

# ICGC SOUTH ASIA SEMINAR SERIES

## The people versus English: Angrezī Hatāo and the “Spiritual Demands” of Socialism

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537 Heller Hall (ICGC) Live stream @ [icgc.umn.edu](https://icgc.umn.edu)

In April 1957, the firebrand socialist leader at the head of a newly-formed splinter Socialist Party, Rammanohar Lohia launched his Angrezī Hatāo (Banish English) movement—demanding the immediate removal of English from all levels of state administration and public life in the country. My paper situates Angrezī Hatāo’s roots in Lohia’s attempt to usher in a radical change in existing socialist ideas and political methods. Using the archive of Lohia’s Socialist Party, I reconstruct an account of the strains of building the party organization and sustaining mass civil disobedience movements at the grassroot level. My paper illustrates how, partly in response to these challenges, Lohia’s version of Gandhism adopted language, as exemplified in Angrezī Hatāo, as the cornerstone of his socialist politics. Once he did, language took on a magical quality in his critique. It transformed into the thread with which he tried to suture the conflicting demands of different castes of socialist subjects. As the movement progressed, Lohia’s ideas on language took on new forms in keeping with these demands. His case against English had been built on an idea of “people’s languages” forged through the collective political and cultural endeavors of Indian language speakers against the authority of English-speaking elites. However, Angrezī Hatāo’s discourse shifted from that of remaking languages politically to the use of familial metaphors to express the underlying unity of Indian languages, in which Hindi enjoyed a pride of place as the “loving older sister.” The broad unity of lower-caste Indian language speaking masses against English elites was subsumed under the familial unity represented by the nation. Recent attempts to resurrect Lohia’s ideas for contemporary politics, must contend with the shifts in his critique of the relationship between language, caste/class, and democracy drawn out in my paper.



An image of prominent leaders of the Praja Socialist Party. It reads: “Vande Mataram, Jai Hind, Eki Yeh Bal Hai” (“Hail mother, hail India, unity is power.”) c. 1952, Jai Hind Picture Co., Bombay (Source & copyright: Collection of Erwin Neumayer and Christine Schelberger, Vienna, Tasveer Ghar)

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