



## **INDIAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT: A SOCIOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF CLASS HISTORY**

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Indian social structure is known for its deep rooted traditions from ages. Every aspect of the society i.e. family, religion, economy, inert-personal relations etc. were governed by the set of traditions of the society. Different dynasties came into power from time to time but the social structure remained same with little or no modifications. It was in eighteenth and nineteenth century, Indian society was going through the time of transition. Centuries long Social structure was changing. Main reason for such transformation was the change in power structure at the upper level. In the image of early British administrators, the eighteenth century was a period of instability and insecurity. This period saw the decline of Mughal Empire and the rise of new colonial power in its place (Tirthankar 1987:31). The rise of British power resulted in political and economic chaos. Both British and nationalist scholars believe in the same perspective and also supported by Marxists. Other scholars are of view that introduction of new economic system by British gave rise to the new possibilities and the economy which was self-sufficient in itself became national and global in character. Introduction of new economic system in place of traditional economy of India altered the centuries old structure of the Indian society and gave rise to new categories and classes in society. In the present Paper, attempts to study the economic system in the pre-British era both at rural and urban level. Introduction of new economic policies of the Britishers. Formation of classes in Indian society due to new economic system. Role of new education system and modern transportation in the formation of class. Class interest leading national consciousness among classes. Contribution of different classes in national struggle. For D.P Mukherjee, class was product of the colonial economic policy, on the one hand, and social and educational policy, on the other. This non-productive and non-commercial class played significant roles in Indian history: (a)

contributed to the consolidation of the British rule, (b) it led a successful nationalist struggle against that very regime, (c) it launched a socialist struggle, (d) it brought about Partition of the country, and (e) it became the main force behind planned social change in post-independent (Mukherjee 1952).

### **Glance at Pre-British India**

Agriculture has been always the main source of livelihood in India. In pre-British India, agriculture was self sufficient through ages. Village community was little republic economically, politically, religiously and socially. There were no individual land rights nor does the land belong to king or the state. Land was owned by the village community and was distributed to the peasants for cultivation. King use to get part of the produce through its representative. Land was cultivated with the co-operation of the family members and the village community. Tools of agriculture and technology were simple as a result yield was just sufficient for the village community. All the conflicts related to land and other issues were settled within the village itself. Apart from agriculture, artisans also existed as a part of village community. Artisans fulfil the other needs of the village like pottery, black smith, leather works, carpenter etc. They use to render their services to the villagers on demand, in return they get the part of produce from the village community. (Desai, 1948) Therefore in pre-British era village had no contact with the outer world since village was self sufficient. Technology was simple and people had no surplus as such they had no materialistic life. Social structure was based on caste lines. Urban life was different then the rural life. In urban centres different types of industries existed. Textile and handicraft of India at that time was in demand in other countries. Product of iron and leather in was used by the armies of the time. Apart from that there were lead, mercury and iron mines. Therefore, there was the class of merchants at that time. These merchants have loyalties with royalties and belong to high class. Material life was the part of urban culture.

### **Transformation of Economy**

The transformation of the pre-British feudal economy into a capitalist economy was mainly a result of the British conquest of India, the political and economic policies adopted by the British government and the economic penetration of India chiefly by British capitalism in its three phases of development—trading, industrial, and financial (Desai, 1948). In 1765, the British received the right from the Mughal emperor to collect the land revenue from Bengal. Between 1765 to 1825, they introduced far reaching changes in land taxation and land laws, which had implications for agriculture and rural inequality and possibly for poverty and living standards in the long run (Tirthankar:1987). New rules and economic development did not follow independent lines but was determined, in nature and extent, primarily by the needs and interests of British capitalism. A native merchant capitalist class, though weak, existed and was gathering strength in India before and during the period when the British, the French and other foreign companies

established contact with India and started a career of commercial penetration and political domination of India. The new states which emerged from the ruins of the Mughal Empire were largely controlled financially by the trading class, although their political structure remained feudal.

### **Modern Industry, Transportation system and Class**

The establishment of modern machine-based industries in India during the period of the British rule played a significant role in the consolidation of the national economy of the country. The establishment of railways in India, during the middle of the nineteenth century, created a condition for the growth of modern industries in India. The construction of railways in India was primarily undertaken to meet the raw material and market requirements of the British industries. Their construction also gave scope for the investment of British capital and sale of the products of the growing engineering industry of Britain in India. The establishment of railways and the accumulation of sufficient savings in the hands of the Indian merchant class to serve as basic capital, made possible the creation of the Indian-owned modern industries in India.

The growth of modern industries brought into existence modern industrial cities which became the centres of social, political, and cultural life. Further, the growth of modern industries led to the emergence of such new social groups as the class of the bourgeoisie and that of the proletariat which are the basic classes of the modern capitalist society. As capitalist economy based on competition and commodity production developed, the intermediate classes of small producers such as artisans, and others, being unable to compete with powerful industrial rivals in the market, therefore fall into the ranks of the workers. In the rural areas independent peasants, due to circumstances of capital economic environment, increasingly lose land to merchants and other capitalists and a good proportion of them become landless labourers or agricultural proletariat (Desai, 1948).

### **Emergence of social class in India**

The emergence of the social classes in India was the result of the establishment of a capitalist economy, a new type of state system and state administrative machinery, and the spread of new education during the British rule. The Indian people from traditional system were forced to adjust into new social groupings and classes. The process of the rise of new social classes in different parts of the country and among various communities was an uneven one because new economy spread unevenly depending on the growth of political power of Britain in India. New social classes came into being earlier in those zones which came under British influence earlier. Bengal was the first where the British Government created private property in land in the shape of Zamindari. Therefore, two new social classes, the zamindars and the tenants, came first into existence. It was in Bengal and Bombay the first industrial enterprises such as jute and cotton factories were started which led to the emergence of such new classes as industrialists and proletariat. These

provinces were maintained by new administrative system and introduced new educational institutions imparting knowledge in modern sciences such as modern medicine, law, etc. thereby leading to the growth of the professional classes. After 1857, the new economy, administrative system, and modern education spread all over India and gave rise to new social classes on a national scale. The process of the rise of new social classes among different communities was also an uneven one. This was due to the fact that certain communities were engaged, in the pre-British period, in definite economic, social, or educational systems. In pre-British society, mainly the banyas were traders, and the bharmins were custodians of education among the Hindus. In the new social environment, the banyas were among the first groups to take to modern capitalist commerce and banking and develop into new social classes, namely the commercial and financial bourgeoisie. Similarly, the Bharmins were among the first to study the modern education introduced by the British government and turned into modern intelligentsia and an educated middle class. The upper strata of the Muslim community in the pre-British period, were, on the whole, divorced from medieval trade or money-lending and were mainly engaged in military and administrative careers. Further, they predominantly resided in Northern India which came under the British rule much later. The vast Muslim population of Bengal mainly belonged to the poor classes. Hence a modern intelligentsia, a modern educated middle class and a bourgeoisie, on a substantial scale, sprang from within the Muslim community in later decades.

A.R. Desai identified the following categories of classes that emerged out of new economic system. In agrarian areas these were principally

1. Zamindars;
2. Absentee landlords;
3. Tenants under zamindars and absentee landlords;
4. The class of peasant proprietors divided into upper, middle and lower strata;
5. Agricultural labourers;
6. The modern class of merchants
7. The modern class of money-lenders.

In the urban areas, these were principally

1. The modern class of capitalists, industrial, commercial and financial;
2. The modern working class engaged in industrial, transport, mining, and such other enterprises;
3. The class of the petty traders and shopkeepers bound up with modern capitalist economy;
4. The professional classes such as technicians, doctors, lawyers, professors, journalists, managers, clerks and others, comprising the intelligentsia and the educated middle class.

Basic characteristic of the new social classes was their national character because they were integral parts of a single state regime. As the individuals and groups comprising the class became conscious of their interests. They felt an urge to organize them on an all- India scale and start movement to advance their common interests on a national basis. It was not so in pre-British India, when no single national economy or state regime existed. In pre-British India, the village artisan, for example, had no common economic ties or interests with artisans in other villages since he was a part of village autarchy. The same followed with the town handicraftsmen of other towns. India at that time was divided into multiple unconnected local economies and a congeries of states. Hence, there were neither common political nor economic interests of all the artisans, handicraftsmen, or agriculturists. This led to the absence of impulse to organize and struggle on a national basis and scale. As D.P Mukherjee observes, the next attempt to change India was initiated by the nationalists. It was again a middle-class pursuit. Initially pro-British in its attitude, the middle class felt being cheated by the British when it found that industry, trade, and commerce, and even government employment went out of their hands. Indian nationalism was a by-product of frustration of the Indian middle class. Previously, this class looked down upon Indian tradition. Its vision was then coloured by the coloniser's perception of Indian culture. Now it started glorifying it (Mukherjee 1958:190). As Marx says that Capitalism sows the seeds of its own destruction so was the case in India. British government introduced the capitalist mode of production in all spheres of economic sphere and created different categories of classes in social life. These classes at different levels, time and space faced different types of exploitation. They organised themselves, became class conscious and started their struggle for their emancipation from the exploitative rule. The movements of different classes were against the British rules keeping in view their interests with national character.

### **Indian Peasant Movements**

After 1918 peasants began to develop political consciousness, took part in organized national struggles and subsequently even build up their own organizations under their own flag and programme and organize struggles for the fulfilment of that programme under their own leadership (Desai, 1948).

Before 1918, a number of peasant movements took place which were spontaneous, had limited field and local economic aims. The period between 1870 and 1897 was of severe famines in India, among which those of 1870, 1896, and 1897 were most devastating resulting in occasional peasants struggles broke out against the zamindars, moneylenders, and the government. In 1870, the Bengal tenants were hit hard by the economic depression. Thousands of them came to refuse rents, disobey the courts and finally to fight with whatever weapons were available. A regular state of anarchy came to prevail in a large part of Bengal. The rising was quelled by the government and appointed an Inquiry Committee and subsequently enacted the Bengal Tenancy Act in 1885.

The slump in cotton prices after the end of the Civil War in America resulted in debt burden. In the Deccan in 1875, the Maratha peasants rose against the moneylenders, raided the houses of moneylenders, destroyed documents of debts and even killed some of them. The riot was quelled and government recognized the necessity of relief to the peasants and passed the Deccan Agriculturists Relief Act in 1879.

In 1917-18 the struggle of the peasants of Champaran in Bihar against the indigo planters, most of whom were Europeans. Gandhi led the struggle and employed his method of Satyagraha. The government appointed an Inquiry Committee with Gandhi as a member and, on the basis of the report enacted a law which brought partial relief to the peasants. These were some of the main peasant struggles before the Non-Co-operation Movement of 1919. The struggles lacked a political content and were often anarchic. Section of Indian peasants became politically consciousness during the Non-Co-operation Movement. The Indian National Congress gave a slogan of non-payment of land revenue which had a great effect. The peasants interpreted the political struggle for Swaraj against the heavy land tax. It was the first participation of a section of Indian peasants in an organized political movement. The Moplah Rebellion of 1922 had both communal and economic roots. The economic discontent of the Moplah's who were mainly Muslim agriculturists was exploited by the Nambudris, who were Brahmin landlords in Malabar, a revolt, predominantly economic in content but religious in form, broke out leading to tragic loss of life and property. It was after the end of the Non-Co-operation Movement that the process of the formation of independent class organizations of the Indian peasantry started. Labour unions were formed in Andhra in 1923. Kissan sabhas were started in some parts of the Punjab, Bengal, and the U.P. in 1926-7. In 1928, representatives of the Bihar and Uttar Pradesh Kissan sabhas presented a memorandum to the All-Parties Conference presided over by Motilal Nehru, which embodied such demands as universal franchise, fundamental democratic rights and national independence. The Andhra Provincial Ryot's Association was started in 1928.

Two struggles of the peasantry of the Bardoli District in Gujarat broke out, one in 1928 and the other in 1930. The first was led by Vallabh bhai Patel and its success in persuading the government to accept most of the demands gave a strong impetus to the peasant movement.

The world agrarian and general economic crisis occurred in 1929. Sections of Peasants participated in demonstrations and meetings organized by the Congress. There were peasant movements in the U.P., Andhra, Gujarat, Karnataka and other parts of the country. The peasant movements began to gather strength in the 1930's. The first Indian peasant School to train active peasant workers in the method of carrying on propaganda and organizational work was started at Nidubrole in 1938. The Madras Presidency Ryot's

Association was formed in 1935. The Madras Presidency Agriculturists' Association was organised in 1937. The Bihar Kissan Sabha which was started in 1927 developed into an extensive organization after 1934 due to the effort of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati. Bihar Kissan Sabha became the strongest section of the All-India Kissan Sabhas which were subsequently formed. The Provincial Kissan Sabha was formed in the U.P. in 1935 with a programme which included the demands for the abolition of the Zamindari system. The government passed a number of relief measures to alleviate the conditions of the peasants. In the U.P. five Debt Relief Acts were passed in 1934; in the Punjab, the Regulation of Accounts Act was passed in 1934; in Bengal, the Moneylenders Act was passed in 1933 and the Relief of Indebtedness Act in 1935. Since even this legislation did not appreciably improve the position of the peasants, their discontent continued to grow and find expression in the growth of the peasant movement.

The first All-India Kissan Congress which met at Lucknow in 1935 decided that the Congress should be established as the supreme kisan organization in the country. Jawaharlal Nehru expressed strong sympathies and support for the Kissan Congress. The establishment of the All-India Kissan Congress was an event of great historical significance. For the first time in the history of the Indian an all India organization of the Indian peasantry came into existence with a programme of common demands and expressed the aspirations of the peasantry. During the period of the growth of the peasant movement since 1934, volunteer organizations among peasants also sprang up in a number of places.

### **Education, Class formation and National Movement**

Introduction of new education policy by the Britishers created a new class of professionals who received the modern education. Modern intelligentsia developed decades before modern industries were established. Raja Ram Mohan Roy and his group constituted the first group of intelligentsia who studied western education and imbibed its rationalist approach. With the establishment of Universities in the country after 1857, the numerical strength of the educated Indians rapidly increased. The educated Indians were the first to acquire national consciousness in India (Desai, 1948). The educated class played a very important role in the history of modern Indian nationalism. They integrated, to a great extent, the Indian people into a modern nation and organized various progressive socio-reform movements in the country. They were the pioneers, organizers and leaders of all political national movements. They brought ideas of nationalism and freedom to wider sections of the Indian people, through educational and propaganda work. Between 1851 and 1884, the professional classes had formed three organizations in the country, namely the Madras Native Association, the Bombay Association, and the Indian Association. The main demand of these organizations was that the government should employ the staff in the state machinery by its own nationals rather than foreigners. In 1885 the first national political organization of the Indian

people, the Indian National Congress was founded, the language adopted by the Congress was English. Thus the educated class was the first to become the leaders of the national struggle. During the Liberal phase, the nationalist movement was led by such outstanding Liberal intellectuals as Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Dadabhai Naoroji, S. Bannerji, Mahadev Govind Ranade, Pherozshah Mehta, and others, who were the product of modern education introduced in India by the British government. Garam dal was guided by leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, and Lala Lajpat Rai who themselves belonged to the modern English-knowing intelligentsia. After 1918, when the nationalist movement acquired more mass basis, its leadership was provided by Gandhi, C. R. Das, Motilal Nehru, Vithalbhai Patel, C. Rajagopalachari, Rajendra Prasad, Jawaharlal Nehru, Subash Chandra Bose and other socialist and communist intellectuals. Educated Indian studied the history of trade union and peasant movements in other countries, gave a lead to the Indian workers and peasants and helped them to form their class organizations and movements.

The educated middle class was composed of lawyers, doctors, technicians, professors, journalists, state servants, clerks, students and others. The educated middle class steadily grew in number in the second half of the nineteenth century and after. The growth of modern education in India was not paralleled by a proportional economic development of the country. Due to the economic policy of the British government unemployment among the educated class had assumed serious proportions. Political discontent due to unemployment among the educated middle class, was an important factor in the growth of nationalism of which Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai, Bipin Chandra Pal, and Aurobindo Ghose were the leaders. Educated middle class grew in the country in the subsequent decades and became more conscious of its interests. Educated groups began to form their own organizations and formulate their own demands. After 1930, number of unions and associations of such groups as teachers, lawyers, engineers, emerged to defend and organize struggles. These organizations were similar to trade unions which protected the immediate interests of workers and peasants. The rapid growth of students' organizations and unions, particularly after 1934, all over India, culminating in the formation of all-India students organizations.

### **Indian High Class and National Movement**

From 1880 onward, modern industries steadily developed in India and the industrial bourgeoisie grew in strength. With the expansion of internal and foreign trade and growth of modern industries and banks in India, a new class developed of modern commercial, industrial and financial bourgeoisie. This class was economically and socially the strongest class in India. The rise and development of the Indian bourgeoisie was bound up with the expansion of trade, commerce, industry and banking in India. Europeans were also engaged

in trade, industry and banking in India. For their interests, they formed their own organizations. The first European Chamber of Commerce was established at Calcutta in 1834 and at Bombay and Madras in 1836. The first Indian Chamber of Commerce, The Bengal National Chamber of Commerce, was started in 1887. The Indian Merchants Chamber was founded in Bombay in 1907. The Marwari Chamber of Commerce was started at Calcutta in 1900 and the South Indian Chamber of Commerce at Madras in 1909. The Indian Chamber of Commerce was created in 1925 to promote and protect the trade, commerce, and industries in which Indians are engaged or concerned. The conflict of interests between the Indian and the European commercial classes was the main reason for the formation of the independent organizations of these respective groups. The main grievances of the Indian merchants were the preferential treatment shown to European business by the British government and restrictions put on Indian trade with non-British countries. The rising industrialist class had become conscious by 1905. They extended their support to the professional classes who were already fighting for breaking the monopoly of the British in the services and professions. The industrialist classes were interested to replace the British monopoly of industries in India. The Indian economic development was adapted and subordinated to the requirements of British industries, thereby reducing the Indian economy to subordinate the British economy. The industrial capitalists entered in the nationalist movement during the first decade of the twentieth century with the slogans of protection, favourable exchange ratio, subsidies for the growing industries etc. They supported the Indian National Congress by supporting the Swadeshi movement and boycott of English goods which served their own class interest. The Swadeshi Movement helped in the growth of Indian industries, especially the textile industry. The nationalist movement was restricted to the intelligentsia, sections of the commercial bourgeoisie and educated middle class who secured a broader social basis from 1905. Wealthy industrialists like Birla, Bajaj, Ambalal Sarabhai, Kasturbhai Lalbhai, and others, supported the Congress under Gandhi's absolute leadership and financed its programmes.

### **Indian Working Class & National Movement:**

With the Industrial establishment, appearance of the modern worker came on national scene in the second half of the nineteenth century. Before the nationalist associates themselves with the working class there were several agitation and strikes by the workers of Bombay, Calcutta, Surat, Madras etc. Such agitations were spontaneous and unorganised revolts based on immediate economic grievances. There were some organised efforts to improve the condition of workers like in 1878, Sravjaee Shapoorji Bengali tried unsuccessful attempt to introduce a bill in Bombay legislative council to limit the working hours of labour. In the beginning the nationalist movement was indifferent to the labour condition. The major reason of such attitude was that the anti-imperialist struggle was in infancy stage and the nationalist do not want to weaken the

common struggle against the British rule by creating division between national struggle and the labour struggle. Dadabai Naoroji in the second session of Indian National Congress (1886) made it clear that Congress must confine itself to programmes in which whole nation can participate. This Scenario change with the deteriorating condition of labour employed in British owned enterprises. This was partially because the employer and employed were from different nation. The Indian National Congress & Nationalist news paper campaign against the conditions of tea plantation worker in Assam. They were reduced to slavery and European Planters were given powers to arrest, Punish and prevent them from running away. The first organised strike by the section of workers occurred in May 1899 in railways owned and managed by British. Their demands were related to wages, working hours and other condition of services. Almost all nationalist news paper came in full support of the strike. With the growth of working class a new tendency emerged among the national intelligentsia. In 1903 G. Subramaniba urged the worker to organise themselves in Union to fight for their rights. In the history of India the Swadeshi movement of 1903-8 was landmark in the labour movement. Prominent leaders supporting Swadeshi movement for labour were Aswanicoomar, Prabhat Kumar Rai Chowdhwary, Prem Bose and Apooba Kumar Goshe. The most important feature of labour movement in Swadeshi struggles were that it was based purely on economic questions involving workers with the wider political issues. The partition of Bengal on 16 October 1905 invited large scale strikes of working class in Bengal. In 1919 to 1922 the working class created their own nationwide labour organisations to defend their class rights. It was the period when working class also got involved in main stream national politics. All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) in was found in 1920 with the help of Lokamanya Tilak and Lala Laj Pat Rai was its first president. The manifesto of AITUC urged workers to organise and involves themselves in national politics. As per the new atmosphere, working class was involved in struggle and responded to the change political scenario. In 1920 there were 125 unions with the total membership of 250,000. Between 1919 & 1921 railway workers struggled for economic demand and racial discrimination and supported to Rowalt agitation, non cooperation movement and Khilafat movement. In November 1921 the workers responded to a Congress call of country wide general strike at the time of the visit of the Prince of Wales.

By 1927 various communist groups in different parts of India organised themselves into the Workers and Peasant Parties (WPP) under the leadership of S.A.DANGE, Muzaffer Ahmed, P.C. Joshi and Sohan Singh Josh. In Bombay its membership rose from 324 to 54000 by the end of 1928. The labour movement suffered major setback due to government offensive policies like Public Safety and Trade Dispute Act and also due to shift in stand of communist leaders to align only with workers problem leaving aside national movement. There was dip in working class movement between 1931 & 1936. During the tenure of Congress provincial government, the working class

activity again came up with provincial autonomy and the formation of popular ministries during 1937-1939. Therefore, between 1937 to 1939 the number of trade union increases from 271 to 562 and membership from 261047 to 399159. This shift was due to the increased civil liberty during the congress government and pro-labour attitude by Congress ministers. World war second began on 3 September 1939 and working class of Bombay was first to go on anti-war strike on 2 October, 1939. About 90000 workers participated in the strike. During 1945-47 the workers in large numbers participated in post war political programmes. In 1945, the Bombay and Calcutta dock Workers refused to load ships going to Indonesia with supplies for troops. The last years of colonial rule also saw an increase in strike on economic issues all over the country.

### **Conclusion**

British with their advent in India introduced capitalist economy, western education, modern transport system, press and media and so on. All these introductions in the Indian social system altered the traditional India drastically. Traditional relations in agriculture and urban economy disappeared and new relations of capitalist nature came in place. These new economic relations took the form of various classes in rural and urban India. These classes expanded with the expansion of British rule in India. New economic system benefitted these classes at different levels. Therefore, they showed their loyalty to the British government in the beginning. Due to increasing competition in the market and different attitude of the British government towards Indian and European traders, the scenario changed. Competition of market put pressure on the workers and peasants. They were forced to work on minimal wages, their conditions deteriorated and they revolted for their rights. Spread of education created intelligentsia in India, who later became the reformers and the leaders of the national movement. Spread of education at the wider scale also created unemployment among the youth, whose frustration resulted in their struggle with the government to prefer them in government jobs in India then the Europeans. British government preferential behaviour towards the European traders and discrimination towards Indians made Indian bourgeoisie to rethink their loyalty towards British. They made their own trade unions and later they financed most of the programmes of Indian National Congress, the front runner of Indian National movement. Railway, press and media also helped in the national movement of India in big way.

Therefore, all the classes that came into existence due to the new capitalist economy and were loyal to the British government in the beginning, later became hostile to the system due to working conditions and political conditions of the country. Different classes had different economic and political interests but the enemy for all of them was common which ultimately resulted in the national movement of India under the leadership of the intelligentsia created by the British.

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