



## Ram Manohar Lohia: Contested Claim and Vision

Gupta Naresh Kumar

Department of Political Science, University of Delhi, New Delhi, INDIA

Available online at: [www.isca.in](http://www.isca.in)

Received 7<sup>th</sup> April 2015, revised 11<sup>th</sup> May 2015, accepted 10<sup>th</sup> June 2015

### Abstract

*Among leaders who have influenced the course of Indian Political history and way of thinking, Ram Manohar Lohia was indeed a unique figure. Born on 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 1910 in Akbarpur, Uttar Pradesh, he was one amongst of the great nationalist political leaders of the Indian independence movement. Seeking an indigenous free from euro-centric solution to Indian problems, Lohia's vision and claim for his thoughts still remain contested and debated along the corridors of the Indian Philosophical and Political thoughts. In analysing Ram Manohar Lohia's ideas, this piece of work deals with two of his most debated works 'On Language' and 'The Two Segregation of Caste and Sex', excavating their philosophical foundations and reconstruct his political doctrine.*

**Key words:** Language, Caste, Sex, Modernity, Indian Political thought and Politics.

### Introduction

Decades have passed, still lays the contested claims of Lohia's views and ideas on Indian politics. As rightly pointed out by Yogendra Yadav (EPW, 2010 p1)—“During his life time, Rammanohar Lohia paid the price for three ‘sins’ that the opinion-making class could never forgive him for—he attacked Nehru repeatedly at a time when Nehru was god-like; he led a vigorous and voluble campaign against English and he publicly questioned upper caste dominance and advocated caste-based affirmative action<sup>1</sup>. The logic of Misinterpretation still seems to prevail, regarding what he said, what he meant, while saying and how he has been misinterpreted, across time and space. Being a Socialist, Lohia, tends to be completely different from the kind of socialism that the west preached. Atleast, he tried to come out of the room, whose walls were made of the same economic vision drawn from the general aims of capitalism. Tolpadi Rajaram argued, for Lohia the Socialist Project in India should seek autonomy, both in theory and practice and therefore needed a radical departure from its European models. It was rather for him, an open-ended project signifying possibilities of different and even contrasting interpretations<sup>2</sup>. Another significant contribution of him lies in his intersectionalist approach for understanding the inequalities, exclusions and exploitations in the power system of India<sup>3</sup>. The dynamicity of power and its determinants in forms of caste, class, gender and language indeed became the crucial point to start understanding the true complexities of the Indian society from Lohia's point of view. Let me therefore, look into some of his work (after removing the lens, which was already fixed for quite some time) in order to show where lies the domain of misinterpretation, contested ideas, and why still there is no taker of his views and ideas on Indian politics.

I have therefore decided to review two of his famous works—one on “Language” and other on—“The Two Segregation of Caste and Sex”.

### Language (September 1966)

On the issue of Language, Lohia has been labelled—as Anti-English, but not against any other Indian language and in some instance Hindi chauvinist. But was Lohia any of this? What have been his take on this issue. According to Lohia, there have been three voices in the political scene of India on the issue of language. Briefly, speaking, the much proclaimed claims have been that English is the language of modernity and if any nation wants to develop and progress, must therefore adopt this language, then can only it will be able to compete in this modern world. Others significant claims have been following, i. Communicating with the World claim, ii. Uniting claim, iii. Developmental claim, iv. Scientific claim. This Lohia, identify to be the claims of the Extremists, while on the other hand, he also identified the Moderates claims, who are ready to grant concessions to this language issue and argue till the time Indian Languages are not developed enough to serve our purpose, let English therefore be the language of the time. The third voice however comes from him, whom we will discuss latter. Let us first talk about these two voices. Prior to independence, under the leadership of Gandhi, much of the claims, belief, slogans, revolved around immediate replacement of English by India's own language. But as soon as freedom was gained and framing of Constitution started, doubts, debates and distrust on the issue of Language also took place. Both the ruling ideology and party were in a mode to compromise and agreed with the time phase maturity given to Indian Language, and for that time being let English be the language of the need. This shows how baggage of the past was continued with the sheer optimistic belief that it will fetch them good returns. However, this got more

complicated and with the Official Language Act, 1963, matter got worse. A Dual standard approach was taken therefore. As Lohia observed, during fifteen years the Congress government did two things. On the one hand it appointed committees and commissions to develop Hindi and other Indian languages: on the other it went on vomiting poisonous sermons in regard to the undeveloped stages of Indian language<sup>4</sup>.

On the claim that English being Modern language and India's window should remain open to the world. Lohia, here questions this whole idea of modernity and even puts question mark on why should only English be the only wind that should flow inside the window of India's house. For Lohia, language, therefore, was not only the means of communication; rather it also acted as a tool for the construction of one's identity and self expression. On the Modernist claim of the language, Lohia brings the tussle between—reason and belief, science and superstition and truth and orthodoxy. As he showed, how certain language, with so belief claims itself superior to other language. And here, one can also analyse the dominance and power factor i.e. the power of the language and how English is the power of dominance. As for Lohia, the basic question that one needs to ask was 'what is modernity'? Is it such a thing which could only be measured or understood from the prism of the West, or to be more precisely by following their self proclaimed understanding of Modernity? "To an Indian, English does not provide this. It besets him with hypocrisy; it turns an Indian into a bundle of complexes, a man with no human personality, an imitating headless monkey<sup>4</sup>.

Hence, while regarding why English should be the language of communication with the world, we can also bring our understanding of the Oriental discourse on how the west looks upon east<sup>5</sup>. That is to say, how has west done much of our home work regarding, how should we live, what should we eat, what should be our language and if we don't follow, then we might still have to be in the waiting room of the history. How language creates hierarchy and superior-inferior complex, gets beautifully analysed in Lohia work on Language. This is reason, why Lohia, disregard English to be the only language of communication, and therefore talk about other language as well like Russian, German and Italian. Moreover, on the claim on uniting India and the role of English language, Lohia completely regards it a falsifying history. While those who have argued for its scientific superiority, i.e. language of science, Lohia argues, it seems to mean as if English was born with all that it has today. Science and technology have never been the forte of the English people, infact, much of states, which are headway in it, belongs to Russia, Germany, France and Japan. As he pointed—For a French man English is probably nothing but French badly pronounced or vulgarly written.

He also brings the irony, of how on the one hand the Constitution of India talks about abolishing English, but the Lok Sabha has for all these years been violating the Constitution. He was therefore sceptical whether Parliament will ever be able to

do away with this Language problem and will Indian language gets its due right on time. Finally, for Lohia the underline role of English language and English education was to create a new breed of ruling elites. For this few will rule many. Lohia therefore tries to breakdown this power-sharing equation with the help of this linguistic turn. He moreover, tells us how such continuation of colonial language still puts us in chain, more in terms of mental colonisation and political feudalism. He therefore, when talks about *Saat Krantiyan* (seven revolutions), one of his radical attempts is to bring change in this Language domain and help establish a more egalitarian society<sup>6</sup>.

### The two segregations of caste and sex (January 1953)

Lohia as a man of practice and not a mere thinker did have something useful to tell us on the issue of caste and gender disparity. In this piece of work, Lohia has beautifully shown how two forms of oppressions and discrimination go in hand in hand. The parasitic nature of these two evils forms of discrimination, altogether contributed to other forms of discrimination and oppressions. Lohia in this work also presents to us the dilemma and contradictions one finds within democracy. He starts with sayings that, Indian are the saddest, poorest and diseased affected people on this earth; and the reason being the two segregations of sex and caste. He (Lohia) therefore rejected the claim that— "with the removal of poverty through a modern means of economy, these segregations will automatically get disappeared<sup>7</sup>. For him, this was the biggest mistake or lie one can say, for he said—poverty and the segregations sex and caste thrive on earth upon each other's worm. Therefore, a war on poverty will remain ineffective, until and unless similar kind of wars is not launched against both the segregations of sex and caste.

Lohia also brings into account, how despite, being committed to democratic values and principle, certain acts goes against it directly and in way provides support to those cultural practices and belief, which itself needed to be questioned and should have been washed away with the help of these democratic values. For instance, Lohia pointed out, how the President of Indian Republic publicly bathed the feet of two hundred Brahmins in the holy city of Banaras. Lohia regards such act to be vulgar display, which opening supports the preservation of caste system in India. Such incidents one can argue do bring and preserve identity politics. As he said "to bathe another's feet on the ground that he is a Brahmin is to guarantee the continuance of the caste system, of poverty and sadness<sup>7</sup>.

All these Lohia argued led to the unfinished goal of establishing a more egalitarian society in India. Lohia, apart from its general critic of the caste system, was also interested to know, what plans; does the government have to tackle this problem of caste? One suggestion, which Lohia had in mind, was to have inter-caste marriage and relate it with government jobs. As it being one of the criteria for getting government job. This here now brings us to the segregation between the two sexes. Hence, therefore,

segregations of all kinds are inter-related and sustain each other. Lohia, infact was said to be the first to establish such interesting linkage between caste and sex.

For Lohia argued the biggest section of the Indian population, almost 3/4<sup>th</sup> of the people, who were discriminated, disenfranchised and neglected were women and sudras. For Lohia identified, four major problems of the Indian women, which he thought needed to be addressed and done away with. They were: "i. the slavery of the kitchen and the stove that smokes horribly, ii. the hypocrisy attached to sex and marriage, including dowry, birth control and motherhood, iii. the need for greater equality between the two sexes in all sphere of life and iv. finally, opportunity in terms of leadership and other government jobs<sup>8</sup>.

On the problem regarding slavery of the kitchen and the stove that smokes horrible, Lohia argued for their autonomy from such slavery and encouraged them to agitate for their rights, and protest against under-feeding and unemployment. On the issue of sex hypocrisy, issue of marriage and problems of motherhood, Lohia argued that, both men and women should have their right of their sexual need and desire. Regarding marriage, issue of dowry, irrelevant expenditure on printing wedding cards, should be done away with. Addressing the issue of dowry, Lohia argues- "A girl without dowry is a person of no consequence, like a cow without her calf<sup>9</sup>. He therefore wants dowry to be penalised, as it has produced a perverted India. Regarding motherhood, Lohia, made a strong claims on the rights of the women to get divorce and remarry of unmarried motherhood and making birth control facilities available even after marriage. He therefore called for greater freedom for both men and women in terms of marriage and extends of going against caste and class barriers. Finally Lohia, talked about equal leadership qualities and opportunities to be identified and given to both men and women. The days when we will overcome this sexual difference and break the cultural barriers of caste and class that will be the day, when we can say to achieved true independence and establish a more egalitarian society. Hence, taking inspiration from his work and ideas on Caste, Sex, Marriage, Language and modernity, many Indian Political thinkers and Political Philosophers have continued to march forth with the ideas and thoughts of Lohia and has criticized all forms of segregations existing in our society. In the words of Lohia "There is no greater virtue today than to smash these abominable segregations of caste and sex. Let them only remember not a cause hurt or pain or be coarse, for the relationship between man and woman is of delicate texture. They

may not always be able to avoid it. But the striving should never cease. Above all, dispel this black sadness, and adventure into joy<sup>9</sup>.

## Conclusion

At last we can conclude by putting forward some questions, why there is no takers of Lohia's ideas, debates and analyses? Is it because he adopted a new line of thinking, which went against the standard academic or political approach? Or was it because he approach was too radical and unrealistic to achieve? Why still in our daily academia standia, Lohia still don't found any space? Has Lohia ideas failed us, or have we failed Lohia?

## References

1. Yadav Yogendra, On Remembering Lohia, *Economic and Political Weekly*, **XLV(40)**, 46-50 (2010)
2. Tolpadi Rajaram, 'Context, Discourse and Vision of Lohia's Socialism' *Economic and Political Weekly*, **XLV(40)**, 71-77 (2010)
3. Chatterjee Partha, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, (1986)
4. Lohia Ram Manohar, *Language* (September 1966), Rammanohar Lohia Samata Vidyalaya Nyasa, Hyderabad, Second Edition, (1986)
5. Said Edward W, *Orientalism*, Vintage Books, New York, (1979)
6. Dubey Satya Mitra, Dr Rammanohar Lohia: A Rebel Socialist and a Visionary, *Mainstream*, **XLIX(13)**, 30, (2011)
7. Lohia Ram Manohar, the two segregations of caste and sex (1953), Available at: [http:// lohiatoday.com/ByLohia /Two\\_SegregationsOfCasteAndSex.pdf](http://lohiatoday.com/ByLohia/Two_SegregationsOfCasteAndSex.pdf).
8. Lohia Ram Manohar, *The Caste System* (1964), Rammanohar Lohia Samata Vidyalaya Nyasa, Hyderabad, Second Edition, (1979)
9. Lohia Ram Manohar, *The Two Segregations of Caste and Sex* (2015), Available at: [http://www.theotherside.org.in /index.php/issue/oct\\_2014/the\\_two\\_segregations\\_of\\_caste\\_and\\_sex](http://www.theotherside.org.in/index.php/issue/oct_2014/the_two_segregations_of_caste_and_sex)