



The Role of Educated Middle Class in Abdur Razzaq's Political Parties in India: A Marxist Approach

Sumon Sikder

sikders620@gmail.com

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v7i3.2191>

APA Citation: Sikder, S. (2025). The Role of Educated Middle Class in Abdur Razzaq's Political Parties in India: A Marxist Approach . *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies*. 7(3).278-284. <http://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v7i3.2191>

Received:

12/04/2025

Accepted:

17/05/2025

Keywords:

Educated Middle Class, Nationalist Leadership, Colonial Education, Marxist Approach, Power Dynamics.

Abstract

Abdur Razzaq's Political Parties in India provides a vivid portrayal of the political dynamics of colonial India, with a particular focus on the educated middle class. Employing a Marxist lens, this research explores their pivotal yet paradoxical role in nationalist movements, highlighting their dual identity as agents of anti-colonial resistance and beneficiaries of colonial systems. This study critically examines how their class interests shaped their contributions and limitations, arguing that their vision for independence, while significant, often reflected bourgeois priorities over radical social transformation. This class is actually part of the bourgeoisie, and on the other hand, they led all the movements against the British. Critically examining Razzaq's perspective, the research explores his argument that despite leading these movements, this class did not hold sole control over the trajectory of Indian nationalism. By adopting a Marxist approach, this research sheds light on the complex interplay of economic and social factors that shaped India's political landscape under colonialism, particularly the role and limitations of the educated middle class within the broader struggle for independence.

1. INTRODUCTION

The educated middle class played a major role in shaping India's struggle for independence during British colonial rule. This group had a unique and complex position. On one hand, they benefited from the colonial system through education, jobs, and social status. On the other hand, they became leaders who challenged British rule and demanded self-governance. Understanding their role requires looking at the contradictions between their class interests and political actions.

The British established an education system in India aimed at training Indians to serve as clerks, teachers, and administrators. This system created a new social group—the educated middle class—who spoke English and were familiar with Western political ideas like democracy, liberty, and nationalism. Exposure to these ideas helped spark political awareness among them. They began to organize political parties, lead protests, and push for reforms and independence.

However, as members of the middle class, they often had economic and social interests that differed from those of workers, peasants, and the rural poor. Their leadership in the nationalist movement tended to focus on gradual reforms and constitutional change rather than radical social transformation. This sometimes limited their ability to fully represent the diverse demands of Indian society.

This paper uses a Marxist framework to analyze the role of the educated middle class in colonial India. Marxist ideas about class struggle, cultural influence, and power help explain the contradictions in their

leadership. While they played a key role in mobilizing resistance, they also worked to preserve their own class privileges. Their vision for India's future was shaped by these competing interests.

The paradox of the educated middle class is that they were both opponents and products of colonial rule. They helped give the independence movement structure and legitimacy through organizations like the Indian National Congress. Yet, they did not fully include the voices of marginalized groups. This study examines Abdur Razzaq's argument that, although this class was central to nationalism, they did not fully control its direction. Their leadership reflected both their political goals and their class position.

By placing the educated middle class in the wider historical and social context of colonial India, this paper seeks to provide a balanced view of their contributions and limitations. It shows how their role was shaped by the complex relationship between class, power, and resistance. This study challenges simple ideas about nationalism and highlights the need to consider class dynamics to understand India's independence movement fully.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The educated middle class in colonial India has long been studied by scholars who want to understand how social and political changes unfolded under British rule. This group was created mainly through the British education system, which aimed to train Indians to work in the colonial government. However, the education they received also introduced them to powerful ideas such as liberty, democracy, and nationalism. These ideas helped awaken political awareness among them and led many to challenge British rule (Ray, 1998).

Rajat Kanta Ray highlights that the educated middle class was mostly urban and came from upper-caste backgrounds. Despite their political activity, they stayed closely connected to the colonial system that gave them social status and economic opportunities. This relationship shaped how they led the nationalist movement. They were interested in reforms that would benefit their class and often hesitated to push for radical changes that might disrupt the existing social order (Ray, 1998).

Sumit Sarkar builds on this by showing how the middle class's leadership focused more on political reform and less on social revolution. Their goals were influenced by bourgeois values, favoring gradual change within the colonial framework rather than overthrowing it completely. This approach limited the movement's ability to address deep economic inequalities and social injustices faced by peasants and workers (Sarkar, 1983).

Partha Chatterjee offers a critical perspective, arguing that the educated middle class relied too much on Western political ideas. According to him, this reliance restricted their vision of nationalism and made it difficult for them to understand the realities faced by rural and working-class Indians. This created a divide between the leadership and the majority of the population, whose demands for land rights and economic justice often went unheard (Chatterjee, 1986). Similarly, Ranajit Guha points out that the leadership tended to prioritize the concerns of urban elites while marginalizing the more radical demands coming from peasants and workers (Guha, 1983).

From a Marxist perspective, the educated middle class occupied a contradictory position. Shlomo Avineri explains that they depended on colonial power structures for their social and economic standing but also opposed British rule politically (Avineri, 1968). Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony helps us understand how this class maintained influence by shaping the nationalist movement's ideas to serve their interests (Gramsci, 1971). Their political strategies often avoided radical social upheaval and instead aimed to maintain stability through constitutional reforms (Washbrook, 1976).

Abdur Razzaq provides a sharp critique of the educated middle class's role. He acknowledges their important contributions to organizing resistance but argues that their vision of independence was limited by bourgeois interests. Razzaq notes that their focus on political freedom often left social and economic inequalities unchallenged, as their leadership prioritized elite privileges over radical change (Razzaq, 1970).

In conclusion, existing scholarship demonstrates that the educated middle class played a multifaceted role in India's nationalist movement. They were both agents of political change and protectors of their class advantages. Their leadership reflected the tensions between reformist goals and the need for social revolution. To fully understand their impact, it is necessary to recognize these contradictions and how they shaped the course of India's independence struggle.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs qualitative research methods to analyse Abdur Razzaq's Political Parties in India, utilising a Marxist framework. Combining close textual analysis, historical context, and theoretical critique, it investigates the educated middle class's strategies and limitations in India's nationalist movements.

The primary source is Razzaq's work, which provides key insights into the educated middle class's political strategies and their alignment with bourgeois interests. Close reading techniques are used to understand his arguments about the contradictions in their leadership. Secondary sources, such as Sumit Sarkar's *Modern India: 1885–1947* and Partha Chatterjee's *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, are included to provide historical context and scholarly perspectives.

A Marxist framework underpins the study, with concepts like class struggle and cultural hegemony guiding the analysis. This framework helps to explain how the economic and social positions of the educated middle class shaped their political actions and limitations. The research also compares

the role of the educated middle class with that of other groups, such as peasants and workers, to highlight differences in priorities and strategies.

This combination of textual analysis, historical context and theoretical critique ensures a balanced and thorough exploration of Razzaq's arguments. The study engages with existing scholarship to position its findings within broader academic debates, offering a clear and focused examination of the educated middle class's role in India's struggle for independence.

4. DISCUSSIONS

4.1. The Educated Middle Class as Leaders of Nationalism: Strategies and Limitations

The educated middle class played a central role in India's nationalist movement during colonial rule. This class largely emerged from the British colonial education system, which aimed to produce individuals trained in English and familiar with Western political ideas such as liberty, democracy, and self-governance. Exposure to these concepts inspired many in this group to challenge British authority and demand political rights (Ray, 1998).

Their leadership was marked by a preference for non-violent methods and constitutional reforms. Rather than calling for immediate and radical change, they believed in gradual progress through negotiation and legal means. This approach aligned with their position as a class that benefited from colonial structures, including access to education, government jobs, and social status. Their desire to maintain social order and stability shaped their political strategies (Sarkar, 1983).

Prominent leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru exemplified these strategies. Gandhi's philosophy of ahimsa, or non-violence, helped mobilize large segments of Indian society. His

campaigns, such as the Civil Disobedience Movement, used peaceful protest to undermine British authority while appealing to moral and ethical values. Nehru, meanwhile, emphasized parliamentary democracy and constitutional governance. His vision projected India as a modern nation-state capable of self-rule within a democratic framework. Both leaders successfully united diverse groups, including urban intellectuals and rural populations, under a common nationalist goal (Chatterjee, 1986).

Despite their achievements, the middle class's leadership had significant limitations. Their focus on constitutional reform often left critical socio-economic issues unaddressed. Peasants and workers, who made up a large part of the population, demanded land reforms, fair wages, and better living conditions. However, these demands were frequently sidelined because they threatened existing economic hierarchies that the educated middle class was part of. This created a disconnect between the nationalist leadership and the grassroots movements that sustained the struggle (Guha, 1983).

Moreover, the middle class's relationship with colonial power was paradoxical. While they opposed British rule politically, they were economically and socially dependent on the colonial system. Their privileged status, earned through colonial education and employment, made them cautious about supporting radical changes that could undermine their position. This contradiction influenced their political choices and limited the scope of their vision for independence (Avineri, 1968).

In addition, their reliance on Western political ideas sometimes limited their ability to fully engage with India's diverse social realities. The educated middle class often adopted liberal democratic ideals without sufficiently addressing the deeply rooted caste, class, and regional inequalities within Indian society. This theoretical framework shaped their political discourse, sometimes making it less relevant to the lived experiences of marginalized groups (Chatterjee, 1986).

In conclusion, the educated middle class was a driving force behind India's nationalist movement. Their leadership brought organization, coherence, and international legitimacy to the struggle for independence. Their commitment to non-violence and constitutionalism helped build broad coalitions. Yet, their leadership was also constrained by their class interests, social privileges, and ideological limits. As a result, they could not fully represent or address the diverse economic and social challenges faced by the majority of Indians. This duality is central to understanding both the successes and shortcomings of the nationalist movement led by the educated middle class (Razzaq, 1970).

4.2. Class Contradictions and the Middle-Class Vision of Independence

The educated middle class in colonial India faced a significant contradiction in their vision of independence. On one hand, they opposed British colonial rule and wanted to secure political freedom for India. On the other hand, their position within the colonial system made them cautious about supporting radical changes that could threaten their privileged status (Ray, 1998).

This contradiction is tied to the economic and social benefits the middle class gained under British rule. Many in this group had access to education, government jobs, and connections to colonial institutions. These advantages made them reluctant to challenge the colonial system too harshly. Their vision of independence often focused on replacing British rulers with Indian elites, rather than changing the underlying social and economic structure (Sarkar, 1983). As a result, their vision was more about political sovereignty than radical social transformation.

Their reluctance to support social reforms reflects their reliance on Western political ideas. The middle class admired the British system of governance and often sought to adopt constitutional reforms based on Western democracies. While these reforms were essential for gaining political freedom, they did not address deeper issues like land redistribution or workers' rights (Chatterjee, 1986). The middle class's focus on constitutional independence largely ignored the economic struggles of the rural peasantry, who

faced heavy taxes and poor living conditions. Their nationalism was therefore limited to political change, without confronting the economic inequalities within Indian society (Chatterjee, 1986).

The middle class also believed that they were the natural leaders of the nationalist movement. This belief was based on their privileged position within colonial society. However, this view overlooked the demands of marginalised groups, such as workers and peasants, who had their own visions of what independence should entail. The middle class's nationalist vision did not fully account for the social justice issues faced by these groups (Guha, 1983). As a result, their leadership often marginalized the most radical demands for social and economic equality.

Moreover, the relationship between the middle class and colonialism was paradoxical. While they fought for political independence, they were also dependent on colonial economic structures for their livelihood. Their vision of independence was focused on achieving political freedom, but it did not include dismantling the colonial capitalist system (Avineri, 1968). This led to a vision of self-rule that was limited in scope. It aimed for political freedom without challenging the economic systems that had supported their rise (Avineri, 1968).

In conclusion, the educated middle class's vision of independence was shaped by the contradictions inherent in their class. While they were central to the nationalist movement and played a key role in gaining political freedom, their leadership was restricted by their social and economic position. Their focus on gradual reforms and political sovereignty did not address the deeper issues of social justice. This contradiction limited the movement's ability to bring about lasting social transformation in post-colonial India (Razzaq, 1970).

4.3. The Unequal Representation of Subaltern Voices in Nationalist Movements

The educated middle class in colonial India played a significant role in leading the nationalist movement. However, their leadership often overshadowed the voices and struggles of subaltern groups, including peasants, workers, and marginalised communities. While these groups were crucial to the anti-colonial resistance, their contributions were frequently overlooked or downplayed by the nationalist leadership (Guha, 1983).

One reason for this exclusion was the middle class's focus on political sovereignty rather than addressing the economic and social inequalities faced by subaltern groups. This class leaders, such as those in the Indian National Congress (INC), were primarily concerned with constitutional reforms and self-rule. These goals, while important, did not directly challenge the exploitation and marginalization experienced by the working classes and peasants (Sarkar, 1983). As a result, the demands for land redistribution, better wages, and improved working conditions were often sidelined in favor of achieving political independence through legal and peaceful means.

Additionally, the nationalist leadership tended to view subaltern struggles as secondary to the larger goal of political freedom. For example, the rural peasants' demand for land reforms was often dismissed by middle-class leaders who saw it as too radical or disruptive to the social order. This selective representation excluded those most affected by colonial policies, leaving their needs and demands largely unaddressed (Guha, 1983). This created a disconnect between the leadership and the masses, as the middle class's version of nationalism focused on elite concerns, such as the status of Indian elites in a self-governed nation.

The middle class also failed to acknowledge the different forms of resistance that were happening at the grassroots level. While they mobilized through peaceful protests and constitutional means, many subaltern groups were engaged in direct action, such as the peasant uprisings and worker strikes. These movements were often viewed by the middle class as chaotic or disorganized, which led to their marginalization within the broader nationalist movement (Guha, 1983).

In addition, the focus on upper-caste leadership in nationalist organizations further contributed to the unequal representation of subaltern voices. Many leaders from the educated middle class were from higher caste backgrounds, and their policies often ignored or even undermined the concerns of lower castes. This made it difficult for marginalized communities to see themselves as part of the nationalist struggle. Their exclusion from decision-making processes within the nationalist movement reinforced existing social hierarchies and inequalities (Chatterjee, 1986).

In conclusion, while the educated middle class played a central role in India's nationalist movement, their leadership often excluded the voices of subaltern groups. By focusing on constitutional reforms and political independence, they failed to address the social and economic inequalities faced by peasants, workers, and marginalized communities. This unequal representation created a divide within the movement, limiting its potential to bring about truly inclusive change (Guha, 1983; Sarkar, 1983).

4.4.Revisiting Razzaq's Critique: A Marxist Reflection on Middle-Class Politics

Abdur Razzaq's analysis of the educated middle class in colonial India presents a critical perspective on their role in the nationalist movement. Razzaq acknowledges their significant contributions, but he also highlights the limitations of their leadership. His critique is rooted in a Marxist understanding of class power, which helps explain the contradictions in the middle class's political actions (Razzaq, 1970).

One of the key points Razzaq makes is that the educated middle class, while central to the nationalist struggle, were also a product of colonialism. They were dependent on colonial structures for their education, status, and economic position. This created a tension in their political actions. On one hand, they led the movement for political independence. On the other hand, their actions were constrained by their reliance on colonial systems that benefited their class. This paradox meant that their vision for independence was often limited to political freedom rather than social revolution (Razzaq, 1970).

A Marxist lens helps further explain this contradiction. The middle class was in a "contradictory class location," as they were economically dependent on colonialism but ideologically opposed to it (Avineri, 1968). Their political strategies reflected this contradiction. They focused on constitutional reforms and gradual change rather than calling for radical transformations of the economic system. They sought to replace British rulers with Indian elites, but they did not challenge the colonial capitalist system that had helped them rise. As a result, their vision of independence was incomplete, leaving social and economic inequalities largely unaddressed (Gramsci, 1971).

Razzaq's critique also points to the middle class's limited ability to lead a truly inclusive nationalist movement. Their focus on gradual reforms alienated the masses, particularly the peasants and workers who demanded more immediate and radical changes. The middle class's priorities were shaped by their social and economic status, which made them hesitant to support radical demands for land reforms or labor rights. Instead, they often framed nationalism in terms of constitutional independence, which did not fully address the structural inequalities of Indian society (Sarkar, 1983).

In addition, Razzaq critiques the middle class's dependence on Western political ideas. While these ideas were important for framing the nationalist struggle, they were not always suitable for addressing India's unique socio-economic challenges. Western democratic ideals influenced the middle class's vision of independence, but these ideals often ignored the deep-rooted caste and class inequalities within Indian society. This limited their ability to create an inclusive and transformative nationalist agenda (Chatterjee, 1986).

In conclusion, Razzaq's critique offers a Marxist reflection on the contradictions of middle-class politics in colonial India. While the educated middle class played a crucial role in the nationalist movement, their leadership was constrained by their class interests. They sought political independence but were

unwilling to challenge the colonial capitalist system that benefited them. Their focus on gradual reforms and constitutional changes, rather than social revolution, left many of India's deep-seated issues unaddressed. Razzaq's analysis provides a more nuanced understanding of the educated middle class's role, emphasizing the limitations of their vision for independence (Razzaq, 1970).

5. CONCLUSION

This study critically examines the role of the educated middle class in colonial India. Their leadership was crucial in the nationalist movement, but contradictions also marked it. On one hand, they fought for independence from British rule. On the other hand, they benefited from the colonial system. This paradox influenced both their strategies and their vision for post-colonial India.

The middle class's vision for independence focused on political sovereignty. Their strategies emphasized constitutional reforms and non-violent resistance. While these methods helped gain political freedom, they did not challenge the deeper social and economic inequalities in India. Issues such as land redistribution, workers' rights, and the empowerment of marginalized groups were largely ignored. Their focus on preserving the status quo limited and excluded their vision of independence.

Razzaq's Marxist critique sheds light on these contradictions. He shows how, despite their significant contributions to India's political independence, the middle class's leadership ignored the needs of the majority. Their reluctance to pursue radical socio-economic reforms meant that the nationalist movement, while achieving political freedom, failed to address the persistent economic and social injustices in colonial India. The focus on elite political freedom overshadowed the urgent demands of peasants, workers, and other marginalized communities.

True freedom, this study argues, requires more than just political sovereignty. It demands a fundamental transformation of the social and economic systems that perpetuate inequality. By revisiting Razzaq's critique, we see the importance of an inclusive vision of nationalism—one that addresses both political and socio-economic justice. For India to truly be free, its independence must ensure justice for all citizens, not just the elites.

REFERENCES

- Avineri, S. (1968). *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx*. Cambridge University Press.
- Chatterjee, P. (1986). *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* University of Minnesota Press.
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (Q. Hoare & G. Nowell Smith, Eds.). International Publishers.
- Guha, R. (1983). *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*. Oxford University Press.
- Ray, R. K. (1998). *The Rise of the Indian Middle Class in Colonial India: A Study of the Impact of Education*. University of Chicago Press.
- Razzaq, A. (1970). *Political Parties in India*. Sahitya Akademi.
- Sarkar, S. (1983). *Modern India: 1885–1947*. Macmillan.
- Washbrook, D. A. (1976). *The Capitalist Transformation of India: An Historical Interpretation*. Cambridge University Press.