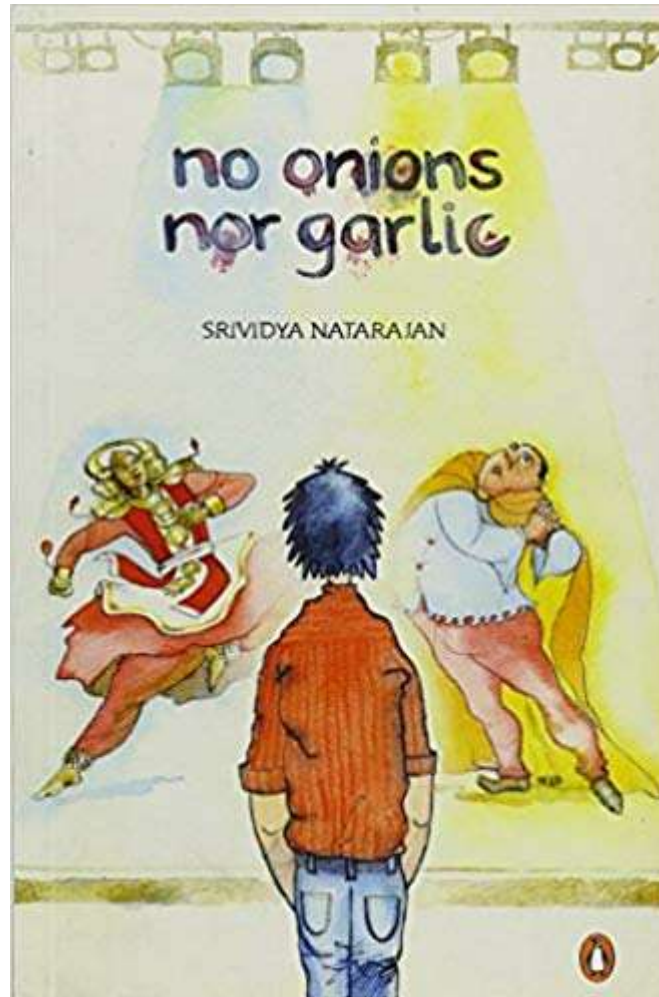


Evolution of Campus Novel in India

Dr. M. Eswara Rao, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.

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Courtesy: <https://www.amazon.com/Onions-Nor-Garlic-Srividya-Natarajan/dp/0143099612>

Abstract

“Campus novel” originated as a literary genre in the West in the fifties of 20th century as one of the Second World War aftermath developments in the West and a little later in India. Many members of faculty used this genre to write about themselves and the problems and follies that occurred on campus. In the beginning of 21st century, the alumni of different campuses, especially in India, tried to record their experiences on campus afresh in their debut novels. The paper

presents the review of campus novels produced in India from the 1950s to present day, to the possible extent, to focus the recurring but varied themes of these novels in the changing times.

Keywords: campus, campus novel, campus life, Indian English novel, Indian campus novel

Introduction

Prime themes in campus novels across the globe include narratives on the lives of academics, life and matters relating to academic institutions which were established, flourished and which acquired global reputation; and student-life that is linked predominantly with the academics and the institutes. Enormous fiction has been written in the recent past. The “campus novel” originated as a literary genre in the West in 1950s as one of the Second World War aftermath developments in the US and the UK. Many academics involved themselves in writing about the problems and follies which occurred on campus. The trend continued till the end of 20th century, but the beginning of 21st century has given a way to some students, especially in India, to record their experiences on campus afresh in their novels. The works produced by these new generation writers are treated as popular fiction. It is supposed that it will have a faster growth both in terms of quality and quantity. Initially, campus novel could not attract much readership and the attention of critics.

This paper presents the review of campus novels produced in India from the fifties to present day, to the possible extent, to focus the recurring but varied themes of these novels in the changing times.

Early Works

It is believed that the first Indian campus novel is *The Long Long Days*, a debut novel by P.M.Nityanandan, published in 1960. According to K.R.S. Iyengar, the author of *Indian writing in English*, it is a novel that has college life in Madras as subject and provides lot of entertainment” (514). It focuses on the activities and attitudes of students in a South Indian town. Their life in hostels, friendship among students, and mischief are the significant themes of the novel. Students’ attending classes only for the sake of attendance, sketching of the professor’s image on the desk during lectures, gambling, participation in college elections, a dispute at the mess; watching movies in late night shows, etc., are some of the issues of student life focused in the novel.

M.V. Rama Sarma’s *The Farewell Party* (1971) is an autobiographical novel that speaks of many academic and political issues: the impact of caste system, the Indian freedom movement, the condition of India in post-independence era, synthesis of the cultures of the East and the West, the ill-effects of war, etc. The decline of ethical values in faculty members and corrupt examination system are some additional highlighted features of the novel. It also deals with how a good teacher commands respect from the students.

Some moral issues of campus life and their impact on modern students are discussed in K.M.Trishanku’s *Onion Peel* (1973). It is all about the protagonist P.K. Ram Nathan, a postgraduate in Philosophy and a journalist who turns out to be a womanizer. Trishanku, through the characters of Nathan and Sita Dixit, presents how deterioration of moral values happen with some highly educated modern students.

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Another best-seller novel, *Goodbye to Elsa* (1974) by Saros Cowasjee, a professor, critic, journalist, and screenplay writer comes in the same lines. It offers the presentation of Tristan both as a student and faculty member. The ill-treatment of seniors and humiliation of a student at the Army Academy, Universities of Delhi and Leeds; and the portrayal of politics of campus, problems in research and illicit romantic episodes of a professor are found in the novel.

The trend-setting campus novel with the subtitle “A Novel of Campus Life in India Today”, *Atom and the Serpent* (1982) is the novel written by Prema Nandakumar, the daughter of the renowned critic, K.R.Srinivas Iyengar. It is a satirical novel which mainly concentrates on the teaching and non-teaching faculty in the university more than the students. It meticulously brings out the changing mentality of the faculty in the modern era. The novelist presents many issues like the demonstrations, the gheraos, the indifferent attitude of the staff members towards research, their clamouring for promotions, politics, and the controlling abilities of the Vice Chancellor to control all these irregularities, etc.

Miracles Happen, by D.R. Sharma, a Professor of English at Punjab University, Chandigarh is about administration of a university campus, misappropriation of power under the leadership of an inefficient Vice Chancellor. The Vice-Chancellor’s transformation, after a dip into the holy river, brings about brave decisions, makes him scrupulous in settling all the irregularities like a miracle.

Anurag Mathur’s novel *The Inscrutable Americans* (1991) gives an amusing account of life of Gopal, a religious, vegetarian, Indian student at a small American university, Eversville, to pursue a diploma course. The cultural dilemma he experienced in American city life, his frequently annoying language and his shocking reactions to American customs are amusingly presented. Despite his fighting with racism and insecurity, Gopal develops affection for his friends, colleagues and teachers.

A medical student Bharat’s protest against the administration to support mess workers on the campus is found in Kavary Nambisan’s *The Truth (Almost) About Bharat* (1991). A watchman gets hurt by a stone which Bharat throws. Bharat, terrified by the incidents at college and in his own life, goes on a motorcycle journey across India. A focus on students, teachers and the administration is found in the novel.

Presentation of a protagonist as a student and a teacher is also found in Anuradha Marwah Roy’s renowned novel *The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta* (1993). The small-town girl, who aspires to become civil servant, joins M.Phil course at Jana University, faces difficulty with her research supervisor. Her choice of becoming a lecturer to lead an independent life and her plans to take up writing are dealt with three-fold aspects of campus life in the novel.

The only campus novel in Indian Fiction in English in verse is Rita Joshi’s *The Awakening-a Novella in Rhyme* in 1993. Inspired by Vikram Seth’s novel *The Golden Gate*, Joshi has written a satire on the faculty and principal of a college. Cambridge educated and returned JR (might be the author herself) an honest teacher, joins as a lecturer and manages her academics as well as a

drama society. She fights against the unjust acts of the principal and the forced obedience by the faculty and students. Consequently, she resigns the job, to be a full-time writer. Academics and their disillusionment with their profession are widely satirized in the novel.

Prof. V. Pandu Ranga Rao's novel, *The Drunk Tantra* (1994) presents a scathing attack on defective and vulnerable system of Education and Politics are the other issues of college life like exams, seminars, strikes, and the cynical mind set of the college faculty, etc.

The true and desirable characteristics of a faculty member are presented by Makarand R. Paranjape, in his novel, *The Narrator* (1995) through the character Rahul Patwardhan. He is sincere in completing syllabus, obtaining a PhD degree, and maintains good relations with colleagues. The mischievous and wild behavior of students, their bunking classes, breaking rules, drinking, visiting prostitutes etc. are also focused in the novel.

An enjoyable satire on college life, *The Virgin Syndrome* (1997) is written by Rani Dharker who teaches English literature at the M.S. University, Baroda. It is her first novel narrated in the first person has many parodies of fables. The forty-plus year-old heroine finds love and fulfillment in a young man Siddharth and speaks of her memories with him.

Works in 21st Century

A good number of campus novels have been produced in the early 21st century. The paper also discusses some of the prominent novels in a chronological order.

Campus (2002) is a novel that presents the malfunctioning of the Universities in the present times by Prof. K.L.Kamal, the former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Rajasthan, Jaipur. It reports the challenging life of a determined Vice-chancellor who wishes to see his university as one of the best National Universities by promoting higher education and research. Non-cooperation of some members of staff, strikes, burning of his effigies, pressure from a corrupted governing body, and favoritism in academics are the prominent themes of the novel.

A controversial, virtual history classroom that leads to liberal dissent is depicted in a Githa Hariharan's novel, *In Times of Siege* (2003). According to Shabano Bilgrami, it is "a subtle dissection of the contest between religious intolerance and liberal dissent in modern day India" (*Asian Review* 2 Mar 2005). The novel focuses an ideological battle between RSS supporters and Leftists in the name of distortion of history which caused involvement of external elements in academics on both sides; campus politics that disturbed the student life at nation level, and also indifferent university authorities.

A new trend of students' writing novels on the campuses they attended after they have left them is started with the entry of Chetan Bhagat. *Five Point Someone* (2004), Bhagat's most popular novel, is set in the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi. It gives a detailed story of three students who were screwed up by the grading system of the IIT. Ragging, grade system, malpractice, pressures and academic stress, student-teacher relations, friendship, hostel life and careerism are the issues of student life depicted in this novel at length.

Abhijit Bhaduri's *Mediocre But Arrogant* (2005) is a campus novel which presents the student life at the 'Management Institute of Jamshedpur', from where the protagonist graduates and successfully obtains his first job in HR.

Caste politics at one of the south Indian Universities is interestingly figured in the novel of Srividya Natarajan, *No Onions, Nor Garlic* (2006). Professor Ram, the central figure of the novel tries to establish a statue of goddess of education, and to appoint his son as an Assistant professor in the department of English avoiding the most eligible Dalit candidate; organizing processions in the name of caste in university with students; delaying the submission of research scholar's thesis for selfish reasons; and mediocrity in conducting a conference with all his relatives and caste people; trying to have his own papers and books published; exhibiting excessive hatred towards the low caste people are the prominent issues discussed in the novel.

Arindam Chatterjee, the author Amitab Bagchi's own image as a protagonist at IIT Delhi is presented in the novel *Above Average* (2006). The characters in the novel are created based on real people. Unlike *Five Point Someone* it is not totally about IIT. It is woven around Arindam Chatterjee, his stay at IIT, his performance as a rock drummer, his visits to Opera and finally his shift to the US. Nandini Nair observes that, Arindam, like other IITians, is not much successful to live up to expectations but gets recognition there by striving constantly. (*The Hindu Metro plus*, 9 Apr 2007)

A campus novel that gives the life on JNU campus of Delhi is, *Sumthing of a Mocktale*. It is a novel written by Somadas. Rahman quotes Das: "The book is about the experiences of three girls entering JNU which shape their mental faculties and orient their lifestyles to trigger a growth process in them. These experiences transform them into socially conscientious individuals" (*The Tribune* 18 Nov2007). It focuses the hopes, plans and preparations of career building, dressing styles, dating and love making, heart breaking etc.

Joker in the Pack (2007) by IIM alumni Ritesh Sharma and Neeraj Pahlajani is a novel set in IIM campus. The novel describes a middle-class boy from urban India Shekhar Verma obsessed with Bollywood and Cricket, pressured by his parents and others, tries a career in Information Technology first and then an MBA. The career options, confused state of mind of students, pressures and expectations are the themes discussed in the novel.

Tushar Raheja's debut novel, *Anything for You Ma'am: the love story of an IITian* (2007) is another novel that deals with the IIT campus. Harishdeep Jolly, an alumnus of IIM Bangalore is the author of *Everything You Desire: A Journey Through IIM* (2007). The issues of career and relationships among the students are chiefly dealt with in this novel. *Three Makes a Crowd* (2007) by Kaushik Sirkar is on hostel life at Dehradun's Rashtriya Indian Military College. It's a story of three friends and their adventurous experiences at IMA.

A celebrated critic and editor of *Indian English Literature*, M.K. Naik, has also tried a novel, *Corridors of Knowledge* (2008) that deals with the life of the protagonist as a student as well as a professor. M.K. Naik puts that the novel contains the memories of his last thirty years and the theme of corruption in higher education (*The Criterion*, April 2010).

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Bombay Rains Bombay Girls (2008) is a debut novel of Anirban Bose, a medical doctor; gives his own experience at a medical college located in Bombay (Mumbai). The novel mainly focuses on love, heartbreak, ragging, friendship, regionalism, leadership, etc. Shy-looking Adi, who hails from a small-town Ranchi, gradually emerges as a leader in the class Mumbai's Grant Medical College and gets so many friends in the class from boys and girls.

Keep off the Grass (2008) by Karan Bajaj is a novel set in IIM Bangalore. It gives account of Samrat Ratan, a Yale graduate and an investment banker on Wall Street who quits his career gets enrolled in a B-school, and his two friends- Sarkar and Vinod. The grades, competition and the aspirations make them restless. Surprisingly, they find fun and solace in smoking, drinking and Marijuana. Pleasure trips, Grade system, campus interviews and Internship are the other concepts presented in the novel.

Another novel by Chetan Bhagat is *The Two States* (2009). As the novel is an autobiographical one, the boy and the girl are Chetan Bhagat and his wife Anusha who are from Delhi and Tamil Nadu, respectively. Besides their group studies, friendship, romance, wedding, the novel also details the traditions and cultural diversity prevailed in India.

Two important themes of student life-romance and psychology are presented in *A Sunny Shady Life* (2009) written by Sachin Garg (*Merinews* 14 March 2009). Sunny, an engineering student at Delhi College of Engineering makes love with a senior girl, organizes cricket tournament. They go on partying, have fun and sex. His internship in Paris and friendship are mostly covered themes in the novel.

The two popular novels deal with stories of college days, love-affairs, partying, behavior of hostilities, so called relationships friendship and heartbreak, etc. are *Of Course I love you* (2009) and *Now That You're Rich: Let's Fall in Love!* (2009) jointly written by Durjoy Dutta and Manvi Ahuja.

Manish Gupta's debut novel, *Nine Months Ago* (2010) describes the life of students at IIT Bombay. Students' use of technology, making love, chatting, dating, peer-pressure, stress, malpractice in examinations, student-teacher relations, hostel life, attending conferences etc are the focused in the novel.

Findings and Conclusions

The campus novels of India, like elsewhere, mostly dealt with themes related to all the three factors of academic or campus life: students, faculty members and administration. The locale is India, and the characters are shown either following or violating the ethos of the typical Indian society. Certain features of the Indian campus novel can be highlighted.

Firstly, the novels chiefly focused on the issues of student life in hostels and on campus. They have happy moments in friendship, funny life styles, mischief, watching movies; and develop bad habits like ragging, drinking, and visiting prostitutes etc. Some serious academic aspects like examinations, stress, striving for grades, interviews, seminars, difficulties with research supervisors they usually come across on campus life. They get confused with career options, and

involve in heat generating issues like elections, demonstrations, strikes, protests, bunking classes, fights with the administration. Many social issues like fighting with racism and insecurity, the effects of caste system, the ill-effects of war, the deteriorated moral values, Use and misuse of technology etc. also have their effect on student life.

Secondly, campus novels discuss the role of faculty members on campus – the profession of teaching, the changing roles and mentalities of the teacher, and decline of ethical values in faculty members, corrupt examination patterns, illegitimate romantic episodes among professors, the indifference and views of the staff members towards recent research, clamouring for higher positions, power politics, disillusionment with their profession, etc.

Thirdly, the novels present criticism on the administration- misuse of power, corruption, inefficient Vice Chancellors, mis-fits and unfits ruling the temple of learning, vulnerable system of education, politics, domineering principal, fighting against the unjust acts of administration.

We can conclude by saying that the Indian campus novel has contributed to the evolution of the genre in several ways: (1) by providing local (read Indian) flavour, (2) by showing the socio-cultural milieu and the attitude of youth to society even as the war between tradition and modernity ensued, and (3) by exploring the complex relations between different stakeholders in the campus.

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Dr. M.Eswara Rao, M.A., M. Phil., Ph.D.
GMRIT, Rajam, Andhra Pradesh
eswar.majji@gmail.com

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