

Lohia's Immanent Critique of Caste

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Abstract

Immanent critique is interested in exploring internal strength of a social order on the basis of which its limits are exposed. This paper argues that Lohia's critique of caste is based on recognition of its internal strength. Lohia's critique is primarily interested in exploring why caste manages to survive centuries of resistance from within or from outside. Is there any strength in caste order? Even when it looks to be weak, it is still a stronger resilient system of power. His thesis is not to legitimise caste order. Rather it aims to explore appropriate lessons for socialist movement that must aim at the destruction of caste inequalities. These issues are unexplored by previous thinkers like Gandhi and Ambedkar. Yet, in several senses, his assessment of caste complements Ambedkar's annihilation of caste. The present paper, though primarily interested in exploring Lohia's critique, hints at the connections between these great critics of caste order.

Caste as domination or legitimation?

Since caste is a power structure, it needs to be related to a theory of power. A theory of power is usually caught with a tension between two notions of power: power as a hierarchy of domination on the one hand and power as a system of legitimation on the other hand. The former focuses on a hierarchy of elites and subalterns, structural inequalities arising between them and strategies to dominate subaltern strata and so on. The latter focuses on why subalterns give consent to the domination of elites and its moral and legal paraphernalia.

These notions of power represent two different sides of power, sometimes pushing theorists to take sectarian positions. That is to say, theorists of power may merely echo the one or the other side of power, failing to notice that there are actually two sides of power in live tension or contradiction between each other. A comprehensive theory of power will have to engage with these two different tendencies of power structure. Thus, a broad view of caste power may have to take into account the hierarchy of domination and structures of legitimation. It must break with a binary view that treats caste as domination or as legitimation process.

This paper primarily focuses on Lohia's accounts which deal with the moral order of caste. He focuses on the legitimizing process of caste system and enquires into why caste has survived as a social system. He throws some light on the resilient strength of caste system, while pleading for the destruction of caste's exclusionary practices. But it would be a terrible mistake to examine Lohia's account of caste in isolation from that of Gandhi and Ambedkar. Moreover, in terms of genealogy, he should be evaluated as a succeeding thinker. If Lohia needs to be examined in relation to his immediate intellectual context, the antecedent tradition of criticism of caste must be placed beforehand so that we can assess his own contributions fruitfully. It may not be inaccurate to claim that the earlier thinkers such as Gandhi and Ambedkar describe caste as a hierarchy of domination (untouchability for Gandhi and graded inequalities for Ambedkar). Lohia on the other hand focuses on caste as a legitimising system: how does it draw support of people and gain acceptability as a system? A non-sectarian view of caste may thus have to combine these two important views of caste system as these views represent two different sides of caste system.

Ambedkar and Lohia on Gandhi's view of Caste

There is one thing common to both Ambedkar and Lohia. Both are dissatisfied with Gandhi's doctrine of least resistance to caste order. Both argue for the rediscovery of Satyagrah against caste system. If you recall, Gandhi was wary of Satyagrah against caste inequalities, notwithstanding his opposition to the British Raj on the grounds of Satyagrah. Gandhi does not think it would be prudent to place Satyagrah against caste order during the British Raj or even after India's Independence. Rather, on the caste issues, he proposes the doctrine of least resistance as a matter of principle rather than a time-dependent strategy. Gandhi thinks that caste is an unequal structure between the touchable castes and the untouchable castes.

He argues for changing the upper caste mentalities by an appeal to their change of hearts. He argues that if the upper castes could be convinced with an appeal to the principle of ancestral calling, it would be possible for them to believe in the redundancy of untouchability. According to this principle, we are doing different functions as our duties to a village community as ordained by our ancestors. Through an alternative education of upper castes, it would be possible to convince them that different castes do mere duties to their ancestors. So, there is no low or polluted duty and high or pure duty. All caste functions are duties as per the ancestral calling. Once upper castes are convinced with a notion of duty in every manual labour, it would be possible for them to remove from their minds that some groups do menial labour or polluted functions. All functions would be seen as necessary duties to ancestors. Once upper castes are convinced with this doctrine, they would also undertake street sweeping and so on as Gandhi himself did. That would bring an end to untouchability. So, Satyagraha against untouchability is not necessary. Ambedkar calls Gandhi's doctrine as the one of least resistance.¹

Both Ambedkar and Lohia remain dissatisfied with Gandhi's doctrine of least resistance. Both argue that Gandhi, as a matter of principle, denies the relevance of Satyagrah against caste inequalities. If you look around India's history, it is full of such Satyagraha resistance movements against caste system, so argues Ambedkar. By denying Satyagraha against caste, Gandhi denies the relevance of this history to contemporary egalitarians. Ambedkar argues that Gandhi's call for abolition of untouchability amounts to a case of limited egalitarianism. Lohia too argues that Gandhi's Satyagraha may be extended against caste system and socialism, unlike Gandhism, may explore the possibility of policy action against caste inequalities, a theme in which Ambedkar is equally concerned. Thus, we find some common threads in their assessment of Gandhism vis-à-vis caste order. Both agree the Gandhism reduces caste into existence of untouchables and nullifies any concerted policy or political action against caste system. Both agree that it would be necessary to view caste order as power structure and offer an all-rounded critique of caste so that it would be entirely abolished.

For both of them, the abolition of caste order is more important than the abolition of untouchability of the Dalits as Gandhism envisages. Both agree that Gandhism is an egalitarian ideology on the caste question but it has limited utilities in a democratic nation determined to abolish caste inequalities. In fact, Ambedkar, unlike his followers, clearly demarcates three egalitarian ideologies against caste: Gandhism, Marxism and Buddhism. For him as also for Lohia, it would be possible to learn from Gandhism and Marxism while trying to establish an egalitarian ideology, even though lessons from them may have limited applicability in relation to caste order in India. So, I submit, Ambedkar was not anti-Gandhi as made out by his followers today. In a dialectical thinking, there are no pro- or anti- positions.²

Both give credit to Gandhi for discovering Satyagraha as a means of people's struggle against injustice and for popularizing Satyagraha at a pan-Indian level. Lohia assumes that due to Gandhi, it would be now possible to place Satyagraha against caste system, even though Gandhi might have placed "the change of heart" doctrine in relation to caste or property disputes.³ For, due to Gandhism, Satyagraha is now etched on to people's memory at a national level. People would never forget its relevance in their own social and political struggles. There is no blind anti-Gandhism in Ambedkar as made out by his followers today, even though he is sharply critical of Gandhism.

Ambedkar and caste as a system of graded inequalities

Let us focus on Ambedkar's programme of annihilation of caste as a prelude to our discussion of Lohia's plea for the destruction of caste order. Ambedkar argues clearly: Gandhism has a weak understanding of caste inequalities and moreover has a weaker understanding of solutions to caste order. We have seen the latter aspect and now shall examine the former aspect. Gandhi identifies untouchability of the Dalits as a major problem in the caste order. He is for the abolition of untouchability, even though he prescribes no political action. But, he forgets that untouchability is not simply limited to the Dalit's social experience. Untouchability is also experience of the so-called touchable castes and all women across caste order. By simply ignoring this simple point, Gandhi misses the essence of caste system which consists of grades of untouchability against several human beings, not simply Dalits. Caste is defined by untouchability practiced within "touchable" castes and against untouchable castes rather than by the position of untouchables as Gandhi imagines. One of the broadest definitions of caste system as a system of graded inequalities is thus found in Ambedkar. In comparison, the Gandhian conception of caste pales into romantic narrow mindedness. Let us elaborate this feature of caste as captured by Ambedkar briefly.⁴

Caste is simply not a system of inequalities between castes of purity and castes of pollution. Such a neat division of labour is not there in the caste system. There are grades of pollution, followed by rules of precedence in matters of education, religion, commensality, marriage, economy and so on. Such rules of precedence exclude not merely Dalits from various sectors of human life. They also exclude Sudras, Vaisyas, non-Vedic Brahmins as well as all women across caste divisions. Caste is thus a hierarchy of grades/ranks of people subdivided by the different rules of precedence in matters governing human life, where the Vedic Brahmin male occupies the top of hierarchy with Dalits occupying its bottom. Let us see how rules of precedence occur in education life under the caste order. Vedas and Puranas were seen as two different sources of knowledge. Vedic Brahmins occupied superior status over Puranic Brahmins as the Vedic knowledge preceded Puranic knowledge. Brahmin male occupied superior status over Brahmin women in matters of knowledge. Women of any caste and all non-Brahmin males were excluded from education system by caste practices.

Violation of such rules by any group invited proportionate physical punishment. Such punishment rules varied from region to region. If you recall, Ambedkar's submission against Gandhi is that the latter ignores the prevalence of untouchability among "touchable" castes. Even non-Vedic Brahmins and all Brahmin women are not supposed to know the Vedas. The Vedas must be kept away from all these groups. Forms of untouchability are practiced across all "touchable" castes. Even, untouchables are divided by rules of precedence. Malas think that

they are superior to Madigas in Andhra Pradesh and assume that the latter are untouchables. Not merely in education but also in all other spheres of life, such rules of precedence prevail, thus creating a variety of untouchability strata across caste order. That is why Gandhi's call for abolition of untouchability of untouchable castes or Dalits is a weak solution, further weakened by his plea for change of hearts of the upper castes. Thus, Ambedkar pleads that all round Satyagraha must be conducted to destroy the essence of caste which lies in varieties of untouchability created by the social system. We shall leave Ambedkar here. It should be enough to indicate how Ambedkar examines caste as a hierarchy of power.

Lohia's analysis: caste's moral order

As I said before, Lohia does not explore how caste is organized as a graded hierarchy. I am not aware if Lohia knows Ambedkar's rich analysis. Most probably, unwittingly, he examines what is left out by Ambedkar. Why caste order manages to survive in the midst of resistance against caste and foreign conquests? This is most important question for Lohia, "Castes have endured over thousands of years".⁵ He goes on to explore how caste creates legitimation processes so that lower castes feel that they are indeed lower, and so on. He goes on to explore how caste creates insurance or social security for which people do not have to pay a premium. How castes produce a split personality in average Hindus without a stable and sincere voice on anything? How castes disunite and divide masses who witnessed several foreign conquests by tiny armies whereas vast masses remained passive? No foreign conquests propelled them for mass action due to caste divisions. For, he continuously looks for mobilization of people for socialist action in the midst of passivity of masses imposed by caste or in the midst of social security given by caste? Can socialists learn from some positive features by destroying the negative features of caste system? What strategy they ought to have to do so? What policy actions are possible under socialism?

Caste as insurance

To cite Lohia: "Caste is presumably the world's largest insurance for which one does not pay a formal or regular premium. Solidarity is always there, when everything else fails".⁶ Caste provides for social solidarity in matters of child-bearing, marriage, funeral obsequies, feasts and other rituals. Men belonging to the same caste assist each other at these decisive hours of needs. But Lohia does not fail to notice that caste-based security for which we may not have to pay any premium for insurance protection is also "excluding men of other castes" who are reduced to be in periphery of such social security system. This system of insurance without any cost or premium makes the system more resilient and durable in the eyes of its members only. I remember one incident from Aska, a small town in Orissa. One Komati (trader) family was not able to arrange their daughter in wedding due to financial difficulties of the family. The Komati Pentha arranged money for her marriage and finally arranged a boy for her too. She was "happily" married off after sometime. Such solidarity is found in the caste associations throughout India. Brahmin Associations give fellowship to the poor Brahmin students in the schools. Kamma Sangams do similar things. Do we ever come across beggars among Komatis or Jat Sikhs? The Langar houses or Penthas take care of such people. Such activities provide legitimacy and strength to caste order. Caste continues to survive despite many crisis points posed by modernization. This partly explains why caste has survived even the foreign conquests led by Muslims and Christians who came to India with egalitarian ideologies but got adjusted with caste order. And in fact, due to a modernization drive, caste has managed to survive in urban areas by getting organized as associations offering many kinds of assistance at times of

financial crisis. The more a caste group has money, the more it is organized with association offices and schemes of assistance for needy members of its own caste. To use a more fashionable term, I would say that caste provides for social capital networks. But such social capital networks are restricted within a particular caste stratum.⁷ Can socialism learn from this community network to weaken caste order instead of relying on the state power to do so as at present? I assume Lohia is interested in inferring such a question from his investigation into caste system, though I must confess I have not been able to see such an explicit query asked by him. Otherwise, why should be a socialist leader interested in telling us about this networking aspect of caste? Lohia does not ask such a sharp question, as I am afraid, he purely relies on the state/party model of socialism to overcome barriers of caste system while offering social security. His model of solution converges with that of Nehruvian liberals and communist parties, even though the way he examines caste system frontally his analysis differs from them. Lohia does not share what he calls their “wordy opposition” to caste, which will be examined in the last section of the paper.

Caste as a system of moral subordination

Another aspect of caste system is the way it survives with the support from lower castes. The upper castes do not have to dominate them with the rule of gun. Lower castes justify their subordination by discovering folklore of their kind and offer justification of their own subordination through a moral discourse innovated by themselves rather than by upper castes. Lower castes have legends and myths that justify their lowly situation and transform it into a symbol of sacrifice and luster. Lohia gives an illustration from fisher-folk’s life. The Kaivarts (fisher-folk caste) who presumably number more than one crore population tell stories about their mythical ancestors, who were simple, un-greedy, brave and generous and who lost everything to other ancestors of Kshatriyas and other high castes because of their greater greed and deceit. The current lot of misery is attributed to the unending succession of sacrificial acts for the sake of high principles. This sacrifice is seen not as an active principle that seeks change but as a passive submission to the caste order. This sort of mythical sacrifices is wide-spread among the lower castes. They secure their subordination.⁸

Caste produces a weak nation

Lohia argues that a great misreading of Indian history is that foreigners could invade and conquer India due to our internal quarrels and intrigues. This is plain nonsense. The single most cause is caste system which produced imbecility and passivity among masses who were hardly interested in nation’s tragedies. Caste is the single most reason why national feeling, national solidarity and action in preventing national tragedies could not develop and still does not develop. Unless caste is destroyed new India could not revive. India would remain weak, not due to intrigues but due to caste inequalities. If political parties play with caste cards in electoral democracy, nation would remain dormant and docile. India would not be seen as a developed nation. So in Lohia’s estimate caste and nation do have negative correlation. If one remains strong, the other remains weak. If caste remains strong, people’s languages, their housing and general styles of living will remain undeveloped and their mind will have imbecility due to inferiority complexes instilled in them over thousand years.⁹ A vibrant India cannot be born in such situations. So the destruction of caste is more important for nation-building.

Caste produces a split personality among Hindus

Caste induces Hindus to commit biggest hypocrisies. Hindus like all other religious people tell lies to others. What is however unique about Hindus is they lie themselves. A Hindu tells lies to him as well as others and feels most comfortable with its success. A Hindu mind, due to caste, is a bundle of contradictions. Unless caste is destroyed in belief and practice, a Hindu mind will no way seek to develop in him/her a consistent character and sincere moral personality.

There is a very interesting discussion between Lohia and Gandhi. After Lohia returned from Germany, he met Gandhi. Gandhi called him a very brave man. Lohia responded by saying that the tiger is also brave. Gandhi called him a learned man. Lohia laughed it away, by saying that a lawyer who enjoys financial benefits as a result of people's growing conflicts is also learned man. Then, Gandhi concluded that Lohia had "sheel", which can best be translated as "continuity in character". Lohia kept silence.¹⁰

Lohia assumes that once we believe in caste moralities, our personalities will remain retarded and under-grown. Thus, on my interpretation of his writings, Lohia thinks that an average Hindu mind (I would extend this idea to average caste conscious Muslims and Christians) may be brave or may be learned. But in order to have continuity in character, he must believe in a caste-free society, must prove that s/he is committed to the destruction of caste in practice. That means s/he must have social networks (friendship, trusts) across caste order. Any restriction of this will be hypocritical. Lohia gives two more examples from public life. He gives the cases of the PM and the President. The PM once over a week told the press that he would resign as nobody listened to him, even though people respected him. Next day, he would continue to hold the post. Next day, again, he would threaten to resign and next moment, he would withdraw. Thus, the PM would indicate how he lacked "sheel". The President was still worse. He was part of the constitutional post which believed in prohibition but he was also the President of the Calcutta Club, founded by Indian bourgeoisie, where wines flowed every evening. A rich Tanti (a weaver caste) wanted to join as member but was refused as he was not from the families of "the Tatas and Birlas".¹¹ And the President was still the chief patron of the Club, even after a weaver from upper class was refused its membership. Neither the President nor the Prime Minister did even blink that whatever they were doing was full of contradictions. Such imbecility of mind occurs because of the lack of commitment to a caste-free society. Lohia somehow believed that continuity in character can arise only if we the Hindus (or even non-Hindus) are committed to the destruction of caste order in belief and social practice.

This theme remained dear to his writings and personality throughout his life. Let us devote time to this issue which was closer to his heart. He comes back to this theme in several of his writings. Lohia's argument about an average Hindu personality believing in caste order as a bundle of contradictions was anticipated by D D Kosambi, the Marxist historian. Kosambi argues that the average Hindu is like a python which assimilates contradictions, without attempting to resolve them. Caste order is indeed based on this kind of assimilation, without any attempt to resolve their contradictions. Contradictions surface and resurface, without any attempt to resolve them. Contradictions between Vedic Brahmin and non-Vedic Brahmin, contradiction between Brahmin male and Brahmin female, contradiction between each Sudra caste trying to claim purity against pollution of other Sudra castes, contradiction within Dalit castes and contradiction between Dalits and non-Dalits. If we take the case of the Lord Shiva's entourage, it will be very clear what Kosambi means. Let us examine closely what constitutes Shiva's

entourage. In this entourage, we have different elements who are mutually opposed to each other. We have a bull, a cobra, an elephant god with a rat in His convoy. We have Parvathi with a lion in Her convoy. Quite a few of these characters induce us to believe in set of contradictions that our caste minds assimilate, without any attempt to resolve them. If we go deeper, you may find that caste order evolved by subjugating and assimilating different tribes with their different cults like snake cult, Basava (bull) cult, elephant cult and so on, thus produced an entourage of Shiva. In the process of preserving their cults, the tribes got assimilated into caste-based occupations and a Hindu pantheon was established.¹² Sastras and Puranas began justifying this caste order and prescribed rules of precedence for different people differently, a point we have already seen from Ambedkar. Caste and Hinduism are essentially about assimilating contradictions without any attempt to resolve them. I do not wish to equate Hinduism with caste order. But there is a caste core of the Hindu social order which is also a core of the converts from Hinduism to Islam and also to Christianity in post-Independent India.¹³

Lohia argues that an average Hindu personality is hypocritical. Like any other foreigner, he tells lies to others. But he is more than this. He also lies himself.¹⁴ Lohia believes that this personality trait is product of caste order. If I take this as a working hypothesis, I find his argument very interesting. Lohia gives some more examples from marriage. A Telugu Brahmin boy may marry a Kannada Brahmin girl and may claim that their marriage is “pan- Indian”. According to Lohia, such a marriage is actually a pan-Brahmin marriage rather than pan-Indian marriage. This is a hypocritical claim. Such hypocrisies are rampant in caste society. Similarly an Oriya Kandayata gets married with an Oriya Chasa and calls this inter-caste marriage. This is marriage within “touchable” castes and can hardly be called as inter-caste. We can probably think of our contemporary examples. Politically, a Mala may claim that he is a Dalit but does not hesitate to ex-communicate Madigas and their assertions for self-identity, thus debunking his entire claim for a Dalit identity. Such hypocrisy – from social or political life - is plenty in caste order spreading from its top to bottom. These are all cases of a split personality of a person or a group owing to the peculiarity of caste contradictions whose resolution is not sought by them.

Caste as International Order: Classes Oscillate as Caste?

Lohia believed that Western classes also oscillate towards caste order, even though caste order is uniquely Indian. Caste-like rigidities, privileges, imbecilities and excommunication exist in American and Soviet societies.¹⁵ Similarities exist between castes and classes in certain matters. For example, like India’s untouchable castes, the American black people live in ghettos and cannot visit hotels marked for white population which he himself experienced in the USA when he visited an “all white” cafeteria in Jackson in the Mississippi state in 1964. He was blocked at the entrance by the owner, ably assisted by the police, under “the rules of privacy”. By merely having purchasing power is not enough in such situations. A culture of segregation, practised by one’s colour or birth, exists everywhere.¹⁶ Caste-like barriers are created by people in liberal democratic class societies, even though people may believe in equality for everybody (meaning **all** white people). In such situations, classes oscillate towards castes. So a struggle against caste barriers is simultaneously a struggle against class inequalities. There is however a subtle difference. In class struggle, socialism is concerned with equality or distribution of resources, whereas socialism is concerned with justice or dignity of each human being in all anti-caste resistance.¹⁷ But class struggle must oscillate towards caste struggle as classes veer towards caste system. Otherwise, we may end up in socialism as existed in the then Soviet Union, without any concern for justice, so argues Lohia. Thus anti-caste movements concerned with

justice issues are basically international by nature, and are not just India-centered. If we recall, there was a huge debate on this issue in India in 2001. The World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Tolerance (WCAR), was being organized by the United Nations in Durban in 2001, when the NDA government was in power. Both the national government and the Sarkari intellectuals did not want to internationalise the caste question, and refused to participate in the WCAR in 2001.¹⁸ They claimed that caste is not same as race and tried to argue that caste is uniquely an Indian phenomenon and thereby should be delinked from the concerns of international black people's movements.¹⁹ Even if the history of caste is not the same as that of race, a point made by Ambedkar against Tamil Dalit intellectuals, Lohia would have argued that the Sarkari intellectuals tried to prevent India's anti-caste movements to learn concerns of justice raised by Black movements.

If they have similar concerns of justice – opposing forms of segregation on the grounds of human dignity, then such issues are international rather than national. They have ample scope to learn about moral, political, ideological doctrines of justice from each other. Lohia argues that caste question is concerned with justice, where as class question is concerned with equality. So a struggle for equality must be interlinked with a struggle for justice, if democratic socialism must avoid the disastrous path of Soviet socialism under the Bolshevik party which was singularly concerned with “class”. Incidentally, Ambedkar raises a similar concern against Marxism, for the latter is singularly concerned with equality by ignoring liberty and justice. Movements for justice must be internationalized along with movements for equality. Internal oscillation must take place in between these two social movements and must provide feedback to each other.

What is to be done?

Lohia argues that there are three kinds of opposition to caste order. First, there are ones who believe in the wordy opposition to caste like Nehruvian liberals, the communists and the Praja Socialist Party. Second, there are those who believe in partial opposition to caste by the Sudras like the DK politics in South during his time or Yadava politics of the North during our time. Third, there are those who believe in a wholesale opposition to caste order. Lohia prefers the third alternative as the first two groups are basically hypocrites. True to his character (sheel), he prefers a broad-based opposition to caste involving Dalits, Sudras, Muslims and women who are all victims of caste-based hypocritical politics. Here, he disagrees with Ambedkar's strategy of relying on Dalits only. Let me elaborate this aspect now.

First, Lohia argues, “The wordy opposition to caste is the loudest in respect of such generalized condemnation of caste as it leaves the existing structure almost intact”.²⁰ Raise everybody economically, this thesis claims. It also argues, the caste denies equality of opportunities. So to solve this problem of denial, we must ensure equality of opportunity to everybody irrespective of caste. Communists, the PSP and Nehruvian Congress stand for this thesis. Any other social and political attempt to do away the caste inequalities is condemned as “casteist”. As a result, economic equality for Dalits and Sudras are seen as the most important. But this thesis forgets that the policy of equal opportunity in economic sphere has helped the upper caste people entrenched into higher positions. Only the most talented one from among the Sudras and Dalits could be absorbed in the economic sector.

This economic strategy also leaves behind caste traditions in marriage and other aspects of life intact. By condemning anti-caste efforts of all other forces by non-economic means it fails to see how its economic strategy does not help elevate lower castes into economically equal to upper castes. It has fostered caste-based inequalities in job sector. As a result, 80% of jobs are still cornered by the upper castes who account for 20% of population in India. To quote him, “when more than 4/5th of nation’s vital leadership is traditionally selected from among 1/5th of its population, a state of atrophy is bound to ensue”.²¹

Secondly, the wordy war on caste is evenly matched by the second empty struggle against caste led by select Sudra groups. Among Sudras, certain castes are numerically powerful. The age of adult franchise has placed power in their hands. The Reddys, Mudaliars, Marathas, Yadavas or Ahirs, along with Brahmins and Khatriyas, are nearly 25% of population. They still leave out 3/4th of population. So sectional elevation brings about some changes within the caste system, but leaves the basis of castes unaltered. Still worse, sectional elevation is dangerous in another way. Those among the lower castes who rise to high positions tend to assimilate themselves to the existing high-castes. In this process, they appropriate baser qualities of the high castes. It also generates bitter caste jealousies and intrigues. Caste divisions do not vanish at all. Caste distinctions reappear. Women are segregated and sacred threads reappear among the non-Dwijas.²²

Finally, a true struggle against caste is concerned with elevation of all rather than one or the other section of lower castes. This struggle aims to pitchfork the five downgraded groups such as women, Sudras, Dalits, backward caste Muslims and Adivasis, into positions of leadership, irrespective of their merit as it stands today. A doctrine of preferential opportunity in employment must be followed up along with a social and political programme against caste system. Eighty percent of jobs in the leadership of political parties, national economy and government service should be reserved for 3/4th of our population. However, Lohia thinks that there should be a distinction between equal opportunity in education and preferential opportunity in employment. No child must be preferred or prevented by a policy while pursuing education. Discrimination should be exercised only in the case of government jobs. Educated Dwijas should try their luck in other fields. To end caste, social measures like mixed dinners, and inter-caste marriages and economic measures like “land to the tiller” from among the lower castes must be encouraged. Women’s issues like fetching drinking water from distant areas or building of lavatories for women in rural areas must be resolved, apart from the distribution of property to press for women’s rights. Discussions, plays, and fairs should be organized.²³ Even, in government jobs there should be reservation for those who marry outside their caste. This is a sure way of breaking caste barriers. The socialists must make all efforts towards the destruction of caste order among Hindus and non-Hindus.

In retrospect, we must distinguish Lohia’s critique from those followers of Lohia who surrendered his manifold criticism of caste into the sectional politics of Sudras in North India through the Samajwadi Party of Mulyam Singh Yadav and the Rashtriya Janata Dal of Laloo Prasad Yadav. Lohia’s attempts in characterising such partial elevation of Sudras in South India should not be forgotten. He criticizes the Sudra politics in South for being concerned with “partial elevation” of Sudras, for alienating itself from Dalits, women, backward Muslims and Adivasis and for not showing interest in carrying out the agenda of destruction of caste system. While Lohia’s critique of caste must be distinguished from his followers in electoral field today, his alternative model merely relies on state action for equality and justice.

There are two major difficulties in accepting Lohia's model of socialism. First, there could be an anomaly in his claim that equal opportunity in education must be followed, whereas preferential treatment in employment is to be adopted. As Ambedkar argues, caste has denied education to many social groups: women, Sudras, Dalits and Adivasis. If there is no preferential policy protecting education for these groups, it would not be possible for spreading education among common people. So any anti-caste measure must aim at affirmative policy on education, for education alone can develop initial capacities of subaltern strata that were historically denied education by caste system. Lohia's argument for equal opportunity in modern education may reproduce educational inequalities caste-wise.

Second, he believes in putting pressure on the state for public egalitarian policies through civil liberties movements. So his model of socialism could be called as state socialism which ultimately gets one-sided in its emphasis for neglecting a community organisation of resources that may also weaken caste communities and help in the emergence of territorial communities with sharing of specific resources at each territorial level. By sharing resources at each territory from below to a summit of pyramid, one can simultaneously retain powers of communities and also push them beyond caste order, without exclusively relying on state action as Lohia proposes. In Lohia's state socialism, the state is all powerful and communities have no role to play in breaking barriers of caste order. Though his model state is a democratic state, the state is still the motor of social change. This is a theme of Jayaprakash's critique of state-centered socialism through his concept of Lokniti, which socialists may have to pay attention in order to explore if these thinkers may complement each other in the withering away of caste order in future India.²⁴

(The paper was presented in the Lohia Centenary Seminar, Social Science Forum, Vijayawada, July 26, 2009. I thank Dr Anjaiah for this opportunity.)

NOTES

¹ B R Ambedkar, “An Anti-Untouchability Agenda”, in V Rodrigues (ed.), **The Essentials Writings of B R Ambedkar**, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002.

² Ambedkar would have agreed with Lohia that he is not anti- or pro-Gandhi. See R M Lohia, **Marx, Gandhi and Socialism**, Rammanohar Lohia Samata Vidyalaya Nyasa, Hyderabad, Second Edition, 1978, p. 364.

³ Ibid, pp. 157-158.

⁴ B R Ambedkar, “Annihilation of Caste”, and “Reply to the Mahatma”, in V Rodrigues (ed.), **Op. Cit.**, 2002, pp. 263-320.

⁵ R M Lohia, **The Caste System**, Rammanohar Lohia Samata Vidyalaya Nyasa, Hyderabad, 1964, p. 81.

⁶ R M Lohia, **op. cit.**, n.5, p. 80.

⁷ Hans Blomkvist, “Traditional communities, Caste and Democracy: The Indian Mystery”, Paul Dekker and Eric M Uslaner (eds.), **Social Capital and Participation in Everyday Life**, Routledge, London, 2001.

⁸ R M Lohia, **op. cit.**, n.5, p. 84.

⁹ R M Lohia, **op. cit.**, n.5, pp. 83-84.

¹⁰ Harris Wofford Jr., “About Lohia”, **Lohia and American Meet 1951 & 1964**, B R Pub, Delhi, 2002, p. V.

¹¹ R M Lohia, **op. cit.**, n.5, pp. 132-134.

¹² D D Kosambi, **The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline**, Vikas Pub., Delhi, 1990, pp. 169-171.

¹³ Thus it is possible for all non-Hindus (including atheists) to believe in caste just as it is possible for a reformist Hindu to reject caste order. For a long time, Ambedkar thought that as a Hindu it should be possible for him to rejuvenate Hinduism by abolishing caste order internally. Cf. Ambedkar, **op. cit.** n. 4. Gandhi probably did not understand caste order in details and yet he did not believe in casteism. Ambedkar rightly calls Gandhism or Marxism as an egalitarian ideology against caste order, even though, according to him, there are serious inadequacies in these ideologies.

¹⁴ See R M Lohia, “Hinduism”, in his **Fragments of a World Mind**, Maitrayani, Calcutta, (n.d.), pp. 112-125.

¹⁵ R M Lohia, **Wheel of History**, B R Pub., Delhi, 1955, pp. 33-34.

¹⁶ R M Lohia: “I make it perfectly clear. I am not trying something foul in American life. ... Such foul spots exist everywhere – also in India.” (**op. cit.**, n. 10, p. 204)

¹⁷ R M Lohia, **Wheel of History**, op. cit., p. 37.

¹⁸ A Pinto, “UN Conference against Racism: Is Caste Race?”, **Economic and Political Weekly**, July 28, 2001.

¹⁹ A Betteile, “Race and Caste”, Opinion Page, **The Hindu**, 10 March 2001.

²⁰ R M Lohia, op. cit., n. 5, p. 95

²¹ Ibid, p. 97.

²² Ibid, p. 101.

²³ R M Lohia, op. cit., n. 5, pp. 136-137.

²⁴ I would like to propose an eclectic approach to socialism rather than take side of state socialism of Lohia and Ambedkar or communitarian socialism of Jayprakash and others. An alternative construction, however, may need to be worked out later.

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Reprinted from my SOCIETY I-IV(1-4), 2008-09, 18-32

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