

Middle class in Malgudi: An evocative portrayal

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This paper attempts to gain a sociological insight of the depiction of ‘middle class’ by the celebrated Indian writer R.K. Narayan. Malgudi, a fictional South Indian town, is a prototypical representation of typical Indian society and the literary works of Narayan vividly mirrors the everyday happenings. While the existing research has focused on Narayan’s depiction of ‘cosmopolitanism’ (Kumar, 2011), ‘child life’ (Rashmi, 2018), ‘myth’ (Ghosh, 2017), and ‘power’ (Zolfagharkhani and Akhgarandouz, 2012), this study reveals the author’s depiction of the middle class and his derision of certain lifestyle practices of the class in question. Set in the backdrop of 1930s, the paper attempts to identify how the stories of Malgudi showcase the peculiarities of lifestyle practices of middle class in South Asia and study the applicability of Narayan’s portrayal of middle class to the present day. For instance, educational achievement is considered to be of utmost importance for the preservation of one’s own status and for the achievement of social mobility by the middle class in South Asia. However, in this quest for educational achievement, Narayan laments the fate of those who are so-called “misfit” and are oriented differently. Ironically, educational success is often unsuccessful in buying freedom from alienating and oppressive livelihood practices engaging the middle class. Furthermore, in their longing for conspicuous consumption and use of consumer goods for enhancing status, the middle class is submerged in a daze of “false consciousness”. There is also accompanying erosion of ‘social capital’ and the expanding “radius of distrust” (Fukuyama, 2001). This secondary research relied on content analysis of selected short stories of Narayan, namely, ‘Forty Five a Month’, “Iswaran”, “Sweets for Angels”, and “Swami and Friends” to arrive at the findings and used the theories of Karl Marx, Max Weber, Erik Ohlin Wright, Pierre Bourdieu, and Veblen to develop sociological understanding.

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