

Making Claims for Power: A New Agenda in Dalit Politics of Uttar Pradesh, 1946-48.

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‘...[T]he awakened untouchable today is repeatedly asking them [the Congress] if they could not

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remove the ‘social evil’ of their own creation without political power, how do they expect us [the untouchables] to liberate ourselves without political power’. (Shastri, *Poona Pact*. 1946 p.24)

‘This is 1946, not 1932’. (Shastri, *Poona Pact*. 1946 p.76)¹

Shankaranand Shastri’s statements help us locate two related propositions that came to constitute Dalit politics in Uttar Pradesh in the 1940s.² The first proposition deals with claims made by Dalits to acquire political power—specifically in the form of adequate representation in the provincial legislative assemblies and in the Constituent Assembly. They demanded positive discrimination in the form of reservations within legislative and executive institutions. Safeguards for Dalits, it was argued, should be incorporated into the proposed constitution for Indian citizens. The second proposition concerns *achhut* identity, through which Dalits hoped to reconstitute their polity in UP. The Scheduled Castes Federation (SCF) and even a section of Congress Harijans staked a claim for *achhut* identity to distinguish their

1 Shankaranand Shastri, *Poona Pact Or Gandhi*, first published in 1946, Bahujan Kalyan Prakashan (Hindi), Lucknow (U.P.) Eleventh edition 1994. Translations from Hindi are mine. In 1946, the Dalit activist, Shankaranand Shastri, wrote a passionate political history of the Dalit struggle from 1932 to 1946. The second edition, published in 1965, was revised to include political developments upto 1956. The book provides a Dalit perspective to the events between 1932 to 1956. ‘Shastri’ is a Brahman title for learned persons appropriated by the author to question their sole claim to learning. Shankaranand Shastri was a prominent leader of SCF of UP, based in Lucknow.

2 I have used the term *achhut* and Dalit interchangeably. Dalits gave a new radical meaning to the term *achhut* or ‘untouchable’ to mean ‘pure’ or ‘untouched’ in their struggles around this time. This term was used in opposition to Harijan or Scheduled Castes, the former a Gandhian category and the latter a state category. Shastri also underlined this point. He issued an appeal to Dalits that they should organise under a separate *achhut* identity and discard their disparate caste identities.

difference from ‘other communities’.³ Dalit writings increasingly depicted the Poona Pact as a great betrayal by the Congress and the British.⁴ From their experience of the two general elections of 1937 and 1946, they argued that the electoral mechanism worked out under the aegis of the Poona Pact was structured against the Dalits.

In this essay, I argue that in the 1940s Dalits of UP articulated an inclusive *achhut* identity to mobilise diverse sections of Dalit society: Jatavs, Chamars, Ad-Dharmis, Pasis, and so forth. I will argue that this new agenda defined by a claim for political power, became the focal point of the mobilisation. Through a discussion of Shastri's response, along with other responses in the form of petitions, resolutions, the emergence of the SCF and broad support for it in the elections in 1945, I will elaborate the content of their agenda. In the first section, I argue that this new agenda to create an inclusive *achhut* identity was an outcome of political realignments within Dalit politics—realignments in the form of a new political body, the SCF and a new set of demands intended to liberate their community. In the second section I demonstrate that the new agenda acquired wider support among Dalits, by discussing

3 The All-India Scheduled Castes Federation was established in Nagpur, 18-20 July 1942. R.B.N. Shivraj (Madras) was elected as its President and P.N. Rajbhoj (Pune) as its General Secretary.

4 The Poona Pact was signed on 24 September 1932 between the representatives of caste Hindus led by Gandhi and Dalits led by Ambedkar. Under the pact, Ambedkar gave up his demand for separate electorates in favour of a system of primary and secondary elections, which allowed separate electorates for Dalits in primaries and a joint electorate in the general elections. It was signed in response to the MacDonald communal award of 16 August 1932 and Mahatma Gandhi's decision “fast unto death”. The MacDonald award extended separate electorates to the ‘untouchables’ of India. Besides conferring upon the untouchables the right to vote with other members of the Hindu community in what were defined as general constituencies, it also created “a number of special seats filled from Depressed Class electorates in the areas where these voters chiefly prevail”. Mahatma Gandhi announced his decision to “fast unto death” in protest against the provision of separate electorates for the ‘untouchables’, which he claimed sought to divide the Hindu community between the caste Hindus and the Dalits.

the responses of Dalit leaders and organisations to the Cabinet Mission awards.⁵ In the third section I compare statements made by the SCF with petitions written by the Congress Harijan organisations from western UP in order to argue that despite their apparent opposition to each other their demands were similar. Lastly, I argue that the Poona Pact constituted a defining moment in the formulation of a Dalit agenda in the 1940s. The Pact created structural constraints to the emergence of a radical *achhut* polity that would hoped to win elections and challenge the Congress. I demonstrate this point through a study of the elections of 1945-6, linking it with the implications of the Poona Pact. Elections were and are not the sole product of politics, but by excavating debates in and around them, it is possible to re-open issues of identity, nationhood and their relationship to power.

Dalits, ignored by the colonial state, have also been neglected by much of mainstream historiography. The historiography of the Freedom struggle maintains a peculiar silence about Dalit society and politics of the partition years.⁶ The questions raised by Dalit leaders like Dr B.R. Ambedkar, P.N. Rajbhoj, J.N. Mandal and Jagjivan Ram and by provincial leaders are not even noted or acknowledged. Especially worth noting here is Dr Ambedkar's pointed criticism of both the Cabinet Mission plan and moves initiated by the Congress. The coming independence along with the Constitution and the Republic has a particular understanding—its liberating potentialities for the deprived

⁵ The three members of the British Cabinet—Secretary of State Pethick-Lawrence, Cripps and Alexander—formed the Cabinet Mission that visited India between March-June 1946 to discuss with Indian leaders, two issues, one that of interim government and the other that of principles and procedures for framing a new constitution of free India. See section—II of this article.

⁶ Satyapal and P. Chandra, *Sixty Years of Congress: India Lost; India Regained* (Lahore, 1946). Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India: 1885—1947* (Delhi, 1947); Ravinder Kumar, 'Structure of Politics in India on the Eve of Independence', *Occasional Papers in History and Society*, Second Series, No. XVI (Nehru Memorial Museum and Library Delhi) (hereafter NMML); Robert J. Moore, *Escape from Empire: The Atlee Government and the Indian Problem* (Oxford, 1983); D.A. Low (ed.), *Indian National Congress: Centenary Hindsight* (Delhi, 1988).

sections of Indian society. The key role played by Dr Ambedkar in drafting the Indian Constitution is taken as one such instance which allows a generous interpretation of the role of the Congress and the incipient nation-state towards the welfare of the Dalits in India. *Achhut* concerns are reduced to a footnote in a grand master narrative; more seriously, the many alternative strategies with which they experimented have disappeared from historical accounts.

The few writings which are specially concerned with the history of Dalits in the partition years also tend to ignore their history. Jurgensmeyer's account of the struggles of Ad-Dharmis in the Punjab is one such study. In 'the final struggle for independence' he writes, 'issues regarding the lower castes were all but forgotten'.⁷ But, forgotten by whom? Only by caste Hindu leaders and historians, it seems to me. The politics of the Congress, the Muslim League, the Sikhs, the princely states and the British during these years have received extensive scholarly attention. The dynamics of Dalit politics have largely been ignored. Sekhar Bandyopadhyaya's study of Namasudras of Bengal from 1937-47 is one of the few works that address' the issues of partition and independence.⁸ He argues that Namasudras

7 Mark Juergensmeyer, *Religion as Social Vision: The Movement against Untouchability in 20th Century Punjab* (Berkeley, 1982), p. 164; Marc Gallanter, *Competing Equalities: The Indian Experience with Compensatory Discrimination* (University of California Press, 1980); Peter Reeves, 'Changing Patterns of Political Alignments in the General Elections to the U.P. Legislative Assembly, 1937 and 1946', *Modern Asian Studies*, V, 2, (1971); Eleanor Zelliott, 'Congress and Untouchables, 1915-50', in R. Sisson and S. Wolpert (eds.), *Congress and Indian Nationalism: The pre-independence phase* (Berkeley, 1988); Usuda Masayaki, 'Pushed Towards the Partition: Jogendranath Mandal and the constrained Namasudra movement', H. Kotani (ed.), *Caste System, Untouchability and the Depressed* (Delhi, 1992).

8 Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Protest and Identity in Colonial India: The Namasudras of Bengal, 1872-1947* (London 1997). See his article, 'From Alienation to Integration: Changes in the Politics of Caste in Bengal, 1937-47', *Indian Economic and Social History Review (IESHR)*, XXXI, 3, (1994). The following works also inform us about Dalits politics and society during the period of independence and partition. R.K. Kshirsagar, *Dalit Movement in*

politics moved away from a position of 'alienation' in the 1920s and 1930s to one of 'integration' with the Congress and the nation in the 1940s.⁹ The term 'alienation' is defined with reference to the Congress and the position of the Namasudras towards it. In the context of Bengal, Bandyopadhyay has argued that until the 1930s Namasudras remained indifferent towards the Congress and in fact supported the policies of Colonial power and in the process earned safeguards from them. In the 1940s, he claims, their politics moved towards integration with the Congress and the nation. Joya Chatterji identifies another similar stream of integration, the Namasudras participation in the 'communal battles over their religious right as Hindus'.¹⁰ It is possible to study Dalit politics in this era from a different perspective. In this essay I suggest that the mainstream history of Dalits' integration with the nation has erased many of the alternative strategies and positions which were embraced by Dalits during the partition years.

I

In their studies of the Ad-Dharm movement in Punjab and the Jatavs of Agra, Juergensmeyer and Lynch note a major shift in Dalit politics in the 1940s. Juergensmeyer attributes the change to the emergence of

India and its Leaders (1857-1956), (Nagpur 1992); Gail Omvedt describes the SCF as a 'step backwards from the 1930s radicalism' of class struggle. Gail Omvedt, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India* (Delhi, 1994), p. 217; Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (Delhi, 1998); Saurabh Dube, *Untouchable Pasts: Religion, Identity and Power among a Central Indian Community, 1780-1950* (Albany, 1998); Marika Vicziany and Oliver Mendelsohn, *Untouchable: Subordination, poverty and the state in modern India* (Cambridge, 1998); Vijay Prashad, *Untouchable Freedom: A Social History of a Dalit Community* (Delhi, 1999).

⁹ Bandyopadhyay, 'From Alienation to Integration' p. 350. Bandyopadhyay, *Caste Protest and Identity*, p. 174

¹⁰ Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu communalism and partition, 1932-1947* (Delhi 1995), p. 202.

the 'Ambedkar alternative' and Lynch describes the shift in Dalit politics as a 'turning point'.¹¹ In the case of Juergensmeyer this helps explain the decline of the Ad-Dharm movement in the 1940s. Lynch describes a shift in Jatav politics suggesting that now they identified themselves with the scheduled castes as the oppressed and deprived section of the society. Both these shifts I will show contributed to the remarkable expansion of the SCF in UP. In this section, I will discuss a number of trends in Dalit politics which emerged in the first half of the twentieth century.

The Jatav Mahasabha had repeatedly rejected the 'untouchable' Chamar status for their community in the 1920s and 30s.¹² In fact, this position was not limited to the Jatavs. A prominent feature of the Dalit movement of this period was the contestation of the status of 'unclean' and 'impure' attached to their communities. In this phase, the Jatavs through their Mahasabha made a claim for Kshatriya status. The Chuhra community of Punjab articulated a new religious identity by formulating their own alternative, that of the Ad-Dharm religion. The Chuhras consciously began to describe themselves as Ad-Dharmis, a position they defined outside the realm of the Hindu community. They outlined their own religious rituals and moral order, social structure and history. The Jatavs sought a 'clean' status within the fold of brahmanical religion. The Ad-dharmis rejected the Brahmanical religion. These two different choices by Dalits were two strategies which attempted to adopt a 'clean' status.

Dilip Menon has argued that the Gandhian Congress programme of *achhutodhar* (Harijan uplift) identified 'the problem in terms of an opposition between cleanliness and the lack of it, locating the whole issue not in terms of economic or social realities but in a physical state'.¹³ Caste hierarchy was not rejected. Instead, the emphasis on caste equality through the temple entry satyagrahas organised by the Congress, appealed to the Dalits. Hazari, a Dalit, in his autobiography illustrates this point. Writing

11 Juergensmeyer, *Religion as Social Vision*, p. 163 and Lynch, *Politics of Untouchability*, pp. 86-7.

12 Lynch, *Politics of Untouchability*, pp. 69-71.

13 Dilip Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India, Malabar, 1900-1947* (Delhi, 1994), p. 85

about the decade of 1920s, he says that being part of the Congress ‘meant breaking the barrier between castes’. Recounting his sense of liberation, he writes ‘if I wore a Gandhi cap no one would ask who I was’.¹⁴ Hazari's point is not a mere euphemism; rather it captures the euphoric impact of the Congress in the 1920s among the educated sections of Dalits. For the first generation of educated Dalit intelligentsia, the Congress offered hope for individual deliverance away from the realities of Hindu society.

Another aspect of the Congress agenda that is revealed in a series of articles entitled ‘Political Alignments to-day’, deals with the growth of communal parties.¹⁵ These articles were prepared for the All India Congress Committee in the late 1930s. In the section on ‘depressed classes parties’ the paper distinguished between two kinds of politics in India, one that is communal and therefore reactionary, backward and feudal and the other that is progressive, modern and radical and nationalist. Dalit political organisation represents the former and therefore was labelled anti-national. It described their leaders as ‘reactionaries’ and ‘loyalists’, accusing them of being selfish and arguing that their politics constitute one form of communal politics and that Dr Ambedkar was their most important representative. Their reactionary politics exploits ‘cultural, economic and political interests’ of communities and caste, dividing the freedom struggle and benefiting the imperialist and feudal forces.

The paper argued for a politics that would fight for the just cause of the ‘most exploited section of Indian society’. This politics, it argued, must be based on working class unity aiming for the united front of *achhuts*, peasants and workers against the imperialist forces. The Congress, it claimed, was best equipped to lead this front because of its commitment to radical reforms in relation to the land

14 Hazari, *I was an outcast: The autobiography of an unknown Indian* (Delhi, 1951). (The book was written in 1935, mentioned in the Preface), p. 116.

15 ‘The Political Alignments to-day’, All India Congress Committee Papers (hereafter AICC), F.No. 49/1946, pp.31-39 Nehru Memorial and Museum and Library Delhi (hereafter NMML). The note does not mention any date.

question and industry outlined in the Karachi resolution of 1930. But Dalits also responded to these criticisms. Shastri, for example, accused the Congress of mischievous propaganda to discredit their struggle.¹⁶ A Namierist reading of Dalit politics, then and even now, would be unfair, for theirs was a fight for liberation- - social and political.

Dalits were also looking for answers to reshape their lives. They addressed the issue not only in terms of 'religion' but also in terms of their 'occupations' as well. Nandini Gooptu has argued that by the 1930s Adi-Hindu ideology had become popular in the towns of UP, as it grappled with questions of their ritual status and menial occupation.¹⁷ The Adi-Hindu movement in UP emphasised a new religious identity for the Chamars based on their popular religious traditions. Their ideologues created alternative structures of religious and social ideology among Dalit labourers, borrowing heavily from the bhakti traditions of the Kabir, Ravidass, Valmiki and Shri Narayan sects. By linking their status and occupation with the bhakti tradition, Adi-Hindu ideologues sought to fight the stigma of untouchability attached to their occupation. Despite the process of urbanisation and economic development, caste inequities still defined and organised the urban landscape, both in terms of jobs and housing.

It seems that by the 1940s a Dalit politics which emphasised 'ritual purity' and a 'clean' social status had reached its limits. Lynch and Juergensmeyer has also noted this point (albeit only in passing) in their work. They relate it to a shift in the agenda of Dalit politics. Lynch and Juergensmeyer explain the 'shift' in Dalit politics as a move towards an active participation in nationalist politics. They do not, however, deal with the nature of this transition within Dalit politics. There was a general realisation among Dalits of the failure and incapacity of the Congress to offer them a dignified liberation. If there was an optimistic Hazari in the 1920s, then there was a disillusioned Shastri in the 1940s, who defined

¹⁶ Shastri, *Poona Pact*, pp. 100-115.

¹⁷ Nandini Gooptu, 'Caste and Labour: Untouchable Social Movements in Urban U.P. in the Early Twentieth Century', in Peter Robb (ed.), *Dalit Movements and the Meanings of Labour in Colonial India* (Delhi, 1992).

the limits of the Congress. Shastri argued that it was a mistake to have accepted Gandhi as their liberator for so long. 'If Gandhi and Company had done genuine work for their uplift', wrote Shastri, 'the *achhuts* would not have felt it necessary to raise their own voice'.¹⁸

The Congress considered untouchability a religious problem of the Hindus, whereas Dalits viewed it as a political one. Shastri identified two essential aspects of real social reform for Dalits: special educational facilities and a twelve per cent reservation in government jobs. He tells us that Dr Ambedkar implemented this agenda for the first time as a member of the Viceroy Council in 1942.¹⁹ Shastri was clear that in the absence of a separate electorate, their problems would remain unresolved.²⁰ He argued that the existing constitutional arrangement would continue to allow the election of unrepresentative Congress candidates from reserved constituencies. We can discern a shift in the agenda of Dalit politics in the 1940s, especially the way in which some of the *achhut* caste mahasabhas appropriated the platform of the SCF. It made a claim to represent Dalits against the British and the forthcoming discussions on transfer of Power.

It seems that most Dalit caste mahasabhas came to a similar conclusion. The Jatavs and Chamar mahasabhas established the SCF in UP. For instance, the Jatav Mahasabha founded the SCF in Agra in 1942. They found it necessary to organise a united front of the *achhuts* under the banner of SCF. The merger with the SCF implied a move towards a new all-encompassing identity of the *achhuts*. The Dalit caste mahasabhas in UP merged with the SCF.²¹ This helped SCF acquire a prominent presence in the

18 Shastri, *Poona Pact*, p. 9 This aspect forms a major theme of his work.

19 Shastri, *Poona Pact*, p. 41.

20 Shastri, *Poona Pact*. See his chapter, 'Why separate Electorates?', pp. 118-121.

21 Examples of such mahasabhas are, the Jatav mahasabha of Agra in 1944, the Chamars mahasabha (Kanpur) the Adi-Hindu Ravidas mahasabha (Allahabad) in U.P., the Ad-Dharmis in Punjab (1946), Namasudharas led by Jogendranath Mandal founded SCF in Bengal (1943) and Satnamis[Chamars] of Chhatisgarh [Central

major towns of UP within a short time-span. Nandini Gooptu has argued that ‘the informal nature of links between apex Adi-Hindu organisations in the towns and local caste-groups in neighbourhoods contributed to the strength of the (bhakti) movement’.²² Gooptu argues that these organisations had an influential presence in urban towns in UP. The SCF benefited from the caste mahasabhas engaged in the social uplift of their respective communities. As an organisation, it inherited the networks of the various castes mahasabhas. In a sense it was not a one way process of the SCF seeking to enlighten Dalits; rather, it was a conscious move of alliance from both sides.

Let me illustrate one such instance, that of the Adi-Hindu Ravidass mahasabha of Allahabad. The mahasabha maintained in its resolution that Dalits ‘are trying their utmost to gain all their legitimate social, moral and citizen (sic) rights’ and that they were not part of Hindu samaj.²³ Among the important speakers present were the local leaders R.S. Shyam Lal, Asharfi Lal, Hiralal Balmiki and the Congress MLA Masuriya Din. In fact, Dalits passed resolutions along similar lines in various districts of UP in 1946: Gorakhpur, Azamgarh, Etah, Etawah, Jalaun, Lucknow, Agra, Kanpur, Saharanpur and Meerut.²⁴ On this issue, the position of the Congress Harijan leaders was more ambivalent than ever before. The rapid popularity of the SCF among Dalits in UP added to the ambivalence. (I demonstrate this point through an analysis of the 1946 elections in the following section) Even the Depressed Classes League (DCL) of the Dalit Congress leader Jagjivan Ram, as I will show below, found it difficult to

Provinces]founded SCF in 1945.

²² Nandini Gooptu, ‘Caste and Labour’, p. 20.

²³ Resolution dated 16 February 1946. Harijan Sahayak Department, F.No. 164/1946, Box No. 370. (Uttar Pradesh State Arches, Lucknow), (UPSA).

²⁴ Criminal Investigation Department, Uttar Pradesh: Weekly Police Abstracts of Intelligence for 1946 (PAI) (CID Lucknow).

adhere to the Congress programme in the wake of the rise of the SCF.²⁵

Education and political power together came to be considered as a panacea for the problems of Dalits by the 1940s.²⁶ Adi-Hindu ideologues and activists played a crucial role in spreading these ideas in their neighbourhoods. Gooptu argues that the bhakti movements in the towns ‘developed into support for caste-based political agitation, spearheaded by literate leaders to gain recognition of their rights and privileged access to education and employment’.²⁷ These leaders played a crucial role in the success of the UPSCF in the Primaries. Political leaders as well as the leaders of caste mahasabhas—Chamars, Jatavs, Raidasis, Balmikis, Kabir Panthi, and the literate Adi-Hindu ideologues based in the towns of UP constituted the Dalit intelligentsia. Their immediate concern was to ensure that the Constituent Assembly—which would also draft the constitution for independent India—guarantees reservation in education and employment. Their dream was for Dalits to occupy influential positions in the legislatures, government offices and other institutions in order to be able to directly formulate programmes for Dalit uplift. A new consensus had emerged among the Dalit intelligentsia in the urban towns of UP.

II

The SCF expected some kind of constitutional safeguards from the Cabinet Mission. It was hopeful that the Cabinet Mission would provide the principle of separate representation for Dalits by recognising them as a separate community. This was a major demand of the SCF and had been repeatedly asserted in its resolutions since 1942.²⁸ It was also put forward at the Simla Conference in 1945. The expectation of the SCF that this demand would be fulfilled was not entirely unfounded. It was based on

25 Depressed Classes League was established at a Depressed Classes conference in Kanpur, R.L. Biswas was elected as its President and Jagjivan Ram and P.N. Rajbhoj were elected as its Secretaries.

26 Menon makes a similar point in the context of Malabar. Menon, *Caste, and Communism*, p. 145.

27 Nandini Gooptu, ‘Caste and Labour’, p. 297.

28 Vasant Moon (ed.), *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches Vol. IX* (Bombay, 1990), pp. 346-349.

commitments made by colonial officials and the Viceroys. Lord Wavell in his letter (15 August 1944) to Mahatma Gandhi had stated that ‘the Scheduled Castes are one of the important and separate elements in the national life of India. That their consent is a necessary condition precedent for the transfer of power to Indians (sic)’.²⁹ Earlier Lord Linlithgow had made a similar statement about the Dalits in his speech on 20 August 1940 in Bombay.³⁰ According to Ambedkar, the Cabinet Delegation had given a positive response to his proposals during their meeting on 15 April 1946.³¹ However Dalit leaders were not invited to the final discussions at Simla. The British, in the end, accepted the Congress position that Dalits are Hindus and therefore do not require recognition as a separate community.

The Cabinet Mission awards of 16 May 1946 failed to provide any specific safeguards for the Dalits.³² The Cabinet Mission prepared an interim plan for a peaceful and planned transfer of power to the Indian leaders.³³ The plan envisaged a Constituent Assembly consisting of Indian representatives to draft a constitution for India. I also proposed an Interim Ministry at the centre to manage the final transfer of power. The crucial question, here, was the composition of these two structures, which came to be contested by the political parties. The Mission decided that ‘it is sufficient to recognise only three main communities in India: General, Muslim and Sikh’ for representation in the Constituent Assembly. This enabled the Muslim and Sikh communities to gain representation in proportion to their population in the provinces.³⁴ Despite their claims for separate status, Dalits were classified within the General

29 Moon (ed.), *Ambedkar Writings and Speeches* Vol. X, pp. 540-541.

30 Ibid., p. 539, A very important speech in which the British formally offered the Dominion Status to India. *Speeches by The Marquess of Linlithgow Vol. II, Nov. 1938-Oct. 1943* (Delhi, 1944), pp. 64-68.

31 Ibid., p. 538.

32 *Papers Relating to The Cabinet Mission To India 1946* (Delhi 1946), p.100.

33 R.J. Moore, *Escape From Empire*, gives a detailed account of constitutional history during these years.

34 *Papers relating to the Cabinet Mission to India, 1946* (Delhi, 1946), p. 100.

(Hindu) category. The Constituent Assembly consisted of the members of provincial legislatures, divided into three categories a) General b) Muslims and c) Sikhs. Dalits and other minorities were accommodated only in the Advisory Committee in hopes of to safeguarding their interests in the proposed Constitution.

Ambedkar, in his critique of the Cabinet Mission proposals, maintained that the ‘the Scheduled Castes were greatly surprised to find themselves lumped together with the Hindus’.³⁵ The status and powers of the Advisory Committee were also not defined. Further, Ambedkar argued that the representatives of the Dalits to the Constituent Assembly represented only the Congress. He disagreed with the Cabinet Mission’s defence that the Congress had won the Dalit seats in the last election. He argued that an examination of the results of the elections in the primaries in 1945 would demonstrate how poorly the Congress really represented Dalits. It was only in the primaries that Dalits had a separate electorate, and not in the general elections. His analysis of the election results of the Primaries indicated that the Non-Congress Dalit parties gained 72% of votes compared with only 28% obtained by the Congress.³⁶ It does suggest that when Dalits are given a chance to vote as a separate electorate, the majority choose non-Congress candidates.

Jagjivan Ram’s response to the Mission’s plan makes interesting reading considering his status as a senior leader of the Congress party. Referring to Congress’ victory in the recent election, he claimed that Dalits had rejected the Ambedkarite politics of separate electorates.³⁷ He, however, took a position quite different from that of the Congress. He agreed that the Cabinet Mission had failed Dalits, and reiterated the demand of the DCL that ‘Harijans should be given representation in the Constituent

35 Moon (ed.), *Ambedkar Writings and Speeches Vol. X*, pp. 523-528.

36 Moon (ed.), *Ambedkar Writings and Speeches. Vol. X*, pp. 529-535; Shastri, *Poona Pact*, p. 89.

37 *The Pioneer*, (English, Lucknow) 21 June 1946.

Assembly and the Legislative Assembly in proportion to their population in a province'.³⁸ Some time later, at a press conference, he explained the difference between his party and the SCF: the DCL wanted the protection of the Dalits and not their separation, whereas the SCF wanted their separation.³⁹ This demand was first raised by the DCL in its resolution of 18 August 1944 in Nagpur session. The resolution 'regretted that neither Gandhiji nor Rajgopalchari's formula to break the political deadlock took any notice of the untouchables'. It emphasised the need to protect the interests of Harijans in any political settlement between the Congress, the Muslim League and the British.⁴⁰ We should rightly acknowledge that this resolution of the Depressed Classes League's marks their first break with Congress.

Historians have generally viewed Jagjivan Ram as a Congress 'agent', and therefore Congress' alternative to the leadership of Ambedkar. This viewpoint is insensitive to Jagjivan Ram's concern for the Dalits. His biographer, Nalin V. Sharma, points to the dilemma faced by Jagjivan Ram at this specific juncture. He writes, 'Jagjivan Ram could not holding the views he did, assert that the untouchables were a separate nation. He could not at the same time leave the untouchables' interest completely unrepresented' either.⁴¹ Jagjivan Ram realised that unless special provisions were made for the rights of Dalits their conditions would not change. His biographer argues that this dilemma was a core element in Jagjivan Ram's thinking. This may well be true.

I would suggest otherwise, and point to the specificity of the 1940s. Jagjivan Ram came to realise the importance of changes then in progress and therefore reassessed his position. It was for this reason that he agreed with Lord Wavell's characterisation of the Congress in 1944 as a caste-Hindu

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ *The Pioneer*, 25 July 1946; Shastri also mentioned a shift in Jagjivan Ram's position; Shastri, *Poona Pact*, p.50.

⁴⁰ Nalin Vilochan Sharma, *Jagjivan Ram: A Biography* (Patna, no date), p. 127.

⁴¹ Ibid.

party. When Gandhi protested against Wavell's description of the Congress, Jagjivan Ram issued a public statement supporting of Wavell's statement.⁴² This is too significant to be missed, especially as he was explicitly contradicting Gandhi, no less. He argued that the Poona Pact was a clear acknowledgement of two sections within the Hindus, 'the Harijan' and 'the non-Harijans and Hindus'. This radicalism, in a leading Congress Harijan leader, underlines the changes taking place around this time in the character and temper of Dalit politics. It is also a comment on the Congress' failure to deal adequately with the problems of Dalit society.

Dalits were unanimous in their criticism of the composition of the Interim Ministry as envisaged in the Cabinet Mission award. Ambedkar objected to the unfair and unjust composition of the Ministry. He said that the Dalits, who had demanded three seats, were allotted only one.⁴³ Jagjivan Ram, too, pointed out that according to their population of 60 million, they should have been given three seats.⁴⁴ He complained that 'if three seats could be allotted to the Muslims, two seats to the Sikhs, then one seat for the [Dalits] is unfair and against the principles of the Cabinet Mission Plan'. Harijan leaders throughout UP also made similar criticisms. Hari Prasad Tamta, a Dalit Congress leader from Kumaon, accused Congress and the League of betraying the Dalits.⁴⁵ Chaudhari Girdhari Lal, Congress Harijan Legislative Member and Parliamentary Secretary in the Congress Ministry also expressed his disapproval of the Cabinet Mission's proposal.⁴⁶

The SCF protest was not limited to mere statements in the Press. It organised *satyagraha* or

42 Ibid., p.132. *The Hindustan Times*, (English Delhi) 18 June 1945.

43 *The Pioneer*, 18 June 1946.

44 Ibid., 21 June 1946.

45 Ibid., 29 June 1946.

46 Ibid., 28 June 1946.

peaceful protests throughout India to protest against the Cabinet Mission award and the Congress.⁴⁷ The SCF demanded a blueprint from the Congress outlining the measures to improve the conditions of Dalits in independent India. It asked for the abrogation of the Poona Pact, calling it a political fraud against the Dalits.⁴⁸ The SCF also demanded separate electorates for Dalits. Furthermore, Gandhi and his Harijan movement were held responsible for denying legitimate rights to Dalits. The satyagraha in UP began in Lucknow on 16 July, when hundreds of *achhut satyagrahis* marched in a procession towards the Legislative Assembly. Tilak Chand Kureel, President of the UPSCF, led the demonstration. The *satyagrahis* carried placards and raised slogans, 'Down with British Imperialism', 'Down with Congress' and 'Scrap the Poona Pact'.⁴⁹ The prominent *achhut* leaders - Kureel, Jaiswar, Talib and Shastri - were arrested immediately after they had addressed the *satyagrahis*. On the first day of the *satyagraha*, 222 Dalit *satyagrahis* were arrested. Additional *satyagraha* were held on 17, 18, 22, 24 and 29 July.⁵⁰ The official statement made in the Legislative Assembly gave the total number of *satyagrahis* arrested as 311.⁵¹ On the last day of the Legislative Assembly session, some 45

47 Ibid., 9 July 1946, Shastri, *Poona Pact*, p.71 '...thousands of satyagrahis are converging under the 'blue' flag of the Federation (SCF)'. For a more complete discussion see Ramnarayan S. Rawat, 'Partition Politics and Achhut Identity: A Study of the Scheduled Castes Federation and Dalit Politics in UP, 1946-48', in Suvir Kaul (ed.), *The Partitions of Memory: The Afterlife of the Division of India*. (Delhi 2001).

48 Ibid. Also two pamphlets, 'To Boycott Mahatma Gandhi Is Justified', and 'The Poona Pact - A Political Fraud'. F.No. 41/4/47-R. Secretariat of the Governor-General Reforms (National Archives of India [hereafter NAI] Delhi).

49 *The Pioneer*, 17 July 1946. Tilak Chand Kureel, besides President of UP SCF, was also the foremost leader of Chamar Mahasabha. Piraal Kureel-Talib was a founder-member of the SCF in Maharashtra and a prominent leader in Lucknow. Behari Lal Jaiswar was a prominent leader in Lucknow and President District SCF, Lucknow.

50 *The Pioneer*, 18,19,23,25,& 30 July, 1946.

51 *Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly UP, 1946 Vol. XXIV Official Report* (Allahabad 1947),p.7-8.

satyagrahis were arrested.⁵² The programme of *satyagraha* was deliberately planned to coincide with the session of Legislative Assemblies in the provinces. The *satyagraha* was organised in front of the Legislative Assemblies to highlight the lack of representation of Dalits in these democratic institutions. It was most successful in the Bombay Presidency, the Central Provinces and the United Provinces (where it acquired widespread rural support).⁵³

To ensure participation in the *satyagraha*, leaders of the UPSCF toured their respective areas to mobilise Dalits. We may note that the decision to launch a *satyagraha* was taken in the first week of June, and by the second week the leaders of the party began the process of mobilising support. The Dalit leaders Dr. Manik Chand and Faqir Chand toured western areas of UP, and an intensive campaign was launched by them in Agra and Ferozabad. Tilak Chand Kureel organised Dalits in Kanpur and Lucknow and also toured Azamgarh and Gorakhpur. Swami Chhamanand also held similar kinds of meetings in Etah and Etawah districts.⁵⁴ In the absence of detailed information, it is difficult to assess the number of *satyagrahis* provided by the district branches of the SCF. Meetings and demonstrations were reported from Etah, Etawah, Faizabad, Gorakhpur, Fatehgarh, Ferozabad, Agra, Azamgarh and Farrukhabad around the same time.⁵⁵ The demonstrations were organised to coincide with the *satyagraha* in Lucknow. The objectives of the SCF were underlined in these meetings: criticism of the Congress swaraj, unity of *achhuts*, the caste-Hindu character of the Congress and faith in the leadership of Ambedkar.

52 PAI, 16 August 1946.

53 Ibid., 29 July 1946, Shastri, *Poona Pact*, p. 71 & 131.

54 PAI, 21 & 27 June and 5 July 1946. Manik Chand and Faqir Chand Jatav were brothers and prominent activists of SCF in Agra. Manik Chand Jataveer was founder member of Jatav Mahasabha in Agra and subsequently founded the SCF in Agra during Ambedkar's visit. Swami Chhamanand was President of the district SCF Etawah.

55 PAI, 26 July and 2 August 1946.

The SCF organised a second phase of *satyagraha* in April-May 1947. The Dalit movement took hold in twenty-three (23) districts of UP. Ten of these districts witnessed prolonged agitation from June to November 1946.⁵⁶ A crucial feature of this second phase of Dalit agitation in UP was the emphasis on the leadership of Ambedkar. This was a conscious effort on the part of Dalit leaders to project him as the leader of the Dalits in opposition to Mahatma Gandhi and Jagjivan Ram. For instance, in a meeting at Moradabad the SCF passed a resolution declaring their faith in Ambedkar and describing him as their true leader and representative. Dalits in Hamirpur decided to worship 'Bhim' instead of 'Ram'. Resolutions along similar lines were passed in Fyzabad, Etah, Etawah, Allahabad and Moradabad. Reposing faith in Ambedkar's leadership and declaring him as their true representative became an integral feature of the new *achhut* identity. Through their *satyagraha* the stature of Ambedkar as a Dalit leader gained wider recognition in UP. Ambedkar's leadership was emphasised in both the primary and general elections, the efforts were concentrated primarily in urban areas.⁵⁷ Altogether, the extent of the *satyagraha* speaks remarkably well of a party set up only four years earlier, in 1942.

III

The two Congress Harijan organisations of western UP were among the first to register their protest not only against the award of the Cabinet Mission, but also against its acceptance by the Congress. In June 1946, the District Harijan Conference of Meerut and the District Harijan Uddhar Sabha of Saharanpur passed two identical resolutions.⁵⁸ These resolutions also add to our understanding of the new agenda that was beginning to shape Dalit politics in UP around this time. The two resolutions were passed in

⁵⁶PAI reports for 1946.

⁵⁷Ibid., 20 & 27 September 18 & 25 October 22 February 15 March, 1946.

⁵⁸F.No. 41/4/47-R, Request from the scheduled castes of UP (NAI, Delhi).

response to the statement made by the Congress President, Maulana Azad on 24 June 1946 that the seats for Dalits in the Constituent Assembly would be fixed in accordance with the proportion of their members in the Assembly of each province.⁵⁹ The Congress Harijans (hereafter Harijans) of western UP disagreed with the Congress interpretation of the Cabinet Mission award regarding the rights of Dalits. It is not just this disagreement which is interesting, what is more significant is that these resolutions came from *within Congress Harijan* organisations. The Congress Harijans of western UP ended up questioning Congress' claims to represent them.

The two resolutions outlined the concerns and fears of the Harijans of Meerut and Saharanpur. The Harijans argued that they had not received adequate representation in the Constituent Assembly, which they described as undemocratic. The criterion enunciated by the Cabinet Mission for elections to the Constituent Assembly was on the basis of one representative for every million of the population. If this criterion, the Harijans argued, could be applied to other communities, the caste Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, then why were they excluded? The Harijans demanded proportional representation in the Constituent Assembly. The total population of Dalits was 11 million in UP out of a total population of 55 million. They demanded 45 seats in the Legislative Assembly, out of 140 general seats. They were allotted only 20 seats under the Cabinet Mission plan in the Assembly. It was only through proportional representation in the Constituent Assembly that the rights of the Harijan community could be secured. They accused the Congress of being partial and unfair in the application of the Awards to the Harijan community and warned about a possible struggle if their legitimate rights were ignored.

Harijans were conscious of the empowering potentialities of the Constituent Assembly. In this regard, the resolutions put forward by the Harijans identified two flaws in the arrangement worked out by the Congress. First, they pointed to the inadequate representation of Dalits in the UP Legislative

⁵⁹ *The Hindustan Times*, 24 June 1946.

Assembly. The Congress plan would only carry this injustice into the Constituent Assembly. By raising the question of their inadequate representation, the Dalits were also questioning the democratic character of the Legislative Assembly. Their second point concerned the representation provided to the 'other communities' in the Constituent Assembly. The Harijans claimed treatment on par with caste Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. This was offered as an alternative measure which would enable a fair representation of Dalits in the Constituent Assembly.

What is significant for us is the articulation of this difference within the Congress and its implications for Dalit politics. We may note that the Harijans avoided any direct reference to their separate identity from the caste Hindus in their resolutions. This was a deliberate effort to avoid any reference to religious differences with caste Hindus. They made their claims on a secular principle acceptable to the Congress. Rather, they sought a fair approach from the Congress to 'their community'; similar to those provided to 'other communities'. The distinction between 'their community' and 'other communities' was an important one and articulated in explicit terms. It was based on the constitutional principle acceptable to the Congress. The right of separate representation for other communities in the Constituent Assembly was based on proportional representation that was not extended to the Dalits. Thus, to reinforce their claim they drew the analogy with 'other communities' to demand similar treatment for 'their community'. Yet the stand taken by the two Congress Harijan organisations of Meerut and Saharanpur was closer to the SCF's position than to that of the Congress. The SCF, while demanding separate representation for Dalits in the Constituent Assembly, emphasised a religious distinction from the Hindus. Thus, both emphasised a distinction for 'their community': one on religious grounds, the other on secular grounds.

It is this tension between the Congress and their Harijan supporters of western UP which indicates changes in their position in the 1940s. Despite these tensions the two Harijan organisations

were, nevertheless, still keen to emphasise their association with the Congress. We may note that the two resolutions were addressed in order of preference to the Congress leaders and the Viceroy. They deliberately distanced their initiative from Dr Ambedkar and the SCF. They further emphasised their relationship with the Congress through the involvement of Jaipal Singh and the Kumar Ashram.

Jaipal Singh was elected as a Congress MLA in 1946 from the reserved seat of Faizabad (east) Lucknow.⁶⁰ As a Harijan leader from Lucknow division, he travelled to Meerut to attend the Conference and promote their cause. He extended his involvement by participating in the Dalit agitation in UP. His presence also highlighted the prominent role of the Meerut region in Harijan politics of the province. The resolution of the District Harijan Conference, Meerut, was drafted and signed by Laxman Singh, manager of the Kumar Ashram. A prominent Congressman, Algu Rai Shastri, set up the Ashram in 1924, to undertake *achhutoddhar* (Harijan uplift) programme in the Meerut district.⁶¹ It was one of the earliest initiatives in UP, inspired by the Gandhian vision of Harijan reform. The Saharanpur (east constituency) was a reserved constituency for Dalits. In the elections held in 1946, the Congress candidate Girdhari Lal was elected unopposed to the Legislative Assembly.⁶² He joined the G.B. Pant Ministry as Parliament Secretary, one of the few Harijan MLAs given a position in the Government. Meerut region in general was a prominent centre of *achhut* radicalism and activism and acknowledged as such by Dalits and the Congress.

The identical nature of these two resolutions, both in form and content and the close proximity in time and space should be noted. The political events unfolding in the summer of 1946 were keenly

⁶⁰ Peter D. Reeves et. al., *A Handbook to Elections in Uttar Pradesh, 1920-51* (Delhi, 1975), p. 339; see also AICC files, F.No. E.D. 1 KW-II/1946 (NMML, Delhi).

⁶¹ Gyanendra Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in U.P. 1926-34: A study in Imperfect Mobilisation* (Delhi, 1978), pp. 49-50.

⁶² *The Pioneer*, 29 July 1946. AICC files, F. No. ED1KW-II/1946 (NMML, Delhi).

monitored by Dalits not only in UP, but likely all over India as well. It indicates that a great deal of debate was generated among the Dalit leaders of western UP, particularly within these two Harijan organisations. The rapid ease with which the Harijans organised public meetings after the press statement of the Congress President on 24 June suggests that the implications of the Cabinet Mission award were widely known. The meetings were held on 26 June in Meerut and 30 June in Saharanpur. They are adjacent districts and the Dalits of Saharanpur approved without any change the resolution passed in Meerut. I would like to locate their differences with the Congress in relation to the Dalit agitation in UP at that time. Police reports regularly mention Dalit agitations from June through November, when the agitation petered out. Prior to 1946—between 1943 and 1945—there are no reports of Dalit protest in UP.

In an interview, the Dalit leader from the 1940s, Dr Chhedi Lal Sathi also mentions that a massive Dalit agitation took place a year before independence.⁶³ He was in the Congress in 1946-47 but claims that he also supported the Dalit *satyagraha*. His support was in response to the injustice perpetrated by the Cabinet Mission proposals in regard to the rights of Dalits. According to him, it was a popular *satyagraha* comparable to the Quit India movement. Some two lakh Dalit *satyagrahis*, he adds with pride, participated in the movement. This may be an exaggeration, but it makes a point about the popular strength of the movement supported by other stray bits of evidence. The Dalit agitation against *begari* (forced and unpaid labour) was first noted in Meerut, Saharanpur, Bareilly, Muzaffarnagar and Pilibhit. The Fortnightly Reports underlined the increased antagonism between caste Hindus and Dalits; particularly tense were Meerut, Saharanpur and Bareilly districts.⁶⁴

⁶³Interview 26 April 1995, Dr. Chhedi Lal Sathi is a Dalit activist, politician and lawyer, he is 76 years old and lives in Lucknow. He was a member of the Congress and later joined the Republican Party of India that was set-up by Ambedkar in 1956

⁶⁴Fortnightly Reports, F.No. 18/7/1946 & 18/8/1946, Home Department (NAI, Delhi).

The Commissioners of Meerut and Bareilly particularly noted the Dalit agitation. In Saharanpur the protests between 26 June and 5 July were attributed to meetings organised by Congress MLA Jaipal Singh. Therefore, 'cultivation has ceased because the Chamars who form the bulk of the labourers were demanding wages ranging from Rs. 45 to Rs. 60 a month'. In 'reprisal the zamindars have forbidden these Chamars from cutting grass, and relations have become considerably strained'.⁶⁵ Jaipal Singh not only participated in these protests but also played a key role in framing the resolutions of Harijan organisations. Similar protests were reported from other parts of UP. In Rampurva village of Gorakhpur, Chamars demanded three bighas of land for cultivation plus Rs.6 as monthly pay. In Pilibhit district, Chamars resolved to boycott the carrying of bodies for post-mortem for the police.⁶⁶ Similarly, the 'dais' (mid-wives), usually Dalit women, demanded wages for their work. The 'dais' performed the polluting task of assisting in child-births for the caste Hindu women.

Dalits were clearly seeking to redefine their position by making their occupations respectable and gaining independence from the domination exercised by caste Hindus. The caste Hindus retaliated by withdrawing the traditional rights of Chamars. They used coercion to enforce their boycott as well as violence. In Muzaffarnagar district, violent retribution by Gujars left one Chamar dead and seventy others injured. Similarly, Thakurs (caste Hindu landlords) attacked some Chamar villages in Badaun district. These are stray, but reported incidents of violent attack, to which one can easily add scores of incidents that may have gone unreported. In Saharanpur district, however, the Dalit agitation gained more widespread solidarity and was able to effectively resist retaliation by the zamindars.

The Anglo-Indian press gave particular attention to the Dalit agitation in Saharanpur. The *Pioneer* noted that 'economic life in the countryside in the district (Saharanpur) is threatened with serious disruption following some new demands of Chamars against the age old conditions of services'.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

It accused ‘Ambedkarites of inciting the lower castes without realising that the difficulties created by them will be equal for all’. It added that the Muslim League was supporting the Ambedkarites in this ‘mischievous propaganda which is gradually spreading in many villages’.⁶⁷ The perspective of the *Pioneer* was very similar to that of the *Vartman*-- a Hindi nationalist weekly published from Kanpur.⁶⁸ *Vartman's* editorial was equally revealing. On the Dalit *satyagraha* of July 1946, it commented that ‘the only reason for this *satyagraha* is Dr Ambedkar's ambition and political frustration’ and went on to accuse the Ambedkarites of mischievous propaganda supported by the League.⁶⁹ Congress’ understanding of Dalit movement as “separatist” and “anti-national” was widely shared by the Hindi media and even by the Anglo-Indian press.

IV

The success of the SCF in the primary elections was another moment that illustrates the shift in Dalit politics in the 1940s, a success that still needs to be acknowledged within historiography. In a recent essay, Bandyopadhyay has reaffirmed the success of the Congress in the context of Bengal, writing that ‘the Congress had effectively appropriated the scheduled caste movement’.⁷⁰ In the Bengal elections the Congress Dalit candidates won in 24 seats out of 30. The performance of the Congress in UP was even better despite effective competition from the SCF. The Congress swept the 20 seats reserved for the Dalits in the elections. Through this comparison and ‘in view of extended franchise’, Bandyopadhyay argues that ‘we may take the election results as an index, though still in a very limited sense, of popular

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷*The Pioneer*, 11 June 1946.

⁶⁸*Vartman*, (Kanpur, Hindi), 22 July 1946.

⁶⁹*Vartaman*, 22 July 1946.

⁷⁰Bandyopadhyay, ‘From Alienation to Integration’, p.373. Bandyopadhyay, *Caste Protest and Identity*, p.203

will as well'.⁷¹ This is a view that needs to be seriously qualified and questioned. Historians have generally accepted the success of the Congress in the Dalit reserved constituencies as evidence of the widespread popularity of the Congress. Although the SCF contested these results, claiming that they did not reflect the popular will, historians have never taken seriously their complaints. However, as I will argue in the following discussion, the SCF's complaint that the electoral arrangements were structured in favor of caste Hindus, was, in fact, legitimate. Implications of the Poona Pact on the electoral system in the reserved constituencies are crucial to an understanding of the election results of 1946.⁷² To ignore these implications is to perpetuate the dominance of the caste Hindu point of view in the writing of history.

The SCF's critique of the Poona Pact was shaped by their experience of the 1946 elections. I wish to elaborate this point to outline my disagreement with Bandyopadhyay. His study does not acknowledge the specific conditions under which elections were held for reserved seats. There is a critical distinction which needs to be made between the primary and general elections in a reserved constituency, given that these two elections function as two separate stages of elections. Only in the primaries did Dalits vote exclusively for their own candidates. Without an understanding of the implications of their structure, one cannot make a fair assessment of the Congress claim to represent the Dalits in the 1946 elections. I would argue that we should re-examine what Bandyopadhyay describes as an 'index of popular will' in favour of the Congress by analysing the results, not of the general election, but of the primaries.⁷³

Shastri's position on the Poona Pact was clear. He stated in no uncertain terms that the Dalit freedom struggle must begin with a demand to remove this 'evil pact'. For Shastri and the SCF, the

71 Ibid., p.373. Ibid., p. 203.

72 Peter Reeves, 'Patterns of Political Alignments', pp. 134-135.

73 Bandyopadhyay, 'From Alienation to Integration', p. 373. Bandyopadhyay, *Caste Protest and Identity*, p. 203.

electoral results of 1945-46 influenced the decision of the Cabinet Mission.⁷⁴ In his book, Shastri argued that the Poona Pact was intended to benefit the Dalits but instead it favoured the caste Hindus. Therefore despite its impressive gains in the percentage of votes, the SCF was unable to win any seat in UP. Following the Poona Pact twenty reserved seats were converted into double-member seats. Under this revised double-member system each voter was allowed to cast two votes and the candidate—either a *achhut* or a general (caste Hindu)—with the largest number of votes would be elected to fill the general seat. The *achhut* candidate with the highest total filled the scheduled caste seat. The Pact keeping in mind the spirit of a reserved constituency, accepted the possibility that an *achhut* candidate could be eligible not only to a reserved seat but also to a general seat beside the reserved seat, if he received the highest number of votes. This possibility in fact became a reality in three constituencies in UP.

In 1946, three Dalit candidates secured the highest number of votes in the general elections in the reserved constituencies of Kanpur city, Budaun (east) and Basti (south). However, instead of being declared elected for the general seats, they were awarded reserved seats. In effect they were elected not as general candidates but as reserved candidates.⁷⁵ Let me illustrate this through the example of the Kanpur city general elections. In Kanpur city, the Dalit Congress candidate, Bhagwan Din Mehtar, received the highest number of votes with 34,782, followed by the general candidate Dr. Jawaharlal Rohtagi with 34,550 votes and the SCF candidate Piarelal Talib with 8,736 votes. According to the rules, the two Dalit candidates, Bhagwan Din Mehtar and Piarelal Talib should have been elected to the general and reserved (primary) seats. Since Mehtar received more votes than the general candidate Rohtagi, he should have been declared victor for the general seat and Talib should have been elected for the reserved seat. Instead, the officials illegally declared Dr. Rohtagi and Bhagwan Din Mehtar elected

⁷⁴ Shastri, *Poona Pact*, pp.81-90.

for the two general and reserved seats respectively.

Peter Reeves finds it difficult to explain these results. He writes, 'either it was an oversight on the part of Returning Officers which escaped the notice of other candidates or it was some form of agreement to ignore the rules'.⁷⁶ We have no evidence to suggest whether or not Talib protested. Considering the mood of an assertive Dalit politics at the time it is rather difficult to believe that Talib would have remained silent. It seems to me that officials deliberately ignored the rules for the benefit of the Congress candidate and due to their caste Hindu affinities. If only Shastri and Ambedkar had known this when they spoke of the 'open hostility shown by the Returning Officers and the Polling Officers - all of whom were caste Hindus against the scheduled caste candidates'.⁷⁷ It is incidents like these which give us insight into the nature of Congress' success in the elections and must make us question their claim that they had the popular support of the Dalits. It also adds to the credibility of the SCF criticism that Congress rule would be synonymous with Hindu raj.

In the primary elections, the first stage of the election procedure scheduled castes voted for scheduled castes candidates. In the second stage, or the general elections, the reserved constituency became a general seat. In a double-member seat, each voter had two votes with an option to use them to vote for *two general candidates* or for *two scheduled caste candidates* or *for one of each*.⁷⁸ In his book, Shastri explains the rationale of two votes that was put forward by the caste Hindu signatories of the Poona Pact. The Dalits had two votes, one because of their *achhut* identity and the other because they were Hindus. Similarly, Hindus exercised two votes, one because of their Hindu identity and the other because *achhuts* were Hindus. This shocking explanation indicates the extent to which the

⁷⁵Peter Reeves, *Uttar Pradesh, 1920-51*, p. xlii.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Moon (ed.), *Ambedkar Writings and Speeches Vol. X*, p. 543.

⁷⁸Shastri, *Poona Pact*, pp. 74-75, also Peter Reeves, 'Patterns of Political Alignments', p. 116.

election system was subverted against the Dalits. Under this double-member structure caste Hindus held an influential role in the election of *achhut* candidates in the general elections. Since the electoral franchise was defined on the basis of property and education, the influence of caste Hindus was even more pronounced in the outcome.⁷⁹

Primary elections were obligatory only when more than four candidates contested. This arrangement favoured an established party like the Congress and enabled it to field its own candidate in all of the reserved seats facilitating their unopposed election.⁸⁰ In fact, this is what actually happened in most of the reserved constituencies. In the 1935 primaries, elections were necessary only in six constituencies and in fourteen constituencies the Congress candidates were elected unopposed. In the 1945 primaries, elections became obligatory only in three constituencies in Agra and Allahabad cities where the SCF gave the Congress a tough fight and in Almora rural where it was the independents.⁸¹ The reduced number of elections in 1945 may indicate that Dalits realised the futility of fighting the Congress in a system that was weighted against them. To challenge the Congress and establish its credentials, the SCF fielded four or more candidates in the primary elections in these three constituencies, which forced the Congress to take a similar step.⁸² As Ambedkar notes, ‘the object of a Party entering into a Primary Election was to drive out all rival parties from the Final Election by putting up at least four candidates on its party ticket’.⁸³

In UP the SCF decided to field candidates only in the four urban constituencies—Agra,

79 Ibid., p. 75.

80 Moon (ed.), *Ambedkar Writings and Speeches Vol. X*, p. 544.

81 Peter Reeves, ‘Patterns of Political Alignments’, pp. 254-259 & 315-319.

82 Shastri, *Poona Pact*, p. 90. According to Shastri, the SCF fought elections only in four urban towns with the specific objective of demonstrating its support among the Dalits.

83 Moon (ed.), *Ambedkar Writings and Speeches Vol. X*, p. 544.

Allahabad, Kanpur and Lucknow—in order to concentrate their efforts against the Congress. But only in the Agra and Allahabad did the SCF actually manage to field a panel of four SCF candidates. The idea behind this was to drive out SCF's rival, the Congress, from the general election by nominating four SCF's candidates. In both of these two seats Congress barely managed to elect two candidates, whereas SCF's five candidates were elected.⁸⁴ In Agra city, the SCF and the Congress fielded four candidates each. In the final four, SCF had two candidates and one each from Congress and Hindu Sabha. The four Dalit Congress candidates polled 27.10 per cent votes, while the four SCF candidates polled 46.39 per cent of the total votes. Congress was marginally ahead in Allahabad with 51.27 percentage of the total votes closely followed by the SCF with 48.24 per cent. In the final four Congress managed only one successful candidate and SCF succeeded in capturing the remaining three seats.⁸⁵ (See the Appendix of the article)

The electoral structure established by the Poona Pact encouraged Congress and SCF voters to adopt very different voting strategies. The Appendix, which shows the actual votes received by each candidate, suggests that Congress encouraged voters to adopt the tactical strategy of voting for only a single Congress candidate, in order to ensure the advancement of one Congress candidate to the general election. The nominations were more a response to the SCF's claim that Congress would fail to nominate four candidates.⁸⁶ The Congress probably feared that if it attempted to elect all the four candidates it would lose. Its successful candidates received consolidated votes, unlike the SCF. SCF voters, on the other hand voted in a manner which dispersed votes more equitably among all the SCF candidates. The four SCF candidates usually received equitable votes compared to the votes polled by the Congress candidates, in the two constituencies of Agra City and Allahabad City. This was an

⁸⁴Peter Reeves, *Uttar Pradesh*, pp. 315-319.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Moon (ed.), *Ambedkar Writings and Speeches Vol. X*, p. 526.

attempt to try to defeat Congress by getting all four of their candidates onto the general ballot.

Ambedkar, in his critique of the proposals of Cabinet Mission, argued that the Congress did not represent the scheduled castes of India. According to his analysis of the All-India primary election results, the Non-Congress scheduled caste parties gained 72 per cent of the total votes compared to 28% obtained by the Congress Harijans.⁸⁷ The political parties included among Non-Congress Parties were the SCF, independents, Communists, Unionists, Hindu Mahasabha and Radical Democratic Party. In his analysis of the primaries in UP, Ambedkar noted that the Congress received 41.8 per cent of the total votes, the SCF received 30.5 per cent and the independents received 18.8 per cent of the total votes polled.⁸⁸ The good performance given by the independents was due to their impressive showing in the Almora district (rural) of UP, the third constituency where primary elections became obligatory. The two Congress nominees, Munshi Khushi Ram and Kamala, received 29.37 per cent and 9.69 per cent of votes respectively, whereas of the two independent candidates, Munshi Ram Prasad Tamta received 45.08 per cent of votes and R.B. Hari Prasad Tamta 6.65 per cent of votes.⁸⁹ The combined vote of the two independent candidates was 51.73%, compare to 39.06% of the Congress, once again pointing to the lack of support for the Congress candidates in a reserved constituency. The lack of popular votes for Congress in reserved constituencies does contradict Congress' claim that they represent the 'popular will' in the 1945-6 elections.

This discussion of the 1945 primaries also helps us underline a decisive shift among the Dalit intelligentsia towards the SCF. The primary results suggest that the SCF was successful in offering the Dalit urban intelligentsia an effective alternative to the Congress and caste Hindus. The success of the UPSCF in the primary elections is otherwise difficult to explain. The SCF's nine candidates were

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 526.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 534-5.

⁸⁹Peter Reeves, *Uttar Pradesh*, p. 318.

elected from the four urban seats of UP, whereas the Congress managed to elect only four.⁹⁰ The simple fact that the SCF received more votes than the Congress in these primaries drives home the point that a large section of the Dalit intelligentsia—comprising leaders and activists of various caste mahasabhas, Adi-Hindu ideologues and literate Dalits—had moved to the SCF.

The SCF's success can also be seen in the number of Dalit candidates who had previously stood as independent or Congress candidates in the 1936 primaries, who stood as SCF candidates in 1945. Karan Singh Kane of Agra, a former Congress candidate in the 1936 elections contested the 1945 elections as an SCF candidate. Similarly the SCF candidate (1945) R.S. Shyamlal of Allahabad had stood as an independent in the 1936 elections.⁹¹ They were not an exception but rather a part of a wider process of leaders of Dalit caste mahasabhas joining the SCF. Gopi Chand Pipal (President District SCF Agra), Dr. Manik Chand and Karan Singh Kane were prominent leaders of the Jatav Mahasabha of Agra.⁹² Similarly, Purushotam Das Kureel, organising Secretary of the UPSCF, was President of Chamar Mahasabha, while Tilak Chand Kureel (president of UPSCF) and Piare Lal Kureel (SCF Lucknow) were prominent leaders of the Chamar Mahasabha.⁹³ Members of the Adi-Hindu Ravidass mahasabha like R.S. Shyam Lal (SCF Allahabad), Hira Lal Jaiswal and Asharfi Lal Pasi were also prominent leaders of the UPSCF.⁹⁴ As I have show, these shifts within the Dalit intelligentsia was linked to the emergence of a new Dalit agenda.

Conclusion

Shastri's quote in the opening page of this article captured the new mood of the times. A remarkable

90 Ibid.

91 Kshirsagar, *Dalit Movemenst in India*, pp. 235-236.

92 Ibid., pp. 295-296, 230-232, 235-236.

93 Ibid., pp. 253-255, F.No. 41/4/47-R, Secretariat of the Governor- General Reforms, (NAI, Delhi).

94 Harijan Sahayak Department, F.No. 164/1946, Box No. 370 (UPSA, Lucknow).

shift in the agenda and tone of Dalit politics in UP took place in the 1940s. Existing historical writings tell us very little about this shift. Instead, they reaffirm the mainstream (Congress) position that these years were insignificant for Dalit politics. The preceding analysis suggest that Dalits particularly those living in the urban areas, were disenchanted with the Congress, a position which contradicts the story which existing historiography tells us. The Cabinet Mission award was the immediate moment for the emergence of dissent. Dalits openly aired their anger at being ignored by the British and their outrage at the Congress for accepting the Award. The Congress Harijans of Meerut and Saharanpur loudly expressed their opposition to the Congress position. Some of the Congress Harijan leaders went a step further by participating in the *begari* agitation. Among them, Jaipal Singh's role in the *begari* protest was the most remarkable. The process of realignment was evident even within organised Dalit politics. The Jatav, Chamar, Adi-Hindu Raidasis mahasabhas, and the urban Dalit intelligentsia established branches of the SCF throughout UP. Turning back on earlier positions, they came to feel that to fulfil their agenda, it was necessary to emphasise their *achhut* identity. The SCF's impressive performance in the scheduled castes primaries only underlines this rising popular support for the SCF.

By raising the question of untouchability, Dalits were forcing the Congress to address the question of caste-inequality, not at the 'social' or 'religious' level but more directly at the political level. It has been argued in the context of Uttar Pradesh that peasant movements during 1921-24 forced the Congress to adopt a radical social programme—of zamindari abolition and land reforms—as part of the Indian national movement.⁹⁵ Despite this radical agenda the Congress failed to address the issue of caste-inequality as repeatedly raised by the Dalits in UP. Dilip Menon makes a similar point in his study of Malabar society.⁹⁶ This failure of the Congress to address caste-inequality led to increasing

95 Gyan Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress*, '... the experience of popular struggle...led to a somewhat sharper definition of the social content and objectives of Congress nationalism...', p. 206.

96 Dilip Menon, *Caste and Communism*, pp. 90. In Malabar region the success of the Communists was due to the

disenchantment with the Congress on the part of the Dalit in the 1940s. Regardless, the economic and social reforms proposed by Congress as part of the national movement did not prove sufficient to satisfy dalit and the SCF, thus prompting the emergence of a significant new agenda in the Dalit politics of UP during the partition years.

Appendix.

U.P. Legislative Assembly, 1945 Scheduled Caste Primary Election.

1	GU	IV	11		AGRA CITY E:10,105 30.68%
	Ram Chandra Sehra	CON			
	Pyare Lal	HS			
	Karan Singh Kane (Jatav)	SCF			
	Ram Narain	SCF			
CON	Ram Chandra Sehra		836	26.97	
CON	Kalyan Singh		3	0.10	
CON	Jagan Nath Prasad Jatav		1	0.03	
CON	Nardeo Shastri		[0]	0.00	
HS	Pyare Lal		452	14.58	
SCF	Karan Singh Kane (Jatav)		744	24.00	
SCF	Ram Narain		682	22.00	
SCF	Brij Mohan Lal		9	0.29	
SCF	Ram Swaroop Sag		3	0.10	
SCF(i)	Khem Chand Bohre		370	11.94	
			3,100	100.01	
2	GU	IV	8		ALLAHABAD CITY E: 6,854 50.23%
	Masuria Din	CON			
	R.S. Shyam Lal	SCF			
	Prabhu Dayal	SCF			
	Kallan	SCF			
CON	Masuria Din		1,701	49.40	
CON	Mewa Lal		57	1.66	
CON	Gukul Prasad		19	0.55	
CON	Ram Phal		2	0.06	
				51.27	
SCF	R.S. Shyam Lal		674	19.58	
SCF	Prabhu Dayal		361	10.49	
SCF	Kallan		358	10.40	
SCF	Ram Autar		271	7.87	
				48.24	
			3,443	100.0	

(i) Given as All-India Depressed Classes League in Returns... 1945-48, p.38 and *The Pioneer*, 13 Dec. 1945 mentions him as Agra Depressed Class League candidate.

'reshaping of communism into a doctrine of caste equality', p. 2.

GU: General Urban.

IV: Number of members to be returned.

11 & 8: Number of candidates.

Source: Peter Reeves, *Uttar Pradesh*, pp. 315-316.