Chapter II

FACULTY ORIENTED NOVELS

Taken globally, faculty oriented campus novels are in such large numbers that it is possible to make general observations picking the common features. Such emergence has prompted hundreds of research papers and studies to focus on campus / academic novels by the authors like Kingsley Amis, Mary McCarthy, David Lodge, Bernard Malamud, Vladimir Nobokov and others. Scholars have analysed the academic set up in its various hues and patterns including the several components of the campuses. Critics have observed that such novels have captured not just the working of the Higher Education Centers, but the typical personnel found in such campuses, be it professors, presidents, faculty or the students.

However, in the Indian context such novels are not many, but they are quite unique, albeit with a few exceptions, and each one can be studied separately. The novels differ with respect to their settings, protagonists and style of writing. There are novels set in college campuses, university campuses and even in an Open University campus. Protagonists happen to be Vice Chancellors, lecturers or even visiting faculty. The style of narration also offers much variety: first person as also third person narrations and even the stream of consciousness technique.
The faculty members are not only the insiders but are often framers of the academic structure. It is they who have to decide the functioning, the structure and the standard of the campus to a large extent. Moreover, as teachers are the most crucial and primary stakeholders of the academic system one expects a faculty oriented novel to present the negative as well as positive aspects of the academic world.

Does a campus novel orient a lay reader with the right perspective? Does it supplement a reader’s understanding of campus affairs? Can one look up for a campus novel in order to direct the self towards academia? Are campus novels an aid to self analysis? Are some of the questions one gets while exploring the world of campus novels. Higher education centers quite isolated as they are from the ordinary public, the campus novels perhaps are the one tool to provide a link between the campus and the general public. Are we to expect such a purpose behind the writing of a campus novel? Or is it just an artistic urge of a literary artist that prompts the creation of such novels? If so, what is the artistic standard of such works? The researcher expects such works to at least open a door for retrospection and self-revelation for the educators compelling them to work for the creation of a campus that gives an opportunity for a better academic experience both for the students and the faculty.

The relatively small number of campus novels in Indian English facilitates examination of them individually against the backdrop of such queries.
Prema Nandakumar’s *Atom and the Serpent* generally claimed to be the first of its kind in Indian English, presents an authentic picture of a typical Indian University, with a reliable blend of old and new, ideal and crooked, good and evil forces. True to her words, the writer attempts to project “essential realities and not particular actualities” without “overdoing the picture.” With the subtitle, ‘A Novel of Campus Life in India Today’ the novel is an illuminating depiction of the ugly side of the campus along with an intermittent better part of the human soul. The story is an account of the experience of a nuclear scientist in a university campus where the reader gets glimpses of campus life even as the protagonist himself gets exposed to his own inner realm.

With its ridiculous ‘phoren’ adorer Mr. Yana, unscrupulous Mr. Dattatreya, the Principal, and Mrs. Sheela Rani, supported by men like Kshema Rao, we are not left far from feeling the poisonous pangs of the venomous serpent creeping all over the campus trying to affect each and every atom. However, the precious atoms like Rajeshwara and Satya remain unpoisoned even by the most poisonous bites of the serpent, giving us an assurance that ‘sanity still lurks in our universities’ (p 65)

The beautiful and serene ambience of the university campus unfolds before us when Dr. Kamalapati Vatsa, a nuclear scientist in Neutron Moderator Department of Bombay, alights on the campus as a visiting professor to give a series of lectures on atomic energy. His brief stay from Monday to Friday frames...
the five chapters of the novel, namely ‘Atom Scientist’, ‘Visha Kanya’, ‘Point Counterpoint’, ‘Laceration’ and ‘Holocaust’. The well laden campus which immediately attracts any passing visitor doesn’t have the same standard when it comes to research laboratories or other infrastructure facilities. Yana, the Head of the Department shows Vatsa through the rusted 18th century equipments and blames our system that leads to the inferior quality of our research.

“... They advise us to manage somehow with things on hand. Things! What things! Rusted eighteenth century equipment! Or useless, outmoded, hand-me-down from the States! Oh, this Somehowism, this Anyhowism! I wish a nuclear explosion blasts our Indian Universities so that we can build upon the ruins something entirely new and worthwhile.” (p 144)

Further, the reader is exposed to the four representative departments in particular: Department of Atomic Research headed by the vociferous Yougandharayana or Yana the Americanised, the Econometrics Department with Sheela Rani as a Reader, the Applied Politics Department, headed by the cunning Dattatreya and the Sanskrit Department headed by the scholar academician and the most respected Prof. Rajeshwara. The readers also visit quite a few households on the campus, including that of the Vice Chancellor Adhyaksha himself where we meet the unusual son of the VC, Raj, and his mature and loving wife Satya. “Without overcrowding the canvas, there is enough variety in the dramatis personae to suggest the wide spectrum of Faculty composition, from the utterly ridiculous and criminal to the nearly sublime.”

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While there are enough episodes to describe the scandal mongering Sheela Rani, the departmental routine and politics guided and directed by Kshema Rao, professional jealousy and the like, we are also introduced to the scholarly Rajeshwara, sensible and intelligent and most of all the cultured Satya, and the caring and pleasant daughter of Rajeshwara, Laxmi. The link in the story is established as it is revealed to Vatsa that the most revered Professor Rajeshwara is none other than the favourite pupil of his late father Datta, the great Sanskrit scholar and it is a mere coincidence that his neighbor in Bombay, Mrs Chander who happens to be Rajeshwara’s daughter, has also come on vacation along with her cute little son Chintu.

Vatsa, the son of a great Sanskrit scholar, had taken up a study in nuclear science. At his adolescent age, he had lost all veneration for Sanskrit and everything that is old, and developed a very strong view that India can develop only if the thrust is given to modern areas like nuclear energy, though later he regrets sacrificing the old for the new. It is only after coming in contact with Rajeshwara that he realises that the ‘old’ should complement the ‘new’. However, his father Datta’s influence had already made him well versed with Sanskrit language and the literature, which he had the chance to teach. This teaching assignment abroad allows him to contemplate on and compare the academic system here with that abroad and through the interaction between Vatsa and Rajeshwara the writer even reasons out the difference between the two mindsets.
“Students in India are usually frigid, so to say,” said Vatsa, “they listen, they do not seem to think.”

“What do you mean?”

“They don’t ask questions. They take everything for granted when the professor mouths it. I can’t understand this lassitude, this apathy, but they are obviously facile when it comes to writing their examinations or performing their experiments.

“I don’t think our students are all that dull. I would rather put it down to an innate Indianness. An unquestioning attitude towards the elder is instilled in Indian consciousness. A son rarely contradicts his father. He may do something against his father’s wishes, but contradicting him verbally and openly, that is rare.” (p 136-137)

A tradition of centuries of obedience to the Guru, they agree, seems to have transformed a student into a ‘receptive vessel’. Still Vatsa couldn’t help but miss the stimulating two-way traffic of his teaching experience abroad.

The physical details of the University, including the layout of the campus, various departments and lecture halls give a vivid picture of a typical south Indian university campus. On the very first day on the campus Vatsa “wakes up to the sounds of the birds chirping in the quiet university campus, a heaven of peace and contentment” (p 11) even before which he had been introduced to the ‘university politics’ by the infamous ‘scandal scatterer’ Sheela Rani. The
academic actuality of the university departments are exposed as Vatsa walks into
the department of Atomic Energy to deliver his talk. Vatsa’s vision of “packed
200-foam-seated auditorium with gleaming mikes and noble lecterns and ever so
many paintings of past academic worthies blessing those present”, gets shattered
as he enters the hall where “there were only two boys and one girl distributed on
the several benches”. Vatsa observes …

“Facing them was a raised platform with three chairs and a table.
The table had a stained cloth as a cover and a cracked vase on it with
a bunch of purple and white bougainvillea with an ill boded lectern”
(p 103)

Vatsa’s mind effortlessly goes back to his days abroad where -
“the endowment lectures would be attended by the cream of faculty
and students irrespective of what faculty they are from bringing a
decorum and dignity to the endowment lectures and they discussed
the subject for days together and often leading to antithetical
stances” (p 103)

While Vatsa still craves for the stimulating two way traffic in his classes, on the
day stipulated for the monthly seminar, ‘the Readers looked as though they were
in a house of mourning’ (p 143). All our universities are doing, according to
Yana is to ‘encode raw B.Sc. graduates and decode them as M.Sc.s two years
later’ (p 146)
Vatsa has some serious questions of concern regarding our education system which she feels is a 'national tragedy'. He laments -

“What had come over the Indian Universities? How come the Indian educational scene had grown murky of late? Something is rotten in the State of Denmark! But would Heaven take a hand now, as Horatio had fondly hoped?” (p148)

Further he questions the very purpose of our universities: “Why aren’t our universities contributing towards the development of any field?” While the limitations of the universities and the dark side of the education system are expressed throughout the novel through the actions or expressions of various characters, especially Yana and Rani, the writer, through the discussions between Vatsa and Rajeshwara, brings out the essence of true education – the duty of a teacher and teacher student relationship:

“A wonderful thing about being a teacher is to be able to gain an entry into the student’s heart and make him blossom into a true votary of knowledge…”.

“But to fail in this sacred task because of insincerity and lack of dedication or the intrusion of deceit was to desecrate the sanctity of a teacher’s vocation… Teaching was not the mere half-hearted trading of information, knowledge and skills. It was something more, a vocation, a sacerdony…”(p 170)
Vatsa finds in Rajeshwara one such academician ‘who took great care to teach his students, spending long hours in preparation and also constantly involved in research and publication’ (p 177).

While Vatsa is a keen researcher, who goes on to explore an old wooden table and finds out the historical truths about the VC’s villa and the Gulmohar tree which unfolds to him the ultimate truth of life, Sheela Rani hates research but craves to place herself in the chair of a professor and gets a riot organized and so much of destruction caused to achieve her cause.

“... All these Ph.D.s are shams and shampoos, and in America, I hear, you can get a Ph.D. for psittacine performances or for working out the average of a middle-class porcupine’s tail! ... you just assemble a few pages of plagiarized parrotry, then appoint the negotiable chap in the neighbouring dump as the external expert, and hey presto! You are a Ph.D., one of the neo-brahmins of the academic hierarchy!” (p 162)

Within a short span of three days Vatsa finds that for Sheela Rani,

“... nothing, nothing was sacred or inviolate to her, neither the old values nor the eternal verities, neither the philanthropic Zamindar who had donated the building, nor her colleagues and students who were now occupying it, nor yet any of the campus community. For that matter, she seemed to have no more than contempt even for her husband, treating him much as a convenient hawai slipper for
bathroom comfort. She gleefully called him the Otter without any trace of self-consciousness...” (p 156)

Her eloquent tongue often generously attributes her colleagues with overstated names like ‘Tribal Chief’ for Adhyaksha the VC, ‘Otter’ for Dattatreya the Principal, ‘that sick little maniac’ for Raj the son of the VC, and her own department is called ‘Econometrics’.

By choosing a protagonist who doesn’t really belong to the campus and who is not even an academician in the conventional sense, the author has conveniently made it possible to give an objective view of the campus. The novel, compared to other faculty oriented novels, gives a balanced view of the campus, blending the good and the bad elements.

*Atom and the Serpent* is to be appreciated not just for being practically the first of its kind – a full fledged campus novel, showcasing the campus life from various angles – it also attempts to impart multiple messages. The reader needs to hold both the threads of the story simultaneously – that of the campus life and that of the life of campus dwellers.

“... the air (on the campus) is thick with a surfeit of frivolities and rascalities, and we witness the unsavoury fight for position and promotion and foreign deputation, the spectacle of waste and pettiness”.5 This side of ‘Education’ or ‘Academia’ as a system in its true manifestation as seen in the contemporary Indian Universities is highlighted. At the same time the existence of the brighter side of it is also made evident through the dialogues of Rajeshwara and Satya. Similarly the Campus portrayed in academic blocks runs parallelly with Raj -
Satya story. The devastating final riot puts an end to all that was boiling hitherto, as some solution, some compromise, some reconciliation is finally accomplished and the novel ends on a note of hope.

Vice Chancellors being the most important personalities of any university campus it is not surprising to see that quite a few campus novels take the VCs to be their protagonists, with all their strengths and weaknesses, specially bringing in those critical moments of their vice chancellorship, wherein they really have to make decisions. Two such campus novels are *Miracles Happen* and *Campus*.

*Miracles Happen*, a campus novel by D R Sharma written in two parts viz ‘Spell’ and ‘Transformation’ tries to depict and expose campus politics in various colours and its victims. The author D R Sharma, a professor of English at Punjab University, Chandigarh, tries, as he himself claims, ‘to portray truth with imagination’ in this fictional work.

This novel, which almost overlooks the fact that even the students are a part of the campus, focuses on the activities of a vice-chancellor, who is gripped by the vicious tentacles of his wife and a couple of other men with vested interests.

Om Prakash Handa is the Vice Chancellor of a once prestigious Mansa-Devi University, located at the foothills of Shivaliks, and astonishingly modern in architecture, one of the top ranking universities during the days of Dr. Raheja’s vice chancellorship.
"Its inception unfolds a narrative of dedication and vision on the part of its pioneers. .... competent faculty and inquisitive students. In the very first few years it acquired a distinct position on the national and global map of scholarship, and visitors from abroad always expressed a wish to have a look at this architectural marvel.

With a glorious past, Mansa devi campus has a sordid present. Earlier (they) ...looked up to the mountains and grew; today (they) hedge in at the sight of mountainous grandeur and promote their personal mystiques....survival and supremacy .... the present guardians of Mansa Devi campus proclaim the death of soul in its teaching and administrative blocks. Small men with vaunting dreams govern its destiny which earlier was directed by giants with imagination and fair play.” (p 19-20) 

The present Vice Chancellor Dr. Handa, is a pawn in the hands of his wife, Rukmani, and a very shrewd and influential colleague in the campus Dr. Das and his ‘Cleopatra’ Rekha. While the VC himself, having come up from a humble background, and being an ardent admirer and follower of Bhagavad Gita at heart and thought, could not follow any of the teachings of Gita due to his timidity, allowing others to take advantage of the situation. The University suffers from ‘the supremacy of small men’. (p 49)
Mr. Deepak Chawla the narrator, with his friend, Raj, and the Gandhian Dr. Joginder Bawa, strives to transform Mansa Devi to its earlier days of Dr. Raheja.

Rekha, an awfully attractive and elegant young lady tactfully traps the men in the university with her charms and this time, to their mutual advantage, it happens to be Dr. Das, an exceptionally influential man who knew to have the right connections and use them at crucial times. She is sharp enough to notice that—

“Das is ... a persuasive opinion-shaper on the campus. Look at the way he calls for the tune from the Chief Executive” (p 25)

With such charm

“it was Rekha who became the de-facto arbiter of the academic and administrative destiny of Mansa Devi campus” (p 25)

She has her plans well devised as she knew that

“Das is the kingpin in campus politics and the Vice Chancellor’s confidant. Whatever one wants the other supplies. And both of them are going to rule here for a long time. In the meantime I will reach the top rung of the academic ladder.”(p 26)

He is well aware of the right sap to be tapped to suck the maximum fluid. He had the Controller of Examination and Liaison Officer for foreign students at his disposal who conveniently supplied all his requirements of “foreign stuff.” He
also had his extra academic source of strength in Mandalai the Chief Minister of
the state, a confidant of the Prime Minister, who contributed the largest to Mansa
Devi’s financial pool.

Rukmani, the wife of the VC better known as ‘auntieji’ by her admirers like Das,
manipulates the rules of the university, and handles almost all the affairs of
Mansa Devi Campus. The complete administration of the campus is virtually in
the hands of Das whose ‘Spell’ controls the campus. Das leaves no opportunity
unused to satisfy the ‘career development’ of his people, especially his beloved,
Rekha. The writer gives out his opinion on the corrupt condition of a typical
Indian campus when Raj remarks

“.... no campus is idyllic … I have cultivated an attitude of tolerance
.... through experience”( p 34-35)

Finally, as Raj feels that if such corruption is to be protested a ‘reasonable
strength is required’, they find Dr. Bawa’s strength the soul courage to be strong
even to protest the ways of the VC and present administration and bring about
a ‘transformation’ of the inner soul of the VC which finds its effect in the whole
set-up of the campus. The first part thus sets the stage as to necessitate the entry
of Bawa to renovate the deteriorating lot of Mansa Devi campus. He comes as an
answer to “is there no way to pull Mansa Devi out of this quagmire?” (p 47)
And Bawa rightly diagnoses the problem -

"The trouble with Mansa Devi campus, ... was its dominance by clerks. They flourished on the disunity and rampant groupism in the teaching faculty. He notices that "all our minor to major problems can be suitably tackled if we behave with a modicum of dignity" (p 51)

Bawa, by the manifestation of his soul courage, rouses the inner conscience of Handa and consequently, an unexpected 'miracle happens' in the Mansa Devi campus. Though everything ends well as the novel comes to an end it fails to satisfy the discerning reader. The incredible rapidity of the change leaves the reader disappointed as also "the lack of suspense and situation to grip the imagination make the novel somewhat dragging". However picturisation of the campus and its routine affairs and activities are quite realistic.

The novel opens with an enquiry of a student and proceeds with the routine scenes in the canteen, faculty meetings, the picturesque setting of the campus with its ruined library and other infrastructure, the clerical follies and audacities, the composition of students and faculty on the campus, interviews and elections, interference and intrigues among the staff, petty quarrels and paltry politics and finally the emergence of the team led by Bawa to act as a panacea to the ailing campus.
Typical of a campus novel, there are Das-Rekha episodes, their vested interests, enough people at different strata to work for them with an interest for self benefit, and the all powerful indomitable husband promoter auntieji and the like. There are also calm, quiet but sensible people around, though in a smaller number, like Deepak and Raj with their equally sensible and supportive wives Uma and Sheela, an invulnerable Bawa who with his intellectual, emotional and spiritual strength is able to transform the whole campus. Apart from Deepak and Raj there is Nair with a tinge of angry-young-man image, who has his own rash and short-tempered way of tackling the issues.

A number of literary references like, Ulyssis, Penelope, Sisyphus, David and Jonathan, Helen and Casanova, Ravana, Kaikeyi, Ram, Drona and Jayadratha and Sanjay abound the novel to draw parallelism and irony. Humorous references blending the characters from Ramayana and Mahabharata, used here enhances the implied meaning indicated.

"But why is she shuttling between Ram and Laxman?" enquired sheela.

"To hasten the fall of Ravana," replied Raj.

"...... Ravana is the composite evil on the Mansa Devi campus. Rekha, Das and Mahant are its identifiable three hands.

"And the Chief Executive?"

"A hapless prisoner."
“…… The man is reading the Gita and Kaikeyi is lying distraught on the floor. The male Manthara is watching the scene form the window,” Raj explained.

“How did you develop such a yogic vision of a Sanjaya?”

“Through intuition.” (p 68-69)”

Further, Rekha and Das are ironically associated with Helen and Cassanova. Bava denies himself to be the ‘Sysiphus to roll up the boulder of academic integrity’, (p 48) when appealed by Raj and Deepak to set right the ‘creeping vulgarity on the campus’. Das, shrewd as he is, clearly recognizes that it is difficult to trap Handa any more, as his source of energy is Bhagavad Gita which is read not ‘in order to escape, but to grapple with reality’. (p 69) Further, he defends himself with Machiavellian principle of ‘end justifying the means’. Frequent use of such allusions keeps the informed reader amused.

As against the general expectations of a faculty oriented campus novel, we hardly find in the novel any discussion of academic issues. All the tours in the name of seminars and fellowships are about either a jolly outing, a way for career development as a means to get better incentives and increments or at least a way to grab better power or position in the administration of the campus. Nowhere in the novel do we find any faculty sharing his / her experience of the classroom or an interaction with the students, not even a contemplation of a concerned teacher. Except for showing their support to Bawa, students do not make any appearance at all in the whole novel.
Nevertheless, the importance of the students is expressed in a discussion between Bawa and Deepak:

“students are vital to the growth of the faculty ... a university is built or unbuilt by its faculty ... where the faculty is dedicated and competent, students are disciplined and creative. When the faculty is inept and interchanging ideas with ideology, students get weary and disillusioned. That is what leads to campus unrest.” (p 150)

Further Bawa also remarks –

“when teachers lack integrity, they eventually breed discontent among their wards, and instead of building the nation they hasten its doom” (p 150)

However, in case of Mansa Devi it is noticed that much of the cause for the sickness of the university is administrative.

This novel hints at the potential capability of the faculty members to bring about a transformation in the entire university set up. It is the two young faculty members, Deepak and Raj who take the initiative to set the campus right.

Vice Chancellor being the most responsible power on the campus, it is obvious that his failure in administration results in the downfall of the campus. While most of the campus novels just hold a mirror to the rotten lot of the campus showing it to be irreparable, Miracles Happen stands out in showing the possibilities of miracles.
Miracles Happen is specially noted in this study for the fact that it seems to have inspired another novel of this kind namely Campus: A novel by K L Kamal. This work subtitled ‘A Novel’, and described to be a novel written in the stream of consciousness technique is more a commentary on the present pathetic situation of higher education scenario at the university level lamenting on its flaws and follies, limitations and politics. More than half the book is an account of what goes on in the mind of Chandrakanth, the VC of the University.

One of the most striking features in the two novels is not just that the protagonists are VCs but strangely both draw their inspiration from Bhagawad Gita. Chandrakanth, the VC, is guided by the ‘dictates of Rama and Krishna’ and Gandhian ideals. The vice chancellor is portrayed as an embodiment of all that is good, virtuous and ideal in the world, but surprisingly as also weak:

“a good teacher, a fine orator and a conscientious administrator but weak from within.” (p 9)

As an ideal scholar he appreciates Aristotle, Marx and T H Greene and also likes John Locke, John Stuart Mill, John Ruskin, and Harold J Laski. He adores Aurobindo, Gandhi and Vivekananda. He has realised the truth in Sardar Patel’s words that “an administrator’s heart must be in his mind, and he tries very hard to be an able administrator but not fully successful in his effort”. (p 11) Being philosophical, the VC dreams of a utopian ideology.
Chandrakant willingly takes up this challenging post of VC with a strong commitment to instill a work culture and work ethics in the university with a view to revive teaching and learning process. Like Handa of *Miracles Happen* he too tries to seek strength from Bhagwad Gita. However it doesn’t take too long for him to sense the hard realities.

Only two months earlier when he took charge as VC he had dreamt of ‘upgrading the institution to the status of a National University’ and making it ‘a centre of excellence in learning and research’. But very soon he realises that “this was a crown of thorns, perhaps not a crown at all, just thorns”. (p 15-16)

“The only morality that prevailed in the university was one of encroachment and a wish to show the other down”. (p 16)

Talking of the moral and intellectual degradation of the teachers themselves Kamal poses a question as to “who should the students go to for inspiration?”, (p 37) because he observes that the teachers are so malignant that if one brings out a book, the most favourable comment a colleague could make was that, “the get up of the book is good” for there was “no respect between the teachers or no respect of teachers for their profession.” (p 51)

While a small part of the book reveals the problems needlessly created in the university by people with vested interests, most of the remaining larger part deals with the VC’s contemplations on solving them through the ethics of Bhagawad Gita and the writings / preaching of great leaders like Vivekananda.
Chandrakant’s tours abroad induce in him an enthusiasm to introduce new courses to suit the changing times. Nevertheless, this was protested by the teachers who shun the additional responsibilities associated with it. The only solace to Chandrakant was that there were reasonable people like Mehta, concerned friends like Shivani, Roopchand and Pramodkumar, dedicated students like Padmini, who would morally support him. Prof. Mehta, who was ready to join with the VC feels that “that higher education which cannot relate itself to the reconstruction of society is really meaningless” (p 64)

To add to the banality the writer also puts the usual lamentations about the western influence on our young minds. At the same time he also wants our universities to follow the work culture and professionalism he has witnessed in some of the western universities.

Further, comparing the university’s condition of the past with that of the present he feels that

“the present age lacked the dedication, belongingness and the sense of duty.... The universities are no more the temples of learning, research, creativity and culture, instead they had become centers of political activism, inflated egoism unbridled individuals and other non academic pursuits. According to him higher education has become “directionless and motiveless” (p 65)

But on his visit to another university as the Chairperson of the Accreditation Committee, he gathers hope, as he was glad to find certain amount of work
culture in place there. Further he also examines the benefits of getting an autonomous status to the university. Considering the ever diluting and deteriorating education system the writer expresses his concern, because he knows that “higher education is directly related to national progress and betterment”.(p 66) His continued reflection on the current education system takes him back to that of his student days. When Padmini, a student and one of his ardent admirers, talks and highlights the wide gap between the rich and the poor, the VC ponders over the question, whether it is possible for the university to move in such a direction to abolish the wide gap between the “affluent India” and “the miserable and the suffering Bharath”.(p 82)

Chandrakant, who draws all his inspiration from Gita compares his own plight with that of Arjun, but fails to identify himself with Arjun as he realises that he was too weak unlike Arjun and moreover he has no Krishna to lead him. Chandrakant who appears to be mentally strong at the outset, is gradually shattered and too exhausted to continue with his intended struggle to get his dream university materialized.

He feels that the vital role of the university is to help in developing a ‘healthy and positivist way of thinking’ among the youth and lead them to evolve a better adjusted and more acceptable personality. And at the end, even while the VC himself had resolved to take action in the right direction, Madhav Prasad Dwivedi and Roopchand come to meet him, urge him to move forward and assure their wholehearted support. The cloud starts dispersing, as Chandrakant tells himself “neither remorseful nor an escapist be”.(p 92)
While the first part gives us the unbearable lot of the VC, as there is pressure, tension, hostility from all sides – be it students, teachers, administrative staff or even outsiders like political parties – either openly or indirectly, the second and final part ends with a ray of hope as even his opponents see some genuine and honest attempts of the VC for the betterment of the university, although the change of heart of the opponents seem more contrived than logical. Neither the depiction of the campus nor the ‘soaring high’ of the VC’s soul carries much conviction. The title ‘Campus’ only flatters to deceive.

The three novels discussed above viz Atom and the Serpent, Miracles Happen and Campus cannot be grouped with many of the typical campus novels published abroad that are observed by critics to have exhibited certain salient features such as exaggeration, caricature of academic figures, hilarious episodes bringing out the foolishness of the professors/lecturers and the like. Satire and irony are the basic tools generally used. In general such novels have depicted the academic centers as being full of such contemptible characters with ulterior mottos and the good and the noble, if any, are shown as an exception. In this sense, the above novels are not only different but also unique in their handling of the theme and characterization. The protagonist in each of the above novels ultimately tries to set right the rotten lot of the university or at least is not a party to such condition. The characters are admired or hated for their ultimate intention or motto rather than laughed at for their stupidity or foolishness.
But Ranga Rao's *The Drunk Tantra* is an interesting exception, written almost on the same lines as *Lucky Jim* by Kingsley Amis. By taking Ms. Mohana a new Lecturer to be one of the narrators apart from the author-narrator, Rao sets a convenient frame for exposing his targets. The protagonist, being a novice to the field, is an untainted, unbiased insider open to hear and analyse the situation from various angles. While the omniscient author-narrator covers the incident in a wider arena including those outside the campus, it is possible for Mohana to share her limited view with a critical outlook.

The novel portrays an array of characters in various hues and colours completing the picture of a college campus. There are Mohana, Prof. Daash and Mr. Varma, ‘a scientist of international repute, the promise of young India’, with a sincere academic bent of mind while Hairy alias Hari Kishan symbolises the bad, unfair and ugly side of the academia. Mrs. Mocham, Mrs. Karan, Mr. Sharma, and others fill the gap representing the peculiar, deteriorating and self centered natures.

The novel is structurally divided into three parts – *Retreat, Revolt* and *Flight* which are further divided into numerous episodes suitably narrated by Mohana or the author.

Set in the campus of one of the oldest colleges in the city named St. Jaans for Jaanayya College, “comparatively much better off than most other colleges, (p 4)\(^1\)\(^0\) the novel speaks of the let off classes and unengaged classes, exam hall decked with malpractice attacks and counterattacks, lecturers with all their other
interests except their classes, the staff council meeting turning into a war council meeting and even the valuation system where a student can be a victim of the mistake of any one of so many people responsible for it.

Consoling Meena, one of the brightest students, who gets unbelievably less marks Daash says:

"You alone are not responsible for your results. The examiner, the babus in the examination branch of the university office, the computer operator... Anyone could have made a mistake. Let's ask for revaluation" (p 57)

Mohana enters the campus as a new appointee as a lecturer with the intrinsic curiosity, hope and a little bit of apprehension. Interestingly, she comes with a strange query about the location of Begum Puram which no one had ever heard of and everyone promises to find it out for her. With this constant quest for Begum Puram at the back of her mind she soon gets adjusted to the new environ with Daash, Varma and other colleagues along with a couple of students helping her explore and better understand the campus. Eventually she is entrusted with various other responsibilities, one of which being the wardenship of the hostel brings her nearer to the student community. She takes note of all kinds of people on the campus especially those that are committed like the security guard, Bahadur.

The bus stop next to the campus, 'the skewed shelter', forms an important part of the campus, as the protagonist claims to have learnt a lot here about her
colleagues and college life while waiting for the ‘unwilling, unsteady, truant bus’. It is in such meetings that Daash opens out to her the pleasures of teaching as well as the drawbacks of our system. He describes the college as a minor jungle and university a major jungle bringing out the chaotic state of the academia. “With his whole tool kit of teaching tricks which he readily spares for his juniors, Daash is a joker in the jungle” (p 18) in the sense that he laughs and makes you laugh. He is the only other person with Mohana who shows a genuine academic concern. The short episodes with Daash are dotted with statements showing concern for education. He rightly counsels the new entrant Mohana that there is no alternative to knowing as a spirit of enquiry – intellectual enquiry – is indispensable to teaching profession.

Realising the importance of the formative period - when the intellectual and emotional make up of the child turns into that of an adult – Daash emphasizes on the need of emotional support to the students. He also opines that the rejuvenating rewards of teaching are the fresh faces and lively minds though there are ‘potentially mischievous ones in rapt observation’. True to the temperament of a good teacher Mohana starts observing the students from the very first day and notices that there was an air of deference and casual arrogance that marked Shelly Caper, the Literary Secretary.

Biting satire, loaded sarcasm, irony wrapped in humour... Rao’s talent unfolds with the introduction of Hairy in the opening pages of the novel through a legend which reveals how he got his gifted hair all over his body except on his head. Hairy, who was a mere lecturer, with his ‘connections’ with the right people like
the banker who shows him the importance of and the ways to make money, and his politically influential cousin and his service to the trusted ones makes it to the principal’s post very soon. His saga of reaching this position is narrated with intriguing episodes at various levels in and around the academic arena. Tired of his non teaching lecturership Hairy continually encounters the fundamental question ‘What does one do when he doesn’t do?’, which serves as a refrain throughout the novel.

The plot of the novel, skillfully devised, allows the author to look into diverse aspects of campus life from various angles illustrating the authentic picture of the campus. We come across the clash of complexes among the faculty from different streams –

“Have you heard of .... smoking in the classrooms?

… It can happen only in the arts and humanities classes”( p 25)

Student community is observed and analysed on varied occasions by the faculty members, both individually and as a group. Talking of ‘Malhotra’s teaching Shop, Rao contrasts the total absence of any academic professionalism expected of a college, with that found very much in private tuition centers. In fact such teachers, he comments, “occasionally went to their respective colleges/ university departments for relief”.(p 33) But in Mr. Daash we find a real teacher, who enjoys every bit of his academic existence and feels that

“it works both ways. I don’t know what I would have done without students.”
Quoting the story of Mrs Karan the ‘fertility Goddess’, the author draws our attention to the domestic set up that could be a hurdle in the academic progress, especially of the lady teachers.

"We had a fine young woman, tough-minded, well-read, an honest teacher. I am talking of a woman teacher who joined the college ten years ago. In the very first few years she spent here, she was elected Secretary of the Staff Association. With her enthusiasm and intelligence, she made a solid contribution to the staff welfare. She was nominated student adviser and she represented the college in the teacher's forum. ... She worked for her Ph.D. from the first year of her service and produced a decent doctoral dissertation. Active, articulate, vivacious: a teacher who was a social asset ... Then... she married... and everything changed." (p 77)

The second part of the novel titled 'Revolt' gives an account of Hairy's ascent to the Principal's throne and a strike in the college as also an international seminar conducted in his reign. The fight between the aspiring candidates, like Hairy and Mrs Mocham, for the post of Principal of St Jaans is sarcastically depicted. The much coveted post is decided not by the ability or the potential of the candidates but by the degree of interest taken by their influential cousins.

Finally with Hairy's regular visit to his cousin, taking care of his domestic chore and the like, grinning and smiling, getting thrilled at every comment he makes, he makes it to the Principal's post.
Addressing an IAS man in the presence of Hairy, the cousin remarks –

"... the educated class of this country, the less said about them the better.... They have no longer any moral authority left, ... (they are) parasites – with apologies to my learned friend here" at which

"Hairy was electrified at the importance given to him"! (p 127)

However, neither the staff nor the students were in favour of his selection and that resulted in agitation for a while.

"...classes were boycotted, students themselves led the way and the quadrangle resounded to passionate slogans. For a week or so - and then it all subsided because of Mr. Daash; in part because of him."

(p 129)

Daash, wise and mature as he was, and having understood the world better, advises Mohana and others,

"You can’t be teachers and staff members of the college and also be at the same time the selection committee for the post of principal"

(p 129)

Further, a Vice-Principal’s post is created with Hairy’s proposal to accommodate Mrs Mocham. The depiction of Mrs Mocham’s character, with her three marriages and divorces and the accumulation of a huge property, her intention of sending her son abroad for studies, and the tragic suicide of her son could well be enough content for another story – a social novel.
Hairy flourishes as the Principal of St. Jaans as he knows to manage his affairs well. His day would start with a visit to the Chairman’s residence, attending to all his personal and domestic problems. Next important work is to visit the VC ‘who found Hairy useful in things small and big’.

“For example, it was Hairy who rescued the VC and his favourite professor from the mess they found themselves in when a research student under (the latter’s) his supervision committed suicide, leaving a suicide note which was murderous. .... The Research Scholar’s Association and the student’s Union made a big noise – Hairy ... helped to unearth the little known facts of the suicide’s past, such as his strained relationship with his father, his frustrated love affair, which saved the necks of the professor and the VC.” (p 136)

Hairy, as principal, proves to be more staff – friendly –

“Now, salary checks were no longer delayed; dearness arrears cleared ...; promotions were promised.... Hairy soon came to be called the Telling Principal”. (p136)

Hairy achieves many more things like getting a Genetic Laboratory of national fame established at the college and organizing an International Seminar though it was criticized by some as a ‘semi literate barbecue’. He also brings in the idea of getting the teachers assessed periodically by the students. However, many teachers get outraged by the proposal. He also thinks of some weird ideas like forcing the teachers to clean the playfield.
“Administration by demoralization – seemed to be the Hairy principle” (p 156)

Hairy had the same wit, confidence and affection as Mr Daash when he spoke. He gives his own philosophy of the teaching profession as:

“Teaching is a complex human process; it is bound to be uneven; you are happy with yourself one day, one semester, one term, one academic year, and not so satisfied with your contribution another time. An honest competence is all that is expected of us: work to the best of our abilities. .... If you do not deny yourself to the students, you are being honest. .... three kinds of contribution may be demanded from the teacher First, the teacher is a counselor. ...(the students) come to you with confession, for consolation, counsel. .... What I am talking about is the moral responsibility. By moral I mean the emotional, the psychological, and the physical.” (p198)

But it is shocking, especially to Mohana, to learn that it is the utter frustration of losing the principal’s post of the college to a man like Hairy that caused the untimely death of Daash.

Issues like the affair between two non-teaching staff members, their enquiry, Mohana’s suspension and the students’ earnest request for her to return, a snake bite on the campus, Ram Bahadur the security guard – his illness and recovery, an interloper’s attempt to enter the ladies hostel and Mohana’s handling him, give the non academic perspective of the campus.
Stuffing the character of Hairy with too much exaggeration seems to have resulted in a loss of credibility. “Rao’s overuse of sex proves to be the main weakness of his novel. It not only dilutes its seriousness of purpose, but also contributes to some of its dull moments. It also blunts the pointedness and concentration of the narrative, which is a must for successful satire.”11 The reader who is prompted to anticipate a relevant purpose in introducing the quest for Begum Puram is left disappointed at the end.

However, as a campus novel, *The Drunk Tantra* deserves to be noted as it exhibits most of the features of campus novels written abroad. At the same time one finds an undercurrent of a serious reflection of the umpteen problems associated with campus life. Thus the author brings in a uniqueness to the story, treatment, plot and style of the novel.

- 5 -

The campus in question in Githa Hariharan’s *In Times of Siege* being an open university, is sans the presence of ‘the living breathing mass of students’ where ‘the students are only names, addresses and postmarks’.(p 3)12 So Prof. Shiv Murthy, the protagonist, a faculty in the Department of History of Kasturba Gandhi University, whose lesson turns out to be an issue of controversy, does not exactly teach, but ‘coordinates resources for his educational clients’. There are other colleagues of him in the department, the core faculty, like Lal, Arya, Menon, and Amita Sen who are also ‘processors of historical resources for their unseen students’. (p 14)
The campus activity in the novel begins with a department meeting. “The head (of the department), Dr. Sharma, is a timid man whose head is just a little too big for his slight, finely sculpted body. His idea of paradise would be a place where the inmates proceed solemnly from one meeting to another. He is now practicing for his role in his own corner of paradise: presiding, unbearably grave and pompous”.(p15)

The meeting that begins with a discussion on maintenance of computers and printers and repair of coolers, slowly proceeds to lesson and module deadlines, problem with fax machines, 376 assignments being lost in the post, stationary sanction and other routine matters. It is only at the end under ‘Any Other Matter’ of the agenda that the timid head ventures to raise the pertinent issue.

The novel is singular in its setting being an open university. It all begins with two separate events taking place in Dr. Shiv’s life almost during the same time.

The lesson Shiv had written with ‘genuine interest and historical curiosity’ about the 12th century visionary Basavanna is now being alleged of having ‘distorted history’ as he had tried to rationalise the action of Basava as against the common practice of deifying him. Shiv is advised by the university authorities to ‘make a full apology or retraction’ for an unknown and unclear blunder by him. As an average faculty, aged fifty two, comfortably leading his ‘small life’ dotted with ‘small triumphs’, Shiv wouldn’t like confrontations. But Meena, wouldn’t let it go. She is a research scholar, a sociology student, in the nearby Kamala Nehru University. She happens to land in his house with a broken leg while his wife
was away visiting their daughter in Seatle, as Shiv was requested by her mother, an old friend, to play the local guardian for her. She is working on what she calls women’s stories —'stories of women affected by the anti-sikh riots after Indira Gandhi’s assassination in 1984'. Meena, with her ‘sharp comments and swift response’, (p 77) supported by her friends, forces Shiv not to yield and prompts him to take up the matter seriously and defend his lesson through the media. ‘Speak up! Before it’s too late’ is the ferociously independent Meena’s policy.

The whole issue gets more and more complicated, specially with the Arya-tainted atmosphere in the university. Surprisingly enough, it is Meena, who gets only limited details of the department from Shiv, very shrewdly makes out that ‘It’s Arya’ who is behind all this, even before Shiv the insider could realise.

However, his inner conscience questions his professorship.

"Why pretend you are a professor if you can’t stand up to someone telling you what to think? How to think?" (p 64)

His father’s voice that often haunts him further encourages him with

"Do you imagine that an ordinary man cannot be a hero?" (p 64)

Shiv’s uncle, who wanted Shiv to be a doctor, an engineer or at least a chartered accountant, feels that to choose teaching as a profession itself was an admission of failure, a regressive choice of dubious impractical virtue.
An Indian Professor’s life, which generally is believed to be as easy and as unaccountable as a dream, suddenly and unexpectedly changes for Shiv, and he wakes up to the ‘real life’. The Dean and Head of the Department summons Shiv for a discussion over a cup of tea, where Shiv is asked to defend his lesson. The head himself, having done a lot of homework reads out his list of ‘phrases and sentences’ that lend themselves to misinterpretation and declares that the problem is not the text itself, but the implications. The Itihas Suraksha Manch comes out with three demands: separate apologies from Dr Shiv Murthy and from the Department, by extension the University; the lesson to be retracted and material recalled from students, study centers and libraries; and the rewritten lesson to be submitted to the Manch for approval, before getting printed. (p 69)

But, Shiv, who would generally avoid confrontations, has now changed and declares that he would not apologise. Having said he is unable to judge his own actions he senses strange similarities in the predicament of Basava in 1168 and himself in 2000. Shiv’s indecision and ‘let-me-think and discuss’ attitude is placed next to Meena, Amar and group who are able to distil all complexities to the ‘breadth and weight of one sentence’.

Meena, even with her cast on one leg, very naturally and easily mobilizes her friends even from her bed, while Shiv himself is almost wrapped in a cast that immobilizes him.” (p 88)

“The department meeting with the head’s regimented bureaucratic paradise” is contrasted with another meeting that is “Meena’s sort, attended by twenty like-
minded people, who seem to have spent most of their lives disagreeing with each other on their common beliefs” (p 137). At the end of the meeting, unlike the department meeting, they are able to arrive at a tangible decision to hold a rally followed by a public meeting, with a solid action plan in place.

Shiv has all kinds of people around him. There is the resolute group of youngsters like Meena and others, the Aryas in the department, as well as Amita Sen who habitually suffers from chronic boredom, and the enigmatic Menon who are now agitated and supportive to Shiv, and his own wife Rekha, ‘who would like to banish (the mystery of Basava and of his father) to an irrelevant past.’ (p 104)

At one point Shiv unconsciously traces some parallel between his father and Basava. With that his mind tries to travel beyond ‘the modest limits of prescribed modules and syllabus’ (p 105)

As the issue of the distorted lesson on Basava picks up a new dimension at a personal level, his explorations about Basava provides an insight into his father’s life. Shiv experiences a strange feeling. And the writer very subtly enters the minds of the readers. Shiv grows nostalgic about his pre-controversy days and he earnestly wishes to ‘go back to being a simple teacher’ and writing his new lessons.

Recalling a similar incident about a play on the life of Basava, the writer draws our attention to how an unnecessary controversy thus created can become a convenient election issue.
"The play ... was published in 1986. It won a state award and was prescribed as a textbook in a couple of universities. Then eight years later, some group in Karnataka — cousins, or ancestors, of Shiv's Manch — woke up to the possibilities of the book. They accused the play of portraying Basava as a coward; implying that he committed suicide; casting aspersions on the ‘chastity’ of some women saints; and letting some characters use obscene language.

The group demanded that the play be withdrawn from the university syllabus. There were the usual ban-the-book scenes. Copies were burnt; so was an effigy of the playwright. Rallies were held for and against; buses and trains came to a halt. There were protest fasts; one man attempted self immolation; most of all it became a convenient election issue. Finally, 'in view of the law and order situation' the book was withdrawn from the university syllabus in 1995 by government order.” (p 109 — 110)

The infringement of politics in academics has always been a reality of a campus.

Consequent to the incident and Shiv's daring statement that he need not apologise, he inevitably gets entangled in an apparently never ending chain of interviews, meetings and telephone calls while Meena too gets completely involved in the matter and 'plays a general on the battlefield, directing operations' (p 117)
Meena throughout wonders what the department colleagues of Shiv are doing and how they cannot take a stand. However, there is Amita Sen, a colleague, with whom Shiv had a half-hearted affair, who assures that herself and Menon are on his side. They even strive hard and manage to get the Head call an extraordinary staff meeting.

Even after the meeting which turns into a violent fight between Arya and Shiv, while the timid head of the department simply looks on, the strike is held. History, which was hitherto considered 'a dull and safe choice of subject', has become 'a live, fiery thing, as capable of explosion as a time bomb'(p134). Shiv would like to believe that it is Basava the poet-reformer who links 1168 and 2000. But in reality it is the hatemongers who really link "the same 'manchs' that have sprouted at different times, centuries apart".(p 161)

Shiv's strong belief that he is a rule-following person and Meena's constant attempt to convince him that 'he can't avoid confrontation' could only leave him with horrible nightmares, which he is afraid might come true.

Day by day the controversy of Shiv's lesson takes over new dimensions and becomes the talk of the town. Each newspaper gives its own version of the story taking sides – pro-Manch and pro-University. The one that started with Basava and caste and temple soon finds "a stage (that is) littered with Muslim invaders, Christian Missionaries, sons of the soil and foreigners. The stage has grown and grown till it is a battlefield big enough for the new patriots and their wild and warped nationalistic dreams." (p 94)
Shiv’s department room gets ransacked as he narrowly escapes, with the help of Menon; rally and a public meeting are held with all decorum of slogan shouting and campaigning; Attending Meetings, interviews, panel-discussions, phone-calls and even hate-mails fill Shiv’s routine now.

Soon the news reaches Rekha at Seattle in such wild colour that it forces the generally tough, smooth-talking Rekha shiver for a while. Her voice wobbles for a moment when she manages to counsel Shiv with –

“I do see you can’t give in so easily. It’s not as if I don’t see the principle of the thing. But to be idealistic at such a time, and with such people! ... don’t forget you are dealing with hoodlums who have pulled down mosques and churches that have stood for so many years. They’ve engineered riots, ... they are so powerful now. What can we do – Shiv, don’t you understand? I am afraid.” (p154-155)

At times of utter distress Shiv tries to find solace in writing his new lesson on the medieval Vijaynagar Empire, but in vain.

“What else can a teacher do? What other weapons come to hand?” (p156)

The ‘shecurity loving’ VC gives his version of the incident to an interviewer. The VC is depicted as a caricature with his ‘sh’s for ‘s’s.
The days pass by. All the hullabaloo slowly gets hushed up as the media catches new sensational news. Meena gradually recovers as Shiv realises that she ‘will walk again, walk on, and walk away’. (p197)

Even in an Open University setting Gita Hariharan tactfully finds place to expose the readers to the ins and outs of a university politics and complications created thereof. By introducing Meena into Shiv’s life she also gives us a glimpse of student activities and their involvement in campus politics. Very soon the riot that started in KGU also spreads to KNU, giving the reader a glimpse of the riot hit student filled campus scene.

The novelist critiques all her characters with irony, empathy, wit and humour. She ‘feels like a fly on the wall’, doesn’t identify with any character but observes every move very keenly.

_In Times of Siege_ is a “fast-paced powerful narrative that is crisply written and builds up a cliff hanging denouement … in the manner of an academic thriller. …It seems to be a combination of campus novel and a political novel or a campus novel with a predominantly political theme”.\(^{13}\) However, though the writer didn’t intend it to be a campus novel, she agrees to have purposely chosen the university set up to show “if debate, free and frank, is stifled in a university setup then that shows the insidious nature of communal forces” She also attempts to “foreground the fact that there is a return to a sense of fear, persecution and ghettoisation (and) There is the atrophy of intellectuality and a decline of the romantic veneration of the teacher figure”.\(^{14}\) She is worried “ if a
college —(representing) learning, debate and openness of mind — is actually taking mob censorship seriously, we really are in times of Siege. And the siege is not just external — the mob or the fundamentalist or the terrorist — but within minds. The novel expresses a serious concern over the lack of academic freedom prevalent in our system.

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It is striking to note that each of the above apparently unique novels do share certain commonalities. All the above five novels associate the rudeness or cruelty driven by mean or cunning mentality with that of a beast. While Hairy in *The Drunk Tantra* is an epitome of animal instinct in man both literally and metaphorically, there are Sheela Rani the serpent in *Atom and the Serpent* who is also a vixen, the reference to jackals and wolves and tigers in *Miracles Happen*, Arya in *In Times of Siege*, as the mousy dog and whose ‘open mouth reveals illicitly large teeth, long like those of a hungry wolf’.

Faculty oriented novels generally deal with the power politics — fighting to gain and hold authority and status — rampant on the campus. All the five novels discussed above do conform to this observation. But power, in its genuine sense — acquisition of knowledge, academic achievement and gaining appreciation from the students — has been sadly overlooked.
2 Prema, Nandakumar, Author’s note, Atom and the Serpent, Affiliated East West Press, 1982
3 Prema, Nandakumar, Atom and the Serpent, Affiliated East West Press, 1982. Subsequent references made are from the same edition.
5 Ibid
6 D. R. Sharma, Miracles Happen, Writers Workshop, 1985. Subsequent references made are to the same edition.
8 K.L. Kamal, Campus : A Novel, University Book House, 2002. Subsequent references made are to the same edition.
9 Christopher Steven Wiegensten, The Contemporary academic Novel: A study in Genre Dissertation Abstract, University of Missouri, 1987
13 Sachidananda Mohanty, The Siege Within, The Hindu, Thursday, April 22nd, 2003
14 Ibid

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