



DR. RAMMANOHAR LOHIA



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Dr. Rammanohar Lohia was one of the most eminent personalities of India's freedom struggle and socialist movement. A staunch socialist by instinct and conviction, he gave a new direction and dimension to the socialist movement in India, keeping in view the ground realities of Indian social, political and economic matrix. Apart from being a revolutionary philosopher, a prolific writer and a selfless social worker, he was a parliamentarian *par excellence*.

Rammanohar Lohia was born on 23 March 1910 at Akbarpur in the Faizabad district of Uttar Pradesh. As a child, he grew up in an atmosphere free from caste, communal and other prejudices. He inherited the spirit of ardent nationalism from his father who was an active Congressman and a staunch follower of Mahatma Gandhi. Since his childhood, Lohia was sensitive to the plight of the needy and the suffering.

Rammanohar Lohia received his early education at the Tandon Pathshala and the Visheshwar Nath High School in Akbarpur. Having passed the Intermediate examination from the Banaras Hindu University, he joined the Vidyasagar College, Calcutta\* for higher studies. In 1932, he obtained the Ph.D. Degree in Economics from Berlin University with 'Salt and Civil Disobedience' as the subject of his doctoral thesis. It was in Berlin that he studied the works of Marx and Hegel. He left Berlin with definite leanings towards socialism. He was also profoundly influenced by Gandhiji's lofty ideals, values and methods.

Dr. Lohia joined the freedom movement at an early age. His interest in politics gained further momentum due to the atmosphere he found at his home. At the young age of ten, he had organised a student strike in 1920 at the death of Lokmanya Tilak. A valiant freedom fighter, Lohia actively participated in the Non-Cooperation Movement launched by Gandhiji.

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\*Now called Kolkata.

In 1928, he presided over a meeting in Calcutta to boycott the Simon Commission. He came into contact with Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru at a youth session in Calcutta and, thereafter, a close relationship developed between the two.

On his return from Berlin in 1933, Dr. Lohia completely immersed himself in political activities. He was instrumental in the formation of the Congress Socialist Party within the Indian National Congress and was considered as one of its pillars. In 1936, when Pandit Nehru became the Congress President, he started the Foreign Affairs Department of the Congress Party and appointed Dr. Lohia as the Secretary of this Department, an office which he held with distinction till August 1938. Dr. Lohia played a vital role in laying the foundation of India's foreign policy and maintained a close contact with the freedom movements in other parts of the world; he also developed close relations with the progressive organisations in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Dr. Lohia played a significant role in the 'Quit India Movement' of 1942. He gave directions to his colleagues during the Movement while remaining underground for nearly two years. He utilised this time by writing booklets, pamphlets and articles which were very inspiring. He was ultimately arrested on 20 May 1944 and was imprisoned till 11 April 1946. In fact, Dr. Lohia was arrested for as many as 25 times during the Freedom Movement.

A committed socialist, Dr. Lohia always believed in the ideology of democratic socialism and stood for power to the elected representatives of the people through parliamentary means. He also supported the non-violent direct action against every social, economic and political injustice. His creative mind had a great fascination for new ideas and he was averse to the doctrinaire approach to social, political and economic problems. A relentless fighter against every form of injustice, Dr. Lohia fervently pleaded for social equality and preferential opportunity for the socially deprived sections of society to enable them to overcome their centuries' old plight.

A major contribution of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia to the Indian polity was the incorporation of the Gandhian philosophy in the socialist thought. A firm believer in

decentralised economy, Dr. Lohia stressed the need for setting up of cottage industries and small machines with minimum capital investment where maximum manpower could be used.

All through his life, Dr. Lohia identified himself with the masses, particularly those living in the rural areas and villages, which made him the symbol of the aspirations of the poor peasants, landless people and agricultural labourers. He initiated *Kisan* marches and struggles right from 1947. He not only advocated the need for a fundamental re-ordering of our social relations but also provided an ideological basis for this revolutionary transformation.

Dr. Lohia's association with the Indian Parliament began in 1963, when he was elected to the Third Lok Sabha in a bye-election from Farrukhabad constituency in Uttar Pradesh. He was re-elected in March 1967 to the Fourth Lok Sabha from Kannauj constituency in Uttar Pradesh. A dedicated parliamentarian, Dr. Lohia evinced keen interest in the business of the House. He enthralled the House with stimulating speeches on contemporary issues. He also effectively articulated the grievances of the people on the Floor of the House.

An articulate champion of social equality, Dr. Lohia denounced the caste system and the hierarchical order based on birth. He considered it as the single most important factor for the decline of the nation and its repeated subjection to external aggression and foreign rule. He also launched a "destroy caste" movement. He believed that in a traditionally unequal society, equality could not be established by merely providing equal opportunities to all. It is in this context that he strongly advocated for special opportunities to be given to the backward classes, women, *dalits*, *adivasis* and the backward among the minorities to uplift them socially, educationally and economically.

Dr. Lohia possessed a universal outlook; his greatness lay in his simplicity and intense love for fellow human beings. In him, there was an ideal combination of piety, love, modesty, anger and suffering. He was a leader of the masses who always talked in their language. He was a relentless revolutionary and an exponent of dynamic political and economic thinking. Like Gandhiji, he had

also articulated his opposition to oppressive and cruel laws and rules. He was whole-heartedly devoted to Hindu-Muslim unity. When India achieved Independence and was partitioned, he tirelessly and fearlessly worked to maintain national unity and communal harmony.

A multi-faceted personality, Dr. Lohia was also a prolific writer. During the freedom movement, through his extensive writings, he showed the way of freedom to the people of the country, leaving an ever-lasting imprint of his thoughts on their minds. A few of his noteworthy publications were: '*Mystery of Sir Stafford Cripps*'; '*Aspects of Socialist Policy*'; '*Marx, Gandhi and Socialism*'; '*The Caste System*'; '*Foreign Policy*'; '*The Indian Agriculture*'; '*Socialism*'; '*Hinduism*'; '*Kranti Ke Liye Sangathan*' and '*Samajvadi Ekta*'. Dr. Lohia also served as the Chairman of the Editorial Board of '*Mankind*' and '*Jan*'.

Dr. Lohia passed away in New Delhi on 12 October 1967 at the age of 57. Paying homage to the departed soul, the then Prime Minister, Smt. Indira Gandhi, described Dr. Lohia as a leading parliamentarian and said that "his untimely death removed a vigorous mind and a dynamic character from the country". His whole life, according to her, was a "struggle for causes he held dear for the downtrodden and the underprivileged".

The then Chairman of the Rajya Sabha (and later President of India), Shri V.V. Giri described Dr. Lohia as "the founder of the socialist movement in the country", and said: "As a member of Lok Sabha, Dr. Lohia established for himself an abiding reputation as a powerful speaker and an outstanding parliamentarian who forcefully attacked Government's policies. His intentions and sincerity were never in doubt, for he always had the welfare of the people in mind."

While paying glowing tributes to the departed leader in the House describing his death as untimely, the then Speaker, Lok Sabha, Dr. N. Sanjiva Reddy said: "His death has removed from the Indian political scene and the House, one of the outstanding leaders."