

# Caste and Class in Ambedkar's Struggle

In the 1930s, for the first time in Indian politics, Ambedkar jointly addressed caste and class, unravelling the connections between caste, class, and religion in Indian society. A focus on the anti-*khoti* struggle in the Konkan region and the working class struggle in Bombay, under Ambedkar's leadership through the Independent Labour Party during 1936–42, allows for a deeper exploration of this ideological position. Ambedkar's formulation and emphasis of the "untouchables' question" in class struggle, then and now, has continued to disrupt traditional formulations of working class solidarity.

This paper is a revised version of one presented at the First International Willi Münzenberg Congress, 2015 at the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, Berlin. The author would like to thank Umesh Bagade and Tanika Sarkar for their critical insights in understanding the issues of caste and class. The title of this paper, *Mukti Kon Pathe?* (Which Way to Emancipation?) has been inspired by the title of Ambedkar's popular speech delivered in 1936 in Bombay city.

On 20 June 1936, Ambedkar delivered a speech in Bombay titled *Mukti Kon Pathe?* (Which Way to Emancipation?), which was reproduced in his self-published news weekly *Janata*. This speech was important as it presented pathways for the emancipation of the untouchables and laid bare the interlinkages between caste, class, and religion. The speech was delivered between two important events of Ambedkar's life—his announcement of leaving the Hindu religion in 1935 and the establishment of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) in 1936, a concerted effort to march along the outlined pathways.

The formation of the ILP in the 1930s did not represent a shift or expansion in Ambedkar's anti-caste ideology; rather it had always been one of the core tenets of his philosophy since the writing of "Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development" (1916). The material reality of caste and class was always central to his ideological position. His first struggle, the Mahad Satyagraha in 1927, had passed a resolution along economic lines. According to Raosaheb Kasbe (1985: 57), the period of the 1930s had given a realistic approach to Ambedkar's political position.

This conjuncture presents us with several questions. Why did Ambedkar not join an existing labour organisation? What forced him to establish a separate political organisation of labourers? This could be explored through his ideological position on the underpinning of caste, class, and religion. So far, most historical accounts on Ambedkar's movement, its demands and followers have pointed out that the mobilisation was largely limited to Dalits and even amongst them, the Mahars (Zelliot 1996; Omvedt 1994; Jaffrelot 2005; Gokhale 1993). However, the period of the founding of the ILP and its immediate aftermath witnessed an expanding social base, especially in the Konkan region. This paper explores the processes

underlying changes in the social constituents of the movement in the context of two important struggles, under Ambedkar's leadership, in Bombay and Konkan based on his intersectional analysis of caste, class, and religion.

The late 1930s saw a definite turn in political developments in India. Elections to the first elected provincial government in Bombay in 1937 saw the emergence of various social and political forces. The untouchables were mobilised for the first time ever as a political force under Ambedkar's leadership. At the same time, he shifted to a labour organisation in order to expand the social base of his movement. After the elections, Ambedkar's party became a major political force in the Bombay Presidency. The ILP played a significant role in the 1930s, foregrounding caste and class issues in the prevalent political discourses. In 1937, the Congress came into power in the Bombay Presidency. The impact of the new government was felt mainly in the realm of labour and agrarian relations—the two domains in which provincial governments had powers to legislate. While in the past, the Congress had clung to the myth of an Indian society free of internal conflicts and united in opposition to the British, the growth of social conflicts in towns and the countryside forced it to take into account the competing aspirations of various social groups (Markovits 1981: 487).

### **Anti-khoti Movement and ILP**

In the Konkan region, policies of the colonial government contributed to the consolidation of the *khoti* land tenure system and perpetuated its exploitative forms. Caste constituted the material base of this system and Bombay's newly emerging educated middle class was deeply influenced by caste interests. Due to its upper caste and class nature, the Congress remained a strong supporter of the *khoti* system throughout the colonial period.

Within the Bombay Presidency, the *khoti* system existed separately in the Konkan region. The *khots* (landlords) rented villages, farmed land and collected village revenues for the government as hereditary officers. The British rarely had any control over *khots*, and landlords retained a substantial measure of autonomy, including the right to collect taxes and impose jurisdiction over tenants (Kaiwar 1994: 812). The *khots* were mostly Chitpavan Brahmins and a few high-caste Marathas and Muslims (Campbell 1883: 103). *Khots* could not just keep a part of the revenue accrual, but often also set themselves up as local "minor Rajahs" (Jaffrelot 2005: 77). Tenants, on the other hand, were Marathas, Kunbis, Mahars, Bhandaris and Agris.

During the 19th and early 20th centuries, the Konkan region supplied most of the labour to new industries emerging in Bombay. Geographically and economically, Bombay was the nearest alternative for Konkani labour. In 1928–29, 63% of workers came from the Konkan, 27% from the Deccan and not a single worker from Bombay city (Government of Bombay 1934: 58). But this massive migration was also initiated, or at least supported, by the existing agrarian crisis in the Konkan (Chandavarkar 2002). The *khoti* system forced landless labourers to look for job opportunities as unskilled

labourers.

Discontent against the khoti system had been simmering in the Konkan for long, such that an anti-khoti struggle eventually emerged within the anti-caste movement in Maharashtra beginning 1920 onwards (Suradkar 2013). None of the other political parties bothered about this. The left parties and forces of Bombay Presidency showed least interest in the anti-khoti resentment amongst peasants and tenants. The Indian nationalists also always stood in favour of the khots' rights. B G Tilak and V N Mandlik opposed abolition of the khoti system.<sup>1</sup>

In the 1920s, S K Bole (a Bhandari caste leader of the Non-Brahmin Party in the Bombay Legislative Council) highlighted the grievances of khoti tenants. Ambedkar supported him in this cause but nothing came out of it in the early period. Then during the 1930s, Ambedkar launched a peasant agitation against the khoti system that proved very effective.<sup>2</sup>

One of the main aims of the formation of the ILP in 1936 was to concentrate on and solve the problems and grievances of the landless and poor tenants, agriculturalists and workers.<sup>3</sup> Ambedkar fused issues pertaining to caste and class and made them the core of his party programme. Against this background, Ambedkar explained in an interview to the *Times of India* his party's aims and agenda.<sup>4</sup> With an outright socialist line, he stressed his aim of abolishing the khoti system. His shift to a workers party was a necessary electoral strategy aimed at widening the anti-caste movement's social support base. While his shift to the labour movement did not shrink the eradication of untouchability from his political programme, it nevertheless radicalised his anti-caste agenda.

The election campaign of 1937 sparked a renewal of the ongoing struggle. While the Congress in Bombay Presidency won 86 out of 175 seats, the newly established parties unexpectedly fared quite well.<sup>5</sup> The ILP won 15 seats in the provincial assembly. Three general candidates and two Dalit candidates won for the ILP in the Konkan region.<sup>6</sup> Ambedkar won from the reserved constituency from the working class localities of Byculla and Parel. It was from the Konkan that the largest number of candidates won.

On 17 September 1937, Ambedkar introduced a bill in the Bombay Legislative Council for the abolition of the khoti system in Konkan, a position more radical than his party's programme (Omvedt 1994: 196). It must be noted that in the first provincial assemblies, Ambedkar was the first legislator in India to introduce a bill for the abolition of the serfdom of agricultural tenants (Keer 2009: 296). While presenting the bill in the legislative assembly, he said that "under the system of khoti tenure, freedom has been so grossly abused by the khots it has been reduced to a state of abject slavery" (Ambedkar 2005: 100).

But the Congress government did not bring forth this bill for discussion in the assembly. After a disappointing response from the Congress, Ambedkar launched a protest march against the Bombay Legislative Assembly to abolish the khoti system. The communists too were involved in this struggle. The climax was a march of 25,000 peasants to the Bombay Council Hall on 12 January 1938,<sup>7</sup> the biggest pre-independence mobilisation of peasants in

Maharashtra. After this protest, Ambedkar delivered a speech where prominent Marxist leaders, such as Indulal Yagnik and S A Dange, were present. In his speech, he declared his closeness to the Marxist ideology.<sup>8</sup>

The entire 1930s was a period when Ambedkar formulated the struggle as being against both “capitalism” and “Brahminism.” The ILP flag was red and slogans included “against landlordism, victory to peasants, victory to workers and victory to red flag.”<sup>9</sup> These were the years in which the pages of *Janata* were filled with reports of the struggles of workers and peasants against “capitalists and landlords” as well as the Dalit fight against atrocities (Omvedt 1994: 278).

### **The Cheri Strike and Tenant Solidarity**

Ambedkar announced the anti-khoti movement in 1929 at Chiplun in the *Shetkari Parishad* (peasant conference). The first peasant meeting was held at Goregaon in Mangaon taluka, Raigarh district (Dharmadhikari 1999: 29). The parishad and Ambedkarite leaders adopted a programme that rejected the practice of *makta* (tenancy contract stipulating the khot's share in produce), *begar* (unpaid labour) and compulsory levies paid by tenants to khots. One of the strongest non-makta strikes took place at Cheri for a full five years between 1932 and 1937. Tenants had to pay the landlord half of the gross produce and in some cases, even more apart from having to perform all kinds of *begar*. Tenants expressed their willingness to pay half the produce, but they also wanted written confirmation for cultivation rights for the next year. When their demands were refused, the strike at Cheri began. Ambedkar's followers carried out an intensive campaign. This included public meetings of workers residing in Bombay. Communist leaders like B T Ranadive and G S Sardesai joined the struggle. As a result of the Cheri strike, khot land became arid for four years, forcing the khots to appeal to the courts against tenants (Dharmadhikari 1999: 44–51).

Many Dalit leaders were actively engaged in the Konkan in mobilising Dalit, Kunbi, Agri, and Bhandari tenants against the khoti system and in support of the Mahar Watan bill. In July 1929, Sambhaji Gaikwad took the initiative to organise the Bahishkrit Vargache Jungi Zahir Sabha (open protest assembly of depressed classes). The association highlighted the atrocities of caste Hindus against Dalits in Chiplun, Khed, and Dapoli in the Konkan region, and also wrote and spoke in support of the Mahar Watan bill and for the creation of the Konkan Saurakshak Fund to help victims of atrocities (Omvedt 2011: xi).

The Congress's silence on the anti-khoti bill forced Ambedkar to push for a mass struggle. The movement managed to mobilise tenants and protests against landlords through various means, such as boycotting khot land, non-payment of revenues, and building common cause against landlords. Tanaji Mahadev Gudekar and Sambhaji Gaikwad mobilised the Ratnagiri Zilla Shetkari Parishad and Cheeplun Shetkari Parishad to campaign for the anti-khoti bill and to bring to bear public pressure on the government. Several meetings were held between 1937 and 1939 across the Konkan region and in other parts of Bombay Presidency during this campaign (Omvedt 2011: xiii).

Peasants themselves started bringing resolutions against their exploitation

at the village level. In their resolutions, they insisted that tenants should boycott the cultivation of land. No one was to work for the khot and if someone did, he was boycotted.<sup>10</sup> In the *Janata*, Ambedkar appealed to tenants to forget their caste differences and to feel as one caste, that of tenants.<sup>11</sup> Mobilisation around the rampant issue of economic exploitation helped the ILP to build common ground with various peasant castes.

Ambedkar's visits to Ratnagiri in 1938 were crucial for the development of the anti-khoti movement. Mass participation started through boycotting khot land and refusing to pay makta or produce.<sup>12</sup> This was against surplus appropriation. Ambedkar advised tenants that whatever corn they produced, must be harvested and taken home by them; and that they should not be afraid of jails. He publicly promised that he would accompany them to jail.<sup>13</sup> Ambedkar adopted this method because the Khoti Settlement Act (Bombay Act I of 1880) had confirmed that "khots shall continue to hold their villages conditionally on the payment of the amount of the *jama* (land revenue)." Thus, in order to paralyse the khoti system, the agreement between the khot and colonial ruler had to be destroyed. Although Ambedkar adopted this method, he believed that there was no other way than mass struggle accompanied by legal processes.<sup>14</sup>

Ambedkar was aware of the limitations of struggles in rural areas due to the caste-feudal structure. Articles in the *Janata* bear witness to the fact that village strikes were more difficult than those in urban areas. In the cities, workers had a chance to join other mills after a strike but in villages, dependency on the *sawakar* (moneylender) and khot was absolute.<sup>15</sup> The economic dependency meant a great obstacle in agitation. Graded inequality caused even further suffering to untouchable tenants. Therefore, before calling for the strike, they had to confirm that no caste tenant would work for the khot and that it was a complete boycott.

This unity of different castes paralysed the khots in some parts of the region. In many strikes, tenants brought a resolution not to cultivate khoti lands, and so, the land became arid. Therefore, the khots started finding labour from other villages, but due to the tenants' solidarity, those of other villages also refused to work on their land. The khots used caste differences to destroy peasant unity, but it did not work this time. It became difficult for the khots to recruit labour from other castes. The khots appealed in court for punishment of tenants refusing to work on their land. In many cases, the khots could not convince Maratha caste men to stand witness against an untouchable tenant.<sup>16</sup> Owing to the unity among various castes, the khots were also not able to gather witnesses against tenants' rebellion for not obeying the khoti pattern.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the khots tried to provide witnesses from other villages. Many khots from northern Ratnagiri filed complaints and cases in court against their tenants.<sup>18</sup>

During these days, A V Chitre delivered vibrant speeches against the khoti system.<sup>19</sup> He exhorted peasants not to be afraid of attachments and jails.<sup>20</sup> The emerging class alliance was strengthening the tenants' activities against khots. Several khots of the Ratnagiri district requested police protection as they feared Chitre's propaganda would lead tenants to

violence.<sup>21</sup> There were frequent reports of “intense feelings” between landlords and tenants, and also vociferous and angry meetings and assaults by Mahars against Brahmin or Bania khots in 1938 and 1939 (Chandavarkar 2002: 139). The struggle became vibrant in 1939 as the government recorded the quick emergence of a “grave situation which, unless handled soon, might lead to a crisis enveloping the whole of the Ratnagiri and Kolaba District.”<sup>22</sup> The report went on to say that the tension was due to a full-fledged non-payment of rents campaign. The government warned that in the course of the next month, the whole district may be involved.<sup>23</sup>

Detailed records of the police department provide information about the involvement of a large number of middle castes, such as Kunbis, Telis and Agris, in the tenant movement. For instance, on 1 January 1938, the ILP held a meeting at Dapoli which was attended by 5,000 agriculturists, consisting of about 3,000 Mahars and 2,000 Kunbis.<sup>24</sup> The general tenor of their speech was that agriculturists and untouchables should unite against landlords,<sup>25</sup> and they decided not to cooperate with the Brahmins who ill-treated them.<sup>26</sup> To compete with the expanding social base of Ambedkar’s movement, the Congress started organising Chamar conferences to demonstrate and allege that Ambedkar was only a leader of the Mahars.<sup>27</sup>

In 1939, a clear pro-khoti stand emerged from the Congress and they started arresting leaders of the ILP.<sup>28</sup> They were served with notices forbidding them to take part in peasant activities.<sup>29</sup> The struggle continued till 1942 but due to the primacy of other issues in the colonial condition, Ambedkar had to shift his political focus. As a result of this shift, the anti-khoti struggle did not receive equal attention after 1942 as it did in the 1930s.

### **Mobilising Workers in Bombay**

The 1930s was also marked by significant mobilisation of different caste workers in Bombay under the leadership of the ILP. In 1937, the Congress in its election manifesto made many promises of safeguarding workers’ rights. But in the spring of 1938, the Congress government started making efforts at placating capitalist interests and improving their relations with the business world. One of the major labour laws introduced at the time was the Trade Disputes Bill, 1938 that openly supported business interests.

The ILP was yet another radical labour organisation on the Bombay political scene along with the Communist Party of India (CPI), Indian National Congress, Democratic Swaraj Party, and the Muslim League. The ILP’s presence in Bombay politics greatly influenced the workers’ public sphere. Towards the end of the 1930s, caste tensions within the workforce once more found emphatic political expression when Ambedkar’s ILP obtained considerable support from the Mahar millworkers of Bombay city. By linking his opposition to the trade disputes legislation of 1938 with the contemporary anti-khoti agitation in Ratnagiri, he brought together issues bearing upon both, the rural and urban interests of the working classes and showed how narrowly conceived the communist strategy, with its solitary focus on the urban identity of workers, had been (Chandavarkar 2002: 428).

The ILP’s programme was close to a socialist agenda but the social base of the party was entirely different from other labour organisations. The ILP



was considered an untouchables' organisation. Caste prejudices among workers became a considerable obstacle for them to join the ILP. The party itself had focused on different social groups working in lesser-paid industrial sectors, offering a broad appeal directed at all class and caste groups. Ambedkar hoped that the ILP could be the party to lead a political alliance of the untouchables and caste-Hindus, based on the common identity of and interest as workers, to fight against the perpetrators of oppression (Gokhale 1993: 133). The ILP visualised the untouchables' class interests together with that of the other class groups, but their concern of fighting against untouchability alienated caste-Hindu workers.

The Congress ministry introduced the Trade Disputes Bill in the Bombay Legislative Assembly on 2 September 1938. The bill against Bombay workers, also known as the first of the "black acts," made conciliation compulsory and strikes illegal under certain ill-defined conditions (Omvedt 1994: 199). The penalty for illegal strikes was extremely high at six months' imprisonment. Congress's desire to placate the bourgeoisie and curb labour unrest in the strongest base of the Communists was reflected in the drastic provisions of the Bombay Trades Disputes Act, 1929 (Sarkar 2008: 362). The bill met with strong opposition in the legislative assembly from trade unions, Ambedkar's ILP as well as the Muslim League, but the government was in such a hurry to get it passed that it did not even allow the formation of a select committee to look more closely into its provisions.<sup>30</sup> Eventually, the bill was passed on 5 November 1938.

Ambedkar (2005) termed this act "The Workers' Civil Liberties Suspension Act" in 1938. He made an eloquent defence of the right to strike as "simply another name for the right to freedom," and argued that "under the conditions prescribed by this Bill there is no possibility of any free union growing up in the country" (Ambedkar 2005: 210). He described the bill as "bad, bloody and brutal" (Omvedt 1994: 199). Further, the provisions of the bill were based on an utter disregard of the fact that the two partners—employers and workers—were not equally organised and did not possess the same strength and power. Ambedkar demanded separate provisions and regulations for workers as they were the subordinated group. He opposed the bill for judging workers and owners on the same footing as if both existed on a level playing field. Ambedkar critically examined the notion of competitive equality in general and in the Trade Disputes Bill in particular. He observed that the notion of equality was tricky and could produce injustice.<sup>31</sup>

### **Strike against Trade Disputes Bill, 1938**

Ambedkar quickly seized the moment to announce that the ILP's executive committee would organise a one-day general strike. Prior to the strike, a mammoth United Labour Front rally was held on 16 October 1938 at Kamgar Maidan in Parel, where 30,000 workers were mobilised. It was announced that they would organise a one-day strike on 7 November at the presidency level.<sup>32</sup>

After this conference, many of the foremost labour leaders of the CPI and the ILP organised conferences at different places in Bombay.<sup>33</sup> ILP leaders,

Sambhaji Tukaram Gaikwad and Revji Bua Dolas, went around with *bhajani mandals* (troupes singing bhajans or devotional songs) across the industrial areas of Bombay to campaign for the strike's success. Sambhaji was instrumental in referring to the saints belonging to various sects such as Kabir Panth, Ramanand Panth, Nath Panth and Warkari Panth (Omvedt 2011: xiii). Hundreds of volunteers of the Mahar Dnyati Samiti (Mahar caste committee) under the leadership of Revji Bua Dolas, Sambhaji Tukaram Gaikwad, Madke Buwa, Member of Legislative Assembly Gangadhar Ghadge, Keshav Adrekar, Tanaji Mahadev Gudekar and Shyamrao Parulekar campaigned against the bill in South, South-Central and Central Bombay where the mills were situated and at railway stations, mill gates and workers' colonies (Omvedt 2011: xiv).

Before the day of the strike, they organised a workers' conference in Bombay. On the evening of 6 November 1938, 10 lakh workers gathered at the Kamgar Maidan at Parel—a sign that the next day's strike was going to be successful.<sup>34</sup> The responsibility of organising this meeting was given to Madke Bua Dolas, Sambhaji Gaikwad and his Mahar Dnyati Panchayat. The meeting was indeed a big success. This workers' struggle led to the emergence of Ambedkar as a labour leader on the national scene (Omvedt 2011: xiv).

The rally, a huge procession, started from the Kamgar Maidan and wending its course through Parel, Lalbaug and Delisle Road ended at the Jambori Maidan at Worli. Workers gathered to listen to the fiery speeches of Ambedkar, Jamnadas Mehta, S A Dange and other labour leaders.<sup>35</sup> Indulal Yagnik, a communist leader from Gujarat, asked the workers to break the "black bill." Dange lashed out at Congress leaders. Ambedkar asked the workers to take over power by electing their own representatives in the legislative bodies: he, therefore, ruled out any revolutionary agenda. But this stand did not prevent him from sharing the platform with communist leaders like Dange (Jaffrelot 2005: 79).

On the day of the strike in the industrial part of the city, in the morning, every man was at his post, in front of the mill gates, at the mouth of every street converging on the main roads. In the morning, the mill whistles blew and the mill gates were flung open. However, neither did a municipal sweeper nor a single drainage worker come out to keep the city clean. Thousands of shops refused to open their doors, thousands of hawkers refused to embark on the usual trek along the city's streets, and thousands of peddlers refused to ply their goods on this day.<sup>36</sup>

In Bombay, the strike was joined by approximately half of all mill-hands. Policemen opened fire on unarmed workers at three different places. Two persons died and more than 14 workers were seriously wounded while 633 sustained injuries. The *Janata* condemned the Congress notion of non-violence and pro-capitalist position.<sup>37</sup>

In his assembly speech against the bill, Ambedkar said that the Congress government had brought this bill and was suppressing the workers' movement because it knew that workers were strong crusaders for the peasant movement. Therefore, it tried to break the links between rural and urban



struggles against the Congress government. The strike was considered remarkable and its success was attributed to the ILP; as Dhananjay Keer (2009: 313) states, out of 2,500 volunteers engaged in organising the strike 90% were ILP men.

The Congress leaders supported police violence.<sup>38</sup> Ambedkar demanded an enquiry into the firing and lathi charge.<sup>39</sup> The Government of Bombay issued an order appointing a committee of enquiry into the firing.<sup>40</sup> The appointment of the committee was forced upon the Congress government by virtue of the forthcoming municipal elections during which, if the enquiry demand were not granted, the Congress would have been under a heavy handicap.<sup>41</sup> But the committee, dominated by Congress members, resulted in the latter's favour and displaced the responsibility of the firing onto the attitude and actions of the crowd.<sup>42</sup>

In this period, Ambedkar interacted with many workers' and peasants' organisations at the national level, which he regarded as natural allies for his cause.<sup>43</sup> The *Janata* carried news on peasant movements in Bengal, Gujarat and Swami Sahajanand in Bihar.<sup>44</sup> He tried to build an alliance, mainly around anti-Congress positions. It was an effort to bring together different class organisations, working actively against imperialism and internal grievances of society. This was a purely political deal to form a front against the Congress at the national level.

### **Religion, Caste, and Class**

The ILP initiated a peasant struggle against the khoti structure in the Konkan region and parallelly developed links with Bombay's working classes. Thus, Bombay city politics at the time reflected the political anger of the Konkan agrarian crisis. Rajnarayan Chandavarkar (1997) describes the contradiction between the nature of rural peasantry and urban working class. He argues that this was not, however, the consequence of inherited rural traditions of resistance and violence finding expression in the towns. In fact, migrant workers from Satara, with a long and continuing tradition of resistance, were among the more quiescent labourers in Bombay; those from Ratnagiri, a district whose political temper by contrast appeared somnolent, were found to be the vanguard of the workers' movements (Chandavarkar 1997: 186). It was the decline of the Satyashodhak Samaj activities in Satara, during the 1930s, that silenced the demands of workers in Bombay politics, whereas Ambedkar's emerging peasant movement in the Konkan had a vibrant effect on Bombay's politics of the time.

Many non-makta strikes took place under the ILP's guidance. The Underi village strike was one of the famous amongst these. The khots went to court against this strike. The Sessions Court of Alibagh convicted several people and sentenced them to 10 years of imprisonment.<sup>45</sup> The Bombay mill and municipality workers established the Underi Khatala Committee (Underi case committee) to generate funds for court expenses towards the peasant struggle. Committees were founded across Bombay and members came mostly from the labour camps. The Underi Khatala Committee had decided to appeal against the Alibagh verdict in a higher court. Committee members organised meetings in different localities of Bombay to raise funds and workers'

consciousness vis-à-vis the prevalent peasant struggle.

Ambedkari *jalsas*<sup>46</sup> played an important role in collecting funds from different localities. The committee would invite various jalsa parties to perform and they would appeal to the gathering to donate money for Underi victims.<sup>47</sup> Ambedkar took the case to the Bombay High Court, where the workers' prison term was reduced by one year.<sup>48</sup> The *Janata* criticised the role of the judiciary in just finding the accused and not seeking to understand the root cause of the feudal exploitative structure.

The analyses of the exploitative village caste economy started appearing in the content of the Ambedkari *jalsas*. These *jalsas* provided minute observations on economic relations in the *balutedari* system and explained caste and class experiences in rural and urban areas. The *jalsa* groups were spotlighting internal conflicts and played an important role in explaining relations between Brahminical religion, caste and labour. Their central line of analysis was to show how religion provides strength to appropriate surplus from untouchable workers (Dhawre 2006). It explained the processes of internalisation and naturalisation of caste occupations through Brahminical religion. The ILP made a deliberate effort, through print media, to provide class orientation to supporters of different castes. It is evident that the poetry published in the *Janata* raised issues of caste, class and gender.

As part of the socio-economic struggle in various villages, the Kunbis started performing marriage rituals without the help of Brahmins. They stopped giving *dakshina* (fees) to the Brahmins for presiding over marriage rituals and stopped calling Brahmins to their weddings.<sup>49</sup>

While dealing with the issue of untouchability, Ambedkar explored the contradictions between *savarnas* and *avarnas*. He often portrayed this as a contradiction between the untouchables and Hindus (Bagade 2011: 76). In an article in the *Bahishkrit Bharat* in August 1929, Ambedkar described how upper caste solidarity was being used against tenants to support the *khoti* system (Dharmadhikari 1999: 23). He said that the Brahmins were not the only hurdles for the upliftment of untouchables, but that even non-Brahmins were responsible for it. Ambedkar described how exploitation was essentially hierarchical in the caste system, using the idiom of class to explain caste contradictions. Ambedkar knew the difference between class and caste, but in order to denote the process of the caste groups, he used the term classes instead of caste. He explained that as Hindus were divided into multiple castes, castes too were divided into different classes with two broad classifications being "savarna" and "avarna" (Bagade 2011: 82). After Ambedkar's declaration to leave the Hindu religion in 1935, untouchable workers stopped worshiping Hindu gods and performing traditional village duties. In some areas, Kunbis and Marathas resisted this with the help of the *khots* representing a *savarna* consciousness. However, upper caste *savarna* solidarity was working against the Dalits, forcing them to practise all Hindu rituals to maintain the social order.<sup>50</sup> Thus, celebrating Hindu culture became an instrument for holding the untouchables in the caste economic structure.

On the one hand, class consciousness emerged against the khots, but on the other his anti-*maharvatan* agitation had already estranged the feelings between the two parties by advising the Mahars not to skin carcasses or eat dead meat and the like. The others retaliated by refusing to pay *baluta* in cash or kind (Chandavarkar 2002: 138). Caste Hindu tenants were asserting their caste privileges and at the same time, organising themselves as classes of castes. Therefore, Dalit mobility was being obstructed by caste Hindus resorting to caste atrocities and socio-economic boycotts. In April 1928, Ambedkar had complained that Mahars were facing problems in the Kolaba district because they had decided to abandon their traditional duties, such as skinning dead animals. This act of revolt was opposed even by the Muslim khots, asking them to practise Brahminical culture for keeping them in the balutedari structure. Due to their threats, the Mahars were unable to leave their villages.<sup>51</sup> Thus, Brahminical culture operated through and reproduced the caste economy.

Although Ambedkar tried to mobilise peasants on the issue of class rights, he knew that fragile and antagonistic social relations would result in atrocities. He believed that this relation could be altered only through a fundamental change in the caste economy. He advised Dalits to exercise their legal rights on public property and natural resources in the villages.<sup>52</sup> He advised the untouchables to migrate to cities to be relieved from exploitation at the hands of caste Hindus and landlords. Therefore, jalsas in the 1930s started supporting Dalit migration to cities in their cultural presentations. He felt that cities were more open to the untouchables in transcending caste boundaries and moving into class stratification, which was one step ahead of Brahminical caste identity and caste-based occupation.

### **The Untouchables' Question in Class Struggle**

From 1936 onwards, Ambedkar demonstrated closeness to various class organisations. He held long dialogues with the socialists and Marxists. He debated strongly with the socialists not only in his political speeches and activities but also in his brilliant work, *Annihilation of Caste* (Ambedkar 1936b). He expected from them an understanding of the materiality of caste. His thrust was to provide a clear picture of class revolution in India, which would not be a reality without annihilating the caste system. It was a historical attempt to bring communist organisations close to the anti-caste tradition. The basic difference between Ambedkar and the communist ideology was that Ambedkar went beyond a materialist explanation and showed the significant role of culture in the appropriation of surplus and exploitation. Historically, it is important to note that Ambedkar offered an alliance to them against "Brahminism" and "capitalism."

But, the alliance did not survive long, as the communists' traditional class position, which tended to sideline caste issues, had disappointed Ambedkar. It was not Ambedkar who later distanced himself from the communist movement, but communists themselves who were not ready to understand other forms of exploitation as a basic structure. They saw caste as a "feudal" vestige, a social formation both archaic and unreal, which would wither away with the advent of industrialisation. The march of

history itself would solve the problem of caste (Gokhale 1993: 140). Ambedkar disputed the notion that working class organisations would transcend caste, and he argued for an anti-caste revolution. He emphasised that the mental hold of religious slavery had to be destroyed. In his renowned speech *Annihilation of Caste*, he argued that religion maintains a hold over the proletariat. Religion, social status and property are sources of power and authority, and hence, must be given equal importance (Bagade 2011: 74).

The communists did not recognise what Ambedkar called the “division of labourers.” During the 1920s and 1930s, communist leaders ignored anti-caste protests in Maharashtra (Shakir and Shinde 1979: 56). The left could not welcome and respond to this fusion of the caste–class movement. The silence of communist leaders on the khoti struggle and Ambedkar’s anti-caste movement alienated the untouchables from them. Thus, the communist support in 1938 was temporary and event-based.

Ambedkar explained untouchability as an economic system that permits uncontrolled economic exploitation. That is because there is no independent public opinion to condemn it and there is no impartial machinery of administration to restrain it. There is no appeal to public opinion, for whatever public opinion there is, is the opinion of the caste Hindus who belong to the exploiting class and as such, favour exploitation (Ambedkar 1990: 197). Ambedkar was the first to underline and deplore the divisions among the untouchables who were in his opinion “a disunited body” infested with the caste system in which they believe as much as did the high caste Hindus. This caste system among the untouchables continually gives rise to mutual rivalry and jealousy, making common action impossible (Jaffrelot 2005: 37).

Ambedkar (1987), further explaining the division of labourers, writes,

*The principle of graded inequality has been carried into the economic field ... The Hindu social order does not recognise equal need, equal work or equal ability the reward of the labour. Its motto is that in regard to the distribution of the good things of life, those who are reckoned as the highest must get the most and best and those who are classed as lowest must accept the least and the worst. (p 111)*

Ambedkar highlighted the complexities of class struggle in India and emphasised a structural necessity to address the untouchables’ question separately. He organised separate conferences for the untouchables. One of the significant “Untouchable Workers’ Conference” was held in 1938, at Manmad and attended by over 15,000 untouchable workers. In this conference, Ambedkar said that the untouchables had not succeeded in securing some of the most elementary rights to which all human beings are entitled.<sup>53</sup> He further explained how untouchability was being practised among workers. He mentioned that untouchability was not only a social problem but an economic problem too.<sup>54</sup> Brahminism has controlled the life of all classes, providing special privileges to certain classes and rejecting any possibility of equality for other classes. It rejects basic civil rights and restricts economic mobility.<sup>55</sup> He explained that all untouchables can be labourers

but all labourers cannot be untouchables. He said that the condition of untouchable labour was quite different from other caste workers. Communist leaders did not try to remove the injustice inflicted upon untouchable workers as they feared a split among workers. He questioned the communists' perception of not recognising caste division among workers.

According to Bagade (2011: 85), Ambedkar explored caste consciousness in two realms: (i) caste consciousness as structured in the Brahminical cultural system, and (ii) caste identities and their autonomous structure, where the caste-self/pride is derived in opposition to other castes through the caste psychology of hatred and contempt. The untouchable conference at Manmad was criticised by the left leaders on the basis that "workers do not have caste and religion."<sup>56</sup> In response to this, Ambedkar raised some questions: (i) why were untouchable workers not allowed to join the same canteen where touchable castes eat? (ii) Why were the railway-property wells not open for the untouchables? (iii) Why was there a big hurdle for untouchables in job promotion?<sup>57</sup> He observed that it was notorious that there were many official appointments from which a Depressed Class worker was shut out by reason of the fact that he was an untouchable. He believed that in India, workers had to fight against two enemies: Brahminism and capitalism. The communists criticised such efforts because they could not recognise Brahminism as an enemy which negated freedom, equality and fraternity.<sup>58</sup> Ambedkar blamed them for not looking critically at the Brahminical culture.

The conference defined what could be a true workers' organisation for the untouchables: first, the organisation should not be isolated from the issues of the untouchables and they should be represented in their central body. Second, there should be a separate fund for the untouchables' issues and special attention should be given to the same.<sup>59</sup> Ambedkar was expecting an assurance on the above two counts from trade unions. He was ready to have an alliance with the workers movement if caste along with class would become one of the important issues of their political programme. He perceived that religious sanction is the highest sanction of caste. Caste as a system of graded inequality and exploitation based on purity/pollution remained the basis of the productive relations of untouchables with Hindus (Bagade 2011: 79). Therefore, he expected a critical examination of Brahminical religion in the caste and class structure in India.

## **Conclusions**

After Ambedkar's shift from the ILP to the Scheduled Castes Federation in 1942, attention towards the anti-khоти struggle reduced drastically. Nevertheless, caste and class remained a core issue in Ambedkar's analysis and he constantly appealed to workers to form their own political organisations. The priority he accorded to the issues of caste and untouchability in his political programme did not attract other organisations as allies. In order to prepare for a larger class struggle, he prioritised the fight against caste and religion and advocated for workers' unity and the notion of justice. To Ambedkar, the "de-Brahminisation" of tenants and workers was one of the ways to build class consciousness.

Ambedkar demonstrated that organic and political connections between agricultural tenants and workers can be leveraged for the agenda against Brahminism and capitalism. The fusion of caste and class struggles and its contestation of religious sanctity has historically always radicalised these struggles and resulted in a more emancipatory reality.

In *Mukti Kon Pathe?*, Ambedkar reminds us that the question of untouchability is that of a class struggle between the untouchables and touchables. He was convinced that the annihilation of caste required both a rejection of the Hindu religion and the adoption of an alternative religion. He further explained that economic mobility of the untouchables is strongly restricted in the caste economy, which is regulated by religion and controlled through violence and boycott. He believed that the class struggle between the touchables and untouchables is unending and it would remain forever in Brahminical religion. As religion is *sanatan* (eternal) for the upper castes, there were no possibilities of change in the structure. Thus, his idea of anti-caste and class revolution was marching against Brahminism and exploring all possibilities of equality, justice and freedom.

Source: xaam.in

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## **Presidents of Congress past: A look at the party's presidency since 1947**

Rahul Gandhi has become the 16th person to hold the post of Congress president since independence, and the fourth from the Nehru-Gandhi family. Incidentally, Sonia Gandhi, the outgoing president has held the post for the longest time since independence, beating even Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi.

We take a look at the varied presidencies the party has seen so far since 1947.

J.B. Kripalani – 1947

Known as Acharya Kripalani, he was the president of the

Congress during the transfer of power in 1947. Defeated in a subsequent election in 1950, Kripalani left the party to found the Kisan Majdoor Praja Party, which was merged with the Socialist Party of India to form the Praja Socialist Party. He then went on to win a Lok Sabha seat four times, and moved the first ever no-confidence motion after the Indo-China war of 1962.

Pattabhi Sitaramayya – 1948-49

Sitaramayya successfully ran for the president's post with the support of Jawaharlal Nehru. He was also the Governor of Madhya Pradesh from 1952-57, and was elected to the Rajya Sabha before that. He was one of the leaders who demanded the need for a separate state that went on to become Andhra Pradesh. He founded the Andhra Bank in Machilipatnam in 1923.

Purushottam Das Tandon – 1950

A Bharat Ratna awardee, Tandon won against Kripalani in the 1950 elections, but soon resigned from the post because of differences he had with Nehru. Tandon was a Lok Sabha MP in 1952 and was elected to the Rajya Sabha in 1956. He was also instrumental in making sure that Hindi received official language status.

Jawaharlal Nehru – 1951-54

The first Prime Minister of India was the president of the Congress when they dominated state and national elections, winning in 1951, 1957 and 1962.

U.N. Dhebar – 1955-59

Dhebar was the Chief Minister of Saurashtra from 1948-54 and held a four-year term as Congress president. In 1962, he was elected to the Lok Sabha from Rajkot.

Indira Gandhi – 1959, 1966-67, 1978-84



Indira Gandhi held the post for three non-consecutive terms, the first one towards the end of the 1950s. Her second term was aided by Kamaraj's support for her, which helped her win against Morarji Desai. But, soon after, unrest in the party saw it split into factions under her and the Syndicate headed by Kamaraj, which led to two Congress parties, and two presidents. Her third term was more significant as not only were they her last years, but they began right after the Emergency that she had been instrumental in imposing.

The years 1967-69 saw tumult in the party as the split led to senior leaders exiting the Indira Gandhi-led faction Congress (R). The Syndicate, as the other faction was called, formed the Congress (O). Kamaraj and later Morarji Desai functioned as presidents of Congress (O). In the 1971 general elections Congress (O) won 16 Lok Sabha seats as opposed to 352 seats won by Congress (R). In 1977, after the Emergency, Congress (O) merged with Bharatiya Lok Dal, Bharatiya Jan Sangh, Socialist Party of India and the Swatantra Party to form the Janata Party. They won the elections that year and Morarji Desai was Prime Minister from 1977-79.

Neelam Sanjiva Reddy – 1960-63

Reddy was the sixth President of India, and he served as the Congress president thrice. In 1967 he became the Lok Sabha Speaker, and to emphasise the importance of the Speaker's non-partisan nature, he resigned from the party. After he lost the 1969 Presidential elections to V.V. Giri, he retired from active politics. He returned to politics in 1975 as a Janata Party candidate, won a Lok Sabha seat, was elected as Speaker, and in 17 days resigned from his post to become the President.

K. Kamaraj – 1964-67

He was known as the 'Kingmaker' in political circles and was responsible for Lal Bahadur Shastri's appointment as Prime Minister, and Indira Gandhi's ascendance as Congress

president. The third Chief Minister of Madras State (Tamil Nadu), he was the leader of the Congress (O) when the party split up after Indira Gandhi's elevation to the presidency, a post he remained in until his death in 1975.

S. Nijalingappa – 1968-69

Nijalingappa was the last President of the undivided Congress party, and during the split, he ended up on the side of the Syndicate. He was elected to the first Lok Sabha from the Chitradurga constituency in 1952.

Jagjivan Ram – 1970-71

Another Congress president who went on to join the Janata Party, Jagjivan Ram was the Deputy Prime Minister of India when Morarji Desai was the PM. Later, he formed his own party, naming it Congress (J) and remained an MP until his death.

Shankar Dayal Sharma – 1972-74

Another President from the Congress chiefs stable, Sharma was also the Vice President under R. Venkataraman. He swore in three Prime Ministers in the last year of his Presidency.

Devakanta Barua – 1975-77

Known best for his proclamation, "India is Indira, Indira is India," Barua later parted ways with the party that was named as Indian Congress (Socialist). He was the Governor of Bihar from 1971-73.

Rajiv Gandhi – 1985-91

Taking over the reins of the party after his mother's assassination, Rajiv Gandhi remained the president until his assassination in 1991.

P.V. Narasimha Rao – 1992-96

The first Prime Minister of India from a non-Hindi speaking

region, Rao's term also oversaw the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya.

Sitaram Kesri – 1996-98

Sitaram Kesri's years as president were marked with significant departures by senior party leaders. He was removed from his post after the party's electoral defeat in 1998.

Sonia Gandhi – 1998-2017

Sonia Gandhi has held the Congress president's post for the longest period of time. Her presidency saw the Congress win two subsequent elections in 2004 and 2009, and lose to the BJP in 2014, ending up with just 44 MPs in the Lok Sabha.

Source: xaam.in

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## **THE EMERGING INDIA-JAPAN-AUSTRALIA RELATIONSHIP**

## **THE EMERGING INDIA-JAPAN-AUSTRALIA RELATIONSHIP**

### **THE NEWS**

- India, Japan, and Australia held the fourth edition of the trilateral meet in New Delhi.
- The three sides discussed various issues such as – maritime security, disaster response capabilities, regional connectivity issues.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE MEETING

- **FREE & OPEN PACIFIC REGION**– The trio highlighted the growing convergence of their respective countries interest in the Indo-Pacific region and underscored their shared commitment to peace, democracy, and economic growth.
- **2+2 DIALOGUE**– India and Australia held their 2+2 inaugural dialogue to discuss a way to ensure free and open Indo-Pacific region.
- **UNITY OF ASEAN**– The three countries also underlined support for ASEAN centrality and hinting at the unity of ASEAN against any move made by outsiders.
- **MARITIME SECURITY**– The three sides also focused on the need for greater collaboration on maritime security.
- **TERRORISM**– The trio has agreed to greater collaboration on maritime security and to fight terrorism in all its forms.

## NEW SECURITY ARCHITECTURE IN ASIA

- The four-nation “QUAD” which met in Manila, is seen as the possible nucleus of a new emerging security architecture in Asia.
- The four nations are expected to come together in near future for naval drills and the move is expected to be in the backdrop of China’s – One Belt One Road initiative, Beijing’s action in South China Sea region and its disregard for UNCLOS verdict in the case with Philippines and its military agenda in the Indian Ocean Region.

## WAY AHEAD

- India will be hosting ASEAN-India summit in Delhi in January and the theme will be based on three “C’s – Commerce, Connectivity, and Culture.
- All 10 ASEAN-nations will be the chief guest at the Republic day.

Source: xaam.in

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# What is a Scorpene? an explainer on Scorpene and the

# submarine deal with DCNS

Here's an explainer on Scorpene and the submarine deal with DCNS.

Scorpene is a conventional powered submarine weighing 1,500 tonnes and can go up to depths of 300m. It is built by DCNS of France.

What has it to do with India?

In October 2005, India had signed a USD 3.75 bn deal for six of submarines to be built by Mazgaon Dock Limited (MDL) in Mumbai with transfer of technology. Additional deals were signed with Thales and MBDA for systems and weapons.

What is the status of the deal?

After repeated delays over four years, the first submarine began sea trials in May this year and is expected to be commissioned into the Navy by October. The remaining five submarines are at various stages of construction and MDL has assured to hand over one submarine every nine months.

Why are submarines so important?

A submarine is the quietest military platform and extremely tough to detect. Their main cover is their ability to move stealthily under water and keep an eye on enemy movement of vessels.

Submarines are the most potent military platforms currently available even ahead of aircraft carriers which need a large entourage to protect it.

The fact that nations which possess nuclear weapons base their second strike capability (ability to strike back after being hit first by nuclear strike) on nuclear powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBN) underscores their importance.

What is stealth?

Every military platform has a footprint which shows up on radar by which is used by adversaries to track it. So it is extremely important to minimise the footprint to protect our military assets and retain the element of surprise in case of an offensive

For a submarine, stealth is the most important protection. Stealth is a relative concept. It can be increased relatively to varying levels by adopting several measures right from the platforms design to operational measures to reduce noise and vibrations to stay away from prowling radars and sonars.

How do submarines operate?

As Submarines operate under water they rely on sonar or sound waves for communication and detection. Each class of submarine operates over specific frequencies, their signature, and is highly guarded.

What is the leak all about?

The 22,400 pages of documents leaked are essentially the manufacturer's, in this case DCNS, manual detailing the technical specifications of the submarine.

They detail the combat and stealth capabilities of the Scorpene, including what frequencies they gather intelligence at, what levels of noise they make at various speeds and their diving depths, range and endurance and so on. It also discloses magnetic, electromagnetic and infra-red data as well as specifications of the submarine's torpedo launch system and the combat system.

So does it mean the submarines are compromised?

Not entirely but the fact that such information has been leaked is a concern in itself. Rival navies take years to collect such kind of information and this coming out in public

domain is not a healthy sign.

While the manufacturer's technical manual has come out in the public domain, the operational and tactical procedures are developed by the user, the Indian Navy, once the submarine is inducted. In addition as the submarines are still under construction small tweaking can be done to change their signatures, as a precautionary measure.

Source: xaam.in

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## Govt. sets up NIC-CERT centre to detect, prevent cyberattacks

NIC's networks handle 500 GB of data at given point in time The Centre on Monday unveiled the NIC-CERT centre that would

monitor and help in early detection and mitigation of cyberattacks on government networks.

“All communications between government departments – Centre, State and district, as well as interactions between the government and the citizens takes place through NIC’s network,” said Electronics and IT Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad.

“The NIC-CERT will help us in our pursuit of a safe cyberspace by early detection of any attack on India’s systems,” he said.

NIC’s (National Informatics Centre) networks handle about 500 GB of data at any given point in time.

NIC-CERT currently has a team of about 30 cybersecurity professionals working in two shifts. This is in addition to the more than 300 people in the cybersecurity team who already work at the NIC, NIC Director General Neeta Verma said.

Working in tandem

NIC-CERT will operate in close co-ordination and collaboration with other sectoral CERTs and more so with CERT-In, she added.

The government had already announced setting up of sectoral CERTs (computer emergency response teams) for sectors such as finance and power.

“Using various tools, the team at NIC-CERT will be able to identify vulnerabilities and possible exploits and the intelligence gathered will give CERT the ability to predict and prevent attacks.” Mr. Prasad added.

It will also alert the concerned parties concerned in case it detects any malicious activity. “Any unusual movement on the NIC network, any attacks, intrusions will be detected and cleaned,” he said.

The minister also said that he has called a meeting of all

state IT ministers in January which will mainly focus on the issue of cybersecurity and safety. "The role of the state governments has to be expanded in the area of cybersecurity. The centre and the states have to work together," he said.

Source: xaam.in

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# **RUSSIA-INDIA-CHINA TRILATERAL MEET**

## **THE NEWS**

- The Russia-India-China held the 15th foreign ministerial meeting, first trilateral meet post-Doklam in New Delhi.
- India's External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj held a bilateral meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi respectively to discuss all the issues of mutual interest.

## **TOPICS DISCUSSED**

- **TERRORISM-** The three-nation for the first time came together and called for cooperation to take decisive and strong action against global terrorism. Although India's EAM did not mention Jaish-e-Mohammad in the list of terror groups, however, she mentioned Laksar-e-Taliban, Islamic State, and al-Qaeda.
- **STABILITY IN INDO-PACIFIC REGION-** India also stressed to opt for a collective approach by the three countries in ensuring peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.
- **CONNECTIVITY-** The connectivity remained focus area at the RIC meet. India's focus is likely to stress on the speedy implementation of the 7,200 km-long International North-South Transport Corridor(INSTC) linking India, Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia with Europe.

## RIC JOINT STATEMENT

- The RIC Joint statement did not name Pakistan unlike the joint document issued after the BRICS.
- The three countries also agreed to intensify cooperation in multilateral for including FATF (Financial Action Task Force) and FATF-style regional bodies(FSRBs) in order to cut the flows of funds, and other financial assets and economic resources to individuals and entities involved in terrorism.

## CONCLUSION

- The RIC underlined the primary and leading role and responsibility of states in preventing and countering terrorism and extremism.
- RIC called for greater unity, stronger partnership and concerted actions by the international community in addressing the menace of terrorism in accordance with international law and the UN Charter.

Source: xaam.in

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## For clean air, India needs a policy leap

The way to curb pollution is to tax carbon. Only then will households look for greener substitutes

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that air pollution is one of the biggest public concerns in India today. Its implications are many but just two will suffice here. A report of the Lancet Commission on pollution and health states that around 19 lakh people die prematurely every year from diseases caused by outdoor and indoor air pollution. A study by the Indian Journal of Pediatrics shows that the lungs of children who grow up in polluted environments like Delhi are 10% smaller compared to the lungs of children who grow up in the U.S. This is nothing short of a public health emergency. What is needed, therefore, is a comprehensive policy to curb

pollution. We need to act now.

At the heart of the problem of pollution are carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions. About 75% of all greenhouse gas emissions are CO<sub>2</sub> emissions produced through burning fossil fuels – oil, coal and natural gas – to generate energy. Since the early 2000s, carbon emissions have increased because of high growth in the Indian economy. In 2014, India's total carbon emissions were more than three times the levels in 1990, as per World Bank data. This is because of India's heavy dependence on fossil fuels and a dramatically low level of energy efficiency.

Remodel the energy mix

Emissions can be curbed only if people are persuaded to move away from fossil fuels and adopt greener forms of energy. But how do we achieve that? Tax carbon, period.

A part of the carbon revenue thus generated can be used for a systemic overhaul of the energy mix, which, to a large extent, would address the pressing problem of environmental degradation. The Indian economy's energy mix needs to be remodelled through investments in clean renewable sources of energy like solar, wind, hydro, geothermal and low-emissions bioenergy, and by raising the level of energy efficiency through investments in building retrofits, grid upgrades, and industrial efficiency. According to our estimates, this energy mix overhaul requires an additional 1.5% of GDP (to the current annual level of 0.6%) annually over the next two decades. Assuming that the Indian economy grows at 6% per annum and the population is likely to rise from 1.3 billion to 1.5 billion over the next two decades, the per capita emissions will still fall as a result of this policy, from the International Energy Agency's 2035 Current Policy Scenario of 3.1 metric tonnes to 1.5 metric tonnes – a 52% decline. Since this expenditure is financed by the carbon tax revenue, it will be a revenue-neutral policy with no implications on the

fiscal deficit.

There is, however, a problem with carbon tax. It's regressive in nature – it affects the poor more than the rich. Fortunately, there's a way out. Economists in the West have argued for a 'tax and dividend' policy according to which the revenue thus generated is distributed equally across its citizens and as a result, the poor are more than compensated for the loss, since in absolute amounts the rich pay more carbon tax than the poor. Such a policy of cash transfer, which might work in the West, however, has a problem in the Indian context, which has been discussed in the context of the Right to Food debate.

Instead of a cash transfer, the other part of the carbon revenue can be used for an in-kind transfer of free electricity to the population that contributes less carbon than the economy average, and universal travel passes to compensate for the rise in transport costs and to encourage the use of green public transport. Such a policy justly addresses the widening schism between Bharat, which bears the climate impact burden, and India, which is imposing that burden because of its lifestyle choices.

As of 2014, more than 20% of India's population did not have access to electricity. In July 2012, India experienced a blackout affecting roughly 70 crore people. Through this Right to Energy programme, every household in India will have access to electricity, a feat that almost all the governments since Independence have dreamt of but have failed to deliver. The free entitlement of fuel and electricity for a household works out to 189 kWh per month based on our calculations from the National Sample Survey data. Anything above this limit will be charged in full to control misuse of this policy. Travel passes with a pre-loaded balance amount of around ₹4,600 per household per annum, which can be used in any mode of public transport – private and government alike – will be available for every household.

The level of carbon tax required for this policy to come into effect is ₹2,818 per metric tonne of CO<sub>2</sub>. It will be levied upstream, namely, at ports, mine-heads, and so on. While the prices of almost all the commodities will rise, the highest rise in price will be in fuel and energy since the carbon content is the highest in this category. To give an idea about the pinch that will be felt, the average price of electricity will rise from its current value of ₹3.73 to ₹4.67 per kWh.

### Other benefits

This policy not only curbs emissions but also delivers on providing more employment since the employment elasticity in greener forms of energy is higher than those in fossil fuel-based energy. Higher prices of commodities according to their carbon content will induce households, including the rich, to look for greener substitutes. They have the effect of enticing even the poor to move away from traditional forms of energy consumption because the price of energy will be zero for them (provided they consume less than the cut-off limit) as compared to a shadow positive price in terms of the time used for collection of wood or cow dung cakes. Availability of free energy also addresses the issue of stealing of electricity, since there will be no incentive left for those who steal. In India, even in 2014, the value of electricity stolen through corrupt means amounts to about 0.8% of GDP. It's difficult to put a figure on the health benefits that such a policy will entail, but as a rough measure, a significant part of more than 3% of India's GDP currently spent on pollution-induced diseases will surely come down.

If we want to breathe to live, India needs to make such a policy leap.

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Source: [xaam.in](http://xaam.in)