

# The Trajectory of India's Middle Class



# The Trajectory of India's Middle Class

*Economy, Ethics and Etiquette*

Edited by

Lancy Lobo and Jayesh Shah

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The Trajectory of India's Middle Class: Economy, Ethics and Etiquette

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AAP	<i>Aam Aadmi</i> Party
ACB	Anti-Corruption Bureau
ACM	Anti-Corruption Movement
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AIIMS	All India Institute for Medical Sciences
ANC	Antenatal care
AP	Andhra Pradesh
BJP	<i>Bharatiya Janata</i> Party
BPL	Below the Poverty Line
BSP	<i>Bahujan Samajwadi</i> Party
CBR	Crude Birth Rate
CDR	Crude Death Rate
CITU	Centre of Indian Trade Unions
CPIM	Communist Party of India Marxist
CPR	Common Property Regime
CSDS	Centre for the Study of Developing Societies
DSP	Durgapur Steel Plant
FC	Fishing Cooperative
FD	Fishing Department
FF	Fish Federation
FMCG	Fast Moving Consumer Goods
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GPS	Global Positioning System
IAC	India against Corruption
IHDS	Indian Human Development Survey
IIPS	International Institute for Population Sciences
IITs	Indian Institutes of Technology
IMAI	Internet and Mobile Association of India
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRDP	Integrated Rural Development Programme
IT/ITES	Information Technology /Information Technology Enabled Services
JNU	Jawaharlal Nehru University
LFPR	Labour Force Participation Rate
MISH	Market Information Survey of Households

MP	Madhya Pradesh
MPCE	Monthly per capita expenditure
MPFDC	Madhya Pradesh Fish Development Corporation
MPPF	Madhya Pradesh Fish Federation
NCAER	National Council of Applied Economic Research
NCRLM	National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NES	National Election Study
NF	National Front
NFHS	National Family Health Survey
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NRI	Non-Resident Indians
NSHIE	National Survey of Household Income and Expenditure
NSMs	New Social Movements
NSS	National Sample Survey
NSSO	National Sample Survey Organisation
OBC	Other Backward Class
PDA	Personal Digital Assistance
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
RGNF	Rajeev Gandhi National Fellowship programme
RMP	Rural Manpower Programme
RSS	<i>Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh</i>
RTI	Reproductive Tract Infections
RTI	Right To Information
SC	Scheduled Caste
SMS	Short Messaging Service
SP	<i>Samajwadi Party</i>
ST	Scheduled Tribe
TB	Tuberculosis
TDP	<i>Telugu Desam Party</i>
TFR	Total Fertility Rate
UMC	Upper Middle Class
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UPA	United Progressive Alliance
UPSC	Union Public Service Commission
VHP	<i>Vishwa Hindu Parishad</i>

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Lancy Lobo

Jayesh Shah

## FOREWORD

# THE SLIPPERY ATTRACTIONS OF THE MIDDLE CLASS

We are all middle class. Or at least the vote seeking politicians would like us to believe that we are or at the very least his or her party would do their best to get you into a middle class. Or perhaps you will slot into what is called neo-middle class.

The middle class is by its very label a slippery category. Marx and Engels began their Manifesto by asserting that all history is the history of class struggle. But the middle class was not a part of their geography of the classes. The two classes were the Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat. The feudal classes were on their way out. There was the deplorable lumpen-proletariat. But the middle class was nowhere in the classic description. Of course, the third volume of *Capital* trails off just as Marx comes to the description of class. So he never defined class properly.

For Marxists of late nineteenth century, class definitions were necessary for charting the likelihood of the socialist revolution. In this effort, the middle class was a suspect category. Its allegiances were divided. It was most likely to be enthusiastic at first for change and then betray the workers as the going got rough. So we had the middle class labelled as the petit-bourgeoisie who never quite won the admiration of the Marxists – many of whom were undoubtedly middle class.

Marx is dead and even more so is Lenin. Nowadays we need class categories for economic policy purposes, for marketing strategies and for analysing political developments. In developed countries – the UK, for example – almost everyone is described as middle class. The old romantic attachment to the notion of belonging to the working class which was there even as recently as the 1960s is no longer there. Poverty is there (by the definition of income being under 65% of the median income), as is hardship. But as far as party political rhetoric is concerned, there is only the middle class.

Strategies for measuring the size of the middle class often start with income. Let us say the middle class is somewhere between the bottom

three income deciles and the top two. Or we could say that the middle class is that group whose income is above the mean income which puts it into a minority since in an unequal society, the mean is way above the median. Income itself is a tricky notion because earned income – salary – may not be all that a family has. We need to factor in assets and move towards what the economists call permanent income. This is where narrowly defined income categories have to be supplemented by “sociological” considerations of aspirations and attitudes.

Mary Douglas, who was a distinguished anthropologist, once tried to define class by consumption patterns. In a book *The World of Goods* (1979) co-authored with Baron Isherwood, she tried to classify the goods consumed in terms of the desire to communicate. She thought that while the poorer classes spent their money on food and drink – isolating goods – the British middle classes spent theirs on acquiring telephones (important in the 1970s) and having a spare room in their flats so friends could visit. Only by consuming communicating goods could one ensure upward mobility. She wanted the welfare state to give more communicating goods to the poor so they could enjoy mobility.

The very notion of the middle class is tied in with economic development within a capitalist society. Historically, the growth of the colonial state, which began in the port cities of Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay, confined the middle class to those regions. With independence, the whole country became available for the aspiring household to be middle class. Yet growth was uneven across the regions. Thus, some regions had more of a middle class than others – the North East, for example, which remained underdeveloped.

India has transited from a rather restricted state capitalism of the Nehru-Gandhi era to a slightly more liberal version of state capitalism. This transition has thrown up new avenues for people to enter the middle class. If you add, for the Hindu sections of the population, the complication of caste, the notion of a working class Brahmin would make no sense, poor though the household may be. A middle class Dalit family is a recent phenomenon. Muslims have an even smaller middle class and that too more unevenly spread across India – more in the coastal cities of western India and in south India than in north India. This is why putting a number on the size of the middle class is such a tricky operation.

Perhaps the idea of the middle class should be used as a normative criterion of how developed an economy has become. A society which has a majority of its population defining itself as middle class can be safely called a developed society. India has a long way to go before it arrives at that stage.



In the meanwhile, enjoy this book which is rich in its scope and the quality of its contributors.

**Meghnad Desai**  
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# INTRODUCTION

LANCY LOBO AND JAYESH SHAH

## I

### **General Introduction**

The middle class has been historically linked to the question of development, especially in the post-colonial context, where one of the defining features of this category has been its role as the articulator and representative of the interests of the masses. This role was performed by this class in colonial India and continued in the post-Independence period under the Nehruvian model of development (Shabnam 2012). India's growth achievements since the 1990s have put the living standards of many Indians under global scrutiny. While the economic literature has primarily focused on poverty and inequality, the fortunes of the "new Indian middle class" have received substantial attention in the media and business journals, as their earning potential and spending habits have important implications for the national/global economy.

Who is the Indian middle class? A broad definition, reflected in most references to the middle class, places these households between the poor and the extremely rich. This potentially encompasses a very large and varied group of individuals; but the Indian middle class has been typically perceived to be an educated section of urban society employed in or seeking white collar jobs.

Is class merely a question of income? Apart from income, one needs to take into account the nature of middle class consciousness of itself. What are the concrete indicators and manifestations of the middle class? Are they neighbourhoods, clubs, associations, kinds of houses, gadgets therein, and vehicles? Do they include the middle class and the nature of the celebration of life cycle events, kinship relations, life in the neighbourhood, intercaste/interfaith relations, speech and language, and behaviour? What about the middle class within a caste? How can one recognize the middle class from its external behaviour, aspirations, and

consciousness? These are some of the questions that need to be addressed by scholars for an adequate understanding of the middle class.

The size and characteristics of the Indian middle class deserve attention for several reasons. India possesses a sixth of the world's population and therefore its middle class constitutes a significant portion of the global workforce as well as a substantial market for final products. Secondly, the Indian middle class seems ideally placed to partake of the direct trickle-down benefits of high growth and to respond to economic incentives in a way that would make the growth sustainable. Finally, the growth and consumption habits of the middle class serve as a useful metric of how living standards in India are changing. Hence, it seems essential to develop a rigorous method for defining and identifying the Indian middle class.

However, there have been increasing debates and critical analysis concerning this dimension of the middle class over recent years, mostly within the general discourse that emerged in the post-liberalization phase centering on the rise of what has been termed the “new middle class” and its implications for an altered understanding of the idea of “middle class” itself in India. It is important to point out here that surprisingly enough the relationship of the middle class to the question of development remains a relatively less attended area in the Indian scholarly domain. Although some of the recent studies have specifically looked at the relationship of the middle class to the environment issue, any holistic study of the middle class and its relationship to the broader issues of development, society and culture remain a less explored but a hugely interesting area (Shabnam 2012).

### **The Middle Class in India**

Existing scholars have a common belief that the Indian middle class is hardly monolithic and economic interests hardly homogeneous. The National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) put the middle class at 50 million people (roughly 5% of the total population of India) in 2005 and 142 million people (roughly 12% of total population of India) in 2011 (Beinhocker et al 2007). If income is a fickle way of measuring the middle class, focusing on middle class “values” can also be treacherous territory. An estimate by the political scientist Devesh Kapur, using higher education as a yardstick, was that 30 million households, one-eighth of the total population of India, were middle class in 2010 (Sitapati 2011). Presenting it in relative terms, another recent estimate by K.P. Kannan and G. Raveendran set the number of middle income Indians at around 19% of

the total Indian population in the year 2011 (Kannan and Raveendran 2011). However, they also point to significant regional variations in the spread of the middle-income group. Another “value”-based definition by sociologist Beteille (2001), focuses on occupation status and non-manual work. From the different studies on the subject, it is possible to conclude that the Indian middle class comes from varied economic backgrounds, constitutes a relatively small percentage of the population and is slightly easier to define in terms of “values” (Sitapati 2011).

Contemporary research on the Indian middle class points out that there are two opposing camps, reflecting contrasting standpoints, concerning this class (Shabnam 2012). First, the middle class is seen as having grown in terms of its sheer numerical strength and having established itself as a prominent consuming class that can be used as a case to prove the success of the liberalization of the Indian economy even to the extent of the coming of a “New India”. Secondly, such claims have been attended with a moral anxiety concerning the changing nature of this class: whether the rise of this class, as a marker of increasing consumerism in India, can be seen as a welcome change and whether it has wider implications. The question of critical importance is the impact these policies have had on most members of a class which for quite some time now have quite demonstrably surrendered all pretence of idealism or morality or social sensitivity on the twin altars of self-interest and material well-being. The policy of economic liberalization provided the Indian middle class with an excuse for separating its world even more blatantly from the vast masses of the destitute and deprived in India (Varma 2007).

The role of the middle class, thus perceived, and the moral, ideological underpinnings of the idea of the middle class as representing wider interests of the nation which seem to have undergone a radical change over recent times, naturally come under closer scrutiny in any discussion on the middle class and its relationship to the question of development (Shabnam 2012). If we try to look at some of the basic assumptions of this claimed change it seems to suggest a neat inter-connection between the changing state framework and its policy of economic reforms, the resultant changing class location of the middle class and consequently, its changing class characteristics and the interests that it represents. The middle class also needs to be understood analytically in terms of its role in relation to the state, market and the civil society and the role it continues to play in articulating the socio-economic and political interests of diverse communities (Jodhka and Prakash 2011). While this conceptual elaboration restricts the numerical strength of the middle class, it expands

the analytical frame to understand the interaction of the middle class with the state, market, and civil society.

The main focus of the book is some general claims of change concerning the relationship of the middle class to the question of development, society, culture, and public advocacy. This book brings together the diverse lines of arguments provided by the scholarly domain concerning middle class. In keeping with the focus, the book attempts to fulfil the following objectives:

- To explore the structural continuities and patterned discontinuities between the colonial, post-colonial and the “new” middle class
- To understand the relationship of the middle class at different points of time with the society on one hand and the state and economy on the other
- To make sense of the complex relationship between governance, political democracy, and the middle class
- To understand how the middle class interacts with the state and influences the market on one hand and dominates political articulations and social relationships on the other
- To understand the socio-political and economic articulation of the middle class amongst historically marginalized social groups like Dalits, Tribals and minorities
- To discuss the socio-cultural changes among the middle class in India
- To look at some of the general claims of shift concerning the relation of the middle class to the question of development, society, culture, and public advocacy

## II

The book is divided into six parts. The first part of the book is based on the theme “*The Indian Middle Class: Old and New*” and attempts to explore and understand the following:

- The sociological markers – changing ideologies and aspirations of the middle class
- The transformation of the Indian middle class
- The “then” and “now” of the Indian middle class
- The growth and changing aspirations of the Indian middle class
- The “new” middle class identity in the post liberalization period

- The idea of consumerism as the marker of the “new” middle class

Panini focuses on the process of bourgeoisification which is gaining new social significance in India under the influence of globalized market forces and advances in information and media technologies. Bourgeoisification refers to the expansion of the social space occupied by the middle class and to its increasing size and salience in terms of the power and influence it wields in economic, political, and social dimensions. It is both a structural and a social process. According to him, the Indian middle class has access to “soft power” whereby it gains the power of persuasion and legitimacy for its ideas and actions. The Indian middle class is also very diverse and colourful and bourgeoisification will help strengthen these trends of the middle class.

Raijada attempts to understand the “then” and “now” of the Indian middle class in the context of its composition and structural changes, its claims of arrival, its aspirations, attitudes, and value systems and government policy contributions. Her essay unravels the transformation of the middle class in the context of some sociological markers and their changing ideologies and aspirations. She charts the course of middle class growth during three periods, viz., 1850–1947, 1947–1991 and 1991–present times. According to her, the middle class has emerged as a multi-layered class from a single homogenous class. A survey carried out by her examines various aspects of the middle class such as travelling patterns, consumption patterns, and access to medical facilities.

Jha, while focusing on education, income, and occupation, traces the trajectory and the various processes involved in the making of the middle class in India from the time it was regarded as “an important social formation of some significance”. She also tracks the growth of the Indian middle class during three significant periods – the pre-British period, British rule and post-independence period. She concludes that post-independence India saw the middle class having a “managerial” relationship with the state as service and professional classes and later as an “assertive and visible” competitor for claims on the state, and these developments can be said to be also responsible for the rise of the new middle class identity in liberalizing India. The cultural capital of higher education and social capital acquired through professional careers continue to dominate the new middle class but along with it, it is also distinguished from the “old” Indian economy by its global integration.

Juhi Singh aims to examine the dilemmas of conceptual use and definitions of the middle class from the available literature and provide possible explanations for more convincing use of the word “new” or

“emergent” middle classes. With an ambiguity that pervades the definition of the “new middle class”, she explores the experiences of three respondents belonging to different castes and social backgrounds with respect to their professional experiences and aspirations. This was carried out using the case study method. She concludes by putting forward both an idea and a question as to whether consumption and consumerism can be considered as the markers of the new middle class.

The second theme, “*The Indian Middle Class, the State, Globalization, and Development*”, reflects upon critical issues such as:

- The dynamics of the state and the middle class especially in the post urbanization period
- Conflict of interest between different sections of the middle class
- Political implications of the organization of the middle class
- The impact of the middle class on Indian politics
- Differences between the old and the new middle class
- The nature of politics with the rise of middle class of a particular type – especially affiliated to a particular identify and type of nationalism
- The nature and growth of the middle class in India

Leela Fernandes discusses the Indian middle class and the post-liberalization state with reference to a theoretical framework. She points out that though scholarship in this area has looked at the relationship between the state, business, and workers, less attention has been given to the ways in which the relationship between India’s middle classes and the state was restructured in the post-liberalization periods of the mid-1980s and 1990s. She puts forth a theoretical analysis of this relationship between the state and the middle classes with a focus on how middle class–state relations play a role in shaping the post-liberalization state developmental agenda and the tensions and the strains that arise through conflicts that emerge between this post-liberalization state agenda and the broader developmental multi-class demands on the state.

Taking an economist’s view of the middle class, Lahiri’s essay touches upon several significant features such as:

- The definition of middle class
- The variety of alternative understandings of the middle class in India
- The importance of the middle class in India
- The link between sustainable development and middle class



- The nature of the growth of middle class

According to him, in India the middle class has made strides, but not as much as in some other Asian countries. After providing a detailed introduction to the definition of the middle class and the role of the middle class in economic development, he discusses whether the policy stance in India has given short shrift to the middle class by focusing on other income categories. He also suggests that the middle class has failed to become a vocal interest group to steer the course of economic policies in a democratic set up.

Looking to the perspective of mass media professional, Prabhu explores the following four issues: the rise of social groups that go in the making of the middle class in India, the appearance of consumer based identity of the middle class and its job preferences, the impact of the middle class on Indian politics as well as on state policy, and a shift in the political leanings of the Indian middle class since the 1990s. He attempts to track the growth of the Indian middle class during the pre- and post-independence era as well as state activities that led to the growth of the middle class. He observes that the middle class has served as a backbone for economy, democracy, and modernization in the country.

Ashutosh Kumar addresses the question of the “new” middle class and its significance in India. He refers to the expansion of the middle class with the emergence of the new categories of the middle class in late post-colonial India experiencing economic and democratic transition. He suggests that these emergent categories of the “new” middle class and its economic, cultural, and political choices are increasingly influencing the way politics and economies are assuming shape in India. He refers to the middle class as “cultural entrepreneurs” who easily lap up authoritarian leadership and alternative forms of politics.

Part Three of the book, “*Locating the Indian Middle Class in Regional, Urban, and Rural Scenarios*”, deliberates on the following in the four essays:

- The standard of living and status of health of middle class groups
- The need to develop a universal definition and measurement techniques with respect to the middle class in varied contexts
- The changing ethos of the Gujarati urban middle class
- The emergence of new urban Gujarati middle class, different from the traditional
- The nature and dynamics of rural middle class
- Change in Rural–Urban dynamics of the middle class

- Examination of the processes of depeasantization, embourgeoisement and the subsequent rise of the rural middle class

On the Bengali middle class, Howladar attempts to engage with the various nuances of politics in the state of West Bengal *vis-à-vis* the middle class. He traces the trajectory of the Bengali middle class (referred to as the *Bhadralok* in colonial times) from the era of British colonialism to the Left rule and now the Trinamool rule in Bengal. With the coming of Mamata Banerjee at the helm of power, there has been the subsequent emergence of identity politics in the state. This seems to threaten the prevalent hegemony of the middle class which characterized the Left Front regime. He undertakes a case analysis of Bengali commercial cinema to highlight how the old middle class is loosening its grip over popular culture. Presently, Bengali commercial cinema is directly catering to consumerist aspirations and fantasies connected with neo-liberalism. He observes that the present regime in West Bengal is trying to break down the old *Bhadralok* hegemony and create a new *Bhadralok* class with allegiance to the Trinamool.

Supriya Singh comments upon several dynamic changes in the political and social behavior of the Indian middle class. According to her, a significant shift is seen towards modern day occupations, individual-centric life, inclination towards middle class values and consumerism. She examines the processes of depeasantization, embourgeoisement and subsequent emergence of rural middle class as an outcome of land transactions. She calls for sociological attention to the rise and growth of the rural middle class based on the study of two villages of Lucknow district in Uttar Pradesh using intensive fieldwork as well as secondary data. The trend of the rural middle class moving to urbanization and modern day consumerist values is increasingly being observed and this has resulted into a change in the structure and nature of the rural middle class.

In an effort to map the nature of social change in Charotar, Gujarat, Shashikant Kumar focuses on inter-linkages established from the study of sample villages of Anand *taluka* (an administrative unit of a district) from secondary data as well as primary data. He considers several indicators such as job profiles, income changes, change in housing characteristics and consumption indicators for the study. He argues for a change in urban-rural dynamics by virtue of identical demands of goods and services fuelled by new economy as the reduction in migration trends, consumption of white goods, and highly mobile social class requires needs for more focus on the rural middle class who are emerging as new drivers of economic growth in India.

Rajesh Raushan observes that the Indian middle class is a heterogeneous group and embodies diversity in language, religion, and caste. His study is framed to analyse the standard of living and status of health of the middle class in the country using the third wave of National Family Health Survey (NFHS) data collected in 2005–06 for all 28 states and Delhi. The wealth index of the household is used to find out Indian middle class population. He depicts several statistical results related to parameters like availability of different facilities and health status of the middle class with reference to the illness suffered by them. He concludes that there is a huge variation among social groups even within the middle class and this call for further investigation.

The fourth part, *“The Middle Class among Historically Deprived Social Groups and Minorities”*, addresses broad issues such as:

- The middle class among the Indian Muslim community
- The notion of a Bengali middle class from the vantage point of it being a social guardian, a power block and a mediating agency
- The emergence and issues of the Indian Christian middle class and the challenges faced by them

Significant points such as threats to Indian secularism by extremist forces, internal tensions among the Christian middle class in India, the crisis of identity faced by them, the search for alternative narratives of the middle class and how the middle class looks at class, caste, gender, and liberalization come up for discussion in the four chapters of this section.

Aditya Agarwal focuses on the middle class among the Indian Muslim community and brings to light several aspects with respect to the demographic structure, educational backwardness, and stratification in the Indian Muslim community. He argues that the rise of the middle class among the Muslim community in recent years has not been sufficiently studied. He attempts to explain two major concerns about what factors explain social and educational backwardness of “lower” groups of the Muslim population of India and what factors contribute to the rise and growth of the middle class in the Muslim community in India.

The next essay unfolds the experiences of the Indian Christian middle class and the challenges before them. Justin Jose attempts to identify who the middle class are in the Christian community, what their economic pattern is in this era of liberalization, and whether any improvement can be made in their present status. He comments upon various issues of relevance like the emergence of the Indian Christian middle class as narrated by three real life experiences of Christians belonging to the

middle class from different parts of the country, the divisions within the Christian community, and the nature of the different “middle classes” among the Indian Christians. He also provides some concrete suggestions regarding the stabilization of the complex relationship between the emerging Christian middle class and the government with respect to their socio-cultural and economic uplift.

The fifth part deals with “*Sociocultural Changes among the Indian Middle Class*” and discusses the following issues of a diverse range:

- Ageing in India – The class demographics and policy issues
- Indian middle class as a power block
- The need for extensive academic engagement with the middle class
- The idea and representations of the middle class as reflected in popular culture
- Middle class youth and the social media
- Understanding the role of the middle class in relation to changing patterns and trends of communication

Bhagat argues that ageing is a matter of recent concern and much historical and theoretical debate surrounds this issue. While ageing is an achievement in human society, it has put forth enormous challenges. In India, there are about 100 million people aged 60 plus. The aged are not a homogeneous group and they belong to different classes with varied challenges and potential for change. His chapter analyses the conditions of the aged from an economic perspective, particularly their sources of income and livelihood, support they receive from their family and children, their living arrangements and the extent of support from state programmes. He tries to argue that old age support should not be seen as a mere response from the government and families but the civil society led by middle class has an even greater role to play for a productive and dignified integration of old people in a time of rapid changes in the institutions of family and social organizations. He concludes that ageing is a success story and the problems faced by the middle class elderly should be the subject of research.

In continuing with providing an in-depth understanding of the role of the middle class in relation to changing patterns and trends in communication, Rachna Sharma explores the emergence of a new middle class in relation to social media and youth. She observes that in keeping with the characteristics of social media, its ability to mitigate the constraints of space and time, its participatory nature and the diverse range of communication and expression made possible by its use, there seems to

be a rise in the pro-active socio-political existence of the youth who use such media. She attempts to study the implications of social media and the behaviour of youth. Since social media are creating a parallel virtual society with its own norms, its own public sphere, and its own set of social sanctions, it becomes interesting to try and understand the socio-cultural-political process and behaviour of the emerging middle class and its relationship with the real society and social media.

The last part of the book is on the theme “*Social Activism, Public Advocacy, and the Middle Class*” and discusses the following themes:

- Participation of the middle class in recent movements and the expression of middle class angst against the state
- Wider social engagement of the Bengali middle class by an examination of the narratives of public sector employees connected to several associational spaces
- Engagement of the middle class with the ruling class and its implications for a particular community

Pathania provides a comparative view of India Against Corruption (IAC) Movement and the Anti-Rape protest movement in Delhi with respect to the role of the urban, educated middle class in both the movements. He attempts to discover commonalities and differences in both the movements which appeared to be mainly middle class – a force to reckon with – in the chapter. He observes that the mass base for both the movements was mostly middle class and it reflected the angst of the middle class against the inefficiency of the state. The media (especially the social media) served as the most crucial platform for information for the middle class. The middle class used both these movements to get across their grievances against the political system.

Shabnam’s essay examines the middle class as an “active” agent shaping its own “class-ness” by analysing some middle class voices from a steel township in West Bengal – the Durgapur Steel Plant (DSP). Through a contextualized analysis of an on-going empirical work conducted in the Durgapur Steel Plant Township, she explores the theme of the wider social engagement of the Bengali middle class by looking at the narratives of some of the public sector employees who were connected to various kinds of extra-professional, associational spaces, be they formally political, cultural, or of the civil society forum.

Jharna Pathak mirrors the debate on common property resource centres around issues of a particular strategy for managing it in order to cater to the growing demand of communities that depend on it and the economy at

large that would like to benefit from the use of natural resources. She uses the Fishing Cooperatives (FC) formed in the large reservoir project of Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat to look into the process of understanding the engagement of the middle class with ruling class and its implications in terms of income and inequality of fishermen. She discusses the future of corruption, economic reform, and democracy in developing countries in her essay.

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