CHAPTER VIII

LAIJPAT RAI'S IDEAS ON EVOLUTION AND REVOLUTIONARIES.
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Lajpat Rai's attitude towards terrorism and the terrorist movement has been a subject of controversy. Lajpat Rai's deportation to Mandalay in June 1907 along with Ajit Singh put him for a while within the orbit of terrorist activities. The role of Lajpat Rai during the Punjab in Ferment has been discussed in Chapter II of this study. There was no substance in the reports on the basis of which the Viceroy had ordered his deportation. An analysis of Minto-Morley papers does not support the thesis of his being a revolutionary. The official documents amply demonstrate that none of the reasons advanced officially for the deportation by the Punjab Government were true. Lord Minto had to confess that he was made to order his deportation in a panic by misrepresentation of the case by the Punjab Government. Lord Minto refused his assent to the Punjab Canal Colonies Bill after it had been assented to by the Lieutenant Governor, on the very grounds for which it had been condemned by the Layallpur meeting in which Lajpat Rai had taken part. It was fortuitous that the deportation of Ajit Singh had been ordered at the same time. The focus of

1. For detailed analysis of Lajpat Rai's role during Punjab in Ferment see Chapter II of Part A of this Study.
This chapter is on Lajpat Rai's ideas on revolution and his role in the revolutionary movements of his time. Whether he was a revolutionary or not would depend on it. Lajpat Rai made a penetrating analysis of Revolutions and the causes of revolutionary movements particularly in the context of India. In his 'Reflections on Revolutions' he has succinctly summed up his ideas on revolutions and revolutionaries. According to Lajpat Rai, Revolutions are above dogmas. Every revolution must have its own creed.

No nation deserved to be free which could not win its freedom, and was prepared to fight for it, if necessary.

Freedom won, principally, by outside help was liable to be lost. "By themselves must nations be made," is true today as ever.

The capacity to fight for freedom was as much a moral and a spiritual asset as it was physical and scientific.

Revolutions in order to be fruitful must have a moral and humane foundation. They must have a popular basis.

Secret movements were a double-edged weapon. While they may be necessary against entrenched and armed autocracy they must be jealously guarded against the machinations of selfish, ambitious and unscrupulous adventurers. The less secrecy a revolutionary movement had, the better for its moral and ethical side.

Discipline and judgement were as much necessary for the success of a revolutionary movement as courage and initiative.

The revolutionaries who were prepared to die are more often than not, amongst the best. Their premature loss deprived the movement of its inspiring figures and brought to the forefront men of inferior moral calibre.

A revolutionary movement could not be run on absolutely democratic lines. Yet the revolutionary autocrats must be not only of towering intellect but possess moral character of the highest type.

The greatest asset of a revolutionary movement was the faith of its adherents. Their success in deliberation, organization and action would be only in proportion to their faith in the righteousness of their cause.
A revolutionary movement must be based on reason and not on blind faith.

In all representations to their allies, if there were any, they must be absolutely truthful and straightforward.

Above all they must be possessed of an extraordinary amount of patience as distinguished from procrastination. The too much calculating and prudent revolutionary sometimes let golden opportunities for action slip off his hands. He thereby hampered the movement by his lack of vision and courage. But a man who by reckless bluff endangered his fellow workers and thereby caused disproportionate losses to the cause, unconsciously brought about a demoralization.

Much should not be built on temporary successes. The revolutionary movement must have its martyrs. But it must not send its adherents to a certain death for the sake of martyrdom alone.

Lajpat Rai mixed freely and intimately with prominent revolutionaries in India, Japan and America. His connection with the revolutionary movement deserves careful study in the light of these propositions.

His Attitude Towards Terrorism and Revolutionaries.

Though never himself in favour of terrorism or revolution, Lajpat Rai had a soft corner for young men who turned out to be revolutionaries. In 1906 and 1907 his house was open to these young men whenever they cared to come. Har Dayal had lived with him for sometime. He never cared to enquire what they did when they met. Occasionally they would fasten upon a random sentence or two of his and make that a source of inspiration. His account of the
Indian revolutionaries in the United States and Japan amply proved that though he disagreed with them, he was ready to render them all help in their personal difficulties. When M.N. Roy landed penniless in America it was Lajpat Rai who gave him food and shelter.

In the introduction to his autobiography, written in November 1914 in New York, he praised terrorists in India for their "valour and patriotic sacrifice." In particular, he extolled the vengeance of Narendra Gossain (the approver in the Alipur conspiracy case who was murdered in jail by two revolutionists who were later executed)\(^2\) and remarked that "a day will come when people will take wreaths of homage to their statues."\(^3\) Likewise, he wrote: "The bomb thrower on Lord Hardinge did a memorable act unique for its valour." Lajpat Rai, however, regretted that the secret societies lacked the support of wealthy people and that their revolutionary acts were regarded by the masses as sheer madness. While the revolutionists "spread the gospel of freedom" he deplored the fact that educated Indians regarded their efforts as futile and detrimental to India and 


charged them with selfishness and cowardice. Those who blamed the extremists' party for 'having injured the cause' by prompting Government repression, did not realise that under foreign rule, peace unalloyed by repression would be fatal. The political consciousness created by the extremist in a decade would not have been created by the moderates in half a century.

But it would be wrong to infer from Lajpat Rai's praise for the terrorists that he approved of their aim to oust the British outright from India. As mentioned earlier, in August 1907, Minto had written to Morley that Lajpat Rai was connected in a revolutionary plot with the 'Amir' of Afghanistan, but no proof of this charge was ever furnished. The Englishman published the allegation on September 10, 1908, and in a suit against The Englishman the Calcutta High Court awarded Lajpat Rai Rs.15,000 in damages for libel. In November, 1914, Lajpat Rai was invited by two members of the 'Ghadar' party -- Chandra Chakravarti and Heramba Lal Gupta -- to a meeting of Indian students at their Hindustani Association in New York, in which Chakravarti gave an anti-British and pro-German speech. When pressed to speak,

Lajpat Rai said, "I am an Indian patriot and I wish freedom for my country. I have no sympathy with the Germans nor have anything against them. Considering our present circumstances we will rather stay in the British Empire as a self-governing part than go out to be governed by another nation."

At another meeting of the 'Ghadar' party, Lajpat Rai was told by one Barkatullah that a rebellion was imminent in India, that it would be backed by the 'Amir' of Kabul, and that Lajpat Rai should co-operate without fear, since India would be free in three months' time. To this he answered that he wished neither the 'Amir' nor the Germans in India, and called Barkatullah a fool and a liar.

In December 1914, Lajpat Rai was approached by Heramba Lal Gupta in Boston, and was informed by him that the Germans were eager to have his support on any terms of agreement, and asked if he would co-operate. To this he answered "No." At Los Angeles, Heramba Lal Gupta again pressed Lajpat Rai, and on German instructions offered him the leadership of the Indo-German organization. It was again flatly refused. In December 1915, Lajpat Rai attended a meeting of Indian students in New York, in which his few words of greetings were interpreted by the Chairman, Ram Chandra Mazumdar, as an indication of his sympathy with the 'Ghadar' movement. But this was strongly refuted by

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Lajpat Rai, who protested against his having been tricked and misrepresented by Ram Chandra Mazumdar. In 1916, Chandra Chakravarti was appointed head of the 'Ghadar' party in America, and on his return from Germany was instructed to persuade Lajpat Rai to go to Germany, but again Lajpat Rai rejected the proposal.

Between November 1914 and January 1920 while he was in the U.S.A. and Japan he came in contact with various types of revolutionaries. Some of them were in favour of collection and manufacture of fire arms and bombs for assassination and other terroristic activities. But men like Bhai Parmarnand, Jadugopal Mukherjee and Particle did not like to collect money by committing dacoity on their fellow-countrymen or to murder individual British officers. They tried to tamper with the loyalty of the Indian army by skillful propaganda, raise the standard of revolt and carry on guerilla war. But when the First World War broke out, most of them were in favour of securing German help for the liberation of India. Lajpat Rai did not believe that freedom secured with foreign help was worth having. He told an 'agent' of Ramchandra that he had no doubt that the Germans would grab India and suck the life blood out of her even more mercilessly than the English had done. He had

8. Ibid., pp. 52-53.
nothing but hatred for Prussianism. In his presidential speech in the special session of the Congress in September, 1920, he condemned Michael O'Dwyer's method of governing the Punjab as Prussian in conception, Prussian in aim and Prussian in execution.\textsuperscript{10}

Thus he disparaged the intention of the terrorists to liberate India by means of German help and expressed his conviction that German rule would prove far worse than British rule. He concluded that the 'Ghadar' leaders brought nothing but discredit to their cause both in America and Germany. He opined that they would have been the worst possible rulers, had India fallen into their hands.\textsuperscript{11}

Notwithstanding the unsuccessful attempt to enlist Lajpat Rai in the 'Ghadar' party, the Indian Nationalist Committee at Leipzig, published in 1917, his article entitled \textsuperscript{12} "Reflections on the political situation in India" with the following introduction:

"Insulted and disillusioned India will realise frustration after the war and will tread upon the red path of revolution. Lajpat Rai's 'Reflections' ...

\textsuperscript{10} Lajpat Rai, \textit{The Call to Young India} (S. Ganesan), p.163
\textsuperscript{11} Lajpat Rai, \textit{Autobiographical Writings} (Delhi, 1965), pp. 204-05.
is a warning and assertion that nothing short of organized armed force will free the helpless millions of India."

In the above article, Lajpat Rai described British rule as tyrannical and oppressive. Neither the moderates nor the extremists desired the immediate severance of India from British rule. But Lajpat Rai foresaw that, "the spread of revolutionary ideas and the development of the movement for independence will not be stopped."13

One finds a certain ambivalence on the part of Lajpat Rai towards the revolutionaries. On the one hand he sympathised with them and praised their courage and sacrifice. On the other hand he condemned the terrorist activities and their methods. At the Patna session of the Congress in December 1912 when the constitutionalist leaders brought forward a resolution condemning the Delhi Bomb outrage, Lajpat Rai supported it.

Again he declared in June 1917 in his 'Open letter to Lloyd George': "At no time before or during the war did I place my faith in the likelihood of India getting any help from Germany."14 Even when preparations for what proved to be

a hopeless 'rising' in India at the instigation of Germany were being made in the U.S.A., Lajpat Rai had the courage to declare that no thoughtful Indian at present was anxious to or even willing to seek the aid of a foreign government. He condemned the revolutionaries in 1919 because he held that 'revolutionaries have taught us lying and deception, double dealing and duplicity, besides assassination, robbery and dacoity.' It is short-sightedness to try to bring about revolution by assassination, murder, terrorism or dacoity. In a letter from New York, dated July 19, 1919 he criticised these young men, as they were angling for German help against the British in India. In a letter to Mahatama Gandhi published in the Young India on August 13, 1919, he went to the extent of saying that he was 'convinced of futility of attempts to bring about forcible revolution (in India).'

How much reliance could be placed on public utterances of this sort as conveying the true sentiment of the speaker? Lajpat Rai himself wrote in 1919:

"Public speeches denouncing the revolutionary propaganda and the revolutionary activities or

15. Ibid., p. 253.
16. Ibid., p. 313.
17. Ibid., p. 315.
18. Ibid., p. 319.
19. Ibid., p. 327.
public condemnation of the latter in the press are good in their own way, but they are not quite effective. The revolutionist may ascribe it to fear, timidity or hypocrisy."20

In 1915 Lajpat Rai met in Tokyo Rash Behari Basu, who was then living under the name, P.N. Thakur, and was under orders of deportation. Rash Behari is said to have entreated Lajpat Rai to take charge of a sum of 21,500 yen, though the latter did not believe in Basu's programme. The tenor of Lajpat Rai's writing gave one the impression that he did not know that Thakur was Rash Behari. But Lajpat Rai knew him to be a terrorist who did not believe in the possibility of absolute independence for India in the near future. Lajpat Rai was further informed that Rash Behari had no faith in the Germans, yet he was prepared to use them for terrorist purposes. "I begged of him," wrote Lajpat Rai: "to give me no secrets and he gave me very few."21 Ramchandra, the 'Ghadar' leader, also handed over to him 3,500 Dollars during the very first month of their acquaintance in America for defraying the expenses of defence of Bhai Parmanand in the First Lahore Conspiracy case in 1915. Ramchandra also gave 600 Dollars to Lajpat Rai for the


publication of his book *Young India*. Is it not possible to conclude from all these facts that Lajpat Rai was in the confidence of the revolutionaries?

According to M.N. Roy, Rash Behari Basu's plan of freeing India was with the help of Japan, which he believed was destined to free Asia from white domination. With reference to such schemes Lajpat Rai said in his presidential speech in the Congress: "I do not desire the destruction of some Empires for the benefit of others." M.N. Roy stated that Lajpat Rai went to America from London in 1915 and with his great oratorical power won the sympathy of liberal minded Americans for the cause of Indian Independence. While he was returning to India via London he was refused permission to proceed further. "It was suspected," writes M.N. Roy, "that while in America, he had established some conspiratorial contact with the enemy. Like all colonial nationalists he was of course, pro-German: but he was too cautious a man to be actively connected with any clandestine arrangements." If these words are to be believed, one has to take all the anti-German statements made by Lajpat Rai in 1919 in his 'Autobiographical Notes' and in 1920 in the

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presidential speech as mere afterthoughts written with a view to warding off any suspicion against him. But possibly M.N. Roy was attributing his own ideas to Lajpat Rai.

Towards the close of his biographical notes Lajpat Rai wrote: "I have lost almost all faith in secret work and in secret organisations." It signified that at one time he had faith in them and that faith had not yet vanished completely. The position taken by him could best be seen from his observations on those advocates of constructive nationalism who wanted independence, but, not till Indians were able to protect themselves against the outside world. Such people would like to make use of both the Congress and the bomb. He explained this point thus:

"They would not advocate the use of the bomb and the revolver; in fact they might in all seriousness dissuade people from using them, but when they are used, they would not give up the offenders even if they knew who they were. But they do not like the use of the bomb and the revolver for general political purposes or for terrorising. These people believe in a propaganda of selfless social service."25

All the ambivalences, if not contradictions, which one discovered in the various utterances of Lajpat Rai could be reconciled in the light of this statement.

Regarding the causes of revolutionary movement, Lajpat Rai started from the fundamental proposition that political institutions were nothing but reflection of the national mind and national conditions. Indians wanted to have freedom to live according to their own conception and to pursue their own ideals in an independent state free from the interference of others. The British rulers did not allow them to live such a life. This was the root cause of the revolutionary movement. The other contributory causes were the insolent conduct of an alien bureaucracy, the distrust of the Government towards the educated classes, who were not allowed to express their opinion freely. The elderly leaders could have dissuaded hot-headed young men from taking recourse to terrorism. But any close association with them was likely to get one into hot water.

The revolutionary propaganda in the Punjab during 1908 and 1909 owed its virility, in part at least, to the absence of "legitimate" constitutional political activity in that province. The repressive policy of the Punjab Government made such activity well-nigh impossible. As a result of its repressive measures, the youth felt so much exasperated that they made several attempts on the lives of high officials. Publications which had been suppressed

were published and circulated secretly. Arms were smuggled and stolen, attempts were made to wreck railways and thus terrorise the Government.  

Lajpat Rai believed that "the revolutionary struggle in India had been brought to its shores by its rulers." They changed the whole structure of social life in India by revolutionary economic changes introduced for their own benefit. At the same time, Indians' outlook on life had been changed, by the Western system of education, law courts and newspapers. Since a section of the ruling race claimed right to rule the Indians by sword, thus a struggle between the forces of democratic change and reactionary militarism was inevitable. Further the Government drove disaffection underground by its policy of indiscriminate persecutions.

In the opinion of Lajpat Rai, the root causes were political and economic and unless they were removed, violent crime of this nature would not disappear. These grievances could not be removed except by radical changes in the form, constitution and policy of the Government.

28. Ibid., p. 162.
29. Ibid., p. 162.
Lajpat Rai was not a revolutionary in the sense of a terrorist, because he did not approve of their methods. Nor was he a votary of non-violence like Mahatma Gandhi. He admired the ardour and sincerity of many terrorists but deprecated their tendency to lean on foreign help and taking recourse to violent methods. He supported non-violent non-cooperation not as an act of faith, but because he was convinced that the country was not ripe for the militant revolutionary struggle. As a pragmatic analyst he was convinced that violence or force was not going to achieve the desired goal. He was, therefore, led to conclude that any resort to violence in the political situation then existing was insane and foolish and would lead to demoralization and further repression. In the light of the above discussion, it may be, perhaps, more accurate to describe Lajpat Rai as a pragmatist militant nationalist and not a revolutionary in the sense that he was not a terrorist.