

What Is Living and What Is Dead in Rammanohar Lohia?

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In judging Rammanohar Lohia's ideas, this essay excavates their philosophical foundations and reconstructs his political doctrine in line with these beliefs and his political programme. It examines Lohia's relationship with modernity and the role this played in his thinking, while looking at his analytical tools in terms of his distinctive theory of history and its implications for his understanding of India. It sheds light on his innovative recasting of the doctrine of socialism, the idea of equality, and the political and economic model of a socialist society. After paying close attention to his theory of political action and the contents of his political programme, as well as his limitations, it attempts to determine Lohia's place in the history of ideas in the 20th century and his relevance to our time.

This essay is dedicated to the memory of Kishen Pattanayak (1930-2004), a close and unusual associate of Lohia, who taught me how to approach Lohia without ever talking about it.

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Log meri baat sunenge jaroor, lekin mere marane ke baad. (People will surely listen me, but after I am dead).

– Rammanohar Lohia¹

A prophecy? Fond hope? Or despair? This oft-cited statement made by Rammanohar Lohia lends itself to all these readings. It is equally plausible to read this as a statement not about the future but about his relationship with his own time. This could have been said by someone deeply aware that he was out of sync with his own time, that many of his ideas were too radical for it, and that he could not but be misunderstood.² Lohia's birth centenary year is a good occasion to take this suspicion seriously and go back to his ideas to see if they make more sense today than they did in his own time. This is what the present essay does.

It does so by asking a straightforward question: What is living and what is dead in Lohia? Or what, if anything, in Lohia's political practice and ideas is relevant to, and valuable for, our times? Or which aspects of his legacy are not very helpful in attempts to reshape a new world? An understanding of whether Lohia was ahead of *his* time requires us to assess how he relates to *our* time. This simple notion is less obvious and common than might seem. To a small and dwindling cult of Lohiites, the very idea that something could be “dead” in Lohia would be nothing short of blasphemy. At the opposite end, in Nehruvian or Marxist circles, the idea that something could be “living” in Lohia would invite a smirk.³ And practitioners of intellectual history would wonder if there is any point in asking such contemporary questions about past thinkers such as Lohia.⁴

This essay is not intended to be a response to these three types of interlocutors. It simply makes three assumptions to overcome these three preliminary hurdles. It assumes that the best tribute to Lohia is to do to him what he did to thinkers like Karl Marx and Mahatma Gandhi – rigorously scrutinise his ideas and discard those elements that do not stand close examination.⁵ It also assumes that there is now a critical mass of non-Lohiites who may be curious about his ideas and willing to disentangle his legacy from the prejudices passed on by his partisan contemporaries. Finally, this essay takes it for granted that the line dividing political theory from the history of ideas is a matter of intellectual conventions. An encounter with a recent figure like Lohia forces us to explicitly state our judgment about his ideas – something that is otherwise buried in assumptions when dealing with thinkers of the distant past.

The central question leads this essay to rearranging the standard route to the study of Lohia's archive. The standard journey that

begins with his political doctrine would help us see what is available in Lohia, but would not aid us in saying what is living and what is dead in Lohia. Someone who cares to ask this question has to undertake a more difficult and risky venture. It would involve excavating the philosophical foundations of Lohia's ideas and reconstructing his political doctrine in line with these beliefs on the one hand and his political programme on the other. Therefore, this essay begins at the margins, by investigating Lohia's vantage point in terms of time and space. An excavation of the philosophic foundations of his political argument in Section 1 reveals that Lohia's relationship to modernity played a greater role in his thinking than appears to be the case. The next three sections deploy this understanding to reconstruct and examine his answers to the three central questions of political theory – where do we stand today?; where do we wish to go?; and how do we go from where we are to where we wish to be? Accordingly, Section 2 turns to his analytical tools in terms of his theory of history and its implications for his understanding of contemporary India. It notices that his theory of history performs a different role than philosophies of history are known to and that it leaves a crippling hole in his analysis of India. This leads in Section 3 to the standard stops on the Lohia pilgrimage: his innovative recasting of the doctrine of socialism, the idea of equality, and the political and economic model of a socialist society. Section 4 pays close attention to Lohia's theory of political action and the contents of his political programme, for it enables us to better understand his political doctrine. At the end of the journey, the final section tries to look at the material that has been examined from some distance to determine Lohia's place in the history of ideas in the 20th century. It suggests that Lohia may be more relevant today than he was in his own time, provided we are aware of his limitations.

1 Whose Modernity? Which Universe?

Truth is known from an aspect or an angle. That is not to say that truth is partial. In fact, partial truth is strictly speaking an error of expression. Truth is either whole or not at all. What is perhaps loosely meant by this frequent idiom of partial truth is not the denial of whole truth but assertion of aspectual truth or truth from an angle which the seeker or the knower adopts. Error may lie in not taking up the angle properly. Or, even if a proper aspect or stance were adopted, error may arise from hurried, blocked or careless view... Writing on aspects in a knowingly aspectual manner, one does not have to tutor facts to fit them into a theory nor to torture theory in order to include all the facts (*Marx, Gandhi and Socialism* [subsequently MGS]: i-ii).

1.1 Beyond Objectivism and Relativism

Reading Lohia is like looking at a large M F Husain canvas: strong and bold lines, bright colours, an unsettling blend of diverse elements, profound without being forbidding, accessible yet enigmatic.⁶ Lohia does not offer a master key to his theoretical oeuvre. He does not draw a blueprint of his doctrinal architecture that shows how the various aspects of his thinking are interconnected. What he offers, almost deliberately, is a large collage with somewhat carelessly pasted fragments and lots of blanks. The fragments he presents are neither at the same level of abstraction nor do they avoid overlapping. The content of these fragments – it could be a philosophic hypothesis or a grand historical generalisation, a concrete charter of demands or a

programme of action – is so powerful that one could forget to notice that this is at best an outline.

If Lohia's intellectual project is an unfinished business, it is not just because he was a political activist, always pressed for time.⁷ Lohia harboured an inherent suspicion of doctrines that claimed completion. "All doctrines, so it appears, have their being within a certain framework of power. They are unable to burst this framework, not unless they are born outside it" (MGS: vii). Acutely conscious of the power-knowledge nexus, Lohia sought to interrogate the framework of power represented by the dominant doctrines of his time, including the prevailing doctrines of liberation. At the same time, this awareness did not lead him to reducing truth claims to their power effects.⁸ Lohia did not abandon the idea of truth; he detached it from foundational certitudes.

Unlike political ideologies that seek the comfort of absolute truth, Lohia insisted that truth did not involve "a view from nowhere," that it could be approached only "from an angle, a sight or a line of vision" (MGS: i). This did not mean embracing relativism, for errors of misreading from a correct angle or lies involved in choosing an inappropriate angle were real and identifiable, but it did mean giving up the comfort of conclusive and secure foundations. He did not specify how disputes among different readings from the same angle were to be resolved and, more importantly, how one would choose the right angle, but he was clear that there was no definite way of resolving these questions once and for all. Instead of looking at power and politics as obstacles to truth, he saw the triad of truth, power and politics as an enabling relationship. "Politics deals with truth and power; it is the attempt to change the world along lines of truth with such power as one may command" (MGS: 316).

Lohia did not develop the radical suggestion implicit in these epistemic hints. Yet it is necessary to comprehend the radical potential in his point of departure. Lohia's stance enabled him to sidestep an established tendency in radical politics – the attempt to ground political action in epistemic certitudes. He also avoided the tendency to lapse into political paralysis when the received certitudes were challenged.⁹ His attempt to decouple political action from objectivist truth and to anchor it in a modest but coherent notion of truth (ever conscious that it was looking at the world from one of many possible angles) was an invitation for a form of political action that was always corrigible and hence profoundly democratic.

Lohia's epistemic stance is also relevant to understanding his angle for arriving at the truth that guided his political action. His anti-objectivism meant that he would not take the easy way out and claim a privileged ontological status for any period in history (for instance, the 19th century), any place (for instance, Europe) or section of society (for instance, the proletariat) for providing cognitive assurance. His anti-relativism meant that he would not shy away from specifying his vantage point and giving reasons for it. This meant specifying his angle in terms of time and space. To Lohia this meant an interrogation of the teleological understanding of time and the Eurocentric understanding of space. An interrogation of both these dominant notions culminated in a critique of European modernity as the natural north of the

compass of radical politics (Kaviraj 2009: 189) and a search for an alternative kind of universalism. This is how he tried to step outside the regime of power that was built into the dominant paradigm of radical politics.

1.2 From Future to the Present Moment

While in solitary confinement in the infamous Lahore Fort during 1943-44, Lohia found a philosophic resolution to the hope and despair he experienced during months of incessant torture (see “An Episode in Yoga”, *Interval during Politics* [subsequently IDP]: 36-48). He found that the present was always bearable, the future was not. Living the present moment in fear or hope of some distant future was an error in understanding time. If one could live in the eternity of the moment, hope and despair did not arise. This philosophic insight, born in the torture chamber, gave Lohia an angle or a viewpoint to apprehend truth.

After the Lahore experience, the living and the present moment acquired another meaning for me ... not let anticipated desires of succeeding moments obtrude upon the relish of the present moment. That would be living life thoroughly and intensively, without greed (IDP: 47).¹⁰

He transferred this insight from the inner self to the world of political action. Political movements suffer from a similar error all the time: their actions in the present are performed in the hope of achieving some objective in the distant future. Very often the link between the present and the future is rather convoluted, giving rise to the politics of remote justification, where all kinds of heinous acts in the present are justified in the name of some utopian future. This has its mirror image in the politics that is a prisoner of the past, where an image of the golden past serves the same purpose. A recognition of this error led Lohia to forge a normative yardstick as well as an analytical tool. Living in the present would mean that each action should have an ethical justification intrinsic to itself and not with reference to some future. This would save us from the politics of fear or greed. Lohia named it the principle of immediacy. “This principle of immediacy ordains that each single act contains its own justification and there is no need to call upon the succeeding act in order to justify what is done here and now” (*Wheel of History*: 76). Lohia did not formulate the analytical part of this insight as clearly as the normative principle.

In analytical terms, the politics of the present moment meant going beyond the banal truism of the present as the only real moment we live in, it meant embracing the “here and now” as a point of departure. This stood in opposition to teleological theories that regard the present as no more than a point of transition between an ordered past and a determined future. Nor was this a vulgar “presentism”, unaware of history and unmindful of the future. For Lohia, the politics of the present meant grasping the two dimensions – flux and eternity – that constitute the present moment. He was quick to recognise that these two dimensions required two different analytical tools. “When [the present moment] is flux, it belongs to the realm of history, the realm where driving forces may be sought and helped or checked. When it is eternity, it belongs to the realm of fable and myth, art and literature, religion and philosophy” (*Wheel*: 75).

While he did not devote equal attention to both these aspects – much of his analysis focused on comprehending the driving forces of the flux that is history – he drew upon wider and deeper intellectual resources than most political actors. But he could not do justice to the theoretical and political possibilities inherent in his insight. Lohia hinted at, but did not spell out, an intriguing possibility of the politics of eternity. Nor did he work out the political implications of the radical indeterminacy of the present.

1.3 Beyond “Euro-normality”

The other dimension of Lohia’s angle to truth, his spatial location, also underwent a decisive break in the 1940s. As someone born into a nationalist family and in the leadership of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP), his uncompromising opposition to colonial political domination and a rejection of the coloniser’s claims of cultural superiority were natural. Yet an extra-sensitive Lohia discovered that a subtler but deeper form of Eurocentrism persisted despite political opposition. It tended to take two forms, European diffusionism and Euro-normality, both of which Lohia exposed and opposed with vigour. While non-European regions of the world and its coloured races remained his chosen “line of vision” to truth, he steered clear of a parochial nationalism and steadfastly adhered to universalism.

European diffusionism was the belief that Europe happened to be the place that had experienced some social and economic transformations that were universal in scope and would therefore spread all over the world. This belief, especially its progressive version, was quite common among Indian nationalists and socialists in Lohia’s time. Lohia struggled with this idea in the course of writing “Economics after Marx”, an unfinished critique of Marxist economics written while in hiding during the Quit India movement. In the course of understanding the history of capitalism, Lohia arrived at a core conviction that was to stay with him as a foundational belief. He came to the conclusion that external dynamics played a principal role in the rise and sustenance of capitalism. Thus colonialism was not an external prop that capitalism leaned on to ward off a crisis at a late stage of its existence; capitalism and colonialism were twins (MGS: 10-31). Surplus value should therefore be redefined with reference to the average world production per worker, rather than confined to the dynamics within a national economy (MGS: 24). Since the same external resources would not be available to the non-European world, he concluded that capitalism would not be a progressive and dynamic force outside Europe.¹¹ He also noted that communism shared the capitalist model of capital-intensive production and technology. The practical implication was clear – since capitalism and communism shared an economic model that could not be extended to the rest of the world, those living outside Europe had to look for a new model.¹²

He was to generalise this rejection of the idea of European diffusionism. He argued that colonial difference reflected a deeper civilisational difference or a difference in the historical trajectories of European and non-European societies. He concluded that the path of development followed by European civilisation and its extensions would not be open to the rest of the world even when they were no longer colonised. “In India, any attempt

whether under communism or socialism or capitalism to achieve the modern civilisation which the world has known for the past 300 years must result in barren cruelty, cruelty which knows no success" (MGS: 109).

Lohia was to extend this specific insight to a general, theoretic plane, almost a methodological principle, a hermeneutic of suspicion as it were, against the assumption of Euro-normality¹³ built into all the dominant knowledge forms and political ideologies. For him, the prevailing ideologies of modern civilisation, its normative principles and theoretical generalisations were of limited European provenance and equally limited applicability. They had to be treated as provincial unless proven otherwise. While making a suggestion about the kind of research that should be carried out in Indian universities, Lohia observed, "Europe has so dominated the world's current thought that it does not occur to university men in the non-European world to submit these concepts to close examination. Like the team of blinkered oxen in an oil press, they go on and on researching into sectional conditions with Europe's tools and without a thought that these tools are inadequate and require to be refashioned" (IDP: 94). His objection was that "such abstractions as capitalism, communism or even socialism" contained a hidden reference to concrete European history, and they were thus "unique historical phenomena incapable of reproduction without an identical setting" (IDP: 94).

Lohia did not wish to reset the compass of modern thought so as to point to India; nor did he believe that the social world could not have a general principle. He wanted to recast the existing tools in the light of global experience and a universal intellectual heritage into ones of universal validity. In his own words,

... the conceptual tools of worldwide usage are European in origin and validity. These tools must be subjected to a thorough enquiry. Their pretence at worldwide validity must be laid bare and the way must be prepared for better conceptual tools through fundamental analysis... such research may well create the atmosphere, both within and outside the university, for the creation of tools of thought of universal validity (IDP: 93).

1.4 From Side-looking to Forward-looking Universalism

Shifting his vantage point to the here and now, in the sense described above, had far-reaching implications for Lohia's theory and politics. It brought him into sharp opposition with a dominant belief of his times, the belief that societies such as India could see an image of their future in the mirror of the present Europe. The idea of modernity, the doctrine of modernisation and the faith in progress collapsed the time and space dimension into a single, trans-historic vantage point. This vantage point of modernity had a profound disregard for the here and now of these societies, for their present looked like the past in this imagined time frame, and thus meant a backward glance. Lohia could not but disengage from this viewpoint, yet he did not turn his back on the modernist project. In what appears to be an ambiguity in Lohia, one can discern two theoretical moves.

The first move was already well rehearsed in modern Indian political thought. It involved reducing modernity to its empirical referent, contemporary European and American civilisation, and then offering an assessment. This is how Lohia used the expression "modern civilisation" in *Wheel of History*. For him, capitalism and

communism were but two faces of this modern civilisation that had reached a dead end. "Modern civilisation, no matter what its initial urges may have been, has become a complex consisting of production of remote effect, tool of remote production, democracy of remote second-rate application and even class struggle of remote justification" (*Wheel*: 82). Lohia's critique of this modern civilisation appears very much in line with, and more subtle and fully developed than, Gandhi's view of satanic modern civilisation.

At the same time, he did not treat the idea of modernity as a spent force. He firmly refused to locate his utopia in the past and appeared to be invoking the idea of modernity in a positive light, though detached from its European form. One of his throwaway remarks, his vision of a "modernity unknown to Europeans" (*Notes and Comments* [subsequently N&C] 1: 198), brings out the sense underlying his occasional references to modernity. But it also gives rise to a question: what is real modernity? This question was posed to Lohia by Rabi Ray in September 1962 at a Socialist Party camp held in Nagarjun Sagar (*Rammanohar Lohia Rachanavali*, 4: 556). Lohia's brief response distinguished between a "side-looking" (*baghal-dekhoo* in Hindi, a typical Lohiaite coinage) and a "forward-looking" worldview. A side-looking worldview passed for modernity and involved no independent thinking but simply imitating and replicating the modern civilisation of Europe and the US all over the world. A true modernity would involve a forward-looking worldview. "Whatever is suitable or rational in both of them – the backward-looking and the side-looking people – adopt that. Real modernity is [the idea] that the world has to be reconstructed from scratch [*naye sire se sansaar ki rachana karana*]" (*Rachanavali* 4: 556).

This was a minimalist view of modernity, keen to detach itself from any available model but reluctant to attach any substantive principles to it.¹⁴ A year later he identified his own dilemma, "The modernist who wishes to move ahead of the existing present has often to engage in an unfavourable dialectic. In the heat of argument with the revivalist, he runs the risk of extolling the current situation, of being side-looking, forgetful of his forward-looking modernism. In the [sic] heap of argument with side-looking [sic] cosmopolite, he runs the risk of extolling backward-looking positions out of awkwardness of expounding unfamiliar forward-looking universalism" (MGS: xxvi). He was to develop this into a distinction between cosmopolitanism and universalism. "A cosmopolite is a premature universalist, an imitator of superficial attainments of dominant civilisations, an inhabitant of upper caste milieus without real contact with the people" (N&C 1: 303). He held the cosmopolites responsible for all that was wrong with post-independent India – leaving no doubt that he had Jawaharlal Nehru and the communists in mind – but he was less willing to spell out what his universalism would entail (N&C 1: 303-8).

While Lohia left the difficult task of putting content into this unfamiliar, forward-looking universalism to the next generation, his clear negation of the "backward-looking" and the "side-looking" worldviews already distinguished him from his contemporaries. His insistence on the here and now as the vantage point of theory was not a plea for Indian exceptionalism. His refusal to draw

his model from India's past or from Europe's present meant that the future of non-European societies lay in discovering an uncharted path. "The theory of equal irrelevance is the decision of the traveller on a new road, who refuses to be tempted by the two other roads that go round and round and lead nowhere" (MGS: 336). This was a profound and disturbing recognition with unsettling consequences for established ways of thinking about the future course of action. While this recognition crossed out some imagined paths, it did not by itself indicate which path was to be taken. It raised a powerful question, but did not offer a definite answer.

2 Where Do We Stand Today? And Why?

"The destiny of man must be read not alone in the annals of history but also in the indestructible eternity of each moment so grandly engraved in stories that never take place but are eternally real. If man must learn to live in history, he has equal need to live outside it" (*Wheel*: 75).

2.1 Grand Narrative of History

History fascinated Lohia, from the earliest stages of his intellectual evolution to the very end of his life.¹⁵ Stated fully in his *Wheel of History*,¹⁶ Lohia's theory of history follows the template of the grand narrative set by the 19th century philosophy of history, taken to its heights by Friedrich Hegel, Gottlieb Fichte and Marx. Lohia's training in Germany led him to begin with this template, perhaps too easily. He was no doubt aware of "schools of history which refuse to admit of any law or purpose or design in history" but instead of dismissing or refuting this rival approach, he offered a limited defence, "I would not be much interested in such a view because it does not accord me an instrument, a tool of thought, with which to work" (*Wheel*: 3, 4).

For him, the wheel of history did not move in a cycle, nor did it move in linear ascent. He criticised the cyclical view of history, Indian or otherwise, for lacking "universal validity". But his real ire was reserved for the western theories of linear progress that failed to notice the rise and decline of nation's in history.

The illiterate hope of making one's own century the last word yet in human progress and of making Western Civilisation the centre of the entire world and the measuring rod for all previous civilisation is dying out ... To divide the history of the world into ancient, medieval and modern periods and to ascribe to them an ascent, linear or broken, is cultural barbarism, not even interesting (*Wheel*: 8).

He found this primitive belief embedded in all branches of modern social theory originating in the West – economics, sociology, the study of politics and, above all, the philosophy of history. Naturally, the materialist interpretation of history offered by Marx was no exception.

Like most other modern doctrines emanating from Europe, the materialist interpretation of history is also a doctrine in the service of the status quo, at least that part of the status quo which means European glory. This examination of the internal logic of dialectical materialism as applied to history reveals it to be as spiritual as it is undialectical, and altogether unhistorical (*Wheel*: 23).¹⁷

In his grand narrative, human history so far had been characterised by two interconnected movements. On the one hand, the

centre of economic prosperity and political power kept shifting from one region to another. On the other, every society oscillated between a rigidly defined social stratification ("caste") and a more mobile social stratification ("class"). Both these movements were causally connected to each other. A society rose to power and prosperity only as long as it kept improving its technical and organisational prowess in one critical dimension ("maximum efficiency"). In this phase, the society could afford to permit internal mobility and a manageable contestation for status ("equality principle"). After a point, the society hit the limits of one-dimensional growth, declined in relation to other societies and withdrew into restricting social mobility ("justice principle"). The global centre of dominance then shifted to another society that had begun pursuing another dimension of efficiency.

Yet this movement of the wheel of history need not continue infinitely. An ever higher physical and cultural intermingling of races, civilisations and societies ("approximation of mankind") and a considerable reduction in social inequality within a society ("internal approximation") could lead us to a stage in human history when unity of mankind can be achieved through conscious and intelligent designing ("willed approximation"). This would create conditions for racial mixing,¹⁸ cultural learning, unlimited pursuit of multi-dimensional excellence ("total efficiency"), sharing of economic resources and prosperity, winding up caste and class divisions and ending political dominance. The cruel movement of the wheel of history could thus be brought to a halt.

This new civilisation would attempt to achieve approximation of human race and the overcoming of class and caste and regional shifts through comparatively equal production in all the world. Its technology and administration would be suited to this requirement and, on the basis of respective sovereignties of decentralised communes and an integrated mankind, the people would be able to rule themselves ... Man, individually will seek to know the combination of fable with history, the eternal with the flux, and, in trying to develop his whole personality of poise as well as struggle, he will take part in this new civilisation of tranquil activity (*Wheel*: 86).

On the face of it, Lohia's theory is just another grand narrative of history that has all the apparent charm and serious limitations of the 19th century German genre as a mode of thinking about the past, present and future. If Lohia's interrogation of the Marxist theory of history is a yardstick of rigorous empirical scrutiny, it is doubtful if his own grand generalisations would stand such an examination. It would be hard to argue that much of the well-known facts of Indian history, let alone the history of the rest of the world, can be fitted well into Lohia's theory.¹⁹ As for its predictive power,²⁰ it is fair to say that the jury is still out on whether mankind has moved towards greater approximation, both externally and internally.

Yet, Lohia's theory of history deviates from its German counterparts in three ways. First, it is not governed by teleology. He was very conscious in noting that the new civilisation that he advocated was not in any way written into the logic of history, "What is possible is however not necessary" (*Wheel*: 55). His theory recognises the role of and need for human action. Second, history is not the only source of connecting the past to the future. His recognition of fables and myths as sources of learning relaxes the grip of this theory. Finally, and above

all, Lohia does not press the truth claims of this theory. Unlike classical philosophers of history, he saw his theory merely as a “tool of thought”. Whenever Lohia made any concrete attempt to read Indian history, he did not try to force the facts into his meta-narrative. Sometimes he would not even use his own theory of history as a framing device.

2.2 Understanding India

On this reading, the real significance of Lohia’s grand narrative of history is not that it proves a robust guide to understanding the actual course of history, but that it opens the doors to understanding the specificity of Indian society. The metaphor of a wheel-like movement of history served to offer an alternative to the narrative of a single road to progress. Thus, societies like India were not condemned to replicate the path followed by modern Europe. His theory of regular, almost inevitable, continental shift in the global centre of economic and political power was an antidote to the apparent invincibility of the west. It held out hope that western hegemony would come to an end and it offered good reasons why Indians should think about life before and after western hegemony. His theorisation about caste and class as principles of stratification potentially present in every society served to de-essentialise caste as a unique Indian affliction and to help understand the intersection of caste and class. Finally the idea of willed approximation helped to think beyond notions of racial purity and cultural uniqueness to participate in a universal project that would not be a cover for subjugation. It also enabled him to go beyond the apparent dichotomy of capitalism and communism and insist on their “equal irrelevance” to his vision of a new society.

Lohia’s theory of history enabled him to move away from the two available templates of thinking about Indian society. The dominant template drew its conceptual resources from modern social theory and invited the analyst to compare Indian society with the “natural” social form of modern Europe. Making a rapid and smooth transition from colonial documents to social science and radical politics, this dominant template framed Indian society as inherently conservative, hierarchical and parochial, waiting to be liberated by the ideas and forces of modernity. The other template, much less powerful and often a mirror image of the first, sought to defend Indian society against such external reading by offering a largely textual interpretation of the principles that ordered Indian (mostly Hindu) society. In this reading, Indian society is framed as a harmonious, peaceful, integrative and other-worldly society that somehow needs to recover the pristine purity it had before it was defiled by outsiders.

Lohia’s philosophic anchors and his theory of history promised a third approach. His vantage point of the here and offered a way to recognise the externality and essentialism built into both the available templates. His theory of history drew attention to the linkage between external subordination and internal decay, thus enabling him to simultaneously dissect colonial oppression and the injustice of the caste system. His attention to the role of fables and mythology sensitised him to the task of understanding popular culture, something overlooked in both the conventional templates. He did not shy away from the challenge of radical

reconstruction of Indian society, nor did he obey any precedents or existing models for the future. Lohia’s approach promised nothing short of a radical reconstruction of the historical sociology of power in India.

This promise was largely unrealised. One can occasionally get glimpses in Lohia of what this understanding could achieve. Unlike the communists, Lohia recognised caste as the primary form of inequality in Indian society without essentialising it.²¹ Unlike Ambedkarites, Lohia did not subsume all other social divisions under caste; he recognised class and gender as intersecting caste divisions. He accepted the challenge of forging policies and politics that responded to this complex phenomenon of graded and cross-cutting inequalities (see “Towards the Destruction of Castes and Classes” in *The Caste System*: 79-105.) By and large, however, Lohia’s analysis of Indian society could not live up to the promise of his approach. The one big lacuna was a careful causal analysis of the structure of Indian society and change in it. This gap was often filled by an excessively subjective reading of historical change, over-attentive to the story of individual motives and betrayals, or national character and the ruling elites.²²

Lohia’s use of fables and mythology too leaves something to be desired. He invoked Indian mythology, though not systematically, to spell out his interpretation of desirable human qualities. His essay “Ram and Krishna and Siva” (IDP: 1-29) is particularly noteworthy in this respect. For him, Rama stands for limits (*maryada*), Krishna for exuberance (*unmukta*) and Siva for the non-dimensional personality (*aseemit vyaktitva*). Each of these ideals can degenerate, Rama into narrowness, Krishna into a dissolute philanderer and Siva into a formless, episodic existence. He, of course, wished to combine the best of three: the non-dimensional mind of Siva, the exuberant heart of Krishna and the self-limiting deeds of Rama.

There is something deeply instructive about Lohia’s approach to mythology. He invokes fables and myths without a tinge of guilt or awkwardness, without caring about their historical or textual accuracy and without trying to sound reverent. At the same time, his use of mythological memory was episodic and not systematic, often used to illustrate or communicate a point rather than serve as a vehicle for thinking. At times, Lohia seems to suggest that mythology was for him an entry point to understanding popular culture, but he did not see the project through.

3 Where Do We Go from Here? What’s the Goal?

No greater disaster could befall socialism than if the historical peculiarities of its career in Europe were sought to be universalised and reproduced in the other two-thirds of the world.

– Lohia, presidential address to the Socialist Party’s Pachmarhi convention, 1952 (MGS: 329)

The long pilgrimage of socialism has been to end the exile of man and his agonising self-alienation. That pilgrimage asks, in our times and our country, a new direction. To offer it that direction is the only way to be not merely loyal to the tradition but to keep it alive.

– Lohia, concluding response to the discussion on the Pachmarhi address (MGS: 369)

Lohia’s theory of history and his reading of fables prepared the ground for his political theory. Politics was to him “an

attempt to change the world along lines of truth with such power as one may command” (MGS: 316). Changing the world meant ushering in a new civilisation that would replace modern civilisation. In a brilliant rhetorical move, Lohia gave his vision of a new civilisation an old name. He called it socialism. This usage did not obviously sit easily with the received tradition of socialist thought in the West and also in India.²³ At the same time, it offered a new vantage point to redefine the idea of socialism, to refurbish its normative resources, to re-imagine its model of a desirable society, to rethink its analytical tools, to revise its reading of the past and the present, and to redraw its line on strategy and tactics. It suddenly offered a third way for a politics sandwiched between Soviet-backed communism and Nehru-style democratic socialism.

3.1 Reformulating Socialism

“The Doctrinal Foundations of Socialism” (MGS: 320-63), Lohia’s presidential address to the Pachmarhi convention of the Socialist Party in 1952, must be counted among the finest political speeches in post-independent India. A debacle in the first general election, the presence of leaders taller than him, and the existence of diverse streams appear to have made Lohia unusually accommodative and self-restrained, making this speech even more special.²⁴ For a movement mired in ideological confusion, it held out a fresh vision, a distinct identity and a measure of ideological self-confidence. For a party surrounded by a Nehruvian Congress and the communists, it carved out an independent political line, a new strategy and tactics. To the dejected and rudderless worker, it offered reasons for hope, an organisational ethic and a programme of action. The Pachmarhi address suddenly brought to fruition Lohia’s ideological evolution in the previous decade.²⁵ His reformulation of the socialist doctrine in this address – read with some supplementary texts and speeches from 1952²⁶ – contained all the key ideas that he was to be remembered for. Much of Lohia’s subsequent writing and thinking was an elaboration of this vision, fine-tuning it in the light of subsequent political developments and, crucially, spelling out a political programme consistent with it.

Lohia’s Pachmarhi address began with a subtle conceptual move. Referring to the recent political setbacks suffered by the socialists, he suggested that this “lack of power” was related to a “lack of mind” (MGS: 320), which, in turn, was rooted in the inability to secure a “doctrinal foundation” that could give autonomous direction to socialist thought and action. Specifically, it meant autonomy from the two dominant ideologies of the time, capitalism and communism. “Socialism should cease to live on borrowed breath. Too long has it borrowed from communism its economic aims and from capitalism or the liberal age its non-economic and general aims” (MGS: 321). He thus appropriated the word “socialism” for a third camp in world politics, for an alternative to both capitalism and communism. He announced, as if it was self-evident, that socialism was a very young idea, a “newer doctrine than capitalism or communism” (MGS: 321).

Lohia achieved many objectives with this move. By rejecting the left-right spectrum as encompassing the range of ideological choices, he escaped the necessity of placing himself somewhere

in the middle.²⁷ Instead of placing the Socialist Party to the left of Nehru’s Congress and to the right of the Communist Party, Lohia could now place the idea of socialism on a different plane. This enabled him to distinguish his politics sharply from middle-of-the-road democratic socialism, towards which most of his colleagues were drifting. He could also avoid a relationship of intellectual heteronomy and political subordination to European social democracy.²⁸ He rejected the label “democratic socialism” and insisted that “socialism” stood for a distinct idea that needed no prefix or suffix (MGS: 425-26). An insistence on the distinctiveness of the socialist creed also helped him reject some of the attempts being made to graft a liberal democracy on to a socialist economy or to mix Buddhist spiritualism with Marxist materialism as illogical (MGS: 322, 341). Such patchwork had to give way to an integrally woven idea of socialism.

By distancing himself from the available options and dichotomies, Lohia made room for a creative recasting of the idea of socialism. It meant reformulating the received socialist answers to the three core questions of political theory – where do we stand today?; where do we wish to go?; and how do we go from where we are to where we wish to be? So, securing doctrinal foundations for socialism meant redefining its normative basis, including the idea of equality, the ideals of a socialist society, and the social, economic and political model of socialism. On the analytical plane, it meant carrying out a fresh analysis of Indian society and its social divisions in the light of the driving forces of history identified by Lohia. Finally, it also meant rethinking the path to socialism by reflecting on the techniques for socialist transformation and formulating its tactics and strategy. Lohia’s “Doctrinal Foundations of Socialism” was an attempt to outline new answers to old questions. His subsequent writings and speeches fleshed out this outline and partly built on it. He did not substantially revise any of his core formulations from 1952.²⁹

3.2 Redefining Equality

Lohia began by redefining the concept of equality that lies at the heart of the vision of socialism (“The Meaning of Equality”, MGS: 222-41). In keeping with his conviction on the limited scope for political ideologies, he did not claim primacy for the idea of equality in the hierarchy of human significance. But he did insist that “equality is perhaps as high an aim of life as truth or beauty” (MGS: 222). He wanted to rescue the idea of equality from the narrow frame of received socialist doctrine, to investigate it in “serenity” and bring out its “complete meaning” (MGS: 222). Lohia formulated the concept of equality along two dimensions. One dimension of equality was represented by the binary of inner and outward equality, which followed straight from his theory of history and his acute sensitivity to the universal implications of every ideal and theory. The other dimension was represented by the binary of spiritual and material equality. The interaction of these dimensions yielded the four components of his more comprehensive concept of equality – inner-material (equality within a nation), outer-material (equality among nations), outer-spiritual (equality as kinship or fraternity) and inner-spiritual (equality as equanimity). The politics of socialism

was for him an attempt to spell out each of these four abstractions in terms of concrete demands, and to work out the most judicious mix of example, persuasion and compulsion to realise these ideals in the given world.

This innovative reworking enabled him to expand the conceptual space of the idea of equality as well as broaden its intellectual resources.³⁰ Traditionally, the communists and the socialists had focused only on “inner-material” equality and had seen that too just in terms of economic classes. Lohia’s theory of history meant that he could pay attention to equality of productivity and consumption across national boundaries. Socialists had no doubt recognised fraternity as a value, but had not quite brought it within the core of the idea of socialism. Lohia’s most interesting contribution – though not elaborated by him nor taken up by his followers – was extending the idea of equality to the inner self.³¹ He thus established a link between modern egalitarian thinking and Indian intellectual traditions.³²

The reworking also enabled Lohia to restate the ideal of socialist revolution. He replaced the socialist idea of the revolution that would usher in changes in every aspect of society by the idea of Seven Revolutions to emphasise the autonomy of the various dimensions of social life that required revolutionary transformation (MGS: xxxi-xxxx). In Lohia’s famous formulation,³³ these seven dimensions included revolutions to end five kinds of inequalities – gender inequality; caste (which for him was a generic name for any immobile stratification) inequality; class (which for him was a generic name for any economic division that permitted mobility) inequality; racial inequality; and inequality among nations. To this list he added, somewhat incongruously, two very different items. One was a revolution against encroachment on individual privacy by the collective, an aspect often overlooked by socialists.³⁴ The final, and in his view “the greatest revolution of our time”, was the procedural revolution characterised by civil disobedience against injustice.

3.3 Revised Models

The statement of ideals required spelling these out in terms of the economic and political model of a socialist society. Here Lohia charted a new course, different from that of received socialist doctrine and at variance with that advocated by his colleagues in India.³⁵ To him, a socialist economy’s role was to strive for “decent living rather than prosperity”, for that was a goal achievable across the globe. “In place of an ever-increasing output, we should aim at a decent standard of living; in place of desire of modern man to increase the comforts of life within the frontiers of his own nation, the wish of the new man to achieve the desired comfort for the world as a whole” (MGS: 132). The influence of Gandhi was apparent in this, though Lohia distanced himself from the philosophy of austerity.³⁶ This meant a radical change not just in the relations of production but also the forces of production. The quest for globally equitable consumption required improving the labour-capital ratio to a decent level, though not to that achieved by modern civilisation.³⁷ This, in turn, required a change in technology. Socialism outside Europe and America could not be built with the capital-intensive technology of the big machine. A small-unit

technology was compatible with the requirement of modest capitalisation and the goal of equitable distribution. This did not mean going back to the technology discarded by modern civilisation, but inventing new technologies to fulfil this objective (MGS: 326).

In the political realm too, Lohia extended the principle of democracy beyond national boundaries. He argued for a world parliament and a world government based on universal adult franchise that would be entitled to a share of the budget of national governments, which would be used for international peace and the global fight against poverty (MGS: 245, 338-40; *Rachanavali*: 6: 367-75). He also visualised institutions such as a World Developmental Agency to which each nation would contribute according to its capacity and would be entitled to draw on according to its needs. Within national boundaries, Lohia was for a radical reorganisation of political power so as to make it stand on “four pillars” – centre, state, district and panchayat. The state could be effectively decentralised only when substantial powers and a statutory share of resources were reserved for elected governments at the lower levels, including a full-fledged, elected district government (MGS: 523).

Lohia’s reformulations of the policies, concepts and the doctrines associated with the idea of socialism represented a sharp break with the received tradition. Socialist doctrine outside Europe owed its origin to a transfer of political theory from the west to the rest of the world. For all their radicalism in politics, both the Marxist and non-Marxist streams were marked by a high degree of conformism to the canons. Innovations, if any, were hard to come by and carefully concealed. The idea of socialism was spoken about in many a creole and pidgin language, but the original source was rarely challenged (Yadav 1993). Against this background, Lohia’s reformulation was thoroughgoing, almost adventurous. In his hands, the transfer of political theory led to a transformation, the act of translation became a creative one. Lohia dared to believe that leftists outside Europe need not quibble over trivial questions about tactics, that they could ask fundamental questions concerning what it meant to be leftist. He was among the few in the 20th century to do so. Many of Lohia’s proposals – linking the idea of socialism to a new model of development, a new kind of technology, and political decentralisation – seem to have gained in relevance with the passage of time. Even if they did not have the kind of shelf life they appear to have today, Lohia may have left an enduring legacy for the socialist doctrine.

4 What Is to Be Done?

I have sometimes been made uneasy by my own programmatic extremism or immoderation. This has spilled over into some formulations of philosophy or principle. That the acceptability of such thought narrows down does not worry me so much as the suspicion that it may not conform to the many facets of truth. Intolerance is galling to me. I do not think I am intolerant except politically. Is this political intolerance justified? ... This programmatic extremism has been forced on me by the nearly total untruthfulness of the national scene. ... When such is the national scene, to capture firm ground out of this ubiquitous bog of fraud would not be possible though a programme of [sic] moderatism and enveloping goodwill. Firm stakes of principle and policy must be driven into the bog. In view of the

surrounding scene, they appear more extremist than they actually are (MGS: xx).

4.1 Dilemmas of Programmatic Extremism

This moment of confession provides us with an opening to examine Lohia's theory and practice of political action, which constitutes his most noticeable political legacy. Clearly, the choice of programmatic liberalism (in the sense of being eclectic, pluralist or moderate) or extremism (in the sense of being firm, single-minded, intolerant or inflexible) was for him context dependent. The programmatic mode he followed was an "inescapable necessity" rather than his most preferred course of action. He recognised that programmatic liberalism (practised by Gandhi, with a touch of firmness coming from his insistence on truth) might well be superior and more in line with his own philosophical liberalism (especially when compared to the combination of philosophic and programmatic extremism represented by Marx). But it could only be practised in conditions of power and prosperity, not in the conditions of backwardness and misery that characterised much of the non-European world. In the Indian context, a state of national degeneration (itself a product of the philosophic extremism and programmatic moderation introduced in society by Adi Shankara) was an additional factor that pushed him into programmatic extremism.

In retrospect, it is not difficult to identify some other more mundane contextual factors that may have pushed him into over-drawn political differences, sharp personal attacks on opponents, exaggerated policy statements, and theatrical gestures – what he broadly termed programmatic extremism. As noted above, his party was sandwiched between the communists and Nehru, forcing him to create more political room through political action. Lohia's own party was notoriously weak in its organisation, dependent on his personal charisma and symbolic actions. Besides, there was an unmistakable imprint of Lohia's personality – righteous, blunt and increasingly bitter – on the programmatic choices of the Socialist Party after its break with the Praja Socialist Party (PSP). This recognition of the contingency of Lohia's political strategy requires that we uncouple his theory of political action from the course of political action that he himself followed or recommended.

We have already noted two key elements of Lohia's philosophy of political action that were not context dependent and may therefore have a longer life. His critique of teleological theories of history, or what he called the automotive theories of history, meant a rejection of the idea that history tended to realise its goals by itself. The movement of history made it possible to realise some goals, but that in itself did not ensure that it would happen (*Wheel*: 55). This is why we need conscious political action. We have also noted Lohia's theory of immediacy, which provides a yardstick for judging the appropriateness of any action for realising a given objective. To recall, Lohia argued against remote or deferred justification for action. He insisted that every action must be subject to a test of immediacy and must bear a direct relationship to the goals that it seeks to achieve. Both these ideas were new and would need to be part of the socialist doctrine of the future.

4.2 Jail, Vote and Spade

Lohia supplemented these philosophical reflections on the rationale for political action and the normative yardstick for assessing it by expanding the repertoire of political action in the socialist tradition. He sought to synthesise and transform three traditions: the communists focused on struggle, often violent struggle, as the privileged instrument of revolutionary transformation; the democratic socialists preferred electoral and parliamentary activity for systemic reforms; and the Gandhians focused on constructive action to change society. For Lohia, these forms of action represented three aspects of socialist politics that had to be integrated. His slogan "Spade, Vote and Prison" stood for the unity – which meant integration by transformation and not just simple addition – of these forms of action.

Struggle was for him the principal instrument³⁸ of socialist action, but it did not mean violent struggle. For Lohia, reason lost something of its quality when it used weapons to impose itself. Therefore humanity needed a way to combat injustice without the use of weapons. This was what Gandhi's satyagraha was all about. "A fancy opposition has been allowed to grow between satyagraha and class struggle. There is in fact no such opposition, and a genuine class struggle is civil disobedience" (MGS: 346). This allowed him a fresh take on the issue of violence. The real difference, he said, was not between movements that used force and those which did not; it was between those who advocated and organised violence and those who did not. While disapproving of the sentimental non-violence of Gandhians after Gandhi's time, Lohia stuck to an advocacy of non-violence in this sense. He believed that non-violent resistance by way of civil disobedience was Gandhi's greatest gift to humanity.

The two other forms of action, parliamentary politics and constructive action, also underwent a transformation in Lohia's formulation. Elections were to him not merely exercises to win a popular mandate to form a government. They were important occasions for teaching the public and learning from it. A realisation of this objective required that a party had at least a certain minimal presence in an area before contesting elections. Similarly, constructive action was not limited to the activities the Gandhians termed so. For Lohia, running study circles, regular reading and organising anything that decreased collective sadness qualified as this. "Whatever ... scatters this grey sadness and expresses the natural instinct of delight and joy must be acknowledged as a genuine type of constructive action" (MGS: 344).

This aspect of Lohia's thinking has not had the kind of attention it deserves, for 20th century revolutionaries paid insufficient attention to the actual experience of revolutions and their aftermath. For a political tradition so obsessed with strategy and tactics as the left, there has been surprisingly little thinking on combining these various forms of revolutionary political action. Lohia's specific formulation would need modification in a different context, but he may well have anticipated the basic template that transformative politics in a democratic world requires today.

4.3 Multi-pronged Egalitarian Programme

Lohia did not restrict himself to advancing generalised principles about political action. It was crucial to translate every general

principle into a concrete image, a specific demand, a targeted programme of action. He demanded a consistent interplay between a particular programme and its general principle, for “programmes are concretised principles. Principles are generalised programmes” (MGS: 478). He believed that the lack of this connection was the bane of ideas and politics in India. “[India] wallows in the slush of the generalised principles of socialism, equality, non-violence, decentralisation, and democracy. The Indian mind is making little effort to think out such concrete particulars as would turn this slush of generalised principles into firm ground” (MGS: 213). It is therefore not unfair to seek an understanding of Lohia’s political theory by closely examining his programmatic agenda, which is encapsulated in the various manifestoes of the Socialist Party under his leadership.³⁹

Lohia translated his principle of the equal irrelevance of capitalism and communism by demanding that Indian foreign policy be proactive in creating a third camp in world politics, extending all forms of support to decolonised countries in Africa and Asia and dissociating the country from the British Commonwealth. Supporting global peace meant a limitation on all types of weapons, not just giving up nuclear arms. In international fora, he advocated making the United Nations truly universal in its membership, doing away with permanent seats in the Security Council and eliminating veto powers. Closer home, he was for promoting “people to people interaction” among India and its neighbours, and a foreign policy that favoured democratic forces in neighbouring countries. In the case of Pakistan, he wanted partition to be undone by bringing the people on both sides together (*Guilty Men of India’s Partition*: 63-72; *Rachanavali* 6: 396-411). However, he wanted this to be done from a position of strength and chided the Nehru government for neither anticipating nor combating the Chinese aggression.⁴⁰

In the domestic arena, the bulk of the programmes of the Socialist Party related to achieving economic equality in various sectors of the economy. Some of the key demands were no different, except in nuance and details, from the programmes embraced by the communists and other streams of socialists. The measures proposed included nationalisation of all big industries (any industry that hires labour, but not every private enterprise); a ceiling on personal expenditure (*kharcha bandho*); a fixed range for fluctuations in the prices of food and essential commodities (*daam bandho*); a ban on owning more than two houses; the regulation of urban land prices; a ban on production of private cars; and eliminating different classes on passenger trains. The special demands for agriculture⁴¹ included effective land redistribution (not more than three times of an economic holding); an end to sharecropping with the produce going entirely to the tiller; remunerative prices for farmers and living wages for agricultural labourers; not collecting land revenue on uneconomic holdings (*lagaan maafi*); providing free or affordable irrigation to cultivators; and creating a “food army” to increase production, especially that of milk.

In the social sector, Lohia’s distinctiveness came across more clearly. On top of the Socialist Party’s agenda was the demand of 60% reservation for the “backwards”, which included dalits, adivasis, and shudras among Hindus, the backward castes among

minority communities, and women of any caste or community. This was to be supplemented with the management of forests by adivasis and their cooperatives, measures to promote education among deprived communities, and incentives for inter-caste marriages. Recognising education as a special arena of social inequality, the Socialist Party demanded abolishing privileged schools on the one hand and providing universal, uniform and quality education on the other.

If these programmes do not appear very innovative and attractive today, it is not necessarily a comment on the original formulation. These demands have now become a part of our political language. Besides, when political programmes are presented in the same old language and symbolism for decades, they tend to go stale.

4.4 Politics of Language

It was in the realm of cultural politics that Lohia’s platform was radically different and controversial. His plea for “banishment of English” was aimed at dislodging English from its privileged position as the lingua franca of the elite, as the de facto official language of the country, and as the medium of instruction in educational institutions. He was opposed to this status of English in independent India not because it was a foreign language but because it was, in the Indian context, a vehicle of inequality and cultural heteronomy (*Language*: 67). Lohia believed, in line with many other nationalist leaders of his time, that putting English in its place required a powerful Indian language that could substitute it as the national lingua franca. He thought, again in line with leaders like Gandhi, B R Ambedkar and Subhas Chandra Bose, that Hindustani could play that role, provided it was disentangled from communal claims and counterclaims and cured of its Sanskrit and Persian excesses. This is broadly the stand Lohia upheld, vigorously and aggressively, at a time when social and political leaders in post-independent India wanted a quiet burial for this nationalist idea (*Language*: 67-79).

Dethroning English and establishing Hindustani raised a difficult question, which became more acute after the formation of linguistic states – what would be the status of other Indian languages vis-à-vis Hindi or Hindustani? Lohia’s search for a language that could take on English led him to believe that a very wide range of languages (including Punjabi and Gujarati) could be subsumed under Hindustani and that the users of all these languages could be persuaded to use the Nagari script. He came up with three different proposals to address the sensibilities and concerns of the non-Hindi speakers and to recruit them into his Banish English campaign. He proposed Hindi as the official language of the central government with all the central government jobs reserved for non-Hindi speakers, at least for a period of time. Alternatively, he proposed two groups of states: one would abolish English both internally and in its external communications, and the other could retain English to communicate with the central government while abolishing it internally. Finally, he suggested a multilingual (sans English) centre.

Lohia’s stance on language has been widely noticed and criticised but rarely with a nuanced understanding of what he stood for (Yadav 2009a, b; Deshpande 2009a, b). Part of the

problem lies with mechanically repeating Lohia's formulations half a century after they were articulated, during which the national and global contexts have changed significantly. But at least part of the problem continues to be the utter indifference of opinion-makers, including many with leftist credentials, to the issue of Indian languages. Talking about caste injustice has become politically correct of late, but linguistic injustice is still below the progressive radar. In this respect, every form of radical politics still has a lot to learn from Lohia, though his formulations need substantial revision.

4.5 A New Cultural Politics

Lohia's position on Indian languages illustrates something more general, his cultural politics, which set his politics apart from other political streams. More than his doctrine, it was his cultural idiom and programme of action that drew some of the leading creative minds and a host of workers to him. This aspect of Lohia's politics, very obvious to his contemporaries, has remained under-theorised and largely forgotten today.

For Lohia, culture was not just an instrument to propagate a political message. What he said about religion – politics is short-term religion and religion is long-term politics – in some ways also held true for culture. It was an intimate and reciprocal relationship: culture set the terms of politics and politics was an instrument of cultural regeneration. Thus his “cultural politics” was not a separate compartment that existed free of his political doctrine and programme of action. But an analytical separation shows that there were three aspects to it. First of all, there was a cultural extension of his egalitarian project, aimed at strengthening popular culture against feudal cultures. Second, the unfinished project of national integration needed urgent attention. As someone who had seen partition at close quarters, he could not take India's unity for granted and constantly thought about symbols and practices that would cement a sense of oneness. Finally, he saw politics as an instrument of cultural regeneration of the Indian people, as an agent of building cultural self-confidence, and as a catalyst of recovering the collective self. He dismissed the idea that culture was a luxury that only the well-fed could afford and strove for a politics that could feed stomachs as well as souls.

The targets of Lohia's attack were clear and obvious. Side-looking, imitative and shallow modernists or cosmopolites – he had the brown sahebs, their political patrons and opponents like the communists in mind – were the prime objects of his contempt. In their anxiety to sound universal, secular and rational, they abjured the use of cultural idioms, particularistic symbols and everything to do with religion and used a “neutral” modern language. The trouble of course was that this apparently neutral language happened to carry a large residue of European cultural symbols and practices. Lohia was equally careful to avoid the trap of “backward-looking” politics, which deified whatever the ancient classics contained and often sought to mobilise cultural symbols and practices to stoke communal and other divisions.

Lohia recognised that cultural symbols were like alphabets; you cannot quarrel with them and hope to communicate. The only way to oppose a message in a given cultural idiom is to

compose a different message using a finite set of available cultural symbols. This is what Lohia did, drawing freely upon the popular cultural tradition he was most familiar with and encouraging a free play with these symbols. He presented Draupadi, the wise, witty, fearless and independent-minded heroine of *Mahabharata*, as the ideal of Indian womanhood and juxtaposed her with the meek and obedient Savitri.⁴² He translated the idea of transcending private property into *kanchanmukti* by invoking Nachiketa of the *Ishopanishad*. For him, Rama was the symbol of north-south unity in India and Krishna that of east-west unity. Rivers too were carriers of values: the Ganga and the Sarayu were rivers of *kartavya* (duty, discipline), while the Yamuna and its tributaries were rivers of *rasa* (pleasure). He developed Vashishtha and Valmiki as symbols for the narrow and the liberal traditions in Hinduism respectively (*Caste*: 49-73). Significantly, while using these symbols, Lohia defied the politics usually associated with them. He used all these “religious” symbols while proclaiming he was an atheist, he insisted that these stories were no more than stories, and, more often than not, his was a very irreverent take on most of the mythological characters.

His dream project of organising a Ramayan Mela in Chitrakoot (*Rachanavali* 8: 85-106), a dream he spelt out in detail but which he could not realise, also exemplified his cultural politics. His grand plan was to organise a large-scale public festival, with no direct political affiliation or design, to celebrate *Ramayana* and all the cultural symbols associated with it. The idea was to give space to all versions of the *Ramayana* – not just the Tulasi *Ramayana* and the Valmiki *Ramayana*, but all other mainstream and heretic versions from all over India and Indonesia. This would be a forum for presenting epics from all over the world, and for discourses on not just Rama *Katha* (story) and Krishna *Katha* but also on Jesus *Katha* and Mohammad *Katha*. Those who recited the *Ramayana* would come from all parts of the country and from all sections of society, including women and dalits. What about those sections in the Tulasi *Ramayana* that are against women and shudras? The question did not torment Lohia very much. He hoped that the women reciting it would just laugh it off. All great classics were a mix of pearls of wisdom and trash. His argument was simple, “You do not swallow trash in order to pick a pearl, nor do you throw away a pearl along with trash” (*Rachanavali* 8: 87). Such an event, he argued, could meet three objectives – one, collective happiness, which itself constituted constructive political action; two, deepening the understanding of Indian civilisation in a comparative perspective; and three, contributing to the unity of India and its cultural self-confidence.

The politics of culture was not just about ancient or mythological figures. As an ardent nationalist, Lohia understood the power of nationalist symbols and never looked upon the language of nationalism as narrow or gave it up. As one of the few leaders to have opposed partition, he always remained alert to the integrity of national borders. He never quite accepted partition and advocated an Indo-Pak federacy (*Rachanavali* 6: 412-13, 416-17). He endorsed India's claims on Kashmir, but not the government's handling of the issue (*Rachanavali* 7: 55-88). He led the struggle for Goa's integration into the Indian union,

opposed India's acquiescence when China annexed Tibet, and constantly warned the Nehru government of the imminent threat of Chinese aggression. His severe indictment of the Nehru government's handling of the Chinese attack must have appeared unkind and even opportunistic to his contemporaries. He was worried about national integration in the north-east and put forward a series of suggestions to promote the region's interaction with the rest of the country.

Lohia's cultural politics would invite many uncomfortable questions today. There were times when his stance appeared narrowly nationalist. It is easy to note that most of his cultural symbols came from the Hindu religion, though not even his critics accused him of any communal bias with his track record as Gandhi's associate in Noakhali and Calcutta. Some of his suggestions about integrating *urvashiyam* (his preferred name for the north-east region; see *India, China and Northern Frontiers*: 69-98) may appear assimilationist today, just like some of his suggestions about language may appear insensitive to smaller languages. It could be argued that integration with the north-east was more a function of democratic politics and federal institutions than culture. We can disagree with Lohia's answers on each of the three issues, but it would be hard to overlook the three questions Lohia asked – how do we recover the lost cultural confidence of the Indian people?; how do we foster a sense of national unity?; and how do we level inequalities embedded in cultural institutions like language? He also provided a model of multi-level engagement with cultural and religious symbols without falling victim to narrow and chauvinistic politics.

4.6 Limits to Non-Congressism

Finally a word on Lohia's famous (or infamous) non-Congressism (Limaye 1988), which acquired larger than life proportions during the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) regime when some ex-socialists used him to justify their cohabitation with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). For Lohia himself, this was a temporary shift in political tactics, which in no way was central to his political thinking. Opposing the Congress was no religion to him. When the socialists decided to leave the Congress after independence to form a separate party, Lohia was among the few leaders who opposed the decision and argued for staying in the Congress. Nor did he advocate political alliances right from the beginning. Through the 1950s, Lohia opposed socialists taking part in the politics of alliances (*Rachanavali* 3: 127-32). It was only after the third general election that Lohia began to seriously look at the possibility of forming a coalition.

This shift was prompted by many factors, largely non-ideological. There was undoubtedly an element of political fatigue and frustration, especially among middle-level workers. The effect of the first-past-the-post electoral system, which systematically and vastly over-represented the largest party, must have contributed to the sense of being cheated and accentuated the need for a strategy to deal with it. Finally, the steep degeneration in the Congress, especially after Nehru's death, may have convinced Lohia that an unaccountable and unresponsive ruling party posed more of a danger than a small and ineffective communal party like the Jan Sangh, especially if it could be checked by the

presence of other parties, including the communists. This was clearly a short-term measure with limited success. Needless to say, there is little basis to turn this into a doctrine, least of all to justify an alliance with the post-Ayodhya BJP.

5 What Is Living and Dead? And What Is New?

5.1 Two Streams of Radicalism

India witnessed two parallel streams of radical thought in the 20th century. Both these streams developed in opposition to existing structure of domination and sought to build a future on alternative principles. Both these streams differed in their identification of the form of domination that must be overturned and, naturally, of the normative principles that would define the future. Both these streams informed very different kinds of politics, largely to the exclusion of each other. By the end of the 20th century, both these streams had reached a dead-end, politically as well as intellectually, though they continue to inform the language of everyday politics, especially radical politics. The challenge of re-imagining radical politics in the 20th century requires a dialogue, if not a synthesis, between these two streams.

The first stream, the egalitarian tradition, is easier to identify and name. The idea of equality provides the conceptual core to this tradition. Understood largely in the sense of equality of distribution of valuable social goods, the various sub-streams of this tradition differed in their reading of how the existing inequality was patterned and which aspect needed to be privileged to achieve equality. This difference gave rise to different political movements. The socialist sub-stream, including the communists and the naxalites, privileged class-based economic inequalities, social justice movements foregrounded caste-based inequalities and feminists brought gender-based inequalities to the fore. These differences, especially the ones between class and caste as the principal axis of inequality, gave rise to sharp and apparently incommensurable political differences, often distracting from the shared structure of their reasoning. They shared not just their primacy to the ideal of equality but also a certain orientation to the western and the Indian intellectual traditions. Drawn largely from the intellectual resources of western radicalism, their formulations tended to view Indian intellectual traditions with suspicion. The "Euro-normality" built into their conceptual apparatus made Indian society appear inherently odd and conservative.

The second stream is harder to trace, for it did not result in an identifiable "ism" or a singular political expression. Yet from the beginning of the 20th century, or even earlier in figures like Bhudev Mukhopadhyaya, political opposition to colonial rule began to take the form of a deeper critique of the civilisational, cultural and epistemic domination of the modern west. Inspired broadly by the value of *swaraj* or autonomy, this critique came from different vantage points and meant affirmation of very different types of social and political order. At one end stood the narrowly construed nationalist critique that implied a defence of the Indian, or sometimes Hindu, social order as it existed. At the other end of the spectrum stood the Gandhian critique of modern civilisation from the vantage point of an alternative universality, which implied the politics of a critical insider. The political

energy that resulted from this stream lies scattered all over the political spectrum of 20th century India, from the politics of Hindutva on the one hand to Gandhian social action and environmental movements on the other. A focus on the cultural domain and the somewhat defensive posture that often characterised this stream meant a reluctance to confront the social and economic inequalities that marked Indian society.

5.2 Lohia's Synthesis

Lohia was one of the few thinkers⁴³ in 20th century India who made a conscious effort to draw upon both these streams and tried to forge a politics that was radical in both senses of the term. His grounding in cultural traditions and nationalism and his encounters with Gandhi meant that he rebelled not just against colonial political domination, but equally against the cultural and intellectual domination of the West. He outgrew a simple-minded nationalism to develop a critique of Eurocentricism from the vantage point of universalism. It opened him to learning from Indian history, mythology and intellectual traditions without closing his eyes to the best in the global heritage of ideas. This vantage point, "universalist" but not "cosmopolite", forward-looking and not side looking, allowed him to develop an uncompromising critique both of Eurocentricism and of elements in the Indian tradition that cannot stand rational scrutiny. At the same time, his political mooring in the socialist movement meant an uncompromising adherence to the ideal of equality. He outgrew the received and narrow focus on economic equality within a country and expanded the notion to include both internal and external equality and also equality in gender, caste and race.

What makes Lohia perhaps truly unique is that for him combining these two forms of radicalism was neither a mere gesture nor a simple grafting of two very different ideas on each other. He attempted nothing short of an integration that would entail the transformation of both these traditions. Lohia repeatedly opposed and ridiculed attempts to simply pick and choose elements from very different structures of ideas. Integration for him meant reworking the intellectual design so as to harmonise the different principles. An insistence on extending the principle of equality to include equality among nations, for example, would entail re-examining not just the Leninist theory of imperialism but also Marx's understanding of the capitalist forces of production. Similarly a critique of caste must not stop by merely acknowledging an inconvenient fact; it must involve an analysis of the social order that gave rise to the institution of the caste system and a political programme for annihilating caste. This is not to claim that Lohia achieved this integration in every respect, but to acknowledge that the intellectual ambition of integrating the two dominant forms of radicalism placed him ahead of his time and made him relevant to our time.

5.3 Lohia's Relevance

Our time is characterised by an intellectual and political paralysis of both the streams of radicalism identified above. The politics of egalitarianism appears to be exhausted, just when it ought to have gained a fresh lease of life. While internal differences among class, caste and gender-based egalitarianisms have narrowed

down, the ideological space collectively occupied by egalitarian ideologies has shrunk. Capitalism has led to another systemic crisis without a corresponding strengthening of the politics of socialism. The centre of gravity of radical politics has shifted decisively away from Europe without a corresponding shift in the richness of non-European radical ideologies. Long contained and domesticated, the idea of socialism has lost what remaining popular currency it had just when the Indian state requires an egalitarian political will to match its newly acquired resources for welfarist policies of a social democratic nature.

As for indigenous radicalism, its paralysis follows from the absence of a politics distinctively its own. The failure of the Gandhian establishment to follow up on Gandhi's legacy of civil resistance, the refusal of new social movements to embrace politics and the inability of the heterodox Gandhians to evolve a theory of power has meant that the energy of this stream has been hijacked either by the official ideology of the Indian state or by the politics of Hindutva. Both, internal exhaustion or hijacking from outside, have produced similar outcomes – these streams of radicalism have surrendered their ambitions to shape the world in the light of their ideals. A rupture in the history of modern Indian political thought has led to a sharp decline in the conceptual resources of politics and an atrophy in political judgment in contemporary India.

It is in this context that we can appreciate the relevance and the limits of Lohia's ideas. Arguably, Lohia's most enduring legacy is that he provided philosophical foundations for the simultaneous recognition and appreciation of both these forms of radicalism, cleared the theoretical ground for integration of these apparently incommensurable doctrines, and drew the first blueprint of the political architecture of this integral form of radicalism. He did so by interrogating the two simple responses to European modernity underlying these two forms of radicalism. If the autonomist form of radicalism suffered from a backward-looking mentality, the egalitarian form of radicalism was a victim of the side-looking mentality. Lohia's advocacy of universalism rather than cosmopolitanism provided a vantage point for appreciating both egalitarianism and autonomist doctrines. His plea for a forward-looking modernism opened the way for integrating both these forms. For Lohia these were not philosophical choices or aesthetic preferences, he formulated these distinctions as necessary steps for political action guided by a normative vision. His rejection of the simplistic options of going back to a pristine past or replicating someone else's history pointed to a difficult and uncharted path of political action where no precedents reigned, where each action had to be justified on its own terms. Lohia insisted that this indeterminate but not indiscriminate, inherently risky though not altogether unpredictable, action was what radicalism was all about. This open-ended invitation for defining and redefining radical political action is more relevant today than it was in Lohia's own time.

5.4 Lohia's Limitations

Even the most ardent admirers of Lohia would agree that there are new realities and challenges that he had not anticipated. Lohiaites could take credit by saying that the collapse of the communist world would not have surprised Lohia. But the real

question is whether he offers us resources to keep alive the idea of socialism in an age where it no longer grabs the attention of the younger generation. Lohia's choice of the label "socialism" for his new, multidimensional radicalism, did ensure political continuity and energy behind this new idea. At the same time, this expression tends to drag the idea to one of its roots and thus limits its intellectual and political appeal, especially in a world that has seen the fall of many so-called socialist regimes. There are seeds of environmental concern in Lohia, but no more than seeds. Instead of stapling this on to Lohia's economic doctrine, the task is to rethink the doctrine in the light of limits to progress. It is possible to relate to the reality of "globalisation" by stretching Lohia's thinking about true universalism, but it would be stretching. That would be a poor substitute for forming a theory on this phenomenon.

Changing reality has also meant that some of Lohia's ideas have become dated. It is in the nature of any political programme that it carries an expiry date; it is in the nature of political practice for overlook this date and suffer the consequences. Lohia's political theory and programme are no exceptions. If most of Lohia's oft-quoted aphorisms have lost meaning for the new generation, this is hardly surprising, for old expressions have to be renewed for every generation. Lohia's followers did not do so and cannot possibly complain now. The changing nature of the political universe has meant that many of Lohia's ideas have become dated. His politics of language cannot be practised in the same manner today as it could be in his time. It needs to be more sensitive to Indian languages other than Hindi and find smarter ways than simply "banishing" English to counter its dominance. The assimilationist aspects in his approach to national unity need to be rethought. Some of his formulations have indeed become counterproductive. Anti-Congressism is used for justifying political

immorality. The idea of annulling partition by an Indo-Pak federation might drive away the most ardent peacenik in Pakistan. His justification of what he called "political extremism" and his style of organisation building were hardly assets in his own time, today they would be a real liability.

An honest assessment of Lohia's limitations must go beyond the routine concerns of updating, amending and extending his doctrine. If the argument advanced in this essay has any merit, the structure of Lohia's thought had a built-in limitation. His doctrine was like a vast canvas that outlined the issues in broad brush strokes. He presented bold hypotheses, but, even if plausible, these hypotheses must not be mistaken for proof. This is true of his reading of capitalism and its external dynamics. He confronted difficult problems; even if his approach is valid, it cannot be mistaken for a solution. This is the case, for example, with his cultural politics. He asked fascinating questions, but they cannot be mistaken for answers. His thinking about technology and decentralisation is a good example of this. Much of what passes for Lohia's bold theorisation suffers from this fundamental limitation; these "theories" are no more than powerful and fresh theoretical questions. Lohia's reworking of the socialist doctrine is at best an invitation to rethink the fundamentals of the received doctrine. He pointed us in the right direction to look for answers, but rarely did he work them out. Perhaps the biggest mistake of Lohia's admirers and critics was that they mistook his questions for answers. Lohia was indeed ahead of his time in many ways, but the price he paid for it was a certain vacuum in his theoretical architecture. Radical politics in the 21st century cannot get away by simply updating and adapting his ideas. The challenge it faces is nothing short of reconstructing a socialist doctrine in the light of the questions and hints provided by Lohia.

NOTES

- 1 This statement was iconised after Lohia's death and appeared in many posters with his sketch (*Rachanavali* 5: 7).
- 2 This perhaps explains why his prefatory remarks to his books were melancholic, almost disinterested in engaging the contemporary readers the book was being offered to. Thus goes the preface to *Wheel of History*: "If the academic fate of previous excursions into economic and political theory were any guide, I should have desisted from the publication of this effort into historical theory. But hope is undying" (np).
- 3 For an analysis of how our understanding of Lohia is distorted by his critics as well as admirers, see my introductory essay to this collection.
- 4 I am grateful to Janaki Bhakale for sensitising me to this line of reasoning.
- 5 This is very much in line with Lohia's insinuation that the official custodians of a great man's memory tend to do more damage to his ideas than his critics. He invoked it famously in offering a *kujaat* or "heretic" reading of Gandhi that went against both the state-sponsored line and Gandhian orthodoxy (See MGS: xxxiii-xxxiv; *Rachanavali*: 5: 242-64). Kishen Pattmayak argued that Lohia's followers were not very different and that there was a need to rescue Lohia from his followers. I have argued elsewhere for the need to develop a *kujaat* reading of Lohia. See Yadav (2003).
- 6 This parallel with Husain is not accidental. Lohia and Husain knew each other well and shared a common benefactor. Lohia deeply admired Husain's

work and Husain acknowledged Lohia's inspiration behind his *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* series. Husain did covers for all his books and drew Lohia's iconic sketch. There was clearly an intellectual affinity between the two.

- 7 As a self-reflective thinker, Lohia hints at this too: "I have not written books. Was it that I did not have the time or the ability for them? Or, has the structure of my mind corresponded somewhat with the structure of truth to produce 'Aspects', 'Fragments'?" (MGS: i). In this context, he reminds us that two of his collections bore similar titles. He of course concedes that he is "perhaps rationalising an inadequacy into a theory" (MGS: i), but there is clearly something to his suggestion that needs following up.
- 8 This hint is not developed in Lohia, but it offers a richer entry to understanding the politics of knowledge than the post-Foucauldian tradition, which tends to replace the task of evaluation of ideas by a sociology of knowledge, and fights shy of the idea of truth and ethics, only to admit these through the back door.
- 9 If Marxism stood for the first tendency to ground radical politics in an objectivist, sometimes positivist, understanding of knowledge, the second tendency is best exemplified in recent times in the post-modernist turn of the social sciences. In this respect there is an affinity between Lohia and Wittgenstein, though there is no hard evidence of Lohia having read Wittgenstein, apart from some stray invocations of the idea of "family resemblance".

- 10 Rustom Bharucha's essay "Enigmas of Time" (2000) convinced me how significant this apparently marginal essay is to Lohia's thought. His comparison of Gandhi, J Krishnamurti and Lohia brings out the distinctiveness of Lohia's insight on time and how the imperativeness of political action can help resolve apparently irresolvable philosophical dilemmas. This insight also helps us resolve an interpretative dilemma in understanding the transition from the early Lohia of the 1930s to the mature Lohia of the 1950s. This philosophical insight arrived at in the torture chamber is perhaps the epistemic breakthrough that allowed Lohia to free himself of the shackles of the academic mode of reasoning and shift to his well-known style of bold but fragmentary theorising. "Economics after Marx" is thus a text of transition: it is pregnant with the seeds of much of the ideas that were to figure prominently in his later thinking but its form still respects the constraints of academic conventions, which prevent him from articulating his ideas fully. It is no surprise, therefore, that Lohia chose not to complete the unfinished manuscript of *Economics after Marx*, for "this style of inquiry and expression [had] ceased to interest" him (MGS: i).
- 11 At this point the validity of Lohia's reasoning need not detain us. The point here is to note how different this approach was from the understanding of his contemporaries, the liberal modernisers and the socialists, who shared the dream that European history could be re-enacted outside Europe. Articles by Amit Basole and SJP Sunil in this issue explore this point at some length. As

- both of them point out, this thesis was anticipated by Rosa Luxemburg and later argued by the dependency school. For recent arguments in favour of this connection between capitalism and colonialism, see Blaut (1989). For a critique of Marxism as a version of European diffusionism, see Blaut (1999).
- 12 This line of reasoning was implicit in "Economics after Marx", but Lohia could not spell it out in that unfinished manuscript. The basic argument was summarised and its operational implications stated in a seminal essay "Marxism and Socialism" (MGS: 91-118) that Lohia first delivered as a lecture in 1952.
 - 13 This expression is borrowed from Sudipta Kaviraj, who explicated it thus: "... historical experience operated inside the categories [of modern social science] as a form of conceptual gravitation – tending to drag the analyses of distinct societies into a persistent but distorting resemblance to European history, in the process conferring upon European experience and its history the status of apparent 'normalcy'. An implicit European reference works from the heart of the conceptual apparatus of modern social sciences, turning it 'naturally' towards Euro-normality, much as the magnetic properties of a compass needle always make it point north" (2009: 189). There is a striking resemblance between this argument and Lohia's insistence that most concepts of modern knowledge are "European in origin and validity" (IDP: 94), though Kaviraj arrives at this quite independent of Lohia.
 - 14 It is tempting to present Lohia as a precursor of the idea of multiple or alternative modernities. There is much in him to support this claim. He did offer a cogent critique of the idea that modernity has a singular lineage or a univocal institutional expression. But it is clear that he did not stop at this minimalist insistence on multiple forms of, and paths to, modernity. His universalism involved an interrogation of the modernity experienced by or imagined in Europe. His adoption of the label "modernist" was never free of unease. Surrounded by ardent believers and angry atheists, Lohia remained an agnostic vis-à-vis modernity. Like his plea for third camp in world politics, he would have been the votary of a third path in this respect as well.
 - 15 This is something he shared with many other modern Indian political thinkers, from Bankim Chandra Chatterjee to Jawaharlal Nehru. Sudipta Kaviraj shows why history writing was so central to the nationalist project (Kaviraj 2010). History was one of the disciplines Lohia had studied for his doctoral examination. His early commentaries on world events in the *Congress Socialists* (1934-41) to his regular "Notes and Comments" in *Mankind* demonstrate his fascination for history. As a member of the third Lok Sabha, he initiated a special debate on history writing to protest against how an UN-sponsored project had depicted Indian history (*Lok Sabha Mein Lohia*: 158-69).
 - 16 Although the book was published in 1955, it is based on lectures delivered in Hyderabad in 1952. Some of the key ideas of the book – such as continental shifts in the world economy and transformation of castes into class – were anticipated in *Economic after Marx* (MGS: 36, 73). But the entire theory was first summarised in a short note "Driving Forces of World History" (MGS: 258-59) that dates to 1952. Thus Lohia's theory of history should be seen as an integral part of the grand theoretical design that he suddenly unveiled in 1952.
 - 17 Here Lohia fused several distinctions. The Marxist theory of history could be Eurocentric in many different ways: (a) it drew most of its principal material from European history; (b) it interpreted the experience of the rest of the world in the light of European experience; (c) it had the consequence of affirming the superiority of Europe; and (d) it was designed to maintain the supremacy of Europe. Lohia appears to collapse the first three into the fourth formulation. The same could be said about his formulation that "Communism is the latest weapon of Europe against Asia" (MGS: 260). He tended to be most polemical when discussing the communists or Nehru, his two main adversaries in politics. But he did distinguish Marx from his followers and had only positive things to say about Marx the thinker.
 - 18 It needs to be noted that racial mixing was very much an ideal for Lohia. His dream was to "be able to see a world of Mulattos, of half-breeds" (*Wheel*: 59). This needs to be underlined, for some of Lohia's critique of the dominance of the white race over coloured people, much like Frantz Fanon's critique, have been misconstrued to present Lohia as some kind of racist. For such a misreading, see Kuldeep Kumar (2004).
 - 19 For a valiant attempt to validate Lohia's theory in the Indian context, see Vikram (2006).
 - 20 In retrospect, Lohia's forecasts turned out to be a mixed bag. He was exceptionally prescient in seeing the division of the world between capitalism and communism as artificial and temporary. At the same time, his bold forecast about the atom bomb or Gandhi prevailing on the world by the end of the 20th century proved unhelpful. Specifically, he overestimated the power of economic nationalism of the coloured people and the impact of the poverty of the colonies on the economies of West Europe, and underestimated the capacity of the US to manage post-war Europe, the ability of the European powers to cooperate with each other, and the space within capitalism to provide welfare to workers.
 - 21 Lohia was not the only or the first thinker to focus on caste inequalities, but it was rare in his time for egalitarians to recognise caste inequalities. Ironically, it was easier to do so in the era before the Bolshevik revolution. Vivekananda, for example, translated socialism as a rule by shudras. For an analysis of the "strange disappearance of caste" from Indian Marxism, see Kaviraj (2009: 186-90).
 - 22 Lohia's much celebrated and cited analysis of India's partition, *Guilty Men of India's Partition*, is a good example of this tendency. For all its candour and insight, Lohia's analysis of this momentous event gets bogged down in a blame game and does not offer much in terms of a long-term historical understanding.
 - 23 Lohia was at that time uniquely placed to articulate this theory within the socialist movement in India. The parent party, the Congress Socialist Party (CSP), began as a Marxist-Leninist party in 1934 and its leadership continued to remain Marxist, notwithstanding its critique of Indian communists, until the Quit India movement. After independence, when the Socialist Party moved out of the Congress, it shifted to a democratic socialist creed, broadly along the lines of European social democracy. Jayaprakash Narayan, the undisputed leader of the party till the first general election in 1952 had renounced Marxism and materialism but believed in democratic socialism, as did Ashok Mehta. The only exceptional figure was Acharya Narendra Deva, a renowned scholar of Buddhism, who remained a Marxist to the very end.
 - 24 Arguably, the disappearance of this restraint, with Lohia emerging as the sole and unquestioned leader of his Socialist Party, did disservice both to the socialist movement and to the quality of his thinking. Lohia was undoubtedly the most creative mind in the party, but the presence of taller leaders and diverse voices resulted in something of the creative tension necessary for new and relevant formulations. Once it disappeared, the degree of self-restraint necessary for any act of creativity diminished in Lohia. In his party, his word became the final word, even on organisational matters in which he had limited experience and competence. His personal likes and dislikes became political positions and his whims took the appearance of principles. As Lohia got used to a close circle of disciples and admirers, he became more and more distanced from the world outside, reinforcing his caricature as an eccentric.
 - 25 "Some Fundamentals of a World Mind" (MGS: 283-88), a short note authored by him in 1949, already contained many of the key ideas elaborated in the Pachmarhi address. Some of the formulations go back to the *Economics after Marx*. Yet the Pachmarhi address brought these ideas together for the first time and spelt out their implications for political action.
 - 26 His responses to the discussion at Pachmarhi, "Neither Anti-Marx nor Pro-Marx" (MGS: 364) and "On Doctrine" (MGS: 365-69), should be read as a part of his address. A few months later, in August 1952, Lohia gave a series of lectures in Hyderabad which supplemented and elaborated different aspects of the new doctrine. These lectures were later edited and revised by him and were published at different times. They include the *Wheel of History*, "Marxism and Socialism" (MGS: 91-118), "Gandhism and Socialism" (MGS: 119-38), "Anecdotes of Mahatma Gandhi" (MGS: 139-78) and "A Philosophical Hypothesis" (MGS: 179-97).
 - 27 Later he was to characterise his politics as "genuine leftism from bottom" as opposed to Soviet-style "leftism from top" (MGS: xxxvii). This expression – he did not use it often or consistently – anticipated later calls for politics of the subalterns. His comment in *Economics after Marx* on writing the history of colonial labour in India (MGS: 29-30) clearly anticipates the tradition of history writing now known as Subaltern Studies.
 - 28 Although Indian socialists never had the kind of subordinate relationship with their European counterparts as did Indian communists, the non-Lohia stream within the party maintained an affiliation with Socialist International and broadly subscribed to its ideology of democratic socialism. Lohia maintained that European socialists were more European than socialist. For his stinging critique of the French socialists and Socialist International on the Algerian question, see Lohia's editorial comments in *Mankind* (N&C 1: 158-61).
 - 29 Lohia's intellectual biography was not marked by ruptures and turnabouts as dramatic as in the case of Jayaprakash Narayan or M N Roy, yet it can be divided into three phases. From 1933 to 1942 was the first phase of early writings when Lohia articulated the CSP's ideology of militant nationalism as socialism in the academic mode of his time. "Economics after Marx" inaugurated the second phase of intellectual transition, marked by torture in the Lahore Fort, a close association with Gandhi and a trip across the world. Here he struggled with the received orthodoxies and attempted to forge a new doctrine. The Pachmarhi address of 1952 began the third phase of his intellectual journey that was to last until his death.
 - 30 In this respect, Lohia's reformulation can broaden the discussion of the idea of equality in academic political theory in the West. Much of the post-Rawlsian theory has focused narrowly on the distribution of resources within a society. Rawls (1999) refused to extend his principles of justice to the global arena on the ground that the international community was not a scheme for cooperation for mutual advantage and hence not the proper domain of social justice. For those who argue in favour of extending the principle of equality beyond national boundaries, Lohia provides a way to overcome the dichotomy between "international justice" – the idea that all nations must be treated equally – and "global justice", which seeks to establish parity among all citizens irrespective of their national affiliations (Brown 2006). Lohia's proposal of combining the external and the internal dimensions of equality and defining external equality by per capita productivity and consumption for each national unit offer a way out of this debate.
 - 31 Lohia's idea of equanimity draws on the ideal of *shritaprajna* (a man of steadiness and calm, firm in judgment), though he insisted that this was contained within the idea of *samata* or *samatva* (MGS: 240). He did not elaborate on this aspect,

perhaps due to his contempt for ill-integrated medleys of ideas drawn from different sources. He did use some cognate ideas such as *samabodh*, *samalakshya* and *samadrishti* (shared feelings, common objectives and even-handed vision) to flag some of his organisational principles (*Rachanavali* x: xxx), without quite elaborating on these expressions.

- 32 Lohia was conscious of this connection: "The ancients in India seemed to have sensed that inward equanimity and outward equality were two sides of the same coin, for, alone in India's languages, does a single word stand for both meanings" (MGS: 240). He was, of course, not the first one to establish this connection. Some of the 19th century thinkers such as Vivekananda took this for granted. In this respect, the idea of equality underwent a conceptual retreat following the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. There were some attempts, like that of Bhagwan Das, to combine Indian intellectual traditions and the idea of socialism, but, as noted above, Lohia did not think much of such stapling together. For an analysis of the idea of equality in the 19th century, see Ganguly (1975).
- 33 This is the best known but not the only summary formulation of his socialism. For some other lists, see MGS: 489.
- 34 Though this aspect was never fully spelt out or integrated with the rest of his theory, this was certainly not a momentary afterthought. Attention to civil liberty and alertness to the collectivist excesses of even a benign state marked Lohia's thinking from the 1930s. At the same time, he maintained that respecting individual privacy need not entail protecting private property. Most of his early writings appeared in the *Congress Socialist*, the organ of the CSP published from 1934 to 1941.
- 35 Detailing the economic and political model of a socialist society was by then an established practice among Indian socialists. After the party shifted to democratic socialism, Jayaprakash Narayan (1946) and Ashok Mehta (1964) spelt out the model of a socialist society, in line with European social democracy.
- 36 Lohia repeatedly registered his disquiet with Gandhian thinking on the economy, holding that Gandhi did not pay sufficient attention to the material basis of life and offered "more of an amendment than a substantive proposition" (MGS: xiv, 134-36). He saw his own task as integrating the positive aspects of the technology of the present age with the Gandhian amendment and thinking of a new economic system in accordance with it. "Unless desire to live simply is the woof and modern technology the warp, that is, the two are interwoven into a consistent design of institution and thinking, artists or cranks alone make use of this aspect of Gandhian doctrine" (MGS: xv).
- 37 The realisation that the high level of capitalisation that prevailed in the US and Europe was impossible to replicate in the rest of the world was a turning point in Lohia's thinking. He recorded this shift in the only insertion he made to the incomplete manuscript of *Economics after Marx* (MGS: 27).
- 38 Though Lohia's Pachmarhi speech named constructive actions as the "the primary and acknowledged modes of Socialist action", this appeared to be a gesture towards Jayaprakash Narayan who was already leaning towards sarvodaya. His later writings and actions quietly shifted the balance in favour of non-violent struggle.
- 39 Although manifestos are not signed and authored, in the case of the Socialist Party, it was quite clear that these were written by Lohia and approved verbatim by the party. Lohia acknowledged this by including two of the party manifestos in a collection of his own writings, *Marx, Gandhi and Socialism*.
- 40 Lohia went so far as to demand that India should, if necessary, make a nuclear weapon to meet the Chinese threat. "I have deliberately exaggerated my position. I have asked for the bomb, if it were

available ... when my country is attacked I would not hesitate to use any weapon that is necessary and available" (MGS: xxxxi). This might appear to contradict his vigorous pacifism and his advocacy of disarmament, but was consistent with his view that as long as armies existed, they needed to be deployed effectively to counter external aggression. While advocating non-violent resistance in matters internal, he remained sceptical about the use of non-violence when faced with armed aggression from outside. Lohia's statements about the Chinese occupation of Tibet and the Chinese aggression are contained in *India, China and the Northern Frontiers*, see especially 117-20, 135-59.

- 41 Lohia evinced a special interest in agricultural economics right from his early days in the CSP and wrote a series of articles and reports on the state of agriculture, especially in Uttar Pradesh. After independence, the only official committee in which he participated was a committee on food security. For a comprehensive statement, see his address to the Hind Kisan Panchayat in 1950 (*Rachanavali* 3: 66-102).
- 42 See the article by Kumkum Yadav in this issue.
- 43 He was not the only one who tried. In a sense, the socialist movement in India was a natural home for this new form of radicalism. Bhagwan Das's *Socialism: Ancient and Modern* was an early attempt to articulate an Indian version of socialism, later echoed by Sampurnanand's Vedic socialism. Both these appeared to defend pre-modern social arrangements by invoking the modern principles in socialism. Jayaprakash Narayan's brief invocation of ancient India in his "A Plea for the Reconstruction of Indian Polity" also tended to be a romantic view of village India in pre-modern times. Acharya Javdekar's socialism offered a synthesis of Marx and Gandhi. Lohia would have nothing to do with such a grafting of socialism on some strands from Indian intellectual traditions. In this respect, the most interesting case appears to be that of Acharya Narendra Deva, who remained a Marxist and was a renowned scholar of Indian intellectual traditions. But he did not integrate these two aspects of his intellectual self. His famous commentary on Buddhism, *Buddhadharmadarsan*, made no reference to Marxism or socialism. Perhaps it is better to see Lohia's synthesis as a continuity of much earlier attempts by Mahatma Phule, Vivekananda and Narayana Guru to articulate the idea of equality in terms drawn from Indian intellectual traditions.

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Some of Lohia's writings have been identified in the text by abbreviated or shortened titles. Most of what Lohia wrote has been reprinted several times (usually without any distortion in the text) in various publications. The original year of publication and the publication details of the version used in this essay are noted here.

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