

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR

THE MIDDLE CLASS IN INDIA

12-14th June, 2009

J.P.Naik Bhavan
Indian Council for Social Science Research (Western Regional Centre)
Mumbai

Organised by
Indian Council of Social Science Research, Western Regional Centre, Mumbai
Institute for Human Development, New Delhi
Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Contemporary Studies, University of Mumbai

Paper Contributors

Key Note Address	Andre Béteille	Professor Emeritus, University of Delhi
International Dimension		
Variegated Capitalism and Middle Class as a Social Block	Bob Jessop	Professor, University of Lancaster
Theme 1- The Indian Middle Class: Old and New		
Historical Moorings: Continuities and Discontinuities	Gopinath Ravindran	Professor, Jamia Milia University, New Delhi
Who are the Indian Middle Class in Contemporary India? An Empirical Investigation	K.P.Kannan	Professor, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvantapuram, (On Leave) Presently, Member, National Commission for Enterprises in Unorganised Sector
The Great Indian Middle Class: An Analysis through their Purchasing Power	R. K. Shukla	Senior Fellow NCAER, New Delhi
Theme 2- State, Globalisation and Middle Class		
The Economic Reforms and the Middle Class	N Rajaram	Professor, MS University, Baroda
Governance, Political Democracy and the Middle Class		
The Changing Nature of India State and Indian Middle Class	Aseem Prakash	Senior Fellow, Institute for Human Development, New Delhi
Middle Class in the Politics of Economic Reforms	B. Venkatesh Kumar	Associate Professor, University of Mumbai
Theme 3- Locating the Indian Middle Class : Urban and Rural Scenario		
Cities, Middle Class and the Poor	Nandini Gooptu	Fellow, University of Oxford
Urban Politics and the Middle Class	Navdeep Mathur	Assistant Professor, Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad
Urban Informal Economy and Middle Class	Sharit Bhowmik	Professor Tata Institute of Social Sciences., Mumbai

Is there a Rural Middle Class?	S. Parasuraman	Professor and Director, Tata Institute of Social Sciences
Theme 4- Hindu Nationalism and Middle Class		
The Middle Class and Hindu Nationalism	Christophe Jaffrelot	Professor and Director, CERI, Paris
Theme 5 - Middle Class amongst the Historically Deprived Social Groups and Minorities		
Dalit Middle Class	Ramesh Kamble	Associate Professor, University of Mumbai
Muslim Middle Class	Javeed Alam	Chairperson, Indian Council for Social Science Research, New Delhi
Sikh Middle Class	Surinder Jodhka	Professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi
Middle Class Women	Nivedita Menon	Professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi
Adivasi Middle Class	Virginus Xaxa	Professor, North East Hill University, Shillong
Theme 6 - Middle Class and the Judicial Discourse		
Middle Class and Judicial Pronouncements	Navin Chandra	Professor, Institute for Human Development
Theme 7- Social Activism, Public Advocacy and the Middle Class		
Resistance and Protest from the Middle Class	Amitabh Behar	Director, National Centre for Advocacy Studies ,Pune
Theme 8- Dominant Popular Culture and the Middle Class		
Films and Television and the Middle Class	Sharad Raj	Creative Head (Fiction) Cinevistas, Mumbai

Concept Note:
THE MIDDLE INDIA

Introduction: The Proposed Initiative

Thus it is manifest that the best political community is formed by citizens of the middle class, and that those states are likely to be well- administered, in which the middle class is large...where the middle class is large, there are least likely to factions and dissension

Aristotle 306 BC (quoted in Easterly, 2001)¹

... from the early 1990s, India has experienced one of the fastest economic growth rates in the world, averaging over 6 percent and reaching 7-8 percent per year since 2003. While the country still continues to face the tremendous challenge[s]..., robust economic growth has already allowed millions to emerge from poverty creating a sizable middle class of 300 million people.....

World Bank²

Far from being mere “agents” of the ruling classes or a mere “vacillating mass” . . . the intermediate and auxiliary classes of the periphery occupy a strategic field in the economy and politics of their countries, thus obtaining power and initiatives which make it possible for them to struggle for political dominance over other classes, including the bourgeoisie.

Aijaz Ahmad³

One of the more noticeable outcomes of the recent socio-economic and political processes in India has been the emergence of the socio-economic group described as the ‘middle class’. By all reasonable estimates, the strength of the middle class in India is bigger in size than the entire population of many nations. The proposed three day seminar endeavours to bring scholars from diverse disciplines in order to understand, in a much more nuanced manner, the emergence, sustenance and expansion of the middle class in India. Organised at the J.P. Naik Bhavan conference hall at Indian Council for Social Science Research, Mumbai the seminar will have the following themes:

Theme 1- The Indian Middle Class: Old and New

Theme 2- State, Globalisation and Middle Class

Theme 3- Locating the Indian Middle Class: Urban and Rural Scenario

Theme 4 - Middle Class amongst the Historically Deprived Social Groups and Minorities

Theme 5 - Middle Class and the Judicial Discourse

Theme 6- Social Activism, Public Advocacy and Middle Class

Theme 7- Culture, Films/ Television and the Middle Class

¹William Easterly, *Journal of Economic Growth*, 6, 2001, p.317

² World Bank, “Strengthening Institutions for Sustainable Growth”, available at <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INDIAEXTN/Resources/295583-1176163782791/ch1.pdf>

³ Aijaz Ahmad, “Class, Nation and State: Intermediate Classes in Peripheral Societies,” in Dale L. Johnson, ed “Class, Nation, and State: Intermediate Classes in Peripheral Societies”, in Johnson (Ed.), *Middle Classes in Dependent Countries*, Sage, London, p.44

Contours of Exploration

The Indian Middle Class: Old and New

The emergence of the middle class was facilitated by modern education and the consequent work opportunities available in offices set up for commercial, administrative and other purposes by the colonial government⁴. The conceptual and political boundaries of Indian middle class rested on mediation between the colonial rulers and colonial subjects. The relationship was premised on subordination to colonial power but at the same time providing cultural leadership to the indigenous people⁵. In the post-colonial India, the middle class were identified as 'Nehruvian civil service-oriented salariat, short on money but long on institutional perks'⁶. In the contemporary period, the 'new' middle class, as a social group, is depicted as negotiating India's new relationship with the global economy in both cultural (socio symbolic practices of commodity consumption) and economic terms (the beneficiaries of the material benefits of jobs and business in India's new liberalised economy)⁷. Against this brief backdrop, the authors would be requested to explore the structural continuities and patterned discontinuities between the colonial, post colonial and the 'new' middle class. What is the relationship of this class at different points of time with the society on one hand and state and economy on the other? How were/are their values and interests articulated? Further, another paper is expected to use the available secondary data to take up a disaggregated analysis of middle class in terms of education, income and occupation in the context of their social location.

State, Globalisation, Political Process and Middle Class

The middle class has been conceptualised as the part of the dominant coalition governing India⁸ or as a class building hegemony for the present socio-economic and political arrangements⁹ or as the powerful intermediary class regulating India's market economy and controlling and moulding the state towards its interests to varying degrees¹⁰ or as one of the influential constituency supporting liberalisation¹¹.

⁴Andre Beteille, "The Indian Middle Class", available at <http://www.hinduonnet.com/2001/02/05/stories/05052523.htm>

⁵Partha Chatterjee, "A Religion of Urban Domesticity: Sri Ramakrishna and the Calcutta Middle Class", in Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey, eds., *Subaltern Studies VII: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992, p.36

⁶William Mazzarella, "Middle Class", p.1, available at, <http://www.soas.ac.uk/csasfiles/keywords/Mazzarella-middleclass.pdf>

⁷Leela Fernandes, "Restructuring the New Middle Class in Liberalizing India", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. XX Nos. 1 & 2, 2000

⁸Pranab Bardhan, *The Political Economy of Development in India*, 4th ed, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 51, and Pranab Bardhan, "A Political-Economy Perspective on Development," in Bimal Jalan, ed., *The Indian Economy: Problems and Prospects*, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1992, p. 333.

⁹Satish Deshpande, "The Centrality of the Middle Class," *Contemporary India: A Sociological View*, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2003, pp. 125–50.

¹⁰Barbara Harriss-White, *India Working: Essays on Society and Economy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp 43-71

¹¹Atul Kohli, "The Politics of Economic Liberalization in India," *World Development* Vol. 17, No. 3, March 1989, pp. 305–28.

Given these formulations, the objective of this theme will be to engage empirically as well as theoretically in order to understand the role and place of middle class in the ever changing nature of the Indian state against the backdrop of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation. The approach for this exploration will be to first acknowledge the fact that middle class is not a homogenous group but fragmented by social location and ideology on one hand and income and occupation on the other.

The first paper in this theme is expected to examine two strands of interrelated exploration on the relationship of the middle class with economic reforms. On one plane, the paper would be expected to undertake analyses of the major policy constructs (and their political implications) which are ushering in the ascendance of the middle class. The other strand will be to analyse the contradiction inherent in the policies emanating from the economic reforms. In other words, the reform process has promoted rapid growth in the private sector through a judicious mixture of laissez-faire and hidden and visible subsidies which in turn has produced a new capitalist class from within the middle class having cultural capital (education, knowledge, language) and social capital (networks) at its command¹². The same process of economic reforms been detrimental to the interests of the middle class due to the lowering of state subsidies and curtailment of public sector jobs. How do we explain the apparently contradictory outcomes from the standpoint of the middle class? Have the economic reforms created competing interest groups within the middle class? If yes, how does this class reconcile the competing interests and remain an important votary of economic reforms?

The second paper in this theme will analyse the emergent conceptual praxis of neo-liberal governance and its relationship with political democracy and the middle class. There is an ardent call in India, as elsewhere, for government at all levels to reinvent themselves, redefine their institutional arrangement, laws and structure of authority. In practice, it has meant that the execution of development initiatives is through an alliance between state, market and civil society thereby reinterpreting the boundaries between public and private sphere and between the state and the citizens¹³. The attempt is to incorporate market rationality into the structures and practice of the state and bring in efficiency, transparency and accountability through 'distancing decision- making and implementation in a number of areas from political influence' and pressure/ interests groups¹⁴. At the level of political democracy, the poor have acquired a much stronger voice in the political sphere. It is the elite and the middle class who seem to be increasingly shaping the policy discourse but the poor determining the fate of the electoral battle. There has also emerged a broad consensus on this model of economic reforms

¹²Carol Upadhyaya, "Capital Flows, Business Networks and Entrepreneurs in the Indian Software Industry", *Economic and Political Weekly* November 27, 2004, pp.5141-5151

¹³ For more detailed discussion see, Sarah Joseph, "Neo-liberal Reforms and Democracy in India", *Economic and Political Weekly*, August 4, 2007, pp. 3213 -3218

¹⁴ Ibid.

and governance irrespective of political leanings (left, centre, right, social justice parties, Dalit parties etc.). Political parties when in opposition may oppose reforms but avidly push the same while being in power. In this context, how do we make sense of the complex relationship between governance, political democracy and the middle class? How do we understand the right of the citizen and her relationship with the state when her vote does not translates into developmental benefits? How do we understand the much talked about processes of accountability and transparency when it is difficult, both theoretically as well empirically for the citizen to make the market and civil society accountable? What are the structural conditions which have obliterated these differences between political parties? Is it the middle class which has acquired the legitimacy to speak on behalf of society and is instrumental in obliterating these differences because they are the direct beneficiaries of the reforms?

The author of the last paper in this theme would be required to explain the socio-economic and political patterns as well as well as report the findings of ethnographic explorations on how does the middle class, with cultural capital at its command¹⁵, interact and possibly influence the state at different levels – national, federal and local - through different mechanisms. Do we have to view Bardhan's dominant coalition and the place of the middle class in the coalition through a new perspective? How does the middle class interact with the state and influence the market's outcomes on one hand and dominate political articulations and social relationships on the other? Does the middle class have competing interests at different levels of state? If yes, do the competing interests dilute their socio-economic and political power?

The overall suggested objective of the theme would be to understand the implications that the emergence of the new middle class has on the nature of the Indian state understood in terms of the discourse of state autonomy. Do the existing theories of state and its relationship with the economy provide an adequate insight into the emerging complex relationship of the middle class? Do we need to understand the modern state through new theoretical insights in face of its avowed claims for inclusive growth, increasing market penetration, and growing legitimacy of neo middle class discourse?

Middle Class in Urban and Rural Settings

In the last one and half decade, cities in India have become symbols of the economic growth achieved by the nation in the preceding years. The hitherto centres of large-scale mechanised industry (Ahmedabad, Kolkatta, Kanpur, Mumbai etc.) as well as other state capitals and major towns (Bangalore, Chennai, Hyderabad, Pune, Lucknow, Amritsar etc.)

¹⁵ Deshpande (Deshpande: Ibid) points out that cultural capital of the middle class consist of social identity- caste, community, region) or competence (education and skills, social skills, language). The cultural capital has three important attributes of property psychological benefits, excludability of others, and transmissibility across generations

including the national capital region of Delhi are witness to radical socio- economic restructuring. This theme with the help of three papers aims to understand the location and role of the middle class in the radical socio-economic restructuring of the urban space in the last decade and a half.

Many of the cities have become symbols of the “post industrial stage” propelling the service and knowledge economy of the country besides being centres of real estate development, policy experiments of public-private partnership, privatisation of basic services including security, large scale removal/shifting of working class areas, among many other things. In this context, the author of the first paper will be requested to explore the political economy of the emergence of the ‘new’ city in India. How are the present urban areas being shaped by the service economy and real estates developers? How are the middle class interests articulated in the emerging new cities? What are the terms of inclusion/ exclusion of the working class in the development/ expansion of the ‘new’ city?

The second paper in the theme will discuss the socio-political relationship of the urban politics in the ‘new’ cities. It is expected to explore urban municipal governance against the backdrop of socio-political mobilisation and electoral politics of competing political formations. How and why does municipal governance reflect the interests of the middle class, mostly at the expense of the poor? How does the middle class interact and influence municipal governance structures? What impact does the privatisation of basic services have on the middle class?

The third paper in the theme will explore the complex relationship of the growing informal sector with the middle class. In several of the “post industrial” cities, a significant proportion of the middle class have entered the market as owners of capital in order to trade in various goods and services in the informal sector markets. They are the important beneficiaries of urban economic growth while the recent spatial restructuring also demands closure/ shifting of their economic establishments. Further, the growth of modern markets catering to the needs of the aggressive consumer fetish of the middle class is displacing the traditional hawkers who were also a source of relatively cheaper consumer items meeting the immediate consumption needs of this class. In this context, how does the middle class locate itself in the apparently contradictory developments which seem to result from their high earnings and ‘modern consumerist culture’ while at times certain elements work against their interests? How does the certain minimal consensus between them shape the terms of inclusion/ exclusion of lower end entrepreneurs and workers from the ‘new’ city?

The possible frame of analysis of these papers can be to understand the complex plurality of urban life, with particular emphasis on accumulation strategy in the “post industrial age” and the role of middle class in the same. What are the socio-political circumstances for the alliance between big business and the middle class which shape up the new city socio-economic environment? What is the relationship between state, political mobilisation and urban municipal

governance? How does the present form of urban governance and political mobilisation shape 'exclusionary' citizenship?

The last paper in this theme aims to understand the emergence of the middle class in the rural areas. Several of the states in India are witness to the emergence of an agro-mercantile class who have stakes in agriculture but also sufficient economic presence in the nearest urban economy. Their social habits, educational achievements/ aspirations and consumerism seem to be similar to their urban counterparts. Can this be the basis of classifying them as the middle class? What differentiates them from the urban middle class in terms of their accumulation strategy and their relationship with the lower class/ agriculture labour on one hand and big business/ big agriculturalist on the other hand? What is their role in local politics and political mobilisation?

Middle Class amongst the Historically Deprived Social Groups and Minorities

The Indian socio-economic landscape has deep differences shaped by history. Class difference is one of the crucial divisions but often the difference is over determined by different social identities. The central question of the theme would be to understand the socio-political and economic articulation of the middle class amongst historically marginalised social groups and minorities whose life world has been shaped at the intersection of caste, religion, language and region (patriarchy in case of women). What are the political- economy factors behind the rise of the middle class (though proportionately far less than dominant social groups) amongst these social groups? How does the social/ cultural, economic and political articulation of these social groups converge as well as diverge from the dominant middle class? What is the relationship of the middle class in these groups with state, economy and society? How and what is the nature of relationships being shaped between the respective middle class from these social groups and dominant middle class in the socio-economic and political landscape?

In the case of women, besides other social institutions, patriarchy plays an over determining role in socially situating the status of women in the larger social landscape. What are the expectations from middle class women (professional or otherwise) of society in general and family in particular? How has the socio-economic profile of the contemporary middle class woman changed from the preceding decades? How does the new economy integrate middle class women while also excluding them? How do the middle class in general and its women in particular understand gender relationships?

The overall aim of the theme to locate the crucial similarities while marking out important differences in the middle class and mapping how various social institutions shape integration and exclusion.

Middle Class and the Judicial Discourse

The failure of governance to satisfy the aspirations and expectations of the people led to an emergence of an active judiciary often directing the executives to fulfil their responsibilities.

However, in the recent times, the judiciary also seems to have been an important institution directing socio-economic changes in the new cities. In this context, the author will be requested to examine the judicial pronouncements and possibly comment on the ideology of the judicial discourse. To what extent do the judicial pronouncements converge and diverge with the middle class discourse? What is the nature of inclusion and exclusion affected by the judicial discourse? What is the social construct of the middle class in the judicial pronouncements?

Social Activism, Public Advocacy and the Middle Class

The Indian middle class also appears to be at the forefront of social resistance against various forms of exclusion through their membership of social movements and NGOs and thereby striving to make the state accountable to its citizenry. It is the middle class which translates people's aspirations in Weberian bureaucratic terms for policy advocacy. It is again the middle class which tends to form grand alliances with the global civil society for articulating local demands with the international institutions and powerful nations. How do we see this stratum of the middle class in the larger political-economic discourse in general and the middle class discourse in particular? Is the civil society politics immune from larger neo-liberal politics? How do we conceptualise the resistance of the middle class? How do we understand the class relationship with the civil society 'movements'?

Dominant Popular Culture and the Middle Class

This theme is concerned with the production and reproduction of dominant culture with which the middle class in India would like to identify itself. Accordingly, the author is expected to engage herself with institutions – both economic and social - in the 'new' economy which are instrumental in providing a sense of lived middle classness. What is the role of associational life and other social organisation in producing and reproducing culture? How do markets shape middle class culture? What is the role of consumer and other goods in the ongoing process of constructing middle classness? How does middle class culture acquire the status of popular public practice? How do social and economic institutions engage with each other and construct middle class cultural behaviour?

The second paper in the theme is expected to engage with the sociology of select electronic visual mass media – commercial Hindi Cinema and popular soap operas - in shaping the middle class social world view. How does this popular medium construct social relationships and practices? How is media consumption pattern related to consumer markets and how does it reconfigure the understanding of gender relationships?