

Dr. Rammanohar Lohia : Leader Extraordinary

S. R. Nene

People in India and outside know Dr. Lohia more as a burning freedom fighter, founder leader of socialist movement in Asia, fearless politician, always ready to fight for fundamental human rights and as an architect of parliamentary coalition politics in India. However, very few people know Dr. Lohia as a deep scholar, philosopher, champion of Indian tradition and a great visionary humanist of strong creative - imaginative power with ability to inspire others. This dimension of Dr. Lohia's personality has remained rather unnoticed. Above all, Dr. Lohia possessed a rare prescience for human possibilities - human coexistence, our common genealogy and therefore, our common concerns. Dr. Lohia had correctly judged the need to tame ourselves for saving the mankind from disaster due to human profligacy leading, e.g. to the tyranny of arms, religious dogma, despotism and the mindless, creature comfort resulting in unacceptable climate change an overhanging peril threatening the very survival of life on our planet in current times. I have brought focus on these aspects of Dr. Lohia's personage in this article.

Dr. Lohia as a Philosopher and Thinker

Dr. Lohia was a global citizen and addressed the concerns of humanity at large, in the true mould of a philosopher rooted in Indian tradition. He was a man of originality and numerous interests, each a world in itself. Of these, human welfare was dearest to him. In this, the boundaries of geography, language, religion and culture were rather irrelevant to him. He thought in terms of global society.

In his "wheel of History" Dr. Lohia accords equal importance to both the material and spiritual

seekings of man. But he decidedly endorses the subordination of material to spiritual seekings whenever possible. He was in constant search for the evolving spiritual stuff of humanity. In the "Wheel of history", he formulated the law of the triumph of spirit. He states, "When a deadlock between the extreme forces of spirit and matter is reached, the spirit wrecks its revenge upon matter and starts on a new track". He was a true humanist i.e. the opposite of Western philosophers such as Marx and Hegel who were intellectually arrogant and displayed concern only for the material i.e. the morphological aspect rather than the ontological aspect of humanity. He looked at the totality of human potential and possibilities which enable us to determine the right way. He noticed their evidence for example, in Einstein and Gandhiji, one the father of the deadly atom bomb and the other, the father of civil disobedience and peace. He was probably the only philosopher of his times to endorse both these great sons of humanity whose final aim was to overcome tyranny ; in one case by the punishment of evildoers and in the other case, by subduing of the tyranny of colonial rule by peaceful passive resistance i.e. civil disobedience.

Dr. Lohia was the only leader of his times to think in terms of World Parliament, World Government, World Development Authority, World Mind, Single World etc. Although these terms and his theory of total efficiency 1 of the historical development appeared romantic in 1950s, these ideas now appear real and even feasible. What else is the clarion call for ratification of Kyoto Protocol to overcome the threat to our existence due to the peril of climate change ?. This is, no doubt, a sign of the dawning of wisdom and the whole world coming together

to deal with burning human issues. Other burning issues e.g. social and economic inequality, denial of human rights and dignity to the underprivileged citizen of backward nations will also be brought under focus, in full recognition of Dr. Lohia's prescience. This is because world, in current times is so far down the path of human integration, that turning back from the right action is no longer a viable option for the G-7 nations where unregulated capitalism prevails.

Dr. Lohia's Wheel of History is a deep philosophical treatise. This is a book of many original ideas and covers a wide range of human genius, labour, ambitions, concerns, sensibilities, follies and proclivities which make history. The theme, spirit of man, is central to this book. Dr. Lohia believed that history has a purpose, for it accords us a tool of thought with which to work. The implicit meaning of history, according to Dr. Lohia, is ever greater restriction of any kind of pride, profligacy, pugnacity and violence. History implies an unending 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. If there is no such effort, history will be nothing more than endless revolving around Sisyphean labour and ignorance. ...

1. Dr. Lohia's theory of total efficiency of historical development is a self-evident doctrine. It is the all told essence of Dr. Lohia's studies of history and one may add, in a contemporary sense, the whole spectrum of human problem. Its theme is, man can make meaningful history and his tryst with a historical destiny of his own making. All civilizations so far, developed maximum e.g. Western Civilization, only for its own special people within their contours so that they could overpower the outside world and exploit their resources to a maximum extent. This

selfish use of maximum efficiency ruled out any possibility of creating a peaceful single world. Dr. Lohia's theory of total efficiency aims at the use of maximum efficiency spatially in all directions, for the benefit of all human beings across the world. Says Dr. Lohia "Technology and spirit are the two bases of human welfare and total efficiency will pay heed to the summons of both." 2

Indian Roots of Dr. Lohia

Dr. Lohia was firmly rooted in Indian tradition. This was the result of his critical study of the Vedas, Upanishads, Mahabharata and the Ramayana. He had arrived at an intellectual conviction that Indian tradition had a good deal of universal truths and teachings, secular and highly nourishing and that several generations of pure-hearted scholars, thinkers and philosophers had enriched it. Every tradition has two aspects : one temporary and perishable and the other lasting and imperishable, worthy of being lived in all ages and countries. It is the second aspect which was dear to Dr. Lohia. He knew well that while faith in science was fundamental to our existence, Indian traditional values characterized by our great heroes, Shiva, Rama, Krishna, Parvati, Hanuman etc., were essential in that they can guide us in hard times. Dr. Lohia also knew that the concepts of right and wrong do not belong to the realm of science and it is on the thought centering around these concepts that our actions and happiness depend. While science strengthens the body, traditional values strengthen the mind. And yet, as an agile thinker, Dr. Lohia negated the notion of God, personal or cosmic. He did not need any kind of God as his pathfinder or saviour. Although Dr. Lohia did not believe in God, he had implicit faith in the Vibhuti i.e. manifestations of Nirguna meaning the unnamed whole - to use Dr. Lohia's phrase - in our being. He had high regard for the unity and nobility of spirit and the world of thought, emanating from

our moral being, the sense of the sublime and the largess of our humanity. This manifestation of Nirguna acts as the saving grace into our being. Dr. Lohia admirably combined Indian spirituality with Western rationalism in his brand of socialism.

Economic Philosophy of Dr. Lohia

Dr. Lohia preferred a stationary state of economy which is the right destiny for mankind, viz., decent living for all, work for all hands, no extravagance of any kind and a state of peace and contentment. There is no reason why such a stationary state will be technically or culturally primitive. Freed from fear, anxiety and greed, it could have enormous opportunities for human creativity. Without the high costs of militarism, assert the authors of "Limits to Growth", entire population of the world can live well. John Stuart Mill, 2 one of the first and last economists to take seriously the idea of world economy consistent with the finiteness of resources on the earth, saw that a stationary state could indeed support an evolving and improving society. More than 150 years 2. English Philosopher and economist, 1806-1873. No other economist, since the time of Mill has placed the necessary emphasis on the finiteness of earth's resources !! 3 ago he told us. "I am not charmed with the ideal of life held out by those who think that the normal state of human beings is that of struggling to get on, that the trampling, crushing, elbowing and treading on each other's heels are the most desirable lot of humankind. It is scarcely necessary to remark that a stationary condition of capital and population implies no stationary state of human improvement. There could be as much scope as ever, for all kinds of mental culture, moral and social progress ; as much room for improving the art of living and much more likelihood of its being improved. Dr. Lohia, it would appear, was fully grounded in the theory enunciated by John Stuart Mill. Unlike Gandhiji

who insisted on a need-based living, and extremely modest economy, Dr. Lohia held a much broader perspective of life. He was in favour of modern living, e.g. the amenities such as piped drinking water, plumbings, ventilated housing 3 etc., i.e. a substantial improvement over Gandhian concept of modest economy. Dr. Lohia was fully aware of the problem of raising capital for various programmes. According to his scheme, bulk of the capital was to be contributed by people on the lines of the Grameen Bank of Bangla Desh. One of his major programme was for imparting training in professional skills to every able-bodied citizen, man or woman, so that they can attain the highest possible perfection in their respective jobs. Everybody must work. All workforce, even a street sweeper was to have a diploma 4 as his or her qualification for the job. Such a training structure could be raised easily with local capital. Government revenue could then be allocated e.g. to higher technical education, medical services, housing projects etc. Dr. Lohia's economic thought was seminal in nature. It focussed on fundamental issues of humanity without losing the aspect of modernity. Affordable decent living for all without any kind of extravagance was the touchstone of his economic thought. It can be summarized in today's parlance : freedom to develop and excel in natural endowments but not to deal oneself the largest share of creature comforts.

Political Philosophy of Dr. Lohia

Being an original thinker, Dr. Lohia opposed rigid automotive philosophy, such as capitalism, communism or socialism since they seek the idealization of the existing. In capitalism, industrialization and competition i.e. the free market become the ideals. In textbook socialism, industrialization and classless society become the ideals. No other values matter much. Such rigidity 3. More than 75% households in rural India are without these amenities 42 years after Dr. Lohia's death. 4. We have failed to establish this kind of

a national grid of vocational training even 62 years after independence. It stunts growth of thought and rejects better options which flourish in a free and open society. World opinion has rallied around Dr. Lohia's view in current times, that capitalism, communism or socialism are a matter of economic policy only and these terms are whittled down any way. A growing number of intellectuals currently endorse democracy aimed at welfare state where individual talent is fully encouraged and recognized. Dr. Lohia dreamed of humanization of economic concerns of all nations through a vibrant democracy and use of nonviolent means e.g. parliamentary debate to preserve the democracy and save it from cruel and inhuman consequences of a rigid approach. He aimed at creating a new social conscience and targeted the youth of the world for this purpose. The youth in capitalist countries will tone down their materiality and tone up their spirituality. The youth in the third world who preserved traditional values and spirituality despite their sufferance in the long eras of poverty and backwardness, would acquire technology and material aid from the youth in capitalist countries. Each would become "a whole man" to use Dr. Lohia's phrase, in this synergy. The rallying around by 195 nations of the world to resolve the issue of our times viz., irreversible climate change specified in Kyoto Protocol, can be said to exemplify this optimism of Dr. Lohia, for it signifies the realisation that overindulgence in the pleasures of life result in an unacceptable generation of green house gases. This extravagance of isolated prosperity in G-7 nations erroneously regarded as the achievement of human civilisation, has brought the whole world on the brink of the greatest man-made disaster in the current times. There is no doubt that world will have to come round the goal of affordable decent living without any kind of extravagance preached by Dr. Lohia and many other wise thinkers before or since.

A Summary of Dr. Lohia's Worldview

1) Throughout his life, Dr. Lohia stressed on the presence of a spiritual force in the flux of life which ultimately emerges as dharma, the right way. Here, an individual speaks on behalf of the whole society or the whole society asks the individual to speak on their behalf as exemplified by Gandhiji, Gorbachev and Obama in the contemporary society.

2) Socialism was to Dr. Lohia a singular identity of humanity based on equality of all humans and universal friendship.

3) Dr. Lohia was against defining any identity in ethnic, caste, religion, race or community colours, since such divisions promote hatred and suspicion and encourage settling of old scores which come naturally to people who divide themselves in these compartments. 5

4) Dr. Lohia favoured extremely liberal democracy, progressive and modern society which lives within its means, attains a stationary state and fully encourages human talent to bloom comprehensively.

5) Dr. Lohia's mindset did not symbolize any ideology as the final solution to human problems. He firmly believed that we have the capability to find a better way to deal with the needs of the changing times.

About the Author:

Sri SR. Nene is a scientist by training. On his own he studied History and Tradition. He has translated Tarkateerdha Lakshmana Shasry Joshi's marathi book into English under the title "Development of Indian Culture- Vedas to Gandhi" His book "Rammonahar remembered his philosophy, scholastic and vision" published by Rupa Publishers on the occasion of Lohia Centenary.

His Address: S. R.Nene 5, Nataraj Society, Karve Nagar, PUNE-411052 Phone: 020-25440715