

LALA LAJPAT RAI



Lala Lajpat Rai (28 January 1865 – 17 November 1928) was an Indian Punjabi author and politician who is chiefly remembered as a leader in the Indian Independence movement. He was popularly known as Punjab Kesari. He was part of the Lal Bal Pal trio. He was also associated with activities of Punjab National Bank and Lakshmi Insurance Company in their early stages. He sustained serious injuries by the police when leading a non-violent protest against the Simon Commission and died less than three weeks later. His death anniversary (17 November) is one of several days celebrated as Martyrs' Day in India.

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Picture of the banquet given in honor of Lala Lal Rai by California Chapter of H. A. in Reed-Shattuck on February 11, 1916.



Where & when born

Lajpat Rai was born in Ferozpur Punjab on 28 January 1865 to Munshi Radha Krishna Azad and Gulab Devi. His father was an Aggarwal by caste.

Brief life history of the person

Rai had his initial education in Government Higher Secondary School, [Rewari](#) (now in Haryana, previously in Punjab), in the late 1870s and early 1880s, where his father, Radhakrishan, was an Urdu teacher. Rai was influenced by Hinduism and created a career of reforming Indian policy through politics and writing.

When studying law in Lahore, he continued to practice Hinduism. He became a large believer in the idea that Hinduism, above nationality, was the pivotal point upon which an Indian lifestyle must be based.

Hinduism, he believed, led to practices of peace to humanity, and the idea that when nationalist ideas were added to this peaceful belief system, a non-secular nation could be formed. His involvement with Hindu Mahasabha leaders gathered criticism from the Bharat Sabha as the Mahasabhas were non-secular, which did not conform to the system laid out by the Indian National Congress. This focus on Hindu practices in the subcontinent would ultimately lead him to the continuation of peaceful movements to create successful demonstrations for Indian independence.

He was a devotee of Arya Samaj and was the editor of *Arya Gazette*, which he set up during his student time. After studying law at the Government College in Lahore, Lajpat Rai practised at Hissar and Lahore, where he helped to establish the nationalistic Dayananda Anglo-Vedic School and became a follower of Dayananda Sarasvati, the founder of the reformist Hindu society Arya Samaj ("Society of Noble People").

In 1895 Rai helped found the Punjab National Bank, demonstrating his practical concern for self-help and enterprise among Hindus. In 1897 he founded the Hindu Orphan Relief Movement to keep the Christian missions from securing custody of these children. In the National Congress in 1900 he stressed the importance of constructive, nation-building activity and programs for self-reliance.

Later he entered into Political and public life and contributed his life towards this cause till his end on 17th



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November 1928.

Career in political

In 1905 Rai went as a Congress delegate to London, where he fell under the influence of the Hindu revolutionary Shyamji Krishna Varma. Later, in the 1905 Congress session, Rai joined Bal Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal in support of a militant program around boycott, swadeshi (homemade goods), and swaraj (self-rule for India). In 1906 he tried to play the role of mediator between the moderates and the extremists in the Congress.

After his deportation in May 1907, however in November, he was allowed to return when the viceroy, Lord Minto, decided that there was insufficient evidence to hold him for subversion. Lajpat Rai's supporters attempted to secure his election to the presidency of the party session at Surat in December 1907, but elements favouring co-operation with the British refused to accept him, and the party split over the issues

Rai lived in the United States from 1914 until 1920, and then returned during World War I. He toured Sikh communities along the US West Coast; visited Tuskegee University in Alabama; and met with workers in the Philippines. His travelogue, *The United States of America* (1916), details these travels and features extensive quotations from leading African American intellectuals, including W.E.B. Du Bois and Fredrick Douglass. The book also argues for the notion of "color-caste," suggesting sociological similarities between race in the US and caste in India. During World War I, Lajpat Rai lived in the United States, but he returned to India in 1919.

Graduates of the National College, which he founded inside the Bradlaugh Hall at Lahore as an alternative to British institutions, included Bhagat Singh. He was elected President of the Congress party in the Calcutta Special Session of 1920. In 1921, He founded Servants of the People Society, a non-profit welfare organisation, in Lahore, which shifted based to Delhi after partition, and has branches in many parts of India.

In 1925 he entered the Imperial Legislature as a member of the "Swarajist" group. In 1926 he broke with the leaders of the Swarajist group and formed his own "Nationalist party" within the legislature.

In 1928 Rai led the demonstrations against the Simon Commission on Indian constitutional reforms. He was injured by the police in a mass demonstration and died a few weeks later, mourned as a nationalist martyr.

Leadership qualities to mention a few here below

- Demonstrating his concern for self-help and enterprise among Hindus he founded Punjab National Bank.
- He was a Chief architect of the Swadeshi movement: even before Gandhi and Nehru, Rai stressed self-reliance for Indians in 1900.
- He was brave enough to show non-cooperation when Rowlatt Act was formed by British. Thereby he got the title "Punjab Kesari" (Lion of Punjab)

Critical moments in his life

After joining the Indian National Congress, and taking part in political agitation in the Punjab, Lajpat Rai was



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deported to Mandalay, Burma (Myanmar), without trial, in May 1907.

In 1928, the British government set up the Commission, headed by Sir John Simon, to report on the political situation in India. The Indian political parties boycotted the Commission, because it did not include a single Indian in its membership, and it met with country-wide protests. When the Commission visited Lahore on 30 October 1928, Lajpat Rai led silent march in protest against it. The superintendent of police, James A. Scott, ordered the police to lathi (baton) charge the protesters and personally assaulted Rai. Despite being injured, Rai subsequently addressed the crowd and said that "I declare that the blows struck at me today will be the last nails in the coffin of British rule in India"

He did not fully recover from his injuries and died on 17 November 1928 of a heart attack. Doctors thought that Scott's blows had hastened his death. However, when the matter was raised in the British Parliament, the British Government denied any role in Rai's death.

Awards and achievements

- Lala Lajpat Rai's death anniversary, 17 November, is one of the several days celebrated as Martyrs' Day in India.
- Many schools and colleges later renamed under his name.

Writings

- Between 1896 and 1898 he published popular biographies of Mazzini, Garibaldi, Shivajee, and Swami Dayananda.
- The Story of My Deportation (1908)
- Swaraj & Social Change
- Arya Samaj (1915)
- The United States of America: A Hindu's Impression (1916)
- Young India: An Interpretation (1917)
- Unhappy India (1928).
- England's Debt to India (1917)

Sources

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