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Lesson: The Rise of New Middle Class

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Introduction

The Indian national movement was one of the biggest 'mass and popular movement' which modern society has ever witnessed. It was a movement which "galvanized million of people of all classes and ideologies into political action and brought to its knees a mighty colonial empire".¹ The national movement has developed through many stages over the past century. In this process, several political ideas and methodologies have originated in different forms, adopted legal and illegal means, constitutional and revolutionary measures with extreme and moderate approach. It has comprised many currents-conservative and radical and in the modern era, socialist and communist.² During the movement, India also witnessed huge social, cultural, political and economical transformations.

The middle classes were bedrock of each current and transformation. It was vehicles of national movement. This middle class created nationalism, social reform, political awareness and finally led to India's independence. However, any (social or political) movement operates on certain specific environments and conditions. Movement carries several dimensions, variables and factors thereby the evaluation and assessment is being made by research scholars. For the this chapter, our interest confine to know the factors that helped to rise of middle class in colonial period and what kind of impact it had over national movement. There is acceptance that the arrival of British changes the pattern of administration, economy and education that produced new middle class³. In the words of Sanjay

¹ Bipan Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence*, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1989, p.12

² R. Palme Dutt, *India To-day*, New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1940, tenth ed, 2008, p.14

³ See also, Michelgugliemo Torri, "Westernised Middle Class", *Intellectual and Society in Late Colonial India* *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 25, no.4, 1990, pp. PE-2-PE11

Joshi, "the ascendancy of the middle class was the product of a relatively long historical process, predicated on the creation of new forms of the politics, the restructuring of norms of social conduct, and the construction of new values guiding domestic and public life".⁴

This chapter focuses upon the rise of new middle class in colonial India. It tries to conceptualize the idea of middle class and its implications on society and state. It explores the link between rise of middle class and its confrontation with European colonizer especially British empire. This chapter address following questions:

- What is middle class?
- What were the political and economic conditions of India before arrival of arrival of European?
- What were factors that helped the rise of middle class?
- What kind of impact had been made by it over the British Empire?

Middle Class: A Conceptual Framework

In every stage of human civilisation through the ages, society has been hierarchically organised and socially stratified. The base of social stratification could be caste, gender and class. Recently, class became one of the dominant tools for the analysis of society. Class is a group of people who share common political and economic interests, values and ideas in society. Class is a division of society on the economic criteria. The economic criteria include income, profession and education level. It forms motives of common economic interest, common ways of behavior, and common traits character. Each such

⁴ Sanjay Joshi, "Introduction" in Sanjay Joshi (ed.) *The Middle Class in Colonial India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. xiv

class forms a hierarchy of status according to the varying quality of social prestige and power expressed through the standard of living, nature of occupation, and wealth. A class is in fact "a complex phenomenon whose complexity grows with the existence or emergence of a wide range of interest connected with ownership and management of economic and social institutions".⁵

The word middle class highly used term in social science but resists any tight definition. Generally, it has been loosely defined because there is no perfect mechanism to classify the middle class. Sumit Sarkar argued that middle class is very vague term because the subjective bourgeois aspirations were so often associated with links with profession and tenurial landholding rather than industry and trade. He used middle class as "the groups which began asserting some kind of regional or national leadership from the 1870s onwards and which had a significantly different social composition and outlook from the princes, chiefs or zamindars who had led earlier outbursts against British rule down to and including 1857".⁶ The objectives of these leading groups could be quite diverse: national emancipation, regional self-assertion, caste or communal gains and formulating class demand of toilers. The backbone of the middle class is a particular kind of occupational system which was new in the 19th century, at least outside the West, but has now become a worldwide phenomenon. These occupations enjoy unequal esteem and authority and are

⁵ B.B. Mishra, *The India Middle Classes: Their Growth in Modern Times*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1961, p.3

⁶ Sumit Sarkar, *'Popular' Movements and 'Middle Class' Leadership in Late Colonial India: Perspectives and Problems of a 'History From Below'*, Calcutta: Centre for Studies in Social Science, and New Delhi: KP Bachi and Company, p.2

unequally paid.⁷ The middle class is not only an indicator of social change but also brought about the social change.

Indian society is throughout its existence complex, heterogeneous and segmented. Its diversity requires several dimensions to explain the objective conditions. Generally, middle classes are a group of people who exists between capitalist and labour. This model could not be applied in context of India. So, we need to have a broader perspective. The study of class is being made in the discipline of economics and sociology that generates two approaches to employ the middle class as variable to study the national movement. First is Marxian and second is Webrian. These approaches to certain extent would help us to understand the rise of middle class in colonial India.

Marxian Approach:

For Marxian, class is a deriving force of social changes, but minimize role of middle class in the historical development. This approach argues that at any stage of human civilisation, it is an economic factor that determines the political, legal, social, and cultural system. It believes that if mode of production changes, it alter the superstructure of society. In other words, 'base decides the superstructure'. The study from Marxian perspectives is being done by M.N. Roy, R.P. Dutta and A.R. Desai. They believed that rise of middle class in colonial India was result of economic change in Indian society. B.B. Mishra was not Marxist scholar; however he employed the Marxian framework in his analysis of middle class.

⁷ Andre Beteille, "The Indian Middle Class", *The Hindu*, New Delhi dated, 5 February, 2001 available at: www.hindu.com

Weberian Approach:

In Indian context, the analyses of middle class will have to see in context of social system and culture. The society within which it began to take shape was not one of classes, but of castes and communities. The Indian social system is based on the caste system. During the national movement, caste consciousness was not in predominant position. The idea of nation liberation subsumed other competing ideology. This approach explored other option like ideological and cultural factors in the emergence of middle class. Historians like Bipan Chandra; Ravinder Kumar are the example of this school.

Sanjay Joshi offered the cultural perspective to the rise of new middle class. The middle class in colonial India was not a social group that could be classified as "occupying a median position in terms of standard sociological indicators of income, consumption, or status". Though usually not from the traditional landed aristocracy, there is little doubt that the people who came to term themselves middle class were from the upper rungs of Indian society.⁸ According to him, the middle class in colonial India was a category and the product of a group of people sharing a social and economic background. They were "the producers and products of a new cultural politics in a transformed historical context". It was not simply similarities in education, occupation, or profession that made a middle class in colonial India. It was "the initiation of new cultural politics which allowed them to articulate a new set of beliefs, values, and modes of politics, thus distinguishing them from other social groups both below and above". It was not traditional status alone that upper caste Hindus or ashraf

⁸ Sanjay Joshi, Introduction" in Sanjay Joshi (ed.) *The Middle Class in Colonial India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010, p. xvi

Muslim men deployed to create distinctions between themselves and other social groups in colonial India. Rather, it was by “transforming traditional cultural values and the basis of social hierarchy that a distinctive middle class emerged”. It was not simply the objective circumstances of their existence that made a group of intellectuals and bureaucrats key political and social figures. Rather, “efforts of cultural entrepreneurship made them into a middle class and a significant player in the social and political life of colonial India”.⁹ The dominant English-educated groups did not emerge as a result of economic change. It had cultural values.

India before Arrival of European

Politically, India was divided and disunited. The Mughal Empire began to shatter after the death of Aurangzeb in 1707. It had suffered from the disease of monarchy. Internal succession fight led to rise of regional centres of power like Nizam of Deccan, Bengal, Awadh, The Maratha, The Afghans, The Rajputs, Jats and Sikhs etc.¹⁰ . These regional centres of power became independent when central power became weak. There were many princely states, when Europeans began to settle down in India. India was not a unitary state. Some states were rich, some were not. India had divided into many social, economic classes, and they were not developed.

Socially, India represented heterogeneity in its mosaic. It was stratified and divided on the basis of caste and religion. There were ruling class which was composed of emperor, nobility and courtier. In the middle came the small and frugal middle class comprising small

⁹ Sanjay Joshi, Introduction” in Sanjay Joshi (ed.) *The Middle Class in Colonial India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010, p. xvi

¹⁰ Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *From Plassey to Partition: A History of Modern India*, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2004, pp. 11-37

merchants, shopkeepers, lower cadre of employees' town artisans. At lower strata, it was artesian and peasantry who were living in the village.¹¹ B.B. Mishra identified four elements in Indian society at pre-British period: "the king and his courtiers forming the bureaucratic apparatus of the state, the priestly intellectual comprising scholarly and professional categories, the merchant, called *vaishya*, and the agriculturist, including both artisans and peasants".¹²

Economically, the instability at political level influenced the economic system. The disintegration of the political authority inevitably brought about economic fragmentation and disruption. Inner conflicts and war among the princely state adversely affected the economic activity. However, in the beginning of the 18th century the basic unit of Indian economy was self-sufficient and self-governing village community which produced almost all for its local needs. Decca, Mushirdabad, Ahmedabad, Lahore, Karachi, Bombay Agra, Masulipatam were major centre of economic activities. Indian artisan industry and occupational specialization were very highly developed. India was the second largest economy of the world after China upto 1820. It had shared near twenty five percent of world gross domestic product in 1700 and sixteen percent in 1820.¹³

Arrival of European and the Consolidation of British Rule

European penetration into India began with Portuguese establishment of their factory at Calicut in 1500 and their conquest of Goa in 1506,

¹¹ B.L Grover and S. Grover, *A New Look at Modern Indian History*, New Delhi: S. Chand, 2000, p. 26

¹² B.B. Mishra, *The India Middle Classes: Their Growth in Modern Times*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1961, p.21

¹³ Angus Maddison *The World Economy* New Delhi: OECD and Academic Foundation, 2007, p. 641; A.G. Frank "India in the World Economy. 1400-1750" *Economic and Politically Weekly*, vol. 31, no, 30, pp. PE50-PE64

more than four centuries ago. The British East India company was founded in 1600, the Dutch East India company in 1602 and the French Compagnie des Indes in 1664.¹⁴ Several wars had been taken place among the European country especially between French and Britain. It was Britain which got upper hand, overpowered French and paved the way of British rule in India for two hundreds years.

The British were involved in continuing hostilities after the victory at Plassey. The decline of the Mughal Empire and Indian disunity contributed to British success. Three presidencies, centered at Madras, Bombay, and Calcutta, directly governed the territories gained. Other regions were controlled through agents at Indian rulers' courts. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, India was becoming Britain's major colonial possession. It contained the empire's largest colonized population. The willingness of Indians to serve in British-led armies contributed a powerful land force to the empire. Indian ports were vital to British sea power. During the nineteenth century, India became the major outlet for British manufactured goods and overseas investment, as well as a major supplier of raw materials.

India was the jewel in the crown of the British Empire. It was said that the sun never set on the British Empire, whose territory touched every continent on the Earth. The British Raj, the period of British colonial rule from 'Plassey to Partition', treated India as a sort of empire in its own right.¹⁵

Factors of Rising Middle Class

¹⁴ R. Palme Dutt, *India To-day*, New Delh: People's Publishing House, 1940, tenth ed, 2008, p. 8

¹⁵ S. Bandopadhyay, *From Plassey to Partition: A History of Modern India*. New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2004

A new middle class began to emerge in India in the middle of the 19th century in the womb of an ancient hierarchical society. The advent of Europe rejuvenated Indian society with introduction of modern education system and their scientific achievements like railways, postal system and telegram. The introduction of English language became beneficial and emerged as an integrative force and connected Indian leadership that had a western educational background¹⁶. They changed the nature of state and its governing principles. Territorial consolidation made by the British generated the 'collective intentionality' that led for the resistance capacity against 'the foreigner'. It helped in the recovering of national self.¹⁷ This provided an opportunity for the emergence of middle class. There were so many factors responsible for rise of middle class in colonial India. A.R. Desai argued that "the emergence of social class in India was the direct result of the establishment of new social economy, new type state system and state administrative system and spread of new education system"¹⁸.

Educational Factor

It is believed that the introduction of British pattern of education in English medium had propelled to rise of new educated class in society. Humayau Kabir established the links between the British education policy and rise of middle class. For a long time, the administration was being run for the benefit of empire. There was necessity for a group of people which could meditate between rulers and Indian masses and

¹⁶Henry Cotton, *India in Transition*, Delhi B.R. Publishing, pp. 2-3,

¹⁷Sisir Kumar Mitra, *Resurgent India*, vol. I, London Allied, 1963, p. 93

¹⁸ A.R. Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, Mumbai: Popular Prakashan 1948, 2000, 6th edition, p. 162

provide man power to the lower level of administration.¹⁹ This was the sole purpose of education policy. Education created a variation in society. The most important single factor that accounts for this great transformation is "the impact of the West through the introduction of English education. It broke the barrier which had hitherto effectively shut India from the outside world and opened the floodgate of Western Ideas".²⁰ The arrival of British education attracted new class of society that was engaged in the study of Persian and Sankrit. New system presented a different kind of political, social and cultural values. These educated people came into touch modern idea and concepts like liberty, equality, right and freedom of state. By this education system, a new middle class, English educated social group came into existence, which was not loyal to British. They prepared a platform for the national movement.

The purpose of education was to colonise Indian mind. Western education had deep impact over the mind of middle class. However, "if this education was designed to colonize the mind of the Indian intelligentsia and breed in them a sense of loyalty, latter also selectively appropriated and manipulated that knowledge of domination to craft their critique of colonialism".²¹

Here, it is not need to invoke the Orientals and Anglolist debate but it should be remembered that every educated man or women were not the part of western educations. The native education system also produced professional middle class. The medium of language was

¹⁹ Hymayun Kabir, *Indian Heritage*, Kessenger Publishing, reprinted, 2009, p.102

²⁰ R.C. Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India, vol. I*, Calcutta (Kolkatta): Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1971, p. 260

²¹ Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *From Plassey to Partition: A History of Modern India*, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2004, p. 210

continuing in Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian. They are the educated class and have started playing a major role in politics which was earlier reserved for upper and royal classes.

Political Unification and Centralized Administration

Politically, a radical transformation had occurred. The medieval political order and the concepts, on which it was founded, had completely disappeared. British introduced a new system of administration in India. They introduced a rule of law in the territories. Modern judiciary came up. A natural corollary to the principle of equality before the law was introduced. This certainly was novel feature in a caste- ridden society. Equality before law of the new judicial system wiped out earlier differences of Indian society.

The main changes which the British made in Indian society were at the top. They replaced the wasteful warlord aristocracy by a bureaucratic-military establishment. The East India introduced certain changes in Indian administration. It strengthened its rule over provinces gradually, so its approach towards administrative reforms was tactical. The remedies adopted by them differed somewhat in different provinces, but the general lines of reform in all were to retain the village system and to improve the machinery for supervision.²² The first step in this direction was to relieve the zamindars of their liability for police service, which was commuted for a payment of enhanced revenue. Considerable reforms were also effected in the administration of criminal justice and a milder and rational system of trial and punishment was substituted for the cruel and partial methods of the native governments. In its long course of evolution, it started to work

²² Angus Maddison, *Class Structure and Economic Growth: India and Pakistan Since Moguls*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1971, Chapter-3, p. 13-14, available at: http://www.ggdc.net/maddison/articles/moghul_3.pdf

on principles of rule of law, although the law did not conform to the interest of Indian people.

British administration in India through civil and police mechanism had taken a long journey to consolidate its empire. The advent of civil and police bureaucracy was sideshow of political development. It came in two forms, first, the charter act from 1773 to 1935 and secondly, separate acts related to specific departments. This historical period had undergone with massive political and administrative transformation. Since the battle of Plassey to 1857 revolution, the British administration was reined by the East Indian Company. This period is characterised as expansion of British Imperialism in India. People in the eighteenth century tended to think of the empire in terms of trade and commerce.

The 1857 revolt was a major turning point in the history of modern India. In May 1858, at the same time, they abolished the British East India Company and replaced it with direct rule under the British crown. Whole administration had gone in the hand of British crown and political activities got central place in British administration. In two hundreds of British rule, the structure, social composition and the nature of administration had transformed accordance with demand of British interest. At the last phase of national movement, three kind of service was emerged namely all Indian civil services, central services and provincial services. The present Indian bureaucracy is reflection of these three services.²³

Features of British Administration:

It organised Indian administration on the basis of rule of laws. The organisation of an Indian Civil Service which worked according to set

²³ For detail study of the development of civil and police administration of India, see A.C. Banerji (ed) Indian Constitutional Documents, 1757-1947, 4.vols, Calcutta 1961

rule and with machine-like efficiency and impartiality was another striking feature of the administration in contrast to the personal rule of the monarch or his governors as the case might have been in pre British times. ICS officers worked as Collectors, Magistrate and Judges.²⁴ It introduced a centralised administration.

Elective politics, in however limited a form, was introduced. It started to induce national voice in administration. The effect of elective politics was drawing the attention of administrative brutality operated over nationalist leaders. It also sensitised native who were the side of British government. It was disjointed as the different provinces had different civil services. There was no code of conduct developed by any of the British-India provinces. As we have seen, British government did not have any preplan to develop a particular mode of administration. It was totally contingent and based on the connivance of its facilitations. The reformative effort was the response to demand of Indian leaders.

Collective Intentionality

Political unification and centralization of Indian political system generated collective intentionality. India attracted the invader from ancient to the modern period from Iranian, Bactrian, Huns, Turk, Moguls and European. It was invaded throughout in its history. "In 3000 years of our history people from all over the world have come and invaded us, captured our lands conquered our minds. From Alexander onwards, the Greeks, The Turks, the Moguls, the

²⁴B.L. Grover and S. Grover, *A New Look At Modern Indian History*, New Delhi, S. Chand, 2000, p.253

Portuguese, the British, the French, the Dutch, all of them came and looted us, took over what was ours"²⁵ Moraes observed that "India's history is a story of assimilation and absorption and of invasions punctured with the period of imperial rules".²⁶

In its historical existence, India hardly remained under the single control of a king or dynasty. It was ruled by different dynasties and kings in different parts of its territory. Its history is a tale of rise and fall of great dynasties. India has a 3000-year history of "growth, decay, and renewal; of invasion, absorption and survival; of imperial conquest and imperial subordination"²⁷. It happened due to lack of 'collective intentionality' towards their greatness and vision of unity. This was a cultural lag on the part of civilisation that could not allow the formation of 'resistance capacity' to check out the adversaries. In the words of B. M. Jain, 'geographically giant in size, politically disunited and disintegrated, socially heterogeneous and ethnically divisive and diverse, India allowed outsiders to tinker with its polity and socio-economic systems. Whenever aliens landed on the Indian soil with the motive to rule the country, Indian had hardly offered any resistance to drive them out with a sense of collective moral responsibility. On the contrary, they amazingly displayed a passive attitude towards the invaders and predators'²⁸. The diversity was one reason to make India scattered in its different territorial existence. Unification instilled the feeling of nationalism and worked towards development of India as a nation. It provided the middle class a foreground to look forward for national cause and overlooked their economic, social and cultural diversity.

²⁵ APJ Kalam "My Vision for India" 2004, available at www.indiavision2020.org

²⁶ Frank Moraes, *India Today*, New York: Macmillan, 1960

²⁷ SP Cohen, *India: Emerging Power*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 35

²⁸ BM Jain, *Global Power*, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008, p.41

Economic Factor

Colonial economic was two way responsible for the rise of middle class. Firstly, the introduction of new industrial system and land system created a group of people that helped in the formation of it. Secondly, the nature of economic exploitation heightened the consciousness that British Empire was imperialist. Economical changes dragged people from their old traditional village professions to urban industrial labouring. These new classes came into existence as a result of the basic economic transformation brought about by the various acts of the British Government such as the new type of land relations, the penetrations of Indian society by the commercial and other forces from the outside capitalist world, and the establishment of modern industries in India.²⁹

The introduction of private property in land in the form of Zamindari and Ryotari by government created the new classes which owned the large estate. They were zamindars, and peasant proprietors. Further, the creation of the right to lease land brought into being such as tenants and sub tenant. The creation of to purchase and sell land together with the right to hire and employ labour on the land, created conditions for the growth of the class of absentee landlords and that of the agricultural proletariat. With the new agrarian-economic system, a hierarchy of intermediaries developed between the zamindar and the cultivating tenants in the zamindari zones, and a chain of intermediaries, namely moneylenders, absentee landlords, and merchants, grew up between the cultivating tenants and the state in the Ryotwari area. In the agrarian area, a group of

²⁹ Angus Maddison, *Class Structure and Economic Growth: India and Pakistan Since Moguls*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1971, Chapter-3, pp. 7-9, available at: http://www.ggdc.net/maddison/articles/moghul_3.pdf

modern money lenders and merchants who were unknown in pre-British Indian society, developed on an increasing scale. They are intermediaries between the peasants and the market, and absentee landlords.³⁰

In the rural area, the classes of money lenders and merchants existed in pre-British India. But the role was transformed when the new land system was introduced. So, the class of modern money lenders and merchants might be described as new social classes linked up with the new capitalist economy and performing functions quite different from pre-British Indian society. Under the British rule, the internal and external trade expanded which resulted in the emergence of a class of commercial bourgeoisie, who engaged in extensive internal and foreign trade. These new merchant classes traded in all production, rural and urban, agriculture and industrial in the country.³¹ The establishment of railways and accumulation of wealth in the hands of the Indian trading class, a section of zamindars and wealthy members of the professional classes led to the rise of Indian owned textile, mining, and other industries and the growth of a new class of industrial bourgeoisie such as mill owners, mine owners, and other owners of new capitalist enterprises. Along with this class, emerged the new class of modern proletariat such as factory workers, mine workers, railway workers, and workers on the plantation. Thus, with the growth of modern industries in India the new class of the modern bourgeoisie and modern proletariat came into existence.³²

³⁰ A.R. Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, Mumbai: Popular Prakashan 1948, 2000, 6th edition, p. 164

³¹ A.R. Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, Mumbai: Popular Prakashan 1948, 2000, 6th edition, p. 166

³² Percival Spear, *The Oxford History of Modern India: 1740-1947*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965, pp. 290--91

In reality, the British Colonialism was disrupting Indian economy and preventing the rise of modern industry and agriculture. The result of colonial rural economy was that the great mass of the people were submerged in poverty and a large sector of the Indian economy was condemned to stagnation. There was growing up "a small group depending on agrarian pursuits which took advantage of the conditions established by British administration to improve their economic condition and strengthen the bourgeois class which led the struggle for freedom".³³ So, it was both, the utilization of opportunity generated by colonial economy and sense of deprivation created by it was the main reason to form the middle class's consciousness.

Social and Cultural Factor

Obviously, India was caste ridden society. Upper castes were middle class. But new educational and administrative system helped to break the caste and religion lineage on the front by creating new set of cultural beliefs and values. With the advent of British rule immense intellectual and cultural changes characterized the 19th century India. We see the rise of a new class of people in Indian society during the British period. This was the rise of the English educated middle class. Now naturally the question comes to our mind that who actually constituted this class of people. In the 19th century, British administrative and economic innovations gave rise to a new professional or urban middle class in Indian towns.³⁴ This new class readily learnt English, for it promoted employment and gave a sense of prestige. The newly educated class usually adopted the professions of junior administrators, lawyers, doctors, teachers etc. Some of them

³³ Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, vol. 3, New Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1972, p.69

³⁴ Dr. Baljit Singh, *Urban Middle Class Climbers*, p. 32

visited England for pursuing higher studies. While in England they saw with their own eyes the working of the political institutions of a free country. On their return to India, they found the situation in India was quite different from that of England. These foreign educated people along with the ever expanding English educated intelligentsia formed the middle class intelligentsia in India. Intelligentsia minimized the impact of parochial loyalties. The class was not a closed hereditary caste and was not bound by any traditional laws. But its components recognized communal and caste obligation, which tended to interfere with their loyalty to the nation. In this sense, it was constituted from Hindu upper caste and Asharaf (well-born) Muslim)³⁵.

The overall development in especially new form of political system and administration provided an institutional opportunity. The institutional opportunities created a public space. New education system requires new teachers, judiciary requires advocates, railway and postal services requires lower level employee. The cumulative was the rise of new middle class. Joshi argued that it was through the public sphere that "middle class norms came to be universalized in colonial India". Using new institutions of the public sphere, these men were able to "recast ideas of respectability to distinguish themselves from upper and lower classes in society, and to posit a moral superiority over both". All of these were a crucial element in the constitution of a middle class.³⁶

The formation and composition of Middle Class

The formation of middle class in colonial India was the result of long historical process. Its beginning could be traced since arrival of

³⁵ Sanjay Joshi, *Fractured Modernity: Making of a Middle Class in Colonial North India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001

³⁶ Sanjay Joshi, "Introduction" in Sanjay Joshi (ed.) *The Middle Class in Colonial India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010, p. xviii

industrialization and trading economy, but concrete observation could be made after 1857 revolution. The formation of middle class could be explained by understanding the nature of national movement. The historical context of the development of middle classes in India is quite different from those in western world. In Europe, it came through industrial revolution. In case of India, it was 19th century under the patronage of British colonial rule that the middle classes beginning to emerge. The study of B.B. Mishra had shown four categories of middle class that are the commercial middle class, industrial middle class, landed middle class and the educated middle class.³⁷ However, the middle class was mainly comprised of three sections: agricultural, industrial and professional.

We also look into the duality of India economy to grasp the clear picture of middle class in colonial India. There were two layers of economic system in rural and urban India. In urban area, the middle class was the product of new economy introduced by the British while rural middle class still based on the land distribution system. It also has been noticed that there were uneven growths in middle class. As we knew that Bengal was the seed of Indian nationalism. British began to settle in this presidency. So Bengal presidency was precursor of the Indian modernization. Calcutta (Kolkatta) had seen first instance for the emergence of middle class. The rise of the middle class in Bengal is therefore for "the most remarkable and the most reassuring of the signs of the times. It is certain indication that in this part of India our faces are set in the right direction, that progress and not retrogression is the order of the day and that the whole tendency of present

³⁷ B.B. Mishra, *The India Middle Classes: Their Growth in Modern Times*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1961

conditions make for an increasing measure of prosperity³⁸. After it, the new middle class first emerged in other presidency capitals of Bombay (Mumbai) and Madras (Chennai).³⁹ The rise of middle class in Bengal resulted in Swadeshi movement of 1905. Gradually, British occupied the most part of India, the national consciousness generated in the middle classes of all India. This expansion of middle classes and their consciousness waged three decisive movements which altered the reign of power. Later, this phenomenon expanded and operated all over India.

Professional class

The major constituents of middle class were professional classes that were coming from new administrative set up namely judiciary and civil administration. They were the educated middle class. It included doctors, teachers, professors, managers, clerks, engineers, chemists, technologies, journalists and others. They formed new social group, which evolved in Indian society during the British period. These social groups linked up with modern industry, agriculture, commerce, finance, administration and press and other section of the new social life were unknown to pre-British India society since such a social, economic and class system did not then exist.⁴⁰

These groups became the spearhead of the Indian middle classes. Though composed of different castes, they developed a common pattern of thinking, and these features contributed to the

³⁸ Surenderanath Banerjea, *The Bengali*, 17 February 1911; quoted in Rajat K. Ray, "Three Interpretation of Indian Nationalism, in BR Nanda (ed.) *Essays in Modern Indian History*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980

³⁹ Andre Beteille, "The Indian Middle Class", *The Hindu*, New Delhi dated, 5 February, 2001 available at: www.hindu.com

⁴⁰ B.B. Mishra, *The India Middle Classes: Their Growth in Modern Times*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1961, p.307-340

growth of India nationalism. The professional classes were the first to break through caste or regional barriers and to develop a sense of unity and solidarity which made possible the development of nationhood in India. These groups were “cultural entrepreneurs” of national movement.⁴¹

Industrial class:

Industrial revolution in Europe led to demand of new market and search of raw materials. So, European began to invest the money in India on utilitarian ground. The major industry sectors were jute, cotton, neel, sugar and mining. The unintended consequence of industrialization created a group of people who constituted the core of middle class. According to Mishra, by 1921, Indian capitalism had emerged as “an independent force, the growth of indigenous as well as foreign capitalist interests in the country led to a considerable increase in the industrial population”. He stated that “the percentage of employed in industrial and other not-agricultural occupations continued to rise in spite of the considerable increase in India’s population, which went up from 279 million in 1891 to 389 million in 1941, and 360 million in 1951 for Indian alone”.⁴² In addition to increasing the number of industrial workers, the growth of industries and urbanization brought into being a considerable number of salaried employees below the managerial and supervisory levels.

Agrarian Middle Class

⁴¹ Sanjay Joshi, “Introduction” in Sanjay Joshi (ed.) *The Middle Class in Colonial India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010, p. xviii

⁴² B.B. Mishra, *The India Middle Classes: Their Growth in Modern Times*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1961, p. 397

The rural India witnessed different set of middle class from urban India. There were changes in the pattern of land ownership. The agrarian middle class were grouped into three sections. First section includes the larger landholder in the Zamindari areas; second group were the bigger farmers in the Ryotwari region; the moneylenders-landowners and businessmen and merchant were come into third sections of the middle class. Basically, they were trader in cash crops which were showing increase in the area sown and the quantity of output.⁴³

Nature of Middle classes

The rise of middle class was growing with evolution of national movement. The nature of national movement had deep impact over nature of middle classes. At least, two stages are identifiable. As it has been observed that the national movement was the history of "the advancing consciousness and mass basis of this movement of national liberation". It began in earlier stage as "a narrow circle of the rising bourgeoisie and professional strata with the most limited aims", and in latter stage, "this process of history reached out to its full stature and achievement". It has prepared the way for a still more far-reaching social liberation⁴⁴.

These phenomena had reflected in the consciousness of middle classes especially English educated people. In its first stage, the middle class were loyal to British government. This was the period 1857 revolt to formation of Indian national congress. Even, it was charged that Congress was formed on the consent of government. However, in latter phase, these middle class disheartened and started

⁴³ Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, vol. 3, New Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1972, p.69

⁴⁴ R. Palme Dutt, *India To-day*, New Delh: People's Publishing House, 1940, tenth ed, 2008, p. 283

mass activity. The Swadeshi movement was first example of mass movement and mobilisation. These educated dissociated with government and began to expose cruel nature of Empire. In the words of Sumit Sarkar, "Macaulay's vision of an English-educated intelligentsia brown in colour but white in thought and tastes was, it is true, beginning to turn a bit sour by the 1880s. Yet the middle class' ambitions which went into the making of provincial associations in Calcutta, Bombay, Poona, and Madras and eventually found expression through the Congress were still little more than an irritant"⁴⁵.

The basic pattern was of an English-educated 'middle class' reared by British rule, engaging in various renaissance activities and eventually turning against their master and so giving birth to modern nationalist- out of frustrated selfish ambitions, ideals of patriotism and democracy derived from Western culture or natural revulsion against foreign rule, the imputed motive in each case depending on the viewpoint of the scholars.⁴⁶

The new middle class was united. They had ignored their background. Earlier, the old middle class of India played a very subordinate part in the affairs of India. According to Spear, the reason was that they were not connected; they were divided by distance, by language, by caste feeling, and by occupation. It had no "common consciousness and was dependent everywhere on the intellectual aristocracy of the Brhnmans and the landed aristocracy of sardars and zamindars". The merchant had little in common with the government official or the doctor with the lawyer. Each profession or vacation was insulated from others by walls of custom and prejudice. No common

⁴⁵ Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India:1885-1947*, New Delhi: Macmillan . 1983, p. 2

⁴⁶ Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India:1885-1947*, New Delhi: Macmillan . 1983, p. 5

consciousness was possible until this exclusiveness between upper and lower, between group and group was broken down.⁴⁷

Mishra went on to say that ideas and institutions of a middle class social order were imported into India. They did not grow from within. They were implanted in the country without a comparable development in its economy and social institutions. The Indian middle class whom the British aimed at creating was to "be a class of imitators, not the originators of new values and methods". The West proceeded to develop education so as to "satisfy the needs of an already developed economy. That was the British theory of infiltration which was to apply to both educational and economic fields".⁴⁸

Role of Middle Class

The struggle of independence was being carried by these middle classes. They put their effort in two ways: first they began to criticize the British empire's policies and second they held direct confrontation with it. The middle class intelligentsia led the Indians in the social, political, religious and cultural sphere and helped a lot in the modernization of India. According to Percival Spear, "the new middle class was a well integrated all-India class with varied background but a common foreground of knowledge, ideas and values... it was a minority in Indian society but a dynamic minority...it had a sense of unity of purpose and hope"⁴⁹. This middle class became the new soul of modern India and in due course infused the whole of India with its spirit. It provided leadership to the Indian National Congress in all its stages of growth. According to Bipan Chandra middle class formed

⁴⁷ Percival Spear, *The Oxford History of Modern India: 1740-1947*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965, p. 289

⁴⁸ B.B. Mishra, *The India Middle Classes: Their Growth in Modern Times*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1961, p. 11

⁴⁹ Percival spear, *The Oxford History of Modern India*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965, p. 291

the "backbone of the Indian national movement".⁵⁰ Peasant movements were also the work of the lower middle classes.⁵¹

Impact

The sole purpose of British Empire to strengthen its hold over Indian territory and made available maximum natural resources for England. In this process, some modern technique and ideas trickled down to Indian. According to Bimal Prasad, it is one of the ironies of history as well as a tribute to the work done by the British in India that the administrative and economic unification of India under British rule itself provided the necessary base for the dawn of a national consciousness⁵². The struggle for independence was not a narrowly limited movement for political emancipation. It was broadly an endeavor to reconstruct an old, static, collective society and to establish in its values as liberty, justice, individualism, humanism and secularism. Middle class was success to establish these objects in Indian constitution.

The new middle class generated the new spirit which had the impact of western culture. There are claims that the impact of western culture "awakened a sense of Indian nationality and deep patriotic feelings such as India never before"⁵³. Indian nationalism can best explained by "the anti-imperialist alliance between the westernized middle class- plus vernacular literati and the peasantry".⁵⁴ Among

⁵⁰ Bipan Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence*, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1989, p. 403

⁵¹ Sumit Sarkar, *'Popular' Movements and 'Middle Class' Leadership in Late Colonial India: Perspectives and Problems of a 'History From Below'*, Calcutta: Centre for Studies in Social Science, and New Delhi: KP Bachi and Company

⁵² Bimal Prasad, *The Origin of India Foreign Policy* Calcutta: Bookland, 1960, p.13

⁵³ R.C. Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India, vol. I*, Calcutta (Kolkatta): Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1971, p. 260

⁵⁴ Michelgugliemo Torri, "Westernised Middle Class", *Intellectual and Society in Late Colonial India* *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 25, no.4, 1990, pp. PE-5

them there were many grades, but they constituted the most dynamic part of Indian society. Each section had its own special interest although among them a community of aims existed and there was growing a consciousness of nationality and sentiment of patriotism which was the result of both material and psychological needs.

Conclusion:

The middle class was the base of social reforms, cultural revivalist, political awareness, protest and demonstrations in national movement. Institutional opportunity had created public space that drove to unite and generate collective intentionality. The emergence of middle class was associated with development of economic and educational activities in the regions. The significance of middle class in colonial India was that it was enlightened class that generated the aspiration for liberation of nation from the British empire.