



Emergence of the middle class

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Abstract

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. However, the middle class was mainly comprised of three sections: agricultural, industrial and professional.

[10:18 PM, 12/5/2017] Sushma DD Jain: educated middle class members. 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.

Keywords: industrial revolution, middle class

Introduction

“A social group that consist of well-educated people, such as doctors, lawyers and teachers, who have good jobs and are neither very rich nor very poor”

The middle class is a class of people in the middle of a social hierarchy. In weberian socio-economic terms, the middle class is the broad group of people in contemporary society who fall socio-economically between the working class and upper class.

The colonial state acted as the primary change-producing agent because its policies and institutions altered the existing patterns of the Punjabi society. The pre-colonial ‘middling classes’ witnessed continues structural and functional transformation when the socially and economically privileged groups responded to the new opportunities offered by the British institutions. Though the process of social change proceeded rapidly, the succeeding generations ‘managed to learn the new without entirely forgetting the old’

Writing in 1881 Denzil Ibbetson noted the ‘liquid state of society’ in which its portions were ‘continually rising, sinking and changing their positions’.

The professional middle classes consisted of those groups whose position sprang from skills based on western education and training, and who occupied a middle position between the British bureaucracy and the Indian aristocracy on the one hand, and the mass of the population persuing occupations that kept them barely on the subsistence level, on the other. Besides lawyers, teachers and doctors, this class could be considered to have included the Indians employed at the lower and middle rungs of administration.

The promaclamation of march 1835 had stated the objective of British educational policy in India as the formation of ‘a class

of persons, Indian in blood and color and British in taste and opinions, in morals and in intellect. Such education was bound to remain limited to the upper and middle class of the society. In order to encourage education in rural area, an education cess was imposed in 1857. The villagers demanded schools such as state patronage to education led to the decline of indigenous education.

Table 1

S. No		
1	5000	1857
2	4500	1881
3	13500	1857
4	400000	1873
5	40000	1889
6	620000	1930

For the higher education, the Punjab University, Lahore was instituted in 1882. The overall enrolment in the Punjab University increased to about 24000 by 1938.

Table 2

S. No	Number of School Teacher	Year
1	12000	1911
2	36500	1931
3	80% Trained Teacher	1938-39
4	1032 Gazetted Position	1911

All educated persons could not be absorbed in the public services. The judicial system had the greatest potential for private practice. The chief court was constituted in 1865 and the pleaders were given permission to practice in 1866.

While pursuing their respective professions, the members of the middle classes, particularly those outside the government service, played a significant role in socio-religious, educational and political spheres. In fact, the activities in the three spheres were dialectically related, with education leading to an awareness of social evils and political consciousness.

Socio-religious movements were initiated by the intelligentsia. The expansion of the Christian missions, their proselytizing activities, dissemination of religious tracts and journals were considered a threat by the Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. The Amritsar Singh Sabha was formed in 1873, the Arya Samaj in 1877, the Lahore Singh Sabha in 1879, the Lahore Anjuman-i-islamia had been founded in 1877. The Ahmadiyah movement was started in 1891. Through their preoccupation with the logical discussion and social reforms, these reform movements made significant contribution towards a heightened communitarian consciousness.

The conditions created by the colonial rule brought about both quantitative and qualitative change in the middle classes in the Punjab. Under Sikh rule, social mobility was conspicuous, but within the traditional framework. The colonial rule hastened the process of social mobility through new policies in agriculture, trade, commerce, education and administration. The middle classes responded to the new conditions with great elan. Irrespective of caste and creed, education became the means of capturing positions of power and prestige. The structural dependence of the middle classes moulded their character and functioning. The ideologies of communalism and nationalism initiated patterns of political mobilization which culminated in the partition of the Punjab and the independence of India in 1947.

References

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