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Rammanohar Lohia: A Heretical Gandhian?

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ABSTRACT

Rammanohar Lohia— the foremost oppositional socialist leader in the 1950s and 60s and one of the most original socialist thinkers in India, is credited with infusing Gandhian ideals in socialist politics. His speech of May 1952, delivered at the Pachmarhi conference of the Socialist Party, was instrumental in bringing important policy changes in the Socialist Party. However, his invocation of Gandhi was not without necessary alterations. These alterations were important in differentiating the ideals of Lohia from those of Gandhi himself and other Gandhians of post-independence India. This article attempts to look into the complexities, innovativeness, and reinterpretations surrounding the appropriation of Gandhian ideals by Lohia while focusing on three distinct fields— the role of the state in a post-colonial/decolonized world, the perennial relevance of satyagraha, and the struggle against the caste-system.

Key words: *Rammanohar Lohia, M. K. Gandhi, Socialism, Gandhism, Caste-system*

“The first half of the twentieth century produced two novel phenomena, atomic Bomb and Mahatma Gandhi, and the century’s second half will struggle and suffer to make its choice between the two.”

—Mahatma Gandhi and Atom Bomb—

Two Novel Phenomena of 20th Century.¹

“... I do not like this language of anti and pro. I am neither anti-Marx nor pro-Marx, and that equally applies to my attitude towards Mahatma Gandhi.”

—Neither Anti-Marx Nor Pro-Marx.²

Introduction

IN 1963, WHILE writing the preface for his most well-known
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collection of essays, Rammanohar Lohia— one of the leading Indian socialist leaders of the 1950s and 1960s— divided his contemporary followers of Mohandas Gandhi into three categories: the governmental, the priestly, and the heretical Gandhians. He accused the first two categories of betraying the principles of Gandhi. His attacks aimed at the Congress government of Jawaharlal Nehru and the *Bhoodan* movement of Vinoba Bhave and Jayaprakash Narayan. According to Lohia, they had made a mockery of Gandhi by highlighting the ephemeral traits of his teachings, like the *charkha*, without realising and implementing its enduring meanings, which is, in this case, controllable technology and self-sufficient village government. He asserted that Gandhism had acquired a “staid, respectable and colourlessly conservative character”³ in the hands of these disciples and had completely lost its revolutionary potential. These two wings have come “together to comprise what is authoritatively accepted as Gandhism,”⁴ Lohia lamented, in India and around the world. Lohia insisted that the attitude of the priestly and the governmental Gandhians to blindly follow Gandhi’s sayings without any critical understanding revealed their intellectual proximity to the Communists, who also followed borrowed theories and models without any critical input of their own.

Lohia claimed the heretical status for himself and his Socialist Party⁵ as it was particularly these group of Gandhians who were making an attempt to interpret Gandhism beyond its accepted version and according to their contemporary realities and requirements and who were not afraid of highlighting “both pleasant and unpleasant facts”⁶ about the Gandhian process despite their firm and resolute belief in the same. According to him, the heretical Gandhians must highlight the enduring elements of Gandhism instead of its ephemeral traits. While trying to reclaim Gandhism from the governmental and priestly Gandhians, Lohia reinterpreted several of Gandhi’s thoughts, which suited his contemporary oppositional socialist politics. In the process, Lohia’s criticisms did not even spare the Mahatma himself whenever the former thought the latter violated his own ideals, of which there were a number of examples. Lohia highlighted two particular incidents: the Bihar earthquake of 1934, whose cause Gandhi linked to the untouchability prevalent in India,⁷ and Gandhi’s opposition to the radicals within the Congress.⁸ He specifically mentioned the case of Subhas Chandra Bose, who failed to garner support from Gandhi and had to leave the Congress. In doing so, he occasionally expressed many thoughts that appeared completely antithetical to Gandhi’s own words. Lohia was well aware of this but called such reinterpretations as a heresy within the Gandhian

framework, which he deemed necessary for rejuvenating Gandhism as a revolutionary ideology.

In this article, I will engage with such reinterpretations of Gandhian thoughts by Lohia concerning three particular issues: the case for a decentralized economic and political system, the perpetual importance of *satyagraha*, even in a post-colonial state, and the caste system. I will begin with a discussion of Lohia's ideals about a decentralized economic system, which he thought would best suit the economic development of a capital-starved country like India. I will next engage with his ideas about *satyagraha*, which became the most well-known method of his political activities in post-independence oppositional politics. Finally, Lohia's anti-caste politics will be taken into account to mark his differences from Gandhi's and highlight the principal aim of his socialist politics, i.e., the establishment of an absolute equal society.

Decentralized Economic Production

In the aftermath of the first General Elections of 1952, the Socialists, dejected by their defeat, met at Pachmarhi to introspect their political and ideological line. In his presidential speech, Lohia asserted that socialism (and, by implication, the socialists themselves) was "torn between the worlds of capitalism and communism" and this prevented it from evolving "into a doctrine which would reconcile the claims of stability and of change, which would serve the needs of stability without strengthening the status quo, as well as the needs of change without fomenting chaos."⁹ For him, socialism was not simply an economic or political model. It was the doctrine of a new age. He went on to distinguish between the economic and general aims of the prevalent socialist ideology. According to him, the economic aims of socialism consisted of a planned economy with the "establishment of social ownership over existing means of production, their further development and mass production."¹⁰ On the other hand, the "preservation of national freedom, democracy, and human rights, and the securing of peace and of what are variously termed as the values of culture or the spiritual qualities of life" were considered its general aims. Lohia remarked that the economic aims of socialism were borrowed from communism while its general aims were more akin to those of the capitalist system. Most of the socialists believed that a simple "grafting of one on the other"¹¹ is the road to the establishment of a socialist society.

Lohia vehemently attacked this simplistic notion of borrowing from both capitalism and communism. He urged his socialist comrades to "disintegrate the premises on which capitalism and communism

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are founded" and search for a unique way to arrange their "own harmony of economic and general aims."¹² Otherwise, socialism would remain "an illogical doctrine that refuses to come of age."¹³

While speaking about the evils of capitalism, Lohia emphasized the violence which accompanies capitalist development:

Capitalism has ravaged the coloured peoples so much that they cannot now respond to its embrace, however affectionate. The task of capital formation over two-thirds of the world is far too colossal for private capital to accomplish. Capitalism cannot even fulfill its primary function of providing capital to mankind. The effort to spread the capitalist integration, which has hitherto been of local application among the white peoples, to all mankind and make it universal is foredoomed to failure. Poverty and war have been the monstrous progenies of capitalism, poverty for two-thirds of mankind and war for the rest, and it is powerless to destroy its own children.¹⁴

However, communism is no different as it "inherits from capitalism its *technique of production*" and it only "seeks to smash the capitalist *relations of production*." Moreover the communist class struggle is a "doctrine of deceit, lies, treason, tyranny, decay of culture, and also, of assistance to capitalism until a successful revolt takes place."¹⁵

Lohia summarized the promises of capitalism and communism using the metaphor of bread and freedom. While capitalism promises freedom, it cannot guarantee bread; on the other hand, in the communist system, while the availability of bread is somewhat certain, freedom remains an allusion. The solution is socialism—the integration of bread and freedom. And as socialism is an open and living ideology, it can accommodate several traits of Gandhian thought.

However, for Lohia, socialism did not mean a premodern, pre-industrialization utopian past. Unlike Gandhi, he was not against the machines or the machine age, which, he argued, had brought unprecedented material equality among the masses. He was indeed against the spiritual inequality that came as a by-product of the unprecedented material equality brought upon by modern machine-based civilization. Under the modern civilization, "the anxieties, tensions, and general emptiness arising out of the unstillable hunger for increasing output and living standards are becoming unbearable."¹⁶ As a solution, he proposed the invention of small-unit machines run by electricity or oil. Lohia's solution, in this way, was antithetical to Nehru's way of ameliorating poverty through centrally planned heavy industrialization initiatives led by a highly trained technocratic elite.

The idea of small-unit machines dates back to at least 1942, when Lohia wrote one of his first theoretical treatises, *Economics After Marx*.

In the heavy industrialization process under the capitalist system—and the communist system, which is a mere imitation of the capitalist mode of production—a specialized managerial class supervised the operation of the big machines, which, in most cases, produce only those commodities which are most profitable to supply. He wrote in *Economics After Marx*:

Science and mass production explore in any period a special bit of the territory of men's demands, this particular demand becomes most profitable to supply, and productive capacity in this sphere is unit technics and mass production.¹⁷

The production of particular goods in the large-unit technics "has made for a block-use of a science, not an all-round use."¹⁸ The proposed small-unit machines, on the other hand, would make an all-round use of science. Lohia knew well that this would not be an easy task, but he was quite optimistic:

This will require almost a new beginning in science, a kind of flexible small-unit technics. It cannot be achieved at once, nor does it today seem at all possible in spheres such as those of turbine and automobile manufacture. But an economy must steadily aim to realize flexible technics wherever possible. Only so can an economy hope to achieve real and undepressing (sic) expansion and an equal distribution of wealth and social understanding. Only so can an economy acquire of all-round application of science.¹⁹

Since 1942, Lohia propagated the small-unit machine as the basis of socialist economic production. Small-unit machines can also be seen as an antidote to workers' alienation from production. Under the small-machine-based socialist production system, no managerial class would be specialized in operating big machines. Every worker would be able to participate equally in the production process, thereby ending the superiority of a specific class and the centralized mass production-based economic system.

Lohia asserted that the future of the Indian economy must ensure a decent standard of living and not simply at an ever-increasing output. He believed, "decent living rather than prosperity is the keynote of the day."²⁰ In the later days, Lohia conceded that the Gandhian philosophy of simple living and its economy has failed to make any considerable appeal among the masses. Nonetheless, he maintained that it had been a revolutionary idea since it "goes against the prevailing taste and economy."²¹ However, if Gandhism wants to be relevant as a governmental idea, it must evolve, and the heretical

Gandhians must highlight the enduring elements of Gandhism. They must pose these elements as a counter to the blind adoption of Euro-American technology by the governmental Gandhians. Lohia had no qualms against the adoption of the *charkha* as an enduring symbol of village sufficiency, given it is adequately modernized by using electric power or oil. He hoped “if an economic thinking could evolve, which did not deny the positive technology of the present age but added to it Gandhiji’s amendment, though not the concrete imagery, Gandhism might become relevant also as government.”²²

Decentralized State and Governance

Lohia was apprehensive about the role of nation-states in the modern world order. He noted in 1955 that the nation-state foundation of the current world order is the principal reason behind the rising of bitter rivalries among the people.²³ A jingoist strong centralized state armed with the atom bomb is the ultimate dystopia in Lohia’s imagination. However, he was equally aware that the abstract idea of a world government could become a concrete reality only when there was a change in the hearts and minds of the ordinary masses. Till then, for the oppressed masses of the world, the presence of state power is almost a physical need:

“Everything else must take second place, even man and humanity. Without the state, India had been producing not men but mice and the humanity of the tallest of them was almost over an abstract cover for stinking individualism, either submissive or greedy. The people can afford to take no risks yet. They dare not play with their state. Peoples with longer experience of statehood have greater vigour and potential for all kinds of defence.”²⁴

Gandhi and Nehru have represented the two broad categories of modern Indian thinking on the state. The former strongly criticized the overwhelming power of the modern state and the violence associated with it. The latter, however, unambiguously supported it as the only effective way to usher the country into a true modern age.²⁵ Lohia was somewhere in between these two ideologues. He knew well the importance of the state in implementing important social policies, but he was always suspicious of its centripetal tendencies. His defense of the state was also in stark contrast with his socialist comrade Jayaprakash Narayan (JP) whose anti-statism took form from his interpretation of Gandhi’s writings. The anti-statism of JP was, in a way, an intellectually comfortable position for the Marxist-turned-Gandhian, who found close links between the ideas of Marx and Gandhi in their anti-state pronouncements.²⁶ While JP

shunned *Raj niti* or institutional politics solely in favor of *Lok niti* or people's politics, Lohia gave equal importance to the statist power politics and the people's movements (on which more in the later part of this essay).

Lohia's solution was the adoption of a decentralized polity manifesting itself in a decentralized state. Lohia as well as many other socialists, thought that by implementing a two-pillared federal structure in post-independent India, the Constituent Assembly betrayed the Gandhian ideals of a decentralized state and imposed an overtly centralized Leviathan State. He, instead, proposed a four-pillar (*chaukhamba*) state with greater power to the lower strata of village panchayats and district administrations. On the upper tier, the four-pillar state of his plan did not stop with a central national-level supervisory government. True to his universal outlook, he added another tier of 'world government' over the national one.

Lohia thought of experimenting with this decentralized governance model to tackle the issues of separatism emerging in different parts of India, especially the Naga separatist movement in North-East India. According to him, the academic writing of history in India is plagued by the imperialist notion of dividing the Indian people into misleading and wrong categories of "Aryan, non-Aryan, Dravidians and Mongols (sic)."²⁷ Foreign nations like China are making most of these divisions through their propaganda and fuelling resentments among the inhabitants of *Urvasiam* (*Uttar Purba Simanta Anchāl*— a neologism created by Lohia describing the North-East India and to counter the colonial nomenclature of North East Frontier Agency or NEFA) by highlighting their physical distinctness from the rest of India. In order to overcome this false propaganda, the Indian government must allow closer interactions between the people of the northeast and the rest of India. The interaction between the people of the north-east and the rest of India should be at the non-governmental level as far as possible— for example, between villages or city wards.

However, active statist-governmental intervention was sought in the lifestyle of the people of the north-east without which the area would remain a "dirty and stagnant pool, even dirtier and more stagnant than the rest of India." He proposed the granting of substantial amount of money for the spread of education and social reform. Proposals that suggested greater intervention in the tribal lifestyle included ending the Jhoom cultivation practice and forming a 'Food army' to bring large tracts of uncultivated land under agriculture. More controversial suggestions included changing habits in the sphere of personal hygiene, bathing habits, dressing sense, and use of cosmetics, etc. For example, he wanted to stop the piercing and

enlargement of the nostrils of the women of the *Apatani* tribe.²⁸ However, Lohia resented that the policies of the government of India were exactly the opposite. According to him, the government's non-interventionist policy regarding the tribal lifestyle was actually hurting them the most.

Curiously enough, Lohia's assertions of a historically close relationship between the tribes of the north-east and the people from the rest of India were, to a certain extent, based on a Hindu mythic past in which Rukmini, the consort of Lord Krishna, belonged to the Mismi tribe of the north-east. He resented that this close relationship has a foundation in the Hindu and Indian cultural past, which the modern Indian government could not comprehend, partly due to the influence of one Verrier Elwin.²⁹ Elwin, whom he described as an expadre, "who in conjunction with the prime minister has evolved a national park theory for the Assam tribal people, which more or less treat them like the Gir lions and isolates them even more from the outside world."³⁰ When Lohia was obstructed from entering the region in 1958, he wrote:

Among many examples of the violation by the government of India of law and the constitution, is its policy completely separating the administration of the Urvasiam area (North-east Frontier Agency) from the rest of the country. This area ...is a prohibited area for the people of the rest of the Indian Union, where no Indian citizen can enter without obtaining a special permit from the Governor of Assam. How is this done when the constitution applies to the whole country.... In the name of protecting the culture of the Adivasis, the advisor to the Governor of Assam for Urvasiam affairs has been indulging in highly condemnable acts. The Governor's advisor has pursued a policy of segregating the residents of this area from the rest of the Indian people and of treating them as protected animals. Such policies are not only shameful and condemnable, but also barbarous.³¹

Elwin, on the other hand, was against any hasty plan of assimilation of the tribals residing in the hills of the north-east with the people from the plains. He was the proponent of a middle path regarding the interaction between the tribals of the north-east and the people from the rest of India, which he described as "neither isolation nor assimilation." He strongly protested against equating the NEFA region with tribal zoos or museums. In his own words, "to try to preserve and develop the best elements in tribal art, religion and culture is something very different from wishing to keep the people in a zoo." According to Ramachandra Guha, the philosophy of Elwin's tribal welfare can be summed up in the following phrase:

festina lente, “make haste slowly.”³²

While the final objective of the policies of both Lohia and Elwin were the same— national integration; they differed largely in the policy details and the pace on which the integrationist policies were to be implemented. It is, however, not surprising that such policy details would be of vital importance to an ideologue like Lohia, who considered both the means and the ends equally important.

The government of India’s failure to smoothly integrate the tribals of the north-east with the rest of India was thus, according to Lohia, a result of the adoption of a series of faulty policies like the extension of unpopular laws like the Forest Act, which deprives the tribals of their inherent right to collect forest items, and incidents of violent shootings, inhuman tortures, and rapes of the members of different tribes to suppress sporadic rebel violence.³³ He concluded that once such wrongs are corrected, there remains no base for the demand of an independent Naga state:

The Socialist Party is of the opinion that the Naga demand for independence is ill-conceived and to the detriment of Nagas themselves. This committee appeals to the Nagas to give up their demand for independence and to make common cause, as citizens of India, with other submerged and exploited sections of Indians in their peaceful struggle against injustice and for fulfilment of their legitimate political, economic and cultural aspirations.³⁴

Lohia, while declining independent statehood to the Nagas, wanted them to participate in an elected district-level government within the Indian state “with powers over police and collection of taxes and with *guaranteed cultural safeguards*.”³⁵ In order to achieve these political concessions, they must not indulge in violence, but non-violent civil disobedience is the path to be followed.

The Spectre of Civil Disobedience

While violent armed separatist struggles were vehemently opposed, Lohia has been regarded as one of the greatest exponents of non-violent movements. In the Pachmarhi speech, Lohia underlined some specific forms of action to achieve socialism— actively pursuing constructive action, participating in elections, and resisting injustice. These three modes of action were made famous by the slogan, “the spade, the vote, and the prison.” He stated that all three are interrelated and “whatever mode of action powerfully influences the people’s will, its effect is undoubtedly felt in the other spheres.”³⁶

Gandhi’s influence is clearly visible in the programs of constructive action and the rhetoric of resistance to injustice. Lohia always

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considered the non-violent mass civil disobedience movements as Gandhi's greatest contribution to revolutionary politics. In 1955, while inaugurating his separate Socialist Party, he claimed that it was Gandhi who, for the first time in history, had put the weapon of civil disobedience into the hands of the masses, which was earlier used by only great men like *Prahlad*,³⁷ Socrates or Henry David Thoreau.³⁸ K. Gopinath Pillai has shown that as early as 1939, Lohia enthusiastically wrote to Gandhi about his views on using satyagraha to redress socio-economic problems, especially the problems of peasants.³⁹ At that time, Gandhi—the conservative, however—promptly rejected the proposition of organizing peasant satyagrahas, for peasants were not adequately trained to pursue non-violent struggle. Even mild attempts from Lohia to convert Gandhian ideals into socialist actions were rebuffed. Madhu Limaye has suggested that Gandhi's rejection of socialist-led Kisan Sabha movements, whose ultimate aim was to abolish the zamindari system in north India, stemmed from his conservative class consciousness.⁴⁰

The situation was quite different in the post-independence period without Gandhi's presence. Lohia, now free to interpret Gandhi's ideals and without the risk of being repudiated by the ideologue himself, attacked the Congress government. He indeed considered post-1947 India (and Pakistan as well) "a strict continuance of British India in most essential ways" for it had inherited and retained the British legacy in "all their ramifications, discipline and barbarism."⁴¹ Thus, he strongly defended the right to organize *satyagrahas* even in independent India, for *satyagrahas* are—like class struggle—an "exercise in power, reduction of the power of evil and increase in the power of good."⁴² As long as there will be injustice and oppression, there will be *satyagraha*. Other socialist leaders like Acharya Narendra Deva also shared the same position:

"Gandhiji never meant to satyagraha to be used only against foreign domination. He advised its use even against economic exploitation and for the establishment of a classless socialist society."⁴³

The socialists' idea of satyagraha in independent India was antithetical to Nehru's idea of satyagraha. Gyan Prakash has shown that Nehru's attitude towards street politics, agitations, people's movements, etc., was completely changed once he assumed state power. He thought that in a democratic setup, citizens should exercise their political will only through voting. The days of street fighting are over, and the greater part of the citizen's energy should be invested in the nation-building process in a disciplined manner.⁴⁴ In 1954, when

Lohia was incarcerated for organizing a civil disobedience movement against the increase in canal tax in Uttar Pradesh, he wrote a letter to Rajendra Prasad, the President of India. In this letter, he reflected on Nehru's attitude towards civil disobedience and his own justifications for its use in democratic, free India:

Your First Minister has observed that the practice of civil disobedience in a free country is senseless. He may have specifically meant conditions of democracy and the adult vote... civil disobedience has a specific purpose alone in a free and democratic country. Under other conditions, the use of violent methods may not be altogether unavoidable and, in any case, its condemnation is not above debate. India's contribution in the present century is the idea under conditions of democracy of obligatory and unqualified condemnation of resort to violence.⁴⁵

The socialist civil disobedience aiming at a more equal society must be based on non-violence because the use of violence and weapons inevitably leads to an unequal system.⁴⁶ Lohia's contention was that since constitutional means like elections often do little to ensure justice for the oppressed masses, they tend to resort to violence and weapons in order to get justice. In this way, an unequal system and a false binary of ballot and bullet persisted, whereas the real dichotomy is between civil disobedience and injustice. It is interesting to note that Lohia's purpose of pursuing non-violent civil disobedience was to achieve *justice* and *equality*; in Gandhi's case, it was *truth* alone.⁴⁷ It should also be noted that Lohia did not fully discount the idea of using violence during a critical moment in a revolution, "let it be noted that I am opposing the organising of violence: its use at a critical moment when the whole people are in revolt and government bayonets are themselves shaky is somewhat different."⁴⁸

In the 1962 election manifesto of the Socialist Party, he declared satyagraha to be not only a "lasting but also a world principle."⁴⁹ Lohia was seriously interested in testing the effectiveness of satyagraha in societies other than India and in issues related to those foreign societies. One of his first acts of satyagraha in independent India was against the suppression of democratic forces in Nepal by the Nepalese monarchy in May 1949. He also peacefully protested against the segregation laws of the USA in Jackson, Mississippi, in 1964. The incident makes quite a furor in both India and the USA.⁵⁰

Social Policies

A much greater contrast between Gandhi and Lohia can be seen in terms of social policies. According to the latter, India's huge population was one of the principal causes of its economic backwardness. Thus,

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Lohia was actively in favor of providing birth control and sterilization facilities to couples who have produced three or more children. He was aware that it might cost the socialists their popularity for a brief moment. But he asserted that the socialists must be “brave enough to open a full-scale attack on social evils.”⁵¹ He also attacked and ridiculed the priestly Gandhians for holding “unholy notions on birth control.”⁵²

According to Lohia, the greatest obstacle to achieving equality in Indian society has been the existence of the caste system. Lohia’s understanding of the caste system was wholesome, his attack on the caste system was unambiguous, and his solution to the evil of the caste system was quite radical. He included women, Sudras, Harijans, Adivasis, and the lower castes of Muslims in the category of the oppressed castes. According to Lohia’s formulations, castes are immobile classes, and classes are immobile castes. Such social systems can be observed in many societies around the world. What makes the Indian case unique is the complete absence of social mobility for thousands of years. Lohia wondered the reasons behind the continuous dominance of the higher castes in India over the centuries. Why did the lower castes tolerate such a discriminating system— an illusion of inferiority about themselves? Why did they never rebel against such a pejorative system? Lohia gave a twofold answer.

On the one hand:

They (the high-castes) cannot do it alone through the gun. They must instil a sense of inferiority into those whom they seek to govern and exploit. This they best can do by turning themselves into a select caste with speech, dress, manners and living of which the lower castes are incapable.⁵³

On the other hand, the lower castes feel a sort of social insurance from the caste system. Since it is the single most overwhelming phenomenon of Indian life, the most personal and intimate rituals of one’s life, like birth, marriage, and death are all associated with their caste identity. One cannot go beyond these identities and still expect a safety net against calamity or routine ill-being from society. In a way, the very existence of an Indian is dependent on their caste identity. There are also a number of myths and legends created in order to project their inferior status. In this way, the ideological subjection has made them, in most cases, active supporters of the status quo. It is, thus, very natural that castes are the determining force in politics, too. Most of the political parties, even the socialist parties, were led by high caste men. Lohia, who was a Baniya by caste, was well aware of this situation and extended his criticism to his own party as well for their failure to elevate enough lower caste politicians to leadership positions.

Lohia was aware that with the spread of English education, trade, and commerce, some traditionally lower castes had acquired higher status. But, their social mobility has failed to improve the situation for the majority of the lower castes. It has only replaced the Brahmins with a powerful *non-Dwijja* caste. This kind of upward mobility has only strengthened the caste system. He discussed the cases of the Reddys of Andhra Pradesh and the Marathas of Maharashtra to illustrate his argument. The influence of the higher castes was such that the lower castes considered it their duty to obey the Dwijas quietly. In this way, a lifeless mass and a chicane elite have been created.

Much has been written about Gandhi's attitude towards the caste system. His ambiguous ideas about caste have baffled historians and generated heated debates.⁵⁴ Lohia himself was not very impressed with Gandhi's role in the fight against the caste system. He thought Gandhi acted as a reformer, not a revolutionary, against the system. He wrote in 1963 that Gandhi's idea about caste,

“...started with some kind of a romantic idealisation about it. He tried to shear it of its evils as though the thing was not evil in itself. It was only sometime around the last great struggle for freedom, the open rebellion of 1942, that he recognized the inherent evil of the caste system.”⁵⁵

Lohia's antidote to the evils of the caste system was not limited to the simple mobilization of anti-Brahmin sentiments like Periyar. He also did not favor presenting an exclusive plan for the Harijans like Ambedkar.⁵⁶ He was talking about the regeneration of the entire nation, which is possible only when the nation is free of the caste system as a whole. In a truly casteless system, there will be no sectional elevations; there will be no blind imitations of higher caste rituals by the upwardly mobile lower castes, and there will be no caste-based antagonism. Lohia proposed a political programme of organizing *satyagrahas* demanding a sixty percent reservation of all leadership positions of the nation.⁵⁷ Lohia stressed the immediate implementation of the proposed reservation system irrespective of the merit of the individuals from the lower castes, as it is only natural that they would not be equal in merit to the upper castes who have enjoyed the privilege of their position for centuries. Lohia argued, “A true doctrine of equal opportunity would have to undo the work of five thousand years by giving preferential treatment to the lower-castes over a period of at least a few decades.”⁵⁸ The upper castes must endure a temporary injustice so that a “...new era of justice and equality may begin.”⁵⁹ A similar formula of reserving sixty percent of posts for the depressed groups was followed within the Socialist Party. However, it must be

remembered that Lohia never advocated reservation as the sole weapon to fight against the caste system. He vigorously advocated inter-caste marriages and inter-dining ceremonies.

Lohia's advocacy for reservation has become the dominant identity of his political legacy to the later generation of scholars. Thus, when Akshaya Mukul wrote a fitting tribute to Lohia in his birth centenary year, he titled his piece "Rammanohar Lohia: The Quota Marshall."⁶⁰ However, Lohia did not propose a blanket reservation of seats for the lower castes in all spheres of public life. For example, he was strictly against reserving seats in the educational sector, as the Backward Castes Commission proposed. He urged the backward castes to ask the government to open more schools and colleges or conduct more than one shift in the same school to accommodate more students from their castes, but they may "never ask for the exclusion of any child of India from the portals of an educational institution."⁶¹

Conclusion

Rammanohar Lohia's greatest politico-intellectual achievement seems to be the invention of a revolutionary Gandhism. He was well aware of Gandhi's disavowal of any sort of class struggle or socialist rhetoric. As long as Gandhi was alive, Lohia's attempts to reinterpret his ideas met with strong resistance. Once martyred, Gandhi became the father of the nation, and he became free to claim his inheritance according to his ideological convictions.

Lohia's attempts to create a heretical strand within Gandhism met with partial success during his own lifetime. He organized a number of *satyagrahas* in different parts of the country (and even outside it), protesting against various evils. Although he was not immediately successful in reaping the benefits of such *satyagrahas* in the electoral politics against the Congress, it somehow forged his image as the most militant oppositional, yet democratic, socialist leader during the first two decades of Indian independence.

Lohia died in October 1967. It is interesting to note that the trajectory of his own ideals resembles Gandhi's. The followers of Lohia, who assumed power in several north Indian states, became well known for their caste-based reservation politics. But this lot of 'Governmental or *sarkari* Lohiaites' ignored the multiple aspects of marginality prevalent in the Indian society, which Lohia took great pains to highlight. Then there is another category of 'priestly' followers of Lohia who are never ready to see beyond him and fail to improvise according to the present realities.⁶²

Lohia's prophecy about the survival of either the Atomic bomb or Gandhism proved to be untrue. The invocation of both Gandhi and

the Bomb continues in the 21st century in different contexts all over the world.⁶³ And it is probably the irony of history that it was a socialist of Lohiaite colors— George Fernandes, who as the Defence Minister of India, actively supervised the Pokhran II nuclear tests in 1998. In this general context of nuclear proliferation and the advent of the neo-liberal economic system in India from the 1990s, the possibility of the emergence of a heretical variety of Lohia's thoughts is not out of question.⁶⁴ However, a discussion of such possibilities remains outside the purview of this essay.

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2. Lohia, 'Neither Anti-Marx Nor Pro-Marx,' "Marx, Gandhi and Socialism," CWRL, Vol 1, p.536
3. Lohia, Preface to "Marx, Gandhi and Socialism," CWRL, Vol 1, p.130
4. *ibid.*
5. This was before the merger of his Socialist Party and the PSP which resulted in the establishment of the Samyukta Socialist Party in 1964.
6. Lohia, 'Guilty Men of India's Partition,' CWRL, Vol 2, p.102
7. Lohia, 'Abstract and Concrete,' "Marx, Gandhi and Socialism," CWRL, Vol 1, p.381
8. Lohia, "Guilty Men of India's Partition," CWRL, Vol 2, pp.107-108
9. Lohia, 'The Doctrinal Foundation of Socialism,' "Marx, Gandhi and Socialism," CWRL, Vol 1, p.491
10. *ibid.*, p.492
11. *ibid.*
12. *ibid.*, p.493
13. *ibid.*
14. *ibid.*, p.494
15. *ibid.*, p.495
16. *ibid.*, p.505
17. Lohia, 'Economics After Marx,' "Marx Gandhi and Socialism," CWRL, Vol 1, p.216
18. *ibid.*
19. *ibid.*, p.217

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20. Lohia, 'Gandhism and Socialism,' "Marx, Gandhi and Socialism," CWRL, Vol 1, p.301
21. Lohia, Preface to "Marx, Gandhi and Socialism," CWRL, Vol 1, p.132
22. *ibid.*
23. Lohia, 'A New Chapter,' "Marx, Gandhi and Socialism," CWRL, Vol 1, p.633
24. Lohia, Preface to "Marx, Gandhi and Socialism," CWRL, Vol 1, p.160
25. Sudipta Kaviraj, "On the enchantment of the state: Indian thought on the role of the state in the narrative of modernity," *European Journal of Sociology*, 46, 2(August 2005), p.277 DOI:10.1017/S0003975605000093
26. Daniel Kent-Carrasco, "A battle over meanings: Jayaprakash Narayan, Rammanohar Lohia and the trajectories of socialism in early independent India," *Global Intellectual History* (2017), p.5, DOI: 10.1080/23801883.2017.1370243
27. 'History, Historians and Historiography,' Lok Sabha Proceedings, 26 April 1966, Appendix IV, CWRL, Vol 6, p.658
28. ²⁸ Ironically these suggestions were made under the heading of 'Certain Uncontroversial Suggestions!' Lohia, "India, China and Northern Frontiers," CWRL, Vol 4, pp.121-123
29. *ibid.*, p.101; On Elwin who was an advisor on the tribal affairs to the administration of NEFA see, Ramachandra Guha, *Savaging the Civilized: Verrier Elwin, His Tribals, and India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999)
30. Lohia's press interview in Hyderabad, July 22, 1959; CWRL, Vol 4, p.101
31. Socialist Party's National Committee Resolution, July 16-19, 1959; *ibid.*, p.98
32. Ramachandra Guha, *An Anthropologist Among the Marxists and Other Essays* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001:2009), p.132
33. According to Stepan et al., the failure of the Government of India to reconcile with the Naga rebels despite prolonged peace talks had much to do with the divided leadership of the rebels than the policies of the Indian state; Stepan et al. *Crafting State-Nations: India and other Multinational Democracies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), pp.106-107
34. Socialist Party's National Committee, March 2-4, 1956; CWRL, Vol 4, p.94
35. *ibid.*, emphasis mine
36. Lohia, 'The Doctrinal Foundation of Socialism,' "Marx, Gandhi and Socialism," CWRL, Vol 1, p.517
37. *Prahlad* was a Hindu mythical character. Although Lohia was an atheist in personal life, he used to interpret Indian mythological characters through the lens of modern political categories. He had analyzed mythical characters like *Rama*, *Krishna*, *Shiva*, *Draupadi*, *Savitri*, etc. in the same manner.
38. Lohia, 'A New Chapter,' "Marx, Gandhi and Socialism," CWRL, Vol

- 1, p.604. Thoreau's writings on civil disobedience had been an influence on both Gandhi and Lohia. However, Lohia gave greater credit to Gandhi as he used civil disobedience in mass movements. It has been pointed out by Sudipta Kaviraj that by forming the modern collective of political mass movement, Gandhi was, in effect, giving a "fundamental concession to political modernity." And thus, Gandhi's resistance to the enormous power of the modern state could only be realized through the formation of another modern collective agency. Kaviraj, "On the enchantment of the state," pp.263-296
39. K. Gopinath Pillai, *Political Philosophy of Rammanohar Lohia: Alternative Development Perceptions* (New Delhi: Deep and Deep Publications, 1994), pp.81-82
40. Madhu Limaye, *Galaxy of the Indian Socialist Leaders* (New Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation, 2000), p.184
41. Lohia, 'Towards the Destruction of Castes and Classes,' "The Caste System," CWRL, Vol 2, p.279. Also see his short note, 'British Legacy,' "Notes and Comments," CWRL, Vol 6, pp. 484-485
42. Lohia, 'The Doctrinal Foundation of Socialism,' "Marx, Gandhi and Socialism," CWRL, Vol 1, p.518
43. Acharya Narendra Deva, "Transition to Socialism," *Towards Socialist Society*, ed. Brahmanand (New Delhi: Centre of Applied Politics, 1979), p.294. This was delivered as the Presidential Address at National Conference of PSP, Gaya, December 1955.
44. Gyan Prakash, *Emergency Chronicles: Indira Gandhi and Democracy's Turning Point* (Gurgaon: Penguin Random House, 2018), pp.77-78
45. Letter from Rammanohar Lohia to the President of India, Naini Central Jail, Undated, Correspondence with Lohia, Rammanohar, Correspondence File, Prem Bhasin Papers, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (henceforward NMML)
46. Lohia, Preface to "Marx, Gandhi and Socialism," CWRL, Vol 1, p.148
47. Lohia had a somewhat subjective view about the nature of Truth. According to him, "All truth is discovered from the aspect or the angle which the seeker or the knower adopts." *ibid.*, p.119
48. Rammanohar Lohia, "The Principles and Objectives of Socialism in Asia," *Socialist Asia: Fortnightly Bulletin*, Vol 1, No. 7, November 16, 1952, Subject File, S. No.-2, Prem Bhasin Papers, NMML
49. Lohia, 'Socialist Party's Election Manifesto of 1962,' 'Two Manifestoes,' "Marx, Gandhi and Socialism," CWRL, Vol 1, p.692
50. Harris Wofford, "Lohia and America Meet," CWRL, Vol 2, pp.553-558; a collection of contemporary newspaper reports. See also, Nico Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), p.240
51. Lohia, 'The Doctrinal Foundation of Socialism,' "Marx, Gandhi and Socialism," CWRL, Vol 1, p.522
52. Lohia, 'The Two Segregations of Caste and Sex,' "The Caste System," CWRL, Vol 2, p.205

53. Lohia, 'Towards the Destruction of Castes and Classes,' "The Caste System," *ibid.*, Vol 2, p.280
54. For further details, see Niskikant Kolge, *Gandhi Against Caste* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2017)
55. Lohia, "Guilty Men of India's Partition," *CWRL*, Vol 2, p.93
56. Lohia admired Ambedkar's learning, integrity and courage but was critical of Ambedkar's exclusive focus on the Harijans, whereas he had the abilities to be a national leader and his explicit support for the Atlantic camp in the world affairs. Letter from Rammanohar Lohia to Madhu Limaye, July 1, 1957, included in "The Caste System," *CWRL*, Vol 2, p.233
57. In retrospect, the demand of reservation for the lower castes appears as the only lasting legacy of Lohia. He has been mocked, attacked, and caricatured for his reservation politics. But a critical reading of Lohia's writings revealed that he was acutely aware of the disadvantages of the reservation system which he termed as 'poisons'. He prescribed a number of precautions which may work as antidotes for the poisons of the reservation system. How some of the followers of Lohia politically thrived on the poison of the reservation system in the subsequent period is a different story and beyond the scope of the present work. Lohia, 'Towards the Destruction of Caste and Classes,' *ibid.*, pp.299-300
58. Lohia, *ibid.*, p.293
59. Lohia, 'Endure Temporary Injustice,' *ibid.*, p.223
60. Akshaya Mukul, "Rammanohar Lohia: The Quota Marshall," *The Times of India*, April 3, 2010, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Ram-Manohar-Lohia-The-Quota-Marshall/articleshow/5756713.cms> Accessed on September 5, 2020
61. Lohia, 'Towards the destruction,' "The Caste System," *CWRL*, Vol 2, p.300
62. Yogendra Yadav, "What is living and What is dead in Rammanohar Lohia?" *Economic and Political Weekly*, 45, 40(October 2-8, 2010), p.92
63. Even Lohia himself was not averse to the idea of India acquiring the Bomb in the aftermath of the Sino-Indian War if it is deemed necessary for the territorial integrity of India. Lohia, Preface to "Marx, Gandhi and Socialism," *CWRL*, Vol 1, p.159
64. For eg., Amit Basole and Sunil have demonstrated the perennial importance of Lohia's critique of capitalism which has become more relevant in this neo-liberal times. See, Amit Basole, "The Technology Question in Lohia," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 45, 44/45 (October 30-November 12, 2010), pp.106-111; and Sunil, "Understanding Capitalism Through Lohia," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 45, 40(October 2-8, 2010), pp.56-63

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