
Reflections of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia's Thought for 21st Century Governance.

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Abstract: The institution of state has always remained inevitable for the welfare of the citizens. As an original Socialist thinker, Dr. Ramamnohar Lohia attempted to reorient Socialist ideals according to the needs and suitability of the Indian state system. The outcome of such an intellectual exercise was his ideal of Four-Pillar State. The basis of such a state is decentralized Socialism, a legacy of Gandhian thought for governance of the country. This paper is an attempt to analyze the various tenets of Four-Pillar state and establish its relevance in combating the challenges obstructing inclusive and effective governance in the context of 21st century India.

Key Words: Governance, Socialism and Communism, Decentralization, Four-Pillar State, Gandhian Thought.

Introduction.

Dr. Rammanohar Lohia, a fiery Socialist leader, was one of the strong pillars of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP). His role in the freedom movement, Quit India Movement, and liberation movement in Nepal and Goa is of great significance. In 1936, he was appointed secretary of the Foreign Affairs Department of the Indian National Congress (henceforth Congress). An ardent supporter of the World Government, Lohia was elected India's representative to the same in 1949. He was instrumental in organizing the Asian Socialist Conference in 1953¹. The publication of the journal *Mankind* was initiated by Dr. Lohia in 1956.

For Lohia, the institution of state was inevitable for the welfare of the citizens, the purpose of the state being social justice, based on the ideals of equality and freedom. His skepticism about the utility of capitalism or communism in solving the problems of India and other countries of Asia

¹The Asian Socialist Conference was established 1953 and its first Conference was organized in Rangoon, then Burma (today's Myanmar), January 6–15th, 1953.

and Africa led to his firm belief that both are equally irrelevant. Instead socialism was the answer but the principles of socialism need to be developed according to the exigencies of the prevailing socio-economic conditions of the system.

Like Gandhi, he suggested small scale production technology which was more suitable in Indian conditions, instead of large scale production technology, because unlike its western counterparts, Asian countries were labour intensive and not capital intensive.

In 1952, as President of the Congress Socialist Party, Lohia pleaded for greater incorporation of Gandhian principles in socialist thought. He advocated decentralized economy, promotion of cottage industries and non-violent methods. Proximity to Gandhian philosophy convinced Lohia that the Socialists should maintain equidistance from the Communists and the Congress. However, Lohia, interpreted Gandhian and Socialist ideas in a different color and extended a new meaning to them.

For Lohia, Democracy and Socialism are the two sides of the same coin. He believed that without economic prosperity, political democracy is a farce. Democracy means that administration is answerable to the elected assembly, thus Lohia advocated limited personality of individuals, party, government and state. In similar vein, the main tenets of socialism as propounded were equitable distribution of wealth, individual freedom, democratic order, end of exploitation, elimination of capitalism, peaceful and constitutional methods and world peace. In Indian conditions, socialism was supposed to bring about changes for betterment in economic and political fields. Therefore, he defined Socialism in terms of economic and social prosperity. Thus, socialism so defined was distinct from European Socialism and Russian Communism. He pointed out the difference in the following words, “communism is equal to socialism minus democracy, plus centralization plus civil war plus Russia.”(Lohia, p.49).

In short, Lohia’s Socialism aimed at:

- a) Maximum attainable equality,
- b) A decent standard of living leading to harmony between socialism, material and moral needs of man,

- c) A judicious balance of industry and agriculture, conducive to all round development of individuals,
- d) Restriction on bureaucracy and decentralization of political and economic power.

The Concept of Four-Pillar State.

The Four-Pillar state as envisaged by Dr. Lohia comprised of centre, state, district and village. These units were a guarantee against authoritarianism and centralization of power. The dream of decentralized socialist state could be realized through seven revolutions or *saptakranti*. These are (1) for equality between man and woman (2) against political, economic and other inequalities based upon skin colour (3) against the inequalities between higher and backward caste and for preferential opportunities for the backward sections (4) against foreign rule and for freedom and democratic World Government (5) for economic equality, planned production and against the lust for system of private property (6) against unjust interference in private life and for democratic methods and (7) against arms and weapons and for *Satyagraha*.

Lohia discarded the intermediate tier that is the *Panchayat Samiti*, and suggested that this Four-Pillar State was not to be confused with self-sufficient villages which is utopia at its best. Such a Four-Pillar state is both a legislative and executive arrangement (Lohia, p.70).

He argued that in the present context, rural government and municipalities derive power by the Acts of Legislature and Parliament. As against this, he was of the view that power should be conferred to the local units by the constitution of the land. Since they are basic institutions of governance, therefore, Government should be near the people to enable them to have easy access to it and actively participate in administration.

The basis of such a state was community life, encompassing all spheres of human activity like production, planning, education, ownership and administration. The different organs of the state would perform certain functions, like center would control the armed forces, armed police under the province whereas all other police functions may be controlled by district and village. Among the industries, railways, iron and steel may be controlled by the center, small unit textile industry under district and village ownership and management. Price fixing will be the task of Central

Government, agriculture may be a subject of the district and the village co-operative societies, rural agricultural development, irrigation, seeds, revenue collecting may be transferred to the village and the district. A substantial part of the revenues should stay with the village and district (Lohia, pp.71-72). The Four-Pillar State implied the complete removal of district magistracy, considered to be a center for the absolute concentration of political power. Furthermore, the district, village and city *panchayats* are to take charge of police as well as welfare functions (Varma, pp. 682).

The Four-Pillar state should also possess the power of planning meaning thereby that planning should not be the function of center alone. For the purpose of development of the villages, Lohia suggested (a) land distribution (b) waste land development (c) abolition of land revenue (d) establishment of food army, as well as *Bhumi Sena* or land army.

A bitter critique of India's foreign policy, he does not subscribe to Nehru's Non-Alignment philosophy which was defined by him as passive neutrality whereas Lohia advocated third camp for third world which is based on active neutrality. The formation of third camp would lead to formation of World Government and World Parliament.

Lohia was a great supporter of regional languages. He believes in the gradual replacement of English by Hindi as the official language of India. He pleads that democracy in India cannot become a reality so long as public administration is carried on through medium of English which is a sealed book to the vast millions (Varma: p. 681).

Critical Appraisal.

Lohia has failed to extend clear-cut guidelines regarding size, population, strategy of elections to the four limbs of the Four-Pillar State. In absence of clear picture, there is every possibility of chaos and disorder to prevail at every level of the four organs of the state. All the four organs are supposed to exercise sovereign power independent of each other which may jeopardize community life, integrity and unity of the country. Similarly, Lohia has failed to mention the functions to be performed by each unit in detail. His mention of the broad list of functions may become the cause of confusion, leading to inter-organ rivalry for power.

The four units are expected not only to exercise power of legislation but also execution of laws made by the province and center within their jurisdiction. There is a danger that this may lead to duplicity in administration. Lohia fails to mention about controlling authority that extends the freedom and independence to a great extent, for all limbs to function in their own jurisdiction. In absence of controlling authority, infighting among the units is expected, leading to disorganized governance. His advocacy of a World Parliament, elected on some sort of adult franchise is a complicated exercise; an utopia at the best.

Impact on Governance.

Despite the above criticisms, Lohia's contributions for better governance cannot be ignored. World Bank problematized the concept of *goodgovernance* for the first time in World Bank Development Report in 1992, wherein government along with non-governmental actors joined hands to meet the needs and aspirations of the citizens. Lohia propounded the theory of the Four-Pillar state where the government and empowered common man joined hands for effective governance. Lohia's theory is therefore of great relevance in 21st century. The theory of Four-Pillar State was extended with the intention to give power to the people and combat provincial narrowness or regionalism. The strategy of bottom-up management would make people active participants in decision making, thus energizing them who otherwise might go into a state of deep slumber and inertia. Lohia was concerned that the power of administration to the village and District *Panchayats* will make them free from the control of legislators and government servants leading to better governance. Under the present scheme, tight control over local bodies by civil servants and administrators have demoralizing effects on village representatives.

Lohia was critical of the present system of planning in India because of its top-bottom approach. Due to centralization, planning today, originates at the center, going downwards fails to provide opportunities to the lower levels of governance to plan for themselves.

Lohia had full faith in the capability of Four-Pillar State in establishing village communities on the models of self-governing institutions of ancient India. He was convinced that the Four-Pillar State is capable of removing centralization and tyranny ultimately leading to the establishment of a firm foundation of effective governance in Indian administration. In his scheme of things, the

village, the *mandal*, the province and the Central Government are integrated in a system of functional federalism. The cohesive bond among them is provided by performance of functions. The district, village and city *panchayats* are to take charge of police as well as welfare functions (Lohia: 1956, p. 132).

Perhaps this advocacy of decentralization is the impact of Gandhian legacy to Indian socialism. Lohia is an original thinker beyond doubt, therefore emphasized for a *New Socialism*² as he believed that orthodox socialism was a dead doctrine. The emphasis of *New Socialism* was on maximum attainable equalitarian standards within a ratio of 1:10 of minimum and maximum income and expenditure. This was to be achieved through process of nationalization which is of prime significance.

Lohia is a supporter of decentralized socialism which implies small machine, co-operative labor and village government (Lohia, p.12). He suggests small unit machine as a safeguard against capitalist concentration and ever increasing unemployment.

Lohia contributed immensely by developing the linkages between language and governance. He was of the opinion that the characteristic feature of Indian polity has been imposition of a foreign language for the purpose of governance. Through centuries, the ruling class has imposed Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian and English on the Indian people. For him, individuals can develop and participate in the governance only when the affairs of the state are carried out in people's languages.

Lohia's concept of *constructive militancy and militant construction*³ and *principle of immediacy*⁴ added a new dimension to the dynamics of politics and governance of the country. Propagation of synthesis of political liberty and economic reconstruction through decentralized socialism was meant to lay a strong foundation of Indian polity where the weakest in the system would avail the opportunity to take decisions in matters relating to their welfare. Lohia will be

²Lohia's statement on October 13th 1959 at Hyderabad reported by the Press Trust of India.

³ Synthesis of a spirit of struggle with the spirit of construction in a non-violent peaceful way.

⁴ Organization and action must continue as parallel currents.

remembered for honesty in politics, discarding double standards and hidden agenda in the governance of the country.

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