

DR. RAMMANOHAR LOHIA REMEMBERED: His Philosophy, Scholarship and Vision by S.R. Nene (Rupa & Co., 7/16, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi 110 002. 2010.)

Time was when there were great editors like Pothan Joseph and Frank Moraes who encouraged wide reading of the literature produced by our great leaders in the twentieth century when young aspirant pen-pushers sought their advice. There was C. Rajagopalachari who was masterminding **Swarajya** where I learnt my first lessons in political journalism. One knew that reading widely, if one could come up with choice quotes from any great political personality of the past, he would be pleased no end and immediately write a card to express his satisfaction. So one raided the libraries to read more and more of these illustrious sons of India who had worked for their motherland's freedom. That was in the 'sixties of the last century.

Those leisurely days are now gone. The explosion of the internet has led to the constantly-heard whine: "There is no time!" There is also the non-availability of texts. Naturally our dependence on secondary sources has become indispensable. Fortunately, Sri S.R. Nene has brought out a dependable study of a remarkable son of India in **Dr. Rammanohar Lohia Remembered: His Philosophy, Scholarship and Vision** and we get a complete picture of the socialist leader.

Dr. Lohia was not the politician of today's brand. He belonged to a more dharmic day when those who wished to lead the people took an integral view of life which meant an effective blend of politics and spirituality. Matter and Spirit are not irreconcilable opposites and one needs the other's presence to be effective for helping man's progression in life. Their writings reflected this approach in a greater or lesser measure. This is the reason why the writings of personalities like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Sri Aurobindo, V.O. Chithambaram Pillai and Rammanohar Lohia remain alive and relevant even today.

Dr. Lohia wrote on politics. Also on various subjects. There was a natural flair for communicable English in him which attracted people. Sri Nene has made helpful divisions of the mass of Lohia's writings under various headings to give us a complete view. Naturally, history takes precedence. The lectures Dr. Lohia delivered in 1922 in Hyderabad (later reissued as **Wheel of History**) study the contours of modern man who started on the path of civilization 60,000 years ago. Where is he now? Compartmentalised into races, languages and religions! Then comes a day when he wants to 'purify' something that is created out of this universal amalgam, a sure scenario for the emergence of Hitler yesterday and Mohammad bin Laden today. When Dr. Lohia is not enthused by the "pride of unending and unstoppable progress by Western civilization" and the talk of its cultural supremacy, he is understandably indignant at the tragedy that has befallen the modern man. As Sri Nene observes, giving the gist of the argument:

“The power of scientific discoveries and militarism was fully exploited in the spread of colonialism and imperialism during the 18th and 19th centuries. The peak of human ambition, combined with extravagance, profligacy, unbridled exploitation of nature and greed for hegemonic control of other people, was reached in the 19th century. The indulgence by national powers in the use of military force and untold violence on the basis of self-asserting justification of their own behaviour, has been assigned by Dr. Lohia to the one hundred years of big industry, beginning from 1850 onwards with the inauguration of Suez Canal, Eiffel Tower and Panama Canal.”

Widely read, Dr. Lohia points out that most of the writers of history have skirted “the need to consider the failings of the unthinking historical personages.” But he had favourites too: Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee. While he rejects the Indian yuga-cycles, he is all admiration for the firm faith expressed by our ancients (including Buddha) about the Dharma that is eternal (sanatana dharma), helping the human being achieves a spiritual growth upwards. Matter (economic aims) and the Spirit (society’s aims) should be integrated. The **Mahabharata** is an understandable mine of basics and the rest of our heritage is also within the ken of Dr. Lohia. However, Sri Nene finds fault with his subject for misunderstanding Shankaracharya’s statement, Brahman is the Truth, the world is unreal and accusing the acharya of “reconciling great heights of spirituality with a social order of perfidious dimensions for the solidification of castes in India.” Indeed, the volume keeps one alert throughout its argument with flashes of insight into Dr. Lohia’s mental make-up. An understandable exclamation mark concludes Dr. Lohia’s advocacy of a Mulatto race as “the most effective remedy against Indian casteism.”

Wheel of History takes the lion’s share of the book. But equally interesting and thought-provoking are the essays comparing Dr. Lohia and Mahatma Gandhi as eternal optimists and the former’s tireless search for a “new cultural humanism”. It is good to know that Dr. Lohia’s life was, after all, not a cry in the wilderness. I would commend this passage to the public notice as we position ourselves towards the next General Election:

“Barring the regimes of Congress prime ministers starting with Indira Gandhi to P.V. Narasimha Rao, which were marked by corruption and bungling, all non-Congress regimes at the centre had a clean record of performance and absence of sinister practices. A bulk of the credit for this good performance must be given to Dr. Lohia and some of his friends who listened to him and pioneered the formation of a strong united front of opposition parties.”

Satyameva jayate, naanrutham, sooner than later!

Prema Nandakumar