ADVANCE PRAISE FOR THE BOOK

"This is a subtle and impressive work of scholarship which breaks new ground in the history of modern India. Using the rich, previously neglected, archive of the Election Commission, Ornit Shani documents how multi-party democracy based on adult franchise was established in a large, diverse, divided and desperately poor country. The research is deep and thorough, the analysis robust and thought-provoking, the writing clear and often vivid. All those interested in modern India, as well as in the history of democratic practice more generally, would profit from a close reading of this book."—Ramachandra Guha, author of Gandhi before India

"This important book goes further than any other in explaining the origin of Indian democracy, how and why it works. Based on wide reading in history and political science, and firmly grounded in hitherto unexplored archival material, Ornit Shani shows that the high idealism about citizenship and democracy in independent India was made real by careful consultation and planning, from 1946 onwards, of a small group of administrative officers, constitutional lawyers and politicians. These framers of the new Indian constitution and the creation of the Indian Electoral Commission surely stand alongside the Founding Fathers of the United States of America in their brilliant practicality establishing a vibrant democratic system for the post-imperial era. Shani's book, therefore, is of interest not just to those who want to know about the Indian experience but for anyone seeking to understand the many and varied forms democracy takes in our contemporary world."—Gordon Johnson, University of Cambridge

"Telling the so far untold story of how the first electoral roll of independent India was prepared, Ornit Shani provides a fascinating glimpse into the formation of the democratic imagination, of both citizens and state personnel."—Niraja Gopal Jayal, Jawaharlal Nehru University

How India Became Democratic
citizenship and the making of the universal franchise

ORNIT SHANI

PENGUIN
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For Fredrik
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and the consequences of settling some constitutional decisions on the electoral rolls.

Making the draft electoral roll on the basis of universal franchise in the context of the unfolding grim tragedy of partition, ultimately enrolling 49 per cent of India’s population, the vast majority of whom were poor and illiterate, in anticipation of the constitution, required a rich political imagination. The conclusion brings together and recapitulates how such a democratic political imaginary was made resonant as a result of the interrelationship between the preparation of the roll and citizenship and constitution making. The production of a gigantic registry of India’s would be citizenry, through a qualitative engagement of officials at all levels with the people throughout the country, made the universal franchise a political and social fact that contributed to the creation and survival of a democratic collective imaginary in the world’s largest democracy.

In More than Real, David Shulman shows that in the South Indian language Telugu of the fifteenth-century ‘one gets exactly what one imagines’, and that ‘what is real is real because it is imagined’.55 The kernel of making real the universal franchise began, as the next chapter explores, in an exercise in political imagination.

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1 Designing for Democracy
Rewriting the Bureaucratic Colonial Imagination

It is suggested that we should initiate the preparations of Electoral rolls as a separate operation and address the Provincial Governments in the matter.1

(K.V. Padmanabhan)

I should then like [Under Secretary] to prepare a plan for India as a whole nation ...2

(B.N. Rau)

An electoral roll on the basis of universal franchise prepared and maintained as accurately and as up-to-date as possible, was the plinth upon which the institutions of electoral democracy would rest. Whereas legal provisions, administrative rules, and procedures for preparation of electoral rolls existed under the colonial framework of elections, neither a conceptual nor a practical institutional schema for universal adult franchise existed for India. Indeed, as already mentioned in the introduction, throughout the first half of the 1930s in the course of making inquiries ‘into the general problem of extending the franchise’3 in the run-up to the 1935 Act, both colonial administrators and Indian representatives in the provincial legislatures across the country asserted that ‘assuming adult suffrage’ would be ‘impracticable at present’,4 and ‘not administratively feasible’.5

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1 Note by the Under Secretary of the Constituent Assembly Secretariat, K.V. Padmanabhan, 18 October 1947, CA/1/FR/49-4, Election Commission of India Record Room (hereafter ECIR).
2 Internal note by the Constitutional Adviser, B.N. Rau, 16 February 1948, CA/1/FR/49-1, ECIR.
4 Reports of the United Provinces Government and Provincial Committee, 1932, IOR/Q/IFC/61, IOC.
5 Summary of Indian Franchise Report (presented to Parliament, 2 June 1932), L/1/607, IOC. The Franchise (Lothian) Committee estimated at the time that adult franchise would mean an electorate of 130 millions.

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Devising the Instructions

This chapter centres on the process of devising the instructions for the preparation of the first draft electoral roll on the basis of adult franchise and its implications for the construction of democracy. It explores how Indian bureaucrats began to depart from colonial administrative habits and procedures of voter registration to make the universal franchise a reality. I suggest that in effect, the process of devising the instructions for the preparation of the preliminary draft electoral roll on the basis of adult franchise became an all-India administrative exercise in guided democratic political imagination, which imbued the notion of universal franchise within the administrative machinery around the country ahead of the enactment of the constitution. The Constituent Assembly Secretariat (CAS) directed the process, which in turn informed deliberations about the practicalities of instituting adult franchise at the lower administrative levels. By examining this process and comparing it with colonial discourses on franchise and procedures for the preparation of electoral rolls, the chapter explores key changes in the bureaucratic political imagination in the transition from colonial rule to independence that were enabled by the administrative undertaking of making the universal franchise. This exercise, I argue, resulted in instituting and operationalizing the procedural aspect of the idea of ‘one woman/man, one vote’. It also set in motion the creation of a new national polity for India.

Devising the Instructions: An Exercise in Guided Democratic Imagination

It was somewhat by chance, and indeed unplanned, that the Constituent Assembly Secretariat undertook the colossal project of the preparation of the draft electoral roll on the basis of adult franchise in late September 1947. The practical implications of preparing the roll first arose in a detailed letter on the subject of ‘Electoral Rolls and Census’, which K. T. Shah, a member of the Fundamental Rights Committee of the Constituent Assembly, addressed to its President Rajendra Prasad on 27 August 1947. ‘It has been decided’, wrote Shah, ‘that the elections to the Legislature under the new Constitution shall be by Adult Suffrage. The preparation of the Electoral Roll on this basis, in every Unit, as well as for the whole country, will be a prolonged and costly task. I, therefore, suggest that the occasion may be utilised to take a complete Census of the country about the same time.’ Shah stressed that there was a lack of

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6 Government of India Act, 1935, Sixth Schedule, pp. 247-98. For example, Part II Madras, compared sub-chapters on qualifications dependent on taxation, property, ‘by reason of guardianship’, literacy, Service in His Majesty’s force, additional qualifications for women, applications necessary for enrolment in certain cases and general provisions as to joint property. Ibid., pp. 250-4. The Act also allowed for parts of the territory to be ‘deem unsuitable for inclusion in any constituency’. Ibid., Fifth Schedule, Clause 5, p. 240.

7 Ibid., Sixth Schedule, p. 249.

8 Ibid., p. 247.

Devising the Instructions

the decennial censuses of 1921, 1931, and 1941. He wrote that separate and adequate steps are due to be taken for repairing the lack of statistics for policy making, but that the importance of ‘the maintenance of an accurate and up-to-date electoral roll’ makes it ‘worth while to concentrate attention’ on it alone.

Madhava wrote about the scope of the electoral roll on the basis of adult franchise, and the challenges that may arise in its preparation. He anticipated that ‘Proofs of having attained “adult” age will turn out to be an insuperable problem since ignorance of precise age is almost universal in India’, that ‘citizenship and naturalization are also bound to throw up good many problems of interpretation’, as would the ‘case of migrant people’. He also discussed the need to consider the particulars that should be in the voters’ register, the drafting of suitable forms and instructions for filling them, and the process of districting.

Discussing Madhava’s report, the Under Secretary of the CAS concluded that ‘we should initiate the preparations of Electoral rolls as a separate operation and address the Provincial Governments in the matter’. Subsequently, the Secretary of the CAS wrote to Rajendra Prasad with the recommendation not to mix up the preparation of electoral rolls with the census. He suggested that ‘it is necessary that we should take steps to consult Provincial Governments about the ways and means of preparing electoral registers on the basis of adult franchise’. He noted that ‘this is not an easy problem’. Prasad agreed.

In its preliminary steps toward implementing the universal franchise the CAS recognised that preparing the electoral roll would require a new form of population counting and knowledge that would make a clean break from colonial practices of enumeration. The Secretary of the CAS emphasised that ‘the last census was regarded as inaccurate on account of political and communal considerations having been allowed to come into play, and this criticism may become validated’ if the census is combined with the registration of voters, ‘in which, apart from individual interests, party interests may also be in action’. In the view of the members of the Secretariat it was critical for the state to find a new way of seeing, to borrow James Scott’s construction. Their logic was informed

...continued...
by a new imperative of seeing like a people. Divorcing the preparation
of the electoral rolls from the census operation meant designing for the
enumeration and constitution of the people as citizens-sovereigns, not
people as a population, subjects-targets of democratic governance.25

In November 1947 the Secretary of the CAS wrote to all the premiers
of the provinces and states and the convenors of group states:
The draft of the new Constitution prepared on the basis of the decision taken
by the Constituent Assembly provides adult franchise ... The work involved in
preparing electoral rolls on the basis of adult franchise is a colossal one, and it
is necessary now to start examining the administrative problems involved. The
President will be glad if you will undertake this in consultation with the other
member States of the group of which you are acting as the Convener ... and let us
know how you propose to prepare the rolls, what difficulties you anticipate and
how you propose to meet them.26

In effect, this was an all-India administrative exercise in guided demo-
ocratic political imagination. The CAS asked the premiers of provinces
and states to imagine the making of a joint electoral roll. That meant they
were asked to envision the whole adult population as capable equal vot-
ers, each carrying the same weight. They were asked to ‘undertake this
in consultation’;25 to envisage the difficulties, as well as to identify the
possible solutions. The idea was, the letter stated, that ‘after the views of
the various Provincial and State governments have been received ... to
evolve some uniform method for preparing the electoral rolls and also to
enable a general exchange of ideas on the subject’.26 The question before
the premiers of provinces and states was how to operationalise the basic
procedural aspect of the notion of equality. To address it they now had to
engage concretely with making universal franchise in their local context.

Over the next few months the governments of the provinces and the
states gradually took on the task. Some did so more conscientiously
than others. The Jaipur Government, for example, appointed a commit-
tee to produce a report on the question of the ‘administrative problems
involved in preparing the electoral rolls on the basis of adult franchise’.27

The Government of the United Provinces expanded the guided exercise
democratic political imagination, when it sent a detailed request to all
District Officers asking for their views and proposals for the preparation
of the roll. The letter laid out for the District Officers the differences
between the nature of enrolment and franchise as it had been practised
thus far, and enrolment on the basis of universal franchise, which they
were asked to imagine. The letter stated, for example: ‘The number of
persons on the ... rolls will increase four times approximately [it actu-
alily increased 6.5 times], but the simplified qualification will to some
extent at least make easier the preparation [sic]. There will be no need to
refer to ... income tax, or revenue records, to judge a person’s eligibility
for being a voter nor will the roll for an area be prepared according to
communities’.28

The Government of Madras considered some principle questions,
for example, whether the onus of registering voters should rest on the
voter or on the government. In doing so their note compared procedures
for voters’ registration in Ceylon, England and the USA. They also pro-
posed, among other things, to set a date, which would be declared as a
public holiday, on which a census of all adult voters would be taken
throughout the province; to prepare fortnightly reports on the progress of
the work; and to ensure sufficient publicity through the press and
‘through propaganda vans’.29

The vast majority of the states and provinces that responded did ‘not
anticipate serious difficulties in the task stupendous as it is’.30 ‘So far as
Patna State is concerned’, wrote its Chief Minister, ‘the work of the
preparation of electoral rolls on the basis of adult franchise ... can be
tackled with a tolerable degree of accuracy through the ... net-work [sic]

Adviser, the Law Secretary and the Revenue Secretary. A Statistical Officer was also
invited to the discussions. See Report of the Jaipur Government on administrative
problems involved in the preparation of the electoral rolls, 20 March 1948, CA/1/
FR/48-I, ECIR.
24 Letter from the Secretary of the CAS to the Premiers of all the Provinces and States, 22
November 1947, CA/5/FR/48, ECIR. On 27 November 1947, the CAS sent the letter
to an additional 11 states that were not on the list of addresses of the 22 November letter.
25 Ibid. The letter only set the age limit of an elector to be no less than 21.
26 Letter from the Secretary of the CAS to Convener of the Groups of States Represented
in the Constituent Assembly, 27 November 1947, CA/1/FR/48-I, ECIR ...
27 The Committee was set up on 16 December 1947 under the Chairmanship of the Development Minister. Other members of the committee included the Reforms
28 See Michel Foucault, ‘Governmentality’, in Peter Miller, Colin Gordon, and Graham
Burchell (eds.), The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality, Chicago: University of
29 Letter from the Deputy Secretary to Government, United Provinces to All District
Officers, United Provinces, 7 January 1948, CA/1/FR/48-I, ECIR.
30 Letter from the Chief Secretary Government of Madras (Public (elections) Department)
to CAS, 5 February 1948, CA/1/FR/48-I, ECIR. According to the proposal, the public
holiday day could be declared under the Negotiable Instruments Act; all govern-
ment officials, including pensioners and able-bodies could be mobilised for the task.
The Chief Secretary suggested sending it to all Collectors of Districts, and Inspectors of
Municipal Councils Commissioner for further remarks.
31 Letter from the Raj Mandir, Danna C. I. to CAS, 7 December 1947, CA/1/FR/48-I,
ECIR. The letter referred to preparation of electoral rolls for the States in Central India
comprising of the Malwa States and Bundelkhand States. Also see letter from the Dewatii,
Baroda State to CAS, 2 January 1948, letter from the Secretary to the Government of
His Highness the Maharaja of Mayurbhanj State, 17 December 1947, ibid.
of which the Patna government have got [sic] throughout the State. Similarly, Surguja State's letter laid out in detail their 'network of staff' that could 'prepare a list of all adults'. Notably, Surguja, as in most princely states, had no experience with any form of democracy until that time, unlike the provinces of British India, where elections on a limited franchise were held. Some governments suggested that 'by the introduction of adult franchise preparation of electoral roll will be very much simplified'. Bureaucrats in the states and provinces were quick to identify the officers who would be entrusted with the task. They even had notions of how much they would be paid for the additional work; what the registration form should look like; and who in, or which part of, the local administration would supply the forms. Only in one state, Bhuj (Kutch) did the Dewan write that 'educationally and politically Kutch is a backward state ... conditions are such as to make it very difficult in the immediate future to introduce adult franchise and to prepare electoral rolls based on such franchise'. Some state governments suggested that

31 Letter from the Chief Minister of Patna State to CAS, 8 December 1947, CA/1/FR/48-L, ECIR. Enrolment was envisioned to be conducted through the State's 700 constabulary.

32 See letter from the Chief Minister Surguja State, 2 December 1947, CA/1/FR/48-L, ECIR. The Chief Minister of the State explained: 'it will be possible for the Patwaris, who have records of almost all residents of villages, to prepare a list of all adults'.

33 Letter from Election Commissioner East Punjab to CAS, 13 January 1948, CA/1/FR/48-L, ECIR. Also see letter from the Deputy Secretary to Government, United Provinces to All District Officers, United Provinces, 7 January 1948, ibid.

34 Sec, for example, letter from the Secretary to Government Law Department, Government of Mysore to CAS, 10 January 1948, CA/1/FR/48-L, ECIR.

35 For example, the Mysore government suggested that the columns in the form include: s. no, name, age, father's/husband's name, occupation and address, and remarks. Ibid. The Madras Government proposed that the 'elector's form' would include: community, caste or sub-caste, literacy and occupation. Letter from the Chief Secretary Government of Madras (Public elections Department) to CAS, 5 February 1948, CA/1/FR/48-L, ECIR.

36 Thus, the Rewa State laid out a comprehensive scheme for the process of enlistment, and passed in January 1948 two State Council resolutions regarding preparation of electoral rolls. The State's procedures set that 'printed forms will be supplied to the Revenue Minister by the Reforms Department within 15 days of the receipt of this resolution in the Reforms Department ... The Revenue Minister will arrange to send the requisite number of forms to each Tahsil Headquarter within five days of the receipt of these forms ... he will be provided with Motor Transport and Petrol coupons to facilitate the supply of forms'. The resolution further instructed that the work of enumeration would be done by the Patwaris in the Kothar areas, by the Forest Guards in the villages and Tilledaras (officers) in their respective (forest) areas. The Tahsildars will be responsible for the preparation of the electoral roll on the basis of the forms they will get from the enumerators within 25 days of receiving these forms; the roll will be in Hindi. 'The Reforms Department will supply instructions in simple Hindi.' See letter from the Chief Secretary Rewa State to CAS, 19 February 1948, CA/1/FR/48-L, ECIR.

37 See letter from the Dewan of Bhuj (Kutch) to CAS, 6 December 1947, CA/1/FR/48-L, ECIR. The Dewan, however, noted that this question is seriously engaging the consideration of His Highness Maharao Sahib Bhadur of Kutch, and asked to be informed 'how other important states of India propose to act in this behalf'. Ibid.

38 See letter from Kotah State to CAS, 8 January 1948, S. no. 63, 18 March 1948; S. no. 21–23 (on Baran State), 2 January 1948, CA/1/FR/48-L, ECIR.

39 Letter from the Secretary of the CAS to the Premiers of all the Provinces and States, 22 November 1947, CA/5/FR/48, ECIR.

40 Letter from Election Commissioner East Punjab to CAS, 13 January 1948, CA/1/FR/48-L, ECIR.

41 The Chief Secretary of the Madras government wrote: 'the voters list containing roughly 30 million voters (so far as the Madras Presidency is concerned) is not an easy job ... There are four main regional languages ... Finding paper for printing is another problem.' See letter from the Chief Secretary Government of Madras (Public elections Department) to CAS, 5 February 1948, CA/1/FR/48-L, ECIR.

the Indian Government should arrange for training courses for Election Officers to remedy lack of qualified personnel in this matter. It was perhaps because the request to 'imagine the roll' was not pinned to a grand nationalist dream about freedom and democracy, but was rather confined to the concrete technical venture of enlistment, that administrators of the states and provinces could envisage the fine details the process would entail in their local contexts. In the CAS's request of the provinces and states the idea of the universal franchise was not accorded with special moral weight or importance. The CAS asked them to 'start examining the administrative problems involved' in preparing a list of all adults, as well as the difficulties that may arise in doing so. Their task was not to implement freedom, equality or the so-called 'will of the people'. The task was posed as ambitious and complex, but it was ultimately perceived to be a technical and administrative undertaking. Indeed, the correspondences from administrators in the provinces and states demonstrated their pragmatic approach and problem-solving orientation to making universal franchise work. Administrators delved into the minutiae of the task. They described in detail and thus introduced before the CAS the local administrative structure and its capacities, as well as recent relevant legislation. The political, historical, or even symbolic significance of the universal franchise was completely absent from the correspondences. Accordingly, administrators made efforts to 'measure' the endeavour of making the franchise transparent, breaking down the task into numbers.

Thus, the imagined difficulties were mostly logistical. A frequently expressed concern was an anticipated shortfall of paper for the roll and presses for printing because, for example, as the Election Commissioner East Punjab commented, 'all the big presses at which they [the rolls] used to be printed are in Lahore', which was now in Pakistan. The Madras and Jaipur governments predicted a shortage of paper on the basis of estimated projections of their voter population under the adult franchise.
Devising the Instructions

to homes was part of the operation. The letter of the Government of Travancore expanded on the ways local bureaucrats were managed so as to prevent disenfranchisement. For example, for each registration unit two assessors of different communities were appointed in order to avoid communal bias.

The Secretariat of the Constituent Assembly reviewed all the responses. After receiving and considering replies from most of the provinces and states, an 'analytical summary of the views expressed in their letters was prepared and placed for consideration' by the members of the CAS. Ultimately, it was the Travancore plan for implementing adult suffrage that captured the political imagination of the CAS.

In a note to the Constitutional Adviser (CA), B. N. Rau, the Joint Secretary on 16 February 1948, asked that the CA may see the letter from the Travancore State ... containing the details of the steps taken by them for the registration of voters on the basis of adult franchise.

On that same day Rau wrote: 'we must thank the Secretary of the Travancore Government for the full and detailed information given in the letter. I should then like [Under Secretary] to prepare a plan for India as a whole nation on the lines of the Travancore plan and bring up for discussion.' Within a week this had been done. The Under Secretary added his own note; 'a revised note is placed below. I have drafted it in the form of a memorandum which can be sent to the States and Provinces'.

During the four months of administrative deliberations within the CAS, in the provinces and the states, the question of implementing universal adult franchise was rendered into imagining a joint roll of all adults in the land as equal capable voters. Designing for that electoral roll began laying the groundwork for scaling up both a national polity for India, as well as the notion of procedural equality for its people.

on 16 September 1947. By 12 October 1947 the register of 29.5 lakh (2.95 million) voters was closed. Upon receiving this letter, the Under Secretary of the CAS asked the Travancore Government for further information and copies of the relevant Acts and forms.

Registration was done on the basis of the house numbers given in the 1941 census, and new buildings were given supplementary numbers. Ibid.

Ibid.

See Summary note by Brij Bhushan, 19 January 1948, CA/1/FR/48-I, ECIR.

Ibid. (emphasis added). This may throw more light on Robin Jeffrey's comment in his study of the first universal suffrage elections in Travancore in 1948 that 'not surprisingly, the electoral system retained a number of features of the princely legislature'. See Robin Jeffrey, 'The "Kerala Model" and Portents for Indian Politics: Inferences from the First Universal Suffrage Elections, Travancore, 1948', unpublished paper, p. 17. I thank Robin Jeffrey for sharing his paper with me.

Internal note, 20 February 1948, CA/1/FR/48-I, ECIR.
‘A Plan for India as a Whole Nation’

By 15 March 1948 the Joint Secretary of the CAS issued a circular letter to all provinces, states, and convenors of group states containing instructions for the preparation of the draft electoral roll on the basis of adult franchise, and detailed directives for the actual enumeration, requesting that the work be carried out forthwith. The rationale was that ‘it is clearly desirable that the elections for the future Central and Provincial Legislatures (these latter are referred to in the new constitution as State Legislatures) should be completed as early as possible after the new constitution comes into operation’. The instructions for the compilation of the roll were issued in anticipation of the new constitution. But they were pegged to the draft constitution that was under consideration and were legitimated on that basis. The letter, which ran over six pages, included an introduction, general instructions, and explanations on the nature of the franchise, the order for preparing the rolls, the types of electoral rolls, the form of the electoral roll, directives for the revisions of the rolls, as well as an appendix with the ‘provisions as to the disqualification of electors’, based on articles from the draft constitution. General instructions, the letter stated, have been drawn up partly on the basis of the replies received from the various governments and partly on existing procedures in certain parts of India.

The instructions set out that every citizen, as defined in article 5 of the draft constitution, of or above 21 years of age who is not disqualified by reason of unsoundness of mind or of non-residence is entitled to registration on the electoral roll. A voter should have a place of residence in the electoral unit for a period of not less than 180 days in the year ending on 31 March 1948.

While the qualifications for being a voter were uniform and were based on the draft constitution, the instructions for the preparation of the roll on the ground provided scope for adjustments and flexibility. The instruction letter stated that ‘there is no intention to standardise the procedure, but only to indicate the general lines on which the work should proceed. Local variations may be found to be necessary and appropriate modifications may accordingly be made by the Governments concerned’. The language of the roll was left to the discretion of each province and state, as was the method of ascertaining the age of a voter.

At the same time, the elaborated description of the process of enumeration made it very concrete and easy to imagine: ‘the registration should be on a house-to-house basis, that is to say, an officer should be deputed to visit each house for the purpose of preparing the register. The registration work may proceed on the basis of the house numbers given in the 1941 census. New buildings in electoral unit may be given supplementary numbers.’

The instructions contrasted the pursuit of universal franchise with the state of franchise until that time:

Under the new constitution there will be no separate electorate for the different communities; but seats will be reserved in certain constituencies... It is, therefore, not necessary to prepare separate rolls for the different communities: one composite roll for all communities will suffice... It may be pointed out that there will be no special constituencies under the new constitution as there are at present, for women, labour, commerce and industry etc.

An illustrative Form of the Electoral Roll was attached in an appendix. These instructions and the new registration form essentially inverted the logic that underlay the colonial form of representation and principles of devolution.
Since the work was to be done in anticipation of the new constitution, the letter of instruction explained that for the present, until the constitution and an election law come into force, it would suffice if draft rolls were prepared under executive instructions, which each province and state should issue. Finally, the CAS requested a fortnightly report from all governments, giving details of the progress made and difficulties encountered.

The manner in which the instructions were formulated, in a collaborative consultation, as an exercise in guided democratic political imagination that went down to the smallest technical details, contributed to imbuing the notion and practical implications of universal franchise within the bureaucracy, which had been at the foundation of the colonial edifice. The almost four months of correspondences and consultations about the actual making of the universal franchise between the Secretariat and administrators across the country triggered a democratisation of the bureaucratic imagination. This did not mean that a new democratic bureaucracy simply emerged in India. But this process produced a fundamentally new set of bureaucratic attitudes in relation to the notion and practice of procedural equality for voting. Moreover, devising the instructions for the preparation of electoral rolls on the basis of universal franchise fostered the sense of an administrative capacity for India as a whole nation, as bureaucrats embarked on making possible and practicable for India what was until then considered impossible.

The 15 March 1948 letter of instructions for the preparation of electoral rolls in anticipation of the new constitution constituted a common bureaucratic ground for democratisation on an all-India scale. A day after the letter was issued B. N. Rau wrote a summary note on ‘preparation of electoral rolls under the new constitution’, which in effect set the instruction letter as a new bureaucratic precedent. Rau wrote in the margins of the note that this ‘may be useful, if questions are asked as to what action we have taken’.

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11 Indeed, at the time that some sections of the bureaucracy were dealing with devising instructions and preparing for making the universal franchise, other components of the bureaucracy were engaged in implementing structures and instructions that challenged the democratic path. Among these were, for example, the permit system and the Influx from West Pakistan Control (from 19 July 1948), the Influx from Pakistan both from East and West Pakistan (10 November 1948) and the Evacuee Property negotiations (January 1949).

12 Along the process of the registration of voters administrators around the country made recurrent reference to “letter No. CA/64/RR/47, dated 15 March 1948”, in correspondences and discussions of questions and problems that arose.

13 Note by B. N. Rau, 10 March 1948, CA/1/PR/48-I, ECIR.

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Government of the Central Provinces and Berar Legislative Department, Memorandum No. 413 XVIII, ‘Preparation of electoral rolls for elections to the future Central and Provincial Legislatures’, 13 July 1948 – From Deputy Secretary to Government, Central Provinces and Berar, Legislative Department to All Deputy Commissioners.
Government are fully alive to the fact that the task is a colossal one, but it is expected that it should be tackled with determination and that it will be ungrudgingly carried out expeditiously, so that this Province may keep pace with the others in the matter... this does not mean that the work should be rushed... The interest of the Province very largely depends upon the accuracy of the electoral roll, unit by unit, in the preparation of which everyone concerned is expected to give the best of his ability.66

One of the first tasks was house numbering, which was prescribed in the form of the electoral roll. Provincial governments adopted the instructions for house numbering suggested at the time by the Census Commissioner.67 Provincial governments elaborated and explained that house numbering in a village should start from the North-East and end in the South-East.68 The Reform Commissioner of Assam suggested

Centrals Provinces and Berar (5 pages), CA/1/FR/48-II, ECIR. Also see Home Department, Constitution and Elections, Memorandum No. 643(2) A.R., 'Preparation of Draft Electoral Rolls for Elections to the Lower Houses of the Central and Provincial Legislatures', from Joint Secretary to the Government of West Bengal to the Commissioner Burdwan/Presidency Division, Calcutta, 22 May 1948, CA/1/FR/48-II, ECIR.

Letter from R. R. Khandu, Reform Commissioner, Assam to All Deputy Commissioners of Plain Districts, 'Preparation of Draft Electoral Rolls under the new Constitution for Central and Provincial Legislatures', No. L.801/47/83, 3 May 1948, CA/1/FR/48-II, ECIR. Initially, the Government of Assam forwarded the CAS's 15 March letter of instructions to all District Officers asking of them to take immediate steps for the preparation of the draft electoral rolls, and noted that further executive orders will be issued as soon as possible. See letter from Secretary to the Governor of Assam in the Legislative Department to All District Officers and Political Officers including Superintendent, Lushai Hills, 'Preparation of electoral rolls under the new Constitution for Central and Provincial legislatures', 23 March 1948, CA/1/FR/48-II. A month later they appointed a Reform Commissioner to take charge of the work. By that time, district officers sent a variety of inquiries and suggestions regarding the preparation of the rolls. The Reform Commissioner of Assam's instructions addressed the questions they raised.

On 3 April 1948, the Census Commissioner for India sent a memorandum (No. 1316-278-II), to the provincial governments, suggesting that the preparation of the electoral rolls should be conducted along with the house numbering as instructed for the preparatory work on the future census, and that the rolls should be based on the house numbers so prepared. Provincial governments approved that. See, for example, Government of the Central Provinces and Berar Legislative Department, Memorandum No. 413/XVIII, 'Preparation of electoral rolls for elections to the future Central and Provincial Legislatures', 13 July 1948 – From Deputy Secretary to Government, Central Provinces and Berar, Legislative Department to All Deputy Commissioners Central Provinces and Berar, CA/1/FR/48-II, ECIR; letter from R. R. Khandu, Reform Commissioner, Assam to All Deputy Commissioners of Plain Districts, 'Preparation of Draft Electoral Rolls under the new Constitution for Central and Provincial Legislatures', No. L.801/47/83, 3 May 1948, CA/1/FR/48-II, ECIR.

66 See, for example, letter from R. R. Khandu, Reform Commissioner, Assam to All District Officers (including Superintendent of Lushai Hills) (No. L.801/47/110), 'Preparation of electoral rolls under the new Constitution for Central and Provincial legislatures', 3 May 1948, CA/1/FR/48-II. For similar instructions see Home Department, Constitution and Elections, Memorandum No. 643(2) A.R., 'Preparation of Draft Electoral Rolls for Elections to the Lower Houses of the Central and Provincial Legislatures', 3 May 1948, CA/1/FR/48-II.

Elections to the Lower Houses of the Central and Provincial Legislatures', from Joint Secretary to the Government of West Bengal to the Commissioner Burdwan/Presidency Division, Calcutta, 22 May 1948, CA/1/FR/48-II, ECIR.

Letter from R. R. Khandu, Reform Commissioner, Assam to All District Officers (including Superintendent of Lushai Hills and Political Officers Bulipara Frontier Tract) (No. L.801/47), 'Preparation of electoral rolls under the new Constitution for Central and Provincial legislatures', 28 May 1948, CA/1/FR/48-II.

Government of West Bengal Home Department (Constitution and Elections), Memo. No. 780(2) A.R., 'Preparation of Draft Electoral Rolls for Elections to the Lower Houses of the Central and Provincial Legislatures', from Joint Secretary to the Government of West Bengal to the Commissioner Burdwan/Presidency Division, Calcutta, 26 June 1948, CA/1/FR/48-II, ECIR.

Home Department, Constitution and Elections, Memorandum No. 643(2) A.R., 'Preparation of Draft Electoral Rolls for Elections to the Lower Houses of the Central and Provincial Legislatures', from Joint Secretary to the Government of West Bengal to the Commissioner Burdwan/Presidency Division, Calcutta, 22 May 1948, CA/1/FR/48-II, ECIR.

Government of West Bengal Home Department (Constitution and Elections), Memo. No. 780(2) A.R., 'Preparation of Draft Electoral Rolls for Elections to the Lower Houses of the Central and Provincial Legislatures', from Joint Secretary to the Government of West Bengal to the Commissioner Burdwan/Presidency Division, Calcutta, 26 June 1948, CA/1/FR/48-II, ECIR.
the villages should be arranged alphabetically. In urban areas the registration officials were instructed to ‘go through every street systematically and make inquiries from house to house’. The Central Provinces and Berar government clarified that ‘where there are more than adult persons than one in a house the names of all such persons should come one after another and the entry pertaining to the succeeding house number should follow after all such names.  

Governments' instructions also described in detail how, for example, the names of voters should be arranged; what should be the unit for the preparation of the rolls – mainly village in rural areas and by ward in urban areas; and where and how essential stationery materials should be purchased. The West Bengal Government, for example, wrote that they requested of 'the Deputy Controller, Stationery', paper 'at the rate of 5 sheets half-follsca for every 10 voters.' Officials were asked to spell names of voters accurately, make sure the lists were legible and written neatly, in ink and on one side of paper. Moreover, governments' instructions provided very detailed technical explanations for each item on the form of the electoral roll, and for how to work out the residential and citizenship qualifications for enrolment. They also set the language of the rolls, and gave directives for the compilations of fortnightly reports on the progress of the work.

73 'Instructions for the Preparation of Draft Electoral Rolls, 1948–49' (16 pages), attached to letter from M. R. Bhide, Election Commissioner East Punjab to CAS, 12 August 1948, CA/1/FR/48-II, ECIR.
74 Ibid.
75 Governor of the Central Provinces and Berar Legislative Department, Memorandum No. 413/XVIII, 'Preparation of electoral rolls for elections to the future Central and Provincial Legislatures', 13 July 1948 – from Deputy Secretary to Government, Central Provinces and Berar, Legislative Department to All Deputy Commissioners Central Provinces and Berar, CA/1/FR/48-II, ECIR.
76 Government of West Bengal Home Department (Constitution and Elections), Memo No. 780(2) A.R., 'Preparation of Draft Electoral Rolls for Elections to the Lower Houses of the Central and Provincial Legislatures', from Joint Secretary to the Government of West Bengal to the Commissioner Burdwan/Presidency Division, Calcutta, 26 June 1948, CA/1/FR/48-II, ECIR.
77 In Assam, for example, Assamese was prescribed for the Assam Valley Districts and Assamese in addition to Bengal in the Cachar District. See letter from R. R. Khaund, Reforms Commissioner, Assam to All Deputy Commissioners of Plain Districts, 'Preparation of Draft Electoral Rolls under the new Constitution for Central and Provincial Legislators' (No. L.801/47/83), 3 May 1948, CA/1/FR/48-II, ECIR. The West Bengal government instructed to prepare the rolls in Bengali, except for Calcutta and Darjeeling, where they were to be prepared in English. See Home Department, Constitution and Elections, Memorandum No. 643(2) A.R., 'Preparation of Draft Electoral Rolls for Elections to the Lower Houses of the Central and Provincial Legislatures', from Joint Secretary to the Government of West Bengal to the Commissioner Burdwan/Presidency Division, Calcutta, 22 May 1948, CA/1/FR/48-II, ECIR. In East Punjab, 'Three lac form of applications have been printed in Urdu, Hindi and Gurmukhi.' Letter from M. R. Bhide, Election Commissioner East Punjab to CAS, 'Preparation of Draft Electoral Rolls under the New Constitution, 21 June 1948, CA/1/FR/48-II, ECIR.
78 'Instructions for the Preparation of Draft Electoral Rolls, 1948–49', attached to letter from M. R. Bhide, Election Commissioner East Punjab to CAS, 12 August 1948, CA/1/FR/48-II, ECIR.
79 Letter from R. R. Khaund, Reforms Commissioner, Assam to All Deputy Commissioners of Plain Districts, 'Preparation of Draft Electoral Rolls under the new Constitution for Central and Provincial Legislators', 13 July 1948 – from Deputy Secretary to Government, Central Provinces and Berar, Legislative Department to All Deputy Commissioners Central Provinces and Berar, CA/1/FR/48-II, ECIR. The government instructed that supervising officers should do percentage checking from birth registers at police stations and kowar's books to find out if in each village or ward all persons eligible for registration have been rightly entered in the roll.
80 Letter from R. R. Khaund, Reforms Commissioner, Assam to All Deputy Commissioners of Plain Districts, 'Preparation of Draft Electoral Rolls under the new Constitution for Central and Provincial Legislators' (No. L.801/47/83), 3 May 1948, CA/1/FR/48-II, ECIR.
81 Purdahashin means women who observed rigid rules of seclusion. The certificate was to be signed by a government officer, or by a Mauzadar, or by the Sarpach. See ibid.

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The method of ascertaining the age of a voter was left to the discretion of each province and state. This was one of the expected challenges that arose in the process of the devising of the instructions. Governments suggested, for example, that a ‘school certificate or a municipal certificate of birth or horoscope should be taken to be sufficient proof’, or checking birth registers at police stations and kowar's books. In Assam, one district officer suggested to 'intelligently frame' a questionnaire on historically important local and national events for each area, such as 'the floods of 1927, the freedom movement of 1930', and to ascertain the age qualification of voters by their ability to recall such events. The Reforms Commissioner of Assam's view, however, was that this method could not be applied in all cases, though it may be 'adopted to suit local conditions'. He suggested 'to leave this point for the district officers to decide for themselves as to the best method to be adopted to meet the need of each area'. He anticipated, in particular, a difficulty in verifying the age of female voters. In case of doubt, and for the registration of 'purdahashin' women he prescribed, on the basis of Rule 15 of Part I of the Assam Legislative Assembly Electoral Rules, 1936, a form for age certificate.

Provincial governments noted the importance of the cooperation of the public for the success of the work. They asked that registering officials inform people in the village or ward about their planned visit to register names in that area a few days beforehand, and to come at a time people are likely to be home. Thus, muharris in East Punjab were instructed 'to make their house-to-house visits before 10 a.m. and from 4 p.m. to
7 p.m. During the day between 12 noon and 4 p.m., moharrirs and supervisors should be required to meet ... in order to exchange notes to avoid multiple entries of one name'. An illustration was provided for that procedure: 'Rosan lives in the Civil Station of Amritsar and also has a place of residence in Karmon Deori, which he may be using occasionally as his residence.' His name is thus likely to be entered in both places. 'When these moharrirs meet as suggested above and compare entries, they are bound to discover this.' The Government of West Bengal suggested that enumerators may 'convene village or ward gathering, where the work can be explained and discussed, and data gathered for insertion in the Rolls', and that this may be completed by visiting individual houses.

Local governments instructed to ensure wide and local publicity to the work of the preparation of electoral rolls. They asked officials to do so through press communiqués in the vernacular, or by other means. For example, the East Punjab Government sent a copy of a press notice that announced the preparation of electoral rolls to the Director General of Public Relations 'for its adaptation for other means of publicity, such as Cinematograph slides, Radio, etc.' It was only with respect to the need to publicise the work that sometimes the plain administrative prose of the instructions was cut through by the sense of the gravity of the operations. 'For the first time', the Government of West Bengal stated, 'and under conditions of full self-government adult franchise is being worked out in the country. It is essential that everyone should come to know of this valuable political right which each adult wields.'

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82 'Instructions for the Preparation of Draft Electoral Rolls, 1948-49', attached to letter from M. R. Bhide, Election Commissioner East Punjab to CAS, 12 August 1948, CA/1/FR/48-II, ECIR.
83 Ibid.
84 Government of West Bengal Home Department (Constitution and Elections), Memo. No. 780(2) A.R., 'Preparation of Draft Electoral Rolls for Elections to the Lower Houses of the Central and Provincial Legislatures', from Joint Secretary to the Government of West Bengal to the Commissioner Burdwan/Presidency Division, Calcutta, 26 June 1948, CA/1/FR/48-II, ECIR.
85 Ibid.
86 See, for example, Government of the Central Provinces and Berar Legislative Department, Memorandum No. 413/XXVIII, 'Preparation of electoral rolls for elections to the future Central and Provincial Legislatures', 13 July 1948 - From Deputy Secretary to Government, Central Provinces and Berar, Legislative Department to All Deputy Commissioners, Central Provinces and Berar, CA/1/FR/48-II, ECIR; letter from R. R. Khaund, Reforms Commissioner, A.P. to All Deputy Commissioners of Bihar, 'Preparation of Draft Electoral Rolls under the new Constitution for Central and Provincial Legislatures' (No. L. 801/47/83), 3 May 1948, CA/1/FR/48-II, ECIR.
88 On 31 July 1948 the CAS asked of the provincial governments for copies of Provincial Instructions in English. See letter from M. R. Bhide, Election Commissioner East Punjab to CAS, 12 August 1948, CA/1/FR/48-II, ECIR.
89 The aim of the motion was 'that instructions be issued forth with to the authorities concerned for the preparation of electoral rolls'. See 'Motion Re Preparation of Electoral Rolls', Constituent Assembly Debates (hereafter CAD), 8 January 1949, (available at http://parliamentofindia.nic.in/debates/debates.htm, accessed 28 June 2017), Members of the Assembly were informed during the discussion that the CAS under the direction of the President had 'already taken certain steps for the purpose'. Ibid.

Local instructions sometimes deviated from the CAS's guidelines, or were phrased in ways that were open to interpretation and potential breaches in the registration of all adults. Some governments made changes to the form that the CAS devised. For example, the Government of East Punjab added a column for occupation and omitted the column for house number and address. Some governments dwelled on colonial rules, for example, the age certificate form for women whose age was in doubt. Indeed, not every bureaucrat that was obstructionist in the 1930s suddenly turned into a non-obstructionist in 1947-1949. Once the registration started, distinct forms of exclusionary practices emerged among administrators on the ground. But, as the following chapters will show, the CAS and various citizen and social organisations took measures against such attempts on the basis of new parameters of governance, based on procedural equality, set by the universal franchise. The CAS unwaveringly oversaw local governments' instruction and their work on the ground, and redressed the breaches that came to its attention.

Once the actual registration of voters started in anticipation of the constitution, the making of democracy on the ground sometimes outpaced the deliberative process of constitution making. The motion on the preparation of the electoral roll on the basis of universal franchise came up for discussion before the Constituent Assembly for the first time only in January 1949, when much of the preliminary work was already well under way.

The democratic shift that took place in the bureaucratic bent and imagination could be illustrated, by looking briefly at the different attitudes and practices that were devised by colonial administrators while addressing the challenge of enrolling women and other groups at the margins of society during the expansion of the franchise in the 1930s. In particular, the next section looks at problems associated with the enlistment of women, which arose both in 1935 and in 1948-1949, but that was dealt with completely differently.
Rewriting the Bureaucratic Colonial Imagination

In discussions on the expansion of the franchise in the early 1930s, provincial franchise committees regarded universal adult suffrage 'to be impracticable at present', in particular 'for administrative reasons'. Colonial administrators' lack of imagination, or rather pursuit of bureaucratic expediency, went so far as to suggest that 'the size of the electorate should be determined by the number of polling officers available'. There was an admission that

the difficulties relate, in our opinion, not to the incapacity of the voter to exercise his new power, nor to the inability of the candidate to handle a large electorate; but mainly to the administrative difficulty of enabling a large mass of the population to record its vote in a fair and satisfactory manner ... But by far the most disturbing factor which makes the problem bristle with difficulties at the present moment is due to the colossal illiteracy of the people.

When colonial administrators were asked ahead of the enactment of the Government of India Act, 1935 to make the leap in the expansion of franchise for elections to the Provincial legislatures from an electorate of approximately seven million to just under 32 million, they still expressed scepticism in some of the provinces, and found the work envisioned by that expansion of the franchise impossible or impracticable. But unlike the idea of universal suffrage, this modest expansion was thought to be 'generally administratively feasible'.

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61 Reports of the United Provinces Government and Provincial Committee, 1932, IOR/Q IFC/61, IOC.

62 Quote from the Franchise Sub-Committee of the Round Table Conference in a letter to Lothian, 29 December 1931 in Joint Secretaries' Notes, 1932, IOR/Q/IFC/88, IOC. The Franchise (Lothian) Committee adopted this view. It rejected adult franchise as 'being immediately impracticable' on the grounds of, first, 'shortage of suitable electoral personnel, of police, of women officials necessary for dealing with the Pundah system and so on'. Second, the conditions of illiteracy 'coupled with the rudimentary stage which the organisation of political parties has reached make it undesirable at present'. See 'Summary of Indian Franchise Report' (Presented to Parliament, 2 June 1932), L/1/607, IOC. For an excellent discussion on the way administrative and financial needs shaped devolution see Eleanor Newbigin, The Hindu Family and the Emergence of Modern India. Last Citizenship and Community. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp. 110–27.

63 Note by John Kerr, 16 October 1933, IOR/L/PJ/9/175, IOC. The expansion of the franchise was suggested on the basis of the recommendations of the white paper (and the Lothian Franchise Committee). Originally the expansion of franchise was planned to be ca. 36 million.

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43 More fundamentally, the concept of an electoral roll that would bind all adults together as equal individuals was anathema to colonial administrators. They designed voter lists and registration forms that divided the electorate into at least three types of constituencies: general, European and Mohammadan. It contained qualifications such as ' Husband pays income tax, literacy'; and it included a 'Special provision regarding names of women'. Indeed, the intention at the time to expand the franchise for women turned out to be a particularly difficult assignment for colonial bureaucrats.

The Government of India Bill, 1935 based on the White Paper and the Indian Franchise Committee envisioned, as part of the expansion of the franchise a growth of the female electorate. The Joint Parliamentary Select Committee was anxious that there should be a substantial increase in the number of women enfranchised. But some provincial governments and administrators were at odds with that task. Early in the discussions of the 1935 constitution, the Government of Bihar and Orissa, for example, attempted to restrict the size of the electorate, and to disenfranchise women. The government had qualifications dependent on taxation for the right of franchise. They argued for an increase in the 'anna franchise' (from 9 to 12 anna), and even demanded a rupee franchise. The Bihar and Orissa government threatened that otherwise there would be no guarantee that 'elections will carry out with success and without grave disorder'.

Already in 1933 Sir John Kerr, the Deputy Chairman of the Indian Franchise Committee, observed that some provinces, in particular

64 See, for example, Assam, Reforms Officer, Assam Legislative Council electoral (preparation, revision, and publication of electoral rolls) rules, 23 May 1936, IOR/V/27/111/10, IOC.


66 This was in reference to qualifications dependent on taxation for the right of franchise. Increasing the tax sum of the franchise requirement would thus reduce the number of voters.

67 Note by John Kerr, 16 October 1933, IOR/L/PJ/9/175, IOC.
Punjab, Assam, Bihar, and Orissa, were ‘really after a reduction of the number of women votes’. He explained that the landed oligarchy in the Legislative Council, who strengthened its power since the reforms of 1920, ‘are now doing all they can to keep the franchise qualification for the tenant class as high as possible, and they are supported by the official element in the Government’. The Government of Assam wrote that “they have already gone farther in extension of franchise [for women] than they really think is safe.”

Moreover, various Reforms Officers in the provinces demanded to prescribe by local rules how ‘their’ women should be treated. The Government of Bihar and Orissa, for example, was of the view that ‘a woman’s name should be removed from the electoral roll if she is divorced, or if her husband dies or loses his property’. Indeed, a key criterion for franchise was property ownership. But when colonial administrators encountered a community where women generally held property they saw this as a pretext for an exception. Thus, at a conference of Reforms Officers in March 1935 in Delhi it was noted that ‘A difficulty arises in the Khasi Hills where the Matriarchal system prevails, property being in the name of women, who will therefore have to appear on the roll. But since they do not ordinarily exercise any public function they will require to nominate some person to exercise the vote.’

Another issue was the question of application for enrolment in relation to women. After prolonged correspondences on the matter the Secretary of State ultimately agreed that in effect the provinces would make their own rules over women’s registration. Thus, the governments of Bengal, and Bihar and Orissa did not prescribe application requirement for women. In the United Provinces and Central Provinces applications by women were required ‘in respect only of the qualification arising from (a) literacy (b) being the pensioned widow or mother of a soldier; or (c) being the wife of an ex-soldier or policeman’. The Madras, Bombay and Assam governments required applications from women for all purposes. Governments of the provinces recognised that the application requirement would have the effect of reducing the number of women enfranchised.

The actual enrolment of women became a particularly contested matter. Officials in some provinces suggested that ‘the recording of women’s names present peculiar difficulties’, and ‘is in any case a matter of difficulty and delicacy and every care must be taken to avoid causing offending’. The problem was that women refused to be registered under their own names. It was ultimately agreed that ‘if a difficulty is experienced in getting the names of women to enter, there is no objection to entering a woman as the wife of “A. B. C.”, rather than being a free enfranchised individual. An illustrative form for such a case was attached to the letters for the District Officers. Eventually, electoral rules for the preparation of electoral rolls in the provinces included particular provisions regarding the registration of women, such as: Where for social or religious reasons there is an objection to the entry of the actual name of a woman in any electoral roll such women may be entered in the roll as “the wife of A. B. (husband’s name)” or, if she is unmarried, as “the daughter of A. B. (father’s name)”.

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98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
100 Letter from the Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam to the Secretary of State for India, 23 May 1935, in Public and Judicial Constitutional Series P & J (C) 3838 Franchise proposals for women in the White Paper views of local governments, October 1933–June 1935, IOR/L/P/9/141, IOC. On similar attitudes towards the question of women’s franchise in the run-up to the constitutional reforms of 1919 see Forbes, Women in Modern India, pp. 93–100. The 1919 Act allowed for the provincial legislatures to decide over the question of women’s suffrage. See Everett, “All the Women Were Hindus and All the Muslims Were Men”; p. 2072.
101 Public and Judicial Constitutional Series P & J (C) 4763/Part IV Franchise Schedules, letter from Secretary to Government of Bihar and Orissa Reform Department to the Secretary to the Government of India Reform Department, 7 April 1935, IOR/L/P/9/175, IOC.
102 Proceedings of the Conference of Reforms Officers held in New Delhi on 5 to 7 March 1935, IOR/M/1/19, IOC.
103 According to the ‘provisions as to franchise’ in the 1935 Act, under certain qualifications for being a voter a person could be enrolled only by applications even if she/he fulfilled the qualifying criteria. Women were to be registered only on an application.
104 Public and Judicial Constitutional Series P & J (C) 4763/Part IV Franchise Schedules, letter of 29 April 1935, IOR/L/P/9/175, IOC.
Having to address the issue of women's franchise the colonial Government of India insisted that the matter of increasing the number of women on the register was 'intimately connected with the administrative feasibility of registering and polling larger numbers'. But it really chose to shirk responsibility for that problem. The Government of India wrote to the Secretary of State for India: 'At the same time of second election this matter will concern responsible Provincial Governments not under your control. It would seem to be inappropriate now to determine finally what their administrative capacity will be, without giving them an opportunity of expressing their opinion.'

From September 1947 to March 1948, during the process of devising instructions for the preparation of the electoral roll on the basis of adult franchise, not a single difficulty, administrative or otherwise, was envisioned in relation to the enrollment of women. In fact, no doubts were expressed about the practicability of adult franchise at that time. However, a few months after the work on the preparation of the draft electoral roll began in 1948, several District Officers, for example, in the United Provinces, reported that 'difficulty is being experienced in ascertaining the names of lady voters who were unwilling to give out their names', and that 'they wish to be recorded as "wife of", "daughter of", "widow of", etc. of a male member of their family'. Some District Officers did so. At this time, the United Provinces Government issued a letter to all District Officers to let them know that the difficulty with women electors was experienced in other districts. Contrary to earlier colonial practices, the Government made it clear that the practice of registering female voters as 'wife of' was not permissible, and

that they were to be registered as individual voters. It directed them to start propaganda work to encourage women to register by their names, suggesting that in addition to giving wide publicity through the press, 'platforms or beat of drums ... you may enlist women workers for the purpose'.

The Government also issued a press communiqué declaring that after a very careful consideration it decided that names of female voters must be given in the draft electoral rolls. The press note encouraged the public to cooperate in giving names of women voters so as to avoid disfranchisement. Addressing the people, the government explained:

The introduction of adult franchise is intended to confer on every adult, male or female, a right to participate in the establishment of a fully democratic system of Government in the country and the provincial Government is therefore anxious that the electoral Rolls are correctly prepared and no adult, male or female, is as far as possible left unrecorded in the Electoral Rolls.

In contrast, in the 1930s colonial administrators made calculated efforts to reduce the size of the electorate. Thus, in August 1935, the Joint Secretary to the Government of India, Reforms Office, wrote with concern to the Bihar and Orissa government that it came to his notice that 'the number of persons entered on the rolls falls very considerably short of the numbers contemplated by the Indian Franchise Committee'. The Bihar and Orissa government replied that, indeed, 'the total number of actual electors shows a net decrease of 1,118,511; but then of course such a decrease was intentional, and the franchise was raised with the express purpose of producing a smaller electorate than the unmanageable one proposed

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112 Telegram from Government of India Reforms Department to Secretary State for India, 22 May 1935, IOR/1/F/9/141, IOC.
113 Ibid.
114 In fact, later on when provincial governments began issuing their executive instructions, the East Punjab government instructed explicitly that 'The actual name of a woman must be entered in the roll.' See 'Instructions for the Preparation of Draft Electoral Rolls, 1948-49' (16 pages), attached to letter from M. R. Bhid, Election Commissioner, East Punjab to CAS, 12 August 1948, CA/1/FR/48-49, ECIR. The Government of the United Provinces instructed that 'No separate forms of electoral rolls for female voters are necessary.' See letter no. 1935/XVII-173/48 from M. K. Kidwai, Additional Deputy Secretary to the Government of the United Provinces to All District Officers, United Provinces, 11 August 1948, CA/1/FR/48-48 II, ECIR. Only the Reforms Commissioner of Assam anticipated difficulty in verifying the age of female voters. See n. 81 above.
115 Fortnightly reports of progress in the preparation of electoral rolls from Government of the United Provinces, 1 October 1948, CA/1/FR/48-III, ECIR; Fortnightly report of progress in the preparation of electoral rolls for the fortights ending 15 October 1948 and 30 October 1948, from the Additional Deputy Secretary to Government of the United Provinces, M. K. Kidwai, to CAS, 10 December 1948, CA/1/FR/48-IV, ECIR.
116 Letter from the Additional Deputy Secretary United Provinces Government to the District Officer of Agra, 19 November 1948, CA/1/FR/48-IV, ECIR. The letter stated, 'Copy forwarded to all District Officers in the Province'.
117 Press Communiqué, Government of the United Provinces, 19 November 1948, CA/1/FR/48-IV, ECIR. It is noteworthy that despite these efforts a large number of women did not re-register as individuals, using their own name, and their initial enrollment as 'wife of', etc., remained on the final rolls. The Chief Election Commissioner of India at the time, Sukumar Sen, estimated that 'out of a total of nearly 80 million women voters in the country, nearly 2.8 million eventually failed to disclose their name, and the entries relating to them had to be deleted from the rolls'. Election Commission of India, Report on the First General Election in India, p. 73. The issue came before Sen before the elections, and he confirmed the decision taken on that matter by the CAS three years earlier that such registration was not permissible. 'Referring to the problem of those ladies whose names could not be enrolled properly in the voters list', on the eve of the first elections, 'Shri Sen assured that their names would be enrolled during the next elections of the country.' Directorate of Public Relations, Government of Rajasthan, press release following a press conference with Sukumar Sen at Bharatpur, 9 October 1951, 57/51-Elec, ECIR.
118 Letter from the Joint Secretary to Government of India Reforms Office to Government of Bihar and Orissa Reform Department, 30 August 1935, IOR/1/F/9/175, IOC.
by the Lothian Committee. The Committee recommended the enfranchisement of 350,000 women. At first, the Bihar and Orissa Government estimated enrolment of only 54,976, and ultimately 232,140 women. The government explained that the lower numbers of enrolled women were 'simply due to the fact that women do not wish to have their names enrolled... In many cases the husbands refuse to have them enrolled even as “wife of”.

Moreover, colonial administrators avoided publicising their efforts, which certainly did not contribute to the successful expansion of the franchise. Several secret memorandums instructed Reforms and District Officers that until the bill was approved in Parliament and received Royal Assent, action had to be taken 'as a matter of administrative routine and with the minimum of publicity for the preparation of a provisional roll'. The Government of India was explicitly asked 'to avoid any communiqué if possible and to deal with matters entirely informally'.

In stark contrast, from 1948 onwards, publicity of the preparatory work of the electoral roll became a prominent principle and a common practice. Paradoxically, the CAS did so by drawing on the same bureaucratic colonial precedent, but with an inverted mind-set. The Joint Secretary of the Constituent Assembly wrote at the outset of the operation that 'electoral rolls cannot be compiled without statutory authority. All that we can do now is to compile them in anticipation of such statutory authority, so that the draft rolls may be ready by the time the new Constitution and electoral law thereunder are passed.'

118 Letter from the Government of Bihar and Orissa Reform Department to the Joint Secretary to Government of India Reforms Office, 4 September 1935, IOR/L/PJ/9/175, IOC (emphasis added).

119 Ibid.

120 In the United Province the total electorate reached 4,842,617, which came to just 11% of the population. The Indian Franchise Committee envisioned an electorate of 13.5%, 6.5 million, out of which 1.5 million women. Only 520,000 women were ultimately enrolled. See Election reports: United Provinces and North-West Frontier Province, 5 August 1937–29 September 1937, IOR/L/PJ/2/1319, IOC. In the 1952 first general elections in independent India the size of the electorate in Uttar Pradesh (formerly the United Provinces) was 31,770,309. See New Delhi: Election Commission of India, Key Highlights of General Elections, 1951 to the First Lok Sabha, New Delhi: Election Commission of India, p. 4.

121 Letter of 18 April 1935, IOR/L/PJ/9/153, IOC (emphasis in the original). Also see Memorandum on delimitation and connected questions from India Office, 10 August 1934, IOR/L/PJ/9/175, IOC.

122 Telegram from the Secretary of State to the Government of India, 24 May 1935, IOR/M/1/19, IOC. The 1935 Act received a Royal Assent on 4 August 1935. It came to force from 1 April 1937.

123 Internal note by the Joint Secretary of CAS, S. N. Mukerjee, 11 March 1948, CAS/1/FR/48-I, ECIR (emphasis added). As for the instructions, 'presumably', the Joint Secretary commented, 'the same provisions would be prescribed by the electoral law when enacted under the new constitution.' Ibid. In a note on the subject B. N. Rau wrote: 'We are proceeding on the assumption that the age qualification... and the qualifications for enrolment... will not be materially different from the existing provisions... for the time being, only draft rolls will be prepared under executive instruction.' See Note by B. N. Rau, 16 March 1948, ibid.

124 Proceedings of the Conference of Reforms Officers held in New Delhi on 5 to 7 March 1935, IOR/M/1/19, IOC.

125 Ibid.

126 Telegram, 13 December 1936, IOR/L/PJ/9/257, IOC. The United Provinces Government explained that their practice of marking the paper on behalf of the voter was adopted on recommendation of the Hammond Committee (The Indian Delimitation Committee, 1936), paragraph 740.

127 Oral evidence given before the Indian Delimitation Committee (evidence by Rev. B Das (Scheduled Castes)), Ranchi, 19 October 1935, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML), New Delhi.
Conclusion

As a first step in devising the instructions for the preparation of the electoral rolls on the basis of full adult franchise the CAS consciously sought to break with colonial practices of enumeration. The correspondences and consultations about an action plan for preparing an electoral roll brought administrators around the country on board in the making of the universal franchise, and created a stake for them in the process. The universality of the franchise was not subject to question. It was posited as a premise. In the all-India exercise in guided democratic imagination administrators were not asked to submit their opinion on the merits or practicality of the idea of the rule of the people. They were asked to establish the institutional infrastructure in support of the notion that sovereignty resides with the people. That collaborative exercise in pursuit of creating a register of people that were bound together as equal citizens for the purpose of authorising their government also rendered existent the idea of 'the people'.

The bureaucrats who were asked to plan for and manage that new all-India project took part in setting a foundational bureaucratic precedent. It was new in a real sense: neither British bureaucrats, nor any other administration before them, had prepared for the enrolment of such a large electorate. The process of devising the instructions for the electoral roll produced a new form of population knowledge: the enumeration of all adults who have the right to vote. They were the sovereigns of the new state. Metaphorically, this list would represent the recipients of the 'transfer of power'.

In essence, the instructions provided a template for shaping democratic relations between the new Indian state, its bureaucrats at different levels, and the people. The plan to register voters on the basis of a house-to-house, village-by-village coverage would offer the opportunity for mid-to lower level officials and ordinary people to engage with each other and with democratic institution building. This procedure for implementing the universal franchise created occasions for people to 'meet', 'see' and 'speak' with the state through the official representatives who showed up at their door to ensure their right to vote. And the plan for enrolment broke with prior colonial practices of counting, like the census. Roll making was not meant to simply count people for a 'useful inventory'. The people were also taken into account as the sovereigns of the new state.

In the process of devising the procedures for the preparation of the electoral roll, in anticipation of the constitution, the notion of procedural equality was bureaucratised. This experience gradually turned the notion of adult franchise for India's masses into a convention.

Initially, the design for India's democracy was still only on paper. It was not inevitable that the paper plan, as imaginative and bold as it was, would match the aspiration of making universal franchise in practice in the midst of the partition, at a moment when the basic question of 'who is an Indian' – the basic criterion for being a voter – was undecided and contested. The next chapter explores that first challenge to the making of the universal franchise.