

Ram Manohar Lohia : **Social and Political Thought**

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INTRODUCTION

- Ram Manohar Lohia had acquired a vast range of social and political thoughts through his life experiences and owing to his quest for knowledge and ‘untiring participation in the social and political issues facing the country at various points of time’.
- His astute analysis of the problems such as poverty and systems of government, and innovative solutions like ideas of ‘Sapta Kranti’ and ‘Chaukhamba Model’ of government demonstrates his deep understanding of the grassroot issues of the country.



- His perspectives and conceptualisations on international issues such as world peace and world government sufficiently illustrate the internationalist vision of Lohia.
- His thinking on 'New Socialism', undoubtedly, remains the basic theoretical construct for which Lohia is acknowledged as the 'frontal figure' of the socialist thought and movement in India.



MAJOR WORKS

- The Caste System, 1964
- Fragments of World Mind, 1949
- Wheel of History, 1955
- Marx, Gandhi and Socialism, 1963
- India, China and Northern Frontiers, 1963
- Guilty Men of India's Partition, 1960



NOTABLE INCIDENTS

- Lohia was one of the founders of the Congress Socialist Party in 1934.
- Protested against enrollment of Indians in the Royal Army during World War II.
- He was arrested on 7th June, 1940 and sentenced to two years imprisonment for writing an article 'Satyagraha Now' in Gandhiji's newspaper Harijan.
- After independence, he founded Hind Kisan Panchayat to help farmers.



LOHIA AND GANDHI

- Ram Manohar Lohia hailed Gandhism as one of the greatest inventions of the twentieth century.
- Lohia sought to combine socialist principles with the four Gandhian ideas, namely, satyagraha, ends and means principle, small machine technology and political decentralization.
- Lohia believed that Gandhi's non-violent Satyagraha was an effective method to bring social change.
- But Lohia did not succumb completely to Gandhian ideas. He was critical about the inconsistencies and drawbacks in Gandhian ideas.



LOHIA AND MARX

- Although Lohia was in favour of Marx's theory of dialectical materialism, he was aware of its limitations.
- He emphasised both the economic factors and humans will as important elements of development of history.
- For Lohia, the theory of determinism was not a solution for the tradition bound Indian society where class distinctions and caste stratifications exist.
- The Marxist theory of class struggle is not an answer for the complex structures of India.



SOCIALISM

- Social equality and social justice were the cardinal principles of Lohia's politics and philosophy.
- To achieve that , he argued that socialism was the only way forward.
- Lohia argued for a distinct and innovative conceptualization of socialism independent from both communism or capitalism .
- Lohia cited his original thesis of Socialism in the Pachmarhi Conference of Socialists in May 1952.



“No greater disaster could befall socialism than if the historical peculiarities of its career in Europe were sought to be universalized and reproduced in the other two-thirds of the world.”

- Lohia,

Presidential Address to the Socialist Party's
Pachmarhi Convention



TOWARDS NEW SOCIALISM

- In his 'Wheel of History', Lohia expressed that human history is characterized by a fight between crystallized castes and loosely cohesive classes.
- To him, the conventional and ordered socialism was, therefore, "a dead doctrine and dying organization".
- Lohia accepted socialism as the viable ideology for India and tried to conceptualise it in the light of the Gandhian inputs.
- He came out with the idea of New Socialism in 1959 with the plea that it offers a comprehensive system of socio-economic and political life for the people in India.



BASIC POSTULATES OF THE NEW SOCIALISM

The basic postulates of the new socialism were stated thus :

- Both Capitalism and Communism are based on centralized power which is not capable of bringing about a radical alteration in society.
- Both Capitalism and Communism believe in the same method and means of production. The single difference between them is that in capitalism some individuals or groups make profit and in communism even though there is no individual profit system, a centralized power, class or party, monopolises the benefits. Society does not in reality enjoy economic, political and individual freedom.



- Both Communism and Democracy are incapable of ushering in social transformation, people's liberty and culture. Therefore, both have to be discarded.
- Socialism does not believe in limited capitalism or mixed economy. It does not believe that this would ever pave the way for socialism.
- The objective for socialism is to establish a free and decentralized society by eliminating capitalism and centralized political and economic influence from society.



NEW SOCIALISM

Lohia made an appeal for 'New Socialism'. He contributed in recommending a double approach to the creation of new society – economic development together with a systematic effort to change those social institutions, which are antithetical to modernity.



PLAN FOR NEW SOCIALISM

Ram Manohar Lohia framed a six-point plan for New Socialism. These are :

- Maximum attainable equality, towards which nationalization of economy may be one essential step;
- A decent standard of living throughout the world, and not increasing standard of living within national frontiers;
- A world parliament elected on some kind of adult franchise with beginning towards a world government and world army;



- Collective and individual practice of civil disobedience so that the unarmed and helpless little man may acquire the habit to resist tyranny and exploitation civilly;
- Freedom of the individual against unjust encroachments of public authority and safeguarding an area of free speech and association and private life over which no government nor organisation may exercise control ;
- Evolution of a technology, which would be consistent with these aims and processes.



SAPTKRANTI (Seven Revolutions)



- 1) Revolting for equality between man and woman
- 2) The abolition of inequalities based on colour
- 3) Elimination and inequalities of birth and caste
- 4) National freedom or ending of foreign influence
- 5) Economic equality through increase in production
- 6) Protecting the privacy of individual life from all collective encroachments
- 7) Limitation on armaments.



Four-Pillars Theory



Lohia quotes :

- *“If the total affairs of a country cannot be simplified so as to achieve the active participation of the common man, they have to be cut up in small and yet smaller quantities. Federalism must go. Sovereign power must not reside alone in centre and federating units. It must be broken up and diffused over the smallest region where a group of men and women live.”*

He continued further,

- *“The next great advance in constitution making will be when a country frames its constitution on the basis of the four-pillar state, the village , the district, the province and the centre, being four pillars of equal majesty and dignity.”*



- The principle of decentralization is central to Lohia's economic and political thinking.
- Lohia's concept of the four pillar state is the manifestation of decentralisation of political and administrative power.
- Four-pillar theory provides a way of life and to all spheres of human activity, for instance, production, ownership, administration, planning, education and the like.
- It raises above the issues of regionalism and fractionalism.



- In the four-pillar state, the armed forces of the state might be controlled by the centre, the armed police by the province, but all other police might be brought under district and village control.
- While industries like the railways or iron and steel might be controlled by the centre, the small unit textile industry of the future might be left to district and village ownership.
- While price fixing might be a central subject, the structure of agriculture and the ratio of capital and labour in it might be left to the choice of the district and the village.



- A substantial part of state revenues should stay with the village and the district.
- As far as possible, the principle of election might be applied to administration, instead of nominations or selections.
- Economic decentralisation, corresponding to political and administrative decentralisation, might be brought and through maximum utilisation of small machines.



RATIONALE

- The 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution of India have, to some extent, made attempts at empowering people at the village and municipal levels.
- However, these measures don't meet the expectations enumerated in the 'four-pillar theory' and much needs to be done in this regard.
- In the wake of globalisation and the path of economic reforms embarked upon by India for the past two decades, there has been over emphasis on privatisation and this is major stumbling block to the four-pillar theory.



CONCLUSION

- Ram Manohar Lohia was a political philosopher having his unconquerable faith in indigenous and traditional institutions and ideas of India.
- Lohia provided flesh and blood to largely abstract formulations of the socialist movement.
- Undoubtedly, Lohia's ideology bears rationale for the present-day Indian politics; nevertheless, the travesty of truth is that there is no dedicated grouping to carry forward this task sincerely in letter and spirit.



- As Anirban Ganguly has aptly observed :

“Unfortunately there are very few, or perhaps none at all, within Lohia’s own party or its pale form that claims to be ‘Samajwadi’, who read Lohia, can match his intellectual sweep and vigour or even produce a grain of what he had given in terms of a prolific intellectual output. Lohia’s political heirs – those who claim today to be carrying forward his legacy in Indian politics, have little use of him and even less understanding of his genius.”



Thank you...

