

Lala Lajpat Rai and Hindu-Muslim Unity

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The Indian Nation, such as it is or such as we intend to build neither is nor will be exclusively Hindu, Muslim, Sikh or Christian. It will be of each and all. That is my ideal of Swarajya.

- Lajpat Rai

Since the death of Lajpat Rai in 1928, scholars have different views regarding his position in the national framework. Due to his association with Hindu movements, Hindu leaders, frequent use of Hindu symbols in his writings and speeches he is considered as Hindu Nationalist, communal, nationalist, liberal communal or extreme communal by some of them.¹ But some scholars have the opinion that Lajpat Rai's association with Hindu organizations was only for his communitarian zeal.² Most of them forget the nationalism of Lajpat Rai without understanding in his approach towards communal harmony and Hindu Muslim unity writings can only help us to know him completely. So, Lajpat Rai needs to be understood with reference to the circumstances contemporary to him. We need to look into the words used in his writings and speeches carefully without coming to any such type of conclusion that is misleading us that Lajpat Rai was a Hindu Nationalist. In 1888 Lajpat Rai by writing "Open Letters" to Sir Syed Ahmed Khan³ made his first foray into the politics and condemned latter's views suggested to Muslim community that they should keep themselves aloof from the Indian National Congress. Lajpat Rai reminded him by giving references from his writings in the past on Hindu- Muslim unity.⁴ It was difficult for him to tolerate the views of this prominent Muslim leader against the unity of nation. He was deadly against any such thing and his open letters to Sir Syed are the proof of his being a true nationalist without any doubt. It seems that Lajpat Rai's criticism of Syed Ahmed Khan was taken as a part of his communal ideology, but, his criticism of this Muslim leader was out of his nationalist thinking as he did not want the separation of Muslims from the Congress. Lajpat Rai's election as a member of Municipal Corporation Hissar from a Muslim majority ward leaves not a single doubt behind his secular thinking. He was very much loved by the Muslim

¹ J.S. Dhanki, *Lajpat Rai and Indian Nationalism*, Jalandhar, ABS Publishers, 1978, p. 357.

² K.L. Tuteja, "The Punjab Hindu Sabha and Communal Politics", *Five Punjabi Centuries* (ed. J.S. Grewal and Indu Banga), Mahohar, Delhi, 2004, p.133.

³ Syed Ahmed Khan (1817-1898) was an eminent Muslim political leader, a scholar and educationist. Earlier, he strongly advocated Hindu-Muslim unity, but after the foundation of Indian National Congress he turned against it and suggested Muslims to stay away from the Congress. He was a Judicial Officer under East India Company (1838-1878) and retired as a Subordinate Judge. He was Honorary Fellow of Royal Asiatic Society in 1864. He founded Translation Society in 1864 (later on renamed as the Scientific Society). He started a bilingual (Urdu and English) Weekly *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, in 1866 and *Tahzib-al-Akhla* (Social Reformer) in 1870. He opened Muhammedan Anglo- Oriental College (later Aligarh Muslim University). He was a member of Indian Legislative Council from 1878 to 1882. He was knitted in 1888. His main work was *The Causes of the Indian Revolt and Indian Mussalmans*.

⁴ V.C. Joshi (ed.), *Lajpat Rai – Writings and Speeches (1920-1928)*, Vol. 1, University Publishers, Delhi, 1966 pp.1-5.

people of his ward.⁵

In his article "A Study of Hindu Nationalism" in 1902 in *Kayastha Samachar* Lajpat Rai argued that the honest differences, discussions on the controversies and criticism of public men by public men are very essential for the progressive growth of every nation. We need to keep our ideals before us. Let our ideal should be sufficiently high, broad and extensive to cover all, who take pride in one common name, ancestry, a history, religion, language and a future.⁶ After the introduction of Separate Electorates in 1909 he bitterly condemned this development. He was against this and was in favour of obliteration of every type of religious distinction for the national progress.⁷ Lajpat Rai in his speech at Hindu Conference organized by the Punjab Hindu Sabha Lahore, 21st October 1909 said, I wish all joy and prosperity to my countrymen of other faiths. In their efforts, to ameliorate the conditions of their own community, and to secure a position of advantage for their co-religionists, I do not find fault with them. Lajpat Rai said, "My exhortation to Hindus as against non-Hindus and to Indians as against non-Indians is summed up in the following words of Yudhishtra on the occasion when the enemies of Duryodhna approached the Pandavas with the proposal to join hands with them in fighting the party of the latter."

Five are we, five are we,
five are we and a hundred are they;
But at the time of dispute with others,
We are hundred and five.⁸

This was the highest example in regard to fight against common enemy of country. He said, for healthy growth of society, differences are essential but, when there is crisis and all such differences should be removed against the common enemy. In the same speech Lajpat Rai stressed upon Hindu unity and solidarity amongst the Hindus which was in no way against Indian unity, He was very firm it is impossible to build a nation from above. It can only be raised from below. It is rather like putting the cart before the horse in expecting the Hindus and Muhammedans to unite and take a common cause, before bringing about a sense of unity and solidarity amongst the different sections of the Hindu community itself.⁹

In December 1909, while addressing the Punjab Hindu Conference, Lajpat Rai pointed out that the Congress has failed to bring Hindus and Muslims together. Now it is for the Hindus to work for Indian unity because "political salvation of India must come out of the combination and union of all communities into one national goal."¹⁰ In an article on 'Hindu-Muslim relations', in 1911 in *Zamana* (Urdu magazine), Lajpat Rai discussed about the factors responsible for the division between both the communities. The primary reason for this division was cow slaughter by Muslims, sound of music near mosques during Hindu festivals, the problem of language and the religious discrimination in government jobs by both the communities.

⁵ M. L. Khosla, *Sher-i-Punjab Lajpat Rai*, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1969, p. 15.

⁶ Lajpat Rai, *The Man in his Own Words*, Ganesh & Co., Madras, 1907, pp. 62-64.

⁷ Sudhir Kumar, "Communal/ National Dichotomy", (eds. J.S. Grewal and Indu Banga (eds.), *Lajpat Rai in Retrospect-Social, Economic, Political and Cultural Concerns*, Publication Bureau Panjab University, Chandigarh, 2000, p. 95.

⁸ B.R. Nanda (ed.) *The Collected Works of Lajpat Rai*, Manohar Publication, New Delhi, 2004 Vol. 4, p.168.

⁹ B.R. Nanda (ed.), *The Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai*, Vol. 4, p. 165.

¹⁰ J.S. Dhanki, *Lala Lajpat Rai and Indian Nationalism*, ABS Publishers, Jalandhar, 1978, p.368.

According to him only these problem can be resolved by creating understanding between the leaders of both the communities and secondly education can help us further resolve these problems.¹¹

(i) Language Question: Lajpat Rai favoured 'Hindi language and devnagri script as national script of India. He argued that the maximum scripts of India have their roots in devnagri script. He said no doubt, the Bengali, Maharashtrians, Gujratis and others were not ready to give up their regional scripts, but still they appreciated the present idea. Even the South Indian languages have resemblance between their languages and devnagri script. Moreover, there is no chance that these people will leave their scripts and adopt Arabic as a national script.¹² Many Muslims and Sikhs were against Lajpat Rai due to his association with Arya Samaj. To them Lajpat Rai said "I offer no apology for it. I must say that I have never made any derogatory remarks against Prophet, Jesus Christ, or Sikh Gurus as it is against my nature to do so. Of course as a Hindu, I have always considered it my duty, and will consider it in future also, to stop people, particularly the Hindus from giving up their religion". I hold great respect for Sikh Gurus, similarly I consider the Prophet of Islam hero among heroes and Jesus Christ worthy of my great respect and adulation.¹³ Lajpat Rai's communitarian zeal is always considered as communal unity between both the communities during the First World War. On the question of self-government related Lajpat Rai said, 'how the war has united Hindus and Muhammedans, not only in their expressions of loyalty to the government, but also in their demand for Home-Rule and their dissatisfaction with the prevailing political condition in India. For the first time in the history of Indian nationalism, the Indian National Congress and the All India Muslim League have met in the same city.¹⁴ Further, Lajpat Rai also tried to bring Hindus and Muslims more close to each other. He criticized those, who advocated that Indians are deeply divided on the basis of religions, sects, castes and languages and cannot form a government on their own. He said that English came to India in seventeenth century and before that India governed herself. Since the arrival of British times, India is in worst state as compared to pre-British days. The people of India were more prosperous under the rule of Ashoka and Akbar than the people of England under Elizabeth and Alred the Great'¹⁵

Lajpat Rai suggested that the relations between Hindus and Muslims can be strengthen much by the writing on the lives of our common national heroes like Shivaji, Maharana Partap, Guru Gobind Singh, Akbar, Sher Shah and Shah Jahan. He suggested that the Hindus should respect and should take pride in the Muslim legends, saints and scholars, and the Muslims should do the same for Hindus.¹⁶ Hindus should feel proud of Sher Shah Suri, Akbar, Shahjahan, Alberuni, Ibn Batuta, Abul Fazal, Faizi and Ghalib. On the other hand, Muslims need to be proud of Hindu epics, the Hindu heroes and of Hindu philosophy and science. These types of efforts

¹¹ B.R. Nanda (ed.), *The Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai*, Vol. 4, pp. 329-33.

¹² B.R. Nanda (ed.), *The Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai*, Vol. 4, pp. 337-38.

¹³ B.R. Nanda (ed.), *The Collected Works of Lajpat Rai*, Vol.4, p. 336.

¹⁴ Lajpat Rai, *Young India-An Interpretation and a History of the Nationalist Movement from within, Servant of the People Society, Lahore, 1927*, p. 54.

¹⁵ Lajpat Rai, *Young India-An Interpretation and a History of the Nationalist Movement from within*, p. 247.

¹⁶ S.R. Bakshi (ed.), *Lajpat Rai : Swaraj and Social Change*, (1919-22), Vol. 2, Publishers, New Delhi, 1990, pp.59- 60

can bring them close to each other and will infuse the feelings of Indian nationalism among them.¹⁷ Speaking in his Presidential Address at the Calcutta session of the Congress, which passed the resolution of Non-Cooperation movement, he supported the Khilafat Movement and said, "Hindu-Muslim unity has heralded a new dawn in Indian history."¹⁸

Lajpat Rai in his Presidential Address to the Punjab Provincial Political Congress held at Jaranwala in December 1923, once again pleaded to create opportunities to bring all the communities together for the benefits of India society.¹⁹ He advocated that no nation can be built without mutual trust and faith unless and until we forget and forgive the faults of each other. We cannot bring peace and harmony. He suggested "united we stand and divided we fall" therefore, the need of the hour is to create an atmosphere of peace, friendship and mutual faith and trust.²⁰ In 1923 replying to the question to *The Tribune* how Hindu-Muslim question would be reconciled? Lajpat Rai said, he had no drug or medicine, which he could administer to the people of both the communities. He said Hindu-Muslim unity would be possible only when the people of both communities would face each other without any ill-will.²¹

In his interview in *The Tribune* on January 1924, Lajpat Rai asked for cultural unity among Hindus and Muslims, which was a great path to create toleration and mutual helpfulness between both. But to achieve that state the spirit of militancy present in both the communities is needed to kept in background. He gave the examples from European society where different Schools of Christianity carried on their propaganda but not in aggressive way. Strength of political parties is not affected by that. Lajpat Rai said, "I would like an effort to be made, if possible to separate altogether political work from purely religious or communal work. In my judgment it is the mixing of the political issues with the latter that has brought about the present impasse."²²

(iii) Shuddhi and Sangathan: Lajpat Rai said, I cannot ask the Hindus to give up *Shuddhi*, because I cannot expect Muhammedans to give up conversions. It is essential to have security from within and from without. The *Sangathan* aims at strengthening the community, removing its divisions and all its inequalities. Lajpat Rai said its main function is to tackle the issue of untouchability on national level. He said, other works like building of educational institutions can wait but not untouchability. He suggested the suspension of all religious and educational projects. To solve the problem of untouchability, he said, "now or never."²³ In another article in *The Tribune* in October, 1924, Lajpat Rai said, "It was the duty of the Hindus to meet the Muslims on the term of equality and not treat them as *Malecha* and he expected the Mussalmans to refrain from calling Hindus as Kafirs. Discussions on Masjids or temples were wastage of our time. "Neither the temples of the Hindus had saved Indians from Muslim invasion nor were it the mosques of the Mussalmans that saved them from European

¹⁷ Lajpat Rai, *Young India-An Interpretation and a History of the Nationalist Movement from within* pp. 37-38

¹⁸ V.C. Joshi (ed.), *Lala Lajpat Rai-The Writings and Speeches*, University Publishers, New Delhi, 1966, Vol. 2, p. 67-75.

¹⁹ B.R. Nanda (ed.), *The Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, 2010, Vol. 10, pp. 67-75.

²⁰ B.R. Nanda (ed.) *The Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai*, Vol. 10, pp. 74-75.

²¹ B.R. Nanda (ed.), *The Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai*, Vol. 10, pp. 81-82.

²² B.R. Nanda (ed.), *The Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai* Vol. 10, pp. 84-85.

²³ *The Tribune* (ed.), 27 January 1924, see also B.R. Nanda (ed.), *The Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai* pp. 84-85

countries."²⁴

In September 1924 when worst Kohat riots took place, deepened the division between Hindus and Muslims. To tackle with the Hindu-Muslim problem he published series of 13 articles in *The Tribune* and expressed his dissatisfaction with Gandhi's approach on Hindu-Muslim issue.²⁵ Lajpat Rai criticized mixing of religion with politics Mahatma Gandhi and appealed him to separate religion from the politics. He called the move of Mahatma Gandhi and the other leaders unfortunate by bringing together Khilafat Movement (religious in nature) along with non-cooperation. The mixing of both movements was a great blunder according to him.²⁶ When, the meeting of All Parties Conference was held in 1925, in Delhi to find the solution of Hindu-Muslim problem after the riots. Lajpat Rai considered the Lucknow Pact 1916 as a great blunder committed by the Congress. He observed that communal representation was a complete negation of nationalism and divided the country into two water-tight compartments. Lajpat Rai said the society will be divided into so many divisions and subdivisions if present idea of communal representation extended. He said, "I ask you to consider this question not in the interest of the Hindus or the Mohammedan community but as one united nation which should stand against those who do not want to give us self-government. If any solution is put forward which will further our progress, I shall whole-heartedly support it. But, remember, we have not only to win our liberty but also to keep it, any patch up agreement by the way of altering the figures of representation would only be a backward step. Let us not try to divide the loaves and fishes but try to evolve a scheme which would further the interests of Swaraj and of unity in the country".²⁷ In 1925, by giving reference to Hindu-Muslim unity, Lajpat Rai said the problem of unity is great hurdle in achieving the desired goal of nation. There was no possibility to achieve Swaraj in the absence of Hindu-Muslim unity. The political freedom of the country cannot be achieved without bringing unity in both the communities.²⁸

In his Presidential Address during eighth session of Hindu Mahasabha held at Calcutta, among the 13 programmes of Hindu Mahasabha, one point was to promote good feelings with Muhammedans and Hindus.²⁹ Further, in his Presidential Address to the Bombay Hindu Mahasabha Conference, one of the main objects of the Sabha, was again to promote good relation between Hindus and other Indian communities in a friendly manner to achieve the goal of self-governance unanimously.³⁰ In his Presidential speech at the Punjab Provincial Hindu Conference at Lahore on June 1925, Lajpat Rai stated that all communities in India were free to protect their political interests. But, such questions can be solved with a spirit of friendliness. It is a dire need of the time and

²⁴ *The Tribune* (Lahore), 27 January 1924, see also B.R. Nanda (ed.), *The Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai* Vol.10, pp. 85-86

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²⁶ Lajpat Rai, *Hindu Muslim Unity: The Problem and its Solution* (13 articles contributed by Lajpat Rai to the Hindu-Muslim unity between 25 November, 1924 and 16 December, 1924) Swarajya Press, Madras, 1925, pp.9-11.

²⁸ B.R Nanda (ed.) *The Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, **Year**, Vol.11, p. 207.

²⁹ *The Bombay Chronicle*, 5 January, 1925, see also, B.R. Nanda (ed.), *The Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai*, Vol.11, p. 237.

³⁰ *The people* (Lahore), 5 December, 1925, see also B.R. Nanda (ed.), *The Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai* Vol.11, pp. 269-84.

hate cannot benefit any party, but only can help to prolong foreign rule in India.³¹

On December 1925, Lajpat Rai spoke from the platform of Hindu Mahasabha and requested all the Indian communities, 'let us live and struggle for freedom as brothers, whose interests are indivisible.' Let us live and die for each other, so that Indians may live and prosper as a nation. India is neither Hindu nor Muslim. It is not even both. It is one. It is India.' He said to the Hindus that you should not dream of a Hindu Raj in India.' It was completely foolish and insane on the part of Hindus that they can create a Hindu rule by crushing Muslims. This type of foolish thinking will ruin them and their country.³² He stated, 'The Hindus have no political aims of their own, separate from those of their countrymen of other faiths.' They should not replace 'nationalism' with 'communalism'. All Hindus want Hindu Raj and the bulk of Muslims did not desire the Muslim Raj. The cry of Hindu or Muslim Raj was purely harmful and needed to be discouraged.³³

In an interview to the Associated Press following the murder of Swami Shradhanand by Abdul Rashid in Delhi on 23 December 1926, he request Hindus and Muslims to work hard to normalize the present condition. This is paramount duty of both the communities. Lajpat Rai made a request before his community that do not get alarmed and disturbed by any threat given by assassin to kill (Lajpat Rai and M.M. Malviya). He stated:

“I will continue to move most freely amongst my Muslim countrymen. I will trust them as implicitly as I have done in the past yet I will fight with them, if fighting is necessary for the furtherance of the rights and interests of Hindu community, in a spirit of friendliness. Need I tell them that with all my solicitude for the rights of Hindu community, with all my love for Vedic religion, with all my love to desire feelings of self-respect for the Hindus, I shall never tolerate or encourage any insult to the Muslim religion, or an attempt to deal with Muslims unfairly or unjustly. I am a humble servant of motherland, Hindu to the marrow of my bones, but all the same, I am ready to safeguard and protect the interests of my non-Hindu countrymen from all unjust and unfair attack from whatever quarter they may come.”³⁴

In August 1927 at the Unity Conference was held at Shimla. To improve the communal situation in the country, Lajpat Rai said we no need not to lose our hearts. He suggested the surveillance of Local Unity Boards to see Local situation and help in removing any type of bitterness. He wanted this step as settlement at all Indian level. He appealed to local Hindu and Muslim leaders and believed much can be achieved and built in this way. In October 1927, he wrote two different articles "Condemnation of Communal Violence is Not Enough" and "Need for Intensive Propaganda Against Violence" and argued that only condemnations cannot bring any positive result, we need to work unless they are accompanied by conduct to stop the persons behind the trouble on both the sides that their act is strongly disliked and hated by their co-religionists. Further the differences and grievances of both the communities can be removed by the mutual agreements or by the intervention of the government.³⁵

When Hindu-Muslim situation was very critical during December 1926 to October 1927, when 13

³¹ *The Tribune* (Lahore), 5 June, 1925, see also B.R. Nanda (ed.), *The Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai* Vol.11, pp. 269-84.

³² S.R. Bakshi, (ed), *Swaraj and Social Change (1923-1928)*, 1990, Vol.3, pp. 69-70.

³³ S.R. Bakshi, (ed.), *Swaraj and Social Change (1923-1928)*, Vol.3, pp. 69-70.

³⁴ B.R. Nanda (ed.), *The Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, 2010, Vol.13, pp. 253-56.

³⁵ B.R. Nanda (ed.), *The Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai*, Vol.13, p. 285.

prominent Hindus including Swami Shradhanand were murdered, by requesting both the communities he wanted to pacify the situation. He made a special request to Hindus that do not be out of control and protest within the limits of law. He wanted to prevent them from taking any step in revenge to the venom vomiting enemies. He requested to carry on an active propaganda for the violence. He knew that it is futile to think about any type of unity without the establishment of violence free atmosphere.³⁶ In the course of his Presidential address to the Provincial Hindu Conference in Sind on 3 May, 1927, Lajpat Rai suggested to Mohammedans that their desire of the emancipation of other Muslim countries was impossible until Swaraj at home was achieved. The achievement of Swaraj was completely impossible if we not work for the mutual interest of our communities.³⁷

It is important to know that when Simon Commission came to India, Lajpat Rai was successful to get support of Muhammad Ali Jinnah was able to bring both communities together against the commission.³⁸ On 1 November, 1928, speaking on the problem of minorities he said, Hindu-Muslim problem is largely created by the policy of division of the British. After the death of Lajpat Rai, Mahatma Gandhi said, Lajpat Rai did not have the 'slightest enmity towards the Muslims.' His desire to strengthen and purify Hinduism must not confound with hatred of Mussalmans and Islam. He was sincerely desirous of promoting and achieving Hindu-Muslim unity.³⁹ This time Bipan Chandra said about Lajpat Rai "a right-hand man of unity movement and All Parties Conference has been struck."⁴⁰

On the basis of his views on Hindu-Muslim Unity it becomes crystal clear that at no point of time Lala Lajpat Rai had anything against any Indian community. Rather he encouraged both the communities to stay together and cherish the common heritage, culture history and language. Without this there will be no future of India. He was One should not forget Lala Lajpat Rai didn't want to see Hindu community weaker and he always tirelessly worked for that. His communitarian zeal should not be mistaken and should be understood very carefully.

³⁶ Raj Kumar, "Lajpat Rai : Question of Hindu-Muslim Unity", *Lala Lajpat Rai: A Visionary Par-Excellence* (ed. By Arun Mehra), Jalandhar, 1911, p.116.

³⁷ Raj Kumar, "Lajpat Rai: Question of Hindu-Muslim Unity", p. 116.

³⁸ Feroz Chand, *Lajpat Rai: Life and Work*, pp. 496-97.

³⁹ B. R. Nanda (ed.) B.R. Nanda (ed.), *The Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, 2010, Vol.13, p. 415.

⁴⁰ B.R. Nanda (ed.), *The Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, 2010, Vol. 15, p. 415.