

The Origin and Development of Campus Novels in Indian English Literature

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Introduction:

In recent times Indian English Novel has acquired a position at the top rung among all the forms of literature. It stands at par with its counter parts written in the English-speaking countries. The international literary awards like the Booker, The Pulitzer, The Sinclair won by Indian novelists exemplify that they have been appreciated even by the Western critics. Indian English Fiction has grown rich with the proliferation of various sub-genres.

Campus novel is also one such sub-genre which has enriched Indian English fiction. In recent times considerable progress has been attained in India in the field of campus novels. But as they have not been sufficiently explored, an endeavor has been made in the present paper to carry out a survey of the campus novels in India. The paper attempts to throw light on the various focal points in Indian campus novels and provides examples for each type.

Origin of Campus Novel and its Growth in the West:

Chris Baldick in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* gives this definition for campus novel-

Campus novel is a novel, usually comic or satirical, in which the action is set within enclosed world of university (or similar set of learning) and highlights the follies of academic life. Many novels had presented nostalgic evocations of college days, but the campus novel in the usual modern sense dated from the 1950s: Mary McCarthy's *The Groves of Academe* (1952) and Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* (1954) began significant tradition in modern fiction including John Barth's *Giles Goat-Boy* (1966), David Lodge's *Changing Places* (1975) and Robert Davis's *The Rebel Angels* (1982)¹

According to David Lodge, a practitioner of this sub-genre,

In English 'Campus Novel' is a term used to designate a work of fiction whose action takes place mainly in a college or university, and which is mainly concerned with the lives of university professors and junior teachers-'faculty' as they are collectively known in America, 'dons' or 'academic staff' in England". *2

The word 'Campus' was first adopted to describe a particular urban space at the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) during the early

decades of the eighteenth century. Some other American colleges later adopted the word to describe individual fields at their own institutions. It was only during the twentieth century that the meaning expanded to include the whole institutional property.

The Latin term 'Campus' which means 'field' is applied to the physical space occupied by a college or university. So Americans were the people who first used the term in this sense. It entered British English only in the late 1950s. The earliest mention in the Oxford English Dictionary of the word 'campus' applying to a British University was in 1958, referring to the University of East Anglia, a University then being built on the American model - that is, a unified, self-contained site in a pastoral or park-like setting.

Seen in this light, the first English campus novel Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim*, cannot be considered a campus novel because it was published in 1954, when the word 'Campus' was not popular in British English. Nobody has ever been successful in discovering as to when exactly the term 'campus novel' first came into vogue in either of the countries. The earliest quotation of the phrase 'Campus Novel' occurs in the Oxford English Dictionary only in 1968 but by then it was a familiar phrase. It was only in the late 1950s or early 1960s that it came to currency.

An alternative name for the campus novel is "Academic Novel". Most critics feel that the phrase 'Academic Novel' is perhaps more inclusive, but 'campus novel' is more expressive of the unity of place which characterizes the genre. The campus novels, by and large satirize professional stereotypes and malpractices/aberrations in educational organizations. They convey the pain of intellectuals, comment on contemporary issues and even discuss the educational trends.

Some critics argue that the first British Campus or Academic novel was C.P. Snow's *The Masters* which was published in 1951. But it is not accepted on the ground that it doesn't have the typical features of the campus novel. Some of them are that *The Masters* is one volume in a long sequence of novels narrated by the same central character; that there is very little about the academic profession that is teaching and scholarship and virtually no mention of students. It didn't even provide a model for future practitioners of campus novels, which was done by *Lucky Jim*.

The Groves of Academe was perhaps the first classic campus novel in America. It was followed by Randall Jarell's *Pictures from an Institution* in 1954 and by Vladimir Nabokov's *Pnin* in 1955. About these, critics argue that there were personal and literary connections between these three books and these highly gifted authors' dwelling upon this subject and setting contributed abundantly to the rapid evolution of this genre.

After the yeoman service of C.P.Snow's *The Masters* (1951), many British Campus novels like Sir Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* (1954), Angus Wilson's *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* (1956), Sir Malcolm Bradbury's *Eating People is Wrong* (1959), Prof. David Lodge's *Changing Places* (1975), *Small World* (1984) and *Nice Work* (1988) [the latter two were shortlisted for the Booker Prize] and others have also enormously contributed for the development and popularity of campus novels.

About the rise of Academic novel, Elaine Showalter, well-known American critic, writes, "One theory argues that it developed because readers like to read about their own world and indeed about themselves".³ It is striking to note that when Mary McCarthy's *The Groves of Academe* was published in America, Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* was being written in England. That means the emergence and growth of campus novels in America and Britain were almost simultaneous and curiously independent. The reasons for this are observed as follows:

The first is the sociological reason - that in the period after the Second World War there was a great expansion in university education. Many new universities were built and the old ones expanded. There were job opportunities in arts faculties which attracted aspiring and practising writers. In America where 'Creative Writing' was already there in the academic syllabus, professional writers were hired to teach it along with conventional literature courses. So university teaching with its generally agreeable conditions and a source of steady income became a welcome choice to the writers. As authors derive ideas and subject matters from the milieu of their habitat, it is obvious that both countries produced a steady stream of campus novels. It is interesting to note that most of these novels are concerned with teachers in the Arts or Humanities fraternity, because that is where most university-based novelists work. For example, Malcolm Bradbury and David Lodge.

Another reason is that the novelist before writing his novel should create or imagine a world which has some kind of logical relation to the real world, within which he can explore the themes that interest him through the narrative. The university or college provides such a world ready-made - a small world which is a kind of microcosm of the larger world.

Elaine Showalter points out that the campus novel which mainly concerns the teaching fraternity is called "Professorromane."⁴ The development of campus novels has led to its offshoots like the Varsity novels which focus on the students and not on the faculty. Kaveri Nambisan's *The Truth (Almost) About Bharat* can be taken as an example. There is another sub-genre of campus novel where the campus provides a setting for detective kind of novels known as Campus Murder Mysteries or University detective novels. Dorothy L. Sayers's *Gaudy Night* (1935), Colin Dexter's *The Silent World of*

Nicholas Quinn form some of the examples. Campus novels have incorporated the contemporary changes in the society. Thus there have been outstanding feminist campus novels bringing out the male chauvinism of academic institutions, like Rebecca's Goldstein's *The Mind-Body problem* (1983).

Though the elements of fun and satire are very often found in campus novels, the element of pain is also inevitably found. In this regard, Elaine Showalter says,

Many academic novels are wildly funny and lines from them have sustained me in hard times.....yet strangely enough, what appeals to me most in academic fiction is its seriousness, even sadness. Perhaps we professors turn to satire because academic life has so much pain so many lives wasted or destroyed.*5

In this regard, Stephen Connor's words can be quoted-"The university is a closed world, with its own norms and values, which is thick with the possibilities of intrigue".*6 He further recognizes two basic plots in academic fiction.

The one concerns the disruption of a closed world, and the gradual return of order and regularity to it, while the other concerns the passage through this closed world of a character who must in the end be allowed to escape its gravitational pull.*7

Development of campus novels in India:

Though the campus novel is considered as an Anglo-American genre, its practitioners in India are found in abundance. It indeed had a slow beginning in India. The first Indian Campus Novel – *The Long Long Days* by P.M. Nityanandan was published in 1960 and then there was a long gap of eleven years before the second campus novel *The Farewell Party* by M.V. Rama Sarma was published in 1971. After this K.M. Trisanku's *Onion Peel* was published in 1973 and Saros Cowasjee's *Goodbye to Elsa* in 1974. Then again there was another long gap of eight years and then Prema Nandakumar's *Atom and the Serpent*, which is considered by critics as campus novel proper appeared in 1982. After this there is a proliferation of writers and "attempts have been made to portray the collegiate experience in India"*8

A survey of the campus novels in India reveals that they can be grouped into various categories. The main categories can be taken as – 1) Campus novels focused on Students,

- 2) Campus novels focused on Faculty, 3) Campus novels focused on Vice Chancellor,
- 4) Campus novels focused on all the malfunctioning of the campus, 5) Bildungsroman.

In the first category, novels like *'The Long Long Days'*, *'The Truth (Almost) About Bharat'* can be considered. Here the campus life of students as seen by students themselves is portrayed. The bustle and buoyancy of hostel life, the intimate bond between friends, their boisterous mischief, are being discussed in great detail. The attitude of the students is conspicuous in these novels. One most common factor in the majority of these novels is love affairs or attraction between the students of opposite sexes. As college students are in an age which is vulnerable to falling in love, the love affairs are invariably delineated.

*In The Long Long Days*⁹ by P.M. Nityanandan, Gopinath who comes to Vikrama College to do his Junior Intermediate opens up to new friendships. The typical student activities like ragging, outing, Graduation Day Celebration are described. The opening itself is made with an inter-collegiate cricket match. The students' respect and consideration for teachers and the principal Natarajan are noteworthy. Unlike the modern students in recent novels, the students in this novel are unselfish. They are not only polite but also think of the reputation of their college.

*The Truth (Almost) About Bharat*¹⁰ deals with the life of Bharat who is a medical student. During a student strike, students pelt stones at the staff cars and the stone which Bharat throws hits chawkidar Shaffruddin. He is put in the ICU and Bharat flees from there fearing grave consequences. He undertakes a journey across the country on his motorbike. In Tellicherry he also falls in love with a girl Rajee but is heartbroken to know that she is already married. Later on he returns with his friend Shanks.

In the second category, novels like *'The Awakening'*, *'Corridors of Knowledge'*; *'The Farewell Party'* can be enlisted. Here the protagonist would be a lecturer or a professor. The goings on in the fraternity of teachers are being presented by him/her. Most often, the protagonist, an honest teacher is confronted with corrupt aspects of the college or university. He struggles to stay away from the unwholesome aspect and tries to get the campus away from corruption.

*The Awakening*¹¹ by Rita Joshi is unique in two aspects. The first aspect is that it is written in verse form and the second one is that the characters are not given names but initials. The protagonist is JR who comes from Cambridge to Delhi, to become a lecturer. She is confronted with the corruption, lion-hunting and dominating nature of the principal and protests against her and finally succeeds in eliminating that negative factor from the college. *Corridors of*

Knowledge^{*12} deals with the life of Madhava Rao. Madhav loses his father at a very young age and grows under the shelter of his uncle. The novel is totally descriptive about his schooling, his studies at the college and university, and later his job as a lecturer and a professor. It also throws light on the corruption which is present in the various fraternities of campus. *The Farewell Party*^{*13} by M.V. Rama Sarma is about an upright teacher Prakasam. He does not get scholarship until his principal retires. Later, one of his colleagues supersedes him. Prakasam gets disturbed by the teacher-politician of the changing world and the commercialization of teaching. Finally he resigns and joins a new rural university and derives peace and contentment from the serene environment in the lap of nature and the fresh new campus. He works there for five years and decides to get retired at the normal age of sixty and to get involved in philosophic and spiritual attainment.

The third category of campus novels is focused on the Vice Chancellor of university. In these novels, the point of view of the Vice chancellor is presented. The problems and tensions of the VC are explained highlighting the darker side of the VC's position. The personal life of the VC is also touched upon in some novels. Considerable light is being thrown on the problem-solving and decision-making capabilities of the VC. In some novels, the deterioration of the standard of the campus, due to the Vice Chancellorship of an inefficient person is delineated. Novels like '*Campus*' '*Atom and the Serpent*', '*Miracles Happen*' can be grouped under this category. '*Campus*'^{*14} by K.L.Kamal is about Chandrakant, a very ambitious Vice Chancellor. He aspires to upgrade his university to the level of a National University and to create a research-conducive atmosphere. But he is disheartened by the gheraos, strikes, slogan-shouting etc. He is even threatened by the syndicate members to resign from the post and even pressurized by a politician to stray from the correct procedures to favor his candidate. But Chandrakant does not yield to anything and gains fortitude by great sayings. Finally people who were against him begin to understand his genuine concern and far-sightedness and approve of him. In Prema Nandakumar's '*Atom and the Serpent*'^{*15}, one can observe the clashes between the Employees' Union and Karmachari Sangh, the gheraos and demonstrations or agitations, the indifference of the staff members towards recent research, power politics, etc. The Vice-Chancellor of the University Dr.D.K. Adhyaksha displays Chanakyan intelligence in coping with these agitations. He knows every staff member and their doings - good and wily ones. He addresses even the menial staff members by their names. Adhyaksha himself was a very good teacher; his turning into a politician is referred to as an academic tragedy. '*Miracles Happen*'^{*16} by D.R.Sharma illustrates how even a brilliant university gets sick when an inefficient and meek Vice Chancellor comes to power. It shows how his cunning subordinate gradually takes administration in his hands and makes him just a rubber stamp. At the end everything gets set right as the VC overcomes his negative influences and restores his power.

The malfunctioning in the campus forms the focus of the next category of novels. *'The Farewell Party'*, *'The Drunk Tantra'*, *'Corridors of Knowledge'*, *'Miracles Happens'*, *'Atom and the Serpent'* are some of the novels which can be enumerated here. Malfunction encompasses faulty administrative system, power politics, irresponsible non-teaching or teaching faculty, etc. The way these malfunctioning contribute to the setback of the university or college is portrayed in these novels. In Ranga Rao's *'The Drunk Tantra'*^{*17}, Hari Kishen, a totally corrupt and unfit person continues to be a lecturer though he never handles classes. He is even raised to the level of Principal by sheer recommendation and influence. Injustice is meted out to the sincere and really deserving candidates like Dr. Daas and Mrs. Mocham in this process. Though bungling is a popular term with principal Hairy, he always manages to overcome them and it is ironic that he is considered to be the biggest anti-bungler. It is because of his servitude to the VC, he is called 'the best Principal in the University'. Hairy is the best example of how a rogue can progress and prosper in the faulty and vulnerable system of Education and Politics in India.

The last category includes novels like *'The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta'*, *'Goodbye to Elsa'*, *'The Narrator'* and *'Corridors of Knowledge'*. These novels concentrate on the growth of the character of the protagonist. In most of these novels, the protagonist develops from a student to a lecturer or even a professor. And so, unlike the other categories, here we get the point of view of the protagonist both as a student and as a teacher. Anuradha Marwah Roy's *'The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta'*^{*18} casts light on the difficulties faced by students at the hands of lecturers during post-graduation and at the hands of supervisors during research. Diversity in the fraternity of professors is brought about from the perspective of a student, by bringing in Prof. Ranganathan into picture as a comparison to her supervisor. Later on Geetika too becomes a lecturer and decides to lead the rest of her life independently. In Saros Cowasjee's *'Goodbye to Elsa'*^{*19}, the protagonist is a student in the first part of the novel and then becomes a lecturer. The novel encompasses his misadventures as a student at the Universities of Delhi and Leeds and later as a lecturer at Erigon College in Canada. In Makarand Paranjape's *'The Narrator'*^{*20}, though the central character Rahul Patwardhan is a lecturer when the novel begins, he describes his past, when he was a student at college. He recounts how students get involved in bad habits like smoking, drinking, consuming drugs, involving in illicit relationships, etc.

Conclusion:

In the present scenario, many Indian novelists are getting fascinated by campus novels and are contributing to this sub-genre, with a lot of experimentations and variations. Some novels concentrate on the positive as well as the negative attitudes of the faculty, some others on the behavior of the students whereas others throw light on the predicament of the VC. Some

others focus on the non-teaching staff and corruption in the campus. These variations contribute not only in increasing the varieties of campus novels but also in rectifying the follies of the people related to the campus. It would not be a surprise if campus novel emerges as one of the principal sub-genres in India in the near future.

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