The Rising Indian Middle Class: A Case Study of Anna Hazare Movement

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Abstract
This paper is scripted in the context of India’s rampant growth in economic realm and an emergence of the strong Indian middle class as an aftermath to this progress. The economic march of any country must coincide with the fulfillment of the demands of its public in political sphere as well. Long colonial experience of India also illustrates the fact that political demands need to be satiated in a society otherwise existing rule fails to commensurate the demands of the educated masses and results in turbulence as it happened during the freedom movement of India. This paper attempts to unveil the core assumptions that led to the genesis of a strong Indian Middle class, the potential and demands which got translated in the form of a mass activism when Anna Hazare emblemized against corruption in India which is a shared dilemma of post-colonial states. The massive resistance of Anna Hazare in India that continues even today against the congress led central government is the applied manifestation of the assertion and dynamism of Indian Middle class. India’s middle class yearns for its potent assertion in political sphere that’s why it stood by a person who is prolocutor of orthodoxy and traditionalism.

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1. Introduction:

The colonial impact on the recent development of India cannot be ignored. In colonial legacies India inherited strong administrative structure, intermediaries and strengthened political elite.\(^1\) India during its inceptive years decided not to join any of bloc, so it did not go for any of specific economic system rather it opted for mixed economy with centralized planning.

Nehru being an idealist went for the institutional development of India with the consolidation of the electorates which resulted in the strengthening of democratic practice in India. The present day’s India’s outburst economic growth owes much to the democratic development in India because development takes place when there would be political stability. \(^2\)

India emerged as a vibrant and stable democracy so the democracy and development nexus is more viable in India. This nexus operates with the structural transition in varying levels of development. The incidence of democracy is undoubtedly related to the level of economic development. \(^3\)

Post 1991 as a reverberation to the liberalized economy India embarked on the road of rampant economic growth. India succeeded in bringing the millions of people out of the desperate poverty and placed them in Middle class now largely settled in cities. India’s household income is likely to triple in next two decades and would become 5\(^{th}\) largest consumer economy by 2025 \(^4\)

It illustrates the fact that India is making headway economically which is resulting in the formation and consolidation of a strengthened middle class. Middle class for any country is very important as it renders new ideas, innovations, human capital, and struggle.

As result of neoliberal policies it has become a potential consumer economy where a large number of people are entering in this class and are driving consumption.

There exists a two way promising relationship between this economic prosperity and newly emerged middle class. At one hand this economic prosperity is thriving India’s consumerism with better standard of life and on other hand it is generating new ideas of political representation, a sense of maturity and a sphere of its assertion.

India’s increasing significance in global sphere is imparting a sense of revamped Indian nation which is new for India as well. India has become an attractive destination for the world. When world was passing through the dire straits of economic recession India was celebrating its continuous annual growth rate of 9%.

At home it has not only improved the socioeconomic conditions but increased awareness, consciousness and made the Indian middle class concerned with their political order. This concerned middle class yearns for its say and assertion in political sphere as well.

The anti-corruption movement of Anna Hazare over the issue of Jan Lokpal bill is the applied manifestation of the same phenomenon, where the Middle Class of India is striving to have its say and acknowledgement.

2. The Indian polity in post-colonial era:

India at its independence was a post-colonial state. So like other state India faced the same challenges as other states in transition face. Post independent India inherited political and constitutional legacy of British Raj with immensely diverse, caste and class based social structure. How democratic practices get settled down in such a diverse society then as it is highly unusual in post-colonial states.

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It was commonly argued by the British rulers of India that parliamentary democracy was unsuited to the society intensely divided into religious and other communal groupings where social structure was imbued with hierarchy rather than ideology.\textsuperscript{6}

India was confronted with three major riddles at that time. One was how to manage the democracy within such a diversified framework. Second question was how to deal the question of religion in the newly independent state. And third query was going with which system of economics and joining either bloc.

The first concern was addressed with linguistic regional based settlements where new regions were setup those who were pledged by the political elite during the freedom struggle. Contemporarily the emerging Indian autonomous regionalism also owes to that settlement. India was declared as parliamentary democracy in its constitution with a strong centre.

India declared itself as a secular state with no acclaimed religion. Here India maneuvered nimbly. This secularism in India though is double faced, where majoritarianism prevails. Minorities are pampered for their vote banks.

None of the economic system was opted completely. India went for centralized planning and mixed economy. A sphere of nonaligned movement was created. India wished to lead the decolonization movements and to become a leader of Asia.

Having received strengthened state machinery and a strong political elite India imparted a sense of mature civilization which was translated by Nehru. India must be respected and honoured. With the domination of congressional rule for initial 17 years, the India got settled down with electoral practices and democratic rituals both at central and local level.

The Indian democracy in early phases can be best understood in understanding the socioeconomic determinants and negotiation of power. India maintained a thin line balance between the centralization and decentralization. Secondly in elite dominated framework the interests of powerful have been safeguarded while not completely excluding the interests of middle class.

As federal democracies go, India is relatively centralized state. While many critics have made this observation, the fact is that demands for decentralization only makes sense in the context of centralized authority, authority and wealth have to exist before they can be redistributed.7

3. The Indian Middle Class

The very conception of Middle class in weberian context is a social stratum in societal hierarchy that lies above the working class but below the upper class. Though Middle class seems purely an economic term but its connection with the social and cultural dynamics cannot be kept aside. Rather it can be defined in socioeconomic perspective.

Middle class is an offshoot of modernity. In sociological approach it is an upward mobility with the transforming means of subsistence, reversing trends of traditionalism and altering pedagogical patterns.

The middle class always work on the idea of calculated risk and is always indulged in the game of its survival. The middle class thinks in the short term and makes a clear vision of the life they desire and focus on it.8

In India the middle class dates back to the colonial era. The advent of British rule brought the unintended consequences of modernization through institutions. British Raj replaced English with Persian as an official language; modern institutions of education were setup. Railways and effective communication network was established. The structural constraints of colonialism placed this newly emerging social group in a unique position of ambivalence that rested between the privileges and points of access that education provided and restricted access to political and economic power.9


8Keith Cameron Smith. The Top 10 Distinctions between Millionaires and the Middle Class.(Ballantine books, 2007), P.1.

People started transforming themselves according to the changing trends of the time. Job opportunities were created. Communal competition was increased. It resulted in the genesis of nobility which was educated and aware as well. This newly emerged nobility was the Middle class of that time. It was the sense of deprivation of non-representation in this class that resulted in the mutiny of 1857. British Raj also realized that if they had to extend their rule then they must have to give representation to the natives of India.

To compensate Indian demands at primary level the local bodies act of 1861 was given by the Raj. It significantly escalated the communal competition and later on the construction of identities also happened through these differences which were institutionalized by Raj through census.\textsuperscript{10}

Reforms of 1909, 1919 and Act of 1935 were in fact the submission of the demands of the Middle class. The leadership of the freedom movement was educated elite that was a representation of the middle class of that time.

Post independent India showed slow involvement of people in shaping the destiny of political setup as the leadership was the same who led India during the freedom struggle. So the frame of rule was the representation of Indian Middle class. India after independence immediately went for the communitarian reorientation thus indulging the masses, so the middle class in India in its early phases was largely state dependent.

This was the growth of Indian Middle class in its second phase but it was having strong linkages with the pre independence middle class through the institutions and elite which India inherited from colonial experience. Nehrvan era was the initiation of state interventionist policies in the economy.

India went for a change in its educational policy with a uniform system of education which later on resulted in a significant increase in the education at local level and creation of employment opportunities. Thus this newly emerged middle class was largely dependent on state. The license raj frame of rule largely involved this vibrant section of the society with its direct stakes in the

\textsuperscript{10}Ian Talbot. India and Pakistan: Inventing the Nation.(Hodder Education Publishers, 2000),
system. The different trade and labour unions were setup. The nature of the political mobilization of the middle class can be traced with white collar union.\textsuperscript{11}

4. **Rise of neo-metropolitan bourgeoisie**

It is the third phase of the growth of Indian Middle class in post liberalized economic era which rapidly altered the socioeconomic conditions in rural areas and gave a way forward for a new class of the society with an improved standard of living but below the bourgeois. The peculiarity attributed to this class was that it lacked political representation but with significant and influential economic weightage.

The concept of metropolitan bourgeoisie was firstly discussed by Hamza Alvi in his seminal essay, “The State in Post-Colonial Societies” \textsuperscript{12} He discussed this in Marxist context but in this case neo metropolitan bourgeoisie accounts for neoliberalism where adoption of neoliberal economic policies in the wake of post-cold war era India underwent for public private entrepreneurship.

It not only resulted in the accumulation of the capital but transformed the socioeconomic condition at ground level which in its long run dawned a strong, aware and strengthened middle class. India in its history remained dominated as a populously rural country. This middle class is largely getting settled in the urban areas of India where in past India as compared to its counter rivals china and Indonesia was far less urbanized.

It has brought a major shift in Indian polity where trends of ruralization are getting reversed. Access to means of information and modern education are vibrantly socializing the masses and are resulting in a mass awareness at large.

Though the economy would be remain dominated by the megacities but a handful of cities like Ludhiana and Chandigarh are having rivaling per capita income and will become attractive

\textsuperscript{11}Leela Fernandees. India's New Middle Class: Democratic Politics in an Era of Economic Reform.(U of Minnesota Press, 2006) 24.

places as well.\textsuperscript{13} It elucidates a significant shift that this development of Middle Class is not unequal or constrained to the major cities only but the remote and secluded areas are now also getting affected of this rapid socioeconomic development, sooner or later these areas would also be incorporated into the neo metropolitan bourgeoisie.

This rise of metropolitan bourgeoisie has been fueled by some other cultural specifics of Indian polity as well. Traditionally India remained an isolationist state with this cognition imparted from the ideational philosophy. With the dawn of India as marching economic giant the global significance of India has been increased manifolds.

The coming of India in limelight as an attractive destination for the world has not only intensified India’s confidence at regional and international level but strengthened its own structural basis as well.

Underlie the rationale that inspite of its enormous diversities, social conflicts, class and caste differences India remained adhered to the ideals of democracy and planned economics.\textsuperscript{14}

During early years of independence the dominant political elite was more tilted towards the centralized social model of economy but it was against the notions of Gandhi who proposed for decentralized and self-reliant village republics. This propelled India to go ahead with the mixture of both models. Immense political participation and long consolidation of ritual of elections venerated Indian democracy.

The continuation of electorates for four successive decades made democratic tradition of India far strengthened and substantive. It enabled India to procure participative democracy. Augmentation of the neoliberal economic policies with the institutionalized functionaries gave birth to erudite, mature and circumspect strata mostly based in urban areas.

\textsuperscript{13}D Eric Beinhocker& Adil S Zainulbhai. “Tracking the Growth of India’s Middle Class” The Mickenly Quarterly, 2007, number 3.

With the advent of these liberal economic policies the migration started taking place from rural areas to urban areas which is an anticipated consequence of development. This has been broadly termed as neo-metropolitan bourgeoisie.

5. Demand for change in political order:

Too much representation offers little democracy. Voters are seen as consumers, democracy is being welded to the Free Market. Those who can't consume don't matter.\textsuperscript{15} There are some genuine issues with Indian political order as well. Most of the independent candidates lose in elections. It shows that it is really hard to win without sponsorship.

The south Asian culture of elite dominated politics has also gripped India as well. The pattern of rule in South Asia is more or less same where the frame of rule is dominated by the one having maximum power share in terms of capabilities or it can be attributed as elite monopolized system.

This pattern of rule persists in India as well where majority of people once get elected could not win again. In a multiparty system, in a country with functional democracy the dominance of the single party is intriguing. Though the congressional rule in India persisted for a long time way back in history but this time having majority in the parliament and impeding the way of popularly demanded legislations is casting a slur upon incumbent government.

If economics exceeds undermining the political demands the likelihood of system’s collapse become obvious. Vice versa, if only politics dominates the fledging economics. The political demands and representation need to be ensured in parallel to let a system run in poise.\textsuperscript{16}

Apparently India is a country in transition and the political order of transitional countries is marked with disorder, agitation, demands, expectations and non-deliverance. In post-colonial states there exists a major rift between an argument of classic democracy, government of the people, for the people, by the people and the real issues of the public. The system that is

\textsuperscript{15}Arundhati Roy. ‘Democracy’s Failing Light.’ Outlook India, July 13, 2009.

\textsuperscript{16}Samuel P. Huntington. Political Order in Changing Societies. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968)
unresponsive and insensitive towards the real issues of the public becomes irrelevant for the masses.

In India still there is impecuniousness at large, poor human development index and a significant divergence between haves and have not.

In India the 300 million live in a miserable situation. 250,000 debt-ridden farmers who have killed themselves, and of the 800 million who have been impoverished and dispossessed to make way and who survive on less than twenty rupees a day.\textsuperscript{17}

This generates resentment at local level that whether democracy has accounted for their real concerns for both normative and practical reasons or not. This consciousness along with access to the modern means of information and awareness result in standing up against the existing order.

Along with other innumerable problems corruption is a common predicament with which developing states are hallmarked. Recent scam of 3G license in India stirred a much hullaballoo. Transparency international’s report also corroborated that unbridled corruption is a shared paradox of states in transition. In India, as in most state dominated economies, there are powerful groups and individuals with a strong interest in maintaining the status quo.\textsuperscript{18}

As middle class is the most dynamic class of the society that is always engaged in the game of survival such disparities impel the masses to stand up for their assertion and brew an insurrection as it happened on the issue of Jan Lokbal in India.

\textbf{6. The movement of Anna Hazare}

In previous year the Indian saga witnessed a massive uprising that continues even today, where the ascendency of “Anna Hazare” swayed emotively and towered seasoned Anna as an iconic furore for Indian youth demanding equitable accountability for all.


The congress led central government has been wobbled and befuddled counterpoising Anna’s demands. A fortnightly walk over in the form of hunger strike pulled in much more eminence, esteem, sustenance and fame for Hazare.

Anna got much catch in previous year over the issue of “Jan Lokpal Bill” where his fast unto death and continuous resistance got accredited and earned him a massive support where youth stood by him.

Anna Hazare a man with immense social services is not for the first time emblemizing against corruption, he did a similar attempt in 1991 where he did launch “Bhrashtachar Virodhi Jan Aandolan” in Ralegaon Siddhi. Anna Hazare and youth of Relegan Siddhi took law into their own hands and were used to tie the drinkers up with the poles but for public shame only. There was no beating.19

His slogan was “The dream of India as a strong nation will not be realized without self-reliant, self-sufficient villages; this can be achieved only through social commitment and involvement of the common man.”20 In the same year he took issue about collusion between 40 forest officials and timber merchants. This protest resulted in the transfer and suspension of these officials. In 1997 he remonstrated about the malpractices in the purchasing of power looms.

Anna got much catch in following year over “Jan Lokpal Bill” which is also known as “Citizen Ombudsman Bill” that has been proposed by the civil society demanding equitable accountability for the public as well as politicians and bureaucrats.21

Anna started his protest against the weak bill of accountability in April 2011 and went for his famous fast unto death. Anna demanded that new law must include public as well as politicians. His continuous resistance got accredited and earned him a massive support, where Indian middle class is now stood by him and supported him.

Anna Hazare the follower of Gandhian tradition earned a status of untarnished person where Indian middle class shocked with the spate of scandals rallied across the country in his support.

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Anna demanded that activist must also be included in the drafting committee for the anti-corruption law.\textsuperscript{22}

On 9\textsuperscript{th} of April 2011 Anna’s demands were accepted and he went for the symbolic ending of his fast. On 28\textsuperscript{th} of July the committee accepted the draft of the bill which was rejected by Anna as a weak bill and warned government to go indefinite from August 16.

The concern of Indian middle class can be illustrated by a fact that within the 24 hours of endorsement of bill some 10,000 faxes were sent demanding stronger bill against corruption.\textsuperscript{23} Lawyers community across the country supported Hazare. Vishwa Hindu Parishad and other opposition parties also supported Anna’s stance. The Mumbai taxi union supported Anna Hazare on 16\textsuperscript{th} August by keeping their taxis off.\textsuperscript{24} It shows how middle class in India was concerned.

Here arises a question why Indian middle class stood by a person whose personal views and ideology is incompatible with modern days’ demands? His authoritarian values and his cognitive constructs are the representation of orthodoxy and traditionalism.

The post-colonial trends India in amalgamation with newly developed polity, in the wake of economic boom have cultivated a sense of deprivation of representation in the middle class of India. It intends to carve a spectrum where it could represent and assert itself. Anna Hazare served as a symbolic representation or a vantage point for the Indian middle class to show its emphatic presence.

Before analyzing Anna’s movement the eventualities of 70s must be comprehended when Jai Parakash Narayn stood against the Indara led government of Congress with his slogan of Lok Saiva. His total revolution movement was also vehemently embraced.

That was the time when Indian polity was with single party domination with the authoritarian rule of Indara Gandhi. It impelled masses to rally behind him. The “Sampurn Karanti” of JP Narayan inclined India towards first constitutional emergency of history. The Narayan

\textsuperscript{22}[India activist Anna Hazare ends hunger strike". BBC News. 9 April 2011. retrieved 28 April 2012.  
\textsuperscript{23}Avaaz decries cabinet’s endorsement of a weak Lokpal Bill". New Delhi: The Times of India. 28 July 2011. retrieved 28 April 2012.  
\textsuperscript{24}Taxi union to join Hazare’s fight for lokpal". Hindustan Times (Mumbai). retrieved 28 April 2012.}
The phenomenon was overzealously influential and it first time countercharged the Congress’s rhetoric for composite culture and alternated it with “Janta culture”. 25

The Narayan phenomenon of 70s metamorphosed Indian politics with great permutations. Indra for the first time was confronted vigorously and it resulted in the establishment of first non-congress government in later stages.

Naryan drew his support from the mass agglomeration of the peoples. He arrived with a new alternative that was totally at odds with the rhetorical composite culture of congress, pleaded cogently by Nehru.

The consequential trends out of this “total revolution movement” were, it did not discredit the venerated liberal democracy in India; it was the first time when Congress got submitted, it made Congress lost its first elections in the centre, and coming of Janta party in power. That was the popular accentuation of political dynamism of India under mixed model of economy.

Anna Hazare’s popularity is also due to the reason that elite dominated political framework offer no representation to the middle class in India and the strong educated middle class of India wants it potent assertion in political arena. Though Anna is the symbol of orthodoxy and traditionalism but apparently he is serving as a symbol of political representation of Indian class.

In recent days Congressional rule in India is imperiled. The five states where elections have been convened Congress managed to triumph only in Manipur. It illustrates that long ruling congressional discourse is likely to be impeded in next term as an aftermath of this rising middle class.

**Conclusion**

The movement of Anna Hazare will have far reaching implications on Indian polity. The disgruntlement in Middle class is rife but it will not incline India towards any coup de tat like globe experienced in the form of Arab spring in recent days. India’s functional institutions have made Indian democracy participative and substantive where people are aware of the power of the ballot.

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Congress can be possibly backlashed in next elections. Janta culture in India is on demise since 1991. The possibility of emergence of a third option in this vacuum cannot be shrugged off. Muslim factor in the form of JUH will also have a decisive factor in next elections.

It would be fallacious to associate this uprising with the very conception of an insurrection. It is a movement generated an aftermath of rapid socioeconomic change and middle class activism. The awareness of Indian masses and their active participation in electoral politics has ignited this wave of disgruntlement.

The leadership of Anna Hazare is symbolic in this struggle of Indian middle class. It is not the true representation of the cognitive construct of Indian middle class. It is only a symbol of politicking and involvement of Indian middle class which is striving for its stature in political section of the society.

As far as Indian democracy would not be stirred much as it is having its roots deep sunk in Indian polity where democracy is embraced as religion. This all unrest in India ostensibly is the uprising of middle class.

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