in terms of the simple truth that all men are equal, not only within the nation but also among nations. When that happens it will change its traditional forms on practically every major score. In place of an increasing standard of living within national frontiers, decent and minimum living standards for all men in the world will be assured. In place of the alternatives between parliamentary and insurrectionary action, a balanced mixture of constitutional action and civil resistance, wherever necessary and possible, will be followed or practised. In place of halting and gradualistic reforms of property and in comet socialization of all property except such as does not employ hired labour and the fixing of a top-bottom ratio in incomes will be brought about. In place of an international organisation of unequal members, a comity of nations, equal in membership and executive and based on some sort of adult franchise, will be established and maintained. In fact, socialism must first achieve the union of mankind in the mind before it can translate that into practice.¹⁷

In the same book, Lohia states that today seven revolutions are taking place everywhere in the world. These revolutions are: “1. for equality between man and woman; 2. against political, economic and spiritual inequality based on skin colour; 3. against inequality of backward and high groups or castes based on long tradition, and for giving special opportunities to the backward; 4. against foreign enslavement and for freedom and world democratic rule; 5. for economic equality and planned production and against the existence of and attachment for private capital; 6. against unjust encroachments on private life and for democratic methods; 7. against weapons and for *satyagraha*.”¹⁸ According to him, the attainment of ‘New Socialism’ all over the world depends upon the success of these seven revolutions.

Lohia urged all the socialist parties of the world to think in terms of an effective world union. “No true internationalism can arise unless its votaries realize that the present crisis of foreign policy is a crisis of human civilization and that it can be overcome only by a union of minds all over the world that cuts across national frontiers and interests and is prepared to hold general principles even when they operate against one’s own system of national or world alliances”.¹⁹ Criticising India’s foreign policy he often remarked that Indian Government’s

foreign policy was more a glittering quilt of imaginary international achievements to cover up the poverty and misery at home than a genuine effort to create new world forces. Hence he advised India's socialism to keep in the forefront of its international aims India's dissociation from the British Commonwealth and continue unceasing efforts to build up a third system, which adheres to the principle of equal irrelevance between the two camps and refuses to put itself in alternative service of either. India's socialism must strive to put the simple truth that all men are equal and that they should form a single world of free association in doctrine as well as a foreign policy.

Lohia was a world-minded person who aspired for a true international unity, yet he never disregarded the national interests, Likewise, he was much influenced by Marx and accepted his theory of dialectical materialism, yet he recognised the significant role played by consciousness in shaping the human history. He advocated for the creation of an intellectual tool that would combine spirit and matter into an autonomous relationship.²⁰

Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia was a great socialist intellectual who did a vigorous thinking and inspired the Indian socialists to develop Asian outlook towards the problems of the day. His socialism, by and large, was based on humanistic foundations which sacrificed the interests neither of the individual nor of the society, neither of the state nor of the world.

¹ Dr. R. M. Lohia, *Marx, Gandhi & Socialism*. Navahind Prakashan, Hyderabad. 1963. p. 121.

² *Ibid.*, p. 120.

³ Dr. R. M. Lohia, *Wheel of History*, Navahind Prakashan, Hyderabad 1950. (Reprint 1963) p. 2.

⁴ *Ibid* p. 5

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁸ Dr. R. M. Lohia, "Problems of Asian Socialism" in the *Will to Power*, Navahind Prakashan, Hyderabad. 1956. p. 55.

⁹ *Ibid.* (Italics mine)

¹⁰ *Ibid* pp. 56-57.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 58.

¹² *Marx, Gandhi and Socialism*, p, 377.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 523.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 286.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 287.

¹⁶ Quoted from *Modern Indian Political Thought* by Dr. V. P. Varma, Lakshmi Narain Agrawal, Agra. (Third Ed. 1967) p. 483.

¹⁷ Dr. R. M. Lohia, *Marx, Gandhi and Socialism*. pp. 475-494.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 531.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 461

²⁰ Dr. R. M. Lohia, *Aspects of Socialist Policy*, Tulloch Road, Bombay. 1952. pp. 76-77.