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## Information and Idioms in Circulation: Engaging the Minority Classification in 1930s India

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### Abstract

Several studies have shown how a system of social classifications influenced the bureaucracy of British India when dealing with Indian society on a day-to-day basis. We know less, however, about how representatives of Indian society engaged such classifications and the information accompanying it to advance their own political agendas. This article examines how the classification of “minorities,” along with data connected to it, impacted discourse of Indian political actors in the early 1930s. The article presents a novel method to analyse first-person speech for themes and information content. It then applies the method to interventions by Indian delegates to the Subcommittee on Minorities of the India Round Table Conference, held in London, 1930–2. The article places the empirical investigation within a conceptual frame inspired by Ian Hacking’s “looping effect.” Hacking attempts to capture how those classified negotiate imposed designations to advance agendas beneficial to themselves. The following study shows how Indian delegates engaged minority classification in a variety of ways in their political argumentation. The study also shows how information related to the minority classification was “looped” in speech by Indian actors to advance political claims and consolidate identities.

**Keywords:** Social classification; imperial bureaucracy; looping effect; political debate; discourse analysis

### Introduction

A system of social classifications, which was introduced by the British in India from the late eighteenth century onwards, shaped colonial perceptions of Indian society. Classes of castes, tribes, languages, religions, etc., were invented or reused to make an alien social universe intelligible, from a British point of view. Social classes rather than individuals became the fundamental principle, which structured the colonial administration’s relations to Indian society. No matter if the issue concerned collection of land revenue, recruitment to the British Indian army, or enrolment in English medium primary education—the system of social classes guided policy.<sup>1</sup> These routine classificatory practices were in no way restricted only to British India but were upheld across British—as well as other European imperial powers’—territories.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sanjay Seth, *Subject Lessons: The Western Education of Colonial India* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, *Define and Rule: Native as Political Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012).

The implementation of this system of social classifications was accompanied by massive collection of information. Censuses, surveys, and other forms of fact finding were carried out on local, provincial, and “all-India” levels on an accelerating scale from the early 1860s. Information attached to the classifications became indispensable in the making of colonial perceptions of Indian society.<sup>3</sup>

Systematic classification and enumeration by the British administration also had an effect in Indian society, enabling a “reconstitution of the ontology of identities,” to use Sudipta Kaviraj’s expression. While people in India had a clear understanding of how to determine the identities of individuals, they did not have at their disposal “a map of identities.”<sup>4</sup> Classification combined with enumeration made communities aware of their relative size and geographical distribution in contrast to other communities, Kaviraj suggests. This relational and statistically underpinned dimension of identity was given an explicit political edge with the introduction of an element of communal representation in the political system of British India during the first decades of the twentieth century.

The relational aspect and political dimension of identity was embodied in a classification, which was added late to political vocabularies in British India: “minorities.” The new classification placed itself at the heart of modern politics in India, as it had elsewhere. It was “essentially tied up with ideas about nations, populations, representation, and enumeration.”<sup>5</sup> In Europe, the minority classification took shape under the pressures of democratisation, migration, nationalism, and nation-state formation. It gained traction in the early 1900s but was more clearly pronounced in the 1920s and 1930s, following the First World War and the formation of the League of Nations.<sup>6</sup>

The content of international minority debates was not fully translatable to the dynamics of India under British administration. Even in India, however, the classification was connected to possibilities of enlarged franchise, limited representation in political assemblies, and extended legal provisions. Unsurprisingly, British India policy did not anchor these new possibilities in universal suffrage or citizenship, but in the system of social classes itself had (re-)invented. The minority/majority distinction in India, hence, was crafted on existing classes of caste, religion, occupation, etc. and was incorporated into the same project of enumeration and documentation. Ian Hacking’s ideas about social classification—or “making up” of people—as described in the introduction to this issue, are useful when thinking about the wider British-led classification process.

Still, the possibility of new, albeit limited, political provisions connected to the minority classification brought an urgency to political debate. This urgency came out clearly in argumentation concerning some central questions: Who was to be classified as a minority? What should be the relations between minorities and majorities? What was the obligation, if any, of the government towards minorities? These questions begged other, fundamentally epistemological questions, which spoke to the ever-growing sets of data on India’s social classes. What was the actual population of a social class in a discrete

<sup>3</sup> Bernhard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press 1996); Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001); Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics of Most of the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Enchantment of Democracy and India* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Kaviraj, *The Enchantment of Democracy and India*, 189.

<sup>5</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of anger* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006), 49.

<sup>6</sup> Martyn Housden, “Inhabiting Different Worlds: The League of Nations and the Protection of National Minorities, 1920–1930,” in *The League of Nations’ Work on Social Issues: Visions, Endeavours, and Experiments*, ed. M. Rodriguez Garcia, D. Rodogno, and L. Kozma (Geneva: United Nations, 2016), 121–36.

location, and how to define and delimit particular social classes in relation to others, in the first place?

This debate in 1920s and 1930s India involved Indian activists and politicians from various sections of society, some of whom will be further introduced below. Many of them had acted as selected, self-proclaimed, or even officially nominated representatives of their social class for a longer period, and their engagement on behalf of their group in the “minority/majority” taxonomy debate added to their ongoing activism.

Despite the often-acknowledged existence of this debate, it is curious that we know very little about how Indian political actors engaged the classification of minority/majority and its associated accumulated data, to advance their own political arguments in discourse. This lacuna is even more puzzling since, in hindsight, we know that ideas of Indian society being composed by numerically major and minor groups had a tangible effect on claim making in modern India. Eventually, the minority classification would also have a remarkable impact on the actual design of independent India’s sociopolitical arrangements.<sup>7</sup>

It seems that the “making up” process of social classification needs to be complemented by a conceptualization through which a made-up class of people actively engages with the classification discursively, providing albeit restricted yet tangible dynamism to the system. Returning to Hacking, we see that he later introduces the idea of “looping effect” to his thinking about social classification, in an attempt to save it from a rigid top-down logic. Looping is used by Hacking to capture the possibility of those classified interacting strategically with the classification once it is becoming entrenched in discourse, knowledge making, and bureaucratic procedures. Hacking elaborates on this looping effect in an interview: “Classifying people has an effect on how they conceive of themselves, they internalize how they are classified, but also they may adapt how they are because of the classification, to the extent that the classification has to be modified in the light of how the people classified have themselves changed.”<sup>8</sup>

Hacking has unfortunately been vague about how exactly the looping effect plays out. He has mentioned the possibility of people taking back control of their classification from institutions or experts upholding the classificatory system. Sometimes this is done by adding new meaning or counter knowledge to the classification itself. I will in this article point towards one possible manifestation of a looping effect, by studying instances when those classified engaged with the “minority” classification, and information accompanying it, to advance their political agendas, through discourse. More specifically, I will study various ways in which groups identified as “minorities,” through their representatives, utilised their designation and knowledge accompanying it in political debate. Specifically, I will analyse interventions regarding the minority classification by Indian delegates to the Sub-committee on Minorities of the Indian Round Table Conference held in London in 1930–2. Special reference will be given to what information resurfaced in support of political claims.

I will focus on four questions. First, what kind of sources of information did Indian actors turn to, in general, when discussing minority issues? For example, were British Indian official statistics prominently referenced, or were religious or mythological scriptures frequently cited?

Second, breaking it down, what themes were discussed, and what information was used in connection to reoccurring themes, in the debate? For example, was focus placed on defining minority status, or what the government should do for minorities? And what

<sup>7</sup> Francesca R. Jensenius, “Mired in Reservations: The Path-Dependent History of Electoral Quotas in India,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 74:1 (2013), 85–105.

<sup>8</sup> O. J. Madsen, J. Servan, and S. A. Øyen, “‘I Am a Philosopher of the Particular Case’: An Interview with the 2009 Holberg Prizewinner Ian Hacking,” *History of the Human Sciences* 26:3 (2013).

information was referred to when defining minority status or debating relations between minorities and the majority?

Third, I will focus on individual speakers. On this level of analysis, it can be revealed who spoke on what theme in the debate about minorities, and who referred to what information in support of their claims. Did some speakers, for example, tone down one theme but stressed others? Did some speakers refer to international conventions or official commission reports more frequently, and others to personal experiences or media to a larger degree?

Fourth, it has been shown that political debates are examples of discourse when identities are shaped. I will subsequently study whether and how information was used to consolidate minority identities.

However, when pursuing this study, we face a methods problem: How do we locate and identify themes and information originating from one sphere (a colonial bureaucracy), but resurfacing in another sphere (discourse of indigenous actors)? To address this, I will present a new general method through which themes and information occurring in first-person speech can be identified and classified.<sup>9</sup> I will then apply the method to Indian politicians and activists who formed part of the Sub-committee on Minorities.<sup>10</sup> All themes and data connected to the minority classification occurring in arguments of this selected group of Indian political actors can hence be identified for analysis. It will subsequently be possible to study the patterns in which vocabulary and information connected to the bureaucracy's classification reoccurred in speech and as such was "looped."

### *Detailing the Minority Classification in British India between the Wars*

There were no acts or conventions in place in India during the early 1900s to regulate minority/majority issues in a broader sense. Conflicting standpoints on the topic were hammered out through debate on unequal terms, putting formats for deliberation centre stage for political activity.

Relations between Hindus and Muslims in particular moved to the centre of controversy and debate, making the issue divisive within the Indian nationalist movement. When discussed in general terms, Hindu-Muslim relations were often referred to as a communal question, where the political minority/majority representational issue was one out of several aspects. For the leadership of the Indian National Congress, "national integrity" was of utmost importance, and they sought to avoid conflict between groups or communities that could jeopardize unity. The Congress leadership and external leading Muslim politicians concluded several pacts from 1916 onwards to this regard, yet divisions kept on emerging.<sup>11</sup>

Government commissions or committees also offered an arena for debating the minority/majority issue, although there were clear restrictions to full Indian participation in policy making. An example was the disputes placed on record for the (Southborough) Franchise Committee of 1918–9, for which, for example, Bhimrao R. Ambedkar, who will be further discussed below, produced an investigation into the situation of "depressed classes" (Dalits) as a distinct group in need of political safeguards.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The method has been co-developed with Nirjhar Mazumder, who has also coded the debates in MAXQDA and designed the figures and graphs.

<sup>10</sup> Government of India, *Proceedings of the Federal Structure Committee and Minorities Committee*, vols. 1–3 (Calcutta: Central Publication Branch, 1932).

<sup>11</sup> Mushirul Hasan, "The Muslim Mass Contacts Campaigns: Analysis of a Strategy of Political Mobilization," in *India's Partition: Process, Strategy and Mobilization*, ed. M. Hasan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 133–59.

<sup>12</sup> Bhimrao R. Ambedkar, "On Franchise and Framing Constituencies (Evidence before the Southborough Committee 1919)," in *Ambedkar Writes*, vol. 1, *Political Writings*, ed. Narendra Jadhav (New Delhi: Konark, 2014), 17–35.

However, it was only with the Indian Round Table Conference of 1930–2 (IRTC) held in London that the minority question was debated in a comprehensive manner, not only as an adjacent theme. The IRTC was taking place at a time of very strained relations between Indian activists and politicians on the one hand, the British administration in India and the imperial bureaucracy in London on the other, as well as during a time of accentuated friction between the leaderships of the Congress and the Muslim League. British Indian authorities had responded repressively and violently to mass mobilisation in India throughout the 1920s. There were conflicting views within the imperial bureaucracy on the best way forward. There were also fissures in the elite Indian political leadership. Muslim spokespersons had campaigned for separate electorates for Muslims already in 1906, a measure which was included in the Indian Councils Act of 1909. The Indian National Congress opposed this move, while other Indian organised interests suggested that similar provisions should be introduced on their behalf.

The first IRTC followed upon the Indian Statutory (Simon) Commission of 1928, which was boycotted by large sections of the Indian nationalist leadership due to total lack of representation from Indian interests. Given the failure of the Simon Commission, the conference was an attempt to lay the groundwork of a new act for the government of India. Indian actors entered the IRTC motivated by different reasonings but with predefined agendas. Most of them had participated in earlier disputes on the various topics of debate. The leadership of the Indian National Congress, however, was absent from the first conference in 1930, but Mohandas K. Gandhi participated as the sole spokesman for the Congress in the second IRTC of 1931. India's many princely states had sent their representatives, who were largely hoping to curb any expansion of democratic principles. Representatives from sociopolitical Hindu organisations were represented, as were spokespersons from Muslim political parties. Other religious or ethnocultural social classes, as well as special interests, were also participating. The debates in the conference were important for making real progress, and for conveying narratives and messaging towards British authorities, home constituencies, and Indian political adversaries and allies.

Organisationally, as pointed out by Stephen Legg, the IRTC borrowed features from the League of Nations and was made up by several subcommittees to which specific issues were referred.<sup>13</sup> Indian delegates participated in the deliberations of several such committees, alongside British Indian and British officials. The topic of minorities in India was referred to the Sub-committee on Minorities, and it published its reports jointly with the Sub-committee on the Federative Structure.

To many delegates the minority issues was closely tied to questions regarding governance and the design of the future political system. The most pressing issue for many Indian members of the committee concerned the question of electorates if the franchise were expanded for limited local elections. The main crux, as it were, was whether to have joint electorates with reserved seats for minorities based on their size, or to have separate electorates for certain social classes during council election.<sup>14</sup> The basic idea in both cases was that those eligible to vote in elections with expanded franchise would do so on the basis of their communal identity rather than individual preferences.

Recognition, political influence, and representation for social groups in a future political system was at stake. Minority classification was seen as a security for classes who were numerically minor in a province or municipality, but was seen as an imposition to undermine perceived legitimate claims to power through numbers by classes who

<sup>13</sup> Stephen Legg, "Imperial Internationalism: The Round Table Conference and the Making of India in London, 1930–1932," *Humanity* 11:1 (2020), 32–53.

<sup>14</sup> Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India: 1885–1947* (Delhi: Macmillan, 2005), 308–9.

were numerically major. Any data regarding the composition, size, etc. of a prospective minority, and also its numerical relation to the majority, became political. This data would be imperative in decisions on who was to be viewed as a legitimate minority and whether separate electorates or joint electorates with reserved seats in the assembly elections was called for.

The active engagement by Indian actors with the minority classification lends itself to a conceptual discussion. Indian politicians and activists had agency and were not merely passively receiving an imposed taxonomy. Their activities were curbed and restricted for sure, but came to influence the debate about the minority classification in the 1930s, as well as its latter codification through independent India's constitution. As Fredrick Cooper reminds us in his study of Western Africa under French rule, there is need for a nuanced understanding of the unequal yet complex relationships between colonial administrations and their critics. Scholarship focusing only on "unremitting struggle" as the legitimate form of protest risks missing out on "political action and claim making that depended on overlapping idioms and interaction between colonizer and colonized."<sup>15</sup> Arguably, hence, by keeping too strict a separation in the analysis of modern India's system of social classification between the colonial bureaucracy, on one hand, and Indian activists and politicians, on the other, we risk overlooking the circulation of idioms and information and between the two spheres.<sup>16</sup> By instead treating them as overlapping albeit unequal domains, we may identify how a classification and accompanying information which originated in a colonial bureaucracy came to shape argumentation among Indian political actors. And from this vantage point we may eventually view the dynamic of coproduction between information, science, and social and political order, differently.<sup>17</sup>

However, the question whether data and labelling generated through the interventions of a colonial bureaucracy could inadvertently enable those engaging its policies is a vexed one. Few scholars of colonialism would today promote the view of a benevolent empire which handed over to its opponents the means of its own eventual decline and ushered in representative democracy. Yet, analysis still ought to pay attention to how specific activities by a colonial bureaucracy (e.g., introducing classifications, generating information), creates unforeseen possibilities for influencing through political action by activists and politicians (e.g., mobilisation around classifications, or using information for argumentation).

### A Method for Analysing Themes and Information in Political Debate

Given what has been described above, it seems plausible that the classification itself, or information pertaining to definitions, enumerations, or relations between social classes, would have entered the arguments of Indian political actors. Yet how, why, and to what extent we cannot tell because of the hitherto lack of studies of speech acts connected to the minority classification. This is partly due to lack of attention to discourse as a site where Indian actors engaged the minority classification politically. However, despite lingering perceptions among historians of political debate being mere posturing, such formats for exchange are increasingly conceived of as sites for political action in the past and present.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 231.

<sup>16</sup> Kapil Raj, *Relocating Modern Science: Circulation and the Construction of Knowledge in South Asia and Europe, 1650-1900* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 13.

<sup>17</sup> Sheila Jasanoff, "The Idiom of Co-production," in *States of Knowledge: The Co-production of Science and Social Order*, ed. Sheila Jasanoff (London: Routledge, 2006), 1-12.

<sup>18</sup> Rochana Bajpai, "Rhetoric as Argument: Social Justice and Affirmative Action in India, 1990," *Modern Asian Studies* 44 (2010), 675-708; C. Wiesner, T. Haapala, and K. Palonen, *Debates, Rhetoric and Political Action: Practices of*



Viewing debates as sites for political activity renders the elementary components of disputes—such as the details of arguments—a concern not only for linguistics but also for political studies. Although central for politics, the composition of political argumentation has to a large degree been absent from discourse analysis.<sup>19</sup> Argumentative debates are also sites where politicised identities are being constructed. Identity construction has been a recurrent theme in discourse analysis over the past decades. Most studies, however, have focused on the consolidation of national identities through references in figures of speech to a shared political history, present, and future, or a common culture and body politics.<sup>20</sup> This article instead indicates how information and official nomenclature contributed to the consolidation of minority identities.

I have selected ten Indian members of the Sub-committee on Minorities of the IRTC, whose speech acts will be analysed in particular for themes and information content connected to the minority classification. The delegates had been nominated by the British government in India to speak on the issue of “minorities” at the IRTC. All ten had been actively representing or speaking on behalf of particular social classes, or were members of an influential political organisation. Several of them had been active outside of India, as the period between the First and Second World War saw the internationalisation of rights debates through international informal “thought zones,” but also through the League of Nations and the International Labour Organization.<sup>21</sup>

Some of the delegates discussed below were on opposite sides of the ideological spectra of the debate. Balakrishna Shivram Moonje, who was speaking on behalf of “Hindus” (Hindu Mahasabha) in the conference, for example, was a hard-line activist for what he saw as the revival of the Hindu nation and character. He found Muslims to be more politically united and better organised than Hindus, and was firmly against meeting the demands of Muslim delegates.<sup>22</sup> Muhammad Shafi (Muslim League), who was considered a moderate, on the other hand was outspoken in his demands for Muslim political representation. He had been active in the debate throughout the interwar years. It had been helpful for Shafi and other Muslim political leaders, according to Mushirul Hasan, to use “minorityism” to “defend gains” where Muslims were numerically strong, and to secure safeguards in geographies where they were “weak in numbers.”<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, what Hasan calls minorityism was also resorted to during the same period by Hindu activists.<sup>24</sup>

Mohandas K. Gandhi (Indian National Congress) was the towering figure of the Indian National Congress, but he had boycotted the first IRTC in 1930. He was released from prison to attend the second session in 1931. Gandhi had been trying to resolve Hindu-Muslim tensions outside of British-controlled fora for more than a decade and

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*Textual Interpretation and Analysis* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 7; Sophia Hatzisavvidou, “Studying Political Disputes: A Rhetorical Perspective and a Case Study,” *Politics*, August 2020, 1.

<sup>19</sup> Rochana Bajpai, *Debating Difference: Group Rights and Liberal Democracy in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); I. Fairclough and N. Fairclough, “Practical Reasoning in Political Discourse: The UK Government’s Response to the Economic Crisis in the 2008 Pre-Budget Report,” *Discourse & Society* 22:3 (2011), 243–68.

<sup>20</sup> E. De Cilla, M. Reissigl, and R. Wodak, “The Discursive Construction of National Identities,” *Discourse & Society* 10:2 (1999), 149–73.

<sup>21</sup> Sugata Bose and Kris Manjapra, eds., *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

<sup>22</sup> Stephen Legg, “Political Lives at Sea: Working and Socialising to and from the India Round Table Conference in London, 1930–1932,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 68 (2020), 21–32.

<sup>23</sup> Mushirul Hasan, “Minority Identity and Its Discontents: Response and Representation,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 29:8 (1994), 442.

<sup>24</sup> Neeti Nair, “Partition and Minority Rights in Punjabi Hindu Debates 1920–1947,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 46:52 (2011), 61–9.

was reluctant to engage the issue under British auspices with the Muslim League leadership. Gandhi was also part of another controversy with an Indian delegate, B. R. Ambedkar. Ambedkar was developing a unique understanding of minority/majority relations as he distinguished “untouchables” or “depressed classes” from the wider Hindu class, much to Gandhi’s displeasure.<sup>25</sup>

Two speakers spoke in the IRTC on behalf of women: Sarojini Naidu and Radhabai Subbarayan. While Subbarayan was less active, Naidu was closely connected to the Indian National Congress. She was also a spokesperson for the Women’s Indian Association, and was connected to international movements for social and political rights of women.<sup>26</sup> Both Naidu and Narayan Malhar Joshi, who represented labour, had experience from the new international institutions in Geneva. Joshi was a well-known activist for labour rights who had served as India’s delegate to deliberations at the ILO, where he spoke about worker’s rights not only in India but wider Asia.<sup>27</sup> Finally, Phiroze Sethna, an influential industrialist, spoke on behalf of Parsees; Kanakarayan Tiruselvam Paul spoke for Christians; and Sardar Ujjal Singh spoke for Sikhs.

Some of these delegates participated only in one conference, such as Gandhi. Others figured in both IRTC 1 and 2, such as Singh, Shafi, and Moonje. Some delegates made very few interventions, such as Naidu. Others were very active, such as Moonje.

### *Identifying Themes and Information in Political Argumentation*

There is no fixed character to arguments in political debate.<sup>28</sup> Arguments reflect the persuasiveness of political ideas and are critical in how actors “express and embody their political thinking and communicate it to others.”<sup>29</sup> Generally speaking, arguments include a claim or topic under dispute or deliberation, as well as the piece of information referenced by the speaker in support of the claim.<sup>30</sup> The role of information in argumentation is to justify or validate the claim. Validation is done through inference, or explicit reference to sources of information, which are presumed to be acceptable by the (epistemic) community, addressed by the speaker.<sup>31</sup>

In other words, when actors are manoeuvring politically by advancing argument to peers or the public, information will most certainly be associated with the claims being made. The information referred to could be correct or incorrect, but the speaker will most likely perceive it or the source it derives from, as acceptable to the target audience. If not, the speaker cannot count on the argument being well received. The sources of information included in argumentation have an imperative role to play in making interventions in political debates acceptable, persuasive, and linked to other features of political narration.

<sup>25</sup> Bhikhu Parekh, *Debating India: Essays on Indian Political Discourse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 107–9.

<sup>26</sup> Rosalind Parr, “Solving World Problems: The Indian Women’s Movement, Global Government, and the ‘Crises of Empire’ 1933–46,” *Journal of Global History* 16:1 (2021), 122–40.

<sup>27</sup> Carolien Stolte, “Bringing Asia to the World: Indian Trade Unionism and the Long Road towards the Asiatic Labour Congress, 1919–37,” *Journal of Global History* 7 (2012), 257–78.

<sup>28</sup> Christian Plantin, “Argumentation Studies and Discourse Analysis: The French Situation and Global Perspectives,” *Discourse Studies* 4:3 (2002), 343–68.

<sup>29</sup> Alan Finlayson, “Proving, Pleasing and Persuading? Rhetoric in Contemporary British Politics,” *Political Quarterly* 85 (2014), 428–36.

<sup>30</sup> P. Besnard and A. Hunter, *Elements of Argumentation* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2008); B. G. Glaser and A. L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (London: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>31</sup> Teun A van Dijk, *Discourse and Knowledge: A Sociocognitive Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).



### *A Method for Analysing Themes and Information Occurring in Debates*

A method which enables a study in detail of how information and themes surface in political debate will be presented below. The method is generally applicable. It will be applied here to produce detailed results of the elementary level of speech by the selected Indian committee members. The method will enable us to locate and analyse themes connected to the minority classification and how information regarding it was strategically used by the Indian delegates to the Sub-committee on Minorities. The entire corpus carries several hundreds of interventions by the selected speakers. By applying the method to the debate in the Sub-committee on Minorities of the IRTC, we will get results on referenced sources of information, the connection between information and specific themes in general, individual speakers and their use of information in connection to themes, and speakers' use of information in relation to minority identities.

Methods of discourse analysis (DA), critical discourse analysis (CDA), and text analysis (TA) are all commonly used when analysing political debates. A crude way of distinguishing between the three is that CDA places emphasis on the role of societal or historical factors in the output of text or talk more than DA and TA does.<sup>32</sup> CDA is hence commonly used when analysing the formation of public perceptions through texts. Both DA and CDA strive to connect singular texts to a wider corpus, identifying intertextuality. TA, on the other hand, has a much more focused approach to the singular text.<sup>33</sup> Intertextuality, for example, is not factored in for this case study. The method we have designed mixes the approaches, by paying attention to case-specific historical context but at the same time staying close to a singular although comprehensive corpus.

The method identifies all referenced information as it occurs in first-person speech. Information is coded as microcategories following the nomenclature used in the text. The identification and classification of microcategories is open ended and case driven. Depending on the case, such a microcategory could be a name of a news outlet, or another committee's report, for example. It could also be other more elusive sources, identified by the speaker, such as a community or the lived experience of the speaker. All identified microcategories are then included in an ever-expanding library. If information is referenced without a source in an argument, it is categorised as an occurrence of unsubstantiated information. If the information without a source is numerical, the classification becomes unsubstantiated numerical information.

The method also allows for identifying and including an aggregate level of subcategories through a grounded theory approach. This level is case driven as well, yet contingent to some extent on the researcher's preknowledge of the material. For example, while a microcategory could be the name of a newspaper, a subcategory could be "Print Media." Subcategories are also part of an ever-expanding library. Micro- and subcategories in turn are consumed by eight to nine predefined categories. These categories are labelled in most general terms, such as "Government and Administration," "Media," or "Sourced Statistics." This method makes it possible to say with certainty what kind of information Indian politicians and activists actually used to support their political claims and ideas. It can thus reveal a circulation, for example, through which facts generated by official authorities were integrated into the arguments of Indian delegates.

<sup>32</sup> Ruth Wodak, Rudolf De Cilla, Martin Reisigl, and Karin Liebhart, *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*, 2nd ed., trans. Angelika Hirsch, Richard Mitten, and J. W. Unger (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009); N. Fairclough, J. Mulderrig, and R. Wodak, "Critical Discourse Analysis," in *Critical Discourse Analysis*, vol. 1, *Concepts, History, Theory*, ed. Ruth Wodak (Los Angeles: Sage, 2013), 79–102.

<sup>33</sup> A. Humphreys and R. Jen-Hui Wang, "Automated Text Analysis for Consumer Research," *Journal of Consumer Research* 44 (2017), 1274–306.

The method also identifies and codes themes referenced in the political arguments and which the information is connected to. Themes occurring in the argument are coded against preexisting definitions. The link between the referenced information and the theme is identified and coded. After having studied the debate in advance, and from knowing the existing literature, four themes were singled out: “the condition of minorities,” “the relation between minority and majority,” “how to define minorities,” and arguments “on the obligation of the government” towards minorities.

This entire process is illustrated in Figure 1. Figure 2 unpacks a single category (Government and Administration), to reveal the case-specific microcategories and subcategories it contains for the IRTC debates of 1930–1.

### Information and Themes in the Debate about Minorities

We have applied the analytical framework outlined above to hundreds of pages of debate in the Sub-committee on Minorities. By doing so we will get unique insights into what themes, and what kind of information, occurred in the argumentation of Indian actors when engaging the minority classification. In this way we will be able to trace how data, as well as the classification itself, was looped by indigenous actors on the imperial bureaucracy which had imposed the classification in the first place. Our analysis includes four types of information that entered political argumentation regarding minority issues: the sources of information which Indian activists referenced in the debates, the links between sources of information and prominent themes debated, patterns in individual speakers’ argumentation during the debate in terms of information used and themes discussed, and how information underpinned a consolidation of minority identities in delegates’ speech.

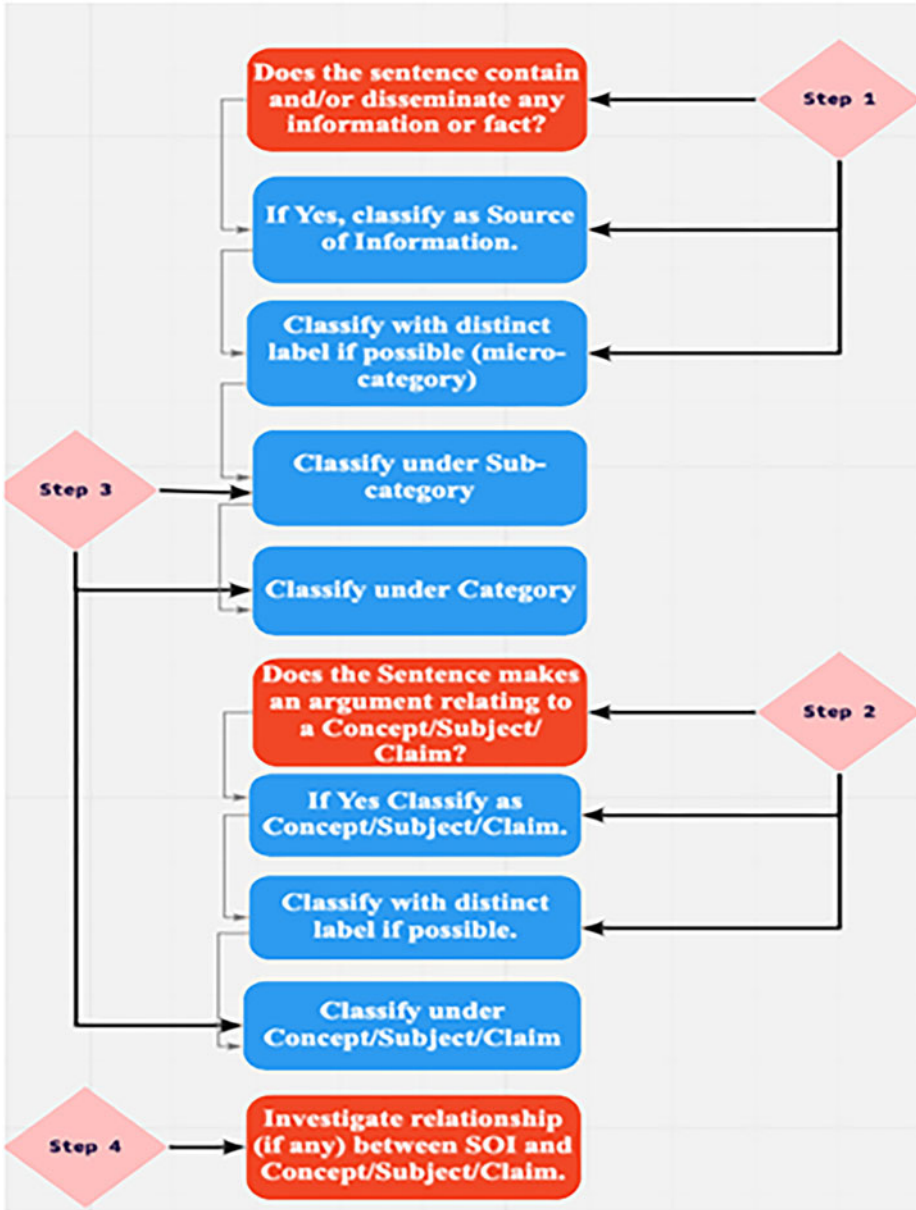
#### *What Sources of Information Were Used as Support in Political Arguments?*

To reiterate, when making a claim, a speaker will generally insert information as support for the claim. This supportive element can differ depending on the situation and type of argumentation, but the purpose for using it is to legitimise a statement in the eyes of the addressed audience.

When analysing the interventions by Indian delegates on the Sub-committee on Minorities, we find that the most frequently referenced sources, on an aggregated level, fall under the framework’s main category, “Government and Administration.” This is an eclectic category bringing together a whole range of *official* sources.

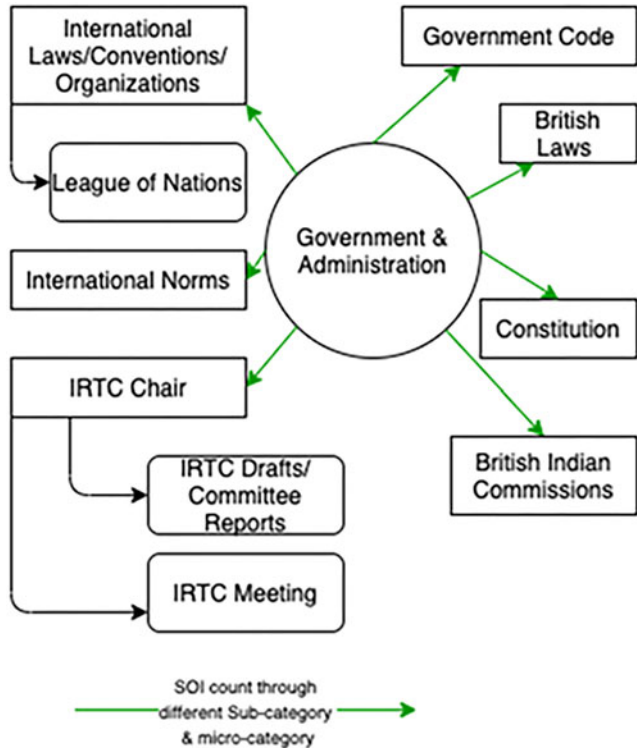
Unpacking the category, we find that the Indian delegates recurrently embed information from various Imperial and British Indian commissions in their interventions. To give one example, Muhammad Shafi stated: “The position is this: consistently from 1888 onwards statesmen of the position of Lord Dufferin and Lord Lansdowne, Governments of India one after another, the Royal commission recently appointed as well as the present Government of India, have stated that in the conditions as they obtain in India, Mussalmans must have their separate electorates.”<sup>34</sup> This shows how occasional committees and commissions, which often included Indian participants, were viewed by particular speakers as an accepted source. The information from the commissions was, however, often not cited in detail by the speakers. Instead, it was referred to in more sweeping formulations. The influence of official commissions on the content of debates on the issue is anyhow clear.

<sup>34</sup> Government of India, *Proceedings*, 58.



**Figure 1.** Process of analysis.

Interestingly, Indian delegates in the Sub-committee on Minorities often refer to the “constitution” of other countries, especially the “British constitution,” a nonexistent entity, in their argumentation. Most probably it was British laws in general that the delegates had in mind. They also frequently referred to the League of Nations when backing up their claims. Stephen Legg has detailed the connections between the IRTC and the League of Nations. Additional to Legg’s suggestion that the League served as model in the organization of the IRTC, he points out that is referred to as a precedent to claims



**Figure 2.** Example of a main Source of Information with under categories.

made by delegates, and even put forward as a possible arbitrator to internal Indian disputes.<sup>35</sup> The results illustrate that the debates in the subcommittee had international connections, and the actual topic for debate—the organisation of minority relations in India—could even be perceived as an issue of international concern.

If we compare the first IRTC in 1930 and the second in 1931, there is an increase in references to minority groups themselves as the named sources of information in support of political claims. Groups often referred to are the “Depressed Classes” (Dalits), and “Mussalmans” (Muslims). One explanation of this could be the growing polarisation and politicisation of the minority debate during the second IRTC, where several internal conflict lines emerged between different minorities. The Indian National Congress could not see eye to eye with the Muslim League, for example. Ambedkar was in turn often critical of Gandhi and the Indian National Congress. It also shows how the labelling by the imperial bureaucracy of social collectives came to structure argumentation. There seems to have been little scope to introduce other minority designations than those given, when participating in the debate.

### *What Information Connected to Which Theme in Political Arguments in General?*

Having provided some frequently referenced sources of information in the arguments made by Indian delegates, I will now turn to the question how such information related to certain topics debated. The topics singled out after we familiarised ourselves with the debates were “defining minority status,” the “condition of the minority,” the “relations

<sup>35</sup> Stephen Legg, “Imperial Internationalism,” 36–43.

between minority and majority,” and the “obligation of the government” towards minorities.

Indian participants used different kind of information for supporting different kinds of arguments. With the analysis run below and summarised in [Chart 1](#), we can reveal what information resurfaced in claims connected with the above-mentioned themes. This directs us to consider whether the speakers found official sources, for example, to be more efficient to include in connection to one topic or the other.

Numbers seem to have played an important role when *minorities were defined* in the arguments of Indian delegates. There are no references to official ethnographic information, for example, which is surprising given the weight such data is given in the research literature on social classifications.<sup>36</sup> In the majority of instances when numerical information was used, however, the numbers cited were unsubstantiated, that is, given without source attribution. On 13 percent of the occasions, however, actual sources for statistics were mentioned by Indian speakers. The most frequently cited sources for numbers and statistics were various dispatches or compilation from the Government of India or a provincial British Indian government. Here is Raja Narendra Nath, for example, representing the Hindus, speaking on the theme of defining minorities, referring to the status of his community in the province of Punjab: “In the first place, the Punjab Government Dispatch says that the Hindus form 31 percent of the population.”<sup>37</sup>

When the debate covers other topics, such as *the relationship between minorities and majorities*, or arguments about what Indian delegates believe should be the *government’s obligations towards minorities*, numerical information plays a much smaller part. Instead, when Indian delegates discussed these themes, they most frequently included information gained through personal experience. Perhaps there was less official information to rely on, or a personal appeal was considered more rhetorically useful. For example, B. R. Ambedkar stated, “I know as a matter of fact that we are hard up against facts, and that people will not allow us to enjoy the rights which are given to us by the constitution.”<sup>38</sup>

Political parties, special interests, organisations, or movements, on the other hand, are also referred to as knowledge authorities when the debate turned to *the relationships between minorities and majorities*, or to *the obligations of the government towards minorities*. The reason for this is that it was a central political issue for the Muslim League, which spoke on behalf of all Muslims in this conference very actively, while Hindu interests were more fragmented. The Muslim League hoped to further secure minority representation in political assemblies and look towards the Government of India, to arrange for this.

Interestingly, academic sources on the one hand, and mythological sources on the other, are only referred to one time each by Indian participants during the debate. Both times the theme was the relationship between minorities and majorities. B. S. Moonje gave the only academic reference in the debate: “Professor Gilbert Murray, who is one of the recognized authorities on the subject of the protection of minorities, says that the Minority Clauses in the Peace Treaties, based on the principle which I have stated, contain the best practical remedy, but at the same time hold out the warning that minorities cannot expect to be treated as friends.”<sup>39</sup>

In summary, we find that numbers produced by the offices of the state were particularly useful in arguments when the speaker wants to be perceived as being precise, and

<sup>36</sup> E.g., Dirks, *Castes of Mind*.

<sup>37</sup> Government of India, *Proceedings*, 13.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

perhaps appear more reliable, as when providing a definition. When the topic is to describe general conditions, speakers turned on to personal experiences in support for their argumentation. The reason for this could have been a lack of supporting sources, but perhaps, also, to raise emotions from an audience. It is also telling how organisations, movements, and leaders (part of the main category “Political Platforms”) emerged as the most frequently cited sources in arguments dealing with the relationship between minorities and majority. This theme was increasingly politicised during this period of modern Indian history.

There were few attempts in this debate to nuance the concept of minority by differentiating between social and political definitions.<sup>40</sup> The entire discussion about definitions of minorities was consumed by the political, and ultimately decided by the numerical relationship. A more cultural or social definition would most probably have relied on ethnographic or mythological information support.

### *What Information Connected to Which Theme in Political Arguments by Individual Speakers?*

A third form of analysis of the minority debate places at centre stage individual Indian speakers’ interventions with regards to their use of information as support in arguments in general, and the four selected themes in particular. This analysis allows us to identify whether individual speakers were inclined to utilise government sources, for example, when making political claims. In this specific case, it is important to note that some Indian delegates only appeared in one out of two conferences, as reflected in [Chart 2](#) below.

As mentioned above, Indian delegates often integrated numbers in their argumentation with regards to minority themes. On most occasions these numbers were unsubstantiated, with no source provided. Phiroze Sethna, however, was most prolific in providing sources for the numbers he referenced in support of his arguments. Unpacking his argumentation, we find that “Bombay Municipality,” a local government institution, is mentioned most frequently as the source for statistics.

Ambedkar, Subbarayan, and Joshi, on the other hand, often relied on own experiences, or acquired knowledge or opinion, as their source of justification for their political arguments throughout the debates. For Ambedkar references to this category make up almost half of the times he mentions a source to justify a claim or speak on a theme. Gandhi was the only delegate who drew support from the category “Mythology and Religion,” although only on one occasion. Interestingly, he rarely, however, referenced official British official sources to support his claims. It is notable that media did not occur as a source of reference at all in this debate, and the only academic reference throughout the debates was made, as mentioned above, by the delegate B. S. Moonje.

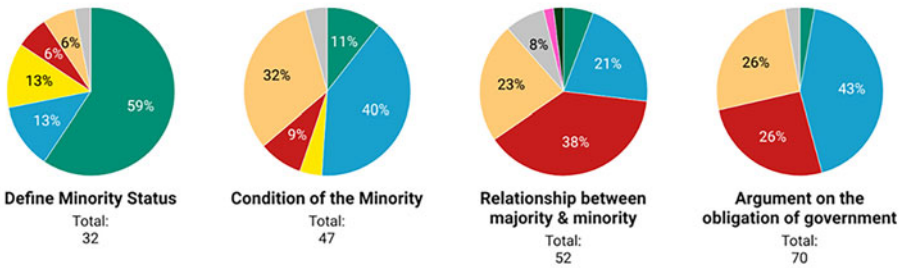
How, then, did Indian delegates weigh in on different themes under debate? Zooming in on the individual level, we find that Indian politicians participating in the debate pay attention to different themes, depending on their political priorities. For example, Muhammad Shafi, representing the Muslim League, paid attention to two themes primarily in his arguments at the first IRTC: how to define minorities and the relationship between minority and majority. He was very active in the first conference compared to the second. How the future Indian political setup would accommodate the interests of Muslims, India’s largest minority, was a core issue for the Muslim League. Shafi devoted considerable amount of speech to the relational issues, thereby playing to the interest of his particular constituency.

<sup>40</sup> P. R. De Souza, H. Ahmed, and M. S. Alam, *Democratic Accommodations: Minorities in Contemporary India* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).



**Based on Subject, SOI comparison**

Legend: Unsubstantiated Numerical Information (Green), Government & Administration (Blue), Sourced Numerical Information (Yellow), Political Platforms (Red), Personal Experience (Orange), History (Grey), Academic References (Pink), Mythology & Religion (Dark Green)



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**Chart 1.** Based on subject, comparison of Sources of Information.

Gandhi, who had boycotted the first conference, paid very little attention in the second conference to the relationship between minorities and majorities in his arguments, our analysis shows. He seems to have avoided a topic that would easily highlight differences among classes and groups within Indian society, which he was trying to consolidate under one banner. It has even been argued that Gandhi wanted to undermine the minority classification per se, to tone down internal differences among Indian communities.<sup>41</sup> Instead, he focused most of his interventions on the obligation of the government towards minorities, and thus turned his attention to the policies of British authorities. The same pattern is visible in the arguments of Radhabai Subbarayan, who represented women.

B. R. Ambedkar paid most attention to the topic of conditions of minorities in the first conference. This can be explained by his interest to highlight the situation for a specific segment connected to the wider Hindu community, which had not yet gained full recognition. Interestingly, he was less active in the second IRTC, in which his interventions mostly focused on defining minority status in order to further consolidate a minority status. Ambedkar was eventually able to secure a separate electorate for “untouchables” (Dalits) in the following Communal Award of 1931.<sup>42</sup>

Since the analysis has been done on two separate conferences, [Chart 2](#) displays changing patterns in statements by those individuals who participated in both. We can observe changes in the number of interventions by individual speakers as well as thematic focus of those interventions. Partly these differences between the first and second conferences can be the result of agenda setting for the meetings, but perhaps also pressure from home constituencies in between the conferences. It could also be explained by the internal dynamic between speakers during the debate. If one topic is brought up by influential participants, others may feel obliged to respond.

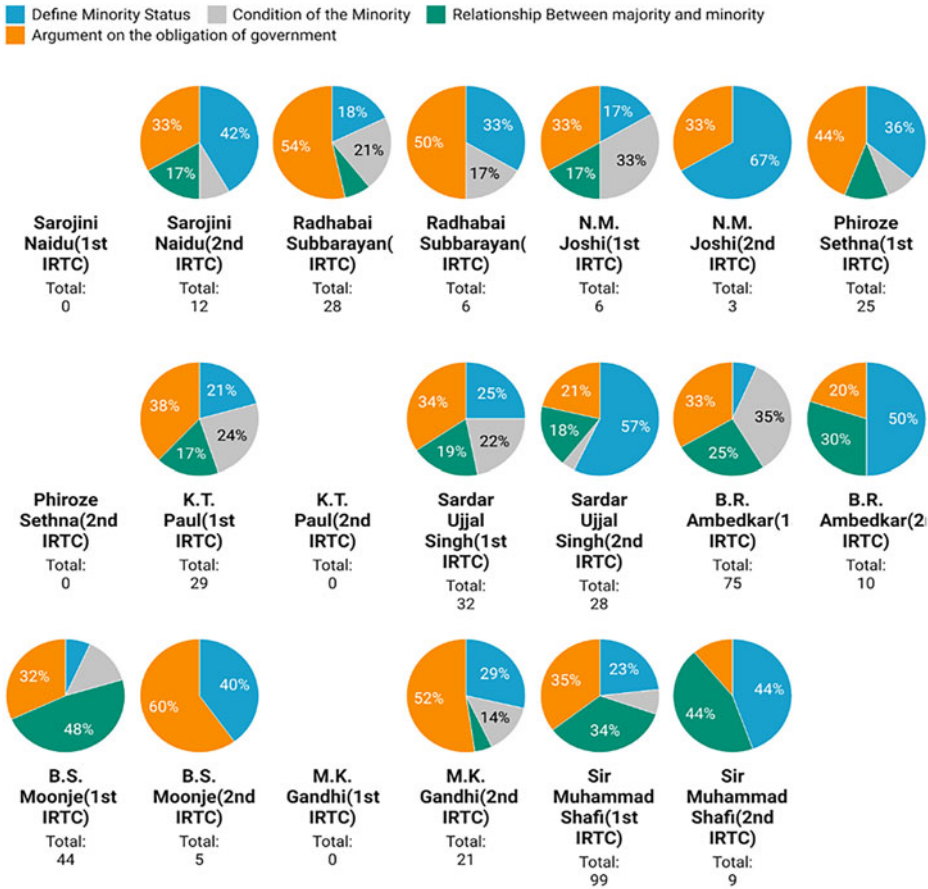
*Was the Classification and Related Information Used to Consolidate Minority Identities?*

As mentioned above, discourse plays an important role in the consolidation of in and out groups. Using references in speech to a mythological past, historic events, perceived shared cultural traits, or perceived shared challenges or opportunities for an imagined

<sup>41</sup> Kaviraj, *The Enchantment of Democracy and India*.

<sup>42</sup> Parekh, *Debating India*, 109.

### Politicians on Subjects across 1st & 2nd IRTC



Created with Datawrapper

**Chart 2.** Subjects discussed by Indian speakers in IRTC I and 2.

collective enables the construction of selves and others.<sup>43</sup> But were there differences in how a minority identity in 1930s India and national identity in contemporary Europe were consolidated? This is a question we will attend to below. In addition, the epistemological underpinning of such identity consolidation has been left unattended in the literature. In today’s world, as well in the past, information is crucial for legitimising and create meaning for claims confirming identities as lived realities. Hence, we will ask below what information was used in speech which consolidated or confirmed the existence of social class identities.

It is important to note that in the corpus we use, identity construction took shape under ongoing political rivalry. Also, the fact that particular classes were already pre-defined to be represented in the IRTC has a very significant residual effect in the formation of their respective arguments claiming their minority status.

<sup>43</sup> De Cilla, Reisigl, and Wodak, “The Discursive Construction of National Identities,” 159.

On an aggregated level of speech, that is, when analysing the corpus without attribution to individuals, we can trace the general focus of speech in debates about minority status. Here we see that a use of the designations pre-given by the official system of classification structured the entire debate. For example, the terms *Muslim* (*Mussalman*, *Musselman*), *Parsee*, *Christian*, or *Sikh* were most frequently used in speech defining minorities by minority representatives themselves. The scope of reconstructing minority identity by inserting a different vocabulary seems to have been very limited.

The official labelling of social classes frequently occurred alongside unsubstantiated statistics and a geographical indicator, such as a province in British India. One plausible explanation to this frequent use seems to be that speakers were heavily occupied by the argument regarding the numerical proportions of their respective community within a delineated geographical area. Again, the linking of minority identities to franchise and representation in political assemblies seems to have influenced what kind of information was used by individual speakers.

For a first example we turn to Muhammad Shafi, who represented the Muslim League. Shafi relied upon geographical criteria and numerical references which seemingly but not verifiably originated in official data. Shafi referred to such official data to underscore the minority status of the community he represented: "In spite of the weightage which the Mussalmans at present enjoy, the Hindus are still in an overwhelming majority, ranging between 70 percent and 85 percent; while in Bengal and in the Punjab in so far as the population is concerned, our majority is only 55.5 percent in the Punjab and 54.5 percent in Bengal."

It is important to note that Shafi's geographically based argumentation was often a response to the claims and demands of his main political contestants, B. S. Moonje and the Hindu Mahasabha. The numerical relational dimension was most pronounced in the consolidation of a minority identity, in comparison to, for example, cultural traits or perceived shared origin or history. The idea of a minority identity became dependent on the very groups they are competing with.

Moonje was one of the politicians with the least focus in defining the minority status, although Hindus were in a minority position in particular regions. However, of the three instances where Moonje engaged the question, he too referred to a numerical rather than a religious or social definitions of minorities.

Sardar Ujjal Singh, representing the Sikhs, also engaged in the attempt to construct the idea of minority. He most frequently referred to his class by the official designation of *Sikhs* as proof of minority status. He also (numerically) compared his group with other groups (Muslims and Hindus), and referred to those groups as majority. The same tendency was observed in the intervention of K. T. Paul, who represented the Indian Christian community. Paul supported his claims of Christians as a minority with unsubstantiated numerical information, but more frequently he did not provide any information content as support in this regard.

Phiroze Sethna, who belonged to the Parsee community, mainly focused on numerical information when formulating the minority identity of Parsees. In his nine interventions on how a minority should be defined, he argued in favour of numerical basis (five times) and religious criteria only once.

Curiously, minorities that were defined without any religious or cultural basis, like "labour" or "women," exclusively relied on their group's pre-given designation to define their own minority status. For example, out of the six times when Radhabai attempted to claim minority status for her group, she relied on the very label "women." N. M. Joshi, representing labour, argued similarly without any grounding in verifiable information.

From the analysis, it is visible that these particular groups, which were already formed, entered into primarily political contestation to become fully recognised as minorities. In this process, the very designation that was officially used to identify the group also became the basis of the argument for minority status. Compared to the discursive construction of national identities studied by Wodak, for example, it is striking how references to a shared past or future, or ideas about common culture, are almost completely absent in the case of the minority debate in British India in the early 1930s. This may very well have changed as parts of the Muslim political leadership began to champion the idea of Pakistan as a homeland for Muslims a decade later.

## Conclusion

The minority classification was brought forward by the imperial bureaucracy to political life and discourse in British India at a critical historical juncture. The Indian nationalist movement had been met with repression. Political reforms were demanded by a wide segment of Indian society but resisted by parts of the imperial bureaucracy. At the same time, spokespersons for Indian parties, interests, and communities had begun to consider what enlarged franchise and wider Indian representation in political assemblies would look like given India's social composition. If elections (restricted) and increased inclusion into political decision-making bodies (marginal in numbers) were pinned to the system of social classes, minority/majority relations between recognised social groups were unequivocally becoming political. To safeguard future political influence became a priority for smaller communities' spokespersons.

It was precarious that so much was at stake politically for individual groups, the Indian nationalist movement, the British administration in India, and Imperial Britain, at the same time as many elements of discourse on the topic of minorities were malleable. The very newness of the classification impacted the character of the exchanges in the Sub-committee on Minorities of the Indian Round Table Conference 1930–2. So much remained undecided when it came to definitions and delimitation. The linking of the minority classification to the design of the political system raised the stakes for all concerned.

A novel method for analysing political speech for themes, idioms, and information content has been presented above. It is generally applicable to any type of political argumentation in the past and present but has been applied here to the proceedings of the Sub-committee on Minorities. An assumption which has been driving this study is that Indian political actors were not passively receiving the imposed classification of minorities but took part in shaping it. And concordant with Hackings's idea of a "looping effect," the results show clearly how those classified actively engaged and negotiated the classification imposed on them. They integrated official information that had a bearing on the classification and turned it in a variety of ways, depending on interests, into their own advantage. The results do not show, however, an intention to transform the classification itself, but rather to apply it or negotiate its premise to better match other ambitions.

Even at a cursory glance of the exchanges in the committee, it is clear that the classification itself gave rise to perhaps unintended possibilities for positioning among the Indian delegates. The labelling of groups and the recognition of them as potential stakeholders to be included in deliberations concerning minority/majority issues impacts speech acts. Except for Mohandas K. Gandhi, all delegates whose speech has here been reviewed used as the departing point for their interventions the very designation they had been given by imperial authorities when entering the subcommittee. There were no exchanges about the legitimacy of the classification or its rationale. There was no intention shown by the delegates to break away from the given parameters. This can

be interpreted as an expression of the hegemony of a divide-and-rule strategy by British authorities, but it can also be viewed as an intent of classified groups to advance their own claims towards the bureaucracy on the basis of their classification.

The analysis of themes raised in argumentation, on a general as well as individual level, tell us that there are two central issues of concern for Indian delegates. One central issue is to highlight the minority status of the class to which the speaker belongs, including its relationship to other classes. The second is to put forward to the government the obligations it is perceived to have towards minorities. There are less interventions to describe, for example, the actual lived conditions of minorities.

The epistemological basis for claims regarding minority status and social class relations is numerical. The numbers are often discussed without references. When attributions exist, they are almost exclusively to official sources. One explanation to this is that there were very few civil society organisations in India compared to Europe during this time, with a capacity to carry out their own statistical surveys.<sup>44</sup> Neither were there media organisations, institutes, or international organisations with an interest or capacity for in-depth fact finding. It could hence be argued that Indian delegates looped official statistics because there was no other information available.

Our analysis shows that official classifications and data were utilised by those classified to support their own argumentation. This is not to say, however, that the looping back was done in defiance or as a challenge to authorities. Even so, the activity of engaging data from government censuses, surveys, or dispatches, but now with a purpose of supporting political claims, tells a story of how Indian actors strategically utilised information to advance political agendas. These are examples of circulation of information that would go unnoticed if we solely focused on how colonial knowledge underpinned colonial policy and perceptions.

In general, our analysis shows that the political argumentation of Indian minority representatives was clearly structured around numerical information. References to non-numerical information are dominated by what we have called *personal experiences*, which includes the speakers' lived experiences but also opinions and acquired knowledge. This category serves as the major countersource to officially produced information, in political argumentation of the Indian delegates. In some instances, political manifests or party policies are also being referred to for information to back up claims. Religious scriptures, mythology, or traditional knowledge are almost nonexistent in this debate. Neither are references to newspapers or other news outlets, or academic institutions, common.

Moving down to the individual speaker's level, the results show that delegates chose strategies to engage the classification and data in their interventions which were consistent with their overall view of the minority question in India of the time. Gandhi, for example, was actively debating but refrained from themes that would highlight differences between social classes. Instead, he spoke mostly on the theme of what obligations the government had towards minorities. For Ambedkar, who sought recognition for the "untouchables" (Dalits), themes concerning the conditions of minorities played a larger role. He used his own acquired knowledge and personal recollections as a source of information to a larger extent than several other speakers. Muhammad Shafi, who represented the numerically largest minority, Muslims, paid much attention to the theme of relations between minorities and the majority. Many of his interventions concerned the relations between Muslims and Hindus in particular, not so much about Muslims in relation to other minorities.

<sup>44</sup> Eileen J Yeo, "Central Not Peripheral: Social Science, Class, and Gender, 1830–1930," in *Social Science in Context: Historical, Sociological, and Global Perspectives*, ed. R. Danell, A. Larsson, and P. Wisselgren (Nordic Academic Press, 2014), 21–32.

Most speakers we have analysed pegged the minority identity on numbers and numerical relations in the population. The political minority identity seems to have been framed in numerical terms. Sociocultural, linguistic, or religious features or characteristics, for example, were hardly put forwards as defining minority status in the debate. Culture, language, and religion defined the class itself, not its minority status. The political minority identity was made up by a numerical relationship to other groups in a particular geography, and crafted upon the class identity. Numbers were in turn frequently connected to geography, in the sense that they described numerical relationship among classes within a province or presidency. In this way official statistics became constitutive of political identity, but they also enabled speakers to further arguments about political representation and safeguards for their social class as a minority.

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