

# **Ram Manohar Lohia and the Methodology of Social Sciences**

-- Prof. K.S. Chalam \*

Unlike most of our Pre-independence leaders like Gandhi, Nehru, Ambedkar and others, Ram Manohar Lohia was trained in a non-Anglo-Saxon environment. Though some of the great thinkers like, Hegel, Marx and even Schumpeter come from this tradition and have enriched the European Intellectual tradition, there is something unique to Germany, Austria and some other countries that suppose, they are not part of the Anglo-Saxon tradition. Ram Manohar Lohia was trained in this tradition as an economist and social scientist. He has obtained Ph.D from Berlin University. Therefore, it is expected that he must have developed a methodology of his own which could be different from others. This makes him distinctly different from others.

I have been searching for an indigenous thinker and a non Anglo-Saxon Intellectual who tried to establish an independent methodology to understand the unique character of India. I am of the opinion that several Intellectuals and scholars who have critically examined India and its traditions have followed the Anglo-Saxon methodology. Naturally all of them have come to similar conclusions. It is now well established that the conclusions reached by scholars or Scientists largely depend upon the approaches or methodology of enquiry. When I have started examining and trying to understand the European writings on our social institutions like caste, family, beliefs etc., I found that they were trying to translate whatever that was encountered here in to their native thinking. One example is that of studying caste. They have translated 'caste' as a form of class which was a reality in Anglo-Saxon world. Even today the American and English scholars and their followers in India use the same concepts.

Recently, I had an occasion to speak to scholars in JNU, Delhi on the occasion of the centenary celebrations of Thurston E, who was one of the earliest to record castes in South India. I have realized after interacting with the scholars, that the same writings are repeated even now. Interestingly, Thurston himself seem to have recorded the details from the Brahmin and upper caste investigators and translators who narrated the institution according to their beliefs. The European Investigator translated them into his own categories of classes as understood in his native country, England. There are now several works available to show the nature of these distortions by scholars like Trautmen. In this context, leaders like Ram Manohar Lohia who had reflected on our social institutions seem to have followed an unique approach to study India and the world. In fact, the methodology used by Lohia appears to be different from all others who were trained in the west. Apart from his activist role as a statesman, Lohia has extensively written and or lectured on all important issues of the day both in English and Hindi.

Lohia was educated in Germany. He was a scholar at Berlin University doing Ph.D. on Salt 'Satyagraha' and returned to India in 1932(3). It appears that he was influenced by German Scholarship and Intellectual tradition which was then and even today is different from American and English traditions. I found that there is a similarity in approach between Joseph Schumpeter and Ram Manohar Lohia. Joseph Schumpeter was an Austrian Economist settled in USA. Among his disciples, we come across Samuelson, Leontiff and Paul Sweezy. The striking similarity is found between Lohia and Schumpeter in their writings particularly in the popular book of Schumpeter, "Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy", Published in 1942, and went into several impressions after the third edition in 1950. Ram Manohar Lohia has published several books and pamphlets. I consider his book, "Marx, Gandhi and Socialism," published in 1963 is his magnum opus. The book contains some of his lectures with an elaborate 50 pages preface in 1963, was published in Hyderabad. It is in this preface Lohia has explained his 7 revolutions. This can be considered as the concluding part of his intellectual endeavour. This book contains 23 chapters discussing several important issues. Both Schumpeter and Lohia started their studies by elaborating on Marx. Even today students of Economics who wanted to learn about Marx refer to Schumpeter's book along with his classic 'History of Economic Analysis'. Lohia like that of Schumpeter examined the Economics of Marx and Marxism and Socialism in the book. He has touched several issues under the overall methodology which he has explained in the chapter on 'Abstract and concrete', 'Materiality and Spirituality' and the 'meaning of Equality'. I was very much impressed by these chapters and consider that they are the unique approaches of Lohia to study Indian Society.

### **Abstract and concrete**

The chapter on 'Abstract and concrete' reminds one about the Hegelian dialectics. It was Hegel who made a distinction between concrete which was understood as the singularly perceived individual objects and phenomenon, while abstract was considered as a product of mind. The Marxist philosophy has adopted it and further elaborated in bringing the relation between these two in the analysis of dynamics of history. Ram Manohar Lohia seems to have been influenced by this tradition in Germany. The uniqueness of Lohia here is that he has applied it to Indian conditions by drawing analogies from Shankara Advaita. In this process, he has pointed out the weakness of the Indian mind. He has introduced the concepts of; thought and action, precept and practice as binary concepts and linked them with the abstract and concrete. In the process, he has brought out the dichotomy between these. He said that the, "ideal appears in the human mind in two shapes, one is abstract and the other concrete. An abstract idea has a concrete shape although it remains ideal still.... In order to convey a meaning an idea has to have its forms, the abstract and the concrete. The abstract idea related to general desires. Democracy, justice, equality and the ending of exploitation by man by man are such general ideals. They have powerfully motivated human minds. They are purely abstract and eternal, although the content of these abstractions has been changing from time to time". An ideal remains as an abstract of

the human mind and suffers in its transition to practice. Lohia goes on explaining the difference between precept and practice and to what extent we can give allowance for the difference. He said that as long as man lives in his body there can be some allowance due to the human nature. It is due to human emotions like greed, selfishness, anger etc that influence our thinking action that result in 'errors of emotions'. But, we cannot simply attribute all the differences to these errors of emotions. Here Lohia tells us that there is another kind of error that arises from the "incapacity to discern the fulfillment of a general principle". The irony is that man is aware of his errors of emotions, but is not aware of his "errors of understanding". It is nothing to do with the character of the person as the person can always correct it and repents for it, if he knows about its wrong path. But a faulty understanding has no mode of correction and is dangerous as it keeps on rolling till it leads to a disaster. At the same time, Lohia pleaded that we cannot tolerate bad habits and they are to be weeded out and human character should improve.

He has also explained the fallacy of the idealization of the actual. Many social Philosophers including Hegelians, Marxists, capitalists and Gandhians are vitiated by this method of understanding, One should not identify what is, with what ought to be. There are people who accept an ideal without understanding it. Therefore, the ideal is accepted by such people in speech but not by the critical faculties of the mind. It is recognized that only when the ideal appears in a concrete shape human action is motivated. The concrete examples are generally drawn from history and experience. We have the concrete examples of French and Russian revolutions that have changed the course of history. This concrete example translated from the abstract ideal has provided the standards for measuring current reality. It is here that Lohia had drawn examples from Indian experience. He said that the Laws of Manu and Yajnavalkya at one time have given life and concrete meaning but later froze to become general principles. Once they became general principles, they stopped all movement of thought and society. The frozen particular becomes a generalized principle in India. There is no effort to think of concrete examples and there is unconscious hypocrisy everywhere talking about socialism, equality, non-violence, decentralization and democracy. It is here Lohia sordidly says that, "the beautiful smile on the faces of such saints and swine is similar to, I believe readiness with which their heavy eyes water. To end this cheating or senility, the Indian mind must in every single instance learn to trace back and forth a statement to its more generalized principles at one end and its more concrete form at other". The consistent interplay of the particular and the general must become a habit of the mind to come out of this muck.

## **Precept and Practice**

The gap between precept and practice will never disappear in human society. But, we should be very careful about our understanding of the situation. The European mind has tried to deny the gap between precept and practice. But in India, a complete divorce of the ideal from the actual can be seen in the Indian mind. “Shankaracharya truly represents the Indian mind. In a stupendous sweep of the mind, he differentiated between worldly truth and absolute truth, and thus made it possible for the human mind not only to distinguish a stone from a man but also a man of one caste from a man of another caste, and yet to believe in the Advaita, the undifferentiated absolute. He endowed the Indian mind with the capacity of diverting the actual from the ideal and of doing almost anything in the name of the ideal”. Elaborating further on this, Lohia drew the attention of the socialists to the concept of Equality. He said that socialism has tried to put a meaning into it by way of income ceilings, restricted land holdings and the like. Socialists should seek to achieve equality by achieving the specific and definite concept that they have about equality. In order to achieve general, we have to start from with the particular. The general concept may be eternal, but it will have a varying particular from age to age. Without the particular, the general becomes a fraud, while the particular also without the general may end in rigidity. Therefore interplay between the general and the particular must go on. The Europeans have achieved the ideal with actual. The Indians have totally divorced from this. “Here in lies the crisis of the human mind today”. Though, Lohia said about it in 1955, it is more than true in our lives in 2010. You can see this every day in the media, in the intellectual discourse of scholars and in our parliamentary procedures blatantly exposing this naked dual behavior without shame. This may be alluded as an Indian character inherited from Advaita as pointed out by Lohia.

## **Mode of production used as a Method**

Lohia has also tried to make a distinction between Marxism and Socialism. Though I have not been able to make a distinction between his concept of socialism from that of scientific socialism and social democracy with the limited literature available with me, I found that Lohia was aware of the mode of production as a method of understanding the dynamics of society. He said that if we were to make a distinction between Marxism and Socialism, it is in the area of destruction of capitalist modes of production and relations of production. He says that a genuine socialist would have to think in terms of destroying both the capitalist relations of production and the capitalist forces of production or at least vastly remodeling them. In the case of communists, Lohia says that they carry only one task, the destruction of capitalist class and there is an end to this. Lohia analyses Marx as a democrat because of his theory of capitalism and the nature of his mind. I think both Lohia and Schumpeter came to similar conclusions, though Lohia has pointed some weaknesses in the assumptions of Marx, having regarded the world economy as a single entity. But he considers that there is the inner and the outer categories of economy in the world.

This analogy of Lohia was found elaborated by Neo-Marxist scholars as centre-periphery imagery in Central America. Lohia was of the opinion that as per Marxian analysis, the crisis of capitalism in terms of immiseration, increasing poverty, reserve army should have taken place in the capitalist west. But, on the contrary, it was in Asia and in a few pockets of Central America, the Marxian class struggles took place. Despite of the lacunae, Lohia says that the greatest achievement of Marxism is abolition of private property and it is to be recorded. Out of several experiments of Gandhi, Lohia has recognized only the idea of Civil disobedience as an individual habit and collective resolve as a gift to the mankind. He was also critical about some of his ideas which were not practical in application.

### **On Equality:**

Lohia was perhaps one of the earliest thinkers to recognize the problem of inequality in its totality. He said that, "equality is perhaps as high an aim of life as truth or beauty. But his aim has not been investigated in serenity. It's direct and immediate repercussions on day-to-day life, on property and income and the general ordering of society, are deep and many." He was very clear about the ideal of equality. Abstract equality for instance must continually be brought into relationship with concrete equality, and other generalizations must be treated similarly. Otherwise, the "tongue will continually spin the charkha and hands will as continually set up textile machines. The tongue will sing of non-violence and equality and hand will practice inequality and use the gun". This speaks about the hypocrisy in our public life which Lohia abhorred.

Though, I could not lay my hands on other important works of Lohia (I got some thanks to Ravela Somayya) before, I have used similar approach of dichotomy as a method in my forthcoming book on 'Economic Reforms and Social Exclusion'. I have developed an approach to study the dichotomies on the basis of the metaphysical and empirical duality of Indian mind and system. Lohia has explained the meaning of Equality much before scholars like Amartya Sen who examined it with a neo-classical and Anglo-Saxon approach. He has derided the so called ideas of the West, such as "the fatherhood of god and brotherhood of man", saying they are mere exhortations. They have no foundations with emotions of man particularly in the practices of an Anglo-Saxon. Giving an example of how a European express shock at the idea of humans pulling rickshaw, but he does not think twice before riding it.

Lohia has elaborated the concept of equality in Indian situation. He has made a distinction between legal equality, political equality, economic and descent based equalities. He has used the methodology to understand the concept of equality. He said that, "the primary issue is to feel the joy of being one with the universe, of being equal with everything in it. Such a spiritual and emotional kinship appears to be a main quality of equality as a high aim of life. In family, the kinship obtains. Its foundation is built on an almost total material equality. No matter what the earnings of individual members may be, or if they do not earn anything at all, as in the case of children and old

parents, the family is in food and dress a compact unit, and the requirements of its members are equally met. An unblemished kinship must reign in the family". This idea of bringing equality as Kinship feeling appears to be more sublime than the Rawlson's idea of fairness as justice to bring equality. After an elaborate discussion on the concept, both in its abstract and concrete terms, Lohia has provided a philosophical meaning to it. Man must feel an inward equality between contrary conditions of pleasure and pain, heat and cold, victory and defeat. Bringing the ancient Indian wisdom of inward equanimity and outward equality as two sides of a coin as 'Samata' and 'Samatvam', Lohia has pointed out that they are already ingrained in our society. Finally, he has concluded his piece on equality as equality must therefore be grasped in all its four meanings. "Material equality must mean the outward approximation among nations as well as the inward approximation within the nation. Spiritual equality must mean outward kinship as much as it means inward equanimity. Only an integrated concept of these four meanings of equanimity, kinship, material equality within the nation and among nations is worthy to become a supreme aim of life and its purpose". Thus the methodology adopted by Lohia to study the Indian conditions and the ethos to formulate a theory of development based on equality is found to be genuinely original and Indian.

The writings of Lohia are now available in print. It is necessary that scholars and activists of Lohia legacy should interrogate these writings from the non-Anglo-Saxon methodology which Lohia has developed and used in his writings. He has developed certain concepts and ideas to point out the fact that the western world has a sway over our lives. This total control of the west over our lives according to Lohia has taken place because of the Anglo-Saxon or European approach to study social issues in India in particular and in Asia in general. It is in this context, Lohia will continue to be relevant in our traditions of Social enquiry in the years to come.

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