

# Lajpat Rai Tells of Great Hindu Renaissance

Famous Indian Lawyer Says That Present-Day Trend of His Country's Art, Literature, and Religion Is Toward Nationalism

By Joyce Kilmer.

FOR years there has been in progress in India a movement strikingly analogous to the Celtic renaissance in Ireland. According to Lajpat Rai, a distinguished lawyer of Lahore, the capital of the Punjab, now on a visit to New York City, the renaissance of India's ancient poetry, art and crafts, drama and religion, is inevitably producing a revival of India's national spirit. England is not blind to the significance of this renaissance, but her efforts to hinder the literary and artistic expressions of India's soul are unavailing.

For years the New Nationalist movement has claimed much of Lajpat Rai's time and energy. The New Nationalist movement has as its goal to obtain for India self rule, not necessarily severance from the British Empire, but partnership in it—home rule, in fact, like that now enjoyed by Canada, Australia, and South Africa.

Although Lajpat Rai is an uncompromising advocate of the Nationalist cause, he has always counseled procedure by evolutionary and not by revolutionary measures, by agitation and education and not by bomb throwing. On the platform and in the newspapers he has endeavored, he says, to prevent revolution, in what he believes the only possible way to make this endeavor, that is, by urging the British Government to inaugurate and carry out honestly a policy of justice to the Indian people. He believes that if the British Government complies with India's just demands there will be no revolution.

In 1907, Lajpat Rai was seized and sent to prison in Burmah. There he was held for six months, without a trial and without being told the nature of his offense. He was suspected of sedition, but no evidence was found, his real offense having been, he says, that he was a Nationalist and was working openly and legally to secure greater liberty for India. After his release he brought suit against two newspapers, one in India and one in London, that had accused him of sedition, and in both suits he was victorious.

I asked Lajpat Rai to tell something of the intellectual and spiritual renaissance which is so closely identified with Indian Nationalism. He said:

"I do not think that I would say that the religious and literary renaissance in India is merely a companion of the Nationalist movement. Rather, the present Nationalist movement arose from the religious and literary renaissance.

"About 1830 there came into being a passionate desire for a re-establishment of the ancient literary, social, and religious ideals of the Indian people. One of the first leaders of thought to be prominently identified with this movement was a Bengali gentleman named Raja Ram Mohan Rai. He founded a new church called Brahmo Samaj.

"Raja Ram Mohan Rai was followed in his work by the father of the now world-famous Rabindranath Tagore and others. Rabindranath himself has played no small part in the renaissance by means of his songs and stories.

"The next step toward the renaissance was the Arya Samaj movement. This was founded by a scholar named Daya Nanda Saraswati, an ascetic of the highest order. Daya Nanda Saraswati knew no language but his mother tongue and Sanskrit. Then came the school of Swami Vivekananda.

"There have been several minor movements with similar effects so far as the renaissance is concerned. The aim of all these movements has been to place before the people the ancient Indian ideals, and to show them that not only politically but also intellectually they have had a glorious past.

"You see one of the first effects of contact with the West was to put into the minds of the people educated under modern conditions the idea that India

had no achievements to her credit, and must depend entirely upon what the British Government might condescend to teach her.

"As a result the British Government Anglicized practically every department of life. Methods of education, ideals of art and architecture, social standards, and religious conceptions of a thoroughly British kind were imposed from without. The theory of the renaissance is that the old order is in many respects more suited

"were practically destroyed. Cheap art of various kinds was imported from Europe. The nobility and the wealthy people began to purchase European art products and to look down upon the native artists. Shakespeare, Milton, Shelley, and Tennyson took the place of the classic Indian poets, and the English language came to be regarded as the hall-mark of civilization and culture. Similarly, our religious and social ideals were being gradually supplanted. In

English to obtain a decent Government position. While the teaching of the native languages is not forbidden, the university examinations are of such a character that the pupils preparing for them have little opportunity and time to study the classical tongues on which the vernacular is based. The classical languages of India occupy only a secondary position. So, before the renaissance all scholarship was English in character, and consequently not of first class. English opens the door to all decent positions; it is necessary in trade and in commerce.

"So there came about the disappearance and degradation of native schools of literature. The native writers lost their high position and the patronage upon which they depended for a living. Ostensibly the Government tried to restore the vernacular, but it was a half-hearted attempt and foredoomed to failure. Poets flourish only where there is appreciation of them, and a language and a literature cannot be restored by Government decree.

"One of the most important phases of the renaissance is the Swadeshi Movement—that is, the 'country-made movement.' You see, heavy export duties were put on home-made goods, and English goods were imported practically free of duty. Of course, this crippled the native craftsmen. In the eighteenth century India was a great manufacturing country, with an extensive shipping industry. In those days, millions' worth of goods, especially silks, fine cottons, and woollens, were sent to Europe, and the products of the Indian hand looms were purchased by royalty. Now these products have disappeared, for they could not compete with the cheap products of English mills brought in free of duty. Furthermore, nothing was done to introduce into India modern systems of industry."

With reference to the literary aspects of the renaissance, Lajpat Rai said:

"Indian scholars are trying to construct a history of Hindu culture and literature based upon their own investigations, instead of, as heretofore, on the authority of European scholars.

"Similarly, many objects of Indian art have been unearthed and exhibited. A new school of indigenous art has arisen, with independent lines of thought and work. The effort of the Nationalist artist is to bring forward and keep in evidence the distinctly national character of Indian art. A brother of Tagore is one of the leaders of the new indigenous art movement.

"Another significant occurrence is the revival of the Indian theatre and Indian music. In Calcutta, in Bombay, in Gujarat, and in other cities there have been established theatres in which the old Hindu dramas are presented. A new dramatic literature is springing up which takes as its theme the ancient literature of the country, or the country's customs and needs. In this connection I may mention the recitals of Indian music which are being given by Ratan Devi to American audiences.

"There has also been a revival of Indian ideals of architecture. There is a great agitation going on as to the style to be adopted for the architecture of Delhi, the new capital of India.

"Of course, you have heard of the 'Bargad Gita.' The theme of this classic is that if it is a duty to fight war should not be eschewed. It should be indulged in not for worldly rewards, but out of a sense of duty alone. Now, it happens that most Nationalists who have been brought into court have had this book in their possession. As a result, the 'Bargad Gita' is under suspicion, and when a Nationalist is arrested his house is searched for a copy of the suspected book to be used in evidence against him.

"All efforts to write or reproduce biographies of eminent patriots or revolutionists of the West are discouraged. Some years ago I wrote in the vernacular a brief biography of Mazzini. When this is found in the house of a suspect it is made an exhibit in evidence against him."



to the genius of the people and is fundamentally more sound than the new.

"For example, take the matter of government. From time immemorial the village had been the unit of government in India. The villages were small republics, administering their own affairs, levying their own taxes, regulating their own educational system, and holding their land in common for the benefit of the community. The right of property was not in the individual but in the village; the land was divided for cultivation according to the needs of the different families.

"These villages had few dealings with the Central Government. They paid the Central Government lump sums on account of revenues, and when great crimes occurred within their precincts they were called upon to give up the criminals to justice. Similarly, most of the internal affairs of the large towns and cities were managed without direct reference to or interference by the Central Government.

"In the arts and industries, India, before the establishment of British rule, was for the most part a country of cottage industries. The artisans and craftsmen manufactured their own wares, and sold them at their own prices, resorting to the capitalist only for occasional help.

"The British Government changed all this. The Government centralized the whole system of administration, removing from the villages and towns every vestige of self-government."

"But how has this affected India's intellectual and artistic life?" I asked. "What has been done in regard to the cottage industries and the literature of the people?"

"Indigenous arts," said Lajpat Rai,

every form of thought and life, the Western ideals were gaining the supremacy."

"But what was becoming of the large number of Indian writers?" I asked. "What were they doing?"

"They were starving," said Lajpat Rai.

"You see, the writers of India always had been maintained by donations and patronage. They had been well provided for, and the fact that they were dependent was not thought to be to their discredit; indeed, they had the highest place in the social hierarchy. From the point of view of property, they were poor, but they were held in the highest esteem by all the Indian people. They were the makers as well as the dispensers of laws. It is true that in time they converted themselves into a priestly class, and so sometimes abused their status. Nevertheless, when they perceived literary genius outside their circle they at once recognized it. Latterly there was no organized theatre, but there were numerous frequent public recitals of ancient epics, with occasional dramatic representations.

"All this culture was destroyed by the advent of English rule. The Western ideas of literature and of the position of the writer were introduced, with the result that the native poets were ruined."

"Then it was the introduction of the printing press," I suggested, "that ruined the literature of India?"

"The introduction of the printing press," Lajpat Rai answered, "in company with a foreign system of government and education. Under a native Government, the introduction of the printing press might have been beneficial.

"In the Government schools all higher education is in English. Throughout India English is given first place, it being impossible for any one ignorant of