



The Social Science Review A Multidisciplinary Journal

(Open Access, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Bi-Monthly Journal)

www.tsreview.in

DR. RAM MANOHAR LOHIA'S THOUGHTS ON EDUCATIONAL REFORM AND LANGUAGE POLICY: A BRIEF REVIEW

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Abstract

Rammanohar Lohia, a nationalist and socialist leader, fought throughout his life for the reconstruction of India based on true equality, including in the field of education, and wanted the replacement of English by Indian languages in all official and other correspondences. In his opinion, no nation or community could fully grow without the proper usage of its own languages, particularly mother tongues. His discussions and debates on these topics as a member of the Indian Parliament are remarkable. His ideas on education and educational reforms are, in fact, part of his vast programme of reconstruction in India. He acknowledged the importance of English but wanted to replace it in official usages as English was unknown to the majority of the Indian people, and therefore, the mother tongue should be useful for complete literacy to teach them, including the vast population belonging to various castes, tribes, and communities that constitute the majority of the total population.

Keywords: *Equality, reconstruction, mother tongue, language, complete literacy.*

Introduction

Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia, a devoted nationalist and socialist, fought throughout his life for the independence and development of our country and for the oppressed. His fight for equality, commitment to the reconstruction of independent India, and efforts to remove the caste, class, religious, and other inequalities in society, including the threat of superstitious beliefs, are still crucial today. His fight included the reconstruction of India in the field of education and the replacement of English by Indian languages in all official and other correspondences. In his opinion, no nation or community could fully grow without the proper usage of its own languages, particularly mother tongues. His discussions and debates on these topics as a member of the Indian Parliament are impressive. His ideas on education and educational reforms are, in fact, part of his vast programme of reconstruction in India. These concerns of Lohia are still as relevant today as they were during his lifetime. Some of these, like religious issues, have become global problems. Lohia identified and discussed the caste, class differences, and issues of inequality in various aspects—the education policy, the right to mother tongue, and many others—that are still vital issues in our society today. The discussion here will, however, confine itself primarily to Lohia's observations of educational issues and language policy.

Education Policy

In Lohia's plan for rebuilding India, the populace would receive a good education to help them deal with social problems, including pervasive superstitions and other disputes. Lohia advocated for uniform and free education in India. He believed that India's education policy, which was based on the British model, required a significant overhaul of the whole educational system. The needs of the populace cannot be met in any way by the current system. The entire educational system needs to be redesigned and rebuilt. He thought that the most crucial aspects of a nation's development were the expansion of literacy and the provision of high-quality education to everybody. His aim was to achieve "complete literacy throughout the country," to literate everybody, and to achieve the goal of real literacy. (Lok Sabha Secretariat, *Eminent Parliamentarians*, 1990, p. 56) In his own words, "There is nothing more important than educational and training programmes, an arm of the Party which has been so sadly neglected hitherto." (Lohia, *The Doctrinal Foundation of Socialism*, in *Marx, Gandhi and Socialism*, 1960, p. 351) He claimed that the use of English in our educational system was a fundamental mistake. He proposed the use of the Indian language in its place. He said that until the working class, middle class, and poor are included in the educational system, no state can advance. Instead of traditional education through colleges or universities, he advocated for technical education for the general public. He proposed the "establishment of polytechnic schools and people's high schools, and centres for youth and women for cultural activities." (Lohia, *Fragments of a World Mind*, 1952, p. 80) He cited the examples of Germany and Sweden, which "... have been developed by workers and peasants who have ... off and on been to polytechnics. The People's Universities of these countries also deserve mention," rather than normal colleges and universities. (S. R. Bakshi, *Rammanohar Lohia...*, 1992, p. 80)

He suggested the creation of a literacy army to end illiteracy within ten years. He believed that more expensive schools should be removed and that "all primary schools should be of a uniform standard." Industrial, technical, and scientific schools must open on a large scale. Higher education should undergo fundamental reforms with an emphasis on research and subject comprehension rather than the superficial and meaningless linguistic patterns used now. (Lohia, *Two Manifestoes*, in *Marx, Gandhi and Socialism*, 1960, p. 525)

Lohia believed that "just as the people have a right to food, cloth, and housing ... the people also have a right to education and medicine." (Lohia, *Two Manifestoes*, in *Marx, Gandhi and Socialism*, Pp. 503-04) Therefore, he considered that it was necessary to establish polytechnics and people's universities for the benefit of the poor, working class, peasants, and other social outcasts. He proposed a uniform system of primary education in the mother tongue, free and mandatory education up to the middle standard, and free, inexpensive, or cheaper higher education facilities, especially for scheduled castes, tribes, and other underprivileged groups in society. These more underprivileged areas should also be provided with free or inexpensive residential facilities. He claimed that "twenty percent of the States' revenues and ten percent of the Central revenues" need to be used to pay for education. He additionally advocated for measures to help primary teachers with their financial situations. (Lohia, *Two Manifestoes*, p. 504).

Lohia was dissatisfied with the education policy of independent India. He mentioned that "educational policy is basically the same as during the British regime." He believed that people should be equipped through education to address the nation's socio-economic issues. In our nation, social disintegration and the concentration of political power were terrible trends that could only be reversed with an effective education strategy based on Indian culture. In order to eradicate ignorance, illiteracy, and superstitions from society, Lohia underlined the importance of a proper education strategy that includes free education up to the Middle Standard as well as a focus on spreading literacy and imparting the right concepts to the general populace. In addition, he advocated for "free medical treatment to large sections of the population" to be provided by the government by gradually integrating the medical field into society. (Lohia, *Two Manifestoes*, p. 504).

He advocated that all children, regardless of caste, class, or status, including Bhangi, Brahmin, Kurmi, Kisan, and the Prime Minister, should attend the same school and receive the same education (Lohia, *The Caste System*, 1964, p. 42). He was opposed to "the continuation of expensive educational institutions

like the ones at Dehra Dun, Lucknow, Delhi, Ooty, and other places.” (Lohia, *Two Manifestoes*, p. 504). He claimed that the initial imperative for India’s reform was equality of access to education. He also demanded that they be given precedence in the educational system in order to equalise women and men and reduce the gender gap (Lohia, *Two Manifestoes*, p. 505). In addition, he said that one of the worst features of education is the shifting textbooks, which also praise militarism, filthy habits, and living party leaders. Children’s books ought to be “classical and sources of general knowledge.” The author-publisher racket needs to end, and they shouldn’t need to be modified that regularly (Lohia, *A New Integration*, in *Marx, Gandhi and Socialism*, p. 383).

Lohia wished to radically revamp the educational system and make it more accessible. He desired that the educational system “impress upon the student the need to integrate their minds.” The wealthy schools ought to be closed down for the sake of equality, and “the children of the highest in the land must go to school with those of the lowest.” Lohia thought local municipal, or local boards should be in charge of overseeing elementary and secondary education. (Lohia, *New Integration*, in *Marx, Gandhi and Socialism*, p. 382) He also promoted the provision of technical and vocational education. He advocated for the extension of agricultural studies, the creation of more technical institutes, the introduction of vocational programmes, and other measures to address the issue of unemployment. He also underlined the importance of education in social medicine. He had a similar interest in creating healthcare facilities, especially those focused on social medicine. He emphasised the need for people to look at other health-related issues. Much work still has to be done in the field of social medicine, he declared. In his own words, “as in the field of education, much needs to be done in the field of social medicine.” The fear of illness and the cost of treatment break down the poor. This job must be undertaken by the government, even if it starts small. It is also vital to stop population growth. He emphasised that to control population growth, the government should adopt proactive measures in this regard. (Lohia, *Fragments of a World Mind*, p. 83) Lohia believed that the nation needed to develop scientifically and that a logical, unified education system was the only way to make that happen. He believed that the current educational system did not encourage technical or scientific achievement. He consequently advocated that higher education and innovative research be given primary attention.

He advocated that all societal norms and practises that are in opposition to the idea of equality between women and men must be eliminated by legislation, propaganda, and education in order to achieve equality. According to him, “women will be given equal status with men in all matters, political, social, and economic,” and the only way for this to happen is through having an effective educational system. He expressed significant concern for women’s conditions and proposed a number of initiatives, including education, to help them overcome socio-economic hardships. For example, he advised building water pumps in remote regions so that women could readily collect water and, for leisure, a public or communal kitchen. For all of these reasons, he began by considering the importance of receiving an excellent education. (Lohia, *Two Manifestoes*, p. 505) He offered preferential opportunities for them in addition to general education for everyone since he was deeply worried about the people of the rural areas, the oppressed, the Adivasis, the backward classes, and the women. Additionally, he was fully aware of the negative impacts of the existing caste system, which, in his opinion, only gave rise to a “hereditary section of privileged people” and “a class of suppressed and oppressed Harijans.” He proposed that “special educational facilities and representation in services” be made available for the underprivileged portion as a result. (Lohia, *Two Manifestoes*, p. 506)

Lohia consequently argued in favour of an exclusive and thorough educational system for India. Lohia recognised the necessity for a brand-new, distinctive educational system in a newly independent, developing, and highly populated nation like India. Given the wide variety of socio-economic and cultural groupings present in India, this was definitely significant for the country’s development. Additionally, a system of education that could foster the growth of every citizen of the nation was necessary given the multilingualism and caste- and class-based structure of Indian culture. Even in the twenty-first century, it is indisputably true that we are unable to educate every person in our society, particularly the Adivasis,

members of lower social strata, and women. As a result, we haven't yet succeeded in realising the goals that Lohia spent his entire life fighting for the development of our country.

Removal of English and the use of Indian Languages

Lohia proposed the elimination of English as part of his educational reforms. He believed that as English is a foreign language, it is inaccessible to the majority of Indians. Like Gandhi, Lohia believed that for political liberty to succeed, mental and cultural liberation were also necessary and that English was out of the reach of the average person. In light of this, he argued that English should no longer be the national language and called for its substitution with an Indian tongue, preferably Hindi. After India gained independence, English was adopted for a temporary period of 15 years under the Indian Constitution, and provisions were made to replace English with Hindi written in *Devnagri* Script along with Indian numerals and other regional languages (Article 343). However, the Official Language Act of 1963 and its Amendment Act of 1967 confirmed the maintenance of English as a long-term strategy. Lohia believed that the fundamental condition for the advancement of democracy and the lowering of socio-economic inequities was the substitution of English as the official language. He also criticised the organised campaign by some to keep English as the official language, insisting that English is "the only rich language, which is the fountainhead of all knowledge, research, and progress." (Tulsi Boda, *Dr. Lohia: Angeri Hatao*, in Verindra Grover, 1996, p. 544)

He declared that, as a true nationalist, "all governmental correspondence and relationships between the States and the Centre must be so regulated that the State is free to correspond with the Centre in its own language while the Centre will correspond with it in Hindi." (Lohia, *Two Manifestoes*, p. 504) In addition, he proposed that all official documents—aside from those pertaining to the census—should be exempt from identifying caste or religion. Being a real nationalist, he also had issues with the way the nation's youth were emulating the western way of life. He devoted all of his time to studying Indian culture. He wanted English to disappear from India and for Hindi and other Indian languages to become our national tongue. He said that being an English lover meant living a "sinful life."

He understood that higher positions in government offices and industries should be automatically reserved for one percent of English-speaking people as long as English is the official language of administration and education, leaving the other 99 percent of people—who barely make 19 paise per day—hungry, jobless, and behind. Additionally, the English-speaking minority class would continue to rule the labour movement, and neither Gulabrao Ganacharya nor Prabhakar More would be able to command the AITUC. (Tulsi Boda, 1996, p. 546)

In 1952, he started the "Angrezi Hatao" movement at a time, when the government spokespeople and the Congress, as well as some opposition parties besides the socialists, were systematically pushing for the preservation of English, which was seen by them as the only rich language and the foundation of all knowledge, research, and progress. Throughout a statement outlining their opinions on language use, Lohia and the Socialist Parties (SSP and PSP) demanded the "replacement of English by people's languages in the country's administration, law courts, legislatures, educational institutions, research, and universities." Another demand was to conduct public service examinations in Indian languages. (Tulsi Boda, p. 547) Lohia said, "This movement should be based on research and spread of truth. The spreading of truth and facts is the basic need of modern life. But unfortunately, truth has become dumb and falsehood talkative in our times. Due to the stranglehold of the mass media of propaganda by the Government, big business and newspaper barons, truth and facts have been buried. To come out of this suffocating situation on the language issue, *Angrezi Hatao Andolan* is a step in the right direction." (Tulsi Boda, p. 545)

Lohia asserts that Indian languages are exceptionally rich and beautiful. Indians should learn their own languages. It is also plausible if local languages are employed in official communications. Although he wasn't anti-English, he did want Indian languages to advance. He suggested that the socialist party should mobilise public support for the following causes:

1. "Use of Hindi and Indian languages as a medium of administration and education. English may be taught as an optional language like French, Russian, etc.
2. The proceedings of Parliament, Assemblies, etc., must be conducted in Hindi or any one of the Indian languages.
3. Public Service Commission examinations must be in Hindi or any other Indian language.
4. English should not be used for public purposes." (Tulsi Boda, p. 547)

According to Lohia, a minority of 40 or 50 lakh Indians from the ruling class are using English as an "instrument of minority rule and exploitation" to maintain their dominance over 40 crores rather than being the language of the people. (Lohia, *Language*, 1966, quoted in Dr. V. K. Arora, p. 105) Therefore, he wanted to encourage the development of Indian languages, replace English with an Indian language (preferably Hindi), and make official correspondence easier for the general population to understand. He aimed to enable everyone to participate in public services, regardless of their proficiency in either the English or the Indian languages.

In this approach, Lohia recommended the immediate elimination of English as a required subject from all public "departments of the secretariat, such as defence, railways, post and telegraph, commerce and industries, etc.," including high courts and universities. He said that the "use of Hindi should start immediately in the centre or a multi-lingual centre should be set up," and in non-Hindi states, the gazetted posts should be reserved for ten years or quotas should be fixed on the basis of the population ratio for all Indian languages. Additionally, it was also suggested that "a multi-lingual centre should be set up." (Lohia, *Two Manifestoes*, pp. 523-24) According to his formula of "mother tongue and optionally Hindi," he also believed that "the mother tongue would immediately replace English in all state activities." (Lohia, *India, China and Northern Frontiers*, 1963, p. 242) He was aware that several states, including Punjab, Maharashtra, and Gujarat, were created using the Indian language formula, but lamented the fact that no provincial language had advanced to this point; in fact, in Maharashtra, English was now more often spoken than Marathi. The position of regional languages is the same in other provinces as well. (Lok Sabha Secretariat, p. 95). For continuing to use English rather than the Indian languages, Lohia criticised the policies of the ruling party.

The dominating inclinations of English-speaking individuals, who make up the elite class in society, were what he sought to destroy rather than the expulsion of English from Indian land. Because English is one of the most voluminous languages in the world, he intended it to be taught alongside other foreign languages and used as a tool for knowledge acquisition. Lohia sought to remove the nation's elitist reliance on English education. In addition to wanting to replace English with Indian languages so that all members of Indian society might benefit from education and take part in all facets of the state, including administration, he was deeply concerned about equality.

Conclusion

The affection and desire for using one's mother tongue have almost become a movement throughout the world. The declaration and observance of International Mother Language Day are the result of such desires. Along with many others, Lohia recognised the value of the mother tongue as a crucial component of contemporary education and communication. His foresight in the reconstruction of India and many other matters, such as his views on education and the use of one's mother tongue, the Himalayan Policy, relations with China and Russia, and the third camp in global politics, are still important today. Therefore, Lohia's thoughts on education policy and his insistence on Indian languages still have equal importance in our society.

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