

RAM MANOHAR LOHIA (1910-1967)

The growth of socialist thought as a philosophy of social and economic reconstruction is mostly the product of the western impact on India. One of the leading figures of the freedom struggle in India, Lala Lajpat Rai was considered by some critics as the first writer on Socialism and Bolshevism in India. The Marxist leader, M. N Roy was critical of Lala Lajpat Rai's writings and considered him as 'a bourgeois politician with sympathy for socialism'. The socialist movement became popular in India only after the first world war and the Russian revolution. The unprecedented economic crisis of the 1920's coupled with the capitalist and imperialist policies of the British government created spiraling inflation and increasing unemployment among the masses. The failure of the two civil disobedience movements of 1930 and 1932 and the compromising attitude of the Congress at the two round Table conferences made a number of young leaders disillusioned. Accordingly, the frustrated leaders within the Indian National Congress formed socialist organisations in different parts of India. During the thirties, Jawaharlal Nehru was considered as a great champion of the socialist philosophy.

By 1934, many socialist groups were formed in different parts of the country. The birth of the Congress Socialist Party in May 1934 was a landmark in the history of the socialist movement in India. The Congress Socialist Party provided an all India platform to all the socialist groups in India. Ashok Mehta's 'Democratic Socialism, and studies in Asian Socialism', Acharya Narendra Dev's 'Socialism and National Revolution', Jayaprakash Narayan's 'Towards Struggle', and Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia's 'The Mystery of Sir Stafford Cripps etc.', played a significant role in spreading the messages of socialism in India.

Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia may be regarded as the most unconventional and original theoretician among socialist thinkers in India. His speeches were severely critical and were packed with statistics. He played an important role during the freedom movement of the country.

Like many other Indian thinkers, the thought process of Lohia was shaped by an activist life lived by him. Being a prominent leader of the socialist movement in both pre- and post independence times, his theoretical explorations in various issues confronting India were enriched by the empirical input drawn from various movements he led or participated in. Born in a village in Faizabad district of Uttar Pradesh on 23rd March, 1910, Lohia was one of the few nationalist leaders in the country having his roots in rural India which probably conditioned his thinking process. Lohia's early initiation in the national movement was marked by two remarkable features. One, his meeting with Gandhi along with his father and listening to his views on like Stayagraha, non-violence and struggle for the independence of the country so much influenced the tender mind of Lohia that he became a Gandhian and remained so throughout his life. Two, imbued with the love for his mother land, he became a freedom fighter at an early age when he organised a small mourning shut-down of the death of Tilak in 1920. His participation in the national movement unabated till the liberation of India.

VIEWS ON SOCIALISM

In 1952, as president of Congress Socialist Party, Lohia pleaded for a greater incorporation of Gandhian ideas in socialist thought. He advocated the significance of a decentralised economy based upon the resuscitation of cottage industries. He asked the Indian socialists to understand the importance of small machines which could utilise maximum labour power with even small capital investment. Developing his argument in favour of Gandhian economy, Lohia explained that the world today was in the grip of two systems and the third one was in the making. He argued that 'Capitalism and Communism are almost fully elaborated systems, and the whole world is in their grip, and the result is poverty and war and fear. The third idea is also making itself felt on the world stage. It is still inadequate, and it has not been fully elaborated, but it is open' Lohia called this idea the true socialist idea. This socialist idea, to him, is based on Gandhian ideas of decentralised economy and village government. He, therefore, urged the importance of small scale cottage industries as visualised by Gandhiji

for meeting the socio-economic needs of rural people. However, this type of thought orientation was not liked by many of his colleagues. In June 1953, Ashok Mehta propounded his thesis of the political compulsions of the backward economy in which he tried to maintain that the ideology of the Congress was coming near to that of the socialists, and hence he urged for an ideological alliance between the Congress and the Praja Socialist Party (PSP). Lohia, as counterbalance to it, presented his equidistant theory and asserted that the socialists were still as much equidistant from the Congress as they were from the Communists. However, he saw no harm in making an electoral adjustment with the Congress under special circumstances. Lohia not only contributed to the development of socialist movement in the country but he also reflected on certain questions of political importance and thereby tried to build up his own socialist theory. Contemplating the process of history, he tells in his famous work, 'Wheel of History' that history appears to move in an inexorable cyclical order and that it moves without emotion. He dismisses Hegelian and Marxist interpretations of history for their answers do not provide us with a definite clue to the working of history. Lohia believes that human history is characterised by a tussle between crystallized castes and loosely cohesive classes.

NEW SOCIALISM

Lohia's scathing attack on the western ideological constructs appears to be aimed at preparing the ground for establishing socialism as the most appropriate theoretical format for steering India on the path of an equitable and all-round socio-economic development. While he 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 of India.

Lohia in his theory of new socialism visualises a four pillar state. In this four pillar state, an attempt is made to synthesise the opposed concepts of centralisation and decentralisation. In this system, the village,

the mandal (the district), the province and the central government all retain importance and are integrated in a system of functional federalism. The cohesive bond is provided by the performance of function.

His theory of new socialism had six basic elements. They are equalitarian standards in the areas of income and expenditure, growing economic interdependence, word parliament system based on adult franchise, democratic freedoms inclusive of right to private life, Gandhian technique of individual and collective civil disobedience, and dignity and rights of common man. Lohia's socialist state has the following features.

1. One-fourth of all governmental and plan expenditure shall be through village, district and city panchayats;
2. Police shall remain subordinate to village, city and district panchayats or any of their agencies;
3. the post of collector shall be abolished and all his functions will be distributed among various bodies in the district;
4. Agriculture industry and other property, which is nationalised will, as far as possible, be administered by village, city and district panchayats;
5. Economic decentralisation, corresponding to political and administrative decentralisation, will have to be brought about through maximum utilisation of small machines;

Lohia was an exponent of decentralised socialism. The socialist state, according to him, must aim at the decentralisation of both economic and political powers. The world liberal as well as proletarian, has hitherto known only the two pillar state. But democracy, according to Lohia, can warm the blood of the common man only when constitutional theory starts practising the state of four limbs, the village, the district the province, and the centre. Organically covered by the flesh and blood of equalities already indicated, this constitutional skeleton of the four- pillar state can bring to democracy joyous fulfilment. He also felt the necessity of creating a fifth pillar in the form of a world government. This is necessary for bringing about peace in the world.

Lohia was convinced that the traditional and organised socialism was a dead doctrine and a dying organisation. In its place, he urged for a new kind of socialism. While discussing his new socialism, he states that equality, democracy, non-violence, decentralisation and socialism are the five supreme principles, not alone of India's politics but also of all world action. 'New socialism' must aim at the attainment of these principles. In his 'New socialism' Lohia states that today seven revolutions are taking place everywhere in the world. These revolutions are:

1. for equality between man and woman
2. against political, economic and spiritual inequality based on skin, colour etc;
3. Against inequality of backward and high group or castes based long tradition, and for giving special opportunities to the backward;
4. against foreign enslavement and for freedom and world democratic rule,
5. For equality and planned production and against the existence and attachment for private capital.
6. against unjust encroachment on private life and for democratic method;
7. against weapons and for Satyagraha.

Thus Lohia advocated socialism in the form of a new civilisation which could be referred to as 'socialist humanism'. He gave a new direction and dimension to the socialist movement in India. He wanted the power of the state to be controlled, guided and framed by people's power and believed in the theology of democratic socialism and non-violent methodology as instruments of socioeconomic transformation. He urged all the socialist parties of the world to think in terms of an effective world union through world government.

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