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Q2(b)

Elaborate the salient features and the role of middle class in India's democracy and development

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · Sociology GS 2 · 20 marks · Social Classes in India

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

Core demand of the question

- Elaborate the salient features and the role of the middle class in India's democracy and development
- Use **Beteille**, **Yogendra Singh**, and the **Rudolphs**
- Cover composition, politics, and development functions

Revision summary

- **The middle class is heterogeneous:** old salariat, new services, and some rural rich.

Beteille stresses internal split and the tension between hierarchy and equality.

The **Rudolphs** and **Yogendra Singh** place it inside modernizing tradition.

It staffs the **developmental state** and shapes media democracy.

It is not the electoral majority and is divided by caste.

Introduction

India's middle class is a layered set of salaried, professional, small-business, and farm households that live by education, office, and consumption more than by large land or factory ownership. Andre **Beteille** treated it as a growing, internally split formation whose values matter for both democracy and development.

Body

Salient features

- **It is heterogeneous:** old professional salariat, public-sector staff, new private services and information-technology workers, and a rural rich-peasant fringe.
- Entry routes are English education, credentials, and urban networks, which still carry caste and regional bias even when the language is merit.
- **Yogendra Singh places this class at the hinge of modernizing tradition:** it uses caste associations and also constitutional talk.
- Family strategy is typically delayed marriage, heavy schooling investment, and a nuclear or translocal household, not a clean break from kinship.

Role in democracy

- The **Rudolphs** showed traditional groups learning modern politics; the middle class supplies lawyers, journalists, party managers, and NGO staff who run that learning.

- It defends procedural democracy, courts, and civil liberties more loudly than many agrarian poor, yet it also fears reservation and street protest when its own mobility feels blocked.
- **Beteille** notes a tension between hierarchy in social life and equality in political ideology; the middle class lives that tension daily.
- Media and, later, social media amplify middle-class agendas, from anti-corruption campaigns to urban governance, which can deepen democracy or narrow it to city consumers.

Role in development

- **Development planning after 1950 used this class as the staff of the developmental state:** engineers, teachers, doctors, and clerks.
- Liberalisation expanded a consuming middle that legitimises growth, private education, and urban infrastructure.
- A. R. Desai would warn that a middle class allied to capital may treat labour and land reform as disorder.
- Inclusive development still depends on whether this class supports public health, common schools, and fair farm prices, or only gated services.

Limits

- It is not a majority. Electoral democracy still turns on poorer rural and urban masses.
- Caste blocs inside the middle class prevent a single class-for-itself politics.

Flow diagram

Education office services -> Middle class
Middle class -> Democratic procedure media courts
Middle class -> Developmental state and consumption
Middle class -> Caste split and reservation anxiety

Conclusion

The Indian middle class is a credentialed, split, and politically noisy formation. It staffs development and argues for democratic procedure, while its own caste and consumption interests can thin both democracy and equal development.

Facts & figures

Beteille

Analysed the Indian middle class as expanding, status-seeking, and internally differentiated.

Yogendra Singh

Middle groups as carriers of modernization of tradition through education and occupation.

Rudolphs

Modern political forms used by older status groups, including urban professionals.

Developmental state

Planning-era middle class as the personnel of public services and industry.

Post-1991

Private services and information work enlarged a consuming urban middle.

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