

CONTRIBUTION OF LALA LAJPAT RAI IN INDIAN FREEDOM STRUGGLE

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ABSTRACT

The history of Indian freedom movement reminds us that the partition of Indian National Congress gave a great setback to the liberalist and extremists group of Congress became more popular. Consequently, the ideology of Lal-Bal-Pal emerged and leaders like Lala Lajpat Rai became more popular among the youth of India. Today most of the scholars know the fact that at the same time Lala Lajpat Rai assailed the Extremists for demanding a time limit for the grant of full Home Rule, forgetting that the authority which fixes the time can cancel it later on. By this time Lajpat Rai's thought had undergone a change with regard to the conception of freedom. He had begun to feel that agitation for complete independence would not be of any use. Even the Home Rule would have to be fought for vigorously and that too was not to be secured without sacrifices and effective leadership. He had come to believe that both the Moderates and the Extremists had failed in giving the 'right lead' to the country. Therefore, his leanings towards Gandhi were evident. His conception of leadership too matched with Gandhi's. Lajpat Rai wanted a leader who could be fearless, truthful, and simple and who would live among the people as a commoner. During the movements of Indian freedom, Lala Lajpat Rai became a multi-faceted personality during Indian freedom struggle. The present research paper highlights the main contribution of Lala Lajpat Rai in Indian freedom struggle.

Keywords: Extremists, Moderates, INC, AITUC, Simon Commission, Indian Freedom.

INTRODUCTION

Actually, Lala Lajpat Rai joined the Indian National Congress (INC) and participated in many political agitations in Punjab. Lala Lajpat Rai was a multi-faceted personality of Indian freedom struggle and he led a life of ceaseless activity dedicated to a self-less service to the nation. Actually, the ideals of new nationalism preached by its high priests like Tilak, Aurobindo and Lajpat Rai assumed concrete shape, which may be regarded as the precursor of the Civil Disobedience Movement of Mahatma Gandhi. Meanwhile, he realized that the British people were indifferent to Indian affairs and the British press was not willing to champion Indian aspirations as some Moderates believed. As early as 1897, he had founded the Hindu Relief Movement to provide help to the famine-stricken people and thus preventing them falling into the clutches of the missionaries. For his growing involvement in the freedom movement, he was given the toughest prison sentences in faraway Mandalay (now Myanmar) in 1907 without trial. For his political agitation, he was deported to Burma without trial in 1907 but returned after a few months because of lack of evidence. Moreover, He was opposed to the partition of Bengal and founded the Home Rule League of America in 1917 in New York. He was also elected President of the All-India Trade Union Congress and he supported the non-cooperation movement of Gandhi at the Nagpur session of the Congress in 1920. He also protested against the Rowlett Act and the Jallianwala Bagh massacre that followed. He founded the Servants of People Society in 1921 and he was elected deputy leader of the Central Legislative Assembly in 1926. In 1928, he moved a resolution in the assembly refusing cooperation with the Simon Commission since the Commission had no Indian members. He was leading a silent protest against the Simon Commission in Lahore when he was brutally

lathi-charged by Superintendent of Police, James Scott. Rai died of injuries sustained a few weeks later. In this regard most of the scholars agreed that Lala Lajpat Rai's contribution to Indian National Movement fall in the unique category.

We know the fact that at the same time Lala Lajpat Rai assailed the Extremists for demanding a time limit for the grant of full Home Rule, forgetting that the authority which fixes the time can cancel it later on. By this time Lajpat Rai's thought had undergone a change with regard to the conception of freedom. He had begun to feel that agitation for complete independence would not be of any use. Even the Home Rule would have to be fought for vigorously and that too was not to be secured without sacrifices and effective leadership. He had come to believe that both the Moderates and the Extremists had failed in giving the right lead' to the country. Therefore, his leanings towards Gandhi were evident. His conception of leadership too matched with Gandhi's. Lajpat Rai wanted a leader who could be fearless, truthful, and simple and who would live among the people as a commoner. Moreover, he was one of the few leaders who realized the difficulties of united anti-colonial struggle. Therefore, he stressed the need for unity in the Hindu society first and thus got ready for the struggle against the British. That is why; he was actively associated with the ideology of Lal-Bal-Pal. Still today nobody can deny the fact that during freedom movement, Lahore in those days was passing through a period of social and religious regeneration. The Brahma Samaj and the Arya Samaj were the popular movements attracting the intelligentsia. Lajpat Rai came in close contact with Pandit Shiv Narayan Agnihotri, a leader of the Punjab Brahma Samaj who later founded the Dev Samaj and, on his persuasion, became a member of the Brahma Samaj. Lajpat Rai's college friends at Lahore, Pt. Guru Dutt, Lala Hansraj and Rai Shiv Nath exerted deep influence on him. Now, we cannot deny the fact that Lala Lajpat Rai was a multi-faceted personality and led a life of ceaseless activity dedicated to a self-less service to the nation. He was born in an educated Aggarwal family of Punjab and he studied in Rewari and later in Lahore, capital of undivided Punjab. Consequently, he was drawn into one of the most creative movements of revitalization of 19th century India, Arya Samaj, founded and led by Swami Dayanand. Later on, he set up a Dayanand Anglo-Vedic school in Lahore. Actually, Lajpat Rai belonged to that period of our history, when people like Aurobindo, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal had come to see the basic faults in the 'Moderate' politics – what they called 'political mendicancy' and the inadequacies of gradual constitutional progress. Here, R.C. Mazumdar, the doyen of Indian historian states: "The ideals of new nationalism preached by its high priests like Tilak, Aurobindo and Lajpat Rai assumed concrete shape, which may be regarded as the precursor of the Civil Disobedience Movement of Mahatma Gandhi".

Meanwhile, Lala Lajpat Rai realized that the British people were indifferent to Indian affairs and the British press was not willing to champion Indian aspirations as some Moderates believed. As early as 1897, he had founded the Hindu Relief Movement to provide help to the famine-stricken people and thus preventing them falling into the clutches of the missionaries. One of the contemporary British reports points out that the head and centre of the entire movement is Lala Lajpat Rai, a Khatri pleader—he is a revolutionary and a political enthusiast who is inspired by the most intense hatred of the British government. For his growing involvement in the freedom movement, he was given the toughest prison sentences in faraway Mandalay (now Myanmar) in 1907 without trial. He also led the protest against the horrendous massacre of Jallianwala Bagh. He visited USA and Japan where he kept in touch with the Indian revolutionaries. In England, he also became a member of the British Labour party. During this period in recognition of his outstanding role in the freedom movement, he was elected President of the Indian National Congress at the Calcutta session held in 1920. Now he took much interest in the condition of the working-class people, and meanwhile he was also elected as the President of the All-

India Trade Union Congress. At this time Lajpat Rai called for highest devotion and the greatest sacrifice from us and our first want, then, is to raise our patriotism to the level of religion, and to aspire to live or die for it. Most of the scholar's remark that Lala Lajpat Rai has been seen as 'a champion of moral courage than of physical courage' and was aware of the basic problems of the society. That is why he is also a well-known social reformer in India. Furthermore, we can point out that being a mass leader, he led from the front. While leading a protest march against the all-White Simon Commission in Lahore, he was brutally assaulted by the British authorities and was seriously injured which caused the untimely death of this towering freedom fighter in Lahore on 17 November 1928. It was to avenge this brutality that Bhagat Singh took up arms along with and paid the ultimate price. He was seriously injured during protests against Simon Commission. But he remarked that the end of the British rule in India is very near and so happened in 1947. That is why; being an extremist in Indian history, his political life is contributed to common people in India and he is regarded as a mass leader still today. Meanwhile it is true that Lala Lajpat Rai played a crucial role in Indian freedom movement and he believed in democratic values in life during his whole political life. He started his political life as a member of INC. Thus, we can point out his role and active participation as a politician as well as a freedom fighter as under:

Lala Lajpat Rai played a vital role in Congress in his whole life in full spirit and letter.

He also joined the Indian National Congress and participated in many political agitations in Punjab during British rule.

Moreover, he took part in many political agitations and for his political agitation, he was deported to Burma without trial in 1907 but returned after a few months because of lack of evidence.

Lala Lajpat Rai opposed the partition of Bengal and played a vital role as an extremist there. That is why he is regarded an extremist leader.

He was also the founder of the Home Rule League of America in 1917 in New York. In the USA, he worked to get moral support for the Indian independence movement from the international community. Subsequently, he was also elected President of the All-India Trade Union Congress and became a mass leader. Also, he was a staunch supporter of the Non-Cooperation Movement of Gandhi at the Nagpur session of the Congress in 1920. Consequently, he also protested against the Rowlett Act and the Jallianwala Bagh massacre that followed and suffered grave injuries that led to his death. In other words, we can say that in 1928, he moved a resolution in the assembly refusing cooperation with the Simon Commission since the Commission had no Indian members.

CONCLUSION

Now we can point out that Lala Lajpat Rai played a vital role in Indian freedom movement and today he is remembered in popular imagination first and foremost as a fervent anti-colonial nationalist who sacrificed his life for India's freedom. Still today, most of the scholars agree with the fact that apart from an exponent of such 'extremist' nationalism, he appears in historical scholarship as a prominent leader of the Arya Samaj, which is often viewed as embodying a form of 'Hindu revivalism'. He also played an important role during protest against Simon Commission in 1928 at Lahore. Meanwhile he was injured and died after some days during serious injuries. Nobody can ignore the fact that in the present time, he appears to be as a prominent leader of the Arya Samaj, which is often viewed as embodying a form of 'Hindu revivalism'. But still today he is regarded as a mass leader and a great freedom fighter of Indian freedom movement

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