

Socialist Thought of Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia: A Study of Equality, Caste, and Social Justice

¹Sushila, ²Dr. Surender (Assistant Professor)

¹Research Scholar, ²Supervisor

¹⁻² Department of, Om Sterling Global University

Abstract

Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia was one of the most original socialist thinkers of modern India who developed a distinctive framework of socialism rooted in Indian social realities. His socialist thought was not limited to economic equality alone, but extended to social justice, caste eradication, gender equality, decentralization, democratic values, and moral reconstruction of society. Deeply influenced by Gandhian ideals, yet critical of both capitalism and orthodox Marxism, Lohia attempted to formulate an alternative path of social transformation suitable to India. He considered caste to be one of the greatest obstacles to equality and argued that socialism in India could not be realized without dismantling caste hierarchy and providing special opportunities to historically oppressed sections. His concept of equality combined both physical and spiritual dimensions, emphasizing equal access to <https://ijmis.org/>

resources, dignity, and social participation.

This paper examines the socialist thought of Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia with special focus on his ideas of equality, caste, and social justice. It also highlights the contemporary relevance of his ideas in understanding democratic transformation and inclusive development in India.

Keywords

Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia, Socialism, Equality, Caste System, Social Justice, Gandhism, Indian Political Thought

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia occupies an important place in modern Indian political thought as a socialist leader, activist, and philosopher who sought to address the deep-rooted inequalities of Indian society. His socialism emerged as a response to exploitation, poverty, caste oppression, and

**International Journal of Multidisciplinary Innovations & Studies
(IJMIS)**

political injustice. Unlike Western socialist models, Lohia's socialism was shaped by Indian historical and cultural conditions. He rejected violence and dictatorship and supported a democratic and decentralized social order. He was influenced by Mahatma Gandhi, especially in relation to non-violence, satyagraha, and moral politics, but at the same time he developed an independent and critical socialist vision. Lohia believed that inequality in India was not merely economic; it was also social, cultural, and political, with caste standing at the center of oppression. He therefore regarded the struggle against caste as essential for the realization of socialism. His thought linked equality with prosperity and insisted that no just society could be built without ensuring dignity, opportunity, and participation for the marginalized. The study of Lohia's socialist thought remains significant because his ideas continue to offer intellectual and practical guidance for debates on social justice and democratic reform in contemporary India.

SOCIALIST THOUGHTS OF DR. RAM MANOHAR LOHIA

The great Indian socialist thinker Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia has always been vocal like a steady flame of light in the great darkness of exploited humanity; he has always brought new life to life. He gave the entire humanity such a ladder on which humanity can feel proud. His thinking was, "How man exploits man, this was the main reason for his worry and anxiety. He wanted to rescue the human race from its painful pitiable condition."¹ "Lohia's concept of socialism is based on original thinking, away from the mixture of capitalist democracy, Marxist economic equality and the welfare programs of Western European social democracy."²

Dr. Lohia did not adopt the path of violence in his socialist ideology and supported the democratic system. Therefore, Dr. Lohia's socialism can become a model and system worth establishing in the contemporary third world countries. Dr. Lohia believed that socialism in India began with Gandhiji's thoughts and actions. He was greatly

¹ Dr. Rajendra Mohan Bhatnagar, Samagra Lohia, Kitabghar Main Road, Gandhi Nagar, Delhi First Edition 1982 Page- 13

<https://ijmis.org/>

² Giriraj Kishore Editor - Hundred Years of Lohia, First Edition 2011, Page- 57

International Journal of Multidisciplinary Innovations & Studies (IJMIS)

influenced by Gandhiji's ideals, values and methods. He described Gandhiji's 'Satyagraha' and 'Non-cooperation' movements as creations of the 20th century. Dr. Lohia wanted the principles of socialism to be associated with Gandhism. His socialism did not only mean poverty removal and inequality removal but also individual reform and character building. Socialism works to connect spiritualism, materialism, social reform and individual reform. Lohia ji does not believe in any conflict between the individual and society. Because he considers the individual as both the goal and the means.

Lohia ji was aware of the limitations of Gandhism but he adopted Gandhism as an open theory. He believed that Gandhism has logical processes with special characteristics. It will strengthen Indian society. He tried to unite the socialist theory of class struggle and the technique of Gandhian Satyagraha. "While discussing the conflicts created by Gandhism, Lohia said that Gandhiji rejected materialism by showing indifference towards the body. Due to this some false dualities were created and Gandhism also acquired the

form of rituals."³ Satyagraha, decentralization, means-objects, discretion, non-violence are Gandhiji's great gifts to the world. Lohia provided a scientific basis to Gandhiji's revolutionary thoughts. In this way Lohiaji is considered to be Gandhiji's evolved successor. "At the time of Gandhi's birth centenary, Lohia ji had described three types of Gandhians. Government, Mathi and low caste"⁴ And he called himself a low caste Gandhian. It is believed that "Gandhi's era was of renunciation, Nehru-Indira's era was of hedonism and Lohia's era was of duty. Today there is a need to balance Gandhi's renunciation and Lohia's duty."⁵

Lohia ji did not reject Marxism only because of centralization, violence, dictatorship, hesitation of individual freedom, irrationality of means-ends etc. In the context of India, he found questions of the mind as important as bread. For this reason, he disagreed with the language of class struggle. He believed that Indian society has become rotten due to the caste system of thousands of years. The reason for the inequalities and exploitation here is not only economic. Lohia had

³ Indumati Kelkar: Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia: Life and Philosophy Revised Edition 2010, Page- 25

<https://ijmis.org/>

⁴ Ibid, page- 42

⁵ Ibid, page- 43

**International Journal of Multidisciplinary Innovations & Studies
(IJMIS)**

clarified this many times. Lohia had also said that the upper class of India is highly educated and English educated and these two crore people exploit the common people.

"Lohia ji believed that capitalism and communism are twin brothers in terms of heavy machinery and large production. The social, cultural background of both is Europe-centric. In the capitalist system, the means of production and distribution are privately owned, whereas in the socialist system, these are controlled by the state."⁶

Dr. Lohia wanted to establish a new social system. His revolutionary ideas have greatly influenced the intellectual young generation of independent India. He wanted to give a new shape to the human mind by carving it. "Dr. Lohia, who showed the way to solve problems, was really like a successful doctor."⁷

Lohia ji had seen many types of inequalities prevalent in human society. Such as economic inequality, which includes

inequality of income and property ownership, social inequality based on class and caste, discrimination between high and low in society, discrimination between men and women, political inequality i.e. lack of equality before law. By thinking about these inequalities, he tried to understand the real form of society. He believed that there is unity and equality in human society and the main reason for the inequality and discrimination that is visible is ignorance and mutual discriminatory behavior. Inequality is unnatural and man-made and equality is natural and innate.

According to Lohia ji, " Equality is of two types, first spiritual and second physical. Physical equality means equality in all types of facilities, incomes and social rights."⁸

Lohia ji believed that in a family there is physical equality in terms of food, drink, shelter, clothing etc., therefore there is mutual brotherhood among all its members and the same has to be brought in the entire human society. Without bringing physical equality,

⁶ Giriraj Kishore Editor: Hundred Years of Lohia, First Edition 2011, Page- 57

⁷ Dr. Yatindra Nath Sharma: Dr. Lohia 's Socialism and Economic Philosophy, page- 15

<https://ijmis.org/>

⁸ Dr. Yatindra Nath Sharma: Dr. Lohia 's Socialism and Economic Philosophy, page- 38

International Journal of Multidisciplinary Innovations & Studies (IJMIS)

the concept of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumvakam' cannot be realized only by preaching. He believed that spiritual equality is a matter of knowledge and experience. Lohia ji said that physical equality is necessary for the realization of equality. According to him, " Socialism is that ideology which paves the way for equality by removing inequalities."⁹

" Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia has defined socialism in two words like equality and prosperity.'¹⁰

All the elements of socialism are reflected in Dr. Lohia 's socialism, therefore there is no hesitation in calling him a true socialist. Dr. Lohia declared the present social, economic and political systems to be unjust and rebelled against them. He was desperate for change. His great desire was that, " An organization of revolutionary politics has to be created and expanded. He believed that there should be a change."¹¹

If on one hand he had a destructive attitude towards the present, on the other hand he was

also an initiative for a new system that matched the current moral values. He had a definite programme, philosophy, movement. He believed that joint efforts should be made to solve the problems. Problems like poverty and exploitation, language, caste, rising prices, foreign affairs could be taken up.

Socialism has a very close relationship with social equality. Socialism is primarily neither a theory of property nor of the state. It is a philosophy of life above economic policies. It is a theory of equality and prosperity in every sphere of life. Dr. Lohia has advocated social equality in a very strong manner. Among the social inequalities, caste system, inequality between men and women, untouchability, apartheid and communalism etc. attracted his attention in particular. Further, an attempt has been made to study the socialist views of Dr. Lohia especially in the context of these inequalities.

⁹ Ibid, page- 40

¹⁰ Tarachand Dixit: Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia's Socialist Philosophy, Lok Bharati Paper Works, First Edition, 2013, Page- 28

<https://ijmis.org/>

¹¹ Ibid, page- 29

**International Journal of Multidisciplinary Innovations & Studies
(IJMIS)****Caste system:-**

Dr. Lohia has defined caste as 'a rigid class'. Because caste is so rigid that a person of one caste is made incapable of entering another caste. Due to this caste trap, the entire life of India has become lifeless.

Of all the inequalities in India, the caste system is the most destructive. Socialism is not possible until the caste system is completely eradicated. Because economic and social equality is the main objective of socialism. Economic inequality and casteism are twin demons and if one has to be fought, it is necessary to fight the other as well."¹² The caste system deprives the lower castes of social and economic equality. Dr. Lohia believed that karma should be paramount and not birth. Touching the feet of a Brahmin on the basis of birth means maintaining the caste system, poverty and misery. Because Lohia ji believed that the hands that can wash the feet of Brahmins in public are the same feet that kick the pure and Harijan."¹³ Thus, how can socialism be imagined where the pure,

Harijan and the poor are in a position to kick? Therefore, to establish a socialist system, more than the elimination of class, there is a greater need to eliminate caste, that is, to end the caste system. The people of India are divided into Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists and Jains. Hindus are divided into Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and pure castes. At the same time, there are sub-castes within these castes too. All these sub-castes are divided to such an extent that they consider it an insult to marry, eat or have birth relations with each other. Lohia believed that "the major facts of life – birth, death, marriage, feast and all other rituals – happen within the framework of caste. On such occasions people of other castes stay on the sidelines, as if they were spectators."¹⁴ According to Dr. Lohia, Brahminic culture and Brahminism are the promoters and creators of feudalism and capitalism."¹⁵ Therefore, till Brahminism and Baniyaism are not uprooted here, the idea of socialism will remain only a dream. The anti-socialist feelings of high and low, small and big rulers

¹² Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia - Caste System, Page- 18

¹³ Ibid, Page - 3

¹⁴ Dr. Lohia - Caste System Page- 83

<https://ijmis.org/>

¹⁵ From the letter written by Dr. Lohia to Shri Chandrika Prasad Jigyasu on 10 September 1957.

**International Journal of Multidisciplinary Innovations & Studies
(IJMIS)**

and ruled in the division of labour are mainly responsible for the downfall of India.

The division of Indian society into hundreds, if not thousands, of castes, which has as much social as political importance, makes it clear why India repeatedly surrenders to foreign armies. History is a witness that in the period when the caste restrictions were loose, India has almost always not surrendered. The history of India continues to be read in a wrong way. Internal conflicts and deceit are blamed for the Indian people surrendering to foreign attacks. This is nonsense. The biggest reason for this is caste. Due to this casteism, about 90 percent of the people remain silent spectators.

" Lohia ji believed that caste as a mature institution exists only in India. But in essence and in its initial forms, it is spread all over the world. "A solidified class is a caste. A loose caste is a class."¹⁶ The gradual change from class to caste and caste to class has been a rule of human history. Caste is solidified only in India. In other places, there are different levels of solidification and melting. "Caste

limits opportunities. Limited opportunities shrink ability. Shrinking ability limits opportunities."¹⁷ Where the caste system prevails, ability and opportunity shrink as much as people and get limited in circles. This shrinking and restricted ability is also of no use. India's experience is proof of the fact that caste turns a country into a dry desert of intellectual barrenness.

No other part of the world has had to suffer so much from the ill-effects of caste system like limitation or shrinkage of talent and almost death of community, but the ill-effects of caste system can be seen everywhere. The initial form of caste is everywhere and along with it the shrinkage of talent and opportunity. There is only one way out of this that the groups which have been more or less suppressed by caste should be given special opportunities. Just like backward and suppressed areas, there are backward and suppressed castes too. In a society affected by the caste system, the powerful and claimant groups do not have a broad vision and therefore do not accept the provision of special opportunities. On the other hand, the

¹⁶ Mastram Kapoor: Editor Ram Manohar Lohia's Writings Part- 1, Page- 139
<https://ijmis.org/>

¹⁷ Ibid, page- 139

**International Journal of Multidisciplinary Innovations & Studies
(IJMIS)**

condition of the oppressed groups and castes is not such that they can effectively claim special opportunities.¹⁸ To break this vicious circle of caste and poverty and shrunken mind, a major mental revolution will be possible only when people can be made to understand that growing inequality and poverty go together in the same way as growing equality and prosperity. This revolution is needed in India more than in any other country, but to some extent it is needed in all countries.

The caste system is a formidable force against change and for stability. The majority of the Indian people are still foreigners in their own country. Their languages are suppressed. And their bread is snatched from them. All this is done, ostensibly, for a great principle, but this principle is intertwined with the caste system. With great discrimination between a few high castes and 40 crore low castes. These high castes want to maintain their rule, not only politically and economically but also religiously.¹⁹ They cannot do this by force alone ; they have to instill a feeling of inferiority in them. They

can do this only by creating castes separated from themselves. By special language, dress, manners and way of life, of which the low castes are incapable.

Due to inferiority complex, such small castes consider themselves insignificant and start avoiding meeting and talking with them.

Lohia ji believed that nowadays everyone is against caste system, yet caste system is still alive. He believed that caste system is opposed in three different ways, one is verbal, second is a low level mixed one and third is such general verbal condemnation about the actual caste which does not harm the current structure, but is done with great vigor. Caste system is condemned by calling it a completely dirty thing, but in the same way those who take active steps to end the caste system are also condemned. To end caste, the principles of increase in standard of living and equal opportunity are invoked. "Promote economic development for everyone: Give equal opportunity to

¹⁸ Mastram Kapoor: Editor Ram Manohar Lohia
Rachnavali Part- 1 Edition 2013, Page- 140
<https://ijmis.org/>

¹⁹ Mastram Kapoor - Editor Ram Manohar Lohiya
Rachnawali Part- 2 Edition 2013, Page- 174
Page | 129

International Journal of Multidisciplinary Innovations & Studies (IJMIS)

everyone, this is what the false supporters of caste system who claim to destroy it say"²⁰

According to Lohia ji, the upper class people want that, "Only men and women of special abilities from the lower castes should join them."²¹ But they also want that the entire structure should remain as it is. The position of the upper castes should remain as it is and there should be no harm to it. If someone from the lower castes proves his abilities and ways, then he is welcome, but how many such people will emerge? Very few. Five thousand years of cruel training and tradition will be up against the talent of one person. Only a very brilliant and very capable person can win in this wrestling. In Indian society, the caste of those who do intellectual labour is fixed, including the soldier caste, they belong to the upper caste. Despite the economic and political revolution, the managers of the state and factories will be from among them only. Lohia ji believed that "the abilities of the upper castes, language, grammar, manners, socializing, ability to expand, ability in ordinary tasks are

indisputable. It has taken 5,000 years to create this indisputable capability."²² This 5,000 -year-old stunt will have to be put to an end by giving special opportunities to the lower castes for at least a few decades and by introducing the new principle of equal opportunity.

According to Lohia ji, "The upper caste people do not constitute more than 20 per cent of the population of India but they occupy nearly 80 per cent of the leadership positions in the country."²³ In the four main departments of national activities, business, army, top administrative jobs and top positions in political parties, easily 80 per cent of the upper caste people are present.

80 % of the leadership of the core of a country is chosen from only 20 % of its population, then it will definitely reach the stage of tuberculosis. 80 % of the population of that country reaches a state of inactivity and incompetence. Our country is sick and is on the verge of death. He says that at least half or 60 % of the top leadership of the nation will have to be chosen from among the lower

²⁰ Mastram Kapoor - Editor Ram Manohar Lohia Rachnawali Part- 2 Edition 2013, Page- 184

²¹ Ibid, page- 184

<https://ijmis.org/>

²² Mastram Kapoor - Editor Ram Manohar Lohia Rachnawali Part- 2 Edition 2013, Page- 185

²³ Ibid, page- 186

**International Journal of Multidisciplinary Innovations & Studies
(IJMIS)**

castes. It is not necessary that this be done through law, but it will have to be done considering it useful.

This can be started by changing the political leadership of the nation. In reality, the majority of the upper castes come from the ranks of the lower castes. But they are unaware of this. Lohia ji believes that the mill of caste works ruthlessly. If it grinds millions of people of lower castes, then it also grinds the upper castes and separates the true upper caste and the false upper caste. The true upper caste wears coat and langot or sherwani and churidaar. These are the Brahmins and Baniyas, Kshatriyas and Kayasthas of Delhi and other capitals.

Taking the caste system forward should mean the progress of all and not just the progress of one section. The progress of one section changes some relationships within the caste system but there is no change in the basis of castes.

Lohia believes that in another sense, “ the progress of a class is harmful. Those people of lower castes who reach higher places, want

to mix with the existing upper castes.”²⁴ In this process, they naturally learn the vices of the upper castes. After reaching higher places, everyone knows how the people of lower castes make their women wear purdah, which does not happen in the upper castes. Whereas it happens only in the middle upper castes. Lohia says that, “ Besides this, the lower castes that rise higher start wearing the sacred thread like the Brahmins. They have been deprived of this till now, but which the true upper castes have now started removing.”²⁵ All this has another result of continuing discrimination. Apart from this, there is no warmth or enthusiasm among the lower castes in this kind of progress. Those who get advanced get separated from their own community. Instead of taking their own original lower castes to the top, they try to become a part of the upper castes of the places where they go. Lohia ji believed that socialism is based on equality of all kinds. Caste creates inequality in the society. There should be no caste in a society with equality. It is necessary to break the caste system to create a classless society. He believed that, "

²⁴ Mastram Kapoor - Editor Ram Manohar Lohia Rachnawali Part- 2 Edition 2013, Page- 188

<https://ijmis.org/>

²⁵ Ibid, page- 189

**International Journal of Multidisciplinary Innovations & Studies
(IJMIS)**

For the elimination of caste system, pure human conduct is required. Caste system does not end just by protesting or saying or listening."²⁶ Caste system is the biggest hurdle in the way of building an ideal society and establishing a new equality. Therefore, Dr. Lohia had urged the most for its elimination.

To end the caste system, it is necessary to give equal rights to the lower castes in the society. The principle of equal opportunity is not enough for this because the lower and backward classes have less ability, so they will not be able to compete. The remedy for this is that this class should be given as many special opportunities as possible. Only by giving special opportunities will they be able to compete with the already developed class. If this is not done, then only "talented or exceptionally capable people will be able to win the battle."²⁷ Lohia ji did not believe in the policy of reservation to bring the people of the lower caste up. To bring them on par, he was in favour of giving 60 percent places to women, Harijans, Shudras, poor Muslims and Christians and tribals everywhere. Lohia

ji used to say that on one hand it is being said that the whole world is one, everyone is equal, everyone is the child of the same God and everyone is brother to each other, then why is there discrimination of high and low among us by dividing us into castes. Because efforts are made to move ahead at the cost of each other and each other's rights are snatched away.

Dr. Lohia attacked from all sides to end the caste system. Religious, economic, social and political. On one hand, he attacked on the basis of true Brahman knowledge and atheism, on the other hand, on economic grounds, he believed that due to the caste system, the lower castes are excluded from public life, which leads to slavery and slavery is the root of exploitation. And this is also the root cause of their poverty. Therefore, he believed that there is a need to bring the lower castes up economically. Therefore, he talked about increasing the wages of agricultural labourers and setting a limit between the highest income and the lowest income.²⁸ Dr. Lohia believed that especially the people of the lower castes do agricultural labour, they

²⁶ Dr. Yatindra Nath Sharma: Dr. Lohia 's Socialism and Economic Philosophy, page- 225

<https://ijmis.org/>

²⁷ Ram Manohar Lohia - Caste System, Page- 98

²⁸ Dr. Lohia: Duties of Despair Page- 28

International Journal of Multidisciplinary Innovations & Studies (IJMIS)

are landless and only they can be economically improved by limiting the income-limit.

Conclusion

Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia's socialist thought offers a powerful and deeply Indian vision of social transformation based on equality, justice, democracy, and human dignity. He moved beyond narrow economic interpretations of socialism and argued that the real problems of Indian society included caste oppression, social discrimination, political inequality, and the denial of equal opportunity. By connecting socialism with Gandhian ethics, non-violence, decentralization, and moral reform, Lohia developed an alternative framework suited to Indian conditions. His strong critique of caste as a rigid and oppressive social structure remains one of his most significant contributions. Overall, Lohia's ideas continue to be relevant in contemporary India because they provide a meaningful foundation for building a more inclusive, just, and egalitarian society.

References

- Dr. Rajendra Mohan Bhatnagar, Samagra Lohia, Kitabghar Main Road, Gandhi Nagar, Delhi First Edition 1982 Page- 13¹ Giriraj Kishore Editor - Hundred Years of Lohia, First Edition 2011, Page- 57
- Indumati Kelkar: Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia: Life and Philosophy Revised Edition 2010, Page- 25
- Ibid, page- 42
- Ibid, page- 43
- Giriraj Kishore Editor: Hundred Years of Lohia, First Edition 2011, Page- 57
- Dr. Yatindra Nath Sharma: Dr. Lohia 's Socialism and Economic Philosophy, page- 15
- Dr. Yatindra Nath Sharma: Dr. Lohia 's Socialism and Economic Philosophy, page- 38
- Ibid, page- 40
- Tarachand Dixit: Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia's Socialist Philosophy, Lok Bharati Paper Works, First Edition, 2013, Page- 28
- Ibid, page- 29
- Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia - Caste System, Page- 18
- Ibid, Page - 3
- Dr. Lohia - Caste System Page- 83 From the letter written by Dr. Lohia to Shri Chandrika Prasad Jigyasu on 10 September 1957.
- Mastram Kapoor: Editor Ram Manohar Lohia's Writings Part- 1, Page- 139
- Ibid, page- 139
- Mastram Kapoor: Editor Ram Manohar Lohia Rachnavali Part- 1 Edition 2013, Page- 140

**International Journal of Multidisciplinary Innovations & Studies
(IJMIS)**

Mastram Kapoor - Editor Ram Manohar
Lahiya Rachnawali Part- 2 Edition 2013,
Page- 174
Mastram Kapoor - Editor Ram Manohar
Lohia Rachnawali Part- 2 Edition 2013,
Page- 184
Ibid, page- 184
Mastram Kapoor - Editor Ram Manohar
Lohia Rachnawali Part- 2 Edition 2013,
Page- 185
Ibid, page- 186
Mastram Kapoor - Editor Ram Manohar
Lohia Rachnawali Part- 2 Edition 2013,
Page- 188
Ibid, page- 189
Dr. Yatindra Nath Sharma: Dr. Lohia 's
Socialism and Economic Philosophy, page-
225
Ram Manohar Lohia - Caste System, Page-
98
Dr. Lohia: Duties of Despair Page- 28