Genealogy, authority and Muslim political representation in British India

EVE TIGNOL

Abstract

This article reflects on the significance of genealogy for Sayyids and other Muslim elites in British North India by exploring some literary productions and political endeavours of the Aligarh movement. At the end of the nineteenth century, poems recalling the extra-Indian origins of Muslim elites became increasingly popular, as Altaf Husain Hali's Musaddas *best exemplified. Translating an anxiety of seeing their power and influence reduced in the colonial world, such nostalgic discourse, intertwining representations of lineage and authority, promptly entered the political realm. The genealogy rhetoric deployed in Urdu poetry played a significant role in sustaining the claims of the leaders of the Aligarh movement as they strove to bolster a cohesive* sharīf *community identity and secure political leadership during the anti-Congress propaganda of 1888 as well as to obtain advantages from British officials according to their so-called political importance. In this context, this article emphasises that in Aligarh's nostalgic poetry, the greatest political weight was put on belonging to the* ashrāf *category rather than to the Sayyids, who only occasionally feature in the sources.*

Introduction

Many scholars have noted that, despite the fact that Islamic teachings promote an egalitarian view of society, Muslims of South Asia are divided into a multitude of categories, or caste-like hereditary and endogamous groupings that "have their own unique matrix of interactions".[1] On top of this hierarchy, not as much depending on occupation than on origin and lineage, are the *ashrāf* (literally, the nobles), a group that subdivides in South Asia into four groups according to their line of descent: the Sayyids (also sometimes referred to as *ahl al-bayt*), who trace their genealogies back to the Prophet, the Shaikhs, who descend from the Prophet's companions, the Pathans (from Afghanistan) and the Mughals (from Iran and Central Asia). Thus, contrary to the Middle East, for instance, where the *ashrāf* designates the Sayyids alone, in South Asia the term more broadly encompasses Muslims of foreign

[1]A. F. Buehler, 'Trends of ashrāfization in India', in *Sayyids and Sharifs in Muslim Societies: The living links to the Prophet*, (ed.) K. Morimoto (New York, 2012), p. 236.

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origin.[2] Sometimes, however, as Levy notes, converts from upper-caste Hindus could also find their way into these groups,[3] and, for some scholars, the importance of birth has to be nuanced. As Buehler reminds us, according to Ali himself, "nobility (*sharaf*) is derived only from knowledge and beautiful behaviour, not from inherited merit and lineage".[4] Hence, in Mughal India, respectability sprang not only from birth but also from social status (*hasbi*),[5] from common tastes and behaviours—and a glorious genealogy could still be negotiated afterwards.

Beyond individual issues of forged ancestry, Sayyids constituted the most respected group of the Muslim South Asian hierarchy. They received material privileges during Mughal rule to the point that a special position (*niqābat*) was created to examine the authenticity of Sayyid claims.[6] They enjoyed a special status and assumed an important role in public, and particularly religious, life. They were (and are still to some extent) endowed with an aura of spiritual power, which led many of them to a career of religious learning and teaching. Sayyids, as Lukas Werth argues, were intimately associated with sainthood.[7] This was particularly the case for Shias, who emphasise reverence for the Prophet's daughter and son-in-law, Ali, and their offspring, Hasan and Husain. The sacredness of their bloodline prevented them to intermix and intermarry, as Ahmed Ali illustrated in his *Twilight in Delhi*,[8] except, perhaps, with the Shaikhs.[9] In pre- and colonial India, Sayyids continued to be respected and addressed with the highest deference. In some cases, as Zahir Dehlvi related about the aftermath of the 1857 Rebellion, they could rely on a peculiar network of solidarity thanks to the "extremely good fortune" that the "progeny of Fatima" brought.[10] In other cases, they could benefit from particular leniency and reverence. As Francis Robinson exemplifies, Maulana Inayatullah (1888–1941), headmaster of the Farangi Mahalli madrasah, "showed especial respect for the Prophet's descendants, excusing one Saiyid several hundred rupees he owed in rent and always using the respectful 'aap' rather than the usual 'tum' when he addressed the Saiyids amongst his pupils".[11]

The relatively small number of Sayyids in Indian society also probably reinforced the singularity of the title. According to the 1891 Census of India, Sayyids represented around

[2]T. Wright, 'The changing role of the sādāt in India and Pakistan', in *The role of the Sādāt/Ashrāf in Muslim history and civilisation*, (eds.) B. Scarcia Amoretti and L. Bottini, *Oriente Moderno* 18 (79), 2 (1999), p. 650.

[3]R. Levy, *Social Structure of Islam* (Cambridge, 1961) quoted by I. Ahmad, 'The Ashraf-Ajlaf Dichotomy in Muslim Social Structure in India', *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 3, 3 (1966), p. 268.

[4]Quoted by A. F. Buehler, 'Trends of ashrāfization', p. 232.

[5]See M. Pernau, *Ashraf into Middle Classes: Muslims in Nineteenth-century Delhi* (New Delhi, 2013), pp. 60–61. See also D. Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Feneration: Muslim solidarity in British India* (Princeton, 1978), p. 30.

[6]A. F. Buehler, 'Trends of ashrāfization', p. 235.

[7]L. Werth, 'Liminality embodied', in *Embodying Charisma: modernity, locality and the performance of emotion in Sufi cults*, (eds.) H. Basu and P. Werbner (London, 1998), p. 80.

[8]The passage occurs when Begam Waheed makes the suggestion to Begam Nihal that a marriage be arranged between Asghar and Bilqeece. Begam Nihal refuses, arguing that "their blood and ours can never mix well. […] They are Mughals, and we are Saiyyeds". A. Ali, *Twilight in Delhi: a novel* (New York, 1994 [1940]) p. 43.

[9]See for instance D. Bredi, 'Sādāt in South Asia: The case of Sayyid Abu'l Hasan 'Ali Nadwi', in *The role of the Sādāt/Ashrāf in Muslim history and civilisation*, (eds.) B. Scarcia Amoretti and L. Bottini, *Oriente Moderno* 18 (79), 2 (1999), p. 378, and S. Komaki, 'The Name of the Gift: Sacred Exchange, Social Practice and Sayyad Category in North India', *Takasaki City University Economics* 15, 4 (2013), pp. 39–48.

[10]Zahir Dehlvi, *Dastan-e Ghadar. The Tale of the Mutiny*, trans. by Rana Safvi (New Delhi, 2017), p. 165.

[11]F. Robinson, *Jamal Mian: the life of Maulana Jamaluddin Abdul Wahab of Farangi Mahall, 1919–2012* (Karachi, 2018), p. 77, quotes Sibghat Allah, *Sadr al-Mudarrisin*, pp. 24–25.

0.05 per cent (1,430,329) of the overall British Indian population (287,223,431). They constituted about the same proportion in the North-Western Provinces and Oudh (242,800 in a population of 47,697,576), amounting to around 10 per cent of the total number of Muslim *ashrāf* in that region.[12] However, while on one hand, the labelling and identifying of Indian Muslims and of their 'caste' was no easy task,[13] British officials also often looked with suspicion at *sharīf*, and particularly Sayyid, claims. In 1891, they remarked, for example, "in the West Panjab the title [of Sayyid] is given to any holy man of that faith, and means simply a religious teacher, supported by the alms of the believer. Elsewhere, the title is assumed on conversion, or, according to the proverb, on the acquisition of the proper amount of worldly goods".[14] If the number of Sayyids was relatively low, the proportion of Muslim *ashrāf*, and of Muslims "bearing Foreign Titles", was more important. The 1891 Census concluded that "the class of Musulman [sic] that returns a foreign title [hereby including a number of Baloch, Turk, and Arab immigrants] includes nearly 12 per cent of the population that it comes next to the Agricultural group in numerical strength".[15] This was a particularly significant number, given that the Census identified approximately twenty per cent of the total population as Muslim.[16]

In this article, I will show through late nineteenth-century poems from the Aligarh movement, that, despite the eminence and aura of Sayyids in Muslim South Asian society, Aligarh leaders—who often bore the Sayyid title themselves—did not politically choose to play on their peculiar status but rather to unite Muslim *ashrāf* beyond individual sub-groups, through a common memory of past political glory. *Ashrāf* were, therefore, generally addressed as a collectivity—notably with the increasing use of the ambiguous and shifting term *qaum* (often rendered as 'community', or 'nation'). The position of Sayyids itself was seldom mentioned. Some scholars have debated the social relevance of the division of Muslim society into *ashrāf* (nobles), *ajlāf* (low classes) and *arzāl* (excluded),[17] deploring the 'over-simplification' of these categories and encouraging scholars to consider sub-groups instead. However, I argue, through analyses of Altaf Husain Hali's nostalgic poems and of the rhetoric used in the poetic propaganda deployed against the Indian National Congress in 1888 that, in the political sphere, belonging to the *sharīf* class carried the greatest political weight. With the pressing need to safeguard Muslim interests in colonial India, to voice common claims and to construct a new political identity, being Sayyid—just as being Shaikh, Mughal or Pathan—was less politically relevant than belonging to the larger *sharīf* class. While this might appear as a paradox (i.e. the contrast between the seemingly eminence of Sayyids and their little importance in contemporary political elite discourses), this observation points to the significance of shaping a Muslim political identity that could both mobilise, and gain

[12]See W. Crooke, *The Tribes and Castes of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh*, vol. 4 (Calcutta, Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, India, 1896), pp. 306, 314, 4, 159. There were approximately 242,800 Sayyids for 1,332,000 Shaikhs, 700,400 Pathans, and 52,000 Mughals in the region.

[13]On this, see S. A. Zaidi, 'Contested identities and the Muslim Qaum in northern India: c. 1860-1900' (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2009), pp. 125–127.

[14]*General Report on the Census of India, 1891, Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty*, (London, 1893), p. 207.

[15]*Ibid*.

[16]*Ibid*., p. 171.

[17]For more on this tripartite division, see G. Ansari, *Muslim Castes in Uttar Pradesh* (Lucknow, 1959).

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recognition from the British. For Aligarhians, it was the memory of Muslim political power, rather than the invocation of religious or spiritual prominence, that moulded the Muslim *qaum* and bolstered the argument of the Muslims' 'political importance'.

The Aligarh movement and the elaboration of a Muslim memory of power

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the new pressures of British rule, such as competitive recruitment, new mandatory qualifications, quotas and the gradual establishment of elective government—first through local committees—, as well as the Hindi-Urdu language controversy that started in the late 1860s and amplified in the following decades, put strain on the former elite. Public offices opened to new English-proficient graduates who directly competed with the Urdu-speaking elite,[18] and the anxiety of seeing other social groups accessing public service increased the latter's fears of inadequacy and sentiments of abasement. Numerous associations aiming to negotiate these pressures consequently emerged in North India.[19] Amongst these, the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College (later Aligarh Muslim University) founded in 1875 by Sayyid Ahmad Khan had the most enduring impact on Urdu-speaking groups and especially the Muslim *ashrāf*.[20]

While the College was first announced to be in the name of all Indian Muslims, it rather trained "a considerable narrower group: the north Indian Muslims literate in Urdu who formed the reservoir of Muslim intelligentsia and government servants",[21] in other words, the *ashrāf*. Hindu students from a similar background also entered the College, living in separate bungalows, and sometimes even outnumbering, until 1889, Muslim students.[22] Among the student population, Lelyveld tells us that in 1875, when the College first opened, "twenty-eight students were Sayyids, twenty-seven Shaikhs, twenty-two Pathans, seven Mughals, two Kamboh".[23] Although that year the number of Sayyid students surpassed the number of other Muslim *ashrāf* pupils, the College certainly did not target Sayyids exclusively.

It is difficult to tell whether Sayyid Ahmad Khan's Sayyid title played any role in the way his ideas were perceived by Muslim elites, and whether it had an impact on the financial support he received. It seems that sometimes his Sayyid-ness might have reinforced representations of him as having an almost Prophet-like outlook. In the first preface to his famous *Musaddas-e Madd-o Jazr-e Islām* (1879), Altaf Husain Hali related his encounter with Sayyid Ahmad Khan as follows:

[18]See F. Robinson, *Separatism among Indian Muslims: the politics of the United Provinces' Muslims, 1860–1923* (London, 1974), pp. 36–50.

[19]K. Pant, *The Kashmiri Pandit. Story of a Community in Exile in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (New Delhi, 1987), p. 143.

[20]By the 1870s, the number of such organisations amounted in the U. P. to more than twenty (Robinson, *Separatism*, p. 85). Societies such as the Benares Institute (1861), the *Jalsah-e Tahżīb* (1868) or the *Anjuman-e Hind* (1868) were not communal in nature and did not aim for 'sanskritisation' but rather at Westernisation through modernist reform. See K. Pant, *The Kashmiri Pandit*, p. 160; L.C. Stout, 'The Hindustani Kayasthas: The Kayastha Pathshala, and the Kayastha Conference, 1873–1914' (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of California, 1975), p. 78; L. Carroll, 'Origins of the Kayastha Temperance Movement', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 11, 4 (1974), p. 432.

[21]D. Lelyveld, *Aligarh's first generation*, p. 123.

[22]*Ibid.*, p. 171.

[23]*Ibid.*, p. 180 quotes the Register of the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College, 1875, pp. 6–9.

> Suddenly, I beheld a servant of the Lord, a hero in that plain, who was travelling along a difficult path. Many of those who had set out with him had fallen behind in exhaustion. Many were still stumbling along with him, but with their lips caked with scales, their feet covered in blisters, their breath coming in gasps, and their faces now pale with fatigue, now red with exertion. […] So powerful was the magic in his glance that whoever he looked at would close his eyes and go along with him.[24]

In an 1888 poem by an Aligarh partisan entitled "The Horn of Israfel" (*Sūr-e Isrāfīl*), which I will present below, the author similarly emphasised Sayyid Ahmad Khan's quasi-saintly status:

> The Sayyid who is the guide of Islam is the day's sun and the night's moon,
> He, who is our chests' shield, who is even called "Sir" by the Government,
> saved the sunken boat of Muslims, he righted the ship in troubled times.[25]

Such representations of Sayyid Ahmad Khan regularly appeared in poems and in contemporary texts, in which Aligarh's founder was often referred to simply by his title, or by the expressions "Sayyid *sāhib*" or "*Pīr Nechar*", which may hint at his particular status within South Asian society.

While a good part of the students, professors and leaders of the college and of the community associations that stemmed from it were indeed Sayyids, they usually did not seem to emphasise their status. In fact, the elaboration of the discourse commemorating Muslim power, which became typical of the Aligarh movement, and which was later paramount in establishing the Indian Muslims' 'political importance', aimed instead at presenting the *ashrāf* as one united community. Besides the elaboration of scholarly works and efforts to promote modern education, the Aligarh movement was famous for the poetic mourning of past glory and for the articulation of a distinctive Muslim memory of power. Almost every event organised by Sayyid Ahmad Khan was accompanied or inaugurated by the recitation of nostalgic verses on the former glory of Muslims and on their present decline.[26] Such poems inundated political meetings and assemblies, particularly community gatherings such as the Muhammadan Educational Conference established by Sayyid Ahmad Khan in 1886, through until the beginning of the twentieth century at least. As the *Rafi-ul Akhbar* illustrated in November 1897:

> No civilised nation which has seen better days can forget its past glory, the memory of which sometimes prompts its members to exert themselves to regain their lost greatness, and sometimes to console themselves with boasting of their greatness in times gone by. The poets and authors of Sir Saiyid Ahmad Khan's school were once in the habit of reciting *marsia*s or dirges on the loss of the Muhammadan supremacy in India.[27]

[24]Altaf Husain Hali, *Musaddas*, First Preface, edited and translated by C. Shackle and J. Majeed, *Hali's Musaddas: the flow and ebb of Islam* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 91–93.

[25]*Sūr-e Isrāfīl*, *Awadh Punch*, 3 May 1888, verse 23.

[26]Partly because Muslim *ashrāf* were more likely to take part if memory was thus invoked. See the letter from Hali to Maulvi Mahbub 'Alam, editor of the *Paisah Akhbār*, Lahore, n.d. (1904?) in *Makātīb-e Ḥālī*, (ed.) Shaikh Muhammad Isma'il Panipati (Lahore, 1950), pp. 49–51.

[27]The *Rafi-ul Akhbar* of the 1 November 1897, *Native Newspapers Reports North-Western Provinces & Oudh*, p. 695.

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This evocation of glorious origins and of an imperial past was instrumental to Aligarh's educational and political endeavours, from the founding of the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College in 1875 to the anti-Congress campaign in the late 1880s, and between 1900 and 1909 when Muslim leaders "were compelled, in order to remain in control, to demand more vigorously than ever before that government should protect their interests".[28] This remembering of past glory was indeed a central feature for Muslim political associations like the All-India Muslim League in 1906,[29] and served many political purposes, from raising funds and mobilising groups to gaining advantages from colonial authorities.[30]

The first Aligarh poem in this vein was Hali's *Musaddas-e Madd-o Jazr-e Islām*, which had an enduring influence on Urdu-speaking elites and Aligarh students, and set the mood of what would be a very successful rhetoric of the Aligarh movement. Indeed, the publication of the *Musaddas* in the pages of the *Tahżīb ul-akhlāq* "took the public by storm"[31] and Hali himself, a Shaikh by birth, was quite critical of its "plain" style and surprised by its success.[32] When the time that he reworked the text in 1886, the *Musadda*s had already become an integral part of the Urdu-speaking elite's life.[33] It developed, on the example of al-Rundi's *Lament for the Fall of Seville*,[34] evocations of exotic glorious Islamic places coupled with a call for action. The *Musaddas* first narrated the powerful energy of Islam that emerged in Arabia and encompassed the whole world, before then going on to describe its decline in India, criticising contemporary torpor, hypocrisy and ignorance, and asking Muslims to educate themselves and to live with their times.

In the poem, Hali evokes a glorious Arab past, with an emphasis on extra-Indian Muslim glory in general. The *Musadda*s linked, in the manner of Andalusian elegies, the landscapes of Arabia, Sevilla, and Samarqand in a meta-historic narrative of past glory and present decline:

> There is no continent upon this globe
> in which their buildings do not stand firm.
> Arabia, India, Egypt, Spain, Syria, Dailam,
> the whole world is filled with their foundations.
> From the summit of Adam's Peak to the Sierra Nevada,
> you will find their traces wherever you go.[35]

It was not a question of highlighting religious pedigree or boasting pure Sayyid lineage, something which Hali would have done with difficulty himself, but rather it displayed a desire to reinforce the status, the authority and the group identity of the Muslim *ashrāf* as a whole. Along with the sacred sands of Arabia were remembered the imposing domes of

[28]F. Robinson, *Separatism*, p. 133.

[29]See F. Robinson, 'The Memory of Power, Muslim "Political Importance" and the Muslim League', in *International Conference on the All India Muslim League (1906–1947)*, (ed.) R. Ahmad (Islamabad, 2006), pp. 157–175.

[30]*Ibid*.

[31]M. Sadiq, *A History of Urdu literature* (Delhi, 1995), p. 347.

[32]He wrote in his second introduction to the *Musaddas* that "the popularity and renown which the poem has won in all parts of India in six years is truly astonishing". See C. Shackle and J. Majeed, *Hali's Musaddas*, p. 99.

[33]See, for instance, A. Qadir, *The New School of Urdu Literature* (Lahore, 1898), p. 20, and T. G. Bailey, *A History of Urdu Literature* (Karachi, 2008), p. 93.

[34]E. Tignol, 'A Note on the Origins of Hali's *Musaddas-e Madd-o Jazr-e Islām*', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 26, 4 (2016), pp. 585–589.

[35]C. Shackle and J. Majeed, *Hali's Musaddas*, verse 80, p. 131.

Al-Andalus and the lavish gardens of Shiraz. Through the evocation of lost Muslim powers, of past excellence in sciences and arts, and of the previous virtues of Muslim people everywhere in the world, Hali helped build a shared history of past glory, which also fed a call for empowerment and agency. He coupled nostalgia with shaming incentives to follow the example of forebears, even as the power now laid in the hands of others. Fellow co-religionists were urged to educate themselves and their sons, to regain the virtues that were said to have been lost. Although this particular narrative mainly aimed at promoting modern education and social reform, as well as at attracting new recruits and funds for the College, it also enduringly shaped the way Muslim memory was expressed and invoked.

In the *Musaddas*, Sayyids are occasionally mentioned: not when it comes to fantasising about Islam's earlier glory, but where the poem illustrates contemporary degradation. The terms "Sayyid", "descendants" or "heirs of the Prophet", "those whose ancestors were God's favourites" or "Pirs" only appear in the section of the poem that laments the present state of affairs of Indian Muslims, often in a context of religious charlatanism and deceitfulness. Almost systematically the Sayyids to whom Hali alludes are criticised as fake through his denunciation that they "make themselves out to be" (*bankar*) of that status, thus implying both that the attribution of Sayyid lineage was frequently considered suspicious and that it conferred local privileges (taking religious alms, being granted spiritual leadership roles in villages):

> Many profess themselves to be founders of mosques, many *make themselves out* to be of Sayyid lineage (*banke khūd sayyid-e khāndānī*).
> Many learn laments and passionate mourning, many exercise their brilliant style in encomium.
> Many become attendants at thresholds and keep on begging for their food, going about from door to door.[36]
> Many people, making themselves out to be well-wishers of the Community, and getting the ignorant to acknowledge their excellence,
> Keep continually going round from village to village in turn, accumulating wealth.
> These are the ones who are now acknowledged as the leaders of Islam,
> These are the ones who now have the title of "heirs to the Prophet" (*wāriś-e anabiyyā*).[37]
> Many people *make themselves out* to be the descendants of Pirs (*pīron kī aulād bankar*), without having any excellence in their noble selves.
> They take great pride merely in the fact that their ancestors were the favourite of God.
> As they go about, they work false wonders, they eat by robbing their disciples.[38]

In each passage about Sayyids, Hali referred specifically to behaviour associated with religious authority—accusations of fraud, like robbing, deceiving disciples or wrongly extorting money from oblivious believers. This was probably because the local religious sphere was the one area of influence in which Sayyids could put their status to full use. The political

[36]C. Shackle and J. Majeed, *Hali's Musaddas*, v. 152, p. 157 (emphasis added).
[37]*Ibid*., v. 184, p. 169 (emphasis added).
[38]*Ibid*., v. 185, p. 169 (emphasis added).

and cultural spheres more generally, on the other hand, were dominated by a collective and more inclusive "we", "people of Islam", "community (*qaum*) of Islam".

Aligarh's anti-Congress propaganda (1888) and the uses of memory

One of the most obvious contexts in which this memory of power first became overtly political was during Aligarh's anti-Congress propaganda launched in 1888, less than a decade after the publication of Hali's *Musaddas*. As the newly-created Indian National Congress (INC), founded in 1885, was preparing its annual session in Allahabad, an anti-Congress propaganda intensified in North India. The INC—which has been described as a "coalition of 'out' factions […] reacting against specific administrative changes or official oppression"[39] and aimed at representing the interests of Indian subjects, without being restricted to any class, caste or religious community[40]—appealed to more and more Muslim *ashrāf*. At the moment of its creation, Sayyid Ahmad Khan had remained distant. But, and despite the fact that he did support the creation of "a new organization for voicing general political grievances",[41] he soon founded a separate "rival" institution in 1886—the Muhammadan Educational Congress, later Conference—that started holding its sessions synchronously with those of the INC.

In the winter of 1887, the INC—which had until then held its annual sessions in East and South India—developed new centres in Lucknow and Allahabad. Congressite Madan Mohan Malaviya started touring the region to recruit new members.[42] That same year, as Badruddin Tyabji, leading Muslim member of the Congress, presided the second annual session in Madras, Sayyid Ahmad Khan decided to position himself clearly against the organisation that increasingly loomed over his claim to represent Indian Muslims.[43] The main objectives of the INC worked against Aligarh's aim to maintain the political influence of Muslim *ashrāf* in North India and worried Aligarh partisans who felt more and more helpless in the face of demands for elective government and competitive examinations.[44] As Hali explained in his biography of Sayyid Ahmad Khan, "he was in the opinion that if the real, fundamental aims of the Congress [Hali specially mentioned competitive examinations held in India and elections for the Legislative Council] were ever accomplished, a severe blow would be dealt to the political status of the Muslims".[45] During the Muslim Educational Conference of 1887, after a year of campaigning, Sayyid Ahmad Khan opened fire against the INC in a speech at Qaiserbagh in Lucknow. In his speech, he insisted on the authority of famous ancestry and on the fact that the representatives in the government councils had to be appointed according to their social status.

> It is very necessary that for the Viceroy's Council the members should be of high social position. I ask you—Will the *Ra'ises* [aristocracy] of our land like it if a man of low community [*adna*

[39]C. A. Bayly, *The Local Roots of Indian Politics: Allahabad, 1880–1920* (Oxford, 1975), p. 136.
[40]The Congress propaganda was often criticised by Muslim opponents as "pro-Hindu" (*Ibid*., pp. 123, 142).
[41]D. Lelyveld, *Aligarh's first generation*, p. 306.
[42]C. A. Bayly, *The Local Roots*, p. 139.
[43]See D. Lelyveld, *Aligarh's first generation*, p. 307.
[44]F. Robinson, *Separatism*, p. 116.
[45]Hali, *Hayat-e Javed. A biographical account of Sir Sayyid,* translated by K. H. Qadiri and D. J. Matthews (Delhi, 2009), p. 208.

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> *qaum*] or low rank, even if he has taken a B.A. degree or an M.A., and even if he is also worthy, would sit and rule over them, would be master of their wealth, property, and honour? Never—nobody at all will like it. *(Cheers)*[46]

The Aligarh founder clearly opposed both competitive examination for government office and universal suffrage (or qualification on income): "To such people", Francis Robinson notes, "the idea of one-man-one-vote was anathema".[47] Sayyid Ahmad Khan strove instead to maintain the privileges of the *sharīf* community, or *qaum*—that he contrasted with individuals of "low community" [*adna qaum*]—by emphasising the so-called natural fitness to rule that flowed in their blood and in their memories. As Malik summarises, Sayyid was indeed "an aristocratic democrat" whose "nationalism was essentially based upon an enlightened conception of *noblesse oblige*".[48]

> Our nation [*qaum*] is of the blood of those who made not only Arabia, but Asia and Europe, to tremble. It is our nation which conquered with its sword the whole of India, although its peoples were all of one religion. (*Cheers*) The time is, however, coming when my brothers, Pathans, Syeds, Hashimi, and Koreishi, whose blood smells of the blood of Abraham, will appear in glittering uniform as Colonels and Majors in the army.[49]

One Urdu term appears here that is decisive to understanding the rhetoric of Aligarhians and the audience toward which their memory narrative was directed to that of *qaum*. The word itself is difficult to translate and, as Ryan Perkins has remarked, "could mean different things in different contexts": "*qaum* as a religious community of Muslims, *qaum* as encompassing all the inhabitants of Hindustan, *qaum* as tribe and *qaum* as nation".[50] As Faisal Devji argues, this term, along with its many identity meanings, specifically emerged in British India from the nineteenth century, and did not have the same significance in princely courts such as Hyderabad or Bhopal where the aristocracy had remained unaffected by the shift of power.[51] While the term referred to different polities in the Mughal empire, like the Afghans, Iranis or Rajputs, "by the middle of the nineteenth century most of the Muslim ones [*qawms*] had been collapsed into a single *qawm* (classically made up of Sayyids, Shaykhs, Mughals and Pathans) […] a kind of hybrid that redefined the concept of nationhood altogether".[52] Sayyid Ahmad Khan himself used the term differently at different points in time, sometimes alluding to one single Hindustani *qaum*, comprising Hindus and Muslims altogether, sometimes referring to one Muslim *qaum*, or even to different *qaum*s, according to rank (*sharīf qaum* vs. *adna qaum*), as quoted above. The Muslim *qaum* appeared as an idea, which encompassed subdivisions of Muslims and united them as a political entity. But, as

[46]'Sir Sayyid's Lucknow Speech (1887)', in *Khutbāt-e sir sayyid, jild-e duvvum*, (ed.) Shaikh Muhammad Isma'il Panipati (Lahore, 1973), pp. 3–28, edited and translated by F. W. Pritchett http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/ooislamlinks/txt_sir_sayyid_lucknow_1887_fwp0106.html#fwp03 (accessed 13 May 2019).

[47]F. Robinson, 'Memory of Power'.

[48]H. Malik, 'Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan's Contribution to the Development of Muslim Nationalism in India', *Modern Asian Studies*, 4, n°2 (1970), p. 133.

[49]'Sir Sayyid's Lucknow Speech (1887)', paragraph 17.

[50]C. R. Perkins, 'Partitioning History: The creation of an *Islami pablik* in late colonial India, c. 1880-1920' (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2011), p. 25.

[51]F. Devji, 'Muslim nationalism: Founding identity in colonial India' (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1993), p. 30.

[52]*Ibid.*, p. 29.

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Devji rightly argues, "unless they specifically mention the *umara* or nobility, for instance, the Aligarhists invariably address themselves to a united Shurafa as a *qawm*—a habit which is soon taken up by non-Aligarhist groups like the *ulama* or clergy as well".[53] The concept of *qaum* was first and foremost a product of the Muslim elites, and of North Indian (Hindustani) Urdu-speaking *ashrāf* in particular. This became clearly visible in the anti-Congress propaganda, when memory narratives more clearly addressed Muslim *ashrāf* as a whole and excluded lower castes.

The Muhammadan Educational Congress of 1887 had already highlighted divisions among Muslim elites as far as attitudes towards lower caste Muslims were concerned. Particularly concerned about the advancement of the *ashrāf*, Sayyid Ahmad Khan openly stood against English education for common Muslims and proposed a resolution against the establishment of small schools for underprivileged children.[54] This was vigorously debated (and eventually dismissed) by the opposition. Among them were Congress members like Munshi Sajjad Husain, Rais of Kakori,[55] the editor of the then ten-year-old *Awadh Punch*, which a year later, as we shall see, engaged in pro-Congress propaganda against Aligarh partisans.[56]

In 1888, just after his Lucknow speech, Sayyid Ahmad Khan launched an anti-Congress campaign under the direction of Theodore Beck and founded the United Indian Patriotic Association. It regularly published pamphlets and "claimed a monopoly on loyalty to British rule and purported to represent the *politically significant* sections of the population".[57] In mid-March 1888, Sayyid Ahmad Khan delivered a speech, in Meerut, asking fellow Muslims to stay aloof from the Congress. He warned them of the danger to their own interests that the INC represented, reminding them that "you have ruled nations, and have for centuries held different countries in your grasp. For seven hundred years in India you have had Imperial sway".[58] In March, April and May 1888, both the anti-Congress and the Congress campaigns grew more intense: while Ajudhia Nath's touring in the region recruited new Congress members from among the province's elite, Aligarh partisans persuaded associations of landlords and government servants into making public declarations against the Congress. In March, Muslims in Allahabad declared themselves opposed to the INC;[59] on 4 April 1888, the British Indian Association of Oudh constituted of maharajas, rajas and *taluqdār*s, both Hindus and Muslims, declared the Congress movement "distinctly seditious", "disclaiming all connection therewith";[60] and in May between 1,200–2,000 Muslims assembled

[53]*Ibid*., p. 30.

[54]See M. S. Jain, *The Aligarh Movement* (New Delhi, 2006), p. 93, and the *Proceedings of the Muslim Educational Conference* (Aligarh, 1887), Resolution 3, p. 42.

[55]S. K. Das, *History of Indian Literature: 1911–1956: struggle for freedom: triumph and tragedy* (New Delhi, 1995), p. 506.

[56]S. Naeem, *Shināsan-e Sir Sayyid*, vol. 2 (Aligarh, 2011), pp. 26–27.

[57]D. Lelyveld, *Aligarh's first generation*, p. 309 (emphasis added).

[58]"Speech of Sir Syed at Meerut (1888) (14th March)", paragraph 17. *Sir Syed Ahmed on the Present State of Indian Politics, Consisting of Speeches and Letters Reprinted from the Pioneer* (Allahabad: The Pioneer Press, 1888), Modern facsimile version (Lahore, 1982), pp. 29–53.

[59]F. Robinson, *Separatism*, p. 120.

[60]*Pamphlets issued by the United Indian Patriotic Association, n°2: Showing the seditious character of the Indian National Congress and the opinions held by eminent natives of India who are OPPOSED to the Movement* (Allahabad, 1888), p. 96.

in Allahabad and again condemned the Congress.[61] As David Lelyveld concludes, "if the aim of Sayyid Ahmad's opposition was to bring Aligarh to the centre of the political stage, it was a consummate success".[62]

Part of the rhetoric used by Aligarhians during this period relied on the type of memory of power and representations of a united Muslim (*sharīf*) *qaum* that had been popularised by Hali's *Musaddas*. And, indeed, Hali himself published that same year a poem entitled *Complaint to India* (*Shikwah-e Hind*). It was filled with anguish and bitterness, and it further elaborated on the extra-Indian heritage of Indian Muslims. The thirty-four pages long poem, written in *tarkīb band*, consisted in a kind of love poem addressed by Muslim "lovers" to their unfaithful beloved India—although poetry on unrequited or disillusioned love was common in classical Urdu poetic traditions, it was quite novel to apply it to a country and it interestingly contrasted with contemporary nationalist imagery portraying India as the Mother Goddess of the nation (*Bhārat Mātā*).[63] In narrating Indian Muslim cultural death (equated with the loss of power), Hali emphasised Muslim glorious origins and genealogical ties with extra-Indian ancestors who belonged to different lands but were united "all under the banner of Islam".[64] As a matter of fact the poem's very first couplet strikingly described Muslims as India's "foreign guests" (*badesī mehmān*).[65] *Complaint to India* included lengthy passages on the qualities of ancestors of various origins, which Muslims would have inherited indiscriminately it could compare to the "virtues (*manaqīb, fazāil*) literature" associated with Sayyid/*sharif* pedigrees in other contexts.[66] The Muslim qualities highlighted by Hali (modesty, hospitality, compassion, learning or bravery) were indeed commonly attributed to Sayyids by the Persian historian Firishta, as Crooke underlined in his ethnography of the North-Western Provinces.[67]

> We had the authority of Turks and the endurance of Mughals
> The determination of Kurds and the sense of honour of Bedouins
> We had the manners of Hashmis and the erudition of Abbasids
> The rhetoric of Arabs and the eloquence of Adenites
> In war, we were impetuous like Ali and courageous like Khalid
> We had the majesty of Khamris and the grandeur of Faruqis[68]

Hali undoubtedly aimed at creating a sense of shared identity, of belonging to a same, and united *qaum*, which he further highlighted by the constant use of the personal pronoun at the first person plural. Hali's *Complaint to India*, thus, built on the same literary devices used in the *Musaddas*: it emphasised the foreign heritage of Muslims through a kind of genealogy that encompassed all possible subdivisions, whether they were ethnic, social or religious.

[61] *Civil and Military Gazette*, 19 May 1888, quoted in *Pamphlets issued by the United Indian Patriotic Association*, appendix, p. vi.
[62] D. Lelyveld, *Aligarh's first generation*, p. 309–310.
[63] See for instance S. Ramaswamy, *The Goddess and the Nation: Mapping Mother India* (Durham, N.C., 2010).
[64] Hali, *Tarkīb band mausūm bah Shikwah-e Hind* (Lahore, 1888), part 10.
[65] *Ibid.*, verse 1.
[66] K. Morimoto, 'Toward the Formation of Sayyido-Sharifology: Questioning Accepted Fact', *Journal of South Asian Studies* 22 (2004), p. 98.
[67] W. Crooke, *The Tribes and Castes of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh*, p. 302.
[68] Hali, *Shikwah-e Hind*, part 3.

Sunnis and Shias, for instance, were not differentiated but included alike as members of the Muslim *qaum*. Whereas earlier genealogies and pre-modern histories tended to highlight family and small group inheritance, as Faisal Devji has shown, the past in Hali's verses was not "filiative" but still "conceived of temporal succession and historical transmission in genealogical terms".[69] It offered a meta-narrative of Muslim history that encouraged Muslim self-awareness and promoted the shaping of a unified, Muslim *sharīf* identity, which was conceived as "more Islamic than Indian".[70] This rhetoric estranged Indian converts, and hints at the fact that the *qaum* evoked by Hali did not include others than *ashrāf*, not the least because, in *Complaint to India*, contrary to the *Musaddas*, India was seen as the prime culprit behind Muslim decline:

O Hindustan, as long as we were not called Indians (*hindī*),
We were distinguished from others in refinement
You have made of our condition an utter ruin
We were fire; you made us ashes, O Hind![71]

This particular memory of Muslim power and the construction of a Muslim community that exclusively included the Muslim *ashrāf*, and especially those from Hindustan (or North India, the term used by Hali in his poem), have to be situated in the particular context of Aligarh's anti-Congress propaganda. Hali's inspiration was most likely influenced, if not commanded, by the tense political atmosphere, which worried many of these former elites. The *Aligarh Institute Gazette* of 1888 was indeed obsessed with the campaign and, week after week, condemned the disloyalty and dangerousness of Congress leaders, who were described, in Urdu as in English, as "worthless and self-seeking",[72] and "infatuated dogmatists who believe that under all circumstances representative government is bound to be a success".[73] The powerful images in Hali's poem of India devouring or reducing Muslims to ashes, mirrored fears that Muslim political influence would disappear in the shadow of elective government and make the Muslim *ashrāf* into a subordinate group, crushed by the Hindu majority.

Like the *Musaddas*, *Complaint to India* generated enthusiasm among Muslim *ashrāf* and was copied by Urdu poets, who sometimes even borrowed its title.[74] It led to the writing of similar poems by Aligarh partisans, to fiery opposite responses from Congress recruits, and to poetic-political debates that we can trace in the *Awadh Punch* of that year. Although Sayyid Ahmad Khan's modernist reform and Hali's powerful poems on a glorious Islamic past were widely praised by Urdu-speaking elites, they also became objects of controversy and ridicule. The satirical Lucknow magazine *Awadh Punch* in particular frequently indulged

[69]F. Devji, 'Muslim nationalism', p. 157.
[70]P. Hardy, 'Modern Muslim Historical Writing on Medieval Muslim India', in *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, (ed.) C. H. Philips (London, 1961), p. 295.
[71]Hali, *Shikwah-e Hind*, part 7.
[72]*Aligarh Institute Gazette*, Dec-June 1888, 1 May 1888, p. 503.
[73]*Ibid*., 19 May 1888, p. 578.
[74]For instance, the *Agra Akhbar* of 14 July 1899 published a *Complaint against India* by one Sayyid Aijaz ud-Din Faiq in which it was said that Muslims "are fast forgetting their origin and changing their manners and customs, and a time is approaching when they will cease to remember their past altogether". See *Native Newspapers Reports for the North-Western Provinces & Oudh*, 1899, p. 372.

in caricaturing Sayyid Ahmad Khan and in mocking the Aligarh movement. From April to May 1888, the magazine published a series of three poems that replied to each other in what increasingly became smear tactics—*The Drum of Islam* (*Naqqārah-e Islām*) composed by Congress partisan Munshi Abdul Basir 'Huzur' (5 April issue), *The Horn of Israfel* (*Sūr-e Isrāfīl*) written by an Aligarhian reader from Mirzapur (3 May issue), and *The Sun of Doomsday* (*Aftāb-e Qiyāmat*) by pro-Congress poet Mirza Muhammad Murtaza 'Ashiq' (31 May). The first poem had initially been published in reply to one anti-Congress pamphlet-poem published in another Urdu newspaper (and not reproduced in the *Awadh Punch*), the *Akhbār ʿAlam-e Tasvīr* of Cawnpore, and entitled "Community Warning" (*Qaumī ʿibrat*). The dispute, introduced and contextualised by Munshi Sajjad Husain, editor of the *Awadh Punch*, was deemed worthy of publication as it was necessary for the readers to "consider both views" and "establish their own opinion" on the matter.[75]

The dispute built on the same kind of genealogy rhetoric and nostalgic poetry put forward by the Aligarh movement. This was not only visible through the themes and titles of the poems themselves, but also by the meter unanimously adopted— the *musaddas*— which Hali had popularised and was now being put to political propaganda ends. The pro-Aligarh poem, *The Horn of Israfel*, even directly mentioned Sayyid Ahmad Khan's Lucknow speech. The dispute displayed both the Aligarh leaders' fears of losing influence and growing tensions between Aligarh's definitions of respectability and the Congress' attempts at securing leadership. Remembering lost glory, the poems all addressed the question of equality in Islam, and hinted at the fact that, in Aligarhian discourse, *ashrāf* unity was partly created by enforcing a strong distinction from lower caste Muslims. While Congress writers emphasised the need to go back to the equality preached by the Prophet, Aligarh poets clearly demonstrated their reluctance to be associated with lower castes:

The Drum of Islam (pro-Congress), 5 April 1888:	**The Horn of Israfel (anti-Congress), 3 May 1888:**
Where are our Muslim brothers	Where are our Muslim brothers
Who governed the whole world?	Who possessed the whole world?
Look, what misfortune befell them,	Look, what calamity befell them:
Turning them into green grocers and butchers!	Green grocers and butchers have become their leaders!
[…] The Prophet made them all equals:	[…] We agree that in Islam we are equal,
He received this order from God.	Green grocers and butchers, poor and rich,
Remember their humility:	But this command is [only] valid inside the mosque,
They were equal like milk and sugar	Take it outside and this will be the result:
They took and gave their daughters to each other,	Carders and weavers will take our lead,
In nobility no one was less than the other.[76]	Cobblers and gardeners will reign over us.[77]

The issue of the political status of Muslim elites led pro-Congress poets to suggest the establishment of a "circular" that would "make everyone equal to those nobles".[78] They especially criticised claims to authority by denouncing deceitful genealogies and self-granted nobility ("many are born out of prostitutes' bellies, their genealogy (*nasab*) is not evident to

[75]Introduction to *Sūr-e Isrāfīl*, *Awadh Punch*, 3 May 1888.
[76]*Naqqārah-e Islām*, *Awadh Punch*, 5 April 1888, verses 1–3.
[77]*Sūr-e Isrāfīl*, *Awadh Punch*, 3 May 1888, verses 1 and 3.
[78]*Naqqārah-e Islām*, verse 42.

you").[79] They expressed their discontent at the Aligarhian desire to redefine respectability in the colonial world through the acquisition of Western knowledge and customs, and through the rejection of Islamic traditions. Since the early 1870s, Aligarhians had been accused of not following the proper Islamic way by giving up traditional Islamic dress, standing while urinating or eating unacceptable food, at tables, with Westerners.[80] Pro-Congress poets made use of these critiques and also more generally expressed pity for the Muslim poor and uneducated, who could never access the elite culture of the Aligarh movement:

> Poor Muslims who are inferiors […]
> They are neither CSI, nor *Necharis*.
> Neither judges, nor *munsifs*, and nor even Deputy collectors!
> They don't wear coats, nor put on trousers.
> They don't urinate standing, and can't speak English.[81]

Again, nowhere in these poems, were sub-groups of *ashrāf* such as Sayyids mentioned, and the only use of the term Sayyid appeared in reference to Sayyid Ahmad Khan:[82] for Aligarh poets, as well as for their opponents, *ashrāf* were here considered as a whole, and in clear opposition to lower castes.

From a memory of temporal power to claims of "political importance"

Such romanticised recollections of Muslim rule continued to appear throughout the end of the nineteenth century and to be used regularly in community meetings. The claims of Sayyid Ahmad Khan that the *ashrāf*, given their history of imperial rule, were naturally fit to lead and to sit in government councils continued to make progress within the political sphere. They spontaneously crystallised in overt claims for Muslim representation according to their so-called political importance. When in October 1906 a deputation of Muslim *ashrāf*, *jagirdar*s, *taluqdār*s and lawyers presented a memorial to Lord Minto in Shimla, the rhetoric was the same. The Muslim document had been drafted by two Sayyids, Sayyid Husain Bilgrami Imad ul-Mulk and Sayyid Mahdi Ali Mohsin ul-Mulk. Invoking "past traditions" and the still fresh memory of the position that Muslim elites occupied in India "a little more than a hundred years ago", they impressed upon the government that:

> the position accorded to the Mahommedan community in any kind of representation, direct or indirect, and in all other ways affecting their status and influence should be commensurate, not merely with their numerical strength, but also *with their political importance* and the value of the contributions which they make to the defence of the empire.[83]

In the following years, the argument of political importance, which stemmed from the construction of this memory of power and the intertwined concept of the Muslim *qaum*,

[79] *Naqqārah-e Islām*, verse 37.
[80] One of the prominent opponents at the time was Imdadul Ali Deputy Collector Aligarh, who wrote a pamphlet entitled *Nurul Afaq*. See, for instance, S. A. Zaidi, 'Contested identities and the Muslim Qaum', p. 52.
[81] *Naqqārah-e Islām*, verse 35.
[82] See particularly *Sūr-e Isrāfil*.
[83] M. Shan, *The Indian Muslims: a documentary record* (Meerut, 1980), vol. 1: 'Founding of the Muslim League', pp. 193–194 (emphasis added).

continued to influence Muslim politics. Even as Sayyid leaders formed a sizeable proportion of the Muslim League founding members, such as Mohsin ul-Mulk (a Barha Sayyid who was Sayyid Ahmad Khan's successor at Aligarh and Secretary of the All-India Muslim League), Sayyid Ameer Ali, Sayyid Nabiullah and Sir Aga Khan III (who read the Simla Deputation address). In December 1908 in Amritsar, Sayyid Ali Imam recalled that "Muslim domination of the country [had] remained in a more or less unbroken chain"[84] until British conquest. At the third session of the Muslim League held in January 1910, the Aga Khan invoked "the community that carried culture to the Pyrenees and to Central Asia, the community that can still recall with emotional pride the greatness of Cordova and Damascus".[85] The memory of power thus became ingrained in the *ashrāf*'s group identity.

As Zaidi rightly notes, however, in the early twentieth century the Muslim *qaum* started to become "far more representational, both in terms of region, as well as in terms of class".[86] For the political representation of Muslims, numbers counted too, although leadership was still understood as restricted to members of the elite. It is interesting to note that around the same time memories of glorious origins and laments on present decline sometimes coincided with feelings of the Muslim urban poor, who were faced with a mounting lack of opportunities and the emergence of competitive Hindu commercial classes who "were also aggressive in their religious and cultural expression".[87] Nandini Gooptu has accordingly remarked that, increasingly, the Muslim poor "conceptualised and made sense of their plight in dialogue with a projected history of decline of the Indian Muslims and of Islam worldwide",[88] a narrative to which Aligarh poets had very much given birth.

Strikingly, as Robinson further noted, British rulers—who governed according to their recognition of different castes, races and religions in Indian society and shared a similar the principles of hereditary power and "aristocracy of birth"—readily acknowledged the argument of the Indian Muslims' political importance as early as 1906.[89] As he has argued, several elements motivated their acknowledgment of the political importance of the Muslim community: on one hand, the idea that the Muslims of India formed a separate community and that they were strong and potentially dangerous for the Raj (and thus to be conciliated), and, on the other hand, the contemporary pro-Muslim stance of British opinion and of the Conservative majority at the House of Lords, which eventually forced Lord Morley, Secretary of State, to raise "the number of Muslim reserved seats on the Imperial Legislative Council" in the Indian Councils Act of 1909,[90] thereby exceeding their representative proportion in Indian society. The concept of the Muslim *qaum*, the memory of its extra-Indian and noble origins, and its claims to political importance that had been constructed by Aligarh

[84]'Presidential address of Saiyid Ali Imam at the second session of the All-India Muslim League, Amritsar, 30 December 1908', quoted by Robinson, 'Memory of Power'.

[85]'The Third Session of the All-India Muslim League held at Delhi, 29–30 January 1910, inaugural address by His Highness the Aga Khan', in *The Indian Muslims: a documentary record*, (ed.) M. Shan (Meerut, 1980), vol. 2: Separate Electorate, p. 239.

[86]S. A. Zaidi, 'Contested identities and the Muslim Qaum', p. 118.

[87]N. Gooptu, *The politics of the urban poor in early twentieth-century India* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 261.

[88]*Ibid.*, p. 268.

[89]F. Robinson, 'Memory of Power'. See also Morley's Despatch in 1907 quoted by F. Robinson, *Separatism*, p. 168.

[90]*Ibid.*

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scholars since the second half of the nineteenth century seem to have interestingly converged with contemporary British representations of Indian Muslims.

Of course, the argument of Muslims' political importance or their genealogical claims to political authority did not remain unchallenged by Indian Muslims themselves, and even by "Young Party" Muslim leaders such as Mohamed Ali Jauhar, who had been educated at Aligarh. While an article in *The Tribune* in February 1909 claimed that the argument was grotesque, given that "a vast majority of them [the *ashrāf*] are descendants of Hindu converts",[91] another that appeared in Mohamed Ali's *Comrade* in 1911 also expressed doubts about the principle, criticising the "*padaram sultan bud* (my father was a king)" logic and displaying instead a desire for self-realisation and self-help.[92] Increasingly in the early 1920s, with the Khilafat movement and *satyāgraha* agitations, and then the particular politics of 1920s-1930s United Provinces, Bengal and Punjab, dominated by landlords and by ambitions to be acknowledged as Muslim-majority regions, the argument of Muslims' political importance was less appropriate and less invoked.[93]

Conclusion

While Sayyids certainly played a role in the politics of the North Western Provinces and later in the United Provinces, notably by occupying leadership roles at the head of the Aligarh movement and the All-India Muslim League, their authority within the larger *sharīf* class was limited. As I have argued here, Aligarh's political rhetoric and endeavours, which the All-India Muslim League inherited in its early years, strove to enhance a memory of power that could unite a *sharīf qaum*. At the time, the main objective was to present a unified sharīf class worthy of political leadership. Therefore, Sayyids, who only represented a small element within the wider Muslim population but a fair proportion of Muslim political leaders, chose not play on their particular superior status in South Asian society. Rather they built on the pride of belonging to a section of society that had previously played a role in governance and that claimed foreign descent, deliberately seeking to create a "unified pan-ethnic religious polity".[94]

Aligarh poets combined memories of worldwide Muslim power with ideas of belonging to a distinct community, which had been endowed with the kinds of special virtues (bravery, modesty, hospitality, learning) that had usually been associated with Sayyids. They constructed memories that appealed to and mobilised many Muslim *ashrāf*, regardless of their individual sub-groups and sectarian divisions, and which had an enduring influence on Indian Muslim politics and representations. While this already appeared in Hali's *Musaddas*, it took wider and more obvious concrete form during the 1888 anti-Congress campaign, with the memory of extra-Indian origins clearly estranging Muslim lower castes, or the "*adna qaum*", to borrow Sayyid Ahmad Khan's words. The term *qaum* itself could assume different meanings at different points in time however, and, by the early twentieth century,

[91]'The Tribune on Muslim Claim for Special Representation', *The Tribune*, 23 February 1909, quoted in *The Indian Muslims*, (ed.) M. Shan (Meerut, 1980), vol. 2, p. 148.
[92]*The Comrade*, 18 February 1911, 1, 6, p. 103.
[93]F. Robinson, 'Memory of power'.
[94]C. R. Perkins, 'Partitioning History', p. 64.

the Muslim *qaum* also included lower castes, although leadership was still retained by the *ashrāf*. These nostalgic recollections of former glory and genealogical claims of belonging to a ruling class by then directly fed the arguments of Muslim Leaguers and were acknowledged by the British. Indian Muslims were consequently not only represented according to their numerical strength, but also to their "political importance".

As such, the situation in the North-Western Provinces of the late nineteenth century and in the United Provinces of the twentieth century seems to have been quite different from what Sarah Ansari has shown for the region of Sindh in the late 1930s. There, the Muslim League did build on the Sayyids' spiritual aura and prestige to influence and secure voters.[95] The League had come relatively late in that region and was looking for timesaving strategies —as in the Punjab—to implement a strong base, hence the resort to local *pir* families who tended to play on their Sayyid-ness. In the North-Western Provinces and in the United Provinces, Sayyids did not rely on their religious aura to secure political leadership. Instead belonging to the Muslim *ashrāf* and sustaining a powerful memory of centuries of Muslim rule was of the greatest political significance.

Eve Tignol
University of Ghent, FWO
Eve.Tignol@ugent.be

[95]See S. Ansari, *Sufi Saints and State Power: the Pirs of Sindh, 1843–1947* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 122, and A. Buehler, 'Trends of ashrāfization', p. 239.

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