

The Role of New Middle Class and Media as phenomenon and voice of the Marginalised in *Revolution 2020: Love, Corruption, Ambition*

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Abstract

Middle class in India is an evolving phenomenon. There are no clear demarcations between the upper, middle and the lower. There are overlaps in terms of socio-economic and political status among them. Over the last few years, there has emerged a new class that may not strictly be called the middle class because of its dynamic and resilient nature. It may be called as neo-middle class owing to its new entry into middle class status and at the same time its being hinged to its lower class or traditional, cultural values. It undergoes a lot of stress caused by its dynamism and its moral and ideological underpinnings which represent the wider interests of the nation undergoing radical change in recent times. The research paper is an attempt to read and analyse the nature of the middle class in the novel. It will study the role of the neo-middle class in terms of its role in relation to the state, market, the civil society and the socio-economic and political interests.

Keywords: Corruption, New middle class, Media, System

Introduction

Chetan Bhagat (1974) is a popular Indian fiction writer. The New York Times called him “the biggest selling English language novelist in India's history”. Most of his literary works address the issues related to Indian youth and their aspirations which have earned him status of the youth icon. Almost all of his literary artifacts were bestsellers and have been filmed by famous

Bollywood directors. For Bhagat, novels are entertainment tools to express views and opinions about society and the youth.

The novel *Revolution 2020: Love. Corruption. Ambition.* (2011) narrates the story of three friends and classmates - Gopal, Raghav and Aarti. The story is narrated by Gopal who belongs to lower economic class and is also the protagonist of the story. Because of his poor economic condition, he could not focus on his studies and was dull in his academics. Like a typical lower class child, he is forced by his father to study for the IIT entrance exam but finds the studies uninteresting. However, his friend, Raghav, was a better student and would always score good marks. The economic status of his family is also better and he has nothing to worry about. He concentrates fully on his education, scores good marks and gets admission in the IIT BHU. Gopal failed to make it to IIT BHU for his poor marks. In the eyes of his father and society, he is an utter failure in almost all the walks of life. His father is a retired teacher who looked after him after the death of his wife when Gopal was only four. He wished Gopal to be an engineer and become a rich person but all in vain. Raghav represents a small intelligent group of Indian middle class youths. He gets good rank in AIEEE and JEE and is treated as a mini-celebrity in the town. There were stories about him in local newspapers. However, he does not want to be richer like Gopal. He wants to work for society through the medium of writing. Contrary to Gopal, he is an idealist and wants to bring change in the society and nation. He is not happy with his current status. The third friend, Aarti, is the daughter of a district magistrate who is an honest fellow. But, she does not raise voice when unfair things happen like corruption or nepotism. Her grandfather was a legendary and respected political leader.

The story of Gopal is a typical story of Indian middle class mentality where parents want their wards to select their career not according to their interests but according to their parent's interest. Gopal, in the novel, claims; "I didn't particularly want to become an engineer. Baba wished to see me as one, and that was why I went to JSR" (23).

Gopal's father even takes a huge loan for the studies of his son and incurs huge debt. Gopal falls in love with Aarti who is his childhood love. The above-mentioned three friends cherish their own individual aims in life, not taking into consideration what their families want. Gopal grows into a young man whose only aim is to become rich through easy means, Raghav wants to bring

social and political transformation in the country, and Aarti aspires to become an air hostess. Like a typical Indian girl, she ditches Gopal and gets into a relationship with Raghav. Gopal also has an uncle, Ghanshyamtaya-ji who has cheated on him and his father by cunningly taking the possession of their agricultural land. Fed up with the delaying of justice, Gopal, after the death of his father, strikes a deal with the local MLA, Shukla. He collaborates with the MLA to start a private engineering college on his family's disputed land. MLA sends his goons to his dishonest uncle and forces him to hand over the land to Gopal. Gopal is made the director of the new college-Ganga Tech College. During his work, Gopal learns about the corrupt education system of the country but he is helpless and has no option except to become a part of it. Raghav becomes a journalist and exposes the corrupt dealings of Shukla in various scams. The poor people have great hopes from Raghav whom they consider as their savior. Because of this, Gopal feels inferior to Raghav. The MLA is jailed, Gopal lives a lavish life and has a number of girlfriends. He feels that Arti deserves Raghav whom she marries.

New-Middle and its Dynamism

The Indian new-middle class is no more dependent on the rich and the dominant section of the society to speak for their rights and concerns. This emerging class, now, has decided to take the reins of the system in its own hands. It has emerged as progressive force, demanding rule of law. The youth and the people of this class are now demanding share in political, social and economic affairs of the nation. Raghav, in the story of the novel *Revolution 2020*, represents the true nature of this class. He does not choose what the family and the society expected him to choose rather he follows his inner-self and becomes a journalist. He writes for the proletariat, raises their issues, exposes the corruption of the system, gets powerful people jailed and punished. This is the power of the young and educated youth of the country. Leela Fernandes' book about India's *New Middle Class: Democratic Politics in an Era of Economic Reforms* (2006) paints a critically realistic picture of Indian society viz a viz class differences. According to her, Sheela Raval also endorses the view that Indian youth are now crossing the mental and physical barriers and are asserting themselves everywhere, and making India a happening place. She further states

Citizens are indeed stepping out. In a departure from the past, Mumbaikars aren't resigning to their fate or escaping to the suburbs. Worsening civic and environmental conditions and burgeoning corruption in Mumbai have nudged citizens across the city out of their slumber. They have come together in groups to raise issues and fight for their rights (137).

Raghav's aim to work as a journalist and his opening of a new media house is a form of new-middle class media which seeks to represent the reality from the point of view of the poor themselves. The ruling class in India after independence controlled the media altogether and used it for its vested interests. Pt. Jawaharlal Lal Nehru "was hesitant of introducing television in India as he was apprehensive that it would be monopolized by the middle class ..." (Prabhu 85). The lower classes had to live as per the wishes of the rich and there was no way out of the rigid systemic apparatus. Modi's rise to power has created a new space for the role of the media and the middle class in almost all spheres of democratic set up. The new middle class media space played a very important role in creating an image of N. Modi as the future prime minister of India. The middle class and the media other than the mainstream media thus played the main role as sculptors of the now Indian democracy. Nagesh Prabhu claims that "the presence of a sizeable number of the middle class and its active engagement in the electoral process, state bureaucracy, law-making bodies, judiciary and media has ensured the stability of the Indian democratic polity, especially after economic liberalization" (Prabhu XXV). Chetan Bhagat also represents the same picture of Indian middle class dynamism and aspiration. For instance, in the novel *Revolution 2020*, the opening of a new news agency as a counter to mainstream media which catered to the tastes and interests of ruling and dominant class by Raghav gives new dimension and shape to the way journalism is done. It reiterates that India is progressing at a faster rate owing to the assertion of the middle class as a new form of agency, defending the democratic rights and interests. Raghav, like an educated and fearless young man, questions the existing coercive and corrupt political set up and demands change in the role it played. Leela Fernandes is also of the view that the new middle class has

...began to emerge as a distinctive political actor—one that attempts to reconstitute the meanings of civic life and provokes new forms of political

contestation in return. In this process, the formation of new middle class identity has sparked political and social conflicts as segments of the middle class, the state, and subaltern social groups negotiate competing responses to broader changes in the liberalizing Indian nation. (137- 138)

Raghav becomes a 'new medial' voice for the subalterns who look towards him for looking after their plights amid moral and ethical corruption and apathy of the rich and the elite. The state plays a mute spectator when the rich and the political elite manipulate the legal system which they are supposed to defend and uphold. Raghav was thrown out of his job by his boss on the directions of Shukla-ji, an MLA. The new emerging educational institutes become a safe way of investments for the corrupt politicians and government officers. The large scale issues of corruption in the novel reminds of the realist historical situation.

For instance, in the 1980s the urban middle class grew alienated from Rajiv Gandhi's regime as he became mired in corruption scandals and as he turned away from earlier promises of economic reforms in favor of more populist electoral strategies. Rajiv Gandhi failed to live up to his promise as a new urban middle class-oriented prime minister and failed to meet the rising expectations of an increasingly vocal middle class that had begun to identify itself as a distinctive group with specific interests that needed political representation. (Fernandes 178)

Raghav decides to take the ruling class head on. He does not accept the status quo and dares to think beyond what the system allowed for. He is a kind of rebel who is conscious of his constitutional rights and duties and uses his education to set the system right by putting the corrupt behind the bars. However, he does not go against the system rather uses the same system for the welfare of the common man. He is optimistic about the changes that he wants to see and takes up into his own hands to set the system right.

The agenda of the media, before the new middle class upsurge, "was largely governed by commercial considerations, and advertisements have become the principal arbiter in deciding coverage of news. The concept of television as an intimate and family medium is being utilized to its fullest to influence the rapidly expanding middle class" (Prabhu 85). After working as a journalist, Raghav, towards the end of the story of *Revolution 2020*, joins politics and marks an

entry of middle class youth into politics who are more sensitive towards the issues and demands of the people especially the 'have nots'. This way he is in a better position to serve the people. He, as a journalist, knows about the lacunas of the system that need to be rectified.

A renowned Marxist scholar Poulantzas examines the two groups he calls as the traditional middle class (old petty bourgeoisie) and the new middle class (new petty bourgeoisie) and argues that both the groups have different economic interests but common element as both don't fall into the category of the bourgeoisie or the proletariat. Distinguishing between these two classes, he discovers that because of capitalism the old petty bourgeoisie is threatened with extinction. However, the new petty bourgeoisie is not faced with any such threat of extinction because capitalism keeps growing (209). This new emerging petty bourgeoisie is distinguished on the economic, political and ideological basis. The working class is exploited not only politically but also ideologically dominated (230–270).

The novel *Revolution 2020* is a *tour de force*, representing the very flux of changing middle class and its transformation into the figure of the 'the new common man' who is conscious of his past and future. At present, he is faced with an ineffective government on the one hand and greedy, lawless bureaucracy and system on the other. The government and the system become an embodiment of the corruption and incompetence cause by weak judicial and executive system. After Shukla ji was fired from his party after being exposed by the new middle class media activist. Raghav created conditions where corrupt had to be brought to justice. But for people like Raghav, the battle is not yet over because he is also conscious of the reality of the Indian system that Shukla-ji will come out of jail by dint of bribes. This is quite typical of the Indian political and judicial system. Shukla-ji enjoys a very hospitable treatment in the jail. He is given a VVIP treatment there. Prison, for him, is like a new house rather than a jail. This is what happened during colonial times as well. The rich and the powerful could influence the judiciary, could hire good lawyers who could prove them innocent. Prabhu also draws our attention to the fact that "The judicial structure, armed forces hierarchies and education system evolved under British rule continued without substantial modifications. It was just the emerging middle class that occupied the vacant chairs of the British administrators, named as 'Brown Sahibs' (48). Raghav also is sure that Shukla can hire good lawyers and prove that he was wrongly implicated

in the case. The political history of India is full of such examples. In such a scenario, the middle class feels quite alienated, having perceptions of what Thomas Hansen has described as middle class perceptions of a “plebianization of the political field” (quoted in Fernandes, 184) in which, as he notes, “From the 1960s onward, the public construction of politics has increasingly been transformed toward that of an ‘immoral vocation,’ a site of unprincipled pragmatism, corruption, nepotism and greed—in brief, as the profane antithesis to the sublime qualities of the cultural realm” (ibid).

Chetan Bhagat, through the novel, has tried to represent the middle class psyche in order to make them the countrymen conscious about the pressing issues of the society. The middle class people in India are obsessed and preoccupied with discourses on the corrupt political elites and the criminalization of politics. The common man is merely treated as a vote bank by such a political system. Middle class is not one single concrete category of people; rather it is a conglomerate of people who belong to several classes within the ‘middle class’. In such a right and corrupt social and political setup, it becomes difficult for a poor person to raise his standard of living and enter into a higher category of class. The only means at hand is education which functions as a ladder for achieving access to employment and economic power.

In a society, defined purely by utilitarian values, human relations and education become merely another marketable entity to become rich. This kind of thinking and behaviour makes the corrupt entrepreneurs and politicians like Shukla a typical upper class which tries to multiply its ill gotten money. The new institutes that the novel discusses about, like engineering colleges where Raghav and Gopal studied, impart a kind of education that partially produces a class of so called intelligentsia which also serves as a ‘self-perpetuating class’ (quoted in Fernandes, 5) of individuals. They are either employed as teachers or became financial supporters of the institutions that had trained them. They produce more individuals of the same clime and there is no way out for them, because their socioeconomic position rests on the social, cultural, and economic capital associated with these institutes. Such intellectuals and the teachers help Gopal run the engineering college that he opened with the help of MLA Shukla ji. Robison and Goodman, while studying the true nature of Asian economic crisis, coined a new phrase “new rich in Asia” (quoted in Leela XXV), that captures the ever changing space between the new

middle class and the rise of the “new rich”. Robison and Goodman also “address internal differences within the middle class, they present a broad definition of the new rich in which they argue that the social basis and power of the “new rich” is derived from “capital, credentials and expertise” rather than from their position in the state apparatus (quoted in Leela XXV).

The emerging new middle class is entering into new fields to carve out careers out of it and are seriously concerned about the political and economic stability of their society. As the system is entirely corrupt, the newly informed struggling middle class is quite hopeless about it. Therefore, it has now decided to take it into their own hands to work and expose the corrupt and bring new consciousness among the masses about the ways of changing the society for the better. In the book written by *The Trajectory of India’s Middle Class: Economy, Ethics and Etiquette* edited by Lancy Lobo and Jayesh Shah writes that the emergence of new middle class - embourgeoisement marks a new trend :

... that has brought to prominence the issue of corruption in politics and has undermined the legitimacy of the state by exposing the complicity of the political class in scandals that have caused huge losses to the public exchequer. The state, as well as the political class, is now under tremendous pressure to reform itself and become more transparent and accountable to the people” (Lobo 16)

The novel, *Revolution 2020: Love, Corruption, Ambition* is primarily about a love triangle, corruption and a journey towards self-discovery of almost all the characters of the story. In the shadow of the love story, the novel addresses the issue of the crippling education system of our country. There is a vicious circle created by corrupt officials who run the system from which there is escape for the poor. In this way, the novel tells an age old tale of human insatiable greed, corruption that is at its worst. We see in the novel how private coaching institutions exploit aspiring engineering aspirants and how parents put their lifetime’s earnings on stake for coaching classes so that their children can crack IIT and IIM exams and change the fortune of the family. They don’t know that the only purpose of these institutions is to earn money by selling dreams, making students into engineers – ‘big man’ in the society. While only a handful of students could accomplish their dreams, others fail and end up into a kind of disaster because the society looks down upon them as outcasts, useless, meaningless who don’t deserve to live. The main motive of

these centers of education is to manufacture engineers and meet the demands of MNCs and other private companies, rest they don't bother about the values of education, humanities and human ethics. 'Reification' and 'fetishism' determine the behavior and ideology of individuals in such a social set up. Reification means to prioritize material and monetary gains over human relationships and fetishism defines that kind of behavior which treats inanimate things as more important and valuable than inanimate ones e.g., humans. These terms strongly demonstrate the psychological frames of capitalist and utilitarian mentality.

Honest and impartial journalism is an impossible task in a society where capitalism is treated as religion. Raghav, who tries to become the voice of the subalterns, is attacked and his office is ransacked by goons of a MLA Shukla ji against whom Raghav wrote an article, exposing his corrupt practices. There is no rule of law as culprits go unpunished. Only those journalists are making successful careers and are in the good books of the system, which have ideological or political affiliations to different party politics. Such journalists avoid asking realistic questions and publish news which highlights the real issues and the corrupt practices of the political and the rich class. Raghav sets up a new media house as a counter to main-stream media journalists. He asks questions which are intended to highlight the corruption, malpractices and illegal activities which have become integral part of the way the system functions. Therefore, Raghav has to face many hardships in the war against powerful forces which constitute the system itself. Raghav, however, succeeds in creating a situation, interrogating the political establishment and demanding answers. The powerful and the rich manipulate the laws according to their needs, making the system more of a crippled kind. Shukla ji hopes, and it is the reality as well, that he will soon be out on bail and can restart his political career once again. In this way, the poor will remain poor and the rich will remain rich forever.

Conclusion

The new middle class and Media have emerged as a dialectically intimate force, taking the whole of the country on the path of progress and development. It has thrown a serious challenge to the mainstream political parties and media by raising its own media houses and political ideologies wherein every citizen can, if anyone works hard and wills to raise standard of life, can achieve success and realize his/her dreams. Freedom and liberty are realized in the real sense of the

terms. Now, it seems most unlikely that the rich will always remain rich and the poor will remain poor. The current Prime Minister, Modi and Chief Minister of Delhi, Kejriwal are living examples of how lower class and middle class has carved new political and media against the background of one that existed since Independence.

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