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Q2(c)

Discuss the salient features of 'new middle class' in India

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · Sociology GS 2 · 10 marks · Social Classes in India

Social Classes in India: Agrarian class structure; Industrial class structure; Middle classes in India.

Core demand of the question

- Discuss the salient features of 'new middle class' in India
- Keep the note to a 10-mark length

Revision summary

The new middle class grows from post-1990s services and consumption.

It differs from the old state-salaried middle class.

It is split between secure professionals and anxious aspirants.

Caste and kinship still shape entry and marriage.

Merit talk sits beside network privilege.

Introduction

India's new middle class is the post-liberalisation layer of urban, often English-using consumers and service workers. It is new in market style, not always new in caste capital.

Body**Salient features**

- It is tied to private services, IT, media, and the informal white-collar fringe, unlike the older Nehruvian salaried state class.
- Consumption, housing societies, and coaching markets mark status as much as a government post once did.
- **It is internally split:** a secure professional peak and a precarious aspirational mass that **Yogendra Singh** would read as uneven modernization.

Social composition

- Dominant and upper castes are over-represented, yet OBC and Dalit entries through education make the class a mixed, tense field.
- **Beteille's differentiation shows:** occupation may rise while marriage stays ranked.

Politics and culture

- It often speaks a language of merit and nation, and is uneasy with reservation even when it uses kinship networks.
- Women in this class enter paid work more, while Seed and Earth honour still polices the household.

Flow diagram

Liberalisation services -> New middle class
New middle class -> Consumption credentials
New middle class -> Caste kinship residue
New middle class -> Split secure vs precarious

Conclusion

The new middle class is a consumption-and-credential formation of liberalising India. Its salient features are private-sector work, status goods, internal inequality, and a caste shadow that the word 'new' does not wipe away.

Facts & figures

Liberalisation 1991

Policy turn that expanded private services as the class's economic base.

IT-BPO belt

Visible occupational core of the new urban middle class.

Beteille

Differentiation of occupation from ritual rank, incomplete in this class's marriages.

Yogendra Singh

Modernization of tradition: new consumption with older family ethics.