

# DR. Ram Manohar Lohia and the Quit India Movement

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The anti-imperialist struggle against the British started in 1920, under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. He introduced the new methodology of non-violence and non-cooperation into the framework of the struggle. The freedom fighters were largely scared of the might and power of the British, namely, its modern arms, weapons and bullets. They were trapped by the fear of injury and death but the salt Satyagraha of Dandi march, a major step in non-cooperation movement was led by Gandhiji as a forlorn soldier with tremendous success. The masses were a witness to the fearless march of Gandhi which emboldened them to become fearless.

After this, the major event which turns out as a landmark in the freedom struggle is the “Quit India” movement. On 8<sup>th</sup> August, 1942, the Indian National Congress passed a resolution almost late in the evening and called the British “to Quit India”, once for all. They were no longer prepared to support the British war against Fascism. All the top national leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Sadar Patel, Jawaharlal Nehru and Azaad were arrested on the morning of 9<sup>th</sup> August, 1942. Vinoba Bhave was the first to court arrest.

Gandhiji gave a stirring call for the masses of India to participate in the movement with a “do or die” slogan. The response was enormous. The unarmed men, women, youth and children courted arrest in the midst of violent attack of

lathies and bullets. From among those, who were arrested many were brutally tortured and maimed.

There was no second line of leadership left to carry on the anti-imperialist struggle. The plan of the British was to crush the movement with an iron hand; to some extent, they have succeeded, to begin with. But soon this was proved false with the entry of valiant socialist leaders like Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia, Jayaprakash Narayan, Aruna Asaf Ali, Achut Patwardhan and others. They formed their underground network and united all the underground freedom fighters to keep the struggle alive and the flag flying.

Dr. Lohia used the Congress Freedom Radio and made fiery speeches to awaken the fire and enthusiasm of the masses. He also wrote booklets and edited bulletins about the national struggle and provided a proper direction to the freedom movement which otherwise would have been like a boat without rudder.

The socialist fighters led by Dr. Lohia and Jayaprakash Narayan developed a programme of sharpening the struggle in terms of mobilization as well as the realization of the objective of freedom, 1) They first concentrated on destroying the system of communication and paralyzing the administration, 2). They planned for either seizing the offices of British administration or damaging them, 3). They developed a plan of blowing of those trains which carried the British arms and ammunitions used against the freedom fighters.

Dr. Lohia was a very good visionary of foreign policy and he was appointed as the secretary of foreign policy department of the Indian National Congress by Pandit Nehru in 1934. With his vast erudition he related the freedom struggle of India with the struggles of other nations. He was not an isolationist but believed in Universalist view of the freedom struggle. Thanks to his teachers Prof. Onken, he had a good grounding in history and could relate the past with the present and future. About the Indian freedom struggle, he said: "India has been the subject of world history during the last 150 years. Free India must not remain merely a subject of world history", it must become its creator.

The underground movement was an interval between 1942 arrests of leaders and the open politics of negotiations in 1944. Dr. Lohia led the underground movement from 9<sup>th</sup> August, 1942 to 28<sup>th</sup> May, 1944. He managed to escape the clutches of British police and intelligence with great skill and courage. As stated earlier, he operated the Congress Freedom Radio from underground with the help of other friends and spread the idea of revolution for 94 days from 13<sup>th</sup> August to 14<sup>th</sup> November, 1942. Dr. Lohia was a dauntless speaker and a selfless fighter. He burnt with freedom and kindled the fire of emancipation in youth and students as well as the government employees and the police of the British administration. In his speeches and writings he attacked the arrogance of the British and their strategy of terror. For sometime, he propagated on the radio from Calcutta.

Many people from different parts of India participated in the freedom struggle with great gusto and dedication to his astonishment; he found the communists and their party overnight changing their stand towards the British. Earlier,

they were calling it as an 'Imperialist War' but under the inspiration and guidance of Moscow, they changed their terminology and called it a "People's War". This was shocking and traumatic and Dr. Lohia was forced to have a second look at the doctrine of Marxism itself because he suspected that there was something lacking in the fundamentals of Marxist ideology. During this period, he wrote a long but unfinished treatise titled "Economics after Marx". In this, he came up with the formulation of the twin origins of capitalism and imperialism/colonialism.

During this period, an underground publication called "Do or Die" was started with his inspiration. Dr. Lohia wrote profusely on the future economy of India, decentralization of power and the power-operated spinning wheel etc. He cautioned the leaders that India should not become a 'slave' to the 'machine'.

In his underground life, Lohia changed places and also changed faces. In Bombay, he was dressed up in Pyjama, Sherwani with a cap while in Calcutta he was immaculately dressed in western attire. These were the tactics needed to escape the gaze of the British spys and police.

Dr. Lohia came to know that Jayaprakash Narayan was in Nepal continuing his underground activity. Then he went to Nepal and met him in a camp where the youth were being imparted training in the use of fire arms. He was very much excited by the activity but it was against his credo of non-violence.

After sometime, the Nepal government at the instance of the British, ordered their police to arrest Lohia, Jayaprakash Narayan and others. Having arrested, the Nepal police lodged them at Hanuman Nagar camp 70 miles away from the main base camp. The guerilla wing of the

freedom fighters known as “Azaad Dasta” decided to liberate Lohia and JP. They came in the early hours at Hanuman Nagar and burnt the huts; they also heavily fired in the air in all directions. This created confusion in the Nepal’s police as they thought that a large number of armed men had attacked them. They were demoralized and could not stop the operation of setting Dr. Lohia and JP free. After travelling few days Dr. Lohia reached Calcutta safely

The British government was chagrined with this development and was furious about the escape of Dr. Lohia from the clutches of Nepal police. They announced big prize money on the head of Lohia and for providing information leading to his arrest.

While staying in Bombay on 19<sup>th</sup> May, 1944, Dr. Lohia was caught and arrested in a flat located in a building in Babulnath road in Bombay. Thus, the adventurous and courageous saga of underground life came to a halt.

He was kept in Bombay jail for one month and later was transferred to Lahore fort which is now in a part of Pakistan. The Lahore fort was notorious for its methods of cruelty and torture. Dr. Lohia was subjected to third degree methods and new methods of torture were tried on his body to extract information from him about the underground movement. He used to be taken from the prison to Jailor’s office with “hand cuffs” around and used to be ordered, to sit in a chair for hours together and ask him the same question “where are your comrades?”, “tell us, we will be nice to you”. After long hours of questioning Dr. Lohia used to get tired and sleepy. Immediately the chair used to be kicked out and he was forced to be awake, although against his will. The sleepless torture initially started with 3 days but later savagely inflicted for more than 30 days on

him. Dr. Lohia felt lonely, despondent and helpless. He told the Jailor and his constables that he was prepared to tell everything about himself but did not know about the other freedom fighters and comrades in arms. But the Britishers were not prepared to believe his version and continued the torture.

During this period, Dr. Lohia tried to inform the central government and its under-secretary Mr. Arthur Anderson at Delhi, but the Punjab police suppressed the information from reaching the higher authorities. Lohia wrote a detailed account of his torture but it never came to the light of the people as the information was ‘killed’ by the Punjab government in collusion with the Federal government.

In December 1944, he was allowed to file a Habeas Corpus petition in the High Court. He added an addendum to his petition but it was heard in camera preventing the press from highlighting the information to the people of India. The petition, however, was dismissed by the local as well as the federal court.

Dr. Lohia vividly remembered the days of his torture in Lahore Fort and said that the suffering was painful and intense; it was a “Stodgy Situation” through which he passed and became further stubborn in his resolve to keep the ‘information’ about the movement ‘close to his breast’. In a letter to Prof. Harold J. Laski, he described the suffering and torture in detail exposing the barbarous character of the British police and administration.

After a long duration of anguish and isolation he was set free at the intervention of Mahatma Gandhi. When Gandhi heard about Dr. Lohia, he was moved and tears rolled off his cheeks. He had a great regard and love for his fearless conduct and spotless integrity. In a press

conference he said: “Whenever I find Dr. Lohia and Jayaprakash Narayan in prison, I feel very sorry, for I have hardly known straighter and braver men than they”.

Coming out of prison later Lohia wrote an account of this torture that he suffered and how he put up with it with no comrades around him. In an article, “a different experiment in Yoga” he stated that at a certain point of time even intense suffering becomes “ecstasy” and he might have achieved the “Nirvikalpa Samadhi”, the stage where the thin line between pleasure and pain vanishes and the self in its totality becomes one!

What we have narrated about Dr. Lohia’s participation in the “Quit India Movement” is only “a tip of the ice burg”. In fact many events and achievements of his life in this movement have not been fully recorded and passed on to

posterity. Yet from the small snippets of the narrative any nationalist Indian would feel that Dr. Lohia carried on the freedom struggle during the quit India movement with incredible courage, selfless sacrifice and immense suffering. In fact he emerges as a fiery speaker and fearless organizer who inspired the countless men, women, and youth of India to keep the lamp of the freedom struggle burning and endlessly moving towards the crescendo! In fact, we are all now witness to the great signature of Dr. Lohia and his comrades on the luminous pages of the history of the “Quit India” movement.

The lesson for us to draw is this that we should fight for the freedom of the poor, deprived and exploited people of India with integrity, fearlessness and dedication and usher in a society of equality and brotherhood!