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Editor: Prof. Shrawan K Sharma

www.thevedicpath.in

thevedicpath@gkv.ac.in

+91-9412074666

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Campus Life of Students: A Study of Two Indian English Campus Novels

Pooja Bajetha,

Research Scholar, Department of English,
S.S.J.Campus Almora–263601, Uttrakhand
email- poojadwt12@ gmail.com

Abstract

This paper attempts to throw light on the rise of campus novel as a sub-genre in India and discusses its major theme the academic life and problems of students as well as their points of view regarding education system and academic activities depicted in Indian campus fiction with special reference to *The Long Long Days (1960)* by P.M. Nityanandan and *Five Point Someone (2004)* by ChetanBhagat. This paper also gives a brief account of the growth and development of the sub-genre Campus Novel in different parts of the world as well as in India from 1950 to 21st century. The findings presented in the paper will give a clear picture of this new genre popular as Campus Novel.

Indian English Campus fiction as a new sub-genre came into existence in early 1950s. This genre has grown up successfully in India in recent years and has contributed considerably to the development of Indian English Fiction. In India, the sub-genre has developed as the voice of the youth of the new generation. This paper attempts to throw light on the rise of campus novel in India and its major theme, life of students inside the campus, which is an essential feature of Indian English campus novels. An attempt will be made to

discuss the hostel and academic life and problems of students as well as their points of view regarding education and academic activities depicted in Indian campus fiction with special reference to *The Long Long Days* (1960) by P.M. Nityanandan and *Five Point Someone* (2004) by Chetan Bhagat.

Campus Fiction, a small and recognizable sub-genre of contemporary fiction, came into existence in early 1950s. The term 'Campus' is derived from a Latin word for 'field' and was first used to describe the grounds of Princeton University in 1774. Some other American colleges adopted the word to describe the fields of their own institutions. The genre has flourished only since about 1950, when American Universities started growing rapidly. In her famous work *The Faculty Towers*, Elaine Showalter remarks about the beginning of the genre: "The Campus Novel that marks its beginning in 1950s depict a society with its own rule and traditions, cut from the outside world, a snug, womb like, and, for some, suffocating world." (14). It is a small but a recognizable sub-genre of contemporary fiction. In this genre the background of the novel is a campus or University. It deals with the activities and issues prevalent in the campuses including teachers, students and their lives. The small world of University is a stage for the dramatization and examination of larger issues. The Oxford Companion to English Literature defines Campus Novel as "A novel set on a university or polytechnic campus; usually written by novelists who are also (temporarily or permanently) academics". (189) 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" (30).

Campus novel, also known as academic novel, is a small but recognizable sub-genre of contemporary fiction. In Britain, it is called University Novel. *The Masters* by C. P. Snow published in 1957 can be considered the first British Campus Novel followed by Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* although they don't have the classic characteristics of the campus novel. After these novels, *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* (1956) by Angus Wilson, *Eating People is Wrong* (1959) by Malcolm Bradbury and Prof. David Lodge's *Changing Places* (1975), *Small World* (1984), *Nice Work* (1988) and *Thinks...* (2001) have also contributed to the development and popularity of campus novels. In America the genre is called Campus Novel or College Novel. It dwells upon various issues related to campus life. *The Groves of Academe* (1951) was perhaps the first classic campus novel in America followed by Randall Jarell's *Pictures from an Institution* in 1954 and *Pnin* by Vladimir Nabokov in 1955. The genre flourished in other parts of the world as well by the 21st century. In 1999 came *Disgrace* by South African writer J.M. Coetzee. It was awarded the Booker Prize and popularised the genre to a large extent. Canadian writer Jeffery Moore started his writing career with the novel *Prisoner in a Red-Rose Chain*, which also revolves around a university campus. It won the Commonwealth Writer's Prize for Best First Book in 2000 and has been translated into many other languages. In 2002 Australian writer Michael Wilding also published a campus novel entitled *Academia Nuts*.

In India the sub-genre came into existence in early 1960. The pioneer of the campus novel in India was P.M. Nityanandan whose *The Long Long Days* was published in 1960. This was followed by M.V. Ramasarma's *The Farewell Party* (1971) and *Onion Peel* (1973) by K.M. Trisanku. Later Saros Cowasjee's *Goodbye to Elsa* (1974), Prema Nanda

Kumar's *Atom and the Serpent* (1982) and *Miracles Happen* (1982) by D.R. Sharma added to the corpus of the genre. In the 1990s, this genre gained more popularity as it is evident from the works published during that decade. *The Truth (Almost) About Bharat* by Kavery Nambisan (1991) followed by Rita Joshi's *The Awakening: A Novella in Rhyme* and Anuradha Marwah Roy's *The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta* both published in 1993 followed by *The Drunk Tantra* (1994) by Ranga Rao and Makrand Paranjape's *The Narrator- A Novel* (1995). By 2000 came some acclaimed Campus novels like *Campus-A Novel* (2002) by K.L. Kamal, *Five Point Someone* (2004) by Chetan Bhagat, *Mediocre but Arrogant* (2005) by Abhijit Bahaduri. Besides these, *Anything For You Ma'am: An IITian's Love Story* (2006) by Tushar Raheja, *No Onion Nor Garlic* (2006) by Srividya Natrajan, *Everything you Desire: A Journey through IIM* (2007) by Harshdeep Jolly, *Above Average* (2007) by Amitabha Bagchi, *Something Of A Mocktail* (2007) by Soma Das, *Joker in the Pack: an irreverent view of life at IIM* (2007) by Ritesh Sharma and Neeraj Pahlajani and *Corridors of Knowledge* (2008) by M.K. Naik added to the popularity of the genre. Some of the very recent novels are *Bombay Rain Bombay Girls* (2008) by Anirban Bose, *Keep of the grass* (2008) by Karan Bajaj, an Indian American novelist, *A Sunny Shady Life* (2009) by Sachin Garg and most recently *FLAKE*, published in 2015, the full title of the novel being *Friendship Love and Killer Escapades* by Pankaj Giri and Apoorv Wanikar.

The genre focuses on various themes. One of the major themes that it focuses on is the life of student inside campuses and the various issues of students. The bustle and buoyancy of hostel life, the intimate bond between friends, their boisterous mischief, are discussed in these novels. An important aspect of campus life, the attraction between the

boys and the girls and development of relationships between them is one of the focal points in these novels. As college students are of an age which is vulnerable to falling in love, such relationships are invariably depicted.

Academic life is a small world within the society that has its own significance as a world of affairs, it is a unique life led by a student for a certain period of time. It is here that the student comes across so many ethical -unethical relations, success and failure anguish and frustration, agony and elation. The confined world of campus in itself is an amalgamation of so many things together. The students are the integral part of these campuses. The campus hostels for the students are something that led the youth to seek a life of emancipation. They develop a desire of emancipating their thoughts from societal bondage. So the campus and the camp-hostels became a place where their thoughts could float freely in their own imaginary sky without any parental or societal restriction. During this period of life students encounter so many issues related to the campus life. They are exposed to new world where friendship, attraction between opposite sex that results in a relationship, indulgence in intoxication, ragging, identity issues and many other student activities that impact their lives. Another important thing that the campus novel focuses on is student's unrest and uncontrolled pressure that leads to depression. To overcome this depression they divert their minds by resorting to smoking and drinking vodka and other intoxicants. This addiction leads them to a world of euphoria, where they remain unconcerned about their academic world and the stresses or storms related to it. Peer pressure and ragging are some another important issue among students in the campuses.

The first Indian campus novel is *The Long Long Days* by P. M. Nityanandan published in 1960. It throws light on multiple aspects of campus life. It gives a complete picture of academic life and issues of the students. The novel is an amalgamation of all the incidents that take place in the life of a student. Like a blockbuster Bollywood movie, it begins with a cricket match and ends on the last day of college life. The novel focuses on different activities and issues of the protagonist Gopinath and his friends in Vikrama College, situated in Madras Presidency. Along with the central character Gopinath, other important characters are his friends Naidu, Kannan, Appan, Jacob, D'Souza, Mathrubootham, Ramanathan and Mandappa. The novel is written in fifteen chapters that present different pictures of students' academic life. Each chapter gives a description of a different activity of student life. The novel opens with the omniscient narrator, who narrates the Sastri Cup Cricket Tournament going in Forrester College between Vikramites and Forrester students. The match is won by Vikramites and the dispute that follows between the two parties is depicted realistically.

The novel is completely focused on students, their life and issues during college. It begins with a cricket match then shifts to the classroom of Mr. VenkataAiyer where he lectures on Shakespeare and Kannan sneaks away from his class as a daily routine. The election propaganda and problems of hostel life related to accommodation, food and other facilities are also discussed in the novel. An account of the various societies or associations formed in the college is given by the author like the Science Club, College Union, Athletic Club, Arts Association, Botany Association, Social Service League and Photographic Society. Apart from these clubs other darker associations like Anti-Bathroom Singers' Society,

Mambalam Chokers for gamblers, Nudist' Club are also given place in the novel.

The writer has given ample details of ragging in Vikrama College which was popularly known as “the baptism of the babes”. The freshers are thrown in the water tank by the seniors. The frequent rebukes of principal, Mr. Natrajan, an Oxonian, are also portrayed faithfully by the writer. Love-relationship is also a crucial part of academic life as this age is vulnerable for falling in love. This aspect of student life is also presented through the relationship between Gopi and Nirmala. A play of Shakespeare was also staged by the students on the Annual Graduates Reception, presenting the acting skills of Jacob, Nirmala and others. Nirmala was the only girl who took part in such activities of college in spite of her father's objections. She is referred by Jacob as, “One vestal virgin among all these loutish men.” (Nityanandan 79) There are also glimpses of vocation planning by students, UTC (University Training Crops) and scene of Carnival. The novel ends with description of examination and the departure of Jacob and D'Souza; before parting they had a meeting with Mr Natrajan whom they were very fond of. After bidding farewell to Mr. Natarajan they said to each other: “That's the end of him and his pipe,” said D'Souza. “We're going to miss him a hell of a lot.” (Nityanandan 121) Mr Natrajana presented an ideal teacher whom students never forget as Jacob said he was “The man's in our blood” (Nityanandan 121).

The plot of *The Long Long Days* (1960) revolves around Arts and Science College. Another popular novel in the twenties that discusses the issues of the students and academic life in great detail is *Five Point Someone* by Chetan Bhagat published in 2004. The novel consists of twenty – seven

chapters detailing the mischievous, boisterous events of the four year journey of three major characters. All three of them find in each other a friend, supporter or a faithful guide throughout their journey of IIT. The novel presents the life of students in an elite institution of India. The subtitle of the book is 'what not to do at IIT'.

The focal point of the book deals with the lives of Hari, Ryan and Alok at IIT who brought themselves into the institution by burning their midnight oil but deflated by the rigor and monotony of the excessive academic work IIT system had. The book targets the futility of the emphasis laid by our Educational System on the grades and GPAs and how the original creativity of the students is crumbled under these grades. The writer satirised the professors who advocate the grading system. The novel is complete picture of what students go through during their student life. Through Ryan the writer criticises the IIT system which promotes mugging, assignments, tests, but does not give enough time to students for creativity or coming out with new ideas. Ryan criticises the system of IIT saying: "This system of relative grading and overburdening the students. I mean it kills the best fun years of your life. But it kills something else. Where there is the room for original thought? Where is the time for creativity? It is not fair"(Bhagat 35).

The faulty education system has also been targeted through these campus novels. The race that is run by every student in the twenty first century has been portrayed in the novel realistically. The common issue among students is scoring marks and grades since it's a misconception among students that scoring good grades leads to a successful career, a reputed life and social acclaim. In search of these grades students often lose their inner identity. The futility of grades

in the most reputed institution of the country (IIT) has been depicted by Ryan the central character in *Five Point Someone*, when he says:

And this IIT system is nothing but a mice race. It is not a rat race, mind you as rats sound somewhat shrewd and clever. So it is not about that. It is about mindlessly running a race for four years, in every class every assignments and every test. It is a race where profs judge you every ten steps, with a GPA stamped on you every semester. Profs who have no idea what science and learning are about.

Bhagat101

He even he further questions the significance of the productivity of these reputed campuses:

“Yes, that is what I think of the profs. I mean what have IITs given to this country? Name one invention in the last three decades.”

Bhagat 101

One of the major parts of campus life is ragging, which has also been discussed in the novel *Five Point Someone*. The issue of ragging which used to be mild in 1960s has become more gross and brutal by 2000. The novel deals with this aspect of campus novel candidly and draws out this serious problem of students that has a profound emotional effect on their minds. Sometimes these effects may lead to suicidal attempts. Hari, the narrator in *Five Point Someone* describes the infliction of ragging on the innocent fresher. He gives the description of the psyche of the innocent freshers when they are asked to take off their clothes by Baku: “Another demon grinned at us, slapping his bare stomach

every few seconds. There seemed to be no choice so we surrendered every item of our clothing, shivering at the unholy glee in Baku's face as he walked by each of us, checking us out and grinning" (Bhagat 3).

How perplexed the students may feel doing these absurd tasks can be understood through Hari's narration while he looked at Alok's face when one of the senior commanded them to bend down with a weird idea of doing something awful with them while they were in the bending position. "I looked at Alok's face. His eyes were invisible behind those thick, bulletproof spectacles, but going by his contorted face, I could tell he was as close to tears as I was" (Bhagat 5). The stress of studies that drive the students mad sometimes is also depicted in the novel. Just to make the standard of the Institution high, much load of exams and assignments is given to the students. Ryan, being a creative student gets fed up with the system and puts a question mark on the high standard saying: "This is high standard? Working away like moronic drones until midnight. ManPro yesterday, ApMech day before, Quanto today... it never ends," Ryan grumbled. "I need a break, man" (Bhagat 14).

Dilemma and conflict among students is also one of the major constituents of these novels. Family condition of the students is another major issue that affects student's psyche during college life. Materialistic life creates utter confusion in the life of youths. It affects them more in their college life. Students find themselves split in two worlds of their psyche, one, their college life, career and the other their family life and personal problems. Their personal issues get merged with their college life and career. What they should choose as a career becomes more a matter of their family condition rather than choice. Alok, in *Five Point Someone* is asked by Ryan

what he want to do in life to which he answers starkly: “I want to get a job in Delhi, so I can look after my parents and take care of our money problems”(Bhagat 99).

The attitude of students towards the teacher has also been given a place in these novels. We find in *Five Point Someone* Professor Veera who always tries to strengthen the will and confidence of his terminated students. Ryan who is creative and likes original ideas finds his teacher in Professor Veera. He kept advising them for their survival and made his best effort to take them out of depression and in shaping their future. He helped his suspended students all the way to get a clean degree. The narrator in *Five Point Someone* describes him when Prof. Veera looked around for an answer in the class while teaching Turbulent Flows “Unlike other Profs, he did not stick to the first row. In fact, he scavenged at the back.” (Bhagat 84) He was the only Professor admired by the five pointers or the last one in the batch. The writers of the campus fiction give a clear account of the students who become devoted slaves to their teachers who really direct their consciousness. The novel ends on a positive note with Hari and Alok getting jobs from the institute placement, Ryan getting opportunity to work more on his project with Professor Veera, his father’s investment in his project also gave a hint of getting Ryan’s relation better with his family.

Both of the novels *The Long Long Days* and *Five Point Someone* end on a typical nostalgic note. In the last chapter of *The Long Long Days* Gopinath, the first year student, felt excluded for the first time when Jacob and D’Souza were parting from the college after five years. They feel nostalgic on the thought of parting from the college. Similarly the narrator Hari in *Five Point Someone* also talks about nostalgic feeling retrospectively looking at his last day at IIT: “You

know, it is strange, I might have passed out of IIT, but in some ways, my soul is still there. Maybe in the hostel corridors, or at Sasi's, or at the insti roof..." (Bhagat 267).

Other novels that deal with the academic life inside the campus and issues of students are *Mediocre but Arrogant* (2005) by Abhijit Bahaduri, the story of Abbey's transformation from an unaware student to a successful professional. *Anything For You Ma'am: An IITian's Love Story* by Tushar Raheja published in 2006, a comedy written by him when he was an undergraduate student in the college. *Everything you Desire: A Journey through IIM* (2007) by Harshdeep Jolly, is narrated in first person and gives a detail of experiences underwent by the protagonist Harsh in his two year stay in IIM. *Above Average* (2007) by Amitabha Bagchi presents the pre or post IITian phase of the life of student, *Something Of A Mocktail* (2007) by Soma Das, revolves around the life of three girls. The book deals with a lot of campus issues along with some serious feminist issues like female child murder. *Joker in the Pack: an irreverent view of life at IIMs* (2007) by Ritesh Sharma and Neeraj Pahlajani is another one in the series of IITs and IIMs novels. It depicts the life of the students in one of the most prestigious colleges in India, fighting for grades and resume points to get a job. The students run after the pursuit of the flashy lifestyle which only later they realise they never wanted. *A Sunny Shady Life* (2009) by Sachin Garg tells about the life of Sunny at Delhi College of engineering and his moving to Paris by fortunate chance for internship.

To conclude, the Indian English Campus Fiction that deals mostly with students and their problems of academic life presents a comprehensive picture of the campuses in India. They hatch a graph of students how they undergo a lot of

stress and storm throughout their academic career. The description of every student oriented activity like hostel life, classroom-culture, teacher-student relationship, ragging, facilities available in the institution and the points of view of students are analysed in these novels. An explicit image of Indian campuses is laid out in these novels. Through observation we find that a campus novel of early 21st century is typically different from that of the 1960s. The aspects of narration, plot, diction and theme are also different. We can find a difference in the settings as well. The narration of Indian English writers of the former is jovial that keeps the reader connected. The campus fiction of the 1960s is set in the arts and science colleges whereas the campus fictions of the 21st century are mostly set in IIT or IIM Campuses. The increasing craze of technical education among students laid the foundation of these novels. Thus the novels, in their own way, depict all the characteristics of campus life in their time.

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