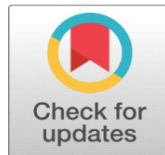
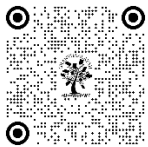


LAJPAT RAI AND NATIONAL EDUCATION: RESPONSE AND REFORM IN THE KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM IN BRITISH INDIA

Dr. Ritu Bhagat ¹✉

¹ Associate Professor, Department of History Shyama Prasad Mukherji College for Women University of Delhi, Delhi, India



Corresponding Author

Dr. Ritu Bhagat, ritub63@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Lala Lajpat Rai (1865-1928) was a keen educationist. The study of educational institutions and ideals and pedagogy were a lifelong passion with Rai. His visits abroad were preoccupied with extensive study of the other nations education system in order to 'adapt them to needs of India.' For Rai the purpose of education should work towards a transformation of the general psychology of the Indian people. The system of education introduced by the British had created a weak and passive Indian society. It was therefore necessary that a modern system of education which reflected the need for a modern and progressive global outlook should be developed. This paper attempts to reassess Lajpat Rai's scheme of national education as a counterpoise to the colonial education introduced by the British in India. Rai viewed this as essential for freeing the Indian mindset from colonial influence and for sowing the seeds for growth of democratic institutions. According to Rai, teaching methods should aim to create "thoughtful and proactive individuals." Looking back to Lajpat Rai's perspectives on establishing a nationalist education system—one that encourages individualism while maintaining a global perspective—can be instrumental in locating the recent changes within new knowledge systems.

Keywords: Lajpat Rai, National Education, Indian Knowledge system, Pedagogy

1. INTRODUCTION

Lala Lajpat Rai (1865-1928) the well-known freedom fighter from Punjab also known as *Punjab Kesari*, was a keen educationist. He was instrumental in promoting the idea of National Education to foster the spirit of nationalism and further the cause of Indian National Movement against the British rule in India. Rai was acutely aware that the colonial system of education served as an impediment to India's growth and did not fulfil her national ambitions. Lajpat Rai aimed at fostering an educational system which would instil a sense of national pride and independence among Indians. This paper attempts to re-evaluate Lajpat Rai's scheme of "national education" as a response to counter the effect of colonial and racist education promoted by the British in India. Rai saw this as a prerequisite for decolonizing the Indian mind and the growth of democratic institutions. For Rai, pedagogical techniques should focus on producing "thinking and active persons." Re-examining Lajpat Rai's ideas on the need for a nationalist education system which promotes individualism and is also international in its outlook will also help contextualise the recent transformations in the Indian knowledge system.

2. EARLY YEARS AND NATIONAL EDUCATION

Lajpat Rai developed a keen interest in education from his very childhood under the influence of his father Radha Kishan, whom he considered as one of the greatest teachers. Lajpat Rai considered his father to be a primary influence for his interest in the field of Education. 'I owe to him my interest in education' he said. Lajpat Rai was actively involved with educational movements right from the beginning of his career. He declared that 'the study of educational institutions, educational ideals and educational methods has been one of the passions of my life.'ⁱ Subsequently his involvement with the Arya Samaj and its educational programme provided the means for the fulfilment of Lajpat Rai's aspirations and in 1886 the DAV school and later Dayanand Anglo Vedic College at Lahore proved to be the focus of his educational activities. He confessed in his own words that 'for 25 years, I gave the best in me to the institution, grudged neither time nor money nor energy in doing all that I could to ensure its success and progress.'ⁱⁱ

The question of 'national education' had greatly occupied the minds of Indian leadership during the anti-colonial movement. The production and dissemination of knowledge by the British empire had led to a great deal of dissatisfaction among Indian intelligentsia. The development of indigenous knowledge and institutions which would impart knowledge on 'nationalist' lines was a concern with many leaders. Lajpat Rai was at the forefront of this movement and collected funds and support for the movement in Punjab and elsewhere in India. Although in his later writings he expressed reservations that the earlier attempts at founding of educational institutes like DAV school and College, Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh, Arya College at Lahore, Hindu College at Benaras, although embodied "national" ideals of their founders but according to Rai were actually not very inclusive in their approach. Lajpat Rai felt that even though these institutions were open to all creeds, they created an 'atmosphere of its own ...national to a certain extent' but otherwise narrow in approach. And for Rai education must necessarily serve an inclusive growth and outlook for all Indians.ⁱⁱⁱ Such was the honesty of Lajpat Rai.

For Lajpat Rai then association with teaching and learning came naturally. He was actively associated with the setting up of educational institutes since the early days of his career and it remained a lifelong commitment. He emphatically declared that 'the study of educational institutions, educational ideals and educational methods has been one of the passions of my life.'^{iv} During his visits abroad, USA and Japan, in particular, Lajpat Rai undertook extensive study of the education system of these nations in order to 'adapt them to the needs of India.'^v According to Lajpat Rai it was important that education should work towards a transformation of the general psychology of the Indian people. The system of education introduced by the British had created a weak and passive Indian society. Rai therefore advocated a modern system of education which reflected the need for a modern and progressive global outlook. He emphasised 'the production of literate, skilled labour, conscious of its rights as human beings, and conscious of its rights as members of the body politic.'^{vi} He placed great emphasis on vocational schools and technological institutes since education must increase an individual's 'productive capacity.'^{vii} Lajpat Rai stated that 'the first requisite of an efficient system of national education is that it enables every citizen to live better and to help others in living better.'^{viii}

3. AIM OF EDUCATION

Lala Lajpat Rai was a patriot and a model for patriots. He wanted his people to look forward not backward, to be realistic and not vaguely and ineffectively 'spiritual'. According to him 'the attempt to live in the past is not only futile but even foolish.' He said 'wisdom is derived from knowledge [and] the world is wiser today than it was three hundred years ago'^{ix} Lajpat Rai asserted that 'we must assume nothing [but] ... analyse every idea, every scheme in the light of day with the search light of scientific truth.'^x For Lalaji, the end and the object of Education is progress and the test of progress is the growth of freedom. Education should make children better than their parents and they can become better if their faculties are trained to function in cooperation with each other and they are brought face to face with life. Lajpat Rai realized dangers of living in the past. he was clear that the world today was different from 'the one in which our ancestors lived, in many respects much more advanced than the latter, in some respects possibly not so advanced. Our progress will depend on our capacity to strike the golden mean and to preserve a well- balanced attitude towards the past and the present, with the determination to chalk out a future for ourselves greater than our past.'^{xi} He further cautioned that there was a need for judicious action and his words deserve extensive quotation— 'we cannot assume that everything ancient was perfect and ideal. Some of the ideas held by our ancestors have been proved to be wrong; we have to readjust them. Some of their methods were faulty; we have to improve upon them. If their institutions, very

well suited to their age and conditions, are absolutely unsuited to modern conditions of life we must replace them. Do not want to be a mere copy of our ancestors. we wish to be better.’^{xii}

Lajpat Rai devoted a substantial part of his time and energy to the study of educational questions. His concern to provide for right type of education for the people of India is evident from his writings. ‘The education problem’, according to Lajpat Rai ‘is assuming serious dimensions....it is the question of questions upon the right solution of which the future of the people of this country principally depends....’^{xiii} For Lalaji education was of paramount importance and his visits abroad were heavily preoccupied with gaining information about the educational system and also the problems of that country whether it was Britain, the United States or Japan. Lajpat Rai’s keen interest in education is evident from his writings such as articles on ‘Education in India’ in 1907 and ‘Social Efficiency’ in *Modern Review* (1908) and ‘Our Education’ in the *Evolution of Japan and Other papers* (1918) and his seminal work, *The Problem of National Education in India*. Even after the publication of his major work he continued to write on this subject of National Education in such works as *The Political future of India* (1919) and the *Ideals of Non-Cooperation* (1924)

4. PEDAGOGY AND PROPOSALS

Let us now examine the ideas and concepts put forward by Lalaji in the context of development of National Education for Indian citizens. Lajpat Rai presented his own model of Education and drafted an all-India scheme of national education dividing it into two parts, one concerning ‘languages’ and second concerning ‘subjects.’ He regarded the adoption of English as a great hindrance to the speedy dissemination of knowledge. He was sure that the country will readily adopt Hindustani as the future national language of India.^{xiv} This would not hinder the growth of provincial vernaculars. The provincial vernaculars should remain the medium of instruction in the primary schools of each province. He further explained that other subjects of study should include a teaching of ‘patriotism,’ ‘hygiene,’ ‘drawing,’ ‘geography of India,’ ‘elementary education of the world,’ ‘history of India—local and provincial history,’ ‘civics,’ ‘music’ and ‘modelling.’^{xv} In short, the entire range of subjects necessary for overall development of the child. He was in favour of uniformity and advocated that same textbooks should be made available all over India and books should be supplied free in all primary schools. English language in Lajpat Rai’s opinion should be made compulsory in the last three years of the elementary school. Lajpat Rai was clear that classical languages such as Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian should be taught for their literary aspect. Elements of modern science should be taught at two levels—for those who want to study at basic level and for those who want to take up higher courses in agriculture commerce and technology or course of higher literary education. Lajpat Rai’s advocacy of coeducation was positive and uninhibited. A system of Education, he says ‘that stresses the authority of parents or the teachers which is based on the suspicion of human nature and human tendencies, which is distrustful of childhood and youth, which is openly out of control, discipline and subordination, which favours empirical methods of pedagogy, which has no respect for the instincts of the boy and the girl is not an ideal system for the production of self- reliant men and women that new India wants.’^{xvi}

The larger aim of Education in the view of Lalaji was to help a student to ‘become a thinking man.’ Education system must be so devised that it will “fit the future generations of India for the battle of life on modern lines according to the economic needs of the age.”^{xvii} To this end Lajpat Rai proposed the introduction of a widespread system of vocational education. By vocational education Lajpat Rai did not just mean trade, or technical efficiency or craft learning in specialized future pursuits. Instead, he wanted education which would accomplish ‘the full intellectual and social meaning of a vocational education ... instruction in the historical background...training in sciences to give intelligence and initiative in dealing with materials and agencies of production and study of economics, civics, and politics to bring the future worker into touch with the problems of the day and the various methods proposed for its improvement.’^{xviii} This was because education being a social function it must enable the students to increase his productive capacity by adding to his own usefulness as well as to that of the society of which he is a member. ‘The first requisite of an efficient system of national education is that it enables every citizen to live better and to help others in living better.’ Lalaji was of the opinion that the vocational and technical aspects of education had not been catered to in the system of education but it was crucial aspect of any system of education. Lajpat Rai advocated the creation of an All- India agency which would lay down the policy for education all over India. In order of urgency and preference Lajpat Rai called for establishment of ‘more schools and more teachers...Vocational schools, including schools for instruction in commerce and foreign languages and technological institutes.’ He was in favour of building ‘continuation schools, high schools and more universities.’^{xix} According to him ‘the first 10 years of our national effort should be mainly devoted to a) the increase of literacy; b) the production of literate, skilled labour conscious of its rights as human beings, and conscious of its rights

as member of the body politic; and c) Multiplication and training of the teachers with as great an increase in their remuneration as may be possible under the circumstances.’^{xx}

Another very important aspect of education which Lajpat Rai advocated was the teaching of ‘patriotism’ and ‘nationalism’ as a regular subject of study. It was to be taught in such a manner that patriotism inculcated ‘love of India as a whole, as distinguished from love of village, town city or province... of Indian rivers, Indian Hills, Indian landscape....’ He goes on to expound the idea and the glory of India further by saying, ‘is there any river which is more majestic and inspiring than Ganga or Brahmaputra or Narmada or even Sindh? are there any cities which in their natural situation and in their past historic traditions can excel Srinagar, Banaras, Allahabad, Patna, Lahore, Bombay, Karachi, Madras, Delhi and Dhaka?’ Similarly, India’s natural wealth in the form of ‘the animals, the trees, the fruits, the variety of cereals and grains, vegetables and roots are surpassed in variety from any nation in the world.’ But Patriotism was more than just geography and material riches, it includes as Lajpat Rai rightly points out by quoting the French philosopher Ernest Renan as ‘*l’ame d’une nation*, the more delicate shadings of feelings, such as piety for the past, admiration and love of the heroic figures in the history of the nation, and its great achievement; love of language, community of tradition, laws and customs, and all that gives individual character to the civilization of each nation.’^{xxi} Lalaji was emphatic that every Indian must be made to realise that anyone ‘born in India, or of Indian parents, or who has made India his or her home, is a compatriot, a brother or sister, regardless of colour, creed, caste or vocation.’^{xxii} Lajpat Rai was of the view that textbooks of patriotism should insist on the essential unity of all religions and that the future prosperity and progress depends on this unity and that religion is a matter of individual faith. ‘To be Indians first, last, and all the time’, said Lajpat Rai, ‘in all political and economic matters and in our relations with non-Indians must be taught to our boys and girls by written and printed lessons as well as by word of mouth.’^{xxiii}

Next in importance for Lajpat Rai was the importance of physical education. He was of the opinion that a healthy body politic was matter of great importance for the nation. Lajpat Rai realized the neglect which prevailed in the health of young children and even adult population. As always, his examination of school system abroad especially in the United States and Japan convinced him of its necessity in primary and secondary education school system. He wished that Indians would apply themselves to its solution as best as possible in the Indian system of education. According to him, it would be in the present and future interests of the nation ‘that everyone of its citizens male or female should possess the maximum amount of health and the maximum of developed intelligence in order to hold its own among the people of the world.’

Lajpat Rai was not only a keen educationist but a visionary who envisaged very early in his political life, a nation that would fulfil the aspirations of a new rising India in the comity of nations. Education was to be the foundation upon which would lay the edifice of this new nation. That caste, creed, religion regionalism would not act as barriers to India’s growth was Lalaji’s dream. For as he said, educational institutions would be like ‘temples for all to enter and worship, regardless of caste, colour, and creed.’ The development and economic prosperity of the nation would lead to ‘salvation’ and ‘freedom from misery, poverty, disease, ignorance and slavery of every kind, in this life, now and here for ourselves and hereafter for our successors.’^{xxiv} Therefore, for Lajpat Rai ‘the most important work is to change the general psychology of our people... to create in them an interest, a zest for real life.’^{xxv}

5. CONCLUSION

It is indeed heartening to note that the current changes and the new educational policy reflects the essence of Lajpat Rai’s ideals of achieving full human potential, an equitable and just society, and promoting national development. These are being accomplished through multidisciplinary learning, holistic learner centred pedagogy, inclusive curriculum based on arts, sciences, crafts, humanities, vocational education, sports and fitness, languages, literature, culture, and values, which make education fulfilling to the learner. Lajpat Rai had said that ‘the aim of education should be to qualify the educated man to think and act for himself with a due sense of responsibility towards society.’ These views are reflected in the NEP 2020 vision which is ‘rooted in Indian ethos’ and works towards ‘an equitable and vibrant knowledge society.’ Recent discourse on educational system is geared towards fulfilling rapid technological advancements and rising demands for skills. In this scenario multi-disciplinarity and skill development have emerged as the most important twin focus of current education policy. Thus, we see how the current knowledge landscape promises to fulfil Lajpat Rai’s lifelong commitment towards development of national education. The roots of the new education policy lie in the ethos created by our nationalist leaders. Lajpat Rai’s belief system, his focus on student centric holistic development, physical

and vocational education for progress of individual, society and the nation lie at the very heart of the new education policy.

6. ENDNOTES AND REFERENCES

ⁱ Preface to The Problem of National Education in India.

ⁱⁱ Ibid

ⁱⁱⁱ Ravinder Kumar, ed. Selected Documents of Lala Lajpat Rai, 1906-1928. India, Anmol Publications, 1992. MAO College was started in 1875 by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan; Hindu College by Indian Home Rule Leaguer Annie Besant in 1898, becoming a part of BHU founded by Madan Mohan Malaviya in 1916; Arya College founders Mahatma Lala Hansraj and Gurudutt Vidhyarthi in 1886. In Lajpat Rai's views, 'each institution created an atmosphere of its own—national to a certain extent, so far as the general cult of love of country was concerned, but otherwise openly sectarian.'

^{iv} Lajpat Rai, The Call to Young India, Madras, S. Ganesan & Co, 1920

^v Ibid.

^{vi} Lajpat Rai, The Problem of National Education in India, United Kingdom, G. Allen & Unwin, 1920.

^{vii} Ibid.

^{viii} Ibid.

^{ix} Purushottam Nagar, Lajpat Rai, The Man and his Ideas, New Delhi, R.C Jain Publishers, 1977

^x The Problem of National education in India, *ibid*. Also see, Moffat, Chris. India's Revolutionary Inheritance: Politics and the Promise of Bhagat Singh. India, Cambridge University Press, 2019.

^{xi} Ibid. p154

^{xii} Ibid. p156

^{xiii} The Punjabi, 2nd Feb 1907

^{xiv} Lajpat Rai was of the view that with the adoption of Hindustani as an all-India language the Hindus will learn it in the Devanagari and the Mohammedans in the Arabic script. Also see Ke Ke Śarmā, (1975). Life and Times of Lala Lajpat Rai. India: Indian Book Agency; Nurullah, S., Naik, J. P. (1951). A History of Education in India During the British Period. India: Macmillan.

^{xv} The Problem of National Education in India, *ibid*

^{xvi} Ibid.

^{xvii} Also see Indu Banga, J. S. Grewal, ed. Lala Lajpat Rai in Retrospect: Political, Economic, Social, and Cultural Concerns. India, Publication Bureau, Panjab University, 2000.

^{xviii} The Problem of National Education in India, in Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai, (CWLLR) Vol 7, New Delhi, Manohar Publications, 2003

^{xix} Ibid.

^{xx} Lajpat Rai, The Problem of National Education, 1976

^{xxi} CWLLR, *ibid*

^{xxii} *ibid*

^{xxiii} Ibid.

^{xxiv} Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, ed. Educating the Nation: Documents on the Discourse of National Education in India, 1880-1920. (2003). India: Kanishka Publishers, Distributors.

^{xxv} Ravinder Kumar, Selected Documents of Lala Lajpat Rai, 1906-1928. (1992). India: Anmol Publications.