

People's Education Society's

DR. AMBEDKAR COLLEGE OF COMMERCE AND ECONOMICS

(Opp. Wadala Bus Depot, Mumbai - 400 031.)



Dr. Rammanohar Lohia
and
Women's Question

compiled and edited by

Lalitha Dhara

The People's Education Society
was founded by

Bharat Ratna Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar
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It runs eleven schools, fifteen colleges
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of the current
Governing Body Members.

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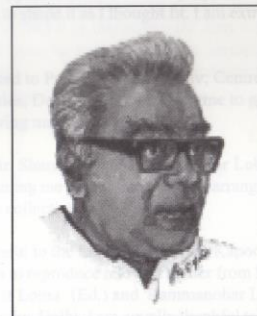
with the support and cooperation of
Principal Dr. S.R.Kamble

for
Women Development Cell, Dr. Ambedkar College Unit

*This book is dedicated to
the great emancipators of women
Mahatma Jotiba Phule
Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule
Rajarshi Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj
Bharat Ratna Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar
and
to women everywhere,
struggling for emancipation*

Spirituality is absolute, morality is relative.
- Dr. Lohia

DR. RAMMANOHAR LOHIA



(23.03.1910 - 12.10.1967)

portrait of Dr. Lohia is by Rayana Giridhar Gowd

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Lalitha Dhara
November, 2013

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Indian woman is truly bound in chains.
- Dr. Lohia

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Rammanohar Lohia was no ordinary socialist leader. He was a man with a grand vision and mission. His was an ignited mind - original and creative, and he placed it in the service of those who were weighed down by caste, class, and gender oppression. He tirelessly strove for an exploitation-free society by waging an all-out war against obscurantist ideas and institutions.

Dr. Lohia was one of those rare breed of leaders of twentieth century India who gave a serious thought to the Women's Question, seeking and seeing several linkages between the personal and the political, between caste and gender. He believed that gender revolution was a necessary precursor for a general revolution. His views on sexuality, chastity, virginity was refreshingly unorthodox and he condemned the double-speak on them.

This booklet attempts to capture the essence of his gender sensibilities. It also aims at placing his gender sensibilities in the context of his general thought process, philosophy and praxis. This is done through others' analytical articles as well as through his own writings.

To understand and appreciate Lohia's gender contribution and place it in perspective, one must have some knowledge of his life and work as it panned out. Qurban Ali does an able job of introducing Lohia to us in his article, 'Dr. Rammanohar Lohia - a profile'.

Part I of this booklet carries articles by different scholars on Lohia's perception on caste, gender and their interface. We have D.L.Sheth who; In his article titled, 'Rammanohar Lohia - caste, class and gender in Indian politics'; states that by transcending the caste-class dichotomy Lohia expanded his concept of the politics of social transformation and linked it with the larger politics of nation building. He goes on to elaborate how he does it.

Anand Kumar in his article, 'Lohia line on destruction of the caste system' draws our attention to the famed seven revolutions theory of Lohia and

places the latter's caste policy and demand for preferential opportunities for all the backward sections of Indian society in the context of this theory.

Woman - her status, position - was never far from Lohia's thoughts. In the article titled, 'Lohia on women', Sharan and Sharma trace Lohia's thoughts on the Women's Question and the linkages he saw between women and tradition, women and caste, women and family.

Prem Singh, in his perceptive article titled, 'Lohia's discourse on women' takes us on a voyage through Lohia's feminist sensibilities. He believes that in Lohia's discourse there is 'ample scope for male potential to play a positive and constructive role in feminist thought and debate.'

Anand Kumar, in his article titled, 'Understanding Lohia's political sociology...' traces Lohia's approach of intersectionality of the four power nexus - gender, caste, class and language and their effect on the people belonging to the margins of society. He draws our attention to Lohia's call for a strong alignment among the five marginalised, paralysed and depressed sections of modern Indian society - women, Dalits, adivasis, the working classes and the depressed sections among the Muslims and Christians.

Kumkum Yadav in her article, 'Draupadi or Savitri: Lohia's feminist reading of mythology' states that Lohia often began his discussion about the status of woman with reference to mythological characters. According to Lohia, the definition of goodness, particularly that of a 'good woman', was constructed so that the social was mistaken for the ethical. He critiqued the unidimensional projection of Savitri as a pativrata to the exclusion of all her other qualities as doing her a grave injustice and traced it to the patriarchal mindset of men.

The many and varied articles on Lohia's lasting contribution is followed by Part 2 where several articles of Lohia's writings \ speeches relevant to his perspective on caste and gender are reproduced, albeit with minor editing. The first piece titled, 'Seven revolutions' talks of seven fundamental revolutions that were being played out on the world stage and how the gender revolution occupies prime place, among them.

In the essay titled, 'Caste' Lohia bemoans the ill effects of a caste-

ridden society and makes a passionate plea for women and depressed among the castes, tribes, minorities to come together and challenge all divisions that marginalize and dehumanize people.

In 'The two segregations of caste and sex', Lohia traces the organic link between caste and gender and how these two stratifications sap the life of a people. He believes that there is no greater virtue than to smash these abominable segregations of caste and sex.

In the next article Lohia argues for the provision of preferential rights for women in order that woman's inequality may be reduced to the minimum and that she may banish the methods of violence from human pursuits. In the same piece he voices his concern for two special groups of women - the widow and the singleton.

In the piece titled, 'Women and sexual purity', Lohia castigates the patriarchal obsession with a woman's body; that too, a tiny part of the body; to the detriment of her ability and functionality.

In the next piece titled, 'Beauty and skin colour', Lohia states that all women are oppressed. Coloured women, who are more numerous, suffer greater oppression. As he puts it, "An aesthetic revolution in the evaluation of beauty and its relation to the colour of the skin will blow the air of freedom and inner peace over all the world almost as much as any political or economic revolutions."

In the essay titled, 'Rama and Krishna and Shiva', Lohia does a brilliant and perceptive analysis of the above mentioned mythical figures and how they have shaped the psyche of Indians. He says candidly, "Religion and politics, god and nation or people have mixed everywhere and at all times, but more so in India." He expresses concern that devotees of Ram could degenerate into wife-banishers, those of Krishna into philanderers in a patriarchal environment. He concludes by praying thus, "O India, Mother, give us the mind of Siva, the heart of Krishna, and the world and deed of Ram. Create us with a non-dimensional mind and an exuberant heart, but a life of limits."

Talking of the myth of Draupadi and Savitri in his essay, 'Draupadi or Savitri', Lohia has this to say. "Savitri is put on a high pedestal, merely

on account of her chastity which is unfair. Draupadi epitomizes Indian women in the true sense and in the same light I say that Draupadi was knowledgeable, brave, bold and a spit fire, to boot". He exhorts Indian women to emulate Draupadi rather than Savitri, not for the number of husbands she had (which he considers irrelevant to the discussion) but in terms of her character and personality.

In Part 3, we have included some miscellaneous items that add immense historic value to this collection. First of all we have in Appendix 1, the correspondence between Dr. Ambedkar and Dr. Lohia. The communication brings out the concerns of both the leaders regarding caste inequality and the need to provide effective leadership to the people for the destruction of caste.

Lohia was as much a man of polemics as he was of action. He exhorted people to read, discuss and debate important issues of social, political import. These debates were to be organized by the Association for the study and destruction of caste, set up in 1960 by a motley group of socialists, headed by Lohia. Appendix 2 reproduces a list of subjects suggested by Lohia for carrying out debates across the country. An examination of the topics reveal the sensitivity of the man to the gender question.

In 1961, the Association for the study and destruction of caste had their first All-India caste conference in Patna which took place under Lohia's leadership. Included in Appendix 3 is the 'End Caste' resolutions. Interestingly, these resolutions were directed against 'caste' and 'gender', revealing the intersecting nature of these two institutions and reflecting the concerns of the members regarding the same.

Afterword by Lalitha Dhara attempts to trace the USP of Lohia in respect of his feminist praxis.

Through this booklet, I have tried to present a comprehensive picture of Lohia's mighty contribution to the cause of women's liberation. I sincerely hope I have succeeded in my mission.

The Women Development Cell, Dr. Ambedkar college unit, has embarked on a rather ambitious project of bringing out a series of booklets on the 'Women's Question' in the Indian context to place at the disposal of

teachers of Humanities, Gender and Foundation Courses at the undergraduate level so that our students may become aware of our feminist heritage and history.

This is the fifth in the series.

Happy and fruitful reading!

Lalitha Dhara

NB:

1. Most of the articles carried herein have had to be edited for purpose of this booklet. The original source is mentioned at the end of each article.
2. The translations from Hindi have been done by volunteers and not professionals. Any shortcomings may please be excused.
3. The original source of all Dr. Lohia's writings is : Rammanohar Lohia Samata Nyas. 6-3-648/2, Somajiguda, Hyderabad - 500082.
4. Despite my best efforts to make this booklet error-free, some mistakes must surely have crept in. My apologies for the same. I welcome your feedback, comments and suggestions on my work. You can send your feedback to my email address: lali.dhara@gmail.com
