

Will the World listen to him?

Some great men are remembered for what they had said, some for what they had done and some for what they had said and done both. In the first category, in Indian context, come Dr. BR Ambedkar and Karl Marx, in the second, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, and in the third, Dr. Rammanohar Lohia. However, Lohia himself described great men under three categories of saint, seer and prophet and never claimed to be any of these but he definitely strived to mould his life according to three great ideals of Indian Culture i.e. Rama, Krishna and Shiva; the limited, exuberant and non-dimensional personalities although he never believed in their historicity and considered imitating them as foolish.

Lohia's biographer, Indumati Kelkar, described his personality as: "Darkish, short body in wrestlers mould, broad forehead, and penetrating eyes glistening through the glasses, a chin indicating grit and self confidence, a naughty smile playing at the corners of the lips, an open and appreciating mind free from affections.

About his inner personality, it can be said that carrying on his shoulders, the cross of infamy and total neglect by the established and ruling sections of the society, this messiah kept himself engaged in breaking the stonewalls and constructing something new with a creative obstinacy. With an aim of infusing life into an otherwise lifeless nation, he spent his life as an Aghori penitent by the funeral pyre.

Lohia's followers have followed more his words than his actions, but he himself wanted to be judged by his actions, his creativity and his resolve and willpower. That is why he said that statues and memorials of a person should be erected only after three hundred years of his death when the momentary fame faded and the person could be judged on the basis of his real contribution, without prejudice.

About his relation with others, the people, it is said that he could deal on equal footing with rich and poor, king and beggar, leader and volunteer, officer and peon, queen and washer maid, Brahmin and shudra, man and woman, child and adult, white and coloured etc. This quality of his was transparent not only in his speech but also in his deeds. He was always cautious not to show any disrespect even to the smallest person although he sometimes, used bitter words for the so called big and arrogant people. He treated his servant, Shobhan like his younger brother and even addressed him so. He fought for his taxi driver in the Lok Sabha. He established a relation of equality with rickshaw-pullers, taxi-drivers, barbers, mahouts, coffee-house bearers, artists, writers as well with ministers, ambassadors etc.

Lohia's life was full of episodes in which he made direct contact with poor people. He visited them in their huts, sat on their broken cots and listened to their tales. He tried to know how many members were there in the family, what was their income, whether they were getting full meal twice a day or not. He used to see children's clothes, women's tattered saris etc. This feedback gave him the courage to wage a battle of three annas and twenty five thousand rupees in the Lok Sabha.

The story of his relation with people is narrated beautifully in interviews with various types of people who came in contact with him, in two volumes of the book Dr. Lohia Ki Kahani, Unke Sathion Ki Zubani edited by Harish Chandra and his wife Padmini. Lohia was perhaps the youngest among the stalwarts of the Congress Socialist Party and later Socialist Party and Praja Socialist Party. In the trinity of the socialist movement in India, Acharya Narendra Deva was Brahma, the law-giver, Jayaprakash Narayan, Vishnu, the organizer and Lohia, Shiva, the creator. When Acharya Narendra Deva, became seriously ill and died, Jayaprakash Narayan drifted to Sarvodaya, this trinity was broken, which weakened the socialist movement. When Lohia, after parting with his old colleagues, formed a separate socialist party, he had to assume the role of all the three deities but he was severely handicapped. Dr. KS Karanth, Lohia's secretary, noted in his book 'Aspects of a Socialist Mind' and wrote:

"It is a sad commentary on the public life of our country that a leader of his eminence and stature lacked the elementary necessities. He did not have till the end of his life a qualified secretary to assist him, he did not have a steno, and he did not even have a full-time typist. He had no funds to pay for these facilities".

But the creator cannot complain of lack of facilities, resources or good raw material. He must create under any circumstances. He must create the most powerful Bhasmasura from an insignificant thing like ash. Lohia did this. He founded a new political party with handful of young colleagues and within ten years created a revolution which broke the monopoly of all powerful Congress party, energized the masses who had been in deep slumber for centuries and set in motion the unending struggle for equality, pride and a decent living. This process is going on even after 43 years of his death. The political parties of the upper castes, which ruled for centuries are today unable to form a government on their own strength even after indulging in naked corruption, terror witch-hunting and vulgar shows like anti-corruption movements, rath yatras and sadbhavna fasts. The upper castes have realized that their grip on the society, which they had dominated for centuries, is no more effective. To that extent, Lohia's efforts have not been less than a revolution.

Lohia is more prone to be misunderstood by historians and scholars due to their own coloured glasses but the images formed in the minds of the ordinary people through their personal contact with him, would last for a longer period. In fact inter-mingling of these images is already creating myths around Lohia and some people have called it "Lohia Cult", which is nothing but a crude attempt to devalue Lohia's thought. There is, however, no possibility of Lohia being subject of a cult although there is a possibility of emergence of a distinct ideology or school of thought based on Lohia's writings.

When Lohia was editing the 'Congress Socialist', he once criticised Gandhi's village industry program and sent the article to Gandhi asking for his comments. Gandhi chided him for showing intolerance to others' views. Lohia promptly apologized. Ironically, Lohia had himself to suffer this intolerance on the part of his opponents throughout life. He was ignored, ridiculed, abused and even physically harmed by Jawaharlal Nehru's admirers and official and unofficial operators under his or his successors' regimes, because he opposed Nehru's policies.

It is tragic for India and for whole mankind that a person like Lohia, who was among the most fertile and original thinkers of the twentieth century such as Mahatma Gandhi, Albert Einstein, Bertrand Russell, Bernard Shaw, Scott Buchanan etc. and who struggled for and lived by the highest values of human society, should remain un-read and un-appreciated among the intellectuals of his time and about half a century after his death, because of an undeclared ban on his writings by the ruling elite of this country. It is like pronouncement of banishment (even death sentence) on a thinker-activist by the dictator and his heirs, accepted and endorsed by the intellectuals and thinkers all over the world.

But the Sanskrit word Shabda is not merely sound, it is thought too and it is called Brahma, the immortal. Lohia's words are right back knocking the doors of conscience of the world whether this relates to the economic crisis which still continues to its fourth year culminating in Occupy Wall Street agitation or to the crisis of the civilization which is dying under its own weight and struggling for a new life (as per Immanuel Wallerstein, author of the book, "End of the world As we know it", and is taking shape in the amorphous World Social Forum as hopefully visualized by Noam Chomsky in his book, 'For Reason Of State'), or to the curses of poverty, inequalities and violence which are increasing day by day despite the best of our efforts, or to the mad race towards Maximum Efficiency as opposed to Total Efficiency, as indicated by Thomas L. Friedman in his article published in New York Times and reproduced in Indian Express on 24th October, 2011.

Lohia's approach to all these problems was holistic in real sense of the word. When Lord Maynard Keynes talked of full employment to tide over the crisis of the thirties of the last century, his approach was not meant for the colonies. When F.D. Roosevelt created lakhs of jobs under the New Deal, it was not a holistic approach for the same reason. Lohia suggested creation of millions of jobs in the developed countries and also full employment in under-developed countries by a world economic development policy under which developed countries will produce goods (i.e. small machines and tools that will increase the productive capacity of the workers there and not dump their surplus goods there). He conceived this arrangement under the concept of world as a family, under which the earning members of the family look after the minimum needs of the un-earning members. The needs of the millions and millions of the villages and urban slums in the under-developed world will keep the factories running in the developed countries and also help creating wealth and capital in the backward world. This will be the holistic solution to the present economic crisis, not the bailing out of the rogue capitalism so far practiced in America and Europe.

In relation to other world crises too, Lohia is more relevant today since he had discussed and analysed all these crises microscopically and macroscopically with a world outlook although his words were lost in wilderness due to narrow mindedness of the world he lived in. He cried in the wilderness. "The world will listen to me, I am sure, but it shall be only after my death."

Will it happen yet?

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