



PUNJAB KESARI LALA LAJPAT RAI

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ABSTRACT

"Lajpat Rai is undoubtedly a man of high character and much respected by his fellow countrymen and if- when I was asked to arrest him, I had known what I do now, I should have required much more evidence before agreeing."

He was a great leader who actively campaigned for Swadeshi and propagated the message of self-reliance in India and abroad. He became a follower of Dayananda Saraswati, founder of the Arya Samaj.

Key words: Punjab, Lala Lajpat Rai, Swadeshi, Freedom

PUNJAB KESARI LALA LAJPAT RAI

He was born on 28 January 1865 in Dhudike, India. He was a revolutionary, politician, Indian writer, a leader of the Hindu supremacy movement, and a powerful orator. He was famous as the 'Lion of Punjab' or 'Punjab Kesari'. His father Radha Kishan and mother Gulab Devi were persons of limited resources. Shri Radha Kishan was a teacher in a small madarsah.

He received his elementary education in the Government Higher Secondary School, Rewari where his father was posted as teacher. Lajpat Rai joined the Government College at Lahore in 1880 to study Law. While in college he came in contact with patriots and future freedom fighters like Lala Hans Raj and Pandit Guru Dutt. He studied law from Government College in Lahore and thereafter started his legal practice in Hissar, Haryana. Since childhood he had a desire to serve his country and therefore took a pledge to free it from foreign rule. In 1884 his father was transferred to Rohtak and Lala Lajpat Rai came along. He married Radha Devi in 1877.



In 1886 the family shifted to Hissar, where he practiced law. During the 1888 and 1889 annual sessions of the National Congress, he participated as a delegate. He moved to Lahore to practice before the High Court in 1892.

In 1888 and again in 1889, he had the honor of being one of the four delegates from Hisar to attend the annual session of the Congress at Allahabad, along with Babu Churamani, Lala Chhabil Das and Seth Gauri Shankar. In 1892, he moved to Lahore to practise before the Lahore High Court. To shape the political policy of India to gain independence, he also practised journalism, and was a regular contributor to several newspapers including The Tribune. In 1886, he helped Mahatma Hansraj establish the nationalistic Dayananda Anglo-Vedic School, Lahore

In the 1980s was associated with the Punjab National Bank and Lakshmi Insurance Company. He remained popular for his activism, organised various meetings with his supporters, and also established an orphanage. He formed public service committees and inspired people. No doubt his fiercely committed nature towards India's independence was one of the greatest qualities. That is why he is also known for his fiery speeches. Let us have a look in detail at his life, the idea of nationalism, and his political journey.

He was a scholar of Arabic, Persian and Urdu. Gulab Devi was unlettered, but indicated great interest in religious activities. Lalaji was married when he was still a teenager. Married at the age of seventeen, he came in contact with Arya Samaj at Ambala. In his address Lalaji told the gathering to learn thoroughly at least one Indian language, preferably Hindi. In 1888, he received his degree in Law and started his practice in Hisar.

He used to donate a large part of his income to further the activities of Arya Samaj He founded an Arya Samaj temple and in due course of time Dayanand Vedic School in Lahore. The school, with the passage of time, was raised to college level. It came to be known as D.A.V. College. Lalaji used the Arya Samaj institution for propagating ideas as social reconstruction, spiritual revival and expansion of education. A practical social reformer, he carried out relief work and supervised work for many orphanages.

He was a devoted educationist and felt that the basic object of education was progress and growth of freedom. He joined the Indian National Congress in 1888 and took active part in the nationalist movement.



Lala Lajpat Rai like reading and it is said that he was deeply impressed by the ideals of patriotism and nationalism outlined by Italian revolutionary leader Giuseppe Mazzini. He with some prominent leaders including Bipin Chandra Pal, Aurobindo Ghosh, and Bal Gangadhar Tilak started seeing the negative aspects of moderate politics advocated by several leaders of the Indian National Congress. They voiced the demand for Dominion status to their strong opposition and need for complete independence or 'Purna Swaraj'. In personal views he was a great believer in inter-faith harmony, but he did not think right of the trend by Congress leaders to sacrifice Hindu interests to appease the Muslim section of the party. Lala was one of the few leaders who realized the difficulties of a united anti-colonial struggle and a possible source of religious conflict between the Hindus and Muslims of the country. His proposal for "a clear partition of India into a Muslim India and non-Muslim India" on December 14, 1923, in The Tribune, met with major controversy.

In 1905 another Congress session was organised under the chairmanship of Gopal Krishan Gokhale in Benaras. In this session Lalaji declared, "Freedom is our birth right."

Lalaji was arrested by the Britishers under the notorious 'Bengal Regulation Act' of 1818 for leading the farmer' agitation in Punjab and lodged in Mande Jail. He was later released on severe public criticism.

Lalaji met Shyamji Krishan Verma, the founder of India Home in London. Shyamji Verma also financed the former revolutionary and patriot Hindu leader Vinayak Damodar Savarkar in his activities aimed to secure freedom from India. He returned to India in 1909.

In 1913, Lalaji again went to London from there he reached America where he stayed for five years till 1919. In America, Lalaji wrote articles and delivered speeches to highlight the sad plight of the Indian people who were oppressed under the British rule. He wrote books on Arya Samaj philosophy and other political and social topics. Some of his works were proscribed by the British Government.

In America, Lalaji founded the India Home Rule league. The main objective of the institution was to enhance the Indian School of thoughts in America.

After spending five years in America, Lalaji returned to India in 1919. Hearing about the sad plight of the people of Punjab caused by the British rule, Lalaji stepped up his freedom struggle. He was arrested on 3rd September, 1921 for delivering provocative speeches and sentenced to one and half years of imprisonment.



In the year 1921, Lalaji founded yet another institution by the name of "Servants of the People Society." The main objective of this society was service to the people.

Patriots and revolutionaries such as Bhagat Singh, Bhai Parmananda, Sukhdev, Jaipal, Bhagwati Charan, Lal Bahadur Shastri, Balwant Rao Mehta were closely connected with the activities of this society at one time or the other.

Lalaji started publishing a few English and Urdu magazines. These magazines contributed a lot to the ideal and thinking of the people of the country. He also formed his own independent state level party in co-operation with Pt. Madan Mohan Malviya and was elected to the assembly.

In 1924, Lalaji founded another committee to work for the removal of untouchability. He also worked in the field of women's literacy, widow marriage, use of Hindi language, help to orphans of revolutionaries etc.

In 1928, when Simon Commission arrived in India, Lalaji took out a procession in Lahore to oppose its arrival. The police made lathi charge on the peaceful demonstrators. Lalaji succumbed to his internal injuries. His death came as a great shock to the nation. Later, Sardar Bhagat Singh in close cooperation with his colleagues such as Rajguru and Chander Shekhar Azad shot dead the Assistant Superintendent of Police, J.P. Saunders in a mistaken identity of his being Scott, the Deputy Superintendent of Police, Lahore, on whose order a brutal lathi charge was made on Lalaji and other peaceful demonstrators,

Gandhiji paid his tributes to Lalaji in the following words.

"So long as the sun shines in the sky, the people of India will remember Lalaji. He was an institution in himself. He loved his country and had a great devotion to duty. He was the friend of the poor... 'Servant of the People Society' which was founded by Lalaji is today a national trust."

Not only Rai was this heavyweight leader of the Indian Nationalist Movement, his views on patriotism and nationalism earned him the status of a venerated leader. He inspired young men of his generation and kindled latent spirit of patriotism in their hearts. Young men such as Chandrasekhar Azad and Bhagat Singh were driven to dedicate their lives for the sake of freedom of their Motherland following his example.

Lala Lajpat Rai made lasting impression in the minds of his countrymen not only by his leadership abilities, but made his presence felt in fields of education, commerce and even healthcare. He was a follower of Dayanand Saraswati and helped establish the



nationalistic Dayanand Anglo-Vedic School. He initiated the established of a bank which later evolved as the ‘Punjab National Bank’. He established a trust in his mother Gulabi Devi’s name in 1927 and oversaw the opening of a tuberculosis hospital for women named Gulabi Devi Chest Hospital.

Monuments and institutes founded in memory of Lala Lajpat Rai

Erected in the early 20th century, a statue of Lajpat Rai at Lahore, was later moved central square in Shimla after the partition of India. In 1959, the Lala Lajpat Rai trust was formed on the eve of his Centenary Birth Celebration by a group of Punjabi philanthropists (including R.P Gupta and B.M Grover) who have settled and prospered in the Indian State of Maharashtra, which runs the Lala Lajpat Rai College of Commerce and Economics in Mumbai. *Lala Lajpat Rai Memorial Medical College, Meerut* is named after him. In 1998, Lala Lajpat Rai Institute of Engineering and Technology, Moga was named after him. In 2010, the Government of Haryana set up the Lala Lajpat Rai University of Veterinary & Animal Sciences in Hisar in his memory.

Lajpat Nagar and Lala Lajpat Rai square with his statue in Hisar; Lajpat Nagar and Lajpat Nagar Central Market in New Delhi, Lala Lajpat Rai memorial park in Lajpat Nagar, Lajpat Rai Market in Chandani Chowk, Delhi; Lala Lajpat Rai Hall of Residence at Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) in Kharagpur; Lala Lajpat Rai Hospital in Kanpur; the bus terminus, several institutes, schools and libraries in his hometown of Jagraon are named in his honor including a bus terminal with statue of him at the entry gate. Further, there are several roads named after him in numerous metropolis and other towns of India.



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