

# Dr. Ram Manohar Lohiya March

## 23,1910 - October 12, 1967

### Dr. Ram Manohar Lohiya

#### Introduction



The socialist leader of a fearless and dynamic personality. Both before independence and in free India he went to prison several times for the sake of the people. A man of rare scholarship and independent thought he toiled to create a society which would ensure justice to the poor, the backward and women

#### A Student in the Motherland's Service

Lohiya was born in 1910. His father, Heeralal, was a merchant in Faizabad, in Uttar Pradesh. Ram Manohar's mother died when he was two years old. The boy's grandmother brought him up. His father was a devoted follower of Mahatma Gandhi. Ram Manohar saw Gandhi for the first time when he was only nine years old. The Indian National Congress held its plenary session in 1923 at Gaya in Bihar. Little Lohiya was a Congress volunteer there. He also attended the 1926 session at Gauhati. Lohiya received his education in Bombay, Benaras and Calcutta. He passed the Metriculation Examination in the first class in 1925. After a two-year course at Benaras University, he joined the Vidya-sagar College in Calcutta. In 1929 he passed the Honors Examination in English Literature. Even in his student days he was attracted towards political agitation. He went to Germany for higher studies. Hitler was in power at that time. Lohiya wrote his doctoral thesis. In Berlin University; his subject was the Salt Satyagraha in India. He was awarded the Doctorate in both

Economics and Political Science. He returned to India in 1932.

## **The Congress Socialist Party**

The Satyagraha or Disobedience Movement launched by Gandhi was spreading throughout the country. Lohiya plunged into the movement. The reward he got was imprisonment.

Just then, the younger members of the Congress Party began to feel that the elders were not moving fast enough. Some of those youngsters had been imprisoned in the Nasik Road Jail. They had great compassion for the poor, the peasantry and the working class. These youngsters were determined to strive for the cause of such people. So they formed a youth wing in the Congress and called it the Congress Socialist Party. Among the founders of this Party were such stalwarts as Jayaprakash Narayan, Ram Manohar Lohiya, Yusuf Meherally, Achut Patwardhan, Ashok Mehta, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya and Acharya Narendra Deva. These people dreamt of building a nation for the toiling millions. In order to achieve this, they decided to put an end to the British rule.

Lohiya became the editor of a periodical the "Congress Socialist". With his western education, Lohiya was very well versed in international affairs. The Congress established a new branch for external affairs. Lohiya had to look after its administration. Lohiya made it possible for the Congress to have contact with all the progressive thinkers of different nations of the world. He opened a separate cell in order to protect the interests of Indians abroad.

## **In Jail**

In 1936, Lohiya was elected a member of the All India Congress Committee. He traveled all over the country and drew young men into the freedom movement. The British imprisoned him in 1938 in Calcutta on charges of sedition.

The Second World War broke out in 1939. The British Government forcibly involved India in the war. Lohiya was against the war. For his antiwar speeches, the British again put him behind the bars in 1940. It was 1942. Gandhi gave a call to the nation and threw a challenge to the British. "Quit India" said he. On the seventh and the eighth of August that year, the All India Congress Committee met in Bombay. The Quit India Movement was launched. On the 9th of August early in the morning the British Government imprisoned all national leaders headed by Gandhi, who coined a magic slogan, "Do or die". Spellbound by this slogan, the entire nation stood up against the British. Many of the national leaders evaded the police and organized the movement. Lohiya was among the foremost. He started a secret Broadcasting station and, with Jayaprakash Narayan, he organized an underground movement.

The government imprisoned Lohiya again in 1944. In the prison he was tortured in several ways. Each day he would be put in handcuffs of different sizes and weights; he would be made to listen to a single word, repeated for hours on end in the officer's chambers; he would be forbidden to close his eyes all night; the moment he closed his eyes his head would be twisted or the handcuffs pulled; for several nights the police would keep knocking a table by his bed with a piece of iron; they would call the national leaders names in his presence. Once an officer was calling Gandhi names. Weary and exasperated by the torture Lohiya roared at him to shut up. The officer made a fuss but thereafter he never opened his mouth again.

### **Lohiya was at last released from the prison in 1946.**

At that time India's freedom was in sight. But freedom from the clutches of the British did not mean freedom from the Portugese. These Portugese imperialists had been ruling three small pockets of territory, Goa, Diu and Daman, for four hundred and fifty years. Their rule was more frightful than that of the British. Lohiya turned

his attention to Goa as soon as he was released from prison. He went to Belgaum in Karnataka. When he entered Goa, the Portuguese Government arrested and deported him. Thus Lohiya laid the foundation for the liberation of Goa from foreign domination. In the north at the foot of the Himalayas was the Kingdom of Nepal ruled by the Rana Dynasty. The youth of Nepal were educated at Benares. Lohiya became their Political 'guru' or mentor. The revolt against the Rana Dynasty in Nepal was inspired by none other than Lohiya himself.

## **The Socialist Party**

August 15, 1947. India became free. But then it was divided. Lohiya was unhappy on this account. Gandhi was murdered on the 30th of January 1948. The communal virus spread all over the country. The Congress Socialist Party was not happy with the way in which the Congress leaders dealt with the situation. The Socialist Party decided to bring together the peasants, the factory workers and the workers in the middle class. On the 15th of April that year, the Socialists left the Congress Party. They formed their own party. One of the top leaders of the party was Lohiya.

Thereafter Lohiya toured the whole country. He strongly criticized the policies of the Nehru Government. In his inimitable style he argued in favor of the stand and the policies of the Socialist Party. He stole the hearts of the youth of the country.

## **In Kagodu in Karnataka**

It was an important event that brought Lohiya in close contact with Karnataka. Shimoga is a district of Karnataka Sagar is a taluk in the district well known for its exquisite sandal woodcarving. There is a small village in this taluk called Kagodu.

There was only one landlord in the entire village. The rest of the

villagers were all tenants or hired peasants of the landlord. Their economic and social conditions were deplorable. The peasants were afraid even to stand before the landlord. They had to wear the dhoti above the ankle. Women were forbidden to wear sarees that cover and the leg below the knee. They all had to toil in the landlord's house but without payment. They could not ever dream of education. The dumb toilers accepted their lot as the will of fate.

A new wind blew across the region after the attainment of freedom. The peasantry awoke. They realized that they too were human beings. They formed unions. But the landlords did not like all this. Suppose these people who had been trampled upon for ages turned against the landlords? Fear gripped the landlords' minds. The peasants were evicted from the lands they had been cultivating. In 1951, the peasants organized themselves. They decided to fight injustice. The Farmers' Union and the Socialist Party of Karnataka launched a satyagraha against the landlords' injustice. Many farmers got into their fields in-groups to fight for their rights. The Government took the side of the landlords. Led by the socialist party, farmers poured in hundreds into the jails in Sagar and Shimoga.

The news reached Lohiya in the month of July 1951. He rushed to Karnataka. Accompanied by the local leaders, he went straight from Bangalore to Sagar. From Sagar off to the village of Kagodu. Since it was the monsoon season, there was incessant rainfall. On the 12th of July the weather was slightly better in the afternoon. With the flag of the Socialist Party in one hand, Lohiya led the peasants and got into the fields. He launched the Satyagraha. The atmosphere was quiet but tense when the procession went through the streets of the village. Soon after the procession, Lohiya arrived at the resthouse of the Sagar Railway Station. It was around midnight. Senior police officials of the district came there and arrested Lohiya.

Lohiya sat through the whole night along with his jailmates in the police lockup in Sagar. The next morning he was brought to the Shimoga jail along with other leaders! There were already quite a few satyagrahis in the jail. That evening Lohiya was taken to Bangalore and kept in confinement in the Government House. When an appeal was made to the High Court, Lohiya was released.

## Humanity

While in the Shimoga jail, the inmates were not being given enough food. The food given to them sufficed only for one meal a day. The satyagrahis had to depend on the food sent from outside by supporters. Lohiya was deeply moved at this state of affairs. But he had little money with him. He had hardly thirty-two rupees in his purse. When the police officials came to take him to Bangalore, Lohiya handed over to his jailmates all the money he had. "Please get some food with this money and distribute it among the satyagrahis" he said. His friends tried hard to dissuade him but in vain. It was not only in Karnataka that Lohiya participated in peasants' agitations. He participated in all the agitations of the downtrodden throughout the country. He was in the vanguard in every fight for the working class against all forms of injustice. He had not only pity for the common man but respect as well.

Once he travelled by train from Sagar to Shimoga in a third class compartment. He was accompanied by some party workers of the Socialist Party. Some of them stretched their legs ignoring the inconvenience to those in the opposite row. There were some farmers in that row. Lohiya could not control his displeasure. He said to the man next to him "This conduct does not befit a socialist. Explain this to the other friends." Such was Lohiya's alertness even in seemingly trivial matters

## The Praja Socialist Party

The first General Elections in free India were held in 1952. The Socialist party fielded its candidates all over the country. Doctor Lohiya did not contest. He toured all the states to explain the aims of his party. He visited the erstwhile Mysore State too and addressed many public meetings. The election did not bring much success to the Socialist Party.

Within a year the Socialist Party and the Kisan Mazdoor Party founded by Acharya Kripalani merged. The new party was named the Praja Socialist Party. Acharya Kripalani became the President of the party. Doctor Lohiya was the General Secretary. Earlier, when Acharya Kripalani was the General Secretary of the All India Congress Committee, Lohiya had been the head of the External Affairs Department of the Congress Party. Lohiya stayed with Kripalani's family and practically became one of them. Thus Kripalani developed great affection for Lohiya.

During this period, Travancore and Cochin, the two princely states, had been merged to form a single state. The Praja Socialist Party was in power and Pattamthanu Pillai was the Chief Minister. Once there was an agitation by estate workers. The Government resorted to firing. Lohiya could not condone this action of the Government headed by his own party. His contention was that the so-called people's party had no right to misuse its powers and to use repression against its own people. He demanded that the Praja Socialist Party Government should resign immediately. He even took a firm stand on the issue. Many leaders in the party did not want to accept his stand. But Lohiya did not budge. Finally in 1955 the Praja Socialist Party took disciplinary action against Lohiya.

## The New Party

In the field of social revolution Lohiya was a galvanizing personality. Vast numbers of young men and women were attracted to his way of thinking. They resented the disciplinary action against Lohiya. The idea of rebuilding the erstwhile Socialist Party began to take shape. In 1955, towards the end of Decemeber, the socialist Lohiyaites met in Hyderabad to exchange views. At last the Socialist Party was reborn. It was the midnight of the 31st of December 1955. The City of Hyderabad witnessed a torch light procession which symbolized the birth of the new party.

The Socialist Party chalked out a specific programme. Lohiya was the author of this programme. He explained the fundamental aims of the party and clarified its practical approach. He started 'Mankind', an English daily from Hyderabad, which voiced his views. He also started 'Jana' -a Hindi monthly.

## Lohiya's Views

Lohiya was an exceptionally talented person. He had mastered different schools of social and political doctrines. He was deeply influenced by thinkers of the West. Prominent among them was Karl Marx. Gandhis' concept of Satyagraha had made a strong impact on India. Lohiya was impressed by the way in which millions of unarmed Indians fought the mighty British. He advocated the realization of socialist ideals through Satyagraha. He firmly believed that the differences between the haves and the havenots, the rich and the poor could be resolved by nonviolent means. Huge mechanization may be useful in advanced regions like Europe and America. India is a land of teeming, millions. The biggest problem is to provide jobs for millions. Hence using small machinery is the only solution. There are, of course, differences between Capitalism and Communism, but both rely on large-scale use of heavy machines. Mere change of ownership does not bring about equality. The very

idea of mechanised industry should be changed. Such were Lohiya's views.

Lohiya had definite views regarding Indian languages. English is a language known to a negligible minority. Hence Lohiya strongly contended that it should no longer be used for purposes of administration. In a democracy the language of the people should be the language of the government. Only then the public can understand what the government does and nobody will be at a disadvantage for not knowing English.

The regional language should be the medium of instruction in schools and colleges. It is easier for children to learn through their own mother tongue. Spending several years to teach English which is not our language is sheer waste of time. In spite of spending so much time we are unable to master this language. People who know English begin to think they are different from others. These people are parasites. English Language has created a gulf between the intellectuals and the common man. So, the regional languages should be used in all walks of life. They should be given priority in courts, in the bazaar, and in all walks of life. These were the views of Lohiya.

More than half of our population comprises women. Their condition is pathetic. Cooking food, breeding children and being a slave to her husband -this is woman's fate. A woman is not considered equal to a man, such is the blind belief sustained through the ages. The law has guaranteed equality to women, but that is only on paper. Equality has not been practiced. Hence jobs must be reserved for women in all walks of life. They must be freed from the tyranny of homework. The latent talent of women should be brought to the limelight. Society does not progress as long as women remain oppressed. Society must be rid of deep-rooted beliefs and old practices. Beginning with women in villages every woman should be given justice. Lohiya

strove for this cause. According to him the emancipation of women was the foundation of social revolution; without this there can be no prosperity

Lohiya had earned fame as an expert in international affairs. He felt that India should not join the camp of either Russia or America. She must remain nonaligned. This, however, should not mean transferring India's approval from one country to another. It was his view that the free countries of Asia and Africa should form a third force.

Men should not hate one another because of the color of the skin. Racial hatred is treachery to mankind. All men are equal. Lohiya was a firm adherent of this ideology. This was why Lohiya staged satyagraha in an episode involving racialist prejudices in a restaurant in Jackson a town in America. He was arrested at the time.

In his life span of 57 years Ram Manohar Lohiya suffered imprisonment twenty times. The government of free India imprisoned him as many as twelve times. As a staunch believer in satyagraha he felt it was his duty to fight injustice, whether it was on a small scale or a big scale.

Lohiya never had faith in violence. By nature as well as training he was nonviolent. He abhorred destructive tendencies. He never lost patience. Time and again he made it clear that nonviolence was not a facade for cowardice. It is our tradition as Indians to remain gentle for a century and than to pounce like a tiger in a matter of seconds. He advised people to hold their heads high always like human beings. He followed what he preached. He never bowed to any force on earth.

"I prefer the spade to the throne" said Lohiya. We should build up our nation. Our country has a huge population. We do not have big machinery. But we have plenty of manpower. Hence we must utilize it to the fullest extent. That will be possible only if every one wields

the spade. If every healthy person donates an hour's labor a day to the cause of the nation, our country will soon be rich. In his life the spade and the prison were like the two sides of a coin.

## **"A Daily Income of twenty-one Paise"**

Lohiya contested the 1962 General Elections to the Lok Sabha from Phulpur constituency in Uttar Pradesh. His rival was the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Lohiya lost the election. But such was his courage that he would challenge even the mightiest men of the land. In May 1963 there was a by election from Farookabad constituency in Uttar Pradesh. Lohiya contested and Won, and entered the Lok Sabha. It was his desire that the Lok Sabha should mirror public opinion. His maiden speech itself was historic. The daily income of twenty-seven crore people of this country is a meagre twenty-one paise, declared Lohiya in the Lok Sabha, to the utter astonishment of government spokesmen. He argued that top priority should be given to the improvement of the condition of such poor people. Every one was astonished when Lohiya disclosed that this poor country spent as much as twenty-five thousand rupees a day on the security of the Prime Minister. He wrote a book elaborating his statements. He argued that popular leaders should not alienate themselves from the common man.

## **Simple Living**

Lohiya was a leader but a man of simple living. He disliked ostentation. His personal belongings were few. He never paid much attention to his attire. Once while he was on tour he opened his suitcase to find all his shirts were torn. New shirts had to be brought from the market. Lohiya never bothered about his needs.

**One terrible curse of our country is caste.**

There are many rungs in the caste system. Any one who has wealth or belongs to one of the higher castes or knows English can prosper. But there are millions in this country who are not so fortunate. The Government should reserve sixty per cent of jobs for women and people belonging to backward communities. The same policy should apply to places in political life. This was the firm stand of Lohiya. Equality of opportunity - this is a sound principle. But when people who have been oppressed for ages are asked to compete with people belonging to forward communities the latter are bound to succeed. Hence it is but right that those who are backward should be given special opportunities. Lohiya based all his programs on this doctrine.

From times immemorial there has been a gulf between profession and practice in India. Lohiya stressed the need to bridge this gulf between word and deed. He never owned any property. Until he became a member of the Lok Sabha he never had any income. His friends and well wishers looked after him.

His house in Delhi was always open to the party workers. Lohiya was returned to Lok Sabha from Kanooz constituency in 1967. In September 1967, he underwent an operation. But he never recovered from it. On the 12th of October 1967 Lohiya breathed his last.

## **A Versatile Genius**

Lohiya was a versatile genius. He had a sharp intellect. He wielded a sharp pen and he was a very effective and persuasive speaker. While addressing public gatherings he always spoke in Hindi. His speech used to be translated into the language of the region. He knew English, German and French very well. He was also proficient in Bengali. He was a man of incisive logic. Once he chooses a subject he would make a thorough study of it. He had special love for economics. And no one could deceive him with mere statistics.

He wrote quite a number of books. "Marx, Gandhi and Socialism" is his masterpiece. "Culprits of the Division of Bharat", "Wheel of History", "Leisure amidst Politics", and "Power Determination" are some of his other works.

Generally at meetings and conferences the leaders are on the stage. Lohiya was an exception. He always sat with the Delegates. Once there was a special plenary session of the Praja Socialist Party in a town in Madhya Pradesh. The Party was discussing whether it should co-operate with the Congress. Ashok Mehta argued in favor of co-operation; Lohiya was against such co-operation. His argument was clear; his words touched every heart. At last Jaya Prakash Narayan declared that he would inform Nehru that it was not possible for the party to co-operate with the Congress, and ended the discussion. Thus Lohiya won over the entire gathering.

## **'Rama, Krishna, Shiva'**

Although basically a politician Lohiya had an excellent knowledge of our ancient scriptures. He used to interpret them from a modern point of view. He wrote a perceptive article on the mythological figures Rama, Krishna and Shiva. Many of his observations in his article are penetrating and significant. He says, "Rama and Krishna may be historical figures. Shiva also may have been a great engineer who dug a canal of the river Ganga. Perhaps he was a veterinary doctor or a great lover of mankind. He has said that the mythological figures embody the dreams and the trials and sufferings of the people who conceived them. Only some people know about the figures of history. But mythological characters have become part and parcel of the popular imagination, and Lohiya had grasped this fact.

Lohiya had great love for Rama and Ramayana. He called Rama "an embodiment of dignity". He organized a Ramayana Mela near Ayodhya. His birthplace Faizabad is close to Ayodhya.

What Lohiya has to say about Sri Rama and Sri Krishna is significant. "Eight parts of Vishnu were embodied in Rama. His was a limited personality. But Krishna had sixteen parts of Vishnu. Hence his personality was as mighty as the ocean." Lohiya wrote that Rama said little but listened to others.

To-day cricket is the most popular game in India, especially in towns and cities. This is a game of the leisurely class. It is a gift of the British Raj. Cricket does not offer as much exercise as football. Lohiya wanted that India should progress in sports so as to earn recognition in the Olympic Games. But he did not think highly of cricket.

## **With Vishveshvaraya**

Lohiya once met Bharatha Rathna Mokshagundam Vishveshvaraya, the great engineer-statesman, when he came to Bangalore.

Vishveshvaraya was ninety years old. Lohiya writes that after Mahatma Gandhi Vishveshvaraya was the second great man of India. Lohiya recalls that in the hundred-minute meeting he found that Vishveshvaraya's memory never failed him. He is all praise for Sir M.V.'s sharp intellect, his life of hard work and his tidiness even in old age. Vishveshvaraya told him that Indian steel was being sold in Glasgow in England even a hundred years ago and that it was possible to manufacture steel of any grade as a small scale industry. He told Lohiya that he had no difficulty in preparing the designs for the Cauvery Valley projects as he had visited the Aswan Dam Project in Egypt.

Lohiya evinced interest in such matters as language and education. He studied the similarity in the scripts of different Indian languages. It was his desire to design a single script for all Indian languages. He felt that different scripts wasted the country's time and money and divided the people. He wished that we had a single script as in Europe.

Lohiya was a very widely traveled man. It was his wish to go round the world without a passport; he did visit Burma once without a passport.

## **Decentralization**

All the political power is concentrated in the hands of the Central Government today. The states are left with very little power; there is no self-government at the district, taluk and village levels. The citizens of the country elect representatives to the Lok Sabha and the state assemblies once in five years. Once elected the representatives cannot be questioned by the common man. Lohiya felt that this state of affairs was unsatisfactory in a democracy. He suggested a different solution. The suggestion was that there should be decentralization of power at all the four stages - at the center and the state, the district and the village levels. He wanted that there should be minimum power at the center and that at the village level there should be maximum power in the conduct of the affairs of the village. The Panchayat administration in charge should also have power over the police. It should also have power to collect taxes. The village Panchayat should get a share of the taxes collected by the state and the center. The progress of a village ought to be planned by the village itself. He called this organization the four-pillared state. According to this arrangement Swaraj begins at the village level and stretches up to Delhi. This provides an opportunity for the common man to participate in the administration. This was the firm view of Lohiya.

## **In the International World**

It was Lohiya's contention that Satyagraha should be used not only at the national level but also in international politics. He longed to do away with the distinctions between the high and the low at the

international level. As a first step he argued that no nation should have special rights in the United Nations Organization. It was his desire that all the poor countries in the world should stand together. Towards the end of the Second World War America dropped the atom bomb not on Germany but on Japan-an Asian country. He said that this proved the racial prejudices of the Western nations. Poverty and progress are not the problems of any single country. While half the world is wallowing in wealth, the other half is struggling in poverty, ignorance, disease and inequality. In such a world peace and tranquility are impossible. The developed nations of the world ought to do their duty by the developing nations. If there is famine in any corner of the world, the other nations should race to help the people. Lohiya used to say that there should be an international welfare fund and an international organization

## **A Hero of Rare Courage**

Such was his life that Lohiya became another name for fearlessness. Both during British rule and in free India he expressed his opinions fearlessly. His yardstick to judge any idea or plan was always the same-does it help the down-trodden and the poor? His scholarship was amazing. His intellect was penetrating. He was a man of independent views.

For five thousand years no one has known whether the common man is alive or dead in this land. His personality should blossom and he must grow into a new man. Lohiya toiled and died for the cause of the common man.