From Theology to Culture:
Secularisation in Lajpat Rai's 'Hindu Nationalism', 1880s–1915

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Abstract: This article explores the Hindu thought of Lala Lajpat Rai (1865–1928), a prominent actor-thinker in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and often considered an ideological ancestor of Savarkarite Hindutva. Focussing on Rai's thought between the 1880s and 1915, it argues that at the same time that Hindu beliefs and practices were undergoing a process of 'religionisation' in the late nineteenth century, in a prominent strand of thinking about Hindu identity, represented by Rai, Hindu religion was being 'thinned down'. It was being defined less by reference to theological detail and complexity and more in broad and simple terms. Second, Hinduism also underwent a process of 'culturalisation'. It was decoupled from faith and practice and re-formulated as secular 'culture'. In Rai's definition of Hindu identity, Hinduism progressively lost ground to 'Hindu culture', which by 1909 formed the centrepiece of his imagined 'Hindu nation'. 'Hindu culture' served to include within Rai's 'Hindu nation' various groups of Indians who were not followers of Hinduism, and simultaneously excluded India's Muslims and Christians. Yet, I argue that this Hindu nationalism remained different from Savarkarite Hindutva. Through its examination of Rai's thought, the article makes broader analytical points. One, that Hindu identity can be defined in various senses—thickly religious, thinly religious, broadly non-religious and 'cultural', apolitical, openly political, or implicitly political. Second, the thinning of religion can be viewed as a form of both religionisation and secularisation, and the secularisation of Hinduism via its culturalisation was co-eval with the larger process of religionisation. Third, it challenges the

dichotomy drawn by Hindu nationalists and secularists alike between the process of secularisation and articulations of Hindu nationalist identity. Finally, Rai's thought reveals that the secularisation and culturalisation of Hindu identity can culminate in a conception of 'Hindu nationalism' distinct from Hindutva.

INTRODUCTION

This article explores the Hindu thought of Lala Lajpat Rai (1865–1928) between the 1880s and 1915. Lajpat Rai is seen as articulating in these years a Hindu nationalism, viewed either as an ideological precursor to or virtual equivalent of V. D. Savarkar's Hindutva (Jaffrelot 1999: 18 & 2011: 79, 113; Bhatt 2001: 2–4, 42–44, 48–55), an ideology elaborated in 1923 and a major intellectual influence on the contemporary Hindu right. As a prominent politician-thinker, Lajpat Rai's ideas about Hindu identity both reflected and shaped broader intellectual phenomenon, representing certainly not all of but still a significant strand of upper-caste, middle class Hindu thinking on Hindu identity. At the very historical juncture when Hindu beliefs and practices were still undergoing a process of religionisation, in the strand of thinking about Hindu identity represented by Lajpat Rai, Hindu religion was thinned down (a concept I explain below). This thinning can be viewed as part of religionisation but also as secularisation. Quite distinct from thinning, Hinduism was also decoupled from religious belief and practice, and reformulated as secular culture (Astor & Mayrl 2020: 3, 7–10). In short, in being culturalised, it was also secularised. Moreover, Hindu 'religion' was losing ground to non-religious Hindu 'culture'. By 1909, 'Hindu culture' formed the centrepiece of Rai's imagined 'Hindu nation' and served to include various groups of Indians within the 'Hindu nation' while simultaneously excluding Indian Muslims and Christians. With this culturalisation (and secularisation) of Hindu identity at its core, Rai's Hindu nationalism overlapped with Savarkarite Hindutva which gained popularity in the 1920s. Yet, it remained significantly distinct, a fact obscured by teleological readings of it as Hindutva's 'antecedent'.

Intellectual history is concerned not only with tracing the intellectual trajectory of a particular individual but also uncovering distinct textures and modes of argumentation and reasoning, which have significance over and above individual lives. This article deliberately restricts itself to understanding the intellectual processes—of thinning down and culturalisation—

occurring within the 'Hindu nationalism' Lajpat Rai articulated between 1880s and 1915 (Rai's most robust articulation of Hindu nationalism in 1909, encountered at the end of this article, represented his thought till 1915). After 1915, Rai permanently ceased to view Hindus and Muslims as separate 'religious nationalities', moving firmly to view them only as members of a single 'Indian' nation (Bhargav 2022a: 3–5). This held true for his 'Indian' nationalism during his exile in America (1915–19) (idem 2018b: 100–125), the Khilafat movement (1920–23) (idem 2022a), and even during his Hindu Mahasabha years (1924–28) (idem 2022b). After 1915, he ceased to thin down and culturalise Hinduism in order to transcend religious diversity among Hindus and realise a capacious 'Hindu nation'. The article's restricted focus on Lajpat Rai's ideas between 1880 and 1915 aims to clarify the intricacies of these intellectual processes occurring within a particular strand of Hindu thought, allowing us to glean analytical insights which go beyond both Rai and the chronological time-frame of this article.

Before I begin, an elaboration of key terms is required. By 'religionisation', I mean the process by which certain assemblages of Hindu beliefs and practices were re-understood and reconstituted in terms of the modern concept of 'religion', i.e., as a comprehensive, unified homogenised and reified system (Cantwell-Smith 1978; Dressler 2019: 3–4). In referring to the 'thinning of religion', I draw on Sudipta Kaviraj's distinction between thick and thin religion. By thick religion, Kaviraj means a religion whose contents are imagined as a vast catalogue of beliefs about large and small things, all of which are seen as crucial to the practice of faith (2010: 345–346). By thin religion, he means the conceptualisation of religion according to a few, simple and broad criteria indifferent to finer details and complexity of religious belief and practice (ibid.: 348). This thinned down definition of Hindu religion, which entailed a de-emphasis on theological detail and complexity (not necessarily a disappearance of theology) can be viewed as a form of religionisation, provided religionisation is understood to assume two forms. One, the subsumption of belief and practice under one system may add to what was earlier covered by the term replaced by 'religion'. In other words, religion may now have more meat in it, be thick. Or, two, it may cover fewer phenomena than were previously covered by the term close to religion. It does this by emphasising a few, select theological criteria as defining religion, i.e., by thinning it.

This thinning may also be seen as 'secularisation'. Here, I partly draw on José Casanova (2006) who posits that one sense of secularisation consists of a decline in religious beliefs. While Casanova refers to secularisation as a sociological process, I use it here to refer to an intellectual process involving a decline in emphasis on detailed and complex theology.[2]

Since Lajpat Rai's thinning down of Hinduism entailed both the adoption of the use of 'religion' but one with a reduced emphasis of theological detail and complexity, it can be seen as both religionisation and secularisation. But Rai subsequently also culturalised Hinduism. This term too needs further clarification. The 'culturalisation' of religion signifies a process by which a belief or practice is conceived as decoupled from theology or religious meaning and explicitly recast as 'cultural'. 'Culture' encompasses a complex, wide-ranging array of capabilities, beliefs, habits, activities and products, in largely non-religious, secular terms and therefore as broadly distinct from 'religion'. Culturalisation then is the process whereby phenomena lose their religious significance, their ties to theology and religious practice, but survive and even flourish with their new, non-religious/secular 'cultural' meaning. For instance, for many individuals, the festival of Diwali or Christmas has been culturalised, celebrated without the religious meaning with which they were previously endowed. According to Casanova, a second form of secularism consists in the making of conceptual distinctions between a religious domain and a non-religious secular domain. 'Culture' is seen as falling in the secular domain.[3] By saying that Hinduism was being culturalised by Lajpat Rai, I mean that Rai was partially de-linking Hinduism from theology and practice, recasting it as non-

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[2] Theology generally refers to an explicit, argumentative discourse about the nature of God and the divine world and, more broadly, religious beliefs. Drawing on Jan Assmann, I take such systematic discourse to constitute explicit theology. This phenomenon does not exist in every religious tradition, Hinduism being one of them. However, Assmann also uses the term 'implicit theology', which he claims is a necessary prerequisite of every religion in the same way that grammar is a necessary prerequisite of every language irrespective of whether an 'explicit' grammar of that language exists (Assmann 2008: 13). If this is so, Hinduism has an implicit theology. In this article, I use the term theology largely in this second sense, to refer to a network or set of religious beliefs. An implicit theology, it might be noted, undergirds even religious practices and rituals.

[3] The emergence of the modern, nineteenth-century concept of 'culture'—signifying the totality of socially-transmitted knowledge, beliefs, behaviour patterns, institutions, arts, morals, laws, customs and all other products of human work and thought (Appiah 2018: 295; Eagleton 2000: 34)—is itself seen by some theorists as part of a wider process of secularisation (Eagleton 2000: 42).

religious/secular 'culture', and thereby distinguishing 'Hindu religion' and 'Hindu culture'. Such culturalisation of Hinduism is an aspect of its secularisation. Here, I wish to also clarify that I of course use the term 'secularisation' in a descriptive rather than normative, value-laden sense, and keeping in mind its distinction from 'secularism', which connotes an ideology seeking the separation of religion and politics for particular normative purposes like individual freedom, non-domination, equal citizenship, or peace. Similarly, throughout the article, I use the term 'secular' in a descriptive sense simply to mean non-religious and not as a derivative of 'secularism'.

Context: Religionisation of and contestation within Hinduism

Several scholars have illustrated how Hindu beliefs and practices underwent radical transformation through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in response to their encounter with British colonialism. The British colonial lens saw religion as the primary unit of Indian society. The colonial state practice of bifurcating Indian family law into new scripture-based 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' law spurred homogenising tendencies within them, and a sharper demarcation between Hindu and Muslim identities, even generating 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' public spheres. This accentuated the cohesiveness of modern Hinduism, and its sense of separation from other faiths. This process was accelerated by the colonial practice of the decennial census, which also took religion as the primary classificatory category for Indian society. To count Hindus and Muslims, census officials defined Hinduism and Islam in a standardised, homogenised manner, which also hardened their boundaries vis-à-vis each other. Believers and practitioners of the Hindu faith were marshalled into a Hindu 'community', mapped, counted and compared to other religious 'communities'. New means of communication like the railways and telegraph, and a booming print culture encouraged Hindus across India to reconceptualise Hinduism in all-India rather than local or regional terms. The increased cohesiveness of Hinduism, as a single religion for all Hindus, was increasingly imagined at a pan-India level (Vishwanathan 2003: 29; Killingley 2003: 509–511; Metcalf 1994: 137; Jones 1981: 74–84; Sarkar 2014: 27–34; Zavos 2000: 40–41; Adcock 2013: 26; Appadurai 1993: 332). Thus, Hinduism was being religionised in the sense of being homogenised and reified.

But Hinduism was also being religionised in another sense. This happened as British scholar-officials and Christian missionaries attempted to understand Hinduism through the new modern concept of 'religion', which itself often remained tied to its western, Christian moorings (Josephson 2012: 76–77). Having never encountered a phenomenon like Hinduism before, the British sought out comparable features with Christianity or other Abrahamic faiths, re-defining and representing Hinduism in their light. Ignoring the plethora of oral, local and vernacular Hindu beliefs and practices, they saw true Hinduism was located in one or more of its ancient, classical scriptures/texts. Often, Hinduism's lack of conformity to Abrahamic faiths provoked vituperative criticisms. Contemporary Hinduism was portrayed as degenerate, disorganised and inferior, with polytheism, idol-worship and caste receiving special censure. The minority of middle-class Hindu subjects with access to the colonial system of education were exposed to such reformulations—and/or scathing evaluations—of Hinduism vis-à-vis Christian-inflected concept of 'religion'. As they defended Hinduism, a significant section of this Hindu intelligentsia responded by reconfiguring aspects of it in light of western, Abrahamic conceptions of 'religion'—often by partially emulating features such as an emphasis on exclusive monotheism and a single, infallible divinely-revealed scripture. The colonial encounter therefore sparked efforts to creatively re-define and reform Hinduism, sometimes to make it correspond more closely to Christianity or Abrahamic faiths more generally (Vishwanathan 2003: 25–28; Zavos 2000: 32, 43; Pennington 2005: 19, 65–69; Scott 2016: 17, 36–38; Sen 2003: 3, 47–48; Thapar 1989: 218 & 1997: 65–66; Frykenberg 1989). In many cases, of course, Hinduism's transformations, even when resulting from a borrowing of external features, represented creative reformulations which were still genuinely Hindu rather than wholesale derivations (Pennington 2005: 11, 16–17), an unsurprising fact given that Hinduism, much like other religions, never constituted a self-contained, unalloyed and unchanging entity.

This religionisation of Hindu beliefs and practices was accompanied by vigorous internal contestation. In re-defining Hinduism in engagement with the modern, western concept of 'religion', Hindus disagreed over what constituted its core features—which text was central to Hinduism or whether texts were important at all; which God was central or whether polytheism was permitted; whether temple-going and idol-worship were integral modes

of worship or a corruption of true Hinduism. Nineteenth century India witnessed a vibrant culture of public debate among Hindus around the nature of Hinduism, manifest most starkly in the proliferation of Hindu socio-religious reform organisations like the Brahmo Samaj, Dharma Sabha, Tadiya Samaj, Arya Samaj, the Sanatan Dharm Sabhas, the Dev Samaj and the Ramakrishna Mission founded by Swami Vivekananda (cf. Jones 1989).

It was the Arya Samaj (Society of Aryans/Nobles), founded by Dayanand Saraswati in 1875, that the young Lajpat Rai joined in 1882. As shown in the following section, the Arya Samaj articulated a distinctive conception of Hinduism as it was being religionised and internally contested. The Samaj's religious outlook, in different ways, would continue to shape Rai's conceptualisation of Hindu religion and Hindu identity. But, as we shall see, even in the early 1890s, imperatives of realising a robust 'Hindu nation' were prompting Rai to dilute the thicker aspects of Arya Samajist theology as he defined Hinduism. Theology was also beginning to get side-lined by secular (in the sense of not strictly related to the divine/sacred) categories like history and culture.

The Thinning of Religion and the Temptation of Culture

Lajpat Rai's conception of religion was shaped by the basic framework of Arya Samajist theology. Following the Samaj, he insisted that the ancient Vedas alone contained the word of God and all divine knowledge. Other historically more recent texts like the Puranas, Tantras and even the Upanishads—called the Vedanta or the 'end of the Vedas'—were dismissed as false creations of man and devoid of divinity (Lajpat Rai 2003l: 375, 377–378, 409 & 2003m: 221; also see Adcock 2013: 43–44). In limiting true religion to the Vedas, Rai, like other Arya Samajists, defined himself against and drew the ire of the self-proclaimed 'orthodox' Hindus, who claimed to defend Sanatan Dharma (Sanskrit: *sanātana dharma*), the eternal continuous tradition of Hinduism, and considered the medieval Puranas (the basis of Krishna, Shiva and Ganesha devotionalism) as divine alongside the Vedas. Locating divinity solely in the Vedas, Rai, again like other Arya Samajists, also differentiated himself from prominent Hindu reformers like the late Rammohan Roy (1774–1833) and Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), who based Hinduism in the philosophical Upanishads, or Ramakrishna Paramhansa (1836–86), who drew inspiration from the strikingly transgressive Tantras (Adcock 2013: 10–11; Sarkar 1992).

Following the Arya Samaj, he also shunned many contemporary Hindu cere-
monies, festivals and practices for their alleged deviation from the Vedas
(Jones 1976: 95–96). But it was Hinduism's polytheism that was singled out
for special censure, with the insistence that true religion embodied in the
Vedas was monotheistic, affirming belief in one God (Lajpat Rai 2003l: 378).
Interestingly, this was despite the Vedas mentioning many Gods (Witzel
2003: 517; Killingley 2003). Lajpat Rai quoted the nineteenth century German
orientalist Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900) to argue that Vedic monothe-
ism was comparable to the monotheism found in the Koran and Bible:

> The real teaching of the Vedas is that there is only one
> God and that there is no other God. This view, according
> to Professor Max Muller, is as important as the view ex-
> pressed in the Koran or the Bible about God […] According
> to Max Muller, even the Bible does not contain such a
> clear enunciation of the concept (Lajpat Rai 2003l: 380).

While the Arya Samajist attack on popular Hindu practices (Jones 1989: 107)
and even insistence on monotheism was shared by some 'orthodox' Sana-
tanist Hindus (Dalmia 1995: 180–190), what really offended Sanatanists was
the iconoclastic attack by Arya Samajists like Lajpat Rai on idol-worship
(Hindi: *mūrti pūjā*). Arya Samajists interpreted Vedic religion as endorsing the
belief that God was formless. This prompted them to reject the notion of
incarnation (the divine assuming human forms), holy-men, and worship
through temples and idols (Lajpat Rai 2003l: 378–379, 407, 412–415). Reject-
ing worship through idols, and even elaborate ritualism—which in fact per-
vades the Vedas (Witzel 2003)—as the trickery of priests[4] (Scott 2016: 155–
157), Lajpat Rai, like other Arya Samajists, enjoined worship through simpli-
fied rituals, including a simple fire ceremony and reading some portion of the
Vedas once a day (Lajpat Rai 2003m: 227). Defining true religion as Vedic
monotheism—grounded in simple, abstract worship to a single formless God,
Rai and his fellow Arya Samajists challenged 'orthodox' Sanatanist Hindus
who, claiming to represent ancient, unbroken Hindu tradition, justified much
of existing Brahmin-led ritual practice, and frequently affirmed a personal

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[4] For Lajpat Rai's views on Brahmins and caste as they evolved through his political-intellectual
life, see (Bhargav 2018a).

God (or gods) to be worshipped through *bhakti* (Hindi/Sanskrit: *bhakti*, '[personal] devotion/love/worship') to his idols and images (Dalmia 1995).

The re-definition of religion—found in the Vedas by Arya Samajists like Rai—as idol-free, abstract monotheism, was substantially a response to persistent British colonial and missionary criticism of contemporary Hinduism for its idolatry and polytheistic excess. Appropriating the supposedly superior abstract monotheism of Protestant Christianity and locating it in the Vedas was partly a way of asserting the standing of ancient Vedic religion vis-à-vis Christianity, portrayed by the British as superior in the colonial context (Jaffrelot 2011: 76; Mitter 1987: 195). Of course, while Arya Samaj's conception of religion was neither purely Hindu nor wholly derivative. It drew on and re-interpreted pre-colonial Hindu traditions in light of Protestant Christianity (cf. Scott 2016: 155–157).

Re-defining Vedic religion in view of British criticism, Rai, like other Arya Samajists, censured several aspects of contemporary Hinduism. Yet, he refused to eschew the category of 'Hinduism' in favour of a separate 'Vedic religion', differing from Arya Samajists willing to do so, as became clear in the split in the Arya Samaj in 1893. As C.S. Adcock has shown, one faction of the Samaj, the 'Gurukul Faction', insisted that all fifty-one doctrines outlined by Dayanand Saraswati, including adherence to vegetarianism, were essential for membership to the Samaj (2013: 97–99). Lajpat Rai joined the opposing 'College Faction', which held that Dayanand, though a great man, was not infallible; some doctrines espoused by him, like vegetarianism, were not key, binding tenets of Vedic religion. Instead, this faction wished to place the Samaj on a 'broad and catholic' basis, requiring members to only express belief in one God and the Vedas (ibid.: 97). As Rai would reminisce in his 1914 book on the Samaj, the only doctrinal requirements were: belief that God was the source of all true knowledge, worship of this single omniscient, formless God alone, and belief that the Vedas were the sole source of His divine wisdom. He wrote:

> This, surely was the simplest of creeds, to which no Hindu, at any rate, should have any difficulty in subscribing [...]. [It was] intended to keep all dogma in the background and to free the Principles from any controversial matter. It is said, in fact, that the object was to make the Arya Samaj as Catholic as it possible could be without sacrificing its Hindu character (Lajpat Rai 2003m: 221).

Although vegetarian himself, Lajpat Rai did not insist on the particularities of Arya doctrine and practice (Jones 1976: 171; Lajpat Rai 2003m: 224). Unlike the Gurukul Faction which prioritised elaborate theological requirements, Rai did not insist on these at the cost of the separation of the Arya Samaj—as the embodiment of true 'Vedic religion'—from the larger entity known as 'Hinduism'.

Lajpat Rai de-emphasised Arya Samajist theology to lay claim to the broader category of Hinduism. Quoting Dayanand as stating that 'I do not entertain the least [*sic*] the idea of founding a new religion or sect' (Lajpat Rai 2003m: 217 & 2003l: 412–413), Rai insisted that Dayanand had merely wished to 'purge Hinduism of all the evils that had found admittance into it' (2003m: 201). This 'reform of Hinduism' would be achieved through a 're-turn' to the ancient, monotheistic Vedic religion conceived as nothing but the uncorrupted, original and true form of Hinduism (idem 2003l: 412–413 & 2003m: 266). An Arya Samaji wishing to hold on to Hindu identity, Rai's defi-nition of Hinduism was influenced by the Arya Samajist religious outlook. But he concluded that the only way to successfully balance both identities, with-out sacrificing one for the other, was to substantially dilute much of the prickly, intricate Arya Samajist theology, and define Hinduism in terms of the Samaj's broadest, most basic tenet: abstract Vedic monotheism.

Minimising Arya Samajist theology was essential to make room for the larg-est number of Hindus to identify—despite the stunning diversity in their beliefs and practices—with his Arya Samaj-inflected definition of Hinduism. In fact, imbibing colonial-official and missionary criticism, Lajpat Rai saw contempo-rary Hinduism's idolatrous polytheism as a source of disarray, and abstract monotheism as a source of unity and strength (idem 2003l: 394–395). For him, 'returning' to abstract Vedic monotheism, to Hinduism's original form, was the best means to transcend Hinduism's complicated religio-theological diversity and achieve Hindu unity. Therefore, while some elementary theology was evi-dent in Lajpat Rai's imagination of Hinduism in the nineteenth century, the im-perative of engineering a Hindu unity fuelled its dilution and attenuation. The-ology, in the form of belief in one God and the Vedas as the sole source of His wisdom, became a means to assert Hinduism's worth vis-à-vis Christianity (and Islam), and strengthen its integrity and unity. Beyond emphasising Vedic

monotheism towards this purpose, Rai remained largely uninterested in the intricacies of Arya Samajist articulations of Vedic theology.

Imperatives of building the Hindu 'community' or 'nation' (Rai used both terms in the 1890s) led Lajpat Rai to sacrifice theological detail and move towards a thin (as opposed to thick) conception of religion. These same compulsions ensured that while envisioning the educational curriculum for the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic (DAV) College, founded in 1888 to honour the Samaj's founder, Rai advocated a 'Vedic' education less geared towards theology than secular instruction in the language, history and culture of Hindus. The DAV College was conceived as a response to what Rai (and other Arya Samajists) considered a 'defective', 'highly lopsided' colonial education, which neglected indigenous learning (Lajpat Rai, 2003a: 104; for more on colonial education, cf. Seth 2008: Chapter 1; Sarkar 2014: 39–41). But unlike the Gurukul Faction, named after the Gurukul it founded in Kangri, U.P., in 1902, Lajpat Rai and his College Faction (named for its association with the DAV College) did not emphasise a rigorous religious education for Hindus (Jones 1976: 85–86; Fischer-Tiné 2001: 283). As evident in his 1893 tract *A Historical Glance at Sanskrit Education in the DAV College*, the young Lajpat Rai wished to 'avoid' the systematic teaching of what he called 'Vedic theology' as a separate subject at the College (Lajpat Rai 2003a: 102–104).[5] The same relative indifference towards theology is evident in his wish that Sandhya (Sanskrit: *saṃdhyā*, prayers involving the recitation of Vedic *mantras* at particular junctures of the day), not be performed during College hours as this forced students averse to prayers to pretend to pray only to retain their place in the college (ibid.: 103–104).

If not 'Vedic theology', what then was the 'Vedic' education Lajpat Rai wished to impart? For him, this entailed 'the promotion of our own language and culture on a national scale' (ibid.: 98). This meant teaching the Vedas, something ignored in government-run education, a greater emphasis on Sanskrit than in government universities, and the 'propagation of our national language' through 'the study of Hindi literature and the [*sic*] allied culture' (ibid.: 98, 100–101). Rai's views on language resulted from the broader, older

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[5] Here, Rai used the term 'Vedic theology' to refer to an explicit theology developed by Arya Samajists which systematically reflected on the nature of God and religion as they believed was expounded by the Vedas.

and still-ongoing process whereby the Hindustani language was cleaved into modern (more Sanskritised) Hindi and (more Persianised) Urdu, conceived as the national languages of Hindus and Muslims, respectively (Dalmia 2001: 146–152, 219–220). He unquestioningly saw Hindi in the Devanagari script as the language of Hindus, despite his own ignorance of it (Lajpat Rai 1965: 79; Chand 1978: 22–25). The 'Vedic education' Rai envisioned for Hindus entailed the teaching of Sanskrit and Hindi language and literature, which he in turn equated with Hindu 'culture'.

However, opposing the Gurukul Faction which strongly prioritised an elaborate scheme of Vedic and Sanskrit studies (Fischer-Tiné 2001: 391 & 2013: 283)[6], Lajpat Rai insisted on the indispensable importance of English education alongside Vedic education. Like Congress 'moderates', Rai considered English liberal education as the greatest blessing of British rule (Lajpat Rai 2003h: 86). He emphasised that even Swami Dayanand was 'not quite happy with institutions […] which taught only Sanskrit', believed that 'the recent enlightenment and so-called renaissance had come from the West mainly through the English language', and appreciated the importance of English education for the 'rejuvenation of the nation' (idem: 2003a: 97). Rai's appreciation of 'liberal education' suggests that he attributed collective rejuvenation to exposure to Western liberal values entailed in English education. For Rai, then, English liberal education was crucial for fostering collective reawakening among Hindus.

For Lajpat Rai, it was English education which had enabled Hindus to 'realise our position', and 'the fact that unless we progress with the times, we will be left behind in the march of nations. It is English education again, which has, strange to say, made us admire our past history' (2003h: 86). Having read numerous histories of India through European writers (idem 2003i: 117–118), Rai saw English education as vital for imparting a historical consciousness, necessary to spur Hindus into collectively regeneration in the present. History as a subject conceived in European terms and deploying European methods—articulating a linear, factual account rather than a cyclical one expressing general historical memory—had indeed been central to the new system of colonial education (Diamond 2014: 81). Despite their intent to justify colonial rule, colonial education conveyed a consciousness of

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[6] English was taught at the Gurukul but accorded lesser priority (Fischer-Tiné 2001: 283).

historical depths and trajectories, and its tripartite periodisation of Indian history into Hindu, Muslim and British periods accentuated 'community consciousness' (Dirks 1990: 25; Chatterjee 1995; Diamond 2014: 93). Rai clearly associated English education with historical consciousness, and the latter with collective consciousness. And so, along with Vedic education in their language and culture, Hindus needed English liberal education which, through its teaching of 'history', would revitalise Hindus.

In fact, as he made clear in the preface to his 1898 book *A History of India*, Lajpat Rai believed that imparting historical knowledge, particularly of one's religion, community and country, should be the main purpose of education (Lajpat Rai 2003i: 115). For Rai, an education in this particular 'history' promoted an understanding of the distinctiveness of Hindu identity, attachment and pride in Hindu religion and community, and finally, knowledge of 'the path laid down by their ancestors' which must be emulated to overcome present Hindu decline (ibid.: 115–116). Such 'history' showed a path towards the regeneration of Hindus as a community/nation. Therefore, apart from instruction in their language, an education for Hindus had to include a knowledge of their 'history', a crucial vehicle to endow them with a collective identity of which they could be proud.

Clearly, the education Rai envisioned for Hindus was geared less towards theology than profane or secular instruction in the language and history of Hindus, both considered central aspects of the unspecified Hindu 'culture' he sought to promote through DAV education. Already by the 1890s, the imperatives of building a regenerated Hindu community/nation were causing theology to lose out to secular categories (in the sense of not strictly related to the divine/sacred) like history and culture in Lajpat Rai's Hindu thought.[7] Of course, religion played some role in the Hindu history Rai wanted Hindus to learn.

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[7] I should briefly pause to clarify that I do not wish to overstate the differences between Lajpat Rai and his College Faction, on one hand, and the Gurukul Faction, on the other. Like Rai and his faction, the Gurukul Faction would attempt to transcend internal diversity among Hindus and forge a Hindu nation by emphasising their common Hindi language, Hindu history, and Aryan Hindu culture (Fischer-Tiné 2001: 284–292). It too evidently engaged in the culturalisation of Hinduism for nation-building purposes. But Lajpat Rai and his faction diverged from the Gurukul Faction in that to build a Hindu nation he defined Hinduism in terms of minimalist theology and de-emphasised theology in favour of non-religious instruction in Hindu language, history and culture. On the other hand, the Gurukul's emphasis on thick religion (Adcock 2013: 97–99; Fischer-Tiné 2013: 391) simultaneously ran counter to its projects of Hindu nation-building.

Countering those British imperial discourses—best exemplified by James Mill—which denigrated Hinduism and Hindus as degenerate and hopeless in their capacity for unity and national self-rule (Zavos 2000: 32–33; Scott 2016: 32; Trautmann 2006: 129; Adcock: 2013: 94–95; Inden 1986: 25–28), Rai, drawing on European Orientalist narratives, contrasted a glorious ancient Vedic past against the picture of contemporary Hindu degeneracy whose reality he uncritically accepted. This ancient Vedic past was an age when Indian society and polity was infused with 'Vedic religion' (Lajpat Rai 2003l: 382). The ancient ancestors of Hindus, the 'Aryans', were united in following Vedic monotheism. Reflecting the influence on Rai of another crucial element of Arya Samajist religious outlook i.e., anti-clericalism—and contrary to the vital role actually accorded to priests in Vedic rituals (Witzel 2003: 75, 79–80), Rai saw Aryans as rejecting Brahmin mediators between themselves and God. This apparently made them intolerant of domination and fiercely politically independent (Lajpat Rai 2003l: 382). Interestingly, here Rai neatly exemplifies J. Barton Scott's argument about Hindu reformist attacks on priesthood, and their concomitant assertion of a spiritually self-ruling subject, laying ground for the notion of a politically self-ruling subject at the heart of nationalist thought (2016). In Rai's eyes, in the Vedic age, ancient Hindu Aryans, strictly adhering to the Vedic religion, were united because of monotheism, and ferociously politically independent and self-ruling because of their insistence on direct worship to God. Religion appeared in this Hindu 'history', but had less to do with theology or practice, and more with asserting Hindu capacity for unity and self-rule.

Hinduism, Social Darwinism, National Spirit: Further Secularisation

The first few years of the twentieth century saw Lajpat Rai de-emphasise theological content even more strongly as he defined Hinduism. Rai now defined true ancient Hinduism as a 'social faith' with the potential to 'arouse the multitudes', containing 'the idea of social unity' and 'social responsibilities and obligations', in turn implicitly seen as evidence that Hinduism possessed 'the notion of national responsibilities' (Lajpat Rai 2003d: 298 & 2003o: 302, 307). Reflecting his engagement with Social Darwinist thought discredited today but ascendent globally at this time (Goldman 2011; Pick 2011; Bayly 2011), Lajpat Rai argued that Hinduism contained the 'social ideals' advanced by Herbert Spencer and Benjamin Kidd. While unlike radical revolutionaries Rai

would never completely abandon faith in effecting change through constitutionalism, he perhaps converged with them to the extent that his belief in the limited Indian capacity to effect change through the colonial state attracted him to the Social Darwinist notion of society-driven change (Kapila 2007: 114–116). In his 1904 article "The Social Genius of Hinduism", he set out to prove that Hinduism was the social force which could drive change, possessing evolutionary social ideals advanced by esteemed Social Darwinists, and resources for social and national regeneration. He read Spencer's social ideal as one in which 'the interests of each citizen and the interests of citizens at large' become 'merged', making the social organism 'socially efficient'. Over time, the individual would develop an 'altruistic instinct' whereby he attained 'the highest of all satisfactions in voluntarily sacrificing himself in the interests of the social organism' (Lajpat Rai 2003o: 303). Spencer, a populariser of the new concept of 'altruism' as much as of Darwinism, was in fact not an enthusiast of extreme altruism (Dixon 2008: 8, 198–199). His *Data of Ethics* (1879), which Rai quoted, rejected both extreme egotism and extreme altruism, arguing for a compromise between them. Still, Rai read Spencer as advocating the social ideal of altruism whereby the individual would happily sacrifice his interests and even himself for the sake of the social organism.

Lajpat Rai also quoted Benjamin Kidd's bestselling *Social Evolution* (1894) to argue that Kidd's social ideal required members of the social organism to sacrifice their individual good not just for the good of the whole but also in 'the interests of the generations yet unborn' (Lajpat Rai 2003o: 304). Spencer believed that as human society naturally evolved from predatory to industrial, civilised forms of social life, it would naturally progress towards higher levels of altruism (Dixon 2008:195–196, 204). He criticised Christianity for promoting a forced and extreme altruism as an ethical ideal in the present, which he believed would promote inferior, degenerate classes. Contesting Spencer, Kidd argued that altruism could only be fostered by religion, and more specifically Protestant Christianity (ibid.: 303–306). Religion was required to persuade individuals to act irrationally and sacrifice their interests for the sake of human progress and even unborn generations, an idea upon which Rai drew in 1904.

To show that Hinduism met the social ideals advanced by Spencer and Kidd, Lajpat Rai quoted selected translations from numerous Hindu texts—not just Vedic texts like the *Rigveda* (R̥g Veda) and *Atharvaveda* (Arthavaveda), but also later, non-Vedic texts like the *Manusmriti* (Manusmr̥ti), *Ramayana* (Rāmāyaṇa) and *Mahabharata* (Mahābhārata). Overlooking its theme of war among ancient Aryas (Sanskrit: *ārya*; 'noble'; also appellation for speakers of Indo-European languages) (Singh 2008: 815–816), Rai argued that the *Rigveda's* division of society into four castes reflected the 'unity of the social organism'. The four castes, 'as individual units of one organism', performed 'their own separate functions', and expressed the 'mutual interdependence of all parts of society', a 'complete system of social duties', and the 'essential oneness of the whole' (Lajpat Rai 2003o: 307–308). For him, the *Manusmriti*, the Brahminical legal code which Rai associated with 'orthodox Hindus', also substantiated this reading of the caste system, reflecting Hinduism's 'original social conception' that emphasised 'service of others' and 'the social good of the whole community' (idem: 308–309). It enjoined members of each caste to perform their duty not just for themselves but for other castes: 'The Brahmin is enjoined to study not for the benefit of his soul only, but to teach others as a purely social duty. In the same way, it was the duty of Kshatriyas to protect all [...] the duty of the Vaishya was to produce and trade for all and that of the Shudra to labour for all [*sic*]' (ibid.: 309). In his "Social Genius" article, Rai fleetingly noted with alarm that the *Manusmriti* advocated 'astounding inequalities of treatment between the Brahmans and Shudras, verging in places almost on inhumanity and cruelty' (ibid.: 308). Even so, the article ultimately glossed these over to present the caste system as evidence of Hinduism's social harmony and unity. Underlining that the 'welfare of all' depended on individuals performing their social duties conscientiously, and emphasising duties of charity and hospitality, the *Manusmriti* embodied 'altruistic morality' (ibid.: 313–317). For Rai, Manu's marriage laws reflected 'an anxiety for the welfare of unborn generations' (ibid.: 319), meeting Kidd's altruistic ideal.

Lajpat Rai also cited selected hymns of the *Rigveda* and *Atharvaveda* which contained exhortations to 'assemble, speak together', have a 'common mind' and 'common purpose', to 'agree and be united', and 'love one another' (ibid.: 319–322). While these Vedic hymns either addressed Vedic

gods or promoted unanimity in the family, Rai interpreted them as aiming at 'effective social organisation' and a 'common national purpose' (ibid.: 321). Lajpat Rai held that the 'actual working' of this 'spirit of unity' was found in the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* (ibid.: 322). Evidently for him, the multiple texts of Hinduism contained the 'germs and foundations' of the 'highest' Social Darwinist ideals, proving their possession of the notion of 'social or national responsibilities' and the existence of 'spirit of nationality' among ancient Hindus (ibid.: 301–302, 322). The sociality of the Hindu faith, which had once constituted Hindus into a nation, had the potential to do so again.

In stressing Hinduism's social and national spirit, Lajpat Rai saw himself as refuting those 'Hindus educated on Western lines' who, urged by 'some eminent Hindus of the western Presidency', held that the 'the genius of Hinduism is essentially individualistic and anti-social', and that Hinduism had no resources to reform the social (ibid.: 301–302, 319). This likely referred to a group of reformers led by Narayan Chandavarkar (1855–1923), who believed that the reformation of Hindu society required not a return to ancient Hindu texts but reliance on reason, and urged rationally-motivated radical breaks with Hindu traditions (Heimsath 1964: 200–204; Natarajan 1959: 86). Lajpat Rai saw himself as countering the belief allegedly held by such Hindus that sociality, absent in Hinduism, must be borrowed from the West, via the western concept of 'reason' (Lajpat Rai 2003o: 301, 306). Rejecting reason as the sole source for building or reforming the social, Rai adduced Benjamin Kidd's argument that 'uncontrolled reason' produced excessive individualism and anti-social tendencies (ibid.: 306). Indeed, Kidd had argued that human progress required societies to be persuaded to become less rational and more religious and altruistic. While Kidd's equation between irrationality, religion and altruism, on one hand, and rationality and selfish individualism, on the other, had been criticised by several commentators (Dixon 2008: 311–312), Lajpat Rai seized on Kidd to reject reason as the sole basis for rejuvenating Hindu society. Ignoring Kidd's emphasis on Christianity, Rai utilised his broader stress on religion to assert that ancient Hinduism already possessed resources to re-build a social and national oriented-ness.

Yet, for Lajpat Rai, excessive reliance on reason was problematic also because it was viewed as a western, foreign concept. In his 1904 article titled "Reform or Revival?", Rai highlighted common ground between what he

called the reformers' 'rational' approach to reform, and the revivalists' shastric, 'national' approach to it (2003k: 327). While Rai defended both approaches, he equated Hindu scriptures with the 'national' and indigenous, and reason with European foreignness, and rejected reason as an exclusive basis for social reform. In wishing that Hindus continue to rely on ancient Hindu scriptures for purposes of reform, Rai saw himself as promoting the indigenous 'national' over the Western. Of course, the equally western concept of 'altruism' was unquestioningly appropriated from British evolutionary sociology, and presented as the defining feature of ancient Hindu texts; Rai's own arguments criticising reason and pushing for a reliance on religion/Hinduism drew on Western public intellectuals like Kidd; and Rai found within ancient Hindu texts a faith corresponding with Social Darwinism and nationalism, modern ideologies originating in the West. Rai saw his references to ancient Hindu texts as an assertion of the 'national' over the western, even as he located modern western ideals within these Hindu texts. Because these ideals were imagined as integral to ancient Hinduism, desirable change towards greater social and national cohesiveness could be seen as consistent with original, true Hinduism rather than a departure from it towards the West.

What is relevant here is that in asserting autonomy from the West in the colonial context, by arguing that the social and national could be built by relying not on western reason but ancient Hindu texts, Lajpat Rai abandoned his earlier Arya Samaj-inflected definition of Hinduism as Vedic monotheism. Reflecting his acceptance of the Samaj as one of Hinduism's many sects, and his move towards a more catholic definition of Hinduism, Rai moved beyond the Vedas to embrace Hinduism's multiple, non-Vedic texts. Importantly, he also elided theology while defining Hinduism. Hinduism, as supposedly embodied in its various Vedic and non-Vedic texts, was stripped of divinity and sacredness, and further secularised as social and national spirit.

In defining Hinduism as sociality and nationalism, Lajpat Rai again sidestepped theological diversity among Hindus. But his subsequent writings reveal that internal religious diversity among Hindus remained a persistent thorn in his project of forging a Hindu nation.

In an article titled "Hinduism and Common Nationality" (1907), Rai wrote:

> It is often said that Hinduism is not the name of a particular religion, nor that of a religious nationality, and that it does not represent one set of beliefs, common to all who call themselves Hindu, and that therefore it is perfectly idle to appeal to Hindus in the name of a common nationality. It has become almost fashion to insist that the term Hinduism is too vague to be properly defined, and that there is hardly anything substantially common which binds one Hindu to another in the ties of national brotherhood. Hinduism, in short, is said to be more often a congeries of different religions and sects holding diverse and not unoften [*sic*] diametrically opposite views on matters of faith and doctrine. Hinduism is said to include and cover almost every form of religious faith known to or practiced by mankind from the purest monotheism to the lowest form of animism, polytheism, hedonism, pantheism, in fact all sorts of isms. There is a fairly large class of Hindus who suffer from want of faith in the potentialities of their religion to unite them or inspire them to the lofty ideals of a great religious platform whereupon to bring together a Hindu union (2003f: 331).

To counter this, Lajpat Rai quoted German Sanskritist Theodor Goldstücker (1821–1872) who highlighted the 'hundreds of creeds' within Christianity, 'every one of which claims to be in exclusive possession of Christianity', and whose 'difference was so essential that it was strong enough to perpetuate the most inveterate animosities and to result in wars the like of which cannot be traced in the history of any other creed' (ibid.: 333–334). Islam too contained 'as many varieties and shades of religious beliefs and doctrines […] if not more, than Hinduism does' (ibid.: 332). Just as internal diversity and even discord did not disqualify Christianity or Islam as 'religious nationalities', so did it not nullify the existence of a Hindu nation. Rai argued that Islam and Christianity accommodated even 'scoffers, agnostics, and skeptics' who questioned the divinity of the Quran and Bible but still clung to 'the outer form of religion, the very essence of which they take pleasure in decrying' (ibid.: 332). Countless individuals who did not consider the Bible as divine revelation stayed within 'the pale of outward Christianity' and for 'religious rites and ceremonies, baptism, marriage, etc.' remained 'as much Christians as those who believe that every letter of the Bible was spoken by God Himself' (ibid.).

Lajpat Rai was suggesting that even atheists could be part of 'Hindu nationality' if they clung to Hinduism's 'outer form'. Belief, worship, ritual and practice were now de-emphasised even more strongly as Rai defined Hinduism. It was instead defined in broadly non-religious, cultural terms to facilitate 'belonging [even] without believing' (Astor & Mayrl 2020: 9). To be sure, Rai's Arya Samajist background still prompted him to invoke the Vedas as the central marker of an internally differentiated Hinduism. He insisted, quoting Goldstücker, that the great bulk of Hindus considered the Vedas 'as the pivot on which all religious questions of Hindu India rest' (2003f: 335). But no mention was made of the theological or ritual content of the Vedas, which served merely as an identity-marker around which Hindus, despite their deep diversity, could rally. Rai equated belonging to a common religion with belonging to a common nation. To transcend the internal diversity among Hindus so they could be seen as members of a common religion and nation, he strongly de-emphasised theological details even as he utilised the Vedas as a de-sacralised identity-marker to unite Hindus despite their theological diversity. Hindu identity was now even more strongly defined by Rai as having less to do with faith and observance and was conceived in non-religious/secular terms, functioning as a marker of communal and national belonging rather than an expression of religious faith.

Strong Culturalisation: Lajpat Rai's Hindu nationalism and Hindutva

Then, in 1909, in his speech to the Punjab Hindu Sabha, Lajpat Rai argued differently. In light of the separate electorates and weighted representation granted to Muslims by the British—which adversely affected the Hindu minority population in his province, Punjab—Rai now jettisoned the category of religion while defining the essence of the Hindu nation. Instead of diluting theology to arrive at a more capacious definition of Hinduism, which then formed the basis of the Hindu nation, Rai now subordinated Hinduism to the more broadly-conceived category of 'Hindu culture'.

He argued that the German word 'Nation' did not 'signify a political nation or a state' but 'connoted what is generally conveyed by the English expression "people", implying a community possessing a certain type of civilisation and culture'. According to this German sense of the term, Hindus were 'a nation in themselves because they represent a type of civilisation all their

own' (idem 2003e: 158–159). Citing Johann Kaspar Bluntschli (1808–1881), an exponent of German ethnic nationalism (Jaffrelot 1999: 32), Lajpat Rai stated that a 'people' or 'nation' was formed through a 'slow psychological process, in which a mass of men gradually develops a type of life and society which differentiates them from others'. This distinctive 'accumulated culture', passed down generationally, became 'hereditary' (2003e: 159). Crucially, Rai argued:

> There was a time when community of religion was made the ground of nationality, but […] in present times community of religion is neither necessary for the formation of a political nation or of a "People" […] However important a part there may be of religion and language in the formation of peoples and nationalities, difference of religion and language is by no means prohibitive. The essence of a people lies in its culture (ibid.: 159–160).

Thus, Hindus constituted a distinct 'nation' and people because they shared a common 'Hindu culture'. By 1909, in the wake of the British concession of separate and weighted Muslim representation, Lajpat Rai realised that basing Hindu nationhood in shared Hindu religion, itself ultimately based in the Vedas, would:

> […] necessarily exclude those who do not subscribe to the scriptural authority of the Vedas, such as our friends of the Brahmo Samaj, the Jains and some Sikhs. But so far as I understand the aim of the leaders of the present Hindu movement, such exclusion is far from their desire. I presume that they wish to include everyone who calls himself a Hindu within the folds of their movement […] (ibid.: 155–156).

It was to provide his hitherto most catholic definition of the Hindu nation that Lajpat Rai based it in 'Hindu culture':

> For the bulk of our people the problem is easily solved by their taking their stand on the Vedas and making them the rallying point of all their efforts after unity and reform. For others who cannot accept the authority of the Vedas as scriptures binding on them, it is quite sufficient if they were to studiously retain, and laboriously maintain, the distinguishing features of Hindu culture in their thought and life (ibid.: 157).

By making 'Hindu culture' its centre, Lajpat Rai now actively included religious groups like the Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists within his 'Hindu nation'. To

arrive at his most encompassing, catholic definition of Hindu nationhood to date, even that most surface-level marker of Hindu religion—the Vedas— which till now still lingered in his 'Hindu' thought—was now assertively superseded by 'Hindu culture'. To build a broad-based Hindu nation which could transcend the internal diversity of Hinduism, and even go beyond this to include other non-Muslim, non-Christian religious groups like the Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists, Hinduism was substituted by the secular notion of 'Hindu culture' as the defining essence of Hindu nationhood.

As for what precisely constituted 'Hindu culture', Lajpat Rai cursorily stated that it was 'easily distinguished from the Semitic and other non-Aryan cultures' and from European culture (ibid.: 157). Like several other north Indian, upper-caste Hindus, Rai seemed unaware that his definition may alienate south Indian and lower-caste Hindus who saw themselves as descendants of non-Aryan Dravidians. Nevertheless, he clutched onto non-European Aryanism alongside non-Semitism as he attempted to define Hindu culture. Elsewhere in his 1909 speech, Rai clarified that he did not believe in 'racial purity' or 'racial superiority' (ibid.: 160), and stressed that obsession with racial purity had led to 'aristocratic' caste exclusiveness which had promoted Hindu stagnation and weakness. Yet, he maintained, 'if identity of racial origin is a necessary condition for the community of a people, which I do not admit, then it exists to the largest possible extent amongst the Hindus' (ibid: 162). To bolster his claim about the existence of a Hindu nation, Rai marshalled the supposedly common Aryan racial origin of Hindus. Nevertheless, for him, it was 'culture' rather than racial origin that constituted a nation's essence. Racial terms—Semitic, non-Aryan—surfaced as Rai attempted to distinguish Hindu 'religion' from Hindu 'culture', and groped for something against which to define this nebulous 'Hindu culture' he sought to make the defining essence of the Hindu nation. But for Rai, ultimately, the 'spirit of Hindu culture which gives us the right to call ourselves a people' was 'reflected in our literature, especially in our epic poetry' and 'our festivals and social practices' (ibid: 163). Rather than race, a culturalised Hinduism, recast as 'Hindu culture' and stripped of its religious significance, was the core of the Hindu nation. Still, the distinction between non-Semitic, Aryan 'Hindu culture' and Semitic, non-Aryan cultures defined the 'Hindu nation' as distinct from India's Muslim and Christians. This distinction was further accentuated by the tacit assumption that these groups partook not

in culturalised Hinduism (Hindu culture) but in culturalised Islam and Christianity (Islamic and Christian cultures).

In summary, in the 1880s and 1890s, at the same time that certain assemblages of Hindu beliefs and practices were undergoing a process of religionisation (getting homogenised as well as translated and reconstituted in terms of the modern category of 'religion'), Lajpat Rai, as an Arya Samajist, was defining Hinduism in terms of a deliberately minimalised Arya Samajist theology. As an Arya Samajist who wished to continue to lay claim to the larger Hindu identity, maintain the integrity of Hinduism and strive for Hindu unity, he chose to define Hinduism in terms of Arya Samaj's most basic tenet: Vedic monotheism. In the context of colonial humiliation and domination, the felt imperative of asserting Hindu self-esteem, and building a united, robust Hindu 'community' and 'nation' transcending Hinduism's internal theological diversity, led Rai to water down Arya Samajist theology as he defined Hinduism. He simultaneously de-emphasised Vedic theology in favour of secular instruction in the language and 'history' of Hindus, both seen as crucial aspects of the Hindu 'culture' he wished to promote.

In 1904, the felt need to assert autonomy from the West led Rai to further strongly de-emphasise doctrine and belief as he defined Hinduism and instead equate it with sociality and nationalism. As evident in his article published in 1907, the imperative of forging a Hindu nation, despite astounding theological diversity among Hindus, prompted Lajpat Rai to radically de-emphasise theology and secularise his conception of Hindu religion, even as his Arya Samajist background made him anxiously retain Vedas as an external identity-marker of Hindu religious and national identity. Finally, as the need to build a robust Hindu nation was felt more urgently after the grant of separate and weighted Muslim representation in 1909, Lajpat Rai articulated his most broad-based definition of the Hindu nation yet. To include all non-Muslim, non-Christian groups within the Hindu nation, he was willing to have Hindu religion be superseded by the broader category of 'Hindu culture'. The Vedas, occasionally retained as an identity-marker to unite the diverse Hindus, were now felt to be insufficient. 'Hinduism' and the category of 'religion' was superseded by the secular notion of 'Hindu culture' which now assertively took centre-stage.

As we know, Hindu beliefs and practices were being increasingly religionised in response to modernity, colonialism, nationalism and modern, number-driven representative politics. Against the background of this broader social-political process of religionisation, we can discern certain intellectual processes evident in Lajpat Rai's thought. An influential politician-thinker who both reflected and shaped broader discourses, the trajectory of Lajpat Rai's ideas represented wider intellectual trends, reflecting a significant strand of Hindu thinking on Hinduism and Hindu identity. As an intellectual process, religionisation could simultaneously take two forms, resulting in a new comprehensive (very thick) religion consisting of a greater number of practices and beliefs or the invention of a thin Hindu religion with fewer beliefs and practices. Rai's initial deliberate reduction of theological detail and complexity and introduction of a definition of Hinduism in terms of a simple, broad criteria set by Vedic monotheism reflected an intellectual process of religionisation in its second form. Since thinning entailed a de-emphasis on theological detail and complexity (a decline in religious belief), it also represented a form of secularisation. Subsequently, against the broader sociological process of religionisation, Rai also engaged in the culturalisation of Hinduism, representing a strong degree of secularisation, both in the sense of a decline in emphasis on theology and conceptual distinction-making between 'religion' and 'culture'. The broader sociological process of the religionisation of Hindu beliefs and practices coexisted with particular intellectual trends represented by Lajpat Rai. By tracing Rai's trajectory, I do not mean to suggest that it represents a broader sociological progression within the Hindu world from religionisation to culturalisation. The trajectory of his thought reflected an emerging intellectual current, not the larger sociological process of the ongoing religionisation of Hindu beliefs and practices or of secularisation.

The thinning down, culturalisation and secularisation of Hindu identity allowed for an expansion of numbers who could belong to the 'Hindu nation'. Yet, in these years, Hindu culture was not conceived by Lajpat Rai as something in which Indian Muslims and Christians also partook. The secularisation and culturalisation of Hindu identity facilitated the inclusion of the tremendously diverse Hindus, as well as of Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists, in his definition of the 'Hindu nation', while simultaneously *excluding* Muslims and Christians. De-emphasising thick religion in favour of thin religion, and religion in favour of Hindu

culture, to transcend the internal religious diversity of Hindus, and produce a broad and catholic definition of the Hindu nation, which simultaneously excluded Muslims and Christians—these were also the hallmarks of Savarkar's Hindutva ideology, elaborated roughly fifteen years later in 1923 in a tract titled *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* Like Rai, Savarkar defined 'Hinduism' extremely capaciously. He argued that while the term was used restrictedly to refer to the majority of Hindus following Vedic dharma, its proper use would refer to all religions native to India, including Avedic (non-Vedic) dharma or religions of the 'minority' of 'heterodox' schools, including not just Arya dharma, but also Sikh, Jain and Buddhist dharma (Savarkar 1969: 104–108). Savarkar therefore de-emphasised theology, and provided a radically thinned-down definition of Hinduism to include larger numbers of people within its fold. However, Savarkar emphasised that 'Hindutva', translated as 'Hindu-ness', was 'not identical with' but broader than adherence to Hinduism, which was a 'limited, less satisfactory, and essentially sectarian term', signifying a 'spiritual or religious dogma or system' (ibid.: 4). The 'essential significance of Hindutva', he clarified, 'was not primarily—and certainly not mainly' concerned with 'any particular theocratic or religious dogma or creed (ibid). The first two essentials of Hindutva nationhood included being 'resident in' and loving India as a Fatherland (ibid.: 83, 91, 101, 115), and possessing Hindu blood (ibid.: 84–91, 101). Yet, these were not sufficient for belonging to Hindutva nationhood, and a third essential—reverence for 'Hindu culture' or Sanskriti—was key (ibid.: 92, 99–100). Thus, like Rai, rather than religious belief, a culturalised Hinduism, stripped of religious significance and recast as 'Hindu culture', was made the key essential of the Hindu nation. While the majority of Indian Muslims and Christians met the first two (geographical and racial) 'essentials' of Hindutva nationhood, they did not meet its third (cultural) essential (ibid.: 92, 99–100). Having adopted a 'new cult', most Muslims and Christians had disowned Hindu culture and therefore failed this key essential of Hindutva. As in Rai's definition of Hindu nationhood, the culturalisation and secularisation of Hinduism and Hindu identity facilitated the inclusion of a diverse range of Hindus, as well as Sikhs, Jains, and Buddhists, while excluding Muslims and Christians.

To be sure, for Savarkar, what decisively excluded all Muslims and Christians from Hindutva nationhood was the important 'religious aspect' of the third 'essential' of Hindu culture (ibid.: 102). This entailed belonging to any

of the different schools of Hindu dharma (including Sikh, Buddhist and Jain dharma), which were the 'offspring of' Hindusthan and, because it was the land of their 'revelation' and where their Gurus and Godmen were born (ibid.: 110, 112), considered Hindusthan their Holyland (ibid.: 111, 113, 115). Therefore, even the minority of Muslims and Christians who proudly partook in Hindu culture were ultimately excluded because they supposedly considered not India but 'Arabia or Palestine' as their Holyland, and because their 'mythology and Godmen, ideas and heroes' were not native but 'foreign' to India (ibid.: 113). Belonging to religions whose origin, myths, and seers were linked exclusively to the territory of Hindusthan was crucial for Hindu national belonging. Alongside culture, then, religion and geography played a critical role in Savarkar's imagination, helping affirm the inclusion of large numbers of people into his definition of Hindutva nationhood, while decisively excluding Muslims and Christians.

What Savarkar considered the 'religious aspect' of the third essential of Hindutva—Hindu culture—was therefore decisive for Hindu national belonging. Yet it appeared only after 'Hindu culture' had first facilitated the exclusion of the majority of Muslims and Christians. Moreover, religion surfaced not to emphasise theological details but to decisively tie Hindus, Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists to the territory of India, while questioning the ties of Muslims and Christians to it, and to thus conclusively include the former and exclude the latter from Hindutva nationhood. For Savarkar, the religions of Muslims and Christians, by drawing them into non-Hindu cultures, and alienating them from Hindu culture, certainly excluded them from Hindutva nationhood. Belonging to the Hindutva nation required these groups to abandon their religions, with their links to 'foreign' holylands and cultures. Yet Savarkar required them to not convert to any schools of Hindu dharma, but to adopt and show attachment to the native 'Hindu culture' of India and, in forgoing their links to Islam and Christianity, and to their foreign holylands, exclusively treat on the territory of India as their sacred land (ibid.: 84, 115, 130). Savarkar's return to revelation, gurus, mythologies, godmen and Holyland ultimately makes religion appear as important to his definition of Hindutva nationhood. Yet, an atheist himself, Savarkar considered theological belief as unimportant for membership to it. Belonging to rather than believing in schools of Hindu dharma was important. Belief and practice remained superseded by territory and 'Hindu culture'. While rejection of Islam and Christianity was essential,

it was assimilation into Hindu *culture* rather than conversion into Hindu *religion* that was required of India's Muslims and Christians.

Both Lajpat Rai and Savarkar considered theological belief an unimportant criterion for Hindu national belonging. Both secularised and culturalised Hinduism, decoupling Hindu identity from religious meaning and refashioning it as non-religious 'Hindu culture'. Both considered 'Hindu culture' as key to their definitions of Hindu nationhood, using the concept to circumvent internal Hindu theological diversity and arrive at a capacious Hindu nation which even included Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists but simultaneously excluded Muslims and Christians. This appears to support the Jaffrelot-Bhatt interpretation of Lajpat Rai's 'Hindu nationalism' as constituting an ideological precursor to or virtual equivalence of Hindutva. Yet, this convergence elides significant distinctions.

As we have seen, the secularisation and culturalisation of Hinduism by Savarkarite Hindutva was accompanied by the demand that Muslims and Christians abandon their religions and cultures and assimilate into Hindu culture. This requirement is the key defining feature of Savarkarite Hindutva (also cf. Pandey 1991: 2999; Bhatt 2001: 98; Bakhle 2010: 178–181). By contrast, Lajpat Rai's self-proclaimed 'Hindu nationalism' did not demand that Muslims and Christians abandon their religions and cultures and assimilate into Hindu culture. Rai's Hindu nationalism imagined Muslim and Christian 'religious nationalities' as robustly existing alongside the Hindu nation (2003c: 6–10 & 2003j: 233–234 & 2003e: 165). Wishing them 'joy and prosperity', Rai believed that these nationalities were 'perfectly justified' in looking to advance their interests, and wished to grant them a 'free hand to strengthen themselves' (2003e: 166, 168). Lajpat Rai accepted the right of Muslim and Christians to proselytise (2003b: 315), and the existence of separate, religion-based personal laws (2003g: 195). Rather than demanding religious abandonment and cultural assimilation, Rai's Hindu nationalism accepted India's religio-cultural diversity. Rai also did not portray Hinduism and Hindu culture as native to India, and Islam/Muslim culture and Christianity/Christian culture as foreign to it. Unlike Savarkar, he did not attempt to establish the supreme claim of Hindus, and their religion and culture, over the land of India. This entailed an even fuller acceptance of India's religio-cultural diversity.

Like Savarkar, Rai saw Hindus, Muslims and Christians as separated by radical religious and cultural differences such that they even formed different 'nationalities'. Yet, unlike him, Rai conceived these distinct nationalities as politically sharing some 'joint aspirations' and interests (2003c: 6–10 & 2003j: 233–234 & 2003e: 165). Despite expressing discomfort and even acrimony towards Muslim politics (idem 2003e: 165–166), he remained open to working with Muslims politically (idem 2003c: 4–9; Nair 2011: 18–19). This is also why, in 1909, he stressed the compatibility of his imagined 'Hindu nation' with a broader 'Indian nation':

> By aiming at unity and solidarity amongst the Hindus, we do not contemplate a blow at Indian unity. [But] I am firmly convinced that it is impossible to build an Indian nation from above. The structure must be built from below (Lajpat Rai 2003e: 165).

Rai prioritised uniting the 'Hindu nation', but firmly declared, 'I believe that the political salvation of India must come out of the combination and union of all communities into one national whole. The goal may be a distant one, but that decidedly is the goal' (ibid.: 167). In 1909, Rai's politically-charged cultural 'Hindu nation' was conceived as existing alongside a similarly conceived Muslim 'nationality', both envisioned as eventually merging into a single 'Indian nation' (ibid.: 165–166).

By 1909, Lajpat Rai had articulated his most robust cultural conception of the Hindu nation. Hindus were imagined as 'nation' in what he considered the German sense of the term, constituting a distinct 'people' with a distinct culture. The Hindus were a distinct 'nation' and 'people', with these concepts signifying a cultural community. While certainly not apolitical, this culturally-defined 'Hindu nation' was never imagined in the full-fledged, modern nationalist sense. It was not imagined as having superior claims over India's territory, or deserving a self-governing state of its own over that land. The Hindu nation and people were not imagined as the repository of sovereignty, which in turn must find expression in a state. Instead, when Lajpat Rai used the word 'nation' in what he called its 'modern political' sense—that is, its full-fledged, modern nationalist-statist sense, embodying the principle that every nation must have a self-governing state over a particular territory—Rai imagined an 'Indian' rather than a 'Hindu' nation (ibid.: 158, 165). When it came to imagining a nation and people that were sovereign, and whose sovereignty must find expression

in a state, Rai imagined an 'Indian' nation and people including Hindus and non-Hindus. And while in these years he did not explicitly elaborate a cultural identity for his weakly-imagined 'Indian nation', his lack of assertion of superior claims for Hindu culture over India, and basic respect for India's pluralism are revealing. Its identification of India with Hindu culture and condition of cultural assimilationism meant that hierarchy, supremacy and domination were central to Savarkarite Hindutva. In contrast, Rai reiterated that he 'does not seek a Hindu majority crushing a Mahomedan or other minorities' (2003n: 199), and accepted Lord Morley's 1908 scheme which guaranteed proportionate Muslim representation (2003e: 167).

Thus, Rai's 'Hindu nationalism' converged with Savarkarite Hindutva in its secularisation and culturalisation of Hinduism to produce a catholic 'Hindu nation' which excluded Muslims and Christians. Yet, it differed in ultimately accepting, despite rivalrous friction and acrimony between the Hindu nation and them, the existence in India of other, robust and politicised 'religious nationalities', and in insisting that Hindus and Muslims must ultimately unite into a common, overarching 'Indian nation'. Unlike the Savarkarite vision, Hindus were not imagined as occupying a position of hierarchical supremacy and domination vis-à-vis India's other religious and cultural groups. Savarkar's secularisation and culturalisation of Hinduism produced a diversity-averse, culturally-assimilationist Hindutva nationalism; Muslims and Christians were excluded from the Hindutva nation (the only nation in India) unless they assimilated into India's essential Hindu culture. By contrast, the secularisation and culturalisation of Hinduism by Lajpat Rai, produced a differently imagined 'Hindu nation'. While Muslims and Christians were excluded from this 'Hindu nation', they were imagined as 'religious nationalities' which, albeit existing in a friction-ridden relationship with the 'Hindu nation', were seen as freely co-existing alongside it in a sort of multi-national, religiously and culturally diverse India (with these, too, imagined as eventually uniting into a diversity-respecting, self-governing 'Indian nation').

CONCLUSION

The significance of the specific textures and trajectories of Lajpat Rai's ideas, as unveiled in this article, go beyond what they tell us about Rai and the particular period under consideration. Their excavation helps clarify the following analytical points. One, that Hindu identity can be defined in various senses—thickly religious, thinly religious, broadly non-religious and 'cultural', apolitical, openly political, or implicitly political. Lajpat Rai of course defined it in specific thinly religious, cultural and implicitly political senses. Second, Rai's thinning of religion represented a form of both religionisation and secularisation, and his secularisation of Hinduism in the form of its culturalisation was co-eval with the broader process of religionisation. Third, Rai's ideas challenge the dichotomy drawn by Hindu nationalists and secularists alike between the process of secularisation and articulations of Hindu nationalist identity. These are not necessarily opposed to each other. Strong articulations of Hindu nationalism are often the product of a thinning down and culturalisation of religion, both of which are part of secularisation—understood in both senses of a decline in emphasis on theological detail and of conceptually differentiating between 'religion' and 'culture' as understood in largely secular terms. Secularisation need not cause the disappearance of religion but can transform religion from its thick to thin form, the latter more conducive for national and other political projects. It can result in the culturalisation of religion, whereby phenomena lose their religious meaning but flourish with their new, 'cultural' meaning. These are important points for secularists to remember.[8] Champions of Hindu nationalism may do well to remember that they are not upholders of an unchanging Hindu religion as against secularists who advocate secularisation. Their projects are as much products of secularisation as the transformed (thinned down or culturalised)

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[8] Self-proclaimed secularists (as well as practicing Hindus) might want to note that for its sophisticated theorists, secularism is about substantially separating organised religion from political power for the sake of normative values (i.e., peace, non-domination, liberty, equal citizenship), and not desiring secularisation in the sense of a decline in religion. Indeed, sophisticated conceptions of secularism allow religion its separate, even public sphere, where it is free to flourish as long as it does not undermine secularism's core normative values (Bhargava 2010: 77–82, 88–89). Of course, while such theorists are not troubled by a flourishing culturalised religion per se, they object as soon as it begins to undermined any of secularism's core values like peace, liberty, non-domination, or equal citizenship.

Hindu identity they vehemently champion. Finally, Rai's thought reveals that the intellectual processes of the thinning down, culturalisation, and secularisation of Hinduism need not generate an assimilationist and domineering Hindutva. Sometimes, these produce a different kind of 'Hindu nationalism' altogether, which, while expressing discomfort about Muslim politics and anxiety about preserving or projecting a Hindu majority from perceived threats, accepts India's religious and cultural diversity.

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