

Harish K. Puri

Lajpat Rai in USA 1914 -1919: Life and Work of a Political Exile



The five year long stay of Lajpat Rai in America (including a six month sojourn in Japan) was a period of an unanticipated exile contrived by conditions created by the World War. When he sailed from London for New York in November 1914, it was proposed to be a six month trip to collect material for a book on America. But he was not allowed to return to India until the end of 1919. The nature of his life and work in USA was shaped as much by the constraints and challenges in the American situation as by his priorities and the state of his mind. A contextual approach to the study of his work for the national cause of India in USA may be more appropriate for the present exploration.

Before we go into the American context of his life and experience, it may be necessary, however, to have an insight into the state of his mind before he went there. The evidence available suggests that when he left India in April 1914 to catch up with the Congress Delegation in England, it appeared to be an escape 'in panic'. He had lived under grave anxiety when three of the young men closely connected with him were involved as the accused in Lahore-Delhi conspiracy case. Balraj was the son of his close friend Lala Hans Raj. Balmukund, brother of Bhai Parmanand, had lived with Lajpat Rai and worked as his valuable assistant in his social work and aid for the depressed classes. Balmukund, was later sentenced to death in the Hardinge Bomb Case. Amir Chand, whom Lajpat Rai respected, was another. Whereas he thoroughly disapproved of their action, he was 'sincerely anxious to help them'. 'I could not do this', he stated, 'as, (i) I was myself suspected and was being watched by the police, (ii) because any help given by me was likely to prejudice the defense'.^[i] He was afraid that the police might somehow drag him into the Lahore Bomb Case. 'Then I began to suspect that I was being spied on by my own servant who lived with me in the same compound'; and as he recorded later, life became 'intolerable, so I decided to leave India as soon as the preliminary inquiry before the magistrate was finished'.^[ii]

Even before that, the circumstances of his life had created considerable despondency after the imprisonment and transportation of Lokmanya Tilak in July 1908, Bipin Chandra Pal's imprisonment in October, and detention of Aurobindo Ghosh earlier in May. He was getting 'disillusioned' with both the Moderates and the Extremists, more so because of the machinations of colleagues like Lala Harkishan Lal in the Punjab

Congress.^[iii] Earlier; his son Krishna, 20 years old, whom he had left in Cambridge for studies in 1908 and who contracted TB there and was brought home, had died in February 1911.^[iv] His relations with prominent Arya Samajists had been strained as some of them considered his extremist politics as ‘a liability’, and he was forced to forego control over the *Panjabee*, which he had considered to be his organ.^[v] Altogether it had been for him a period of anguish and despair. The opportunity of leaving for England as per Karachi Congress resolution (December 1913) provided an escape.

The initial stipulation was that he would stay in London for six months. Lajpat Rai seemed, however, to be reluctant to return to the Punjab when Michael O’Dwyer was the Lt. Governor. Meanwhile the outbreak of the World War in the beginning of August deepened the threat perception. N. S. Hardikar who lived and worked with Lajpat Rai for three years in America tells us that the British government ‘banned his re-entry into India in the name of the war’.^[vi] So Lajpat Rai decided to land up in the USA.

I

How long he was going to be there was not clear to Lajpat Rai; perhaps about six months, he thought. His objective, as he chalked out for himself and for the information of his contacts would be: ^[vii]

- (i) to study the social and political conditions that prevail there,
- (ii) to cultivate and find out what opportunities we had of training our Youngman there,
- (iii) knowing as intimately as possible the conditions of Indians who had settled in USA, and
- (iv) why the American prejudice against immigration had developed so strongly in recent years.

The major task during the uncertain initial part of his stay related to study, observation and exploration for a book on the United States of America, and completion of the manuscript of *Young India* for the press.

A letter of introduction which Sidney Webb gave him for Professor Edwin A. Seligman led to an unfolding of a chain of introductions and contacts with a number of radicals, intellectuals and reformers. Prominent among these were Henry R. Mussay of Columbia University, Professor Felix Adler of the Ethical Culture Society, Professor Hart of Russel Sage Foundation and then Walter Lippman. A bunch of letters of introduction from Lippman put him in touch with W.E.B. DuBois, editor of the Negro journal *Crisis*, and Booker T. Washington of Tuskegee Institute.^[viii] Besides lecturing, and travelling to observe Americans in action, he took a special interest in the condition of the Negroes, visiting settlements and Negro institutions in Atlanta, Georgia, and also in the study of educational system and the status of women. The Indians he met during the early phase included revolutionaries of the Berlin Committee, C.K. Chakrabarty, Heramba Lal Gupta, and Mohammad Barkatullah who asked Lajpat Rai to join him in bringing independence for India within three months with the aid of the Amir of Afghanistan. Lajpat Rai called

him *baglol* (simpleton or a sort of a fool), even though his patriotism seemed intense. He wisely brushed aside their suggestions for lending his support to their revolutionary work. Moving to the west coast and in the midst of meetings with Indians he made friends with Professor Arthur Pope of University of California at Berkeley and a graduate student, Frieda Hausewirth. Pope who had also been friendly with Lala Har Dayal took special interest in India – her past heritage and present problems, and helped Lajpat Rai in the publication of his book.

Lajpat Rai was perhaps quite restive when he decided after seven months of stay in USA to sail for Japan in July 1915. ‘When leaving America I had not intended to return if I could proceed to India without much risk to my *safety of person*’, he recorded in his fragmentary reminiscences.^[ix] The choice of the words ‘safety of person’, speaks about the fear on his mind. The Anglo-Japanese Alliance in the war may have been a factor. The Japanese government had only a few months earlier used its military power to quell a mutiny by Indian soldiers of the British army stationed in Singapore. Though he developed good contact with Prime Minister Okuma and some Japanese intellectuals, delivered a number of lectures and made useful contacts including one with the Chinese leader Dr. Sun Yat Sen, it did not appear very safe or useful for him to stay in Japan longer. In the end, his six month stay in Japan (July-December 1915) was to be an interlude in a long period of exile in USA.

Besides the ‘monotony of exile’ in America, of which he ‘complained to Frieda Hausewirth,’^[x] Lajpat Rai was either run down or perhaps showed a TB condition so that he was quietly moved by Arthur Pope to a Sanatorium at Mirado, in north Santa Barbara, for recuperation.^[xi] Hardikar mentions that Lajpat Rai’s mind was occupied by one single thought. He was eagerly awaiting the day when he could be able to go back to his country’.^[xii] Financial difficulty was another problem. He tried to raise some money through paid lectures.^[xiii] Seligman papers include a letter from Lajpat Rai, in which he talks about the problem: ‘For fear of my funds coming to an abrupt end I have not been living well. There is nothing wrong with me to look at, but... constant worry, anxiety, and home sickness coupled with the desire to live very frugally has affected my vitality’.^[xiv]

Lajpat Rai was a great admirer of Mazzini. He considered Mazzini his *guru* and had written his biography in Urdu several years earlier. Mazzini had described the condition of a political exile as “consumption of the soul”. But he played a significant role for the Italian national cause during the days of his exile. Lajpat Rai seems to have felt that he was destined to be India’s Mazzini in an alien land. But what exactly he would do and in what form was determined by the context of political conditions he observed in USA as also the opportunities available to him.

II

The significant factors in the American socio-political situation which he observed may be described as follows:

Dismay about the politics of his Indian friends was one factor which affected his work. He was unhappy about their collaboration with Germany and conveyed as much to

C. K. Chakrabarty and H.L. Gupta when they met him early on his arrival in New York. By the time Lajpat Rai returned to California from Japan the factional fight among Ghadar leaders in which he refused to be dragged, 'depressed' him much. Similar was the story of young Indian students of the Nalanda Club at Berkeley. Lajpat Rai decided to move away from that 'whirlpool' to New York in the east. 'One thing I can tell you *in strict confidence*', he wrote to Frieda Housewirth, 'that German money has done our people and their cause more harm than good'.^[xv] He had to politely distance himself from them and their activities

Later when America entered the war on the side of Britain in April 1917, the exposure about the 'anti American' activities of Indian revolutionary nationalists, would create widespread hostility against Indian people. Lajpat Rai had to tread warily but work determinedly for the nationalist cause.

2. Ignorance of Americans about India was a significant factor which suggested the task for him. As he observed: 'The civilised world's ignorance about India, her culture, her history, her politics and her economy is simply colossal. People hold very peculiar views about us. Our mysticism has sometimes amused and sometimes repelled them; our poetry and philosophy have at times been praised. Beyond this the affairs of India had little interest for the rest of the mankind'.^[xvi] He was struck by the ignorance and prejudice against Islam. 'In the five years he had not come across a single person who spoke well of Islam and Islamic communities'.^[xvii]

3. All the American information about India was derived almost exclusively from the (unsympathetic) British sources. Their knowledge of the history and literature of India and its present political and economic conditions, as Lajpat Rai and other observers noted, came either from British sources or from their own 'globe trotters'. The picture of India propagated by the British and American Christian missionaries was one of utter religious hypocrisy and immorality, poverty, absence of hygiene, cruelty on women, sati and child widows, thuggee, and communal warfare. Harold Isaacs published later a whole inventory of stereotypes, expletives and abuses which expressed the American images of the Indians and the Chinese.^[xviii] The reports emphasised the immense 'White Man's Burden', for doing God's good work which the British rulers were efficiently carrying on in India in the midst of heavy odds. It was evident to Lajpat Rai that alternative sources of supply of 'authentic' information to the Americans were necessary because their's was a case not of prejudice but of ignorance and misinformation.

4. Sensitivity of the British government and the people to their image in the white Western world of America 'as to what the world thinks and says of them' was another factor which Lajpat Rai took serious note of.^[xix] Indians had to understand the importance of public opinion in countries other than Great Britain, particularly USA.

All put together, Lajpat Rai's understanding of the situation In America underlined the importance of keeping American public and the press well informed about India. This included a regular supply of 'authentic information' as against the British official lies propagated about India and the beneficent imperial service done to Indian people.

III

In the light of the above, Lajpat Rai carved out for himself ‘the function of an Indian nationalist ambassador to America whose duty was to inform the American public about the conditions in India’. He wrote in his journal: ‘In assuming that function I foresaw how important American influence was destined to be in the affairs of the world and how difficult and stupendous was the task I was undertaking considering my own meagre accomplishments and slender resources’.[\[xx\]](#) He had already expressed his judgement in his *Reflections on the Political Situation in India* that the time had come ‘when the whole truth about the Indian situation should be told’.

For that purpose he established an India Home Rule League of America in October 1917, launched a monthly *Young India* from January 1918 and established the India Information Bureau in June 1918. But his task was not going to be easy. He was acutely aware that the political situation was not favourable to any propaganda. ‘Anybody who criticises Great Britain is dubbed as Pro-German’.[\[xxi\]](#)

The evidence collected by American government of a ‘conspiracy’ of Indian revolutionaries in collaboration with Germany included a shipload of arms sent for delivery at Calcutta. Austen Chamberlain, British Secretary of State for India also supplied to US government, carefully prepared evidence of ‘Ghadar propaganda and violent crime’ from Lahore Conspiracy Cases. These led to a chain of arrests of Indians and the German agents in different parts of America. After a lecture by Lajpat Rai at the Columbia University in March 1917, the plain clothes policemen singled out M.N. Roy who had just arrived in USA and pushed him, his wife Evelyn Trent and H. L. Gupta into a waiting car. Once released after interrogation, Roy, Trent and Sarindra Nath Ghose fled to Mexico, to avoid arrest. By March 1917, as the *New York Times* wrote, the ‘easy carelessness of American tolerance (towards East Indians) has given way to a sternness befitting the time and the danger’.[\[xxii\]](#) American entry into the war on the side of Britain on 6 April and the beginning of Hindu-Germany conspiracy Trial on 12 November augmented a series of blazing headlines of the proceedings of this trial involving incriminating evidence against Indians.

Among a total of 105 persons indicted by the US Federal authorities, 36 were Indians. Lajpat Rai was questioned by the police. The US Justice Department records pointed to a confidential Memo prepared by Sir Cecil Spring Rice ‘on the mischievous activities of Lajpat Rai’.[\[xxiii\]](#)

After the Russian Revolution in November 1917, the discovery of letters written to Leon Trotsky by T. N. Das, S. N. Ghose and Agnes Smedley – a great admirer and ‘student’ of Lajpat Rai, led to charges of ‘Hindu-Bolshevik clique’ and ‘red menace’. Smedley was arrested in May 1918 after a raid on her apartment and interrogated. In her autobiography, *Daughter of the Earth*, Smedley reproduced details of her interrogation by the police in May 1918 in which an officer not only threatened her but also shouted in rage: ‘We will arrest (Lajpat Rai) at once’.[\[xxiv\]](#)

The US Congress passed the Sedition Act on 16 May 1918 and another one on 16 October which provided for deportation of alien anarchists. Next year the US government deported 249 radicals together in one ship which included such notables as Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman. Racism was on the rise and the *Call* wrote about rapid growth of Ku Klux Klan. [xxv] Lajpat Rai had to be cautious in his movements, contacts and the choice of words in his speeches and writings. No wonder the revolutionary young Indians called Lajpat Rai a ‘coward’.

Lajpat Rai decided to use the Home Rule League platform towards a cautiously worked out agenda. Its objectives, as he outlined in the first issue (January 1918) of the monthly *Young India*, were:

- (i) To support the Home Rule Movement in India.
- (ii) To cooperate with the political organisations in India and England.
- (iii) To further friendly intercourse between India and America.

By August he had revised the objectives to incorporate the prominent ideas of Woodrow Wilson who had become a most respected hero of the progressive Americans. This emphasised what would further the cause of India and would be music to liberal American mind. Among these were: [xxvi]

‘To secure the power of self-determination for India through constitutional methods’. This meant Home Rule ‘within the British empire, a position like that of Canada, S. Africa and Australia’. (Perhaps he did not have authentic knowledge about the South African self rule). But the other revised objective was:

‘To strengthen and support all democratic institutions that aim at making the world safe for democracy’. The ‘world safe for democracy’, ‘world peace’, war ‘to end all wars’, ‘self determination’ and ‘constitutional methods’, these stances seem to have become central to his writings and speeches during 1918-1919.

(iii) The third revised objective of the League and the *Young India* ‘to further friendly intercourse’ was spelled out to cover ‘social, cultural, educational and commercial’ intercourse between India and America.

The articles published in the *Young India* which Lajpat Rai edited for 24 months covered a wide variety of subjects relating to India, pointing to the richness of India’s heritage, and the damage done to India under the British imperial rule. Criticism of the British government and its policies was skillfully presented, with the support of data and quotes of the British labour and socialist critics for the purpose of authenticity. In his *England’s Debt to India*, for example, he provided enormous statistical data and references from government documents. He mentioned the strength of his arguments in the book with a touch of sarcasm: ‘In judging of Governments and Rulers, it is they whose word is to be accepted and not of the governed and the ruled....So I have chosen to speak from the mouths of the English themselves’. [xxvii] Invariably he italicised or

underlined particular words to draw attention and made it a point to acknowledge his 'emphasis' to stress his being honest and forthright in quoting others.[\[xxviii\]](#)

The seven aims of the 'India Information Bureau' listed in the *Young India* of June 1918, included furnishing of 'authentic' or reliable information of all kinds on India and to serve as publicity and advertising medium between India and the US. After discussing the broad scope of its work, the *Young India* invited the readers to make enquiries and assured that all questions related to India 'will be promptly answered by competent persons'.[\[xxix\]](#) Continued supply of significant publicity information and statistics on India to all the important journals and newspapers became the basis for India centred write-ups and for winning the support of a number of US senators for advocating India's case for self determination.

The emphasis seemed to be not only on education of Americans about India but also on presenting more liberal sophisticated and wise dimensions of India's political movement for enlisting their sympathy for India's cause. Significant to Lajpat Pat for that purpose was frequent exchange with radical journals and friendship with their editors. Prominent among these were Francis Hackett, editor of the Irish weekly *The Republic*, the weekly *Freeman* of Lajpat Rai's intellectual friend and publisher B.W. Huebsch, the weekly *Nation* of Oswald Garrison Villard, and a most radical journal the *Masses* run by Rev. J.H. Holmes, 'an outstanding figure in the Unitarian Church'. J.T. Sunderland of the Anti Imperialism League was closely working for Home Rule League and *Young India*. All these contacts were his great assets. They were indeed deeply impressed by Lajpat Rai and liked him for his being a 'self-made man', his work for social reform in India, particularly the work relating to the depressed classes, and famine relief, his self sacrificing role in politics for which he was even deported in 1907 without trial, his wide knowledge of India's ancient religion and culture, his high ethical standard and frugal living, his balanced and persuasive approach in lectures and writings and his openness and sincerity.

Naeem Gul Rathore in his Ph.D. thesis on Lajpat Rai's 'Nationalist Agitation in the United States', finds that Lajpat Rai noticed what qualities Americans appreciated in him and he made full use of these in his lectures with a touch of modesty.[\[xxx\]](#) In over 10 books and pamphlets and 78 articles published by Lajpat Rai, besides regular editing and writing in *Young India* during this period (which are listed in Rathore's bibliography), Lajpat Rai's range of interest comes out to be very wide. The subjects covered included education in USA and India, the problems and status of women, religions, Negroes in USA and depressed classes in India, the political economy of war, Asia and the war, international politics, Anglo-Persian Treaty, the Japanese and American societies and, of course, issues of British colonial exploitation, and humiliation of a people and the political awakening among Indians.

Lajpat Rai also inspired a number of Indians and Americans to make a deep study of India and to advocate her cause in America and other parts of the world. Agnes Smedley a young journalist was drawn to Lajpat Rai after listening to his lecture at Columbia University on 10 March 1917. She became prominent for her closely observed

and insightful reporting on the Chinese Revolution in 1949, earning her the ‘John Reed of China’ fame.

Smedley’s account of her initial encounter with Lajpat Rai in her autobiography, *Daughter of the Earth*, is illustrative of the impact he made on the other people:[\[xxxii\]](#)

He was a teacher and a wise man. A dark man with white in his hair, a man from India, ugly and severe.... He worked with me although I was raw and ignorant of many things. I was not an interesting person to associate with and yet he worked with me and taught me, filling my life with meaning.

He introduced me to the movement for the freedom of his people and showed me that it was not only an historic movement of itself, but it was part of an international struggle for emancipation.... It was not a distant movement. Because I loved him as I might have loved my father, I learned more than I could have learned from any other source. Through him I touched for the first time a movement of unwavering principle and beauty — the struggle of a continent to be free

The impact on Smedley of her first meeting with Lajpat Rai was ‘enormous’. Her biographers found that he ‘drove Smedley hard in her studies, and she responded with total commitment’. She became a life time friend of India. In the bibliographical listing of Smedley’s articles by her scholar-biographers one finds 35 of her articles published in the *Modern Review* of Calcutta, 15 in *The People* of Lajpat Rai and over 40 articles on India in different journals of Europe and America.[\[xxxiii\]](#)



Agnes Smedley in sari.
New York. circa 1919

N.S. Hardikar, one of the several Indian students who was attracted to Lajpat Rai and worked with him as Secretary of the Home Rule League, also made a notable contribution by organising scores of discussion groups on India and more importantly the Indian Workers Union of America. In his description of the poor living condition of workers in India, what Americans described as a ‘square meal’, was a rarity in their lives; their average per capita income per year was only \$9.50 out of which about \$ 1.60 was taken away in taxes. This touched the workers deeply. Hardikar’s pamphlet, *India – A*

Graveyard, received wide publicity and comments in journals and newspapers. Describing just one lap of his long tour of campaign in 1919, Naeem Gul Rathore mentions 83 lectures given by him in 86 days before ten educational institutions, nine political groups, six religious organisations and 15 conferences with leading officers of various organisations.[\[xxxiii\]](#)

Lajpat Rai noticed a whiff of fresh air in the war messages of President Woodrow Wilson and thought it appropriate to attract his attention to the cause of India. 'Indian Home Rule League begs most respectfully to congratulate Your Excellency upon the lofty sentiments of your latest utterance which is bound to thrill the millions of world's "subject races"', Lajpat Rai wrote to Wilson in a telegram. 'It constitutes a new charter of world's freedom and the United States should have every reason to be proud of the part she is playing in the War. It is a noble and lofty role'.[\[xxxiv\]](#) But in his lectures he also castigated and provoked the Americans to reflect upon, whether all their vision of a new world did not actually exclude three fourths of mankind. 'Democracy at home without democracy abroad is an impossibility', he stressed.[\[xxxv\]](#) After the war ended, Lajpat Rai won the support of some liberals for a petition to President Wilson. It pleaded that the principles he enunciated, may be applied to subject nations within the empires of the *Entente* governments. Later he and Hardikar, managed to address the US Senate's Foreign Relations Committee as representatives of India's Home Rule League. In this they were ably assisted by a lawyer friend of India, Dudley Field Malone. Documents in US Congressional Records point to Lajpat Rai's contact with Senator McCormick of Illinois who was the first in US Senate to have 'openly condemned the British rule in India and identified himself with the Indian national movement'. Others, who similarly advocated India's self determination as a part of the Treaty, included Senator France of Maryland, Senator Gronna of North Dakota and Senator Norris of Nebraska. Senator France had particularly thanked the editor of *Young India* for 'rendering a valuable service in acquainting the people of America with the grave problems which confronted the people of India'.[\[xxxvi\]](#)

Much of the credit for attracting American interest to the cause of Indian nationalism, despite very formidable odds during that period, belongs to Lajpat Rai. When he was finally allowed to proceed to India in December 1919 he was overwhelmed by the affection and respect at the laudatory farewell dinner gatherings. At the dinner by the League of Oppressed Peoples, tributes were paid to him by representatives of all the major participating countries including those by Pethick Lawrence of British Labour Party, Professor Pope and Oswald Garrison Villard as toastmaster. In a touching tribute Villard described Lajpat Rai as 'a wise, brave and sound ambassador, a generous and moderate interpreter of great races to our American Democracy; a profound student of human liberties, with a heart responsive to the upward aspirations of mankind in every clime'[\[xxxvii\]](#) Lajpat Rai disclosed at the Civic Club dinner speech, later published as 'My Farewell' in the *Young India*, that 'for full one year and a half, I had the pleasure of living in a house, a part of which was occupied by a detective in the employ of the US government'. He had reason to suspect that his phone was tapped, his mail was opened and that he was arrested for interrogation six times. 'Yet I must thank the Department of Justice for the courtesy they showed me every time they sent for me'.[\[xxxviii\]](#)

Lajpat Rai was satisfied that the five year exile had been a most fruitful period of his life. He noticed that his efforts contributed to ‘a slight change’ in the proverbial American ignorance and lack of interest in India. But what he seemed to appreciate was the welcome breadth of his own learning and world view. He had found the extensive study at the library of Columbia University and New York Public Library, and exchange of ideas on the most varied subjects with the best of minds from different countries of the world to be extremely valuable. In his article addressed to Indian leaders, he invited the political leaders of India to visit USA: ‘This country is in a way the epitome of the world. Here you can come into contact with the representatives of all countries, cultures and parties and from them we can know about conditions in other countries without going to those countries’.[\[xxxix\]](#) It enabled him to develop a new perspective for seeing India’s problems in the ‘larger context of world problems’.

Writing about politics in the age of science, Lajpat Rai, made, for example, the following observation:[\[xli\]](#)

Science has largely eliminated the dividing lines of the world. It has destroyed space and distance. It has brought the races of men nearer to one another; but only in body, not in heart. To the old causes of conflict, struggle, competition and war, it has added new ones. Formerly men fought for honour, for country, for religion and for gold. Now men fight for coal, for iron and for oil. In the last analysis the fight is for power, now as before, though the ostensible objects are different.

In his *Reflections on Indian Political Situation*, referring to the tall British claims about the objectives of the war, Lajpat Rai made an almost prophetic observation:

‘The talk about ending the war for all times to come is pure and simple non-sense.... The seeds of future war are being sown and the British will have to be ready for that’.[\[xlii\]](#)

Lajpat Rai came to emphasise the need for Indians ‘to think and act internationally’. He stressed the need for modern methods of publicity to educate public opinion towards Indian aspirations in countries other than Great Britain. ‘The world holds us in contempt’, not out of prejudice but because of ignorance, because ‘we let judgement go against us by default’. He recommended the establishment of ‘permanent Indian Information Bureaus’ at least in New York, Tokyo and Paris. Indians should write books on Indian topics for other people of the world, place our periodicals in libraries of the world and establish ‘purely Indian news service’ between India and major civilised countries of the world, he pleaded. Exchange of professors was another of his suggestions: “we should induce some foreign universities to send their professors to Indian universities and invite Indian professors to their universities”.[\[xliii\]](#)

The Indian National Congress placed on record an appreciation for the significant contribution of Lajpat Rai and appeared to value his suggestions. However, no significant step seems to have been taken in that direction except deputing much later Syed Hussain and J. J. Singh for such a work in America during the 1940s. A sense of inadequacy led Lajpat Rai to write a powerful rejoinder to Katherine Mayo’s *Mother India* urgently by publishing his *Unhappy India*. Only he seemed to understand correctly the extent of

damage *Mother India* was likely to do to India's cause. As Harold Isaacs reported, 27 editions of the book had been published and over 250,000 copies of the book were sold in USA by the mid 1940s. According to a public opinion survey conducted by Isaacs, 25 per cent of the Americans derived whatever knowledge they had of India, from Mayo's *Mother India*.^[xliii] Lajpat Rai was grateful to Agnes Smedley for her spirited campaign against the book and for being the first American woman activist to write a scathing review of *Mother India* for the *New Masses*. Even though Smedley's politics in 1927 was at odds with that of Lajpat Rai, their mutual respect had been maintained.

Another significant impact made on him, by his experience during the days of his exile, related to the urgency of a shift in the orientation of politics, i.e., towards the problems of the masses in general and of the labourers in particular. Economic upliftment and education of masses, 'unfettered communication' and 'brotherly sympathy' appeared most important for Congressmen to follow as against their elitist orientation of mind. 'We have to make them (masses) conscious of their great potentialities by working with them in a spirit of co-operation', he wrote in a letter to Mahatma Gandhi, 'and *not working for them in a spirit of patronage*'.^[xliv] Part of the inspiration for the serious attention he gave to organising labourers and peasants in the war against imperialism and capitalism came from his Fabian Socialist friends in England, his work among Indian labourers, and the influence of radicals like DuBois in USA.

Lajpat Rai seemed to be quite unhappy and despondent about the political situation and the fate of Indian people before the lathi blows in Lahore hastened his death in 1928. The task he had set for himself after returning to India in 1920 was stupendous as against the formidable challenges and his limited capacity to cope with these. But the tremendous work he did according to his political sense, with deep commitment, has not yet been adequately assessed. His life and work during the period of his exile in USA and the impact it made on his thought process and priorities of social action, a more or less neglected area, requires greater attention of researchers.

Notes and References

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- [i] Nagar, Purushottam (1977). *Lala Lajpat Rai: The Man and His Ideas*. Delhi: Manohar, p. 70.
- [ii] *Loc. cit.*
- [iii] *Ibid.* 67.
- [iv] Rathore, Naeem Gul (1965). "Indian Nationalist Agitation in the United States: A Study of Lala Lajpat Rai and the India Home Rule League of America 1914-20", Ph.D. Dissertation, USA: Columbia University, p. 42.
- [v] *Loc. Cit.*
- [vi] Hardikar, N. S. (1966). *Lala Lajpat Rai in America*. Delhi: Servants of the People Society, p. 3.
- [vii] Rai (1916). *The United States of America: A Hindu's Impressions and a Study*, Calcutta, pp. iii & 6
- [viii] Rathore, *op.cit.*, pp.45-53
- [ix] Chand, Feroz (1978). *Lajpat Rai: Life and Work*. New Delhi: Publications Division, Government of India, p. 279
- [x] To Frieda Hausewirth, New York, Sunday May 1916 (undated). Photocopy with the author.
- [xi] Rathore, *op.cit.*, 66. Rathore in fact talks of Lajpat Rai's 'predisposition to tuberculosis' and remarks that his health was in a 'precarious state' when he reached California in December 1915. *Ibid.*, p. 185
- [xii] Hardikar, *op.cit.* p. 2
- [xiii] Letter to Frieda Hausewirth.

- [xiv] Rathore, *op.cit.* p. 188. Two years later when B.G. Tilak learnt about Rai's difficulties, he managed to send 5,000 dollars through Annie Besant's Theosophical Society connection.
- [xv] Letter to Frieda Hausewirth, emphasis in the original
- [xvi] Lajpat Rai, 'Need for Publicity Abroad', *The Tribune*, 4 September 1919, cf. Joshi, V. C. (1966), *Lala Lajpat Rai: Writings and Speeches*. Delhi: University Publishers, Vol.1, p. 318.
- [xvii] *Ibid*, 322
- [xviii] Isaacs, Harold (1980). *Scratches on Our Minds: American Image of China and India*. New York: M.E.Sharp Inc.(Revised)
- [xix] Lajpat Rai (1916/1968), p. 186
- [xx] Rathore, *op.cit.* p. 73.
- [xxi] Letter to Frieda Hausewirth, New York, 2 April 1917 (photocopy with the author)
- [xxii] MacKinnon, Janice R. and Stephen R. Mac Kinnon (1988). *Agnes Smedley: The Life and Times of an American Radical*. Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 39
- [xxiii] Rathore (1965), 92
- [xxiv] Mac Kinnon, *op.cit.* p. 45
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About the author: Harish K. Puri retired as Professor of Political Science and Chairman Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Chair, Guru Nanak Dev University. His research publications include seven books and over 120 research papers and popular articles. Noticeable among the books are *Ghadar Movement, Ideology, Organisation and Strategy; Terrorism in Punjab – Understanding Grass root Reality* (co-authored); *Social and Political Movements* (edited) and many more.

E: harishpuri@gmail.com