

**KrantaDarsi Lohia - Compilation by Ravela Somayya,
Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia Samata Trust and Dr Lohia Centenary Celebrations**

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In the month of March 2014, I had the opportunity of attending an international seminar on “Democracy, Socialism: Visions for the 21st Century” at Hyderabad which brought together host of progressive intellectuals to explore the future of left-socialist movement in the changing globalized world. It was a rare opportunity to listen to those optimistic speeches of left intellectuals like Marta Harnecker, Michael Lebowitz, Amiya Bagchi and several Indian communist and socialist leaders. What I found surprising amidst of the hopeful messages from Latin American left movements, is absence of or no reference to the “Indian variety of socialist and humanist thought” espoused by Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia when we explore 21st century options, countervailing forces that challenge globalisation. As a strange coincidence that, amidst milling crowds, I was presented with this volume under review “Krantadarsi Lohia” a compilation of essays in Telugu, that portray various facets of socialism of Indian variety, espoused by Dr Ram Manohar Lohia. I felt it was timely that we bring to the centre stage radical humanist alternatives to the centre stage of intellectual debate. With that purpose in mind, I felt I should write review of this Telugu volume introducing Lohia through the lens of intellectuals of Andhra Pradesh.

Authors of this volume are unanimous in their view that he can be bracketed as a thinker of that genre of freedom struggle, par excellence as that of Gandhi and Ambedkar. For those who lived through the post independent India as adolescents, Dr Lohia represented a left-humanist alternative to the nascent capitalist development as well as the right wing conservatism. And for today’s globalised world, Lohia-socialism would perhaps be the alternative that is being desperately explored by those who are outraged by the rampage of the financialised capitalist development and its concomitant global crisis.

I chose to introduce these essays to those English readers who may appreciate the rich analytical content from the intellectuals, journalists and political activists of Andhra Pradesh who worked with Dr. Lohia or studied his mission to achieve a socialist society. It is interesting to observe that Dr. Lohia has espoused promotion of mother tongue (and local language) for the emancipation of the millions of the poor, who suffered the hegemony of English speakers and were detached from the governance.

In this volume, compiled by Shri Ravela Somayya garu we get to read various facets of the revolutionary and free spirit of Dr. Lohia, who remained as a ‘rebel’; and always swam against the mainstream all through his life. If one were to look for the historical origins of anti-congressism in Indian political landscape, they can be

traced to Dr. Lohia, who succeeded in building a counternarrative to the centralized nation development project, which broadly reflected the romantic idealization, *a la* Pandit Nehru of Soviet experience with his emphasis on capital goods and industrialization policies, with scant regard to address structural inequities and injustices that were embedded in the society. Dr. Lohia chose a path of social transformation and economic justice and proposed alternative path, which is more relevant today than any time in the history of capitalist development and its crisis.

Dr. Lohia's Indian version of socialist thought unfortunately has not been widely disseminated or understood. Is it that people felt it is too idealist! Or is it that there were conflicting experiences at that time and could not decipher his view adequately in the cacophony of ideological debates? There can be several explanations. One reason could be that several of Dr. Lohia's followers have scattered into different political formations and could not build a party with ideological platform. Compromises that socialists have undertaken during the Janata party experiment has dented the moral conviction and strength. The other being that by nature 'Lohia' himself was a non-conformist and perhaps his true followers too have not been sufficiently 'market' savvy to counter the hegemony of Nehruvian model of 1960s-70s and subsequent neo liberal ideology followed by the post 1980s regimes in India.

We ought to appreciate the rich analysis on the political discourse that Dr. Lohia spearheaded, where in socialist dreams were 'almost realised' in Independent India. At one point there were nine state governments which had socialist party in power. If one were to reflect and assess the postmandal political ascendancy of identity politics, the credit goes to Dr. Lohia who embraced diversity and plurality and struggled against the hegemony and caste domination.

The year 2010 marked the centenary of Ram Manohar Lohia and there have been year -long public functions across India disseminating the principles and ideals of Dr. Lohia. This present compilation under review brings together writings of socialist scholars on the life and ideology of Dr Lohia during that year in various Telugu newspapers, magazines and periodicals. It is interesting to note that Dr. Lohia had a particular affinity to the city of Hyderabad and it remained as a bastion of ideological followers of Dr. Lohia up until 1980s, though they were not a significant force in Andhra Pradesh. (it is interesting to note that Dr Lohia commented on the narrow parochial agenda's of parties very early, much before the advent of regional parties and identity politics while he was travelling in Andhra Pradesh!)

It is a historical fact that the formation of Janata party (as a grand alliance - submerging identities) of non-congress political formations at the aftermath of internal emergency (1975-77) in India, subsumed the distinct identity of 'socialists' in the Indian political space. The decade of 1980s saw saffronisation and

mandalisation of Indian political space which jostled with each other through identity politics in the Hindi heartland and regionalization of political mobilization which resulted in complete marginalization of 'socialist' ideology within political formations. Today, it is a fact that so called 'Lohia-ites' (as followers of Dr.Lohia's humanistic socialism) are in various identity based regional political formations to a larger extent relegated their socialist ideals a go by.

In this political quagmire that in the year 2010, the Lohia Centenary Committee has toured all over India spreading the message of Lohia-socialism (seven principles for revolution) bringing ideological engagement within in political society to the centre stage.. such gatherings may not have attracted huge crowds, but I am sure they have provided a ideological basis for re-dedicating towards socialism wiping out the skepticism that there is no alternative (TINA).

This centenary volume contains essays from progressive social thinkers, socialist ideologues who were co-travellers and followers of Dr. Lohia during his life time and still attempting to remain loyal to the ideals he espoused. A commendable job by Shri Ravela Somayya garu to compile and introduce this to the present generation.

Authors of these essays who by themselves are outstanding intellectuals of telugu , bring interesting facets about the ideological and transformative project of Dr. Lohia and lament fate of socialism in the country. Leaders contemporary to Dr. Lohia or influenced by him have spread into several political formations across the spectrum and often seen compromising with the rightist ideological groups. However, what is fascinating in these essays is the acknowledgement that whether it is a 'welfare state' posturing or left-off centre politics practiced by the mainstream parties and regional parties that practice identity politics, all have to concede to the strength of radical humanism that Dr. Lohia advocated throughout his life especially in this era of globalization.

Dr. Lohia as several contributors have commented has been an embodiment of idealism. A man with a mission of social transformation, he was found to be a rest-less and agitated individual. How much contagion he was able to create among his followers is a matter open for scrutiny, but on hindsight if it were the era of mass media and social mobilization, there would have been millions of takers for the ideals that he attempted to propagate. In this era of marketisation of ideas – I am sure socialists have a great uphill task to match with those neoliberals.

Coming back to “Krantadarsi Lohia”, all the contributors attempted to unveil Dr. Lohia from various facets in order to amplify his political philosophy of humanistic socialism and his call for social transformation. All the contributors themselves are progressive scholars who strived to achieve a just and equitable society and its transformation. Without going into individual essays, I attempt to summarize the collective reflections of all the contributors.

Dr. Lohia identified the inadequacy of the capitalist development as well as the Bolshevik and communist project practiced by the centralized party bureaucracy in USSR during the decades of post war period, up until 1980s. His views on feminism, women’s question and caste are relevant today. His disenchantment towards communism stems from the practices of party bureaucracy, however he identified marxist historical method and dialectic as relevant philosophical approaches that can be combined with humanistic elements from Gandhi. Thus, his unique transformative program attempts to bring best of the both, Marx and Gandhi. But a critical question here is, how did it span as a transformative project at the implementation level? There appears to be a mixed verdict on this as ‘socialists’ in India never received such a mandate to implement what Dr. Lohia dreamt of. Rather several of his formulations have been twisted in order and the rapid changes in the global order, with dismantling of USSR and its aftermath stunted the practicality of such ideals. Central to Dr. Lohia’s transformative program has been decentralization and respect for humanity and individual freedom. He countered the communist transformative project on these grounds so also loathed the concentration of power and wealth accumulation of the capitalist enterprise through exploitation. He identified imperialism and capitalism as two sides of the same coin and through such analysis questioned the domination of “English” as an imperial project, continues to remain as a hegemonic force even after Independence.

Most writers while appreciating the ideals of Dr. Lohia raise an interesting question. That is, who are the torch bearers of ideals of Dr. Lohia now in this era? Some of them ask this directly, some put forward in a skeptical way. Are the mainstream political parties in a position to realize the ideals at least partially? ‘Welfare’ and populist’ posturing of mainstream political formations appear to give us an impression that social inclusiveness and political participation has been achieved. Did they really confront structural power imbalances? How can social control over capital be achieved through the current system? How can humanistic principles of liberty and freedom be achieved simultaneously through neo-liberal policies where citizenship claims are reduced to consumerist claims? These are the questions that some authors pose.

Will the progressive social movements be in a position to inherit the legacy of Dr. Lohia and work amongst the masses in order to build transformative politics? There are some stray examples, but the future of progressive social movements itself is becoming bleak in the era of globalization. The state repression and its power are enormous that it chokes the voices of the democratic dissent. It is in this context, a visionary leadership that imbibes Dr. Lohia's vision and moral strength needs to come to play a critical role. If not individual, a collective leadership is necessary in order to build a just and humane society. The Arab spring and socialist experiments of Latin America provide a glimmer of hope for a 21st century social transformation project. How these experiences fan out in Indian soil is a million dollar question, as we are still grappling with identity politics and not able to embrace the pluralistic ethos. Dr. Lohia's views remain relevant in achieving the transformation that is required by the 21st century.

Alternative politics based on a grand alliance of progressive parties and movements is required. Would they remain ideologically committed to a humanistic socialist society? Or do they disintegrate and gravitate towards identity politics?