Chapter – 4

Where do I proceed from here? A portrayal of career anxiety among the people in the contemporary Indian English campus novels

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As the general belief goes, the key to a bright future that involves pretty good financial prospects passes through the door of higher education, especially from an educational institution of an elevated repute. The perspective of the people goes through a tremendous change when one gets enrolled in a well known educational institution. This change of attitude among the people is noticed by Shekhar Verma in the novel Joker in the Pack when he secures admission in IIM. His girlfriend’s mother is in full awe of him as she considers him to be a ‘pinnacle of excellence’. Shekhar experiences the change in the behaviour of the people around him as he states,

For the ‘extras’ that I had shut out of my life a few years earlier, I was a great intellectual with profound philosophies on life. I could enlighten their kids and put them on the path to salvation—The IIM Way. They came and sought my valuable inputs on academics and achievements. The entire middle-class set-up around me had turned into a bunch of devotees. These were the very people who had smirks on their faces when I had been declared a ‘road-romeo’ as per the ‘middle-class value system’. (71-72)
Prashant John in his novel *Second Degree* describes every student of IIM as “part of the crème-de-la-crème of the country” (18). While traveling from Hyderabad to Ahmedabad, he experiences the pleasure and importance of being an IIM student.

The journey from Hyderabad to Ahmedabad was mostly an ego-boosting experience. I was the toast of my co-passengers as soon as they discovered that I was going to study at IIM. Word spread quite rapidly and I was soon providing advice to a couple of retired government officers and a few old NRI’s on how to apply to the programme and what the admissions committee was looking for in the applications. The clarity and insight I had into the application and evaluation process were amazing. If only I had a fraction of that insight when I was applying, but that was not important now—I was already an expert on the programme even before setting foot on campus. (17)

4.1. **Destination Placement**

Students’ ultimate aim of joining higher educational institutions is to secure their career. They desire a job with a handsome pay cheque and prefer to work abroad. Apparently, the renowned educational institutions live up to their reputation by making their students capable of achieving a promising job irrespective of it being their dream job or not. The harsh academic rigour of years culminates into fruition of anxiety, expectations, perseverance and hard work. Though gaining a dream job is the end result, its preparatory arrangements commence from the first day of the college.

4.1.1. **Ambition and Preparation**

Students, who are ambitious and want to achieve the best in life, know the virtue of hard work and value of systematic preparations. Admission in higher
educational institutions can be obtained through a strict and arduous procedure which involves the clearing of competitive examinations like CAT, participation in group discussions and performance in the personal interview. Among the millions of aspirants, only a few are selected to join the commendable courses at the elite institutions in the country. Shekhar Verma in Joker in the Pack, in spite of receiving a degree in information technology, isn’t happy as he wants to live a life of a king and feels that only a degree at IIM will be able to facilitate his ambition. This aspiration allows him to thrive hard and secure admission in IIMB. Shekhar feels,

An MBA from one of the top institutes in the country would be my redemption….There were stories of IIM MBAs jet-setting across the world, buying expensive watches as soon as they graduated, making a jazzy presentation in plush boardrooms. I believed I was born for that life. (32)

Abbey in Mediocre But Arrogant joins Management Institution of Jamshedpur (MIJ) and experiences the competitive attitude of students. He writes,

I was quite unprepared for the rigour that MIJ demanded of me, to keep my nose above the academic poverty line. In MIJ, everything was different. Every student was ambitious and wanted to run the world or at least a part of it. The toppers set standards everyone tried to beat. Almost everyone was determined to work for a multinational or at least the private sector because that was where meritocracy reigned—or so we believed. Anything to do with the public sector or government service was considered infra dig and if you opted for a job in either, you were a loser. (20-21)
The journey that begins from here, till the completion of the course, takes a toll on students as they make their way out by crossing every hurdle, challenges and conflicts with either their expertise or mediocrity. Their journey, finally, meets its destination agreeably well.

4.1.2. The Placement Committee

The placement committee, which is even referred to as Placecom by students is an all-important body which is run by students under the guidance of their teachers. Members of the Placecom help students to prepare an appropriate resume by providing guidance to highlight their potential in the written format. According to Harsh in *Everything You Desire*,

Placecom is the one body whose every instruction and diktat get followed pretty seriously by everyone. (14)

Placecom is in charge of inviting all the companies for placement in campus; summer placement for the first year students and final job placement for the final year students. Talking about the activities of the Placecom members, Harsh in *Everything You Desire* writes,

The most important student body was the Placecom or the Placement committee-this was a body of 8-10 students responsible for managing the placement process. They were responsible for liaising with companies, trying to attract new firms and also managing the entire process on the ground. (69)

The members of the Placecom get the first-hand information about the companies coming to campus and they also get to access the resumes, profiles and
posting of the previous years’ students of the institution. This enables them to prepare themselves well for better placement and even guide others for the same. Samar in *Joker in the Pack* finds it very beneficial to be a part of the Placecom as he describes,

> Information as I had realized during summers, was a valuable commodity, and what better place to get information than at the heart of the process. Having access to every seniors’ resume, getting to know the latest trends in what companies wanted in a resume and in person, being in the know of how processes were scheduled—could prove helpful in the finals. At the same time, being part of the control room was almost as demanding as Vista had been—sleepless nights again, and a fight for grades. (108)

During the elections, students’ aspiration to run for the Placecom is inevitable. Every student wants to be a member of the Placecom as its membership would help them realize their dreams. Prashant John writes about the significance of the Placecom in his novel *Second Degree*.

> It was a bit like the scene from Angels and Demons when the Conclave was selecting the Pope. Everyone was nominating themselves to committees they thought were most important. And without exception, everyone was nominating themselves for the all-important Placement Committee! (149)

The way in which students appeal to vote is very interesting and amusing at times. They try to project themselves as saviours and go the extent of getting the assurance of vote in their favour from other students by promising to them varied perks and benefits in return. Their general entreats of doing overall good in fact results in individual success and a sense of attaining power over others. Prashant goes
on to write about Prasad, one of the Placecom nominees, who lure others to vote for him.

“Look guys, we are going to rig this poll in the larger interest of the class. We are going to help even those who don’t deserve to be helped,” Prasad explained. I was seeing this guy in a new light. Suddenly he wasn’t just the con man trying to get everybody to do his work for him; he was now playing politics and devious game on a grand scale. (151)

The campaigning even gets nasty when Prasad threatens his opponent to withdraw from elections. Prashant is a witness to this.


Prashant gets disgusted with such a spiteful behaviour of students who were in IIM and the ‘executives’ of the B-School. Varun whom Prashant considers as Wikipedia of B-school politics doesn’t consider this unruly behaviour of students as a big deal and asserts,

“It’s the Placement Committee, dude!” Varun said rolling his eyes. “It’s the one place you should be if you want to get to the big names when they come on campus—maximum face time with the recruiters. Makes a big difference.” ... “And obviously not everyone can get into the Placement Committee. So the logical thing to do is to be associated with placements in some way or the
other and then get on to some other committee. Looks good in your resume.”

(152)

Members of the Placecom perform a hectic but responsible duty. They take a poll of students to know their preferences of companies. They invite prestigious companies for the placement on campus and also arrange the interviews of the students according to their choice of the companies. The four to five days of placement procedure is pretty strenuous but accomplishing.

4.1.3. Summer Placement

Summer placement allows students to take a close look at the real world to face reality while continuing with their major academic course. Their dreams are either strengthened or shattered based on the experiences of the summer placement. Students get really excited and nervous about the whole procedure. Abbey in Mediocre But Arrogant experiences this stress,

Our batch was psyched up too. After all, we were interviewing for summer jobs. How to dress right for an interview, to tie a double knot (in a necktie), to behave in front of the panel, but before getting there, how to write a resume. All these questions started bugging us as the placement season drew closer. We had to go and get summer jobs that lasted six to eight weeks. And since they could translate into firm job offers at the end of the following year, we had to choose the companies very carefully. (207-208)

Abbey, Joy, Harpal, Rusty, Ayesha and Gopher go to Mumbai in various companies for their summer placement. Abbey is assigned to do a project in the factory in Sewree and gets his first taste of life in India’s financial capital which he
feels is very mechanical, impersonal and precise. Abbey doesn’t feel comfortable the way his summer job starts.

However, the summer project, for which I was in Bombay, was not happening in a big way for sure. That sucked. The elation of working for the coveted company was quickly replaced by despair. I was eager to work hard and create a good impression so that I would translate into a job offer next year. But I hardly got to meet my project guide, Mr. Gowarikar, the personnel manager of the factory. (213-214)

Mr. Gowarikar is critical about the interns, who have turned up in his company and goes on to insult and discourage them by saying,

An MBA from MIJ is useless and will not teach you anything that is required in practical life. (214)

Eventually, Abbey meets the Director of Personnel at the head office as guided by Rusty and informs him about his disappointment at not being adequately challenged during his project and also goes on to tell him that no decent student in MIJ would ever want to work in a company that doesn’t provide a proper challenge. On the very next day, Mr. Gowarikar calls him and hands over the data collection assignment to him. Abbey finds it very difficult to run around the factory pleading the staff members to fill up his eight-page questionnaire. He has to get two hundred such questionnaires filled up, analyze the data and put up the findings into a report in a four week’s time. Rusty comes to his help and explains him about the dos and don’ts of doing surveys and collecting data. Abbey talks about it,

‘There are three basic rules of surveys.
Rule No. 1: Nothing more than one page. So cut out the crap and keep it brief. Preferably no more than 10 questions.’

He sipped the cold coffee that I was paying for and continued. ‘Rule No. 2: Tell people, you can’t come back and you’ll wait while they fill up. Tell them you’ll send them a copy of your project report. That helps.’

He finished the coffee and sucked on the ice cubes before spitting them into the glass. ‘Rule no. 3: Don’t depend on others to fill up your questionnaire. Do it yourself.” (219-220)

Rusty has the experience of the corporate world and his street smart attitude enables him to transform problems into opportunities. He suggests practical solutions to Abbey. Abbey is a novice in the world of real-life business and gets upset while not being able to deal with the challenges. At such times, Rusty’s pragmatic and worldly wise wisdom comes to his aid. However, Abbey doesn’t let go of his principles by following Rusty blindly. He amalgamates his way of working with Rusty’s suggestions to overcome his hurdles. Abbey is initially shocked and reluctant to follow Rusty’s advice but finally, he gets convinced with Rusty’s reasoning.

‘Abbey you are such an ass! Who’s going to read through 200 questionnaires? Just give them a summary—an executive summary of the findings. Have it typed and bound so it looks good among the other project reports on the bookshelf. Think of this as a critical term paper. Your main objective is to get good grades—not to discover some brilliant truth which these managers do not know about. Oh yeah, put in a good word about this jerk Gowarikar in the first few pages of the project report, about how he helped you learn so much etc.
That will ensure his support during your presentation to the director of personnel on the last day of your project. Tell that Gowarikar or whatever his name is, to grade you on a 4 point scale, A+, A, B+ or B. you will likely end up with a B+. Wear a crisp white shirt and a tie whenever you are in the head office. They will judge you by your appearance rather than read the shit that a summer trainee has written. (220-221)

Abbey actually manages to get a B+ for his summer project on ‘Perception of Union-Management Relations in Sewree Factory’. Rusty’s practicality helps him a lot in successfully completing his summer project.

Unable to secure a placement in many of the companies, on Day Zero and Day One, Shekhar in *Joker in the Pack*, experiences his self-confidence shatter.

A long time back, I had held the belief that I, The Shekhar Verma, was born to rule the planet. And entry into IIMB had further strengthened that belief. But the summer placement had been a humbling experience and all I had achieved was the ‘Day Two’ tag and self-doubts. I knew deep within that evaluating myself on just those few days was kiddish and unfair, but the fact was I had wanted to run that race and my more accomplished batch-mates had beaten me. Clearly, my league and competitors had changed and I needed to adapt myself to whatever extent possible to make it big at the final frontier. (96)

Finally, Shekhar secures the internship at Britania Company based in Bangalore. He is assigned the data collection job and travels extensively in Bangalore, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal to fill up the questionnaires by customers and retailers about their attitude towards the variety of biscuits manufactured by the company. It’s
an enhancing experience for him as he learns a lot from the street-smart retailers especially like Jaipal Bhai in Shahjahanpur. Filling of the questionnaire is a difficult task but Shekhar finds a practical way out of doing this.

I was still ambling half an hour later when I saw a bunch of youngsters with bags on their shoulders and questionnaires in hand. Holy shit, I realized I had just gotten lucky. I reached the group of around fifteen to twenty people and got to know that they were also MBAs spending their summer getting questionnaires filled. Destiny had brought us embarrassed MBAs together and we decided to help each other out of our shared misery. Everyone circulated his/her questionnaire amongst the others and started filling up the questionnaires he/she got from the rest of the group. To maintain just a bit of good faith, I got six of them filled, leaving the remaining four for genuine respondents. The four genuine responses took an hour’s time—eight to nine minutes each in answering the questions and the remaining time in gathering the courage to walk up to a lady with a questionnaire in hand. I realized that getting the questionnaire filled in the villages of U.P. and West Bengal might be a tougher challenge than MG Road in Bangalore. (118)

After dealing with the difficulties and gaining real-life market experiences, Shekhar finally manages to make a successful presentation in front of the company authorities and due to his good and presentable work, he gets the PPO (Pre-Placement Offer). He thus secures his position in the job but as his ambitions were sky high, he prefers to go through the rigmarole of the final placement procedure during the final year.
Harsh in *Everything You Desire* realizes the difficulties that one faces while doing a job in the sales department.

The week passed in a flash as I visited two different distributors and had a guided tour of a few markets with the local territory managers. Four days into the internship, I got a feel of how tough life in sales can be. From the sales guy to the territory managers to the marketing managers-everyone had twelve hour days at the minimum with a lot of market visits. I was going to be a part of the same grind over the next two months. (149)

Prashant in *Second Degree* goes to Vancouver, Canada and New Jersey, USA under the International Immersion Programme which is equivalent to the summer internship with the exception that it mandatorily requires everyone to be out of India for five weeks. He experiences a significant difference in the education system which is prevalent in India and abroad. The sessions in the B-school in Vancouver are enjoyed by him and his friends and he also observes the difference between the B-School in India and abroad.

Sessions in the B-school were almost a walk in the park compared to the grilling we underwent at IIM. The approach here seemed to be to have a stimulating discussion rather than establish that the other person was an idiot.

All in all, we had the time of our life. (205)

### 4.1.4. Dreams versus Reality

Realistic, callous, practical and instructive experience of summer placement enables students to come out of any dilemma or delusion they have regarding their career choice. Professor Gayatri and Professor Raju in *Everything You Desire* give the
reorientation session with a view of preparing students for the future. Every student has to undergo a psychological Profiling Test which supposes to make them realize the kind of career or job each individual is inherently suitable for. On the next day, Professor Gayatri and Professor Raju talk to students about their career and placement.

“I am never surprised by statistics which say that over one third IIM grads change jobs within the first year. It is expected because you people look for jobs and not a career,” she began. “Salary and foreign locations are the only things that your starry eyes see.” She said in a rebuking tone. “I know of some of your seniors who actually returned to India within a year complaining that what they were promised by companies in postings abroad is totally different from reality,” added Professor Raju. “…I guess you people should introspect over the next few weeks and see what psychological Profiling that was done yesterday to see what kind of career suits you.” “Trust me in the long term all of you would have equally rewarding careers with equally high salaries.”

(168)

This session leaves students with quite a lot to think about their aptitude and choice of career. Harsh attributes this ability of realization to the summer internship as well.

The rule was that across the second year, one could only change two subjects after the allocation of subjects. Thanks to the summer internship exposure, many now wanted to change their areas of concentration— from Marketing to Finance and Finance to I.T and so on! After much toing and froing between
the Academic council and subjects during the year, that seemed to be like a small allowance but suited many people. (178)

4.1.5. Pre-Placement Talks (PPTs)

All those companies which are invited for the placements conduct the pre-placement talks to apprise students about the perks of joining their companies. Students, who usually are busy preparing their CVs, consider most of these PPTs boring and sometimes they even send their juniors to attend these sessions as a proxy. This tradition goes on from one batch to another.

Difference between students’ approach towards the local company and that of a foreign one is also quite evident. Prashant John in Second Degree talks about the wayward behaviour of a student during one of the PPTs of a local company.

One of the older members of our batch was apparently quite pleased with the talk. When the presentation wrapped up and the company invited feedback and comments, this person walked down to the well, put his hand on the presenter’s shoulder and said “Very nice presentation. I liked you a lot. But I don’t think much of your company.” With that, he walked out of the class leaving behind a rather embarrassed Berrywala, a fuming Daddu and the rest of us, including the company chaps, stunned. (241)

Contrary to this, attitude and approach of students are genuinely sincere and attentive during the PPTs of foreign companies. Prashant justifies this contrast when he writes,
The day McKinsey and Company confirmed their pre-placement talk, everyone went into a tizzy. It was the first “dream” company to come for a talk. Unlike the previous talks, no reminders were needed. The dress code automatically went to formal. Instead of a standard half-hour one-way talk, everyone was leaning in to hear out the associates who had come to campus and participate. They talked about the challenging but exciting life of a consultant at McKinsey. Mouths opened wide when the career progression to Partner was shown along with a hint of earnings. (242)

Some of the foreign companies arrange their PPT sessions in the five-star hotels and resorts and invite those students whom they have shortlisted for the interviews on the basis of their CVs. These sessions include lectures from the members of the company, doubt clearing, dinner and cocktails and above all observation and analysis of the students by the members of the company.

4.1.6. Final Preparations for the Placement

Final placement is the big day that students await with nervousness, tension and expectations. Indicating its significance, Harsh in Everything You Desire writes,

It was one of the main reasons why you aspire to study at an IIM. It was the day when the final placements were going to kick off…well, it was really like last minute revision for an exam—a big exam, well the biggest exam till now! (224-225)

The excitement and turmoil of the placement season are described quite elaborately in most of the contemporary Indian English campus novels under study. This season engulfs every student’s attention and their dreams of fruition of their
desires make them participate in the placement procedures with much zest and interest. Students may not be so serious during the course of their academic studies but the placement season compels them all to be wise and prepare themselves adequately to face the campus interviews in order to secure amazing jobs. Abbey in *Mediocre But Arrogant* also describes the anxiety experienced by the students during the placement week.

There was tension in the air. Campus placements were scheduled to begin soon. Our seniors were literally walking on eggshells, as they prepared to interview for their final placements, which would make or break their careers. Nobody made small talk with each other. Did that mean friends competing for the same goals do not remain friends? The library was suddenly full of people reading newspapers and business magazines. Not a copy of *Harvard Business Review* and *Business India* was to be had, for love or money. (207)

In *Everything You Desire*, Harsh too experiences the same stress of the final placement and decides to do thorough preparation for facing the interviews with due confidence and smartness.

As placement time approached, it was time to speed up the momentum of preparations. Dipendu, Aditya and I decided to dedicate two hours each night for case interview preparation, irrespective of PPTs, assignments, quizzes or whatever else might be happening. (215)

Even love takes a backseat during the placement week. This aspect is displayed by Harshdeep Jolly in *Everything You Desire*. Pre-placement talks are not the only significant things happening in the month of February. Valentine’s Day also
happens to be in the same month. As the ritual of the day demands, Tushar Professes his love for Priya and waits for her reciprocal but Priya diminishes any chance of it and replies,

“I will reply to your proposal after the placements. Let’s focus on what is currently a very important task at hand. Thanks for the lovely roses.”

“I also have this box of chocolates, which I thought I would give you after you said Yes!” spoke Tushar with such an innocent face, that Priya couldn’t help laughing. “Well, I am definitely going to have the chocolates. Time for hard work now. You will get my reply in March after the placements!” was Priya’s final word. (213-214)

Students prefer to secure placement on Day Zero, in order to save themselves from the agonizing exercise of the later days. Shekhar in Joker in the Pack explaining about the slotting system of placement writes,

Day Zero is usually reserved for big consulting firms and international investment banks. The general implication, therefore, becomes that the ‘best of the batch’ gets placed on Day Zero. On Day One, it’s the turn of MNC retail banks and a select few marketing or IT companies to vie for attention among the bulk of the students. On Day Two the remaining marketing and IT companies and the ‘lesser’ finance companies (like insurance companies, Indian PSU banks etc.) are invited to pick up the ‘leftovers’. Day Three is a rare phenomenon when times are good –it largely comprises family-owned or relatively small companies. (78-79)
Keeping abreast with the tension of their students, some of the teachers help their students in their preparations for the final placement. In *Everything You Desire*, Prof Ravi Arora helps Harsh in practicing case interviews and gives him some tips to fine tune his resume. Prof Arora motivates Harsh to pursue a Ph.D. in future and for the placement, he advises him that,

At the end of the day, wherever you go, do your best. All this day 0—day 1 hype is only as long as you are on the campus, once you are in the corporate world, you’ll realize all jobs tend to be the same. In the long run, all of you would be earning the same amount of money also!” (214)

Prof Arora also advises Harsh that, “You should be tense about placement not, nervous. The right amount of tension keeps you alert and active. Nervousness makes you flounder and fail.” (223)

Much importance is given to the preparation of the curriculum vitae (CV) as it is considered to be the face value of every student who would be judged and selected for the interviews by the companies. Harsh in *Everything You Desire* writes about how his involvement in all the activities in college led to increasing a point in his CV. He feels awkward about this fact.

My CV checklist seemed to be going fine. I held a position of responsibility, was also part of the consulting club, had organised a few events and now the CGPA was the immediate priority. As I thought about this, I wondered what was happening to me. A one-page document had been driving my life for the past few months. It was a weird thought. (171)
Students’ efforts of gaining good grades, presenting and submitting their assignment, projects and due tasks while studying are not adequately balanced when they fail to gain good job opportunities. Each one tries to gain a job in their initial interviews but all are not so successful. Students have to go through the pain of facing interviews and updating themselves for the same until their goal is accomplished. Despite meticulous preparations, the frustration that one undergoes by facing the interviews one after the other is nerve-racking. Shekhar in *Joker in the Pack* voices his frustrations quite distinctively.

I was getting angry at the ruthlessness of the ‘system’ that reduced people who had been achievers all their lives to beings shunted around from room to room in search of someone, anyone, to take them in. I also felt angry at the HRs and the company officials who knew the process because they had once been a part of it but still did nothing to refine it or make it more humane. The chaos was at its peak in the waiting area. People were walking around in a dazed state, half aware of surroundings and completely disillusioned with the idea of self-esteem. This, to me, was the IIM Daze. It was a stupor that could only be induced by unrealistic expectations, kiddish fantasies and a lack of extraordinary merit or extraordinary *jugaad.* (92-93)

The few but breathtaking days of the placement season fly away rapidly leaving most of the students happy but extremely exhausted. All the endeavours of presenting themselves as the best candidates for the job finally help them attain their desires but also drain them of their energy. As soon as the hype of the final placement settles down in the campus, the campus seems to lose its charm. As Abbey comments in *Mediocre But Arrogant,*
With the placement season having come to an end, life in MIJ lost its lustre. There was an air of deflated balloons about all of us. We seemed to have lost our raison d’etre. The cut-throat competition of the group discussions, the elbowing each other out of the way, was all over. We were friends again. What an anticlimax after those adrenaline-filled days! (293)

4.1.7. The Irony in Placement

As the placement season comes to an end, students start reflecting upon its proceedings and wonder at the little or no correlation between academic brilliance, employment opportunities and employability. Abbey in Mediocre But Arrogant realizes this and writes,

A few days into the placement season and the unspoken hierarchy and labels that had stuck to us for two years had changed. Many rank holders, including Sethu, had been attending innumerable interviews with no success, whereas some of the laggards in academics had got really good offers. It caused much heartburn and misery among the less fortunate ones. (280)

Only after getting grilled at many interviews, Harsh in Everything You Desire finally manages to obtain a very good job offer and gets saved from further torture of the placement procedures. In his conversation with his friend Dipendu, irony strikes out loud in dream versus reality.

“Boston Consulting Group. No investment bank offers for me!” Dipendu replied. I couldn’t stop laughing at the irony. (232)

Sometimes, an ironical situation is created when students receive more than one job offer of equivalent goodness, prospects and compatibility. Their toil and tension for securing one good job sometimes lead to gaining more than one by their brilliant performances in the interviews. Then they are faced with the tension of choosing and selecting the best offer among the rest. Prashant John in Second Degree mentions this challenge that students face. It is, of course, a win-win situation but then too students face the approach-approach conflict where the options available are endearing but they have to select the most appropriate one.

Soon most people in the batch started to have a different kind of problem. They had too many offers and couldn’t make up their mind. Placement rules prevent “job-offer-hoarding” or some of the chaps with a ‘sexier’ resume would end up getting all the offers. It was a win-win formula which forced people to make up their mind, have clarity and not be greedy. You had to be sure of yourselves to hold on to that dream job, considering the number of tempting job offers you might have to pass up on along the way. (245-246)

4.1.8. Pre-Placement Offer (PPO) and Out of Placement (OOP)

Some of the students are fortunate enough to stay away from all the worries and turmoil of the final placement. During their internships, they manage to procure the final placement i.e. Pre-Placement Offer in the companies of their summer placement. If the company and the remuneration it offers to suit the psyche of the students then they do not participate in the rigmarole of the final placement. They are
happy to receive the PPO by the respective companies. Rusty in *Mediocre But Arrogant*, Priya in *Everything You Desire* and Shekhar in Jocker in the Pack receive the PPO. Nevertheless, Shekhar’s dream of living a life king size doesn’t allow him to remain content with the offer and thus he chooses to be a part of the final placement procedure where he gets selected by the consulting firm based in the USA.

However, Prashant John in *Second Degree* does not take part in any of the final placement interviews. His friends coax him to join the procedure but in vain. Finally, he is marked as an OOP (Out of Placement).

“You have a week, after which we are going to mark you as OOP,” said Daddu. OOP was the term for Out of Placement. An option exercised voluntarily by those who didn’t want to be included in the placement process. Typically this option was by those who wanted to start their own ventures or wanted to explore opportunities with companies who would not be coming on campus. (247)

Prashant does not want to be a part of the corporate world as he intensely feels and wishes to do something which would benefit the society at large. He asserts, “It would be good to work for a cause instead of joining the rat race again, I decided.” (249)

When students get admission in the educational institutions of high repute, people, in general, tend to think of them as very brilliant and efficient ones and expect them to gain the job that would offer them bountiful paycheck. Not to receive any job offer even after studying at IIM is not taken lightly by many and it leads to severe criticism and resulting explanation which Prashant experiences,
I had a tough time explaining to Mom why I didn’t have a job. Mrs. Mehra, her neighbour was convinced I had never been to IIM in the first place and pretty much told everyone as much. But my sister really didn’t care. The sheer joy of boasting that her brother had survived IIM-A was enough gratification for her. …My boss invited me back, friends offered to look out for me at their employer’s place. I thanked everyone politely, but I figured that what happened was for the best. For the first time, I had been given the opportunity to really think what I really wanted to do in life. Maybe I just wasn’t ready to go back to the rat-race. (255)

Champak in *Joker in the Pack* furnishes a dream of becoming an entrepreneur so he opts out of the placement procedure. His decision is accurate and he succeeds in his business venture. As Shekhar writes about Champak,

Champak plunged into the deep end to realize his life’s ambitions. Despite a background of preparing a three-page summer report, he sweated it out when it came to his entrepreneurial venture. Over the following few months, he secured funding from a leading private equity firm on the merit of his business plan. (194)

Ryan in *Five Point Someone* fails to secure any job and his friends Hari and Alok worry about him. However, Prof Veera recognizes Ryan’s creative ability and offers him a job to work as his Research Assistant.

Would you like to work as my RA?” Prof Veera said. Research Assistant. I can get you a two-year contract. Will not pay a lot, say two thousand a month. But you live on campus, and you can continue research on lubricants. (257)
Ryan’s anxiety ends with a satisfactory and successful turn in his career. As Hari informs,

Ryan worked with Prof Veera, and with all that cash from his Dad, is investing in a factory about two hours from Delhi. Local villagers from nearby have been hired for construction. (270)

4.1.9. Media Hype

Media plays a pivotal role in elevating the excitement of people who may have anything to do with IIM or not by presenting hyped reports, particularly focusing on the salaries which the companies from abroad offer. Prashant John is Second Degree remarks,

The media was all abuzz with placements at IIMs. The highest salary was a much-abused term and each report tried to outdo the other. Statistics of International Salaries were touted. Fixed components, Variable components, maximum possible bonuses were all added up while reporting the ‘salary’. Mind-boggling amounts were on offer and even larger numbers got splashed in the media. Sexing it up was the name of the game. (251)

These reports have an adverse effect on the parents of those students who miss out the opportunity to work with an international firm. Shekhar Verma in Joker in the Pack lands up getting an offer from an Indian company for his summer internship. In spite of securing that position of the Day Two of the summer placement, he worries about explaining the same to his parents due to the misleading media reports.
The media had printed reams about IIM grads making it big with enormous stipends in exotic locations. I was sure I would have a tough time explaining why I was going to sell cookies in Bangalore when I was doing the same course as them. (97)

The hype created by media serves as torture to the students who couldn’t gain attractive job offers at the international frontiers. It becomes difficult for them to give any explanation to their relatives about the same. It is taken for granted by the people, in general, that these students studying in the topmost educational institutions in India would easily manage to get such an offer. Shekhar admonishes media which is averse to those students who fail to secure jobs with huge salaries at foreign locales.

Every year, the placement process is publicized in the media as if it were the biggest festival in the world. Think of the student who actually wants to do marketing or IT and hence doesn’t want to sit for day zero or day one. Every day for the first four days of placements, his family, friends and relatives would be calling him up ‘I am watching the news; placements in your campus seem to be great! Where are you going? How much are you getting?’ What is the marketing enthusiast supposed to say – ‘My companies have not come yet. When they do come, I will be taking up a marketing job that can place me in Gorakhpur at a package of Rs 6,00,000.’ When the media prints astronomical figures being earned in exotic locales, ‘Oh…sorry to hear that’ will be the probable reaction, as if the guy has lost a loved one. (79)

Gaurav and Harsh in *Everything You Desire* feel that media shouldn’t create much hype about the salaries and should display the facts and not the fancies. They opine that the media should not present any distorted picture to the general public.
The T.V. channels had created the big hype around IIM salaries and we weren’t amused. All dollar salaries converted into rupees were hogging the limelight. Thirty lakhs or forty lakhs sounds very impressive. How does it matter if it is actually a 70K salary for US placement or 40K Pound salary in London? You can’t convert those salaries in rupees, Man! (242)

4.1.10. Realization of Dreams

The desirable dream which guides, motivates and influences the academic rigour of students is consequently realized in the form of securing an enviable job even before completion of their degree course. This joy reflects in the words of Harsh in Everything You Desire.

We all had good jobs—whether we wanted them or not; whether they were as per our expectation or not! Everyone got their share of reward at the end of the nearly two year’s journey called IIM. (241)

Most of the major characters in the contemporary Indian English campus novels under study are happy to gain a job which would help them in leading a life of their dream and desire. Hari gets a job in Bombay, Alok gets one in Delhi and Ryan is satisfied to become an RA and continue with his research work in Five Point Someone, Abbey in Mediocre But Arrogant secures a job in Balwanpur, Harsh in Everything You Desire and Shekhar in Joker in the Pack get placement in New York, USA. Deb in Of Course I Love You...! manages to get a job where his father had worked but eventually resigns to pursue a career of a writer. Prashant John the writer of Second Degree prepares himself for a career in entrepreneurship and writing. Kaya in Sumthing of a Mocktale pursues research. There is no mention of career anxiety
and its tumultuous procedures in the novels *Anything for You Ma’am*, *Bombay Rains*, *Bombay Girls* and *Love, A Rather Bad Idea* as the course of its action ends during the middle of the college years of the characters.

When the destined journey reaches its befitting climax, the joy that it produces knows no bound. A sense of satisfaction is experienced by the triumvirs viz. students, teachers and parents of the contemporary Indian English campus novels under study. Excitement, satisfaction and happiness in realizing one’s goal are well described in the words of Shekhar Verma in *Joker in the Pack*.

Years and years of slogging, and this is what it had come down to – a signature that told me I was about to start on the lifestyle I had waited all my life for – money, flashy cars, jet-setting across the most happening cities in the world — there was nothing more in the world I wanted at that point in time. (187)

While reminiscing the stepping stones of his success, Shekar Verma finally experiences the bliss and feels,

I took in a deep breath and closed my eyes, smiling at the thought that Shekhar Verma would finally be a king. (193)

4.2. **Conclusion**

An academic journey that started with an amalgamation of both positive and negative feelings thus culminates into the realization of one’s potential, dream and self altogether. This is a phase of fruition of all the endeavours put together to achieve the desired goal. Students are able to understand and differentiate between reality and dreams i.e. between their aspirations and potential. They finally become secure,
independent and happy. This phase marks the beginning of their journey into the real world leaving behind all the comforts of the campuses. Their hard work and perseverance enable them to choose a distinctive arena for which they have prepared themselves to face with absolute confidence, exclusive aura and enriching self-esteem.