

A VEDANTIC STUDY OF DR. LOHIA

After Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Rammanohar Lohia, is likely to be appropriated by his critics and opponents in the age-old tradition of appropriation and assimilation which saw Buddhism being appropriated by Shankar's *Shaivism* and *Vaishnavism* and Buddha being recognized as an incarnation of Vishnu.

A beautiful and thought-provoking book written by Shri S.R. Nene (a fine scholar and Rashtra Seva Dal trained socialist) with title 'Dr. Rammanohar Lohia Remembered: His Philosophy and Vision' ^[1], gives us an inkling of this possibility. It gives Lohia admirers a good feeling in view of the counter attempt to denigrate and black-list Lohia by Marxists and Nehruites, the process they started when Lohia was alive and which they are continuing even after 43 years of his death.

Shri Nene is a scholar of many disciplines, with knowledge of many languages and with interest in wide-range of subjects including behavioural science, evolutionary human history, anthropology, etc. but he stands firmly on the foundation of Indian culture, tradition and intellectual history. Like Namboodris of Kerela and Iyers of Tamilnadu, he as a Chitpavan Brahmin of Maharashtra, is deeply immersed in the ocean of knowledge of Indian tradition, starting from *Vedas* and through *Upanishadas*, *Shastras* to *Vedanta* of Shankaracharya version and its off-shoots.

It is difficult to say as to what exactly attracted him to Lohia, since Lohia had the quality of attracting different kind of persons for different reasons. Some were attracted to him on account of his fervor for equality, liberty and fraternity, some for his unrelenting struggle, some for his extreme love for humanity, some for his unassuming, simple and carefree life-style in the tradition of Siva, some for his dogged determination to fight the evils of the society irrespective of the consequences and in the face of opposite tide and adverse atmosphere all around; and some for his love for Indian culture.

Most probably Shri Nene was most attracted to his last quality. That is why, this book is devoted mainly to the study of his book 'Wheel of History' in which Dr. Lohia has questioned almost all historians of Europe and given an entirely new interpretation of human history based on cyclic movement of time instead of linear one as followed for euro-centric historians. This cyclic movement of time is akin to '*Chaturyagi*' (four-epoch) scheme of Indian tradition although Lohia was neither enamoured with four-fold division of our mythological Indian history nor with what was rotten in the Indian culture like the caste-system.

Although Shri Nene differs with Lohia on several matters like Shankaracharya's dichotomy of abstract and concrete (*Nirguna and Saguna*) which solidified caste system, Rama's treatment to Sita and Shambuk which he justifies on the ground of established *Dharma* and current norms of that time (p.163). He also unlike Lohia appears to be too much influenced by the imperialist historians and Ambedkarite scholars in the matter of creation of *Shudras* and Untouchables as result of conquest of indigenous inhabitants by foreign invaders (p.49).

Yet, his appreciation of Lohia's book 'Wheel of History' is really a genuine example of research work. He refers to his study of many famous western historians including Oswald Spengler, Arnold Toynbee, Sorokin and many others (p.17) and finds Lohia's views on history refreshing and inspiring. He says that 'according to Hegel, Karl Marx, Engels, history is an eternal dialectic in which one type reactively causes the rise of the other i.e. the opposite type like the rich and the poor, the haves and have-nots, the conquerors and the vanquished etc. and the tension between the two opposing forces is resolved in the dialectic movement of history. Lohia too subscribes to this dialectics, but expands this dialectics in two directions, internal and external, with caste and class acting and reacting on each other in conditions of external conquests and internal peace. Lohia's main criticism of euro-centric historians like Marx, Hegel, Engels, Toynbee, Spengler etc. was that they ignored the external conflict between imperialists and their subjects, the colonies, and took it for granted that whatever happened in Europe will also happen in all other countries. Lohia challenged this euro-centrism ^[2].

According to Dr. Lohia, history should become an advisory agency or a think tank to discern the ideal so as to spur the succeeding generations to actualize it by avoiding past mistakes and by amending their behaviour (p.18). To state the symptoms of a malady is not to remove the cause of the malady. 'The meaning of life has to be wrested, and at some stage, man must begin to unravel his purpose through history' (p.18). He clearly differed from historians who considered history as mere recording of facts ^[3]. Another aspect of this book which must have fascinated Shri Nene was 'undiscoverability of history'. Lohia's disappointment was about the unfathomable nature of subtler motives, feelings and the struggle or conflict in the sub-conscious, which influenced the big names in the history to undertake benevolent acts or wreak destruction, blood-bath and violence (p.19).

To accomplish history Lohia recommended reading of legends, myths as part of history. His treatment of history as prose of life and myths as poetry of life might have fascinated the writer, on account of its being in line with Indian tradition of history which is incorporated in epics like *Ramayana and Mahabharata* and several mythological compilations. The writer has also noted in the beginning of the book that Lohia believed that history has a purpose, for it accords us a tool-of-thought with which to work..... History implies an un-ending enlargement of knowledge, peace and prosperity for the benefit of entire humanity, especially the less privileged people and creating a society in which all capacities endowed by nature in mankind will be developed fully for their welfarist use. Shri Nene, sees in this concept of history a glimpse of four ventures of Indian ethos, i.e. *Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksha*; which states that all efforts, all knowledge lead to the *Moksha* which means, the absolute freedom, absolute equality and absolute fraternity.

What determines the course of history, spirit or matter, is also an interesting point which is decided by Lohia, in accordance with Indian ethos. He is of the opinion that the matter (which he describes as economic aims) and spirit (which he describes as general aims), should be balanced and in autonomous co-relation and no one should ignore the other. According to Dr. Lohia, old civilizations declined due to excessive weight of the spiritual (general) aims, while the modern (western) civilization is likely to decline due to excessive weight of material (economic)

aims. In Lohia's views, 'The spirit wreaks vengeance upon matter and upsets the whole apple-cart (p.35). Decline of Soviet Union in 1989 is given as an example by the writer. He says, by 1992, communism based on the rigid belief that history is determined by economics, disappeared from Europe, its land of birth (p.35) ^[4].

In nutshell, Lohia's views on purpose of history, approximation of mankind, balance between the economic aims and general aims (matter and spirit), autonomous state of these two aims, constantly acting and reacting on each other and oscillation of prosperity and power between communities and continents together with opposition to euro-centrism, inspired the writer to write this beautiful chapter on 'Wheel of History'.

But this was not the sole purpose of the book. The writer also wanted to place Dr. Lohia side by side with Buddha, Shankaracharya and Gandhi, the three icons who reflect the light of essence of Indian culture to which the writer is sincerely devoted. He sees two basic orientations in Lohia, spiritual belief and rational faith in science, which he also sees in Gautam Buddha and Shankaracharya. As for Gandhi, who has already been appropriated by the Indian culturists of both Gandhian and non-Gandhian brand, Lohia had already declared himself a sort of devotee, though heretic or *kujat Gandhivadi*.

Thus Lohia, with-spiritual bent of mind, unenamoured with western culture and civilization, genuinely interested in Indian culture, legends, myths, gods, rivers and pilgrim places, supporting Indian languages as against foreign language i.e. English, quoting *Upanishads, Gita, Mahabharata, Ramayana* in support of his view, writing beautiful essays on Ram, Krishna and Siva and leading a simple life, is fit person to be placed in the line of Buddha, Shankaracharya, Ram Krishna Paramhansa and Vivekanand. The writer even finds something additional in Lohia. He says: "But they were all advocates of ascetism of one kind or the other and also believers in *karma*, and more importantly completely ignorant of the truth enunciated by Dr. Lohia, that social inequality is inversely proportional to economic prosperity of the society (p.65). Besides, the writer firmly believes that Lohia would stand out as a philosopher in Buddha's mould in the matter of constructive philosophy with critical philosophy (p.78).

Lohia didn't believe in God but he believed in human consciousness. He not only talks of consciousness but describes its various moods in his article 'An Episode in Yoga', and even talks of *Nirvikalp Samadhi*, the highest stage of mind i.e. consciousness. According to Shri Nene this consciousness is nothing but God's grace: "All macro and micro events from movement of giant stars to those of tiniest fundamental particles are coordinated in a mathematical order by all-pervading consciousness" (p.83). Human consciousness is only a part of this all-pervading consciousness. The author assumes that "Dr. Lohia, as an avid reader of the findings of leading scientists must have read that miracles of human consciousness was unexplainable without resort to metaphysical framework i.e. language of faith as opposed to rational ground" (p.85).

With this, the author deduces the existence of God from the presence of human consciousness: "We can, therefore, conclude that the origin of human consciousness, especially the moral sense, the inner eye and the inner voice which constitute human spirit, so highly valued by Dr.

Lohia, are not known to us.... Consequently, we cannot discount the possibility of the existence of a transcendental being named God or some other being who gave us our special gift of consciousness.... Dr. Lohia too felt compelled to refer to it. Dr. Lohia once said, ‘God and woman are probably the only two purposes of life’ (p.87). The author failed to mention that Dr. Lohia added to this statement that God he didn’t believe and woman he didn’t get. He has even tried to prove that *Sankhya’s Purusha*, *Vedanta’s Brahma* and human consciousness are same. Hence Dr. Lohia could very well be bracketed with Buddha, Shankaracharya, Vivekanand and Gandhi.

However, there were some problems. Lohia did not believe in caste. He wanted to annihilate caste. He was fully confident that caste could be abolished. Even Dr. B.R. Ambedkar did not have this confidence. Even though he wanted to annihilate the caste, he ultimately gave up in disappointment and embraced Buddhism. But Lohia set a plan and worked for it till his death and that plan continued working even after his death. His slogan of 60% reservation to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Castes, including backward minorities and women of all caste, is bringing about the transformation of the society. It has dethroned the upper castes from perpetual power and it is gradually advancing towards social equality though in a painful manner.

But this does not fit in the scheme of *Vedanta* or *Advaita*, the monism of Shankaracharya, which doesn’t differentiate between men and men or women and women, not even between man and animal or man and insect and treat all equally and so far the apparent discrimination is concerned, it is an illusion. He also cites Shankar in support of caste-system: “Through stupendous distinction between absolute truth and worldly truth, Shankar has laid down a philosophical basis for reconciling great heights of spirituality with social order of perfidious dimension of solidification of caste (p.43).

He even quotes a *vedic* hymn in support of caste-distinction: “In spite of identical endowment of hearing and eye-sight, the faculty of intelligence is not endowed equally among the votaries of knowledge, in the same way as some pools are deep, their water rising to the head level or above, some pools are knee-deep, whereas water in some pool is barely sufficient for bathing” (p.53). So the writer says: “It is not known how Shankaracharya contributed to the solidification of the caste-system (as Lohia alleges). Shankaracharya has in fact testified to the equality of all human beings”. Then the writer surmises that Dr. Lohia has probably relied too much on the communist leaders diatribe against Hindu religion and religious leaders” (p.44).

Not only this, the writer produces a piece of scientific evidence. After comparing Neanderthal with Homo sapiens in God-given consciousness, he produces an evidence from Genetic Engineering. He says: “Genes produced intellectual caste-system in which those at the top are natural and inevitable overlords of those at the bottom: (p.93).

Shri Nene defends the caste in no uncertain manner. He says: “caste was necessitated by constant arrivals of new people into India from north-west. Adjustment and integration of new arrivals and their miscegenate progenies, in the already existing four-fold order, was compelling

need as well as a daunting task of the time (p.83) ^[5]. But inspite of Dr. Lohia's stand on caste-system which is unpalatable to adherents of Indian culture or Shankara's *Advaita*, Shri Nene insists upon including Dr. Lohia among the pioneers of Indian culture. Comparing him to Shankaracharya and Buddha, he says: "In this effort (in philosophizing almost all important aspects of human activity), he admirably combined Shankaracharya's sharp intellect with Buddha's compassionate heart. But even more, like the great Shankaracharya, he walked all over as an intrepid dialectician (p.149).

In order to stress their point, many scholars and thinkers have a tendency to over-simplify. Karl Marx had made many such over-simplifications which have easily captivated the young generations, even though many of them are disillusioned of them later. One such over-simplification regarding Lohia was made by Shri Yogendra Yadav, a really fine scholar, in his monograph on Lohia, published in Economic & Political Weekly of October 2-9, 2010, he said: "Among Lohia's admirers anything dead in Lohia, would be treated as blasphemy and among his critics (like Nehruites and Marxists) ^[6] anything living in Lohia, would invite a smirk".

Shri Nene's book negates this over-simplification.

About the author

Born on 4th August, 1924 in Himachal Pradesh. Freelance writer and journalist in Hindi, having written, edited and translated more than 100 books and pamphlets on literature, social and political thought, education and children's literature including 11 volumes of documents on freedom movement and 17 volumes of collected works of Dr. Lohia. Long association with socialist movement. **Special interest of study:** Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Rammanohar Lohia, Jaiprakash Narayan, Acharya Narendra Deva, Madhu Limaye and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.

FOOT-NOTES

1. Nene, S.R, Dr. Rammanohar Lohia remembered; His Philosophy and Vision; Rupa & Co, New Delhi-2, 1st edition, 2010; Price Rs 295.
2. In this his was the second precursor voice against what was later known as Orientalism; the first voice being that of Mahatma Gandhi in 'Hind Swaraj'.
3. Dr. Lohia, had contempt for those Indian historians, who followed blindly the traditions, set by imperialist historians. Such Indian historians also had scant regard for Lohia. One incident was narrated by Marxist scholar P.C Joshi in an article published in *Akar*-Oct-December, 2010. He says when he was studying in university, a friend of his gave Lohia's book 'Wheel of History', to his professor R.K. Mukherjee who casually asked him to go through it and let him know his opinion. The friend, after going through the book reported that it is influenced by Spengler. The professor put it aside.
4. The writer sees Lohia's concepts of matter and spirit like Lakshmi and Saraswati, who should never be brought into race for supremacy.
5. Even Vivekanand has justified caste in an interview given to The Hindu in 1897. According to him caste-system is an intelligent scheme to uplift everyone to the stage of a Brahmin and then to entitle him for *Moksha*.
6. A retired Marxist professor of Delhi University who had recently written & published a textbook on Economics, said after reading Lohia's essay 'Economics After Marx', that Lohia's economics was weak. This reminded me of meeting that took place between American President F.D. Roosevelt and Lord Maynard Keynes in connection with FDR's New Deal programme to tackle the great depression. The President called the Nobel laureate only as professor and Keynes commented that President's economics was weak.