



Mains Practice Question

Q. Despite being sensitive to Hindu interests, Lala Lajpat Rai actually championed diversity in unity. Comment. (150 words)

28 Jan, 2019 GS Paper 1 History

Approach

- Examine how Lala Lajpat Rai's sensitivities lay with Hindu Interests
- Discuss how he largely pursued the secular and nationalist interests and didn't follow any exclusionary policy

Introduction

- Lala Lajpat Rai was a prominent nationalist leader who played an important role in India's struggle for freedom.

Body

His inclination towards Hindu interests

- He was influenced greatly by the Arya Samaj and was part of the Hindu reform movement.
- In 1897, he founded the Hindu Relief Movement to provide help to the famine-stricken people and thus preventing them from falling into the clutches of the missionaries.
- He was an advocate of an assertive Hindu politics, exemplified by his participation in the Punjab Hindu Sabha in 1909 and Hindu Mahasabha in the mid-1920s.
- He was also a supporter of the two-nation theory, saying that while Hindus and Muslims needed to unite to overthrow the British Raj, a separate nation for each would solve the greater purpose of peaceful coexistence.

However, his vision of Hindu politics was very different from the exclusivist Hindu nationalism and based on unity in diversity.

- He never demanded that either India's religious minorities be forcefully assimilated into Hindu culture or be excluded from the nation.
- Having earlier conceived of Hindus and Muslims as separate "religious nationalities", by 1915, he proclaimed that "religious nationalism" was a "false idea", embodying a "narrow sectarianism" which could never be "truly national".
- Argued that India's natural geography brilliantly marked it off from the rest of the world, endowing its people with a common nationhood.
- He sometimes ceased speaking of a common Hindu culture to talk of a larger distinctive Indian culture that bound India's diverse peoples and argued that Indians must develop for themselves a pluralist public national culture.
- According to him, Hindus and Muslims would do well to take part in each other's festivals and religious occasions like Basant Panchami, Baisakhi, Dussehra, Diwali, Muharram and Shab-e-Barat.
- For him, Akbar was a role model whose memory ought to inspire Hindus and Muslims

Conclusion

Even after Lajpat Rai turned to the Hindu Mahasabha for numerous complicated reasons, he never renounced his commitment to India's religio-cultural diversity. He showed that a politics sensitive to the interests of Hindus can be free of a "tyrannical" desire to impose religio-cultural homogeneity on the nation.

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