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Eve Tignol

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## From *Wakīl* to *Numā'indah*

### A History of Urdu Concepts for Political Representation in North India, 1858–1919

Eve Tignol

#### Abstract

This article explores the (contested) concept of political representation in Urdu during the colonial period to address “deceptive familiarities” and highlight multilingual and transnational influences on contemporary Indian Muslim claims. Drawing on official documents, letters, speeches, and newspapers from the late 1850s to 1919, it argues that the “politics of presence”—or descriptive representation—of “Old Party” leaders stemmed from their aristocratic concept of representation as trusteeship (*wakālat*). Despite changes in terminology, the concept was only challenged in the 1910s by the “Young Party” and by the embracing of democratic values. Conceptual change was then materialized by the appropriation of the Persian *numā'indagī* in Urdu—a term that might have consecutively accredited descriptive claims and the use of religious symbols in election campaigns.

**Keywords:** British India, conceptual history, democracy, descriptive representation, Islam, political representation

This article builds on growing scholarship addressing the many concepts of political representation in Western, but also non-Western, societies as democracies seem to experience a worldwide “crisis.”<sup>1</sup> While scholars of Muslim South Asia have of course interrogated the

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concepts and practices of political representation—Muslim representation appeared as one of the major problems in contemporary India as the Sachar Committee (2006) highlighted—concepts have not been considered in the vernacular. Although twentieth-century Muslim

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1. Extending beyond the West, e.g., Yves Sintomer and Yunyun Zhou, “‘Representation’ and *Dàibǎo*: A Comparative Study of the Notions of Political Representation in France and China,” *Journal of Chinese Governance* 4, no. 4 (2019): 362–389, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23812346.2019.1672371>; Joshua Hill, *Voting as a Rite: A History of Elections in Modern China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019). For an overview, see also Stéphanie Tawa Lama-Rewal, “Political Representation in India: Enlarging the Perspective,” *India Review* 15, no. 2 (2016): 163–171, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14736489.2016.1165552>.

leaders were usually fluent in English, interactions with vernacular languages and the “deceptive familiarity” of concepts should not be overlooked.<sup>2</sup>

I address this issue by providing a first, and experimental, exploration into the Urdu concepts for political representation from the beginning of the British Raj in the second half of the nineteenth century to the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms of 1919, with the introduction of measures toward self-government, direct elections, and the extension of the franchise. The aim is to characterize the shifting vernacular concepts and vocabulary of representation in their historical context by focusing on the colonial period during which representative government was gradually implemented, through an analysis of a selected corpus of official documents, political writings and speeches, and contemporary newspapers (*Aligarh Institute Gazette*, *Al Hilāl*, *The Comrade*, and *Madīnah*).

Adopting both semasiological and onomasiological approaches, I show how the vocabulary of political representation changed from the aristocratic ideal of representation as trusteeship (*wakālat*, *niyābat*) in the 1860s, to reflecting territorial-based constituencies (*qā'im maqāmī*) with claims to Muslim descriptive representation during the anti-Congress campaigns in the late 1880s. These claims were endorsed by the 1909 Indian Councils Act after the Simla Deputation of 1906. In 1915, as local self-government was being discussed, the term of *numā'indagī* borrowed from Persian gained prominence as the modern concepts of popular sovereignty, democratic rights and individual free choice spread in British India. Illustrating how aristocratic understandings of representation gradually gave way to democratic models, I also hint at how particular perceptions of authority impacted political

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2. Carlo Ginzburg, “Représentation: le mot, l'idée, la chose,” in *Annales : Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 46, no. 6 (1991): 1219–1234, <https://doi.org/10.3406/ahess.1991.279008>.

claims in the development of a non-Western democracy. Doing so, I stress links between linguistic transfer and semantic change, and connect the political ideas of Indian Muslim leaders to broader and multilingual networks of conceptual interactions.

### **Sayyid Ahmad Khan's Concept of Representation**

In his *Asbāb-e Baġhāwat-e Hind* (The causes of the Indian revolt), when the famous Muslim reformer Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817–1898) explained the reasons behind the Uprising of 1857,<sup>3</sup> he pointed at the lack of Indian participation in the Legislative Council and at profound misunderstandings between natives and colonial rulers, which led, according to him, to unsuccessful governance and growing discontent. The fourth of the five main underlying causes of 1857 was the want of friendly relations between the government and the people.<sup>4</sup> This critique of the East India Company rule addressed key differences between British and Mughal styles of governance, as reflected in *akhlāq* (practical philosophy) treatises. While Indo-Persian polity emphasized social intercourse as a governing practice, the British government relied on institutions such as judicial courts.<sup>5</sup>

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3. The Rebellion of 1857 was an uprising against the East India Company that ended with the transfer of power to the British Crown (Government of India Act, 1858).

4. Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Asbāb-e Baġhāwat-e Hind* [The Causes of the Indian Revolt], 111 of the Urdu provided online and trans. F. W. Pritchett

<http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00urdu/asbab/translation2005.html> (accessed October 2021).

5. Mana Kia, “Companionship as Political Ethic: Friendship, Intimacy, and Service in Late Mughal Visions of Just Rule” (online lecture delivered at Habib and Exeter University, 11 February 2021).

Company officials denounced the arbitrariness and accommodativeness of indigenous law<sup>6</sup> and, in contrast, rapidly worked at implementing a “universalistic idiom of jurisprudence”<sup>7</sup> and legal structures through which “exclusive rights to judicial and punitive authority as the prerogative of sovereignty” were established.<sup>8</sup> The condition for the participation of Indians in colonial governance soon rested on their ability to master the new regulations. Consequently, many elites turned to the legal profession, so much so that the second half of the nineteenth century was sometimes called the Vakil Raj (the rule of the lawyer).<sup>9</sup>

Sayyid Ahmad Khan himself followed a typical career path for north Indian (Muslim) elites desirous to take part in the colonial administration (the *kachahrī* milieu)—government service being closed to native candidates until 1853.<sup>10</sup> When he decided to join colonial

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=prOqrLEBbKA&list=WL&index=4&t=568s>.

6. Radhika Singha, *A Despotism of Law: Crime and Justice in Early Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 27.

7. Ibid., 286; Sandria Freitag, “Crime in the Social Order of Colonial North India,” *Modern Asian Studies* 25, no. 2, (1991): 227–261, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/312511>.

8. Singha, *A Despotism of Law*, 2.

9. Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 125–130.

10. Literally “court of justice,” the *kachahrī* is the complex of courts and administrative offices. Ibid., 303; Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Pakistan Paradox: Instability and Resilience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 35. About the *kachahrī* and Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s career, see David Lelyveld, *Aligarh’s First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 56–63.

institutions in 1838, he naturally turned toward acquiring legal knowledge through his uncle who was *Şadr-e Amīn* (Chief Justice) of Delhi. He gradually moved up the ladder from *Sar-rishtadār* (clerk) to *Munşif* (judge) in 1841, and, in 1855, he was appointed permanent *Şadr-e Amīn* of Bijnor until 1857.<sup>11</sup> In his view, besides playing a role in the judiciary system, Indian elites also needed to be included in the law-making process. Many laws, he argued, were passed that hurt the feelings of the population.<sup>12</sup> With no means of dialogue between the new legislators and the population with their own established customs, a rift between rulers and subjects was unavoidable.<sup>13</sup> Then, Sayyid Ahmad Khan was concerned about the admission of Indian elites to the Legislative Council, emphasizing participation (*sharkat, mudākhālat*) more than representation.

As soon as *The Causes of the Indian Revolt* was printed, Sayyid Ahmad Khan sent it to the British Parliament and the Government of India, much against his friends' advice, who feared for his life.<sup>14</sup> Despite some reservations that were soon dispersed, the pamphlet was well received, and a couple of years later, the Indian Council Act (1861) ratified the admission of additional non-official members to the Legislative Council.<sup>15</sup> In 1866, Sayyid Ahmad Khan acknowledged the passing of the Act as "a memorable incident in the history of

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11. Altaf Husain Hali, *Hayat-e Jawed: A Biographical Account of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan*, part I–II, trans. R.A. Alavi (1901; Aligarh: Sir Syed Academy, 2008), 28.

12. Khan, *Asbāb-e Baġhāwat-e Hind*, 135–140.

13. *Ibid.*, 112–113.

14. Hali, *Hayat-e Jawed*, 45.

15. See *The Indian Councils Acts, 1861 and 1892, and Rules and Regulations for the Council of the Governor General at Meetings for the Purpose of Making Laws and Regulations* (Calcutta, Supt. of Govt, 1898), 8.

India,” but he also compared it to “a toy being given to a child” and wished for the day when “the Council would be composed of representatives from every district” (*har z̄ile ‘ meṇ ek shak̄ḥṣ k̄ā Kaunsil meṇ dāk̄hil honā zarūr hogā*)<sup>16</sup>—it is emblematic that, contrary to the translation, the original did not use “representative” but referred to admission instead (*dāk̄hil*).

The Act opened the door to the nomination of Indian members, although they rather served, for the authorities, as “crude public-opinion barometer” and “advisory ‘safety valve.’”<sup>17</sup> As Sir Charles Wood expressed in 1861, the inclusion of Indians in the Councils aimed at preventing the passing of laws that might “excite the minds of the Native population”<sup>18</sup> as much as at co-opting them into colonial rule:

I believe greater advantages will result from admitting the Native chiefs to co-operate with us for legislative purposes; they will no longer feel, as they have hitherto done, that they are excluded from the management of affairs in their own country, and nothing, I am persuaded, will tend more *to conciliate to our rule the*

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16. Haroon K. Sherwani, “The Political Thought of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan,” *Indian Journal of Political Sciences* 5, no. 4 (1944): 306–328, here 311, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42754317>.

For the Urdu, see Khan, “Ghazipur Speech (1864),” *Mukammal Majmū‘ah Lectures-o Speeches* [Complete Collection of Lectures and Speeches] (Lucknow: Nawal Kishore Press, 1898), 20.

17. T. G. Percival Spear, “British Imperial Power, 1858–1947,” in *India, Encyclopaedia Britannica*, ed. F. R. Allchin, Stanley Wolpert, and Philip Calkins, 104, <https://www.britannica.com/place/India> (accessed December 2021).

18. HC Deb 06 June 1861 vol. 163 cc 633–47, 642, <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1861/jun/06/leave-first-reading>.

*minds of Natives of high rank.* I have no intention of doing anything to make this Council a debating society.<sup>19</sup>

Farzana Shaikh and others have underlined that Muslim elites were profoundly aware of the limitations imposed by the state, and so their views of representation were very much shaped by and developed within those limits.<sup>20</sup> Scholars have argued that in the 1860s, Indian representatives worked as “informants,” “speaking of” the Indian population rather than “speaking for” them—providing information rather than having a say.<sup>21</sup> They have hence been described as “agents of the government,”<sup>22</sup> intermediaries who enabled the good exercise of colonial authority, with local bodies working at best as a sort of “school for native representatives.”<sup>23</sup> *The Causes of the Indian Revolt* is often quoted in this regard since it presented the advantages of admitting Indian representatives in colonial institutions for the stability of the government. Nonetheless, turning to vernacular vocabulary sheds more light on the way Sayyid Ahmad Khan conceived representation, which went beyond what can be read from his 1858 apologetic pamphlet.

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19. *Ibid.*, paragraph 643.

20. Farzana Shaikh, *Community and Consensus in Islam: Muslim Representation in Colonial India, 1860–1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 89–90.

21. Sandria Freitag, *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), 56–62.

22. Jaby Mathew, “Representation in the Shadow of Colonialism: Conceptions of Political Representation in 19th and 20th Century India,” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2017), 95.

23. *Ibid.*, 54.

The word “representation” itself was not easily translated into Urdu and, until relatively late, reflections oscillated between circumlocutions, straightforward transcriptions of English terms (*rīprezainṭeshan*, *rīprezainṭeṭīv*, *ḍeleḡeṭ*) and the hesitant resort to legal terminology. Contemporary bilingual dictionaries like Fallon’s *English Hindustani Law and Commercial Dictionary* (1858) and *New Hindustani-English Dictionary* (1879) nonetheless provided a list of vernacular synonyms, like *wakīl/wakālat*, *nā’ib/niyābat*, or *qā’im maqām/ī*, or the Sanskritized *pratinidhtā/pratinidhitva*. In the rare instances when representatives were directly mentioned in Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s works, they were called *wakīls* (sometimes *nā’ibs*).

The use of *wakīl*—a term that was otherwise commonly used for lawyers—is striking. It was indeed through discussions about the participation in legislature that the issue of representation was brought forth; many elites worked as legal practitioners (and it is in that milieu that local politics would emerge);<sup>24</sup> and contemporary British political philosophy supported juridical visions of representation. But, I argue, *wakīl* (with the substantive *wakālat*, less used in the sources) also conveyed specific meanings and had important implications on the way representation was conceptualized by Sayyid Ahmad Khan as a trusteeship.

The term *wakīl* is of Arabic origin. It appears in the Qur’an as one of the divine titles (3:173, 4:171, 28:28, and 73:9), where it means the trustee, the “disposer of affairs,” the one who watches for his people and provides for their needs; someone in whom one can trust.<sup>25</sup> It is common expression in Arabic to say *tawakkal ‘ala Allah* (put your trust in God) when

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24. Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism*, 130.

25. Martin Parsons, *Unveiling God: Contextualising Christology for Islamic Culture* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2005), 199.

starting a journey for instance.<sup>26</sup> The term also evoked the practice of *wakāla*, developed from the time of the Prophet as an Islamic practice of representation in law and finance. *Wakāla* is a contract between a contractor (or the principal, *muwakkil*) and an agent (*wakīl*) that legally authorizes the latter to act on behalf of the former, usually because the principal cannot perform the task (due to distance or to being underage, for instance) or because the principal prefers to entrust it to someone more skilled and experienced. The breadth of *wakāla* is wide and encompasses matters of finance, law, or even religious duty (pilgrimage or charity).<sup>27</sup> While *wakāla* is still relevant in Islamic finance, it is also the term used for common legal practice in South Asia, where *wakālat-nāmas* are legal documents empowering lawyers to plead in court on behalf of their clients.

*Wakālat* in Urdu hence conveys a juridical vision of representation: it entails the looking after the interests of another.<sup>28</sup> In Islamic jurisprudence, the agent is not allowed to act intentionally in a manner that would result in any risk or harm to the principal and is legally bound to act on and for the *muwakkil*'s behalf.<sup>29</sup> The question of the representation of interests echoed Western reflections that considered society to be composed of different interest groups, as in the model formulated by Edmund Burke (1729–1797) and in John Stuart Mill's influential *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861). The latter, often read

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26. Moshe Piamenta, *Islam in Everyday Arabic Speech* (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 27.

27. Mohammad D. M. Napijah, "The Theory of the Contract of Agency (*Al Wakalah*) in Islamic Law" (PhD diss., University of Glasgow, 1995), 118.

28. Hanna Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 140.

29. Napijah, "The Theory of the Contract," 60.

by Indian elites, promoted representative government as carefully balancing various conflicting (mostly class) interests.<sup>30</sup>

Occasionally, Sayyid Ahmad Khan also used *nā'ib/niyābat* for representation.<sup>31</sup> Like *wakālat, niyābat* emphasized that the deputy (*nā'ib*, pl. *nuwwāb* to which *nawāb* is linked) appointed by a ruler or judge worked on the latter's behalf.<sup>32</sup> Literally, in Arabic *nā'ib* is a “substitute of the doer,” and the preposition *bi-n-niyābati-'an* translates as “on behalf of” and “for the benefit/interest of.”<sup>33</sup> From the mid-seventeenth century, the Arabic word was associated with agentive representation.<sup>34</sup> As Ayalon noted, both *wakīl* and *nā'ib* were used

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30. John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861), Gutenberg Project, 2004, chapter 3, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/5669/5669-h/5669-h.htm> (accessed October 2021).

31. Khan, “Siyāsāt aur ham” [Politics and Us], Meerut speech, 16 March 1888, *Khutbāt-e Sir Sayyid* [Speeches of Sir Sayyid], vol. 2, ed. M. I. Panipati (Lahore: Majlis-e Taraqqi-e Adab, 1973), 49; Khan, *Tahzīb ul-akhlāq*, 15 Shawwal 1290H (1863), 163 quoted by Lajpat Rai, “Second Open Letter,” *The Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai*, vol. 1, ed. B.R. Nanda (Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2003), 3–25, here 9. From October to December 1888, Lajpat Rai wrote a series of letters in the *Koh-e Nūr* (Lahore). They were republished in English in *The Tribune*, before circulating as a pamphlet.

32. Hamilton A. R. Gibb and Ami Ayalon, “Nā'ib,” *Encyclopedia of Islam*, ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W. P. Heinrichs, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2012), [http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_COM\\_0839](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0839) (accessed October 2021).

33. Mohssen Esseesy, *Grammaticalization of Arabic Prepositions and Subordinators: A Corpus-Based Study* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 98.

34. *Ibid.*, 97–98.

for “people’s representatives in government” in the Middle East in the nineteenth century, *nā’ib* being generalized after the foundation of the Egyptian *Majlis al-shūrā al-nuwwāb* (consultative assembly of deputies) in 1866.<sup>35</sup>

Contrary to how scholarship generally viewed early Indian representatives as colonial informants, the interests that native *wakīls* were said to represent were clearly those of the Indian population. Sayyid Ahmad Khan and others in the 1860s–1880s, made clear that the representatives (*wakīls*) were those of “the country” (*mulk*),<sup>36</sup> “of a large number of men” (*bahut zyāda ashkhās ke*),<sup>37</sup> or sent to the authorities by “us” (*ham*).<sup>38</sup> The Urdu terminology thus clarifies that, from the Muslim elites’ perspective, Indian representatives had the primary function of representing the interests of and speaking for—not “of”—the Indian population. Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s conception of Indian representation conveyed by the concept of

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35. Gibb and Ayalon, “Nā’ib,” *Encyclopedia of Islam*; and Ayalon, *Language and Change in the Arab Middle East: The Evolution of Modern Political Discourse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 75–77.

36. Khan, “Polīṭikal umūr aur musalmān” [Political issues and Muslims], Lucknow speech, 28 December 1887, in *Khutbāt-e Sir Sayyid*, 7. I am using the English translation of the Lucknow speech of The Pioneer Press, ed., *Sir Syed Ahmed on the Present State of Indian Politics* (Allahabad: Pioneer Press, 1888), 1–24 provided online by F. W. Pritchett: [http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00islamlinks/txt\\_sir\\_sayyid\\_lucknow\\_1887.html](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00islamlinks/txt_sir_sayyid_lucknow_1887.html).

37. *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, 23 April 1888, 458.

38. Nawab Fateh Nawaz Jang, *Gulgasht-e farang* (Agra: Matba Mufeed-e Aam, n.d.), 95 trans. O. Khalidi, *An Indian Passage to Europe: The Travels of Fath Nawaz Jang* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

*wakālat* (or *niyābat*) evoked substantive activity, that is, representing as “acting for,”<sup>39</sup> albeit colonial authorities might have considered it as a “descriptive” presence (in which representatives reflect and sometimes supply information about constituents).<sup>40</sup>

Sayyid Ahmad Khan argued that, through proper representation, Indians had the power to impact colonial institutions. He did not consider nominated representatives to be passive or mere information givers. As Robinson showed, there was indeed room for a share of local power. Between 1868 and 1883, “non-official Indians were winning a real influence over local life,” though this was, of course, monitored.<sup>41</sup> In 1887, Sayyid Ahmad Khan asserted “we cannot say that we have no influence over the laws. This is unquestionable and beyond doubt.”<sup>42</sup> As representatives were considered actors, the quality of representation depended and was judged on their activeness. There was no tolerance for the passivity of the aristocrats unworthily sitting in the Council.<sup>43</sup> Already in December 1866, Aligarh’s founder criticized native members for not “opening their mouths at all or else making proposals that are useless

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39. Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation*, 114.

40. *Ibid.*, 81.

41. Francis Robinson, “Municipal Government and Muslim Separatism in the United Provinces, 1883 to 1916,” *Modern Asian Studies* 7, no. 3 (1973): 389–390, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X0000528X>

42. Khan, Lucknow Speech, 7n41.

43. *Ibid.*, 6.

to the welfare of the country,”<sup>44</sup> and later justified his own nomination as additional member (1878–1882) “by speaking practically on every important Bill.”<sup>45</sup>

Sayyid Ahmad Khan insisted on the competence of Indian representatives. Education became his main purpose—Mill also considered it a standard prerequisite for representative government and for the extension of the suffrage in Britain in 1861.<sup>46</sup> In 1864, during his speech at Ghazipur, Sayyid Ahmad Khan mentioned a conversation with the authorities that requested him “to tell if in every district such able men can be found who could enter the Council; if there are, we are willing to admit them.” He recognized that it was precisely the lack of education that prevented his countrymen from taking part in colonial institutions.<sup>47</sup> To participate in governance, Sayyid Ahmad Khan repeatedly argued, Indians needed to prove their capability and loyalty—here, loyalty meant implementing a friendly environment to voice constructive disagreement:

As far as you have made yourselves worthy of the confidence of Government, to that extent you have received high positions. Make yourselves her friends and prove to her that your friendship with her is like that of the English and the

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44. *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, 28 December 1866, 664 quoted by Sherwani, “The Political Thought of Sir Syed,” 313.

45. *Ibid.*, 318.

46. Mill, *Considerations*, chapter 8: “I regard it as wholly inadmissible that any person should participate in the suffrage without being able to read, write, and, I will add, perform the common operations of arithmetic.”

47. Khan, *Mukammal Majmū‘ah*, 20.

Scotch. After this what you have to claim, claim (*da'wā*)—on condition that you are qualified [*liyāqat*] for it.<sup>48</sup>

*Wakīls* needed to be *trustworthy* and competent. Yet, a good *wakīl* could not just be any qualified man for Sayyid Ahmad Khan: only noblemen could truly represent the Indian population. He made this clear as he opposed the demands of the newly founded Indian National Congress (INC) for competitive examinations in government service from 1887. The representative for Sayyid Ahmad Khan, as reflected by the vocabulary, looked for the welfare of the people in a fiduciary-like relationship. As a matter of fact, particularly in the case of unrestricted (*mutlaqa wakāla*) agency, the *wakīl* is free to act as he thinks best in his principal's interests, especially since the latter is generally considered incapable of acting for himself.<sup>49</sup> As a trustee, the *wakīl* works on a “free mandate.” Of course, he has an obligation to work in the *muwwakil*'s best interest, but he remains independent to make his own decisions.<sup>50</sup>

As political historians have emphasized, this vision of representation was influenced both by colonial approaches that highlighted the representative quality of “natural leaders,” and by Indo-Persian conceptions of secular authority and legitimacy. On one hand, Indian representation was mediated through the government's appreciation of who was most

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48. Khan, Meerut Speech, 48. English translation in *Sir Syed Ahmed on the Present State*, 29–53. Khan, *Mukammal Majmū'ah*, 27.

49. Pitkin thus described the model of trusteeship. Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation*, 128; Yves Sintomer, “Les sens de la représentation politique: usages et mésusages d'une notion,” *Raisons politiques* 50 (2013): 13–34, here 20, <https://doi.org/10.3917/rai.050.0013>.

50. Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation*, 128.

“representative.”<sup>51</sup> Colonial institutions endorsed the idea that there were in India “natural leaders,” usually the landed aristocracy, to which were added the emerging middle classes under Lord Ripon (1880–1884). They were appointed by nomination, most being “re-appointed year after year.”<sup>52</sup> As Jaby Mathew summarized, out of the forty-five nominated additional members from 1862 to 1892, the vast majority were native princes or land magnates.<sup>53</sup> British officials saw them as both representatives (/informants) and intermediaries who helped to exercise authority.

On the other hand, the former Mughal aristocracy was also steeped in Persianate norms of governance, which underlined the role of just rulers to maintain balance between different interest groups.<sup>54</sup> Since Sultan Ghiyas Uddin Balban (1266–1286), kings were considered “vice-regents” of God on earth (*nā'ib-e k̲hudā*), acting as intermediaries between God and the people. *Akhlāq* treatises like Nasir al-Din al-Tusi’s famous *Nasirean Ethics* (thirteenth century)—which influenced Mughal political ideology tremendously—conceived the ruler as a representative of his people in the sense that the ruler acted for their welfare, as God acted as *wakīl* for believers. Secular authority was ultimately provided from above but implied being

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51. Robert W. Stern, *Democracy and Dictatorship in South Asia: Dominant Classes and Political Outcomes in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh* (Westport: Praeger, 2001), 33.

52. Hugh Tinker, *The Foundations of Local Self-Government in India, Pakistan, and Burma* (London: The Athlone Press, 1954), 38 quoted by Mathew, “Representation in the Shadow,” 64.

53. *Ibid.*, 65.

54. Muzaffar Alam, “State Building under the Mughals: Religion, Culture and Politics,” *Cahiers d’Asie Centrale* 3/4 (1997): 105–128, here 117, <http://journals.openedition.org/asiacentrale/478>.

responsible and watching out for the interests of the population. Trust, or *tawakkul*, also traditionally described the relationship between a spiritual guide (*murshid*) seen as *wakīl* and his disciple (*murīd*) in Sufism—the absolute dependence and entrusting of the latter’s self to the former mirroring the believers’ complete reliance on God.<sup>55</sup>

Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s understanding of the role of the representative compared favorably with Burke’s trustee model. In Burke’s view, government was not “instituted to be a control *upon* the people . . . It was designed as a control *for* the people”<sup>56</sup> and, in that sense, was representative of their interests. In his speech to the electors of Bristol in 1774, the MP detailed his vision: “Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion.”<sup>57</sup> For Burke, “authority was based on some form of trust,” and he believed that the British government had

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55. For instance, Charles Lindholm, “Prophets and *Pirs*: Charismatic Islam in the Middle East and South Asia,” in *Embodying Charisma: Modernity, Locality and the Performance of Emotion in Sufi Cults*, ed. Helene Basu and Pnina Werbner (Routledge: London, 1998), 209–233, here 214; Leonard Lewisohn, “The Way of *Tawakkul*: The Ideal of ‘Trust in God’ in Classical Persian Sufism,” *Islamic Culture* LXXIII, no. 2 (April 1999): 27–62.

56. Edmund Burke, “Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents (1770),” paragraph 493. “The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke, vol. 1,” *Project Gutenberg*, <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/15043/pg15043-images.html> (accessed October 2021)

57. Burke, “Speech to the Electors of Bristol,” 3 November 1774. “The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke, vol. 1,” *Project Gutenberg*, <https://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/v1ch13s7.html> (accessed October 2021)

failed to “promote the welfare of the people” in India.<sup>58</sup> Sayyid Ahmad Khan knew Burke’s work,<sup>59</sup> and, like him, emphasized trust and rejected democratic mechanisms of accountability. Representatives did not represent the people as individual electors but as a collective entity: representation built on a different perception of what made authority. As Ananya Dasgupta has argued for the same period in Bengal, the claim to represent was based on “a principle of distinction—on social rank and moral worth” (linked to land property) and political sovereignty on the “dispensation of State patronage.”<sup>60</sup>

### **The Congress/Anti-Congress Dispute: “Politics of Ideas,” “Politics of Presence”**

While the Indian Councils Act of 1861 paved the way for native representation, Lord Ripon’s “Resolution on local self-government” in 1882 first introduced the elective principle in local bodies and municipalities (a portion of non-official members remained appointed by nomination).<sup>61</sup> The reforms addressed some of the issues raised by the English-educated Indian elites who had founded the INC to represent the interests of Indian subjects. The INC

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58. James Conniff, “Burke and India: The Failure of the Theory of Trusteeship,” *Political Research Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (1993): 291–306, here 306 and 293 respectively, <https://doi.org/10.2307/448889>.

59. Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Strictures upon the Present Educational System in India*, 1869 quoted in *The Aligarh Movement: Basic Documents: 1864–1898*, ed. M. Shan (New Delhi: Meenakshi Prakashan, 1978), 184.

60. Ananya Dasgupta, “Labors of Representation: Cultivating Land, Self, and Community among Muslims in Late Colonial Bengal” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2013), 62, 70.

61. Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism*, 110.

campaigns in the North-Western Provinces and Oudh in 1887–1888 led Sayyid Ahmad Khan to position himself clearly against the organization.<sup>62</sup> Some labeled his opposition to be the result of his “senility” (he was then seventy years old), of Theodore Beck’s influence, or of the government’s financial pressure.<sup>63</sup> But, clearly, Aligarh’s founder had reasons to be opposed to both demands for competitive examinations and for the introduction of elections: they directly threatened the political influence of Urdu-speaking *ashrāf* and the category of “natural leaders” as representatives of the population.

Although Congress leaders, like Allan Octavian Hume or Lajpat Rai, tried to convince Sayyid Ahmad Khan that his *Causes of the Indian Revolt* was their inspiration for the foundation of the INC in 1885,<sup>64</sup> the latter was utterly hostile to political agitation and to voting—especially if it included lower classes.<sup>65</sup> One of his main arguments was that the elective principle was detrimental to the welfare of the country—this, of course, is better understood if the people is assumed to be incapable of acting for themselves as the *wakīl-*

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62. Chris A. Bayly, *The Local Roots of Indian Politics: Allahabad, 1880–1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 122–133.

63. Hafeez Malik, “Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s Contribution to the Development of Muslim Nationalism in India,” *Modern Asian Studies* 4, no. 2 (1970): 129–147, here 141, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X00005096>; Muhammad Shan, *Sir Sayyid: tarīkhī-o siyāsī ā’īne meṇ* [Sir Sayyid: In history and politics] (Aligarh: Aligarh Book Depot, 1967), 87.

64. *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, 12 December 1887 quoted by Farooq A. Dar, “Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Hindu-Muslim Question in India,” *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan* 55, no. 2 (2018): 11–24, here 20; See also Rai, “Third Open Letter,” *The Collected Works*, 17.

65. Khan, Lucknow Speech, 12n41.

trustee model presupposed.<sup>66</sup> Despite his resistance, the 1883 Municipalities Act had given the vote to men whose income ranged from Rs. 120 to 500 or whose houses were valued from Rs. 12 to 60 (a very limited portion of the population).<sup>67</sup> This nonetheless gave room for greater participation and provided more power to the new commercial classes (especially Hindu moneylenders and traders) that were gaining prominence in the region. As Robinson showed, this was less the case in Awadh where landed interests crosscut religious affiliations.<sup>68</sup> In the North-Western Provinces, however, the interests between the landed and Indo-Persian service classes and the (Hindu) commercial classes collided. As a result, communal tension started to build in the Allahabad municipal board from the 1870s.<sup>69</sup>

The Congress/anti-Congress campaigns (1887–1888) constituted a high clashing point between two contrasting views on representation. Strikingly, it was also a time when the vocabulary of representation changed. The triumph of a more liberal democratic vision was reflected by the popular replacement of the term *wakīl* by *qā'im maqām* in the following years. While a *wakīl* worked for the interests of a principal, the *qā'im maqām* “stood in the place” of another—*qā'im* meaning “standing” and *maqām* “place,” *locum tenens* literally.<sup>70</sup> In the Ottoman Empire, from the fifteenth century, the title was given to a variety of officials.<sup>71</sup>

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66. Ibid., 25.

67. Robinson, “Municipal Government,” 395.

68. Ibid., 402. About the maintenance of cross-community alliances, see 406 and 409.

69. Ibid., 410 quotes Municipal B March 1888, 40.

70. “Qā'im maqām,” in *Urdū Luġhat: Tārīkhī uṣūl par* [Urdu dictionary on historical principles], vol. 14 (Karachi: Urdu Luġhat Board, 1992), 129.

71. E. Kuran and P. M. Holt, “Qā'im-Maqām,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 2012 (accessed October 2021).

Traditionally a *qā'im maqām* was a representative of the state at a local level. From the late 1880s, *qā'im maqām* in Urdu also meant the reverse. The term more accurately translated the changing political circumstances and especially the extension of the electoral system based on the division of geographical constituencies and wards, but it also reflected the intimate relationship between property and representation as the franchise was calculated through taxation.<sup>72</sup>

The precise way representatives acted as delegates who “stood for” their constituents, however, became the object of heated discussion. Those years provide us with two corpuses that gain from being put into dialogue as Vanya Bhargav showed: Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s speeches and Lajpat Rai’s “Open letters” to Sir Sayyid.<sup>73</sup> I have not been able to access the original Urdu, yet the translations still contain valuable information. In his letters, Lajpat Rai tried to demonstrate that Sayyid Ahmad Khan had operated a “miserable change”<sup>74</sup> from his earlier position in favor of Indian representation.<sup>75</sup> What the letters indicate is that the bone of contention laid in the concept of representation itself and the interpretation of the function of the representative. When Sayyid Ahmad Khan initially argued for the representative as a trustee, Lajpat Rai argued for the representative as a delegate. Instead of working independently on behalf of the population, Lajpat Rai’s representative was to convey their

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72. Dasgupta, “Labors of Representation,” 71.

73. Vanya V. Bhargav, “Letters to Sir Syed: Lajpat Rai’s Response to the Muslim Refusal of Minorityhood,” *Global Intellectual History* 7, no.6 (2022): 974–993, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23801883.2021.1939501>.

74. Rai, “First Open Letter,” *The Collected Works*, 4.

75. Bhargav, “Letters to Sir Syed,” 3.

voices accurately.<sup>76</sup> That the debate opposed two different visions of the representative materialized in the question of who was legitimate: the qualified nominated landlord or the elected middle-class man?

On one side, Aligarh's strategy to discredit the Congress's claims to representativeness was to point at the lack of participation of "natural leaders":

Now the noblemen of Oudh, Hindu, and Mahomedan, have declared against the Congress. Even the smaller among the Taluqdars have as many as 20,000 tenantry. Their tenantry look on them as their hereditary chiefs. We may therefore say that *the Taluqdars represent a larger number of men (bahut zyāda ashkhās ke wakīl haiñ)* than all the Congress-walas put together.<sup>77</sup>

Sayyid Ahmad Khan strove to collect signatures and public declarations of as many maharajas, rajas, and *talūqdārs* as possible.<sup>78</sup> He objected to Tyabji's use of the word "delegate" for Muslim participants in the Madras session of 1887, arguing that "in those districts from which they went, there were not among the Raises and influential Mahomedans,

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76. Rai, "First Open Letter," *The Collected Works*, 5: "How can the people of a country have their voice constantly heard if not through representatives?"

77. *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, 23 April 1888, 458. My emphasis.

78. See *Pamphlets Issued by the United Indian Patriotic Association, n°2: Showing the seditious character of the Indian National Congress* (Allahabad: United Indian Patriotic Association, 1888).

nor among the middle classes, ten men who knew what the National Congress was, nor who had elected whom.”<sup>79</sup>

On the other side, Lajpat Rai criticized Aligarh’s pretension to representativeness on the grounds that Indian representatives did not reflect the people’s opinions: “Could Raja Peary Mohan Mukerjee and other native members have consented to the raising of the Salt tax [1886], if they had thought that their seats depended on the voices of the people, whose throats were, so to speak, to be cut by that obnoxious and inhumane measure?”<sup>80</sup> One of the issues that Lajpat Rai raised was accountability—as political theorists highlight, a trustee model of representation is judged on outcomes and relies on trust.<sup>81</sup> So, if representatives worked on a free mandate for the welfare of the people, why did representation end up being harmful to them? As Hanna Pitkin and Suzanne Dovi both underlined, a representative cannot find himself “persistently at odds with the wishes of the represented without good reason in terms of their interest,”<sup>82</sup> otherwise he is just exercising “mere authority.”<sup>83</sup>

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79. “Sir Syed Ahmed’s reply to Mr. Budruddin Tyabji,” *Sir Syed Ahmed on the Present State*, 54–62.

80. Rai, “Second Open Letter,” *The Collected Works*, 10.

81. See, for instance, Justin Fox and Kenneth W. Shotts, “Delegates or Trustees? A Theory of Political Accountability,” *Journal of Politics* 71, no. 4 (2009): 1225–1237, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022381609990260>; William T. Bianco, *Trust: Representatives and Constituents* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

82. Suzanne Dovi, “Hanna Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation*,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Classics in Contemporary Political Theory*, ed. J. T. Levy (Oxford University Press, 2015), [3. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198717133.013.24](https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198717133.013.24)

83. Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation*, 210.

For Lajpat Rai, representation implied reflecting the constituents. And, surely, a way to ensure that representatives reflected them accurately was through elections. Official nomination was branded a “downright farce.”<sup>84</sup> Democratic representation in British India (as was the case in the metropole) was increasingly understood as “standing for”: the emphasis was put less on the activity of representation per se and more on the mission to reflect and represent the constituents, that is, make them present.<sup>85</sup> Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s aristocratic-trustee model of representation was rapidly crumbling under the weight of the new reforms and could no longer prevail over the delegate model. This explains his shift in those years from emphasizing cross-community landed interests to increasingly pushing for Muslim communal representation. Even as the delegate model imposed itself, Lajpat Rai’s and Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s visions collided.

Scholarship most clearly focused on the issue of minorityhood and described Aligarh’s position as “a descriptive and community-based notion of representation.”<sup>86</sup> Descriptive representation, as Pitkin theorized, is the way representatives reflect constituents by virtue of resemblance, sharing the same characteristics, like a mirror;<sup>87</sup> and, indeed, “in contexts of distrust,” minorities and disadvantaged groups often prefer to implement such type of

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84. Bhargav, “Letters to Sir Syed,” 8.

85. Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation*, 11.

86. Faisal Devji, *Muslim Zion: Pakistan as a Political Idea* (London: Hurst & Company, 2013), 54; Bhargav, “Letters to Sir Syed,” 13.

87. Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation*, 61.

representation.<sup>88</sup> It is difficult to argue that Sayyid Ahmad Khan did not consider numbers or the threat of majoritarianism, but I suggest that it was not the only thing at stake. Through his claim for Muslim particularism, he was also trying to preserve ingrained principles of authority.

Here, Anne Phillips's distinction between "politics of ideas" and "politics of presence" is most useful. In "politics of ideas"—the Congress position—diversity is considered primarily in terms of opinions and, accordingly, accountability is measured by how accurately opinions are reflected.<sup>89</sup> The question of resemblance between representative and represented is located at the level of ideas, not at the level of the group's composition or characteristics. The result is that "politics of ideas" operates an important shift of emphasis "from *who* the politicians are to *what* (preferences, ideas) they represent."<sup>90</sup> "Where such processes are successful," Phillips continues, "they reduce the discretion and autonomy of individual representatives; in the process, they seem to minimize the importance of who these individuals might be."<sup>91</sup> For Sayyid Ahmad Khan, the idea that virtually anyone could work as a representative was abhorrent: who the representative was certainly not a small matter. Besides the importance of avoiding the Muslims' political exclusion, he also wanted to secure direct access to power for traditional elites.

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88. See, for instance, Jane Mansbridge, "Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent 'Yes,'" in *Women, Gender, and Politics: A Reader*, ed. M. L. Krook and S. Childs (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 205.

89. Anne Phillips, *The Politics of Presence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1.

90. *Ibid.*, 4.

91. *Ibid.*

Increasingly from the late 1860s, Sayyid Ahmad Khan started focusing on the interests of north Indian Muslims. The bitter Hindi-Urdu controversy that tore the Indo-Muslim intelligentsia apart was getting more intense. Already in 1868, influential Hindi supporters—among them Raja Shiva Prasad—asked that the *devanāgarī* script replace *nasta‘līq* in law courts. This sapped Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s efforts to secure government jobs for Urdu-speaking elites. While in his 1880s speeches, Aligarh’s founder wished for an alliance between Hindu and Muslim landed and service classes,<sup>92</sup> it was also clear by then that he did not believe that such an alliance was still viable.<sup>93</sup> He did not trust cross-community representation to be possible or beneficial.<sup>94</sup> Lajpat Rai’s last letter expressly complained about his emphasis on “the Muslim community”: “Then, again, when were you inspired with the idea that the Hindu and the Mahomedan interests are sure to clash . . .? Because up to 1884 you believed in the doctrine of Hindus and Mahomedans having one and the same political interests, and being the members of one and the same nation.”<sup>95</sup>

The perception that Muslims represented a distinct class of interests concurred with colonial epistemologies, which considered Indian society to be constituted of different interest groups delineated according to caste and religious heritage rather than to territory. Muslims

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92. Khan, Lucknow Speech, 17; Khan, Meerut Speech, 35.

93. See his discussion with Shakespeare, Commissioner of Banaras, in the late 1860s: Hali, *Hayat-e Jawed*, 77.

94. See “Sir Syed Ahmed’s reply to Mr. Budruddin Tyabji.”

95. Rai, “Fourth Open Letter,” *The Collected Works*, 24.

were officially recognized as a distinct category—despite their many internal divisions.<sup>96</sup> As David Gilmartin notes, religion was seen as a form “of ‘ethnic’ identity—an identity unconnected with the assertion of any religious principles for individual behaviour or for the definition of the larger political system.”<sup>97</sup> Since 1881, colonial censuses provided all-India statistics about Muslims, which Sayyid Ahmad Khan dearly considered. “The Muslim community,” however, was very much in the making.<sup>98</sup> Emphasizing Muslims as a separate interest group, however, could (and did) guarantee that north Indian *ashrāf* would remain the leaders of a substantial portion of the population.<sup>99</sup> Nonetheless, “politics of presence” also risked maintaining Muslims in a “game in which Hindus have four dice and us only one.”<sup>100</sup>

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96. See for instance *HC Deb 06 June 1861 vol 163 cc633-47*, 634,

<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1861/jun/06/leave-first-reading> (accessed October 2021).

97. David Gilmartin, “‘Divine Displeasure’ and Muslim Elections: The Shaping of Community in Twentieth-Century Punjab,” in *The Political Inheritance of Pakistan*, ed. D. A. Low (London: Macmillan, 1991), 106–129, here 111.

98. As Mansbridge noted “the process of representation can call into being aspects of an individual or collective self that did not earlier exist.” Jane Mansbridge, “The Evolution of Political Representation in Liberal Democracies: Concepts and Practices,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Representation in Liberal Democracies*, ed. R. Rohrschneider and J. Thomassen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 17–54, here 18.

99. Devji, *Muslim Zion*, 51; Hilal Ahmed, “Debating Muslim political representation,” *Redrawing Boundaries* (2008), [https://www.india-seminar.com/2008/586/586\\_hilal\\_ahmed.htm](https://www.india-seminar.com/2008/586/586_hilal_ahmed.htm) (accessed October 2021)

100. Khan, Lucknow Speech, 16.

### **The Simla Deputation and the Institutionalization of the “Politics of Presence”**

Communal tension culminated with the Nagri Resolution (1900), which endorsed the use of *devanāgarī* in the administration and accentuated the needs for Aligarh leaders to create a political organization. The discussion on the participation of Muslims in the political agitation of the INC and on the necessity of community-based electorates initiated by Sayyid Ahmad Khan continued to divide opinion. In December 1900, a dispute unfolded in the *Pioneer* between the pro-Congress Indian journalist Alfred Nundy and various “Old Party” Aligarh supporters and leaders. As “men of property and influence”<sup>101</sup>—mostly land magnates—the latter depended on government leniency and were adamant about loyalty. Alfred Nundy’s first letter, which opened with the assertion that Muslims were increasingly sympathetic to the agitation of the Congress and contributed “substantial donations”<sup>102</sup> to that effect was unsurprisingly contested by “Old Party” leaders who argued that loyalty and separate Muslim representation were necessary, thereby clinging to Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s principles.

One interesting element of reflection emerged in the correspondence. In his refutation of Nundy’s letter, Theodore Morrison argued against representative government since India was composed of “distinct and sometimes antagonistic nationalities,” following Mill’s recommendations. Only once the “fusion” between the different “races” was complete would representative government be truly conceivable. But, he argued, in the present situation

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101. Robinson, *Separatism among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces’ Muslims, 1860–1923* (1974; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 176.

102. Letter from Alfred Nundy to the *Pioneer*, in *The Indian Muslims: A Documentary Record (1900–1947)*, vol. 1, ed. Muhammad Shan (Meerut: Meenakshi Prakashan, 1983), 3.

“parties will inevitably be formed upon the lines of racial and religious antipathy.”<sup>103</sup> To this, Nundy was quick to react, saying that “the best theories are contradicted by facts”<sup>104</sup> and that there were several examples of cross-religious representation, notably in Cuttack (Orissa) where Hindus had elected a Christian representative for several years in a row.<sup>105</sup>

The difficult “fusion”—the erosion of group differences—for conventional representative democracy is indeed a potential pitfall of the “politics of presence” when applied to non-class interests. In her seminal work, Phillips traced the emergence of “politics of presence” to the late nineteenth-century European movement for the representation of labor. The movement addressed class difference, which, for liberals, could be “discounted” or, for socialists, would gradually fade away through democratic processes.<sup>106</sup> But a problem arises when the group differences represented through presence are not up for obliteration: a Muslim might never want to stop being a Muslim; a Dalit will likely never stop being a Dalit. If group differences ever remain, then how is such “fusion” possible or even desirable?

In any case, as Judith Brown noted, still after the 1909 reforms, Indian representation in British India did not aim at reflecting citizens equally “as in a simple territorial franchise” but distinct group interests.<sup>107</sup> As such, the argument that “our Hindu brothers do not like to see a Muslim as their representative” was persuasive. Even in the case a Muslim representative was elected by Hindus, the *Aligarh Institute Gazette* added that the latter made sure to secure the

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103. Letter from Theodore Morrison to the *Pioneer*, in *The Indian Muslims*, 9.

104. Letter from Alfred Nundy to the *Pioneer*, in *The Indian Muslims*, 11.

105. Ibid.

106. Phillips, *The Politics of Presence*, 8.

107. Judith Brown, *Modern India: The Origins of an Asian Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 149.

election of “some Muslim who, instead of benefiting Muslims, harms them.”<sup>108</sup> To mitigate risks of misrepresentation, only Muslims should be able to elect Muslim representatives.

Already in 1896, the Anglo-Oriental Defence Association of Aligarh asked for reserved seats, weightage, and separate electorates in the Legislative Council and in the local bodies of the North-Western Provinces.<sup>109</sup> Those demands were formally presented at Shimla in 1906, as new reforms were envisaged for the extension of the franchise.

Political historians of British India have thoroughly discussed the significance of the Simla Deputation for the recognition of Muslims as a distinct political community, which materialized in the provisions of the Indian Councils Act of 1909 that guaranteed separate electorates and weightage on account of their “political importance” thus evading the mere rule of numbers. Critics highlighted the unrepresentativeness of the Deputation, which did not reflect the younger generation,<sup>110</sup> or Muslim minorities, particularly Shias.<sup>111</sup> Yet, as Shaikh highlighted, the claims brought forward “were congruent with colonial policy and official notions of representation.”<sup>112</sup> More broadly, the Deputation showed that its leaders were

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108. *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, 3 October 1906, 6

109. Matiur Rahman, “The All India Muslim League in Indian Politics, 1906–1912” (PhD School of Oriental and African Studies, 1968), 24–25 quotes *The Pioneer*, 22 December 1896.

110. *Awadh Akhbar* (Lucknow) in *Selections from the Native Newspapers published in the United Provinces, received up to 13th October 1906*, 41, 689–690.

111. The editor of the *Gauhar-i Shahwar* (Lucknow) in *Selections from the Native Newspapers published in the United Provinces, received up to 20th October 1906*, 42, 707.

112. Shaikh, *Community and Consensus*, 160. See also Francis Robinson, “The Memory of Power, Muslim ‘Political Importance’ and the Muslim League,” in *The Muslim World in*

determined to put the emphasis back on who was representative. The memorial in Urdu juxtaposed several terms for representation, resorting to *qā'im maqāmi-o niyābat* as well as, again, to *wakālat*.<sup>113</sup> The vocabulary demonstrated that Sayyid Ahmad Khan's three-decades-old concept of representation was still very much alive. The memorialists indeed claimed that Indian Muslims were endowed with particular authoritative qualities (with “natural leadership”) that justified a greater share of political presence.<sup>114</sup> The trustee model had continued to influence the concept for the “Old Party,” along with their reluctance to embrace democratic accountability.

The Morley-Minto reforms of 1909 abolished official majority in provincial legislatures and raised the number of Indian (non-official) members through (mostly indirect) elections—the franchise still only included less than 3 percent of the population—but the greater share given to Muslims raised the specter of a Hindu majority being vulnerable to an oligarchic Muslim minority<sup>115</sup> and generated greater communal tensions in municipal boards. “The communal attitudes previously confined to some West UP and Doab towns, now, by means of the electoral machinery of the reformed councils, percolated throughout the province.”<sup>116</sup> It was increasingly felt, and made explicit, that Muslims should keep to the separate electorate

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*Modern South Asia: Power, Authority, Knowledge* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2020), 293–295.

113. “Simla Memorial (Urdu),” in *Muslim League Documents 1900–1947*, vol. 1, ed. S. Mujahid (Karachi: Qaid-e Azam Academy, 1990), 139, 140, and 143.

114. Shaikh, *Community and Consensus*, 136, also 141.

115. Letter from Alfred Nundy to the *Pioneer*, in *The Indian Muslims*, 5. See also Memorandum by the Hon'ble Nawab Ali Chaudhuri, in *The Indian Muslims*, vol. 5, 98.

116. Robinson, “Municipal Government,” 419.

only.<sup>117</sup> As the English weekly *Comrade*, an organ of the new generation of Muslim political leaders, however complained in 1911: “If the Muhammadans are entirely confined to their own special constituencies, it is most probable that there will be no opportunity in the future of testing the question whether Muhammadans can secure adequate representation in a mixed electorate.”<sup>118</sup>

### **New Political Leadership, New Values**

Separate representation endorsed by the 1909 reforms prompted the expansion of Muslim politics.<sup>119</sup> In the following years, dissatisfaction with state policies increased among the Muslim middle classes. The loyalty of the “Old Party” no longer paid off for “Young Party” Muslims who usually earned their bread through low-paid government service and considered themselves the “poorer section of the community.”<sup>120</sup> The period was characterized by a struggle for leadership within the newly founded All India Muslim League (AIML, f. 1906), which eventually resulted in the success of the “Young Party” in 1916.<sup>121</sup>

Liberalism and the progressive constitutional changes toward greater popular political involvement that were spreading in the West and in the Middle East energized the new generation of educated Indian elites. *The Comrade* eagerly reported on the success of Young Turks: “despotism has been shaken and destroyed. . . . The choice means, finally, the

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117. Ibid., 417.

118. “Muslim Representation,” *Comrade*, 10 June 1911, 423.

119. Robinson, *Separatism*, 175.

120. Ibid., 178.

121. See Ibid., 194–236. The transfer of the League organization from Aligarh to Lucknow, and the secretaryship of Wazir Hasan from 1912 accelerated the process (Ibid., 227).

recognition of a popular era.”<sup>122</sup> With the success of the Swadeshi movement and the subsequent annulment of the Partition of Bengal in 1911, there was increasing enthusiasm for mass political participation in British India. While Dasgupta emphasized the important role of *anjumans* such as the *Anjuman-e ‘ulamā-e Bangālā* in the dissemination of democratic politics, the movement was broader.<sup>123</sup> New progressive reforms within the AIML in 1911 aimed at “including the common man (*ma ‘mūlī ādmī*).”<sup>124</sup> When membership was previously restricted to prosperous individuals, changes in 1913 expanded the central League body and reduced membership subscription fees to make way for “a new social demographic.”<sup>125</sup>

The questions of local autonomy and popular sovereignty were on the table since Lord Crewe’s November 1911 *Despatch* aroused a hope for greater devolution of power. The Congress and the League both started claiming the right to self-government and direct elections. At the twenty-ninth session of the INC in December 1914, Babu Surendranath Banerjea put forward a Resolution for self-government understood as “government given to the people.”<sup>126</sup> He continued, “Brother delegates, ladies and gentlemen, the signs and the portents of the times are in our favour; civilised humanity is with us; the blessings of mankind follow us; the world forces are arrayed in our favour. The whole air is surcharged with the

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122. *The Comrade*, 24 August 1912, 185.

123. Dasgupta, “Labors of Representation,” 78.

124. *Ibid.*, 229, see also “Muslim League kī Iṣlāḥ,” *Madīnah, Bijnor*, 1 May 1912.

125. Maya Tudor, *The Promise of Power: The Origins of Democracy in India and Autocracy in Pakistan* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 64.

126. *Report of the 29th Indian National Congress held at Madras on the 28th, 29th and 30th December 1914* (Madras: Thompson and Co, 1915), 101.

spirit of liberty. Ireland has got her Home Rule.”<sup>127</sup> As Gilmartin illustrated, the concept of popular sovereignty which built on “an idealized vision of the autonomous individual, capable of providing reasoned consent” spread from Britain to India.<sup>128</sup> Voting was considered a free and individual act that was to be protected from “undue influence.” It is symptomatic that, in August 1912, when it solicited public opinion on the Muslim University Scheme, *The Comrade* assured its readers that “the names of the voters will, under no circumstances, be disclosed *if secrecy is desired*,”<sup>129</sup> thus encouraging the practice of secret ballot that had been introduced in Britain in 1872 to prevent electoral corruption and limit the influence of landlords.

In that context, and as World War I started, further political reforms in the municipalities were announced. In 1915, when the official Urdu translation of the Resolution on Local Self-Government was issued, the new term *numā'indah* appeared and since then gained prominence in the vocabulary of political representation in Urdu.<sup>130</sup> While the *Aligarh Institute Gazette* still talked about representatives as *qā'im maqāms* two weeks prior, on 5 May 1915 the government representative was now called a *numā'indah*—the term *niyābat* also appeared when discussing minority representation.<sup>131</sup> Urdu writers and journalists picked

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127. Ibid., 104.

128. Gilmartin, “Voting, Religion, and the People’s Sovereignty,” 307.

129. *The Comrade*, 24 August 1912, 186.

130. This is at least the first occurrence that I have identified. *Resolution by the Government of India*, Dept of Education, n°55–77 (Municipalities), 28 April 1915, partly reproduced in Urdu in “Local Self-Government: Government-e Hind kā Resolution,” *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, 5 May 1915, 6–9.

131. Ibid., 8.

it up in the following months and *numā'indah* soon became the accepted denomination for a representative in general. The *Urdu Dictionary of Historical Principles* dated the first occurrence in 1922, but the word had already been adopted and popularized in 1915–1916.<sup>132</sup>

This time, the change in vocabulary truly reflected a transformation of the very concept of representation, with new ideas on popular sovereignty, civil rights, and democratic participation. The 1915 Resolution indeed proposed “expand[ing] the electoral element in the constitution of local bodies” and “allow[ing] local bodies more ample control over budgets,” so to “mark a real and immediate extension of the principles of local self-government.”<sup>133</sup> It encouraged the number of elected non-officials to supersede the number of official and nominated members—in the United Provinces, the number of elected non-officials then did not yet surpass twenty of eighty-four members.<sup>134</sup>

Derivations from the Persian suffix *numā* for “showing, indicating” in Urdu were plenty,<sup>135</sup> but *numā'indah* (literally the shower, the exhibitor) was new. It was directly borrowed from Persian. It is noteworthy that *numā'indah* was the term used for political representatives in the decisive Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906. After a year of protests, Mozaffar ad-Din Shah Qajar (1853–1907) eventually accepted the creation of

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132. Abdul G. Khan, *Naqsh-e Farang* (Lahore: Darul Ishaat Punjab, 1924), 15. See “numā'indah,” in *Urdū Luġhat*, vol. 20, 421.

133. *Indian Local Self-Government Policy, 1915. Being a Resolution Issued by the Governor General in Council on the 28<sup>th</sup> April 1915* (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1915), 4.

134. *Ibid.*, 6.

135. For instance, *numā'ish* (a show), *numā'ish-gāh* (a museum), etc., see J. T. Platts, *A Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi, and English* (London: W.H. Allen & Co, 1884), 1153.

National Consultative Assembly (*Majlis-i Shūrā-yi Millī*) and the drafting of a constitution in 1906, followed by the 1907 Supplementary Fundamental Laws.<sup>136</sup> As Janet Afary remarked, “the limits that the Majles had imposed on the Shah, as well as the new discourse of justice, liberty, and equality, would create a tremendous paradigm shift in early twentieth-century Iran.”<sup>137</sup> Drafted on the model of the 1831 Belgian constitution and on the Ottoman and Bulgarian constitutions, the Iranian constitution significantly reduced the Shah’s authority and made his ministers accountable to the new representative body.<sup>138</sup> A wind of revolution was blowing toward popular sovereignty. The first Iranian election of July 1906 was, despite limited franchise, seen as a momentum for democratic politics.<sup>139</sup> The adoption of *numā’indah* in Urdu was, I argue, directly linked to the embracing of democratic values and to a clear distancing from the aristocratic concept of representation of the “Old Party.”

In March 1916, in an article using the new term, the paper *Madīnah* (Bijnor) specifically wished that an expanded franchise and reforms in the system of voting would complicate the

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136. The Constitution of 1906 and the Supplements can be accessed in English and Farsi: <https://fis-iran.org/fa/document/iran-1906-constitution/>. About the history of the events leading to the Constitution, see Mangol Bayat, *Iran’s First Revolution: Shi’ism and the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–1909* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

137. Janet Afary, “Civil liberties and the Making of Iran’s First Constitution,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25, no. 2 (2005): 341–359, here 345, <https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/186819>.

138. Eric Massie and Janet Afary, “Iran’s 1907 Constitution and Its Sources: A Critical Comparison,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 46, no. 3 (2019): 464–480, here 468, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2018.1425607>.

139. Afary, “Civil Liberties,” 344.

traditional workings of local power hierarchies. It complained: “when there are two names in front of one voter (*rā’e-dene wālā*), the latter always wishes for the election of the individual with whom he has some connection (*ta’lluq*), even though he considers that the other individual is more able.”<sup>140</sup> The paper aspired to greater transparency and to the exercise of individual free will. Nonetheless, it also appeared that election was perceived as selection (the Urdu *intikhāb* indeed meant both) in which the moral qualities of representatives were valued: “those people who want to take the government of the country in their own hands first need to inspect their own self (*zāt*);”<sup>141</sup> a man who cannot manage his own affairs would not be able to manage the country. In any case, *numā’indah* reflected the ideal that, through direct elections and democratic political participation, traditional structures of power could be challenged, as was increasingly the case outside of South Asia.

In the early 1910s, new ideas, and new alliances, were set in motion. Yet, as Gilmartin noted, the gradual introduction of elections in colonial India also “brought a structure of tensions relating to the nature of sovereignty (and to its religious framings) and the nature of the individual self.”<sup>142</sup> Separate Muslim representation and electorates further accentuated those tensions. In 1912, Abul Kalam Azad (1888–1958), Congress member and later one of the leaders of the Khilafat Movement (1919–1924), insisted that focusing on communal matters prevented the development of unifying democratic ideals. About Muslim separate representation, he criticized, “‘The number of Muslims is lower.’ ‘Self-government will be

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140. “Siyāsī irtiqā” [Political development], *Madīnah*, 1 March 1916 reproduced in *Intikhāb-e Madīnah Bijnor* [Selections of Madinah, Bijnor], ed. S. M. Aqil Rizvi (Lucknow: Urdu Academy, 1977), 21.

141. *Ibid.*, 20.

142. Gilmartin, “Voting, Religion, and the People’s Sovereignty,” 311.

Hindu government.’ ‘Hindus will crush Muslims.’ ‘Muslims will always remain slaves and servants.’ If this mentality is still in order, then let it remain! You find slavery (*ghulamī*) so charming that, God willing, He will indeed keep you in that state.”<sup>143</sup> The “balkanization” of politics, Phillips argued, is indeed one of the main objections to the “politics of presence,” along with the issues of accountability and of “implausible essentialism” (as if all Muslims share the same interests),<sup>144</sup> which INC leaders had addressed since the late 1880s. Rather than intensifying divisions within Indian society, new political leadership focused on freedom from foreign oppression and self-government. In Indian matters, they asserted that they should be Indians first.<sup>145</sup>

Interestingly, however, the 1915 reforms did not discuss separate electorates for Muslims. It created public outcry and endangered the rapprochement between the League and the Congress. As Syed Ali Nabi, president of the UP Muslim League, wrote in October 1915: “there has never been such a consensus of opinion among all the Musalmans on any political question.”<sup>146</sup> To protect the new AIML-INC alliance, separate Muslim representation was

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143. See *Al Hilāl*, 27 July 1912, 1, 3, 2–3 quoted by Nishat Qaiyoom, “Maulana Azad’s Journalistic Crusade Against Colonialism,” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 73 (2012): 678–685, here 683, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44156263>.

144. Phillips, *The Politics of Presence*, 22.

145. Maulana Mohammed Ali’s speech at the Round Table Conference, 19 November 1930, from Gulam Allana, *Pakistan Movement Historical Documents* (Karachi: University of Karachi, n.d. [1969]), 61–75:  
[http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00islamlinks/txt\\_muhammadali\\_1930.html](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00islamlinks/txt_muhammadali_1930.html).

146. S. Ali Nabi to Secretary, Government of UP, 19 October 1915, Municipal 1915, 230 E n°58 quoted by Robinson, “Municipal Government,” 431.

accepted by all parties and introduced in the Municipalities Bill in December 1915.<sup>147</sup> The famous Lucknow Pact of 1916 later guaranteed the maintenance of separate electorates for Muslims, after much debate on the proportion of Muslim representation.<sup>148</sup> Even as “Young Party” leaders appealed for Hindu-Muslim cooperation, Muslim separate representation was no longer negotiable. The measure perpetuated the “problematic relationship of individual autonomy and religious community.”<sup>149</sup>

It is difficult to gauge if and to what extent the term of *numā'indah* in Urdu could have in turn influenced understandings of representation. From the Persian verb *namūdan* “to show,” *numā'indah*—*numā'indagī* for representation—etymologically refers to display.<sup>150</sup> It compared with the artistic connotations of the English, which evokes visual art and a sense of sameness. A representative (*numā'indah*) takes on the meaning of a typical specimen of a group, which exhibits its most common characteristics.<sup>151</sup>

In 1919, the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms brought greater power to the provinces and introduced direct elections all the way from local to national legislatures,<sup>152</sup> and maintained

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147. Ibid., 435.

148. Robinson, *Separatism*, 258.

149. Gilmartin, “Voting, Religion, and the People’s Sovereignty,” 326.

150. John T. Platts, *A Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi, and English* (London: W. H. Allen & Co, 1884), 1153.

151. See the example given in Anne Phillips Griffiths and Richard Wollheim, “Symposium: How Can One Person Represent Another?,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 34, (1960): 187–224, 188, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4106658>.

152. Niraja Gopal Jayal, “Introduction: Situating Indian Democracy,” in *Democracy in India*, ed. N. Gopal Jayal (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1–49, here 21.

separate electorates for Muslims. As scholars have highlighted, this led to the emergence of competing Muslim parties and “gave space for the conflation of religious community and politics and for voting as a ritual symbol affiliation to a specific community.”<sup>153</sup> Election contests increasingly resembled “public rituals” that built on visual religious symbols and “dramatized visions of community,” despite official attempts at limiting the “corrupt exercise of ‘undue [spiritual] influence.’”<sup>154</sup> Maybe the term *numā’indagī* facilitated such understandings and played a role the elaboration of Indian elections into what some have characterized as “a political festival incorporating the elements of planning, pilgrimage, procession.”<sup>155</sup>

## Conclusion

The history of political representation in British India was accompanied by a history of shifting Urdu terminology and concepts that developed in dialogue with the West and the Middle East. The aristocratic concept of representation as trusteeship (*wakālat*) in Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s mid-nineteenth century writings had an enduring impact on the politics of the “Old Party” who claimed a greater share of Muslim political representation in 1906 and founded the AIML to protect traditional authority (that related to land property) against the extension of the franchise. Indian political participation in British India remained tied to a conception of representation to protect distinct group interests. The endorsement of separate

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153. Gilmartin, “Divine Displeasure,” 111.

154. Ibid.

155. Walter Hauser and Wendy Singer, “The Democratic Rite: Celebration and Participation in the Indian Elections,” *Far Eastern Survey* 26, no. 9 (1957): 941–958, here 942, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2644082>.

electorates for Muslims responded to colonial perceptions of Indian society, but, as I have argued, the “politics of presence” of Sayyid Ahmad Khan and his followers also translated a quest for political power, which was partially secured by the Indian Councils Act of 1909.

At the turn of the twentieth century, ideological change was conspicuous in the wake of the First Iranian Constitution of 1906, which had forcefully eroded monarchy in favor of democracy, and of the Young Turks Revolution of 1908, which very much inspired “Young Party” Muslims. The concept of *numā’indagī*, borrowed from Persian in 1915, enshrined those new democratic values, which challenged traditional power hierarchies as political institutions gradually worked at implementing local self-government and popular sovereignty. In 1922, Abul Kalam Azad argued that Islam was originally a democratic republican government in which the caliph—as representative of the people (not of God)—was selected through collective consensus: “an assertion of human rights 1100 years before the French Revolution.”<sup>156</sup> During the most “genuine” (*khālis*) period of the Prophet and first four successors, the elected caliph lived the simple life of common men; only later was the system corrupted and autocracy established. As Azad strikingly argued, “there is no difference between a foreign oppressive government and one’s own oppressive government.”<sup>157</sup> For many of the new generation, the aristocratic concept of representation was depicted as against Islamic principles.

*Numā’indagī* conveyed the ideals of equality, civil rights, and freedom but could also accredit the perception that the relationship between representative and represented was one of sameness, or that representation somehow involved visual display. Although in 1912 and

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156. Essay dated 11 January 1922, Calcutta, Presidency Jail, Alipur in Abul Kalam Azad, *Qaul-e Faiṣal* (Calcutta: Al Balagh Press, 192?), 51.

157. *Ibid.*, 62.

1913, Mohammad Ali Jinnah described separate electorates for Muslims as a “hateful necessity,”<sup>158</sup> a temporary measure to allow the “evolution of a common Indian nationality,”<sup>159</sup> the idea that only Muslims could represent Muslim ended up being the way Muslim representation was mainly understood—albeit sometimes contested. From the mid-1920s, Indian political life fractured again along communal lines after the failure of the non-cooperation and Khilafat movements. The period then witnessed the emergence of several Muslim parties that, through election campaigns, further commingled political and religious community.

**Eve Tignol** is CNRS Research Fellow at the Institute of Asian Studies in Marseille. [ORCID:](#) 0000-0002-9800-2121 E-mail: [eve.tignol@cnrs.fr](mailto:eve.tignol@cnrs.fr)

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158. “All-India Muslim League, Fifth Session, March 3–4, 1912,” in *Foundations of Pakistan: All-India Muslim League Documents, 1906–1947*, ed. S. Sharifuddin Pirzada (Islamabad: National Pub. House, 2007), 208–243, here 243.

159. “Mohammad Shafi’s Presidential Address, March 22–23, 1913,” in *Foundations of Pakistan*, 253–254.