ABSTRACT

The genre of campus novel focuses on wayward academics and academic life in a university setting where the main action is set in and around the campus of a university or a college. These novels present us with a comprehensive and often paradoxical portrait of academia. The objectives of these novels range from complete mockery of the academic world to the social and political critique or critical scrutiny of the role of academia. Significantly enough, the authors of the campus novels write not only for the academic readers but also for the non-academics, wishing to be comprehensible to the general public as well. These novels are therefore highly readable, full of mirth and humanity.

The campus fiction vacillates between realism and experiment. That is why it is concerned with the conscientious pragmatism, on the one hand, and the comic mode of fiction encompassing elements of parody and farce, on the other. Several styles and narrative modes like absurdist, romanticized, meta-fictional, self-reflective as well as satirical devices like wit, epigram, sarcasm and repartee help to bring out satire in the campus novels. According to Aristotle, one of the first literary critics, the basic devices that engage the reader are conflict, peripeteia and a string of cause and effect. That is why the pattern of binary opposition forms the
principal structure of these novels. It also functions as the specific or idiosyncratic device which the authors use to entertain and surprise the readers. The entertaining and at the same time intellectual reading of the campus novels has made this genre immensely popular world-wide.

In the campus novels the high morals of the university are set against the actual conduct and the behaviour of the people who work in them. These people are subject to the same reprehensible desires and self-seeking ambition as anybody else. Interestingly, this contrast is perhaps more ironic, more marked than it would be in any other professional setting. The elements of comedy and escape characterize the campus novel but the corrective purpose primarily makes it an academic satire.

The campus novels have, in the recent years, crossed over the boundaries of the Anglo-American World, enriching Indian English fiction as well. In the present scenario, many Indian novelists are getting fascinated by campus life and are contributing to this sub-genre with a lot of experimentation and variations. These variations have contributed not only in increasing the varieties of campus novels but also in rectifying the follies of the people related to the campus.

My present doctoral research entitled “Academic Satire: Indian English Campus Novels in Context”, purports to bring out various manifestations of satire in Indian campus novels in English. The critical
studies in this area till now have not explored the full possibilities of this genre, leaving a lot of unexplored potential that can bear interesting results. The present study is a modest attempt to enrich this gap in criticism pertaining to Indian campus novels in English. I have critically studied thoroughly the select four Indian campus novels in English namely, *Goodbye to Elsa* (1974) by Saros Cowasjee, *Atom and the Serpent* (1982) by Prema Nandkumar, *The Truth Almost About Bharat* (1991) by Kavery Nambisan, and *The Awakening: A Novella in Rhyme* (1993) by Rita Joshi and analysed them to trace various expressions and shades of satire which the novelists have used for rectifying the follies of the people related to the campus.

In this dissertation, I have tried to focus primarily on the following major aspects:

1. to identify the precise nature of academic satire in the Indian campus novels
2. to analyse the Indian campus novels focusing on its settings, characters and the campus realities; and
3. to assess the role of academia in the Indian context.

I selected the above mentioned four campus novels for my study because each of these novels is based on distinct themes and are spread
across a period of over three decades, starting from 1970s to 1990s. These novels therefore reflect the developments and changes that were incorporated in the thematic content and narrative styles of the campus novel over a period of thirty years.

This thesis, through extensive literature survey and a close analytical reading, tries to explore the academic tensions and ambitions of the fast expanding world of higher education as reflected in the Indian Campus Novels in English through six chapters. The first chapter is introductory in nature and provides various definitions of the campus novel through a succinct discussion of major novelists and critics as well as historical, social and cultural information of the literary genre. This chapter also offers biographical information on the novelists, their lives and their way of writing to give a better understanding of the purpose and the artistic intention they want to express with their writing. The chapter introduces the express objective of the present research to examine the various satirical manifestations in the select Indian English campus novels.

The second chapter undertakes to study Saros Cowasjee’s campus novel, Goodbye to Elsa (1974) which deals with the misery of a perturbed academic who turns mentally unstable at the end of the novel. The novel traces the journey and presents the point of view of the protagonist both
as a student and as a teacher. The novel is distinct in the sense that Cowasjee has unfurled a tragic theme in a facetious manner and has pertinently made use of black humour to illustrate this matter.

The third chapter that deals with Prema Nandakumar’s *Atom and the Serpent* (1982) is a biting satire which provides a realistic and interesting portrait of the contemporary campus life in India. The author paints a thorough picture of the multi-faceted campus life in an Indian university and exposes the severe break down of morality and the proliferation of perversion in thought, conduct and action with reference to the faculty.

The fourth chapter provides the analysis of Kavery Nambisan’s *The Truth Almost About Bharat* (1991) which is about a medical student named Bharat who is running away from the imposed and inescapable realities of his life. The story is narrated in the voice of the nineteen year old Bharat, who in the course of his journey, goes on discovering many aspects of truth about himself and also about the nation Bharat. The novel is full of picaresque humour which is served with an undertone of sadness.

The fifth chapter is formed by the analysis of Rita Joshi’s novel *The Awakening: A Novella in Rhyme* (1993) which deals with the theme of corruption and opportunism in educational institutions and draws
attention to the negligence or lack of concern of the faculty towards academics. The author gives us a grim insight into the state of higher education in the country and the unbecoming academic setting in modern India is sketched with enormous detail in the novel.

The *sixth* chapter is a summing up of the findings of the research. It reiterates the ideas discussed in the previous chapters and hopes to convincingly demonstrate how the objectives set out in the thesis is realized in the course of this study.