

**Querying the Indian Parliament:
What can the Question Hour tell us about Muslim
Representation in India?**

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Querying the Parliament: What can the Question Hour tell us about Muslim Representation in India?

Is a numeric representation of Muslim Members of Parliament (MPs) resulting in substantive representation of Indian Muslims? To answer this, a study was conducted using a set more than of 276,000 parliamentary questions tabled in the Lok Sabha. In order to extract information from the question texts, a method implementing a word embedding algorithm was used and about 1300 questions about Indian Muslims were discovered. Frequently occurring topics were determined using topic models and word embeddings. Finally, this was linked to the religious information of the MPs who had raised the question. The result show the issues and themes get raise in the Parliament about Indian Muslims. While a fraction of Muslim MPs in the Indian Parliament raise questions to represent their religious groups, the Muslim MPs who do participate in such a way raise a larger and more meaningful proportion of concerns about Indian Muslims in the Lok Sabha.

Keywords: Muslim representation; question hour; Indian parliament

Introduction

Looking at the last 30 years of the Indian legislature, we can observe that the presence of Muslim parliamentarians has been on a decline, although their overall population has slightly risen over time. Indian Muslims make up about 14.2% of the population, making them India's largest minority. The 16th Lok Sabha Assembly (the lower house of the Indian Parliament) formed in 2014 witnessed the lowest number of Muslim Members of Parliament (MPs) being elected to the highest law-making body.

Shankar & Rodrigues argue that the Indian Parliament has performed a valuable role by deepening representative democracy, that has been characterized most significantly by the changing social composition of the MPs who are elected to the Indian Parliament (Shankar and Rodrigues 2014). However, this trend does not hold

towards the broadening of the religious background of MPs and their presence in the house.

This approach is laid down as ‘descriptive representation’: wherein an ideal composition of an institution mirrors the social composition of the electorate, that is, how a legislature is composed (and not what it does) is the criteria to evaluate its representativeness. Here, an emphasis is laid on a mathematical exactness, which leads to an accurate correspondence between the electors and the elected (Pitkin 1967, 60-62). For example, if a group makes up 10% of the country’s population, the members of its legislatures should ideally compose 10% of the institution’s strength, thereby asserting their representation in the body. While these are necessary parameters that contribute to our understanding of political representation, they are not sufficient to explain how it manifests in the activities of the Indian Parliament. Thereby, it is essential to understand the ways in which representative acts are carried out by the MPs in the form of *substantive representation* (Pitkin 1967, 112-114) by studying how politicians act once they are elected to the house. This study attempts to illustrate this concept through the case of Muslim representation in the Indian Parliament. This is done by first understanding what are the issues about Indian Muslims that get raised in the Indian Parliament, and who are the MPs raising them.

The presence of Muslims MPs in the Lok Sabha has been declining over the past 20 years (Figure 1), although their population has risen slightly during the same period. Indian Muslims made up about 14.2% of the population according to the 2011 census, as compared to 13.4% in 2001.

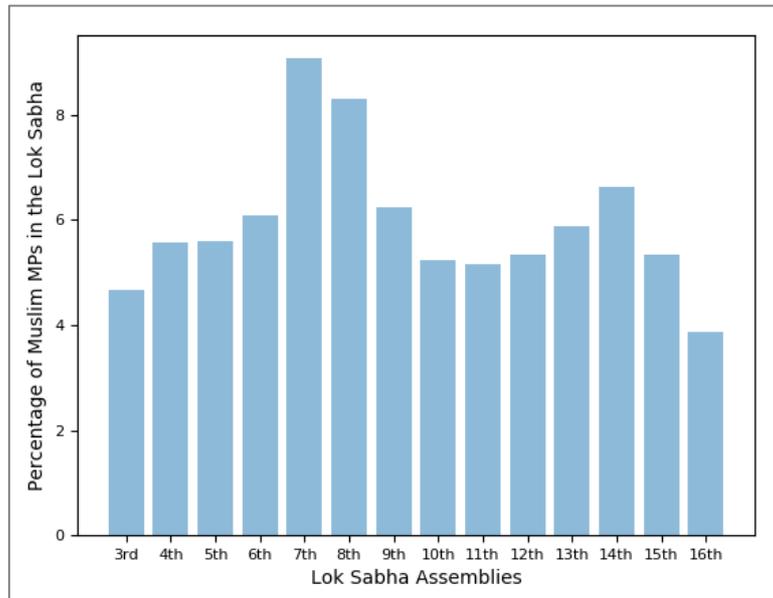


Figure 1: Percentage of Muslim MPs elected to the Lok Sabha. Data compiled by Ansari, 2006.

As we can observe from Figure 1, Muslim MPs, on an average, have held about 6% of Lok Sabha seats since 1952, however the share of Muslim MPs in the 16th Lok Sabha has fallen to a historic low of 3.7% (Ansari, 2006).

The Indian Constitution has a provision for reserving seats for members belonging to particular groups: namely the Scheduled Castes & the Scheduled Tribes. However, during the deliberations in the Indian Constituent Assembly, the demand for reservations for religious minorities at all levels of legislative bodies were rejected. It is believed that the articulation of specific grievances faced by Indian Muslims became constrained as a result of their identification with the Muslim League post-independence. Consequently, elections put in office ‘docile’ Muslims who feared denial of nomination in subsequent elections, which made them less likely to take more radical stances in the community’s interest (Hasan 1988). Thus, this declining trend in the political representation of Muslims MPs and MLAs in both national and state legislatures (Gayer 2012, Verniers 2012, Ansari 2006) can be a cause for the allegation

that there has been a decrease in the representatives who substantively represented the concerns of Indian Muslims.

However, this can only be true if we believe that only a practicing Muslim can represent the true interests and concerns of the Muslim electorate in India. It is thus a question legitimacy: *who* is it the person that can meaningfully represent the diverse viewpoints of heterogeneous voters. Conventional knowledge says that there is something about members who belong to certain groups, whose membership has the ability shapes one's thought and influences in unique ways. This idea has led theorists to argue that effective representation requires a deep understanding of those being represented, that comes through experiences of a representative belonging to the same group (Saalfeld 2011). There is some work showing that the presence of elected representatives from certain backgrounds aids in the assimilation of those communities in mainstream society (Jensenius 2017). Additionally, research has also shown that the presence of members from certain groups in political bodies affects the delivery of public goods towards these groups (Duflo and Chattopadhyay 2004).

This paper uses the data available from the proceedings of the question hour to understand how community belonging manifests itself as representation in the proceedings of the Question Hour of Indian Parliament. Thus, this paper deviates in looking at substantive representation from a standpoint of affecting delivery of public goods to that of voicing concerns and interests of the India's Muslim minority in the Parliament. In order to do this, I first provide a background of existing literature to lay down the approach of studying question hour/question times and what they can tell us about Parliaments. The second section provides a description about the methods involved in extracting and categorizing the dataset of questions raised during the Question Hour. Methods from computer science and text analytics are used here as they

substantially reduce the effort required in analysing and categorizing a dataset of over 276,000 questions. Finally, I lay down the trends pertaining to a number of themes that are raised in the questions and provide some future directions regarding how the findings can be corroborated using pointed surveys of Indian politicians and citizens to understand if the concerns raised are in line with the actual issues faced by Indian Muslims.

The results of the study reveal three things. First, it informs us the topics of the diverse viewpoints raised about Indian Muslims in the Parliament during the question hour. Second, it finds an association between an MP's religious background (as a Muslim or a non-Muslim) and the content of the Parliamentary Questions in the Lok Sabha, which is also dependent on the percentage of Muslim population of the constituency from which the MP has been elected. Thus, the study not only quantifies the substantive representation of Indian Muslims in the Indian Parliament by discovering the forms and themes raised, but also lays down a method for future research (across identities like occupations, caste, gender etc.) that can be studied for both India and similar parliamentary democracies that have a designated 'Question Time' as a part of their sessions.

Parliamentary Question Hour

The first hour of each day's session in both Houses of the Parliament is called the Question Hour. Here, MPs from both the ruling party and the opposition can pose questions to the Ministers, who have to provide oral answers (to Starred Questions) or written answers (to Unstarred Questions) (Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha 2018). A maximum of 250 questions (including 20 starred questions) can be tabled for any given day of the session. This forms a large dataset of questions which is a useful repository of information. A sample question is provided in Figure 2

(Secretariat, Parliament of India: Lok Sabha (Questions) 2014).

<p>GOVERNMENT OF INDIA MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE LOK SABHA STARRED QUESTION NO: 411 ANSWERED ON:21.02.2014 STORAGE OF VACCINES FEROZE VARUN GANDHI</p> <p>(a) whether the Government has extended financial and technical support to the States/UTs for proper storage of vaccines in the rural areas, particularly those with inadequate supply of electricity;</p> <p>(b) if so, the details thereof during each of the last three years and the current year, State/UT-wise;</p> <p>(c) whether the Government proposes to encourage use of solar powered refrigerators and vaccine coolers to store vaccines in the rural areas; and</p> <p>(d) if so, the details thereof?</p>	<p>ANSWER</p> <p>THE MINISTER OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE (SHRI GHULAM NABI AZAD)</p> <p>(a)to (d):A statement is laid on the Table of the House.</p> <p>STATEMENT REFERRED TO IN REPLY TO LOK SABHA STARRED QUESTION NO. 411 FOR 21ST FEBRUARY, 2014</p> <p>(a) Yes. Government of India has extended financial and technical support to the States/UTs for proper storage of vaccines. In addition, supplies are made to State/UTs in kind. These supplies are cold chain equipments (both conventional and solar powered), generators etc.</p> <p>(b) The details of the funds provided to states/UTs for cold chain maintenance and technical training of Refrigerator mechanics, including training on cold chain handling of cold chain handlers, Medical Officers, frontline worker for capacity building are at annexure 1 and annexure 2.</p> <p>(c) Yes.</p> <p>(d) Solar equipments for storage of vaccines have been provided to 16 States.</p>
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Figure 2: Sample Question raised in the 15th Lok Sabha

One finding has been that the imperative to respond to questions raised by MPs is not matched by ministers in their obligation to be precise or forthcoming in their responses. Ministers often get away with giving vague assurances, however, the right of MPs to raise questions has been instrumental in uncovering some of India's earliest scams. In 1958, a finding unearthed by a parliamentary question eventually led to the resignation of the Finance Minister (Subramanian 2012).

There are a number of ways to analyse parliamentary questions. One way is to study who is asking the questions and evaluate an MP's participation by observing the number of questions raised by him/her (Ayyangar and Jacob 2014, Alemán, Micozzi and Ramírez 2018, Bailer 2011). Another way is to look at the content of questions and dissect the data by either looking at representation of groups, which tells us who is being represented, or by classifying the data with respect to the area of concern, which tells us what is being represented (Jacob 2014, Bird 2005, Blidook and Kerby 2014, Russo 2011, Saalfeld 2011, Spary 2010).

Studying the content of questions can be helpful to understand the interests and priorities of elected representatives. A study of the Canadian Parliament shows that politicians tend to ask a large number of questions on agriculture if a large percentage of

their constituency is primarily involved in agrarian occupations, substantiating the strength of electoral motivations in asking questions (Blidook and Kerby 2014). On the topic of women's issues raised in the Parliament, Bird finds that on searching terms 'women', 'men' and 'gender' across questions asked in 1997 and 1998 in the British Parliament, women MPs are more likely than their male colleagues to refer to 'women' and 'gender' in both written and oral questions (Bird 2005). Similarly, a study of parliamentary questions tabled in the British House of Commons finds that MPs respond to their constituents' racial demographics and accordingly put forward questions relating to minority concerns if they represent constituencies which have a high share of non-white residents (Saalfeld 2011).

Studies on comparative legislatures devoted to the study of parliamentary questions have been gradually increasing. While a majority of them concern European Parliaments, there have been a few studies on the Indian Parliament as well. The earliest research on the question hour in the Indian Parliament laid down a methodological approach to use content-analysis to understand response styles, questioning frequencies, and question types (Mohapatra 1969). Using 30 years of questioning data, it was shown that MPs who have less college education or belong to reserved (Scheduled Tribe) constituencies ask fewer questions (Ayyangar and Jacob 2014). Women MPs also ask a lesser number of questions, resulting in their reduced active representation in the House proceedings (Ayyangar and Jacob 2014). Datta's findings on the question hour show that while the move to televising the house proceedings in 1996 did not affect locality of issues or constituency concerns, senior party members became more likely to ask questions during these telecasts. Moreover, the questions typically catered to urban concerns as the audience of the proceedings were likely to be from cities (Datta 2007).

The existing literature either relies on inferences based on question counts from MPs belonging to specific groups or on detection of keywords that would infer a topic or interest. Firstly, while the number of questions is useful, it is also important to understand what the questions are about. For example, we cannot know that an increase in the number of questions from women MPs are out of a substantive concern for women's issues unless we know to what extent these questions concern women's interests. Secondly, it becomes difficult to accurately categorize a question as that being of a woman's interest by merely using a limited set of keywords, whose effectiveness heavily relies on the method employed for determining them. The number of parliamentary questions each year go well over the thousands, and methods involving manual reading or human coding are extremely tedious. There are also limitations of the existing methods with respect to the ease of scalability and replication. In the following sections, this paper will propose a new method of studying these questions by implementing methods from computer science in order to overcome these limitations.

The inference of parliamentary questions as a proxy for parliamentarian's priorities comes not without its caveats. The questions could be used as signals towards other objectives and may not necessarily reflect an MP's true interests: the data cannot tell us whether these questions are symbolic or substantive. Since the questions submitted by Indian MPs are more than the limit prescribed in the Rules of Procedure of the House, they are selected to be tabled by a random ballot (Secretariat). Thus, the questions may reflect an honest interest as long as the Lok Sabha's procedure on question acceptance is followed as per the written code, that is, the process of selection is *actually* random. Having said that, looking at a large enough dataset curated to study a specific phenomenon on the parliamentary behaviour provides a wealth of insights about representation that takes place during this session in the Indian Parliament.

Data and Methods

The Secretariat of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha maintain a record of the questions asked during each day that the House is in session. The complete data for these questions is available on the Lok Sabha website under the Questions Search tab for the last four Lok Sabha Assemblies. For these analyses, only the periods for which the entire set of questions is available at the time of the study, i.e. Winter Session of the 13th Lok Sabha to Monsoon Session of the 16th Lok Sabha has been used. The first part in this section describes the questions dataset and the additional sources from which information about MPs was retrieved. The second part introduces the methods for extracting and categorizing the relevant questions into topics.

Data

Each session of the Lok Sabha can generate over 5000 questions. The large volume of data, the tendency of manual typists to run into typing errors, the lack of pertinent linked information in an easily navigable interface and the absence of a functioning option to download the dataset from the Lok Sabha's website are all reasons that have hindered the study of this rich dataset. The entire dataset (along with text of the question and answer) were retrieved using web scraping scripts written on Python making use of Selenium to crawl through the web pages of the Lok Sabha website.

Unpacking the context of a question is possible by obtaining some sociological details about the MP(s) asking the question, but even basic information like constituency and gender of an MP are unavailable in the metadata of the questions available on the website and need to be merged using other data sources. The Election Commission of India (ECI) is the authoritative source for such data. The ECI releases constituency-level datasets of the General Elections from 1961 onwards. These have been digitized in analysable formats from PDF files and made available on the website

of the Trivedi Centre for Political Data (Jensenius and Verniers 2017). For the purpose of this study, the winners from the elections held between 1999 and 2014 (towards the 13th, 14th, 15th and 16th Lok Sabha) have been considered. Sociological data regarding religion of MPs was also merged with this dataset (Ansari 2006).

Method

Using the text of the questions, it is possible to understand the content of the questions, that is, to know what is being spoken about. One of the essential requirements of this step involved the structuring and categorizing of the dataset into themes and topics. In some studies, keywords have been manually determined and searched in the dataset, which can be useful as a starting point, although the inability to manually generate an exhaustive set of categories remains a major drawback.

Here, methods using natural language processing (NLP) become extremely useful. The text (words) of the question is used as data. Each word is called a ‘token’ and forms a nugget of information that can be used to derive knowledge about the question like topic, tone, type and so on. These tokens are cleaned by removing stop-words, frequent words and characters other than text. In the following sections, I will describe the purpose and theoretical grounding for the classification strategy as well as the method employed in for extracting relevant questions pertaining to Indian Muslims from the dataset and performing the classification. An overview of the process flow for extracting questions is laid down in Figure 3.

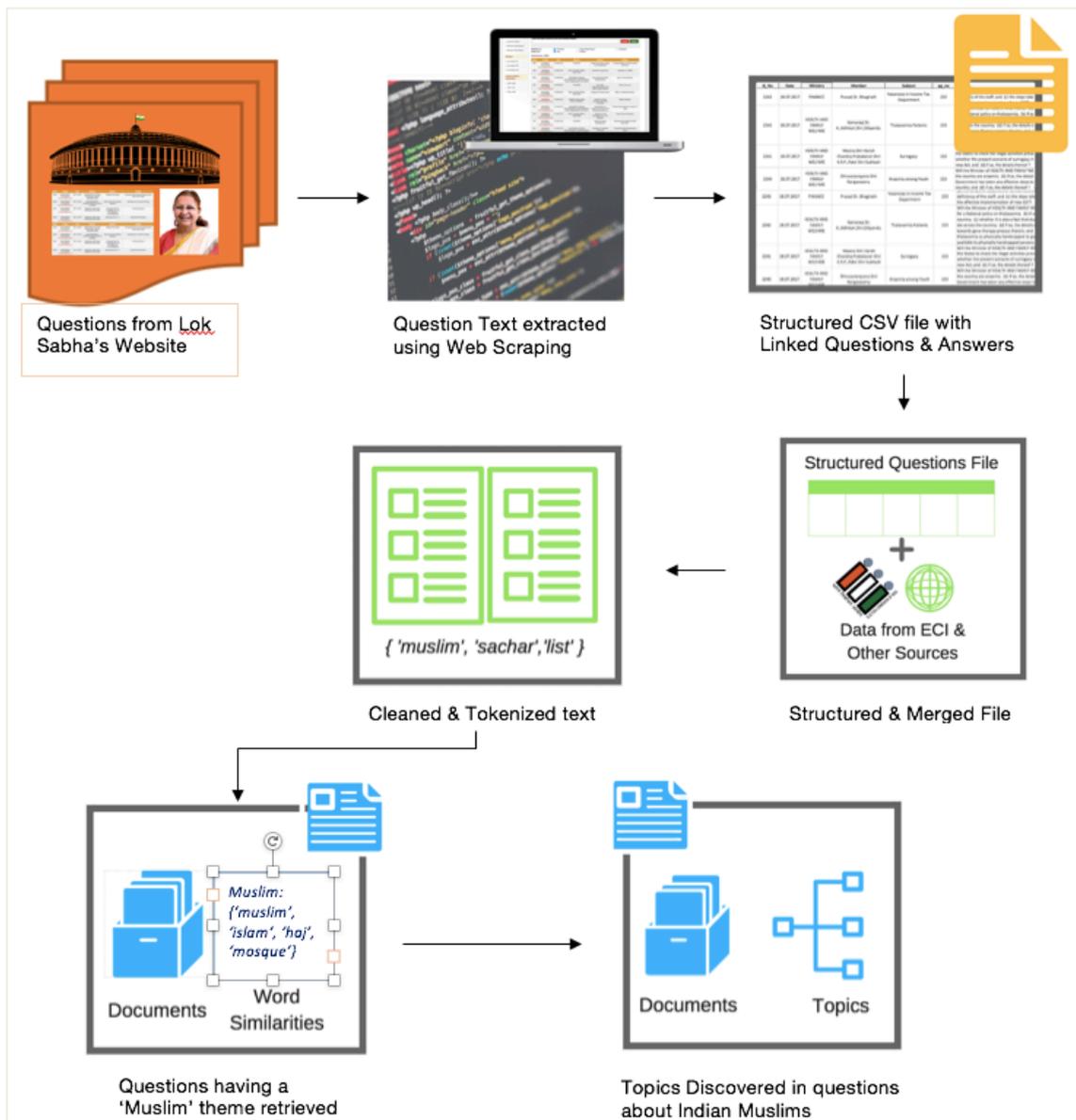


Figure 3: Process flow: Data Extraction, Cleaning & Results

Theory of Classification

Once the clean tokens are ready, the following two tasks need to be performed in order to extract information from the dataset:

- (1) Determining which questions are about Indian Muslims
- (2) Classifying questions extracted into specific topics.

The first task pertains to the determination of questions that are being raised about Muslims during the question hour in the Lok Sabha. Here, the Sachar Committee Report provides some theoretical direction - by broadly categorizing such concerns into three types. Firstly, there are issues that are common to all people of the country, specific geographies or socio-economic backgrounds, and as an extension, are relevant to the Muslim Community. Secondly, there are issues common to all minorities, which could be about linguistic rights, freedom to set up minority institution and so on, of which again Muslim issues form a subset. Lastly, there are issues that are specific to Muslims only (Sachar, et al. 2006).

The classification of a question to be ‘about Muslims’ depends on some kind of explicit reference to the community or its characteristic feature in the text of the question. Conversely, there might be other issues that concern Indian Muslims without an explicit reference, for example, questions concerning education and poverty, which significantly affects the Muslim community along with other groups. The focus of this study is only on an explicit mention of concern for the Muslim community which would require a dataset of all those questions that express an overt interest about Muslims in some form.

Extracting Questions

These questions are selected using the vector similarity of all words present in the questions to the word ‘Muslim’ calculated by the word2vec algorithm (Mikolov, et al. 2013). The 500 most similar words to the anchor word ‘Muslim’ were studied to create a curated list of 37 words including root words and their variants (Table 1). The words have been chosen in a way that as long as a question has even a single occurrence of any of these words, it can probably be classified as a question about Muslims. All the extracted questions were read and manually pruned to remove any false positives. This

created a dataset of 1291 questions from the last four Lok Sabhas.

Muslim	masjid	muslims	urdu	madarsa	waqf	islamic	mosques
madararas	wakf	madarsas	maef	madrassas	talaq	simi	dargah
madrasas	sharia	babri	islam	madarasa	mosque	madrassa	madrasa
dargahs	shia	sunni	hajis	haj	sachar	sachhar	sachchar
ranganath	rangnath	imam	imams	spqem			

Table 1: Curated word list for determining ‘Muslim’ theme in Parliamentary Questions

Classification

Once the subset of questions about Muslims has been retrieved, topic modelling was used to understand the various topics appearing in the questions, with the number of topics set at 50. A set of 20 words corresponds to a topic were manually coded into a category. On cleaning & elimination, there were 12 topics shortlisted using the model, which could be clubbed in a variety of forms to draw meaningful inferences (Figure 3). In order to maintain uniformity in classifying each question into these topics, a series of rules were worked out. These categories were either rigid or overlapping. A rigid category is one which can be mapped onto a single topic only, and an overlapping category is one which can be mapped on to more than one topic.

Word lists for each topic were determined using word2vec, by looking at the top 50 similar words to an anchor word of the topic. Following this order gave a precise automated coding (rules expanded in Table 2). Once this was done, all the classifications were manually read to make sure the method was suitable leading to an adequate classification.

Step No.	Topics Discovered	Word List - from word2vec	Combination Rule
1	Babri Masjid	babri, ayodhya	not overlapping
2	Questions about Waqf Boards	waqf, wakf	not overlapping
3	Questions about the Haj	haj, hajis	not overlapping
4	Student's Islamic Movement of India	simi	not overlapping
5	Welfare of Muslim Prisoners	jail, jails, prisoner, prisoners	not overlapping
6	Violence against Muslims	violence, displace, displaced, disturbance, disturbances, riot, riots, migrating, forcefully, muslim_victims, targeted	not overlapping
7	Islamic Terrorism	terrorist, terrorism, militant, militants, laden, extremist, extremists, jihadi, ISIS, ISI, islamic_state, taliban, islamic_army, security_agencies, intelligence, national_security, terrorists	not overlapping
8	Reservation & Representation of Muslims	reservation, reservations, reserve_seat, reserve_seats, representation_for, representation_of, representation_to, quota, ranganath, rangnath, obc_list, obcs_list, caste_status, dalit_muslims, seats, seat, scheduled_caste, enlist, scheduled_castes, list, scheduled_castes, enlist	not overlapping
9	Culture & Language	urdu, arabic, persian, mosque, mosques, dargah, monument, shrine, festival, arts, artisans, dargahs, masjid, imam, imams	overlapping
10	Muslim Personal Law	personal_law, divorce, sharia, marriage, marriages, allowance, talaq, adoption, islamic_bank, nikahnama	not overlapping
11	Questions about the Sachar Commission Report	sachar, sachchar, sachhar, rajinder	not overlapping
12	Education of Muslims	education, educational, madrasa, madrasas, madarsa, madarsas, madarasas, madarasa, student, students, school, schools, literacy, training, university, universities, teachers, scholarships, scholarship, fellowship, fellowships, maulana azad education foundation, college, colleges, maef, spqem, madrassas	overlapping
13	Development of Muslims	skill, employment, jobs, health, hospital, hospitals, poverty, economic, enrolment, upliftment, welfare, backwardness, living_standard, living_standards, water, credit, maulana_azad_foundation, loans, development, islamic_banks, islamic_bank, islamic_banking	overlapping

Table 2: Rules for determining topics in dataset

Muslim Issues and Parliamentary Questions

Using this dataset of questions, it is now possible to answer whether a large minority population in India able to substantively (or symbolically) assert their interests in the Indian political sphere. This section attempts to answer this by describing the form in which substantive representation of Indian Muslims takes place during the Question Hour by looking at the number and content of questions.

The total number of questions asked depends on the number of sittings per year, however there has been a marked increase in the number of questions about Muslims in the 15th and 16th Lok Sabha (Figure 4). These questions make an average of 0.67% of all questions asked during the question hour.

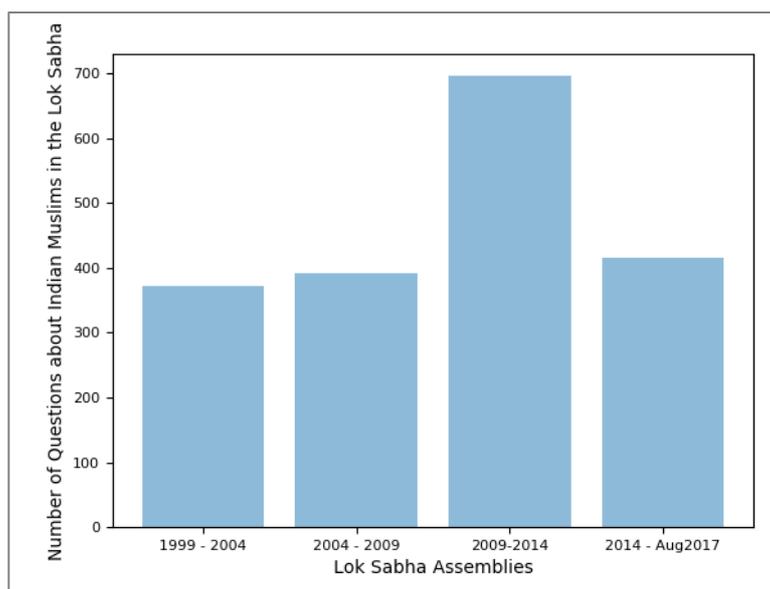


Figure 4: Number of Questions about Indian Muslims in the Lok Sabha

4.3% of questions on all topics are raised by Muslim MPs, while they make up between 4 and 6% of the total strength of the House at any point in the last four assemblies. This shows that while they are not over-represented in the question hour proceedings due to their strength or questioning behaviour, they still ask 20% of all meaningful questions about Muslims during the question hour.

However, not all Muslim MPs raise questions during the question hour. Some Muslim MPs may hold a seat in the Cabinet and hence ask no questions, otherwise all MPs are free to ask questions of the government ministries. Not asking any questions about particular issues by a MP may be an indication of her low interest or concern about the issue. Of the 117 Muslim MPs elected in these four terms, 57 (48%) of them have asked no questions concerning Muslims. However, the percentage of Muslim MPs who actually ask questions about Indian Muslims has increased from 32% in the 13th Lok Sabha to 70% in the 16th Lok Sabha (Figure 5).

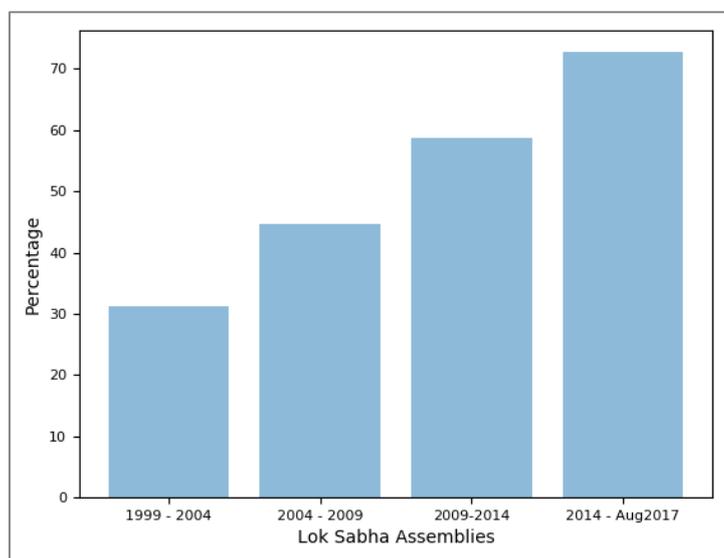


Figure 5: Share of Muslim MPs who ask Questions about Muslims in the Lok Sabha

This could be indicative of two trends - either Muslim MPs are showing a growing concern about the welfare of their communities in the light of the changing socio-political environments, or a decrease in Muslim MPs in the house has led to an election of only those candidates who can substantively represent the Muslim community's concerns in the Parliament. While these reasons are purely speculative at this point, we can learn more by understanding who the Muslim MPs are who raise the

most and least questions about Indian Muslims in the Lok Sabha (Table 3) depending on the percentage of Muslims in the parliamentary constituencies (Rahman 2018).

Name	Constituency	State	% of Muslim Population in Constituency ¹	Lok Sabha Assembly	Questions Raised about Muslims
Asaduddin Owaisi	Hyderabad	Andhra Pradesh	50 to 80%	15,16	38,19
Abdul Rahman	Vellore	Tamil Nadu	Below 20%	15	18
Badruddin Ajmal	Dhubri	Assam	50 to 80%	15,16	17,16
E. T. Muhammed Basheer	Ponnani	Kerala	50 to 80%	15,16	16,5
Sk. Saidul Haque	Burdwan-Durgapur	West Bengal	Below 20%	15	10
Shafiqur Rahman Barq	Sambhal	Uttar Pradesh	40 to 50%	15	10
Sharief Ud Din Shariq	Baramulla	Jammu & Kashmir	Above 90%	15	6
Syed Shahnawaz Hussain	Bhagalpur	Bihar	Below 20%	15	5
Jahan Kaiser	Sitapur	Uttar Pradesh	20 to 40%	15	5
Sultan Ahmed	Uluberia	West Bengal	20 to 40%	16	5

Table 3: Muslim MPs asking the largest number of questions about Muslims during the question hour

Only 29 constituencies (5%) have a Muslim population over 40%, while the Muslim MPs who ask a significant number of questions on Muslim issues typically belong to constituencies with a large Muslim population. This is indicative of a strong electoral incentive for Muslim MPs to ask questions concerning a large part of their electorate. However, there are also some Muslim MPs from constituencies having a Muslim population of more than 80% who have asked no questions on any issues pertaining to Muslims. This includes Mehbooba Mufti (Anantnag - 14th Lok Sabha), Omar Abdullah (Srinagar - 14th Lok Sabha), Muzaffar Hussain Baig (Baramulla - 16th

¹ Constituencies only post the 4th delimitation (15th and 16th Lok Sabha) considered here.

Lok Sabha) and P. M. Sayeed (Lakshadweep - 13th Lok Sabha). Even in constituencies that have a Muslim population between 50-80%, there are Muslim MPs who have not asked any questions on these issues, namely - Moinul Hassan (Murshidabad - 13th Lok Sabha), Abul Hasnat Khan (Jangipur - 13th Lok Sabha) and A.F. Golam Osmani (Barpeta - 14th Lok Sabha). A common thread linking all these MPs is that they are typically senior party leaders or seasoned incumbents.

Similarly, with regard to the other MPs, we know that the 682 non-Muslim MPs across 20 years have been asking questions about Muslim issues in the House. Here, the MPs asking the most questions do not ask as many questions on Muslim issues as Muslim MPs on the same topic (Table 4).

As a stark contrast, we see that these non-Muslim MPs are not necessarily elected from constituencies having large Muslim populations. Moreover, MPs like Thaawar Chand Gehlot (13 questions) and Milind Murli Deora (9 questions) went on to hold Ministerial positions in subsequent governments. While the former was the Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment in the 16th Lok Sabha, the latter was the Minister for Communications and IT in 2011.

MP Name	Constituency Name	State	Lok Sabha Assembly	Percentage of Muslim Population in Constituency	Number of Questions about Muslims
Neeraj Shekhar	Ballia	Uttar Pradesh	15	Below 20%	11
Kamal Kishore	Bahraich	Uttar Pradesh	15	Below 20%	11
Magunta Srinivasulu Reddy	Ongole	Andhra Pradesh	15	Below 20%	11
Yashvir Singh	Nagina	Uttar Pradesh	15	40 to 50%	10
R. Dhruvanarayana	Chamarajnaragar	Karnataka	15	Below 20%	9
Suresh Kumar Shetkar	Zahirabad	Andhra Pradesh	15	Below 20%	9
Sambasiva Rayapati Rao	Guntur	Andhra Pradesh	15	Below 20%	9

Table 4: Non-Muslim MPs asking the most number of questions about Muslims

Again, there are non-Muslim MPs from constituencies having a large Muslim population who do not ask any questions pertaining to Indian Muslims, namely - P. Koonhikoya (Lakshadweep, ST Constituency - 14th Lok Sabha), Nepal Chandra Das (Karimganj, SC Constituency - 13th Lok Sabha) and Adhir Ranjan Choudhary (Baharampur - 15th & 16th Lok Sabha).

While these might be isolated examples, it points to two relationships that should be studied further. Firstly, we need to understand to what extent the percentage of the Muslim population of a constituency determines the representation of substantive issues in the Parliament. This could tell us more about the extent to which an MP has an incentive to represent her constituents may be influenced by the constituency's demographic composition. Secondly, the question arises whether the raising of substantive issues in the House actually leads to the elevation of MPs to higher positions. Both these questions are important for understanding how electoral incentives and political motivations get manifested and rewarded, either through incumbency (by getting a ticket for re-election and votes from constituents) or through the accomplishment of political ambitions in the form of advancement to senior positions.

Content of Questions

As we have looked at the profiles of the MPs who raise questions about Indian Muslims, we now turn to the topics that these MPs are raising in their parliamentary questions, and study if they have any bearing on the religious profile of the MPs.

Question Themes

Across the themes identified using topic modelling, the various topics making up the discourse during the question hour are given in Table 5.

Category	Number of questions	Percentage of questions
Questions about the Haj	463	24.7%
Education of Muslims	428	22.8%
Culture & Language	167	8.9%
Islamic Terrorism	157	8.4%
Questions about Waqf Boards	149	7.9%
Development of Muslims	130	6.9%
Questions about the Sachar Commission Report	116	6.2%
Reservation & Representation of Muslims	112	6.0%
Student's Islamic Movement of India	53	2.8%
Babri Masjid	33	1.7%
Muslim Personal Law	31	1.6%
Violence against Muslims	30	1.6%
Welfare of Muslim Prisoners	7	0.4%

Table 5: Topic-wise break up of questions about Muslims

Questions on Haj make up a large share of all of the questions about Muslim - ranging from questions concerning the Haj subsidies, annual expenditure on the subsidy, details of the arrangements of the transportation and accommodation of pilgrims and so on.

The second category of most asked questions includes questions on the education: regarding Madarsas, scholarships to Muslim girls & boys and so on. This category is followed by questions on culture & language, which includes questions on the teaching of Urdu language in schools², maintenance of mosques among others.

The composition of questions across assemblies is given in Table 6. Here we can see a clear increase in the number of questions concerning equity that can be accounted

² which belong to both topics of Development and Culture/Language and are weighted accordingly

to the release of the Sachar Commission Report in 2006. At the same time, a small share of the questions is pertaining to the security of the Muslim community in India.

There has also been a reduction in the questions asked on topics like Culture & Language, Haj, Babri Masjid and Sachar report implementation over time, especially in the 16th Lok Sabha. This decrease is compensated by an increase in the number of questions on development and particularly education of Muslims.

Category	13th Lok Sabha	14th Lok Sabha	15th Lok Sabha	16th Lok Sabha
Questions about the Haj	29%	20%	27%	21%
Education of Muslims	9%	27%	26%	25%
Culture & Language	13%	10%	8%	6%
Islamic Terrorism	15%	4%	2%	17%
Questions about Waqf Boards	10%	6%	7%	9%
Development of Muslims	2%	6%	10%	7%
Questions about the Sachar Commission Report	0%	11%	8%	4%
Reservation & Representation of Muslims	6%	6%	7%	4%
Student's Islamic Movement of India	5%	4%	1%	3%
Babri Masjid	6%	2%	0%	0%
Muslim Personal Law	2%	2%	1%	2%
Violence against Muslims	3%	1%	1%	2%
Welfare of Muslim Prisoners	0%	0%	1%	0%

Table 6: Questions raised about Muslim Topics: All MPs

Finally, we can also understand these questions depending on who is raising them. In order to do this, we look at each category and find what are the religious backgrounds of the MPs who are raising the issues during the Question Hour.

Topic	Questions asked by			Percentages of Questions by	
	Muslim MPs	Non-Muslim MPs	All MPs	Muslim MPs (%)	Non-Muslim MPs (%)
Questions about the Haj	63	400	463	14%	86%
Education of Muslims	96	331	427	22%	78%
Culture & Language	43	124	167	26%	74%
Islamic Terrorism	4	153	157	3%	97%
Questions about Waqf Boards	36	113	149	24%	76%
Development of Muslims	26	104	130	20%	80%
Questions about the Sachar Commission Report	19	97	116	16%	84%
Reservation & Representation of Muslims	25	87	112	22%	78%
Student's Islamic Movement of India	1	52	53	2%	98%
Babri Masjid	7	26	33	21%	79%
Muslim Personal Law	9	22	31	29%	71%
Violence against Muslims	7	23	30	23%	77%
Welfare of Muslim Prisoners	5	2	7	71%	29%

Table 7: Topic priorities by religious background of MPs

Table 7 shows that in spite of holding a small number of seats in the house, Muslim MPs are able to substantively express their concern on the floor across a range of topics that are important to Muslims. Some of the questions that are about Muslims may not necessarily be spoken out of a real concern about the community but with a negative connotation. This becomes completely apparent in the case of the questions about Islamic terrorism (questions about terrorism and SIMI³), where almost 98% of questions are asked by non-Muslim MPs. At the same time, Muslim MPs are adept at raising pointed questions about the afflictions to the Muslim community - in case of rights of Muslim prisoners and protection of the Urdu language. Considering only

³ all questions in this category concern some form of Islamic terrorism only.

substantive issues and neglecting the questions on Islamic Terrorism, 20% of all substantive concerns on Muslim issues are raised by Muslim MPs, while they haven't held more than 6% of the seats at any time.

Conclusion

This work has involved using a relatively unexplored dataset of the question hour in the Indian Parliament to study substantive representation of interests of Indian Muslims. The effort to contextualize the dataset involved obtaining information of elected representatives from Statistical Reports shared by the Election Commission as well as sources that helped establish the religion of elected MPs. While this paper dwells into the study of the nature of questions raised in the Parliament, it opens up several lines of thought pertaining to the study of the Indian Parliament as well as Muslim representation in Indian politics.

Firstly, the dataset of proceedings of the question hour poses a number of questions – why is it that certain MPs raise more questions than others? An analysis of the proceedings of the 16th Lok Sabha showed that the non-Cabinet MPs asking zero questions were typically senior politicians or incumbents. Studies on comparative legislatures have shown that MPs may be acting out of political ambitions, that is, by asking a large number of questions they are able to attract attention from senior party leaders that leads to their elevation within the party ranks. This might be indicative of the fact that these questions may be more symbolic than substantive, and would require detailed interviews with MPs to understand their reasons for the level of participation observed in the House.

Secondly, we are posed with the question of whether these issues are of concern to Indian Muslims, perhaps throwing light on a gap in meaningful representation of the

electorate. This could be explained by looking into theories of delegation and accountability of the Government of India. There has been a dearth of understanding about the behaviour and effectiveness of Indian parliamentarians, which has left the electorate with little information about how their elected MPs act on their behalf. The proceedings of the question hour need to be studied further as they form a novel avenue to bridge the gap in information between MPs and the electorate.

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