

Middle class in india sociology



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Is there something called the Indian Middle Class? How does this manifest in everyday India ? Illustrate this from Mother Pious Lady Reference?

Indian middle class; is it a group or a phenomenon? Who are the people who form the Indian middle class, what are their culture? The Indian middle class has grown from a minority in pre-independence era to a vast majority taking the grip of the whole nation and playing a major role in driving it towards development. The book ' Mother Pious Lady' by Mr Santosh Desai portrays the Indian middle class in vivid detail. The following writing takes the headings of the book and tries to explain Indian middle class with illustration from the book. I have tried covering the topics which I was able to connect to.

Economic reform has provided the Indian middle class the most needed the liberation in terms of living life to the most. There has been a constant shift in the cultural sign and symbols adapted through ages. Disappearance of girl's pig tail, freedom of mobility through scooterette, providing the elders their own space of living, telecommunication evolution, explosion in the passenger car segment , changing clothing pattern are few of the visible patterns in society. Girl's pony tail were a symbol of desired feminine reserved nature which has seen a change both in length and its handling. The shortening of hair gives a girl a sense of personal control displayed metaphorically. The scooty revolution has helped the female to expand her boundaries without being dependent on any family member providing her a sense of independence. Even the car owned has seen a shift towards adapting more compact cars. The recent shift from petrol to electric and LPG based cars not only signifies the change in attitude towards efficiency but

also the urge to keep up technologically. Dhoni has been one the true middle class iconic figures which has altered the way Indian see a small town boy. The 'can do' attitude along with the lack of fear of failure and unmindfulness of hierarchy has been the reason behind success of Dhoni. Any Indian middle class can draw inspiration from him in the way towards dealing with pressure and performing without fear of failure. The increase in disposable income has led to the change in attitude towards life, attitude towards savings. The Indian middle class is not afraid to take risks in life to get a bigger return. He is in constant search of avenues of making money. An age where money has its own language, and the person in possession of money is in possession of power. It has become the source of energy which drives the entire economy, of which Indian middle class has played the most important role.

Arranged marriage in a typical middle class families is still not openly accepted, reasons may be preference for same caste bride which may not be guaranteed in love marriage. It may also be due to unfamiliarity or not being comfortable to other caste customs being brought and practiced in one family. Arrange marriage is not seen as marriage of two individuals but two families as well. The idea of prospective bride and groom to know each other before marriage is not given preference as the custom of these individuals having the luxury of spending time together is quite rare in any joint family. Also, the societal pressure is also a big factor which forces one to look into same caste bride or groom. The priority of selection bride or groom also is quite typical in middle class family and exchange of dowry which comes as unsaid package plays a major role in this decision. The education qualification in higher of engineer or doctor may fetch enough dowry to

groom family to cover almost all the family members lifetime expenditure. Its agreed that many a times this money only changes hand in case the same family has a girl to be married away. All these factors doesn't provide the luxury to place the freedom to choose the bride in the hand of the prospective groom himself. The power to choose the family needs to be closely guarded and the sense of freedom even need to be made to felt to the groom. Also, the custom of preparing and matching kundli of prospective bride and groom to formally accept marriage proposal also affects the decision. The decision to go against the family's belief of marrying someone who technically doesn't match on paper may lead to social seclusion. ' The present has become poor indicator of the future' indicates that current reputation, societal status, family acceptance takes preference over the prospective future of those two individuals living together happily. The middle path of arranged love marriage seems to provide the best possible solution in the current middle class society. It comes with best of both the worlds. Even though, this may not be happening at an encouraging level provides enough encouragement to other families to try to adapt for the benefit of those two individuals in question. Other reason for further acceptance of this phenomenon is the trend of growing number of nuclear families. The tradition of newly wed bride to stay with the family is becoming less frequent, leading to providing both the individuals to start their life with their own rules. The importance given to the caste is also decreasing due to importance given to education qualification and economic status in the society.

The essence of middle class can be truly experienced while travelling across country via any means be it train, bus, jugaad or be it airplane. Out of all these means Train definitely displays the middle class in true sense. Indian Railways carries millions of Indians mostly middle class people through length and breadth of this huge nation on a daily basis. A typical middle class passenger takes a train journey not just as travel but as ritual. He is worried about the co-passenger's destination more than his own. The train coupe forms a perfect blend of many cultures and their practices. It is clearly visible during the meal time. Any Gujarati family travels in a group of min 4-5 members with a plethora of food varieties in their stock. The ritual of cutting and preparing salad, preparing for the meal by arranging the plates and laying out the pre made food contents. The daily routine of having daily meal is still maintained irrespective of the place they may be.

After Gold, probably Stainless steel is the metal which places itself highly in the life of typical Indian middle class family. The metal is a reliable carrier of memories. It stands for pride, trust and assurance. Stainless steel makes its presence very eminent in daily life of middle class family through vessels, utensils. It is the true representation of aspirations of middle class family, to be able to shine even after being put to test on a daily basis. It serves to utility to max. But due to recent advent of polymer technology and post liberalization era, Stainless steel is being slowly being replaced by more cheaper and easily replaceable elements like plastics, aluminium. This trend not only displays the changing attitude of the middle class towards daily life approach. There has been a constant shift from need for longevity, durability to alternatives which would serve the utility at best price. This change is

evident of the fact of the fast changing life, non belief in long standing commitment. Ease of manufacturing, handling, disposal, multi utility and economy of use

Need for Communication places itself on a very high scale for any Indian, specially a middle class family. The urge to stay connected through any possible means forms a strong bond among geographically spread and settled of the community. Even Post card saw its evolution in the form of launch of competition postcards, travel postcards etc, which formed an important part of a typical middle class family. Post card, in pre telecommunication era, was the perfect carrier of messages which contained message not for individuals but for the whole family from another family as such. Post card was like the facebook wall for the whole family. After the advent to telecommunication era, the ease of message transmission was shifted to audio content from textual content. But the current shift to electronic mail or e-mail has detached the flavour of writing letter to near and dear ones. Its well acknowledged that it has made life simpler, but the shift from paper letter to e-mail has shifted the letter only as intention.

Middle class is best known for its ability to excel at the time of scarcity. The backbone of this feat comes from the culture of staying in joint families. Joint family is a true representation of Marxist institute where the fruits of toil of the family is equally shared among the members. The belief in sharing everyone materialistic property among the members gives it a strong sense of binding. Every member works for the family not for his self individual. But, there has been a constant erosion in the concept of living through sharing. This is clearly evident in the rising conflict in land claiming issues in joint

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families. The constant shift from joint to nuclear families, constant movement of families from rural areas to urban areas, rising living costs and at the base of all the changing attitude of middle class towards living through sharing has led to this crude change.

Summer break was usually associated with long break from school, summer holidays and trip to either native place or to a holiday destination with the family. It was a time to spend quality time with our near and dear ones. It was a time to take up some hobby at leisure be it reading comics, take up painting or music classes. But the true essence of the break was that it provided an opportunity to connect to our real self, to our places and culture of origin. It was a time to experience the new, refuel with fresh change of much needed air. There has been a constant shift in the attitude of middle class towards the summer break as well. The shift from leisure spending to time to more serious way on engagement has been created due to constant peer pressure and to prove oneself distinct from the lot. The mushrooming of summer camps for children for sports, music and arts classes is not due to self interest of children as such but also to satisfy the aspiration of typical middle class parents to see their children develop a multi faceted personality.

Mother's role is universally given the top priority in any human being relationship pyramid. Indian Mother plays an even more important role in any middle class family. Gender Role of mother is very prominent in a middle class family. She is the person responsible for binding the family, its health and even for counselling. She plays multiple roles in a family with varied responsibilities. She is the one who is more bothered about her sons exams.

She portrays the true values of middle class through her aspirations for the family at the cost of sacrificing her own life.

The affinity of a typical middle class family with white cloth reflects its aspiration levels of getting noticed in the society. This portrays the notion of purity in the era of corruption. The analogue of usage of ultramarine on white cloth is clearly with thin film of elite culture which every middle class aspires to be a part of. Ultramarine actually doesn't help in whitening the cloth but only provides a blue coat to cover up the real patches of yellow dirt resting on the cloth. It signifies the constant urge of Indian middle class to stand apart, its constant urge to excel through continuous trial. The recent adaption of dye based cloth dye from ultramarine depicts a change in time. The spike in demand of English medium school for middle class and associating children education with English displays the attitude towards thin film culture to hide their true image.

The obsession with order and discipline is a typical characteristic of Indian middle class. The sense of belonging is one of the implicit needs of the Indian middle class. Well creased and iron clothes are one of the symbols used to strengthen the need for order. It gives them the strength to fight against the chaos of nature. Straight Line represents their triumph of humanness.

In the pre-liberalization era when people were not suffering from ADD(attention deficit disorder), people had vivid means of entertainment ranging from coffee house debating, fishing, travelling or be it sitting idle with friends with corner tea shops and having friendly chat. Even the

perception of viewing something in motion could be termed as entertainment. Here the house window played an important role in opening. It was the theatre of our imagination which would let your creativity do the talking. The recent expansion in the media domain has increased the options of entertainment but also reduced the interest in the outside real world. The role of window has changed from taking interest in real world to secluding oneself from the society.

The ritual of visiting our relatives and near and dear ones without pre-announcement and even without a purpose was a common habit among middle class families having geographically scattered members. Even the purpose of the visit was not important. But recently due changing relationship among people and with growing linearity among it, the visit is associated with a purpose. Even the acceptance of un announced visit are not welcomed. The reasons of the trend can be varying ranging from improving communication technology to shrinking of family size to engulfing oneself in their own word.

One place where the true middle class can be found congregating is the 4 pages of weekly matrimonial ads in daily newspapers. The ads are structured as per the caste requirement. The place becomes the marketing platform where packaging the individual in the form of few highlighted well seeked off words becomes the success criteria of finding any mate through those ads. A typical middle class arranged marriage doesn't takes place between individuals but between the families and in turn their relatives. It doesn't remains an event affecting 2 individuals but goes far beyond. The typical middle class phenomenon of intra caste marriage even at the cost of not

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finding suitable bride/groom can have unwelcomed effect. It not only affects those individuals but also the society. This menace can only be dealt with if the priority of suitability for partner selection is shifted from caste to their personal attitude matching.

Any vehicle which is typically associated with a middle class family has to be a scooter. A scooter is analogous to a mule; comparable in strength and obedience for load carriage. A vehicle providing mobility with multi utility and an aura of safety around it was the perfect companion of any Indian middle class family. Scooter portrays the middle class persona to perfection. The ability of carry person well above rated number and weight, the ability to transform from people carriage vehicle to goods carrier in both front compartment and side deck, never asking for maintenance and providing the security of spare wheel made it the most suitable vehicle on Indian roads for any middle class family.

Auto rickshaw has been an integral part of our lives which provides personalised travelling mode at near affordable price. Auto rickshaw was a vehicle which provided freedom from wait for public transport and provided door to door connectivity. The vehicle was a true image of the growing aspirations of the Indian middle class providing them the much needed differentiation in terms of image perception. The vehicle itself was positioned between the affordable but not comfortable mode of transportation, ie 2 wheelers and un-affordable 4 wheelers for a typical middle class. Of late due to improving public transportation in cities and increasing fares of auto transport, there has been a shift towards other modes but auto rickshaw is here to stay to its USP.

In the pre-liberalization era, buying of any household appliance was an occasion in itself. The long term association with the appliances bought made it even further a special occasion. The appliances ranged from TV, fridge, Tape recorder, scooter, cooker, sewing machine etc. The appliance almost became a part of the family itself with special handling care taken care by the head of the family. The TV remote was the power centre which needs to be wrapped in polythene and handled only under guided supervision. Of late with the advent of consumerism and even increasing appliances buying and replacement rate, the importance of any appliance has reduced drastically. The role of appliance has shifted from being centrally used by the family to personalized usage. The concept of personalized appliance for every member of the family be it mobile phones, music systems or even vehicles has reduced the emotional elements attached with the appliance. The behaviour has changed from repair mentality to exchange mentality. This has further reduced the need for caring for the appliance as the life cycle of the technology considered upto date has also reduced drastically with new models being churned out every few models with better and improved features.

The medical service was and is still considered luxury for many strata of our society. The affordability and notions attached with medical service and doctor are still alien in many parts of the society where the sole responsibility of the family health either lies in the hands of god or local medicine practitioners. But in other well off places doctors are almost next to god. The typical Indian middle class finds itself stuck between the affordability factor and belief factor. Of late a typical Indian middle class tries

to over smart the well trained doctor through primary research on internet. To him the advice given by an unknown on internet appeals to him with greater truth factor than the advice given to him by doctor.

Radio was a very strong binding medium in pre TV era connecting people from across the geography, occupation etc. There has been a constant shift in the methodology of popularity calculation of songs. Not only radio but also TV has been affected by the consumerism. The method of popularity is not only based on artists performance but also on the no. of sms send during the event. The Indian middle class is an upfront participant in the era of consumerism. The power of voting for their favourite performer has engaged the middle class into ever longer participation and increased its loyalty for the event. A typical Indian middle class finds pleasure in seeing someone alike performing well and progressing in the event. Cinema is trying to woo the middle class by providing much demand exclusive comfort through various class in shows.

Typical Indian street food is a moving map of Indian culture whether you eat paani poori or idli dosa or Chinese. Its a place where hygiene is typically overlooked and is subsided by taste. Its a place for any typical calorie conscious individual to indulge and forget about extra calories. Its also a place where people across religion, caste and race are binded without issues.

Indians love their cinemas and Songs and heroes are an integral part of it. Of late, there has been a constant shift from emotion based poetic songs to meaningless songs which are getting more encouragement from the society. Society doesn't have the quest for meaning through songs anymore, reasons

may be varied. May be the middle class doesn't come to cinema anymore as a issue solver but as a mere entertainer. Cinema provides them escape from daily life issues for a couple of hours. And that's the reason, people look up to today's heroes as mere epitome of excess. The need of the hour is to encourage the real heroes to bring change in the society. Middle class need to rise to true heroism, be it being entrepreneur; helping generate jobs, generate income for people, be it working for societal development.

Indian middle class is obsessed with power which really comes hard and short lived at times. The phenomenon is clearly evident in political hierarchy, power associated with official cars, its red sirens, the issue associated with security frisking. The reasons may be in the culture's acceptance of power distance, the need to show power at hand to society to gain importance. PSUs were set with mind set of socialism, but apparently they are the power house of the Indian industries. This scenario has been constantly shifting due to increasing entry of MNCs in India who preach exactly the opposite with its flat office structure, its open door policy, its transparency, its priority to performance over age based seniority etc. Film, politics and corporate are biggest institutions providing transfer of legacy through free passage of the baton to their next generation. License raj period was a black era where one's ability to survive directly depended on the bureaucratic contacts he/she had. The Indian middle class was a complete misfit in this zone. The scene is also changing fast due to increased concern over the company's performance even at the cost of baton going to an outsider fit for the role. We need to watch for similar happenings in politics as well.

Indian middle class are the true carriers of ancient Indian culture in today's Indian culture. This is represented clearly in the food and our existence around it. The food acts as the centre of our existence and stomach the seat of our soul. Food may be the barometer of our lives. The reasons could be due to immigration of varied cultures in India through ages, providing an enriching mix of food culture. One of unique form of food serving can be found in Thali. It forms a unique contrast with the western food culture of serving food in linear courses. The food itself is arranged all a time providing the connoisseur the option of selecting his course order accordingly. The reason why we enjoy Thali may be due to our finding pleasure in chaos. Another, interesting food form ie Pickle forms a central part of a typical middle class diet. Pickle tries to preserve its ingredient in interesting form. It acts like the culture distillate. The availability of thali food in restaurant and pickle available in jars in retail stores reflect the changes in society. The hectic and fast moving lifestyle in urban areas doesn't provide an opportunity to families in either engaging in pickle preparation at home, neither do they find time to have meals at a time with the whole family at once. Even the food habits have seen constant change from Indian food to western food. The need to have the food on the move has seen shift in food and catering culture.

Indians have always felt fuzzy in declaring their love towards their loved ones and the concept of expressing oneself through words, day celebration etc was of alien in nature. With liberalization and adoption of western culture, there has a constant shift towards need for verbal and visual expression of love and care. The growth of cards culture in form of Archies,

Hallmark etc., celebration of father's day, mother's day, and even valentines day has come under accepted and much needed norms. The major reasons may be increasing spatial, cultural and generation gap among the family members. The middle class in the run to keep up with the society has replaced bhai dooj with brother's day, the daily expressed silent care with valentine's day, the parental respect with father's day. The reason could be the need to make every occasion big and reason to celebrate with public display. The love in some cases may also be weighed in terms of the value of the gift exchanged. The Indian middle class obsession with English is not a new phenomenon, whether in the form of English pet names, obsession with English medium schools, the urge to communicate in English. This market is very well served by the growing tutorial classes promising to teach English in 30 days. Even though the excessive obsession has led to corrosion of native Indian culture but it also has a silver lining along with it. The booming IT outsourcing industry has been successful majorly due to the proficiency achieved by Indian middle class to international acceptable standards which has led to opening of job horizons for many.

The Indian middle class believes in sharing and living, but sometimes at the cost of others inconvenience. This is clearly evident in the missing mobile etiquettes, throwing garbage in public places, listening TV at home at full volume. The lack of need to respect others space may be the outcome of the feeling of one with the society. This seem an issue of little relevance but with times there arises the need to educate people about respecting for others feeling and space essential for peaceful coexistence.

Few rituals find peculiar adaptation in typical Indian middle class society. The traffic system portrays a system of chaos working perfectly in harmony. Every driver has his own meaning of traffic rule, he drives focused only on his objective. The myopic objective getting ahead of others even at the cost of creating traffic jam later. Honking is used for power display with safety put to backseat. Indian traffic is a perfect smaller version of Indian middle class culture. Many cities operate with no traffic signal nor with traffic policemen, which display almost magically the understanding amongst motorist. Indians always find hard to follow rules carved by someone else but are always apt to form their own. The rules are there to be bent which is evident in the way drivers do when they just hang the seat belt to escape fine only to release it at the first possible opportunity, two wheelers carry helmets in hand only to be worn when faced with a traffic policeman. The 'chalta hai' proves to be major deterrent to arrive at a lasting solution. The lack of desire for quality may be due to lack of desire for lasting solution. The major beneficiary is Indian politics where criminals are forgotten and re-elected, where scams are forgone with time. India has come a long way from 64 crore bofors scam to 1.76 lakh crore 2G telecom scam of which Indian middle class was a mere spectator. Indian middle seem to be good at forgiving and even better at forgetting. Even sports remains untouched when come to the scandals like cricket and recent common wealth games. The reason may be the attitude of disinterest of people towards apt punishment.

The need of the hour is to educate the mass about the importance and benefit of following traffic rules. The need of the hour is to make the Indian

middle class realize the power they have in their hands to elect capable and apt people.

Liquor was always looked up as a menace in the Indian middle class and its association with ability to take the human out of oneself. The elite and extreme lower class always some occasion or reason associated with liquor consumption. But the middle class always took it as an unwinding tool, as a medium to hang out with. Our trip to Hill stations have always been associated with family, as a place to escape the heat and noise of the city. Indians always have been worshipping Sun, but also has always been looked with harshness of its nature which is quite opposite to western culture where they tend to welcome sun. Amitabh Bacchan is one those iconic figures who has lived through Indians for almost four decades now. He has lived almost all his characters too real life like. He has given every Indian the sense of his own existence through his reel characters. He has been the icon of credibility for most if the Indian middle class. He is the one who can be trusted by any brand either for publicity or damage control, ranging from Gujarat tourism to Cadbury worm controversy.