Chapter V

CONCLUSION

Novels are the most widely read and perhaps the most appealing of all literary forms as the themes or settings are generally drawn from common human experiences. As such they are also an unfolding of the inner realities of the chosen area and so "they are believed by their readers to constitute an accurate representation of life".¹

Of late such a representation of life on campus of higher education has drawn the attention of people as most readers of novels have come in contact with higher education centers as students, faculty, administrators or parents. Even though 18th century marks the period in which professors first began to appear as standard literary characters, it is only in the 20th century that the 'campus novel' as a sub genre gained a firm popular footing. While the writers in England and America have come out with hundreds of campus novels which are identified variously as college novels, varsity novels, or academic novels, in India such novels have made their entry only in 1960's and almost up to the year 2000, only a handful of campus novels were published. And till the publication of Five Point Someone, followed by a host of such student oriented novels the common reader hardly had a concept of the 'campus novel'. In the light of more such novels coming out, this study has attempted to take stock of the salient features of such novels and incidentally analyse the potential of the campus novels.

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The Indian English Campus Novels examined in the previous three chapters namely *Faculty Oriented Novels, Student Oriented Novels, and Campus Issues in other Novels* conform more or less to Sanford Pinsker's description of the campus novel: "The academic novel might best be described as a fun house mirror held up to the nature of our colleges and universities". ² Most of the novels discussed in this study tend to use clear and direct prose to present ordinary, everyday events of campus life, truthfully imitating the actual life on campus as seen in any realistic novel.³ This is borne out also by the statements made by the authors themselves. Prema Nandakumar in her Author's Note, claims that *Atom and the Serpent* 'is an attempt to project essential realities though not particular actualities'.⁴ For D.R. Sharma, *Miracles Happen*, 'is an attempt to portray truth'.⁵ K L Kamal asserts that his characters, in *Campus: a Novel*, 'are grounded in reality'.⁶ The story of *Mediocre But Arrogant* according to Abhijit Bhaduri is 'one that most of us can relate to'.⁷

An interesting fact that emerges from the study of these novels is that they invariably cover fairly short periods, mostly moving with the academic calendar. If a novel like *Atom and the serpent* concentrates on the happenings over a five-day period, *Five Point Someone* takes us through the four-year stay of the protagonists on the campus. It is surprising that even the faculty oriented novels restrict themselves to limited periods of time, though their own stay on campus is not limited.
Does the campus novel in the Indian English context impart to the readers – either the general reader or academics – any message or reflect a comprehensive picture of campus life? “Academic insiders often read these novels very differently from civilians. We know the in-jokes, the real-life figures being caricatured, the places and headlines being skewered; and we can identify and enjoy the literary references, the critical allusions and the generic twists. Thus while outsiders may read the novels for story, entertainment and message, academics and others familiar with literary canons and scholarly trends will also decipher them as forms of literary criticism or literary celebration” 8

Out of a handful of faculty oriented novels published so far five novels are identified as representative of faculty oriented novels for the purpose of discussion in the Second chapter. Prema Nandakumar’s Atom and the Serpent being the first of its kind in India, presents a fairly balanced blend of positive and negative aspects of the campus life. While there are scholarly Rajeshwar, well intentioned but misguided Vatsa who later repents his own action, Sathya, the victim of the situation, the novel abounds in characterising the vicious Sheela Rani backed by her brother Kshema Rao, Phoren Adorer Yana with his host of fun loving students. The vice chancellor Adhyaksha is a very realistically tactful person who can take the situation under control owing to his experience that has taught him to compromise. Raj and Laxmi being campus dwellers witness the affairs of the campus. By introducing an outsider the author has been comparatively successful in giving an objective picture of the campus. The
discussion between Rajeshwar and Vatsa brings in a slight breeze of intellect that still wafts on the campus.

Campus, by K L Kamal, an ex-Vice Chancellor of Rajasthan University at once reminds us of Miracles Happen authored by D R Sharma. Protagonists of both these novels being the VCs of the respective universities, surprisingly draw their inspiration from Bhagavad Geeta. Both these novels divided into two parts depict the status of the university, the deteriorating standards in the first part and a new ‘Transformation’ that is brought about presenting the dream of taking the university to ‘Soaring Heights’ in the second part.

Such faculty oriented novels generally seem to act as a convenient vent for the writer to spill out his frustrations of his experiences involving academic follies and weaknesses and distorted administrative set up, undue power in the hands of unworthy people and an utter helplessness of the authorities to take the situation under control. Consequently such novels become a one sided version – and that mostly negative – of the campus, whereas what one hopes from a campus novelist is “an even handed attentiveness to both the joys and pains of academic life... instead of wallowing in its failures and frustrations before quickly retreating back to the ivory tower where professors can bask in escapist self-identification”.9

Campus novel is one of the means by which the public gets a glimpse of the academic life in the higher education center. The campus novelist in this sense shoulders the responsibility of molding the public perception of higher
education. Ideally, a campus novel opens a window for a layman, into the inner realities of campus experience. But the cynical, satirical and ironical picture generally presented in the faculty oriented novel is likely to throw a young enthusiast into the world of disillusion.

The Drunk Tantra by Ranga Rao keeps more in line with the much known trend setting novel Lucky Jim, by Kingsley Amis. However compared to the earlier two novels discussed, The Drunk Tantra deals with more genuinely academic issues and aims at a more comprehensive picture highlighting the positive side of the campus in the portrayal of committed and concerned teachers like Mohana and Dr. Dash. Satire is justifiably used in such novels as a timely and effective mantra to critically comment on the present state of academia. The campuses, with vulnerable faculty, fun loving students and opportunist administration, is indeed susceptible to satire and irony.

Gita Hariharan’s In Times of Siege is a campus novel with a difference with respect to its theme, treatment and even the setting. Though the author herself doesn’t like it to be categorized a campus novel, it is ‘a campus novel with a predominantly political theme’. The novel definitely rises above the other campus novels even with an open university as its setting and the protagonist’s quests for his identity. Introduction of Meena, allows the author to give us a glimpse of student activities and their involvement in the campus politics. The picturesque depiction of the suppression of the voice of the intellectuals by the
undue upper hand of the mindless irrational mob taking over is, as has been observed, brilliant.

Unlike the student oriented novels which can be studied bringing out the salient features in general, almost every faculty oriented novel discussed here is unique in its own way. It is interesting to note that the authors from a non-academic background have given a more balanced view and raised more pertinent issues relevant to academics. One would expect the academician-turned-novelist, being very much a part of the academic milieu, some of them even excellent and committed academicians themselves, to create a campus with an unbiased imagination. Unfortunately this has not happened but for a rare exception or two. Indian colleges and universities, as perhaps anywhere else, do have their drawbacks and limitations and even flaws in the system. But the better part of them cannot be outrightly denied. In an attempt to exaggerate the lacunae the authors seem to have failed to capture the spirit of Indian campuses, more so in presenting to the reader the academically commendable aspects.

One expects an academician-author to have a general concern for the betterment of the university. As a character Morris Zapp in David Lodge’s campus novel *Small World* remarks, “The point is ...... to uphold the institution of academic studies. We maintain our position in society by publicly performing certain ritual just like any other group of workers in the realm of discourse – lawyers, politicians and journalists”\textsuperscript{11}
The student oriented novels discussed in Chapter III generally exhibit a similar set of features especially in those that are published during the current decade. Except for *Long Long Days* by P M Nityanandan, most of the other novels discussed here are autobiographical in nature, written by ex-students of some of our prestigious colleges or universities. As such they all present a picture of their alma mater with a typical student approach.

The novels that cannot be categorically classified either as faculty oriented or student oriented or those that can be said to be only partially campus novels are dealt with in the fourth chapter. *Too High for Rivalry* by Murial Vasi though set in a school premises shows prominent features of a campus novel. *No Onions Nor Garlic* by Srividya Natarajan gives a more comprehensive picture in the sense that it tries to take into account a number of academic issues like co-curricular activities, conference, interaction with different sets of people and so on. *The Higher Education of Geethika Mahendiratta* by Marwah Roy, *Bachelor of Arts* by R K Narayan, *The Collector's Wife* by Mitra Phukan, *Lost Directions* by Shakuntala Bharwani, *Inscrutable Americans* by Anurag Mathur are among the others that partially deal with campus issues. Some of these novels, it is noticed, effectively bring out the campus realities though their main concern is something different. There are of course a good number of love stories which are very conveniently set in academic premises. Such novels are cautiously avoided in this study as their central theme is neither academic nor do they expose the campus set up, academic condition or administrative issues of the campus.
An analysis of the above mentioned works as campus novels establishes that the Indian English campus novel as a subgenre has already set in. But the contribution to the field both in terms of number and quality is somewhat disappointing.

One of the important tools to enhance the quality of a novel is its characterisation. The characters in campus novels tend to be only types rather than round or complete characters. This can be reasonably justified, as a role on campus — either as student or faculty — is only one of the many roles played by an individual. The scope of the writer to create a complete character is limited as the writer generally restricts himself /herself to depicting one aspect of life. However, the writers could have created more lifelike characters through focusing on all the aspects of their assigned roles on the campus. Contrasting Gopinath of *Long Long Days* and Chandran of *Bachelor of Arts* bears out this observation.

This could be one reason why the partially campus novels make more interesting read as far as characterization is concerned. Campus novels view the entire campus as a system whereas partially campus novels use campus as one of the aspects or experiences as it affects the destiny of the individual. The kind of campus experience makes a part of the background for the later life of Chandran in *Bachelor of Arts*. Geetika’s experience on campus is one aspect — though a major one — that leads her to maturity. *No Onions Nor Garlic* gives an array of characters that are viewed both from within and without the campus bringing in
a coherence. Introducing the inevitable responses demanded by the domestic front of Saritha and Aruna allows Wasi to portray a credible situation on campus. Rukmini’s view towards life and understanding the situation of the riot hit Assam where her students are involved is considerably guided by her campus exposure. With their diverse themes and focuses, as also inclusive of varied aspects of life, partially campus novels have more freedom to open up a totally new and unexpected dimension of life.

Another reason for the partial utilization of the potential of the genre seems to be its relative newness. Even when taken globally it has been strongly felt, for the first 50-60 years of its introduction, by many critics that “most novels centering about academic life demonstrate strikingly that we have had little first rate fiction in this field”.

But the picture in the West today is different. There are representative and exemplary campus novels like *The Groves of Academe* by Mary McCarthy, *Small World* and *Changing Places* by David Lodge, *The Masters* by C P Snow, *The History Man* by Bradbury Malcolm, just to name a few.

However, the campus novel, in the Indian literary context has not yet reached that stage of maturity. Nevertheless novels like *In Times of Siege, Five Point Someone, Mediocre But Arrogant* have made their mark as campus novels worthy of serious consideration. Also, with new centers of learning coming up every day and more and more students entering the higher education centers which in turn result in expansion of faculty community and larger administrative
set up, chances of getting a worthwhile campus novel are much better now compared to the earlier decades.

There are any number of innovative practices like project oriented teaching, participatory learning, accreditation processes, quality improvement drive witnessed in quite a few institutions. The material today is rich enough. Some of the issues closely related to the essential academic activities such as tests and exams, seminars and conferences, guest lectures and interactions, discussions and discourses, procuring projects and publishing papers, guiding and research, convocations and celebrations, achievements and rewards, scholarships and fellowships, hardly find a place in most of these novels, sadly, more so in faculty oriented ones. Teaching- Learning is seldom treated as a pleasurable or thrilling activity.

Considering the authorship and the readership of the student oriented novels one is ready to compromise with the nature and quality of the novels. “If the readers of college novels (campus novels) are indeed the participants in college ...... they read them as a form of catharsis and release.”13 But one expects a more thought provoking text from the faculty oriented ones especially when the author happens to be an academician, holding a responsible position in an academic establishment.

It is seen from our study that almost every campus novel exhibits a high degree of dissatisfaction with the academic system and administrative set up prevalent
in India and quite often compares it with Western systems while the similar loopholes are pointed out in American and British campus / academic novels.

We hardly come across in these novels intellectual discussion, academic debates and deliberations except a very few like the one between Rajeshwara and Vatsa in *Atom and the Serpent*. Dr S L Bhairappa’s *Doora Saridaru*, a Kannada novel, though not a campus novel, gives a feel of the standard expected of the seekers of higher education. Similarly, *Kaleju Ranga*, by B G L Swamy pulls out the lacunae in the system quite humourously. Such writings are important not only for forming general opinion for an uninformed reader, but also to provide the academics with a chance for retrospection, inspection and rectification if need be. More than anything else, “a well written campus novel enables those of us who work in colleges and universities to gain a socio-cultural perspective of how others see us. In this light, novels provide an opportunity to think self reflexively about academic life.”

If a campus novel prompts a casual teacher or a research scholar to raise a pertinent question ‘what does it mean to be an academician?’, the purpose of the campus novel to a great extent is served. “The reading of academic novels ought to re-instil in the professorate a concern for academic freedom and an awareness of the social obligation and responsibility that academics have ... The discomfort that academic novels may cause us is reason not to avoid reading such texts, but to create change ... Good campus novels, then, may not portray us as we wish to be seen, but by complicating the picture of academic life, the
novels may encourage us to act as we wish to be seen”.15 Revealing the reality is one thing; adding to the betterment is another. This is what one expects from the concerned writers.

Neither the historical records nor the sociological survey of any civilization has given much importance to the condition prevailing in the contemporary academic set up. As such a close look into campus life as revealed in campus novels may help us understand this part of the society at a given time, if only “it were possible to synthesize all the various elements of college life – to fuse the good with the bad – the resulting picture would no doubt be fairly adequate and satisfying, but unfortunately few books present such a balanced study. It cannot be denied that every aspect of college life described in fiction has its counterpart in real life. But a discerning reader feels that while part of the truth has been told not all of it has. Perhaps it never can be. But certainly the great college (campus) novel remains to be written.”16

Similar is the situation today with the Indian English Campus Novel. It has shown a promise of a comprehensive perspective of the higher education ethos. The best however, is yet to come.
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10 Sachidananda Mohanty, The Siege Within, The Hindu, Tuesday, April 22nd, 2003
11 Lodge David, Small World, Penguin, 1995, p.28
14 William G Tierney, Academic freedom and tenure, Between Fiction and Reality, Jl. of Higher Education, 2004, March-April, 75(2) p 163
15 Ibid pp 175-176