

Imagining an Alternative Modernity: An Intellectual Biography of Rammanohar Lohia

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Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
Department of History of Vanderbilt University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For Honors in History

April 2021

On the basis of this thesis defended by the candidate on _____
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Acknowledgements

I would first and foremost like to thank my advisor, Professor Samira Sheikh, who has guided me throughout this process with never ending patience and wisdom. Without her support over the past year and a half this project would have never been remotely possible. I would also like to thank Professor Francis Wcislo, whose curiosity and humor made for many long and enjoyable discussions, always leaving me with a renewed passion for this project. I must also thank Professors Akshya Saxena, Mabel Gergan, and Elliot McCarter, all of whom took the time outside of their official obligations to discuss my project with me, to offer me advice, and to support me in my intellectual journey. Additionally, this thesis would not have been possible without the invaluable assistance of Jason Schultz of the Vanderbilt Library staff, and the many resources he helped me access. Finally, I would like to thank my peers in the Thesis Seminar, whose own works inspired me and whose feedback was invaluable. In particular, I would like to thank my friend Musa Subramaniam, whose many long conversations with me inspired me, fueled my passion for history, and challenged my ideas and thinking.

Introduction

Rammanohar Lohia was a failed politician. By the time he was finally to the Lok Sabha -- India's lower house of parliament -- in 1963, it was clear that his Socialist Party would never be a major force in Indian politics. At its peak in 1952, it held only twenty-one of the body's four hundred and eighty-nine seats. The year he died, in 1967, it held only thirteen.¹ In those fifteen years, the party would fracture repeatedly, with top leadership abandoning the party to join the dominant Congress party, or to pursue activist projects outside of electoral politics altogether. The internal conflicts that drove these defections were due, in part, to Lohia's combustive personality. A man who clung to his beliefs with a passionate fervor, Lohia could be uncompromising and single-minded. His most noticeable talent as a politician -- his fiery rebukes of the most powerful members of Indian society -- could, when aimed at friends and allies, be alienating and divisive. This was surely frustrating to a man who made clear repeatedly throughout his career that his purpose was not simply to serve as patriotic opposition, but for the Socialists to become the ruling party of India.

He was also not a particularly refined intellectual. While he was highly educated -- in 1933 he earned a PhD in economics during a stay in Berlin -- his academic career ended in his youth. He instead spent his career campaigning and advocating, and had little time to sit down and write a cohesive intellectual work. As such, his contributions as an intellectual consist mostly of essays written for *Janata*, the Party's journal, or speeches given at various conferences and gatherings. His intellectual contributions are thus, as he himself admitted, "fragments." Any particular essay or speech might be powerful, eloquent, and even brilliant, but lack in elaboration or depth. For the historian interested in understanding Lohia, it is thus necessary to be attuned to

¹ Lewis P. Fickett, "The Praja Socialist Party of India -- 1952-1972: A Final Assessment," *Asian Survey* 13, no. 9 (1973): 826.

this fragmentary nature of his thought -- to the repetitions as he campaigned in one city, and then the next, hammering home the ideas most important to him, but also to the small and curious asides, indicating a more expansive range of interests left unexplored.

Yet, despite never reaching the heights of Indian politics, or leaving behind a single, monumental text to define his intellectual legacy, Lohia played a vital role in the formation of leftist thought in the early years of India's independence. While never truly at the center of things, his willingness to constantly challenge those in power both through public demonstration and through incisive critique marked him as one of the most distinctive figures of his era. More than anything else, Lohia stands apart as a figure capable of immense feats of imagination. In the early 1950s in particular, as India was struggling with the act of self-creation, Lohia devoted himself to discovering what being "postcolonial" truly meant, to envisioning what a postcolonial world could look like. To Lohia, this meant interrogating every aspect of the Western civilization that had colonized India -- from the ideological assumptions that drove its quest for world domination, to the technologies that it had used the resources of colonized peoples to produce. For India, and the rest of the world, to actually decolonize meant liberating themselves from these very structures. It meant creating, from the ground up, new ways of being, ones developed by the peoples of the decolonized world. It meant that the entirety of modernity had to be called into question, that a new civilization built upon fundamentally different phenomenological experiences and ideas had to be built.

Thus, Lohia, in conjunction with contemporary figures such as Jayaprakash Narayan, Ashoka Mehta, and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, developed a political program built upon the concept of decentralization, of putting economic and political power into the hands of villages and peasants. They embraced the ideal of self-sufficiency, of a world in which communities

produced what they needed and freely shared it amongst each other. This program was driven by the belief that politics was best enacted at the smallest level, that the Western ideologies, whether capitalism or communism, produced political and economic systems that devoured the weak and powerless, producing soul-crushing poverty while enriching a few white, European men. That poverty could only be ended through a shared commitment to work, to helping and uplifting those around you, and not by attempting to construct the same systems that had produced such immense violence across the world.

However, Lohia also set himself apart from these figures. He did not embrace a pure rejection of modernity as seen in Gandhian thought; he did not desire to return to, rescue, reconstitute precolonial, ancient India. While Lohia emerged out of the Gandhian camp, and developed much of his thinking through engaging with Gandhian discourse, he had a far more complex relationship with classical India than that of the Mahatma and those who carried on the Gandhian torch following his assassination. Just as he believed that the violence inherent in Western thought and Western systems had to be revealed and annihilated, he also believed that the same energy had to be turned towards Indian thought and systems, particularly those that produced the caste system. In an effort to escape Europe, India must not give in to its worst, most violent impulses. Not only was the Indian past filled with oppression and violence, but an attempt to use only the technologies that they had thousands of years ago -- the hoe and the wheel -- would inevitably result in further hunger. There were too many people, too many mouths to feed. Western civilization was too powerful, too willing to maintain a hegemonic domination over the global south, to attempt to live as Indians had in ancient times.

The almost contradictory implications of these two strands of Lohia's thought; his passionate refusal to participate in the project of Western modernity, his unwillingness to see the

past as the answer to the problems of today, resulted in him having to develop an altogether new system, one which in this thesis will be called an “alternative modernity.” While Lohia would instead prefer terms such as “new civilization,” or “new world” to describe this system, “alternative modernity” captures the full extent of his work. Lohia recognized the value and appeal of modernity, but feared its oppressive and self-destructive qualities. He argued that what was needed, therefore, was to rethink modernity at a fundamental level, to think through the spiritual traditions and ways of life of colonized peoples, and to develop something new in the process. New theories of history which, rather than forcing humanity upon a teleological train that assumed that progress was unending, that the quality of life for people -- both those living under capitalism or communism -- could constantly improve, instead understood that there was a cyclical rhythm to history, that civilizations rose and fell, and that constructing society in hopes that there would be a utopian end-point would lead only to destruction. New technologies -- what he called small-unit machines -- that would be developed as an alternative to the “monster machines” of the west, which turned human beings into technological components; small-unit machines, he hoped, would be developed by Indian engineers with the intention of putting the power of electricity into the hands of individual farmers, serving as a means of empowerment and liberation rather than alienation. And finally, new forms of international political action, which would turn his alternative modernity into a universal system to replace Western modernity. These forms of international politics would no longer be reliant on the nation-state, instead serving as a means to allow individuals to participate in a global community.

In developing these points, this thesis will pay close attention to two core aspects of Lohia’s style of thinking. The first is his constant use of dialectical thinking to develop his ideas. In nearly every essay or speech he wrote, Lohia presented his argument as a means of rejecting

the worst ideas while recovering the best from diametrically opposing concepts -- not this, nor that, but instead, this. In the early 1950s, the period on which this thesis is focused, Lohia was particularly concerned with placing the ideas of Gandhi and Karl Marx in productive conversation with one another. With some in his party defecting in order to follow the Gandhian saint Vinoba Bhave, and others seeking to turn the Socialist Party into a full-fledged Marxist party, Lohia sought to unite the two by demonstrating the short-comings of both while rescuing those aspects most useful to postcolonial India. Similarly, Lohia would seek to synthesize the individual with the universal; seek to find a way to construct an intellectual system that allowed the universal to be experienced at the smallest, most local level. He would do the same with questions of materiality and spirituality, with the activity of the West and the poise of the East, and between Ambedkar and, once again, Gandhi. This dialectical process led to an open and flexible system of thought, into which all who sought justice and equality could conceivably be included.

The other second key aspect of Lohia's style of thinking is a deep interest and attunement to power. Like most leftist thinkers, Lohia was concerned with asking who had power in society, who did not, and how to correct the injustices resulting from these inequalities. Yet, unlike many others on the Indian left during this period, he took seriously the need for those on the bottom to actively seek power for themselves in order to dismantle oppressive systems. This was revealed partly in Lohia's attitude towards electoral politics; while in India at the time it was considered uncouth to actively seek to gain office, Lohia urged his fellow party-members to aggressively work to win elections, defeat the incumbent Indian National Congress, and become the ruling party of India. However, his interest in power extended to a much deeper level than this. To Lohia, power seemed to be tied directly to creation; to have power, meant to be able to create.

Thus, his ideas were concerned with finding ways to put power into the hands of farmers, to redistribute power from Europe and North America to Africa and Asia, so that the decolonized world could create its own systems of thought, could create its own means of sustenance, its own forms of economics, its own political structures. This will to power -- as he called it -- was at the center of Lohia's intellectual work.

Literature Review

In recent years, historians have begun to demonstrate an increased interest in the intellectual history of post-independence India, a time period which has, for the most part, gone woefully unexamined. Lohia is one figure who a few historians have begun to examine, although none have done so in a fully comprehensive manner. The most significant works examining Lohia have been published by Taylor C. Sherman, Daniel Kent Carrasco, and Yogendra Yadav. For the most part, Sherman and Carrasco's interest in Lohia has come primarily through his relationship to other figures, with Sherman writing broadly about socialism in India in the 1950s, with a particular focus upon Vinoba Bhave's *Bhoodan* Movement, and with Carrasco focusing on Jayaprakash Narayan and his relationship to Lohia. Neither historian thus provides a detailed analysis of Lohia's writings or intellectual system, instead focusing on the most obvious distinctions between Lohia and his peers. Both thinkers hone in on Lohia's concept of the small-unit machine, as well as his ardent condemnation of caste. As such, these works serve as excellent introductions to Lohia and the socialist movement more broadly, however, neither pursue the deeper implications of Lohia's thought.²

² Taylor C. Sherman, "A Gandhian Answer to the Threat of Communism? Sarvodaya and Postcolonial Nationalism in India," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 53, no. 2 (April 1, 2016): 249–70; Taylor C. Sherman, "'A New Type of Revolution': Socialist Thought in India, 1940s–1960s," *Postcolonial Studies* 21, no. 4 (n.d.): 485; Daniel Kent Carrasco, "Jayaprakash Narayan and Lok Niti: Socialism, Gandhism, and Political Cultures of Protest in XX Century India" (King's College London, 2016); Daniel Kent-Carrasco, "A Battle over Meanings: Jayaprakash Narayan, Rammanohar Lohia and the Trajectories

Yadav, a political scientist and active politician who has been inspired by Lohia, has written a much more detailed analysis of Lohia and his writings, and has pursued many of the implications left unexamined by Sherman and Carrasco. Yadav hones in on many of the aspects of Lohia's thought that this thesis discusses, from Lohia's attempts to move beyond what Yadav calls "euro-normality," his rejection of European teleological history, and his complex relationship to Hindu culture, which he argued was necessary in order to forge a sense of national identity at the same time as he ruthlessly critiqued its most oppressive elements.³ However, Yadav's work is not historical, and is intended primarily to introduce current-day activists to Lohia's work so that they might draw inspiration from it. Furthermore, Yadav, as well as Sherman and Carrasco, pay little attention to Lohia's international activism and theories of Third World politics, which this thesis will argue was one not only of the most impactful aspects of Lohia's career, but also provides the final piece to the puzzle that is his overall intellectual system.

In addition to works that directly discuss Lohia, this thesis will draw upon a number of theoretical works that discuss the contested space of the "village" -- not the actual physical village space, but the village as a representation of classical India, of decentralized politics -- in Lohia's lifetime. Of particular interest are the writings of Daniel Immerwahr, Anupama Mohan, David Arnold, and J.F. Chairez-Garza. Mohan primarily analyzes literary depictions of villages in the first half of the twentieth century, with a particular interest in how Gandhi's utopian vision of village life was translated into novels by writers such as Raja Rao. Mohan argues that these

of Socialism in Early Independent India," *Global Intellectual History (Abingdon, England)* 2, no. 3 (2017): 370–88.

³ Yogendra Yadav, "On Remembering Lohia," *Economic and Political Weekly* 45, no. 40 (2010): 46–50; Yogendra Yadav, "What Is Living and What Is Dead in Rammanohar Lohia?," *Economic and Political Weekly* 45, no. 40 (2010): 92–107.

works often depicted a “homotopia,” in which a utopian India was depicted as Hindu and casteist.⁴ Chairez-Garza similarly analyzes Gandhian idealization of the village, with a particular focus on B.R. Ambedkar’s criticism of Gandhi’s villigism, arguing instead that the village was the most violent site for Dalits, in which they were segregated from the rest of the community and placed in restrictive and oppressive social roles.⁵ Both Mohan and Chairez-Garza have been instructive in understanding how Lohia diverged from Gandhian thought, as Lohia often favored a more Ambedkarian analysis of village life, focusing on the oppression and poverty faced by women and Dalits. This thesis will argue that rather than relying upon a Gandhian romanticization of the village, Lohia instead argued that the village had to fundamentally change in order for it to provide the foundation for a decentralized political system.

Immerwahr’s work focuses on international efforts in the mid-twentieth century to rethink development in a way that emphasized bottom-up community building. These efforts were often a direct response to modernity, and resulted in a high degree of intellectual and economic exchange between India and the United States.⁶ His work has been invaluable in understanding modernity theory, as well as in positioning Lohia within an international movement. Arnold’s work has also been valuable in understanding discourse surrounding modernization and development, particularly his discussion of “everyday technologies” in twentieth century India. Of particular interest is the contrast he draws between Gandhi’s condemnation of all technology as alienating and oppressive and the vision presented by Begum Rokaya in her short story “Sultana’s Dream,” in which a speculative feminist utopia is

⁴ Anupama Mohan, *Utopia and the Village in South Asian Literatures* (Basingstoke ; Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

⁵ Jesús Francisco Cháirez-Garza, “Touching Space: Ambedkar on the Spatial Features of Untouchability,” *Contemporary South Asia* 22, no. 1 (January 2, 2014): 37–50.

⁶ Daniel Immerwahr, *Thinking Small: The United States and the Lure of Community Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

envisioned wherein technology serves as a liberating force.⁷ This has been instructive in understanding Lohia's views on technology, which existed in tension with both these perspectives. While sharing Gandhi's distrust of large-scale technology, he also believed that technology could be potentially empowering if rethought to emphasize small-scale, local development.

Finally, the writings of Vijay Prashad and Dipesh Chakrabarty on the Bandung Conference have informed this thesis's third chapter, which is concerned with Lohia's relationship to and work within the non-aligned movement. Both authors argue that while the Bandung Conference was an important step in the project of developing solidarity amongst formerly decolonized nations, it led to little concrete action and represented an uncritical acceptance of modernity by Third World leaders.⁸ While Lohia also sought cooperation amongst Asian and African nations, his political project must be understood as opposed to, rather than in conjunction with, the participants of Bandung. Chakrabarty's seminal work *Provincializing Europe* has also been useful in understanding Lohia's relationship to European thought, which he drew from while at the same time arguing that its limited perspective limited its usefulness in postcolonial India.⁹

These writings will all be put in conversation with Lohia's own writings. As this thesis is primarily concerned with providing an intellectual history of Lohia -- with understanding his place within and contributions to the intellectual milieu of the early 1950s -- it will primarily

⁷ David Arnold, *Everyday Technology: Machines and the Making of India's Modernity* (University of Chicago Press, 2013).

⁸ Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Legacies of Bandung: Decolonisation and the Politics of Culture," *Economic and Political Weekly* 40, no. 46 (2005): 4812–18; Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World*, A New Press People's History (New York: New Press, 2007).

⁹ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: University Press, 2007).

draw upon his published speeches and essays found in his *Collected Works*, with a focus on contextualizing his many seemingly disconnected statements in hopes of understanding the broader motivations and implications of his intellectual system. This thesis takes seriously C.A. Bayly's assertion that understanding the history of ideas is a vital exercise in and of itself, that "we need to know why some ideas were more resonant than others at particular times. The answer lies in their long-term virtue both in argument and also in helping people to understand their particular, and increasingly rapidly changing, life-worlds."¹⁰ While Lohia must also be understood within the particular material circumstances and social changes of his time, the primary focus in the following chapters is on understanding the philosophical genealogy of his work, the discourses in which he participated, and the intellectual territory that he aggressively and distinctively staked out for himself. The hope is to understand Lohia's "life-world" within the context of early postcolonial India, revealing this period to be far more complex and dynamic than generally acknowledged by historians of South Asia.

Chapter Overview

The first two chapters work in conjunction with one another, with each serving as an in-depth examination of Lohia's engagement with one side of the Marx-Gandhi dialectic that in many ways defined his career. In the early 1950s, in particular, Lohia found himself at the helm of a Socialist Party that had only vaguely defined itself ideologically. Made up of a motley and disparate group of activists and intellectuals, Lohia was torn between two seemingly incompatible worldviews: materialist Marxists, and spiritualist Gandhians. He devoted himself to

¹⁰ C. A. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire : The Wiles Lectures given at the Queen's University of Belfast, 2007*, Ideas in Context 100 (Cambridge, UK ; Cambridge University Press, 2012), 24.

stitching these groups together into a single fabric, an effort which ended in failure but in the process resulted in him articulating a powerful vision for the future of India.

Chapter One will focus on Lohia's relationship to Marxism, particularly on why he believed it to be an unsuitable ideology for India. Lohia would argue that communism and capitalism, rather than representing two separate world systems, were actually both offshoots of the same civilization and had at their core the same ideological assumptions. Both shared a belief in teleological histories, and thus both justified present-day brutality in their quest to reach a prosperous and utopian future. India would have to liberate itself from these ideas, would have to develop new ways of comprehending the world and history that would rely instead upon concepts natural to the "Indian mind," -- a phrase that Lohia utilized while at the same time problematizing. Thus, Lohia would replace this teleological history with a cyclical history, one that accounted for caste as well as class, and one that did not assume that Europe and North America represented the height of human progress.

Chapter Two will focus on Lohia's "heretical Gandhism," the ways in which he diverged from Gandhian orthodoxy and his critiques of contemporary Gandhians, particularly Vinoba Bhave. While Bhave would articulate a politics of decentralization reliant upon romantic images of ancient India and the Indian village, Lohia would instead present an almost Ambedkarian image of the village as a space of squalor and oppression. The purpose of decentralization, he would suggest, was to transform the village into something new entirely, to create a new space that could be the bedrock for an alternative modernity through the creation and utilization of small-unit machines.

The final chapter will look at how Lohia attempted to universalize the ideology that is revealed in chapters one and two. It will analyze his efforts to establish solidarity amongst Asian

nations in an attempt to maintain independence from both the communist and capitalist systems, as well as his efforts to build relationships with activists in the United States of America, who he believed could play an important role in dismantling the old civilization and in constructing a new one. This chapter will argue that Lohia attempted to find a universality that empowered individual towns and villages so that they could contribute to and participate equally in a global community. He hoped to create a world without nations and borders, in which each individual as an equal citizen of a single world government.

Chapter 1

Wheel of History: The Quest for a Postcolonial Ideology

Introduction

The early 1950s were the most crucial years of Rammanohar Lohia's political career. They were years of immense optimism: for the man himself, for his movement, and for India as a whole. They were years filled with the possibilities of creation -- self-creation -- as India, newly independent, could decide for itself what it was, what it could be. Lohia, in particular, was filled with the spirit of this moment. He saw a possibility that the Socialist Party, which, for most of the pre-Independence years had been a fringe group on the sideline of most major political discussions, could ascend to new heights. He believed that a message of decentralization, a program built around devolving power to the lowest levels of Indian society, could capture the imagination of the electorate.¹¹ "The people are dulled and no political party is alive enough to awaken them," he declared in 1952.¹² The space was wide open for an active Socialist Party to invigorate the people, to foster an enthusiastic spirit that could lead India into this new period of independence.

His optimism, however, did not blind him to the realities of the political climate. India's first general election, held in 1951, was a disaster for the socialists. While they won the second-largest vote share in the country, this was hardly an accomplishment considering the dominance of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's Indian National Congress (INC). Of the Lok Sabha's 489 seats, the Socialists were only able to capture a meager twelve.¹³ This led to the

¹¹ Indumati Kelkar. *Dr. Rammanohar Lohia: His Life and Philosophy*. (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers and Distributors, 1996), 197.

¹² Rammanohar Lohia. *Will to Power and Other Writings*. (Hyderabad, India: Navahind Publications, 1956), 5.

¹³ Marshall Windmiller, "Gandhian Socialism in India," *Far Eastern Survey* 23, no. 3 (March 1, 1954): 40–45; "From 1951 till Now, a Quick Look at How India Voted in General Elections," SBS.com, accessed April 25, 2021, <https://www.sbs.com.au/language/english/from-1951-till-now-a-quick-look-at-how-india-voted-in-general-elections>.

1952 merger of the Socialist Party, led by Jayaprakash Narayan and Lohia, with the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party, led by JB Kripalani. Yet this new party, dubbed the Praja Socialist Party (PSP), still faced immense challenges, first and foremost among them being a high degree of internal tension.¹⁴ The new party, cobbled together as it was by different groups with different motives, was not united; in fact, it was in danger of being pulled apart as members were drawn towards two competing figures, two competing guiding lights: Karl Marx and Mohandas Gandhi.¹⁵ Members of the party's Marxist wing, believing that only a violent revolution could truly overturn the existing order, were growing tired of the Party's commitment to "social revolution."¹⁶ Members of the Gandhian wing, on the other hand, seemed to be losing interest in electoral politics all-together; they believed the Party was not going far enough in its commitment to social revolution. This was particularly true of Narayan, the Party's president and Lohia's closest friend.

Lohia and Narayan -- also known as JP -- had first met decades before, in 1933, when they were both fervent young nationalists imprisoned by the British government in Nasik Jail. It was there that the two, together with other young nationalists likewise imprisoned, would form the foundation of what would become the Socialist Party.¹⁷ Yet, much had changed since those early years. At the time, JP -- who had just returned from earning a PhD in America -- was a committed Marxist. However, over the decades his ideology had not only shifted, but been inverted entirely. Inspired in part by Vinoba Bhave, a spiritual leader and activist considered by many to be Gandhi's heir, JP had turned away from the materialism of Marx and towards the

¹⁴ Fickett, "The Praja Socialist Party of India," 826.

¹⁵ Kelkar, 214.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹⁷ Kent-Carrasco, 373-376.

spiritualism of Gandhi.¹⁸ He turned away from *Raj Niti* -- power politics, the politics of governments and elections -- in favor of *Lok Niti* -- people politics.¹⁹

Bhave's *Bhoodan Movement*, which sought to solve India's ever-worsening crisis of rural poverty by convincing wealthy landowners to donate their land to the poor, inspired Narayan.²⁰ He saw in *Bhoodan*, in this Gandhian-style method of nonviolent revolution, a capacity to inspire and mobilize masses of people that the Socialists could only dream of. "We often talked of organizing the effective will of the people and of giving a point and shape to their yearning and sufferings" he said in a speech delivered to the Party's Betul Convention in 1953, "I submit that the *Bhoodan* Movement is a magnificent effort in that direction [...] The *Bhoodan* Movement of Vinoba has given a point and shape to people's hunger for land, to their yearning for equality [...] I have just said that, in spite of our doubts and airs of ideological superiority, we were driven like leaves in Gandhiji's storm. I believe a storm is brewing again, and once again we are going to be blown about like shriveled leaves." JP's infatuation with Gandhism was so complete that he would end up leaving electoral politics altogether, declaring: "I have come to believe that the party system will not be conducive to national integration. It is an unsatisfactory system and is incapable of providing an adequate framework for the democratic requirements of the masses." A Western party system, he believed, could only lead to divisions within the nation, when what was needed was collective mass action by a unified public.²¹ Two days after making this declaration, his distaste for party politics made clear, his commitment to Gandhism and *Bhoodan*

¹⁸ Taylor C. Sherman, "A Gandhian Answer to the Threat of Communism? Sarvodaya and Postcolonial Nationalism in India," 256.

¹⁹ Kent-Carrasco, 371.

²⁰ Sherman, 249-250.

²¹ Jayaprakash Narayan, "Intervention in the Debate on General Secretary's Report, Betul, 16 June 1953," In *Selected Works of Jayaprakash Narayan* Edited by Bimal Prasad. Vol. 6. (Sanctum Books, 2005), 350–52.

concretized, JP, while maintaining his membership, nonetheless resigned as president of the PSP.²²

This was no doubt an emotional moment for Lohia. His closest friend and collaborator -- a man with whom he had spent years in jail, suffering for their shared commitment to an independent India, and who, when that independence was achieved, had toiled together on the fringes of Indian politics to forge a viable Socialist movement -- was drifting away from the party the two had created, and into the arms of Vinoba Bhave and an entirely different kind of politics. Lohia was now, for all intents and purposes, the leader of the Socialist movement. In the coming years, as various iterations of the Socialist Party fractured and faded away, he would, in some ways, *be* the Socialist movement in India.²³ Yet, in this crisis, in the wake of a crushing electoral defeat, amidst the conflict between the Party's Marxist and Gandhian wings, Lohia saw opportunity. First, however, he had to wrangle together the disaffected members of his Party, he had to instill in them a confidence and sense of shared purpose. It was in these years that perhaps the most central aspect of Lohia's personality, of his political and intellectual style, of his ideological commitments, was revealed. Lohia was a thinker profoundly concerned with power: electoral power, Indian power, peasant power, international power, intellectual power, and electric power.

This interest was articulated most clearly, and most forcefully, in a 1952 speech entitled the "Will to Power." This was a speech directed at his fellow Party leaders, delivered in defense of *raj niti* -- of the "power politics" that JP was increasingly critical of. What he saw in JP's distaste for *raj niti*, what he saw in the Party leadership's unwillingness to more aggressively

²² Jayaprakash Narayan, "Statement on His Resignation from the National Executive of the PSP, Betul, 18 June 1953," In *Selected Works of Jayaprakash Narayan* Edited by Bimal Prasad. Vol. 6. (Sanctum Books, 2005), 355.

²³ Kent-Carrasco, 377.

pursue office, was a meek unwillingness to embrace the moment. Lohia, in this speech, sought to redefine Indian leadership away from the renunciatory style of Gandhism by arguing that, in a nation “shivering with hunger” and a “world cowering under the shadow of war” it was the PSP’s responsibility to seek power. “The greatest test for any political party lies in its will to power,” he stated. “A curious obscurity has been allowed to grow around this will in our country as if it were sinful or at least ugly to want power.” This belief in the sinfulness of power, he believed, was an “enfeebling hypocrisy.” Rather, “to want to become the opposition when the substance of the people and of all mankind is being eaten away is ugly if not sinful,” he argued, cleverly inverting the language of sinfulness to refocus ideals of leadership upon one’s responsibility to the people -- one’s responsibility to “warm up the the temper of the people so that they become the makers of their destiny” -- rather than to one’s pure spiritual fulfillment.²⁴ Yet, this was not entirely a rejection of Gandhian-style leadership, nor an embrace of ambition for ambition’s sake. “The will to power must indeed be a chaste and vigorous will, as far away from perversity as it should be from weakness,” he said, nodding towards the Gandhian ideal of *brahmacharya*, or power attained through chastity -- the elimination of desire.²⁵

If, in the “will to power” Lohia was concerned only with redefining Indian leadership, than this alone would be enough to mark him as a distinctive figure in Indian politics, and to influence the course of his career and the future of the PSP. Lohia’s combative insistence on refusing to collaborate with the Congress, his vitriolic condemnation of compromises and half-measures, his disgust with those who chose meek placidity over rage against injustice would be a

²⁴ Rammanohar Lohia, “Will to Power,” in *Will to Power and Other Writings* (Hyderabad, India: Navahind Publications, 1956), 3–4.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 4. For a discussion of *brahmacharya* see Vinay Lal, “Nakedness, Non-Violence, and the Negation of Negation: Gandhi’s Experiments in Brahmacharya and Celibate Sexuality,” *South Asia* 22, no. 2 (1999): 63–94.

hall-mark of his political career -- this was one of his most admirable traits, at times revealing a prescient understanding of how, if the Socialists were not careful, those in power would manipulate the language of justice and equality to subsume the more radical and thus threatening elements of Socialism. It was also one of the chief reasons for his political failures. It was this attitude that would lose him friends and allies, and would limit the Party's ability to extend beyond the most committed core of believers.²⁶

Yet the "will to power" extends beyond Lohia's understanding of practical politics. Power, to Lohia, meant the ability to create -- "the will to construct" he argued, "is the other side of the will to agitate and combat and the two together make the will to power."²⁷ This sense of vigor and action -- this drive to create -- is Lohia's most fundamental impulse. It is here that the link between the various forms of power that Lohia was concerned with -- the link between electoral power and electric power -- becomes apparent. As I will explain in the following chapter, Lohia's theory of development was dependent on the idea of putting the power of electricity into the hands of peasants and farmers through the use of "small-unit machines." The intention was that by making electric power available to them, farmers could become the "builders" -- the creators -- of a new civilization.²⁸

This chapter is concerned with a different form of power, and a different form of creation. I'll call it "intellectual power," but it is tied closely to various material and spiritual exercises in power as well. This is the power of a nation, or a civilization, to craft its own thought; to devise an intellectual system built upon its own traditions and concepts. To Lohia, this was an essential part of the decolonization process; before India could create a new

²⁶ Fickett, 829.

²⁷ Lohia, "Will to Power," 6.

²⁸ Rammanohar Lohia, "The Farmer in India (1950)," ed. Mastram Kapoor, vol. 7, *Collected Works of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia* (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers and Distributors, 2011), 18.

civilization, before it could will itself to that form of power, it first had to free itself from the ideologies of its conquerors and create new ways of thinking about the world. In the capitalist and communist nations of the West, he argued, “idea” had been placed in the “service of force.”²⁹ Rather than people acting based off of new ideas, inspired by their beliefs and the conditions of the world around them, they sought to use the ideologies that they had already subscribed to as a means to dominate others. In the West, “thinking has ceased to be creative. It is propagandist.”³⁰ If India were to continue to think using the ideologies of the West, it would only be doing so because of the force -- the domination -- of its former colonizers.

What was needed, therefore, was for India to use its creative capabilities to create a new system of thought. “The evolution of theory and the will to power are interdependent exercises and thrive on one another,” he stated at the close of his “Will to Power” speech.³¹ It was necessary, therefore, to break the hegemonic power of European ideologies, even those, or, particularly those, that might be appealing and useful to Indian socialists, such as Marxism. This did not necessarily mean rejecting Marxism entirely -- Lohia certainly saw much value in, and was influenced immensely by, Marxist class analysis -- but it did mean reformulating Marxism for an Indian context, it meant telling history not through a European Marxist lens, but through an Indian lens.

The following pages will focus on a series of speeches Lohia delivered in 1952 in Hyderabad, all published in 1955 under the title *Wheel of History*.³² Due to the fragmentary

²⁹ Rammanohar Lohia, “The Doctrinal Foundation of Socialism (1952),” in *Marx, Gandhi, and Socialism*, ed. Mastram Kapoor, vol. 1, Collected Works of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers and Distributors, 2011), 506.

³⁰ Rammanohar Lohia, “Some Fundamentals of a World Mind (1949),” in *Marx, Gandhi, and Socialism*, ed. Mastram Kapoor, vol. 1, Collected Works of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers and Distributors, 2011), 455.

³¹ Lohia, “Will to Power,” 9.

³² Rammanohar Lohia, *Wheel of History* (New Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1955).

nature of his thought, *Wheel of History*, at just over seventy pages, serves as his most cohesive work, his most rigorous engagement with theory. Its concern, suggested by the title, is to replace Marxist teleological history with a cyclical history, a move with profound implications for Lohia. The first section of this chapter will deal with why Lohia was not satisfied with Marxist history, why he believed that a teleological telling of history was inseparable from colonialism, how this telling of history supported European supremacy. The second section asks why Lohia was attracted to a cyclical telling, specifically wondering why Lohia, who was an avowed atheist, centered his theory on traditional Hindu conceptions of time. The final section will deal with the actual mechanics of Lohia's cyclical theory of history, specifically how Lohia sought to place caste in conversation with Marxist class theory, arguing that history was not just a constant process of class struggle, but also of caste struggle.

Marx and Modern Civilization

“Over twenty years ago some students of history were seated at a table of the Berlin University restaurant. Some of them were Hegelians and some Marxists, and I happened to throw a question at them as to how India, with its mature civilisation, fell under foreign rule.”³³ It is with these words that Lohia begins *Wheel of History*, already establishing, in just two sentences, the basic themes and intent behind the work. Educated in Berlin, Lohia clearly engaged and drew from a wide range of thinkers from the German philosophical tradition. Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche, all, in some form or other, shine through in Lohia's works, which can be seen in large part through his appropriation of Nietzsche's phrase “will to power.”³⁴ *Wheel of History* is, at its foundation, intended to engage with the grand theories of history produced by these thinkers, particularly

³³ Lohia, *Wheel of History*, 1.

³⁴ Ciano Aydin, “Nietzsche on Reality as Will to Power: Toward an ‘Organization—Struggle’ Model,” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, no. 33 (2007): 25–48.

Marx, and to assert India's place within these histories. These theories of history, which all intended to speak to the underlying impulses behind the movement of civilizations, suffered from a limited perspective. Written only with an understanding of European history and European culture, these thinkers were unable to speak to the experiences of peoples from other parts of the globe. *Wheel of History* was thus Lohia's attempt to contribute a new perspective to the conversation at that Berlin restaurant, a view from India.

While he engages with several European theories of history, Lohia's primary focus in *Wheel of History* is on Marxism, in large part because Marxism was what both he and his fellow members of the PSP were most drawn to. Yet, despite this, he believed that it was unacceptable that the PSP become a Marxist party, and essential that they establish a form of socialism independent of Marxism. At the root of Lohia's critique of Marxism is a critique of modernity itself; to Lohia, modernity was a distinctly European phenomenon, born out of the economic exploitation of colonized nations. One of Marx's most glaring blindspots, Lohia argued, was the idea that imperialism was the last stage of capitalism, rather than one of the first and most essential aspects of it. It was only through imperialism -- through the conquest and exploitation of the colonized peoples and their resources -- that the industrial revolution, and thus, modernity and Marxism, were made possible. "Imperialism is with both Marx and Lenin a tumour of capitalism, an odorous after-growth," he wrote in an earlier essay. This belief that imperialism was merely the "last stage of capitalism" thus fostered in Marxists "an unintelligent concern for the colonial races." The reality, Lohia argued, was that imperialism "appears at the first stage of

capitalism [...] it gobbles up one country after another,” using the resources stolen from those countries to fuel its development.³⁵

It was impossible, therefore, that the nations of Asia and Africa -- that India, which, under Nehru, was so desperately trying to “catch up” with European nations -- could ever truly participate in the modern experience.³⁶ The nations of Asia and Africa, he pointed out, had nowhere to colonize; they’d been beaten to the punch. “The industrial revolution,” he wrote, “belonged to a unique historical situation, incapable of repetition in Asia and Africa. Too little land and too many men and too few tools are a mark of Asia, so that application of the technique of mass production is utterly impossible.”³⁷ Thus, if modernity spread to the rest of the world, it would not be out of a sense of sharing, a sense of mutual and democratic participation of all nations and peoples in the construction of modernity. A globalized modernity could only be the result of colonialism and continued European domination -- and Marxism was a profoundly modern ideology.

In fact, in one of Lohia’s more daring assertions, capitalism and communism were not the opposite and opposing forces that they were made out to be. Instead, the two, together, formed the Janus-like face of “modern civilization.” While the two differed on the question of ownership of the means of production -- and in this, Lohia certainly preferred Marxism -- they nevertheless shared the same fundamental impulse, the same intrinsic drive.³⁸ That is, a belief in the teleology of progress. “Philosophies of history characteristic of Western Civilisation,” whether they be Marxist or capitalist philosophies, “have assumed progress to be linear or broken,” he argued.

³⁵ Rammanohar Lohia, “Economics after Marx (1943),” in *Marx, Gandhi, and Socialism*, ed. Mastram Kapoor, vol. 1, Collected Works of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers and Distributors, 2011), 179–82.

³⁶ Chakrabarty. “Legacies of Bandung,” 4812–4818.

³⁷ Lohia, *Wheel of History*, 64.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 63.

“Everchanging technology [...] gave Western man a robust faith in his future.”³⁹ This faith in technology to produce a future utopia is, to Lohia, the defining feature of both systems of thought. “Capitalism as well as communism have thought and still think of the golden age when, with advancing industrialisation, improving living standards, and rising national output, the whole world would tie up in forms of intimate friendship and wars would fade away.”⁴⁰ Nevermind the fact that, this technology, this constant progress, was only made possible by “child labour, wars among nations and extreme exploitation.”⁴¹ Teleological theories of history, therefore, were inherently violent. They instilled in their believers “a strange illusion” that “ignoble acts are justified by the outcome of a remote future.”⁴²

Marxism thus promoted the continued economic exploitation of colonized and formerly colonized countries. Yet, this teleological view of history and of progress, this belief that Europe is leading humanity into a future golden age, not only produced economic domination, but intellectual domination as well. The assertion that the golden age of humanity lay in the future discounted the possibility that there had been a golden age in the past; it discounted the possibility that non-European nations, such as India, had once been at the peak of human civilization. If it was true that history was a constant progression forward, that deterioration could not have occurred. Europe, in this telling, would always be the guide of civilisation, the leader of the pack. If this teleological view of history were true, than, Lohia argued, “the world should have in all history known an unchanging visage, with a starred smile fixed on one side and a frozen tear pocking the other.”⁴³ In what is perhaps his most powerfully phrased critique of

³⁹ Ibid., 9.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 63.

⁴¹ Ibid., 9.

⁴² Ibid., 69.

⁴³ Ibid., 19-20.

Marx, Lohia suggests that communism is an ideology of European supremacy: “the effort of Marx was, after all, a colossal construction of the mind to keep the smile on the visage of Europe ever dancing. It was a peerless attempt of the European spirit [...] Like most other modern doctrines emanating from Europe, the materialist interpretation of history is also a doctrine in the service of the status quo, at least that part of the status quo which means European glory.”⁴⁴

This is a fascinating passage, one that challenges the very notion of Marxism as revolutionary ideology. It is also a somewhat disconcerting passage, particularly for the intentionality that it assumes in Marx’s “effort” to construct a “doctrine in the service of the status quo.” Yet, Lohia’s critique of Marx in *Wheel of History* seems to extend beyond this claim that Marx simply failed to fully appreciate the origins of imperialism; rather, in *Wheel of History* he seems to be arguing that Marxism, by sheer nature of its European-ness, its emergence from an Hegelian intellectual tradition built around the idea of history moving towards some grand finality, could never be adequate in understanding and explaining the history of formerly colonized nations.⁴⁵ This was, essentially, a provincialization of Marx, an assertion that Marx was an unmistakably local thinker.⁴⁶ Accepting a European ideology such as Marxism, an ideology that inherently supported the destructive modern belief in ever-increasing progress, would mean accepting a form of colonialism, an intellectual domination. Marxism could never be a true path towards liberation. Indians had to liberate themselves; had to develop a new telling of history, one which did not promote the notion that the face of Asia had always been covered by a frozen tear.

The Mind of an Indian

⁴⁴ Ibid., 20.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 17.

⁴⁶ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*.

In building his theory, it was essential to Lohia that he place it within the idioms of the Indian population; that his philosophy was a product of and legible to the “Indian mind.” This is in large part what drew Lohia to a cyclical telling of history: “the purely cyclical view of history should be fairly familiar to the Indian,” he explained, alluding to the Hindu idea that history passes through “four periods [...] a kind of golden age going on the dark age with a yellow age and a brown age in between.” Lohia believed that, even at first glance, this version of history hewed far closer to actual events than a view of history centered around the idea of infinite progress. “It is a view of history which admits of rise as well as fall, an ascent over again after a fall has been reached. It seems to coincide with what actually happens in human life, where a people emerge victorious in their struggle with evil, attain to heights of glory and power, of goodness, or truth, or beauty, and then the spirit wearies. They start descending again into incohesion and weakness and general lack of purpose, when through inevitable light after darkness, the spirit flowers and an ascent is possible again.”⁴⁷

There is certainly a logic to this, and his assertion that a cyclical telling of history is far more natural to Indians than a teleological telling raises no eyebrows. This is not only due to the connection to Hinduism, but also to what is a clear evocation of Gandhi, the spinning wheel being one of the most central symbols within his philosophy. As Aishwary Kumar has noted, Gandhi’s engagement with the spinning wheel extended beyond an interest in cloth-making and towards a relationship with time oriented around patient, skillful action.⁴⁸ Yet, Lohia’s move to center his theory in a Hindu religious concept is also quite curious, and deserves further scrutiny.

⁴⁷ Lohia, *Wheel of History*, 5.

⁴⁸ Aishwary Kumar, *Radical Equality: Ambedkar, Gandhi, and the Risk of Democracy*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2015), 104.

While Lohia was far from the only Indian figure interested in developing Hindu concepts to be applicable in the modern day, Lohia stands out amongst them; he was, after all, an atheist.⁴⁹

Thus, it is important to further examine Lohia's complex relationship to Hinduism, in which, despite his atheism he found great value.⁵⁰ While not made explicit, the passage above suggests that Lohia, in his efforts to uncover and develop a postcolonial ideology for India, felt it necessary to develop his ideas out of a tradition he believed to be authentically Indian; a tradition he believed to be amenable to his populist tendencies -- his desire for the people to possess the intellectual and economic power in the nation.⁵¹ However, this was far from an endorsement of these traditions or ideas. Rather, Lohia's engagement with Hinduism was profoundly critical of its traditions and its oppressive structures. He sought to rescue Hinduism from itself.

To first understand the value that Hinduism had to Lohia, we must turn to one of his shortest speeches, delivered in 1951 entitled "Rivers of India." The speech addressed the necessity of protecting India's sacred rivers from pollution, and in it Lohia reveals a sensitivity to the phenomenological experience of the peasant; a desire to take seriously the worldview of India's rural populations. "I wish to make it clear that I am an atheist," he begins the speech, "let no one, therefore, misunderstand that I have begun to believe in God." His investment in protecting the rivers -- which in India are considered sites of pilgrimages or even gods -- did not stem from his own religious views. Rather, it came from an understanding that relationships with rivers were central to the daily spiritual and material life of most Indians. "Out of 40 crores of our country's population, about a crore or two have a dip daily in rivers and 50 to 60 lakhs drink

⁴⁹ Rammanohar Lohia, "Rivers of India (1951)," ed. Mastram Kapoor, vol. 5, *Collected Works of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia* (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers and Distributors, 2011), 101.

⁵⁰ For a discussion on atheism in early 20th century India and its relationship to politics, see J. Daniel Elam, "Bhagat Singh's Atheism," *History Workshop Journal* Spring 2020, no. 89 (April 2020): 109–20.

⁵¹ Rammanohar Lohia, "Round the World," ed. Mastram Kapoor, vol. 5, *Collected Works of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia* (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers and Distributors, 2011), 29.

river water. Their minds and hearts are linked with the rivers.” Thus, Lohia believed it to be essential that a river purification project be launched, focused on the factories that polluted the river that so many Indians drank and bathed in daily. Those who were not interested in such a project, he stated, “come from the wealthy class. They do not have the mind of the Indian at all. If they had, the river purification project should have been ready by now.” Lohia concluded: “What is in a *tirth* (pilgrimage)? – Only water. So the people should shout at the government, ‘You shameless ones, stop this sacrilege.’ I am, however, an atheist. With me it is not a question of pilgrimage. The point is whether this country should belong to the 30 lakhs or to the 40 crores.”⁵²

This makes clear the degree to which Lohia saw fostering the spiritual commitments of India’s populace as being central to his populist commitments; the rivers were sacred to the masses of India, central to the daily experience, the very means by which Indians interacted with the world, and therefore they had to be protected. He encouraged the population to defend their sites of pilgrimage, despite he himself not sharing that particular belief. He saw this defense of their spiritual understanding of the world to be a legitimate, and necessary, form of politics.⁵³ Yet here, it would be wise to spend some more time on the term “mind of an Indian,” which Lohia uses both in this speech and in *Wheel of History*, where it is rephrased as “Indian mind.”⁵⁴ This could be a somewhat concerning term, for it is necessarily exclusive and possibly even essentialist in its meaning. There seems to be a conflation in both these instances of an “Indian mind” with a “Hindu mind,” and indeed, in a 1950 essay titled “Hinduism” Lohia uses the phrase

⁵² Lohia, “Rivers of India,” 101-103. A lakh stands for 100,000, and a crore stands for 10,000,000. Lohia is essentially asking if the country should belong to the general public or to the wealthy minority.

⁵³ For a thoughtful discussion of peasant spirituality and its relationship to Marxism, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Subaltern Histories and Post-Enlightenment Rationalism,” in *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (University of Chicago Press, 2002), 20–37.

⁵⁴ Lohia, *Wheel of History*, 5.

“Hindu mind” with nearly the same meaning.⁵⁵ Yet, his evocation of an “Indian,” or “Hindu” mind is not always with a positive connotation. While he believed it was essential that postcolonial Indian politics be centered upon the Indian mind, he also believed the Indian mind had to be challenged, intensely critiqued, and exorcised of its most inegalitarian and oppressive tendencies.⁵⁶

In “Hinduism,” Lohia argues that the history of Hinduism has been a 5,000 year war between the liberal and fanatical sides of the religion, “part of which grossly evil and another which can be of service to man.”⁵⁷ This debate between the two lies in Hinduism’s ancient origins. “Over four thousand years ago and more, molten lead was poured into the ears of some Hindus and their tongues pulled out by other Hindus, for the caste system ordained that no untouchable shall hear or read the Vedas [...] At the same time [a revolt seems] to have taken place against the caste system in ancient times. A whole Upanishad is devoted to the complete and entire demolition of the caste system,” he wrote.⁵⁸ This had developed Hinduism into a religion of “hypocrisy,” where “alongside [...] faith in metaphysical equality goes the most heinous conduct of social inequality.”⁵⁹ In order to resolve this war between the two sides, “mere liberalisation of the four issues will not do; they have to be once and for all resolved of the conflict and eliminated completely from the Hindu mind [...] No Hindu can be genuinely tolerant to Muslims unless he acts at the same time actively against caste and property and for woman. Likewise, a Hindu who is genuinely against caste and property and for woman will inevitably be

⁵⁵ Rammanohar Lohia, “Hinduism (1950),” ed. Mastram Kapoor, vol. 5, *Collected Works of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia* (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers and Distributors, 2011), 220.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 212 and 223.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 213.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 221.

tolerant to Muslims.”⁶⁰ Thus, in Lohia’s usage of the term “Hindu mind” there is an intense engagement with the violence within that very concept. His attempt to center his politics within traditions natural to Indians, natural to peasants, was not necessarily a defense of those traditions, but an attempt to reformulate them for a postcolonial age, to develop them so that they might be useful in the construction of an alternative modernity.

This same impulse is present in *Wheel of History*. At the same time as Lohia embraces the cyclical interpretation of time as being an essential aspect of the Indian’s way of understanding the world, he critiques it for the role it has played in the establishment of the caste system. “While this [cyclical view of history] has awakened great interest in the enduring things of life, that which passes has not received its due attention and has sometimes avenged itself by degrading the Indian mind into impotence or cant,” he writes. “An attempt is also made to turn this deep and rich view of history into an allegory, deflowering the four cyclical ages in the life of a people into the numerous qualities of descending goodness.”⁶¹ Thus, his appropriation of the cyclical passage of time for his theory was not meant merely to replace Marxist history with Hindu history. It was also meant to reclaim the wheel from those Hindus who sought to use it as a means to enshrine the caste system within society. Crucially, Lohia, in his reclamation of the wheel, would use it to critique that very system.

Class and Caste

What, then, was the mechanism by which the wheel turned? How could a religious concept developed thousands of years ago apply to a twentieth century India just recently freed from colonial rule, struggling with adapting to a modernity that, in Lohia’s telling, was violent to its

⁶⁰ Ibid., 220 and 224.

⁶¹ Lohia, *Wheel of History*, 5.

core? How could a new telling of history be found that explained not just the oppression of the working classes, but also the global inequalities that colonialism and imperialism created?

The solution, to Lohia, was to synthesize Marxist class theory with Indian theories on caste. There was an obvious purpose to doing so, one that was a logical continuation of Lohia's belief in Marxism's inadequacy. While Marx, in an essay on the British Empire, acknowledged caste discrimination, his writings were not sufficient to understanding one of the most brutal forms of oppression known throughout world history.⁶² This relative omission presented a problem for Indians interested in Marx, who, in their pursuit of justice for the working classes, could not ignore casteism. The question of how caste related to Marx's theories was one that contemporary Marxists hotly debated. Perhaps the most popular theory belonged to thinkers such as the sociologist AR Desai, who argued that caste must be understood as an aspect of the superstructure. Caste was maintained, in large part, through appeals to concepts such as karma to religious texts such as the *Bhagavad Gita*, and as such a cultural rather than material phenomenon. Such thinkers therefore argued that a focus on class alone, on changing the material conditions that produced the superstructure, would be sufficient to end caste-based oppression.⁶³

Such an analysis, Lohia believed, failed to understand the true relationship between class and caste, a relationship that explained the movement of all human history. Rather than caste being an aspect, an outgrowth of class inequality, Lohia argued that caste and class are two halves of a whole -- that class represented the wheel as it rotated towards its apex, and caste as it descended back towards the ground. "Class," he wrote, "is mobile caste. Caste is immobile

⁶² Sanjaya Baru, "Karl Marx and Analysis of Indian Society," *Economic and Political Weekly* 18, no. 50 (1983): 2102–8.

⁶³ Vasanthi Raman, "The Marxist Sociology of A.R. Desai and the Bombay School: A Tribute and a Discussion," *Sociological Bulletin* 62, no. 2 (May 1, 2013): 262–262.

class.”⁶⁴ Human history consisted of a process whereby a civilization grows in “organisational or technical efficiency,” and as it does so, “there is health, vigour and general movement and, internally, different sections of the population engage in class struggle to improve their various lots.” However, eventually, the civilization attains “maximum efficiency,” when it is no longer growing economically, no longer developing new technologies and new means of extracting resources from other societies. When this happens, “the internal class struggle becomes unbearable and an attempt is made to resolve it into an apparently just system of caste.” This is thus how the Indian caste system formed. In an attempt to dampen resistance from the lower classes, religious justifications for this inequality were developed.⁶⁵ “All human history hitherto has been an internal movement between castes and class, between classes solidifying into castes and castes loosening into classes,” Lohia wrote, in a clear evocation of Marx.⁶⁶ The implication is that Marx, living in Europe during the industrial revolution, during a period of increasing efficiency and tense class struggle, only saw one side of this process. Marx had only ever seen a Europe in which the efficiency and vitality of the civilization was increasing, he had never seen a civilization entrenched in a stagnant caste system. Gazing upon the past, it appeared to him as if that was the natural state of things, and thus, looking into the future, believed that was how things would remain. Lohia, coming from a caste-based society, one which had once been mighty and vibrant but was now seemingly stuck in its ways, could see that history did not progress so linearly.

This is an intriguing and creative critique of Marxism, but also one that is perhaps exceedingly bold in the ways that it diverges sharply from generally accepted understandings of

⁶⁴ Lohia, *Wheel of History*, 25.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

caste. The first way it does is in the claim that caste is not a uniquely Indian phenomenon, that it is in fact a universal system experienced by all human societies. The second is that, in order to universalize caste, Lohia must divorce it from religion. “Classification by birth or its recognition by religion is not a necessary quality of caste, he writes, in a rather dramatic departure from the generally accepted views on caste.”⁶⁷

To support his argument, Lohia draws upon a few examples from history: the patricians and plebeians in Rome, America’s “almost tribal distinction” between races, Nazi Germany’s hierarchization of society along ethnic lines, and finally, the Soviet Union.⁶⁸ It is the example of the Soviet Union to which Lohia provides the most in-depth explanation, and the one that is most central to his argument. The Soviet caste system, he believed, arose “out of the need to create a highly industrial economy from an agriculture one, which may not have been possible in the climate of sharp class struggle.” This argument, it seems, is somewhat contradictory to his formulation of the class/caste distinction, which rested upon the assumption that class appeared during periods of increasing economic efficiency, which Lohia explains by stating that rather than Russia’s caste system being “protective” it is “creative.” This is a vague and unformed concept, and not entirely convincing. Yet, the comparison Lohia draws is interesting, particularly in his argument that “communist Russia is also exhibiting among other obnoxious features of caste the particularly odious characteristic of untouchability [...] that the Russian system is more glaringly cruel than the Indian is largely deceptive, for time and religion may have rubbed off its sharper edges in India and, by making caste acceptable even to those who suffer, driven its cruelty underground into a pervasive but concealed virus.”⁶⁹ Religion, in Lohia’s view, can thus

⁶⁷ Lohia, *Wheel of History*, 24.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 25, 29 and 32-33.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

serve as a means of maintaining the caste system, of indoctrinating those it oppresses into supporting it, but religion is not the cause nor essential to a caste system. Ideology -- even a supposedly revolutionary ideology, such as Marxism -- could serve the same purpose. In perhaps his most dire warning against Marxism, Lohia stated that he was “as keen about the abolition of classes as anybody can be, but I am fearful that under the cover of abolition of classes, castes have ever been created.”⁷⁰

It is hard to know what to make of these arguments surrounding caste. On the one hand, a generous reading would find an attempt here to find new forms of solidarity beyond the class-based solidarities provided by Marxism. This might have been the correct impulse -- certainly, throughout the early twentieth century Indian anti-caste activists, Lohia amongst them, were able to develop just such a solidarity with African American intellectuals and communities.⁷¹ On the other hand, they run the risk of underestimating the particular perniciousness of the caste system, the particular ways it was ingrained in the Indian psyche. It certainly diverges sharply from the Ambedkarian understanding of caste as a distinctly Indian phenomenon, tied inextricably to the Hindu religion, producing a unique and unfathomable form of suffering that could only be annihilated by an excoriation of the very foundations of Indian civilization.⁷²

Despite the potential weaknesses of his argument, there is a further implication of Lohia’s move to universalize caste, one that is relevant to Lohia’s original intention in hypothesizing his cyclical telling of history. The purpose, after all, was to find a way to combat the intellectual hegemony of Europe, an intellectual hegemony supported by Marx’s telling of history. The central flaw of Marx’s argument, as posited by Lohia, was an assumption that the European

⁷⁰ Ibid., 34.

⁷¹ Nico Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 109, <https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674062962>.

⁷² Kumar, *Radical Equality*, 39-40

historical experience was a universal experience, that labor relations in all societies took on the same general forms, that civilizations across the globe would and wanted to progress in the same fashion as Europe. In some ways, therefore, Lohia's assertion that caste is not an Indian oddity, that is instead central to the pulse of all nations, must be understood within Lohia's larger postcolonial project. To assert that, instead, European history could only be explained by using an experience understood to be uniquely Indian, to universalize India in this way, was an expression of Lohia's will to power, a demonstration that India, too, could be at the center of the world.

Conclusion

This chapter was an exploration of Lohia's understanding of intellectual power, particularly the ways in which ideas can reinforce colonial domination. This chapter thus primarily dealt with Lohia's critique of Marx, and of European modernity more broadly -- the impulse within European thought to assume that the train of progress could hurtle ever forwards, that there was no end of the line. In building his critique of this intellectual tradition, of this modernity, Lohia turned towards Indian tradition as a base for his political thought. The next chapter, however, will deal with Lohia's understanding of two different forms of power, peasant power and electric power. In this chapter, we will focus on Lohia's critique of the second great figure to which members of his party were attracted to: Gandhi. Particularly, the impulse of Gandhi and Gandhians to defend tradition for traditions sake, to excuse casteist and patriarchal oppression in the name of tradition. Here, it will become apparent that while Lohia was a critic of European modernity, and of the European faith in infinite progress, he was not opposed to machines or technological progress. Rather, he believed that technology could be utilized in his mission to empower the peasant, that the invention of new "small-unit machines" -- created by and for

Indians -- that could place the power of electricity in the hands of farmers would be a path towards developing true self-sufficiency.

In *Wheel of History* Lohia writes that “every society or civilisation has tended so far to develop into a certain direction of organisational or technical efficiency. As long as this efficiency grows, there are two possible spiritual reactions to it. Some reject it outright, for it does not correspond to their idea of what a society should be. However loud their protests may be, the influence of such a reaction on the course of events is negligible. Another reaction is to mistake this growing efficiency in one direction for total efficiency and, with or without alterations in detail, to put oneself in its service.”⁷³ This chapter focused on Lohia’s critique of those who put themselves in service of the quest for total efficiency. The following chapter, however, will focus on his critique of those who rejected progress outright in defense of “their idea of what a society should be.” In doing so, I will reveal Lohia as an imaginer of a kind of modernity -- an alternative modernity.

⁷³ Lohia, *Wheel of History*, 23

Chapter 2

A Heretical Gandhian: Lohia's Formulation of an Alternative Modernity

Introduction

While the previous chapter focused on Lohia's views and critiques of Marxism, this chapter will focus on his relationship to Gandhism, the second near-mythical figure that Lohia feared members of the Socialist Party would become blindly devoted to, losing sight of their true purpose, which he believed was to develop a new ideology suitable for the postcolonial world. Lohia's relationship to Gandhism was far more subtle, and far more personal, than his relationship to Marxism. Lohia never considered himself a Marxist; it seems that even while a student in Berlin, where he mingled with members of the Communist Party, he maintained a healthy skepticism towards it.⁷⁴ However, like nearly all prominent figures involved in the nationalist movement, Lohia was, at one point, a devoted follower of Gandhi. In fact, born in 1910, Lohia was just a child when Gandhi first rose to prominence, and the Mahatma quickly became his idol. Years later, in 1952, Lohia would recall when Gandhi visited his village in around 1920, when Lohia was still a schoolboy. "My father took me to Gandhiji," he wrote, "and all that I remember of that incident is that I touched his feet and he touched my back [...]"

Countless persons of my generation have, I believe, gone through similar experiences and have been powerfully influenced by the touch of that benign and powerful hand. Then in later years some of us have been fortunate enough to see or feel that touch in greater detail. I may here add that I never touched anybody else's feet outside of the family, and that too when very young."⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Indumati Kelkar, *Dr. Rammanohar Lohia: His Life and Philosophy* (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers and Distributors, 1996), 36–37.

⁷⁵ Rammanohar Lohia, "Anecdotes of Mahatma Gandhi," in *Marx, Gandhi, and Socialism*, ed. Mastram Kapoor, vol. 1, *Collected Works of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia* (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers and Distributors, 2011), 308.

This level of affection that Lohia had for Gandhi would remain throughout his career, even as he drifted away from Gandhi's ideology and movement, and away from the kind of hero-worship that Lohia believed to be inherently dangerous.⁷⁶

Thus, Gandhi had a profound influence upon Lohia, both as a man and intellectual. Even late in his life Lohia would still describe himself as an adherent of "heretical Gandhism."⁷⁷ And, in many ways, it seemed that Lohia considered this heretical Gandhism to more fully express the true message of the Mahatma than that of contemporary Gandhians, that he considered himself a more true inheritor of Gandhi's legacy than those who openly declared themselves to be Gandhians. Those Gandhians, whether members of the Indian National Congress now entrenched in the seats of power, or residents of the still-thriving ashram, had utterly failed the man they were devoted to. "No prophet was however so unlucky in his disciples" Lohia wrote of Gandhi.⁷⁸ Gandhism had split into two primary camps, Lohia believed, the priestly and governmental. Both of these, in their own way, had become a feeble version of the faith that had once led India to independence.

Governmental Gandhism had failed by the mere fact of its existence. In Lohia's view, Gandhism was an ideology and a method of political action devised to oppose power. As an ideology, it rested upon an almost anarchic vision of an India in which power was devolved to village republics.⁷⁹ As a method -- *satyagraha* (non-violent resistance) -- it existed entirely to challenge the apparatus of the state. In government, both of these ideals had been watered down

⁷⁶ Rammanohar Lohia, "Economics after Marx," in *Marx, Gandhi, and Socialism*, ed. Mastram Kapoor, vol. 1, Collected Works of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers and Distributors, 2011), 167.

⁷⁷ Rammanohar Lohia, "Preface to Marx, Gandhi, and Socialism," in *Marx, Gandhi, and Socialism*, ed. Mastram Kapoor, vol. 1, Collected Works of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers and Distributors, 2011), 162.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 131

⁷⁹ M.K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj* (Navajivan Publishing House, 1933), 55.

to near uselessness. “Gandhism as opposition was revolutionary in its own fashion,” Lohia contended, “as government, it is most staid, respectable, and colourlessly conservative.”⁸⁰ At least Marxism “is more revolutionary after it captures the government than when it is struggling for power; it must upset the older order of property, religion and other relationships. Not so with Gandhism [...] Gandhism in government is not at all upsetting; it lets everything live as of old, or almost everything.”⁸¹ This diminishing of Gandhi’s method became most clear to Lohia following riotous protests in Lucknow in 1953, which resulted in clashes between student protestors and state police. Lohia, while not explicitly endorsing the destruction of property wrought by the students, criticized those in power who used the language of nonviolence to condemn the students while at the same time failing to attend to the greater violence inflicted on a daily basis by the state. “Non-violence, like moral values, has acquired ceremonial usages and has, therefore, become a substitute for thought,” he wrote, continuing that “one could safely bet on the proposition that practically everybody who talks loudly of non-violence today is a supporter of the status quo and, therefore, an inciter to ultimate violence.” In a statement emblematic of his impassioned, polemical style, he concluded that “present-day Gandhism in all its manifestations is an attempt to use the word of Gandhi in order to kill his soul.”⁸²

“Priestly Gandhism,” exemplified by the Gandhian saint Vinoba Bhave, was no exception in Lohia’s mind. Bhave, the leader of a mid-1950s land-rights movement known as the *Bhoodan* Movement, was on the surface a radical committed to the eradication of poverty. In his speeches and essays, Bhave comes across as so vociferously opposed to state power, so committed to the ideals of communal living, as to be essentially an anarchist. Bhave and his

⁸⁰ Lohia, “Preface to Marx, Gandhi, and Socialism,” 130

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 131

⁸² Rammanohar Lohia, “Lucknow Revolt,” in *Will to Power and Other Writings* (Hyderabad, India: Navahind Publications, 1956), 40.

movement, which sought to alleviate poverty and class-conflict in rural areas by convincing wealthy landowners to donate portions of their estates to the poor and landless, achieved a great deal of renown, attracting attention from across the globe.⁸³ It was Bhave that pulled JP Narayan, Lohia's old friend and the former leader of the Socialist Party, away from electoral politics, forever fracturing the movement he and Lohia had built together.⁸⁴ When Bhave initially arrived on the scene in the early 1950s, Lohia cautiously viewed him as an ally.⁸⁵ By the 1960s, however, that goodwill had clearly dissipated. "Although [*Bhoodan*] has donned the outward clothes of austerity and appeared to be undesirous of power, it has striven not to stray too far away from seats of authority and the influence or money they confer," he wrote. He added the damning remark that "it has not struggled against caste or capitalism or the domination of a minority, language or high prices [...] all the surface glitter of priestly Gandhism cannot however long conceal its inner emptiness. Its significance to the world is nil."⁸⁶

This chapter emphasizes the divide between Lohia and Gandhism and seeks to understand why Lohia chose to label himself a heretical Gandhian. It focuses specifically on those aspects of Lohia's thought that were most clearly inspired by Gandhi, where, on the surface, there was the most common ground between Lohia and Bhave. That is, Lohia's belief that government should happen at the most local, most personal level; that India should be a nation governed by villages and farmers. In fact, the simplest expression of Lohia's socialism

⁸³ Benjamin Siegel, "The Kibbutz and the Ashram: Sarvodaya Agriculture, Israeli Aid, and the Global Imaginaries of Indian Development," *The American Historical Review* 125, no. 4 (October 21, 2020): 1175–1204; Taylor C. Sherman, "A Gandhian Answer to the Threat of Communism? Sarvodaya and Postcolonial Nationalism in India," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 53, no. 2 (April 1, 2016): 249–70.

⁸⁴ Daniel Kent Carrasco, "Jayaprakash Narayan and Lok Niti: Socialism Gandhism, and Political Cultures of Protest in XX Century India" (King's College London, 2016), 124–31.

⁸⁵ Rammanohar Lohia, "The Doctrinal Foundation of Socialism (1952)," in *Marx, Gandhi, and Socialism*, ed. Mastram Kapoor, vol. 1, Collected Works of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers and Distributors, 2011), 534.

⁸⁶ Lohia, "Preface to Marx, Gandhi, and Socialism," 162

might be that he favored the abolition of private property, but also believed that ownership of property by the state would be “disastrous both for bread and freedom.”⁸⁷ Instead, he called for property to be held by villages and by farmer’s co-operatives and called for a massive redistribution of land away from landowners and towards those who actually labored upon it. In a Socialist India, Lohia stated firmly, “land will belong to the tiller.”⁸⁸ This was, on the surface, right in line with Bhave and the entire Gandhian tradition of *Sarvodaya*. Bhave argued that *Sarvodaya*, translated as “the upliftment of all,” meant “freedom from government; it implies decentralization of power.”⁸⁹ He thus shared Lohia’s belief that power should be devolved from the centre to the village, writing that “every village in India must be a nation in miniature.”⁹⁰ When it came to redistribution of land, Bhave was perhaps even more radical than Lohia. “Possession of land is as much a sin as theft,” he wrote, “that is why land should be owned by the village.”⁹¹ When what Bhave labelled *Gramdan*, or “villagisation,” came to pass, when individual ownership of land was abolished and all land held in common by the people of the village, then “people of an entire village would constitute themselves into a family. Air, water and land -- which are all gifts of God to man -- would be shared by all. The villagers would take to co-operative endeavour. A villager will begin to think, ‘I shall work not for myself but for the society. I shall care not only for myself but for the whole village community.’”⁹²

⁸⁷ Lohia, “The Doctrinal Foundation of Socialism,” 498

⁸⁸ Rammanohar Lohia, “Statement of Policy,” in *Marx, Gandhi, and Socialism*, ed. Mastram Kapoor, vol. 1, Collected Works of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers and Distributors, 2011), 573.

⁸⁹ Vinoba Bhave, “People’s Power,” in *The Intimate and the Ultimate*, ed. Satish Kumar (England: Element Books, 1986), 37.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 54

⁹¹ Vinoba Bhave, “Gramdan: Why and How?,” in *Vinoba Bhave*, ed. Verinder Grover, vol. 27, Political Thinkers of Modern India (New Delhi: Deep and Deep Publications, 1995), 377.

⁹² Vinoba Bhave, “Bhoodan and Gramdan,” in *Vinoba Bhave*, ed. Verinder Grover, vol. 27, Political Thinkers of Modern India (New Delhi: Deep and Deep Publications, 1995), 339.

Why then, despite this seeming unity of purpose, did Lohia come to view Bhave and his movement with such disdain? Despite their shared commitment to “villagisation” there was a profound difference between Lohia and Bhave in what the village symbolized. To Bhave, as to Gandhi, the village was a fundamentally anti-modern space. Their commitment to the village arose out of a desire to reconstitute a pre-modern, pre-colonial India. Gandhi was famously opposed to the use of practically all technology except the most ancient of tools, such as the wheel and the hoe. Bhave, a brahmin trained in sanskrit, centered his philosophy around ancient Hindu texts such as the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*. This led to what Lohia believed to be dangerously regressive attitudes towards both caste and gender, and an over-romanticization of ancient India and village life more broadly. Indeed, while Bhave’s commitment to village decentralization was radically egalitarian, it was also radically conservative.⁹³

Lohia, on the other hand, despite his investment in the village as being the site upon which a postcolonial India would be built, did not share a Gandhian faith in Indian antiquity. In fact, his writings of ancient Indian history, and on Indian villages, often seem far more in line with the most incisive and important critique of Gandhian thought, the Dalit leader and intellectual B.R. Ambedkar. While Gandhians viewed colonialism and modernity as being the primary origins of violence and oppression in India, Ambedkar attributed this violence to Indian antiquity and to the religion of Hinduism which produced the caste system. Lohia, true to his usual dialectical style of thinking, seems to have found a productive tension between these two seemingly incompatible views. He argued that the current state of Indian society was a product both of an oppressive religious history and of the more recent introduction of capitalism. “Five

⁹³ The concept of Gandhism’s “Radical Conservatism” is borrowed from Aishwary Kumar, *Radical Equality: Ambedkar, Gandhi, and the Risk of Democracy*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2015).

thousand years of Indian history and more have now matured to a climax and the fate of world capitalism is also twined with it. On the one hand are the forces of working men, peasants on the field and labourers in the factories and whole masses of working middle classes [...] and on the other, are feudal and capitalist classes assisted by anachronistic elements of an old civilization,” he wrote in 1956, adding that “the system of castes, which has made private beggary more honourable than manual work, and the theory of Karma, which seeks deliverance from new action although it is well aware that the accumulation of past deeds has to be worked out, have both erected a civilization in which indolence of action is far easier to attain than the severe discipline of contemplation. A bureaucratic capitalism has further heightened the disease.”⁹⁴

Thus, Lohia’s near-Ambedkarian critique of caste made him incapable of fully subscribing to a worldview which idealized Indian antiquity. Rather, I will argue that while Bhave and the Gandhian tradition viewed villagisation as a means to reconstitute Indian antiquity, Lohia sought to transform the village, and to have the village transform India, and then the world. This desire for transformation -- for creation -- led Lohia to develop his most singular intellectual contribution, the idea of the “small-unit machine.” Rather than opposing technology altogether, as Gandhi and Bhave did, Lohia would argue that it was the way that capitalist and communist countries utilized technology that created the alienating and dehumanizing effects the Gandhians bemoaned. He believed that India could imagine and create new machines, new tools that could put the power of technology into the hands of farmers, could empower villages and therefore India itself. Through these machines, and the farmers that would use them, India could

⁹⁴ Rammanohar Lohia, “Statement of Policy,” 648; Rammanohar Lohia, “A New Chapter (1955),” in *Marx, Gandhi, and Socialism*, vol. 1, Collected Works of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers and Distributors, 2011), 615.

create its new civilization. Thus, he envisioned the village not as the last mainstay of a long-gone ancient past, but as the site upon which an alternative modernity would be built.

Gandhian Villagisation Theory

Before the divide between Lohia and Bhave can be understood, they must first be situated within the broader arc of Gandhian theory and their views contextualized within the intellectual milieu of the 1950s. To Americans in the 21st century, the concept of abolishing private property and devolving all power into the hands of villages and farmers might seem impossibly radical.

However, while Bhave and Lohia were both exceptional in their commitment to the eradication of class and poverty, their ideas were not necessarily outside of the mainstream intellectually. In fact, when Bhave first burst onto the scene in 1951, he was in many ways fulfilling a needed role within the political ecosystem.

Before *Bhoodan*, Bhave was a relatively obscure figure, and little is known about his origins outside the hagiographic tales told about him but friends and collaborators such as JP Narayan. Mostly, we know that Bhave was a brahmin who was educated in Sanskrit and was primarily interested in religion and spirituality more so than politics. While he participated in the nationalist movement, and was even a dedicated follower and close friend of Gandhi, following Indian independence Bhave retired to his ashram and mostly disappeared from the spotlight.⁹⁵ Indeed, JP, in his introduction to Bhave's book *Talk on the Gita*, once wrote that "Vinoba is not a politician, nore a social reformer or a revolutionary. He is first and last a man of God." Thus, "nothing was more natural," than that Gandhi's mission "should have devolved upon him."⁹⁶

Bhave took up his master's mantle in 1951, when he quite literally walked in the troubled state of Hyderabad. At the time, Hyderabad seemed to be on the verge of communist revolution.

⁹⁵ Sherman, "A Gandhian Answer to the Threat of Communism," 256-257

⁹⁶ Vinoba Bhave, *Talks on the Gita* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 7–8.

Economic inequality in rural areas had led to poor peasants being kicked off their farms as landlords hoarded wealth, political power, and property. In the 1940s, peasants revolted – seizing land from wealthier landlords, often the very same properties they had been evicted from. While this movement was not explicitly communist, communist leaders in India were eager to exploit it, and many of the movement’s leaders were “avowed communists.” This, together with the peasant-driven success of Maoism in China, gave political leaders in India ample reason to fear that India might soon follow China’s lead. Yet, for the most part, both the government of Hyderabad and Nehru’s government were incapable of stemming the tide.⁹⁷ Bhave, after just a short time spent assessing the situation, was quickly able to stem the unrest. He convinced wealthy landholders to donate portions of their land to poorer members of the community; this initial move was so successful that Bhave soon began travelling across India, leading both a spiritual and political movement to convince the elite to donate land, labor, and sometimes entire villages to the community.^{98 99}

Bhave was not just interested in finding a more peaceful method of redistributing land than Communism. He was also strongly opposed to the top-down statism of Nehru, and to government more broadly. Even when the Government enacted policies and programs he believed in, Bhave warned against reliance upon it. “That is why my voice is raised in opposition to good government,” he wrote, “bad government has been condemned by everyone [...] But what seems to me to be wrong is that we should allow ourselves to be governed at all, even by a good government.”¹⁰⁰ However, despite this critique of the Indian state, Bhave had a far closer

⁹⁷ Sherman, “A Gandhian Answer to the Threat of Communism?,” 252–56.

⁹⁸ Sherman, 257; Sherman, “‘A New Type of Revolution’: Socialist Thought in India, 1940s–1960s: *Postcolonial Studies*: Vol 21, No 4,” 8.

⁹⁹ Sherman, “A Gandhian Answer to the Threat of Communism,” Taylor C. Sherman, “‘A New Type of Revolution’: Socialist Thought in India, 1940s–1960s,” *Postcolonial Studies* 21, no. 4 (n.d.): 8.

¹⁰⁰ Bhave, “People’s Power,” 39

relationship with the Prime Minister than might be assumed, and his activism was far more beneficial to the state than he might have intended. This is most evident from the simple fact that by quieting discontent in the countryside and potentially preventing a communist revolt, Bhave helped stabilize Nehru's position during the fragile early years of independence. But Bhave's assistance to Nehru was more than incidental. In 1960, Nehru enlisted Bhave's help in rallying popular support for the Prime Minister during negotiations with Chinese premier Chou En-Lai following a series of border conflicts between the two nations.¹⁰¹ It was this incident in particular that seemed to enrage Lohia, as he stated that "Priestly Gandhism has spoken intermittently of disarmament, even unilateral disarmament, while it has taken all the money it needed and more and other resources it needed and more and other resources from the counterpart in government, which maintained and increased the armed forces."¹⁰²

Even beyond Bhave's direct assistance to Nehru's regime, Bhave's overall project and philosophy was less counter to that of Nehru than widely believed. In the popular imagination, Nehru stands as the ultimate modernizer, intent on pulling India dragging and screaming into the twentieth century. There is certainly a great deal of truth to this; Nehru's administration pursued massive infrastructure projects and aggressively concentrated power in New Delhi. Yet, recent scholarship has revealed that at the same time as they pursued these aims, Nehru and his advisors also made efforts to stay true to the vision of Gandhi that had led them to power. In the late 1950s Nehru put in place the Panchayat Raj system, which sought to establish village councils that could provide villages a degree of autonomy and self-governance.¹⁰³ He also brought in

¹⁰¹ Ramachandra Guha, *India after Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy* (London: Macmillan, 2007), 314.

¹⁰² Lohia, "Preface to Marx, Gandhi, and Socialism," 161

¹⁰³ C. A. Bayly, "The Ends of Liberalism and the Political Thought of Nehru's India," *Modern Intellectual History* 12, no. 3 (November 2015): 625–26.

international aid, particularly from America, which sought to experiment with developing just the sort of communal, village-based societies envisioned by Gandhian thinkers.¹⁰⁴ As Daniel Immerwahr has argued, Nehru did not view his modernizing projects to be contradictory to community-oriented politics. As Immerwahr has stated, “Gandhism, and alternatives to modernization did not stand on the other side of an unbridgeable epistemological divide from high modernism. Indeed, a principal argument of this book is that the urge to modernize and the quest for community shared space, existing alongside or even within each other.”¹⁰⁵ Thus, while Bhave certainly opposed Nehru’s large-scale developmental projects, Bhave’s desire to have India be governed at the most local level, to empower farmers, to eradicate rural poverty, did not pose a threat to Nehru’s ideological agenda; in many ways, it furthered it. And, due to Bhave and JP’s disdain for electoral politics, they did not pose a threat to Nehru’s hold over the Indian government. Due to lacking a true adversarial position to the government, Bhave was able to enjoy a great deal of success and international renown, with one international aid project from Israel in particular choosing to work with his ashram.¹⁰⁶

Yet, these efforts, whether Nehru’s Panchayat program, aid projects from America, or Bhave’s *Bhoodan*, all ran into the same challenges, and, arguably, failed for the same reasons. While they all sought to alleviate poverty and empower farmers, none addressed one of the greatest causes of inequality -- perhaps even the root of inequality -- in rural India. That is, the caste system. These programs all relied upon implementation by local leaders -- usually men of a high caste -- and as a result saw the mass amounts of the resources provided be hoarded by those

¹⁰⁴ Daniel Immerwahr, *Thinking Small: The United States and the Lure of Community Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 77–79; Taylor C. Sherman, “From ‘Grow More Food’ to ‘Miss a Meal’: Hunger, Development and the Limits of Post-Colonial Nationalism in India, 1947-1957,” *South Asia* 36, no. 4 (2013): 571–88.

¹⁰⁵ Immerwahr, 71

¹⁰⁶ Benjamin Siegel, “The Kibbutz and the Ashram,” 1175

already in positions of power.¹⁰⁷ Meanwhile, the land donated to *Bhoodan* often proved to be far more symbolic than actually effective in alleviating landlessness or poverty. Most of the land was never actually distributed to the poor, and the land that was distributed was the worst slivers of landowners estates -- rocky, sandy, and unfit for cultivation.¹⁰⁸ These failures led to one of Lohia's harshest condemnations of Bhave, as he stated that "Euro-Americans have been either in too much of a hurry and corrupted by India government's money or influence to evaluate priestly Gandhism properly or overawed so much by Mahatma Gandhi as to have lost their critical faculty towards his successors. They have failed to apply the one test they should have to priestly Gandhism; how far is it bearing witness to its faith."¹⁰⁹

The failures of these efforts were not just failures of logistics or planning, they were a natural result of the regressive nature of this kind of anti-modern thinking. In his book *Radical Equality: Gandhi, Ambedkar, and the Risk of Democracy* Aishwary Kumar argues that Gandhi's attempt attitude towards caste represented a sort of "radical conservatism," whereby a certain kind of inequality was accepted and even defended. Gandhi would write admiringly of the rule of India's mythical king Rama, wherein all creatures were protected. Yet, within this, Kumar draws out how while all were equally protected, this vision of a just society rests upon a stark inequality, where all, from Rama's wife Sita, to the dogs within the kingdom, lived within their unequal role in society with a chaste humility.¹¹⁰ Bhave would take this radical conservatism farther than Gandhi ever did. Gandhi, while aggressively against the use of modern technology,

¹⁰⁷ Immerwahr, 87

¹⁰⁸ Guha, 216

¹⁰⁹ Lohia, "Preface to Marx, Gandhi, and Socialism," 162

¹¹⁰ Kumar, *Radical Equality*, 174-175

was always somewhat vague about what exactly he hoped India would look like following independence, the degree to which he hoped to reconstitute Indian antiquity.

Bhave was not. His radical anti-modern politics are perhaps most apparent in an essay entitled “Education or Manipulation.” Despite being highly educated and well-read himself, Bhave in some ways viewed education – or at least, twentieth century models of education, as both useless and harmful. “We consider medicine bottles to be the sign of a sick body; we ought to consider books, whether secular or religious, as the sign of a sick mind!” he wrote.¹¹¹ While some literary education could be valuable, Bhave believed that too many people dedicated their whole lives to study, without cultivating themselves spiritually and without engaging in necessary physical labor.¹¹² Education had become a means of discipline and punishment, exemplified best by authoritarian examinations.¹¹³ Particularly worrisome, education was government-controlled; something that ancient Indians had carefully avoided. “We in India used to hold to the principle that education should be completely free from state control. Kings exercised no authority over the gurus [...] The consequence was that Sanskrit literature achieved a degree of freedom of thought such as can be seen nowhere else.”¹¹⁴ True education, he thought, happened over the course of a lifetime, and could only happen when teacher and student lived in a commune together engaged in the work of growing food, making cloth, and cleaning.¹¹⁵ Ideally, this education should take place entirely in the village, rather than in some far-off university. “When all the business of life from birth to death is transacted in villages, why should not the whole learning of life be available also in villages?” He wondered, “my village is not a

¹¹¹ Vinoba Bhave, “Education or Manipulation,” in *The Intimate and the Ultimate*, ed. Satish Kumar (England: Element Books, 1986), 19.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 18

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 24-26

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 31-32

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 27

fragment, it is an integral whole. My plan is for a complete and integrated village community where every aspect of life is complete.”¹¹⁶ This could be accomplished only by following the example of India’s ancient masters. Bhave advocated for a “university in every village,” by which he meant that India should revive the ancient tradition of the wandering holy man who travelled from village to village, teaching as he went.¹¹⁷ This vision of a “wandering holy man” is, unmistakably, a reference to the idealized image of Brahmins found in Indian literature.

This defense of and romanticization of caste is made entirely explicit in his essay “People’s Power,” in which Bhave presents a common argument made by those seeking to defend caste: that the caste system was a harmonious system designed to give each member of society a function and purpose. “The village *panchayats* which we once had in India were a great boon,” he wrote, “The food production of the village, its education, its defence, and all other important affairs were handled by the *panchayat*. In the *panchayat* all five castes united to manage their affairs; it was a common organisation for all. All the land belonged to the *panchayat* and a portion was given to every farmer for cultivation [...] Thus the whole village lived like a family and the *panchayat* managed its affairs. That was real self-government.”¹¹⁸ This unwillingness to confront the historic brutality of the caste system, this effort to nurture nostalgia for it, explains the mindset of a great many of those who participated in villagisation efforts in the 1950s, and thus explains the failures of those very efforts.

Further, Bhave’s regressivism was not limited to issues of caste. Gender, too, was a topic on which he betrayed a powerful conservative impulse. Taylor C. Sherman has noted that the image of a *jeevandani* -- the term Bhave used for those who committed themselves entirely to his

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 33-34

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 34

¹¹⁸ Bhave, “People’s Power,” *The Intimate and the Ultimate*, 57-58

movement -- was an entirely masculine ideal. It rested upon the ideal of renunciation and chastity, of a man leaving his family behind to commit himself to the cause, effectively implying that women could not participate in *Bhoodan*.¹¹⁹ Lohia himself criticized Bhave's stances on gender and caste, writing in one essay that "Shri Vinoba Bhave has been tempted to corrupt his estimable Bhoodan Movement with unholy notions on birth-control and on the caste system,"¹²⁰

Thus, despite Bhave's radical commitment to the abolition of property and to the eradication of poverty, his politics belied a deeply conservative bent within his anti-modern defense of the ancient Indian village as utopia. Lohia, deeply committed to both feminism and anti-casteism, would find this vision unacceptable. Why then, was he still committed to the ideal of villagisation, of government at the most local level? And how did his theory differ from that of the Gandhians? How was his theory of villagisation the centerpiece of a proposed alternative modernity, rather than a symbol of a parochial anti-modernity? To answer these questions, we must briefly turn to Ambedkar, whose blistering critiques of the Indian village echo in Lohia's own thought, but whose solutions Lohia saw as shortsighted.

Ambedkar and the Village

Gandhian theory encountered no greater or insightful critic than B.R. Ambedkar, who, at around the same time as Lohia was struggling to hold his party together following defections to Bhave's movement, was beginning his highly publicized conversion to Buddhism, convinced that there was no path for Dalit liberation within Hinduism. His philosophy was centered around an almost Marxian critique of the entirety of Indian history, arguing that the brutality of the caste system

¹¹⁹ Sherman, "A New Type of Revolution," 8

¹²⁰ Rammanohar Lohia, "The Two Segregations of Caste and Sex," in *Will to Power and Other Writings* (Hyderabad, India: Navahind Publications, 1956), 108.

was not a product of British colonialism, but that it was instead ingrained within the very essence of Hinduism, from the moment the vedas were written, to the composition of the *Mahabharata*, to the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi.¹²¹ Within Ambedkar's critique was an analysis of the politics of space, one that aggressively challenged popular Gandhian theories about the value of communal village life. Ambedkar questioned whether or not Dalits could be said to belong to the same community as caste Hindus, arguing that just because these groups all lived in the same land did not mean that they shared any common cause or identity with each other. "Men do not become a society by living in physical proximity, any more than a man ceases to be a member of his society by living so many miles away from other men," he wrote in his iconic and iconoclastic pamphlet *Annihilation of Caste*.¹²² Such an argument could strike a fatal blow to villagisation theory, as it relied upon the idea that small communities did a better job of fostering social relationships, mutual responsibility, and respect.

And there was much truth to Ambedkar's argument. Raised in a village himself, Ambedkar experienced firsthand the brutality of caste discrimination in villages, where Dalits were segregated to the worst parts of the community and barred from entering certain public spaces, such as temples. "Every Hindu village has a ghetto," he wrote, "The Hindus live in the village and the Untouchables in the ghetto."¹²³ This segregation and discrimination was not an incidental aspect of culture, but a result of the very nature of village life, the very thing that attracted Gandhians to villagisation -- that is, its intimacy. In a village, where everybody was aware of everybody else's family history, it was impossible for Dalits to erase their caste history,

¹²¹ Aishwary Kumar, "Ambedkar's Inheritances," *Modern Intellectual History* 7, no. 2 (August 2010): 400.

¹²² B.R. Ambedkar, "Annihilation of Caste," in *Ambedkar: An Overview* (New Delhi: Rupa Publications, 2018), 346.

¹²³ B.R. Ambedkar, quoted in Jesús Francisco Cháirez-Garza, "Touching Space: Ambedkar on the Spatial Features of Untouchability," *Contemporary South Asia* 22, no. 1 (January 2, 2014): 6.

for them to no longer be seen as “untouchable” by caste Hindus. “So long as the village provides an easy method of marking out and identifying the Untouchables, the Untouchable has no escape from Untouchability” he argued.¹²⁴

Somewhat surprisingly for a man inculcated within the Gandhian tradition, whose politics were so reliant upon villagisation theory, Lohia seems to have agreed with, or at least been influenced by, Ambedkar’s views on Indian villages. In the months leading up Ambedkar’s untimely death in 1956, Lohia had exchanged letters with him in an attempt to recruit him into the Socialist Party. In one letter, in which Lohia invites Ambedkar to speak at a Socialist conference, his respect for the man is clear. “I only wish to emphasise the utter intellectual collapse that has overtaken our country,” he writes, “and how necessary it is for a man like you to speak unreservedly.”¹²⁵ I do not believe that these attempts to draw Ambedkar into the Socialist orbit were merely cynical attempts by Lohia to increase Dalit support for the Socialist Party. Rather, Lohia seems to have felt a genuine shared purpose between him and Ambedkar, particularly on issues of caste. Indeed, even when Ambedkar is not directly referenced, his influence shines through in Lohia’s writings on caste and on the village.

Despite seeing a future for India within the village, Lohia’s writings bear little of the Bhave or Gandhi-like romanticization of the village as it currently was or had once been. He makes this explicit in an essay entitled “People, Space, and Struggle,” written in 1960, just around the time when Lohia became increasingly vociferous in his critiques of “priestly Gandhism.” In the essay, Lohia focuses primarily on India’s increasing population, on the “jostling and elbowing,” the suffocating lack of space that was increasingly defining social

¹²⁴ Ibid., 7

¹²⁵ Rammanohar Lohia, “Correspondence with Dr. Ambedkar,” ed. Mastram Kapoor, vol. 2, *Collected Works of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia* (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers and Distributors, 2011), 229.

relations.¹²⁶ “The village is rarely what poetry or romance has conceived it to be,” Lohia states. “It is at least in India the filthiest place on earth, filthy of body, and only a little bit less filthy of mind.” In an Ambedkarian turn, he focuses his attention on the segregated layout of villages in particular. “Winding little lanes connect one house with another, particularly in the quarters of the lower castes, and there is absolutely no privacy of living. The lowest caste live on the lowest levels of village lands and their houses or at least their lanes are mud and slush.” As far as social dynamics within the village, the lives of those of lower caste are “a continuing routine of humiliation and insult. In their dealings with better placed or higher caste farmers, who employ them or share their crops, and policeman, they are often abused, sometimes beaten up, held in prison for offences which they have not committed, ousted from their hovels through denial of lavatory sites, deprived of any kind of education or medicine and otherwise made to live like animals.”¹²⁷ This reference to “living like animals” also echoes Ambedkar’s own writing on the subject, who believed that a return to the village would be a “return to nature, to animal life.”¹²⁸ In a particularly dramatic phrase, Lohia states: “the village typifies India, this half-alive carrion and swarms of flies feeding on its festering sores.”¹²⁹

It is also clear that Lohia did not view this state of things in rural India to be the result of modernization or of colonialism, at least not entirely. He shared Ambedkar’s core belief in the violence inherent in Indian antiquity. In one 1953 essay, Lohia remarked that the caste system was the result of “a ten-thousand year old tradition of cultural supremacy.”¹³⁰ In another, he

¹²⁶ Rammanohar Lohia, “People, Space and Struggles,” ed. Mastram Kapoor, vol. 6, *Collected Works of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia* (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers and Distributors, 2011), 259.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 261

¹²⁸ Chairez-Garza, 5

¹²⁹ Lohia, “People, Space and Struggles,” 262

¹³⁰ Rammanohar Lohia, “Class Organisations - Instruments to Abolish Caste,” in *Will to Power and Other Writings* (Hyderabad, India: Navahind Publications, 1956), 113.

condemned Indian culture almost in its entirety, writing that “The Indian people are the saddest on earth [...] Religion, politics, business, and publicity are all conspiring to preserve the slime that goes by the name of culture.”¹³¹ These types of statements are remarkable coming from a man who had once called himself a Gandhian. In fact, they challenged the very foundational assumption of Gandhian theory -- that is, the innate greatness of Indian civilization. In *Hind Swaraj*, Ghandism’s founding document, Gandhi asserted that of all the civilizations in world history, India’s was the greatest, and it was the greatest precisely because so much of its ancient culture had survived into the present day. “We have managed with the same kind of plow as existed thousands of years ago,” he wrote,

“We have retained the same kind of cottages that we had in former times and our indigenous education remains the same as before. We have had no system of life-corroding competition. Each followed his own occupation or trade and charged a regulation wage. It was not that we did not know how to invent machinery, but our forefathers knew that if we set our hearts after such things, we would become slaves and lose our moral fibre. They, therefore, after due deliberation decided that we should only do what we could with our hands and feet. They further reasoned that large cities were a snare and a useless encumbrance and that people would not be happy in them, that there would be gangs of thieves and robbers, prostitution and vice flourishing in them and that poor men would be robbed by rich men. They were, therefore, satisfied with small villages.”¹³²

This statement makes clear the radical conservatism at the heart of Gandhism, of the extreme anti-modern impulse that propelled the movement forward. Indeed, while Gandhi evolved -- hesitantly and, it must be said, incompletely -- on issues of caste in the years after *Hind Swaraj* was published, his reference to all people not straying from their occupation or trade makes clear

¹³¹ Lohia, “The Two Segregations of Caste and Sex,” 101-109

¹³² Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, 54-55

that Bhave's explicit defense of the caste system was by no means outside the parameters of Gandhian thought.

Why was it then that, in spite of these fundamental disagreements with Gandhian theory, Lohia could not leave the Gandhian dream of villagisation behind? Here, we must turn to his critique of Ambedkar. While Lohia shared Ambedkar's understanding of village life, and his assessment of the violence of Indian antiquity, he believed that Ambedkar's proposed cure was no better than the disease. Lohia believed that Ambedkar and his followers, in their attempt to free themselves from the "slime" of Indian culture, made a mistake in embracing Western culture, in affecting what Lohia dubbed a "surface modernisation." "The leadership wears woollens and tie in the summer," he wrote, adding that it has "acquired its positions precisely by virtue of its modernisation, of its ability with the English speech or the European dress. It does not wish to discard the sources of its distinction, no matter how injurious they may be to the mass of its kinfolk."¹³³ In a letter to a friend, Lohia once wrote that Ambedkar's greatest fault was that he was too influenced by the intellectual traditions of Western Europe and North America, saying that "with Dr. Ambedkar, the greatest difficulty has always been his ideological affiliation with the Atlantic camp."¹³⁴ Indeed, Ambedkar, in his desire to annihilate the injustice embedded in Indian culture, to eradicate the dystopian villages that he viewed as eternal traps for the lower castes, embraced the greatest symbol of twentieth century, Western, liberal modernity - the city. He urged Dalits to abandon villages and move to cities, which to Ambedkar, following in the tradition of American philosopher John Dewey, represented the possibility of a society in which people did not leave isolated lives, where social relations were defined by interaction and

¹³³ Lohia, "People, Space and Struggles," 270

¹³⁴ "Lohia, "Correspondence with Dr. Ambedkar," 230

exchange. Counter to the inherent stillness of the vision of a Bhave or Gandhi, where in the villages time seemed to sit still, where people were born and lived in the same community in which their ancestors had, Ambedkar's city represented continuous motion of people and ideas. Cities, he believed, could "nurture forgetfulness." Dalits could leave the violent heritage of their caste status behind, and remake themselves.¹³⁵

As compelling as this argument by Ambedkar was, it is also clear why this vision would not appeal to Lohia. As discussed in Chapter 1, an essential aspect of Lohia's postcolonialism was the belief that India could not free itself by embracing the trappings of Western modernity. He believed it was essential that India created itself; that it used Indian ideas and concepts to tear off the shackles of European hegemony. Here, then, Lohia had to find a way to put in constructive conversation the seemingly polar philosophies of Ambedkar, Gandhi, and Marx, had to balance two seemingly contradictory impulses: the first, a passionate belief that there was an abiding inequality at the heart of Indian society and culture; the second, a belief that to seek to participate in the vision of Western Modernity was to accept an altogether different kind of domination.

Here, let us return to Lohia's statement that the "village typifies India." It seems that, in spite of everything that the village represented, despite the reality of everyday violence within the village, Lohia could not leave the Gandhian dream behind precisely because, in all its ugliness, the village *typified India*. It was inherently, essentially Indian. Therefore, it was the site upon which a postcolonial India had to be built. But, this could not be, as it was for Bhave and Gandhi, a *return*, an attempt to rescue an India that had never truly existed. It had to instead be

¹³⁵ Chairez-Garza, 10-11

an attempt to move into the future, to create an India that *could have been*. In short, he believed that India had to do what Gandhi claimed it could have done those many thousands years ago; it had to build machines.

The Small-Unit Machine and Alternative Modernity

In his book *Everyday Technologies*, the historian David Arnold contrasts two wildly different visions for an utopian Indian future that both proved influential in the early twentieth century. The first is the vision presented by Gandhi in *Hind Swaraj*, in which India is liberated from the oppressive forces of modernity and lives without technology -- dystopia, in Gandhi's view, is one created by modern machines. The second is that of Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, presented in her 1905 science-fiction short story "Sultana's Dream." In this story, Hossain imagines a feminist utopia called "Ladyland," in which technology has been used to master the elements and create a bountiful, peaceful, and prosperous society. Here, technology is imagined as a liberating force, one that leads to female emancipation and the general welfare of the community.¹³⁶ Through this, Arnold demonstrates that while Gandhi might have been the dominant intellectual force of the first half of India's twentieth century, technology was often imagined as far more than the oppressive, colonial force he maintained it to be.

Lohia's critiques of modernity, his fear of European "monster machines" that stripped people of their identities and produced engorged states and corporations can make him appear to be almost a Luddite in the Gandhian mold. However, his attitudes towards technology were far more nuanced and creative than this, in many ways falling far more in line with Hossain's

¹³⁶ David Arnold, *Everyday Technology: Machines and the Making of India's Modernity* (University of Chicago Press, 2013), 16–18; Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, "Sultana's Dream.," University of Pennsylvania Digital Library, accessed April 25, 2021, <https://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/sultana/dream/dream.html>.

attitudes than Gandhi's. While he was opposed to monster machines, and the ideological systems that produced these machines, he did not reject the idea machinery or development. The issue was not with machines, but instead with the kinds of machines European civilization favored. As he put it, "this is no rejection of the machine, but it is a rejection of the situation in which the heavy machine and its counterpart, the Leviathan State, predominate."¹³⁷ Indeed, he believed that machines were absolutely necessary to meet the challenges of a twentieth century India and its ever growing population. In a critique of Nehruvian campaigns to compel farmers to grow more food, Lohia wrote that "slogans such as 'produce or perish,' 'work hard' are empty nothings, for, human labour, unassisted by machines, has no place in the modern world and cannot produce wealth."¹³⁸ What was needed, he believed, was what he would call the "small-unit machine," a type of technology that would empower farmers to develop their own communities on their own terms. "The basic problem is not to cut down the use of mechanical or electrical power," he wrote, "but to make it available for production in the same small units in the manner it is today available for consumption in prosperous economies as light, ventilation, or heating [...] This will require almost a new beginning science, a kind of flexible small-unit technics."¹³⁹

There was perhaps no idea more dear to Lohia's heart than this. Across all the periods of his career, all his essays and speeches, perhaps few topics are raised with such regularity than the necessity of their creation. Despite the immense emphasis Lohia places upon it, however, it can be hard to grasp what exactly Lohia meant by the term "small-unit machine," in large part because, in his mind, they had yet to be invented. He would occasionally give examples of the type of machine he was envisioning -- for example, the American jeep, which was a "kind of

¹³⁷ Lohia, "The Doctrinal Foundation of Socialism," 499.

¹³⁸ Lohia, "Statement of Policy," 575-576

¹³⁹ Lohia, "Economics after Marx," 217

maid-of-all-work; it can plough the fields, furnish power for milking, in addition to being an auto” as well as “the power-loom, the pumping-set, crushing and grinding mills, and the like.”¹⁴⁰

The commonality between these machines are clear; each is relatively easy to use and could be kept and operated by a single family, thus allowing small-scale farmers to be more productive and to enrich themselves and their communities.

However, Lohia seemed to be less interested in using even these machines, and instead in the prospect of India designing its own technology entirely. “The small-unit machine run by electricity or oil is the answer. Only a few such machines exist; many more will have to be invented,” he wrote, “Technology, which the modern age has kept ever changing, will have to make a revolutionary break with the present. The problem will not be solved by going back to earlier machines discarded by modern civilization, but by inventing new ones with a definite principle and aim.”¹⁴¹ This emphasis on invention, on creation, already demonstrates the degree to which his vision departed from that of Gandhism, and, in stark contrast to Bhave’s views on education, Lohia called for the establishment of technical and polytechnic institutes at which the “normal person” would go after secondary instruction in order to be trained in the science of agriculture and machines.¹⁴² There is a bit of science fiction in Lohia’s formulation here -- in his writings, small-unit machines are essentially speculative technology. Their power lies mostly in the way Lohia uses the potential of their creation to imagine a future radically different, more

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 235 and “Statement of Policy,” 576

¹⁴¹ Lohia, “The Doctrinal Foundation of Socialism,” 497

¹⁴² Rammanohar Lohia, “A New Integration (1952),” in *Marx, Gandhi, and Socialism*, ed. Mastram Kapoor, vol. 1, Collected Works of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers and Distributors, 2011), 555.

just and equal, than the present. “Not until techniques have become dynamic and a spirit of inventiveness has seized the land, is there a chance of revitalizing the people,” he wrote.¹⁴³

Why was it that Lohia felt it essential that Indians invent their own machinery, separate from that of Western technology? As usual, for Lohia this was fundamentally a question of power -- small-unit machines represented a chance to empower India’s mass population of peasants to create their own future; to harness the power of electricity to create a new civilization.

“The peasant has no doubt often enough in history revolted and has through his revolts broadened the frontiers of freedom. But these have been in the nature of volcanic eruptions, long periods of quiescence interrupted by sudden and short activity. The peasantry take no part in day by day politics. Living in villages and close to nature and soil and beasts, away from cities where clamorous voices make themselves heard every day, the peasantry are probably the great unchanging mass through whom a civilization preserves itself. But of creating a new civilization they do little except to give a few massive strokes, and in building it up bit by bit and day by day, they take not share. I have wondered whether it would be possible for the peasant to influence the daily course of events, in brief, to become the builder of a new civilization, a cobuilder with others and also what this would look like.”¹⁴⁴

This passage captures Lohia’s most fundamental desire, the heart of his philosophy and political program. In his historiography, the power of peasants throughout history was expressed through the singular, destructive act of rebellion.¹⁴⁵ Besides that, their role in history was to remain unchanging -- to preserve Indian civilization. In Gandhism, this was the value peasants held; the unchanging quality of the peasantry was its fundamental virtue. To Lohia the heretic, while it might have been true that peasants were a static presence in history, this was not a virtue.

¹⁴³ Rammanohar Lohia, “The Farmer in India (1950),” ed. Mastram Kapoor, vol. 7, *Collected Works of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia* (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers and Distributors, 2011), 20.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁴⁵ Lohia’s attitude here fits squarely within generally accepted colonial historiographies at the time, see Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford, 1983), 1-4.

Instead, he desired to see a vital and active peasantry, to have them move from a static -- and at times destructive -- force, to a creative force. It was through the small-unit machine that he believed this would be made possible, as it was the small-unit machine that would allow the peasantry to participate equally in the new, alternative modernity he hoped postcolonial India would create.

That was what the small-unit machine was -- his attempt to have India create its own machinery was an attempt to have India imagine and create its own modernity, for the modernity of the Western world had left India behind. "The old population of Asia cannot duplicate the unique historical industrial age of Europe and America," he wrote. "Even assuming that Asian populations may come up to present European standards after a great deal of stinting and massacres through famine and otherwise, the long time required for this process would meanwhile have caused a further advance of a considerable number of European and American economies. The industrial inequality among nations would thus remain."¹⁴⁶ It was impossible for India, and other formerly colonized nations, to duplicate the industrial revolution -- the conditions that made modernity possible -- because it was impossible for them to duplicate colonialism. "The west evolved its technique and machinery side by side with the annexations of three-fourths of the world as its village," he wrote. "Large scale industry and techniques were possible in imperial centuries. I do not think that the effort can be repeated, even apart from the question of its desirability."¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Rammanohar Lohia, "Materiality and Spirituality," in *Marx, Gandhi and Socialism*, ed. Mastram Kapoor, vol. 1, Collected Works of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers and Distributors, 2011), 372–73.

¹⁴⁷ Lohia, "The Farmer in India," 22

This is what Lohia meant by saying small-unit machines represented a “revolutionary break with the present.” Later in that same passage, Lohia elaborates further on the historical significance of this project. “Such a machine is not the product of decentralization in space, which modern civilization in Europe and the US has started talking about,” he writes in reference to the very kinds of developmental aid programs supported by Nehru and Bhave. Rather, “it is the embodiment of the whole principle of decentralization, in space and in time.”¹⁴⁸ This statement -- decentralization in time -- just hangs there, unelaborated upon. When put into the context of Lohia’s views on the historicism of European modernity, it becomes clear that to decentralize time meant breaking the hold that the teleology of modernity had upon the world. If modernistic European theories such as Marxism relied upon the idea that there was a single train of progress that all nations must follow, then Lohia’s statement is a declaration that India could follow its own path; build its own locomotive. At the same time, it was an assertion that India did not have to “go back,” it did not have to reverse the engine.

Conclusion

It is important to appreciate the uniqueness of Lohia’s vision; to those who wished for India to participate in modernity, the village represented backwardness and parochialism. To those who wished to avoid modernity, the village was ideal for nearly the same reasons. For Lohia to suggest that the village could be the site upon which a new modernity could be imagined, a new course of history pursued, was an imaginative way for him to balance his many competing impulses and programs. The next chapter will further pursue Lohia’s vision of an alternative modernity and will explore Lohia’s travels across the globe and his views on international

¹⁴⁸ Lohia, “The Doctrinal Foundation of Socialism,” 497

relations. While this article focused on the locality of Lohia's vision, his desire to empower the smallest units of social life, this chapter will focus on the universality of that same vision.

Chapter 3

The Desire to Create: Lohia's International Vision

This chapter will examine the final aspect of Lohia's project, which I have labelled "alternative modernity." Up to now, it has perhaps been unclear what makes Lohia's project a proposal of an alternative modernity, as opposed to simply being a critique of modernity and a re-envisioning of development in the global south. Modernity, as formulated by Immerwahr, is the belief there is a "single condition toward which all societies eventually converge."¹⁴⁹ It is a fundamentally universalizing ideology. This chapter will argue that is what made Lohia's proposed intellectual system a truly "alternative modernity" is that his conception of postcolonial internationalism was built upon the belief that the Third World -- the decolonized nations of Asia and Africa -- needed to construct a civilization that could challenge and eventually replace the civilization of the West, a civilization of monster machines, where everything existed in the name of ever-increasing progress, a progress that could only end in self-destruction.

This chapter will thus focus primarily on two different events in Lohia's life -- the first will be that Asian Socialist Conference held in Rangoon in 1953, which Lohia and other members of the P.S.P. helped organize, and the second will be a journey Lohia took to the United States of America in 1951. While the non-chronological order here might be somewhat counterintuitive, the Rangoon Conference, and Lohia's eventual disappointment with its results, serves as perhaps the clearest articulation of Lohia's internationalist and universalist theories, particularly his investment in the idea of a World Parliament that he hoped could challenge and replace the United Nations. Lohia's journey to the United States, where he met with everybody from Albert Einstein to farmers in the mountains of East Tennessee, is the clearest demonstration

¹⁴⁹ Immerwahr, *Thinking Small*, 61.

of his praxis, of his attempts to forge productive international solidarities and begin to form the international political community he envisioned. Between these two moments will emerge a potential contradiction. Up to this point, this thesis has presented Lohia as a thinker concerned immensely with questions of postcolonialism, of how to establish India as a truly independent nation free from the hegemony of the west both economically and intellectually. His work with the Asian Socialist Conference will further strengthen this image, particularly his impassioned plea to fellow Asian nations to remain neutral in the Cold War. Lohia will take this neutrality farther than major Asian leaders of the time, such as Nehru and Sukarno, as he will promote what he called the “doctrine of equal indifference,” the belief that the two major camps of the twentieth century -- the capitalist and communist -- had no relevance to the civilization that the nations of Asia and Africa could someday build. Despite this, Lohia nonetheless believed that the people of America, particularly farmers and black people, would play an essential role in establishing international solidarities and in constructing a new civilization.

The Asian Socialist Conference and a World Parliament

There is perhaps no more iconic event in the history of postcolonialism than that of the Bandung Conference, held in Indonesia in 1955. Held with the intention of developing a sense of international cooperation amongst countries loyal to neither to the U.S.S.R. or to the U.S.A., Bandung easily captures the imagination with romantic images of figures such as Jawaharlal Nehru, Sukarno, Gamal Abdel Nasser, and Zhou Enlai joining together to take a stand against imperialism and usher in a new era in world history -- an era of liberation, of the “Third World.” Yet, for all its symbolic significance and rhetorical grandeur, historians have recently demonstrated the limitations of Bandung -- limitations of imagination and limitations of action,

an inability to rise above petty politics and to imagine a truly different reality than that being competed over by the two great empires of the post-war world.¹⁵⁰

Perhaps no figure best articulated and anticipated these limitations than Lohia, who played a small but significant role in the history and genesis of Bandung. In 1953, Lohia and the P.S.P., in conjunction with other Asian socialist parties such as the Burma Socialist Party and the Partai Socialis Indonesia, organized the Asian Socialist Conference in the Burmese city of Rangoon.¹⁵¹ Held with the intention of exchanging ideas about how to foster cooperation between Asian nations and develop a system of mutual support, Zaw Win has labelled the Rangoon Conference a “dress rehearsal” for Bandung, as it was one of the first instances of multinational cooperation between formerly decolonized nations.¹⁵² However, the vision that Lohia presented to the A.S.C. would differ radically from that espoused by the participants of Bandung just two years later, demonstrating the various and contested ways that postcolonial intellectuals sought to navigate this new era.

The key difference between Lohia’s vision of the “Third World” and that of Nehru, Sukarno, or Nasser comes down to contrasting relationships to modernity. While the Bandung Conference was staunchly anti-imperialist (at least in the official declarations made by the participating members) it was also a fundamentally modernizing project. If the leaders at Bandung, whether they were right-wing authoritarians such as the Philippines’ Carlos Romero, communists such as Zhou En-Lai, or socialists such as Nehru, could all agree on one thing, it was of the absolute need to “catch-up” with the west.¹⁵³ As Nehru put it, “What Europe did in a

¹⁵⁰ Prashad, *The Darker Nations*, 34; Chakrabarty, “Legacies of Bandung,” 4814.

¹⁵¹ Kyaw Zaw Win, “The 1953 Asian Socialist Conference in Rangoon: Precursor to the Bandung Conference,” in *Bandung 1955: Little Histories*, ed. Derek McDougall and Antonia Finnane (Victoria, Australia: Monash University Press, 2010), 44–46.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁵³ Prashad, *The Darker Nations*, 34 and Chakrabarty, “Legacies of Bandung,” 4814.

hundred or a hundred and fifty years, we must do in ten or fifteen years.”¹⁵⁴ As Chakrabarty has argued, this led to the leaders of these nations adopting a “pedagogical” style of leadership -- a belief that the subaltern communities of their nations were not-quite-yet capable of being true “modern citizens,” and that it was a leaders role to teach them how to be so.¹⁵⁵

For Lohia, the A.S.C. was primarily an opportunity to warn fellow Asians against the dangers of this exact vision. The question Lohia sought to answer in his speeches to the conference revolved primarily around one question: what did it mean to be neutral? If Asia, and hopefully eventually Africa, were to construct a “Third World” independent from the capitalist and communist camps, what should that world look like? First, it was eminently clear to Lohia that Nehru and his compatriots were pursuing a facile form of neutrality, in which the Third World was defined entirely by negative characteristics -- neither communist nor capitalist, but not exactly anything in particular.¹⁵⁶ Lohia would frame this as a passive neutrality, while he advocated for an active neutrality. He believed the Third World had to be a creative force, writing that “the great drawback of the Third Camp is that its independence of the two blocs is merely passive. It attempts to intervene in the international situation after the crisis stage. [...] The neutral bloc today is only passively independent. It must become creatively independent.”¹⁵⁷

Just as a postcolonial India had to create its own ideas, its own ways of thinking about and understanding the structure of the world; just as Indian scientists and engineers had to create new technologies in the form of small-unit machines, and Indian farmers had to use these technologies to create a prosperous, self-sufficient India; so, too, did all the decolonized

¹⁵⁴ Chakrabarty, “Legacies of Bandung,” 4814.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 4814-4815.

¹⁵⁶ Rammanohar Lohia, “Third Camp in World Affairs (1950),” ed. Mastram Kapoor, vol. 3, *Collected Works of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia* (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers and Distributors, 2011), 335.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 317.

countries of the world, the destitute and down-trodden peoples, had to band together to create an entirely new civilization separate from that of the capitalist or communist camps. In fact, he believed that the one advantage the poorest nations of the world had over the two dominant civilizations is that they still had the capability to create a new system. The United States, Soviet Russia, and Europe, while still invested in creating new, elaborate monster-machines in order to continue their never-ending quest for an improved standard of living, were mostly concerned with preservation. They sought to preserve their ideologies, causing them to create closed systems of thought, and they sought to preserve their power and influence in the world.¹⁵⁸ “The rich countries have achieved much, and they therefore want to preserve defend [sic], whereas we on the other hand, must create and desire to create,” he wrote in 1951. “The desire to preserve causes fear, whereas the desire to create causes courage.”¹⁵⁹

He made this stance clear in two speeches delivered to the Rangoon Conference. In one, he declared that the third world must have a mindset of “neither conformism nor co-existence.” Must not simply adopt the system of one of the two civilizations, as China did with communism, nor seek to co-exist, find a balance between, “two mutually contradictory systems” as Nehru sought to do. “Beyond them both,” he argued, leading into a typically Lohian dialectical statement, “is an attitude of mind that takes from conformism its desire to check and cure evil and from co-existence its desire not to impose the truth as one sees it upon others [...] When such a new system arises to give hope to tortured mankind, the spell of the other two systems over their own votaries and peoples is somewhat broken, and they sneak a look or two of curiosity or

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 306

¹⁵⁹ Rammanohar Lohia, “Equality of All Nations Essential for World Peace (1951),” ed. Mastram Kapoor, vol. 3, *Collected Works of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia* (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers and Distributors, 2011), 426.

affection at the new creation.”¹⁶⁰ Yet, if Asian nations did not actively embrace a new, socialist ideology, if they did not strive to develop themselves in a way committed to decentralization and the eradication of poverty, then the opposite was bound to happen. Asian nations could not maintain Nehru’s passive neutrality without inevitably sneaking a look of curiosity at the capitalist or communist systems. At Rangoon, Lohia warned fellow Asian leaders about communism in particular, partly because at first glance socialism could easily be mistaken for communism, and partly because he believed communism had far more appeal to the hunger-stricken parts of the world than capitalism.

Liberal democracy, the great achievement of Western Europe and the United States, would hold little water in places where access to food was of far more concern than the right to vote. As such, it was no wonder that nations such as China would be attracted to highly authoritarian yet egalitarian ideologies such as Maoism. “European masses may be inspired by a desire for freedom of expression, assembly and the like, but not so Asian masses [...] The Asian masses will be willing to sell their democratic rights if they believe that they can procure bread through some economic system,” he believed.¹⁶¹ Therefore, he told his fellow conference-members that it was absolutely essential that they make clear what separated socialism from communism. “They both demand redivision of land. Both demand emancipation of all peoples,” he said. But the Communist demand for land redistribution was merely a “paper transaction.” “Everybody knows that communist redivision of land is only a tactical manoeuvre and a first step towards ultimate collectivisation [...] Communist redivision of land is a hoax to begin with and a futile cruelty in the end.” Socialist redivision of land was instead predicated upon

¹⁶⁰ Rammanohar Lohia, “An Asian Policy (1952),” in *Marx, Gandhi, and Socialism*, ed. Mastram Kapoor, vol. 1, *Collected Works of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia* (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers and Distributors, 2011), 488–89.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 358.

empowerment of the peasant - the introduction of cooperative farming and small-unit machines in particular. "Socialist redivision of land, because it is coupled with decentralisation of power, will produce good economic results as well as a new way of living."¹⁶² Essentially, while communist economics focused entirely on the redistribution of resources, Lohia's socialism would also achieve a redistribution of power; it would couple economic equality with political equality, achieving true democracy.

Importantly, to Lohia, this set Asian socialists apart not just from communists, but from European democratic-socialists as well. After a visit to Sweden, Lohia found himself overcome by a "sense of resentment" due to what he called the "practical idealism" of their socialist government.¹⁶³ Coming from already-prosperous nations, European socialists had to only be concerned with the immediate well-being of their people. They had little need or desire to think outside the bounds of nationalism, had little impetus to imagine a new world. "Socialism made the European State increasingly a welfare State, a state with pensions and insurance and food subsidies and good education and medicine for the million," he conceded, "but it lost its ambition to reconstruct the world; it ceased to be a proposition for the united socialist world and became amendment to the existing capitalist society; it was no longer a creator and it shrunk into an ornament."¹⁶⁴ Over the week he spent in Sweden, Lohia wrote that "the greatest concern of the socialist government in Sweden was [...] over the price of milk."¹⁶⁵ While he did still view European democratic-socialists as being more-or-less allies, it is clear that Lohia saw the Rangoon conference as a unique opportunity to articulate an altogether new kind of socialism,

¹⁶² Ibid., 360-261.

¹⁶³ Lohia, "Third Camp in World Affairs," 308.

¹⁶⁴ Rammanohar Lohia, "Some Reflections on Internationalism," ed. Mastram Kapoor, vol. 3, *Collected Works of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia* (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers and Distributors, 2011), 388.

¹⁶⁵ Lohia, "Third Camp in World Affairs," 308-309.

what he labelled to “Asian Socialism,” although he also hoped to incorporate African nations -- the sun of independence just beginning to rise on their horizons -- into the fold. This was a socialism forged by the shared experience of colonialism, and the shared condition of postcolonialism. A socialism united by the “will to power,” united by the necessity of creation. These nations, all with “too many people, too little land and too few forces of production” would never be able to “catch-up” with a Europe that had industrialized only by pillaging the global south, and thus had to imagine a new path forward altogether.¹⁶⁶ Thus, two years before Bandung, Lohia was already declaring the vision of Nehru and his peers to be doomed to failure. And, in many ways, Lohia’s warnings were prescient. While Bandung produced a great deal of positive sentiment across the decolonized world, its concrete solutions were negligible, and a truly active and unified Third World never materialized.¹⁶⁷

Up to this point, Lohia’s message to his fellow Asian Socialists was not altogether different than his message to socialists within India. In both contexts, Lohia urged for absolute clarity of purpose and of message, to maintain a clear distinction from both capitalism and communism, and to not be enraptured by the temptations of European modernity -- of monster machines. What is most instructive about Lohia’s experience at Rangoon, however, was his profound and near-immediate disappointment with its results. He had hoped that Rangoon would set the stage for an era in which individual nations would put aside their immediate self-interest and begin working towards a greater overall good. Specifically, he proposed the creation of a new system of government, a World Parliament, that he believed would come to replace the United Nations. While Lohia did not use the phrase, it was clear that he believed the UN to

¹⁶⁶ Rammanohar Lohia, “Problems of Asian Socialism (1955),” ed. Mastram Kapoor, vol. 3, *Collected Works of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia* (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers and Distributors, 2011), 362.

¹⁶⁷ Chakrabarty, “Legacies of Bandung,” 4812.

essentially be a neocolonial institution, and that any pretensions it made towards increasing international cooperation and world peace were not only facile, but would lead to further global inequality. The UN, he argued, was the clearest manifestation of a “caste system” amongst nations, with some nations -- those given a spot on the security council -- making up the highest caste, and other, non-white nations, making up the lower caste.¹⁶⁸ The organization, which sought to be the “mind and conscience of mankind,” thus suffered from a “lack of universality and equality.”¹⁶⁹ What was needed, therefore, was to replace the United Nations with a World Parliament, in which “the whole of mankind should be treated as one whole, and each individual should have a vote.”¹⁷⁰ This would necessitate a “revolution in the idea of citizenship.” People needed to come to see themselves as citizens of the world, rather than of individual states. “If the people of India and the peoples of Asia want to give mankind a new concept of world citizenship, they should realize that it does not matter where a person was born or who his parents were, or whether he is indigent, he has an equal right with everyone else to live and work and die where he pleases,” he wrote. “All the world, and in particular Asia are anxiously waiting for some state to assert the simple faith that citizenship shall be human.”¹⁷¹

Importantly, Lohia did not believe that the UN could serve as a pathway to the World Parliament. Rather, he thought it essential that they start with a “clean slate,” in which, rather than one part of the globe dominating the other, they both learned to function together in a dialectic of creation and conservation. “The whole idea of assistance flowing out from the strong

¹⁶⁸ Rammanohar Lohia, “Asia and World Order (1952),” ed. Mastram Kapoor, vol. 3, *Collected Works of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia* (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers and Distributors, 2011), 375.

¹⁶⁹ Rammanohar Lohia, “Revision of United Nations Charter (1954),” ed. Mastram Kapoor, vol. 3, *Collected Works of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia* (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers and Distributors, 2011), 383.

¹⁷⁰ Rammanohar Lohia, “World Government, Only Hope (1951),” ed. Mastram Kapoor, vol. 3, *Collected Works of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia* (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers and Distributors, 2011), 421–22.

¹⁷¹ Lohia, “An Asian Policy,” 471.

to the weak in a spirit of generosity is fruitless,” he wrote. “Europe and the U.S. have too much to conserve and too little to create, while Asia and Africa have too much to create but too little to build it on. Conservation and creation are at war on a world scale. Not the passing conflict of power blocs but this great war of our epoch determines man’s destiny. When Europe and U.S. [sic] realise the impossibility to conserve, until Asia and Africa create, a world mind potent enough to form a world government will have been born.”¹⁷² This synthesis would not be achieved by the United Nations, which in many ways symbolized the pinnacle of Western modernity; a belief in universalism, yes, but a universalism that flowed out of Europe and towards the rest of the world.

Yet, he also came to realize that the Asian Socialist Conference, and other like minded movements such as Bandung, would also fail to provide a path towards World Government. This was due to the great barrier of the nation state. Shortly after the Rangoon conference, Lohia declared it to be a “debacle.” This was because, despite the purpose of the conference being to foster a spirit of international cooperation, participant members were unable to rise above short-sighted “national self-interest.”¹⁷³ Almost immediately after the conference, conflict arose over the creation of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, which Lohia believed to be only in service of the “Atlantic Camp” -- Western Europe and the U.S.A. However, with some nations more concerned with self-defence than unity, the debate tore the conference apart and led to its dissolution.¹⁷⁴ The problem, Lohia realized, was that all major efforts at internationalism up to that moment, whether Rangoon, Bandung, or the U.N., were the product of nation-states attempting to cooperate with one another. These representatives would never be able to act in the

¹⁷² Lohia, “Third Camp in World Affairs, 330-333 and “Asia and World Order,” 377.

¹⁷³ Lohia, “Some Reflections on Internationalism,” 392.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 390-397.

interest of all man-kind, and thus, a truly revolutionary internationalism would be one that originated not from nation-states, but from individuals. “A difference of character,” he wrote, “will arise only when a new international mechanism is able to make a direct appeal to every man against or over his State.”¹⁷⁵

This meant, essentially, that the concept of the nation-state itself had to be done away with. Lohia would produce an almost direct critique of the kind of “pedagogical” leadership that Nehru and the other Bandung representatives espoused. The international movement, he believed, would not be directed from conference halls as the project of a few elite men leading their supposedly ignorant and innocent peoples towards a modern future. Rather, a truly postcolonial, socialist internationalism had to be built from the ground up, grown in the soil of village farms and tilled by small-unit machines, the work of individual workers and laborers sharing in a universal sense of human-ness. Lohia would go further than declaring Nehru’s form of politics as “pedagogical,” instead framing it as maternalistic. “To the modern man,” he wrote, “the State is the great mother. He derives his being from the State [...] Any genuine internationalism must dare to see the world in the raw, must first acknowledge, that the State is the great mother. This fact cannot be wished away by exuberant phrases. It must be submitted to deep meditation. That a national is not the representative and ambassador of his government but of his people and more so of his idea and movement is a meaningless generalisation unless it is woven concretely into the protocols of daily life.”¹⁷⁶ This is a curious statement, in large part for the framing of the state as a “great mother.” This phrase does not necessarily evoke images of the state as an oppressive or counterrevolutionary force, instead seemingly acknowledging the

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 398.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 406.

comfort and safety that can be found in the state, while at the same time declaring that it must be done away with, that new forms of being-in-community must be found.

This statement also, in many ways, gets to the core of Lohia's understanding of political action, one clearly derived from his Gandhian upbringing. The idea that politics must be something woven into daily life, that revolutionary action is something lived and mundanely experienced, rather than something dramatically declared with "exuberant phrases," is Gandhian at the core. At the same time as Lohia is arguing for a universal system, he is asserting that this universalism could only be produced at the smallest level; in the home, the village, in the flesh-and-blood interactions between human beings, in the sweat of their labor.

Yet, there is also a great deal of Marx synthesized into Lohia's understanding of internationalism. In this same essay, entitled "Some Reflections on Internationalism," he suggests that it is only through this Gandhian method that Marx's call for an international workers movement might be fulfilled. He even begins the essay with Marx's famous commandment: "Workers of the world, unite!" Lohia believed that in the back half of the nineteenth century, this call was on the way to being answered. But in large part due to the nationalist fervor produced by the First World War, European socialists had come to see themselves as "workers of their own nations," and not as "workers of the world." It was then that European socialism became a "doctrine of material comfort and nothing more."¹⁷⁷ Asia -- its people, ideas, and methods -- was therefore needed to unite downtrodden peoples across the planet. "Asian governments and political parties are inclined to borrow concepts from Europe and America, with the result that nothing new or significant happens," he wrote.¹⁷⁸ It was time

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 387.

¹⁷⁸ Lohia, "An Asian Policy," 471.

that the flow was reversed, that Asia produced the ideas that could revolutionize social relations across the globe, could liberate the working classes and achieve the dream of world peace.

A Technicolor Civilization

In the early 1950s, Lohia would take concrete steps to establish the sort of community-to-community cooperation that he envisioned. While these were often feeble half-steps that led nowhere, they are nonetheless revealing of the ways in which Lohia believed a unified world could come to be. Perhaps the most significant of these efforts was a 1951 trip circumnavigating the globe that Lohia took as a representative of the Socialist Party. Starting in Calcutta, he flew west, “sometimes going up and down, north and south, but always westerly, and came back to Calcutta.”¹⁷⁹ On his journey, he would visit a wide variety of nations, all occupying different roles in the world. Rome, “a great city in the past [...] the entrance to modern civilization.”¹⁸⁰ Germany, “one of the most remarkable spots of this European civilization and in some ways its most terrifying spokesman.”¹⁸¹ Indonesia, a nation “wanting to change, but taking it easy, too damnably easy, [it] may yet play a large part in achieving the new human civilization of activity and poise.”¹⁸² Yugoslavia, a communist nation whose efforts to decentralize political power into the hands of its factory workers intrigued Lohia greatly. It was “a communist nation trying in a partial way to turn socialist,” he wrote.¹⁸³

Of all his stops, however, it seems that none fascinated Lohia so much as the United States of America, where he spent over a month travelling from coast-to-coast, meeting with significant figures such as Albert Einstein, Eleanor Roosevelt, Pearl Buck, and union leader

¹⁷⁹ Lohia, “Round the World,” 13

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 13

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 14

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 41

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 39

Walter Reuther, but also visiting farmers in east Tennessee, Alabama, California, and North Dakota, civil rights activists in Nashville, and college students at Stanford. The conversations he had there, recorded by an anonymous aide in a report back to party leadership, are instructive not only of his views on modernity, but also of how he believed that Asian ideas could transform American society, how he believed America and Asia could come to share together in a new, alternative modernity.

Almost immediately upon landing in New York City, Lohia was overwhelmed by the beauty of America. It was, he believed, a “technicolor civilization.” “All kinds of lights,” he wrote, “green, blue, red, and white, and one does not know which hue, and it seems to be almost always day no matter what time one travels. Heaps and heaps of light underneath you, this is the bewildering achievement of technology in the U.S.A.”¹⁸⁴ The nation was so prosperous that all its women, even the poorest, he believed, could dress like princesses.¹⁸⁵ In east Tennessee, he visited the “dazzling” dams of the T.V.A., whose “breath-taking” turbines made the “irrigated countryside beautiful.”¹⁸⁶ It was clear that Lohia was drawn in by the glories of Western civilization; he certainly saw and understood the seductive appeal of its wealth and technology. Yet, he also wondered if beneath it all was a darker, more sinister truth. “I sometimes doubt if one can have that much power and beauty without evil” he wrote in a letter written to his friend and then-party president JP Narayan.¹⁸⁷ It was in eastern Tennessee that Lohia would find the answer to his question.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 24

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 31

¹⁸⁶ Anonymous, “Report on Dr. Lohia’s Visit to U.S. (1951),” ed. Mastram Kapoor, vol. 2, *Collected Works of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia* (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers and Distributors, 2011), 399.

¹⁸⁷ Rammanohar Lohia, “Letter to Jayaprakash (1951),” ed. Mastram Kapoor, vol. 2, *Collected Works of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia* (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers and Distributors, 2011), 510.

Around the same time as he visited the TVA Lohia also stopped in Oak Ridge, a production site for the Manhattan Project. This was a stop of immense symbolic significance for Lohia. While the atomic bomb of course held immense meaning to everyone living in the mid-twentieth century, Lohia believed that the atomic bomb represented more than just an existential threat to humanity. He believed that it represented Western civilization -- the Western modernity that was the product of colonialism, that he so desperately sought to find an alternative to -- in its entirety. This belief is summed up in one idea that Lohia expressed time after time in his speeches and essays, with a regularity seen only by his most cherished concept, the small-unit machine. The idea was that in the twentieth century only two truly great things had been accomplished: Mahatma Gandhi lived, thought, and died, and the atomic bomb had been created.

While somewhat repetitive, it is worth looking at three separate instances of Lohia's specific phrasing on this topic. In one, an official declaration of the principles of the Socialist Party, Lohia wrote that "The present century has known only one originator, Mahatma Gandhi, and only one discovery, the atomic bomb; the discovery is the culmination of modern civilization the same as the originator came out of a womb not yet identifiable or strong."¹⁸⁸ In a public 1954 speech in the city of Kanpur, he declared that "the first half of the twentieth century produced two novel phenomena, atomic Bomb and Mahatma Gandhi, and the century's second half will struggle and suffer to make its choice between the two."¹⁸⁹ And, on this very same trip to the United States, in a conversation with Albert Einstein, he stated: "I have said that our age has

¹⁸⁸ Rammanohar Lohia, "Principle of Equal Irrelevance (1947)," in *Marx, Gandhi, and Socialism*, ed. Mastram Kapoor, vol. 1, Collected Works of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers and Distributors, 2011), 415.

¹⁸⁹ Rammanohar Lohia, "Mahatma Gandhi and Atom Bomb -- Two Novel Phenomena of 20th Century (1954)," ed. Mastram Kapoor, vol. 3, Collected Works of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers and Distributors, 2011), 246.

thought only twice. Mahatma Gandhi and atomic energy; one is gone, and your invention is a source of death.”¹⁹⁰

Curiously, Lohia never elaborates upon these claims. For an idea so central to his way of thinking, an idea that he repeated seemingly every chance he got, he never fully explains what he means by it, and instead simply states it. Yet, these quotes, placed next to each other, seem to evoke a more rigorously thought-through concept than each taken separately. As discussed in the first chapter, at the foundation of Lohia’s critique of Western modernity/civilization -- whether community or capitalist -- was that at its most fundamental level there was an investment in a teleological style of thought, a belief that there is a train of progress carrying the people of the West towards a final, utopian stop.

In those instances when Lohia examines this teleological thought, it usually seems to carry an implication that teleology is impossible, an inherently foolish notion, that the prosperity of civilizations rises and falls, that there is an up-and-down rhythm to progress. Yet in the phrase “culmination of western civilization,” Lohia suggests that perhaps this is not entirely the case, perhaps the history of Western civilization does follow a set course; that the atomic bomb was the telos of Western modernity; that it was the ultimate monster machine; and that the only place an ideology of infinite growth, infinite progress, production, and innovation could lead, was to self-destruction. At the same time as this civilization was hurtling towards oblivion, a new civilization was being born, that of the “originator” Gandhi. The particular word-choice is rather revealing of Lohia’s attitude towards Gandhi. As discussed in the second chapter, Lohia formed his political identity in large part through critiquing the ideas and legacy of the man who had once been his idol. Yet, Gandhi was still the ultimate symbol of decolonization, the ultimate

¹⁹⁰ Anonymous, “Report on Dr. Lohia’s Visit,” 420.

symbol for an alternative way of being, one oriented around sustainability and self-sufficiency. This symbol was needed, Lohia suggests, not just to guide postcolonial nations to an independent future unconcerned with their former colonizers, but to “struggle” with Western civilization, to rescue it from its own suicide. This statement is thus perhaps the clearest articulation of what makes Lohia’s system an alternative modernity; his postcolonial socialism needed to become a universal system in order to prevent the destruction of the human race. And still, despite these assertions there is a strange and uncharacteristic defeatism in his statement to Einstein that “one was gone” and the other “a source of death.” A genuine fear that Western modernity, in its race towards death, might win out after all.

These feelings all came to the forefront during Lohia’s visit to Oak Ridge. It is here that Lohia’s true feelings towards the United States -- towards this “technicolour civilization” -- becomes apparent. When he first sees the facility, Lohia finds himself strangely enthralled by its beauty. After “one drives around a bend” he writes, “it is just there, this establishment of death so beautiful to look at [...] Tall and graceful chimneys going up, silver-grey and slender chimney; unless you knew it was a place manufacturing the atom bomb, you might take it for a factory of some celestial toys [...] It had the same effect on me as Mephisto, who talks intelligently and looks handsome in a certain type of drama.” Here, it thus becomes clear just what kind of evil lurks behind the “power and beauty” that Lohia wrote to JP about. Yet, Lohia ends his description of the facility with a strange statement: “Perversely enough, the Oak Ridge establishment gave me hope that perhaps some day we would have one world.”¹⁹¹

Why was it that, as Lohia gazed upon the greatest achievement of Western modernity, the most powerful and destructive force in the world, he could see his vision for a unified and

¹⁹¹ Lohia, “Round the World,” 28.

peaceful world most clearly? Because, he would answer, in that moment he realized that Western civilization, by pursuing its own annihilation, had rendered itself irrelevant. The future could not belong to this civilization, and so therefore it must belong to a new one. When asked by Americans why it was that Lohia preached non-alignment, whether or not this was a moral failing considering the brutality of the Soviet regime, he “said that the existing civilization had already become irrelevant to me [and] to the world of tomorrow, for the Oak Ridges, the New Yorks, and the Moscows, and the big mass-production factories are irrelevant to the new world that we are striving to create from which poverty will be banished.”¹⁹²

Lohia called this the “theory of equal irrelevance,” yet, he did not travel to the United States merely to convince Americans of their own insignificance, or to demonstrate the superiority of Indian civilization.¹⁹³ As much as Lohia despised the civilization America had built, he did not believe it was constructed due to any inherent qualities of its people. “If the Socialist Party of India adopts a policy of Third Camp [...] It is without any talk of moral superiority. We do not believe that Atlantic peoples to be in error, or lower than us. You are the product of centuries of history, and so are we.”¹⁹⁴ Just as Lohia believed that Indians could free themselves from their history of caste and gender-based oppression, he also believed Americans could free themselves from their history. Thus, he came to America to learn and to build connections between his movement and like-minded organizations in America. He believed that despite the inherent failings at the core of Western ideology, there was much the American people, as individuals, could offer to a new world. “The peoples of all lands have endearing qualities,” he wrote, “and they are all equally relevant to the new civilization. The two forms of

¹⁹² Ibid., 29.

¹⁹³ Anonymous, “Report on Dr. Lohia’s Visit,” 377.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 425.

the existing civilization, Capitalist and Communist, are equally irrelevant to a new creation, but not so the peoples living under them.”¹⁹⁵ While in eastern Tennessee, on the same leg of his journey in which he visited Oak Ridge, Lohia would put this statement into action. One of the most significant stops Lohia made on his journey was in the small town of Monteagle, where he visited a small but vibrant base of the burgeoning civil rights movement known as the Highlander Folk School.

Founded in 1932 by preacher-turned-activist Myles Horton, Highlander was originally intended to serve as a means to educate and organize small-scale farmers in eastern Tennessee, to help establish unions and cooperatives, to serve as a community center where people could live in-common, growing food for the entire community.¹⁹⁶ Lohia’s companion, who recorded his daily activities, described the place as “a sort of ‘ashram’ in the Tennessee hills.”¹⁹⁷ In many ways, therefore, Highlander represented just the kind of politics he hoped would take hold in the second half of the twentieth century, particularly because Horton was committed to the cause of integration, and by the early 1950s the focus of the school was transitioning away from labor and agricultural issues and towards racial justice, holding weeks-long seminars on civil disobedience for young activists.¹⁹⁸ In his visit, Lohia came to respect Horton so much that he would remark that “if Myles is genuine, and I have no reason to doubt that he is, [...] then he is the best thing we have turned up.”¹⁹⁹

At Highlander -- as well as at a meeting of the Farmers’ Union in Marion Junction, Alabama -- which Horton would take him to visit, Lohia spoke to local farmers about his “dream

¹⁹⁵ Lohia, “Principle of Equal Irrelevance,” 416.

¹⁹⁶ For more on the Highlander School, see John M. Glen, *Highlander: No Ordinary School*, 2nd ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996).

¹⁹⁷ Anonymous, “Report on Dr. Lohia’s Visit,” 380.

¹⁹⁸ Glen, *Highlander*, 121.

¹⁹⁹ Anonymous, “Report on Dr. Lohia’s Visit,” 397.

of a farmers' civilization," of the need for small-unit machines, the redivision of land, political decentralization, and of the shared intellectual influence Henry David Thoreau had on both movements.²⁰⁰ He was shocked by the poverty he witnessed -- travelling to the richest nation in the world from one of the poorest, Lohia expected the whole country to be sharing in the glories of modern conveniences, and was surprised when the farmers there told him that the vast majority of them went without running water, electricity, and sewage.²⁰¹ Near the end of the meeting, Lohia spoke to the farmers about his belief in volunteerism; the necessity of a politics enacted through individuals choosing to contribute to their community. When hearing this, a group of farmers asked him if he and the Socialist Party could use their labor digging ditches, creating irrigation channels, or constructing buildings, a prospect that "delighted" Lohia.²⁰² While Lohia believed that aid that came from the American government, or other Western powers, was "designed to tie up an Asian people with one or the other of the conformist systems," he nevertheless thought it was essential that "international brigades of satyagrahis" be sent out to other nations to not only contribute to efforts at nonviolent resistance, but also to build international solidarity and community.²⁰³ The enthusiastic willingness of Tennessee farmers to travel to India to help communities that they had never met, but nonetheless felt a kinship with, no doubt gave Lohia a vision of the new world he hoped to build. "These people have opposed the powers-that-be in America all their life, and the felt kinship with someone doing the same in India," Horton told him.²⁰⁴ While it seems that these Tennessee farmers never did find their way to India, this moment nevertheless demonstrates the ways in which Lohia

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 389-391.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 380.

²⁰² Ibid., 383

²⁰³ Lohia, "Asia and World Order," 373-374.

²⁰⁴ Anonymous, "Report on Dr. Lohia's Visit," 383.

helped to build an international community independent of nation-states, one in which individual communities chose to contribute to a universal civilization.

While in America, Lohia also worked on establishing solidarity in ways beyond issues relating to land and agriculture. He was particularly concerned with the issue of race in America, which interested him partly because Lohia felt a natural relationship between all people of color in the world -- all the people that made up the lower-castes of the international order, and partly because he felt that segregation itself was a clear manifestation of a caste system, as discussed in Chapter One.²⁰⁵ Ever the contrarian, he demonstrated a clear willingness to challenge his audiences on these topics. As his companion noted, Lohia always seemed to speak with the intention of provoking a response from his listeners, fitting squarely within Lohia's typical dialectical style of thinking. "To Southern Whites Lohia chose to talk about race; to Negroes he talked of Africa and jail going; to Wall Street he described decentralized socialism [...] He left a wake of questions and new thinking wherever he went [...] What better way to assess the American mind than by causing, and observing, such reactions?"²⁰⁶ Indeed, at the stop in Marion Junction, he told his white audience of his "mulatto dream," his hope that one day "all mankind would become mulatto." "All who can produce children of each other are of the same race" he told them.²⁰⁷

Perhaps more significant was Lohia's efforts to export the ideas and methods of Gandhian civil disobedience to black activists. During talks at Fisk University and Howard University, Lohia talked of the need for black activists to be willing to risk imprisonment. "Why not a little jail going? Resist some of this injustice directly, and non-violently, and go to prison if

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 410

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 428

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 394

required?” he asked Dr. Charles Johnson, the president of Fisk.²⁰⁸ To the students at Howard, he said: “I believe that civil disobedience is a weapon of universal application. And I am not being oblique -- I mean it can be used on the race question in this country [...] To the destruction of the caste system in all its forms we must dedicate our lives.”²⁰⁹ Over a decade later, on a trip to the United States in 1964, Lohia would back up these words with action. After being turned away from a segregated restaurant in Jackson, Mississippi, Lohia refused to leave, with the incident ending in a brief imprisonment.²¹⁰ While an interest in Gandhism was already growing well before Lohia’s visit to America, he nonetheless played a small but important role in bringing India’s most important intellectual export to the United States.

Conclusion

This final chapter has explored the ways in which Lohia sought to complete his intellectual project by turning it into a system of thought that could challenge the supremacy of capitalism and communism at an international level, outside the borders of India. During both the Asian Socialist Conference at Rangoon, as well as his journey to America, Lohia sought to find ways build up a new civilization that could rescue the world from the suicidal tendencies of Western modernity. This new world would be one that achieved a synthesis between the interests of the individual and interests of the universal; in which individuals would be able to live fulfilling, self-sufficient lives in intimate and caring communities while participating actively in the well-being of those across the world from them.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 379

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 410

²¹⁰ Anonymous, “Indian Party Leader Jailed in Miss. Row,” ed. Mastram Kapoor, vol. 2, *Collected Works of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia* (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers and Distributors, 2011), 555; Nico Slate, *Lord Cornwallis Is Dead: The Struggle for Democracy in the United States and India* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2019), 184.

Conclusion A Politics of Despair

In October of 1967, Rammanohar Lohia died an early death at the age of fifty-seven.²¹¹ He had spent his last years growing increasingly bitter at the failures of the Socialist Party, increasingly aware that his Party would never be able to break the stranglehold the Indian National Congress held over the government. In 1955 he wrote that the Socialist Party had missed its opportunity to coalesce around a cohesive ideology and challenge the ruling party. It had missed its “golden chance to become the sole and unchallengeable spokesman of radical politics” and “the names of those who surrendered like all other parties should be held in lasting infamy.”²¹² In 1958 he condemned fellow Socialist leaders for seeking alliances with other parties -- both the Communist Party and the INC -- watering down the party’s ideological purity in the “selfish pursuit of office [...] by a bunch of despondent men.”²¹³ And in 1961 he admitted that when he looks “at the world around me, I am often made to feel that I am an outmoded individual of any notoriety.”²¹⁴ When he died it was as a respected statesman, visited on his death bed by old comrades such as Kamaladevi Chattpadhyay, Ashok Mehta, JB Kripalani, and of course, JP Narayan, as well as by some of the most singular figures in Indian politics -- the iconic VK Krishna Menon, and the new Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi.²¹⁵ Yet, he also died as a man who had never been able accomplish his greatest desire; had never been able to create a Socialist Party that could become the ruling party of India, and a guiding light for the decolonized world.

²¹¹ Kelkar, *Dr. Rammanohar Lohia: His Life and Philosophy*, 449

²¹² Lohia, “A New Chapter,” 592

²¹³ Rammanohar Lohia, “Inanity of World Socialism (1958),” ed. Mastram Kapoor, vol. 6, *Collected Works of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia* (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers and Distributors, 2011), 176.

²¹⁴ Rammanohar Lohia, “Forward to Lohia and America Meet (1961),” ed. Mastram Kapoor, vol. 2, *Collected Works of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia* (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers and Distributors, 2011), 366.

²¹⁵ Kelkar, *Dr. Rammanohar Lohia: His Life and Philosophy*, 450

Ironically, a few years after Lohia's death, his old friend, colleague, and rival JP would nearly carry out Lohia's vision. Over two decades after declaring that he was leaving electoral politics behind, JP would jump back into the fray in 1974, launching what is popularly known as the "J.P. Movement" in the state of Bihar. A wide ranging protest movement against the policies of Indira Gandhi, J.P.'s movement eventually became a coalition of various groups across India known as the Janata Front, which in 1975 became the first political party to defeat the I.N.C. and gain control of parliament.²¹⁶ However, while it seems that J.P. finally took Lohia's will to power seriously -- finally acknowledged that political office had to be won in order to enact wide scale social changes -- the Janata Front's failures also stand, in many ways, as an example of the kind of politics Lohia warned against. Held together primarily by the force of J.P.'s personal charisma, the Janata Front had little ideological consistency, with member groups ranging from leftist students to the militant Hindu nationalist movement the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (R.S.S.). Although only in power for three years, the Janata Front provided legitimacy to the R.S.S., leading, indirectly, to the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (B.J.P.) in Indian politics.²¹⁷

It is unlikely that Lohia, who warned socialists against cults of personalities, against investing their political identity in a single figure, who preached absolute ideological clarity and consistency, and who hoped for a diverse future for India, would have viewed the Janata Front as a positive development. Yet, for those same reasons, it is unlikely, even had he lived longer, that his political program would have seen a true moment of victory. "I have accepted a philosophy of despair," he once said. "All I can say is this: that no matter that my way of thinking may not

²¹⁶ Daniel Kent Carrasco. (2016). *Jayaprakash Narayan and Lok Niti: Socialism, Gandhism and Political Cultures of Protest in XX Century India* (Doctoral dissertation, King's College London, 2016). London, England: King's College, 213-229

²¹⁷ Ibid, 208-209

become the government in my life time, I am perfect in it.”²¹⁸ It is this way of thinking, more than any concrete political achievement, that stands as Lohia’s greatest legacy. And indeed, it was a *way of thinking*, a style and a methodology, rather than his specific conclusions, that was his most distinctive quality, and that has been the focus of this thesis.

Lohia is generally regarded today as being a fairly conventional democratic socialist. Historians such as Sherman and Kent Carrasco, whose primary purpose is to compare him to the other major figures of his day, generally consider him to be a somewhat less radical version of Bhave and Narayan; more willing to accept the strictures of the state, more invested in electoral politics, less condemning of the ills of technology. Generally, he is seen as being somewhere between *Bhoodan* and Nehru. Yet, this analysis misses just how radical -- or at least, singular -- of a thinker he was. His constant willingness to critique the foundations of his own thought, to engage with seemingly contradictory ideas at the same time, mark him as a unique figure who demonstrated the intense complexities of intellectual discourse in the early 1950s in India. There is a profound sense of struggling in his writings, struggling over the many questions confronting India: caste, gender, colonialism, capitalism, communism. His exhausting effort to find ways to balance and meld his at-times conflicting and contradictory priorities is a feature throughout his works. His openness to ideas, the vigorousness with which he intensely critiqued even his closest allies and influences, made him if not the most extreme politician of his age, at least one of its most imaginative and creative thinkers. It also makes him immensely difficult to pin down. Never fully embracing any one orthodoxy, Lohia does not fit comfortably into any single political movement or philosophy. It is perhaps for this reason why Lohia spoke of a philosophy of despair -- a loneliness not just in tangible politics, but in his very way of thinking.

²¹⁸ Rammanohar Lohia, “India’s Politics Today (1951),” ed. Mastram Kapoor, vol. 2, *Collected Works of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia* (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers and Distributors, 2011), 535.

In crafting the vision laid out in the three chapters of this thesis, it would perhaps have been easy for Lohia to fall into naive, overly-optimistic, utopian thought. Yet, he rarely, if ever, fell into that trap. The future that Lohia imagined was never presented as a final, prescriptive vision towards which he and his listeners must fling themselves head on. Instead, he seemed to always invite his audience to work along beside him in imagining and creating the world in which they wanted to live; to participate equally in the creation of a new civilization. Indeed, one of the most fascinating aspects of Lohia's works is an almost intentional incompleteness -- as if he was leaving blanks to be filled in. This is seen most clearly in his concept of the small-unit machine, in which he was always vague on the specifics, and called for those with more technical knowledge than him to fulfill the vision. Yet it is also seen in the very fundamentals of his socialism, a socialism that sought to free each individual from whatever evils oppressed them -- whether it was poverty, casteism, racism, sexism, etc. -- so that they could create their own world. This is why this thesis has unified itself around a term that Lohia himself never used -- alternative modernity. What Lohia seemed most interested in was presenting a possibility of a future that could be, one that flowed out of the postcolonial world, if only people were able to will themselves to create it.

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