

BIRTH AND DEATH ARE HIS LIFE IN BETWEEN BELONGS TO PEOPLE

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If a country loses a philosopher, it is equal to losing an eye. The loss is more if a statesman is lost. But what if a country loses a statesman who is also a sensitive, humane and pragmatic leader? We cannot foresee how long it would take for a country to get a similar person again. One of such persons lost by this country is – Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia.

We have thousands of people who make theories and create conflicts with brains full of bookish stuff. But very few are those who have a broader outlook, those who live what they preach, who do not hesitate to improve themselves in the light of experiences, derive fresh energy by imbibing the views of others. They promote universal peace. Lohia is at the top of all such persons.

While passing on experiences to the next generation the old generation will also guide the new generation to understand the changes in times and behave accordingly. If the leaders of old generation are after seeking truth, they put a noble ideal before the next generation and infuse confidence in them. Dr.Lohia is one such a leader who analysed the world with a heart and set an example.

While studying in Germany he observed the changing world at its center. He returned to India and joined the freedom movement along with Gandhi. In his ambition to look at the country. He started the socialist movement in the country. He spent the 1950s to go around the world and codified his observations in his book “Interval during politics”. He faced the question – what is the cause of conflicts and inequalities in the society? What could be the solution for it? Being agitated by the problem he did what he could to offer a solution.

Caste happened to be the most destructive factor in Indian life. He called on the upper castes to help the people who were subjected over generations to social injustice. In enjoying the fruits of superiority, he suggested that Sudras, Harijans, Muslims and women shall be allowed a share of more than what they deserve. In the 1960s, having opportunity to be the leader of the socialist party in the Lok Sabha, he bestowed that privilege on Mr. Rabi Roy who belongs to a backward class. Similarly, in the Rajya Sabha also he chose one Mr. Murahari, a Perika from Andhra as leader of the party. That was how he practiced what he preached. He advised the people of the lower castes not to hate the upper caste people as there are poor even among them. Showing malice and hatred amounts to conferring honour on meanness forever, he said.

In New York, looking at the skyscrapers spreading over miles, he said he was reminded of devils and spirits, which he never believed. He contemplated a situation where the buildings might be subjected to attack by bombs resulting in demolition. If such a thing happens, he did not feel the loss of property, he felt sorry for the innumerable people who may lose life or limb under the debris. Fortunately for him he did not face such a horror in his life.

But a similar horror materialized 50 years later when the World Trade Center was attacked by terrorists. It was foreseen, not dreamt, by the political philosopher. He noticed the wicked ways of capitalism developing in the United States and observed while the capacity to dominate the world passing from Europe to the United States.

It is nearly 50 years since Lohia left this world. But what is the present situation of the society? – broken into pieces, Donald Trump bragging his offer of sovereignty if he gets elected; people in India applauding the leaders who declare that those who do not shout “Bharat Mata ki Jai” do not have the right to live in this country; at the same time those who question that shibboleth are also accepted; while Rohith are weeping that their birth in this country is itself a curse, the government branding them terrorists and condemning them; outraging sensitivities of the people to encash their votes. This is the peculiar situation of liberalized and globalized society. Everybody is hurt and everybody is in search of the culprit. Nobody realizes that he too contributed to the injury. Nobody wants to know the truth. Those who are in authority are afraid of losing the authority if the truth comes out. Confusion among the people is the source of their strength. Naturally, they create confusion.

The pity is these leaders also come out of the same society of which we are a part. Society itself is responsible for the broken situation. It is difficult to see the truth as everyone is associated with some piece of it. The upper caste is interested in safeguarding their economic and social superiority. The middle class is worried about the security of the family and confine themselves to that. The lower class satisfied in serving the upper class and lead a peaceful life apprehensive of what is happening beyond their perspective. But there is also a small fifth class of people who strive hard to get at the truth, reveal the real causes of this confusion and make a selfless effort to do justice and bring equality. People like Lohia belong to this class. It is these Lohias that could prevent confusion and conflict in the society. But where are they now?

When Lohia was alive the enemy was an outsider, easily identified and targeted. In the present capitalist globalized society, it is not possible to identify the enemy. It is internal and completely hidden. In order to safeguard the security and comfort on hand, people adopt a selfish mentality to keep quiet. It is this outlook that is the enemy at present.

This is the time of conflict between individuals. Nobody wants to think of others. Everybody satisfies himself by associating with a piece of the society. Everybody is a competitor to the other. All are suffering by this attitude. But time passes on silently. What can a Lohia do in this context? At present politics is an industry of big profits. They spend crores to get elected to a public post and naturally intend to earn many times more. It is possible only in a capitalist system and so helps in perpetuating it. Every exploitation can be legalized. After the Girijans in Dandakaranya, it may be our turn. The political system responsible to govern the country is itself infected with this dreadful virus. Its influence is felt in every aspect of life. Even if a man like Lohia contests election he will lose deposit in the present situation. Caste and religion are the real contestants. Everybody says it is wrong, but at the same time forms a part of it.

When Lohia was invited by Nehru to join as the general secretary of the congress. He politely declined the tempting offer stating that he would prefer to sit in the opposition to question the government and keep it online to help the people. He dreamt of a situation when the highest income of an individual in the society is not more than ten times that of the minimum income. His affection to rural life made him encourage M.F.Hussain paint the rural life rather than that of

Tatas and Birlas. He looked at painting and sculpture from a different angle. He was never seeking luxury and personal comfort. When he visited Ongole to attend the Socialist Conference, he preferred to sleep on the railway platform rather than seeking the help of somebody to get a comfortable accommodation. He was willing to go with minimum comforts provided it serves the spread of his mission. That kind of dedication to his principles earned him thousands of followers like Kesavarao Jadhav and Ravela Somayya. While on tour to the US he used to enter into conversation with drivers of taxis in which he was travelling in order to know the real feelings of common men. He accepted the country as his family which provoked him to lead a saintly life, unlike the religious saints.

In general, wealth and status are found together. But at times they may take different paths. All the people in the society are not the same. The number of people in a class may be increasing or decreasing. Wealth also will be fluctuating. That is, the class is dynamic. But in a caste the status and earnings remain static. There will be change and conflict in a class. When class ceases to be dynamic, it degenerates into a caste. When caste becomes dynamic it metamorphoses into a class. This kind of inactive caste systems can be found all over the world. But in other countries the caste outlook was changing constantly whereas it is rigid and static in India. Having noticed this difference Lohia concluded that Socialism in India is not possible unless the caste problem is solved. His efforts to bring social justice resulted in establishing non-congress governments in some states of North India.

There can be difference of opinion regarding the application of Lohia's principles to social problems and on the limitations to his ideology. But nobody entertains a doubt on the clarity of his thought and the sincerity of his practice. If only Lohia were alive today he would have demonstrated the beauty of life in plural society and unity in diversity to the religious bigots who are claiming monopoly on patriotism and define nationality. The conflicts between different mind sets were always agitating Lohia. When he met Einstein, he pointed out "There are two people now who caught the attention of the world – one is Gandhi and the other is yourself. Gandhi tried to unify the world by peace and non-violence. But you invented the atomic bomb that is frighteningly violent." Einstein was shocked by this blatant allegation. Nevertheless, he too agreed with what Lohia said.

Having gone to Yugoslavia, Lohia told them that their communism was a snake with poisonous fangs. In America, he told them their capitalism is a dreadful demon. Those who understand Lohia could declare that in the present situation he would have gone to each household explaining the drawbacks and encouraging them to come out of their complacency that is killing us. He said once, "I don't believe in rebirth. But countries definitely have rebirths because the good efforts made now to improve the country will give results to the next generation. That is its rebirth." At least for that purpose he would have kept the society alert and awake. He complimented Droupadi as the ideal woman as she never accepted the superiority of men. Woman has to fight to a level where she can make the man follow her. "Look at the natives in the jungle," he said. They derive so much of happiness in spite of poverty in the natural surroundings. Indians can learn from them how to lead a happy life. You have to go with others to learn from them. There is a lot to be learnt from Marx and Gandhi. He cautioned that learning from them does not mean falling for the teachings of others. You should not be influenced by others beyond a limit. You must be yourself. That proves Lohia's eternal quest for truth. That was how he became close to Gandhi and Ambedkar.

No doubt he was a close follower of Gandhi. But when found necessary he did not hesitate to differ with him. In order to do justice to the gullible he was ready to question his own convictions on socialism. His life was a pure river with bright flashes reflecting on the waves throughout. He told the backward classes to restrain themselves from adopting the habits of upper classes after coming to power. The social justice contemplated by Lohia will be possible only when those who enjoyed the power concede the subsequent opportunity to others. Otherwise, it leads to concentration of power and formation of different levels in the caste itself. It is obvious that the power enjoyed by the father is being passed on to his son or relatives. This is not desirable. The power shall pass on to others. Otherwise, there is no use of conducting meetings and conferences. He was convinced that socialism in India is not possible unless the problem of caste is solved.

He asserted that there can be no permanent definition to socialism. It must be identified by each one in the light of his experiences. Like Buddha he would be a great leader only when he finds places for all others in his heart and finds himself reflected in others' hearts. Even there may not be followers and circumstances may not be favourable. There may not be power or authority. But he goes on spreading his light on unity and equality. He generates a hope that change will come tomorrow if not today. Lohia was one of such leaders. He had his birth and his death. But his life belongs to the people at large.

The pity of the present situation is that the communists are not like communists; those who take the name of Gandhi are not his followers; leftists are not on the left of center. No one will meet with the other. Why so? Is it the effect of time? Or does it indicate the need to redefine the theories? Is the human being really so selfish? We must find the truth. Trying to improve the society without discarding the selfishness only displays the ego. It fails to achieve anything. It will only search for an enemy and an excuse. Lack of self-criticism only leads to running away from reality. There may be differences of opinion on whether we could solve the social problems by applying his principles or regarding the limitations on the application of his concepts. But nobody can suspect Lohia's integrity and intellect.

He left the country after doing what all he wanted to do to combat the social injustice that was prevailing over generations. He just showed the way for the next generation. Born in the higher Vysya caste, he always thought of the lower class people who were subjected to injustice for generations continuously. It needs people who practice what they preach. Lohia sowed the seed for the spring. We have to see whether it flowers and prospers or withers away.

(Translated from Telugu)

By Jasti Jawaharlal

