

WRAP Exams · wrapexams.com

Prelims PYQ, Mains model answers, and copy evaluation. Write to the desk for this paper, a doubt, or the AI waitlist.

ask@wrapexams.com · +91 85951 84903 · wrapexams.com

Q3(c)

Describe the main features of Indian new middle class. How is it different from the old middle class?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · 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

- Characterise the old (colonial / early post-colonial) middle class
- Characterise the new middle class after liberalisation
- Compare occupation, culture, politics and relation to caste
- Use **B. B. Misra**, Beteille, Fernandes, Dipankar Gupta as anchors

Revision summary

The old middle class grew from colonial education, law and bureaucracy and later staffed the Nehruvian state.

The new middle class grew after 1991 around private services, IT and consumption.

Beteille and Misra describe the older service stratum; Fernandes describes the consumer-citizen.

Caste and English schooling shape entry into both.

The new class is larger but still a minority; it has not absorbed the informal majority.

Introduction

- **The old Indian middle class was largely a child of the colonial state:** clerks, lawyers, doctors, teachers and the early ICS/IAS. The **new middle class** is a child of **1991**, private services, and consumption. They share aspiration and English; they do not share the same employer or the same idea of the public good.

Body**Old middle class**

B. B. Misra traced a professional and bureaucratic stratum created by English education and law courts. It led the national movement, staffed Nehruvian planning, and often spoke a language of **austerity, science and secular office**. Caste was not absent-Kayastha, Brahmin, Bhadrak, Tamil Brahmin over-representation-but the **role model was the gazetted officer**, not the mall. **André Beteille** stressed education and the service class as a relatively autonomous domain of inequality beside caste and land.

New middle class

- **After liberalisation, Leela Fernandes and others describe a consumer-citizen:** IT and BPO, finance, organised retail, private hospitals and coaching. Income is more private-sector and contractual. Culture is branded, gated, and media-saturated. Politics often leans toward **order**,

anti-corruption spectacle and Hindu-majoritarian comfort, rather than the old socialist vocabulary-though this varies by city and caste. Reservation debates split this class: some see merit as a sacred scarce good; OBC and Dalit professional fractions are themselves a new middle class.

- **Differences:** employer (state vs private/global); security (pensioned vs flexible); spatial form (civil lines vs gated township); gender (a larger visible cohort of employed women in services); and relation to the poor (planning paternalism vs security-and-consumption distance).

Continuity: both use **education as the main elevator**, both remain skewed by caste and metro location, and both fear falling into the informal majority.

The new class is numerically larger yet still a minority. Calling all smartphone users "middle class" is advertising, not sociology.

Flow diagram

Old middle class -> State professions

New middle class -> Private services and consumption

Education -> Old middle class

Education -> New middle class

Conclusion

The old middle class was professional-bureaucratic and state-facing. The new middle class is private, consuming and globally linked. Caste and schooling structure both. The shift is real; it is not the death of the old service class, which still sits in sarkari offices.

Facts & figures

B. B. Misra

Classic historical sociology of the Indian middle classes under colonial rule.

1991 reforms

Liberalisation that expanded private services and a consumption-led middle class.

Leela Fernandes

Analysed the new middle class as a political and cultural project, not only an income slab.