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Vanya Vaidehi Bhargav

# **Hindu Politics in Service of Secularism**

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# Hindu Politics in Service of Secularism

## 1 Introduction

This paper explores the political thought during the 1920s of Lala Lajpat Rai (1865–1928), a prominent anti-colonial nationalist. He is now widely regarded as an early pioneer of Hindu nationalism, which either has strong continuities with exclusivist-assimilationist *Hindutva* nationalism, or laid the basic ideological groundwork for it.<sup>1</sup> A contemporary of M.K. Gandhi, Lajpat Rai was a prominent leader of the Hindu Mahasabha (The Great Assembly of Hindus), which emerged in the 1920s as the most influential Hindu political organisation of the time, even compared to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS; National Volunteer Organisation), which is now well-known, but was then more marginal.<sup>2</sup> As temporary president of the Mahasabha, Rai played a leading role in consolidating a Hindu communal politics in the mid-1920s – his response to the context of mutual suspicion, antagonism, and violence that marked Hindu-Muslim relations in India during this decade. However, a closer look at Rai’s ideas reveals that his efforts to engineer a sociopolitical consolidation of Hindus were founded

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- 1 Christophe Jaffrelot, “Genesis and Development of Hindu Nationalism in the Punjab: From the Arya Samaj to the Hindu Sabha (1875–1910),” in *Religion, Caste, and Politics in India* (London: Hurst, 2011), 113; Chetan Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 2–4, 42–44, 48–55; William Gould, *Hindu Nationalism and the Language of Politics in Late Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 38; C.S. Adcock, *The Limits of Tolerance: Indian Secularism and the Politics of Religious Freedom* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 92–99, 129–32, 149–55. One exception is Neeti Nair, who notes that Rai shifted positions, held complicated and sometimes inconsistent stances (*Changing Homelands: Hindu Politics and the Partition of India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 16–19, chap. 2).
- 2 For more on the RSS, see Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics: 1925 to the 1990s* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1999); Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, chap. 5.

in a desire to establish a secular Indian nation state. This paper explores the articulation of secularism by this Hindu ‘communal’ politician. It first outlines, in detail, the historical context under which a secular politics became vital for Rai, and then elaborates the intricate internal texture of his complex, often fluid vision of secularism. Here, I demonstrate how he squared his organisation of an often-virulent, potentially violent Hindu politics with a vision of secularism. The second half of the paper explores the theoretical implications of Rai’s dynamic position. I illustrate how Lajpat Rai simultaneously articulated *both* a Hindu communal politics and a vision of secularism. By so doing, this paper challenges the long-drawn strict dichotomy between Hindu politics or Hindu ‘communalism’ and Indian secularism, undermining the assumption that these two positions cannot be simultaneously held. Yet, the paper also pushes back against revisionist scholarship which, in challenging assumptions of strict mutual exclusivity between Indian secularism and Hindu communalism, has tended to overlook and undermine meaningful distinctions that still exist between these categories, and promoted a misleading tendency towards their conflation. This paper insists on the need to retain and respect the analytical distinctions between the categories of secularism and Hindu ‘communalism’, even while recognising that they do not always exist in relation to each other as a strict dichotomy. Unearthing a hitherto-hidden Indian secularism articulated by this ‘Hindu communal’ politician, the paper will briefly explore the ways in which Rai’s complex position overlaps with, and is distinct from, Western variants of secularism, India’s constitutional secularism, and the Gandhian-Nehruvian vision, the latter of which became hegemonic till the 1970s. The paper ends by, very briefly, comparing Lajpat Rai’s position with *Hindutva* nationalism<sup>3</sup> – a major influence on the contemporary Hindu right – and by reflecting on the relationship between the Hindu right and secularism.

First, a clarification of my choice of terms. The Multiple Secularities project distinguishes between secularity as an analytical category, connoting a modality of making distinctions between religion and non-religion, and

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3 In this article, I use the term ‘Hindutva nationalism’ for heuristic purposes, to signify the culturally assimilationist, diversity-averse Hindu nationalism of V.D. Sarvarkar and M.S. Golwalkar, which has been a major influence on the contemporary Hindu right.

secularism as a normative category, signifying the ideological project of separating the two.<sup>4</sup> Since my paper deals with historical actors pursuing the ideological project of separating religion from the state and/or politics for certain normative ends, I use the category secularism throughout. This not only does justice to these historical actors' own eventual use of this term in the modern colonial era, but, more importantly, seems to be the appropriate analytical category to capture the normative content that guided the quest of these historical actors to separate religion from the state and/or politics. At the same time, for most of these modern historical actors, the ideological objective of separation (secularism) itself rested on the act of making conceptual distinctions between religion and the state or politics (secularity). Their varying articulations of Indian secularism therefore involved different expressions of Indian secularity.

## 2 The context: Hindu-Muslim cooperation and its unravelling

In order to grasp the secular vision that Lajpat Rai developed in the mid-1920s, it is important to understand both the wider and the more immediate political contexts in which it crystallised. In this section, I spend some time laying out these contexts. From its foundation in 1885, much of India's Muslim leadership had remained aloof from the Indian National Congress, eventually forming their own political organisation in 1906: the Muslim League.<sup>5</sup> In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, high-born Muslim leaders spurned the Congress, as they rejected its modern conception of nationhood, with its connotations of popular self-rule. Muslim notables believed themselves to be naturally gifted in the art of political rule, imagining themselves as partners of the British Empire, alongside some Hindu aristocrats. However, even at this stage, a major reason why Muslim leaders rejected the Congress

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4 Christoph Kleine, and Monika Wohlrab-Sahr, "Research Programme of the HCAS 'Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities,'" Working Paper Series of the HCAS "Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities" 1, Leipzig University, 2016, 6–8; Monika Wohlrab-Sahr, and Marian Burchardt, "Revisiting the Secular: Multiple Secularities and Pathways to Modernity," Working Paper Series of the HCAS "Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities" 2, Leipzig University, 2017, 12.

5 This was the same Muslim League that would lead the movement for Pakistan in the 1940s. Its objectives in the first three decades of its existence, however, were quite different, and far from demanding a separate nation state.

was their fear that the latter's demand for elective representation would inaugurate a system in which numbers mattered, and the Muslim minority therefore be structurally disadvantaged.<sup>6</sup>

When Muslim leaders formed the Muslim League, they did so to demand separate political representation, in the form of separate electorates and 'weightages' (representation in excess of numbers) in the new system of (limited) elective political representation. This reflected the League's rejection of the Congress' claim that it represented the common political interests of Hindus and Muslims as members of an 'Indian' nation. The League admitted the existence of several shared political interests, but nonetheless considered Hindus and Muslims to be distinct political communities (or 'nationalities'), each with its own special political interests which could be represented only by members of that community. While many Congressmen still frequently declared their loyalty to the Crown, the number of those who were demanding some form of self-government (even whilst conceiving India as remaining within the British Empire) rose steadily. By contrast, the leaders of the Muslim League declared their loyalty to the British, without demanding eventual self-government.

Given that the Congress and the League had long conducted their politics separately, it was a remarkable achievement when, in 1916, these two organisations came to an accord. In what came to be called the 'Lucknow Pact', after the North Indian city where it was negotiated, they arrived at a shared agreement, not just on Indian self-government, but also on the question of political representation for Hindus and Muslims in India's legislatures. The Congress accepted separate electorates and weighted communal representation for Muslims in provinces where they constituted a minority.<sup>7</sup> The Pact helped create an atmosphere of mutual trust between Hindus and Muslims, laying ground for further cooperation in subsequent years.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, such collaboration was evident when a section of Hindu and Muslim leaders joined forces in the Khilafat/non-cooperation movement (1919–22).

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6 Vanya Vaidehi Bhargav, "Between Hindu and Indian: The Nationalist Thought of Lala Lajpat Rai" (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 2018), 23–25.

7 Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India: 1886–1947* (Delhi: Macmillan, 1983), 150.

8 Hugh Owen, "Negotiating the Lucknow Pact," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 31, no. 3 (1972): 578.



The Khilafat movement was a Pan-Islamic movement launched by a newly emergent Indian Muslim leadership in the aftermath of the First World War. The war had ended with the British and Ottomans on the victorious and defeated sides, respectively. The Khilafat movement in India aimed to preserve the Ottoman caliphate-empire, which the victorious allied powers threatened to dismantle at the Paris Peace Conference in January 1919. Gandhi, recently returned from South Africa, and now asserting his leadership in Indian politics, believed that Hindu-Muslim unity was the foundation of Indian national identity, and expressed sympathy with what he called the 'Khilafat wrong'. The Khilafat grievance was soon linked to other war-related grievances, also affecting non-Muslims, such as the British government's passing of the Rowlatt Acts, which extended wartime emergency powers into peacetime, and the British massacre of Indians who had gathered to protest the Acts in Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar, in April 1919. Combining these grievances, Gandhi and a section of the Indian Muslim leadership cooperated to mobilise popular demonstrations and eventually launch the Khilafat and 'non-cooperation' movement directed at the British government. The movement was characterised by unprecedented and widespread Hindu-Muslim fraternisation, at both leadership and popular levels.<sup>9</sup> This amity manifested itself, among other things, in the united congregations of Hindus and Muslims in mosques and temples.<sup>10</sup>

However, over time, cracks began to appear in this Hindu-Muslim cooperation. By early 1921, a few Muslim Khilafat leaders were growing increasingly impatient with Gandhi's insistence on non-violent non-cooperation, which, in turn, alarmed a section of the Hindu leadership.<sup>11</sup> The Mapilla rebellion in South India in August, in which the predominantly

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9 John Zavos, *The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 145; Gail Minault, *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India* (Delhi: Columbia University Press, 1982), 70–71; Cemil Aydin, *The Idea of the Muslim World: A Global Intellectual History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 84.

10 Minault, *Khilafat Movement*, 70–71; Shabnum Tejani, *Indian Secularism: A Social and Intellectual History, 1890–1950* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 154.

11 Minault, *Khilafat Movement*, 138; Tejani, *Indian Secularism*, 163–64. The eagerness to use violence was, of course, not confined to only the Indian Muslim leaders of the Khilafat movement. From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, right up to the war years, several Hindus and Sikhs had been involved in plots to either assassinate British officials or overthrow the British government through an armed revolt. See Sarkar, *Modern India*, 123–35, 144–49.

Muslim Mapilla peasants revolted against their Hindu landlords, further eroded trust between Hindu and Muslim leaders. The rebellion arose out of a combination of complex factors: agrarian discontent and an incipient famine; the Mapilla community's long history of armed rebellion against authority, and the inclusion of a sizeable number of recently demobilised soldiers trained in the use of arms and concerted action; Mapilla support for the Khilafat but advocacy of a form of non-cooperation that condoned violence as a means to demand redressal from their Hindu landlords; the government's mishandling of agrarian discontent and its repression of political meetings by Congress and Khilafat leaders; and an eventual trigger involving the alleged desecration of a mosque. The government reported that the revolt caused the destruction of Hindu temples, alongside estates, and that it included forcible conversions and the proclamation of Khilafat kingdoms.<sup>12</sup> Although the all-India Muslim Khilafat leadership, themselves powerless to end the revolt, condemned the violence and expressed horror at forcible conversions, sections of Hindu leadership grew sceptical of Muslim intentions. For them, the Mapilla revolt raised the spectre of an organised Muslim community poised to wipe out Hindus.<sup>13</sup> Further sporadic incidents of violence gave the colonial government an excuse to repress the Khilafat/non-cooperation movement and arrest its Hindu and Muslim leaders, and Gandhi himself decided to call off his movement in early 1922, in response to violence perpetrated by some of his followers (leading to his own arrest and further repression). As a result, the earlier enthusiasm and momentum of the movement curdled into resentment and despair. Many Hindu and Muslim leaders blamed each other for lacking commitment to the movement.<sup>14</sup> Divisions surfaced even among Congress leaders and Muslim Pan-Islamic leaders, over the form in which to continue non-cooperation with the colonial government.<sup>15</sup>

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12 Minault, *Khilafat Movement*, 145–49; Tejani, *Indian Secularism*, 165.

13 Gyanendra Pandey, "Hindus and Others: The Militant Hindu Construction," *Economic and Political Weekly* 26, no. 52 (1991): 2998; Charu Gupta, "Articulating Hindu Masculinity and Femininity: 'Shuddhi' and 'Sangathan' Movements in United Provinces in the 1920s," *Economic and Political Weekly* 33, no. 13 (1998): 728.

14 Minault, *Khilafat Movement*, 177–86.

15 From the beginning, deep differences existed among Hindu and Muslim leaders, between those who favoured cooperation with the government and those who did not, and between those who were more and less committed to nonviolence.

Meanwhile, at the popular level, the passions and energies released during the mass movement began to find new, often violent outlets. From this point, until the close of the 1920s, riots occurred with an alarming frequency and intensity across various regions of North India. To give some sense of the scale: 1922 saw riots in Multan (Punjab); 1923 in Amritsar (Punjab) and the towns of Agra and Saharanpur (United Provinces; today's Uttar Pradesh); 1924 saw disturbances in Delhi and a major conflagration in Kohat (Northwest Frontier Province; today's Kyber Pakhtunkwa in Pakistan); in 1925 and 1926, riots ravaged Panipat and Rawalpindi (Punjab). According to official records, 76 riots were recorded in India between 1923 and July 1926, clustered around Bombay, Punjab, Delhi, the United Provinces, Bihar and Bengal. By official reckoning, 1926 saw 11 riots in Bengal alone, with Calcutta witnessing arguably the longest riot India had ever seen, spanning a whole month.<sup>16</sup> Increasing polarisation between Hindus and Muslims found expression in the competitive *shuddhi/sangathan* and *tabligh/tanzim* movements for Hindu and Muslim consolidation, respectively. The Arya Samaj, a Hindu reform organisation, revived the *shuddhi* ('purification' or 'reconversion') movement, to reclaim those forcibly converted during the Mapilla rebellion. They soon extended their campaign to 'reconvert' groups of 'borderline Muslims', such as the Muslim Malkana Rajputs of the United Provinces, who followed many Hindu customs.<sup>17</sup> This was accompanied, in 1922, by the revival of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha (The Great All-India Hindu Assembly), which had been dormant and marginalised since its foundation in 1915. The Hindu Mahasabha launched the Hindu *sangathan* ('organisation') movement, calling on Hindus to organise in 'self-defence', in response to what they saw as the threat of violence and conversion from Muslims. Alarmed, a number of prominent Ulama and Sufis, supported by the Jamiat al-Ulama (the all-India organisation of Islamic theologians and jurists founded during the Khilafat movement), launched the *tabligh* ('propagation'), while another

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16 Pradip Kumar Datta, "War over Music: The Riots of 1926 in Bengal," *Social Scientist* 18, no. 6/7 (1990): 38.

17 Minault, *Khilafat Movement*, 193; Gupta, "Hindu Masculinity," 728; Tejani, *Indian Secularism*, 166; Yoginder Sikand, "Arya Shuddhi and Muslim Tabligh: Muslim Reactions to Arya Samaj Proselytization (1923–30)," in *Religious Conversion in India: Modes, Motivations, and Meanings*, ed. Rowena Robinson, and Sathianathan Clarke (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 102–9.

prominent Khilafat leader now began *tanzim* ('organisation') – apparently also in 'self-defence.' These movements, the consequence of Hindu-Muslim antagonism and violence, often themselves provoked further violence.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, polarisation and rioting resulted in the unravelling of the Lucknow Pact, as certain disgruntled Hindu and Muslim leaders manipulated and even encouraged violence, to press their demands and push for the Pact's revision.<sup>19</sup>

It was in response to this new atmosphere of mutual mistrust, hostility, and violence that Lajpat Rai would articulate his ideas of secularism.<sup>20</sup> Rai's own province of Punjab was particularly notable for its depth of inter-communal tension. Touring Punjab in 1923, Congress leaders concluded that "relations between Hindus and Mussulmans, both educated and uneducated, were so greatly strained that each community had practically arrayed itself in an armed camp against the other."<sup>21</sup> The 1919 constitutional reforms introduced by the British had granted substantial powers to Indian provinces (as opposed to the central government), and shifted power from confrontational urban middle-class politicians, to a loyalist rural elite that favoured cooperation with the British imperial order.<sup>22</sup> In the Muslim-majority province of Punjab, this had given substantial power to a party dominated by Muslim landlords, which, even as it enacted policies for all communities, had attempted to consolidate Muslim majority votes by extending communal representation to local bodies and educational institutions. This resulted in deep resentment among many urban Punjabi Hindus, rapidly and seriously embittering Hindu-Muslim relations throughout the Punjab.<sup>23</sup> It was the major riot in Kohat, in the neighbouring Muslim-majority Northwest Frontier Province, however,

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18 Minault, *Khilafat Movement*, 194–95.

19 Owen, "Lucknow Pact," 586.

20 Here, I use secularism in the sense used by Rajeev Bhargava, to connote a vision seeking the separation of organised religion from organised political power, for the sake of a specific set of values. Rajeev Bhargava, *The Promise of India's Secular Democracy* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 65.

21 David Page, *Prelude to Partition: The Indian Muslims and the Imperial System of Control, 1920–1932* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982), 85.

22 Page, *Prelude to Partition*, 22.

23 Ayesha Jalal, and Anil Seal, "Alternative to Partition: Muslim Politics between the Wars," *Modern Asian Studies* 15, no. 3 (1981): 426; Nair, *Changing Homelands*, 71–72; Page, *Prelude to Partition*, 86–87.

that most affected Lajpat Rai. Here, the riot was triggered by a pamphlet written by a supporter of Hindu *sangathan*, which made a call to spread the faith of Vishnu all the way to Mecca and promised to annihilate Muslims. Initiated by a complicated series of events, in which panicked firing by Hindus led to the death of a Muslim boy, the riot eventually forced the British government to evacuate the entire Hindu minority from Kohat.<sup>24</sup>

### 3 The response: Hindu political consolidation and secular Indian nationalism

In the years coinciding with and immediately following the First World War, Lajpat Rai had actively discouraged the organisation of separate, rivalrous Hindu and Muslim politics. In a book in 1918, he spoke of “the false ideas of religious nationalism and communal patriotism”,<sup>25</sup> and declared the Arya Samaj – with which he himself had been closely associated until the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – to be “narrow and openly sectarian”.<sup>26</sup> As one newspaper reported, at a public meeting in 1920, “Lajpat Rai announced that hereafter he severed his connection with any religious sect dealing with political problems”.<sup>27</sup> In another public speech in 1920, he asked Hindus and Muslims to end their “petty” quarrels over the “crumbs” of council seats thrown at them by the British, and unite to “take the whole loaf together”.<sup>28</sup>

But the new atmosphere of mistrust and violence that had been developing in India since 1922 had, by late 1924, convinced Lajpat Rai of the urgent need for Hindus to consolidate in an exclusively Hindu organisation: the newly revived Hindu Mahasabha.<sup>29</sup> Apart from rising violence, Lajpat Rai’s call for an assertive Hindu politics was a response to the political actions of the bulk of Indian Muslim leadership. For many

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24 Nair, *Changing Homelands*, 54–71.

25 Lala Lajpat Rai, “Problem of National Education in India, 1918,” in *Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai*, ed. Bal Ram Nanda (New Delhi: Manohar, 2003), 7:184.

26 Lajpat Rai, 132–33.

27 Lala Lajpat Rai, “Unity, the Foundation of Liberty, The Tribune, 26 February 1920,” in *Collected Works*, 9:3.

28 Lala Lajpat Rai, “Amritsar-Place of Political Pilgrimage, The Tribune, 16 March 1920,” in *Collected Works*, 9:28–29.

29 Lala Lajpat Rai, “The Hindu Mahasabha and Muslim League, Bombay Chronicle, 22 December 1924,” in *Collected Works*, 11-203.

of these Muslim leaders, Hindu-Muslim cooperation during the Khilafat movement had never implied that Indian Muslims would abandon their own community-based political organisations – the Muslim League and Khilafat Committee – in favour of the Indian National Congress. In rejecting the Congress' claim to represent the political interests of Muslims, this Indian Muslim leadership thus only continued a long-held political stance. But Lajpat Rai's implicit expectation that the cooperation of the preceding years would result in Muslim rejection of separate organisation, in favour of the Congress, now produced a sense of betrayal.<sup>30</sup> Muslims were seen as rejecting a 'national' politics in common with Hindus, to persist with a community-based politics, to negotiate with the Hindus and the British government. In 1924, Indian Muslim politics was fragmented like never before due to the centrifugal forces unleashed by the constitutional reforms of 1919.<sup>31</sup> Yet, Muslim leaders from across India managed to unite in the Muslim League to define a united Muslim position on the question of political representation. They demanded the continuation of separate Muslim electorates, and pushed for a further increase in communal representation, beyond the level agreed upon at Lucknow.<sup>32</sup> For Lajpat Rai, the continuing separate Muslim political organisation, as if Hindus and Muslims were "two parties to a quarrel", necessitated the activation of a mirroring Hindu political organisation, to articulate the Hindu position on the question of communal representation. Interestingly, despite the Muslim League's dismissal of the Congress as an organisation predominated by Hindus, Lajpat Rai maintained that the Congress, as an Indian 'national' organisation claiming to represent both Hindus and Muslims, could not represent Hindu political interests

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30 Lala Lajpat Rai, "The Hindu Sabha and Hindu Community, The Tribune, 16 January 1925," in *Collected Works*, 11:210; Lala Lajpat Rai, "The Need for Hindu Organisation, The Bombay Chronicle, 5 January 1925," in *Collected Works*, 11:205; Lajpat Rai, "The Hindu Mahasabha and Muslim League," 11:202–3.

31 Page, *Prelude to Partition*, 39, 98–101; Jalal and Seal, "Alternative to Partition," 429–30.

32 All-India Muslim League, "All India Muslim League, Fifteenth Session," in *Evolution of Muslim Political Thought in India*, ed. A. M. Zaidi (New Delhi: Michiko and Panjathan, 1975), 2:272.

in negotiations with the Muslim League.<sup>33</sup> Hindu political interests could only be represented in an unfettered manner by the Mahasabha.

But what does Lajpat Rai's call for Hindu political consolidation have to do with secularism? Searching, like many others, for the causes of Hindu-Muslim tension, Lajpat Rai identified communal representation – the provision of separate political representation for Muslims – as its root cause.<sup>34</sup> Throwing his weight behind the revitalised Hindu Mahasabha, he exhorted Hindus to rally behind it to “stoutly oppose” communal representation.<sup>35</sup> In his view, this principle was “destructive and antagonistic to the idea of common nationhood”, and separate electorates made “this vicious principle immeasurably worse”.<sup>36</sup> By permanently institutionalising a religious community-based politics and politically dividing India's Hindus and Muslims into “watertight compartments”, they created conditions for “a never-ending civil war”<sup>37</sup> and prevented “the emergence of one national will in the political field”, in effect making the evolution of a nation impossible.<sup>38</sup> This, in turn, prevented Hindus and Muslims from uniting against the British, encouraged British denial of Indian self-government, and ensured India's “perpetual bondage”.<sup>39</sup> In fact, as mentioned above, it has been argued that the acceptance of communal representation and separate electorates

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33 Lajpat Rai, “The Hindu Mahasabha and Muslim League,” 202–3.

34 Lala Lajpat Rai, “Religion and Politics, The People, 22 August 1926,” in *Collected Works*, 12:354.

35 Lala Lajpat Rai, “Presidential Speech at the Punjab Provincial Hindu Conference, Lahore, The Tribune, 5 June 1925,” in *Collected Works*, 11:249; Lala Lajpat Rai, “On Sarojini Naidu's Criticism of the Leaders of the Hindu Sabha Movement, The Tribune, 24 October 1925,” in *Collected Works*, 11:261.

36 Lala Lajpat Rai, “Hindu-Muslim Unity, The Tribune, November–December 1924,” in *Collected Works*, 11:172.

37 Lala Lajpat Rai, “My Political Creed, The People, 26 July 1925,” in *Collected Works*, 11:383; Lala Lajpat Rai “Communal Representation – a Negation of Nationalism, Hindustan Times, 27 January 1925,” in *Collected Works*, 11:217.

38 Lajpat Rai, “My Political Creed,” 11:383; Lala Lajpat Rai, “Communal Representation, The People, 19 December 1926,” in *Collected Works*, 12:358.

39 Lajpat Rai, “Communal Representation – a Negation,” 11:217; Lala Lajpat Rai, “Communalism, Nationalism and Internationalism, The People, 27 September 1925,” in *Collected Works*, 11:403–4; Lajpat Rai, “My Political Creed,” 11:383. It must, however, be remembered that, as their demands for communal representation implied, many Indian Muslim leaders continued to conceptualise Hindus and Muslims as distinct (if overlapping) religio-political communities.

by the Congress, in the 1916 Lucknow Pact, laid the ground for Hindu-Muslim cooperation up until the unravelling of the Khilafat movement. It had also brought to prominence a new Indian Muslim political discourse, which conceptualised Hindus and Muslims not as distinct nationalities, but as members of one Indian nation who must cooperate to attain self-government.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, Lajpat Rai wanted the Hindu Mahasabha to oppose communal representation because, in his eyes, it thwarted first national unity and then national autonomy (the former conceived as a prerequisite for the latter). Interestingly, while he saw Muslim politics as representing a backward, illegitimate politics of religious community (a politics now pejoratively labelled as ‘communalism’) that was opposed to Indian nationalism,<sup>41</sup> the Mahasabha’s Hindu politics was seen as not ‘communal’, but consistent with Indian nationalism. This was because, as he saw it, while Muslim politics insisted on nationalism-negating communal representation, Hindu politics was geared towards opposing communal representation, and thereby “killing communalism in politics”. In this way he hoped it would create the conditions for the emergence of Indian nationhood.<sup>42</sup>

At this point, the concept of secularism becomes relevant to Lajpat Rai’s political thought. The prominent nationalist Hindu leader opposed communal representation precisely because he believed it violated the secular preconditions necessary to forge the Indian nation. In an article in 1924, he expressed his discomfort with communal representation in the following terms:

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- 40 Ian Douglas, “‘Abul Kalam Azad and Pakistan’: A Post-Bangladesh Reconsideration of an Indian Muslim’s Opposition to Partition,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 40, no. 4 (1972): 473; Mohammad Ali Jinnah, *Mohammad Ali Jinnah An Ambassador of Unity: His Speeches and Writings (1912–1917)*, ed. Sarojini Naidu (Madras: GA Natesan and Co., 1918), 36–49; Shan Mohammad, ed., “Comrade on the Creed of Muslim League, 4 January 1913,” in *The Indian Muslims: A Documentary Record (1900–1947)* (Meerut: Meenakshi Prakashan, 1980), 3:222–24.
- 41 Lala Lajpat Rai, “Presidential Address to the Eighth Session of the Hindu Mahasabha, Calcutta, Amrita Bazar Patrika, 12 April 1925,” in *Collected Works*, 11:228; Lajpat Rai “Communalism, Nationalism and Internationalism,” 11:403.
- 42 Lajpat Rai, “Presidential Address, Eighth Hindu Mahasabha,” 11:228; Lala Lajpat Rai, “Two Wrongs?, The Tribune, 10 November 1925,” in *Collected Works*, 11:267; Lala Lajpat Rai, “Concluding Speech at the Bombay Hindu Mahasabha Conference, The Bombay Chronicle, 8 December 1925,” in *Collected Works*, 11:284.



The history of several European countries shows that [...] what helped them to *become nations* was a decisive refusal to give in to the claims of religion. As a fundamental principle of their policy, they recognised the supremacy of the state over religion, and gradually removed all religious distinctions so far as they affected the constitution of the state, including services under the state [...]. In India [...] the acceptance of communal representation was a concession to religion [...]. The supremacy of religion over the state has thus been enthroned.<sup>43</sup>

What Lajpat Rai meant here is clarified by placing these remarks in the context of scattered statements he made in two other articles over the next two years. A year later, he wrote:

In ancient times, all systems of religion insisted on the unity of life and hence politics were only a department of religion. But those were more or less days of isolation. A single religion held sway in large areas and often men of one race, speaking one language and following one religion were the sole occupants of the soil of a country [...]. Hence, we find that every system of religious law professes to be a complete code for its followers, dealing almost exhaustively with every department and phase of individual and collective life. No one ever imagined a condition of things which would involve a variety of religions [...] a variety of languages or a variety of races in one country [...]. The conditions of life throughout the world have now been so completely changed that any insistence on sticking to the letter of the old laws is out of the question. Modern Europe and America have practically banished religion from the orbit of their political activities.<sup>44</sup>

For Rai, the conflation of religious and political domains was possibly suitable in ancient times, which he assumed were characterised by religiously homogeneous societies. However, it was “out of the question” for “modern” times, supposedly marked by unprecedented levels of religious diversity. In this reading, it was in response to this new religious diversity – and the injustice and conflict presumably generated by religious politics under such conditions – that “modern Europe and modern America” had “practically banished religion from the orbit of their political activities”.

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43 Lajpat Rai, “Hindu-Muslim Unity,” 11:167. Emphasis mine.

44 Lala Lajpat Rai, “What Is Political Work, The People, 8 November 1925,” in *Collected Works*, 11:417.

In fact, the modern age of industrialism and nationalism had produced much greater levels of homogenisation than had existed in pre-modern, pre-industrial societies.<sup>45</sup> In much of Europe, the notion of separating religion from politics arose, not as a response to religious diversity, but in predominantly single-religion, often even single-denomination societies. After the Reformation, Christian sectarian diversity provoked terrible religious warfare in Europe for more than a century. These wars were ended in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, not by the establishment of secular states, but by the reaffirmation of confessional states with strong links to particular denominational churches.<sup>46</sup> In many places, these alliances between European states and their churches translated into various forms of intolerance, homogenisation, migration, expulsion, forced conversion, and legal sanctions against minorities.<sup>47</sup> Over the next two centuries, the

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45 Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (New York, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 35–55.

46 The 'confessionalisation of Europe' saw the emergence of three mono-confessional blocs: the Lutheran north (Denmark, Norway, Sweden), the Catholic south (France, Italy, Spain, Portugal), and the Orthodox east. In between, there was also a belt of 'bi-' and 'multi-confessional' lands. This included England and Ireland, south Germany, Switzerland, Bohemia, Poland, and Hungary. However, Ireland was a colony of a Britain that was dominated by Anglican England, and, as such, saw efforts at Protestantisation, with Catholics being subject to social and political discrimination for a long time. Even in multi-confessional German lands, there were Lutheran, Reformed and Catholic states with tendencies towards disciplining, assimilation, and homogenisation. Policies of religious homogenisation were similarly undertaken in Hungary and Bohemia. See Anja Hennig, "Zum Verhältnis von Religion und Politik in Europa," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 63, no. 24 (2013): 44; Philip Gorski, "Historicizing the Secularization Debate: Church, State, and Society in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe, ca. 1300 to 1700," *American Sociological Review* 65, no. 1 (2000): 147–48, 157–58; Joel F. Harrington, and Helmut Walser Smith, "Confessionalization, Community, and State Building in Germany, 1555–1870," *The Journal of Modern History* 69, no. 1 (1997): 82–86; Daniel Nexon, "Religion, European Identity, and Political Contention in Historical Perspective," in *Religion in an Expanding Europe*, ed. Timothy Byrnes, and Peter Katzenstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 278.

47 Craig J. Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, "Introduction," in *Rethinking Secularism*, ed. Craig J. Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 15; Wolfgang Reinhard, "Reformation, Counter-Reformation, and the Early Modern State: A Reassessment," *The Catholic Historical Review* 75, no. 3 (1989): 384, 393, 398; Harrington, and Smith, "Confessionalization, Community, and State Building," 86; Nexon, "Religion, European Identity," 258–61, 277–78;

tremendous power of established churches was felt to be disproportionate and meddlesome by various social actors in these European states, as well as by the states themselves, as they sought to increase their own power over their societies. This culminated in the separation of church and state.<sup>48</sup> Secular states therefore emerged in European countries which possessed a high degree of religious homogeneity, and which had tended to meet sectarian diversity with homogenisation. The notion that politics must be separated from religion, having gained wider currency in Europe only from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>49</sup> also emerged within this context. When Lajpat Rai stated that Europe separated religion from politics as a response to religious diversity and conflict, he overlooked the extent to which diversity had already been ironed out in European societies by the time secular states and the notion of secular politics emerged. He also failed to sufficiently consider that this politics was often the result of political objectives other than the management of religious diversity and conflict. Nevertheless, Rai understood European history differently, believing the idea of religious-political separation to be a response to religious diversity and conflict. So, in an article in 1926, he went on:

Europe eventually decided to divorce religion from politics [...]. Religion has become an affair of the individual, it has been completely relegated to its proper and legitimate function of forming and regulating the inner

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Gorski, "Historicizing the Secularization Debate: Church, State, and Society in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe, ca. 1300 to 1700," 157–58.

In the 'multi-confessional' German lands, the assumed need to manage sectarian diversity and conflict led to confessional (not secular) states. These confessional German states resulted in 'confessional cleansing,' forced migration, expulsion, homogenisation, unequal treatment of minorities, and the hardening of confession-specific Protestant and Catholic identities, which reproduced confessional conflicts and intolerance. Harrington, and Smith, "Confessionalization, Community, and State Building," 77–78, 84–92.

48 See Rajeev Bhargava, "Is European Secularism Secular Enough?," in *Religion, Secularism, and Constitutional Democracy*, ed. Jean Cohen, and Cecil Lamborde (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2016), 167; Calhoun, Juergensmeyer, and VanAntwerpen, "Introduction," 7, 15; Mark Juergensmeyer, "Rethinking the Secular and Religious Aspects of Violence," in *Rethinking Secularism*, ed. Craig J. Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 187; Andrew Copson, *Secularism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019), 61–70.

49 Juergensmeyer, "Secular and Religious Aspects of Violence," 187.

consciousness of each individual in matters spiritual. As a result, Europe has been completely rid of all religious influences in the political and economic fields. Men can freely join in political and economic organisations irrespective of all religious differences.<sup>50</sup>

Clearly, Lajpat Rai believed that the differentiation of separate religious and political spheres and the privatisation of religion was how “modern Europe and modern America” had transcended differences of religion to – as stated in his first quotation from 1924 – “become nations”. Rai did not explicitly use these terms while articulating this specific reasoning, but he evidently saw secularism and secularisation as the West’s answer to religious conflict, and as a precondition for the transformation of Western countries into modern nations.<sup>51</sup>

As for India, Lajpat Rai wrote that ancient Hindu lawmakers, assuming that India would always be inhabited by Sanskrit-speaking, Veda-worshipping Hindus, had not conceived of a body-politic containing non-Hindus.<sup>52</sup> But, with the presence of non-Hindus in the modern body-politic, sticking to old Hindu laws was out of the question. Rai evidently considered the idea of a Hindu-theocratic state, or even simply a state with Hinduism as its established religion, to be inappropriate for India’s religiously diverse society. Yet, this modern-day religious diversity was causing conflict, particularly as religions were mixed with politics, and preventing India from emerging as an ‘effective’ nation.<sup>53</sup> For him, the ideal remedy for this religious conflict was to follow the modern West by divorcing religion from politics and ending all religious distinctions in politics.<sup>54</sup> Thus, Lajpat Rai saw the separation of religion from politics and, as we saw above, the privatisation of religion as the ideal means for members of India’s religious communities to unite into an Indian nation. His vision went beyond the establishment

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50 Lajpat Rai, “Religion and Politics,” 12:352–53.

51 Both Skinnerian and German conceptual history approaches allow for a concept being possessed in the absence of a word to express it. Melvin Richter, *The History of Political and Social Concepts: A Critical Introduction* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1995), 9, 133.

52 Lajpat Rai, “My Political Creed,” 11:382.

53 Lajpat Rai, “My Political Creed,” 11:382; Lajpat Rai, “Hindu-Muslim Unity,” 11:145–46.

54 Lajpat Rai, “Hindu-Muslim Unity,” 11:147.

of a state free of religion, to also advocate that all politics be entirely free of religious markers; political organisations intending to control or influence the state also had to be free of religious markers, with Rai even dreaming of privatisation as a means of facilitating this. Therefore, he saw a secular state and secular politics as essential preconditions for Hindus and Muslims to unite as members of an Indian nation.<sup>55</sup>

Interestingly, Lajpat Rai's opposition to the politics of religious communities was also driven by another purpose. He considered the victory of "secular power" – the removal of religion from political and economic domains – as directly linked to Europe's global ascendancy:

Europe decided to divorce religion from politics. Churches protest and contest, rebel and resist but eventually secular power wins [...]. This has directly led to Europe's ascendancy in the world. Europe is today the master of the world, in fact practically of the whole world, as America is only a child of Europe [...].<sup>56</sup>

Lajpat Rai argued that once religion was divorced from politics, as it had been in Europe and America:

Racial and credal prejudices may still prevail but the real determining factor in the governance of every body-politic is [now] economic. Every nation recognises that its place and position in the council of nations depends on the efficiency of its people, [which is] determined by its intellectual and economic potentialities. It is the latter that determine the power of a body-politic and not its religious faiths. We have yet to realise that politics must be divorced from religion if the Indian nation is ever to be efficient in the modern sense.<sup>57</sup>

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55 A politician deeply embedded in everyday politics, Rai articulated his ideas in the thick of a political context that was fast-changing and extremely polarised, often violent, and charged with fear. He did not, therefore, explicitly elaborate on the nuances of precisely what he meant by the unity of Hindus and Muslims as a single Indian nation. However, it is likely he meant their existence and conduct – despite differences, divisions, and frictions – as a relatively harmonious, conflict-free, and cooperative political community or nation. The imperative of functioning in this manner was felt more urgently in the context of British colonial rule and the need to fight it.

56 Lajpat Rai, "Religion and Politics," 12:352–53.

57 Lajpat Rai, "What Is Political Work," 12:417–18.

Possibly reflecting his long (but intermittent) association with left-wing circles, Rai believed that once religion had been divorced from politics, the real determining factor in the governance of Western nations had become economic. Unshackled by religion, they became free to reach their economic potential, and became “efficient in the modern sense”, which in turn determined their position in the international council of nations. The strict separation of religion from politics was therefore necessary for the future Indian nation to attain a respectable international status in the council of nations.

Lajpat Rai himself only began using the terms ‘secular’, ‘secular government’ and ‘secularism’ from late 1926. But in conceptualising a political domain *entirely free* of markers of religion, he was already elaborating the conceptual blocks of what may be called a hard-line secularism from late 1924 onwards. Like other Indian nationalists, Lajpat Rai mostly contrasted the term ‘communal’ with the term ‘national’ because he saw the politics of religious communities as violating the national. But, for him, the ‘communal’ violated the ‘national’ precisely because it mixed religion with politics, and thus defied ideas of a ‘secular’ state and politics, which he considered crucial for the foundation of a united Indian nation. It was this secular vision that propelled his opposition to communal representation and his agenda of Hindu political consolidation.

Although sometimes dreaming of a more aggressively hard-line secularism, entailing the privatisation of religion, the version of secularism that Lajpat Rai aimed to establish in India closely resembled the United States’ model of a strict wall of separation. This is evident in how he envisioned the future government of independent India in the Draft National Pact (DNP), which he drafted in 1923 alongside the Indian nationalist Muslim leader, M.A. Ansari. He imagined a democratic, federal Indian government, that would guarantee

full religious liberty, that is liberty of belief, worship, propaganda, association, and education to all communities forming the Indian nation and shall form a constitutional right which it shall never be lawful for any Government to annul, modify, suspend or otherwise interfere with.

Moreover, the DNP stated that

to prevent any particular religious denomination being given any undue preference over any other, no Government funds or funds collected by local bodies from public revenues and public taxes including cesses shall be devoted to the promotion and furtherance of any denominational institutions or purposes.<sup>58</sup>

This came close to the United States' conception of secularism: a strict separation of the state and religion, such that the state interfered in religion neither negatively to hinder or reform it, nor positively to assist it (with this strict non-interference being conceived as guaranteeing religious freedom).<sup>59</sup> However, interestingly, the DNP accepted proportional communal representation in the state and central legislatures, albeit alongside strictly joint (territorial) rather than communal electorates. Lajpat Rai accepted proportional communal representation for a fixed (but as yet unspecified) time, before it was to be abolished. He was therefore willing to depart from strict separation – and, also, quite significantly from his ideal of a hard-line secularism – to allow political representation based on religious communities. This concession to religiously defined minorities acknowledged their fears regarding Hindu majoritarian domination. That Rai was aware of such fears is indicated by his following statement:

The Hindus [...] form the majority and the Muslims are afraid of not receiving justice at their hands without the necessary guarantees for projection and safeguarding of their communal or minority interests.<sup>60</sup>

In fact, much of the fury of Lajpat Rai's politics of Hindu consolidation was directed against what he considered Muslim attempts to push communal

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58 A. M. Zaidi, ed., "Report of the Indian National Pact Committee, All-India Muslim League, Fifteenth Session," in *Evolution of Muslim Political Thought in India* (New Delhi: Michiko and Panjathan, 1975), 2:463–67.

59 For more on the American ideal of secularism, see Bhargava, "Is European Secularism Secular Enough?," 165–67. Also see Leonard Levy, *The Establishment Clause: Religion and the First Amendment* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1986).

60 Lala Lajpat Rai, "Presidential Address to the Bombay Hindu Mahasabha Conference, Supplement to The People, 5 December 1925," in *Collected Works*, 11:272.

representation beyond ‘reasonable’ limits.<sup>61</sup> Muslim leaders proposed having their representation in legislatures extended beyond demographic proportionality. Additionally, they pushed for extending communal representation beyond legislatures, to government services, local bodies, and educational institutions. Rai largely viewed these proposals as attempts by the Muslim minority to attain political dominance.<sup>62</sup> A historical memory of Muslim rule seemed to converge with the contemporary context of an unrelenting atmosphere of terrible violence, anxieties about Muslim conversions, and a proliferation of newspaper reports on alleged cases of abduction of Hindu women by Muslim hooligans.<sup>63</sup> It is also worth noting that Lajpat Rai belonged to a Hindu minority in one of India’s few Muslim-majority provinces. Together, these factors combined to encourage Rai’s fears that the Muslim minority’s demands for progressive increases in communal representation were designed to secure untrammelled dominance, rather than – as they repeatedly insisted – simply adequate, meaningful political representation, and protection against Hindu domination. In January 1926, Lajpat Rai stated:

Mr. Jinnah [a prominent leader of the Muslim League and future founder of Pakistan] [...] has invented the plea of adequate and effective representation of minorities in all elected bodies as a necessary condition of Indian political progress towards Swarajya [self-rule]. He, however, is not content with that [...] Mr. Jinnah’s object seems to be to get an extension of Muslim representation every time there is a constitutional advance on the plea that there can be no advance without Hindu-Muslim agreement, and no Hindu-Muslim agreement without a revision of the [Lucknow] Pact in favour of the Muslims [...]. Let us examine a little bit closely the implication of the formula “adequate and effective”. Effective against whom? Against the majority of course [...]. They simply want Muslim

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61 Lajpat Rai, “Hindu-Muslim Unity,” 11:173; Lajpat Rai, “On Sarojini Naidu’s Criticism,” 11:261; Lajpat Rai, “Presidential Address to the Bombay Hindu Mahasabha Conference,” 11:272.

62 Lajpat Rai, “Presidential Address, Eighth Hindu Mahasabha,” 11:229; Lajpat Rai, “Presidential Address to the Bombay Hindu Mahasabha Conference,” 11:271.

63 Pradip Kumar Datta, *Carving Blocs: Communal Ideology in Early Twentieth-Century Bengal* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), chap. 4; Gupta, “Hindu Masculinity”; Lala Lajpat Rai, “Need for Hindus to Organise Themselves, The Bombay Chronicle, 19 April 1927,” in *Collected Works*, 13:214–15.



minorities everywhere to be in a position to make Hindu majorities ineffective by a combination with Government blocs.<sup>64</sup>

A month earlier, he had expressed similar fears regarding Muslim intentions:

They insist on communal representation all along the political line and also organising their separate communal entity so completely as to become the dominating communal entity in India. This is bound to come about if other communities refuse to organise themselves. Their refusal to do so means acquiescence in a condition of things which must sooner or later end in their merging into or subordination to the other community. If the Muslims organise and Hindus refuse or neglect to organise the consequences are plain.<sup>65</sup>

Indian Muslim leaders sought to gain what they believed was an adequate share of political representation for the Muslim minority, in an India with a majority Hindu population. This often comprised demands for weighted representation, and even parity with Hindus. In the uncertain context of colonial domination, and against memories of Mughal rule, Rai often read these demands as signifying an intent to dominate. And the Mahasabha's Hindu politics were conceived by him not as belligerence but as a legitimate defence against perceived designs of Muslim domination, to ensure that communal representation was kept within a 'reasonable' limit.

However, this limit of reason – beyond which Muslim demands provoked, for Lajpat Rai, fears of Muslim domination – was defined in terms of Muslim representation in legislatures in proportion to their numbers. Rai never explicitly clarified why he defined the limit of reasonable representation to be that which was proportionate to population demographics. But his belief likely stemmed from the emergent and increasingly dominant modern democratic conviction that there must be an integral connection between numbers and share of political power and representation.<sup>66</sup> Guaranteed

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64 Lala Lajpat Rai, "Sir Abdur Rahim's Speech and Mr. Jinnah's Comments, The People, 24 January 1926," in *Collected Works*, 12:322–24.

65 Lajpat Rai, "Presidential Address to the Bombay Hindu Mahasabha Conference," 11:272–73.

66 For more on the link between democracy and the politics of numbers, see Farzana Shaikh, *Community and Consensus in Islam: Muslim Representation in Colonial India, 1860–1947* (Delhi: Imprint One, 2012), 114, 158. Also see Sudipta Kaviraj,

Muslim representation over and above their numbers was labelled a serious encroachment on the rights and interests of Hindus, whose acceptance of such a system would amount to committing “political hara-kiri”.<sup>67</sup> In short, a just political arrangement was one where communal representation for the Muslim minority did not impinge on the Hindu majority’s ‘rightful place’ in the future government of India.<sup>68</sup> For Rai, one important aim behind the Hindu Mahasabha’s *sangathan* (‘organisation’) movement was to maintain and display a Hindu majority, in a context where efforts were afoot to renegotiate the extent of political representation for each community in India’s constitution.<sup>69</sup> This *sangathan* involved opposition to the newly emergent emancipatory caste politics (of the kind represented by B.R. Ambedkar),<sup>70</sup> believed to weaken urgently needed Hindu political

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“On Thick and Thin Religion: Some Critical Reflections on Secularization Theory,” in *Religion and the Political Imagination*, ed. Ira Katznelson, and Gareth Stedman Jones (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 352; Arjun Appadurai, “Number in the Colonial Imagination,” in *Orientalism and the Post-Colonial Predicament*, ed. Carol Breckenridge, and Peter van der Veer (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 332.

- 67 Lajpat Rai, “Two Wrongs?” 11:267; Lajpat Rai, “On Sarojini Naidu’s Criticism,” 11:261.
- 68 Lala Lajpat Rai, “Presidential Address at the Provincial Hindu Conference of Agra, The Tribune, 30 October 1928,” in *Collected Works*, 15:241. While Rai, again, did not explicitly elaborate on this, he seemed to believe that the numerical preponderance of Hindus legitimately entitled them to a substantial share of political power and representation. Rai yearned for a future politics where democratic decision-making – and majorities and minorities – would be based on, and continuously shift according to, the aggregation of preferences. Here, religious identities would not matter. However, he also worked with religious identity-based conceptions of democratic decision-making and of majorities and minorities. Here, these statuses, as majority or minority, would not shift, but remain permanent, as they were conceived according to the supposedly permanent religious identities of individuals. Thus, Rai seemed to believe that India was inhabited by a Hindu majority and Muslim minority, and that the numerical preponderance of Hindus entitled them to a greater share of political representation than the Muslim minority. This once again links back to the modern democratic conviction that there must be an integral link between numbers and share of political power and representation. For more on the difference between preference-based and identity-based majorities and minorities, see Bhargava, *Promise*, 16–19.
- 69 Lajpat Rai, “Presidential Speech, Punjab Provincial Hindu Conference,” 11:246–48; Lajpat Rai, “Presidential Address, Provincial Hindu Conference of Agra,” 15:219.
- 70 Ambedkar, the influential leader of the ‘untouchable’ castes, and one of the principal architects of India’s future constitution, had in the 1920s begun to

consolidation.<sup>71</sup> *Sangathan* demanded that Hindus temporarily retreat from any potentially fracturing projects of egalitarian reform of the hierarchical, unequal caste relations in order to symbolically unite as a Hindu community. It even entailed an exhortation to Hindus to oppose the Gandhian ideal of *ahimsa* (nonviolence), believed to emasculate Hindus and blunt their capacity for violence in supposed self-defence.<sup>72</sup> Renouncing Gandhian *ahimsa*, and retaining the capacity for violence, was considered necessary to endow Hindus with a more assertive, ‘masculine’, and action-ready character. Hindus were also encouraged to establish *akharas* (gymnasias) to physically train their bodies.<sup>73</sup> Made in a context of periodic rioting, and the Mahasabha’s promotion of physically trained ‘volunteer’ groups who could defend Hindus if needed, these suggestions came close to a direct sanction of Hindu violence. Lajpat Rai therefore wished to engineer a muscular, even violence-ready consolidation of the Hindu majority. This militant Hindu mobilisation ultimately aimed at realising either his more hard-line secular ideal of strict separation without any communal representation, or the more minority-sensitive secular state he envisioned (as in the DNP) which permitted limited, proportionate communal representation.

Lajpat Rai’s secularism was predicated upon a strong desire to limit community rights, which, as noted by Rochana Bajpai and Shabnum Tejani, also forms part of the history of India’s constitutional secularism.<sup>74</sup> It also clearly assumed the existence of the Hindu majority, which he was willing to defend, even violently if necessary. At the same time, while he wished Hindus to benefit from the advantages that would accrue to them under ‘democratic raj’ (democratic rule), he did not want Hindus to misuse their numerical strength to dominate over other religious communities. In one of his articles, he wrote:

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demand separate political representation for these ‘depressed classes’. Assertive politics by India’s untouchables had similarly emerged in other parts of India, most notably in Uttar Pradesh and the Punjab.

71 For more, see Bhargav, “Between Hindu and Indian: The Nationalist Thought of Lala Lajpat Rai,” 186–87.

72 Lajpat Rai, “Presidential Address, Eighth Hindu Mahasabha,” 11:226–27; Lala Lajpat Rai, “Ahimsa Paramodharmah, The People, 18 October 1925,” in *Collected Works*, 11:406–7.

73 Lajpat Rai, “Presidential Address, Eighth Hindu Mahasabha,” 11:227.

74 Rochana Bajpai, *Debating Difference: Group Rights and Liberal Democracy in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), chap. 2; Tejani, *Indian Secularism*.

To the Hindus, I will say, if there are any among you who still dream of a Hindu Raj [rule] in this country, who think they can crush the Mussulmans and be the supreme power in this land, tell them that they are fools or, to be more accurate, that they are insane, and that their insanity will ruin their Hinduism along with their country [...].<sup>75</sup>

The absence of a desire for Hindu domination was evident in his imagining of a state that neither privileged nor established the Hindu religion, abstained from funding any religion, and granted religious freedom. This is reflected in his advocacy of Hindustani, a language with a more or less equal number of Sanskrit and Persio-Arabic words, in both the Sanskrit Devanagiri and Persian scripts, as India's national language.<sup>76</sup> His desire for a federal government meant substantial autonomy for India's Muslim majority provinces like Punjab, Bengal and the Northwest Frontier Province. Finally, as already noted, in conceding proportionate communal representation for a limited time, Lajpat Rai acknowledged Muslim fears of Hindu domination. Therefore, Rai's secularism was predicated on a clear awareness of, and even insistence on, a *democratic advantage* for the Hindu majority (in the sense of India's secular democracy putting Hindus in a favourable position). But he did not wish this advantage to translate into *domination* (untrammelled power and influence) over minorities. He thus sought political arrangements and mechanisms to prevent the degeneration of democratic advantage into majoritarianism.

#### 4 The 'Hindu communalism' vs. 'secularism' dichotomy

Since the 1990s, revisionist scholarship on South Asia has sought to challenge the strict oppositional dichotomy between secularism and Hindu communalism, long drawn by Indian nationalist historiography. Ayesha Jalal has argued that, historically, the secular Indian nationalist ideology often "compromised" with Hindu majoritarianism, while the

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75 Lajpat Rai, "Hindu-Muslim Unity," 11:181. Until the 1940s, the terms 'Hindu Raj' and 'Muslim Raj' had no territorial connotations, but implied the ability to exercise power over the other 'community'. See Markus Daechsel, *The Politics of Self-Expression: The Urdu Middle-Class Milieu in Mid-Twentieth Century India and Pakistan* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), 76–79.

76 A. M. Zaidi, ed., "Report of the Indian National Pact Committee," 2:463–67; Lala Lajpat Rai, "Problem of National Education in India, 1918," in *Collected Works*, 7:198–99.

latter comfortably claimed the mantle of secularism.<sup>77</sup> For Shabnum Tejani and C.S. Adcock, Indian secularism rests on the engineering of a Hindu majority, and has been complicit in denying Muslim demands for political representation.<sup>78</sup> Commenting on contemporary times, Partha Chatterjee has pointed out that, rather than opposing the secular state, the Hindu right approves of the secular idea of separation, using the ideological resources of the secular state to forcibly assimilate India's religious minorities into a homogenised notion of Indian/Hindu 'national culture'.<sup>79</sup> Collectively, this scholarship has promoted the impression that one can comfortably champion both secularism and Hindu communalism or majoritarianism simultaneously, and that therefore Indian secularism was, and still is, compromised by Hindu majoritarian communalism, consisting of little more than Hindu majoritarianism.<sup>80</sup> This, such scholarship holds, renders Indian secularism inadequate as a political ideal.

Lajpat Rai's political thought in the mid-1920s certainly shows that secularism and Hindu politics are not necessarily mutually exclusive intellectual positions. Rai's vision of political secularism was articulated alongside a militant politics of Hindu consolidation, which aimed, by force if necessary, to safeguard a Hindu majority and oppose – or at least restrict – separate Muslim representation. Indeed, as a politician who advocated a politics of Hindu consolidation, Rai did not oppose the secular state, but rather approved of the idea of separation for the sake of certain ends. My research, illustrating that Rai simultaneously championed both a Hindu 'communal' politics and a vision of secularism, appears to align with the above-mentioned scholarship. It seems to suggest that Rai's simultaneous articulation of both a militant Hindu politics and a vision of secularism proves a) the deceptive and empty nature of his secularism, b) the

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77 Ayesha Jalal, "Exploding Communalism: The Politics of Muslim Identity in South Asia," in *Nationalism, Democracy and Development: State and Politics in India*, ed. Sugata Bose, and Ayesha Jalal (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).

78 Tejani, *Indian Secularism*, 236, 255–56; Adcock, *Limits of Tolerance*.

79 Partha Chatterjee, "Secularism and Tolerance," in *Secularism and Its Critics*, ed. Rajeev Bhargava (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 347–60.

80 For one example, see how Tejani has been read by Nandini Chatterjee, *The Making of Indian Secularism: Empire, Law and Christianity, 1830–1960* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 4–5.

contaminated and compromised nature of Indian secularism, and/or c) the inadequacy of secularism as a political ideal more generally.

In fact, I wish to use Rai's ideas as a prism through which to challenge these conclusions. In my view, Lajpat Rai's Hindu communal politics does not invalidate the intellectual significance of his secularism. The latter – as we shall see in greater detail in the next section – continued to possess positive, multi-layered content and meaning. While Rai did engineer a politics of Hindu consolidation and seek to safeguard a Hindu majority, he nonetheless sought the separation of religion and the state and politics, for the sake of values like inter-religious peace, religious freedom, equality and equal citizenship irrespective of religion. He was also not guided by the desire for Hindu domination over religious minorities, and was open to establishing certain institutional measures to prevent Hindu majoritarianism. In short, I argue that his secularism is *not* reducible to either Hindu communalism or Hindu majoritarianism. Rather than being dismissed as a mere cover for his underlying and more deeply held Hindu communalism, Lajpat Rai's ideas on secularism should be taken seriously.

At the same time, and equally importantly, the implications and significance of his militant Hindu politics also cannot be ignored. Rai did articulate a genuine value-guided secularism, and his Hindu communal politics never aimed at a politics of anti-secular Hindu domination. However, his adoption of a militant Hindu communal politics, which he considered a temporary and instrumental means to realise this vision, certainly made his secular position unstable, and threatened to undermine the very secularism he wished to enshrine. Rather than a stable and seamless intellectual position, Rai's co-articulation of a secularism and a militant Hindu politics constituted a complex, dynamic, and precarious balancing act between sets of ideas in deep tension. While his co-articulation does flout any strict dichotomy between Hindu communalism and secularism, this by no means implies that his secularism can be equated with his Hindu communalism. The instability, tension and risk within what may be called Rai's 'secular-communal complex' must be recognised.

It is vital to recognise the instability, friction, and tension within Lajpat Rai's complex intellectual position. In doing so, we recognise that the simultaneous articulation of the categories of secularism and Hindu 'communalism' by the same individual does not justify a reductive reading and a near-complete elision of the conceptual distinctions between these

categories. It serves as a reminder of the analytical tension, contrast, and even incompatibility that still exists, to a large degree, between categories of secularism and Hindu communalism. In short, it reminds us to retain and respect the meaningful analytical distinctions that exist between these categories, even as we discard assumptions of absolute mutual exclusivity. Rai's complex ideas do not prove that secularism and Hindu communalism or majoritarianism can be seamlessly championed together, or that Indian secularism is compromised by Hindu communalism, thus constituting an inadequate and futile political ideal. Rai brought secularism and communalism into an internally combustible relationship, in which, over time, one was bound to destroy the other. Once we see this, we can see how Indian secularism – and secularism in general – can be admitted as a meaningful and valuable political ideal, and Rai's communalism as something which threatened to undermine it.

Another reason why revisionist scholarship views Indian secularism as a deficient ideal, compromised by Hindu majoritarianism, is the conceptual overlap between them – at least in articulations of Indian secularism by Hindu political thinkers. The two concepts share the assumption of, and in some cases even attachment to, the notion of a Hindu majority. This overlap – an important intervention of revisionist historiography – cannot be denied, and is evident in the thought of Lajpat Rai. Yet, once again, the acknowledgement of this overlap between Indian secularism and Hindu majoritarianism or communalism has often slipped into an unhelpful tendency towards subsequent conceptual conflation. It has also been used to suggest the deceptive, compromised, and inadequate nature of secularism, whether in its Indian form, or as a concept more generally. The slippage between these categories needs to be admitted, while still remembering the meaningful differences that exist between them. Rai's attachment to the idea of a Hindu majority was not equivalent to a desire to establish Hindu cultural-political domination over India's religious minorities (it was not equivalent to a Hindu majoritarianism). Recognising (and even critiquing) his attachment to a Hindu majority does not have to end in the invalidation of his secularism, which was conceived as an attempt – in however limited a form – to establish a nation state grounded in inter-religious peace, religious freedom and equality. He also sought certain political arrangements to prevent Hindu domination. Similarly, the recognition of this overlap between secularism and Hindu majoritarianism or communalism can and

should co-exist with an alertness to the several analytical distinctions that exist between these positions (and their normative ends). Once again, this can help us remember that while articulations of Indian secularism may have certain imperfections and risks, which evidently need to be checked and improved upon, secularism is no different to other political ideals in this regard. More importantly, it reminds us that these imperfections do not render secularism a compromised or ineffectual political ideal, as it continues to possess normative features aiming at a religiously peaceful, free, equal, and just society in some form.

In the next section, I more deeply explore the meaning of the secularism Lajpat Rai articulated as a staunch Hindu politician, as well as of his militant Hindu politics. In the final section, I briefly compare and contrast Rai's secularism to the following: the secularisms of the West, the ideal of secularism found in the Indian constitution, and the positions of Gandhi and Nehru – men much better known for their secular credentials. Finally, I will very briefly compare it to the *Hindutva* nationalist ideology, as articulated by its most influential founder-ideologues.

## 5 A 'Hindu communal' articulation of Indian secularism

Quentin Skinner argues that the clearest sign of a society having entered into the self-conscious possession of a new concept is the generation of a new vocabulary, in terms of which the concept is then articulated and discussed.<sup>81</sup> The Skinnerian approach therefore admits the possibility of the expression of a concept – albeit perhaps a relatively less self-conscious one – before the production of a new vocabulary with which to express it. This approach aligns with German conceptual history, which allows that an individual or group may possess a concept without having a word by which to express it.<sup>82</sup> If secularism, broadly speaking, and in its most elementary form, is a vision seeking the separation of organised religion from organised political power, for the sake of a specific set of values, Lajpat Rai was clearly elaborating the concept by 1924. He first did so without using the terms 'secular' and 'secularism'. From 1926, he took up (albeit still infrequently) the use of these terms, with this new vocabulary signifying

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81 As cited in Richter, *History of Political and Social Concepts*, 133.

82 Richter, 9.



a more self-conscious articulation of the concept. This challenges scholars who, mistaking either word with concept or concept with elaborate theory, posit that secularism was irrelevant to Indian political discourse prior to India's independence in 1947.<sup>83</sup>

The question I am more interested in here, however, is less historical and more theoretical: what was the specific conceptual structure of the secularism elaborated by Lajpat Rai in the mid-1920s? As political theorist Rajeev Bhargava has argued, secularism may be a universal normative doctrine, but its elements are interpreted and related to each other in different ways, adding up to different conceptions of secularism.<sup>84</sup> Each conception unpacks the metaphor of separation differently, selects different elements from the stock of values that give separation its purpose, or places different weight on the same values. In this section, I ask in what precise way Lajpat Rai, as a Hindu 'communal' politician, interpreted and arranged the basic conceptual elements of secularism.

How, then, did Rai conceive separation? As we saw, his secularism entailed a rejection of a Hindu theocracy. Rai did not envision the future Indian state as having a union or alliance with a Hindu religious order, or as being guided by Hindu religious ends and purposes, or being directly administered by a priestly order or other religious authority. Further, he did not affirm the idea of a state establishing Hinduism as the dominant religion.<sup>85</sup> Though such establishment would have entailed a degree of separation, in that the state would not be governed by priestly or other religious authority, it would have still granted Hinduism official,

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83 Akeel Bilgrami, "Jawaharlal Nehru, Mohandas Gandhi, and the Contexts of Indian Secularism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Indian Philosophy*, ed. Jonardon Ganeri (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014). Tejani, *Indian Secularism*, chap. 6. My historical findings substantiate scholarship that assumes a longer history of the concept, stretching back to India's pre-independence period. This assumption runs through the work of Rajeev Bhargava. For one example, see *Promise*, 4. Also see Rochana Bajpai, "The Conceptual Vocabularies of Secularism and Minority Rights in India," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 7, no. 2 (2002); Triloki N. Madan, "Secularism in Its Place," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 46, no. 4 (1987): 747–59; Chatterjee, "Secularism and Tolerance"; Sudipta Kaviraj, "Languages of Secularity," *Economic and Political Weekly* 48, no. 50 (2013): 93–102.

84 Bhargava, *Promise*, 65.

85 For a clear explanation of the analytical distinction between theocracies and states with established religions, see Bhargava, 70–75.

legal recognition, and promoted state laws and policies that supported Hinduism over other religions. Lajpat Rai endorsed a secular state with ends entirely separate from the divine ends of religion; a state whose roles and functions were imagined as being distinct from the roles and functions of religion; and which did not privilege Hinduism. However, as Bhargava points out, secular states are marked by a relation with religion not just at the level of ends and institutions, but also at a third level of law and public policy.<sup>86</sup> In some cases, like that of India, disconnection at the former levels is seen in conjunction with some connection at this third level. Differences in how the metaphor of separation is unpacked at this third level, he argues, open up the possibility of distinguishing varieties of secularism. As stated in the DNP, “to prevent any particular religious denomination being given any undue preference over any other”, Rai envisioned that “no Government funds” should be devoted to the “promotion and furtherance of any denominational institutions or purposes”. In his belief that the state must not actively fund any religious institution or purpose, Rai’s secularism resembled, as noted already, the ‘wall of separation’ ideal of secularism found in the United States. This is also evident in his granting “full religious liberty”, including “liberty of belief, worship, propaganda, association, and education to all communities forming the Indian nation” as a “constitutional right”.<sup>87</sup> It is also shown in his desire to abolish communal political representation altogether. However, that Rai’s secularism cannot be simply straightjacketed into the strictly separationist ideal of secularism is suggested by his willingness to grant, if reluctantly, community-specific *political* rights (communal representation) for a limited time. Rather than being indifferent to religious communities, Rai’s secularism breached the wall of separation to countenance political rights for religious communities.

What, then, were the substantive values or ends for which Lajpat Rai imagined separation?<sup>88</sup> Clearly, the unrelenting waves of Hindu-Muslim violence that ravaged Indian society were a cause for Lajpat Rai stressing

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86 Bhargava, 74–75.

87 Emphasis mine.

88 For contemporary theorists of secularism, mechanical separation does not, in itself, amount to secularism. While amoral secular states can exist, *secularism* entails separation for the sake of some *values*. Once again, see Bhargava, *Promise*, 67, 76–77.

the importance of state-religion separation. This interreligious violence particularly undergirded his discomfort with community-specific political rights, at least beyond 'reasonable limits'. One of the values his secularism therefore sought to achieve was *peace*, i.e. the prevention of what he called a "never-ending civil war", arising out of a clash of incompatible religious visions. Secondly, the secular state he envisioned would guarantee the constitutional right to *religious liberty* to all religious groups in India. Further, the granting of the right to religious liberty to all groups or communities meant that no one religion would determine the rights and freedoms granted by the state. Religious freedom would be granted not just to the numerically preponderous religious community of Hindus, but to all religious communities in India. Rai's secularism was therefore concerned with the value of *equality* (of all religious groups). Finally, the prohibition of government funding for any religious purposes, to prevent preferential treatment for any particular religion, also seems to be guided by the values of equality and justice. Although not mentioned in the DNP itself, Lajpat Rai had in previous years indicated his belief in individualistically construed *equal citizenship*. In 1918, he had forcefully argued that "every human being born in India, or of Indian parents, or who has made India his or her home, is a compatriot, a brother or a sister, regardless of colour, creed, caste or vocation".<sup>89</sup> In 1928, he enthusiastically embraced the Motilal Nehru Report, which granted universal suffrage and defined the word citizen as "every person who was born, and whose father was either born or naturalised within the territorial limits of the Commonwealth".<sup>90</sup> He took for granted that every such Indian would possess passive citizenship rights to claim entitlements from the state, without discrimination on grounds of religion. His endorsement of the Nehru report, which granted the right to vote to every citizen above the age of twenty-one, reveals his acceptance of equal active citizenship rights for all Indians, irrespective of religion.

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89 Lajpat Rai, "Problem of National Education," 7:32.

90 B. Shiva Rao, *The Framing of the Constitution: Select Documents* (Delhi: Universal Law Publishing Co, 2004), 1:59. The report was produced by a committee chaired by the father of Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, who is believed to have played a major role in drafting it, along with his father.

All persons, irrespective of religion, were recognised as active citizens i.e. equal participants in the political domain.<sup>91</sup>

Yet, the value that remained supremely important for Lajpat Rai's secularism was *nationalism* – the principle that the people of India must form a united and self-ruling political community. As we saw, Rai opposed communal representation, as he believed that dividing India into two compartmentalised religio-political communities would pre-ordain religious division and strife, which would, in turn, thwart the unity and autonomy of the Indian national-political community. His secularism aimed at inter-community peace, precisely because peace was indispensable for Indian national unity and autonomy. It could also be argued, however, that Rai's granting of religious liberty, equality, and justice to all religious groups, individualistically construed equal citizenship rights, and even limited community-specific political rights to religious minorities, intended to promote a *particular* kind of Indian nation. In this sense, while his secularism remained supremely concerned with national unity, its other ends – peace, liberty, and equality for individual citizens and religious communities – while appearing as subordinate, less significant normative purposes, in fact give insight into the ways in which Rai attempted to forge an inclusive national community, and therefore into the *nature* of his secular Indian nationalism.

Finally, Rai also believed in secularism's vital importance for the Indian nation's achieving economic *prosperity* and *international status* after gaining independence from the empire. This concern with economic prosperity and international rank does not reduce Rai's secularism to an amoral secularism, without any commitment to moral values.<sup>92</sup> National prosperity, recognition, and respect themselves constitute values, which, in

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91 For the distinction between passive and active citizenship rights, see Bhargava, *Promise*, 78–79.

92 For Bhargava, secularism must necessarily be constitutively tied to substantive values like peace, tolerance, liberty, and equal citizenship. He terms states that espouse moral values, but that are in fact only interested in maximising power and wealth, as amoral secular states (what I have here called amoral secularism). Rai's secularism demonstrates that, apart from peace, tolerance, liberty, and equality, secularism can also be guided by national prosperity, recognition, and respect, and that this, too, can constitute a project of values. Bhargava, 76.

turn, co-existed with other liberal, egalitarian, and communitarian moral principles, which guided Rai's secularism and nationalism.

It is precisely due to this layered, multi-value nature of Rai's secularism, that it cannot be reduced to a cynical, value-less Hindu-majoritarian grab for power. As noted, this secularism was attached to the notion of a Hindu majority, which had to be protected, through a Hindu politics, against the (exaggerated, and even paranoid) perception of a threat from the Muslim minority. In the atmosphere of uncertainty, mistrust, polarisation, and violence, India's main Muslim organisations were intermittently perceived as being motivated by the desire to encroach upon, and even dominate over, Hindus. But even as Rai's Hindu politics strove to protect a Hindu majority advantage, they were not driven by the desire to establish Hindu domination over minorities. They sought to establish a secular state and politics, guided by values such as peace, religious liberty, religious equality, and equal citizenship irrespective of religion. Rai's secularism granted minority rights in their socio-cultural form, and countenanced allowing community-specific political rights for minorities for a fixed period, if such a concession was unavoidable. Rai's secularism thus considered establishing certain institutional measures to prevent Hindu majoritarianism. Rather than being a farcical secularism that existed only to veil an ulterior motive of securing Hindu majority domination, Rai's secularism possessed positive content, was guided by multiple values, and attempted to accommodate, and do justice to, India's religious diversity. At the same time, as already noted, Rai's adoption of a militant politics of Hindu consolidation, which he considered a temporary and instrumental means to establish his secularism, was precisely a contributing factor in rendering this secularism unstable. It threatened to undercut the very secularism that he wished to establish – particularly through its permissiveness towards violence, which undermined inter-community peace.

Before turning to the question of Hindu violence, let us pause to explore a little more deeply how Lajpat Rai conceptualised the 'Indian nation' in this period. Rai most clearly elaborated his conception of the 'Indian nation' in *cultural* terms, in his writings between 1915 and 1920. As with most things with Rai, his stance was fluid, in flux, and defied simplicity. On one occasion, he endorsed a pamphlet which stated that the Indian people, despite their religious diversity, were united by a timeless Hindu culture,

and their apparent common descent from the ancient Hindu Aryan race.<sup>93</sup> While this was a way of endowing India's Hindus and Muslims with a sense of common belonging, the pamphlet's emphasis on an immemorial Hindu culture and Aryan race privileged Hindu tropes, in a manner that could potentially alienate Indian Muslims. Calling itself an 'Indian nationalism', this nationalism can be legitimately regarded as a particular form of Hindu nationalism. Yet unlike V.D. Savarkar, the famous founder-ideologue of *Hindutva* nationalism, Rai's Hindu nationalism never demanded that Indian Muslims and Christians abandon their religious cultures to assimilate into Hindu culture. Instead, it constituted a distinct non-assimilationist, diversity-accepting Hindu nationalism. More importantly, in several other writings, Lajpat Rai elaborated an Indian nationalism which attempted to endow India's Hindus and Muslims with a sense of common belonging, through a broader, more inclusive, pluralist path. This included shunning the Hindu-leaning trope of the Aryan race, instead asserting that Hindus and Muslims belonged to a common 'Anglo-Mongolian' racial admixture:

No Indian, Hindu or Mohammedan, ever attaches any importance to his racial origin or to the racial origins of the rest of his countrymen. *There is no country on the face of the globe which has a pure race.* The sons of man have so freely mixed and mingled in the past, that racial distinctions are only a matter of imagination and conjecture. More often than not they are a cloak for political dominance and economic exploitation [...]. In India there is no race conflict. Hindu and Mussulman and Christian are all a racial "mix up" [*sic*]. The Mussulman descendants of Persia, Afghan, Turkaman [*sic*], Mogul and Arab invaders have a great deal of Aryan blood in their veins and the Hindu descendants of the Aryans have a great deal of Mongolian blood. The Anglo-Indians, too, have all these veins. It is stupid and mischievous to talk of race conflict in India. Mother India knows and recognises no race distinctions [...].<sup>94</sup>

Lajpat Rai also attempted to fashion a pluralist public national culture for India, which assertively included Islam and Muslim culture:

The present writer [Lajpat Rai] has expressed several times that these national festivals are the milestones on the road to national life, landmarks

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93 Lala Lajpat Rai, "Self-Determination for India, 1918," in *Collected Works*, 7:244.

94 Lajpat Rai, "Problem of National Education," 7:183–84. Emphasis original.

in the history of the nation, and he is glad to notice there is a conscious awakening to their value and significance in the life of the nation. The Hindus and Muslims would do well to take part in each other's festivals instead of making them the occasion of breaking each other's heads. With the exception of a very few festivals, most of the Hindu and Mohammedan festivals can be given an all-India character. One cannot understand why Mohammedans cannot take part in in celebration of *Basant Panchami*, *Bisakhi*, *Dussehra* and *Diwali*; nor why Hindus cannot join in the celebration of *Muharram* and the *Shab-i-Barat* [...].<sup>95</sup>

We modern Indians can be as well proud of a Hali, an Iqbal, a Mohani as of a Tagore, Roy and Harish Chandra. We are as proud of Syed Ahmed Khan as of Rammohan Roy and Dayanand.<sup>96</sup>

In his person, Akbar [the medieval Mughal emperor] combined the *best elements of real Islam and real Hinduism*. That in itself is evidence of Akbar's greatness of soul. May his memory inspire his countrymen, Hindu and Mohammedan, in building the future national edifice in such a way as to combine not just *the best of the two old cultures*, but also the best of the new one, that has since been born in the West, from which India is drawing copiously.<sup>97</sup>

Rai's attempt to craft a pluralist Indian nationalism was evident in his compromise-driven advocacy of Hindustani – a language shared by both communities – written in both the Sanskrit Devanagari script (usually used by Hindus) and the Urdu script (usually by Muslims) as India's national language:

I may assume that the country will readily adopt Hindustani as the future national language of India [...]. The provincial vernaculars must be the medium of instruction in primary schools of each province, with the addition of Hindustani as an All-India language, the Hindus learning it in Deva Nagri and the Mussulmans in Urdu characters.<sup>98</sup>

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95 Lala Lajpat Rai, "Review of 'Footfalls of Indian History', *Modern Review*, September 1915," in *Collected Works*, 5:373.

96 Lajpat Rai, "Problem of National Education," 7:186. Here, Rai refers to Muslim and Hindu personalities from the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, who were renowned for their literary, philosophical, cultural, or political achievements.

97 Lala Lajpat Rai, "Akbar, The Great Mogul, *Young India*, July 1918," in *Collected Works*, 7:287. Emphasis mine.

98 Lajpat Rai, "Problem of National Education," 7:198–99.

Thus, Lajpat Rai attempted to unite India's Hindus and Muslims into a single Indian nation, by emphasising their common jumbled racial origins, encouraging an Indian national culture which respected both Hinduism and Islam, and advocating Hindustani as India's national language. By 1924, however, the atmosphere of mistrust, polarisation, and violence had shaken Rai's confidence in this Indian nation. Rai ceased to elaborate the cultural identity of the Indian nation, and instead focussed his energies on opposing separate electorates and communal representation. But it was very likely this same conception of the Indian nation which underlay his opposition to these political mechanisms. These, he now firmly believed, were sure to undermine the possibility of a united Indian national community ever emerging. In the mid-1920s, Rai's cultural imagination of the secular Indian nation could perhaps still be deconstructed into a narrower, but diversity-accepting, Hindu nationalism, co-existing alongside a broader, more pluralist Indian nationalism. But in political terms, Rai's secular Indian nationalism was consistently firm in its explicit willingness to grant individualistically-construed equal citizenship rights, and religious liberty, equality, and justice to all religious groups. It was also willing to countenance community-specific political rights for religious minorities. Rai's cultural imaginations of Indian nationalism could occasionally veer towards Hindu cultural assumptions, with potentially marginalising effects on the sense of national belonging of minorities. But these also co-existed with, and were tempered by, his cultural imaginations which sought to craft a pluralist public national culture for the Indian nation, as well as by his imagination of a civic nationalism in the political domain. The latter aimed to achieve an inclusive, united Indian nation, through the above-mentioned political rights and freedoms. These – as much as his cultural imagination – provide insight into the nature of Lajpat Rai's nationalism, which was the central value fuelling his urgent desire to substantially separate the religious and political domains. Rai's secularism was driven by a secular Indian nationalism which can be deconstructed into what may be called a culturally Hindu-leaning, but non-assimilationist, diversity-accepting Hindu nationalism and a culturally pluralist Indian nationalism that was even more accommodative and celebratory of diversity.

But how should we understand Lajpat Rai's authorisation of violence? Rai's sanction of Hindu violence in 'self-defence' aimed, as noted above, at protecting the Hindu majority from the perceived threats of Muslim



violence and desires of domination. The sanctioning of Hindu violence here was performed not through an appeal to any intellectual resources within Hinduism, analogous to the manner that the concept of Jihad is appealed to in Islam – or, indeed, how many Hindus, including Rai, had previously justified political violence, predominantly against the British, through appeal to the *Bhagavad Gita* (100 CE). Instead, violence was rendered permissible by undermining the concept of *ahimsa* (nonviolence), which Gandhi wished to make central to Hinduism. Hinduism was defined to stress its compatibility with violence. This constituted what may be called a religious justification for political violence, guided by what may be understood as a religiously-defined political end: to protect a religious majority (from the perceived threat of Muslim domination).<sup>99</sup> Yet, as we saw, Rai's militant Hindu consolidation, and even violence, ultimately aimed to establish a secular nation state, not a Hindu one. In a sense, then, Rai can be seen as once again flouting conceptual dichotomies by permitting 'religious' violence for the sake of a secularism in the future. Rather than constituting a revolt against the oppressiveness of secularism, as violent modern religious politics has often been understood,<sup>100</sup> Hindu political violence here was intended to serve the ideology of secular nationalism. So, religion appears neither as the means to criticise the secular ideal, nor as a rival of secular nationalism.<sup>101</sup> Instead, it is imagined as the servant of secularism, eager to assist it, with violence if necessary. In this way, Hindu violence for the cause of secular nationalism was also a form of secular violence.

Religious violence in opposition to secularism, and to establish a religious state, has been frequently noted. The terrible violence associated with modern secular ideologies in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has also been acknowledged.<sup>102</sup> The worst massacres of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – the slaughter of millions in the First

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99 Here, I mean religion in the sense of *thin* rather than *thick* religion. That is, this religion is unconcerned with, and de-emphasises, the finer points of doctrine and practice. It is also more interested in this world rather than the next, and is more politically oriented. For more on the differences between thick and thin religion, see Kaviraj, "Thick and Thin Religion," 347–49.

100 Juergensmeyer, "Secular and Religious Aspects of Violence"; Ashis Nandy "The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Tolerance," in *Secularism and Its Critics*, ed. Rajeev Bhargava (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998); Madan, "Secularism in Its Place".

101 Juergensmeyer, "Secular and Religious Aspects of Violence," 192, 196.

102 Juergensmeyer, 199.

World War, the communist terror in the Soviet Union, the Nazi Holocaust, and the nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki – were the result of secular ideologies rather than religious fanaticism and intolerance.<sup>103</sup> Secular violence for the sake of establishing or maintaining secularism has also received attention. Some varieties of secularism have been recognised as hostile and oppressive towards religion, such as those found in China since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, or in Soviet Russia. Similarly, a particular interpretation of French *laïcité*, that took hold from 1905, was less hospitable to public expressions of religions. In Turkey, too, an institutionalised secular hostility to religion was seen from the time of Atatürk until Erdogan’s rise to power in the early 2000s. These cases variously entailed the repression of, and/or violence towards, religious institutions and actors. For instance, in China, secular violence took the form of the destruction of temples.<sup>104</sup> The Soviet Union prohibited most religious activities, persecuted clergymen, and even blew up the largest place of worship in Russia.<sup>105</sup> French *laïcité* was similarly predicated on anti-clericalism, or hostility towards the clergy. Atatürk’s Turkey saw authoritarian measures to repress religious leaders.<sup>106</sup> Lajpat Rai sanctioned neither Hindu violence to establish a Hindu state, nor secular violence against religious authorities and institutions for the sake of secularism. What is distinctive about Rai is his sanctioning of religion-related violence for the sake of a particular vision of secularism. This brings to light the theoretical possibility of a counter-intuitive relationship between ‘communal’ violence and secularism or secular nationalism. Rai’s permissiveness towards violence aimed at readying Hindus for self-

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103 Charles Taylor, “Western Secularity,” in *Rethinking Secularism*, ed. Craig J. Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 70; Juergensmeyer, “Secular and Religious Aspects of Violence,” 198.

104 Peter van der Veer, “Smash Temples, Burn Books: Comparing Secularist Projects in India and China,” in *Rethinking Secularism*, ed. Craig J. Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

105 Geoffrey Hosking, “The Russian Orthodox Church and Secularisation,” in *Religion and the Political Imagination*, ed. Ira Katznelson, and Gareth Stedman Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

106 Whilst both were assertive and interventionist, for the differences between French and Turkish secularisms, see Alfred Stepan, “The Multiple Secularisms of Modern Democratic and Non-Democratic Regimes,” in *Rethinking Secularism*, ed. Craig J. Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 119–20.

defence against Muslim violence and perceived designs of Muslim political domination. But this organised Hindu violence simultaneously also aimed to protect – from the perceived threat of ruination – the possibility of realising for a free India his ideal of secularism, grounded in equal citizenship and religious freedom for all religious communities and, potentially, limited political rights for religious minorities. Violence is permitted not to generate unbridled Hindu domination over Muslims and eliminate religious diversity, but to realise a secularism that granted minority rights, even as it protected Hindu democratic advantage.

Here, my argument differs from that advanced by Ashis Nandy, for whom secularism, due to its oppressive attitude towards religion, is necessarily the real culprit and cause behind modern religious violence.<sup>107</sup> Rai's political thought certainly seems to substantiate Nandy's point that modern religious violence, rather than a spontaneous expression of religion in the sense of faith, was a product of *religion as ideology*, which itself – like secularism – is a product of modernity.<sup>108</sup> Given that Rai's sanctioning of Hindu violence was ultimately for the sake of a future secularism, I would agree with its characterisation as a form of what Nandy calls "secular communal" or secular violence.<sup>109</sup> I also acknowledge Nandy's argument about the false opposition drawn between religious violence and modernisation, and perhaps even secularisation. However, recognition of Rai's simultaneous advocacy of secularism and Hindu violence does not imply that his secularism *determined* his sanction of Hindu violence. Hindu violence was the perilous and counterproductive path chosen by Rai to establish his vision of secularism. Rai's permissiveness towards Hindu communal violence does not nullify the analytical significance of the substantive moral content underpinning his secularism. But by heightening the mutual mistrust, estrangement, polarisation and violence between Hindus and Muslims, Rai's sanctioning of Hindu communal violence threatened to preclude the realisation of the secularism he longed to establish.

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107 Ashis Nandy, "An Anti-Secular Manifesto," *India International Centre Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 56–57.

108 Nandy, "The Politics of Secularism". The link between modernity, the thinning of religion (in Nandy's terms, the transition from religion as faith to religion as ideology), and violence has also been made by Kaviraj, "Thick and Thin Religion," 348.

109 Nandy uses the term 'secular communal violence', and refers to India's contemporary religious riots as 'secular riots'. Nandy, "An Anti-Secular Manifesto," 59, 62.

## 6 A brief comparison with ‘Western’ secularisms, Indian constitutional secularism, Gandhi-Nehru, and the Hindu right

Having analysed the internal texture of Lajpat Rai’s secularism, I now turn briefly to compare it with other ideals of secularism, both globally and within India, as a means of further clarifying its specificity. As noted, Rai’s secularism came close to the strictly separationist American ‘wall of separation’ model, in terms of its generally non-interventionist bent. Neither actively hostile to religion, nor actively attempting to assist religion, Rai’s secularism in large part followed what Bhargava calls the “mutual exclusion” model, whereby the state passively respects religion by leaving it alone.<sup>110</sup> This was quite different from the model of “one-sided exclusion”, where the state, more hostile to religion, retains the power to interfere in its affairs to control, tame or marginalise religion.<sup>111</sup> While attracted by the privatisation of religion for the sake of a radically secularised domain as an *ideal*, Lajpat Rai’s secularism was clearly willing to allow for its public presence. Yet, as noted already, Rai’s secularism was not identical to the idealised American model of secularism, given its breach of the wall of separation to grant minority rights, both in their socio-cultural and political forms. Therefore, rather than passive respect, it entailed an active engagement with religious minorities, though this active assistance consisted of possible political recognition rather than public funding. Importantly, it also differed from the secularisms of most Western European states (except France), which disconnected from religion by granting formal rights to all individuals irrespective of religion, whilst nonetheless remaining *connected* to religion through their active and positive accommodation of the countries’ respective dominant religions. Due to their conceptualisation in historical settings in which non-Christian religions were sociologically and politically insignificant, if not absent, Western European secularisms granted monopolistic privileges to one or more branches of Christianity.<sup>112</sup> Lajpat Rai’s secularism had to grapple with India’s specific socio-cultural context of profound religious diversity which, at the time, included the world’s largest Muslim population, as well

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110 Bhargava, “Is European Secularism Secular Enough?” 165–67.

111 Bhargava, 165.

112 Bhargava, 167–68; Stepan, “Multiple Secularisms,” 121–25.

as numerous small religious minorities.<sup>113</sup> Unlike European secularism, it faced the problem of inter-religious conflict. In dealing with this issue, Rai's ideal went beyond Western European secularism, even though it emanated from within a Hindu communal political organisation, and was less minority-sensitive than the secularisms of other Indians of his time. It mirrored the "moderate secularism"<sup>114</sup> of Western Europe in breaching of the wall of separation. But it differed from the European model in doing so not to propose any sort of (even weak) establishment of Hinduism, but in an attempt to better accommodate India's deep religious diversity through contemplated socio-cultural and political rights (and federalism).

How did this Hindu 'communal' politician's articulation of Indian secularism compare with the conception that would be enshrined in the Indian constitution a quarter of a century later? Like the latter, Rai's vision follows the principle of non-establishment, and grants religious liberty and equal citizenship to all individuals. It, also, similarly rejects strict separation, to actively grant community-specific rights to religious minorities. A difference lies in Rai's refusal of state aid for any religious institutions or purposes. This is unlike the Indian constitution, which commits the state to intervene to provide aid to educational institutions established by religious communities. Additionally, Indian constitutional secularism would allow the state a much more interventionist role in religious affairs, permitting it to undermine certain aspects of religion, and to promote others.<sup>115</sup> Rai mentioned nothing about the state's active interference in religious communities to make them more liberal and egalitarian. Instead, he sought to grant religious communities substantial freedom to manage their own internal affairs. At the same time, this Hindu 'communal' politician was willing to concede community-specific political rights to the enormous Muslim population of undivided India, even if reluctantly and as a necessary evil.<sup>116</sup> Here, he differed from the

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113 Faisal Devji, *The Impossible Indian: Gandhi and the Temptation of Violence* (London: Harvard University Press, 2012), 74.

114 The phrase is Tariq Modood's. Bhargava, "Is European Secularism Secular Enough?" 164.

115 For a forensic analysis of India's constitutional secularism, see Bhargava, *Promise*, 81–96.

116 By the end of his life, Rai no longer viewed communal representation for minorities as merely a necessary evil. In 1928, just before his death, he

Indian constitution which, following India's Partition and the formation of the Muslim-majority state of Pakistan, would reject such separate representation for India's substantially reduced Muslim minority.<sup>117</sup> At the same time, Rai sought to establish his secularism through militant Hindu consolidation. India's constitutional secularism is certainly predicated on a history of reluctance towards granting, and then eventually denying, political rights to Muslims.<sup>118</sup> But it is also predominantly based on a history of top Congress leaders rejecting militant communal political consolidation – whether Muslim or Hindu – as a means to achieve secularism. The Indian constitution instituted a version of secularism, which sought to discourage 'communal' politics, through its emphasis on individual rights, via non-violent, democratic, and institutional means.

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straightforwardly urged Hindus to accept the Nehru Report "out of a profound sense of necessity, the necessity of reconciling Mohammedan sentiment and feeling". Cited in Nair, *Changing Homelands*, 89.

117 Tejani, *Indian Secularism*, chap. 6. Indian Muslims are severely under-represented in the Indian parliament, with their representation declining since the 1980s to a mere 4.42% in 2019, despite forming 14.2% of the population, according to the 2011 census. Shakil Sana, "Yet Again, No Muslim Face in BJP's Bandwagon Headed to Parliament," *The New Indian Express*, 24 May 2019, <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2019/may/24/yet-again-no-muslim-face-in-bjps-bandwagon-headed-to-parliament-1981129.html>. Reservations, considered by Rai in the mid-1920s but eventually rejected by the Indian constitution, have been intermittently demanded since the 1990s, by some certain Muslim groups, as well as a small Muslim party called AIMIM (All-India Majlis-e-Ittehad-Muslimeen), based in Hyderabad in Southern India. See Bhargava, *Promise*, 193–94, and Rochana Bajpai, and Adnan Farooqui, "Non-Extremist Outbidding: Muslim Leadership in Majoritarian India," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 24, no. 3 (2018): 276–98. Pondering the unjust political under-representation of Muslims, Bhargava considers a particular form of Muslim political representation (reservations) as a desirable mechanism for political inclusion, arguing for its compatibility with the principle of secularism. He warns, however, that a vicious majoritarian backlash against Muslim reservations might ultimately make conditions worse for India's Muslims. Bhargava, *Promise*, 210–16. While the regrettable under-representation of Muslims seems to support Tejani's critique of India's constitutional secularism, this critique overlooks the ways in which Partition itself was responsible for a strengthening of India's Hindu majority, while simultaneously massively weakening its Muslim minority.

118 Bajpai, *Debating Difference*, chap. 2; Tejani, *Indian Secularism*.

Certainly, India's constitutional secularism cannot be said to sanction militant Hindu consolidation for its own sake.

How does Rai's mid-1920s secular-communal complex compare with the 'Gandhi-Nehru tradition' that steadily grew to become the hegemonic discourse of Indian secularism up until the 1970s?<sup>119</sup> Rai's vision overlapped with that of Gandhi and Nehru in numerous ways: in envisioning a free India that was neither a theocracy nor a nation that established any particular religion;<sup>120</sup> in not assuming a hostile stance towards religion, but conceding it public space,<sup>121</sup> and in going beyond strict separation to recognise community-specific socio-cultural rights for religious minorities.<sup>122</sup> While Gandhi seldom used the language of rights, he remained concerned about the freedom of religious minorities, and ultimately endorsed the Congress' language of rights, including group rights. More thoroughly contextualised studies of Gandhi and Nehru are required, however, to ascertain their positions on the question of political rights for minorities in the mid-1920s. Gandhi seems to have been willing to concede them, even whilst disagreeing with them in principle,<sup>123</sup> whereas Nehru's discomfort with institutionalising religion in the political domain was evident by the late 1920s.<sup>124</sup> Collectively, Gandhi and Nehru mirrored the dilemma felt by Lajpat Rai over the question of accepting political rights for India's religious minorities.

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119 Sushmita Nath, "Narratives of Secularity in 20<sup>th</sup>-Century India," in *Companion to the Study of Secularity*, edited by HCAS "Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities", Leipzig University, 2019, [https://www.multiple-secularities.de/publications/companion/css\\_nath\\_narrativesofsecularity.pdf](https://www.multiple-secularities.de/publications/companion/css_nath_narrativesofsecularity.pdf).

120 Bhikhu C. Parekh, *Gandhi: A Very Short Introduction*, Very Short Introductions 37 (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), 85; Rajeev Bhargava, "Nehru against Nehruvians," *Economic and Political Weekly* 52, no. 8 (2017): 36–38.

121 Parekh, *Gandhi*, 85; Bhargava, "Nehru against Nehruvians," 36–38. For more about Nehru's secularism not being anti-religious, see Stepan, "Multiple Secularisms"; Kaviraj, "Languages of Secularity," 100; Charles Taylor, "Can Secularism Travel?" in *Beyond the Secular West*, ed. Akeel Bilgrami (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2016), 24; Sushmita Nath, "Jawaharlal Nehru and the Question of Indian Secularity" (Lecture, Conference of the KFG "Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities": Secularities – Patterns of Distinction, Paths of Differentiation, Leipzig University, October 2018), 13.

122 For Nehru, see Bhargava, "Nehru against Nehruvians," 38; Nath, "Nehru and Indian Secularity," 13.

123 Page, *Prelude to Partition*, 121.

124 Nath, "Nehru and Indian Secularity," 13.

It is also due to this convergence of Gandhi and Nehru – seen as the foremost representatives of Indian secularism – with Hindu communal politicians such as Rai, that Indian secularism has been recently treated as a diaphanous concept – merely “Hindu confessionalism by another name”, as one scholar put it.<sup>125</sup>

But, again, the acknowledgement of convergence between the positions of Gandhi, Nehru and Lajpat Rai – their collective assumption of the existence of a Hindu majority and discomfort over institutionalising ‘communal’ representation – must be accompanied by a recognition of their distinctions. This once again prevents us from collapsing Indian secularism into Hindu communalism, and reminds us not to forget the meaningful distinctions between these categories. Gandhian secularism aimed at a secular state which allowed for the public presence of religion, and granted socio-cultural rights to minorities. As for politics, it considered Religion (with a capital R) – i.e. religion in the sense of universal truth or morality that underlies all faiths – as essential to politics.<sup>126</sup> In fact, desiring less reliance on the state and its language of rights, Gandhian secularism urged an everyday Religious (moral) politics of tolerance, and even self-sacrifice, for ‘the other’, as a way of showing mutual respect for even radical difference between religious communities.<sup>127</sup> Such mixing of Religion and politics was Gandhian secularism’s answer to interreligious conflict and violence.<sup>128</sup> At the same time, it opposed the mixing of politics with religions in their mutually exclusive, organised forms, and the rivalrous, divisive, and polarising religious politics of Hindu and Muslim consolidation. Gandhian secularism was sympathetic to a Religious politics striving towards mutual tolerance, but rejected a politics of a rivalrous religious political consolidation, instead encouraging the representation of the ‘mutuality’ of Hindu and Muslim interests by the ‘national’ Congress.<sup>129</sup>

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125 Perry Anderson, *The Indian Ideology* (London: Verso Books, 2013). For a similar view, see Jalal, “Exploding Communalism: The Politics of Muslim Identity in South Asia”; Tejani, *Indian Secularism*.

126 Ajay Skaria, “Gandhi’s Politics: Liberalism and the Question of the Ashram,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 4 (2003): 958–60, 969; Bhargava, “Nehru against Nehruvians,” 36; Parekh, *Gandhi*, 69.

127 Skaria, “Gandhi’s Politics,” 976–79; Devji, *Impossible Indian*, chap. 3.

128 Adcock, *Limits of Tolerance*, 143, 146.

129 M.K. Gandhi, “Conundrums, Young India, 2 April 1925,” in *Collected Works*



Finally, *Ahimsa* (nonviolence) was fundamental to Gandhian secularism, which rejected Hindu (and Muslim) communal violence.

Nehruvian secularism was marked by a greater reliance on the state, and a greater emphasis on rights, than Gandhian secularism, with its insistence on an everyday religio-moral politics of nonviolence and tolerance, based on respecting deep religious difference. Nehru was more willing to accord the secular state an interventionist role in fighting religion-based oppression, particularly in terms of caste and gender. Nehru did not regard religion as being essential to politics in the way Gandhi did.<sup>130</sup> Reflecting the influence of socialism upon him, Nehru went further than Gandhi, in harshly castigating religious community-based politics (not only of the Muslim minority, but also of the Hindu majority) as a backward-looking, pre-modern form of politics, as well as a sort of false consciousness arising from what were actually economic grievances.<sup>131</sup> For Nehru, as for Gandhi, the path to secularism could never lie through a religious community based-politics, but rather had to begin by strongly repudiating precisely such politics, and firmly conceiving the Indian nation as comprised of individual citizens.<sup>132</sup> Viewing India's Hindus and Muslims as members of the Indian nation, he viewed any mutual suspicion in their relations as regrettable. Devoid of fears of domination by a Muslim minority in a future democracy, he saw no sense in Hindu majority consolidation, which could only intensify Muslim fears of the Hindu majority, to which

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of *Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 31 (Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India, 1965).

130 Bhargava claims that, like Gandhi, Nehru considered religion – in the sense of universal morality and ethics – as being essential in politics, and – once again, like Gandhi – opposed the mixing of politics with religion in its institutionalised forms. “Nehru against Nehruvians,” 35–36. Others disagree, arguing that Nehru was deeply uncomfortable with religion in all forms, due to its capacity to both introduce emotion and diminish reason in politics. Nath, “Nehru and Indian Secularity,” 13. It seems to me that the two interpretations can be squared. Nehru may have simultaneously considered morality as essential to politics (sometimes, but not always, equating it with religion), been wary of emotional religious-based appeals (in a manner that Gandhi was perhaps not), and strongly opposed religious community-based politics.

131 Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 244; Nath, “Nehru and Indian Secularity,” 10–11.

132 Pandey, *Construction of Communalism*, 238.

he was sympathetic.<sup>133</sup> Sanctioning Hindu violence would only aggravate communal rioting, which Nehru once called “black religious savagery”.<sup>134</sup> Rather than serving secularism, this could only do it harm.

Rai’s secularism was closer to Nehru’s than Gandhi’s, in its greater reliance on the state and its guarantee of rights, than on an everyday moral politics of tolerance. While Rai was sympathetic to the Gandhian approach during the Khilafat movement (1919–22), the new context of the mid-1920s had him roundly dismissing the notion that “the Hindu-Muslim problem” could be solved through “sentimental talk”.<sup>135</sup> Yet, unlike Nehru, Rai did not seem to accord the secular state an interventionist role, to make religion more liberal and egalitarian. Rai’s belief that the separation of religion from politics was essential for individuals to unite over economic issues, and for India to reach its economic potential, again overlapped with Nehruvian secularism. But where Lajpat Rai’s secularism unmistakably diverged from both Gandhi’s and Nehru’s secularism was, of course, in its obsessive fear of Muslim domination, and what he thought was his temporary reliance on Hindu communal consolidation and violence. This stance at least partly resulted from the Hindu minority status in his own state of Punjab. As we have seen, for Rai, the path to secularism lay through counteracting Muslim attempts to institutionalise what he perceived as a dangerous, divisive and even domineering Muslim politics, through a militant Hindu politics of consolidation. Unlike Gandhian and Nehruvian secularism, which stood on firmer ground, Lajpat Rai’s secularism was unstable, relying as it did on an instrumental Hindu communal politics, which threatened to undermine the core values of his imagined secularism.

This is why Rai’s articulation of Indian secularism needs to be acknowledged as a stance distinct from the more robust and minority-sensitive secularisms embodied by both the Gandhian-Nehru tradition and India’s constitution. Recognising the distinctiveness of Rai’s secularism, given his role as a Hindu ‘communal’ politician, will also allow us to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of the historical

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133 Benjamin Zachariah, *Nehru* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), 74.

134 Sarvepalli Gopal, *British Policy in India, 1858–1905* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 200.

135 Bhargav, “Between Hindu and Indian: The Nationalist Thought of Lala Lajpat Rai,” 151.

and conceptual relationship between Indian secularism and the ‘Hindu right’. Some sections of the latter, however small, historically articulated what should be recognised as a genuine secularism, and played at least an indirect role in shaping India’s secular constitution. While one aspect of this convergence between a section of the Hindu right and the Indian constitution certainly relates to the attenuation of community rights, and a reluctance regarding political rights for minorities, another relates to the granting of minority rights. This challenges the assumptions of some within the contemporary Hindu right, that they have had no historical relation to India’s constitutional secularism and its granting of minority rights, which they associate only with Nehru and the Congress. Further, acknowledging Rai’s articulation of secularism opens the theoretical possibility of genuine secularisms existing among sections of the Hindu right today. Some sections of the Hindu right articulate a secularism even more hard-line and minority-insensitive than the hard-line secularism desired by Rai, considering socio-cultural rights for minorities as “pseudo-secular” and anti-secular.<sup>136</sup> More importantly, the secularism Rai articulated as a Hindu communal politician throws into relief the nature of the self-proclaimed ‘secularism’ promoted by much of the *Sangh Parivar* (the ‘family’ of Hindu nationalist organisations) since the 1990s. As Partha Chatterjee rightly notes, the *Parivar* has often used the language of ‘secularism’ to *assimilate* minorities into a homogenised notion of Hindu culture. However, this represents an instrumental deployment of the term, with the aim of establishing Hindu cultural and political domination, and severely undercuts the core substantive values that constitute all versions of secularism. In my view, Chatterjee is mistaken in interpreting the Hindu right’s instrumental reliance on the language of ‘secularism’ to promote its own agenda of Hindu domination as revealing the flawed nature of secularism itself. Much of the Hindu right cannot be said to be guided by any genuine secularism, and rather is guided by normative ends opposed to it. In fact, it very likely longs for a strong establishment of Hinduism as the privileged religion of the Indian state (much like Islam in Pakistan),<sup>137</sup> an idea that departs from

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136 Tejani, *Indian Secularism*, 9.

137 Bhargava, *Promise*, 83.

secularism in all its forms. India's current dramatic turn away from secularism is symbolically reflected in the near-disappearance of the term from political discourse,<sup>138</sup> and most starkly and tangibly in the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s linking of Indian citizenship to non-Muslim religions through the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019. By linking religion to citizenship, the BJP seeks to fulfil the vision of ultra-Hindu nationalist ideologues like V.D. Savarkar, who wished India's religious minorities to live as second-class citizens, or perhaps even of M.S. Golwalkar, whose Hindu nationalist vision did not even grant them citizenship rights.<sup>139</sup> In its attempt to subjugate minorities through, among other things, cultural assimilation and hierarchically arranged religion-based citizenship, dominant strands of the Hindu right today diverge from the secularism represented by Hindu politicians like Lajpat Rai. This despite Rai still being claimed by the Hindu right (including the BJP) as its icon. Rai articulated a secularism that, although less accommodative and robust than the Gandhian-Nehruvian or Indian constitutional variants, was still always predicated on equal citizenship, respect for India's religious diversity, and a concession of minority rights.

## 7 Conclusion

Secularity denotes a modality of making distinctions between the religious and the non-religious. This paper has focussed on secularism as a specific normative form of secularity. In doing so, it recovers a distinctive, Hindu 'communal' articulation of Indian secularism and secularity, which overlaps with, but remains analytically distinct from, other versions exemplified by Gandhi, Nehru and the Indian constitution. Of the four "reference problems" identified by the *Multiple Secularities* project,<sup>140</sup> historical actors in colonial India were evidently most concerned with a) religious heterogeneity and its potential for conflict or actual conflict, and b) the related problem of social and national integration and development. In contrast to Europe and even the United States, colonial India was

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138 Rajeev Bhargava, "How to Rescue Genuine Secularism," *The Hindu*, 28 May 2019, <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/how-to-rescue-genuine-secularism/article27267143.ece>.

139 Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalist Movement*, 28–30, 57.

140 Kleine, and Wohlrab-Sahr, "Research Programme," 20.

marked by a longer historical engagement with long-standing and deep religious diversity. The major presence of Islam in the subcontinent from the 13<sup>th</sup> century meant that, along with its Hindu majority, India was home to the world's largest Muslim population, alongside numerous other smaller minorities – Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains and Parsis. This sociological fact of astounding diversity posed considerable challenges for national integration. All Indian secularisms responded to, and offered solutions to, the two specific and related reference problems of religious diversity and conflict, and national integration. Yet, in doing so, they espoused different versions of secularism, which they sought to establish in multiple ways. These in turn were better or worse for realising the desired ends of secularism. As such, while *Multiple Secularities* sees the diverse secularisms and secularities of different countries as being shaped by their particular responses to specific reference problems, this paper demonstrates that the same set of reference problems can also result in multiple secularisms and secularities within the same country.

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