



MIDDLE CLASS MOVEMENTS

Dr. K. Sravana Kumar

Lecturer in History, N.B.K.R Science and Arts College, Vidya Nagar,
Kota Mandal, Nellore, Andhra Pradesh

Introduction:

The middle class is placed between labour and capital. It neither directly owns the means of production that pumps out the surplus generated by wage labour power, nor does it, by its own labour, produce the surplus which has use and exchange value. Broadly speaking, this class consists of the petty bourgeoisie and the white-collar workers. The former are either self-employed or involved in the distribution of commodities and the latter are non-manual office workers, supervisors and professionals. Thus, in terms of occupation, shopkeepers, salesmen, brokers, government and non-government office-workers, writers, teachers, and self-employed professionals, such as engineers, pleaders, doctors, etc., constitute the middle class. Most of these occupations require at least some degree of formal education.

This middle class is primarily a product of capitalist development and the expansion of the functions of the state in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Though the petty bourgeoisie and managers did exist in precapitalist society, they constituted a tiny class. Industrial development and expansion of markets require not only a larger managerial class than earlier, but also impel the state to shoulder the responsibilities of monitoring market competition and resolving the contradictions of capitalist development. This includes formation and implementation of welfare programmes to minimise tension in society. For carrying out these functions, the state also requires a managerial class. Formal education contributes to the expansion of this class.

It is difficult to estimate the size of this class in contemporary India. It is certainly very large. According to the calculations made by Ranjit Sahu (1986), the number of white-collar employees is larger than that of industrial workers.' A large majority of the members of the middle class belong to the upper and middle castes.

While scanning literature on the subject, one is disappointed at the absence of studies on middle-class movements per se, whereas one finds studies on peasant, working-class or tribal movements. This is not because the middle-class movements are few in number, nor because scholars have an aversion towards the middle class. They do take cognisance of the role of the middle class in various movements. But these movements are primarily analysed in terms of the issues that they raise, such as social reform movements, the nationalist movement, human rights movements, ecology movements, and so on. Or, these movements are called 'mass movements', as the issues are not class specific, nor affecting mainly the middle class. The issues are posed as societal problems. The leaders of such movements, who belong to the middle class, mobilise other classes for support.

In this section, I shall deal with the studies on those movements in which I believe the middle class played a prominent role as initiators, and those where a majority of the participants belong to the middle class. Though students also belong to this class, we have dealt with their movements separately. British rule established and introduced a capitalist economy, a new administrative system and English education in the early nineteenth century. Consequently, a tiny educated class emerged in urban areas (Desai 1957; Mishra 1978). The members of this class were upper-caste Hindus.

Muslims were, for a variety of reasons late in availing of an English education (Seal 1968). A few individuals in different parts of the country not only raised questions but also revolted against certain customs and traditions of the Hindu social system. These individuals, known as social and religious reformers, were all those who were advocates of alterations in social customs which would involve a break with traditionally accepted patterns; they were those who, convinced themselves that altered ways of thinking and behaving were positive values, sought to convince others to modify or entirely transform their ways of life' (Heimsath 1964: 4).

The reformers took up several issues. They included elimination of or change in certain caste regulations and rituals: the sari system, widow remarriage, child marriage, status of women, girls' education, prohibition, etc. Though a few talked against the caste hierarchy and untouchability, most of the reformers (except a few who led the anti-Brahmin movement), did not challenge the social structure. They adopted a gradualist approach. Heimsath argues, In India, social reform did not ordinarily mean a reorganisation of the structure of society at large, as it did in the West, for the benefit of underprivileged social economic classes. Instead it meant the infusion into the existing social structure of new ways of life and thought: the society would be preserved, while its members would be transformed (1964: 5).

The reformers either revolted individually or formed associations. These associations were of three types: general (or voluntary) associations; caste reform associations and religious reform bodies (generally called samaj) (Heimsath 1964). The Indian National Social Conference was formed in 1887. Social reform associations came into existence at provincial and local levels. Some of them were formed around one issue, such as widow remarriage or marriageable age, child marriage, whereas others took up general issues related to social reform, protesting against 'conservatism', including protests against religious heads, superstitions, caste restrictions for crossing the sea, etc. They were loose organisations whose activities were largely confined to programmes, conferences and passing resolutions. A few of them turned into charity organisations and undertook welfare programmes—particularly in education. Some reformers confined their activities to their caste. They formed caste associations and persuaded caste fellows to join for the reformation of certain unacceptable practices which they felt were either inhuman or did not fit in with the changing times. The most prominent associations were related to religious reforms. Raja Rammohan Roy, who protested against the sati system, formed the Brahmo Samaj which remained the centre for social reform activities in Bengal (Kopf 1979). The Prarthana Samaj came into existence in Bombay under the leadership of Mahadev Govind Ranade (Tucker 1977). The Arya Samaj, formed by Dayanand Saraswati, was the predominant influence in Punjab and north India (Jones 1968; Jordens 1977; Vable 1983). On the whole, social reform movements were weak in south India, despite the presence of a large number of western-educated persons. Heimsath observes that 'the region produced no reformer of national standing and only a few with lasting local influence' (1964: 253). It should be noted that the backward-caste movement as an anti-Brahmin movement was prominent in the Madras Presidency; which we have dealt with later. The main thrust of the socio-religious reform movements was to revive or rejuvenate Hindu religion and society. This was, according to many scholars, to counter the impact of western culture and the efforts of proselytisation by Christian missionaries (Heimsath 1964; Jones 1968; Bhatt 1973; Sun 1977; Jordens 1977). K. P. Gupta (1974), in his study on the Ramakrishna Mission, refutes this position. He argues that the 'innovative potentiality' of Hinduism was more responsible for its rejuvenation rather than the threat or impact of other

religions or cultures. According to A.R. Desai, the traditional social structure and religion were not able to cope with the new economic structure which was based on individualism. The reformers were therefore striving 'to extend the principle of individual liberty to the sphere of religion (1957: 258).

The social reform movements among Hindus and Muslims contributed to the development of nationalism on regional and religious lines. There were several kinds of nationalisms competing with each other. Anil Seal argues, There were keen internal rivalries, but these were between caste and caste, community, not between class and class. Moreover, those groups which felt a similarity of interest were themselves more the product of bureaucratic initiative than of economic change. Since these groups can be largely identified with the men educated in western styles, and since it was these men whose hopes and fears went into the building of the new associations that emerged as the Indian National Congress, a conceptual system based on elites, rather than on classes, would seem more promising (1968: 341).

These elite belong to the middle class. Granting that the initiative came from the bureaucracy, it was intended to bring about economic change in society in general and the middle class in particular.

The middle class participated at various stages of India's freedom movement. The major events of their collective action were the partition of Bengal in 1906, the non-cooperation campaign in the early 1920s, the anti-Simon agitation in the mid-1920s, Civil Disobedience movements in the early 1930s, and the Quit India movement in 1942. Besides this, there were a number of local-level campaigns—organised and spontaneous—against the British Raj. Though there are a large number of studies on the freedom movement, most of them are mainly focused on the leadership and their decisions. In his study on popular movements between 1945 and 1947, Sumit Sarkar argues that, 'in this as well as in other periods of modern Indian history, the decisions and actions of leaders, British or Indian, cannot really be understood without the counterpoint provided by pressures from below¹ (1982: 677). A few studies on the Bang-bhang movement, the Civil Disobedience movement and the Quit India movement, point out that there were close links between local politics and national agitations (Stoddart 1975). Use of religious and communal idioms and violence are examined by some other scholars (Irschick 1976; Hennigham 1979). The communal dimension of the participants has been highlighted by some studies.

Social reform among the Muslims began with the Aligarh movement led by Syed Ahmad Khan. The main thrust of the movement was to persuade the Muslim landed gentry to take an English education. Without English education, it was feared that the Muslims would be unable to compete with the Hindus and would remain backward. M.S.Jain (1965) argues that the spirit behind the Aligarh movement was to reassert Muslim superiority over the Hindus, which the former had lost during the early phase of the British rule. The movement generated the urge for a 'separate and independent status' for the Muslims. The Ullama of Uttar Pradesh opposed the Aligarh movement and the subsequent demand for a separate state for Muslims (Faruqi 1963). The Khilafat movement (1919-24) led by the Muslim intelligentsia and the Ullama, mobilised a cross section of the Muslims. Their claim was that the Sultan of Turkey was the custodian and defender, the protector of the holy places known as Jazirat al-Arab. The movement was supported by all the Muslim groups and by the Indian National Congress (Dixit 1969; Hasan 1981). Religious symbols, like the mosque, the haji, sufi shrines, provided a sense of belonging to the common fraternity of Islam in India (Hasan 1981). Generally, the 'divide and rule' policy of the British rulers, Muslim orthodoxy, and the educational and

economic backwardness of the Muslims, are considered to be responsible for the growth of communal Muslim politics (Desai 1957; Smith 1963). Prabha Dixit (1974) argues that a search for power was responsible for communal politics (see also Broomfield 1968). It is the argument of many scholars that the nationalist movement failed to develop secular symbols. The nationalist movement was dominated by the Hindus who used Hindu religious symbols and idioms for the freedom movement (Smith 1963; Ahmad 1969).

Seal (1968) and Brass (1970) refute the general argument regarding the backwardness of the Muslims. They point out that they were far from being backward in the Muslim-minority provinces. Gopal Krishna argues that 'it would seem that sociologically the communal movement was a movement of the privileged rather than of the deprived sections of the Muslim population (1981: 55).

A number of Hindu and Muslim communal organisations have come into existence in post-independence India. Through various programmes, they strengthen communal identities and stereotypes for each other. Sensitive issues are raised and articulated. These organisations play an important role in rousing communal sentiments. The number of communal riots has increased since the 1950s. Apart from a large number of journalistic writings and government-appointed inquiry commissions' reports, a few case studies by social scientists and activists are now available (Shah 1970; Engineer and Shakir 1985; Van der Veer 1987; Brass 1996, 1998; Horowitz 2001). They highlight not only communal antagonisms, but also economic factors in mobilising members of both communities against each other. Some studies focus on the manipulation of the elite in rousing sentiments leading to riots (Patel 1985). By now we have a good deal of documents on communal riots which include government reports and also reports by independent citizens as well as human rights groups and non-government organisations (NGOs). Systematic comparative studies on communally based mobilisation into riots need to be undertaken to understand the complexities of the phenomenon. There is a good deal of literature on secularisation, nationalism and communal politics. This requires a full-fledged review. We have excluded it from the scope of the present work.

The upper-caste Hindu middle class launched struggles in Bihar and Gujarat against reservation for the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other backward classes. Upper-caste government servants also launched agitations against the roster system which provided certain benefits to Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe employees. These agitations were primarily the result of the conflict of economic interests between upper and deprived caste groups; the middle-class leaders of these agitations raised the issue of 'merit', 'secularism' and 'efficiency'. While analysing the 1981 anti-reservation agitation in Gujarat, I.P. Desai argues that the economic structure was not able to provide employment opportunities for the lower strata of the higher castes.

The higher castes therefore wish to prevent the mobility of lower castes and contain the discontent among the lower strata of higher castes by appealing to the concealed caste sentiment among them and speaking publicly against casteism, communalism, reservation and all that is particularistic, narrow and parochial. Thus although "merit" appears to be a progressive slogan, it is in fact a weapon for defending the moribund Hindu hierarchy and maintain [the] social economic status quo (1985: 135).

By now, there are a few articles on the Gujarat anti-reservation agitation (Yagnik 1981; Bose 1985; Shah 1987) providing information about the socio-economic and political dimensions of the conflict between the upper castes and the deprived groups.

Shah (1987) argues that these two agitations were essentially struggles within the middle class. They were fights between the upper- and middle-caste members on the one hand, and the new entrants from the low castes on the other. Some sections of the middle class—white-collar government employees, school and university teachers, etc.—launched movements on economic issues affecting them, such as, revision of pay scales, bonus, job security. Though there is no systematic study on the struggles, a few descriptive accounts and analyses of the demands are available. A few of the recent movements led by the middle class began with economic issues, like price rise, scarcity of essential commodities and unemployment. But in the course of the development of these movements, these issues were sidetracked and the movements raised populist issues, which appeal to various classes. They raise moral and cultural issues. They sometimes provide an ideological basis for 'democratic capitalism' and sometimes also for 'non-capitalist development strategy' (Khoros 1980). Take the case of the 1974 Gujarat movement, popularly known as the Nav Nirman (reconstruction) movement, and the Bihar movement known as the movement for total revolution. Though both these movements began with economic issues, they also raised the issues of corruption, democratic rights and social reform- These issues were not spelled out, nor were they linked with the economic and political structure of the society. They succeeded in ousting the chief minister in Gujarat and the Congress party in Bihar (Desai 1974; Wood 1975; Jones and Jones 1976; Barik 1977; Shah 1977). Ghanshyam Shah (1977) observes that they wanted more economic benefits by bringing about certain changes in the system. 'They do not believe in changing the basic aspects of the system. They have a stake in the system. To them Revolution is a slogan.'

At the end of the nineteenth century, the educated Hindu middle class of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh launched a series of agitations for the removal of Urdu and for its replacement by Hindi in the Devnagri script. Muslim intellectuals also launched a counter-agitation in defence of Urdu (Das Gupta 1970; Brass 1977). The middle class of south India launched struggles during the 1950s and 1960s against the 'imposition' of Hindi and for the retention of English. For them it was a struggle against Hindu imperialism (Hardgrave 1965; Forrester 1966; and Rao 1979). The middle class of linguistic groups such as Marathi, Gujarati, Tclugu and Punjabi, demanded the formation of linguistic states in the 1950s. They launched agitations for these demands (Phadke 1979; Nijhawan 1982). For maintenance of their cultural identity, the middle class among the Tamilian, the Punjabi, the Naga, the Mizo populations, the tribals of Chhota Nagpur area, spearheaded agitations for the formation of separate states within or outside the Indian Union.

We have already discussed the demands of the Naga, the Mizo, and the tribals of Chhota Nagpur and other tribals for separate states or districts (see Chapter 3).

The Dravidian movement in Tamil Nadu was a backward caste or non-Brahmin movement with which we have dealt earlier. It was also directed against north Indians, and demanded a separate state named 'Dravidisthan', i.e., homeland of the Dravidians outside the Indian Union (Hardgrave 1964, 1965, 1979; Irschick 1976; Ram 1979). Periyar E.V. Ramaswamy, a leader of the Dravidian movement said, 'Tamil Nadu was all along a nation and still it is a nation and that is known as Dravidian. Civilisation, customs and manners of Tamils are different from that of Bengalees and Bombayans... Hindi language and literature are opposed to the interests of Tamilians in general and to all other non-Brahmins elsewhere, in particular.'

The Sikh community of Punjab also demanded a separate state called Khalistan. The Shri Anandpur Sahib Resolution demanded that one of the aims of the Akali Dal be

'maintaining the feeling of a separate independent entity of the Sikh Panth and creation of an environment in which the "National Expression" of the Sikhs can be full and satisfactory' (Dhillon 1974; Puri 1981, 1983; Kumar et al. 1984; Kumar 1984).

The Assam agitation, which began in the late 1970s with the formation of the All Assam Students' Union, also raised issues regarding the identity of the Assamese and the development of Assam. In a sense, it was a 'nationality' movement (Mira 1982; Gohain 1985, Basu 1992). Regional or linguistic identities have been sharpened in India since independence and they have become a potential force in mobilising the middle class which faces competition from other classes in the economic field. Robert Hardgrave asserts: Regionalism is rooted in India's cultural and linguistic diversity. Projected in geographical terms, it is at the state level both an ethnic and economic phenomenon. It is an expression of heightened political consciousness, expanding participation and increasing competition for scarce resources.... Economic grievances expressed in charges of unfairness, discrimination or Centre neglect may be fused with cultural anxiety over language status and ethnic balance. It is this fusion that gives regionalism its potency. Language and culture, like religion, are at the core of an individual's identity and when politicized take a potentially virulent form (1983: 1171).

Most social scientists have seen these movements as 'dysfunctional' or a threat to national 'unity' and 'integration'. They believe that the Indian nation state should maintain its boundaries and hold its territory together. Therefore, they are unable to view these struggles as movements for 'self-determination' (Mohanty 1982).

Nativism:

There is a very thin line between 'nativism' and 'nationalism': Katzenstein argues, 'Nativism ... is distinct from movements of ethnic, linguistic or regional subnationalism, and is specifically anti-migrant. Sub-national movements, such as in India the Akali Dal or Dravida Munnetia Kazhagam, may contain nativist elements, similarly, the mobilisation of anti-migrant sentiment may rely on ethnic, linguistic or regional loyalties' (1976: 44). According to Myron Weiner, nativism is one form of ethnic politics. Nativism is that form of ethnic identity that seeks to exclude those who are not members of the local or indigenous ethnic groups from residing and/or working in a territory because they are not native to the country or region: nativism is anti-migrant. To the extent that the D.M.K., the Akali Dal, the Andhra Mahasabha, and the Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti were not anti-migrant, they should not be classified as nativist (1978: 296).

Nativist movements are not of recent origin, there were a few such movements before independence. For instance, the movement against the non-mulki developed in Hyderabad soon after World War I, when the local educated population expressed its opposition to the government policy of recruiting Muslims from northern India into the state administrative services (Weiner 1978; Reddy and Sharma 1979). Similarly, the anti-Bengali movement in Assam protested against the domination of their educational and administrative services by Bengali Hindus (Weiner 1978; Das 1982). In post-independence India, the widely known movements are: the Telengana Nativist movement, the Shiv Sena movement in Maharashtra and the Assam movement- The Telengana nativist agitation began in 1969. Initially, the agitation was aimed at the continuance of Telengana 'safeguards' and mulki rules formulated at the time of the formation of Andhra Pradesh in 1956. At a later stage, it demanded separation of the region from the rest of Andhra Pradesh (Reddy and Sharma 1979). The Shiv Sena (i.e., the army of Shivaji) movement was initiated in 1966 in Bombay. It demanded that as Bombay was the capital of Maharashtra, Maharashtrians should be given the

opportunity to make the most of what their capital city had to offer. They asked that 80 per cent of all jobs and economic opportunities in Bombay should be reserved for Maharashtrian; (Joshi 1970; Katzenstein 1976; Gupta 1982).

The Assam movement began in 1978. Its main demands included the detection, deportation and deletion of foreigners' names from electoral rolls. The movement aimed at the ouster of the Bengali middle class which enjoyed a major share in government jobs (Weiner 1978; Das 1982). Similarly, during the late 1960s the Kannada Chaluvaligar (i.e., agitation) demanded restrictions against Tamil, Malayali, and Telugu migrants to Bangalore and preference for the local Kannada-speaking population (Weiner 1978). The underlying reason for the issue of nativism is competition for government jobs between the natives and the migrants. The cities and regions where nativist movements took place have the following characteristics:

- ✓ The locale contains a substantial number of middle-class migrants belonging to culturally distinguishable ethnic groups originating from another section of the country;
- ✓ There is a native middle class, expanding under the impetus of a growth in secondary and higher education;
- ✓ There is a highly competitive labour market in which the native middle class seeks employment in private and public sector firms and in government, where middle-class positions are already held by migrants or their descendents;
- ✓ There are limited opportunities for the native middle class to find employment outside their own locale (Weiner 1978: 293).

A small section of the urban middle-class intelligentsia—university and college teachers, researchers and lawyers—has formed organisations at state and national levels for the protection of 'civil' and "democratic¹ rights. They raise issues related to violation of 'civil¹ and democratic rights of various strata of society, including the oppressed classes (Desai 1986). The existing constitutional channels, such as the judiciary, the state assemblies and Parliament are used for challenging the government's decisions and the power of vested interests. The media is used to highlight issues and create public opinion. Fact-finding committees are appointed. The intelligentsia has also raised ecological issues. They organise conferences, publish reports and submit memoranda to the government. Studies on these organisations and their mobilisation efforts are many (Ray 1986). We shall discuss the studies on human rights movements

Participants:

Students and intellectuals have provided leadership to most middle-class movements. Though some of the populist, national and nativist movements draw support from peasants and other sections of society when they raise emotional and general issues; they continue to be dominated by the middle class. Myron Weiner observed, 'nativism is largely a middle-class sentiment, not a movement among the industrial labour force or the peasantry, even though there are culturally distinguishable migrants in the industrial labour force in many cities and in some rural areas' (1978: 293). Some scholars argue that political leaders excite regional or nativist sentiments in the middle class for their political ends. Iqbal Narain asserts that the political elite exploits situations of regional deprivation and unrest and converts them into movements to forge and strengthen its individual and factional support bases (1984). While studying regionalism in Telengana, Ram Reddy and Sharma observed that factional politics exploited the regional sentiments of the people of Telengana for strengthening their political positions. Similarly, Subrarnanyam argues, Political

leaders, when they feel that their due share is not received and they are being overshadowed and ignored, search for some kind of spontaneous rationale to infuse emotions among the people and project themselves as the protectors of public interests, and thus tensions and conflicts are created in an unparallel community in a democratic polity (1984:130).

However, Javed Alam propounds another theory. He argues, 'Re-gionalistic demands get flared up because of contradictions among the ruling classes.... The locally placed ruling classes seek greater power to further their own interests when such interests are perceived as not being served by the all India classes' (1984: 17). He does not support his argument with evidence. As a result of their assumptions that these movements are created by the political elite, scholars do not examine the mobilisation aspect of the movement. They study primarily the decision-making process among the elite. Y.D. Phadke's study on the Samyukta Maharashtra movement (1979) is a case in point. Those who adhere to such conspiracy theories do not explain why political leaders succeed in arousing nativist emotions in certain states and why they fail in others. Most studies on middle-class movements discussed above are brief. Some deal with the political decision-making process and the factors responsible for the movement. Some of the movements were 'spontaneous' and short-lived. They did not have an organisational structure, whereas some movements were well-organised. Many scholars do not analyse the organisational aspects of the movements. The studies on the Shiv Sena by Dipankar Gupta, the Nav Nirman and the Bihar movements by Ghan-shyam Shah and the Nav Nirman movement by P.M. Sheth, analyse the organisational structure of these movements. At this stage of our knowledge, it is difficult to find a pattern in organisational structures in different types of middle-class movements

References:

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