LIFE SKETCH OF LALA HARDAYAL: THE FOUNDER OF GHADAR MOVEMENT

Dr. Raj Kumar
Assistant Professor, PG Department of History, Dev Samaj College for Women, Ferozepur City (PB).

ABSTRACT

The Ghadar movement stood for the revolutionary overthrow of the British rule in India. It had two pronged strategy: to expose the racial discrimination of the American, Canadian and the British Government towards Indians and to evoke national pride for independence of India. Those who worked for it were Punjabi immigrants, mostly Sikhs, small and middle peasants at home, working as labourers in farms and factories in the U.S.A. and Canada. Their emigration was a response to economic frustration and oppression at home. In the foreign land, they were treated as slave. Therefore, they started organizing themselves to get freedom from the yoke of British slavery. They formed an organization named ‘Hindustan Association of the Pacific Coast’ which later known as Ghadar Party. Lala Hardayal was the real brain behind the Ghadar Movement. He guided this movement in its initial years. He was a great thinker, intellectual and Ideologue of Ghadar Movement.

Lala Hardayal was born in Delhi in 1884 in a lower middle class Kayastha family in Cheera Khana (Delhi) which lies at the back of Gurudwara Sisganj. His father Gauri Dayal Mathur, a scholar of Persian and Urdu was employed as a copy reader in the District Court, Delhi. Gauri Dayal had a large family of seven children, four sons and three daughters. Lala Hardayal was youngest of the four sons. When he was born, the administration of Delhi was a part of the Punjab. The colleges of Delhi were also affiliated to the Panjab University, Lahore. Delhi was a capital of India on December 12, 1911. So Lala Hardayal was considered a native of the Punjab.

He was sent to Cambridge Mission School, Delhi at the age of four. From here, he did his matriculation at the age of fourteen. He completed his graduation from Saint Stephen's College, Delhi. He stood first in every examination. He did his M.A. in English literature from Government College, Lahore in 1903. Next year, he got M.A. degree in history from same college. According to Khushwant Singh, he possessed phenomenal memory and broke many University examination records. He came to known as the “Great Har Dayal”. In his school time, he used to take extra interest in other curriculum activities. In Delhi, he founded the Kayastha Sabha for elderly persons. Three men, Hans Raj, the Principal of DAV College, Lahore, Lala Lajpat Rai and Bhai Parmanand became friends of his and influenced him in the process of his education. He was also greatly influenced by V.D. Savarkar who advocated a popular armed rebellion in India on the pattern of what he described as ‘The Indian War of Independence 1857’. Lala Hardayal’s years at Lahore were crucial for him because it was here, he came into contact with political, social, religious and intellectual activists.

In early 1905, he was selected for state scholarship (200 sterling annual), granted by the Government of India to the promising young scholars. He was first Punjabi or North Indian to be awarded this scholarship. In the meantime, he used to take extra interest in other curriculum activities. In Delhi, he came in touch with India House (established by Shyamji Krishna Varma), the centre for Indian nationalist extremists. The aim of this organization was to spread revolutionary propaganda among the students. Lala Hardayal met Shyamji Krishna Varma in April 1906, eight months after his arrival in England. He was introduced by Bhai Parmanand, his friend from Lahore to Shyamji. In India House, he also met Savarkar, Virendranath Chattopadaya and other young revolutionaries. He had an ambition to take the I.C.S. examination, but soon dropped the idea and plunged into the struggle for freedom of India. Commenting on his transformation, Lala Lajpat Rai wrote in Young India, “it is needless to say that even in England, he maintained his reputation for brilliant scholarship, but what is remarkable is that it was here he became a nationalist.”

In 1907, Sardar Ajit Singh and Lala Lajpat Rai, leaders of Punjab Agrarian Agitation, were arrested and exiled. This news produced a great stir in the minds of Hindu students in London and other places. This agitation influenced Lala Hardayal also. He was surprised to see the propound patriotism of Englishmen and also wished to see his country free. He said to Bhai Parmanand, “I have a mind to leave the University of Oxford, go back to India and stir up a movement for the freedom of motherland. Now, he considered a sin to accept the state scholarship. He argued that “all this education and these degrees are meant to denationalize us.” He resigned his scholarship in the fall of 1907. According to Gobind Bihari Lal, his resignation created a fluster among the Indian as well as British academic circles.

After his resignation, he returned to India in early 1908 and moulded his life style according to Indian tradition. He gave up English dress and wore a dhoti (loin cloth) and Kurtas (collarless shirt). He refused eatables from the English and became a strict vegetarian. In February 1908, he met Tilak who was impressed by his personality. Tilak wrote back to Shyamji Krishna Varma that he expected Lala Hardayal to develop into a leader in the Punjab and he would “prove a tower of strength to the Nationalist party generally.” Lala Hardayal spent some time with Lala Lajpat Rai in Lahore and held classes of young men for preaching the relevance of passive resistance and boycott as weapon for striving the British out of India. During this period, he regularly contributed articles to The Punjabi (Edited by Lala Lajpat Rai) and Modern Review (Published from Calcutta). The theme of his writings was exploitation by the British Empire.

He went back to Europe in the end of 1908. After visiting London, he went to Paris. Here, he came into contact with the best political thought of Europe. He made friendship with Egyptian nationalists and Russian revolutionists. He also came into close touch with Karl Marx's grandson Jean Lonquet who was one of the prominent French journalists. In Paris, he edited Bande Matram, a monthly journal in September 1909. In May 1910, he published article entitled “The Social Conquest of The Hindu Race.” It had been prescribed under the Press Act and its importation into India was prohibited under the Sea Customs Act in December 1910.

Early in 1911, he went to United States. After a short stay at Boston, he proceeded to Berkeley. His reputation as a scholar already preceded him. In February 1912, he was invited to join the faculty of Stanford University as a lecturer in Philosophy. At University, he got in touch with various socialist and anarchist groups. Soon, he came to be known as an exponent of anarchism in San Francisco. During this period, he also got acquainted with Marxism and its literature. He was an anarchist who believed in revolution not only in India but...
revolution everywhere. He used to say, "I am a revolutionary first and everything else afterwards."\(^{15}\)

In September 1912, he resigned his post and returned to Berkeley to take up revolutionary work. He was familiar with Thakur Das and Indians living in California heard about him as he had been writing in the Urdu newspapers of Lahore. It was through these newspapers that the Indians living in America came to know about the political struggle of Lala Hardayal writes S. S. Joshi. From here started relations between Lala Hardayal and the Punjabi settlers in California.\(^{16}\)

In summer 1912, he began to be identified with nationalist activities. He was engaged in vigorous activities, widening the circles of his radical friends among American intellectuals, writing articles and delivering a series of lectures on anarchist and syndicalist movements.\(^{17}\)

The major event which excited Lala Hardayal beyond the limit, was the bomb attack on the life of the Viceroy, Lord Hardinge on December 12, 1912 in Delhi. He was tremendously excited with joy. On 25th December, he told about this to the students at Nalanda Hostel. They shouted, danced and sang "Bande Matram", Lala Hardayal delivered a speech at this time and concluded it with a couplet from the famous Urdu Poet Mir Taqi Mir:

"Pangi apni Sambhaliyeega Mir,
Aur Basti nahin, yeh Delhi hai.\(^{18}\)

Next year, he published a virulently anarchist and revolutionary pamphlet written in Urdu entitled, Shawbash (Well Done! Or Bravo) in the commemoration of the bomb attack on the Viceroy. The translation of Shubash was made by an official of the Foreign Department of the Government of India. The Punjab and Government of India's Custom Act 1878 (Section 19)\(^{19}\). He also wrote another article entitled Philosophy of Bomb to commemorate this occasion. This article published in an edition of 5000. It preached that the bomb was a good vehicle for the liberation of the oppressed.\(^{20}\)

During 1912-1913, Lala Hardayal toured different parts of United States and delivered his revolutionary speeches to the Indian emigrants. His revolutionary ideas and speeches influenced immigrants and organized them to prepare for revolution in India against the British Government. He strongly said that they could not remove the British except in America until they were free. He appealed them to serve your country with tan, man, dhun (body, mind and wealth). His exhortations to his countrymen read as under:

"My heroes! O, Lions! O' brave man! Recover your senses. How long will you continue to sleep? How long will you consent to be shot-beaten by others and put up with their tyrannies? O' Indian young men, look at yourselves, slavery has converted you into pale skeletal creatures. Rise O, Lions! Serve your country and do your duty. Let us unite to avenge Nana Sahib and Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi. Preserve the honor of your forefathers. Prove yourselves to be worthy sons of Singhis, Khans and Rajputs, you will not get the opportunity again.\(^{21}\)

On April 21, 1913, a meeting of Indian settlers was summoned at Astoria, USA. This came out an important meeting as it laid the foundation of Ghadar Party. Sohan Singh Bhakna was chosen as the president, Jawaala Singh and Kesar Singh as Vice Presidents of this Party. Lala Hardayal was selected as General Secretary. In this meeting, Lala Hardayal addressed the audience with following words:

"You have come to America and seen with your own eyes the prosperity of this country. Nothing is more than that America is ruled by its own people. In India, on the other hand, the people have no voice in the administration of the country. The British are mindful only to their personal interests. As an agricultural country in the world and yet we see famine ravaging our country. The reason for this is that what is grown in India merely to export to England by the Government. What you earn, earn for your country. Prepare now to sacrifice yourselves for your country.\(^{22}\)

The term Ghadar Party was used by Lala Hardayal in the first issue of the Ghadar paper. The party was strictly secular in character and no religious discussions were allowed in the organization. This was one point which showed the character of the organization and made it different from other revolutionary organization.\(^{23}\)

In Astoria meeting, it was also decided to start a weekly paper the Ghadar. The work of the paper was entrusted to Lala Hardayal. He lived, worked, ate and slept there with all his associates, setting by personal example of high standard of conduct and simple living for others to emulate.

The first issue of the Ghadar was published in Urdu on November 1, 1913 with Lala Hardayal as editor. Jagat Ram, Ram Chandra and Gobind Bilhari Lal worked as his assistants. The objective of starting the paper was made clear at the outset. It said "Our name and work are identical: an armed revolution was to be started in India, because the people could no longer bear the tyranny and oppression under British rule". Lala Hardayal clearly stated that the motto of the paper was not against any religion. Its aim was to attain freedom of India.\(^{24}\)

On 31 December 1913, a meeting was held at Sacramento. While addressing the audience Lala Hardayal said, "Germany was preparing to go to war with England and it was the time to get ready to go to India for coming revolution."\(^{25}\)

He anticipated the outbreak of war between England and Germany around 1920 and he thought they had enough time for preparation. He said we had six years for preparing ourselves. This period was considered enough for the Ghadar Party to create branches within and outside India and raise the level of consciousness of people and prepares them for a revolt.\(^{26}\)

The British Government was getting regular reports of the activities of the Ghadar Party. The revolutionary awakening among the Indians panicked them. They thought that the real man behind this revolutionary upsurge was Lala Hardayal. Therefore, arrest warrants were issued against him. He was arrested in San Francisco on March 25, 1914 by U.S. authorities on a complaint of British Council. He was arrested on the charge of being an anarchist.\(^{27}\)

Michael O’Dwyer linked him with the murder attempt on the Viceroy, Lord Hardinge (December 12, 1912). Before his arrest, Lala Hardayal delivered a speech at Union Hall, San Francisco. He said, "The American Government was also acting on the behalf of the British Government. His arrest was not in connection with his work on the Ghadar, it was on account of a speech which had delivered against the Czariat Government in Russia". The evening, he went to police post. He was detained in the police post for whole day and in the evening released on a bond of 100 dollars. The news of Lala Hardayal’s arrest spread like a wild fire. All the executive members of the party arrived at Ghadar Ashram and were concerned with the issue of his arrest. They were greatly distressed at the step of the American Government. The Ghadar of March 31, 1914 reported the event with a sensational headline:

"Congratulations! Congratulations!! Congratulations!!!
Be on alert, Enemy’s first Blow.\(^{28}\)

Although, he was released on bail, but the senior members of the Ghadar Party frightened that the American authorities might hand him over to British Government. Therefore, they decided that Lala Hardayal should be sent outside America.\(^{29}\)

At this time, Lala Hardayal wrote in Ghadar, "If I am turned out of this country (U.S.A.), I can make preparation for the mutiny in any other country. Our organization and our arrangements are so complete that the Ghadar work will be carried on by the Ghadars stopped by the police in the country. I shall go to Germany to make arrangements for approaching Ghadar".\(^{30}\)

He left America in March 1914 and went to Switzerland. After this, his interest in the Ghadar Movement slackened considerably. In his absence, the activities of Ghadar Party were directed by Ram Chand Peshawari. Santokh Singh Dhardeo (District Amritsar) replaced him as General Secretary and Pandit Jagat Ram was assigned the duty of dispatching the newspaper which was earlier handled by Lala Hardayal himself.\(^{31}\)

When the First World War broke out (August 4, 1914), he was in Geneva (Switzerland) and lived there for ten months (April 1914 to January 1915). After that, he went to Berlin (Germany) and arrived there on January 27, 1915.\(^{32}\)

After the beginning of the First World War, ‘Indian Independence Committee’ or ‘Berlin India Committee’ was founded in the middle of 1915 in Berlin. Lala Hardayal and B.N. Chattopadhaya were its leading members. Lala Hardayal was the head of the Committee.\(^{33}\)

According to H. K. Puri, Lala Hardayal was persuaded to join the Berlin India Committee mainly because of his reputation as a leader of the Ghadar Party.\(^{34}\)

At the end of March 1916, Lala Hardayal was deputed by the Committee to proceed to Turkey. Immediately after his arrival in Constantinople, he informed the Ghadar Party about the thousands of Indian Muslims who were coming every year to perform the Haj. He suggested, it was essential that Ghadar should be preached to them and requested the Ghadar Party to send some workers to assist him in this task. In a note to the Berlin Committee, he mentioned, "The great importance of Constantinople as a centre for future work" and hinted that Enver-Pasha was inclined to value our opinion. He further referred to the work Ichhpann-i-Islam (published by Punjabi Muslim Abu Sayid) which was run by the Turkish Office under Enver Pasha. He expressed the desire to bring Ichhpann-i-Islam under the control of the Berlin India Committee.\(^{35}\)

During the latter part of the Great War, the German saw no chance of success. They began to treat Indians indifferently. Some of the Indians themselves were jealous of each other. Lala Hardayal could not tolerate this and decided to leave Germany. The disillusionment of Lala Hardayal with Germany made him to public declare, “Imperialism is always an evil, but British and French Imperialism in its worst form is thousand times preferable to German or Japanese imperialism.”\(^{36}\)

He resigned from Berlin India Committee and went to Sweden. He admitted in a letter to his friend, Professor Arnold of London about getting to base his old revolutionary ideas. He intended to base his future propaganda on this principle, that the time had come for the British to be driven out of India.\(^{37}\)
Hardayal was assassinated”. The implication was that the assassination was made in this connection have led his friends and the public…. to believe that Lala untimely and sudden death of Lala Hardayal are intriguing and all the enquiries and other religious heads paid tributes to him.

In November 1926, there was a major development took place in Lala Hardayal’s life. He met Agda Erikson, a Swedish social worker and philanthropist of significant accomplishment. She was to become his companion from then on and his acknowledged wife from the summer of 1932. He got his second marriage with Agda Erikson after he was forty-eight. She was about two months younger than him. He stayed in Sweden for nine months from October 1918 to October 1927. During this period, he lived at various places in Stockholm and Gothenburg. His last stay is known to have been in Langedrag, south of Gothenburg, where he had a room flat.

In March 1927, he once again asked the British government for amnesty and permission to move to London. He arrived in London on October 10, 1927 accompanied by Agda Erikson. In 1928, while staying in London, he thought of securing a doctorate. The life of Gautama Buddha and Buddhism had great attraction for Lala Hardayal. He choose as the subject of his thesis for the doctorate, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature.* This was the man who twenty years earlier had spurned the state scholarship at Oxford as he wanted no favours from the British and disassociated himself from them. In October 1931, he submitted his thesis to the University of London. He was awarded Doctor of Philosophy Degree in 1932. Next year, his thesis was published by London publishers. During his stay in London, he did not try to keep himself up to date about Indian politics. He devoted most of his time in study. In this time, he worked for his second book *Hints for Self Culture*. It took three years of reading research and writing. It was published in 1934. This was well received in the United Kingdom. In the next three years, he prepared another book, *Twelve Religions and Modern Life* which was published in November 1937. In this book, he favoured humanism.

In 1938, he applied to the British Indian Government for permission to return India but the British rulers did not trust him. Indian circles continued to take a sympathetic interest in him. Mr. Shamlal (Member of Indian Legislative Council of State) opened correspondence with India Office London regarding the possibility of amnesty for him. He asked for a British passport. He also asked that a letter be forwarded to his brother Kishan in Delhi and added: “I wish to enquire how my mother, wife and daughter are. They will also be glad to have news of me and learn that I have got rid of my old revolutionary ideas.”

Carried out by British intelligence, which was nervous and suspicious of his return to India. DHARANIVRA wrote, “Lala Hardayal could not have died a sick bed. Martyrdom was the only way in which the significance of his life could have been completed.”

At last, Lala Hardayal was a great revolutionary who played an important role in the struggle of India’s Independence. He was a great scholar and speaker who preached revolutionary ideas among the Indians for freeing themselves from British shackles. His revolutionary ideas and writings were reflected in the pages of *Ghadar* paper and transmitted among Indians. He was a propagandist, an inspirer and ideologue who guided the Ghadar Movement and outlined its initial ideology. However, his disenchantment with the revolutionary movement subsequently made him suspect in the eyes of several contemporaries. Yet there is no denying the fact that his role inculcating revolutionary consciousness among the hundreds of the contemporary people was remarkable.

NOTES AND REFERENCES:

1. The Gurudwara was built on the place: where Guru Jeg Bahadur and Bhai Matidas were decapitated; Dharanivra (ed.), Letters of Lala Har Dayal, Indian Book Agency, Ambala-Cantt., 1970, p. 10.
7. Emily C. Brown, Har Dayal: Hindu Revolutionary and Rationalist, p. 16.
16. Lala Lajpat Rai, Young India, Publishing Division, Delhi, 1976, pp. 165-66.
19. The National Movement (1885-1940), Ghadar Party Collections, pp. 73-81; Emily C. Brown, Har Dayal: Hindu Revolutionary and Rationalist, p. 64.
22. Ibid, p. 3.
27. Ibid, p. 66.


47. The aim of the ‘Berlin India Committee’ was to train selected number of men in the manufacture and use of explosives and modern weapons and then to send them by various routes to India and printing and distributing anti-British literature to organize the rebellious Indians in India and abroad. This committee sent men and money to India with instruction to inform the leaders of revolutionary groups that help would be forthcoming from Germany in the form of weapons and that they should organize themselves and prepare plans; Indian Revolutionary Committee Berlin: Activities in the First World War (1914-18), Ghadar Related Matter, Accession No. 11276, Rare Documents, DBYH, Jalandhar, p. 6. See also David Machado, “The Ghadar Party and the Hindu German Conspiracy”, p. 9.


51. L. P. Mathur, Indian Revolutionary Movement in the United States of America, p. 130.

52. Dharamvira, Lala Har Dayal and Revolutionary Movements of His Times, p. 235.


55. Ibid; p. 155.

56. Ibid; p. 157.

57. Agda Erikson belonged to a wealthy family. Her father had owned large spinning and weaving mills in Boras (Sweden). She had studied at Upsala University, Sweden. She was a social worker and founded the Folks High School in Viskadalon. She met Lala Hardayal while establishing this school; E. Jaiwant Paul and Shubh Paul, Har Dayal: The Great Revolutionary, p. 155; See also Emily C. Brown, Har Dayal: Hindu Revolutionary and Rationalist, p. 238.

58. Navratan Kapur, Dr. Har Dayal: A Practical Intellectual and Diplomat, (Punjabi), p. 64.


62. P.C. Joshi, “Lala Har Dayal: A Biographical Note and a Note on his Karl Marx”, p. 32.


