

LOHIA'S CHAUKHAMBHA RAJ & GOOD GOVERNANCE: RELEVANCE IN PRESENT-DAY INDIA

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of 'Good Governance' is construed as an indeterminate term currently in vogue in the development discourse to explain as to how public institutions conduct public affairs and manage public resources. Widely viewed as the process of decision-making, the notion of governance also entails the process by which decisions are implemented or not implemented. Broadly speaking, the concept of 'Good Governance' facilitates comparison between ineffective economies or political bodies and viable economies or political bodies. Accordingly, this concept focuses on the responsibility of governments and governing bodies to come up to the expectations of the masses as opposed to select groups in society. However, Sam Agere has pointed out: "The discretionary space left by the lack of a clear well-defined scope for what governance encompasses allows users to choose and set their own parameters."¹

Dr Ram Manohar Lohia had acquired a vast range of the social and political thoughts through his life experiences and owing to his quest for knowledge and 'untiring participation in the social and political issues facing the country at various points of time.' His vast spectrum of thoughts varied from, on the one hand, his astute analysis of the problems such as poverty and systems of government, and innovative solutions like ideas of sapta kranti and 'Chaukhamba Model' of government demonstrates his deep understanding of the grassroots issues of the country. On the other hand, his perspectives and conceptualisations on international issues such as world peace and world government sufficiently illustrate the internationalist vision of Lohia. However, his thinking on 'New Socialism', undoubtedly, remains the basic theoretical construct for which Lohia

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is acknowledged as the 'frontal figure' of the socialist thought and movement in India. This paper endeavours to analyse Lohia's 'Chaukhamba Model' and its relevance for good governance in contemporary India.

CHAUKHAMBHA MODEL

Reiterating his faith in the idea of democracy, as a system of government, to provide for basic institutional framework of government in India, Lohia; however, also expressed his anxiety with democracy having the tendency of turning into a sterile—and sometimes oppressive—model, if it was not properly supported by positive orientations in the policies and programmes of the government. He, therefore, argued for adapting the system of democracy to the complex and unique socio-economic conditions prevailing in India. He was in favour of guaranteeing basic fundamental freedoms of the people, provided it was ensured that the basic needs of each and every citizen would be fulfilled. In Lohia's opinion, the notion of democracy must not be limited merely in allocating certain civil and political rights to the people, but be understood in such a way that it leads to generation of such socio-economic conditions where nobody remains without securing the basic minimum needs of life.

Disenchanted with the existing two-pillar model of government, i.e., Centre and the States, in India, he pioneered the notion of four-pillar model of government, which envisaged an arrangement when a constitution was framed on the basis of the four-pillar state, the village, the district, the province and the centre, being four pillars of equal majesty and dignity. It was construed as an integral part of Lohia's conception of socialism. Lohia's 'Chaukhamba Model' was apparently not a mere executive arrangement under which the superior parliaments could legislate and the village and district organs were left with the execution of the laws, rather it was both a legislative as well as a full-fledged executive arrangement.

Construed as a way of life extending to all spheres of human activity, for instance, production, ownership, administration, planning, education and the like, the 'Chaukhamba Model' provides a structure and a way in which the community of a state is to be so organised and sovereign power so diffused that each little community in it lives the way of life that it chose. These various ways of life is a commonly strong bond that unite the numerous communities into a state. The state, therefore, was to be organised in such a manner that it could allow the widest opportunity for popular participation, "Sovereign power must not reside alone in centre and federating units. It must be broken up and diffused over smallest region where a group of men and women live."²

The idea of such a state however, did not represent the idea of a self-sufficient village but of the 'intelligent and vital village.' Under such a structure of the state each little community would live intelligently and strive after the integrity and unity of the nation.³

In the 'Chaukhamba Model' or four-pillar state the armed forces of the state might be controlled by the centre, the armed police by the province but all other police might be brought under district and village control. While industries like the railways or iron and steel might be controlled by the Centre, the small unit textile industry of the future might be left to district and village ownership. While price fixing might be a central subject the structure of agriculture and the ratio of capital and labour in it might be left to the choice of the district and the village. A substantial part of state revenues should stay with the village and the district. As far as possible the principle of election might be applied to administrative, instead of nominations or selections. Economic decentralisation, corresponding to political and administration decentralisation, might be brought about through maximum utilisation of small machines.⁴

The 'Chaukhamba Model' rose above the issues of regionalism and factionalism. It diffused power also within people's organisations and corporations. Lohia opined that four-pillar state might indeed appear fanatic to many in view of the special conditions of the country, its illiteracy, its fears and superstitions and above all, its castes. The village representatives may indeed be selfish and ignorant and raise caste above justice. And yet to give him power seemed the only way to deliver the people from inertia as well as an administration that was both top-heavy and corrupt. Lohia believed that by giving power to small communities of men, democracy of the first grade was possible. The four-pillar state ensured effective and intelligent democracy to the common man.⁵

Lohia accorded equal and simultaneous emphasis on economic and political decentralisation. Decentralisation of economic and political power was the core of his conception of 'Chaukhamba Model.' While underlining that political decentralisation was symbol of equality and prosperity, he asserted that there could be no political democracy without economic democracy as there could be no economic democracy without political democracy. He was opposed to political centralisation because it could engender monopoly of the politician- business-bureaucracy nexus wherein masses are victimised. He explicitly stated that political centralisation "conditioned human thinking; ideas have been replaced by propaganda and thinking has become subservient to power."⁶ According to him, centralised political power renders the common people to become mere pawns in the hands of those wielding power and thus rendered helpless under the centralised power system and such a system defeats the very purpose of democracy.

Lohia wanted the community of a state so organised and sovereign power so diffused that each of little community in it lives the way of life it chooses. These various ways of life must indeed run a common bond strong enough to bond the numerous communities in to a state. With regard to the question as to how strong must these bonds be in their four-pillar order, Lohia's reply was that it 'must be left for the time to determine.'⁷ Asserting that no precise list of federal or state or district or village or concurrent subjects could be drawn up, Lohia argued that experience and time and perhaps the next Constituent Assembly of India could make precise allocations. He further added: "For the present time, there must be unhedged will to diffuse power and to let each little community live intelligently consistent with the unity and integrity of the nation."⁸

Cautioning that the popular principle of the four-pillar state may cause great confusion and occasion numerous errors in the beginning, Lohia averred that it "will clean up the administration in the end by the process of forcing the vast mass to act and judge. For instance, the only way to purify controls is to leave their administration to the village, town and district Panchayat and to take them out of the hands of the legislators and government servants."⁹

Lohia wanted private property to go, except such as did not occasion employment of one person by another. He was not in favour of ownership of property by the state exclusively at the centre as it was disastrous both for bread and freedom. Part of property must be owned by the village and the province as much as by the centre and by co-operative.¹⁰

Lohia wanted legislative decentralisation along with administrative decentralisation. In order to make decentralisation of the administration meaningful, Lohia was in favour of allocating some limited legislative powers to the district administration and village Panchayats so that they could manage their affairs appropriately.¹¹

While arguing for abolishing the office of the Governor, Lohia stated that the limited functional relationship between the Centre and state should be discharged by a single official only. He was in favour of amending the Evidence Act along with Criminal Procedure Code in such a manner so that common man should have justice at minimum cost. He was also in favour of constituting a committee to reconsider the existing laws and suggest remedial measures to remove the undemocratic elements from those laws. He wanted single High Court and single Public Service Commission for two or three states so that the number of courts and public service commissions could be reduced and their jurisdiction could be expanded for more efficiency.¹² Therefore, it was the thinking of Lohia that through political and economic decentralisation, the citizens could be able to run the local administration and raise necessary resources for the development of the nation.

In the opinion of Lohia, the citizens can become the architect of their destinies only through decentralisation of power. And democratic participation of all citizens could be possible under Chaukhamba Raj. Undoubtedly, Lohia acknowledged democracy of the people, by the people and for the people; nevertheless, he averred that Chaukhamba Raj was essential to making democracy really functional because it facilitates the establishment of rule of the community, by the community and for the community, which is essential for a vibrant democracy.

Broadly speaking, Lohia's 'Chaukhamba Model' is the outcome of his views on socialism and emphasis on decentralisation – economic, political and legislative – forms the core of this model. Hence it deems appropriate to have a brief overview of Lohia's socialism.

LOHIA'S NEW SOCIALISM

Lohia's criticism of the Western ideological constructs appears to be aimed at paving the way for establishing socialism as the most appropriate theoretical format for steering India on the trajectory of an equitable and all-round socio-economic development. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that even his ideology of socialism kept on getting improvised and enriched with newer intellectual inputs imbibed by him from time to time. Undoubtedly, Lohia accepted socialism as the viable ideology for India and tried to conceptualise it in the light of the Gandhian inputs; nonetheless, he came out with the idea of New Socialism in 1959 with the plea that it offers a comprehensive system of socio-economic and political life for the people in India.¹³

In his conceptualisation of the notion of socialism, Lohia opined that, ...the concept of socialism has too long lagged 'behind the cohorts of capitalism or of communism' and has lived 'on borrowed breath' leading to hesitancy in the action of socialists and that it must be developed, if it is to have an effective appeal, into a doctrine independent of other political ideologies.¹⁴ Accordingly, Lohia sought to rid the ideology of socialism from 'its borrowed breadth' by infusing the spirit of Gandhism in it, specifically by dovetailing the philosophy with the Gandhian doctrines of satyagraha, theory of ends-means consistency, economic system rooted in the small machine technology and, finally, the idea of political decentralisation.

He maintained that the incorporation of Gandhian principles in the socialist philosophy would lend greater practicability of socialism to the Indian situations. The core of socialism as visualised by Lohia drew its spirit and substance from the Gandhian principles of socioeconomic and political reconstruction of the Indian society and formed the doctrinal foundations of socialism as conceptualised by Lohia.¹⁵ What, however, was unique to Lohia was his notion of decentralised socialism whose essence lay in emphasis on things like small machine, cooperative labour, village government and decentralised planning.¹⁶

Lohia's conception of New Socialism in 1959 was greatly influenced by his 'circumstantial motivations and lived experiences'. Evidently, more comprehensive in scope and reflective of the holistic vision of its proponent, the theory of New Socialism was founded on the basis of six fundamental elements encompassing both domestic as well as foreign aspects of the life of the people. These six elements were: egalitarian standards in the areas of income and expenditure, growing economic interdependence, world parliament system based on adult franchise, democratic freedoms inclusive of right to private life, Gandhian technique of individual and collective civil disobedience, and dignity and rights of common man.¹⁷

Lohia opined that the cumulative impact of his notion of New Socialism would lie in providing such a complex web of system of life for the people that they would not only be able to live an egalitarian and contented life within the country but would also aspire to become a part of the world government. His advocacy of socialism in the form of a new civilisation, which could be referred to as 'socialist humanism', could be said to have given a new direction and dimension to the socialist movement in India. He called on all the socialist parties of the world to think in terms of an effective world union through world government. Reinforcing his faith in the world government, Lohia modified his notion of 'four pillars of state' to include the 'fifth pillar' in it in the form of the world government and established the World Development Council in his endeavour to set up world government to maintain peace in the world.

RATIONALE

Undoubtedly, Lohia's 'Chaukhamba Model' was based on his vastly acquired knowledge livable experiences in the contemporary India wherein he was disenchanted with the existing socio-economic and political mechanism owing to its inability to solve the problems confronting the multitude of the masses in the country. The principles underlying Lohia's 'Chaukhamba Model' seem more utopian than pragmatic because putting these principles into practice by formulating necessary laws requires various amendments to the Indian Constitution, which is a tedious process on which consensus cannot be built. Besides, Lohia's conception of this 'Chaukhamba Model' is not fully illustrated in details, as Lohia himself admitted that details would be determined by the time as well as the future Constituent Assembly to frame a new Constitution

incorporating the principles enunciated by Lohia in his various writings and speeches from time to time.

Besides, the existing constitutional provisions facilitate two-pillar federal model – Centre and States –in the country which is being carried on somewhat properly in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Constitution of India. The 73 and 74 amendments to the Constitution have, to some extent, made attempts at empowering people at the village and municipal levels. However, these measures don't meet the expectations enumerated in the 'Chaukhamba Model' and much needs to be done in this regard.

In the wake of globalisation and the path of economic reforms embarked upon by India for the past two decades, there has been over emphasis on privatisation and this is major stumbling block to the 'Chaukhamba Model'.

CONCLUSION

Lohia's concept of Chaukhamba Raj represents a middle path between Gandhian notion of self-reliant village and modern federalism. He has tried to provide a solid shape to his political views, like his economic views, through his notion of Chaukhamba Raj and administrative decentralisation. Gandhian influence on his notion of political decentralisation is clearly visible. He endeavoured to build a true democracy by vesting the control over bureaucracy in the hands of elected representatives of the people. Such an arrangement, on the one hand, can be helpful in putting an end of red-tapism; and on the other hand, it can also be helpful in reducing the chances of corruption and immoral practices because the ruling party will not be able to make misuse of the bureaucracy. Besides, the government officials can discharge their duties properly when they are free from political pressure.

In sum, Lohia's creditable contribution to the system of government is seemingly his model of four pillars of state called the 'Chaukhamba Model', which was contextualised within the framework of decentralised democratic polity that Lohia recommended for India. In the present-day political discourse in India, Lohia's name is invoked for garnering political support and votes in the elections. During the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the prime ministerial candidate of the BJP appropriated the name of Lohia in his electoral campaigns in Uttar Pradesh despite the fact that the BJP has nothing to do with Lohia's ideology. However, Samajwadi party in Uttar Pradesh professes to be the heir to the legacy of Ram Manohar Lohia, not exclusively but in tandem with Gandhism, socialism and its economic ideology having undergone various transformations over the years.

Undoubtedly, Lohia's ideology bears rationale for the present-day Indian politics; nevertheless, the travesty of truth is that there is no dedicated grouping to carry forward this task sincerely in letter and spirit. As Anirban Ganguly has aptly observed: "Unfortunately there are very few, or perhaps none at all, within Lohia's own party or its pale form that claims to be 'Samajwadi', who read Lohia, can match his intellectual sweep and vigour or even produce a grain of what he had given in terms of a prolific intellectual output. Lohia's political heirs — those who claim today to be carrying forward his legacy in Indian politics, have little use of him and even less understanding of his genius."¹⁸

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