

An Overview of Lohia's Socio-Political Ideas

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Abstract

Politics in India has changed to a greater extent since the last few decades and it is facing many problems. Like every other political system, the nature of the Indian political system has been shaped by its historical, social, economic, religious and many other traditions of the society. Rammanohar Lohia's contribution to the development of Indian socialist political thought is invaluable. An attempt has been made to show how socio-political ideas of Rammanohar Lohia can help to regenerate the spirit of India.

Keywords: Lohia, Socialism, Equality, Politics

INTRODUCTION

Since ages, politics has played a pivotal role in human civilization. Politics is an essential human activity – essential in building societies and communities based on rules, laws and a balance of conflicting interests (Girardin, 2012). Indian politics by nature is diversified in many ways such as castes, religions, and the people speaking various languages have influenced the Indian politics. Thus, like every other political system, the nature of the Indian political system has been shaped by its historical, social, economic, religious and many other traditions of the society (Nurjaman, 2014). As one of the largest democratic countries in the world, India is also facing many social, political, cultural and economic problems such as lack of ethics in politics, family politics, communalism, caste-based politics etc. overall political analysis of India shows that there has been a rapid change and as a result a difference could be seen between pre and post-independence political scenario. Pre-independence politics viz., Indian freedom movement based on the humanistic values of Mahatma Gandhi achieved a great victory and proved that Satyagraha, Non-violence, civil disobedience are the powerful tools of politics. But the current Indian politics occupied largely with money and muscle power lacking ethics and using caste and religion as a tool of politics for votes is really an unhealthy development for any society.

Indian freedom movement gave birth to many great politicians and intellectuals such as Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Subhash Chandra Bose etc., and one among them was Ram Manohar Lohia-one of the founders of Indian socialism. He laid doctrinal foundations for the socialistic politics in India. His political philosophy covers most of the problems India has been facing since freedom struggle. Lohia was critical about the British government but he was more critical on Indian government which changed its fundamental policies after the death of Gandhi.

Rammanohar Lohia's contribution to the development of Indian socialist political thought is invaluable. Lohia's philosophy was initially influenced by Marxism but later he was impressed and influenced by the Gandhian ideals and methods. He believed in the Gandhian methods of Satyagraha, Civil disobedience, and Non-Violent revolution. Lohia's first concern was to create the socialist theory on the basis of Indian conditions. Lohia like Gandhi never agreed with the Marxist concept of means and ends, he believed that both means and ends are equally important and means should be based on the Gandhian concept of love, truth, and non-violence.

Contemporary political problems and challenges in India

After independence from British rule, it has been almost over half a century that India has adopted and incorporated a constitutional democratic set up with the parliamentary system of government. Although, with the rapid development in the political system India has turned out to be the world's largest democracy, yet the nation's ability to deliver effective governance has hardly improved. After independence, a transition and transformation were witnessed by the virtue of adopting democracy, many issues like poverty, gender discrimination, caste problem and communalism etc, were addressed publicly by many politicians but the seed of effective ethics based politics was never sown. Therefore the problems still remain intact in one or the other form. Eradicating them demands a firm socio-political thought and in this case, looking back at the uncompromising and unparallel views of Rammanohar Lohia seems to be helpful. Before putting on record on the views of Lohia, it is considered worth mentioning the problems in the political sphere of contemporary India.

Lack of Ethics in Politics

Political ethics means the practice of making moral judgments about political action and the study of that practice (IEE). Consistency between vision and process is an essential ingredient of political success (Girardin, 2012). Moral behavior in politics is a more important discipline of focus and debate than ever. The aim of instilling and upholding ethically upright behavior is optimal governance rather than ideal or perfect. Generally speaking, ethics, especially through its normative approach, emphasizes equity and just governance which enhances and adds decisive value to politics.

Being a decision making the authority of the societal welfare, politicians are expected to refrain from moral debauchery. Therefore, politics is supposed to be ethical in nature and politicians should follow the moral way of life publicly and privately. On the contrary, many legislators are in the net for unethical acts including drug smuggling, corruption, and sex-related crimes against women (Sing., 2008). As representatives of the people, their words and actions matter a lot.

Mahatma Gandhi emphasized the moral behavior of an individual especially people who are working for society. They should be more conscious of their words and actions. Lohia an adherent of Gandhi also gave importance to ethics in politics. For Lohia, self-discipline in

politics plays a significant role without which politics is crude. Ethical politics substantiates the principle of character building (Rustom, 1993).

The narrowest possible meaning of Will Power in politics could be “the determination of an individual political actor to do and say things that will produce the desired outcome.” India is a country where there is a lack of political will i.e. the incapacity of political or administrative instruments to achieve an outcome. A political leader is supposed to develop ‘political will’ to change or achieve something, some capacity to envision how things might be different.

To quote a few major problems “poverty, regional and religion based politics, communalism, gender discrimination etc. with a proper programme and execution most of the problems can be annihilated. Regarding this Lohia says in his article policy and problems” what is needed is a policy that will combat corruption and dishonesty. What is needed is an economic and legal policy. Nobody should be allowed to spend more than the prescribed maximum. If anybody is legitimately suspected of living beyond his means or accumulating beyond his income, the law must come down heavily on him unless he can prove where he got all that from. Such a policy may create a different set of problems but the will is there, this will become precisely the starting point of the fight to finish between the old order and the new” (Lohia, 2011).

Lohia was a strong supporter of the concept of decentralization in every sphere of national life. Decentralization of economic power must begin with the decentralization of political power (Usha, 1985) to achieve decentralization Lohia put forward the concept of “Four pillar state”. The four pillars namely, the village, the Mandal or district, the province. The central government should be integrated into a system of function federalism. The four pillar state implies the abolition of district magistracy which represents a notorious concentration of political power. Furthermore, the district, village and city Panchayats are to take charge of policies as well as welfare functions (Lohia, 1956). Perhaps it was in this context he has encouraged the lower castes in the positions of party and power politics to provide adequate representation to the real proletariat.

As an adherent supporter of Gandhi, he wanted to build the state on the principles of Gandhi Ji. His idea of the state is that which is totally decentralized in nature. He called his theory of decentralizing a “four pillars state”. Its four pillars—the Village, the Mandal (the district), the Province and the Central Government, will be so organized as to work on the principle of a functional democracy. The main features of this state, according to Lohia, will be:

- (1) One-fourth of all governmental and plan expenditure shall be through the 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. As far as possible, the principle of the election will be applied in administration, instead of nominations.

(4) Agriculture, industry and other property, which is nationalized, will, as far as possible, be owned and administered by village, city and district panchayats.

(5) Economic decentralization, corresponding to political and administrative decentralization, will have to be brought about through maximum utilization of small machines (Lohia, 2011).

LOHIA'S CONCEPT OF NEW SOCIALISM

Lohia's political ideology is called New Socialism. Rammanohar Lohia refused to accept western socialism and convinced that foreign socialism will never be a solution giver to Indian socio-political and economic problems. So, he presented his original Socialism in the Socialist conference held at Panchamri on May 1952. According to Lohia socialism is newer doctrine than capitalism or communism. The fundamental postulates of New Socialism are as follows;

1. Socialism is a newer doctrine than Capitalism or Communism. He further says Socialism should cease to live on the borrowed breath. Too long has it borrowed from communism its economic aims and capitalism or the liberal age its non-economic and general aim. An acute disharmony has resulted.

2. To explore once again the economic and the general aims of society and to integrate them into a harmony should be a high endeavor of Socialist doctrine.

3. The establishment of social ownership over existing means of production, their further development, and mass production, and some kind of a planned economy are acknowledged in varying degrees as the economic aims of Socialism.

4. The preservation of national freedom, democracy, and human rights and the securing of peace and of what is variously termed as the values of a culture or the spiritual qualities of life are believed to be the general aims of Socialism.

5. Unless Socialism is able to disintegrate the premises on which Capitalism and Communism are founded and arrange instead its own harmony of economic and general aims, it will continue to be an illogical doctrine that refuses to come of age (Lohia, 2011).

According to Lohia "the idea of achieving equality and prosperity is socialism". In our country, this definition acquires a deeper meaning, for I think that here or in any other country where there is poverty, absolute poverty, the only means to achieve prosperity is equality".(Bhattacharya, 2012).

LOHIA'S CONCEPT OF SEVEN REVOLUTIONS

Lohia's concept of seven revolutions clearly shows the inequality in all its aspects. Those seven revolutions are:

(1) For equality between man and woman;

According to Lohia" main revolution of our times aims at achieving equality between man and woman. Of all injustice, plaguing the earth, those arising out of the inequality between the sexes are perhaps the bedrock. Inequality between man and woman has to become part of

human habit and nature that it seeps into everything else. Most of humanity suffers from one inequality or another, but one half of it is weighted down further. Unequal employment practices are a very small expression of a woman's inferior position, often insidiously concealed. The man has ever been actuated by two contrary impulses towards the woman. He wants him too bright, intelligent, and handsome and the rest, in short, a very living person. In the mind of the male, therefore, resides a grievous clash between wanting her to be his woman, as also alive and beautiful, therefore, to be free and at the same time *unfree*. Not unless this clash is resolved at least tentatively and pragmatically, can there be equal status for women. Giving her equal opportunity would not solve the problem of inequality between sexes. When a group of people is held down by debility, physical or cultural, the only way to bring it up to equality with others is through conferment of preferential opportunities. (Bhattacharya, 2012).

(2) Against political, economic and other inequalities based upon skin color:

Lohia was against all kinds of discrimination. With reference to discriminate based on color, he says "A revolution specific to our time aims at demolishing inequality springing from skin-color". (Bhattacharya, 2012). Color inequality still exists in our society .people think that fairness of sin superior and present condition is no different than the past. People won't get fair skin using so many creams and moisturizes. This blind belief of white color admiration is really a sign of any healthy society. Lohia continues saying" this down-grading of colored skin is certainly the result of white supremacy in the past four hundred years, at least in some measure.

(3) Against the inequalities between higher and backward castes and for preferential opportunities for the backward sections:

Lohia's approaches to the caste problem are unique and significant. According to Lohia caste is immobile class. Loosening caste is class. "Caste restricts opportunity. Restricted opportunity constricts ability. Constricted ability further restricts opportunity. Where caste prevails, opportunity and ability are restricted to ever-narrowing circles of the people". (Bhattacharya, 2012)

No other part of the earth has indeed suffered as much from constricted ability and the near death of the nation that flows from caste, but its drawbacks are everywhere to see. Incipient caste is everywhere. So is corresponding restriction fo ability and opportunity. The only way out is a preferential opportunity for groups whom caste has more or less disabled. (Bhattacharya, 2012)

Lohia further says," To finish this vicious circle of caste and poverty and restrictive mentality, a great revolution of spirit is necessary. Only, if all men are persuaded to see that growing inequality and position go together in the same way as wealth and approximating equality, would this material and spiritual revolution be possible. India needs this revolution more than any other land, but all peoples need it to some degree" (Bhattacharya, 2012).

(4) Against foreign rules and for freedom and democratic world government

Lohia was against all kinds of foreign interventions. He clearly states that all foreign rules are dominant and danger to the freedom of the particular society. He was also a great advocate of world government.

(5) Economic equality and planned production and against the lust for and system of private property

Economic equality is one of the important concerns for Lohia because the world was divided into two groups one is rich and another is poor. The root cause for the class struggle is nothing but economic inequality. He was against the private ownership and believed that equal distribution of wealth and planned production can help to create a socialist society.

(6) Against unjust interference in private life and for democratic methods

The sixth revolution of Lohia is relevant to the present times than ever. With the growth of technology governments can easily spy on the private life of an individual and according to Lohia the interference of the government into the individual life is shows that government which is ruling is not following the democratic methods.

(7) Against arms and weapons and for Satyagraha.

It is obvious that nearly half-a-century after this thesis of Lohia the world has moved closer to these noble aims in different parts of the world (Kumar, 2014).

Conclusion

Rammanohar Lohia's contribution to the development of socialist thought in India is very significant and unique. Apart from his socialist ideas like four pillar state and Seven Revolutions. He was also an advocate of small-unit technology and critic of modern civilization. Contemporary Indian society experiencing many socio-political problems and Lohia's socialist ideals can be a tool to solve the many problems of the present. Although Lohia is not physically with us still his ideas are influencing many activists across India and the world who are working hard to achieve the egalitarian society.

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