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LALA LAJPAT RAI: AN EXTRAORDINARY VISIONARY AND CRUSADER OF CREDLESS MODERN SOCIETY

Vishav Bandhu Verma

Head, Department of History/PHC , Apeejay College of Fine Arts,
Jalandhar.

ABSTRACT:-

Nineteenth-Century marks the dawn of a new era for India, for India's destiny, was about to change. This is also the time many freedom fighters who crusaded to end the depredating British rule and tirelessly worked towards serving the shackles of India's servitude to



Britain. Lala Lajpat Rai stands tallest amongst all leaders of our nationalist movement prior to the advent of Gandhi Ji. He was the writer of the masses, politically enlightened activist and honest journalist. Lala Lajpat Rai's modern perspective in the social and economic field such as religion, nationality, patriotism,

communalism, education, community etc. together with his strong understanding of his own rich culture and religion, places him as one of the most important politicians and social reformer of India. His thoughts were the perfect blend of the best understanding of the west and east, and who aimed at the reformation in Hindu society throughout his life. It is interesting to note that Lala Ji's significant contribution to Indian Nationalism has been occluded (rather than included) in the contemporary historiography by conveniently branding him as a communalist or a liberal communalist. Since the question of social harmony regrettably continues to remain on our national agenda. In this research paper, the efforts have been made to prove the hollowness of these claims alongside, I propose to have a closer look at Lala Lajpat Rai's perception on these matters through his works, speeches, and writings.

KEYWORDS: Freedom Struggle; Lal, Bal, Pal; Extremist; Politician; Lala Lajpat Rai; Educationalist; Communal Harmony; Creedless society;

INTRODUCTION :

The tracing of the beginning of the national movement in modern Indian history is a complex endeavour. The social and geographical diversity of India, the historical complexity of its landscape, different perspectives of patriotism and nationalism, social and communal harmony, religious interpretations of peace, love and communal harmony need to be assessed before determining the positive and negative aspects oozing out from their collective impact on the contemporary situation is necessary. The role of individual also matters a lot in the shaping of public perceptions and their decisions. At times, their own perceptions underwent changes of a far-reaching nature under the influence of above-said notions. Lala Lajpat Rai Ji was such an activist of the Indian nationalism whose role was multi-dimensional, reflective of the diversity of Indian society. He also brought forth communitarian perception, ideas of Hindu- Muslim nationalism and was subversive of secular values. Lala Lajpat

Rai was one of the triumvirates of the Lal, Bal and Pal team, which focused on promoting Swaraj and boycotting European goods. His involvement in the nationalistic movement was tremendous, some of which also led him to suffer gravely. Lala Lajpat Rai belonged to that period of our history when people like Aurobindo Ghosh, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and Bipin Chander Pal had come to see the basic faults in the Moderate politics. What they called Political indecency and the inadequacies of gradual constitutional progress. He was usually considered as an Extremist politician in Indian politics. His involvement with Hindu Mahasabhaite leaders attracts criticism from the other political outfits as the Mahasabha believed in anti-secular society, and did not comply with the norms and system laid out by the Indian National Congress.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Although Lala Ji was true nationalist leader beyond doubt yet his role in national freedom struggle was misconstrued by few biased contemporary historians like Bipin Chandra, Sumit Sarkar and others, who depicted him as a Extremist Hindu Nationalist then communalist or liberal communalist leader, because his ideas in flavors of majority Hindu community, as Arya Samaj and Hindu Mahasabha had a great influence upon him. In the book *"India's Struggle for Independence 1857-1947"*, its editor Bipin Chandra claimed that Lala Ji was liberal or moderate communalist. In the two chapter of the book *"The Rise and Growth of Communalism"* and *"Communalism- The Liberal Phase"* he laments that "many nationalist leaders fell prey to the ideology of communalism". In order to legitimize his inclusion the Lala Ji in the list of liberal communalist, he characterizes his ideology as a second category of communalism. In this kind of communalism, he said, *"the liberal communalist was basically a believer in and practitioner of communal politics; but he still upheld certain liberal, democratic humanistic and nationalistic values. Even while holding that India consisted of distinct religion-based communities.....he continued to believe and profess publically that these different communal interests could be gradually accommodated and brought into harmony with the overall developing national interests, and India built as a nation"*.² He also blames the Congress leadership for their failure to expose the communal and semi-communal leaders like Madan Mohan Malaviya, Lala Lajpat Rai, and Moulana Muhammad Ali who often worked under the shadow of Congress.³ Another historian Sumit Sarkar is not far behind him. He points out the incident of Hindi -Urdu controversy of 1880 as the beginning of the communalism when Lala Ji advocated the idea of Hindu nationalism. He said, "Lala Ji started making pro-Hindi speeches even before the learning of Devanagari script".⁴ Few other scholars also depicted him as Punjabi Hindu nationalism in conjunction with Sri Aurobindo and V.D. Savarkar. What seems to emerge from the above construction of the Lala Ji's role in Indian politics by these so-called secular historians is of a liberal or moderate communalist irrespective of the lack of any textual reference or any contextual evidence in support of their claim, which I refuse to accept. Now I will discuss his role in Indian politics and his opinion towards the communal problem of India in the light of his writings, speeches, and activities. Now, we have to analyze what kind of nationalism or communalism or liberal communalism is manifest in his writings and speeches including his contribution in the sociopolitical field.

EARLY LIFE:

An fervent nationalist and a devoted social reformer whose accomplishments earned him the title of 'Sher-e-Punjab', Lala Lajpat Rai, was born on January 28th, 1865 at a village named Dhudike in district Ferozepur in the family of Munshi Radha Krishna Azad and Shrimati Gulab Devi. His father, a great scholar of Persian and Urdu and Mother, a strict religious lady both inculcated and imbibed their child with strong moral and cultural values. Lajpat Rai's schooling at first was largely carried on by his father Radha Krishnan at home. Later he joined the Mission High School at Ludhiana, where he was granted a scholarship for being a promising child. Lajpat Rai completed double matriculation, one from Calcutta another from Punjab. In college, his classmates were Mahatma Hans Raj, Pandit Guru Dutt Vidyarthi, Raja Narendra Nath and Professor Ruchi Ram Sahni those become very popular in their lives for the shaping of modern Punjab. His upbringing and atmosphere at home were quite liberal and without any taint of Hindu orthodoxy. His grandfather was Jain, Father was unofficially a Muslim and Mother was a Devoted Hindu. He himself claimed that "My father taught me a portion of Quran and I distinctly remember that I used to recite Namaz. Sometimes, I even tried to fast during the Ramzan".⁵ So, Lala Ji

received his first lesson of religion from Quran and observance of Islamic rituals and not from Vedas. The books that moved him most and made him patriotic were the books of Persian languages such as Shahnamah of Firdausi, Sikandar Nama, Waqia-i-hind and Rustum-i-hind and not of Puranas and Upanishads of Sanskrit language, and candidly confess that whole of his boyhood spent in the study of Arabic, Persian and Urdu literature.⁶

AS AN ICON OF NATIONALISM:

In 1885, he completed his Graduation in law and started legal practice in Hissar. However, he did not aim at making legal practice as his profession and devoted his life to Political activism, Journalism, and social reforms. To serve the cause of the country better, he decided to shift from the small town of Hissar. Although he started Practicing his legal career in Punjab High court, yet his mind always remained to boggle for social, political and religious reforms. Although he Graduated in law, yet he was dragged into the political activism by the contemporary socio-political scenario of India while residing at Lahore. Here, he also came in contact with Mahatma Hans Raj who became a source of inspiration for him. He came in touch with Arya Samaj. In 1883, the founder of Arya Samaj Swami Daya Nanda Saraswati died. On this occasion, Lajpat Rai spoke with the fine feeling for two hours and he held the audience spellbound. He came to be regarded as the most effective orator of the Samaj. He was called 'HALF STEEL, HALF WAX'.

Although Sumit Sarkar mentioned the Hindi-Urdu controversy of 1880, for the turning of the Lala Ji towards pro-Hindi nationalist and opponent of Urdu, before he got his first lesson of Hindi. In this context, Sumit Sarkar deliberately omits the few words which Lala Ji mentioned in his work. Soon after the incident Lala Ji started learning the Hindi language and stopped learning Persian and Arabic, though his love for Persian and Urdu remained the same, which is evident from his writings and speeches, which were more in Urdu or Hindustani languages, and also he wrote a novel in Urdu after this incident⁷, which is not mentioned by these scholars. His very first important work in which he mentioned the idea of Nationhood was **"Open letter to Honorable Sir Syed Ahmed Khan"**. His idea of Nation includes both communities such as Hindu and Muslims. This letter showcased his idea of nationhood and his subsequent differences with Sir Syed Ahmed for preaching Muslim separatism and opposition to Congress. Lala Ji wholeheartedly supports Sir Syed's idea of India's Nationalism by citing his famous 1884 speech delivered at Lahore: *"In the word nation, I included both Hindu and Muslims because that is the only meaning which I can attach to it (i.e. nation or qaum). We inhabit the same land, are subject to the rule of same governors, the fountains of benefit for all of us are the same and the pangs of famine also we suffer equally. These are the different grounds upon which I call both of these races which inhabit India by one word; i.e., "Hindu" meaning to say that they are the inhabitants of Hindustan"*.⁸ Later when Syed Ahmad changed his opinion and became a staunch critic of his own idea of Nation, and Indian National Congress, Lala Ji left no stone unturned while criticizing his boyhood hero Sir Syed when he said in his open letter that *"Anybody reading these extracts (i.e. extracts from Sir Syed's speeches) will be once for all convinced of the former loftiness and present lowness of your position. Poor Sir Syed, you must feel sorry, for all this inconsistency, though you may not have the boldness to say so"*⁹

In his another article **"A Study of Hindu Nationalism"**, he warns the Hindus against making a religious, cultural, or linguistic homogeneity as a sign of India's nationhood. He wrote, *"It is wrong to suppose that the idea of Nationalism requires a complete union in all details of religious, social, economic or political life or that it requires a complete freedom from sectarian quarrels or disputes or jealousies"*.¹⁰ This was, perhaps, the first bold acceptance of differences as the constituents of nationality. Lala Ji's notion of nationhood was, indeed, pluralistic, and all-embracing, as it was always self-critical: *"The truth is that honest differences, controversial discussions of public men by public men, are absolutely necessary for the healthy growth and progress of nationality."*¹¹

In his another article **"The National Outlook: The Great need of the situation"** he reinforces the idea of unity in diversity in the context of India's Nationhood. *"The chief object of human yearning is, has been and ought to be, to find harmony in diversity. Nations are built and unified by differences that exist between the various classes of their population"*. Lala Ji outlines the significance of national struggle in which the masses have

participate as primary actors to build the nation, their differences, linguistic, religious and cultural notwithstanding. *"Struggle, the hard struggle is the law of progress, yes struggle we must, both inner as well as against others. There must be the struggle between honesty and dishonesty, between indolence and energy and between time serving selfishness and noble disinterestedness, without the struggle no nation can even aspire to be great and influential"*.

From what angle does his work or quotes of nationalism appears to be communalist or semi communalist? Going by his ideas of nationalism, one could either be a nationalist or a communalist, one could not be both. Why didn't the so-called secular historians notice his reaction to the 1909 separate electorate reforms, which bears a testimony of his being a constructive nationalist? *"That the present reforms are not based on the democratic ideals of the West may be true; but the reason for their enthusiastic reception in India is that they are believed to be a step towards an actual democratic form of Government without distinction of Hindu, Mohammedans, Parsi and the rest. That is the goal of the Hindu politician, he does not seek a Hindu majority crushing Mohammedans or other minorities. Aiming then to obliterate all religious distinction for national political purposes, he objects to communal representation or communal voting which would accentuate these distinctions"*. The Twelfth article gives a summary of his conclusion and thirteen points of advice, including a suggestion for proportional representation in the legislature but not separate electorates, as also a suggestion to divide Punjab into provinces to make majority rule effective. The series ended with " A plea for mutual co-operation and an anguished cry to do away with distrust".

"Let us live and struggle for freedom as brothers whose interests are one and indivisible. let us live and die for each other, so that India may live and prospers as a nation. India is neither Hindu nor a Muslim. It is not even both, It is one and It is India"¹²

AS A POLITICAL ACTIVIST:

In 1905 Rai went as a Congress delegate to London, where he along with Gokhale addressed meetings in Manchester, Edinburgh, and Liverpool for the cause of India's Freedom. In London, he fell under the influence of the Hindu revolutionary Shyamji Krishna Varma. When he returned to India in Nov. 1905, he was given an unprecedented rousing reception at Bombay and Lahore. He felt that "blood was raining down from the Indian sky" and 'the Nation's evil days' were coming to an end. His extremist ideas helped him team up with Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal to form the famous group, 'Bal, Pal, Lal'. After a break up with Gopal Krishna Gokhale during his visit to England in 1905, he conveyed the message to the youth of India that they themselves have to participate in active politics. By now Lal-Bal-Pal. (Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chander Pal) Phase in Indian politics had set in, teeming crowds paid their homage to their idols from Bengal, Maharashtra, and Punjab. They were influencing the Patriots through their magazines 'Bande Mataram', 'Kesari' and 'The Punjabee'. In 1907 Lala Lajpat Rai's fiery speeches and patriotic articles gave an opportunity to the British Viceroy to implicate him for Deportation to Mandalay.

When Lajpat Rai returned from Mandalay, he got elected as the President of Arya Samaj but he declined the honour. He even withdrew his name from the list for the presidency of the Congress at its Surat session. He worked hard for the upliftment of the depressed people. He raised funds for the building of a lecture hall in D.A.V. High School in the name of Principal Mahatma Hans Raj. In 1913 he founded a high school in his native village Jagraon, named after his father- The Radha Krishna High School. He was deputed to go to England regarding a bill which was going to be introduced in Parliament for the reforms of India office. During his stay in England, he paid particular attention to the problems of Indian Students residing there. During the First World War he visited Britain in 1914, however, after being disrupted by British he changed his plan for staying in there for six months and moved to America on a self-imposed exile. In America, he strongly raised his voice about the pitiable state of India through his revolutionary speeches and books. In America, he started a journal called, 'Young India' in which he wrote about the significance of Indian culture and religion and laid stress for the necessity of India's freedom from British colonial rule. Through this journal, he initiated a movement that made him popular worldwide. He worked a lot for the cause of Untouchables. Lala Ji did a lot for the Prison Reforms by writing articles in his journal 'The People'. His activities were multifarious. He was an ardent social reformer. He founded

the Indian Home Rule League of America in October in 1917. He also set up the "Indian Information Bureau" in New York in the year 1918. Lala Lajpat Rai was returned to India in February 1920 as a Great Hero. In September 1920 he was appointed President of the Special Session of the Indian National Congress at Calcutta. Gandhi's non-cooperation program was not really to his liking at first but later on, he plunged into this movement and under his leadership, it spread like a wildfire. He soon came to be known as "Lion of Punjab" and "Punjab Kesari." He traveled far and wide in India and his eloquence brought hundred into Congress fold. His writings and speeches both were hard-hitting and effective. He was a crusader, who knew no fear and championed every worthy cause with all the passion of his soul. But in 1922 he also opposed the withdrawal of this movement. He founded the 'Servants of the People Society', a non-profit welfare organization, in Lahore. Unable to curtail his growing popularity and his potential threat to the Colonial rule, British Government put him behind the bar from 1921 to 1923. After being Freed from jail, he returned to his political activism and paid attention to the communal problem which was threatening to the communal harmony of India at that time. Although he was a devout Hindu and strongly influenced by Arya Samaj, yet he understood the need for Hindu Muslim unity. In 1925, he was appointed as the President of the Hindu Mahasabha in Calcutta, where his inspiring speech instigated numerous Hindus to join the national movement for freedom. He joined Moti Lal Nehru and C.R. Das to found the Swaraj Party.

AS AN IDEAL OF SOCIAL SERVICE:

In 1895 he helped in the foundation of the Punjab National Bank, which demonstrated his practical concern and commercial skills for self-help of the Punjabi Hindus. Between 1896 and 1898 he published popular biographies of Mazzini, Garibaldi, Shivaji, and Swami Dayananda. He founded the Hindu orphan relief movement to keep away the Christian missionaries from securing the custody of the orphan Hindu children in 1897. In the National Congress in 1900 he stressed the importance of constructive, nation-building activity and programs for self-reliance. The last years of the 19th century were marked by severe natural calamities like drought, famine, epidemics etc. Lajpat Rai organized relief committees and raised funds to tackle the grave situation during the famines and droughts of 1897 and 1899. He mobilized D. A. V. College students and went to Bikaner and other parts of Rajasthan to rescue destitute children and bring them to Lahore. He believed that "a nation that not protect its own orphan children cannot command respect at the hands of other people." He raised a strong contingent of volunteers. He worked strenuously for the famine campaign. When the famine affected people reached Lahore they spent their first night at Lala Ji's house. In 1898 Lala Ji curtailed his legal practice and vowed to devote all his energy to the nation. The Kangra district of Punjab suffered destruction in the earthquake of 1905. Lala Ji once again organized relief camps for sufferers and helped to extricate people from the debris.

Lajpat Rai had proved himself to be an excellent lawyer but he wanted to devote himself entirely to the service of the nation. Being an Arya Samaj's extraordinary worker, Lala Lajpat Rai helped in the establishment of the D.A.V. College at Lahore. He offered part of his earning to the D.A.V. College and the Samaj and any other good cause. This kind of sacrifice was novel and unique and whenever he made an appeal for funds even the shabbiest person came forward and offered monetary help.

AS A RENOWNED PHILOSOPHER AND WRITER:

Lala Lajpat Rai was the founder-editor of The Bande Mataram, The Punjabee, and The People. He inspired the youths of his generation and enlightened them with the spirit of patriotism. Lala Lajpat Rai made a lasting impression in the minds of his countrymen not only by his leadership abilities but inspired them with his achievements in the fields of education, writing, journalism, commerce, banking, agricultural cooperative societies and even in healthcare. "The Story of My Deportation", "Arya Samaj", "The United States of America: A Hindu's Impression", "Young India", "England's debt to India", "Unhappy India" and his autobiographical works were the representation of his unique writing skills. During his political career, he was imprisoned many times including two occasions in 1921 and 1922 when he was involved in the Non-Cooperation Movement.

HIS SUPREME SACRIFICE:

His love for service was insatiable. His supreme sacrifice came when he led a procession in Lahore to boycott the Simon Commission. The Simon commission landed (for the second time) on October 11, 1928, and was expected in Lahore on the 30th, Lala Ji went ahead and organized a huge "Go back, Simon" procession. The black flags indicated that the people of India did not want John Simon and his colleagues as their representatives. Although the demonstration was most orderly and the best controlled, Lahore had ever witnessed, yet police lathi-charged at the unarmed public. But neither Lala Ji nor the people flinched away or take the step back. Although Lala Ji was badly hit on head and chest, yet he did not stop, and he also delivered a speech on that fateful evening in spite of his injury. Lala Ji said, "Every blow aimed at me will prove a nail into the coffin of the British Empire!" The lathi blows proved fatal to him and the Lion of Punjab, Lala Lajpat Rai expired on November 17th, 1928.

CONCLUSION:

It becomes clear that Lala Ji was trying to make the socio-political environment in both its aspect: i.e. the performative and the pedagogic free from the ideal of communalism. The Managers of Hindu Mahasabha may have nurtured communalist ideology in 1920's but they would have repented their decision to appoint Lala Ji as the President of Hindu Mahasabha. Where is even the faintest hint of the much propagated "Two nation Theory" in Lala Ji's discourse or writing or even in their activities, which formed the fulcrum of Jinnah's communalism? Another injustice done to him is by clubbing him with Madan Mohan Malaviya, N. C. Kelkar and M. A. Jinnah in the category of communalist leaders. Lala Ji had great admiration for both Gandhi Ji and Malaviya Ji but differed from them profoundly in his worldviews and political convictions. In his article "My Political Creed", he wrote, "I differ from both not only in temperament but also in principles and programs. The introduction of religion in any shape or manner in the Non-Cooperation Movement was in my judgment a great blunder". Perhaps we forgot the Lala Ji voices of constructive nationalism. It is the time we recovered Lala Ji from the miasma of contemporary historiography and got him installed at his proper place in the pantheon of Indian nationalism.

Lala Lajpat Rai, Sher-i-Punjab was indeed, a lion both in thoughts and deeds, the contemporary relevance of his thoughts and prescriptions to remove anomalies from Indian society and polity deserve mention. Lala Lajpat Rai was a great nationalist is beyond doubt. Even a cursory survey of the tribute paid to him by his contemporaries, including Gandhi Ji and Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, during his lifetime and even after his death will suffice to prove this point. Mahatma Gandhi summed up the life and achievements of Lala Lajpat Rai in "Young India". He said, "Men like the Lala cannot die so long as the Sun shines in the Indian sky. Lala Ji means an institution. From his youth, he made his country's service his religion. His patriotism was no narrow creed. He loved his country because he loved the world". His nationalism was internationalism hence, he holds on the European mind. He was an ardent social and religious reformer. His zeal for social and religious reforms demanded his participation in politics. In the political field, he was indispensable. He was fearless in the expression of his views. His extreme frankness embarrassed his friends. It also confused his critics, but he was incorrigible.¹³ Lala Ji was the first one amongst those hundred public figures signatories who appealed for inter-communal harmony in October 1923. The appeal's approach to the question was unique: that indulging in communal misdeeds is a 'sin' in religious terms and it is the duty of co-religionists of such offenders to resist it. As Mahatma Gandhi succinctly put it "It is impossible to think of a single movement in which Lala Lajpat Rai was not linked". Mr. Oswald Garrison Villard, editor of "Nation" described Lala Ji as a wise, brave and sound ambassador, a generous and modest interpreter of greatest races to American democracy a profound student of human liberties.

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Vishav Bandhu Verma

Head, Department of History/PHC , Apeejay College of Fine Arts, Jalandhar.