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## UNIT 9 RAM MANOHAR LOHIYA: SOCIALIST DEMOCRACY\*

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### 9.0 OBJECTIVES

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This unit deals with one of the important Indian socialist thinkers – Ram Manohar Lohiya and his idea of Socialist Democracy. The main objective of this unit is to get acquainted with him and to understand his important ideas, particularly focusing his thoughts on Socialist Democracy. Therefore, after reading this unit, you will be able to:

- understand Ram Manohar Lohiya and his contribution to Indian socialist thought
- understand his unique contribution in the sense of redefining socialism and
- understand his idea of Socialist Democracy

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## 9.1 INTRODUCTION

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Ram Manohar Lohiya (1910-1967) was a prominent leader, and considered by many as the most original thinker of the socialist movement in India. He was an activist in the Indian national movement for independence and a socialist political leader. Before understanding his thought, it is necessary to know about his life and work.

### 9.1.1 His Life

Ram Manohar Lohiya was born on March 23, 1910 in a middle class merchant family at Akbarpur, which is currently a part of the state of Uttar Pradesh. His father, Heera Lal Lohiya, was a freedom fighter and a staunch follower of Mahatma Gandhi. His mother, Chanda, died in 1912 when he was very young. He became familiarized with India's national movement for independence at an early age by his father through the various protest assemblies.

Lohiya received his education in various cities including Bombay, Banaras, and Calcutta. He succeeded the matriculation examination in first class in 1925. He joined the Vidyasagar College in Calcutta after completion of a two-year course at Banaras University. In the year 1929, he passed the Honours examination in English literature. He was attracted towards political agitation, even during his student days. For example, he was just ten-years old when he organized a student strike in 1920 on the death of Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak. He went to Germany for higher studies in 1929. When he arrived in Berlin, he was very young, just over 19 years, with a B.A. degree from the University of Calcutta and a nationalist fervor imbibed from his family. He obtained Ph.D. in Economics from Frederick William University (today's Humboldt University of Berlin). He wrote his Ph.D. thesis on the topic of *The Salt Taxation in India*. This was an important issue which led to Gandhi's historical march to Dandi. He focused on Gandhi's socio-economic theory. He submitted his thesis in 1933.

His proficiency in German language was excellent. Even decades later, he wrote letters in German with ease and conversed with Albert Einstein in German during his visit to the U.S. in 1951. In Germany he also came into contact with the German socialist intellectuals and political workers. The intellectual background and political conditions in Germany in that period immensely influenced the thinking of Lohiya. He was influenced by the intellectual ferment in the university, the cultural atmosphere of Berlin and the political situation in Germany – all of which had a lasting impact on his future thoughts and actions. He maintained his interest in German politics even while in the Congress Socialist Party (CSP), and wrote a series of commentaries on the rise of Nazism and Europe's march towards a world war. The choice of Germany reflected Lohiya's dislike in joining any university in Britain – at that time the choice of most Indians aspiring for a place in the colonial administration. Lohiya's education in Berlin formed a significant part in his ideological evolution. He left Berlin with definite leanings towards socialism. The experience in Berlin widened his understanding and perception.

When he returned to India in 1933, he got fully involved in the national movement led by the Indian National Congress (henceforth the Congress). He joined the socialist movement as one of the founders of the CSP. He was considered as one of its pillars. Lohiya and other leaders like Acharya Narendra Dev, Jaya Prakash Narayan, Achyut Patwardhan, Ashok Mehta, and Minoo Masani formed CSP in 1934. These leaders attempted to build a nation for the majority toiling people. They tried to strengthen the national movement by organizing workers and peasants. CSP had declared socialism as its objective. It stated that only Marxism could guide the anti-imperialist forces to their destiny, and thus emphasized on democratizing the organizational structure of the Congress. Lohiya actively participated in the national movement, and played an important role in the underground Quit India Movement of 1942, and also went to jail several times for his activism.

After independence, the CSP got separated from the Congress. The Socialist Party (Praja Socialist Party after 1952) became a major opposition party in post-independence India. At this point, Lohiya emerged as its first rank leader. He played a key role in the formation of it. He was elected as General Secretary of the new party in 1953. In 1955, the socialists gathered at Hyderabad and a new Socialist Party of India was established under the chairmanship of Lohiya. After 1964 it became Samyukta Socialist Party. Under Lohiya's leadership his party adopted the policy of active opposition to the Congress government. It organized several protests and civil disobedience campaigns against policies of the government. However, the party had very little success in elections. Lohiya himself succeeded in getting elected to the Lok Sabha only in 1963. Before the general elections of 1967, he tried to unite all the opposition parties against the Congress. This new strategy became successful. However, Lohiya did not live to build on it. He died in 1967 in New Delhi. He was unmarried. He left behind no family, and no property. However, he inspired many with his ideas. Lohiya led several people's movements, and he was jailed on numerous occasions during the colonial period and after independence. He visited several countries and participated in meetings of the Socialist International and the World Peace Council.

### 9.1.2 His Writings

Lohiya was not only a socialist leader but also a profound thinker. He manifested his ideas through his writings. He was a prolific writer. His writings consisted of articles or sometimes a series of articles. Most of these were revised scripts of the lectures that he had delivered at various places. These essays were then compiled together in the form of books. The most important of such collections of Lohiya's writings is *Marx, Gandhi and Socialism* (1963). Some of his other such books are *The Third Camp in World Affairs* (1951), *Wheel of History* (1955), *Will to Power and Other Writings* (1956), *Guilty Men of India's Partition* (1960), *The Caste System* (1963), and *Interval During Politics* (1965).

His ideas were not limited to politics. He took serious interest in issues related to culture, economy, religion, and science and technology. He reflected not merely

on the present, but also on the distant past and future. He attempted to create awareness among the people by writing articles and pamphlets. He utilized his time by writing booklets, pamphlets and articles such as *How to establish an Independent Government, I am Free*, *Prepare for the Revolution*, and *Brave Fighters March Forward*. He published the journal *Do or Die* during this period. He had also written another scholarly article *Economics after Marx* while he was underground. He was not only one of the founder members of the CSP, but also an editor of its mouthpiece *Congress Socialist*. He edited the first thirteen issues of it.

### **9.1.3 His Political Thought**

One of the important features of Lohiya's political thought was that he never accepted any of the given ideologies in totality. It was his ambitious attempt to answer a large range of questions. For example, he was influenced both by Marxism and Gandhism; but he also criticized both of these ideologies. He never followed any ideology unthinkingly. He studied and analyzed ideas deeply and also questioned them. Whenever he found problems with any ism, he criticized it.

Another important feature of Lohiya's political thought was that he never believed in violence. He was non-violent by nature as well as training. He refuses destructive tendencies. He never lost endurance. He believed that non-violence was not a quality for cowardice. He followed what he reached. In his letter to Mahatma Gandhi, he had elaborated the concept of non-violence in following words, "Non-violent collective action is among the rarest and most precious gifts received by mankind in all history".

Lohiya criticized capitalism. He studied the unfair nature of capitalism and how the British colonial rule was responsible for exploitation of the Indian people while staying in India. He entered the nationalist movement and joined the struggle against British imperialism in 1934 as a Congress Socialist. In 1936, he was selected by Jawaharlal Nehru as the secretary of the Foreign Affairs Department of the All India Congress Committee (AICC) which was the highest body of the Congress Party. His selection was recognition of his talents and his wide knowledge of international affairs. As Foreign Secretary of the Congress, he played an important role in laying the foundations of the foreign policy of India. He gave up that responsibility in 1938, and started to develop his own political standpoint by critically examining positions held by the Gandhian leadership of the Congress and the Communists who had poured into the CSP. He was arrested in 1940, and was sentenced to a jail term of two years for delivering anti-war speeches. During the Second World War, he was of the opinion that India should not give any support to the British Rule. He advocated complete non-cooperation.

Lohiya was aware of the issues faced by the overseas Indians, and he told the Indian people about their deplorable conditions. He had also drawn the attention of the world towards the repression of civil liberties in India and other countries.

Lohiya lived a short and passionate life of thought and action. Recently there has been a significant revival of interest in Lohiya among people's movements and

struggles, especially those involved in resisting displacement, environmental destruction and large-scale development projects. Lohiya provides an alternative perspective, thus there is a growing interest in his ideas.

Lohiya has influenced many emerging writers and artists. He is known for his influence on *Hindi literature* and writers in other Indian languages. Many scholars have criticized Lohiya for his emphasis on Hindi language and his anti-English approach. While commenting upon the critics of Lohiya, *Yogendra Yadav* has argued that “the two most powerful orientations in the institutionalized world of ideas in post-independent India – Nehruvian and Marxist – came together to design a wall of silence around Lohiya.” Many critics of Lohiya’s ideas dismissed him without reading him. They hold strong opinions about Lohiya without reading him at all. Some critics cared to read Lohiya, but their reading tends to be highly selective and the conclusions largely predetermined. The critique does not go beyond the level of criticizing Lohiya for not understanding Marxism correctly and for going against Nehru. Lohiya was concerned for people’s languages. He argued that if language is the medium of expression, then the true expression of the community would come forth only when its people expressed their thoughts in indigenous language. He, therefore, pitched himself strongly against the continuation of English as the medium of administration, the judiciary and higher education.

He is considered as anti-Congress; the uncompromising critic of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty; and the person responsible for the politics of anti-English. For *Yogendra Yadav*, Lohiya has been incorrectly portrayed as a *Hindiwalla*, Hindi supremacist and a Hindi chauvinist. Lohiya’s thinking on the language question has been misrepresented and misunderstood. In 1963, he propounded the strategy of non-Congressism. He was of the opinion that in the past three general elections the Congress won with a thumping majority and there was a feeling among the masses that the Congress cannot be defeated and it has come to stay in power for ever. Lohiya persuaded the entire spectrum of opposition parties to have mutual adjustments to overthrow the Congress rule so that this illusion can be removed from the masses. This formula of Lohiya got huge success in the *1967 general elections* and in *nine States* the Congress party was defeated and *Samyukta Vidhayak Dal* (SVD) Governments were formed by the Opposition parties of that time.

Lohiya also worked for the freedom of Goan and Nepalese people. He was a relentless fighter against every form of injustice. He enthusiastically pleaded for social equality and preferential opportunity for the socially oppressed sections of society to enable them to overcome their hundreds of years old sufferings.

Lohiya knew the fact that people of India live in villages. He, therefore, became the symbol of the aspirations of the poor peasants, the landless people and agricultural labourers. He initiated farmer marches and struggles from 1947.

## Check Your Progress Exercise 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1. Why did Ram Manohar Lohiya oppose the Congress and adopted non-Congressism strategy?

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## 9.2 REDEFINING SOCIALISM

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One of the main contributions of Lohiya was to redefine socialism while considering socialist movement in non-European countries like India. His attempt to redefine socialist was in line with his thinking that any ism should not be followed unthinkingly.

Lohiya's higher education studies in Germany were a period which shaped Lohiya's thinking and ideas. *Indumati Kelkar*, Lohiya's contemporary and biographer, informs us that it was in Germany that Lohiya became a social democrat. When he returned to India in 1933, he became one of the leaders of the CSP, which was formed in 1934. Through a long training in the freedom movement and the organizational struggles to build a socialist movement, Lohiya developed his ideas of socialism. Jayaprakash Narayan, one of the most influential Indian socialist leaders, started the *Bhoodan* movement, and left politics. Other leaders like Achyut Patwardhan and Ramnandan Mishra turned to spiritual quests. Ashok Mehta joined the Congress after some time, and Acharya Narendra Dev, the great intellectual, died in 1955. It was a serious time for the socialist movement. In such a situation, Lohiya tried to fill the void.

Lohiya tried hard to give Indian socialism a new concept and philosophy. He was *not* a socialist in a traditional sense. He opposed Marxism and Communist totalitarianism. He wanted the Indian socialist movement to be liberated from Marxian thought and action. He was influenced by the Gandhian principle of Ahimsa. He played an important role in bringing up a synthesis between Gandhian and Marxian concepts. He has contributed to give a new meaning and method of action to make the Socialist Party the most effective weapon against the capitalist system.

Lohiya defined socialism in terms of 'equality' and 'prosperity' or 'affluence' for the people. To quote him, "If socialism is to be defined in two words then they

are, equality and prosperity. I do not know if this definition has been given earlier at any time. If so, I would call it the best definition given so far. The meaning of socialism is ingrained in these two words: concrete meaning in terms of time and place, and total meaning in terms of ideals.” But the problem that tormented Lohiya was how to bring equality and prosperity together. In Lohiya’s experience, the extremes of affluence and poverty, which had to be leveled down, were not aspects of the similar society. This division, in its most glaring form, had become an aspect of the global order in which the white people of Europe and the U.S. had all the wealth and high levels of productivity while the rest of world remained mired in poverty, dogged by low productivity and low income. That transformed the issue of equality not only amid people of the same country inhabited by those having the same skin colour, but also among people with different skin colours – black, brown and white. It extended to include the differences of caste and gender.

### **9.2.1 *Sapta Kranti* (Seven Revolutions)**

Lohiya gave the idea of *Sapta Kranti* (Seven Revolutions). The programme of *Sapta Kranti* was his comprehensive answer for realizing the socialist dream in the modern world system. He tried to establish an Asian Socialist Forum because organizations such as the Socialist International and the Communist International (or the Comintern) were under the control of white people, either under the Atlantic block or the Soviet block. These contemplations provided impetus to form the concept of *Sapta Kranti* which constituted (i) the civil disobedience against violent revolutions; (ii) economic equality; (iii) abolition of castes; (iv) emancipation of women; (v) national independence; (vi) an end to colour discrimination; and (vii) the individual’s freedom of thought, free of coercion from collectives of any kind.

Lohiya was the theorist of *Sapta Kranti* in the context of creating a new world order on the basis of socialism. He wanted to give a new direction to the movement for socialism by giving equal emphasis to the struggles against sexism, class and caste-based exploitations. It was a departure from the Marxist line of a class-centric programme for a socialist revolution. It was also going beyond the Gandhian emphasis on constructive programme of ending untouchability and casteism. This *Sapta Kranti* is supposed to be simultaneously taking place in the modern world system and it was presented as the most outstanding feature of the twentieth century.

### **9.2.2 New Ideology or Doctrine of Socialism**

Lohiya’s contributions to the socialist thought are manifold. He believed that the individual should be free from ignorance, backwardness and all kinds of superstitions and prejudices. He highlighted the ideological problems of the socialist movement in India. He was inspired by Marxism, but he did not accept some of the postulates of Marxism without thinking. He argued that Gandhian ideas and principles should be re-examined and reconsidered in the light of the changes in the socialist and communist movements all over the world. He further urged to look into the economic problems a country is facing.

Socialism was originally a European theory in at least two senses. It originated from Europe, and it was mainly about Europe. Later on, it got transferred to many non-European societies including India. Indian socialist thinkers had to deal with this European element in their theory. Thus, the question of the West in Indian political thought got translated into the Indian socialist thought as well. The general responses of the Indian socialists was to accept the original western theory, whether communism or democratic-socialism, in its given form. As a result, most of them did not question the belief in the superiority of European civilization. Lohiya's contribution to Indian socialist thought can be understood in this context. He was the first *thinker* in India to challenge the dependence of socialist theory on the West. His entire system of thought was an attempt to build a truly universal socialist theory which took into account the non-European world as well. Lohiya's basic argument in this regard can be stated as follows. Socialism is a liberating and revolutionary ideology. However, due to various historical reasons it has till now centred around Europe. Orthodox Marxism or communism illustrates this dependence. Even those socialists who reject communism tend to mix some features of communism and capitalism, both of which are European products. That is why socialism has failed to perform a revolutionary role in the non-European world. This becomes another tool for establishing European superiority. The way out of this situation is a new ideology or doctrine of socialism. Our task is to search for theoretical foundations of this new doctrine. It involves understanding a fresh historical analysis, setting new goals and devising more appropriate strategies keeping the non-western experience in mind. This is the task that Lohiya set for himself and tried to fulfill throughout his life. Lohiya's task is to remove Euro-centric assumptions i.e. basic ideas centred around Europe, from the existing socialist theory and to build an alternative theory in its place.

On the basis of Lohiya's definition of socialism which is based on equality and prosperity, he claimed his socialism as distinct from European socialism which has failed to acquire a face of its own, distinct from capitalist democracy and Russian communism. His socialism was new, regenerated and liberated from the traditional stains of socialism. He, therefore, strongly believed in the idea that socialist movement in India should have a distinct Indian character.

According to Lohiya, Marx did not consider the peculiar and specific conditions of the non-European world, particularly developing World countries. Lohiya thought that his idea of socialism as a new civilization which would arise in the backward regions of the present civilization and might ultimately cover the entire world. It was largely influenced by the needs and requirements of the present countries of the developing World. Lohiya argued that communism and European tradition of socialism are not relevant in the prevailing socio-economic realities in the developing World countries. Therefore, Lohiya advanced his theory of socialism. He argued that modern concept like capitalism, socialism, equality, liberty, etc. which have evolved in the context of the European experience, should not be universalized and should not be entirely applied to Indian conditions.

It can be argued that Lohiya's ideas and perceptions on socialism was highly pragmatic. He not only redefined socialism in the context of developing World

countries, but also suggested various programmes for its realization. He supported the doctrine – *Equal Irrelevance* of communism and capitalism – to the developing world, including India.

## Check Your Progress Exercise 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1. Why did Ram Manohar Lohiya oppose the Congress and adopted non-Congressism strategy?

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### 9.3 SOCIALIST DEMOCRACY

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Lohiya believed in socialist democracy. He was the founder of an alternative politics based on socialist ideology, with programmes of spade, vote and jail and *Sapta Kranti*. He described these programmes as the symbols of a new perspective of action and construction. According to *Rajindar Sachar*, Lohiya gave a slogan, the sheet-anchor of Democratic Socialism, thus: spade-prison-vote – where spade symbolized constructive activity, prison stood for peaceful struggle against injustice, and the vote for political action. He attempted to incorporate the Gandhian ideas into socialist thought.

He supported the power to the elected representatives of the people through parliamentary means, but accepted the non-violent direct action against any and every social, economic and political injustice.

He believed that the power of the state should be controlled, guided, and framed by people’s power. He also believed in the ideology of democratic socialism and non-violent methodology as instruments of governance.

Lohiya also elaborated his thoughts on the caste system in India. He criticized the caste system. He interacted with some of the most important anti-caste leaders, movements and organizations of India in his quest for the abolition of caste system. He also engaged with Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and Periyar Ramasami Naicker. According to Lohiya, it is necessary to put primary emphasis on the removal of caste system through systemic reform process for the success of democratic socialist movement in India.

Lohiya was known for his Four Pillar State concept. He believed that the village, mandal (district), province and central government as the four pillars of the state. He supported the idea of villages having police and welfare functions.

In his book on *Marx, Gandhi and Socialism*, Lohiya analyzed the principles of democratic socialism as an appropriate philosophy for the successful operation of constructive programmes. He was of the opinion that the economy of a developing country could be improved through the principles of democratic socialism.

Lohiya's idea of socialism has three significant aspects that he sought to develop. One, the decentralized state based on small agro-industrial communities and operating on the principle of the "small unit machine". Lohiya was also a firm believer in decentralized economy. He emphasized the need of setting up of cottage industries and the small machines with minimum capital investments where maximum manpower may be used. However, it is not to be confused with the Gandhian economy based on village self-sufficiency. Two, a new meaning and understanding of Equality in the context of Indian history and situation. And three, the means to achieve the socialist goal.

The aims of Lohiya's socialism are the following:

1. Maximum attainable equality and justice tempered by equality.
2. A decent standard of living which, while avoiding the double impasse of capitalistic and dialectical materialism, will tend to establish complete harmony between the material and moral needs of man.
3. An industrial and agricultural technique and its judicious organization, subjected to man and conducive to his entire physical, intellectual and moral development.
4. The decentralization of political and economic power so as to make it easily available to the common man, and restriction of bureaucracy by the encouragement of cooperation in all domains, particularly in the domain of production, distribution and consumption of national produce.

### **9.3.1 Democracy and Socialism**

Lohiya was influenced by ideas of democracy and socialism. He considered these two ideas as the two sides of the same coin. Socialism and democracy were in no way different. He believed that they were not only complementary to each other, but also interdependent. There could be no socialism without democracy. He evolved a theory of limited personality of individual, party, government and state. To quote him, "Democracy in all circumstances shall be the sheet-anchor of the ideas and programmes of socialism. Democracy means the inevitable answerability of administration to elected assembly."

Lohiya was a democrat by conviction, but socialism appealed him as a way of life. Lohiya believed in democracy, freedom and individual liberty. Such a belief repelled him from communism or Marxism. Lohiya knew that freedom can exist only when there is equality in all the walks of life.

### Check Your Progress Exercise 3

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1. Why did Ram Manohar Lohiya oppose the Congress and adopted non-Congressism strategy?

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### 9.4 LET US SUM UP

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Ram Manohar Lohiya occupies a significant place in the intellectual and political history of modern India. There are many who admired and adored Lohiya, but Lohiya was also criticized by many. Nonetheless, Lohiya’s position as a profound thinker and inspiring leader remains, to a large extent, undisputed. He is one of those few thinkers of modern India who recognized, with astonishing clarity, the difficulties and complexities involved in transferring the ideology of socialism from Europe to non-European cultural locations. He redefined socialism in the context of non-European world, particularly developing World countries. Lohiya knew very well that socialism, as an ideology and a movement, owed its origin to Europe. Therefore, its pursuit elsewhere posed a huge theoretical challenge. Political theorists have described this process as a transfer of political theory. Lohiya readily accepted this challenge and invested a significant part of his intellectual energy in the task of transferring the political theory of socialism from Europe to the larger non-European world.

Lohiya attempted to develop an indigenous, autonomous socialism as an alternative to Nehruvian socialism or Eurocentred socialism. He condemned both communism and capitalism as unsuitable in Indian circumstances. He, therefore, attempted to develop a third camp vis-à-vis the capitalist and communist camps. It is largely an attempt to build an indigenous socialism that would emerge from non-European world and meet their urgent needs. Lohiya has been regarded by many as the most original of the Indian socialist thinkers because of his attempt to liberate socialist doctrine from its traditional understanding. His original and creative mind attracted writers and artists and inspired young generations. He contributed significantly to the history of Indian socialist thought and movement.

Lohiya is a noted figure whose thoughts and ideas continue to have a powerful influence on socio-political life in India. Although there has been a tendency among the recent researchers not to recognize Lohiya and his contribution to

socialist thought in India, his democratic socialist approach to look at ideology as an integrated phenomenon is now being widely accepted throughout the world.

Lohiya was one of the most inspiring, courageous, consistent and creative socialist leaders of the twentieth century. His ideas and views on diverse issues are quiet relevant even today and will continue to remain in the coming centuries.

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## **9.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES**

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### **Check Your Progress Exercise 1**

1. Your answer should highlight following points
  - Lohiya was of the opinion that in the first three general elections of independent India, the Congress won with a thumping majority and there

was a feeling among the masses that the Congress cannot be defeated and it has come to stay in power for ever.

- The Congress was becoming dominant political party which could dominate the Indian political scenario.
- It was the necessity to unite all non-Congress parties to provide alternative to the Congress dominance.

## Check Your Progress Exercise 2

1. Your answer should highlight following points
  - According to Lohiya, the Indian socialist theory was depended upon the West. He argued that communism and European tradition of socialism are irrelevant in the exiting socio-economic realities in the developing world countries including India.
  - Lohiya's entire system of thought was an attempt to build a truly universal socialist theory which took into account the non-European world as well.
  - It involves understanding a fresh historical analysis, setting new goals and devising more appropriate strategies keeping the non-western experience in mind.

## Check Your Progress Exercise 3

1. Your answer should highlight following points
  - Lohiya's alternative politics based on socialist ideology, with programmes of spade, vote and jail and *Sapta Kranti*.
  - Three significant aspects of Lohiya's idea of socialism: One, the decentralized state based on small agro-industrial communities and operating on the principle of the "small unit machine"; two, a new meaning and understanding of Equality in the context of Indian history and situation; and three, the means to achieve the socialist goal.
  - Lohiya considered democracy and socialism as the two sides of the same coin. These were in no way distinct. They were complementary to each other, and also interdependent.