

Marginalisation of Ambedkar and the Scheduled Castes Federation in the Process of the Transfer of Power

SHAHEEN IQBAL KHAN

Independent Scholar

The Indian National Movement also witnessed a movement of Dalit politics towards freedom from hierarchical social constructs, led by leaders like Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and the Scheduled Castes Federation. However, despite being officially recognised as significant representatives of Scheduled Castes for a long period, the Cabinet Mission sidelined them. This paper explores the diminishing legitimacy of Ambedkar and the Scheduled Castes Federation, looking at the process of transfer of power through Ambedkar's lens.

Keywords: Dalit, Scheduled Castes Federation, B.R. Ambedkar, Dalit politics, transfer of power

Introduction

*"Political tyranny is nothing compared to the social tyranny and a reformer who defies society is a more courageous man than a politician who defies Government."*¹

- Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

The Indian National Movement witnessed various movements within it. Along with the struggle for independence from the British, there was a struggle by Dalits² for freedom from the hierarchical structure of the Hindu community. The flag bearers of this struggle were fragmented at regional

¹ B. R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, ed. S. Anand, intro. Arundhati Roy (London: Verso, 2016), 41.

² The low and untouchable castes of the Hindu community, officially termed as 'Depressed Classes' were referred to as 'Scheduled Castes' in the Government of India Act of 1935. This dissertation interchangeably uses the terms untouchables, Depressed Classes, Scheduled Castes, and Dalit. The term 'Dalit' was not used during the period I have covered, however, I will be using it as the term is preferably used in contemporary academic writings.

levels until the establishment of the Scheduled Castes Federation in 1942 by B.R. Ambedkar. The leader aimed to secure political, social, and economic safeguards for the Dalit community and empower future generations to break free from the rigid caste system.

Ambedkar's stance on the Dalits being a separate entity led to conflicts with leaders like Gandhi, the Congress, Hindu Mahasabha, and the Depressed Classes League, who viewed the Dalits as part of the Hindu community. Despite strong opposition, Ambedkar remained steadfast in his demands, and was recognised by the British as the sole representative of the Scheduled Castes during some part of the transfer of power process. However, as the British prepared to leave India, they abandoned Ambedkar, even withdrawing recognition of the Scheduled Castes as a separate entity.

It is insufficient to simply state that the Cabinet Mission ignored Ambedkar's demands for Scheduled Castes' safeguards. While the views of the British government, Congress, and Muslim League were carefully considered, Ambedkar's extensive writings and speeches were largely dismissed. From the MacDonald Award, where the British sought Ambedkar's consent, to Cripps recognising him as the All India Scheduled Castes Federation's representative, to Wavell considering him less influential, and finally, to his marginalisation in the Cabinet Mission, Ambedkar's legitimacy as a Dalit leader steadily declined. This paper examines whether this shift was an outcome of the elections of 1945-46, used by the British to justify the Cabinet Mission Proposals or a move from Ambedkar's vision of Dalits as a separate entity towards Gandhi's integrationist view began even earlier.

As the voice of the Depressed Classes, Ambedkar played a key role in securing the Communal Award of 1932. Despite Gandhi's opposition to the MacDonald Award, the British insisted on Ambedkar's consent before making any changes. This led to negotiations with the Congress and the eventual Poona Pact³, which many saw as a victory for Ambedkar due to the increase in

³ The Poona Pact, concluded on 24 September 1932, was a compromise between Hindu leaders and representatives of the Depressed Classes that revised the British Communal Award of 4 August 1932. It expanded the number of reserved seats for the Depressed Classes from 71 to 148. However, instead of separate electorates, these representatives were to be elected through a joint electorate of both caste Hindus and Depressed Class voters. Candidates

reserved seats for Dalits. However, Ambedkar viewed it as a setback, believing that representatives from reserved constituencies would lack accountability towards the Dalit electorate.⁴ He argued that these politicians would become “a champion of the minority... a slave of the majority,” compromising their ability to represent the Dalit interests effectively.⁵

The Poona Pact of 1932 brought the issue of Dalit representation to the forefront of colonial India's political discourse, marking a shift towards recognising the political agency of Dalits and their struggle for equitable participation. It also solidified Ambedkar's position as a prominent Dalit leader, since the British considered his views before passing and amending the MacDonald Award. The Government of India Act of 1935 reserved legislative seats for the Scheduled Castes, strengthening Dalit politics and giving them a platform to voice their demands. This led to the rise of two political factions within the Dalit community—one aligning with the Congress Party and participating in the national movement, led by Babu Jagjivan Ram, and the other advocating for an independent, autonomous platform for Dalits, led by B.R. Ambedkar.

In the *Nationalist Movement in India*, Sekhar Bandyopadhyay notes that while the Congress assumed power in eight provinces in 1937, it lacked a concrete strategy to address untouchability beyond Gandhi's efforts and previous legislations. Its two-year rule under the Government of India Act of 1935 disappointed both secular socialists like Nehru and Dalit leaders like Ambedkar. Although there were Scheduled Caste members in the cabinets of Assam, Bihar, and Madras, their influence on reforms was minimal. Except in Bombay, where Ambedkar's Independent Labour Party secured most

were to be chosen from a list of four, drawn through a preliminary vote open only to Depressed Class electors. The agreement was largely driven by Mahatma Gandhi, who, while imprisoned in Poona, strongly opposed separate electorates for the Depressed Classes, viewing them as part of the Hindu society. To protest the Award, he began a fast unto death on 20 September, compelling both parties to negotiate. The British government formally approved the Pact on 26 September 1932. For details, see Bipan Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1989), 284–85.

⁴ Francesca R. Jensenius, “Mired in Reservations: The Path-Dependent History of Electoral Quotas in India,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 74, no. 1 (December 4, 2014): 96.

⁵ Ram Samujh, *Reservation Policy: Its Relevance in Modern India* (Mumbai: Samrudh Bharat Publication, 2005), 59.

reserved seats, Scheduled Caste representatives were largely aligned with the Congress.⁶

Given its focus on Gandhian principles like temple entry and changing caste-Hindu attitudes, Congress was unlikely to pass mandatory legislation for untouchable rights. However, Madras and Bombay took more active measures against untouchability. In Bombay, Ambedkar's Independent Labour Party—the main opposition to the Congress—proposed reforms on labour, agriculture, and education, but these were dismissed. In Madras, Chief Minister Rajagopalachari introduced four bills, primarily addressing temple entry and civil rights for Harijans.⁷

Reginald Coupland noted that the Congress provincial governments showed no greater commitment to addressing untouchability than previous administrations.⁸ Even Dalit leaders, inclined towards the Congress, felt alienated.⁹ For instance, M.C. Rajah advocated for a separate Harijan party after his Temple Entry Bill¹⁰ was rejected by both the Congress and Dalits.¹¹ Ambedkar was openly critical of the Congress in Bombay, while in Bengal, the Muslim-majority province, Congress, led by Subhash and Sarat Chandra Bose, secured support from Dalit leaders. The Calcutta Scheduled Caste League, backed by Congress, gained more influence, while the Federation's provincial branch struggled.¹²

Bandyopadhyay notes the fragmented nature of Dalit politics, with the Congress and the Federation constantly competing for exclusive

⁶ Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Nationalist Movement in India: A Reader* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), 228.

⁷ *Indian Annual Register*, 1938, vol. 1, 143.

⁸ Reginald Coupland, *The Indian Problem. Part II, "Indian Politics, 1936–42* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1944), 145.

⁹ Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, "Transfer of Power and the Crisis of Dalit Politics in India, 1945–47," *Modern Asian Studies* 34, no. 4 (October 2000): 899–900.

¹⁰ "Plea for Separate Harijan Party," paper clipping, in M. C. Rajah Papers, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML) New Delhi.

¹¹ Bandyopadhyay, "Transfer of Power," 902.

¹² For details, see Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Protest and Identity in Colonial India: The Namasudras of Bengal, 1872–1947* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011), 173–209.

representation, preventing the emergence of a unified movement.¹³ He argues that the Congress's attempt to integrate Dalit politics towards the end of colonial rule was rooted in a deeper crisis of patronage and legitimacy that emerged during the transfer of power.¹⁴ This crisis, described by Kamalakant Chitre in 1952, intensified as Ambedkar found himself compelled to negotiate with a party he had previously criticised.¹⁵ According to Bandyopadhyay, this situation arose partly from the organisational weakness of the Scheduled Castes Federation and its inability to challenge Congress's dominance or critique the majoritarian version of nationalism effectively.¹⁶

In her book *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution*, Gail Omvedt contends that the Congress, largely controlled by the Brahmins and the bourgeoisie, aimed to appropriate Dalit politics to weaken Ambedkar's influence. She notes that the declaration of independence and partition pushed Ambedkar to ally with the Congress. His preference for a strong, centralised state over the Muslim League's decentralised federal model also shaped his decision.¹⁷ Some scholars see this alliance as a success of Congress's integrationist approach. Eleanor Zelliot describes it as a "remarkable act of political generosity,"¹⁸ while M.S. Gore suggests that, with the Muslim question resolved, bringing Ambedkar into the fold became crucial for addressing untouchability. For Ambedkar, cooperation with the government provided a way to address Dalit issues constructively while maintaining some independence.¹⁹

Previous works primarily focus on Congress's efforts to secure Dalit representation and the crisis faced by Dalit politics during the transfer of power. This dissertation aims to explore the historical context that led Ambedkar and other Dalit leaders to establish the Scheduled Castes

¹³ Bandyopadhyay, "Transfer of Power," 900.

¹⁴ Ibid., 895.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Gail Omvedt, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2014), 304.

¹⁸ Eleanor Zelliot, "Congress and the Untouchables, 1917-1959," in *Congress and Indian Nationalism: The Pre-Independence Phase*, ed. Richard Sisson and Stanley Wolpert (University of California Press, 1988), 193-94.

¹⁹ M. S. Gore, *The Social Context of an Ideology: Ambedkar's Political and Social Thought* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1993), 180-83.

Federation (SCF) as a centralised organisation. The SCF's goal extended beyond securing political safeguards, it sought to create opportunities for future Dalit generations to become economically strong and educated. This study approaches the issue from Ambedkar's perspective as a Dalit who faced socio-economic challenges, earned his education through immense effort, and stood out in a society dominated by caste Hindus. Unlike financially strong parties backed by organisational funds, the SCF emerged from Ambedkar's determination to prevent future generations from enduring the discrimination he experienced. It was not a pursuit of power or privilege but a fight for a secure and equitable future for the Dalit community.

Recognising the Representatives of Scheduled Castes

Dalit politics was divided between the All India Scheduled Castes Federation and Jagjivan Ram's All India Depressed Class League, raising the question of who truly represented the Dalits. The Cripps Mission of 1942 addressed this by inviting political representatives to discuss India's Constitution. Several regional Dalit leaders, aligned with Ambedkar, sought direct engagement with Sir Stafford Cripps, challenging other organisations' claims of sole representation. However, Cripps limited discussions to provincial delegations, inviting Ambedkar and Rao Bahadur M.C. Rajah as national representatives of the Depressed Classes. This recognition legitimised Ambedkar, provoking resentment from the League. In response, League secretary Jamuna Ram insisted that Ambedkar could not represent all Dalits and Jagjivan Ram should be included.²⁰ General Secretary Prithvi Singh Azad further warned that excluding the League would cast doubt on the British Government's sincerity.²¹

Despite such strong appeals, Cripps replied that he regretted his inability 'to grant interviews to representatives of individual organisations.'²² On April 2,

²⁰ Sir S. Cripps, "Note on Interview with the Jam Saheb and Maharaja of Bikaner, 26 March 1942," L/P&J/10/4: f 19, in Nicholas Mansergh, ed., *Transfer of Power 1942-1947*, vol. 1 (London: HMSO, 1970-1977), 487.

²¹ "Prithvi Singh Azad to Sir Stafford Cripps, 28 March 1942," in Bandyopadhyay, "Transfer of Power," 901.

²² "LB. C.A. Cook, Private Secretary to Sir Stafford Cripps to Prithvi Singh Azad, 29 March 1942." Ibid., 901.

the League's Working Committee, chaired by Jagjivan Ram, formally expressed its discontent. It issued a memorandum asserting itself as 'the only representative body of the Depressed Classes,' accusing Cripps of undermining democratic principles and following a divide-and-rule strategy. The League insisted that the Depressed Classes were a part of Hindu society, condemning 'separatist mentality' and vowing to resist any attempts to 'disintegrate Hindu society.'²³

This claim was contentious. Even in Azad's province, the Punjab Provincial Depressed Classes Association expressed their discontent with 'pro-Hindu' leaders like Azad and believed that Scheduled Castes were 'racially and culturally different from all,' further extending their confidence and support to Rajah and Ambedkar. Likewise, the Punjab Balmiki Depressed Classes League stated that the 'Depressed Classes are neither Hindus nor want to be Hindus,' criticising leaders like Azad and Ram. By 1942, Dalit organisations were divided, but the colonial government recognised Ambedkar's Federation, while the Congress-backed League struggled for legitimacy. Within four years, this dynamic would shift, with Ambedkar himself facing marginalisation.

Ambedkar and Dalit organisations initially relied on the colonial government for political and civil rights. However, after meeting Cripps, they recognised a shift in patronage, placing them 'under an unmitigated system of Hindu rule.'²⁴ Ambedkar rejected the Cripps proposals, calling them a 'defeatist surrender to the Congress and Muslim League,'²⁵ and for failing to protect Scheduled Castes' political rights. On December 10, 1942, the Special Scheduled Castes Political Conference in Allahabad declared that 'India...[was] not a nation but...a constellation of nations.' While earlier agreements had recognised Scheduled Castes as a distinct entity, the Cripps

²³ Ibid., 902.

²⁴ "B. R. Ambedkar and M. C. Rajah to Stafford Cripps, 1 April 1942," in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power*, vol. 1, 603.

²⁵ B.R. Ambedkar, "Summary of Statement by Dr. Ambedkar, 5 April 1942," in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches* [hereafter BAWS], ed. Vasant Moon vol. 17, part II (New Delhi: Dr Ambedkar Foundation, 2020), 171–78.

Mission's proposals ignored their concerns, prioritising the future constitution of Caste Hindus.²⁶

In a memorandum to Linlithgow, Ambedkar outlined his concerns about the Cripps proposals, highlighting two ways to protect minority rights: either through a Constituent Assembly or a Treaty. He opposed the treaty model, arguing that it was incompatible with dominion status. He also feared that the Hindu majority in the Constituent Assembly would deny Dalits minority status. Under a joint electorate, Hindus could easily secure all 151 reserved seats in provincial assemblies, controlling the 15 Dalit seats in the Constituent Assembly. Despite Dalits not participating in the Congress-led subversive movements, attempts were made to include them in order to present the party as their legitimate representatives. The British government, prioritising the Congress's demands, neglected the interests of the Dalit community, raising doubts about whether the Cripps proposals had been entirely abandoned.²⁷

Ambedkar's fears were largely realised as British patronage shifted towards the Congress. Colonial officials noted that the weakness of the Scheduled Castes was their unclear identity, suggesting their welfare would be easier to address if they converted to either Christianity or Islam. Remaining Hindus, they argued, meant that progress depended on social integration rather than political safeguards.²⁸ This shift reflected a broader trend of prioritising religious identities in political decision-making. The Gandhian view of Dalit assimilation into Hindu society gained traction, sidelining Dalits as an independent political force. The transfer of power increasingly favoured religiously defined groups, undermining Ambedkar's vision of securing Dalit rights beyond the Hindu framework.

By 1942-43, Linlithgow still regarded Ambedkar as 'the right and only proper representative of the Depressed Classes,'²⁹ leading to his appointment as a Labour Member in the Viceroy's Executive Council. In response to the

²⁶ Bandyopadhyay, "Transfer of Power," 903.

²⁷ "The Marquess of Linlithgow to Mr. Amery, 11 January 1943, MSS. EUR. F. 125/12," in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power*, vol. 3, 488.

²⁸ "Mr. Amery to the Marquess of Linlithgow, 8 February 1943." Ibid., 633-34.

²⁹ "Telegram from Linlithgow to Amery, 20 Feb 1942," in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power*, vol. 1, 211.

Viceroy's request, Ambedkar submitted a memorandum highlighting the issues of the Scheduled Castes and demanding government action. He reminded the administration of its duty towards them, noting that they comprised 'between a sixth and a seventh' of India's population and argued that recognising two substantial minorities could prevent the state from being labelled 'pro-Muslim' or 'anti-Hindu.'³⁰ The following year, some concessions were granted to the Scheduled Castes.³¹

As British departure became imminent, Ambedkar demanded that the transfer of power be delayed until the Depressed Classes were 'elevated in education, economic conditions and social position' to match other sections of society.³² Though he knew this was unrealistic, he sought to keep Scheduled Caste rights central to his political negotiations. The British still viewed Ambedkar as important, but Indian leaders were less willing to accommodate him. On 5 August, the Secretary of State informed the Viceroy that post-war freedom would be conditional on a constitution approved by all 'main elements of India's national life,' including the Depressed Classes.³³ Wavell conveyed this to Gandhi on 15 August.³⁴ Both Gandhi and the Muslim League resisted Dalit inclusion in political discussions. Gandhi saw untouchability as a social and religious issue rather than a political one, sidelining Ambedkar.

During the Gandhi-Jinnah talks, Ambedkar repeatedly stressed that the Scheduled Castes were the third essential party alongside Hindus and Muslims, and could not be incorporated into Pakistan without their consent.³⁵ At a meeting held in Hyderabad, he asserted that political power rightly

³⁰ "Mr. Amery to the Marquess of Linlithgow, 16 Dec 1942, MSS. EUR. F. 125/11," in Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power*, vol. 3, 389-90.

³¹ They got an additional seat in the Central Assembly, reservation in the Indian Civil Services, reservation of 8.5 per cent in recruitment to the Central Services, reservation for technical training in certain government institutions and an allocation of Rs. 3 lakhs for scholarships for technical training in India and abroad.

³² *The Hindu*, 26 September 1944, paper cutting, in *Ambedkar Papers*, File No. 103, NMML, New Delhi.

³³ "Telegram of Mr Amery to Field Marshal Viscount Wavell, 5 August 1944, L/P&J/8/519: ff 120-1," Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power*, vol. 4, 1166-68.

³⁴ "Amery to Wavell, 5 Aug 1944." Ibid., 1166-68.

³⁵ B.R. Ambedkar, "Depressed Classes are not a part of Hindu Community," in Moon, ed., *BAWS*, vol. 17, part III, 310.

belonged to Hindus, Muslims, and Scheduled Castes, and none could be denied their place.³⁶ His insistence on Dalits' recognition in the transfer of power process led to accusations that he was indifferent to India's independence.³⁷ Rejecting this, Ambedkar declared that Dalits sought 'the independence of their community along with the independence of the country.' These allegations likely stemmed from his reliance on British support, as he viewed the colonial government as the only means through which Dalits could achieve their aspirations.

Establishment and Resolutions of the Scheduled Castes Federation

Ambedkar founded the All India Scheduled Castes Federation (AISCF) in Nagpur after the Cripps Mission rejected the separate representation for Scheduled Castes in 1942. Following the Depressed Classes Conference (18-20 July), he criticised the proposals, stating they placated the Congress and the Muslim League while leaving Dalits 'bound hand and foot and handed over to the Caste Hindus.'³⁸ During the conference, a resolution was passed to establish a centralised organisation for the Scheduled Castes. President Rao Bahadur N. Sivaraj chaired the drafting committee, which submitted its report for approval. Key Dalit leaders, including Rai Saheb Shamlal (United Provinces), D.G. Jadhav (Bombay), and Rai Saheb N.C. Dhusia (Bengal), contributed to the resolution.³⁹ Acknowledging the fragmentation of Dalit politics, Shamlal stressed the need for a structured programme. Jadhav proposed forming the AISCF as a 'Central political organisation for carrying on the political movement of the Scheduled Castes,' urging local Dalit organisations to merge into the Federation.⁴⁰

Rai Saheb N.C. Dhusya stressed that maintaining a separate identity for the Depressed Classes required unity.⁴¹ Dalit leaders, recognising the strength of

³⁶ Ibid., 311.

³⁷ Moon, ed., *BAWS*, vol. 17, part III, 310.

³⁸ B.R. Ambedkar, "The Cripps Proposals on Constitutional Advancement," in *Ambedkar Writes*, vol. 1: *Political Writings*, ed. Narendra Jadhav (New Delhi & Seattle: Konark Publishers, 2014), 193.

³⁹ *Report of the Proceedings of the Third Session of the All India Depressed Classes Conference* held at Nagpur on July 18 and 19, 1942, 6.

⁴⁰ *Report of the Proceedings*, 5.

⁴¹ Ibid., 43-44.

Caste Hindus under Congress and Muslims under the League, prioritised unity over 'petty quarrels' to avoid dependence on the 'goodwill of the Caste Hindus'.⁴² In his concluding address, Ambedkar highlighted the extreme poverty of the Depressed Classes, contrasting it with the relative prosperity of Muslims, who had ruled before the British and were economically ahead. He urged Dalits to rely solely on their efforts for progress.⁴³ From its inception, the Scheduled Castes Federation aimed to centralise Dalit representation while fostering self-reliance, avoiding comparisons with the Muslim minority, which Ambedkar saw as economically stronger.

The next day, Ambedkar joined the Governor-General's Executive Council, viewing it as 'a death blow to Brahmanism' and a 'great victory for the untouchables.' Acknowledging that his availability would be limited, he urged other leaders to advance the Federation's cause.⁴⁴ Addressing the Federation's limited reach compared to the Congress, he cited the latter's dominance in the press and its vast financial resources. Congress had amassed 'one crore rupees,' which Ambedkar identified as the 'secret of its success.' He emphasised the need for financial stability to compete with well-organised political entities.⁴⁵ The Federation aimed to establish the Scheduled Castes as a distinct entity in Indian national life, securing their political, economic, and social rights.⁴⁶ Ambedkar, having experienced caste discrimination first-hand, sought constitutional safeguards to protect Dalits.⁴⁷

At a Working Committee meeting held in Madras on 23 September 1944, presided over by N. Sivaraj, the SCF outlined its "Political Demands of the Scheduled Castes".⁴⁸ While the Congress and the Muslim League negotiated India's future, the SCF sought to ensure the recognition of Dalit interests. The resolution asserted that the Scheduled Castes were a separate religious

⁴² D.G. Jadhav said this while proposing Resolution V for the establishment of the All India Scheduled Castes Federation. Ibid., 43.

⁴³ "B.R. Ambedkar, Concluding Address," in *ibid.*, 45.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 45.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 46.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 109.

⁴⁷ Dhananjay Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission* (Mumbai: Popular Prakashan, 2023).

⁴⁸ B.R. Ambedkar, "What the Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables," in Moon, ed., *BAWS*, vol. 9, Appendix XI, 346.

minority, more so than Sikhs and Muslims, under the Cripps Proposals.⁴⁹ It refused to accept the Indian Constitution unless it guaranteed separate electorates and public service reservations. Additionally, the SCF demanded 'separate settlements' for Dalits, enabling them to live apart from caste Hindus, with a Settlement Commission facilitating land purchases.⁵⁰ This, they argued, would protect Dalits from potential oppression under Swaraj.⁵¹

The SCF's demands mirrored the Muslim League's push for Pakistan, advocating for a distinct political identity. Ambedkar, at an SCF meeting in Bombay on 6 May 1945, reiterated his demand for a constitution 'framed by Indians for Indians and with the voluntary consent of Indians,' rejecting dominance by powerful sections. He opposed majority rule, which he deemed unjust in a country where the majority was communal, not political. He described it as a 'permanent majority fixed in its attitude,' incapable of being restructured. To counter this, he called for equal proportions in the central and provincial assemblies for Hindus, Muslims, and Scheduled Castes and insisted that the executive branch must include minorities, not just the legislative majority.⁵²

Ambedkar's proposals aimed to reduce communal tensions and reassure Muslims by preventing majoritarian dominance. He envisioned a 'United India' governed by a 'rule of unanimity,' where legislative and executive decisions required broad consensus. He warned that ignoring these concerns could jeopardize independence. Criticising the Hindu majority for portraying minorities as obstacles while resisting genuine concessions, Ambedkar stressed that minorities would support independence if their rights were protected.⁵³ In this context, Ambedkar advocated a tripartite constitution to ensure governance by 'free, independent, and important elements in the national life of the country.' This underscored his vision for a political structure that safeguarded minority rights and prevented majoritarian rule.

⁴⁹ *Political Demands of Scheduled Castes 1944* (SCF), accessed June 6, 2024, <https://www.constitutionofindia.net/historical-constitution/political-demands-of-scheduled-castes-scheduled-castes-federation1944/>.

⁵⁰ *Political Demands of Scheduled Castes 1944* (SCF).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, Moon, ed., *BAWS*, vol. I, 360, 368-69, 373, 376-78.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

Ambedkar remained vocal about the status of Dalits in independent India and its constitution. Although initially recognised as the leader of the Scheduled Castes, his legitimacy began to decline as India's political scenario evolved. Wavell noted that while the Depressed Classes followed Ambedkar, his influence was limited.⁵⁴ Yet, in October 1944, when considering a 'transitional government' that included all political organisations, Wavell acknowledged Ambedkar as the leader of the Depressed Classes.⁵⁵ Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru also consulted Ambedkar for nominating Dalit representatives to the sub-committee for Scheduled Castes.⁵⁶ The Sapru Committee Report (1945), formed by the Non-Party Conference of November 1944, aimed to address minority issues in India's constitutional framework. Chaired by Sapru, the committee included 30 members distinguished in public affairs, deliberately excluding representatives from dominant political parties.

The report rejected the Muslim League's demand for Pakistan, advocating for a constitution-making body with equal representation for Muslims and Hindus. It recommended joint electorates with reserved seats and proposed a Minorities Commission to assess minority welfare. Additionally, it suggested fundamental rights such as freedom of speech, press, religion, and equality, urging the constitution-making body to clearly define these rights. While the report discussed the idea of dividing rights into justiciable and non-justiciable, it made no specific recommendations.⁵⁷ Initially, Ambedkar was open to

⁵⁴ "Appreciation of the Indian Political Situation by His Excellency the Viceroy, February 1944," in *Transfer of Power*, vol. 4, 884-93.

⁵⁵ "Telegram from Field Marshal Viscount Wavell to Mr. Amey, 5 Oct 1944, L/P&J/8/520: f. 223." *Ibid.*, 85-86.

⁵⁶ Tej Bahadur Sapru, *Constitutional Proposals of the Sapru Committee*, 6.

⁵⁷ Norman Brown, a prominent Indologist, noted in his 1946 publication *India's Constitutional Issues* that the Sapru Committee Report presented a comprehensive and sustained discussion of constitutional matters. However, scholars have suggested that the report was largely ignored and failed to influence key political actors. Ray T. Smith, in his 1968 article *The Role of Indian Liberals in the National Movement, 1915-1947*, argued that the report received little attention. V.P. Menon, in his work, *The Transfer of Power in India*, attributed the Muslim League's hostility towards the report to the absence of a high-ranking Muslim member and the rejection of Pakistan and separate electorates. The Congress also remained indifferent to the report. R.A. Wilson reviewed the report in 1946 for the Royal Institute of International Affairs, stating that in a less communal atmosphere, the report might have garnered the approval of thinking Indians and served as a basis for future constitutional

collaborating with the committee, but upon sensing bias against minority communities, he became more cautious and reserved.⁵⁸ He likely feared that the committee's deliberations would overlook the concerns of the minorities he represented. By distancing himself, Ambedkar aimed to avoid legitimising a process he viewed as prejudiced. This shift reflects his dedication to protecting the rights of marginalised communities, even if it meant stepping back from the committee's proceedings.

The Sapru Conciliation Committee failed largely due to Jinnah's refusal to cooperate. Despite this setback, Ambedkar remained the primary representative of the Dalit community, affirming his leadership in the political sphere. Although Gandhi saw Dalits as part of the Hindu community, they were acknowledged as a distinct and significant group, and Ambedkar was often consulted on matters concerning their representation. However, this period also marked a shift in Dalit representation, signalling a decline in Ambedkar's vision of a 'rule of unanimity.'

The Shift in Patronage Unveils

On 14 June 1945, Wavell proposed forming an 'entirely Indian' Executive Council, excluding only the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief, and including all 'main communities' of India, explicitly recognising the Scheduled Castes.⁵⁹ This recognition affirmed their status as a distinct and significant group in political discussions. However, the move faced criticism from the Hindu Mahasabha, Congress, and from leaders like Gandhi. The Hindu Mahasabha saw it as a threat to Hindu unity by separating the Scheduled Castes from caste Hindus.⁶⁰ Congress used its media to counter claims that it represented only caste Hindus, while Gandhi argued that

discussions. Although the report was initially ignored or criticized, it is possible that it had an indirect impact on the constitution-making process. Seven members of the Sapru Committee went on to join the Constituent Assembly, including M.R. Jayakar, Gopalaswami Ayyangar, John Mathai, Frank Anthony, and Sachidananda Sinha, who became the first provisional chairman of the Constituent Assembly.

⁵⁸ B.R. Ambedkar, "Dr. Ambedkar to Field Marshal Viscount Wavell, 7 June 1945," in Moon, ed., *BAWS*, vol. 10, 476-77.

⁵⁹ "Broadcast speech by His Excellency the Viceroy at New Delhi on 14 June 1945, L/P&J/8/524: ff. 7-8," in Mansergh, ed., *Transfer of Power*, vol. 5, 1122-24.

⁶⁰ "Press Report, 15 June 1945." *Ibid.*, 1125-26.

Congress was a national, non-communal party, criticising any attempt to divide caste Hindus from others.⁶¹

Despite opposition, Wavell invited Ambedkar to represent the Scheduled Castes at the Simla Conference, but Ambedkar declined, recommending N. Sivaraj as a substitute.⁶² He criticised the proposed Executive Council for its inadequate representation of Scheduled Castes, condemning the allocation of “five seats to 90 million Muslims, one seat to 50 million Untouchables, and one seat to 6 million Sikhs.” Ambedkar found this distribution unjust and inconsistent with his principles of fairness. He also accused the British of failing to act as ‘trustees for the Scheduled Castes,’ treating them unfairly and disregarding their commitment to protect Dalit interests.⁶³

The Executive Council was to include fourteen Indian members, and Ambedkar sought at least two Dalit representatives. Wavell feared that agreeing to this might lead Sikhs and Indian Christians to make similar demands and anticipated Gandhi's disapproval.⁶⁴ However, the Secretary of State showed more empathy, considering the numerous telegrams from Dalit organisations requesting three seats. To navigate Gandhi's likely opposition, the Secretary suggested selecting members based on party affiliation rather than community representation, reasoning that Gandhi could not deny the existence of Ambedkar's political party.⁶⁵ Ambedkar's firm demands reflected his awareness of shifting colonial patronage. While the British still recognised him as the legitimate representative of the Dalit community, some officials began to question this acknowledgement.

The Simla Conference failed due to disagreements between the Indian National Congress and the All-India Muslim League over Muslim representation in the executive council. Jinnah insisted that only League members could represent Muslims, seeking recognition as their sole

⁶¹ “Wavell to Amery, Secret Report on Simla Conference, 15 July 1945, L/P&J/8/524: ff 22-4.” Ibid., 1258-63.

⁶² B.R. Ambedkar, “Ambedkar to Wavell, Proposal for representation of Scheduled Castes in the Executive Council, New Delhi, 7 June 1945,” in Moon, ed., *BAWS*, vol. 17 part 2, 167.

⁶³ Ibid., 169.

⁶⁴ “Telegram from Field Marshal Viscount Wavell to Mr Amery, 8 June 1945, L/P&J/8/522: f 194,” in Mansergh, ed., *Transfer of Power*, vol. 5, 1102-03.

⁶⁵ “Telegram from Mr Amery to Field Marshal Viscount Wavell, 22 June 1945, L/P&J/8/522: ff 100-2.” Ibid., 1149-50.

representative. Congress opposed this, as accepting it would imply representing only caste Hindus. The Wavell Plan proposed a 14-member executive council with six Muslim representatives, a number that went beyond their share in the population. Jinnah further demanded veto power over constitutional proposals, which Congress rejected as excessive.⁶⁶

Sivaraj also opposed granting Muslims such privileges, fearing it would reduce the representation of other minorities. Ambedkar expressed similar concerns in a note to the Viceroy.⁶⁷ When the Congress suggested including Scheduled Castes in its list of members, Sivaraj objected, arguing that the Scheduled Castes Federation was the sole representative of the community.⁶⁸ However, the Viceroy maintained that it was reasonable for the Congress to have a 'non-Hindu seat,' specifically a Scheduled Caste representative.⁶⁹ On 2 July, Sivaraj submitted a list of four SCF members—Ambedkar, Sivaraj, Jogendranath Mandal from Bengal, and Ram Prasad Tamta from UP.⁷⁰ However, the Viceroy described Mandal and Tamta as “non-entities” in a telegram to the Secretary of State, suggesting that their influence was limited to regional politics.⁷¹ In contrast, the Congress proposed two Scheduled Caste members, Muniswami Pillai of Madras and Radhanath Das of Bengal.⁷²

While forming the executive council, the Viceroy faced conflicting demands from the Congress, Muslim League, and the Scheduled Castes, as noted by his secretary, Evan Jenkins.⁷³ Ultimately, the decision was to include Ambedkar, despite expected opposition from the Congress, and Muniswami Pillai, described as an ‘amiable non-entity.’ Ambedkar was to receive the Labour

⁶⁶ “Telegrams from Field Marshal Viscount Wavell to Mr Amery, 25 June 1945, L/P&J/8/524: ff 25-6 and L/P&J/8/524: ff 26-7.” Ibid., 1151-7.

⁶⁷ “Telegram from Field Marshal Viscount Wavell to Mr Amery, 7 June 1945, L/PO/10/18: f 183.” Ibid., 1043-4.

⁶⁸ “Field Marshal Viscount Wavell to Mr Amery, 1 July 1945, L/PO/10/22.” Ibid., 1182-5.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ “Telegram from Sir E. Jenkins to Mr Turnbull, 8 July 1945, L/P&J/8/524: f 31.” Ibid., 1208-9.

⁷¹ “Telegram from Field Marshal Viscount Wavell to Mr Amery Telegram, 8 July 1945, L/P&J/8/524: f 32.” Ibid., 1210-1.

⁷² “Telegram from Maulana Azad to Field Marshal Viscount Wavell, 7 July 1945.” Ibid., 1202-5.

⁷³ “Notes by Sir E. Jenkins and Field Marshal Viscount Wavell, 7 July 1945.” Ibid., 1207.

portfolio, and Pillai the Education portfolio.⁷⁴ However, the executive council never materialised because Jinnah refused to cooperate without exclusive Muslim League representation.⁷⁵ The Simla Conference marked the weakening of the Scheduled Castes Federation as it struggled to maintain its position as the sole representative of Dalits. By the 1945-46 elections, the Congress had emerged as the dominant political force, sidelining the Federation.

Elections that Decided the Federation's Fate as a Representative of the Scheduled Castes

The 1946 elections highlighted a 'crisis of representation for Dalit politics,'⁷⁶ as the Scheduled Castes Federation (SCF) was almost entirely displaced by the Congress in the reserved seats across India. In Bombay, where non-Congress Dalits had secured 12 general seats in 1937, the SCF contested 19 general seats, including 15 reserved seats, but Congress won 14 of the reserved seats, with 1 going to an Independent. The Congress swept all the reserved seats in Madras (30), United Provinces (20), Bihar (15), Assam (7), and Orissa (7). In Bengal, the Congress won 24 out of 30 reserved seats, while Independents took 4, the Communist Party 1, and the SCF only 1. In Punjab, the Congress won 6 of the 8 reserved seats, with the Unionists winning 2. In the Central Provinces and Berar, another SCF stronghold, Congress took 19 out of 20 reserved seats, leaving just 1 for the SCF.⁷⁷ Overall, out of 151 reserved seats, the SCF managed to win only two—one each in Bengal and the Central Provinces—marking a significant blow to its political influence.

In its memorandum regarding the 1946 elections, the colonial government assessed the Scheduled Castes Federation (SCF) as having only local influence in a few areas of Bombay and the Central Provinces. The government noted

⁷⁴ "Telegram from Field Marshal Viscount Wavell to Mr Amery, 9 July 1945, L/P&J/8/524: ff 33-4," in Mansergh, ed., *Transfer of Power*, vol. 5, 1215-7.

⁷⁵ "Telegram from Field Marshal Viscount Wavell to all Provincial Governors, 11 July 1945." Ibid., 1227-8.

⁷⁶ Bandyopadhyay, "Transfer of Power," 912.

⁷⁷ Statement showing the results of the elections to the Indian Legislative Assembly, and to the Legislative Assemblies in Madras, Bombay, Bengal, the United Provinces, Punjab, Bihar, Assam, Northwest Frontier Province, Sind, Central Provinces and Berar and Orissa', IOR: L/P&J/8/483; cited in Bandyopadhyay, "Transfer of Power," 912.

that the SCF did not actively contest 129 out of 151 reserved constituencies, suggesting it lacked a realistic chance of success, even in the primary elections.⁷⁸ Out of the 151 seats allocated to Scheduled Castes across the provinces (excluding Sindh and the North-West Frontier Province), primary elections were required only when more than four candidates contested a seat. In the last primary round before the final election, this applied to only 40 out of 151 constituencies, further indicating the SCF's limited reach and influence.⁷⁹

Table 1. Distribution of Seats in Primary Elections Shown Province-Wise

Province	Number of Seats
Madras	10
Bombay	3
Bengal	12
United Provinces	3
Central Provinces	5
Punjab	7

Source: B.R. Ambedkar, "Does the Indian National Congress Represent the Scheduled Castes (Untouchables) of India?," in *BAWS*, ed. Vasant Moon, vol. 10 (New Delhi: Dr Ambedkar Foundation, 2020), 525.

There were no Primary Elections in the Provinces of Bihar and Orissa. The results of the Primary Elections in the 40 constituencies clearly reflect that among the 283 candidates fielded by the Congress (see Table 2), only 46 were nominated by the party. Additionally, out of 168 victorious candidates, merely 38 were from the Congress (see Table 3).

⁷⁸ Ibid., 913.

⁷⁹ B.R. Ambedkar, "Does the Indian National Congress Represent the Scheduled Castes (Untouchables) of India?," in Moon, ed., *BAWS*, vol. 10, 525.

Table 2. Parties Which Contested Primary Election for Seats Reserved for Scheduled Castes Shown Province-wise

Name of the party which put up candidates to contest primary elections	The number of Candidates put up by each Party in each province						Total number of candidates put up by the party in all the provinces
	Madras	Bombay	Bengal	United Provinces	Central Provinces	Punjab	
Congress	10	3	13	11	5	4	46
Scheduled Castes Federation	35	6	8	9	12	none	70
Harijan League	none	none	none	1	3	none	4
No-Party Candidates (Independents)	5	9	76	3	8	52	153
Hindu Maha Sabha	none	none	1	1	none	none	2
Communists	6	none	1	none	none	none	7
Radical Democratic Party	none	none	1	none	none	none	1
Total	56	18	100	25	28	56	283

Source: Ambedkar, "Does the Indian National Congress", 530.

The purpose of a party entering a Primary Election was to 'eliminate all competing parties from the Final Election by nominating at least four candidates on its ticket'. The ability of a party to nominate four candidates

depends on its confidence in the voters' support for its ticket. The Congress party nominated only one candidate per constituency, indicating a 'lack of confidence that Scheduled Caste voters would support the Congress ticket'.⁸⁰ In contrast, the Scheduled Castes Federation had confidently nominated four candidates for each contested seat (see Tables 4 and 5, Columns 3 and 4).

Table 3. Number of Candidates Who Became Successful in Primary Elections in Different Provinces Classified According to Party Affiliations

Name of the Party	Madras	Bombay	Bengal	U.P.	C.P.	Punjab	Total
Congress	10	3	12	4	5	4	38
Scheduled Castes Federation	24	5	6	5	11	none	51
Independents	3	4	36	2	3	21	69
Hindu Maha Sabha	none	none	1	1	1		3
Harijan League	none	none	none	none	none		
Communists	3	none	1	none	none		4
Radical Democratic Party	none	none	none	none	none		
Unionists	none	none	none	none	none	3	3
Total	40	12	56	12	20	28	168

Source: Ambedkar, "Does the Indian National Congress", 536.

⁸⁰ Ambedkar, "Does the Indian National Congress," 533.

Table 4. Parties Which Contested the Primary Election for Seats Reserved for the Scheduled Castes in Madras Constituency

Constituency in which Primary Election was contested	Total of Candidates who took part in the contest	Parties which fought the election and the number of candidates put up by each			
		Congress	Scheduled Castes Federation	Communists	No-Party Candidates/Independents
Amlapuram	7	1	4	2	none
Coconada	5	1	4	none	none
Bandar	5	1	1	3	none
Cuddappa	5	1	4	none	none
Penukonda	5	1	4	none	none
Tirnvannamali	6	1	5	none	none
Tindivanam	6	1	5	none	none
Mannergudi	5	1	none	1	3
Pollachi	7	1	4	none	2
Nammakal	5	1	4	none	none
Total	56	10	35	6	5

Source: Ambedkar, "Does the Indian National Congress", 531.

Based on the votes cast for the Congress, it is indisputable that the party secured only 28 per cent of the total votes in the primary election (see Table 6). 'If there was not the temptation to get oneself elected in the final election with the help of the Hindu votes, the Independents would all be members of the Scheduled Castes Federation. On that assumption, the Scheduled Castes

Federation is the only party that represents the Scheduled Castes, and the 72 per cent voting in favour of the Non-Congress Parties should be set out to its credit'.⁸¹ The outcome of the 1945-46 elections in Bengal held significant implications for the region, as it later served as a benchmark for deciding the partition of Bengal. The Congress party's victory in securing 24 out of 30 seats reserved for Scheduled Castes (SCs) in Bengal was a stark contrast to their earlier claim of only 7 MLAs in the 1937 election. This shift has been described as a "complete reversal" and "effective appropriation" of the Scheduled Caste movement by the Congress.⁸²

Table 5. Parties Which Contested the Primary Election for Seats Reserved for the Scheduled Castes in Central Provinces

Constituency in which Primary Election was contested	Total of Candidates who took part in the contest	Parties which fought the election and the number of candidates put up by each			
		Congress	Scheduled Castes Federation	Harijan League	No-Party Candidate/Independents
Nagpur-cum Sakoli	5	1	2	1	1
Hinganghat	6	1	2	1	2
Bhandara	5	1	3	1	none
Yeotmal	6	1	2	none	3
Chikliali	6	1	3	none	2
Total	28	5	12	3	8

Source: Ambedkar, "Does the Indian National Congress", 533.

⁸¹ Ibid., 536.

⁸² Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Protest, and Identity*, 203.

Table 6. Distribution of Total Votes Polled in Primary Elections Across India and Their Distribution Between Congress and Non-Congress Parties

Total Votes polled throughout India in Primary election	In favour of Congress Parties				In favour of Non-Congress Parties							
	Congress	Harijan League	Total	P.C.	SCF*	Independents	HMS**	Communists	Unionists	RDP***	Total	P.C.
3,59,532	1,03,449	483	1,03,932	28	91,595	1,19,273	1,212	30,863	13,521	136	2,55,600	72

*SCF: Scheduled Castes Federation

**HMS: Hindu Maha Sabha

***RDP: Radical Democratic Party

Source: Ambedkar, "Does the Indian National Congress", 535.

Dwaipayan Sen challenges the idea of integration and argues that the constraints of the Poona Pact hindered the Scheduled Castes Federation (SCF) from achieving electoral success.⁸³ Ramnarayan S. Rawat similarly attributes the SCF's defeat in the United Provinces to these limitations.⁸⁴ Sen notes that in the primary elections, the Congress contested only 29 out of 121 seats, winning 25. However, 37 Independents also won, but most failed to retain

⁸³ Dwaipayan Sen, "'No Matter How, Jogendranath Mandal Had to Be Defeated': The Scheduled Castes Federation and the Making of Partition of Bengal, 1945-47," *The Economic and Social History Review* 49, no. 3 (July-September 2012): 327-35.

⁸⁴ Ramnarayan S. Rawat, "Partition Politics and Achhut Identity: A Study of the Scheduled Castes Federation and Dalit Politics in UP, 1946-48," in *The Partitions of Memory: The Afterlife of the Division of India*, ed. Suvir Kaul (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001), 111-129; and "Making Claims for Power: A New Agenda in Dalit Politics of Uttar Pradesh, 1946-48," in *The Past of the Outcaste: Readings in Dalit History*, eds. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya and Yagati Chinna Rao (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2017), 252-272.

their seats in the general elections. He uses examples from Jessore and Faridpur to illustrate his argument. In Jessore, a Federation candidate who came second in the primary round failed to win either of the two reserved seats in the general election. In Faridpur, two Federation candidates who ranked second and third in the primary elections also lost in the general election. Sen questions whether the 24 out of 25 Congress victories in the general elections genuinely reflected Dalit political preferences.⁸⁵ Sekhar Bandyopadhyay attributes the SCF's defeat to a lack of organisation, criticising its failure to contest 129 out of 151 reserved seats.⁸⁶

The Cabinet Mission Betrayal

On 23 March 1946, the Cabinet Mission arrived in Karachi, including Lord Pethick-Lawrence, Stafford Cripps, and A.V. Alexander. Their goal was to collaborate with Lord Wavell and Indian leaders for facilitating the transfer of power.⁸⁷ The Mission made it clear that recognition of leadership would be based on the 1946 election results, diminishing the credibility of the SCF and Ambedkar as Scheduled Caste representatives. In a press conference on 25 March, Pethick-Lawrence asserted that India's right to self-determination was settled, and its priority was to develop new institutions smoothly and efficiently.⁸⁸ Ambedkar, representing the Scheduled Castes Federation (SCF), submitted a memorandum to the Cabinet Mission demanding separate electorates, adequate representation in legislatures and public services, funds for education, and new settlements for Scheduled Castes.⁸⁹ On 16 May 1946, the Cabinet Mission released its State Papers, proposing a union of India with three provincial groups, an interim government, and a Constituent Assembly

⁸⁵ Sen, "'No Matter How, Jogendranath Mandal Had to Be Defeated,'" 328. Sen challenges the Congress' dominance over the Scheduled Castes (SCs) in Bengal by highlighting the defection of four Congress-backed MLAs to the Scheduled Castes Federation. These individuals, including Dwarkanath Baruri, Haran Chandra Burman, Bholanath Biswas, and Gayanath Biswas, had initially been assured by the Congress of protecting the interests of their community but ultimately lost faith in the party's ability to do so.

⁸⁶ Bandyopadhyay, "Transfer of Power," 913.

⁸⁷ "Introduction," in Mansergh, ed., *Transfer of Power*, vol. 7, ix.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ B.R. Ambedkar, Moon ed., *BAWS*, vol. 17, part 2, 172-81.

elected on a communal basis.⁹⁰ However, these plans ignored the demands outlined by Ambedkar. The Scheduled Castes were excluded from the final discussions at Simla, indicating that the British accepted the Congress' and Gandhi's view of them as part of the Hindu community, further marginalising their voices in the movement for independence.⁹¹

Ambedkar's demands to the Cabinet Mission were not new or unexpected, as they had been consistently raised since 1942.⁹² These demands were grounded in the commitments made by previous Viceroy's who had acknowledged the Scheduled Castes as a distinct group deserving representation. For example, on 8 August 1940, Linlithgow affirmed that the British Government valued the views of minorities in any constitutional plan and would not support transferring power to a government that significant sections of India's population rejected. This position assured minorities like the Scheduled Castes that their interests would be considered, making Ambedkar's demands valid and reasonable.⁹³ The Scheduled Castes were disappointed to be categorised with Hindus under the Cabinet Mission's proposals.⁹⁴ In a parliamentary debate on 18 July 1946, Cripps, Alexander, and Pethick-Lawrence defended this decision. They argued that Congress' success in the reserved seats showed that the Scheduled Castes trusted the party to represent them. Additionally,

⁹⁰ For the Constituent Assembly's composition, the Cabinet Mission Plan classified members of the provincial legislatures into three distinct groups: (1) Muslims, (2) Sikhs, and (3) General. Each group was allocated a specific number of seats and was to elect its own representatives through a separate electorate system. This meant that Muslim members of provincial legislatures would vote for Muslim representatives, Sikhs for Sikh representatives, and all others—categorised under 'General'—would elect their representatives. The 'General' group encompassed Hindus, Scheduled Castes, Indian Christians, and Anglo-Indians. See "Cabinet Mission Plan (Cabinet Mission, 1946)- Constitution of India," Constitution of India, accessed June 12, 2024, <https://www.constitutionofindia.net/historical-constitution/cabinet-mission-plan-cabinet-mission-1946/>.

⁹¹ B.R. Ambedkar, "Reactions to the British Cabinet Plan: Dr. Ambedkar's Protest to Churchill," in Moon ed., *BAWS*, vol. 17, part 2, 223.

⁹² It was also mentioned at the Simla Conference in 1945. See B.R. Ambedkar, "What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables," in Moon ed., *BAWS*, vol. 9, Appendix XI, 346-47.

⁹³ An important speech in which the British formally offered Dominion Status to India. *Speeches by The Marquess of Linlithgow*, vol. 2, November 1938- October 1943 (New Delhi: Government of India, 1944), 233-40.

⁹⁴ Ambedkar, "Does the Indian National Congress," 523.

they claimed that the Advisory Committee on minorities would allow the Scheduled Castes to participate in shaping their safeguards. These arguments aimed to justify grouping the Scheduled Castes with Hindus.⁹⁵

The Cabinet Mission claimed Ambedkar's influence was limited to the Bombay Presidency and Central Provinces, but this was inaccurate. The Scheduled Castes Federation (SCF) had a presence beyond these regions and achieved notable success. The Mission overlooked Ambedkar's victory in the Constituent Assembly elections from the Bengal Provincial Legislative Assembly, where he secured seven first-preference votes, surpassing Sarat Chandra Bose of the Congress. Considering that most of the Scheduled Caste members in Bengal were elected on a Congress ticket and one SCF member was absent due to illness, Ambedkar's win indicates that at least six Congress-affiliated members defied their party to support him.⁹⁶ This showed his influence beyond his perceived strongholds, contradicting the Cabinet Mission's assessment.

Ambedkar rejected the second argument by Cripps, Alexander, and Pethick-Lawrence as 'worse than useless'. He criticised the Advisory Committee for lacking clear powers and relying on simple majority decisions. Since the Committee mirrored the Constituent Assembly, where Scheduled Castes' representatives were Congress members bound by its mandate, Ambedkar believed they could not genuinely represent Scheduled Caste interests.⁹⁷ Ambedkar also rejected the 1946 election results as a legitimate measure of the Congress representing the Scheduled Castes, arguing that the outcome was not a reliable indicator. He noted that parties cooperating with the British had lost the trust of the Indian masses, which affected their electoral performance. Additionally, the Indian National Army (INA) trials, coinciding with the elections, worked in Congress' favour. Ambedkar believed that 'If the INA had not been staged at the time of the election, the Congress would have lost completely'.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Ibid., 523-24.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 527.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 524.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 524-5.

Moreover, Ambedkar criticised the use of the joint electorate system for Scheduled Castes' seats, where Hindus, the numerical majority, could vote. This allowed the Congress to secure Scheduled Caste seats primarily through Hindu votes instead of Dalit support, making the claim of genuine representation questionable. He argued that the election results could not accurately reflect the political preferences of the Scheduled Castes.⁹⁹ Ambedkar emphasised that the true measure of whether the Congress genuinely represented the Scheduled Castes lay in the results of the primary elections, conducted through a separate electorate without Hindu voters. He believed these results reflected the genuine sentiments of the Scheduled Castes. Of the 151 reserved seats for Scheduled Castes in the Provincial Legislatures—allocated across provinces except Sindh and the North-West Frontier Province—primary elections were required only when more than four candidates contested a seat. In the most recent elections, this applied to 40 out of 151 constituencies.¹⁰⁰

Ambedkar wrote a detailed letter to the British Prime Minister Clement Attlee, expressing his concerns about the elections and the flaws of the Poona Pact.¹⁰¹ However, Attlee dismissed his claims, acknowledging the pact's potential injustices but not seeing sufficient reasons to change it. He argued that supporting Ambedkar's stance could be seen as interference with the Constituent Assembly and risk resentment.¹⁰² Attlee's response was unexpected, as it marked a withdrawal of British support for Dalits against the Congress and mirrored Gandhi's view of Ambedkar as a regional leader. Despite this setback, Ambedkar continued to fight for Dalit rights through satyagrahas, determined to secure representation in the new constitutional framework. The Cabinet Mission marked a complete shift in British patronage, abandoning the Scheduled Castes Federation they once recognised as distinct from caste Hindus. During their visit, the Mission consulted with leaders from the 'Nationalist Scheduled Castes'¹⁰³, including Jagjivan Ram, indicating that the British no longer saw Ambedkar as the sole representative of the Dalit community, a significant departure from the Cripps Mission's stance.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 525.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 525-27.

¹⁰¹ B.R. Ambedkar, Moon ed., *BAWS*, vol. 17 part II, 250.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ "Introduction," in Mansergh, ed., *Transfer of Power*, vol. 7, x.

Conclusion

Ambedkar strongly condemned the Cabinet Mission's proposals, calling them a "shameful betrayal" of the sixty million untouchables and warning that excluding them from the Constituent Assembly and the Advisory Committee left them vulnerable. In a letter to Churchill, he expressed fears of a bleak future for the Scheduled Castes, to which Churchill assured him that the Conservative Party would work to protect their interests. However, these promises proved empty, as the Cabinet Mission's plan largely disregarded the Scheduled Castes as a distinct political entity.¹⁰⁴

Even when Ambedkar insisted that separate electorates were essential for genuine representation, Pethick-Lawrence argued that once independence was achieved, Indian politics would shift to economic issues, suggesting that the Scheduled Castes would benefit more by aligning with left-wing movements than relying on a departing British government.¹⁰⁵ This reasoning seemed to mask the British retreat towards Gandhi's view, sidelining Ambedkar's demands and leaving the Scheduled Castes without effective safeguards. In a debate on 6 March 1947 in London, Attlee addressed Britain's responsibilities toward minorities, including the Scheduled Castes. He argued that the British Raj lacked the power, not the will, to uplift the untouchables, and claimed that their position was a part of the Hindu social system that Britain largely accepted. Attlee questioned why Britain was now expected to resolve these issues before leaving India, suggesting that any genuine commitment should have been fulfilled long ago. He defended the Cabinet Mission's approach as a "mission of fulfilment" rather than a betrayal.¹⁰⁶

This statement reflected the British retreat from their earlier support for Ambedkar and the Scheduled Castes Federation. Despite initially backing the McDonald Award against Gandhi's opposition, the British ultimately abandoned Ambedkar to avoid complicating the transfer of power. The rapid

¹⁰⁴ B. R. Ambedkar, "Reactions to the British Cabinet Plan: Dr. Ambedkar's Protest to Churchill," in Moon ed., *BAWS*, vol. 17, part 2, 223.

¹⁰⁵ B. R. Ambedkar, "A Note on the Meeting Between Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Field Marshal Viscount Wavell." *Ibid.*, 193.

¹⁰⁶ Alan Campbell-Johnson, *Mission with Mountbatten* (New Delhi: Wiley Eastern, 1994), 29.

shift from recognising the Scheduled Castes as a distinct political group to sidelining them marked a significant change in British policy within a decade. Ambedkar was a genuine representative of the Dalit community, advocating for their political, social, and economic safeguards to secure their future. Unlike the limited goals of temple entry or punishing caste Hindus, he prioritised education and economic empowerment for the Scheduled Castes. However, a significant limitation in his approach was his reliance on the British. While the Scheduled Castes Federation brought some centralisation to Dalit politics, its influence remained limited. If Ambedkar had built coalitions with influential leaders beyond Gandhi from the start, the Federation might have been seen as a crucial participant in the transfer of power.

Contrary to accusations of separatism, Ambedkar did not oppose India's independence; his concern was the status of Dalits in a free India. His fight was not for political power or personal gain but for securing rights that would prevent future generations from facing the discrimination he endured. The vision he planted in the Indian Constitution reflected his commitment to Dalit upliftment. Ambedkar's leadership continues to inspire Dalit struggles for dignity, identity, and structural change in Indian society.

References

Primary Sources

1. Private Papers

Ambedkar Papers, Nehru Memorial Museum & Library (NMML), New Delhi, India.

M.C. Rajah Papers, Nehru Memorial Museum & Library (NMML), New Delhi, India.

2. Reports and Proceedings

Cabinet Mission Plan (Cabinet Mission, 1946). "Constitution of India." Accessed June 12, 2024. <https://www.constitutionofindia.net/historical-constitution/cabinet-mission-plan-cabinet-mission-1946/>.

Report of the Proceedings of the Third Session of the All India Depressed Classes Conference held at Nagpur on July 18 and 19, 1942, n.d.

Sapru, Tej Bahadur. *Constitutional Proposals of the Sapru Committee*.
<https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.276348/mode/2up>.

3. Periodicals

Indian Annual Register, 1938, vol. 1.
<https://archive.org/details/HindSwaraj.iar.10973.17917>.

4. Memoirs, Books and Collected Works

Ambedkar, B. R., *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, vols. 1, 9, 10, and 17 (Part I-III), edited by Vasant Moon. New Delhi: Dr Ambedkar Foundation, 2020. <https://www.mea.gov.in/books-writings-of-ambedkar.htm>.

Ambedkar, B. R., *Annihilation of caste*, edited by S. Anand, with an introduction by Arundhati Roy. London: Verso, 2016.
https://www.mea.gov.in/images/attach/amb/volume_01.pdf.

Ambedkar, B.R., "The Cripps Proposals on Constitutional Advancement," in *Ambedkar Writes*, vol. 1: *Political Writings*, edited by Narendra Jadhav. New Delhi & Seattle: Konark Publishers, 2014.

Campbell-Johnson, Alan. *Mission with Mountbatten*. New Delhi: Wiley Eastern, 1994. <https://archive.org/details/MissionWithMountbatten>.

Mansergh, Nicholas, (ed.), *The Transfer of Power 1942-1947*, vols. 1- 7 (London: HMSO, 1970–1977)
<https://archive.org/details/transferofpowervol1/mode/2up>.

Menon, V.P., *The Transfer of Power in India* (Bombay: Orient Longmans, 1957), Central Secretariat Library. Accessed June 9, 2024.
<https://indianculture.gov.in/ebooks/transfer-power-india>.

Political Demands of Scheduled Castes 1944 (SCF). Accessed June 6, 2024.
<https://www.constitutionofindia.net/historical-constitution/political-demands-of-scheduled-castes-scheduled-castes-federation1944/>.

Speeches by The Marquess of Linlithgow, vol. II, November 1938- October 1943, Government of India, New Delhi: 1944.
<https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.211401>.

Secondary Sources

- Bandyopadhyay, Sekhar. "Transfer of Power and the Crisis of Dalit Politics in India, 1945–47." *Modern Asian Studies* 34, no. 4 (October 2000): 903–947.
- Bandyopadhyay, Sekhar. *Caste, protest and identity in colonial India: The namasudras of Bengal, 1872–1947*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Bandyopadhyay, Sekhar. *Nationalist Movement in India: A Reader*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Brown, Norman. "India's Constitutional Issues." in *Government and Politics in South Asia*, edited by Craig Baxter, Yogendra Malik, Charles Kennedy, and Robert Oberst. Boulder: Westview Press, 1993.
- Chandra, Bipan. *India's Struggle for Independence, 1857–1947*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1989.
- Coupland, Reginald. *The Indian Problem. Part II: Indian Politics, 1936–42*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1944.
- Gore, M. S. *The Social Context of an Ideology: Ambedkar's Political and Social Thought*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1993.
- Jensenius, Francesca R. "Mired in Reservations: The Path-Dependent History of Electoral Quotas in India." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 74, no. 1 (December 4, 2014): 85–105.
- Keer, Dhananjay. *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission*. Mumbai: Popular Prakashan, 2023.
- Omvedt, Gail. *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India*. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2014.
- Rawat, Ramnarayan. "Making Claims for Power: A New Agenda in Dalit Politics of Uttar Pradesh, 1946–48." In *The Past of the Outcaste: Readings in Dalit History*, edited by Sabyasachi Bhattacharya and Yagati Chinna Rao. Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2017.
- Rawat, Ramnarayan. "Partition Politics and Achhut Identity: A Study of the Scheduled Castes Federation and Dalit Politics in UP, 1946–48." in *The Partitions of Memory: The Afterlife of the Division of India*, edited by Suvir Kaul, 111–129. Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001.

- Samujh, Ram. *Reservation Policy: Its Relevance in Modern India*. Mumbai: Samrudh Bharat Publication, 2005.
- Sen, Dwaipayan. "'No Matter How, Jogendranath Had to Be Defeated': The Scheduled Castes Federation and the Making of Partition of Bengal, 1945–47." *The Economic and Social History Review* 49, no. 3 (July–September 2012): 327–35.
- Smith, Ray T. "The Role of India's 'Liberals' in the Nationalist Movement, 1915–1947." *Asian Survey* 8, no. 7 (July 1968): 607–624.
- Zelliot, Eleanor. "Congress and the Untouchables, 1917–1959." in *Congress and Indian Nationalism: The Pre-Independence Phase*, edited by Richard Sisson and Stanley Wolpert. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.