



POLITICAL ORIENTATION OF MIDDLE CLASS IN NAYA MULUK

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ABSTRACT

The Paper analyse the political position of the middle-class in the selected area of Banke and Bardiya districts. The objective of the research is to explore the middle-class formation process, its position, and the political orientation with its connection to caste/ ethnicity. It adopts the structuralist theory and the relative class power model. It has followed the mixed method of research. This study adopted the gradational concepts of class and measured them based on the self-perceived notion. Documentary resources, questionnaire surveys, and telephone interviews are used for data collection. Diversification of profession and tertiary activities, bureaucracy, expansion of education and activities of NGO/INGO, adoption of privatization, and inclusive representation are major factors in the formation of the middle class. Middle-class people like to be more active in civil society and social organizations than in a political party. It opens the door to a new gateway of research on the middle class and helps to promote common values and a roadmap without exploitation and repression of the ruling class. Despite the postmodern claim of the death or irrelevance of class, the class concept is still relevant as an analytical factor and more as a source of political power. The new middle classes are focused on governance, service delivery, and transformation in addition to social justice, inclusion, and empowerment.

Keywords: Naya Muluk - old middle class - new middle class - political orientation - inclusion

INTRODUCTION

Despite very frequent political changes in Nepal since 1990, the role of class in such changes and the institutionalization of the newly established system could not get enough academic attention. The research is focused on the unexplored subject “new middle class” in Banke, Bardiya of Naya Muluk. ‘Naya Muluk’ (New territory) is the plane area of presently

the part of Banke, Bardiya, Kailali, and Kanchanpur districts. Rana Prime minister Jung Bahadur Rana regained the territory (which was lost by the Sugauli Treaty) as a reward for his military contribution to suppressing the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 in north India (Pinthers *et al.* 2013, English 1985). The territories named Naya Muluk were part of the Doti, Dullu-Dailekh, and Salyan principalities before being lost by the Sugauli Treaty. The socio-political and economic condition of the people of the area is affected by multiple factors like industrialization, market, urbanization, migration, caste/ethnicity (*Verna* system), land ownership, education, bureaucracy, political change, and affirmative actions. Of these multiple factors, a new class having college-level education, involved in government, non-government or private sector positions in the middle of capital and labor, emerged in this area. Such class is composed of Doctors, Engineers, Lawyers, Professors, Teachers, Journalists, and professionals, government, and non-government officials (Sharma 1992, Liechty 2003, Blaikie *et al.* 2014, Pandey 2019). The new middle class is distinct from the old middle class (Proto middle class in Liechty's term) in terms of human capital instead of moneyed capital (Wright 1959). Political orientation in this study is taken as the reflection of values norms, and behavioral patterns made of the class location. Middle-class formation and its political values differ in the social structure. The formation of the middle classes, their political orientation, and linkage to caste/ethnicity are not studied yet. The major objective of the study is to explore the newly emerging middle classes in terms of their political values, behavior, and their connectivity with caste/ethnicity in Naya Muluk. Studies on the middle classes in Nepal are limited and focused on Kathmandu (Liechty 2003). So, such study in this area is novel and relevant for political science research.

The middle-class formation process in a peripheral, urban migrated, and re-settled area is affected by multiple factors. How does the middle class develop its orientation in a different time, context, and political system/social structure and why do the caste/ethnicity and class in different structures represent their interest? The study revolves around the question. Class movement (Yami 2006, Lawati & Pahari 2010) and identity movements (Jha 2017) are recent experiences of Nepalese society. Such movements mobilized different classes and groups by which class mobility and political orientation changed to an extent. How far does the socio-political structure of Naya Muluk specific to Banke and Bardiya is changed in terms of class perception by such movement and how class or caste/

ethnicity matters these days? The study attempts to search for the answer to these questions based on structuralist theory and the balance of class power model.

Theoretical debate on class in terms of gradational and relational or dichotomous and trichotomous concepts has its philosophical foundation (Keister and Southgate 2012). Middle-class studies either adopted the modernization or contextual approach. Western experience and studies have shown the middle class as trustworthy for democracy (Lipset 1959, 1981, Moore 1966, Dahl 1971, Huntington 1991, Glassman 1997, Homi Kharas & Geoffrey Gertz 2010, Fukuyama 2014) while Asiatic, African, and Latin American studies have shown different results that are contextual (Stephens 1989, Rueschemeyer & Stephens 1992, Bertrand 1998, Englehart 2003, Hsiao & Koo 1997, Acemoglu & Robinson 2000, Hattori & Funatsu 2003, Thompson 2004, Goodman 2014). Scholars of classical Marxist tradition adopted antagonistic concepts (Bhattarai 1998, Seddon, Blaikie & Cameron 2002, Neupane 2003, Bhusal 2008, Blaikie, Cameron & Seddon 2014, Mishra 2014, Prasain 2017, Tamang 2020). They analyzed the middle class from a classical Marxist perspective. Some scholars found overlapping between class and ethnicity in Nepal (Kirati 2064, Aahuti 2067, Hachhethu 2003, Mishra 2000, Neupane 2002, Bista 2008, Bhattachan 2008). Complexity and inequality in Nepalese society are reflected in some literature (Chauhan 1971, Khanal 2001, Dahal 2014).

There are limited studies focused on the middle-class (Sharma 1992, Meyer and Chalise 1999, Liechty 2002, Tiwari *et al.* 2016). Some have just touched the middle class in their study (Joshi & Rose 2004, Sharma 2006, Hachhethu 2006, Pandey 2006). Neupane (2002) depicted the new middle class in a Marxist way in a wider spectrum. Liechty (2002) adopted the ethnographical method with a post-structuralist philosophic base. He argued class is a process, not a product. Pandey reflected the evolution process of the Nepalese middle class during the Rana regime and classified Nepalese society into four categories: privileged, middle, lower-middle, and lower class (Pandey 2019). The middle class in the decade took space in academic as well as journalistic writings (Dhakal 2014, Agrawal 2018, Maharjan 2021, Kumar 2021, Sapkota 2021).

Any studies covered the population with this theoretical and conceptual model not yet. This study introduces a new horizon for the study of the new middle-class in 'Naya Muluk'. Concepts of class are

based on occupation, economic, asset-based, or lifestyle or consumption approach. Class in this study is not taken only as a tool for analysis but also as a foundation of political power. This concept is based on Marxist and Weberian traditions. The gradational class concept is adopted for the study. Middle-income groups and middle-classes are used interchangeably and the middle-class notion is based on self-perception.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

The research follows interpretive and social constructivism philosophy. It guides qualitative and mixed-method research. It is descriptive. In this research qualitative data on middle-class perceptions are collected through telephone interview which tends to be more open-ended. Quantitative data are collected through questionnaire surveys as a primary source and textual or written matters as secondary sources. Secondary data are collected through different sources of writing. It included books, reports, research articles, newspapers, etc. Online repositories became supportive for this purpose. A questionnaire survey was conducted on June 1-10, 2021 with 100 respondents among (University and school teachers, government and non-government employees, and professionals (Doctors, small businesses man and farmers with own land) selected by purposive sampling representing Khas-Arya, Madheshi, Muslim, and Tharu communities in Nepalgunj- 1 and Khajura-3 of Banke and the Badhaiyatal-6 of Bardiya District of the Naya Muluk. Books, research articles, and documents are taken as samples for document review and analysis. Focal persons of local governments are chosen for a telephone interview. The unit of analysis is a person and the class as a group, the middle class. Thematic data are managed in thematic analysis. Numerical data are presented in tabular form and different figures using a computer Excel program. The available data are compared in percentages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The context for the middle-class formation

‘Naya Muluk’ (New territory) is the plane area of presently the part of Banke, Bardiya, Kailali, and Kanchanpur districts. Rana Prime minister Jung Bahadur Rana regained the territory (which was lost by the Sugauli Treaty) as a reward for his military contribution to suppressing the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 in north India (Pinthers *et al.* 2013, English 1985). The territories named Naya Muluk were part of the Doti, Dullu-Dailekh, and Salyan principalities before being lost by the Sugauli Treaty. Jung Bahadur

takes a new tie with the British through his military support and opens Naya Muluk for a new settlement. The government announced new opportunities and concessions to settle this area and more people were attracted to such opportunities (Adhikari 1975, Regmi 1981, Gill 2017, Jha 2017). Jung Bahadur himself take many initiations for the management of trade. His specific focus was to promote internal revenue and control informal trans-border trade (Mishra 2017). Jung Bahadur established formal marketplaces and revenue offices in Nepalgunj at Banke and Golamandi and Rajapur at Bardiya and Brahmadeo at Kanchanpur of the Naya Muluk. Mal office was established in Banke under the rule of Chandra Shamsheer (Karki 1981). Naya Muluk Bandobasta Adda and Rakam Goswara were established as government offices. After such settlement, not only the socio-economy of Bheri- Karnali Corridor but also the human life of the corridor linked to the border city, Nepalgunj. Some Tharus from Dang and abroad migrated in the first phase (1860-1950) in western Terai (Gaige 1975; Gunaratne 2002, Chaudhary 2011) and some earlier (Krauskopff 2018). They claim themselves indigenous people of the region. Muslims moved to Nepalgunj from that time near the south after the suppression of the Sepoy Mutiny at Lucknow. Madheshi (Hindu) migrated from the south by searching for a new region due to the high land revenue in Oadh. Indian zamindars were encouraged to take Terai land and they tempt tenant cultivators of plains origin to settle in the area between the 1890s and the 1930s (Gaige1975). The social hierarchy of this area was shaped by the tradition of northern India (English 1985). After 1950 with the control of Malaria, the migration of hill Nepali people take significant shape in the region. Some projects of land settlement under the Nepal resettlement company were launched (Ojha 1983).

More of the land of Naya Muluk was granted to Jung Bahadur and his brothers (Adhikari 2008, Pandey 2019) because they took land as an important asset of the ruling class. But they did not cultivate themselves due to fear of malaria and owned the land as an absent landlord. The government settled the land under a system of Jagir and Birta tenure to the civil and military officials. Despite the feudalistic political system under Rana's rule, increasing trade promoted capitalistic relations among the people. The civil code of Nepal 1854 reorganized the caste/ethnicities into five hierarchical categories (Bennett *et al.* 2008). It created a tight feudal class structure. Limited sectors like business, industries, government jobs, and economic transactions promoted capitalist relations. The land was the major means

of production irrespective of trade. The ruling class and their allies had unlimited land and the subjects with no land. They used the intermediaries Zamindar, Talukdar, Mukhiya, Mulmi, and Jimmawals (Thapa 2000) in Rana rule to exploit at the local level. Talukdar system was dropped just after regaining the area (Regmi 1981) and Chaudhary became the agent to collect revenue of the land at the village level. The class structure at the time of the last quarter of the Rana regime was divided into four classes; high, middle, lower-middle, and service classes based on economic status, kinship, religion, and social practice (Pande 2019).

Nepalgunj city area after 1950 took a significant size and became the center of a modern economy. Growing urbanization increased economic activities. Land Act 1964 and its amendment 2002 reduced the land ceiling and ended dual ownership of land by protecting the right of the tenant cultivators. The modernization process was continued in the Panchayat system (Hachhethu & Gellner 2010) irrespective of a ban on political parties. Rapid progress in infrastructure produced a critical mass of educated middle-class (Ibid). Expansion of schooling began in 1970 (Mishra 2015) made a capitalist relationship. Among the movement of 1950, 1990, and 2006, the latter had a wider base (Ibid). Thus, with the wider base of the class and caste/ethnic movements played a vital role in the eradication of the feudal forms of discrimination and exploitation. It promoted the class mobility and formation of the middle class. Inclusive representation and support for the exploited people provisions created a new situation for class mobility. Nepal's class formation process under feudal structure was much affected by caste/ ethnicity while today it is shaped by class.

Despite the capitalist development of the eighteenth century, the formation of the new middle class took place by the last quarter of the twentieth century and 1950s political change. Diversification of employment and tertiary activities (Liechty 2002), changing agrarian relations (Thapa 2000, Regmi 2014), bulk migration from hills to the Terai after 1960 (Ojha, 1983), international aid, and growing activities of NGO/INGO (Sharma 1992, Mishra 2017), growth of professional employment (Neupane 2002), and infrastructural development (Hachhethu & Gellner 2010) are the major factors of new class formation. Maoist movement (1996-2004) and subsequent identity movement made a new structure of class society. The end of dual ownership of land, and the liberation of Kamaiya and Haliya (a form of semi-bonded labor) made ease for upward class mobility. The class structure reflects in the republic with inclusive and federal forms

of government. Some recent studies estimate the size of the middle class increased by 22% (Chun 2010), and 22% middle-class size (Tiwari *et al.* 2016), and 33.6% (Giri *et al.* 2020).

Inclusive representation in elected government bodies and employment has a positive impact on the behavior and thinking of the exploited groups. The middle-class formation process was shaped by caste/ethnicity to some extent, but much the class matters these days. The grassroots people are less benefited by the inclusive practice of the upper-class of the same group. Redistributive politics strongly favors the middle class at the expense of other income groups (Zoutman *et al.* 2016). The identity movement has blurred the class movement but became a catalyst for shaping class mobility to an extent. The socio-political gap between caste/ethnic groups is reducing.

Orientation of the middle-class and its connection with caste/ ethnicity

Different scholars identify the middle class differently. Some of them identify as ambivalent (Blaikie *et al.* 2014), hanging between the high and low (Liechty 2002), and replacing the caste/ethnic thought (Bista 2020). Caste/ethnicity was a major attribute of the feudal system as being the base of the civil code of Nepal in 1854. But after the 1950s and later movements opened new horizons. The Maoist party tried to blend the caste/ethnic, and gender issues with the class issue during the Maoist insurgency (1996-2004). The movement (2006 to date) of the Madheshi and Adivasi-Janajati people rise the caste/ethnic issue on the ground of the class movement. The new constitution of 2015 fully recognized the multiplicity of caste/ethnicity as an integral part of Nepali society and provided affirmative action for making an inclusive society. Society took a new turn by which the upward mobility of class geared up. By such provision, caste/ethnicity matters for upward mobility but fewer matters to class politics. It changes the bureaucratic and professional structure and supports upward mobility. The middle class is consistent in its demand for better goods and services and keeping the government accountable (Amoranto 2010).

Parties are the most effective agencies of class formation. Political change became possible only by the leadership and joint effort of the parties. But the party leadership is criticized for its inefficiency in public service delivery and effective governance and corruption. For this reason, a significant part of the middle class is beyond the frame of political parties as the data in table 1 shows. According to field survey data, they like to be

neutral in normal life. People from the Tharu, Madhesi, and Muslim groups like to involve in social movements than directly in the political party's movement. The people of the hill caste/ethnic group like to involve in the overall sector of the socio, political and economic issues. However, people of different groups are active in social and civil society movements trying to promote social capital in this region.

Table 1: Participation in movement after 2015 in percentage

S.N.	Type of movement	Percentage
1	Movement of a political party	21
2	Movement of civil society	25
3	Movement of social organization	23
4	No involvement	31

Source: Field survey, 2021

People's attitude toward the middle-income group in this area shows the trend a little high in non-involvement in the movement. 23 % of the people like to involve in the movement of social organizations while 25% of the people like to involve in civil society movements and only 21 % of the people like to involve in political party movements. 31% of the people do not like to involve in movement. Educated people having middle-income like to involve in the civil society movement on the recent issue. The movement of social organization and civil society movement is identical and such involvement makes democracy strong (Barber 2003). The practice of party politics made people more critical of the decision of political parties or governments. The people of the middle-income strata are more critical. It denotes the gap or dissatisfaction with the decision process of the parties in the party life or the government.

Table 2: People's role in the election in percentage

S. N	People's role	Percentage
1	Debating on issues	09
2	Advocating the party line	07
3	Voting for a candidate by personality	82
4	Not voting at all	02

Source: Field Survey, 2021

The election is a common mechanism that examines the popularity of the parties, their leaders, and candidates. People can take important decisions in such a forum without any voice. Middle-income strata in this

area mostly vote in an election in comparison to debating on issues and advocating the party's line. They like to vote based on the personality of the candidate irrespective of party. The data presented in Table 2, most people like to vote for the candidate based on his personality and only 2 % of people do not like to vote at all. Among them, 82% of the people like to vote upon the personality of the candidate while 9% of people like to debate on an issue in the election and 7% of people projected them advocating party line.

In a study, people of the old middle class were found relatively supportive of the established order, and people of the new middle class are relatively change-oriented (Englehart 1977). In a developing society like Nepal, a value judgment is affected by social thought and standards, and positions. Nepalese middle strata adopted high-value standards and are struggling with socio-political and economic transformation. Studies show the empirical reflection of the middle-class interest in their effective participation (Varma 2014, Singh 2010). In the case of this area, the new middle-class can be the major agency of poverty alleviation, employment creation, and governance. The new middle-class values are oriented towards secularism and civic activism (figure 1).

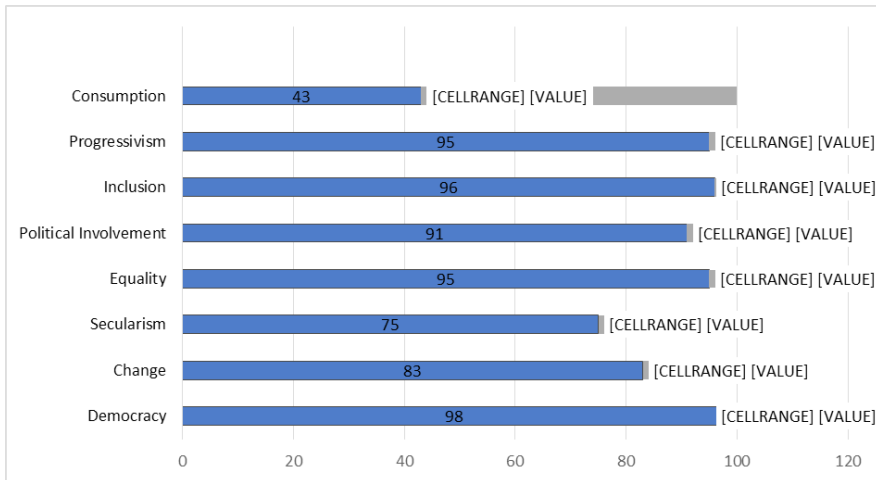


Figure 1: Alternative value preference in percentage

Source: Field Survey, 2021

The people other than the middle classes are more conservative and spiritual as the data shows. In figure 1, the data reveals that people's values

of democracy, inclusion, and progressivism are more than 95 % share while secular value has a 75% share and political involvement is 91% share. The middle-class people like to involve more in the civil society movement than in the political parties. The value of saving is a little high than consumption. It means the middle strata of this area are of lower-middle-class strata. Among the sample, 83 % of people like to change whereas 17% of people want stability. Among them, 23% of the people like to be spiritual. Field survey shows that Muslim people like more stability than other groups. Overall value preference shows that middle-class people have a strong commitment to inclusive democracy and change-oriented progressivism. The middle class in Nepal favors upward mobility of the working classes. Nepal like Malaysia for two decades is still struggling with absolute poverty whereas the middle class is struggling with relative poverty at the same time (Rahman 2002). The caste/ethnicity and class is overlapping to some extent even today.

CONCLUSIONS

Political orientation and consumer culture of the middle classes are dependent upon one's profession, prestige/status, and property. These variables shaped the political orientation and class power of the middle class. The result of the survey of this study area cannot be generalized in Nepal except for other supportive studies. However, the middle-class political orientation is critical in the sense that they critically accept and follow the political parties and government's decisions. They can easily perceive it as a class belonging to them. They have made a class perception and most of them like to call middle class even if they cannot be categorized as middle class based on objective data. They do not accept the political decision taken by the government or political party without critical assessment. Critical thinking towards politics is growing. Some of them are organized by a political party and some have used to involve in civil society and social organization movements than the political party's movement. It is also a broad spectrum of political participation. There is not a single middle class but classes according to their fields or working background. They are searching to converge by a different forum like civil society or mass movement as a common attribute of the middle class. The size and role of the middle class are burgeoning. The Muslims, Madheshi, and Tharus have a community network than a common social network. The distance made between different communities during the identity movement, they are realizing common aspirations. Peoples like to involve in social movements

than political parties Movement. They want to change the foundation of the political party into a new responsive and participatory model. They directly feel better about the reservation system that has contributed formation of middle-class strata. They gained social recognition and political power with prestige. Some of them have realized that the reservation may be a social evil because it does not prefer competition and followed a class approach. However, the discriminated caste/ethnic peoples in the area take the inclusive model as better for their life. The people of lower-class strata expect economic conditions should be the basis of reservation. Their experience of inequality, discrimination, and deprivation in history has little been addressed by the inclusive, federal model with affirmative action. The class-formation process in this area is shaped by multiple factors. Caste/ethnicity has a decreasing effect and is surpassed by profession, adoption of modern values, and changing orientation of the class.

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