

**Post-colonial Indian Academia: A Literary Re-mapping through Indian
Campus Fiction in English**

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requirements for the award of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in English



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DECLARATION

I, Krishanu Adhikari (Reg. No. 14HEPH01), hereby declare that the thesis titled “Post-colonial Indian Academia: A Literary Re-mapping through Indian Campus Fiction in English” submitted under the guidance and supervision of Professor Dasari Murali Manohar is a bonafide research work carried out by me. I also declare that, this thesis has not been submitted in full or in part to this University or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma. I hereby agree that my thesis can be deposited in Shodhganga/INFLIBNET.

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CERTIFICATE

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Education is not the learning of facts, but the training of the mind to think.

- Albert Einstein

A University stands for humanism, for tolerance, for reason, for the adventure of ideas and for the search of truth.

- Jawaharlal Nehru

The novel of academic life is not only the product of reasoned convictions or prejudices about educational philosophy, but it is often the product of the spleen of disgruntled professors or students. Such works contain charming satire or horrifying revelations and may also make shrewd comments on the educational process.

- John O. Lyons

Chapter – I

Introduction

Significance:

The campus of a modern university is an academic space which is socially and culturally inclusive, politically vibrant, and rooted in secular-dialogic approach of critical inquiry. In the present times, almost globally, when the autonomy of the university in (re)production and dissemination of knowledge, or academia's right to dissent and 'speaking truth to power' are at stake owing to diverse exogenous as well as endogenous factors, it is quite worth examining, how literature in conjunction with sociological studies discursively re-visits 'the idea of the university' intervenes with the causality of enduring or contemporary challenges, and upholds the ideals of academic freedom and ethics as panacea to the quandary. But, where and how did it all begin? The history of the University in the Global North dates back to the Hellenic era of Plato's 'the Academy' that was founded in 387 BC, and Aristotle's 'the Lyceum' in 334 BC – both the Athenian schools of philosophy lasted for about three centuries till they were pulled down by the Roman dictator Sulla in 86 BC. Though Plato's 'skeptical school' and Aristotle's 'peripatetic school' practiced multidisciplinary approaches of education, as evidenced in the wide range of subjects being taught there – from philosophy and politics to martial arts, the West had to wait till the medieval era for the inception of the first ever university in the city of Bologna, Italy. Among the oldest existing universities in continuous operation, the University of Bologna was founded in 1088 AD, which was soon followed by the University of Oxford in 1096, and The Cambridge University in 1209.

On the other hand, in the Indian subcontinent, the genealogy of the university traces further back to the tenth century BC, when, as many archeologists and historians believe, the University of Ancient Taxila was foundedⁱ. It was later followed by the establishment of other ancient universities such as, the Nalanda University in the 5th century CE, the Vallabhi

University in 600 AD, and the Vikramshila University in 800 AD. Apart from Buddhist and Vedic studies, these ancient universities are also commemorated for their distinguished scholarship in physical sciences, mathematics, metaphysics, law, history, linguistics, etc. However, they too had met similar fate that of Plato and Aristotle's centers for higher learning, and couldn't stand the test of time, except that in ruins. History testifies that innumerable forays and vandalism carried out by the foreign invaders such as Huns, Arabs, Turks and Afghans across centuries in the pre-colonial times devastated these ancient seats of higher learning and mutilated their enormous intellectual resources. Furthermore, in the colonial period the physical damage was also supplemented with an ideological takeover by the imperial apparatuses of the British Raj, as manifest in the inception of the universities at several urban centers of the colonial India such as Calcutta, Madras, Bombay, Punjab and Allahabad from the latter half of the nineteenth century, thereby making way for English education in India.

Since its inception in the nineteenth century down to the post-colonial developments, the journey of the modern Indian university has been a nuanced and non-linear one. Here, the term 'post-colonial' stands for the post-independence years, i.e. India attaining freedom from the British rule in 1947 to date. With independence came a slew of reform policies and agendas, those aimed to depart from the formerly colonial praxes of dominance of English education and that of 'downward filtration' theoryⁱⁱ to bolster the drive of decolonized pedagogy. The 'epistemological shift' manifested itself in diverse forms and characters – for instance, revival of vernacular languages and indigenous epistemic paradigms, and equal access to education irrespective of caste, class, ethnic and gender identity etc. However, an ontological and teleological survey of the post-colonial Indian University unmask the liminalities and contestations emblematic of its expansion and questions of modernity. Despite its landmark achievements and active role in social transformation, the discontinuities embedded in the process of the Indian University's evolution from an elitist, exclusivist platform to a socially

inclusive institution of higher education following independence have been a pivotal subject of scholarly debates. Starting from demographic and democratic changes in its constitution, to the questions of decolonization, underfunding, lack of academic freedom, uneven progress, academic rivalry, politicization of campus, commercialization of education, etc., a plethora of issues have been foregrounded throughout the scholarly discourses on the idea of the post-colonial Indian university.

Indian Campus Novel as a distinct fictional subgenre dialectically examines the problems facing the Indian academia, satirizes the professional stereotypes, and problematizes the hegemony and power hierarchies around the campus. It further engages with the question of pedagogic reforms and, defends the claims of academic freedom and the university's autonomy as prerequisites for its myriads of social or intellectual responsibilities. By recreating imaginary university or college campuses with a set of fictional characters who resemble their real-life counterparts, and also by setting the fictional narratives within the actual campuses of academic institutions (where the characters are still fictitious), a campus novel "...takes the realities of higher education and transforms them into new objects of study" (Bulaitis 116). A 'dialectical'ⁱⁱⁱ reading of Indian campus fiction would underline how the liberty of literary imagination combined with its recourse to the technique of 'defamiliarization'^{iv} that is intrinsic to its storytelling of the university life, amplify the scope of its critique and thereby foregrounds, a discursive engagement with the liminal junctures of expansion of the Indian University following independence. Literature is believed to be socially transformative and liberating in its disposition. Indian campus fiction's intervention with the inconsistencies in the project of Indian higher education also foregrounds certain values and rectitude in the forms of individualistic and collective resistance, academic skullduggery and pretensions, so to chart out effectively the future possibilities of a more comprehensive structure of university

education. That said, it is worth asking – what is Campus Novel and how does it bring into discussion the diverse strands constitutive of the University?

Shaping of the ‘Campus Novel’ as a fictional subgenre in the West

Literature’s rendezvous with the university and academics is almost as old as the university itself. In English literature, the earliest example of an academic is probably the character of the Clerk from Oxford in “The Clerk’s Tale” from Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* (1400). Since the middle ages till the rise of Novel as a dominant literary genre in the eighteenth century, the literary representations of the university and the concept of education have been quite sparse, yet consistent over the ages. The humorous accounts of Aleyn and John from Cambridge in Chaucer’s “The Reeve’s Tale” or Nicholas in the “The Miller’s Tale”; the satire in Hoccleve’s *De Regimine Principum* (1412), Lyly’s *Euphues* (1579), Philip Stubbe’s *Anatomy of Abuses* (1583) and the *Parnassus Plays* (1600); the lamentation over decline of learning in John Lane’s poem- “Tom Tel-Troth’s Message” (1600); the aphoristic narratives of Bacon’s “Of Studies” (1625) and Milton’s *Of Education* (1644) – among many others, could be cited as early examples across literary genres on university education and academicians as such. And, the vast middle-class readership of the ‘English Novel’ had to wait till the nineteenth century, as noted by different critics, for its first-ever footprint on the university campus.

Novel as a literary genre is discursive in its composition – the inherent discursivity is reflected in its relation with the subject matter(s) at hand and a plethora of issues examined throughout the narrative. In view of the latent discursivity of a work of fiction, Terry Eagleton (2005) rightly observes “...that the novel is a genre which resists exact definition...It cannibalizes other literary modes and mixes the bits and pieces promiscuously together” (1). It draws its resources from disparate, often intermingling social, cultural, historical or political incidents and phenomenon, re-imagines them around its fictional trajectory, and re-produces them through its portrayal of human lives and conditions. Novel as a literary form is rooted in

the common life. It satirizes the stereotypes, problematizes the power hegemony, and uncovers the discontinuities in traditions by weaving in heterogeneous elements within the scope of its fictional narrative. Thus, it discursively engages with the multitudes of assumptions and matrices of any given society or an era. It is the degree and ethics of fictional negotiation with the varied subjects that determines the fictionality of a fiction.

In view of fiction being a melting pot of multitudes of experiences and cultural-literary paradigms, Virginia Woolf defines the novel as “the most pliable of all forms” (qtd. in Eagleton 1). Expanding on Woolf’s proposition, Terry Eagleton contends that ‘the novel’ by eluding any kind of generic determinism accommodates values those are “...most diverse and conflicting” (ibid. 5). Furthermore, he also draws inferences from Bakhtinian philosophy of ‘polyphony’ and ‘heteroglossia’^v, so to assert that “Its impatience with traditional models is also related to the rise of pluralism, as values become too diverse to be unified” (ibid. 7). It is the multiple subjectivities in terms of perceptions or values which a work of fiction encompasses, and linguistic plurality through which it investigates the reality vis-à-vis human lives, vindicate the unique status of fiction among other literary genres, and that of its critique compared to other sociological tractates.

Campus Novel too, as a fictional subgenre adopts the discursive and polyphonic character of fiction in its narration of campus life, inquiry of ‘the idea of the university’, critique of academic culture, investigation of academic-political interface, and its defense or engagement with the ideas of academic values, freedom, scholarship and so forth. Analogous to many fictional forms, it also refuses to comply with any form of fixities pertaining to its taxonomical categorization, and subsumes elements from romance, mystery, poetry, satire, drama, tragedy, history, journalism and other literary or cultural modes of representation. Before I make an attempt to understand what campus fiction is, it is worth stating that this fictional subgenre is also known in different other names within the literary circles such as,

‘College Novel’, ‘University Novel’ and ‘Academic Fiction’. It contains a corpus of fictional works which in many of the cases are written by academics and professors, and are predicated upon their fictionalized subjective reflections on the university life as a whole (Proctor, 1977; Showalter, 2005; Womack, 2002). A campus novel takes up the campus of any higher education institution(s) and lives of the members of the institution(s) as its cardinal sites of fictional enquiry. By situating the fictional narrative within or around a university/college campus, where the plot primarily concerns the lives of professors, students or that of academic-administrators, and their inter-personal relations, a campus novel dialectically intervenes with the accomplishments of higher education as well as the disjunctions. It also incorporates a critique of the political and cultural lives of the university coupled with provocations and almost all the possible paraphernalia of the university as an institution. Furthermore, the question of the university as an insular or an interstitial space, in other words, campus as a microcosm of the larger order or a closed world, also undergirds the thematic landscape of this fictional subgenre. Though satire is the most predominant mode of campus fiction’s re-imagination of the university as an abstract idea as well as a living organism, it began on a different note.

Many western scholars in their respective critical works on western campus fiction, have studied the fictional subtype from different perspectives. For John Kramer, a campus novel is “a full-length work of fiction which incorporates an institution of higher learning as a crucial part of its total setting...” (qtd. in Barasch 29). John O. Lyons considers “...a novel of academic life one in which higher education is treated with seriousness and the main characters are students or professors” (xvii). Furthering on the idea of the university and the question of higher education, other scholars such as, Elaine Showalter and Kenneth Womack have identified ‘satire’ as a key element in campus fiction’s discursive critique of the academia. Academic novels, Showalter contends, “experiment and play with the genre of fiction itself,

comment on contemporary issues, satirize professorial stereotypes and educational trends, and convey the pain of intellectuals called upon to measure themselves against each other and against their internalized expectations of brilliance” (4). In a similar vein, Kenneth Womack argues that “...the academic novel proffers – through its satiric depiction of the institutional states of malaise inherent in its fictive representations of contemporary universities – a means for both implicitly and explicitly advocating positive value systems” (22). Janice Rossen on the other hand, brings about the questions of power, rivalry, and an entrenched politics of inclusion and exclusion cutting across corridors of the universities in her definition of the Campus Novel. For Rossen, “...University fiction...consists of several disparate but related threads: the influence of the power structure within academe and in relation to the world outside, the constant dialectic between competitiveness and idealism – or, scholarship as a means to an end or as an end in itself...” (3). She also observes that the academic novel further underscores the “...question of who is allowed inside various circles within the academic community (as) one way to exercise power is to exclude others from entrance into the University” (ibid. 3).

Now the questions which immediately follow are – how and when did academic fiction start off its journey in the west, till it secured its position as a significant fictional subgenre in the post-war era? Campus Novel as a fictional subtype is more congruous with the idea of “...the history of the novel as a literary form and social document” (Lyons xiii) than that of literary aesthetics. The genesis of the campus fiction goes back to the nineteenth century portrayal of nostalgic and comic accounts of campus life, as evidenced in the examples of William Reade’s *Liberty Hall, Oxon* (1860), Thomas Hughes’s *Tom Brown at Oxford* (1861) and Anthony Trollope’s *Barchester Towers* (1857), only to mention a few. In America too, as Lyons argues, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Fanshawe* (1828) could be read as one of the earliest examples of novel written on academia, where the primary focus on a romanticized narrative

of college life outweighs the nuances and intrigues attached to the institutions of higher learning. But, a considerable number of these early campus novels also offer something intrinsically academic and academia's susceptibility to calls of the political by subtly transcending the tropes of melodrama and idealization of campus life. There are also a vogue of academic novels which are more akin to the idea of educational reform and therefore, they dialectically respond to various reform movements sweeping across the west since the second half of the nineteenth century.

Reflecting upon the fictional demonstrations of academic culture and university life, Elaine Showalter contends that the description of academic politics and the immanent clash between provincial Anglican clergy and evangelical reform in *Barchester Towers* (1857), Anthony Trollope's comic masterpiece, in a way, resembles the dynamics of politics and power relations present in contemporary universities. George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1872) is another representative work of first-generation Campus Novel, where Mr. Casaubon's character is exemplary of "the most haunting spectre of the academic as grim pedagogue, the scholar as the spirit of all that is sterile, cold and dark" (Showalter 5). Furthermore, the educational reforms aiming at democratic expansion of higher education coupled with an equal access to education irrespective of class and gender identity provided new thematic concerns and a plausible platform for future developments of this fictional subgenre. In their project of bringing about the much-coveted changes in higher education sector, the reform movements and different education bills laid bare the prejudices and regressive social forces which had so far grievously impaired the prospects of upward mobilization of marginalized classes and women. The reform acts of 1854 and 1856 on abolition of religious tests and thereby, the hegemony of the Church, or a number of statutes in the 1870s aiming at reconstitution of the governance of Oxford and Cambridge triggered a radical shift in the student population of these universities in the coming years, and also had a wider impact on their academic curriculum.

Campus Fiction, whose development in the West is almost coeval with the gradual evolution of the university into a socially inclusive site for critical inquiry, recreates the pressing need for demographic and pedagogic reform in academia through fictionalized narratives of individuals' relation with the academic space. It, therefore, opens up liminal grounds of investigation with regard to the fictional critique of the contradictions within the university system itself. M. R. Proctor in his book, *The English University Novel* (1977), identifies a set of university novels written in the nineteenth century England which build their narratives upon academia's response to the question of educational reform, flamboyance of Oxbridge life and prevalent injustices in the nineteenth century England. For example, John Gibson Lockhart's *Reginald Dalton: A Story of English University Life* (1823) and Robert Plumer Ward's *De Clifford: or, The Constant Man* (1841) are among those early fictional works where the urgency of university reform has been foregrounded as panacea to the anomalies and deterrents in the university system. For Proctor, these novels

...are not the only ones, and certainly are not the most significant ones, which had a word to say about university reform in the nineteenth century. As a group, however, they represent the initial approach to the subject in fiction, and were...instrumental in demonstrating that more could be done with the university theme than had been accomplished in the preceding century before reform had become a significant issue (64-65).

Indeed, the fictional paradigms set by these novels sent ripples through the literary spectrum, and the idea of academic reform which was constitutive of the focal point of their fictional inquiry, set the course for future development of satire in academic fiction. The transformation of the university into a socially inclusive space for higher learning, and the democratization of higher education were also not free from their own baggage. It is indisputably true that the promulgation of policies and different reform acts brought in the

envisaged changes and safeguarded the rights of the hitherto marginalized sections of the society. Yet, the subterranean presence of age-old stereotypes and hierarchies could still be felt on the campuses along with newfangled divisions and hegemonies. Furthermore, with the universities opening their corridors for general public followed by a burgeoning demand for higher education, there had been a sharp rise in the number of academic institutions ever since the twentieth century. Consequently, there had been a sea-change in the hermeneutics of interpersonal relationships and in the overall academic culture or standards of the universities. It can never be claimed that each change had a positive outcome, neither were all of them efficacious for the advancement of scholarship.

Along the lines of debates on the paradigm shift in ontological and teleological markers of the university, campus novels too had refashioned their fictional trajectory in terms of both form and content. Satire became an imperative literary device; there emerged a new group of novelists often from the professoriate itself and with a whole new oeuvre of fiction. Gradually, since middle of the twentieth century, western campus fiction started being acknowledged as an emergent and significant fictional subgenre in the west. Majority of the twentieth century campus novels are also marked with thematic experimentations befitting the shifting paradigms of education and the university life. A dialectical reading of campus novels also divulges a distinct fictional engagement with evolution of the university space from a closed world – an island of its own accord - to a more socio-politically inclusive and vulnerable site for critical learning.

Critics such as Elaine Showalter, Kenneth Womack and Steven Connor have systematically taken these fictional representations for their research and inquired through a set of incisive pointers in bringing to the fore the interplay between fiction and the changing matrices of academic and cultural life of the universities. Expounding his thesis on the rising popularity of satire in the twentieth century academic novels, Kenneth Womack observes –

“The genre of English university fiction finds its more satiric origins, however, in the various educational reform movements of the mid-nineteenth century, as well as in the admission of women to the sacred groves of Oxford and Cambridge in the latter half of the nineteenth century” (20). To glean the shift, one could also locate an emerging conflict between the academic values and those of the outside world permeating the fictional space(s) of the western campus novels written since the mid-twentieth century.

The Masters (1951) by C. P. Snow revisits the archetypal image of a university campus as an insular space free from the anxiety of external conditions, influences and any kind of social associations. The novel which is set in an unnamed college campus in Cambridge during the 1930s, builds its narrative upon the differences of opinion among the professors entailing the election of the new Master of the college. Despite being a closed world and certain of its values, the fictional portrayal of academic politics and the hierarchies in the campus are in many ways homologous to the power relations and political equations of the larger socio-political order. The text’s intervention with the academic life in the anonymous Cambridge College further demonstrates a discursive critique of an intellectual’s penchant for the elusive ‘ivory tower’ of academia. The picture of the college campus as it appears in *The Masters* (1951), slowly gives way to the microcosmic image of a university campus in the coming years, where academia’s relation with the world outside is not just figurative but the university becomes enmeshed in the socio-political reality of the time. Kingsley Amis’ *Lucky Jim* (1954), set in a provincial redbrick University in Britain in the 50s, unveils a completely different approach to academia from what C. P. Snow perceived. The novel is a comic satire on academic pretensions and idealization of the ivory towers, prevalent among the erstwhile Oxbridge dons. The protagonist Jim Dixon is a junior assistant lecturer in history. His approach towards academia and life differs completely from the characters in *The Masters* (1951). His longing

for sex, women and an acquaintance with the greater world beyond the constricted domain of the university mark a paradigm shift from Snow's world of academia.

Responding to the cultural transformation of the university space, and its reflection on fictional landscape(s) of the campus novels from the 1970s onwards, Showalter rightly contends that "...the University is no longer a sanctuary or a refuge; it is fully caught up in the churning community and the changing society..." (49). The rise and rapid growth of the 'plate-glass' universities in the 60s following the Robbins Report of 1963, alongside the upsurge of revisionist and reformatory theories and their practices significantly contributed to this radical shift. Malcolm Bradbury's *The History Man* (1975), set in the imaginary campus of the University of Watermouth is a testimony to the manner in which academic and personal transformations of the 70s are said to occur. The happenings inside the university campus as well as outside, reflected through the activities of the protagonist Professor Howard Kirk and his wife Barbara Kirk, exemplify this breaking of the wall of academia and the rise of the 'new university'. Moreover, it is said to have offered some unhackneyed approaches of campus fiction's investigation of the dynamic interaction between academia and the shifting socio-cultural milieu of the post-Robbins Britain. In a similar vein, David Lodge's *Changing Places* (1975), *Small World* (1984) and *Nice Work* (1988), collectively known as *Campus Trilogy* (1993), take upon the shift in academic culture of the west from the late 60s as a seminal question foregrounded throughout the fictional narratives. By bringing into discussion the changing dynamics of academic life and relations in British universities caused by multiple intramural and extramural factors, these novels further delve into the nuances of academic values, and how they negotiate as well as are in conflict with the values of the outside world. In his book, *The English Novel in History: 1950-1995* (1996), Steven Connor underlines the dissonances between academic values and that of the larger society with reference to the British campus novels of the 1980s, more precisely David Lodge's *Nice Work*. He observes –

“Sometimes – and more frequently in campus novels produced during the 1980s, the period when British university life was under most economic and ideological assault – the conflict is between academic values and the values of the world ‘outside’, often the industrial or commercial world. As we will see, this is especially the case with *Nice Work*” (Connor 73).

Another set of novels, such as Vladimir Nabokov’s *Pnin* (1957), Malcolm Bradbury’s *Eating People is Wrong* (1959) and *Stoner* (1965) by John Williams among others, set out to explore various psychological issues cutting across academicians in their promotion to higher positions and in their academic engagements, where professional rivalry and the intra/inter-departmental power equations writ large than that of one’s intellectual potential or accomplishment. The portrait of characters like Pnin or William Stoner are paradigmatic of the plight of academicians in their families and at their work places which could further hinder their intellectual pursuits. In line with *Lucky Jim*, the topographical setting of the universities in question in the above works also discursively situate the fictional critique within the conditions of European provincial universities along the two world wars.

Quite homologous with the evolution of campus fiction in Europe as a significant subgenre of fiction, in America too, this subtype of fiction gradually cemented its position in the literary spectrum as an emergent fictional form in the mid-twentieth century, ever since its inception in the preceding century. John O. Lyons aptly scrutinizes the development of American college novel in his book, *The College Novel in America* (1962). According to Lyons, ‘College Novel’ in America could be broadly classified into two types, i.e. novels which are centered upon the lives of students and the ones where the protagonist is a professor, in other words ‘Professorroman’^{vi}. His mapping of the growth of College Novel in America hinges upon a historical reading of the development and changes in thematic and stylistic aspects of this fictional subgenre over the years. The journey which began with romanticized accounts of campus life as manifest in the novels such as Hawthorne’s *Fanshawe* (1828) or

Flandrau's *Harvard Episodes* (1897), gradually evolved as "the novel of academic life as an argument" (Lyons 134) roughly around the middle of the twentieth century.

Robert Herrick's *Chimes* (1926) negotiates the erroneous assumption of the Ivy League American universities, that the economic and moral standards of the nation could be improved solely by ensuring democratic and equal access to higher education. Everett Marston's *Take the High Ground* (1954) problematizes the academic skullduggery in college education of the early twentieth century America. Expanding the call of academic skullduggery and pretensions, novels such as, Mary McCarthy's *Groves of Academe* (1952), Randall Jarrell's *Pictures from an Institution* (1954) and Bernard Malamud's *A New Life* (1961) satirize the discontinuities in the progressive model of college education and the rise of anti-intellectualism in American academia. *Groves of Academe* deserves a further mention for its examination of 'academic freedom' as an indispensable component of the modern university which for Lyons is "the most important novel about academic freedom" (ibid. 169). In this regard, other novels like, T. S. Stribling's *These Bars of Flesh* (1938), May Sarton's *Faithful are the Wounds* (1955) and Howard Fast's *Silas Timberman* (1954) among others, could also be cited as significant fictional works foregrounding the pressing need for academic freedom against plethora of deterrents and political provocations. 'Academic Novel as an argument' also takes in a number of novels critiquing the discursive traces of racism and persistent presence of inequality at the academic world and American society at large. Nolan Miller's *The Merry Innocents* (1947) and Grace Jamison Breckling's *Walk in Beauty* (1955) are two of the noted American college novels satirizing the above-stated impediments which restricted the transformation of the American university into a liberal-democratic institution in the first half of the twentieth century.

Indian Campus Fiction in English: A Brief Historical Overview

In India too, there has been a ‘palimpsestic’ growth of campus fiction in English, and the history of discursivity both in terms of its evolution into a minor yet recognizable fictional subgenre and also in its inquiry of campus life goes back to the late 1930s – a number of novels written by ‘the big trio’^{vii} of Indian English fiction where university campus appears as one of the sub-settings. Indian literature speaks in many languages and Indian English literature is one among them. Indian literary criticism is divided over the appellation and extent of this vast corpus of literary works written in English by Indian authors, or those of Indian origin. E. F. Oaten’s narrowly defined classification of ‘Anglo-Indian Literature’ in the initial years of twentieth century was later revised by K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar first as ‘Indo-Anglian Literature’ in 1943, and then as ‘Indian Writing in English’ in 1962. But, the most comprehensive and widely acknowledged expression, i.e. ‘Indian English Literature’ ascribes to one of the eminent literary historian and critic of Indian literature, M. K. Naik. Though all of them have affirmed the essential heterogeneity of its composition, the debate still persists over nomenclature and range of its categorization. While critics like V. K. Gokak and Iyengar include translations of ‘Bhasha literatures’ in English by Indians, M. K. Naik refuted much of their claims and narrowed it down to only those translated works which “...are creative translations by the authors themselves” (Naik 3). For Naik, “Strictly speaking, Indian English literature may be defined as literature written originally in English by authors Indian by birth, ancestry or nationality” (ibid. 3).

Indian English Fiction, a major literary genre of Indian English literature, too, speaks in multiple forms and voices, in plethora of settings and narratives, thereby vindicating its ‘rhizomatic’^{viii} growth and its status as essentially pluralistic and discursive. Indian Campus Fiction in English is one such fictional subtype which occupies an interesting place in the annals of Indian English literature. The character of a university graduate or that of a professor, and the description of a university campus appear in many of the Indian novels in English and

are not a recent development. One could cite a number of novels authored by the big trio of Indian English fiction such as, R. K. Narayan's *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937), *The English Teacher* (1945), *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967), and Raja Rao's *The Serpent and The Rope* (1960) and *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965) as some of the early examples of Indian English novels, where considerable segments of each of the fictional narratives center upon the imaginary university campuses. Though these novels are partially set around college/university campuses and also divulge elements of campus life, they cannot be considered as campus novels owing to a set of factors. Firstly, despite being set in the campus partially, these novels don't delve into the nuances of academic life and its accomplishments, nor do they foreground the challenges of higher education in a colony on the verge of independence, or in the post-independence era. Second, these works also lack fictional engagement with diverse matrices of academic-political interface and their larger implications on the academic merit of the campus. Furthermore, these fragmentary novelistic representations of the university campus also don't include any substantial reflections on the possibilities of 'decolonizing the university'^{ix} and the tension between tradition and modernity encompassing the Indian academe.

Sudhin N. Ghose's *The Vermillion Boat* (1953), it could be argued, sets about a different type of novel writing in Indian English, where the campus and the idea of the university, the lives of students, or that of academic and administrative communities within the academic space, and the interactions between them, unfold themselves as the pivotal markers of fictional compositions. Reminiscent of Hardy's *Jude*, the protagonist of Ghose's novel, a young orphan encounters innumerable hindrances in materializing his dream of higher education. But, unlike *Jude*, his struggle has a positive outcome, as the anonymous protagonist wades through the difficulties to achieve his goal of higher education. Starting from the betrayal by his local guardian Jogin Da upon his arrival in Kolkata to finding a mentor in his teacher Profulla Babu and love of a different kind for his Latin tutor Roma, the fictional narrative explores diverse

facets of university life; myriads of possibilities academia could offer an individual for his/her moral as well as academic growth and multiple dimensions of interpersonal relations traversing the university space. It is this coming-of-age narrative of the novel which focuses on the intrinsic relation between the evolution of an individual and the university campus, paves the way for future development of Indian campus fiction in English in the coming years.

Before, I make an attempt to map out the parallel growth of this subgenre of fiction since the 1960s, a couple of points need to be clarified concerning the literary origin of Indian campus fiction, and the 'post-colonial Indian academia' it is located in and seeks to investigate. Though certainly Indian in ethos, campus novels in India have their literary origin rooted in the West. They have appropriated the formulas and literary techniques employed by the Western novelists in their narration of campus life and, thereby a discursive critique of the Indian university, its intellectual culture and paraphernalia of the university campus as a whole. For example, satire which is a popular literary device in Western campus novels and is connected with their investigation of educational reform as well as transformation of the university space into a democratic platform, is also intrinsic to the Indian campus novels. It has been scrupulously deployed to problematize the official rhetoric of expansion and democratization of Indian higher education by unmasking ruptures in it. The disjunctions manifest themselves through the problems of underfunding, uneven growth, lack of resources and infrastructure, the predicament of intellectual mediocrity, hierarchical divisions between disciplines in terms of funding and opportunities, lack of academic freedom, etc. Furthermore, the literary devices such as satire, irony and parody which permeate the fictional landscape of Indian campus fiction also corroborate the discursive engagement with the question of the Indian university's vulnerability towards extrinsic political influences and the changing dynamics of academic-political interface.

Second, the history and teleological foundation of the modern Indian University is different from its western counterpart. Whereas, the journey of the western university records a gradual evolution from a closed world towards a political space for higher learning, Indian universities ever since their inception in the colonial India down to the post-independence developments have been enmeshed in the political reality of the nation. During the British Raj, using the London University as the model for foundation of the modern universities was laden with two-fold politics of the imperial government – a) the dissemination of English education in India as a potential tool to colonize an entire race and thus, to ensure their servitude, and, b) the concomitant purpose of production of English educated natives to fill in the second-fiddle positions in public offices and smooth running of the colonial system. Apart from the ulterior motives of the colonial government, the English educated Indians also actively participated and led the freedom movement in India thereby, validating the political identity of the Indian universities.

In the post-independence era, with various reforms and democratic expansion of higher education, Indian universities not just retained their political status, but have been tirelessly realigning their position with the shifting political paradigms of post-colonial India. The political underpinnings and the reality of the Indian University effectively incorporate the residues of colonial discourses and the post-colonial appropriations which gradually unfold with the progress of the nation and that of the Indian university. The Indian University's 'claims of the political'^x ranges broadly from the persistence of academic bureaucracy and dominance of English education, the two essentially western imports to multiple ways of politicization of the campus and manifold political provocations in its pursuit of truth and knowledge. In his essay – "The Permanent Crisis of Indian Higher Education" (1969; 2012), Philip G. Altbach pertinently noted that "The political orientation of universities manifests itself in a number of ways... (which begins with) a very close relationship between the university and government"

(13). In my reading of Indian campus novels, the idea of the university, these fictional accounts underline, do not offer a mere normative perspective of the dynamics of university's relation with the political apparatuses of the nation-state. Rather, their discursive critique of higher education in independent India are evocative of a dialectical as well as historical engagement with political orientation(s) of the Indian university. Put simply, the discursive fictional critique as well as satire of the political influences on academic culture and paradigms of the university as evident in Indian campus novels, connote to the historical timeline of nuanced interaction between the university and political engines of the Indian Government.

Since Ghose's novel, there had been a periodic rise in the number of campus novels in the following decades before it began asserting its position as an emergent fictional subgenre of Indian English fiction since the 1990s, with a significant number of mostly academicians turned novelists started maneuvering their creative interests towards this relatively new type of novel writing. P. M. Nithyanandan's *The Long Long Days* (1960) and K. S. Nayak's *Campus on Fire* (1961) could be identified as the two important works of Indian campus fiction from the 1960s. Having been set in two imaginary college campuses during the 1950s, the two novels look into the then contemporary issues of college education from two different perspectives.

The Long Long Days (1960) which many believe to be the first ever Indian campus novel (novella) written in English, narrates the campus life essentially from the perspectives of students. In the edited volume on the history of Indian English Literature by Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, Shyamala A. Narayan and John Mee in their chapter titled "Novelists of the 1950s and 1960s", identifies Nithyanandan's work as "the first campus novel in Indian English (literature)..." (Narayan and Mee 219). The narrative which is set in a fictitious college campus of a southern province of India in the 50s, centers upon different experiences of student life – from hostel mischiefs and group study to factionalism within the student community over the student election. It is through apparently nostalgic and humorous narration of the student life

on the imaginary college campus, the novel draws a succinct critique of academic skullduggery and crafty practices of the student community to pass the examination. Extending on this question of academic mediocrity, it also lays bare a spate of problems thwarting the growth of college education in the formative years such as, underfunding, inadequate resources and infrastructure, unemployment as well as underemployment, peripheral status of arts and social sciences and so on.

The satire is more persuasive in K. S. Nayak's *Campus on Fire* (1961), and brings into attention how the external political compulsions end up marring the academic culture or standards of higher education institutions in India. Having set in a fictional college campus around the same time as that of Nithyanandan's novel, the unfolding of the plot deftly satirizes the detrimental effects of coercive state machineries upon academic freedom and autonomy of the college or university in production of knowledge and its commitment to the idea of dissent as one of the modalities of 'speaking truth to power'. The narrative is built upon the statist quelling of campus activism led by Avinash and other student activists, denouncing the state sponsored attack on academic freedom and its right to dissent as a distinct tool for social reform. Furthermore, the novel's discursive engagement with the colonial legacy of bureaucracy in academic administration, the paradigms of teacher-student relationship in the post-colonial milieu and the hierarchical divides in academia situate the fictional critique within the broader context of academy's relation with the pervasive tension between tradition and modernity in Indian society.

Extending the span of satire on the academic hierarchy, the later Indian campus novels set in college campuses, such as Rama Sarma's *The Farewell Party* (1971) and Ranga Rao's *The Drunk Tantra* (1994) explore the adverse effect of academic politics and simmering tension between the academicians on the academic growth of an individual as well as the overall intellectual merit of the campus which is rooted in their proclivity for power. *The*

Farewell Party (1971) is a story of an individual professor's lifelong struggle against the power-ridden rivalry and nefarious politics in the college owing to his personal choices and a righteous approach throughout. The novel is an example of a 'Professorroman', and the narration centers on Prakasam's retrospection of his extended career as a college teacher on the verge of his superannuation. Quite similar to the experiences of Nabokov's Pnin or Williams' Stoner, Prakasam's story of not being promoted to a professor despite his academic credentials unmask the sad reality of how, in India, scholarship and intellectual perseverance are of minimal importance in safeguarding the rights and academic interests of an individual professor compared to academic politics. While some like Prakasam endure all the humiliation and poor professional culture or ethics and stay back in India, a considerable number of professors leave India for better working conditions and opportunities in the West as evidenced in the case of Professor Vidyasagar from *Campus on Fire*.

This academic 'brain drain' has been highly disadvantageous for the growth of higher education in India because of the resultant shortage of committed and quality teachers in many of the academic institutions. *The Drunk Tantra* (1994) on the other hand, while being set in an imaginary campus of Janayya College, problematizes the unpleasant side of college politics manifest in selection of the next principal of the college. The quirky narrative of Mohana, a faculty member of that college, symbolically unfolds how with Hairy an incompetent and unrighteous person taking over as the principal by strategically ousting Professor Das, culminates in the waning academic merit of the college. Responding to the emerging crisis of intellectual indigence in many provincial Indian universities and colleges, another campus novel by Rita Joshi, titled *The Awakening* (1992), sheds light on the problem of burgeoning private tuition and an unprecedented growth of a 'mug up' culture among a section of Indian students. The novel argues that an uncritical absorption of knowledge and a half-baked

repetitive reproduction of often hackneyed tutored materials integral to private coaching, prove to be further detrimental to the ethos of critical learning in higher education.

The structure and functioning of the university are more complex and eclectic than that of college, and so is its outreach. The diversity of thought is supplemented with an identical heterogeneity of its vast population which, in turn, reifies its liberal-democratic foundation. Furthermore, the liberal-democratic temperament of the Indian university also takes in the status of a public funded and subsidized institution for an equal access to higher education across class, caste and gender identity. However, neither the liberal-democratic foundation nor the publicness of Indian universities are beyond contestation. Indian campus novels which are set in either imaginary university campuses or real-life ones, discursively locate the intrigues in the democratic rubric of Indian universities as well as the scheming strategies of the political parties and their cultural engines to exploit or co-opt their public status.

The novels like *Atom and the Serpent* (1982) by Prema Nandakumar, D. R. Sharma's *Miracles can Happen* (1985), M. K. Naik's *Corridors of Knowledge* (2008) and Jose Palathingal's *Whispers in the Tower* (2012) negotiate the disjunctions in the project of democratic expansion of tertiary education, the causality of professional rivalry along with the following tension in academia, and academic-political interface in their fictional re-imagination of life in the university campus. The narration of campus life in *Atom and the Serpent* foregrounds the notion of development of science and research in India which was on the cusp of modernization in the late 1970s and how the intellectual community of a provincial university responds to this drive of epistemic modernity. Seen from the perspective of Vatsa, a visiting professor, somewhat reminiscent of Morris Zapp from Lodge's *Campus Trilogy*, the fictional narrative satirizes a number of university professors' penchant for power and the factional politics they indulge in for their narrow self-interests while being indifferent to their

academic duties. It also brings into discussion the vital role the administration of a university plays in nurturing scholarship and securing further academic growth.

While emphasizing the exigency of an academically oriented and steadfast administration of the university, the second and fourth from the aforementioned fictional works place the academic-administrative acumen and mettle of the Vice-Chancellor as instrumental in navigating the intellectual progress of a university. The unfolding of the plot in D. R. Sharma's *Miracles can Happen* (1985) divulges the story of decaying intellectual merit of a fictional university campus of Mansa Devi located near Delhi as a result of the lack of academic vision and administrative skill of Dr. Om Prakash Handa, the new Vice-Chancellor of the university. The fictional narrative exemplifies a polemic against his incompetence evident in his act of counting on the suggestions of his wife and some of the syndicate members, instead of making his own judgements and using his discretion in academic and administrative affairs of the university. Furthering the critique of academic administration, *Whispers in the Tower* (2012) compares and contrasts a strong-willed and unfeigned Vice-Chancellor with that of a weak and immoral one. Whereas, the tenure of Professor Kabir as the Vice-Chancellor is characterized by advancement of scholarship and abidance to academic values, the weak governance during the term of his successor Dr. Malik proves to be an anathema to the growth of the university and its academic ethics. It is when the academic and administrative community of the Akbarabad University, in lieu of working as a unified unit for the well-being of the university, are in turn, divided into conflicting coteries, thereby paving the way for decline in academic merit of the institution.

In M. K. Naik's *Corridors of Knowledge* (2008) a reader could identify a 'diachronic' position in the text's discursive critique of the growth of university education in India which spans around almost forty years of Indian education, i.e. from 1940s – the 80s. Written in the form of 'bildungsroman', the extended temporal setting of the novel around the academic

career of its protagonist has been conducive for examining a spate of factors cutting across the post-independence Indian academia. Alongside the question of university administration and its often strained relation with the professors in the imaginary Gandhi University, the concept of the ‘decolonized’ university, tension between tradition and modernity, the reification of English as the dominant medium in the post-colonial era, the backwardness of provincial universities, and the shifting paradigms of teacher-student relation appear as leitmotifs of the retrospective and non-linear narrative of the novel.

Apart from those, which are set in imaginary university campuses, there are also quite a number of Indian Campus novels on real-life university campus such as, the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), the Chennai University, the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) and the Delhi University (DU). Indian Campus Fiction which is more congruent with the categorization of campus novels as ‘novel of academic life as argument’ is also pertinent to the fictional narration of the life in these actual university campuses. *The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta* (1993) by Anuradha Marwah, Githa Hariharan’s *In Times of Siege* (2003), Srividya Natarajan’s *No Onions Nor Garlic* (2006), Soma Das’ *Sumthing of a Mocktale* (2007), Siddharth Chowdhury’s *Day Scholar* (2010) and Avijit Ghosh’s *Up Campus, Down Campus: The Adventures of Anirban Roy* (2016) are some of the exemplary works of this category of Indian campus fiction. In these novels the universities (mostly metropolitan ones) either carry their real names, or are fictionally appropriated, for examples in *In Times of Siege*, JNU and IGNOU have been represented as KNU (Kamla Nehru University) and KGU (Kasturba Gandhi University) respectively. The thematic concerns of these novels are not just analogous with those set in imaginary university campuses, but the realism embedded in their ‘mimetic’ representations of campus life offers a more nuanced insight into the pedagogic and cultural paradigms as well as the socio-political life of the university.

Novels like *The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta* (1993), *Sumthing of a Mocktale* (2007) and *Up Campus, Down Campus: The Adventures of Anirban Roy* (2016) divulge multiple facets of the campus life and culture of JNU through their narration of the experiences of the protagonists as students. All the texts are semi-autobiographical in their exposition of campus life and unveil an image of the university space that is democratic, dialogic and self-reflexive in its disposition. The radicality of its intellectual culture is evident in Geetika and Anirban's exposure to a whole range of Marxist and (post) structuralist/modern theories in the 80s and the mid-90s as part of classroom pedagogy as well as research in social sciences and humanities. Furthermore, the detailing of student life of Kaya, Shubhra and Ragini is also indicative of how the progressive and dialogic campus culture at JNU could bring about self-transformation from conservatism and cultural orthodoxy of Indian society.

However, the academic, cultural and political paradigms of the university, as the novels critique, are also marked by several contradictions, and thus, revisit the liminalities intrinsic to the academic culture of Indian universities. Anuradha Marwah's novel unmasks the latent ego present among a number of professors and lays open the often strained relation between the professor and his/her research scholars as evidenced in the case of Geetika. The humor in Avijit Ghosh's fictional work aims at critiquing the dominance of left-leaning campus politics at JNU which, often co-opts the dialogic relation between diverse political ideologies and also mars the democratic relations within the academic community. The description of campus life in *Up Campus Down Campus* (2016) is also replete with evidences of tension during the time of student election and the divides within its academic community in the wake of implementation of the Mandal Commission Report in 1992.

In their analyses of the cultural and political life of the campus, *No Onions Nor Garlic* (2006) and *Day Scholar* (2010) bring out into the open, the undercurrent of caste hierarchy and prevalence of lumpen politics within the academic space as detrimental to the idea of the

university. Despite the promulgation of several reservation policies championing the cause of equal access to higher education for more than half a century, the character of Jiva in Natarajan's text is paradigmatic of the segregation or discrimination of Dalit students within the democratic framework of Indian universities even in the post-millennial era. The narrative further unfolds how the Brahminical elitism amongst a section of upper caste professors that follows their biased perception about the intellectual merit of students from the lower castes and strata of the society, undermine the definitions of the university as a socially inclusive space and higher education as a medium for social justice as well as transformation. A university is known for its autonomy in terms of its scholarly duties and its discourse on the 'political'. On the contrary, the portrayal of life in the north campus of the Delhi University during the 1990s in *Day Scholar* (2010) is tarnished by the threat of lumpen politics of the locality. It is through the journey of its protagonist Hriday Thakur into the underbelly of political life of the university, the narrative exposes the murky reality of Machiavellian presence of Zorawar, a local political leader and a Masters student Jishnu Da, his henchman in university politics including the student election. The character of Zorawar and his acts of power exertion further situate the narrative within the broader question of vulnerability of Indian academia caused by extrinsic political pressures in present times.

Extending the problem of rising political tension and contemporary provocations of the Indian university education, Githa Hariharan's *In Times of Siege* (2003) focuses on the emerging threat of 'Hindutva' politics on academic freedom and the secular fabric of Indian universities. The novel is set across the two university campuses of KGU and KNU, and follows the harassment of professor Shiv Murthy from KGU for his history lesson on Basavanna, which drew the ire of a Hindu watchdog group over some of his supposedly controversial hypotheses that debunked their post-truth narratives of Indian history and culture, thereby hurting the Hindutva sentiment. But, the fictional investigation of the predicament of

the post-liberalization Indian university is also marked by the idea of resilience and academia's voice of dissent. It is not just about the individualist resistance vis-à-vis resilience of Shiv, but also encompasses collective dissent of intelligentsia and student activism against the notoriety of right wing cultural engines.

Now, let us come to an array of post-millennial Indian campus novels based on the paradigms of technological education in the post-globalization era which many believe, have popularized this subgenre of fiction both within India as well as outside its geopolitical boundaries. Novels such as Chetan Bhagat's *Five Point Someone* (2004), *2 States* (2009), *Half Girlfriend* (2014), Abhijit Bhaduri's *Mediocre But Arrogant* (2005), Harishdeep Jolly's *Everything You Desire: A Journey Through IIM* (2007), Amitabha Bagchi's *Above Average* (2007) and Karan Bajaj's *Keep Off The Grass* (2008) could be cited as some of the significant works of this category of Indian campus fiction. Akin to many of the Indian campus novels, these novels too, are 'formulaic' in their fictional re-imagination of the campus life of premier institutions for technological and management education such as IITs and IIMs. Besides, their popularity primarily among youth and general readers followed by the tag of 'bestseller' attached to some of these works have led to generalization and narrow categorization of these works as "commercial fiction" or "formulaic prose-works" (Gupta 50).

As campus novel grafts with other literary or fictional genres such as bildungsroman, romance, mystery-thriller, sentimental novel etc., this particular type of Indian campus fiction exploits the elements of romance and melodrama, where the narratives are replete with nostalgia over the student life on the campus. They, in fact, set the platform for the discursive fictional critique of professional education in the post-globalization India. Beginning with an implied criticism of shifting patterns of middle class aspirations and rise of new middle class with economic liberalization, much of the satire rests upon mercantilization of tertiary education and gradual metamorphoses of educational institutions into factories for the

production of skilled professionals inextricably linked with the expansion of neoliberal market economy.

The question of commercialization of higher education with an unparalleled growth of neoliberalism across the globe is a widely discussed topic in recent times. Bill Readings (1997) defines this present epistemological shift in the idea of the university as “posthistorical” (6), because of its incremental departure from the historical base of its intellectual inquiry and social accountabilities, as it no longer participates “...in the historical project of humanity...(and) of culture” (ibid. 5). On the other hand, Henry Giroux accuses neoliberalism for promoting an idea of higher education which is poles apart from its interest in critical or political consciousness, thereby reducing the image of academic institutions into a platform for “depoliticized pedagogy” (5). In India too, different scholars such as Vijender Sharma, Leela Fernandes, Patrick Heller and Shalini Punjabi have also pointed out how such swelling presence of neoliberal ideology in Indian academia owes to the monumental changes in cultural and economic paradigms of the nation-state with the advent of globalization, and has played a significant role in replacing the liberal-democratic culture of Indian academia with that of a depoliticized and market-driven one.

Through their fictionalized accounts of pedagogy and multitudes of relations at these premier Indian institutions for professional education, these novels traverse the debates over the shifting middle-class attention and paradigms of technological education since globalization, thereby carefully unearthing the liminal grounds of their causality. Arindam’s retrospection of his student life at IIT Delhi in *Above Average* (2007) negotiates the shifting terrain of middle class aspiration and a dominant materialistic turn in the technical education of the country. On the other hand, the quasi subjective tone in Alok’s storytelling of his life at IIT and his friendship with Hari and Ryan, is evocative of the bleak reality of how such neoliberal makeover of professional education and the introduction of state-of-the-art

performative indexes often bring in newer markers of division among students and take away the critical potential of higher education. In a similar vein, the exposition of campus life in management institutions such as IIMs (Indian Institution of Management) in novels like *Mediocre But Arrogant* (2005) and *Everything You Desire: A Journey Through IIM* (2007) reiterate almost homomorphous problem of an emerging utilitarian culture, which is responsible for degeneration of intellectual morale as well as interpersonal relations within the academic community.

Examples abound on the representations of female characters in Indian campus novels written both by male and female authors. Many of the women characters who are either academics or students, exhibit many of the attributes of the post-colonial Indian academia comprising both its pros and cons. But, in some of the novels those are written by women novelists, reader could identify discursive fictional attempts of locating and negotiating the issues pertaining to female education, its challenges and an evolution of female consciousness through a set of incisive markers. Their fictional inquiries of the campus also include a parallel engagement with the questions of difficulty and anxiety of female professors in coping with an essentially male dominated structure of Indian academia.

The fictionalized demonstrations of the accoutrements of academic life in Indian colleges in Meena Alexander's *Nampally Road* (1991) and *The Awakening* (1992) by Rita Joshi follow the subjective chronicling of their female protagonists' experiences and struggles as lecturers in two imaginary Indian colleges who graduated from western universities. Having been set in tumultuous times of the Emergency from 1975-77, the narrative of *Nampally Road* articulates a great amount of ordeal and a simultaneous self-transformation of Mira Kannadical, a lecturer in English, due to the politically volatile disposition of Indian academy and her political engagements. It is not just about her perpetual battle to assert her voice or choices at the college, but also has ideological underpinnings as manifest in her self-doubt and re-

evaluation of literature's role in developing a consciousness, if not fully redressing the socio-political problems. Extending the argument of self-transformation, or rather an urgency for social adaptation for a foreign-retained intellectual to teach in Indian academia, the plot of *The Awakening* divulges shocking revelations of a female professor in a women's college, where expectations hardly meet the reality.

Reflecting upon the question of women education in India, *The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta* (1993) penned by Anuradha Marwah delineates the tale of a small-town girl's growing up in a north-Indian middle class locality during the 1980s enmeshed in conservatism and prejudice accompanied by a plethora of hindrances in her path to higher education. Her experiences as a student of a premier metropolitan university in Delhi, presumably JNU and later as a teacher of a college in the same city, epitomize the innumerable challenges a middle class Indian woman lives through in order to empower herself through higher education and then, the travails of empowerment itself, which often proves to be a crown of thorns in an essentially patriarchal society. Srividya Natarajan's *No Onions Nor Garlic* (2006) uncovers another problematic facet of female education through the travails of a Dalit female scholar within the deceptively egalitarian and democratic space of the fictionalized Chennai University. A sub-narrative of Jiva's resolve and unwavering determination, two of her reliable weapons in her protracted war against caste politics in academia, is skillfully woven into a satire on how difficult it could be for a Dalit woman to secure her position in the covertly Brahminical and patriarchal set up of the Indian university.

Githa Hariharan's *In Times of Siege* (2003) and Soma Das' *Sumthing of a Mocktale* (2007), both discuss the status of women in Indian academia while situating their fictional stories within the walls of a metropolitan university in 'New India'. Responding to the socially and culturally transformative potential of the university, *Sumthing of a Mocktale* explores the lives of female students at the JNU campus, and how democracy coupled with dialogic

interactions corroborate the possibilities of empowering women through higher education. On the other hand, the character of Meena, a female student of JNU from *In Times of Siege*, articulates the spirit of academic dissent against dictatorship of the state. She is the one who takes the initiative of staging a demonstration against banning of Shiv's module by a Hindu fundamentalist organization, coordinates with other student activists, and plans the whole course of action. The women's issues which have been foregrounded in these works of Indian campus fiction do not merely vindicate the voice of women in academia. Rather, a critical analysis of the women characters across these novels would unfold a nuanced historical trajectory of the gradual development of a distinct 'female consciousness' rooted in the idea of educational reform and a steady increase in the number of female teachers as well as students.

The attempt of outlining the growth of Indian Campus Novel into a significant subgenre of Indian English fiction over the years will remain incomplete without mentioning the works by Indian diaspora novelists. Saros Cowasjee's *Goodbye to Elsa* (1974) and Rajeev Balasubramanyam's *Professor Chandra Follows His Bliss* (2019) could be identified as the two major campus novels about and by the Indian diaspora academicians. Cowasjee, who is an Indian origin Canadian novelist, deftly places the character of an academician as a recluse – an Indian professor of History in western academia who having lost his physical as well as intellectual vitality and having been deserted by his own family, has resigned himself to his fate and is on the edge of killing himself. Apart from the ubiquitous questions of cultural assimilation and a diaspora academic's challenge of settling in a foreign university, the interplay between different experiences of Tristan as a teacher and his traumatic personal life are also indicative of how taxing the academic competition would prove to be for an individual academician that he/she finds it easier to escape than enduring the drudgery and immense stress of academic life. In a similar vein, though on a different scale, Professor Chandra's narrative in *Professor Chandra Follows His Bliss* (2019) embodies the tremendous existential crisis

caused by the one's quest for academic excellence and scholarly aspirations. A sexagenarian professor at Cambridge and an eminent economist, Professor Chandra who has been a key contender for the mighty Nobel Prize in Economics for quite a number of times as the novel portrays, is completely crestfallen after having been turned down again in 2016. The fictional narration of his retreat and his escapade symbolically intervenes with the question of an academic's frantic, yet futile attempt of compensating the psychological agony with the other pleasures life could offer.

Literature Review

Now, that a brief historical and thematic overview of the evolution of Indian Campus Novel as a distinct fictional subgenre has been given, it is plausible to assume that it has steadily occupied a significant position in the annals of Indian English literature. Despite its peripheral position in the canon of Indian English Literature and having been largely overlooked in the critical volumes by M. K. Naik, Iyengar, Gokak and Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, it still has a small body of criticism dedicated to it. In the course of my research, I have come across some doctoral theses, one dissertation later published as a book, a few research articles and a handful of book reviews exclusively on this particular type of Indian English fiction. Criticism on India campus fiction could be categorized into a couple of broad categories. While, some are concerned with the representation of various aspects of varsity life – from power dynamics and professional rivalry to interpersonal relations and the quest for knowledge, a few of them attempt to study how a corpus of contemporary Indian campus novels chronicle the cultural transformation of the post-liberalization India. Furthermore, some of the dissertations on Indian campus novels also resort to a comparative framework of analysis, as evidenced in the theses of M. Santhi and U. Gayathri Devi. Whereas, the title of U. Gayathri Devi's thesis, "Intellectual Pretensions and Reality in Select Indian English and Tamil Campus Novels" (2011)

exemplifies a comparative approach, M. Santhi's thesis – "Campus Fiction: A Critical Study" (2017), draws an analogy between Western and Indian campus novels.

Rekha Bhat in her thesis titled, "The Indian English Campus Novels: A Study in Genre" (2010) attempts a thematic reading of select Indian campus novels ranging from the 1960s till the recent times by foregrounding the generic classifications of Indian campus novels such as 'Professorroman', student-centric campus novels or 'campus novel as an argument'. In her analyses, she has brought out into open the modalities of fictional engagement with the pretensions, dynamics of academic politics or rivalry, dimensions of student life, their concern for their future, etc., so to locate the larger moral responsibilities of campus fiction to the general public or to the academe as such. P. G. Sridevi's doctoral dissertation: "Campus Novels in Indian English Literature: A Study in Theme and Form" (2013) that was later published as a book, embodies a more or less similar approach of looking into the thematic concerns of Indian campus novels, though her study is not grounded upon the generic classifications of campus novels. Having worked upon a range of Indian campus novels, what Sridevi does is merely studying the fictional evidences by drawing inferences from the liberal-humanist archetypes of the modern university and hardly locates them within the historical and intellectual base of the post-colonial Indian university, if not entirely the ideological or the political ones.

Through a comparative study of select Indian English and Tamil Campus novels, U. Gayathri Devi's thesis (2011) brings to the fore, how the fictional satire intersects with the lived reality of the university enmeshed in the discursive traces of 'hypocrisy', 'politics', 'exploitation and victimization' cutting across the academic space. In a similar vein, the comparison between select Indian campus novels and their British counterparts in M. Santhi's thesis (2017) also aims at deciphering the influences of different dynamics of interpersonal relations, including the teacher-student one and the political life of the campus on its academic

merit. In her study of the campus novels, she has also shed light on the questions of academic freedom, excellence and an intellectual quest for knowledge. Reflecting upon the use of satire in campus novels, Swati Roy in her thesis titled – “Academic Satire: Indian English Campus Novels in Context” (2014) surveys a set of texts and the paradigms of fictional satire of the professional stereotypes and unscrupulousness, so to discern campus novel’s discursive engagement with the re-assessment of the manifold responsibilities of higher education in the post-independence milieu.

Quite analogous to the argumentative framework of Rekha Bhat and M. Santhi, Sneha Kanaiyalal Patel’s dissertation – “People, Processes and Place: An Analytical Study of Contemporary Indian English Campus Novels” (2019) inquires the diverse range of relationships pervading the academic space of the university and ‘the career anxiety’ of the students. By delving into the dynamics of campus relationships and the lives of students, this thesis further aims to interrogate the authorial interventions with the achievements and discontinuities in our education system. Finally, Ms. Garima in her thesis named “Campus Novel as a Chronicle of Cultural Transformation in India in the Era of Liberalization” (2020) takes up a number of contemporary Indian campus novels in English in order to map out how the select campus novels spreading across the decades since independence record the cultural shifts of post-colonial India. The discussion on fictional manifestations of cultural transformation primarily focusses on the economic liberalization of 1991 and the resultant changes in the cultural rubric of the former colony.

Now, let’s come to the individual essays on this fictional genre. Averi Mukhopadhyay penned a number of essays on Indian campus novels. In her article, “Reading the Campus Culture in *Five Point Someone*, *Above Average*, and *No Onions Nor Garlic*” (2015), she inquires through a set of incisive pointers to understand the cultural paradigms of the campus ranging from the university life to that of technological institutions. Mukhopadhyay’s another

piece- “Power Relations in the Force Field of Academia: A Close Reading of Srividya Natarajan’s *No Onions Nor Garlic*” (2019) examines how the use of satire and humor in the text correspond to its critique of power relations in the university in question. The essay embodies a comprehensive analysis of the fictional problematization of the power hierarchies in academia entailing a broad spectrum of the political comprising not just the faculty members, students or the academic administrators, but also the undercurrent of caste discrimination within the academic space. Seen through a similar lens of the circulation of power in the varsity, her research paper titled “Mapping the Trajectory of Power Relations in Academia: A Close Reading of Amitabha Bagchi’s *Above Average*” (2020) studies how an animated fictional narration of camaraderie in the campus or beyond is entrenched in the discursive traces of power relations and tension present among students and their parents apart from academicians themselves.

Responding to the development of this subgenre of fiction in Indian English literature, M. Eswara Rao’s essay “Evolution of Campus Novel in India” (2018) and “Reflections on Indian Campus Novels: A New Literary Subgenre of Academic Discourse” (2022) authored by Amit Yashvant Rao Khapekar review a range of campus novels written since the 1960s till the twenty-first century. In both the papers, the attempts of defining the genre follow a general survey of a whole gamut of fictional works roughly from Nithyanandan’s *The Long Long Days* (1960) to contemporary novels like *Bombay Rains Bombay Girls* (2009) by Anirban Basu and Manish Gupta’s *Nine Months Ago* (2010). In a similar way, a chapter named “The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta and Other Campus Novels” by Shyamala A. Narayan, published in an edited volume *The Postmodern Indian English Novel* (1996), offers a critical overview of the fictional manifestations of the issues pertaining to Indian academy. In my reading, the lack of precision and a critical engagement with either the form or the content of the novels in the above three papers are because they have not focused much on the fictional

critique of the oft-mooted questions on Indian higher education, and neither do they situate the texts within the temporal as well as geo-political conditions of the university. Another essay by Harpreet Kaur and Amandeep Rana entitled “From Pure Aesthetics to Sensory Gratification: Shifting Paradigm of Aesthetic Pleasure in Indian Popular Campus Fiction” (2022) takes up a set of postmillennial Indian campus novels to explore the changing dynamics of literary aesthetics in the new generation Indian campus novels. This, according to the authors is marked by a shift from “a purely aesthetic appreciation of the values of truth, beauty and goodness to the contemporary aspects of hedonistic and somatic pleasures...” (Kaur and Rana 13).

Some of the novels such as Hariharan’s *In Times of Siege* (2003) and Bhagat’s *Five Point Someone* (2004) have also been studied from other perspectives. The idea of historical knowledge or truth and the distortion of history under the influence of an authoritarian government have been foregrounded in some of the essays and a book chapter on Hariharan’s novel. In her essay “Whose History Is It Anyway?: The Politics of Hindu Nationalism in Githa Hariharan’s *In Times of Siege*” (2009), Madhuparna Mitra takes on the notion of ‘history comes through narrative’ and analyses how the narrative(s) are being twisted by the Hindu fundamentalists in order to assert their hermeneutics of Hindutva and to execute their dream of building a ‘Hindu rashtra’ (Hindu nation). Furthering the critique of history as an artifact, Christoph Senft in his book chapter titled “History between Secularism and Speculation: *In Times of Siege* (2003)” (2016) argues that binary of good and bad or right and wrong in terms of reproduction of historical knowledge in academia are actually driven by the nuanced power relations within and beyond the academic space, and by “the complex interactions between academic, political, religious and public discourses” (40).

Extending the critique of Hindu nationalism and distortion of the nation’s history, Sheeba S. Nair’s article “Existential Quandary: Struggle for Power and Space in Githa Hariharan’s *In Times of Siege*” (2012) situates the persistent power struggle between state and

the university within the larger question of spatial domination and therefore, an ideological war of ascendancy over each other. On the other hand, Hariharan in her own essay “In Search of Our Other Selves” (2007) contends that a work of fiction should not just be marked by its critique of any form of essentialism and a threat to secular-democratic fabric of the nation, but also by a discursive engagement with the individualistic or collective resistance against jingoism and waning democratic values.

Research papers on *Five Point Someone* such as Mun Mun Das Biswas’s “Depiction of Youth Culture in Chetan Bhagat’s *Five Point Someone*” (2013), V. Nithiya Parameswari’s “Vision of Indian Youths in Chetan Bhagat’s *Five Point Someone*” (2018) and “Chetan Bhagat’s *Five Point Someone*: A Critique of Youth Culture” (2019) by Dr. Bhupendra N. Kesur and Mr. Rahul S. Wankhede discuss how this particular novel reflects upon the shifting paradigms of youth culture in the post-globalization India. Their discussion of the contemporary youth culture hinge upon the cumulative effect of globalization and economic changes on the youth culture of chiefly the urban India. It is true that the rapid expansion of urbanization and privatization of economy, that are intrinsic to the question of globalization, as Dr. S. Karthik Kumar examines in his article “Delusion and Discovery: An Appraisal of Chetan Bhagat’s *Five Point Someone*” (2014), create new job opportunities in the burgeoning multinational organizations. But, this emerging private sector and lucrative career prospects, he rightly vindicates, are not free from repercussions as they bring in newer matrices of social divides and hierarchies in a country already fraught with multiple conflicts, those dating back to the precolonial or even ancient times.

Finally, before I wind up this section of ‘literature review’, I believe, it is worth noting some of the book reviews published on Indian campus novels. Prema Nandakumar has published a review essay in 1991 on her own novel *Atom and the Serpent* where she discusses a crucial question of the use of English, as the dominant medium of novel writing in India. The

review of Ranga Rao's *The Drunk Tantra*, written by N. P. Singh in 1995, gives a succinct account of the happenings around the imaginary campus of a college, as delineated in the novel. The reviewer also tries to show the manner in which the novelist has comically portrayed the diverse ways of intersection between the insular space of the campus and the outer world. The review of Githa Hariharan's *In Times of Siege* by Anita Nair (2003) briefly highlights a multitude of issues being discussed in the novel and how themes of precarity, middle-classdom, Hindutva atrocities and alternate relationships are woven into the complex tapestry of the novel where there "...are no resolutions...no pat endings" (Nair). Prema Jayakumar's review of Srividya Natarajan's *No Onions Nor Garlic* (2006) notes that it is the embedded humor in the narrative which binds the diverse elements of fictional satire on academic politics, exertion of power by professors, individual follies, Brahminism in the Indian university system and society as a whole, etc. Tara Sahgal's review of Chetan Bhagat's *Five Point Someone* (2004) underlines some of the dominant themes in the novel such as friendship and campus romance, rigours of IIT education and a highly competitive culture followed by the invisible hierarchies within the student community.

From the above review of existing criticism on Indian campus fiction, it could be inferred that though, they have carefully dissected the fictional manifestations of Indian campuses and have systematically taken into consideration a slew of factors cutting across the academic space, they are marred with some inconsistencies and error in judgment. It is true that these publications have done substantial research on the social, cultural, and political landscape of post-independence Indian academia, but frequently at the expense of the intellectual life of campus. Second, neither of these works attempted to place the fictionalized portrayal of the Indian university within the historical context of the development of higher education in India, nor did they attempt to clarify how contemporaneous these fictional compositions are with the growth of the post-colonial Indian University. Furthermore, in some

dissertations, Indian campus novels have been uncritically labelled as ‘popular fiction’ which, further reifies the divide between ‘literary fiction’ and ‘commercial fiction’, and, thereby spark the debate over the credibility of these supposedly popular, alias commercial novels.

Representative Texts and Research Objectives

Now, having observed the key arguments and limitations in the existing criticism on Indian campus fiction, I contend that this thesis seeks to depart from their hermeneutics of reading Indian Campus Novel as popular fiction and also from the normative framework of their critical engagement(s) with the fictional re-imagination of academic space and its culture(s). So, why do I not endorse to such classification of Indian Campus fiction as a popular literary form? And, then, how does this thesis propose to read a whole range of Indian campus novels published since the 1960s to date against the grain of the normative trope of existing criticism?

First, let me briefly look over how popular fiction could be distinguished from highbrow literary fiction. It is quite a tedious job to draw a line between ‘popular novel’ and ‘avant-garde literary fiction’ as literary genres often overlap each other, both in terms of form and content. The ranking of the novel form and literature as a whole as highbrow and popular becomes prominent with more of an elitist criticism of critics such as Henry James, F. R. Leavis, Harold Bloom, Martin Amis, Edward Said, and so on. In his essay, “The Art of Fiction” (1884), Henry James develops a polemic against what he calls “‘vulgarization’ of the novel by popular writers” (qtd. in Gelder 18). For James, a work of fiction is characterized by its “‘discretion’: the restraints of literature, as opposed to the excesses of popular fiction...(and) a novelist writes out of and about ‘all experience’ and aims to represent nothing less than ‘life’ itself in all its complexities...” (ibid. 18). Generally speaking, popular fiction is a kind of literature which primarily considers the common mass as their target readers, and is not confined within the minority of elite readers. Whereas, literary fiction and highbrow cultural

productions are known for their autonomy, ‘intense formal artistry’, ‘tangled plots’, popular culture and to be precise, popular novels on the other hand, are less complex, more prone to convention than ‘originality or creativity’, and are defined by ‘worldly or commercial success’ (Bourdieu, 1993; James, 1884, 1899; Gelder, 2004).

Furthermore, popular fiction which ranges from romance, adventure novels, fantasy, mystery thriller etc. to chick lit, corporate fiction, science fiction and crime fiction (often called as ‘Genre fiction’), as many have argued, usually deviate from the ‘autonomous’ language of canonical fictional works and the art world. Responding to these differences and vindicating its position as a distinct literary type worth analyzing, Ken Gelder contends that “...this is not to say that it is without artistic merit. It simply means that popular fiction, as a form of literary production, occupies a different position altogether in the literary field, one that is not so dependent upon, or engaged with, art world discourse” (ibid. 14).

Though semantically problematic and paradoxical, it is this ‘different position’ which is ascribed to the popular fiction, has invoked a great deal of criticism since the latter half of the twentieth century. The emergence of new disciplines like Cultural Studies and Communication Studies coupled with whole new interdisciplinary approaches in research testify the elevated status of popular fiction within the literary spectrum. Responding to this shift, Christopher Pawling rightly observes in his work (1984) –

There are some indications that attitudes are changing and that popular fiction is beginning to be accepted as a serious area of study. The last few years have witnessed the emergence of new interdisciplinary courses,...where the prejudice against studying popular literature is, theoretically, much less marked. Once one begins to examine literature as a ‘communicative practice’ with social and historical roots, then one cannot afford to ignore those fictional worlds which command the widest public (2).

As previously discussed at length, a considerable number of those contemporary Indian campus novels set in the IITs or IIMs and some of the works set in university campuses incorporate many of the qualities of popular fiction such as lesser ‘tangled plots’, conventional than avant-garde narration, and also talk in a language which often misses out the ‘intense formal artistry’ of literary fiction. But, despite using popular techniques and catering to popular tastes, novels like *The Long Long Days* (1960), *Five Point Someone* (2004), *Mediocre But Arrogant* (2005), *Sumthing of a Mocktale* (2007), *Day Scholar* (2010) and *Up Campus, Down Campus: The Adventures of Anirban Roy* (2016) among others, subtly transcend the pejorative poetics of popular fiction and effectively delve into the nuances of Indian higher education, while being paradoxically contingent upon the tropes of commercial fiction. Quite analogous to Pawling’s assertion, and as the literature review above, indicates, many of these (popular) Indian campus novels have been engaging the critical attention of literary scholars. But, this is not all, neither in terms of the generic definition of Indian campus fiction nor concerning their teleological reading.

Beside these works, Indian Campus Novel as a fictional subgenre also includes other types of novels which do not fall under the category of popular fiction and are more analogous to the composition of ‘literary fiction’ as manifest in their structure, language and plot construction. *Campus on Fire* (1961), *Atom and the Serpent* (1982), *The Awakening* (1992), *The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta* (1993), *In Times of Siege* (2003), *No Onions Nor Garlic* (2006), *Corridors of Knowledge* (2008) and *Whispers in the Tower* (2012) could be cited as some of the examples, which are in a way different from the above mentioned works in their exposition of campus life. In their articulation of campus life along with their discursive engagement with contestations over higher education and provocations of the public universities in India, these works experimented both with the form and content to an extent. While, Rita Joshi’s *The Awakening* records a new approach of poetic narration instead of

prosaic one, thereby introducing the ‘verse novel’ in fictional field of college novel in India, the poignant detailing of ‘Hindutva’ politics in Hariharan’s *In Times of Siege* through ‘metafictional’ techniques, and the campus-caste interface in Natarajan’s *No Onions Nor Garlic* could take the reader by surprise.

Having observed a mélange of novels constitutive of Indian Campus Fiction, now, I think it is pertinent enough to take a note of the novels I have selected for my research. The campus novels which are taken as primary texts are listed below in order of publication:

P. M. Nithyanandan’s *The Long Long Days* (1960), K. S. Nayak’s *Campus on Fire* (1961), Prema Nandakumar’s *Atom and the Serpent* (1982), Rita Joshi’s *The Awakening* (1992), Githa Hariharan’s *In Times of Siege* (2003), Chetan Bhagat’s *Five Point Someone* (2004), Srividya Natarajan’s *No Onions Nor Garlic* (2006), Amitabha Bagchi’s *Above Average* (2007), M. K. Naik’s *Corridors of Knowledge* (2008), Jose Palathingal’s *Whispers in the Tower* (2012), and Avijit Ghosh’s *Up Campus, Down Campus: The Adventures of Anirban Roy* (2016). It is also worth mentioning that the above novels will be thoroughly read as primary texts and, as the research follows an interdisciplinary as well as an intertextual approach, I would often allude briefly to other Indian campus novels and their western counterparts as cross-references to substantiate some of the research hypotheses.

Since, I have underlined the generic diversity of Indian campus fiction which also reflects on the selection of novels as primary texts, now let me come to the teleological part or, how a deconstructive reading of the select novels would help in a literary re-mapping of post-colonial Indian academia beyond the normative tropes of existing research in this area, though, the study doesn’t seek to entirely negate their arguments or analyses of campus life. By departing from the normative paradigms of existing research, in other words, from hitherto practiced approach of locating the traces of satire and fictional demonstrations of campus life within the cultural, academic, political and other discourses of tertiary education in India, while

dispensing with the temporal reciprocity between them, this thesis aims to probe how the fictional interventions with the liberal-humanist archetypes of higher education intersect with the ‘empirical-historical’ process of the evolution of the post-colonial Indian academe.

In my reading, the development of Indian Campus fiction in English is coeval with the shaping of Indian higher education since independence. And, a discrete placement of the elemental diversity in the novelistic detailing of university campuses in tandem with the idea of educational reform and various policies in post-independence times would assert that the discursive fictional critique of oft-mooted questions on the growth of higher education in India is indeed suggestive of a symbiotic relationship campus fiction maintains with the pluralistic history of post-colonial Indian academia. The dialectical reading of select novels which the thesis undertakes, is rooted in deciphering how the liminal spaces of fictional inquiry or critique of university life and culture do not much celebrate the achievements of Indian higher education. Rather, they seek to unmask the discontinuities in the forms of uneven development, intellectual mediocrity, academic skullduggery or pretensions, underfunding vis-à-vis discrimination in funding, hegemonies followed by co-option and silencing, commoditization of education and so on, which loom large behind the façade of official rhetoric of excellence and democratic expansion.

These omissions and contradictions in the project of university education connect the diverse strands of satire via deconstruction of Indian academia along these fictional works within the rubric of an empirical-historical timeframe. Responding to the cardinal question of a literary re-mapping of post-colonial Indian academia, the thesis aims to read the select campus novels through a set of incisive pointers so to sift the discursive fictional engagement(s) with the normative discourses of academic freedom, values, scholarship, truth and knowledge, academic-political interface, commercialization of education, public universities and their

publicness etc., through a sieve of material-historical contexts of Indian higher education. Some of the major objectives those form the scaffolding of this research, are listed below.

1. As the post-independence Indian reality is disturbed with residues of the British imperialism, the university being instrumental in the project of nation-building also embodies the dichotomy between western influences and nativization of Indian academy. The research seeks to investigate how the novels which are published in the initial decades after independence such as *Campus on Fire* (1961) and *The Long Long Days* (1960) and even those published much later, like *Corridors of Knowledge* (2008), foreground the problematics of an entrenched anxiety of western influence in planning and execution of more of an 'Indianized' model of higher education in the formative years after independence – the impact which Philip G. Altbach defines as 'twisted roots' (1989)^{xi}.
2. Reflecting upon this assumption of 'twisted roots', the study would unpack the multiple dimensions of fictional interventions with a wide variety of post-colonial appropriation of Eurocentric models and markers of education – from academic bureaucratization, hierarchies and liberal-democratic base of the university to categorization of disciplines, course curriculum and an ascendancy of English as the new cultural capital or 'auntie tongue syndrome' (Dasgupta, 1993)^{xii} in Indian academia.
3. In India, the idea of modernization is intrinsically connected with the development of science and technology, and dominance of the metropolitan universities, often at the cost of marginalization of arts and humanities education, and of provincial academic institutions. In view of such ascribed positional peripherality, the thesis would draw attention to the textual inquiry of the vulnerability of students from non-science disciplines and the causality of backwardness of provincial universities or colleges.

4. Responding to the emphasis on epistemic modernization and a democratic expansion of higher education evident in the recommendations of Radhakrishnan Commission (1948-49) and Kothari Commission (1964-66) reports, it will look into the crucial role of the university administration in encouraging and navigating the proposed changes. Thus, by foregrounding the questions of academic governance in novels like *Atom and the Serpent* (1982) and *Whispers in the Tower* (2012), I would like to examine how campus novels reflect upon the mutually interdependent relation between the university administration and collective or individual intellectual advancement.
5. Now, taking cue from the political ethos of the Indian university, the thesis will examine how placing the nuances of fictional portrayal as well as satire of the political life of the Indian universities, in tandem, would unfurl the multiple facets of academia's 'claims of the political' (Chatterjee, 2004), its rhizomatic growth over the years and its shifting paradigms.
6. The question of the 'political' obviously connotes to the inescapable footprints of extraneous political forces on academic space, which further substantiate the focus of the thesis on their debatable, often baneful influences on academic freedom, merit, ethics and overall autonomy of the university. The reading would also divulge how the texts shed light on an implied process of re-formulating and re-visioning the strategies of politicization of the campus.
7. Since, the academic world is laden with traces of rivalry, struggle for power, and hierarchies and hegemonic relations, the study will draw upon the varied evidences of fictionalized narrations of strained relations combined with power equations among the academic and administrative community of the university. And, how such conflict of interests and an unabated tendency of overpowering each other either in academics or

in terms of one's position in the university, which are unbecoming of the professoriate, could upset the morale and academic culture of the campus?

8. Explicating further on the hermeneutics of the political in academia, this research also traverses the contemporary challenges posed by the threat of Hindutva and the incursion of neoliberalism in the sector of tertiary education in India especially since the globalization. Taking into account the fictional exposition of campus life in *In Times of Siege* (2003) and *Five Point Someone* (2004), it would revisit how such deliberate interventions hamper academic research, impede the university's autonomy in academic affairs, undermine the critical and political consciousness and, thus deviate academia from its pursuit of 'alternate regimes truth' and knowledge.
9. Last but not least, it is through a critical reading of campus novels like *No Onions Nor Garlic* (2006) and M. K. Naik's novel *Corridors of Knowledge* (2008), the thesis takes on the ideas of 'education as an instrument of social change' (Radhakrishnan et al. 1949), equality and democratic access to institutionalized learning. Drawing inferences from the pioneering works by Ambedkar and Ghurye or, from various reservation policies, it, on one hand, seeks to analyse the literary foregrounding of a pressing need for reservation in education sector for the lower caste people as indispensable to breaking down the centuries old caste stereotypes and hegemony, while bringing them within the purview of mainstream society through education. On the other, the study also strives to locate the discursive traces of caste politics and discrimination in present times those prove to be potential deterrents in the path to upward mobilization of the Dalits, and therefore tampering with the democratic and socially inclusive ethos of the Indian university.

Methodology

The research follows a mixed methodology in its engagement with a literary remapping of the post-colonial Indian academia through a select reading of Indian campus novels. The texts will be read closely and parallel to other literary and non-literary sources across the globe, those are of relevance to my study, thereby substantiating its interdisciplinary and intertextual character. In this project on how campus fiction translates the campus life in Indian varsities, I would draw inferences from an eclectic mix of sources – sociological surveys, statistical data, philosophical and theoretical works, education policies, historical records etc. on higher education and Indian University with all its paraphernalia.

Since, the idea of modern university education in independent India, despite phenomenal endeavors of decolonizing the pedagogy, appropriates the Western discourses of the university and higher education to an extent, and a significant segment of academic scholarship in India is West-bound, the study would (re)-assess/visit the concepts from the Global North and liberal-humanist archetypes of the modern university by dialectically locating them within the lived experiences and a plurality of contexts of Indian academy – from empirical-historical and geo-political conditions to cultural, demographic or intellectual milieu. Furthermore, analogy and inferences would be drawn from a postcolonial corpus of criticism to substantiate my arguments on campus fiction's critique of the Indian university – a method, which by its teleology is comparable to Dipesh Chakrabarty's proposition (2008) of renewing and revising European thoughts "from and for the margins" (16), in order to understand the pluralistic fabric of the history of political modernity in South Asia, or with Aditya Nigam's 'import substituting theorization' (2020) as instrumental to theorizing decolonization in the twenty-first century^{xiii}.

Chapterisation

The following chapter engages with the discursive fictional critique of liminalities and disjunctions associated with conceptualizing nativization and democratization of education following independence in 1947. They (the liminalities and disjunctions) revealed themselves through colonial legacies in the form of ‘twisted roots’ and through multitudes of internal conflicts, hegemonic relations, wanting in academic values, social stratifications, discriminations and prejudices, in short, all possible domains of the political in the early decades of post-colonial India cutting across its academic world. By locating fiction within the lived reality or experiences of colleges and university campuses for roughly about two and half decades after independence, it further enquires how other factors like dominance of English as a medium of instruction and its slow rise as the new cultural capital of post-independent India, hierarchies amongst academic disciplines, persistent problems of underfunding, under-resourced institutions, unemployment and underemployment among many others, also create often insurmountable challenges for the policy makers as well as the academic community to map out comprehensive routes for future developments therefore, augmenting the crisis of Indian academia. Building upon the scathing fictional criticism of darker sides of the political in academia, this chapter traces the much contemporary threat to the autonomy of an institution and to an individual academic’s right to freedom of expression, posed by the coercive state machineries back to the times of a newly independent India. It also investigates how such purposive militantism on the campus by the political parties through their several wings and silencing of intellectual freedom, were counterproductive to the cause of intellectual well-being of any academic institution and its scholarly pursuits.

The third chapter sets out to study three Indian campus novels, i.e. Prema Nandakumar’s *Atom and the Serpent* (1982), Rita Joshi’s *The Awakening* (1992) and Jose Palathingal’s *Whispers in the Tower* (2012) which are set against the backdrop of the Indian

University's journey and expansion from the 1970s to the 1990s. In an endeavor of shedding light upon the fictional problematization of inconsistencies in democratizing higher education and academic modernity, this chapter first draws upon the satire of administrative follies in the universities. By foregrounding a tacit correlation between the fictional evidences and scholarly works on academic administration, it argues that the administrative acumen of academic administrators and an upright governance are instrumental to the intellectual growth of the institution and of an individual academician. Taking cue from this, it also examines the fictional interventions with a pervasive lack of academic ethics or interests in teaching and research among a sizeable number of Indian academicians and their connection with the waning academic standards of the university. It further enquires how power struggle and the 'political' in the campus co-opt the student community of a university that is detrimental to their intellectual growth as well as the future of the varsity. Extending upon the above assumptions, this chapter further situates the crisis of intellectual indigence within the discourse of the American 'mass universities' (Shils, 1997), and analyses how such an attempted analogy between certain types of universities from two different parts of the globe is not just a rhetorical one but, rather implies a gradual metamorphoses of a number of Indian public universities, predominantly the provincial ones into a subsidiary type, what could be called as signpost universities.

The final chapter preceding the conclusion takes up a select post-millennial Indian Campus novels in its study of fictional problematization of a strategic threefold attack on Indian higher education by the right-wing extremism and neoliberalism combined with a persistent problem of caste politics and discrimination in Indian academia. Taking the fictional narratives of resentment and satire as the primary base of my investigation, it contends that such nefarious politics and threatening could prove to be the death knell for the autonomy of the university in academic decisions and eventually, mar the critical-creative temperament of academia.

Furthermore, the multifaceted incursion into academic corridors of the university also marks the departure of the university from its engagement with truth and knowledge. Therefore, drawing inferences from Bill Readings' assumption of the 'post-historical university' (1997), this chapter would try to interpret the fictional demonstration of present impasse, the Indian universities are caught in, as that of the *post-truth university*. In the end, responding to the idea of dissent as intrinsic to academia, it would try to decipher how the textual evidences of individualistic and collective resistance of the academic community form a dialectic with the real-life examples of student activism and unified protest movements by intellectuals across Indian universities in recent times. The chapter also briefly critiques the efficaciousness of such demonstrations in bringing about the desired changes and safeguarding academic interests.

Finally in Conclusion, I would sum up major findings of the research and briefly enumerate further scope of research on this area.

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Notes

ⁱ See *Within the Four Seas: The Dialogue of East and West* by Joseph Needham (Routledge, 2004); Balakrishnan Muniappan and Junaid M. Shaikh, “Lessons in Corporate Governance from Kautilya’s Arthashastra in ancient India” in *World Review of Entrepreneurship, Management and Sustainable Development*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2007).

ⁱⁱ T. B. Macaulay, “Minute on Indian Education” (1835) in *Archives of Empire, Vol. I: From the East India Company to the Suez Canal.*, edited by Barbara Harlow and Mia Carter (Duke University Press, 2003).

ⁱⁱⁱ “Fredric Jameson: The Politics of Style” by Terry Eagleton in *Diacritics* Vol. 12, No. 3 (Autumn, 1982), pp. 14-22

^{iv} “Art as Technique” (1917) by Viktor Shklovsky

^v Mikhail Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel”, pp. 269-422, in *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson, (University of Texas Press, 1981)

^{vi} Richard G. Caram, “The Secular Priests: A Study of the College Professor as Hero in Selected American Fiction, 1955-1977” (Ph.D. Diss., St. Louis University, 1980)

^{vii} The ‘big trio’ namely R. K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao

^{viii} See *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari; translated by Brian Massumi (University of Minnesota Press, 1987)

^{ix} “Decolonizing the University” by Aditya Nigam, in *The University Unthought: Notes for a Future*, edited by Debaditya Bhattacharya (Routledge, 2019)

^x Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (Columbia University Press, 2004) and *Lineages of Political Society: Studies in Postcolonial Democracy* (Columbia University Press, 2011)

^{xi} Philip G. Altbach, “Twisted roots: The Western Impact on Asian Higher Education”, in Altbach, Philip, G, and V. Selvaratnam, eds. *From Dependence to Autonomy*, (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989)

^{xii} Probal Dasgupta, *The Otherness of English: India’s Auntie Tongue Syndrome*, (Sage, 1993)

^{xiii} Aditya Nigam, *Decolonizing Theory: Thinking across Traditions*, (Bloomsbury, 2020)

Chapter – II

Initial Hurdles: Colonial Residues and Problems in Indigenization of Higher Education in Indian Campus Novels

Colonial origins and Post-colonial developments in Indian University Education

In 1797, Charles Grant, a British Statesman and one of the directors of the East Indian Company submitted his memorandum ('Grant's Memorandum', 1792-97) on waning moral standards of Indians and the pressing need for English education as a panacea to this degeneration. Placing of this memorandum is considered as a watershed moment in the history of English education in India. His recommendation to the Company for opening up educational institutions for the natives to learn in English and his appraisal of English as the hotbed of liberal-humanist discourses that "...will open to them (natives) a world of new ideas" (Grant as qtd. in Radhakrishnan, et al. 8) laid the foundation for future developments in the nineteenth century. The Hindu College (later named as the Presidency College) was established in 1817, and Raja Rammohan Roy one of the major proponents of 'Bengal Renaissance' who dismissed Sanskrit education as "the vain and empty subtleties of speculative men" (Roy as qtd. in Radhakrishnan, et al. 9) founded the Vedanta College in 1825 for English education of common Indians. In the nineteenth century, Elphinstone's "Minute" (1823) and most importantly Macaulay's "Minute", presented before the Imperial Government in 1835, shared the 'Eurocentrism' of "Grant's Memorandum", and gave a much needed impetus to the project of English education in India. Apart from his generalized and belittling remark, "...that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia" (Macaulay 230), which the "Minute" is infamous for, what Macaulay actually anticipated is the gradual transformation of English into the economic and cultural capital across the 'East', and therefore, recommended the British government to divert the government fund from instruction

in vernacular languages towards enlightening the Indians in English language, literature and European sciences.

However, behind this seemingly altruistic and liberal gesture of introducing English education in colonial India by overriding our epistemic traditions and vernacular mediums of instruction, lies an entrenched and futuristic imperial agenda of an ideological conditioning and co-option of the East, which he anticipates, would continue to dominate India even when “The scepter may pass away from us (British)” (Macaulay, “A Speech delivered in The House of Commons on the 10th of July 1833” 572). For Macaulay, “There is an empire exempt from all natural causes of decay. Those triumphs are the pacific triumphs of reason over barbarism; that empire is the imperishable empire of our arts and our morals, our literature and our laws” (ibid. 572). It is indisputably true that Macaulay’s “Minute” (1835) and his Speech in the House of Commons (1833) have been advantageous for future developments. The renewed interests of Christian missionaries in building new schools and colleges for English education of the natives, or the ‘Wood’s Despatch’ of 1854, reckoned as “The Magna Charta of English Education in India” (qtd. in Radhakrishnan, et al. 15) and inception of the universities in various parts of the subcontinent bespeak the credibility of Macaulay’s observations.

Following these treatises, there had been a steady growth of English education with universities being founded along the urban areas of colonial India, and a simultaneous increase in enrolment of the native students in higher education. Initially, after the establishment of universities in 1857 at the three presidencies of British India – Calcutta, Madras and Bombay, after a brief hiatus in the drive of building new universities and dilemma in affirming the status of the universities, the Education Commission of 1882 brought about an unparalleled expansion of English education in the country. While, new universities were set up in Punjab province, Allahabad, Dacca, Allahabad, Banaras and Patna, the number of colleges also shot up to 179 in 1901-1902 from a mere 75 colleges in 1882ⁱ. In a similar vein, as the statistics shows, the

burgeoning number of academic institutions was also accompanied by a simultaneous increase in the number of students – in 1881-1882 total number of students in Indian colleges was 5,399; the number rose up to 8,060 in 1887, 9,656, 10,618, 11,546 and 12,424 in the following yearsⁱⁱ.

However, the university system in India during the British Raj which was modeled on the London University was marred with inconsistencies and contradictions. It naturalized as well as strengthened the epistemological and cultural hegemony of the West. In view of disjunctions in the project of English education in colonial times, one could start off with the undemocratic access as the purpose of higher education was not to educate an entire race, but more of a ‘downward filtration’ⁱⁱⁱ. It promotes a biased and flawed approach of selectively educating the native elites that would automatically reach out to the lower strata of the society as, Macaulay claimed, they would always try to emulate the culture and model set by the upper class people. What Macaulay undermined and disregarded purposefully, are the local hierarchies and stratifications in Indian society and the resultant exploitation as well as marginalization of lower castes and classes not excluding certain ethnic communities. Instead of bridging the differences and debunking the hegemonies, this Western education system often exacerbated the social tensions by bringing in newer kinds of social divides. While, the dominant class and mostly upper castes were entitled to the privilege of English education, majority of the people comprising middle and lower classes and also those belonging to lower castes were mostly excluded from the scope of Western education, with our vernacular modes of education decreasing in size and rapidly losing their relevance in an uneven race with their English counterpart. Again, the project of English education in Indian subcontinent was not simply predicated on a holistic mission of intellectual progress of the natives. Rather, it was introduced to serve a practical need of producing enough qualified manpower for the functioning of the state machinery of the Imperial Government, where the Indians would always occupy subservient positions, second in order in the government offices. Apart from

the physical manifestations of hegemonic disposition, the paradox also works on a psychological level here, i.e. instilling liberal thoughts through formal education, and in return demanding blind conformity of the concerned subjects and their loyalty to the exploitative colonial machinery, a tendency which could be often found even in the democratic post-colonial nation-state.

To speak of English education in India during colonial times therefore is to speak primarily of a Eurocentric shift, and co-option of native epistemologies and epistemic traditions, which Edward Said defines as ‘academic orientalism’^{iv}. It is not simply about replacing one form of knowledge production and acquisition with that of another; nor is it about “a structure of lies or of myths...” (Said 6), but rather it is paradigmatic of an exertion of “European Atlantic power over the orient than it is as a veridic discourse about the Orient” (ibid. 6). Furthering his theses of ‘Orientalism’ and the dynamics of power equation, he adds that the orientalist discourse which does not share an unmediated affinity with the ‘political power’ as such, “...is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power...(such as) power political,...power intellectual,...power cultural,...(and) power moral...” (ibid. 12). Apart from the plurality of power exchange endemic to the praxes of ‘Orientalizing’ the East, what is further pertinent here is Said’s emphasis on ‘its redoubtable durability’, and how the “...political imperialism governs an entire field of study, imagination, and scholarly institutions – in such a way as to make its avoidance an intellectual and historical impossibility” (ibid. 14). Said’s propositions on the ineluctability and durability of Orientalist discourses encapsulate the crux of Macaulay’s recommendations along with his aspiration for a continuation of an epistemological and linguistic colonization after the end of geo-political imperialism, and both prove to be considerably veracious even in the context of post-colonial Indian academia. The strategic destruction of indigenous ways of education and replacing them with an exclusivist and predominantly Eurocentric model of English education within a

disparate socio-cultural milieu of a colony that continued to dominate for about a century and more, could only turn out to be an insurmountable challenge for the policy makers and the Government of independent India in their attempts to ‘decolonizing’ the education of the former colony.

With independence, comes a slew of positive changes towards equality, democratization, revival of vernacular mediums of instruction, expansion of public education sector, holistic approach to academic research and academia’s pursuit of truth and knowledge. In the All India Educational Conference of 1948, the first Prime Minister and the then Union Education Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru scorned the populist revisionary approach, and instead emphasized that the education system ought to evolve with the shifting paradigms of the nation, where “The entire basis of education must be revolutionized” (qtd. in Ghosh 178). In 1949, The Constitution of India placed Education as a State Subject and educational institutions as public institutions where the notion of educational development was considered a shared responsibility of the Central Government and the respective State Governments. In the same year, the first education commission of independent India, i.e. The Radhakrishnan Commission (1948-49) submitted its report proposing a radical reconstruction of university education where it would be instrumental to the cause of nation-building and a holistic development of the nation along with its citizens.

It promoted three language formula – the regional, federal (Hindi) and English, foregrounded the pressing need for educated and skilled professionals for socio-economic and cultural development of the newly independent nation, ratified the autonomy of the university, emphasized the urgency of setting up new academic institutions and vocational colleges for the progress of rural India and upward mobilization of the marginalized sections of the society. In view of dynamic growth of academics, continuous assessment, monitoring and funding of the education sector, this commission also proposed multiple recommendations, from building up

a 'University Grants Commission' and development of research and scholarship to assigning universities with the task of conducting refresher courses for teachers of schools and intermediary colleges. Reflecting upon the importance of social justice in a liberal-democratic social framework and upward mobilization of the backward castes and scheduled tribes (SC, ST and OBC), it put forward the ideas of fellowships for them and providing additional assistance by reserving certain percentage of seats for them in education as remedies to the centuries-old social exploitation, injustice and stigmatization of their identity.

Reflecting upon the urgency of upward social mobilization and empowerment of the depressed castes in India, and the moral responsibility of a democratically elected Government of a newly independent nation to ensure equal rights of all its citizens in a hierarchically structured society, "The Constitution of India" (1950) in its Articles 16, 46 and 335 put forward the question of reservation of the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) in education and public sector as a means for their upward mobility and social inclusion. In Article 16, it advocates the freedom of the State in deciding upon the provisions for reservation of the lower castes and backward sections of the society; in Article 46, it urges the State to "...promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and, in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes..." ("The Constitution of India," art. 46); Article 335 validates the claims of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes in Government services in line with maintaining the efficiency of administration. Apart from "The Constitution" (1950), Ambedkar's other works on Caste System in India such as, *The Annihilation of Caste* (1936) and *The Untouchables: Who Were They And Why They Became Untouchables?* (2017) problematize the physical and psychological manifestations of 'untouchability' accompanied by social exclusion and injustice for ages, thereby reasserting the cause for 'annihilation of the caste system' in a socialist democratic nation.

It is not that during the colonial regime there were no initiatives in acknowledging the depressed classes' (only SCs, and not the other communities) rights of political representation, and for the first time in Indian history, the 1919 Act of the Government of India recognized their legitimate claims for political representation. However, their minimal presence in the State Council and Central Assembly was not supplemented with a simultaneous endeavor of bringing them within the reach of mainstream education. In 1954, the Ministry of Education's suggestion of a 20% reservation of seats for the SCs and STs in India (later modified in 1982 with 15% for SC and 7.5% for ST) marked the beginning of a uniform reservation system in the country. Later, the report of the Mandal Commission (1979-80) further proposed a separate reservation of 27% of the total seats for the Other Backward Castes (OBC) in education and government services^v as instrumental to the cause of their upward mobility.

Furthering the drive of democratic expansion, Kothari Commission Report (1964-66) proposed free education and scholarships for physically challenged people and women alongside the aforementioned depressed castes/classes. It also pressed on other propositions like a degree course of a duration for not less than three years, uniform pay scales for college and university teachers, and modernization of orientation programs for teachers as instrumental to quality teaching. Responding to the cause of modernization via epistemic modernity, the Commission recommended a revolutionary progress in science and technology education as inevitable to a nation on the cusp of a paradigm shift in terms of its socio-cultural and economic milieu. The recommendations of these two commissions and a gradual rise in educational expenditure expedited the process of much coveted changes in the educational reality of the country, evident enough in the steady increase in number of academic institutions and an equally consistent growth in enrolment. A. R. Kamat in an essay "Educational Policy in India: Critical Issues" (1980), observes that "During the period from 1950-51 to 1975-76 the total number of educational institutions rose from a little below 250 thousand to over 625

thousand...; the enrolment increased from a little below 25 million to over 100 million; the number of teachers correspondingly increased fourfold, from 0.7 million to 3 million...” (189). These statistics are suggestive of exemplary changes and noteworthy progress in terms of expansion and enrolment in higher education.

But despite these many endeavors towards equality, inclusivity, quality and the evolution of national parameters of education, the deeper nuances of the political and varied forms of impediments concerning their practical applications raise some crucial teleological questions on efficaciousness of the whole venture of epistemic modernity and democratization of higher education in India. First, in spite of the move towards ‘deorientalising’ higher education, Indian universities still embody the anxiety of residual colonial influences, which Altbach defines as ‘twisted roots’ (1989). On the other hand, critics like Andre Beteille, Krishna Kumar, A. H. Hommadi, and others have problematized the multiple shades of insidious forms of power circulation and ideology dissemination pervasive enough in the higher educational milieu of post-independence era. Reflecting upon the causality of intellectual stagnation and a persistent tension between tradition and modernity, Edward Shils (1969) contends that “It respects saintliness-intermittently-and it defers to power, but it does not respect hard and persistent intellectual work and it shows little concern for the conditions under which an academic can be effective” (346). This power-ridden academia not only mars the intellectual integrity or growth, but further disengages the university from its myriads of social and cultural responsibilities. Regardless of various reformative measures to resolve these contradictions, Indian academia has in a way fallen short of evolving itself adequately enough so to bring about the positive changes, and fully utilize its potential for social transformation through education.

This chapter seeks to study three Indian Campus novels to understand how the fictional critique of the academic and political culture of Indian academia during the first two and half

decades after independence negotiate with the initial challenges of decolonizing the University. Unlike the history of the Western University, the modern Indian University ever since its inception has been susceptible to external political drives, where its status as a public funded institution of higher learning in the post-independence era constitutionally justifies the intervention of the state, in reality, the ruling political parties of the Central Government as well as the State Governments of respective times. Philip G. Altbach, in his article titled “Student Politics and Higher Education in India” (1968) has discussed at length the innate political nature of the Indian University, drawing upon the history of the growth of Indian universities over the years. Further extending the question of academic-political interface, this chapter would also try to examine the fictional polemics against the political and bureaucratic co-option of academic space and how they mar the element of freedom, dialogism and self-reflexivity intrinsic to the campus life and the process of critical learning.

Tension between academic idealism in the early post-independence era and the political reality in *Campus on Fire*

K. S. Nayak’s *Campus on Fire* (1961) which is set in the following decade after independence, discursively examines the pros and cons of the formative years of the ‘Indian University’. It is the righteousness of Professor Vidyasagar as an academician, demonstrated through his adherence to academic values and vindication of equality in education, that dialectically situate the fictional narrative within the rubric of educational reforms and Nehru’s vision of equality as one of the seminal motifs of education. His vision of an egalitarian social order, which upholds the idea of equal right to education for all irrespective of caste, class, or gender identity by disclaiming the social stratifications, reflects upon the question of education as ‘an instrument of social change’^{vi}. His liberal-democratic beliefs such as, “Freedom cannot be a ground for human exploitation” (Nayak 17; henceforth COF, page number) were not only resented by a section of his colleagues, but also severely impeded by the coercive state

machineries, as they tend to question the existing power hierarchy under the façade of democracy and equal rights among others.

Thus, fiction as an essentially discursive genre of literature which incorporates several elements of other branches of episteme as its constitutive parameters could also tenably distance itself from the documented narratives and dominant discourses. This ‘dialogism’ of fictional narratives further validates the claim of accommodating/locating the undercurrent of conflict between certain fundamentally incongruous ideologies. Nayak’s *Campus on Fire* (1961) deftly divulges the ceaseless flow of conflict between the need for academic freedom and the pervasive presence of external political incursion within the periphery of the campus. Professor Vidyasagar upholds a concept of education, which would liberate the minds of the people from the age-old prejudices and enlighten them to give rise to a society free from any form of class conflicts and exploitation of the silenced lots in the hands of oppressive social forces. He proposes that the students should actively participate in this honest endeavor to liberate the society from these evils: “I hope, with all the inspiration you derive from this institution, you will dedicate more and more to this cause of reconstruction of the country” (COF 18). This view of the professor is reminiscent of the idea of ‘modern’ Indian education, proposed by Radhakrishnan and others in “The Report of the University Education Commission 1948-1949” that education should also be “an instrument for social change. It should not be its aim merely to enable us to adjust ourselves to the social environment. We must train people not merely to be citizens but also to be individuals...The aim of education should be to break ground for new values and make them possible” (Radhakrishnan, et al. 38). This also entails safeguarding the claims of academic freedom/autonomy of the university; alongside the responsibilities of the university as a social institution in post-independence India.

Vidyasagar's attempt to address the discursive traces of hitherto unheeded voices and to liberate them from the perpetual grind of exploitation and the stigma attached to their identity clearly exemplify a shift from the exclusivist approach of colonial form of education towards a more socially and culturally inclusive one in the post-colonial era. His notion of history as "a statement of record of interested parties" (COF 21), which defies the constitution of the nation as a secular, democratic country in a way encapsulates the sordid reality of the post-independence era, as fundamentally hierarchical in nature and regulated mostly by the native elite classes. His views aptly resonate Hayden White's rendition of history as a narrative, which document the narration of dominant forces as coherent and absolute ones^{vii}.

With the unfolding of the narrative, Nayak deftly divulges the multiple possibilities of how contingent upon the inherent heterogeneity of Indian traditions, university campus, which is essentially a multiculturalist and autonomous space could usher in the practices of dialogic/dialectical form of education, as a more efficient tool to evolve a critical consciousness among the students. The relationship between Prof. Vidyasagar and his students, which transcends the boundaries of classroom, does not simply narrate a radical way of student-teacher interaction, but more crucially throws light on the latent quality of the university as a site for endorsing multicultural interactions and social transformation which provides a dialogic platform for people from different socio-cultural and communal backgrounds. Vidyasagar's attempt to enlighten his students Avinash and Ramakant in the light of the innate heterogeneity of Indian traditions so to unearth the long suppressed voices from the fringes, aimed towards a 'history of the present'^{viii}, is redolent enough in his criticism of the misinterpretation of our histories by the dominant ideological apparatuses.

I warned you that our history is narrated as desired by our Masters, and not as it happened. I expected that when once we are free, such freedom also would be extended to this field. Unfortunately, we have yet to shake off our slavish

outlook...Traditionally we have been learning untruth and it is strange, even during the post-independence days, we continue to preach falsehood. That is the degenerating effect of the enduring bondage on human beings (COF 12-13).

Thus, his honest endeavor to re-write the nation's histories and the seminal role of the universities in this very process of what Teilhard de Chardin called "homonization" (qtd. in Roberts 40) clearly testifies the claim of education as a nation-building tool. This very process of rewriting the histories of the nation and evolution of critical consciousness through education endorse a dialectical and 'dialogic' form of higher education, which champion the causes of the subaltern and liberation from the perpetuity of co-option and 'otherisation'.

But this process of transformation and eviction of age-old prejudices along with the deep-rooted scars in the light of humanist thoughts require what Heidegger stated as 'radical questioning'^{ix}, which entails sharp critique of social follies and the hegemonic disposition; along with active resistance to such unscrupulousness. This very process of re-writing the history and to enlighten the mass about our past for a better understanding of the present resonate enough in his attempt to revisit/relocate the discursive traces from the bygone indigenous traditions of pedagogy.

India alone had the glorious tradition of Gurukula. While students worshipped their teachers, the latter loved them as children...Those were the glorious bonds of the past. But today it is a tragedy. Guru is proud to call himself a Professor, but knows little about his duties...Mechanically he attends to his duties and rest of the day, he is engaged in commercial which earns him material prosperity (COF 41).

This implicit analogy not only reflects upon material self-interests as the pivotal driving force among a section of Indian academicians in the post-independence milieu, but is also indicative of the challenge in maintaining a balance between tradition and modernity. A balance which is

characterized by the urgency in revival of our indigenous cultural or epistemic traditions, and using the vernacular languages as medium of instruction in the freshly imported modern western education system. The persistent tension between the two seemingly irreconcilable forces within the university campus as implied in the fictional narration, also finds resonance in the propositions of The Radhakrishnan Commission (1948-49) – in its emphasis on indigeneity while, ‘accelerating the process of modernization’. The novel aptly locates the ‘lack’ in the ‘collective unconscious’^x of the policymakers, academicians and the newly independent nation to redress the prevalent discrepancies in order to usher in an ‘intellectual decolonization’. Aditya Nigam, in his essay “Decolonizing the University” (2019), argued this as a challenge “to take our experience as the basis of engagement with the categories of thought and frameworks of knowledge received from the West...not as a model to be imitated but as an experience to be evaluated and critically engaged with” (Nigam; ed. Bhattacharya, 68-69).

Prof. Vidyasagar’s speech at his college on the eve of fifth Independence Day deftly divulges the then prevalent reality of the newly independent nation which, despite several egalitarian promises, largely succumbed to the already laid traps of manifold social and religious segregation, considerably persuaded by the time-honored legacies of the pre-colonial and colonial times. The tension further escalates with the appropriation/assimilation of the colonial modalities of privileges and exertion of power by the native bourgeois class, who conceived this ‘independence’ what Frantz Fanon argued in his work *The Wretched of the Earth* (1968) as the “historic mission” to mediate between their own nation and imperial capitalism (Fanon 152). Fanon further maintained that the bourgeois anticolonial nationalist discourses, instead of acknowledging and mulling over the discursive traces of perennially suppressed voices as constitutive parameters of nationhood and bridging the ever-widening rupture between different sections of the society were directed towards neocolonial class consolidation, i.e. a transmitting line between the national and global capitalist forces. This

disingenuous intention of the native elites severely impairs the ‘nationalitarian’ spirit of the country, which he defines as a form of consciousness transcending the narrow boundaries of nationalism and upholds an all-encompassing “national liberation which leads the nation to play its part on the stage of history. It is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows” (ibid. 248). The national liberation entails a conscientious re-evaluation of the precolonial past, taking into consideration discursive elements from our own histories of social divisions/segregation, alongside the markers of obliteration of indigenous epistemologies by the colonial masters, so as to locate and incorporate the underlying heterogeneity of the native traditions within the rubric of the postcolonial nationhood, while dispensing with the documented homogenous historical narratives.

Prof. Vidyasagar’s concern over newer dimensions of socio-political and cultural divisions along with the already entrenched ones which aptly resonates in his statement in a way enunciates author’s own anxiety over the present social and academic paraphernalia:

Freedom should not break a nation into classes. It is the reward of common toil and should be shared by all. But that does not happen. That is the history of all civilizations. In Greece, Rome and today in our own country, the society remains divided. Even in our ancient days, when kings ruled, the society was torn into classes. It is an abuse of freedom to wrest power for a class keeping in bondage the vast mass of humanity (COF 16-17).

Besides, being a site of resistance to such dominant nationalist discourses, the novel discursively engages itself with the present academic milieu and looks into the possibilities/potential of higher education to resolve such contradistinctions and to adopt the approaches conducive enough to retain the dialogic and dialectic relation among different social groups. He and his students, Avinash, Ramakant and others epitomize the Gandhian spirit of nationalism based on democratic humanism, a critique of Western modernism and its

various machineries, and a critical revival as well as engagement with our own indigenous traditions, so as to contextualize or formulate the modalities of a secular spirituality and character building for greater national and humanist interests through education.

A detailed study of their conversations and their actions with the unveiling of the plot would evince their propensity towards the holistic ideals and welfare measures taken to democratize and revolutionize the educational milieu of the country. The novel interrogates further the ensuing crisis in academia through an apt portrayal of a comprehensive picture of an academic institution, where these ideas are equally resented by a section of academic and administrative staffs and spurred further hostility and vindictive modes of exertion of power. The forceful pacification of students' unrest, employing the coercive state machineries and the subsequent allegations levelled against Vidyasagar for his association with the dissenters testify the claims of incursion of the 'political' within the supposedly insular space of the campus. This 'militarization' of / in academia, though unearths dimensions of introspection on the nuanced histories of students' movement and their participation in nationalist movement in India, alongside the shifting paradigms in the post-independence era and the subsequent political quagmire among the faculty members concerning the vicissitudes, raise some fundamental questions on the governing factors behind such insidious forms of power hierarchies as well as exertions, conspicuous among the members of academic institutions.

Janice Rossen has aptly noted in her work *The University in Modern Fiction: When Power is Academic* (1993) the deeper nuances of undercurrent of power hierarchies and interplay of different power-relations ubiquitous among the members of modern universities in Europe, centered on different positions within the boundaries of the institution itself. "The Academic life evokes bitter rivalry and ambition in the on-going contest for power within the college community" (Rossen 120). This hierarchical structure and the relentless desire to retain one's position in the elusive ivory tower and the labyrinths of academia, she contends, are

seminally accountable for fostering hostility among the staffs and turning the college campus into “something like war hysteria” (ibid. 120). Though her inquiry hinges on the contexts of western academia, it largely corresponds to the present state of Indian academia, as irrespective of several measures adopted to indigenize the educational sector of the nation and to corroborate the claims of equality; Western modernity and the legacies of colonial discourses of higher education continue to persist and shape its multidirectional pathways.

The text deftly problematizes the flawed manifestations of policies which appear to be stumbling blocks in the path of national liberation. The fictionalized account of the events weaves the perplexities of unaccomplished goals, deception, hypocrisies permeating the academic space, and much intricate and formidable challenges of the later decades. The feud between Professor Vidyasagar and other faculty members of the institution, owing to his affinity with a students’ association not only results in his public humiliation, but also his suspension from the institution: “...the Principal demanded from all the members of the staff that they would not extend any support to the students, Prof. Vidyasagar silently walked out of the hall in protest. Thus it was decided to expel him from the institution on the charges of insubordination and unlawful association with the Students’ body” (COF 60). This whole incident is not merely suggestive of pernicious modes of circulation of power in academia, but also underlines other issues like academic freedom and ethics.

Academic freedom is hard to define. An ontological as well as teleological reading of the term would rather divulge the underlying discursivity entailing the definition, due to academia’s allegiance to disparate social markers, debate over ‘job or vocation’, ambivalences constitutive of the autonomy of the university, and academic pursuit of truth as determining factors among others. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the very notion of academic freedom started engaging a wide range of thinkers initially from the west and later from their oriental counterparts, which in turn paved the way for the emergence of different schools that

propagated manifold perspectives on this abstruse idea. While Arthur O. Lovejoy (1930) disregarded the claims of distinct freedom, savored by the academicians by comparing them with other salaried employees of other public sectors drawing salaries from the public fund. The American Association of University Professors on the other hand, in their 1915 declaration, marked a departure from Lovejoy's proclamation and emphasized the need to locate the moral responsibility of academicians and academics as a whole within the broader spectrum of public governance and their well-being. Later theorists, such as Graeme C. Moodie (1996) conceives this as a conditional freedom entitled to academic obligations and activities, which by no means is personal in disposition^{xi}.

The multidimensional nature of academic activities tend to become further intricate with ever-shifting socio-economic and cultural paradigms which find resonance in the works of Judith Butler, Paulo Freire, and Henry Giroux among others, call for a thorough re-evaluation of structural and functional parameters of academia by locating it dialectically within the present social and geo-political contexts and not by mere adherence to the liberal humanist archetypes. Freire, who located the whole gamut of production and dissemination of episteme within the lived experience in the material world, hypothesized a dialectical and dialogic form of higher education transcending its implied boundaries. He perceived education and higher educational institutions as active agents of social transformation and platforms geared towards the 'liberation' of the oppressed. This very process of liberation entails a persistent struggle against deep-rooted social injustices and exploitation, ubiquitous in the ever-dynamic hegemonic social order which in a way negates the claims of uniformity and universality of knowledge production. For Freire, "Knowledge always is becoming...Knowledge is changed to the extent that reality also moves and changes" (Freire as qtd. in Roberts 38). Thus the act of 'problematization' implies not only problematizing the established ideals and beliefs but this very endeavor of problematization itself. Judith Butler

(2006), who infuses the term ‘dissent’ as an essential tool of academic problematization, further contends that the dissent should not be confined within the boundaries of the campus, as the fine layers of distinction between the two worlds are not only blurry but the boundaries are equally permeable and intersect each other to an extent.

Vidyasagar’s encounter clearly reflects upon the compromise with academic freedom in the first decade after independence, and also anticipates a larger threat to the university’s autonomy which would unfold in the later years with newer dynamics of political intrusion. A close analysis of the Principal’s remarks such as “unlawful association” (COF 53) and questioning the foundation of Vidyasagar’s popularity followed by the unanimous consent of his colleagues to these allegations, apart from laying bare the academic hierarchies, discursively locates other dark human characteristics of unprofessional rivalry and avarice cutting across Indian academia. Their regressive influences on academic freedom and self-reflection are quintessential elements of university education. As Philip G. Altbach argued, “the post-independence Indian higher education presents a curious combination of close links between the university and government on the one hand, and virtually unplanned and random growth on the other” (Altbach, “Student Politics and Higher Education in India” 11), involves nuanced interests of the political parties and individual leaders as well. This essentially political disposition of Indian higher education not only subtly transcends the academic domain, but turns the members of the institution as subjects of ideology dissemination of the then dominant external political forces. Academicians could be held largely accountable for such pervasive political incursion, as their material greed and the perpetual desire to retain/upgrade their position in the well-knit utopia in a way, often culminate in outrages and blatant hostility make it more accessible for the bureaucratic interests of the state and narrow self-interests of the native elites and place them as mediatory agents in various decision and policy making bodies.

A fictional critique of academic bureaucratization and postcolonial anxieties

The character of Mr. Ghosh thus plays a crucial role not only to voice the novelist's resentment towards such implied bureaucratic presence in academia but also to equally manifest Nayak's subtle satirization of the re-appropriation of colonial modes of power hierarchies by the bureaucrats and native elites. His pivotal role in quieting the student unrest in the college, employing the coercive state machineries which result in bloodshed and the sad demise of four students clearly underlines the deliberate denial of "the liberating character of all education, the need for autonomy of the universities and for freedom of thought and expression for the teachers" (Radhakrishnan et. al 31) and students. The later justification of his action, bringing in the analogy from the avowed superiority of the west and western modernization apart from re-affirming the darker sides of bureaucratization of post-independence Indian academia, further locates the ever-widening rupture between propositions and discontinuities in their manifestations. The narrative deftly captures the author's concern over such uneven progress of Indian education and inadequacies of the postcolonial nation state to address and therefore, eradicate the deep-rooted differences in our native traditions, owing much to the ceaseless propensity of the dominant sections not only to homogenize the vast array of our indigenous histories and cultures, but also to regulate the dialogism and heterogeneity of the campus life, according to their whims and narrow self-interests.

Mr. Ghosh's reverence for the cultural praxes of the colonial masters, are manifest in his words: "You know Principal, when I was in England, I keenly observed the life of the citizens there. It was so orderly and disciplined and they deserved to be a race of masters" (COF, 72). Such attitude reflects upon the apprehensions of the two great Indian thinkers of the twentieth century, Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore concerning the framework of a much-envisioned nationalist education system, which also incorporate a critical endeavor to define or locate the nuanced markers of decolonization within the rubric of national

education system, alongside the larger social order. Tagore's *The Centre of Indian Culture* (1919) documents his vehement disapproval and problematization of the seemingly anticolonial orientation of national education, as it predominantly struts about in borrowed ideals of the overstretched European modernization and European institutions such as Oxford and Cambridge Universities as the primary models to be emulated. He further apprehended that these uncritical modes of adoption of Western ideals and reliance on the narrowly designed concept of European nationhood and its materialist drive would in turn, validate the utilitarian interests of the ruling elite class and dominant orthodox cultural traditions as the markers of civilization. This practice also subtly distances itself from the discursive traces of heterogeneity in native cultural traditions. In a similar vein, Mahatma Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* (1906) records its dissent over European modernization and the machine culture of industrial capitalism, as their obsession with material benefits is imperative of transforming the educational institutions into factories of production of skilled workforce, aimed towards "greater industrial progress and thus material welfare" (Steele 34). He further added that the strong allegiance to the materiality denudes education of its greater humanitarian and spiritual values and as a remedy to such crisis, he instead emphasized the practice of non-violence, spirituality, character building, promotion of vernacular languages, and revival of indigeneity as the determining factors of shaping a national model of education. Both of them contemplated on an educational model, which would bridge the rising dichotomy between the country and the city, along with the pernicious presence of other modalities of social divides. Their works hinge upon their propensity towards deciphering the east-west encounter not merely as an imperial manifestation of Hegelian 'master-slave dialectic'^{xii}, but as a mutually-rewarding comprehensive entity, and the supposed differences could be feasibly resolved through a humanist education, re-evaluation of the pervasive capitalism and a gradual withdrawal from the material markers of modernity.

Some of their ideals were fettered with contradictions, as manifest in Tagore's 'idea of an international university'^{xiii} based on borrowed ideological abstractions from the west, such as 'universal humanism' and 'transnationalism', which eventually become prey to Western homogenization, aptly highlighted by several critics like Jadunath Sarkar and later, by Kumkum Bhattacharya (2014). But despite certain limitations in their propositions, their angst over the ensuing crisis in Indian academia and the unsure grounds of its foundation and direction not only prove to be contemporaneous, but also deftly defines the lived realities of Indian higher education of the later decades. Thus, despite multiple endeavors aiming at the genesis of Indian education, as manifest in the first education commission report of the post-independence India, imprudent modes of imitation of the superstructure of western modernization, doing away with the concept of modernity as a connecting thread between the past and the future are constitutive of the lack in addressing the collective unconscious of the newly independent nation.

The anticlimactic ending of the novel culminated in Vidyasagar's escape to England on an academic assignment. Apart from chronicling a textual resistance to and distancing from the dominant currents in Indian academia, his emigration further indicates one deleterious consequence of sneaky power play in academia, i.e. 'brain drain', and how inimical it could be to academic progress and welfare of the nation. These pertinent debates on brain drain are also symptomatic of a more complex and deep-rooted scar of colonial hangover, the postcolonial societies have failed to redress over the years, which recur time and again as a stumbling block in the path of assertion of indigeneity. Our inherent obsession with the western discourses, blind acceptance of western parameters of modernization as a homogenous entity, (not acknowledging the fissures and inner contradictions skillfully overpowered by the dominant imperial forces) and resorting to the west for validation of our intellectual endeavors, are exemplary of our inferiority complex and the heuristic limitations of Indian education system

to adequately resolve the baneful consequences. Thus, *Campus on Fire* (1961) draws upon the divergent issues related to academic paraphernalia of Indian higher education of the 1950s by locating the narrative within the manifold forms of socio-political churning of a newly independent nation, which are further developed, pertaining to the nuances attached to the realities of Indian university campuses in the other select novels.

Decolonizing the Indian Academia: Fictional representations of prospects and challenges

M. K. Naik's *Corridors of Knowledge* (2008) written in the form of 'bildungsroman', builds the narrative on the lived experiences of Madhav, both as a student and a professor. Starting off with a brief account of his student life as a demure young man from a middle class background, the narrative takes the reader to varied experiences of Madhav as a faculty member initially at two different colleges in larger Bombay province in the late 1940s and the early 50s, and later at a university in Gujarat – against a vast historical backdrop of the post-independence era, from about the early 1940s to the late 70s. In the course of narrating the student life of Madhav, the novel sententiously throws light on a pervasive nationalist fervor present in Indian higher education during the 1940s under the direct influence of Gandhian vision of nation and nationhood. The third person objective point of view deftly employed by the novelist, not simply gives an impetus to this endeavor of fictionalization of historical events but more critically locates the discursive traces of unheeded/muted voices pushed into the perpetual 'waiting room' of histories (Chakrabarty, 2015), as eternal scapegoats of greater political conspiracies.

Madhav's own encounter with the protesting students during the 'Quit India movement' (1942) and subsequent skirmishes between the nationalists and the coercive colonial forces, resulted in the brutality of loss of lives of innocent people such as Sada Kulkarni not merely problematize the unbridled colonial oppression but also anticipate an imminent takeover of Indian academia by the native elites despite promising democratic and equal access to higher

education. The subsequent act of naming the particular place of his death by his name; ‘Sada Square’, as a mark of commemoration uncovers the surreptitious traces of politics of deification, skillfully adopted by the native elites and the mainstream nationalist ideologues to silence, or, to co-opt the discursive voices from the margins. “And now, all of a sudden he had acquired a martyrdom which would have really surprised him. In due course, the square where Sada died came to be known as ‘Sada Square’, and the legend associated with it soon took final shape” (Naik 23; henceforth COK, page number).

The problematics of consent and coercive means of interpellation which permeate the post-independence Indian socio-cultural and political milieu are engaged with, from a ‘defamiliarized’ lens of university campus, as a microcosm of the larger order. Madhav’s own experiences as a student divulge the mutually fulfilling and interdependent side of teacher-student relation. But, what the narrative aims to satirize is the predicament of the student community, owing much to the festering presence of diverse social divisions, deep-rooted prejudices, and the constraints of a newly independent underdeveloped nation, where opportunities are scarce and are largely monopolized by a modest section of English educated native elites and upper caste people. However, this section foregrounds the diverse experiences of Madhav as a teacher within the shifting political and cultural milieu of the Indian university.

The recursive narrative structure allows the plot to discursively engage with the historicity of the mainstream nationalist narratives and the evolution of an individual as an embodiment of the ‘personal political’^{xiv}, within the ever-shifting socio-political, historical and cultural matrix of post-independence India. The novel which follows ‘bildungsroman’ both in terms of form and mode of narration of events traverses Madhav’s past experiences and congruously weaves them in with his present life so to diachronically locate the dynamic process of shaping of an intellectual consciousness over the years and his gradual transformation into an unfeigned academician and a righteous individual. Naik deftly deploys

this technique to historically locate the transformations in Indian higher education since independence, and to satirize the several flaws accountable for the sacrifice of academic integrity and distancing of the university from a democratic site of critical enquiry and self-reflection.

Madhav's role as an academic, while placing him in different academic institutions, aims to critically evaluate and thus, intervene with the liminal growth of Indian higher education since independence, and the overarching bureaucratic and utilitarian drive capable of a gradual metamorphosis of the Gandhi University from its foundational principles. The novel begins with the protagonist's intention of writing an autobiography post superannuation, which vindicates its self-reflexive intervention with the challenges of the Indian higher education, through his past experiences and acquaintances with different individuals. Madhav's role as an English professor enables him with a two-fold perspective to look into the question of decolonisation in or through education in post-colonial India. One such incident entails his experience of teaching Newman's *Idea of the University* to the undergraduate students of a government degree college in the Gujarat province during the initial decades after independence, which discursively reflects upon the prevalent contradictions in the Indian academia concerning the nativization of epistemology, while retaining its colonial structure. The lack of sincerity among the students is symptomatic of the difficulty of coping with the western intellectual models and a persistent lack of a critical consciousness. This further brings about the fundamental question of its efficacy, while having been located within the post-colonial Indian context, and amidst the call for a radical restructuring of our education system through revival of our indigenous languages and knowledge forms. The pressing need for responding to the process of modernity and democratization of education amid the pervasive economic crisis in post-independent Indian society, which provide an obvious pretext for its considerable yet uneven expansion, very often results in our fallacious appropriation of the

Western discourses. This uneven development enlarges the scope for a further investigation of the lack of uniformity in the distribution of resources, and the underlying geo-political factors responsible for such disjunction followed by an equal dearth of academic merit and ethics in Indian education system.

Drawing an analogy between his students in the college and characters like Louis Fernandes or Gauri would further unmask the bleak reality of such lopsided development of higher education in post-independence India. Whereas, students from the privileged classes and from metropolitan institutions are equipped with wide range of resources and improved infrastructural facilities, the plight of students from the non-metropolitan colleges and backward sections throws light on the disparity in academic growth of independent India. This unevenness exposes the inadequacies in several policies on ensuring equality in higher education in terms of enrolment and distribution of resources, and uniform development of infrastructure. People like Gauri and Fernandes were privileged due to their educated family background, class/caste status and urban locations, which in turn bolster their position as elites and reify their dominant status in the post-colonial society. On the other side, Madhav's students from the fictitious Gujarat college are representatives of the majority of Indians, who are not only at the mercy of the elites, but are being constantly 'interpellated' and often forced to imbibe the ascribed methods and subjects through series of justifications, false promises, and coercive and consent mode of ideology dissemination. Neither their voices are recorded, nor are their narratives and works duly acknowledged even in the academic annals of Indian universities. Thus, the envisaged social revolution and equality through education remains patchy, even with several reformative measures such as, financial aids for marginalized sections of the society, inception of educational institutions in remote areas, and introduction of vernacular mediums in higher education. This pervasive crisis in Indian education is contingent upon the failure of our education system in fully eradicating the elements of

exploitation, inequality, and prejudice in our native traditions, through its decolonizing endeavor of enlightening students with India's cultural traditions and their profound historical heritages. In view of this, Ratna Ghosh argues that "the failure to implement the values of a new egalitarian ideology through a national education policy has challenged the effectiveness of education and even resulted, paradoxically, in retarding social change" (18).

The shortcomings in the Indian university education are also subject to its borrowed intellectual tradition from the West, which turns universities into utopias and alienates its members from the existing rubric of the society in which these are situated. Responding to these assumptions, the novel delves further into the provocations of the Indian public universities through Madhav's encounter with people like Narayanbhai, Dr. Bhajanlal, Ratibhai, Maganlalbhai, Dr. Khivsera, and Prof. Anklesaria among others, in the Gandhi University. A dialectical positioning of the fictional narrative within the volatile circumstances of the Indian universities seeks to critique the varied consequences of effectuating the process of bringing in the higher educational institutions under the control of the state, following the recommendation of The Radhakrishnan Commission (1948-49). Gandhi University, which was founded by Narayanbhai Patel during the 1950s in a provincial town of Gujarat largely resembles the parochial temperament and intellectual backwardness, emblematic of many provincial Indian universities. Though "his aim was to establish an educational institution on the lines of Shantiniketan...a residential university with students and teachers living together in the common pursuit of knowledge" (COK 64), the gradual departure from its founding principles towards a state-controlled autonomous institution reminds us of the Rabindranath Tagore's discontent with the national education system.

While demonstrating the fundamental ideals of Visva-Bharati in his lecture (later published in the form of a book) *The Centre of Indian Culture* (1919), Rabindranath Tagore worked through incisive pointers in his critique of the half-baked nature of national education

system in colonial India. His criticism of discriminatory approach of the colonial rulers pertaining to the education of the Indians was rooted in his strong resentment against the borrowed pedagogical markers of “most of our attempts to establish national schools and universities (those) were made with the idea that it was external independence which was needed” (51). This ‘machine-made university’, he believed, not only complicates the persistent tension and animosity among different caste and ethnic communities, but also cripples our cognitive abilities under the façade of upward mobility and material well-being as the sole purpose of education. Building upon the prodigious nationalist trend of imitation of the Western model of education, he further problematizes the lack of a futuristic vision in our national education system, as it endorses to an exclusivist labelling of academic institutions, depending on their (students) response to the job market and functioning of the State, and does not emphasize a comprehensive development of the universities and colleges, and of the teachers. In his other works on education such as: “Shikshar Her-pher” [The Discrepancies of Education] (1905), “Shikshasamasya” [The Problem of Education] (1905) and “Abaran” [The Veil] (1905), he also explicates how such fragmented growth of English education in India, apart from buttressing the superiority of the native elites and upper castes, perpetually postpones the moment of cultural liberation.

Influenced by the grandeur of the western universities like Oxford and Cambridge, he argues that the national education system is driven by an urge to envision it as a finished product. This results in overshadowing of the enduring process of its evolution amongst the Daedalian stereotypes and prejudices present in our indigenous traditions, accompanied by ages of mutilation of our cultural and intellectual resources by the foreign invaders. This further distances the education system from its historical and cultural matrices. The notion of ‘cultural liberation’, as Frantz Fanon (*The Wretched of the Earth*, 1961) puts forth within the context of Algerian independence struggle against the French colonialism entails a conscious effort of

shedding the detrimental colonial trope, where “National culture under colonial domination... becomes a culture condemned to clandestinity” (171). He pressed on the need of the native intellectuals to join the common folks in this struggle for the cultural revival, and enable them in understanding this transitional phase as “occult instability” (qtd. in Ashcroft, et al. 2007), as a prerequisite to cultural decolonization, after ages of colonial silencing and co-option of native epistemologies. Thus upholding education as a panacea, a potential tool to liberate the natives from the detrimental effects of enslavement, Tagore envisions an education system through the project of shaping Visva-Bharati, as a democratic site of knowledge production and dissemination, which would encourage the people across the globe to cultivate their intellect and creative spirit, and promote an organic connection with the locale. He proposes:

...that our education should be in full touch with our complete life, economical, intellectual, aesthetic, social, and spiritual; and our educational institutions should be in the very heart of our society, connected with it by the living bonds of varied co-operations. For true education is to realize at every step how our training and knowledge have organic connection with our surroundings (ibid. 2).

Corridors of Knowledge (2008) significantly intervenes with the pervasive tension between tradition and modernity in a newly independent nation, which was still struggling to free itself from the baneful consequences of two hundred years of the colonial influence. The narrative also uncovers how our national education system, instead of eradicating the contradictions and bridging the ever-widening rupture between these two, often becomes disposed to such cultural-political persuasions and anxiety of assimilation. The impediments of educating the Indians with the western epistemic traditions in a disparate socio cultural milieu of a post-colony during the 1950s-60s, are aptly reflected through the characterization of characters like Dr. Khivsara, Dr. Sutaria, Professor Anklesaria and Prof. Brahmbhatt, among

others. These faculty members of the Gandhi University, along with their academic engagements indulge in other unacademic activities, often adhering to their traditional family occupations. “Dr. Khivsara of Mathematics came from a family of traditional moneylenders. And it was rumoured that the professor plied his trade as a side business” (COK 98). In a similar vein, Professor Brahmabhatt ran a dairy within the campus, Dr. Sutaria-a book and stationary shop, and “Professor Anklesaria of the Commerce Department ran a grocery store” (COK 98). Through a subtle satire of this underlying mercantilization of academy, Naik discursively engages with the churning questions of a cultural alienation of the Indian academicians and the concomitant lack of academic integrity and standards. The degradation in academic ethics as well as spirit of the campus, and the fissures in democratization of education, which recur time and again as the two leitmotifs of the novel, hinge on discrete, yet intersecting internal as well as external factors. These factors range from the lack of an intellectual tradition of its own and academic vis-à-vis administrative hierarchies to the inevitable power exertion and the problem of underpayment of academicians.

The academic mediocrity, exemplary of the provincial Indian universities, is aptly demonstrated through the intellectual stagnation of many of the faculty members of the Gandhi University, such as Dr. D’ Souza, and Aminbhai, among others. While “Dr. D’ Souza’s reading had practically stopped twenty years ago” (COK 85), Aminbhai, driven by his ego and an unbridled desire for power, indulges in unscrupulous methods to safeguard his growth in terms of higher rank in the university, often undermining his academic ethics and responsibilities. “His sudden leap, within just three years from lecturer to professor and Head of the Department, he thought, was some kind of a record. ‘I always knew I was capable; but I did not suspect I was that capable...’” (COK 90). The self-complacency, resonant enough in Aminbhai’s story is further indicative of how glory and fame, renouncing the academic values and the notion of critical enquiry in pursuit of truth largely impairs the academic growth of an institution. The

self-complacency, intellectual stagnation, lack of academic integrity and sincerity, prevalent among a group of academicians of the university closely follows Edward Shil's sharp criticism of the lack of quality education in many of the provincial academic institutions in post-independence India. In his essay, "The Academic Profession in India" (1969), he unequivocally held the faculty members of these institutions responsible for such degradation of academic merit. He contends, "...those who are employed to teach in them (the provincial universities and colleges) know of their low standing and they believe that some of that low standing rubs off on them personally" (354).

The growth of an academic institution which is usually measured through maintaining a balance between classroom pedagogy and academic research, once compromised to an extent, turns universities into degree awarding factories, and equally hinders research and other academic activities. The novel effectively satirizes the fallacies of university education in post-independence India, where an academic degree, even a Ph.D., are mostly valued for their role in promotion and material prosperity. Dr. Ganeshan, Madhav's Ph.D. supervisor, after listening to the story of his previous rejections by other professors and a careful reading of his proposal, rightly observes: "Unfortunately, in our country there are many who regard a doctorate as just an avenue to promotion, or as a useful honorific to prefix to one's name" (COK 63). The underlying dialectic between fiction and the lived reality of the Indian universities in the initial decades after independence, effectively justifies Edward Shil's critique of Indian academia. In his investigation of the general public opinion of the university education in India, he rightly points out:

It cares for incidentals and by-products...for degrees, for the enhancement of India's reputation internationally and for the production of qualified manpower- but it does not care for modern scholarly and scientific knowledge....it defers to power, but it does not respect hard and persistent intellectual work and it

shows little concern for the conditions under which an academic can be effective (346).

He aptly argues how the exogenous origin of knowledge taught in Indian universities, apart from being detrimental to the evolution of the decolonized Indian university, further alienates the universities from the heterogeneity of Indian cultural traditions. He remarks that the epistemic estrangement of Indian academy from its local cultural moorings either turns the university “into more differentiated, more critical, (and) more innovative than its envioning culture” (347), or into mere degree awarding/affiliating institutions bereft of intellectual and human resources. The lack of planning in the proposed democratization of the higher education system in post-colonial India, he contends, results in rhizomatic growth of academic institutions in geo-culturally peripheral regions, where “there is a constant menace of disaffiliation because of inability to conform with the minimal requirements of the university with respect to libraries, teaching space and facilities, laboratories, even seating accommodation for students enrolled, etc.” (354)

The novel delves into the causality of the predicament of these provincial Indian educational institutions, and the politics encompassing these institutions. The inspection of Nav-Gujarat College discursively divulges the debasement of academic values in many such non-metropolitan colleges, which fall short of sustaining the minimum standards of higher educational institutions. The narrator rightly delineates how

The proposed college was to be housed in an old, dilapidated fort of the local zamindar. It was a sprawling structure, but totally unsuitable for a college...In a dark, musty room stood two dusty cupboards which gave the impression of not having been opened for centuries. Opening the stiff doors of the first cupboard with some difficulty, Madhav took out the first book...and when he

tried to open the book, the pages just crumbled in his fingers. White ants had obviously found the books more useful than readers (COK 93).

The threadbare condition of the infrastructural facilities, shortage of staff, and an absence of academic ambience at the college are indicative of the decaying state of many such Indian colleges, which were built in an endeavor to equilibrate education across the nation as a part of the larger projects of democracy and nation building. Despite the honest intentions of the policy makers and the leaders, and rise in enrolment of students with the mushrooming of academic institutions, the ‘vanishing presence’^{xv} of quality education, owing to the absence of quality teachers and adequate resources, in a way, unearths some debatable assumptions pertaining to the latent political and sectarian interests.

Various works by critics such as Philip Altbach (1972), A. R. Kamat (1982) and Karuna Ahmad (1979), repeatedly foreground the different socio-political and cultural constraints that thwart the growth of higher education in India. Altbach in “Problems of University Reform in India” (1972) convincingly critiques the lack of planning in the expansion of higher education in India which entails safeguarding of the interests of the powerful section, both within and beyond the domain of the university. The proposition, ‘Education as an instrument of social change’, implies a bi-directional drive of contributing to the economic development of the nation, and effectuating the necessary social changes through an honest practice of equality and a sustained problematization of various prejudices, divisions, discriminations, and the naturalized power hierarchies in the given social fabric. Being an active constituent in the economic growth does not only refer to its mere conformity to and application of the existing methods and order, but involves the revolutionary practice of breaking newer grounds of knowledge production and transmission through a constant re-evaluation of, and departure from the dominant epistemic traditions, thereby asserting the Freirean concept that “knowledge always is becoming” (Horton and Freire 101).

Responding to the dynamicity of knowledge production and its democratic dissemination are constitutive of a unified development in teaching and research, equal accessibility to necessary apparatuses and academic resources, proficient and sincere manpower, and an uncompromising freedom in research and other academic activities. Following the Nehruvian perception of liberalization of education, the Radhakrishnan Commission (1948-49), and more importantly the Kothari Commission (1964-66) placed education as the prime component in “the much desired social, economic, and cultural revolution” (“Kothari Commission” 9). Undoubtedly, the contributions of these commissions in the progress of education in post-independence India are of paramount importance, despite the dilution of several policies, so as to safeguard various political interests. The rise in the number of higher educational institutions, inclusion of marginalized sections of the society within the mainstream education, unified pay-structure of the teachers, emphasis on the regulatory bodies (UGC, AICTE etc.), introduction of interdisciplinary disciplines and research, and the much awaited advancement in science and technological education owe much to these commissions and the futuristic clairvoyance of the planners and educationists. The accomplishments of the higher education in India remain an unfinished project to a certain extent, not due to the epistemic dynamicity, but because of the increasing politicization of academia through diverse forms of political interventions and influences.

Corridors of Knowledge (2008), as an exemplary work of the fictional subgenre, Indian Campus Fiction in English, discursively engages with the politics of these inspections in such institutions, where academic merit and ethics are superseded by the utilitarian interests of the committee members and even the political leaders. The sarcasm evident in the narration of Ratibhai’s iniquitous conversation with the principal - “discussing far weightier issues such as which brand of whiskey was the best and the meaty question of the choice between Mutton and Chicken” (COK 93). This is followed by the corrupt practice of bribery. Both are indicative of

how such evaluative measures are turned into superfluous routine affairs in an endeavor to satisfy the dominant political as well as narrow personal interests of the corrupt academicians like Ratibhai and Aminbhai. The stigma of backwardness intrinsic to many such provincial Indian colleges and universities, underlines the discontinuities in the evolution of an Indian system of education, where quantitative growth is not accompanied by its qualitative counterpart. Irrespective of the autonomy of the universities, and the considerable growth in the educational sector since independence, the policy of labelling educational sector as a public sector, so as to expedite the process of social reformation through an equal emphasis on epistemic revolution proves convenient enough for political parties to directly intervene in the functioning of the academic institutions. The incremental politicization of the academy which entails acquiring of positions by the political leaders in several academic and administrative bodies of the universities, often has adverse and far-reaching implications. The growing number of academic institutions, used by the political parties as launch pads of their political agenda to draw the public attention, profiteering from the underfunded academic institutions and moreover, the deliberate political intrusions in academic affairs of the universities, estrange them from their fundamental role of intellectual and critical enquiry.

As the plot unfolds, it also discursively engages with the contentious yet tenable assumption of provincial universities as something marked by their peripheral position and backwardness predicated upon their own intramural power equations and struggle for ascendancy. Here, the extramural political forces further exploit these internal tensions in making way for their expediency within the academic space and legitimizing their vested interests. The gradual shift in the status of the Gandhi University from a residential university to an affiliating one, hinges upon many such contested trajectories of the 'political', where the hegemony of the academic administration is not solely restricted within the insular space of the university, and slowly builds up a covert nexus with the external political agencies. The idealist

vision of Narayan Bhai, the founder of the university, gradually gives way to incessant bureaucratization of academia, where the dominant political ideologies tend to regulate the appointment of academic administrators and even the faculty members of the university. The functioning of the university under the regime of the next vice-chancellor Dr. Bhajanlal Kutmutia, which marks the beginning of the departure from its erstwhile status as a residential university, brings about a series of insidious political and materialistic intentions of the academicians turned administrators, in line with the objectives of the ruling political parties.

The scathing satire of M. K. Naik aptly locates the discursive traces of the political entrenched in the very process of this change in the status of the Gandhi University. He narrates, “Feeling utterly frustrated, Narayandas Bhai developed high blood pressure, and soon after that a sudden stroke killed him. This was what the more ambitious members of the university executive council were waiting for. They got the status of the university from Residential to Affiliating, since this gave them scope to dabble in the affairs of several colleges” (COK, 92). He further went on:

Dr. Bhajanlal Kutmutia, Principal of Surat college became vice-chancellor in his place. Unfortunately, he was the exact opposite of Narayanbhai, whose idealism was his favourite butt of ridicule. He had never liked this fad of a residential university. He preferred, he said, an affiliating university with several colleges attached to it that gave the Vice-Chancellor enough room to manoeuvre (by which he of course meant play institutional politics)...The necessary Government machinery was set in motion, and Gandhi Residential University duly became an Affiliating university, with a number of colleges attached to it. Narayanbhai’s idealistic dream had ended; the harsh reality of Bhajanlal’s had succeeded it. The day of the eagle was over; flocks of vultures were out to feed (COK 118-119).

The entwinement of political and narrow self-interests demonstrated in the fictional account of the imaginary university, reflects upon the prevailing conditions in many of the Indian universities, where such ever-increasing politicization severely impedes the academic growth of the institutions. The marring of academic ethics and scholarship, owing much to the rivalry among the faculty members and administrative staff of the universities, efficaciously turn them into political battlegrounds dispensing with their novel responsibilities. In the context of this pervasive crisis in Indian academia, Andre Beteille in his much recent work: *Universities at the Crossroads* (2010) observes that “the universities have become battlegrounds for the promotion of every kind of personal and sectional interest” (45), thereby gradually deviating them from their primary objectives of quality teaching and learning, and novelty in research and scholarship.

Fallacies of Educational standardization through expansion: A critique in post-colonial contexts

In an underdeveloped country like India, an infinitesimal percentage (1-2%) of the total GDP was spent on education in the initial decades after independence, and it even witnessed a staggering rise in the later years (“Selected Educational Statistics”, 2002-2003). In such circumstances, the Nehruvian dream of socio-cultural well-being of the nation and its people through an equal access to quality education falls short of its accomplishment, as the fragmented development is generally restricted within the elite universities mostly located in the metropolitan centers. The lopsided development of higher education, which is evidenced in the two contrary pictures of the colleges in India, i.e. better facilities and access to academic resources in the metropolitan colleges like Chhatrapati College and the Government College of Ahmedabad, (where Madhav worked before joining Gandhi University), compared to their non-metropolitan counterparts, such as the Nav-Gujarat College, dialectically situates the

fallacies in the reformatory praxes, and how the national education system fails to disengage itself from the baneful consequences of the colonial trope of downward filtration.

In an endeavor to ensure equality in education irrespective of caste, gender, and religious differences, there has been a significant growth in the evolution of awareness among the marginalized sections of the society with the inception of educational institutions in rural and semi-rural India, since independence. But the problems of underfunding and intellectual indigence emblematic of many of these provincial Indian academic institutions are contingent upon the overpowering utilitarian perception of several academicians, planners and politicians, which also unravels their (comprising privileged sections) propensity to exert power over the marginalized sections. The discussions on provinciality synonymous with peripherality and backwardness hinge upon correlative binaries such as rural/urban, mediocre/excellence, and underprivileged/privileged. Despite the unjust homogenization of provincial universities as inferior, it could be feasibly argued that with the amassing of maximum share of the fund spent on education sector, the metropolitan universities gradually become the centers of excellence with improved infrastructures, and better libraries equipped with wide access to intellectual resources, whereas their provincial counterparts remain comparatively neglected.

Through the shift in the status of the Gandhi University, the novelist subtly throws light on the predicament of many such provincial Indian universities, due to much of these academic, geographical, and political constraints. They slowly transmute them into degree awarding institutions, renouncing their fundamental ethos of being self-reflexive democratic spaces of scholarship and critical enquiry. This degradation of academic standard and waning spirit in these provincial universities, and a general perception of linking academic degrees solely with job opportunities, present among the academic communities (students and teachers) of these institutions, aptly resembles Malcolm Bradbury's portrayal of British provincial university in his campus novel, *Eating People is Wrong* (1959). Responding to the academic paraphernalia

of a fictional redbrick university in post-war Britain and the collective lack of serious scholarship among its members, he meaningfully expressed his discontent through the voice of the protagonist, Treece, a professor of English. He observes: “You don’t find it (serious ‘literary activity’) so much in the provincial universities, of course; people aren’t so concerned to make an impression, I suppose, and they come here to work and get a job, not have a good time or enrich their souls too much” (Bradbury 71).

Beside the teaching faculties and administrative staff, the novel also tends to locate how this academic mediocrity equally encompasses the student community of the said university, where the pursuit of knowledge is replaced by “...their primary aim...to pass the examination with credit” (COK 108). This lack of intellectual consciousness and conscience, combined with material presupposition, by subsuming the teaching, administrative and student communities, gradually turn these non-premiere institutions into mere ‘teaching shops’, aimed to produce skilled professionals for the market, thereby renouncing the dialogic and socially transformative potential of the university. With the skewed enactment of Western pedagogical approaches and methodologies, while absorbing the innate colonial fallacies of exclusion and increasing ‘techno-bureaucratization’ of academia, the skepticism of Gandhi (*Hind Swaraj* 1909) and Tagore (1905, 1919) concerning the growth and direction of the national education system proves visionary enough in the post-independence era.

The novel further sheds light on the administrative intricacies, and how due to the incessant rivalry and power struggle between the teachers and administrative staff, the academic affairs of the university are largely compromised. The altercation between Madhav and the controller of the examination, Maganbhai over the allotment of rooms for a teachers’ workshop divulges the darker side of the power-ridden academic corridors. A trivial squabble concerning a personal loan is subtly used by Maganbhai, the controller of the examination, to egotistically exert his power on a lesser powerful faculty member Madhav within the

bureaucratic structure of the public university. A few days before the workshop, “Madhav received a letter from the Controller of Examinations asking him to hand over possession of the rooms to the Examination Department immediately. Maganlal’s purpose was plain; this was his way of harassing Madhav” (COK, 101). This hegemonic control of the administrative apparatuses on academic activities, where ‘personal’ becomes the ‘political’, and turns into a professional rivalry further entails labyrinthine networks of unscrupulous appeasement of the clerks of university administration. Viru, one of the clerks of the Gandhi University wittily explains:

Things are much more complicated than that, sahib *Ama Bahu trick chhe* (There are many tricks involved in this)...It (a file) normally begins its march upwards with the Lower Division clerk. It then passes through the hands of functionaries like the Office Superintendent, the Assistant Registrar, the Registrar, until the final decision is taken at the highest level... ‘All files do not move at a uniform pace. If a file pertains to an important case the clerk somehow smells it quite early. The movement of the file is then determined by the amount of consideration paid by the applicant. Absolutely contrary to the laws of Physics, the weightier the ‘consideration’, the swifter is the movement of the file (COK 103).

With this overwhelming mercantilization of the university, and the external political influence within the autonomous space of the campus, the administrative functioning of the university gradually becomes akin to the intricacies of bureaucratic networks of the other public institution. The unbefitting conduct of the office members, coupled with their material greed, vindictive nature, and moreover a unanimous lack of academic consciousness are in many ways responsible for the intellectual stagnation of many of the non-metropolitan Indian universities.

As the novel is written in the form of ‘bildungsroman’, and encompasses Madhav’s entire work experience as a professor, a ‘symptomatic reading’^{xvi} of the narrative further draws upon an alternate historiography of the downturn in the nationalist drive of the Indian education system. A career, spanning over thirty years of teaching in a university, gives him the scope of working with a number of vice-chancellors, and brings about some challenging questions on the role of the Vice-Chancellor in elevating the academic merit of the university. Whereas, a competent and scrupulous Vice-Chancellor ensures uninterrupted functioning of the university, a comparatively weak one can bring it down to the level of a deplorable political platform replete with conflicting political and sectarian interests. In such hostile ambience, scholarly and other academic activities of the university are endlessly marred, as manifest in a plethora of his bitter experiences, starting from conducting workshops in the department to his remuneration bills or intimation of official orders. With the burgeoning, yet clandestine politicization of the campus, evidenced enough in the routine affairs of the university, alongside the political control over the appointment of the staff, the vice-chancellor plays a pivotal role in setting the academic goals and direction of the university, and in the congenial execution of several reformative policies. Iqbal Narain, in one of his articles: “Administration of Higher Education in India” (1987) critically argues that how the fate of a university largely depends on the visionary ideals and perception of the vice-chancellor. While responding to the vice-chancellor’s moral and academic commitment and accountabilities, he also held that he/she has the authority

to decide whether he would like to be a factional leader or an independent non-partisan Vice-Chancellor; whether he would like to follow a policy of appeasement, irrespective of whether the demands are reasonable or not, so that he survives in office or say ‘No’ to unreasonable demands even though this may cost him job or may lead to the closure of the university; whether he would just somehow run the university or also be obliged to work for its academic

development; whether he would like to centralize all power in himself or evolve a decentralized system of administration; whether he would always manipulate for his own survival in office or be prepared to quit when he cannot serve honorably; and so on (Narain, ed. Ghosh and Zachariah 57-58).

It is through the shift in the Vice-Chancellorship, i.e. from Narayanbhai to Dr. Bhajanlal, the novel deftly problematizes the plight of many Indian universities, due to the lack of potentiality and administrative acumen of the authorities. Dr. Bhajanlal's term, which is characterized by a pervasive laxity among the academic and administrative community of the university, denigration of academic temperament, and an overarching utilitarian and hegemonic drive among several members of the university, are symptomatic of a sharp rivalry between the steadfast academics and their conniving administrative counterparts. Bhajanlal, being the vice-chancellor, wields enough power to bring in the necessary changes for the advancement of teaching-learning and research facilities in the campus, but rather impetuously relies on his subordinate staff such as the registrar and the controller of examinations. His over-indulgence with preposterous activities and unbridled desire for power, undermining his professional ethics and responsibilities are one of the seminal factors behind the rising parochialism in the campus, and the animosity among the members with the visible presence of different factions within the academic community. M. K. Naik succinctly charts the visible changes in the academic temperament of the university, as "The Sens and Ramaswamis left, making way for the local Shahs and Patels" (COK 92). Where the university by its very definition is known for accommodating diverse, often contested ideologies, cultures and social groups, the undercurrent of parochialism in many of the Indian universities ought to be questioned, as it has a harrowing impact on the overall academic standard as well as integrity and the work ethics of the university that restrict the growth of individual academicians.

Through the structural and demographic changes of the Gandhi University, Naik subtly responds to the oft-mooted charge on the Indian provincial universities as “self-contained personal fiefdoms” (Bhattacharya 158). The condescending nature of the administrative authorities of the university, alongside their domination in the decision-making bodies, as manifest in a polyphonic narration of the contested trajectories of the university administration and intersecting, yet discrete experiences of several characters, in my opinion, endorse the much recent assumptions of Debaditya Bhattacharya on the non-metropolitan Indian universities. The devaluation of academic standard and spirit of the campus, which began with Bhajanlal’s lack of interest in administrative affairs ends up in his complete withdrawal from his professional duties. This virtually gives the registrar, Vasavada, an immense power to manipulate the university affairs according to his choices, where nepotism and consistent anomaly override academic interests. Thus, in a situation where academic activities are overshadowed by administrative feudalism and sectarianism, the appointment of an upright and diligent individual, Samyogita Devi as the Vice-Chancellor of the Gandhi University was much resented by many of her colleagues.

A close nexus between these corrupt officials and some professors holding significant positions in different bodies, and their narrow self-interests effectively sabotage many of her attempts to restore order within the university. The lack of cooperation is resonant enough in the deliberate acts of misplacement of necessary documents, delay in forwarding the important files to the vice-chancellor, evasive answers of the registrar and other officers, and moreover, the relentless blame-game, leading nowhere. The unanticipated resignation of Samyogita Devi, followed by her untimely death are emblematic of the practical hindrances encountered by those who uphold the novelty of academic administration in safeguarding its moral responsibility to the cause of nation-building, and ensuring the intellectual dynamicity of the university. As Iqbal Narain argues (1985) that, though academic administration demands a

distinct academic insight, entailing the growth, and dissemination of knowledge, and a continuous assessment of the university's contribution to the greater national and social causes, apart from defending law and order, akin to the administrators of the state, the prevailing conditions in many Indian academic institutions divulge a complete different picture of ceaseless bureaucratization, "status-quoism", nepotism, and partisanship" (Narain "Reforming Educational Administration in India: Some Observations specifically in the Context of Higher Education" 940-942).

Drawing upon Narain's critique of Indian academia, and Bhattacharya's pin-pointed criticism of the absence of academic freedom, and democratic ethos, owing much to the authoritarian administrative system in some of the new central universities, located in the provincial towns (founded following The Central Universities Act, 2009), the novel could be read as a distinct literary endeavor to unmask the aftermath of this unrestrained bureaucratization and politicization of the academy. However, Naik does not remain content with the fictionalization of Bhattacharya's claims, rather the detailed demonstration of administrative and academic crisis in the Gandhi University opens up scope for further inquiry into the possible ways to redress the ubiquitous anomaly, restraining the growth of a significant number of non-metropolitan Indian universities.

Corridors of Knowledge employs a two-pronged narrative strategy of satire and resistance in order to distance itself from the discontinuities in Indian university system. While, satire is directed towards a substantial critique of Indian higher education, resistance on the other hand, seems to be applied as a tool to reassert academic values and merit of the university. Though resistance as a metaphor could be amply found in different forms throughout the narrative, it is through Madhav's systematic departure from academic pretensions, his perseverance, sincere scholarship, and upholding of academic integrity, the text offers a meaningful antidote to such intellectual indigence in academia. His zest for knowledge,

followed by his perseverance as a student, overcoming the insurmountable tension and inadequacies in a colony on the verge of independence, and the challenges of a newly independent nation, prepare the bedrock for the later Madhav to hold on to his principle of merit, and to adhere to academic ethics as a professor. It is evident enough that unlike Professor Vidyasagar, Madhav's notion of resistance is mostly articulated through his individualist assertion and choices related to his professional career and the department. But his radical decision of foregoing the cushy job of the principal in some metropolitan government college for a comparatively more precarious one of a lecturer in a lesser-known provincial Indian university during the 1950s is a clear example of an unparalleled academic disposition. Later when many of his colleagues moved to the metropolitan centers of higher studies, and despite their efforts to persuade him, he remains unfazed by their actions or suggestions.

For him, it is not the elite status of the university, which defines or shapes the scholarship and intellectual potential of an institution and an individual professor, but the collective and individual endeavor of teachers, scholars, and students in the common pursuit of knowledge, contingent upon a strong sense of academic values, unbiased perception, and a humanist resolution to contribute to the greater national and social interests. Apart from these, the narrator rightly points out- how for Madhav, "The university campus was an ideal place for doing serious reading and writing" (COK, 84), given its geographical location, far away from the din and bustle of city-life. Unlike, many of his colleagues, his active engagement with research and scholarly pursuits combined with his innovative methods of imparting knowledge to his students to the best of his ability, and enthusiasm in conducting conferences and workshops in the department by overcoming a plethora of hindrances are his own ways of reacting against the rural/urban binary and homogenization of provincial universities as backward.

Building on Fredric Jameson's assertion of 'narrative as a socially symbolic act' (1981), and the potential of art in giving symbolic resolution to real, yet unconsciously as well as subconsciously felt socio-cultural problems, it could be plausibly argued that Madhav's sincerity as a teacher and scholar, combined his noncommittal approach towards the prevailing corruption discursively engage with some of the assumptions of Anindya Sekhar Purakayastha and Subhendra Bhowmik on the provincial Indian universities (2020). In their criticism of the classification of Indian universities into Type 1, 2, and 3 in the National Education Policy, 2020, they have critically discussed how such stratification of universities and the vindication of premiere/non-premiere binary would be further detrimental to the sustenance of many of the provincial Indian universities. Therefore, as a panacea to the stigma of backwardness attached to the provincial universities, and to resolve the financial and academic shortcomings, Purakayastha and Bhowmik propose an unprejudiced deployment of "novel and ground-based innovative methodologies, contingent on local needs to inculcate higher education to these marginalized students who are mostly first-generation learners" (Purakayastha and Bhowmik, 2020).

Thus, an analogy between the recent piece by the above critics and the fictional narrative would be conducive enough for the readers to diachronically locate the malicious practice of stratification of these non-metropolitan universities as backward, and the possible ways of debunking such negative stereotypes. With the recommendation of the Kothari Commission (1964-66), there had been considerable rise in expenditure on research activities in the academic institutions under the governance of different regulatory bodies such as UGC, ICSSR and AICTE, only to mention a few. Madhav's insuperable passion for research and an active interest in organizing seminars, special lectures, and workshops, conquering the geo-political constraints and the administrative intricacies of the Gandhi University reflect upon the potential of an individual member in bringing in the envisaged reforms in Indian higher

education. The narrative clearly brings to the fore, how the administrative ineptitude combined with the deliberate acts of conspiracy by some faculty members, fail to deter him from his pursuit of an academic excellence.

The two opposite portrayal of characters, that is Madhav's perseverance and an uncompromising academic integrity, contrary to the lethargy and a collective academic indifference, present among a significant number of teaching faculties further corroborates the intention of the text to resist and to discursively draw the possibilities of resolution to the visible crisis and challenges of Indian education system. One such incident of an administrative delay in processing the research grant for one of his research projects (UGC funded), and a never-ending effort from his end for a positive response from them signify the precarity of the researchers and teaching fraternity due to the administrative anomaly, and an individual's passive resistance against the intricacies of academic bureaucratization. Naik rightly employs wit and humour, as the instruments to sharpen his critique of academic and administrative frivolity, permeating the 'corridors of knowledge', which is also conspicuous enough in the narration of the said incident.

Numerous letters, reminders and telegrams produced no results. A telephone call to the officer concerned brought the news that the officer was on leave for a month, and that none else could handle the matter. Finally, a kindly Accounts Officer of the University got an *ad hoc* payment sanctioned to Madhav, so that his family was in no danger of starving...So much so that by the time Madhav completed his tenure, he had received barely half of his dues. It took five years for the rest of the amount to reach Madhav. He used to say jocularly that he could have very well utilized the time spent in correspondence with Delhi in completing a minor research project (COK, 159)!

Despite the negative environment, Madhav's emphasis on academic ethics, and dedication to his work throughout his life further reflect in his decision of taking up academic assignments of delivering lectures as the best possible means of utilizing the last sabbatical prior to his superannuation. A dialectical positioning of Madhav's endeavor within the lived reality of Indian universities would rather vindicate the author's urgency in invalidating the generalized assumptions of provincial universities as backward and degree awarding establishments, through a conscientious practice of critical scholarship and academic values.

Imaging Contradictions through Fiction: Linguistic Hegemony of English and its antithetical project of Academic Decolonization

The narrative also engages with the debates on the use of English as an official medium of instruction in the post-colony. Drawing upon the entrenched contradictions entailing the history of 'English education in India', the unfolding of the plot tends to locate its deeper political, historical and cultural connotations within the ever-shifting milieu of the post-independence India. Kakasaheb's suggestion to Madhav for opting English as the major subject in his undergraduate course, reflects on the very fact of assimilation vis-à-vis appropriation of the western standards of modernity and other discourses by a group of English educated native elite class, as a direct offshoot of ideologically loaded colonial education. It further endorses orientalist discourses and prevailing divisions intrinsic to Indian social order, while anticipating the subsequent lived realities of post-colonial India. His realist prediction that "...when India takes her rightful place among the comity of nations, she will need a whole army of Indians who have mastery over English, because English is now a world language" (COK 29), clearly underlines the pervasive tension in Indian society over the dichotomy between revival of native languages and the recognition of English as the world's 'lingua franca'. The problem of diglossia and the politics of the use of English as a heteronomous language in India were taken up by Probal Dasgupta in his phenomenal work, *The Otherness of English: India's Auntie*

Tongue Syndrome (1993), where he stated that “Its presence is purpose-bound; the purposes it serves in India become intelligible only when we come to understand how the communities in this country pursue their goals and use English as a tool in such pursuit” (Dasgupta 130). He further contends that English as the language of expertise and management continues to enjoy its privileged status and even retain the central position after independence, owing much to the reliance of the national leaders on English and other western discourses of modernity as guiding principles. They often ignored the questions of indigeneity, ethnicity and different national interests, espoused as the constitutive elements of the foundation of postcolonial nationhood. The uncritical celebration of the West, often endogenous to the nationalist discourses defers and therefore, dilutes the process of decolonization. It also reiterates Benedict Anderson’s concern over this emerging predilection of interpreting the concept of nation as the colonizer’s gift to its former colonies, and the consequent deterrent and liminalities, foregrounding a teleological enquiry of the ‘unimaginable community’ (English educated native elites and bourgeois), as an aftermath of colonial encounter (Anderson, 1983).

The novel explores further the consequent social fracturing due to the divisive policies and their implementations and hegemonic perceptions of the purveyors of English education in India. The character of Louis Fernandes clearly divulges a different form of class consciousness, much inclined towards assimilation of western discourses, while doing away with the relevant nationalist ones. The antithetical perceptions of Madhav and Fernandes with regard to a fellowship for pursuing masters, resulted in the latter’s decision of moving to America for further studies and later settling there in a less known American university, bring about the undercurrent of newer forms of class divisions and the resulting tension between them, as larger consequences of uneven deployment of English education. With time, the emphasis on English language witnessed an unprecedented rise with the changes in social milieu, which is further facilitated with the advent of private English medium schools in cities

and also the suburbs. This pernicious undercurrent of homogenization of academic standards, under the façade of meeting global parameters not only results in the interpellation of varied subject positions of marginalized sections of the society, but also subtly re-defines different social hegemonies and the colonial modes of segregation.

Apart from Fernandes, Madhav's observation of Dr. D' Souza and the principal of his former college who studied in foreign universities, rests on many contentious contours of the 'rhetoric of English in India'. It entails the problematics of appropriation and re-iteration of Western paradigms by the native elites within the volatile socio-political milieu of the post-independence India during the late 1960s, and subsequent elevation in its cultural status. The waning academic interests of Dr. D' Souza and the principal, along with their increasing administrative responsibilities is conspicuous enough in Madhav's account of "the foreign-trained Principal (who) had little time left for reading, let alone writing" (COK 84), or, "Dr. D' Souza's reading had practically stopped twenty years ago" (COK 85). This in turn facilitates the scope for an enquiry of the text's discursive engagement with the larger questions on how English re-defines the power center in the post-colony, and how Indian public universities, as self-reflexive democratic institutions, respond to such contested yet ineluctable assumption. Drawing upon these textual references (starting from Kakasaheb's suggestion to Madhav), it could be plausibly argued that, despite the shift in the power structure with the independence, English still retains its hegemonic position within the ever-shifting paradigms of the post-independence era. Placing the recommendations of the Conference of Vice-Chancellors of Universities (1948), The Radhakrishnan Commission (1948-49), and The Kothari Commission (1968) would chronologically reflect a gradual departure from an earlier assertion of replacement of English with the native Indian languages in secondary and tertiary education. Though the promotion of vernacular languages as medium of instruction in secondary education has been considerably achieved since independence, the lack of translation and

availability of vast pool of intellectual resources in native languages, and their consequent secondary status in higher education prove conducive enough for English to perpetuate its ontological vis-à-vis teleological domination over Indian languages.

The persistent presence of the colonial politics of ‘downward filtration’ and dilution of the policies by the government, in the process of endorsement of vernacular languages both as disciplines and medium in the tertiary level are also contingent on catering to the conflicting yet analogous interests (Annamalai, 2004). He further argues:

...how the interests of the entrenched elite of bureaucrats and professionals, who want to retain the positions of power, they gained through English, are in opposition to the interests of the emerging elites in the fields of language, literature, and culture, who want to empower their regional languages as well as themselves. Compromises in the policy are made to reconcile the conflicting interests of these two elites (Annamalai, ed. Tollefson, and Tsui 186-187).

This emphasis on English as the medium of instruction in university education also foregrounds the larger question of a collective inferiority complex, thereby complicating as well as receding from the earlier claims of linguistic and intellectual decolonization through education. The ‘anxiety of influence’^{xvii} emblematic of Indian academy’s problematic encounter with the West, besides having been demonstrated through the peripheral status of the Indian languages, also struts about the uncritical appropriation and celebration of the western paradigms of modernity. *Corridors of Knowledge* (2008) makes some significant interventions in unmasking the discursive traces of inferiority ubiquitous in academia, and the interminable delay in the moment of decolonization. Madhav’s concern with the persistent academic indigence in the Indian academic institutions is contingent upon the larger predicament of a cultural bankruptcy, as evidenced in his questioning: “Is it possible that they unconsciously nursed an inferiority

feeling, arising out of their position as members of a conquered race, and this handicap they found too much to overcome?” (COK 84).

Tracing the origin of such pervasive subservience and epistemic dispossession of the natives would engender a sustained critique of the colonial mode of knowledge production and dissemination, which is coterminous with Aditya Nigam’s discontent with the borrowed intellectual framework, constitutive of the post-colonial Indian universities. He (2020) effectively argues how such “‘predicament’ of the global south (calls forth an) understanding it as an inevitable consequence of the cultural mutilation and epistemic dispossession that follows the long years of colonial rule, where our language and vocabulary itself is made inadequate for such purposes” (Nigam xvii).

The practical complications of specious modes of adoption of the western parameters in the non-metropolitan Indian universities, owing much to the skewed development of modernity and English education in provincial towns, find ample resonance in the novel. The tension of addressing the heterogeneity of the students coming from diverse strata of the society along with the endogenous ineptitude of coping with the pedagogical and linguistic markers of the English language, become perspicacious enough in the academic functioning of such peripheral institutions. The case of English departments further complicates such assumptions, as the syllabus curriculum and course structure followed in most of the Indian universities during the 1960s-70s were largely modelled on their western counterparts, overlooking studies on Indian literatures written in English and other vernacular mediums. Dialectically situating the animosity between the committee members over text book selection in the English department of the Gandhi university within the lived reality of the non-metropolitan Indian universities, clearly brings about the larger politics of reception and nativization of English language in India, and the material benefits attached to this whole venture. Madhav’s strong criticism of the poor diction, grammatical and syntactical errors in the locally published English

text books by an ambiguous group of ‘experienced professors’ (relevant in the present times as well), discursively engages with the liminal spaces of development of ‘Postcolonial Englishes’.

As Edgar W. Schneider (2007) argues, this whole process also underlines the urgency of an informed knowledge on “the sociohistorical contexts of their emergence” (4), and “entails structural nativization, understood as the emergence of locally characteristic linguistic patterns and thus the genesis of a new variety of English” (5-6). It is through the embodiment of academic value of ‘belabouring’, and a sincere “transnational perspective...in understanding global English(es)” (Schneider 5), which are evidenced in his onerous task of heading the committee of compiling the text books, Madhav viably distances him from the materialist inclinations of other committee members. His conscientious transnational approach and righteousness also resonate in his insistence on conducting the workshops in the Gandhi University, jointly sponsored by the UGC, “the British Council, and the United States Educational Foundation in India” (COK 124). Taking on Bhabha’s definition of ‘cultural difference’ (1988), as something which “problematizes the division of past and present, tradition and modernity, at the level of cultural representation and...undermines our sense of the homogenizing effects of cultural symbols and icons...” (qtd. in Ashcroft, et al. 2007), Madhav’s position could be perceived as a manifestation of the ‘Third Space of enunciation’^{xviii} as a liberating factor. This, as the novel portrays, allows him to envision academia as a potential site to unmask, or to critique the underlying pretensions in the project of mainstream Indian nationalism.

He rightly observes that such outreach programs would enable the student community of his university to evolve a critical consciousness of their own, founded on the peripherality of their experiences and the geo-political marginalization of the provincial towns in the post-independence India, compared to their metropolitan centers. The resentment (if not a thorough resistance), and passivity among his colleagues concerning such reformative endeavors, apart

from foregrounding the causality of the academic stagnation in provincial academic institutions, also implies a constant anxiety among the English educated native elites and new middle class, entailing their ‘epistemic sovereignty’^{xix} over the hitherto native language-speaking communities. Thus, the paradox of upward mobility through English education and an evolution of a distinct cultural consciousness of the geo-culturally peripheral communities within the monolithic structure of Indian university system, not long after independence, require a much challenging task of debunking the hegemony of the English educated Indian elites.

The furor over Madhav’s recommendation of “books by leading publishers like Macmillan, Oxford, Orient Longman, etc.” (COK 119), deftly exemplifies a discreet textual attempt to resist an overarching utilitarian drive lacking academic merit and integrity, emblematic of a section of Indian academicians in decolonizing the English language. The narrator ironically observes: “‘Were not the local teachers qualified, and were not the local publishers capable of producing text-books of this type?’ they indignantly asked. Behind this righteous wrath was ultimately a simple economic equation: there was ample money in these text books, since the number of copies sold was in thousands” (COK 119). It is through the pointed critique of the material prospects associated with English education in India, M. K. Naik discursively engages with the churning questions of the gradual transmogrification of English as a sellable and visible agent of social adaptability, and the new cultural capital of the postcolony. The dominant materialistic perceptions of Madhav’s colleagues reminds us of Gandhi’s scathing criticism of the evils of English education and its uncritical idealization by the Indians, dialogically demonstrated in his *Hind Swaraj* (1909). Gandhi contends that “We are so much beset by the disease of civilization that we cannot altogether do without English-education. Those who have already received it may make good use of it wherever necessary...The object of making money thereby should be eschewed” (Gandhi 74).

With the emergence of English as the cultural capital of post-independence India, it gradually becomes synonymous with upward social mobility. Braj B. Kachru's provoking, yet befitting proposition that the linguistic and political neutrality of the English language consolidates its dominant position amongst native languages, which in turn, elevates its status as a linguistic medium for socio-economic empowerment in the postcolony (*The Alchemy of English: The Spread Functions, and Models of Non-Native Englishes*, 1986). Owing much to the socio-cultural and political tension between the native Indian languages, his views give us a fresh insight to look closely into the political of English becoming a symbol of empowerment and gradually subsuming the underprivileged sections from urban and rural India. Through the characterization of Matangini Mistry, a faculty member of the English department, Naik subtly engages with the debatable question of upward mobility through English education. Mistry, who hails from a small town and an underprivileged community, through her rise in the academic and administrative ladder of the university, dialectically situates the narrative within the shifting assumptions among the backward sections of the society with the English education and possible empowerment. Her persistent effort and enduring struggle enabled her to transcend the social restrictions imposed on the depressed classes, and also prepared her to effectively question the naturalization of stigma attached to the identity of the subalterns in our country. However, her rise to the elusive ivory tower also expands the scope of further inquiry into the interpellation of ethnic differences through a gradual process of cultural homogenization, and the prevalence of bureaucratic and elitist elements of university education.

Using her knowledge of English language, and her caste identity as a shield, so as to safeguard her individual interests, very often compromising with the academic merit and integrity, are resonant enough of the concern raised by several critics like E. Annamalai, Probal Dasgupta, David Faust and Richa Nagar. Building upon Faust and Nagar's theory of social

fracturing caused by this exclusivist nature of English education (2001), Mistry exemplifies how English becomes a sellable and visible agent of social adaptability, largely determined by the ubiquitous presence of the market, often renouncing the larger intellectual and social responsibilities. The case of Matangini Mistry, apart from pinpointing the failure of our education system in evolving a distinct ‘subaltern consciousness’^{xx}, also aims to problematize the notion of upward mobility through English education, and the surreptitious predilection of power exertion under the façade of ‘epistemic sovereignty’. With this bi-directional development of the plot entailing the academic-political interface in Indian universities, and the socio-cultural and political implication of English education in India, *Corridors of Knowledge* (2008) brings about the question of how our national education system fails to bridge the gap between lived reality and academic engagements.

Set in an imaginary college campus of Tamil Nadu during the 1950s, P. M. Nithyanandan’s *The Long Long Days* (1960) marks a fictional endeavor to delve into the inherent limitations in the national framework of Indian education, and more essentially the plight of college education in a newly independent nation. The lucid story-telling which reminds me of R. K. Narayan’s style of writing in *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937), proves befitting enough for a fictional representation of the predicament of Indian colleges in the following decade after independence. It is through portrayal of the campus life of ‘Vikrama College’, the novel gradually unmasks the intricacies and tensions involved in the planning, lack of a futuristic and decolonized vision in the course curriculum, and the resulting apathy among students. Unlike other Indian Campus Novels, and even their western counterparts, *The Long Long Days* demonstrates a different approach of looking into the campus and its paraphernalia from the perspectives of the students, thereby distancing itself from the popular definition of the subgenre, Campus Fiction as ‘Professorromane’.

Building upon the contested trajectories of expansion of college education in India, as evidenced in the reading of Naik's work, this novel further engages with the problems of college education in India through the detailing of life in a college campus during the 1950s. In an endeavor to locate the deep-seated problems of cultural alienation of ordinary Indian students from their studies due to its foreign origin, and the dearth of an intellectually decolonized mind of the policy-makers of a post-independent nation, Nithyanandan deftly resorts to the literary techniques of humor and satire. The description of students' responses in an English class, and a common picture of detaining students in the same grade for years, clearly reflect upon the shortcomings of higher education in India. While Naidu, a student, is baffled by the question of the professor, Kannan, another student, frantically tries to escape the class. The narrator jocularly observes: "Kannan, the long emaciated patriarch of the class... had been in the Junior Intermediate longer than some of the lecturers. Fighting a losing battle over the years with Shakespeare he had become, like Cassius, a stoic" (Nithyanandan 6; henceforth TLLD page no.). On the other hand, Naidu having been asked who Brutus was, "...stood like a rock. The question, it seemed to him, was quite unfair... 'Quite a character, sir. A nice, strong...' Naidu paused. Was Brutus a man or a woman? '...man,' he concluded, holding his breath" (TLLD 7). Apart from throwing light on an average Indian student's lack of interest in education, these two intersecting pictures foreground some provoking questions on the cultural alienation of an average Indian student within the framework of modern Indian education, often quintessentially English in its demeanor.

In the two hundred years of colonial regime, our native cultures and epistemic traditions were not just depreciated by the colonial masters, but were systematically replaced with their western alternatives. But the English education which was introduced by the British, was largely circumscribed within the native elite class people, thereby distancing itself from a democratic dissemination of knowledge among different social and gender groups. The

independence which ushered in a new era in the history of Indian education, witnessed a considerable rise in the number of institutions and students from different strata of the society. However, the vision of equality and the rise in number of institutions and enrollment of students were not enhanced with an equal development in the quality of teaching and learning, and research in many of these institutions as well as competent teaching professionals. Beside these, a subconscious adherence to the Western epistemic models and use of English as the official medium of instruction, and a simultaneous lack in scholarly endeavors to connect our knowledge system with the rooted contexts, further reverse the envisaged goals of democratization of education. The two above-mentioned instances of academic indifference present among a considerable number of Indian students, in a way corroborate the claims of a cultural alienation of Indian students from the subjects being taught and a sharp division between the elite and non-elite sections.

The recommendations of the Radhakrishnan Commission (1948-49) were imperative enough in protecting the rights of the underprivileged sections of the society through upholding the spirit of equality and introducing financial aids for them and construction of educational institutions in backward places. Yet, one cannot deny the fact that, the then policy makers downplayed the severe consequences of retaining the essential structure of the colonial education to an extent, given the perpetuity of the two-fold exploitation and subjugation of the lower caste/class people in the hands of oppressive Western forces and native elites. Despite several reforms, Indian university system remains largely elitist in nature and often fails to overcome the anxiety of influence, as evidenced in the practice of seeking validation from the West for our intellectual works. As discussed in the last section on English education and the Indian academy, it is evident enough that the English education seems to have re-affirmed the social hierarchies and has also upset the social divisions in the post-independence era. Contrary to the English educated native elites, the backward sections who were not hitherto exposed to

English education, and a preordained notion of modernity suffixed to the English culture, now become a passive recipient of the Westernized Indian higher education. Thus, the project of a social revolution through education remains an unfinished one with such ubiquitous discontinuities, resonant enough in the national education system.

Uneven Expansion, Provincial Backwardness and the Scourge of ‘Massification’ in Indian Higher Education

In the line of Tagore and Gandhi, the later thinkers such as A. R. Kamat (1980), Philip. G. Altbach (1972), Edward Shils (1969) and Iqbal Narain (1985) among others, have accused the policy makers, the academic community and moreover, the increasing politicization of academia for a persistent lack of uniformity in its expansion. After hundreds of years of colonial rule and their rampant looting of our resources, when India became independent, the economic and cultural bankruptcy of the nation emerge as the primary challenges for the national leadership alongside the ineradicable problems of social and geo-political binaries, such as rural/urban and privileged/underprivileged, among others. But unfortunately, contrary to the recommendations of the first education commission, when an average, not exceeding 1.15% of the total GDP of the country was spent on education during 1950s, and the most of it was consumed by a lesser number of elite institutions, the vast number of non-elite and provincial institutions became the worst victims of the problem of underfunding. Taking on the disparity in fund disbursement, Kamat in his article “Educational Policies in India: Critical Issues” (1980), sees it as a two-fold imbalance – firstly, the discrepancy between the secondary and higher education, and secondly, inequality within the higher education structure itself. He rightly argues:

On the one hand we have the IITs, IIMs and other highly subsidized prestigious institutions and select elite colleges and university departments. On the other, there are miserable specimens of institutions of higher education which are

higher only in name; colleges with libraries, having no more than a thousand or a few hundred books, science colleges with little laboratory facilities,...engineering colleges without workshop facilities, and medical colleges with inadequate hospitals having very few patients (Kamat, “Educational Policies in India: Critical Issues” 193-194).

The problem of underfunding which has been inimical to the progress of Indian education was also visible in the pay-structure of the teachers. Unlike other public sector employees and the bureaucrats, the academics were perpetually underpaid. The novel also sheds some light on the financial vulnerability of academicians as one of the constitutive elements, accountable for the prevailing mediocrity in Indian academy. The portrayal of the character of Mr. Venkata Aiyer, a senior lecturer of English, succinctly draws upon the impoverished condition of Indian academics in the post-independence times. While chronicling the overall countenance of Mr. Aiyer as a teacher, the third person narrator discerningly observes: “Everyone thought him an excellent teacher. But few realized that as an underpaid man with six children and a wife to support, he could not afford to be otherwise” (TLLD 6). The lack of a uniform pay-structure for the teachers across the government institutions and the problem of underpayment typical of the Indian education system, were not much emphasized in the first education commission, despite the policy makers’ plea for a social revolution through education. This overarching financial predicament of Indian academia had deterred a large number of meritorious students from opting a career in academics during the first two decades after the independence, which had been detrimental to the growth of a recently launched national education system. The nation had to wait till 1966 for the report of the Kothari Commission (1964-66), which proposed a uniform pay-structure for the teachers and a significant hike in the pay-scale of university and college teachers.

Furthermore, their desultory attitude to the financial precarity of the teachers in a way led to academic stagnation and underdevelopment as constant companions of Indian education system. Since the novel is set against the backdrop of a greater wave of nationalism and early years of nation building in India during the 1950s, the principal's sarcastic remark on his teaching assignment synchronically locates the pervasive academic mediocrity in college education. His disillusionment with the dominant trend of reverence for Western paradigms of education and an overpowering resistance to the 'hermeneutics of change'^{xxi} in Indian academia, is evident enough in his statement "...I have to lecture the fourth-years on Chaucer. Twentieth year I'm exhuming the old gentleman" (TLLD, 49). A dialectical positioning of many of these textual evidences would further unveil distinct junctures of intertextual connection between the text and the postcolonial criticism of Indian academia and its overpowering resistance to any form of change, due to the unresolved problems of tradition and modernity, power hierarchy, and underfunding, followed by a concomitant lack of merit and resources (Singh, 1971; Shils, 1969). Notwithstanding the supposed reform and formation of different regulatory bodies and academic institutions, this remark of the principal of the college discursively engages with the collective lack of the natives' "quest for disalienation" (174) as Fanon observes in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). Therefore, instead of disengaging themselves from the imperial influences, the natives rather become subject of an improper appropriation of colonial discourses.

Homi Bhabha defines this incomplete imitation and the subsequent 'partial presence' of the colonial subject as 'mimicry' ("Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse", 1984). Building upon the notion of 'ambivalence', his first proposition of his bi-fold analysis of 'colonial mimicry' is indicative of the contemporary tensions and contradictions in Indian academia, which is characterized by "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference, that is almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha

126). Thus, as one of the earlier works of the fictional subgenre, Indian Campus Fiction, *The Long Long Days* attempts to locate the discontinuities in the project of a decolonized Indian university system, both ontologically and teleologically.

Along the lines of *Corridors of Knowledge*, where Madhav's friends switch to other lucrative professions, or his colleagues from the government college discouraging him from joining Gandhi University for financial reasons, this novel aptly problematizes the untoward implications of the pervasive crisis of underfunding in higher education. Gopinath, a meritorious student of Vikrama College and one of the central characters of the novel, does not intend to select academics as a possible career option in future. Furthermore, the conversations of the students also divulge a sense of collective consternation with their uncertain future. The angst of an ordinary Indian student with his/her career during the 1950s and the 60s, as evident in the novel, is symptomatic of the challenges of unemployment and underemployment followed by the debate over 'massification', instead of mass education.

The term 'massification', which was developed by the Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire in his book *Education for Critical Consciousness* (1974), is contingent upon the clandestine desire and a subsequent anxiety of the native elites to retain their power over the masses. In post-colonial Brazil, he argues, the sustenance and progress of democracy relies heavily on a large-scale national economic development, which in a way ended the oppressive domination of the muted sections in the hands of privileged ones. But the consequent fear of the native elites persuades them to adopt conniving strategies of domination through deception, and 'consent mode of ideology dissemination'^{xxii}. Thus, in order to hold on to the power center amidst the widespread democratic drive, they very often target the quintessence of every act of social reformation, i.e. the education system of the nation. Without being antipathetic to the notion of equality in education, the dominant class sets the parameters of different examinations quite high and prepare the course curriculum in such a manner, which are often

beyond the cognitive abilities of most of the students from the marginalized sections, and even fail to engage themselves critically. Therefore, on the pretext of adherence to the minimum standard, the discriminatory practices of the native elites culminate either in the mass production of half-educated citizens or in huge percentage of drop-outs, thereby perpetually securing their (oppressed sections) secondary position in the society. The undemocratic practices preceded by an unbridled desire for power exertion, Freire claims, transforms the democratic drive of 'mass education' into a much derogatory appropriation of it, i.e. 'massification'. The term implies a visible lack of critical consciousness among common masses because of an ever-widening rupture between their lived experiences and what is being taught in classrooms, which eventually leads to the problems of unemployment and underemployment.

Although a newly independent India in the 1950s was in a dire need of greater socio-economic reform, and because of writing the thesis in the twenty-first century, I believe, that the country was practically left with no feasible option, other than following the model of Western modernity, for a set of reasons. Firstly, after years of colonial desecration of our indigenous epistemic traditions along with the mutilation of cultural and intellectual resources, the native knowledge system needed a radical revival through a rigorous process of constructions and reconstructions. And secondly, in the purview of fragmented evolution and large-scale debasement of our native institutions, the English educated nationalist leaders and policymakers readily accepted the markers of western modernity as milestones of nation-building.

But the projects of modernity and of an economic liberalization, which hinge on a radical form of educational reform rooted in the lived contexts of the Indians, suffered a major setback because of our undiscerning borrowing from the Western discourses and the politics of/in unplanned expansion and unequal distribution of intellectual and financial resources.

Despite the educators' plea for a systematic growth of higher education and premonition of a 'machine-made university', and 'technocratic modernization' by the visionaries like Tagore and Gandhi much before the independence, an urgency in the action of many of the Indian politicians with the expansion of Indian education system was not solely driven by an academic disposition, but by a nuanced political assumption of power exertion and dissemination of dominant political ideologies. It is true that the call for an epistemic modernization with the growing interaction between academia and the market economy, and a perpetual anxiety of meeting the global standards, triggered the progress of Science and Technological education. However, what the novel satirizes is the under-resourcing and a much naturalized peripherality of Arts and Humanities education in post-colonial times.

The secondary position of non-science disciplines in academia further reflects an asymmetrical teacher-student ratio and poor infrastructural facilities, where a constant anxiety over the career prospects of students looms large. When this large number of students were not guided by a sufficient number of adept teaching staff, and adequate infrastructure and library facilities, the democratic drive of mass education turns into a farcical project with universities and colleges turning into mere degree awarding bodies, while incrementally departing from their scholarly pursuits. The novel provides ample evidences of the dismaying influence of such intellectual mediocrity on the psyche of the students, which also encourages academic malpractices, preceded by a conspicuous lack of interest in education. A realistic portrayal of the university examinations aptly comprises the crafty methods followed by the students in order to pass the examination. The relief and pride resonant in Kannan's voice after the English examination, exemplify the novelist's resentment with the dismal condition of Indian colleges, and his concern over the future of higher education in India. The visible satire in the narration of Kannan's stealthy practice substantiates the above assumption.

On the way to the mess, Kannan revealed the resourceful chicanery that had finally led to the undoing of the Bard. The previous day he had blocked the water supply to an overhead flushing cistern, and temporarily converted it into library. Every time he fell short of essential information, he had only to visit the closet, stretch for the lid (only he could reach it effortlessly), and help himself to the most authentic data available, though the books were damp and mouldy (TLLD 118).

Thus, the problematics of an entrenched colonial legacy in Indian higher education and the resultant academic banality, which are deftly deployed as pivotal causes behind the stunted growth of Indian education and its failure to critically engage the students of all the communities in those difficult times discursively forms the ground for later critics like A. R. Kamat and Mohinder Singh to build up their argument on the deterioration in the academic merit of Indian academy. In view of the prevailing crises in Indian college education, Kamat's unsparing critique aptly engages with many of the assumptions of Nithyanandan, as evidenced in the novel. "By the mid-sixties the resulting situation, particularly in college education had become acute because of maladministration, corrupt practices, substandard instruction, increasing educated unemployment, and above all the increasing drain on the exchequer" (Kamat, "Education and Social Change: A Conceptual Framework" 194).

The narration of the annual graduates' reception in a way vindicates the disposable status of educated youths in India, which is contingent upon the superfluity of pedagogical markers of Indian higher education and the persistent problem of unemployment. Drawing upon the question of vulnerability of arts graduates compared to the science graduates, the narrator judiciously observes, how arts education in post-independence India has become a subject of a two-fold marginalization in the hands of dominant socio-economic and political discourses, i.e. Government's "insistence on an arts degree for the most insignificant posts"

(TLLD 68), and the ambivalent political goal of mass-education. In their inquiry of the proposed goals and the direction of Indian higher education, Iqbal Narain (1985) and Mohinder Singh (1971) held the planners' lack of comprehensive knowledge on the heterogeneity of Indian experiences and the national needs for the irrelevance of formal Indian education in the business of living. "They memorize a host of names, dates and theories dealing with more with cultures, civilizations and conditions far removed from their own, and that also generally in a foreign language" (Singh 121), and "at the back of it all is the fact that students see little purpose in the type of education that they are receiving" (Narain 942).

A 'symptomatic reading' of the textual evidences embodies a distinct fictional endeavor to locate the government's lack of a conscientious and holistic approach with arts education, as "the scope of employment for an arts graduate was pitifully meagre" (TLLD 68). "Heads (students were unnecessarily) crammed with Newman and Gibbon...and imbued with the piquancy of youth, wasted and worn away on clerical stools, adding and subtracting figures...till at the age of forty only an insensate shell was left, fettered by routine and blunted by daily struggle...and of a life that once started so spaciouly" (TLLD 68). The narrator goes on:

Hence the mass production went on at an increasing rate, and academic incubators all over the country spewed forth thousands every year. And they all emerged from the university portals, hot and panting, imagining the race was over and the laurels theirs, only to discover tragically that the race had not yet started...The tragedy lay, not in the actual fact of disillusionment, but in the faithless promise and unfulfilment (TLLD 68).

An evident connection between two of his assumptions, i.e. arts education as a mere political tool for a preposterous execution of mass education and its peripherality, owing much to the generalized claim for underpaid jobs, enables the reader to draw upon the novel's discursive

intervention with the question of underemployment as one of the failures of the postcolonial nation state.

Underemployment is understood as an existing condition in a country, when the employment sector is characterized by an ever-increasing dichotomy between the educational parameters and the availability of jobs. Drawing inferences from the works of economists such as Zvonkovic (1988), Tipps and Gordon (1985) and their definition of ‘underemployment’ in terms of disparity in the wage structure and of “erratic employment or... of employment mismatched with education and training” (Feldman 387), Daniel C. Feldman in his article identified two indicators, as the decisive elements of underemployment. According to him,

Underemployment is defined somehow as an inferior, lesser, or lower quality type of employment. In addition, underemployment is defined relative to some standard. In some cases, underemployment is defined relative to the employment experiences of others with the same education or work history; in other cases, underemployment is defined relative to the person’s own past education or work history (ibid. 387).

Thus, an analogy between Niyanandan’s satire on the plight of arts education in India and the definitive markers of ‘massification’ and underemployment would, in turn, corroborate the claims of discontinuities in the project of equality in education. The dearth of dignified jobs and of a uniform advancement, combined with an equal lack of harmony between the course curricula and the socio-economic matrix of the nation, which in a way, become analogous to the Arts and Humanities education, are deftly deployed by the novelist as a potential tool to unmask the depraved political equations behind the supposed notion of equality.

The gradual transformation of the democratic drive of mass education into a clandestine political tool of ‘massification’ is discernible enough in the novelist’s intervention with a two-way process of the peripheral status of Arts education in India. It entails a failure to inculcate

the spirit of critical enquiry among the students and a constant discordance between courses being taught and requirements of the employment sector. The unplanned expansion of the higher education in India, despite warnings of the policy makers, which could be construed as one of the seminal causes of ‘massification’ of higher education, further foregrounds contested questions on the driving forces of higher education for a common Indian. An analogy between the textual assumptions and the propositions of Mohinder Singh (1971), would draw upon the interrelations between the pedagogical markers and the sociological ones. Singh elaborates on how the hegemonic disposition of the native elites diluted the democratization of higher education, while taking advantage of the ignorance of common masses. In India, the fear of ignominy and stigma of unrewarding menial jobs impelled the privileged sections to opt for those coveted elite academic institutions, few in numbers, so as to safeguard their sovereignty over the common people. Therefore, deriving from Marx and Engels’ (1857-1862) views on education, it could be rightly observed that the seemingly egalitarian drive of education of the hitherto untended lots, advocated by the ruling class was preceded by insidious political and material interests of conformity towards the social hierarchies, better quality of production and improved skilled force. This, eventually perpetuates the implied labelling of second class citizens to the members of underprivileged sections and backward communities; comparatively a larger number of students from these social groups in non-elite and provincial institutions expose the bleak reality of democratization of education.

The myth of meritocracy, which often plays a key role behind this understated discrimination in Indian higher education, Singh contends, is driven by utilitarian motives, i.e. “for status and jobs, than increase in skills or learning for its own sake” (124). Reflecting upon the unanticipated consequences of the anomalies in Indian college education, he further problematizes the lack of righteousness and of comprehensive planning of the government in the implementation of educational policies. Singh also argues that the mass-production of naive

and half-educated college graduates could destabilize the distinguishing markers between literacy and education. Extending upon Singh's corollary, Nithyanandan deftly locates the predicament of Arts and Humanities education in the post-independence India within the challenges as well as pitfalls of mass-education. In purview of the entrenched crisis in India academia, Prof. D'Souza's advice towards the end of the novel paradoxically locates the disposability vis-à-vis dispensability of Arts and Humanities education, in comparison to the Science and Technological education:

“He said: You know, there was a time when I thought the literature graduates the most important of my students, for theirs is the power and the glory of language and expression. But I'm afraid, my boys, times are changing. Now I can only consider you as a set of youths with tremendous, but quite useless potentialities, like a pair of mismatched rabbits. May be, as Wilde puts it, all art is quite useless” (TLLD 121).

The gradual devaluation of Humanities owes considerably to the lack of socialist-liberal prescience of the planners, which is conspicuous enough in the discordance between the economic and education policies. Whereas, economic liberalization paved the way for increasing privatization in different public sectors including education, on the other hand, education policies uphold a much comprehensive and egalitarian resolution to the persistent social divisions through effectuation of equality in education. Quite contrary to mainstream expectations, the emerging corporate presence started to co-opt the democratic drive of national education, while introducing Indian academia with newer layers of Western-import binaries such as, metropolitan/provincial and science/non-science disciplines. Amidst these prevailing tensions and contradictions in Indian academia, what suffers the most is the nation's human resource pool given the nascent stage of the national education system, which often resembles the Lacanian 'mirror stage'^{xxiii}. Because of the academia's inability to ingeniously reflect upon

the choices, the native citizens fall prey to the conniving capitalist tropes, thereby resulting in a pervasive anomaly in human capital formation and returns on it. Where, the privileged section thrive using their material power and put in every effort to enroll their children in elite institutions and science and technological streams, the marginalized communities fall further back into the uneven race because of their lack of critical consciousness, and financial stability.

Responding to the present incongruity in Indian academia, the economist Prof. A M Nalla Gounden in his essay: “Education and Economic Growth: Lessons from India” (1987) brings in a penetrating analysis of the widespread discrepancy in formation and deployment of “Education capital (knowledge, skills and work capacity)” (Gounden, eds. Ghosh and Zachariah 105). Drawing upon the empirical evidences of expenditure in educational sector from 1950 -1980, he meticulously locates the undercurrent of discrimination in allocating resources across several disciplines, regions and communities. The article also employs other statistical data, such as student-teacher ratio in Arts, Science, and Technological education and investment-return ratio in the above disciplines, which empirically validate Nithyanandan’s resentment with the dismal condition of Arts education in India. If we take up Gounden’s analysis of the contrast between Arts and Science/Technological education during the 1950s, contingent upon the above-mentioned factors, the first question which strikes an informed reader is the injustice with Arts education in India, considering a vast number of students with an infinitesimal intellectual and material resources invested in it. Taking on the marker of return ratio, the second question re-evaluates the Government’s ineptitude to augment the vast human resource of Arts and Humanities for relevant human and national causes, which in turn alienates the Arts students from their Science and Technology counterparts.

This alienation is further symptomatic of nuanced ideological crisis such as, mutual disrespect, egotistical rivalry, and an implicit sense of hierarchy crisscrossing the students across disciplines. C. P. Snow’s concern with “a gulf of mutual incomprehension-

sometimes...hostility and dislike, but most of all lack of understanding” (Snow 4) between literary intellectuals and scientists aptly echoes the delineation of antagonism between students from different disciplines of Vikrama College. The epigrammatic style of portrayal of Science and Humanities clubs of the college effectively sums up the intention of the text. The Science club is richer in terms of resources compared to the humanities club and is the most sought after society in the campus, whereas the members of the underfunded, unheeded Humanities club are “secretly regarded by many as a distinctly retrogressive cabal, who had no future in life anyhow” (TLLD 26). The visible rivalry and the politics of favoritism, encompassing the above-stated disciplines, Nitynandan discursively claims, instils an inexorable form of superiority as well as inferiority complex among the academic communities, where a member of a particular discipline no longer feels it imperative enough to empathize or to connect with the varied perspectives of his/her colleagues from other disciplines. Thus, as a panacea to such ubiquitous predicament, Nithyanandan resorts to the inter-personal and critical dialogues among the students and dissent as an apparatus, manifest in the campaigning during the students’ election and campus activism, hinge upon the self-reflexive and democratic ethos of the campus. His persistence on dialogic relations among the students across the disciplinary boundaries, calls for further inquiry into the future possibilities of interdisciplinary studies which recur, time and again, as a pivotal theme in the later works of Indian Campus Fiction in English.

Caste and the claims of ‘Massification’: A reading of *Corridors of Knowledge*

An examination of the Indian contexts of ‘massification’ during the first quarter after independence and their manifestations in campus novels would remain incomplete without an investigation of the embedded presence of caste hierarchies and discrimination within academia, and the problematics of reservation in education as a means to empowerment and upward mobility of the depressed classes (SC, ST, OBC and other marginalized communities).

Caste System in India which is enmeshed in the socio-cultural and political reality of modern India, connotes to a nuanced historical process of oppression through praxes of untouchability and social ostracization followed by a perpetual stigma affixed to the identity of people from the lower castes. It, which dates back to the times of *The Manusmriti* (200 BCE – 300 CE) and the “Sutras”, underlines a set of principles for the Brahmins and other upper castes to retain their purity from the curse of untouchability and subsequent defilement. In his polemic against the fallacies of caste system, B. R. Ambedkar, the torchbearer of empowerment of the ‘Dalits’ in modern times, draws inferences from discursive historical traces of the exploitation of ‘the untouchables’ in the hands of the upper caste people, and their unending plight. In his work, *The Untouchables: Who were they and Why they became untouchables?* (1948), Ambedkar draws a list of communities across the provinces who “...are born impure, they are impure while they live, they die the death of the impure, and they give birth to children who are born with the stigma of Untouchability affixed to them. It is a case of permanent, hereditary stain which nothing can cleanse” (*The Untouchables: Who were they and Why they became untouchables?* 21). He further argues that it results in a form of social segregation and ostracisation of ‘the untouchables’ as “The Hindu will not live in the quarters of the Untouchables and will not allow the Untouchables to live inside Hindu quarters” (ibid. 22). Apart from the prejudices of the upper castes, his observations are also symptomatic of the grim reality of deprivation of the lower castes from their fundamental rights due to the social hierarchies and hegemony of the dominant castes for centuries.

In *Corridors of Knowledge*, an epigrammatic portrayal of the staff room in one of the colleges where Madhav worked as a teacher before he joined the Gandhi University underlines the presence of “...a kind of a Chaturvarnya (fourfold division) [that] seemed to be in silent operation” (COK 55). The narrator wittily observes –

The senior professors, all Class I officers and mostly trained in Oxford or Cambridge, occupied the most comfortable corner in cosy armchairs. They were obviously the ‘Brahmins’ of the Staffroom. The middle ground belonged to middle-aged class II officers, who sat on somewhat smaller chairs. They were evidently the ‘Kshattriyas’. Below them sat the young class III officers, the ‘Vaishyas’, and the the ‘Shudras’ were the demonstrators, tutors, and fellows, who talked in muted tones with each other and generally had an apologetic air about them (COK 55-56).

What is obvious in this fictional narration of the staff room is a discursive critique of academia’s appropriation of the ‘Varna system’^{xxiv} intrinsic to the Hindu society. As the Hindu society is divided into four ‘varnas’, i.e. Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra, supposedly on the grounds of their professions which is constitutive of the Caste system in India, the novel satirizes, how the liberal democratic academic space too, could embody such social divisions.

What is problematic in the ‘division of labour’ and gradation of teachers within a staff room is that, here the caste identity of an individual overshadows his/her academic potential. The hierarchical divisions in Caste system are almost like “water-tight compartments” (Ambedkar *Annihilation of Caste* 47), which thwarts the possibility of upward mobility and social empowerment of the depressed classes. Ambedkar further argues that

Caste System...is a hierarchy in which the divisions of labourers are graded one above the other...This division of labour is not spontaneous, it is not based on natural aptitudes. Social and individual efficiency requires us to develop the capacity of an individual to the point of competency to choose and to make his own career. This principle is violated in the Caste System...The division of labour...is based on the dogma of predestination (ibid. 47 - 48).

Thus, what is implicit in the subtle satire of academic gradation in a college staffroom of modern India which is either on the verge of independence or right after independence, is a problematization of the persistent crisis of hegemonic co-option of the liberal-democratic academic space by the privileged sections, to be precise, the English educated native professors from the dominant castes. This, as the text indicates, restricts the professional growth of academicians from the lower castes and backward sections of the society, either through scheming strategies or through exertion of power, or both.

However, apart from their peripheral position and precarity, in my reading, the fictionalized staffroom in Naik's novel is also evocative of a visible absence of representations from the castes who have not been allotted a place in the pyramidal structure of caste system, i.e. the 'untouchables'. It is by implying the discernible lack of presence of the Dalit intellectuals in Indian academia during the late 1940s, this work of fiction intervenes with the urgency of their empowerment in the democratic framework of the post-independence India, and further underlines the dialectic between enhancing the scope for admittance of the hitherto oppressed castes to higher education and the university's claims of democracy and social inclusivity. Therefore, by reflecting upon the propositions of the Radhakrishnan Commission (1948-49) and the Articles 16, 46 and 335 in "The Constitution of India" (1950) (discussed before), the fictional narrative discursively brings into discussion the questions of reservation in education and financial aids and fellowships for the depressed classes (mostly, SC and ST) for them to stay in an uneven competition with the dominant classes/castes, and as a means to ensuring equal access to education.

The narrative succinctly draws upon the welfare measures taken by the liberal-minded individuals and the Government of independent India accompanied by the financial assistance to the historically deprived communities in order to bring them within the compass of mainstream education system. Pointing at these holistic endeavors, the fictional third person

narrator observes “Tilak college was to operate on the lines of the great Shantiniketan...Room and board were free for students, and even tuition fees were highly subsidized...Preference was to be given to Dalits and students below the poverty line” (COK 34). Though, these measures have been partially conducive to safeguarding the citizen rights of the depressed classes and their right to education, the narrative further alludes to a nuanced politics of strategic exertion of hegemony of the privileged class, which often undermines the efficacy of such projects aiming at equality and empowerment of the marginalized communities. Reflecting upon the lacunae in the principle of equal opportunity, Frank Thakurdas observes that “...the principle of equality of opportunity...on close examination will reveal that opportunity by itself again in an inequalitarian society, even if legally recognised, does not work for citizens whose disparity of economic status, negates or defeats the very equality that it offers” (qtd. in Sharma, et al. 64). Although the text does not much engage with the economic contexts of their precarity, it succinctly shows how the academic world is marred with discursive traces of intellectual hegemonies of the dominant social groups.

Few pages later, the narrator again observes how Manilalbhai, Madhav’s teacher, who hails from an upper caste background, advises him “...to read Samuel Smiles’ *Character*, a book about character-building, which in an earlier generation, was considered to be required reading for all young man, and the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*” (COK 57). His advice is loaded with the problems of his submission to the dominance of Western epistemic discourses in post-colonial Indian academia and his defense of Indian Caste System. First, the example of Samuel Smiles symbolizes an undercurrent of the co-option of Indian academic space by Western epistemology that discursively locates the inescapable reality of English educated native academicians, who mostly belonged to the upper castes and privileged social groups in the initial years after independence. It eventually proves Macaulay’s anticipation of a continuing ideological domination of the East by the West much after the end of British

imperialism to be true. The causality of persistent hegemony of western epistemic discourses and gradual transformation of English into newer cultural capital of post-independence India have been already foregrounded in one of the previous sections. However, apart from the prevalence of Eurocentric models of higher education, his second suggestion to read Vivekananda's works connotes to a subconscious act and therefore, a dominant approach of the upper castes to uphold the essence of caste system in India, if not the hegemonic relations, stigmatization and divides intrinsic to it.

It is true that Vivekananda has decried the modern practices of segregation, exclusion and inequality in Indian caste system (*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda Vol. V*, 1973), and his writings and speeches on Caste are also marked with a scathing criticism of the hegemony and privileged status of the Brahmins in the Indian society. Yet, his views are characterized by ambivalences and contradictions. They entail a wide range of prejudices and misassumptions, thereby naturalizing many of the caste stereotypes. Responding to his contradictory views on Caste system and an assertion of differences amidst unity and sameness, M. Nandakishwor Singh in his article "Revisiting Caste in the Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda" (2018), has critically examined a number of Vivekananda's assumptions on Caste and its diverse manifestations. For Vivekananda, as Nandakishwor Singh notes, caste based differences are tenable enough as long as they encourage "...innovation and productivity...as absolute unity produces the retardation of mental and physical health of society" (2). He also observes that Vivekananda considers Indian caste system "as essentially a part of Indian social order. Without caste, Indian society is incomplete and without caste, the very social structure of India is shapeless" (ibid. 2). Singh also contends that he further warns the lower castes against the severe consequences of uprising, and writings and public speeches expressing anger and their discontent over ages of exploitation and social ostracization, as they would only augment the hostility amongst the castes and bring in social instability.

However, he does not nullify the possibility of upward mobilization of the lower caste groups, though it can only be achieved by adopting the Brahminical ways of education and culture, thereby naturalizing the mental superiority of the Brahmins (*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 3, 1979; Singh 2018). Thus, from Singh's observations, it could be inferred that though Vivekananda endorsed the idea of social empowerment of the Dalits and other lower caste individuals through education, his perceptions are rooted in a regressive assumption of appropriation of the Brahminical knowledge system by the oppressed castes, instead of foregrounding their fragmented narratives of cultural traditions and discursive historical traces of their miseries and social exclusion as 'alternate regimes of truth' and knowledge. Therefore, placing Manilalbhai's recommendation of books to Madhav for further reading and the casteist perception of Vivekananda in tandem, would unpack a succinct fictional intervention with one of the many strategies through which "...elite forfeited the opportunity to use education as a means to draw upon the talent and resources of the overwhelming majority of the population" (Kumar, ed. Ghosh and Zachariah 38).

By taking cue from Freire's assumption of 'massification' as discussed before, it could be pertinently argued that in India, with democracy and the shifting contours of socio-cultural life combined with newer economic demands of the nation, there had been a significant increase in the demands for skilled workforce and espousal of equal rights among all citizens. Although reservation in education and noble initiatives of providing fellowships and financial assistance to the hitherto marginalized communities had been conducive in securing their constitutional rights as manifest in their increasing presence in higher education institutions, the English educated native elites comprising mostly the members of the dominant castes, started resorting to the scheming strategy of an ideological conditioning of their (lower castes) consciousness that is "...contradictory, fragmented, held together in a more or less haphazard whole - the common sense" (Chatterjee 3), by their more refined and seemingly superior

cultural and intellectual traditions. Therefore, the strategic co-option of the intellectual consciousness of Dalits and the subalterns, as implicit in Manilalbhai's advice, has a dire two-fold consequence.

First, his suggestion implies a covert elitist agenda of setting the model and standard of education in such a manner that would befit the privileged section's intellectual acumen and legitimize their vested interests, thereby upsetting the possibilities of intellectual empowerment of the lower castes and reifying their superiority in the intellectual world. As evidenced in the Freirean critique of the cunning strategies deployed by the elites in post-colonial Brazil to manipulate the democratic drive and equal rights to education in their favor, in India too, as the above study suggests, the students from underprivileged communities are quite inevitably pushed to the fringes in this uneven competition with their privileged counterparts. Furthermore, taking from Manilalbhai's suggestion, it could also be argued that the education system often failed to engage the critical attention of the students from backward communities as Indian higher education then, during the initial decades after independence hardly considered the scholarly contributions of Dalit intellectuals and their experiences as worth incorporating in institutionalized education. Reflecting upon the inadequacy of the national education system, and to be precise, the social sciences research in India in evolving a critical consciousness among the subalterns and Dalits rooted in their own experiences, Gopal Guru and Sundar Sarukkai pertinently observe that they end up "...producing reverse orientalism in a very subtle way. The claim to offer epistemological empowerment to Dalits involves a charity element which by definition is condescending" (25).

Second, the sense of condescension of upper caste intellectuals combined with their crafty placement of the dominant epistemic discourses that bespeak the truth, result in a covert co-option of the intellectual consciousness of Dalit academics and students paradoxically through education, which would disable them from realizing "...doing theory as an inner moral

necessity (and to)...make a conscious moral choice to use their sense of freedom for understanding and reflecting on the Dalit experience...to walk back into the Dalit experience in order to accord depth to their reflections” (Guru and Sarukkai, *ibid.* 27-28). This distancing of Dalit intellectuals from their own experiences and cultural moorings often culminates in the appropriation of Dalit subjectivity under the rubric of dominant caste hegemony.

The character of Professor Matangini Mistry, Madhav’s colleague, from *Corridors of Knowledge* (2008), appropriates considerable fallacies of the dominant castes – from their patterns of manipulation to exertion of cultural hegemony, thereby contributing to further ghettoization of academia instead of bolstering its secular-democratic ethos. Apart from a visible lack of academic integrity and professional ethics as discussed before, the narrative further locates how, she too, quite analogous to the approaches of the dominant castes, exploits her own position to attain her goals. On one such occasion, the narrator sarcastically observes her shrewd ways of using her caste and gender identities as a shield against the rightful cause of scholarship in academic research, in order to be promoted as a professor. The satire is pointed enough in the narration of her scheming ways of manipulating the reviewer to publish her doctoral thesis in the form of a book as a necessary prerequisite to her promotion as a professor. Instead of revising her long unpublished dissertation “...in the light of recent criticism...Matangini had...met the lady, armed with a costly Surat sari...(and in her letter to the expert) She emphasized two points in special: one that she belonged to a backward community, and secondly, that she would be the first woman to be a professor” (COK 78).

The portrayal of the character of Matangini and her academic growth are symptomatic of Paulo Freire’s conceptualization of ‘prescription’ as a popular mode used by the dominant class to thwart the possibility of using education as a site for fostering a distinct consciousness of the oppressed, and thus to liberate themselves from the clutches of ideological domination followed by conditioning. For Freire, as appears in his path-breaking work *Pedagogy of the*

Oppressed (1970), “Every prescription represents the imposition of one individual’s choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber’s consciousness. Thus, the behavior of the oppressed is a prescribed behavior...” (47). What follows is that “The oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom. Freedom would require them to eject this image and replace it with autonomy and responsibility” (ibid. 47).

In a similar vein, in *Matangini*, one could identify an assimilation of cultural markers of the dominant castes and their manipulative approaches permeating her activities throughout the narrative. Instead of using her knowledge and her empowered status as a professor for the noble causes of social transformation and justice, where, her seminal role as a Dalit academician demands her “...double commitment both to scholarship and social cause” (Guru and Sarukkai, ibid. 28), the narrative shows, her overweening ambition of going up in the academic ladder is rather marked by an unrestrained desire for power, dispensing with academic values and her intellectual and social responsibilities. Therefore, again going back to the Freirean critique of democratic education system of post-colonial Brazil, as more inclined to ‘massification’ than mass education, it could be contended that Naik’s fictional intervention with the problematics of Caste and Indian education dialectically situates the narrative within the larger questions and contexts of equality and democratization of higher education in India and its susceptibility to the claims of ‘massification’.

Apart from the ineptitude of Indian education system to enable the Dalits and other backward communities to shape and enrich their intellectual consciousness rooted in their own experiences, and to use them as significant markers of their scholarly engagements, it is through the character portrayal of *Matangini*, the novel also briefly sheds light on the untoward ramifications of the reservation system in India. The narrator observes: “*Matangini*...won an appointment to a post in the university on the plea that she belonged to backward community

(The claim was disputed later, but thanks to Matangini's well-wishers, the matter was hushed up) (COK 73). This contested claim of her reservation is evocative of André Beteille's observation (1981) that "The prospects of material advancement through job reservations has led to a kind of competition for backwardness among castes at the middle levels of the hierarchy. This kind of competition creates a vested interest in backwardness, and it combines the worst features of a hierarchical and a free-market society" (quoted in Kumar, ed. Ghosh and Zachariah, *ibid.* 37). Thus, this passing fictional remark on the supposedly disputed claim of Matagini's caste reservation exemplifies how in India, the reformative measures aiming at social inclusion are often politicized for vested interests and promotion in the hierarchical order, and are marred with discordances in terms of their executions. The insidious ways of manipulating the democratic drive of higher education are further responsible for bringing about an alternate authority "...in the inverted image of the authority that it replaced, equally public in character and with its own powers to impose sanctions and levies on the community" (Guha as quoted in Chatterjee, ed. Chaturvedi 12). Taking from these scholarly interventions, and an underlying dialectic between them and the fictional critique, the study claims that the discursive traces of caste politics in higher education and its ramifications are detrimental to the democratic, self-reflexive and dialogic temperament of the university, which could further disengage academia from its commitment to social transformation through education.

Conclusion

In this chapter, through a study of select Indian campus novels, I have examined the novelistic ways of critiquing vis-à-vis intervening with the realities of Indian higher education in the first quarter after independence. Drawing upon the portrayal of fictionalized Indian university or college campuses – from lives of the members of an academic institution and the dynamics of teacher-student or other interpersonal relationships to professional rivalry and academic-administrative intricacies, this chapter contends that despite the call for democratic

expansion and decolonizing the university education, Indian academia then, was riddled with the dominance of Western influences in myriads of ways, which only deferred and complicated the prospect of nativization. Another major challenge that loomed large was to bring its heterogeneous population within the rubric of a uniform national education system, where the internal divides and hierarchies in Indian society, a plethora of prejudices and conservatism across the communities, conflict between diverse social groups and therefore, a constant tension between tradition and modernity played as ineluctable deterrents to the cause of education as an instrument for social transformation. The chapter also argues that the perpetual curse of underfunding and under-resourcing, under-staffed academic institutions, and uneven growth in conjunction with intramural tensions and power struggle in academia, are to be held further accountable for deterioration of academic standards and merit of the campus, which end up marring the liberal-democratic ethos of the university. Therefore, finally drawing inferences from Paulo Freire's conceptualization of 'massification', I conclude that the discontinuities in the project of Indian higher education and discordance between official rhetoric of expansion vis-à-vis excellence and the lived reality, eventually metamorphose the drive of mass education into a much subsidiary category of massification that is bereft of academia's key role in evolving a distinct critical/political consciousness and espousal of social justice through education.

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Notes

ⁱ “The Report of The University Education Commission”, known as the Radhakrishnan Commission Report, 1948-49, pp. 19, (MINISTRY OF EDUCATION GOVERNMENT OF INDIA, 1950)

ⁱⁱ Ibid. 19

ⁱⁱⁱ “Minute on Indian Education” (1835), by Thomas Babington Macaulay

^{iv} See Edward Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 9, (Penguin, 1977)

^v “Educational Safeguards” (Department of Education, Government of India); “Report of the Backward Classes Commission” also known as The Mandal Commission Report, Vol. I & 2 (1980)

^{vi} See “i”

^{vii} Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe*, (John Hopkins University Press, 1973)

^{viii} Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, (Pantheon Books, 1977)

^{ix} See Anson Rabinbach, "Heidegger's Letter on Humanism as Text and Event," in *New German Critique*, vol. 62, pp. 16-20, (Summer 1994)

^x Carl Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, (Princeton University Press, 1959)

^{xi} Stanley Fish, *Versions of Academic Freedom: From Professionalism to Revolution*. (The University of Chicago Press, 2014). He extensively brings into discussion the aforementioned critics' and theoretical schools' observations on 'academic freedom' in his study.

^{xii} See, Wilhelm Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller, (OUP, 1977)

^{xiii} Rabindranath Tagore, “The Centre of Indian Culture” (1919)

^{xiv} Carol Hanisch, “The Personal is Political”, in *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, edited by, Barbara A. Crow, (New York University Press, 2000)

^{xv} See *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, (Harvard University Press, 1999)

^{xvi} A way of critical reading developed by Louis Althusser, to be found in *A Dictionary of Critical Theory*, 1st ed., edited by Ian Buchanan, (OUP, 2010)

^{xvii} Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, (OUP, 1973)

^{xviii} Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (Routledge, 1994); Bill Ashcroft, et al., *Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, p. 108, (Routledge, 2000)

^{xix} Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, trans. Colin Gordon (Pantheon Books, 1980); Joseph Rouse, “Beyond Epistemic Sovereignty” (Wesleyan University, 1996)

^{xx} Partha Chatterjee, “Caste and Subaltern Consciousness” (CSSS, Feb. 1989)

^{xxi} John Panteleimon Manoussakis, *The Ethics of Time: A Phenomenology and Hermeneutics of Change*, (Bloomsbury, 2017)

^{xxii} Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)”, trans. Andy Blunden, (*Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, Monthly Review Press 1971)

^{xxiii} Jacques Lacan, “THE Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of THE / AS Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience”, in *Jacques Lacan: Écrits A Selection*, Trans. by Sheridan, (Routledge, 2001)

^{xxiv} M. N. Srinivas, “Varna and Caste”, pp. 63-69, in *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays*. (Asia Publishing House, 1962)

Chapter – III

Problematics of Expansion: Indian Campus Novels and the Journey of

Indian Universities from the 1970s till middle of the 1990s

The disjunction between the drive of modernization and of ‘decolonization’, which exacerbates the malaise and equivocality in the projects of nation-building and educational reform in the post-independence era, gradually assumes the university space as one of the cardinal sites of its manifestations. The Indian universities, which were grappling with the anxiety of influence(s) pertaining to their imperial past for more than two decades since independence, have now become subject of overpowering political and cultural influences of the two new world powers – USA and the USSR. Since the 1960s, the rise of the USSR and USA as the two prime contenders for world leadership were predicated on their latent intention of influence building in the third world countries. Whereas, the Soviet Union’s influence was strongly felt in functioning of the state machinery, the USA started investing more on the education sector (apart from the market), in the forms of technical and financial support, fellowships for Indian students, and advanced technology and equipment. Behind the façade of supposed humanitarian agenda of the US in sending educational aid for the advancement of Indian academia, lies an entrenched political motif of assertion of their cultural and scientific supremacy, dovetailed with a machiavellian desire of ideological conditioning as well as co-option of the native discourses. In his incisive study on this slow, yet persuasive American influence in the third world academy and the degree and extent of it in the late the 60s and early 70s, Y. Raghaviah underlines a slew of camouflaged political equations of international relations, cultural interpellation, and also a superiority complex over collective acknowledgement of the U. S. leadership as the ulterior motives behind this seemingly “altruistic, humanistic and compassionate dispositions of the U. S., for all her world-wide dispensations” (Raghaviah 16).

Expounding on the questions of proliferation of English as the new ‘cultural capital’ of the post-independence India, and a concomitant social tension between the English educated elites and those Indians who studied in vernacular mediums as discussed in the previous chapter, Sheilu Sreenivasan claims (“American Aid’s Approach Strategy”, 1981), they further pave the way for, as well as accelerate the process of a strategic co-option of Indian academia by unfettered American influences. When a densely populated and underdeveloped nation has to survive the inexorable race of modernization, which hinges on substantial advancement in science and technology, it is more likely to become susceptible to the deceptive matrices of neo-colonialism and late-capitalist expansion in forms of aids and loans. With the recommendations of the Kothari Commission (1964-66), which pressed on rapid and revolutionary changes in science and technology as an indispensable component of modernization, there had been incremental changes in patterns of the U. S. funding of Indian academia. It is believed by a group of academics that the generosity of the U. S., as evidenced in the increasing number of collaborative projects between the U. S. and India, or of various research grants and fellowships, are essentially humanist endeavors for the educational reform of a third world nation. But the entrenched elitism of Western or the U.S. experience, which draws a significant number of native intellectuals for specialized research and higher studies, also prepares the ground for a perilous threat of brain drain, followed by a crisis of lopsided competition and newer markers of divisions among Indian academicians.

Sreenivasan in his essay: “American Aid’s Approach Strategy” (1981), succinctly refers to the unprecedented hike in the “American aid (which) touched the Rs. 10,000 million mark (of the yearly increase) during 1967” (Sreenivasan 185). It is a well acknowledged fact that, these foreign aid/grants and the collaborative projects were advantageous for the revival of science and technological education in the post-independence India. Nevertheless, our uncritical reception of American pedagogical ideals, coupled with a neo-colonial assumption

of indoctrination of the ‘postcolonial’ subjects have been inimical to the liberal-democratic temperament of Indian public universities. Besides, pushing the universities towards these unprecedented challenges caused by this incremental incursion of neoliberal discourses, and implementation of various reform policies proposed by the Kothari Commission (1964-66) and NPE (National Policy on Education) 1986, have been instrumental in reification of the unabating differences in our society. Their promulgations also exacerbate the perennial crises of underfunding and uneven expansion, thereby paradoxically adding to the predicament of Indian academia. Moreover, the skewed enactment of the policies that rub shoulders with the power matrices and hermeneutics of ‘the political’ in the campus, could further deter the university from its commitment towards academic scholarship and social justice. In such challenging circumstances, when dynamism is the key to academic excellence, the intellectual and administrative foresight of the Vice Chancellor of the university and a strong sense of academic values and commitment of its academic community are imperative to the academic progress, and have provoked a number of scholarly debates on them.

Campus Fiction in its portrayal of the academic complex, often questions the ways of expansion of university education in India and also problematizes the discontinuities in the praxes of epistemic modernity, if not the whole drive of modernization itself. This chapter attempts to read a number of Indian campus novels, so as to understand how academic fiction discursively engages with the ideological questions pertaining to the expansion and modernization of university education in India and places the role of academic as well as administrative community of the university as quintessential to the notion of academic growth.

Administrative Sagacity and the Question of academic growth

The ideological grounds of inquiring the liminal junctures of academic and disciplinary hierarchies alongside the question of academic decolonization suspended between reconciliation and ‘indigenization’ⁱ which unfold themselves with the shifting trajectories of

Indian education roughly from the 1970s, prepare the fictional landscape of a set of Indian novels on the idea of the ‘University’ and pluralistic nature of campus life. Here, I find Z. H. Bulaitis’ observation on campus fiction pertinent enough, as he draws upon Schlovsky’s theory of ‘defamiliarization’ⁱⁱ in order to comprehend an academic novel’s discursive engagement with the familiar experiences of university campus. Building upon the existing criticism on this fictional sub-genre in the West, he pertinently argues – “Reading academic fiction in this way takes the realities of higher education and transforms them into new objects of study” (Bulaitis 116). Quite comparable to the use of defamiliarization and satire as the two imperative tools by M. K. Naik in his *Corridors of Knowledge*, Prema Nandakumar’s *Atom and the Serpent* (1982) as an exemplary Indian Campus novel, also resorts to the above-mentioned literary devices in an endeavor to examine the changing paradigms of Indian higher education during the 1970s. Unlike Naik’s novel, *Atom and the Serpent* exemplifies a discrete fictional attempt to look into the challenges of Indian public universities synchronically. Set in an imaginary university campus in the late-70s, this novel delves into the contentious trajectories of proliferation of science education, often at the cost of relegation and unjust labelling of studies and research in humanities as insignificant and superfluous.

Nandakumar employs a different approach of looking into the university campus and its apparatuses from a disinterested and distant perspective of a visiting professor from another institution. The protagonist Dr. Kamalapati Vatsa, an atomic scientist from a scientific research institute in Mumbai, who is invited to deliver a series of special lectures on an emerging discipline of Atomic Research in the said university, becomes an active repository of multi-layered campus stories. However, these minutiae of campus life, in turn, perform as the novelist’s ‘vehicle’ of a discursive critique of the university education in India. The plot, which centers on the narrator’s sojourn at the university, followed by his short-lived interactions with its members (teaching and non-teaching staff), presents a realist picture of the academic and

administrative functioning of a supposedly elite Indian university. The very purpose of his visit embodies a sincere effort of the government towards advancement and democratic dissemination of the scientific knowledge across communities. The Kothari Commission (1964-66), which pressed on the need for revolutionary changes in scientific and technological education as one of the seminal constituents of a modernized society, advocated a radical restructuring of the university education. The proposed radicalization or re-shaping of the pedagogical praxes emphasizes special lectures/symposiums, studies on emerging and interdisciplinary disciplines, upgradation of our mechanisms and foundation of specialized research centers in order to expedite the growth of science education since the late 60s.

In the opening paragraphs of the novel, the reader discovers the claims of interdisciplinarity and specialized research in the Vice Chancellor's proposed plan for trifurcating the department of "Applied Politics, Civics and Administration" (Nandakumar 12; henceforth ATS, page number) into three specialized centers of learning. Furthermore, Vatsa's topic of special lecture on the Biological effects of Atomic Research is exemplary of a steady rise in the number of research activities in these emerging scientific disciplines, with a renewed interest of the regulatory bodies like UGC, CSIR, AICTE, and others. However, the unnamed fictional university in question, which is located at a small town of Northern India, embodies a number of characteristics pertaining to a provincial university, as evidenced in the terse statement of the narrator in one of the introductory paragraphs. "For all that he knew, one group might have been hatching a plot against another in that subtle, suave, poisonous way that is perhaps characteristic of the provincial universities" (ATS 12). Therefore, taking on Jameson's proposition of "narrative as a socially symbolic act" (1981), it could be adequately inferred that the democratic drive of Indian education sought to encompass the wide range of academic institutions as beneficiaries beyond the invisible boundary between metropolitan universities and their provincial counterparts, with dispersal of material and intellectual resources.

A closer look at the proposed education policies would rather testify a more or less righteous approach of the policy-makers with the notion of equality in education, as evidenced in the detailed blueprint of upward mobility of the backward sections through education and a comprehensive growth of Indian academic institutions, dispensing with the binaries of elite/non-elite and metropolitan/provincial universities. The Kothari Commission (1964-66) also brought into discussion, how in the last one and half decades after the independence a sizeable amount from our underfunded education budget was wasted away or misspent due to the lack of planning in execution. In order to redress the anomaly, the commission insists on an active and vigilant supervision of the regulatory bodies in the performance of individual institutions, and also on the performance indicators for assessment of the institutions and individual teachers.

The commission further argued that, the goals of facilitation of academic and scientific research with an introduction to modern technologies and equipment, and an equal access to quality education across institutions hinge largely on a skilled and learned workforce, alongside a steady increase in the funding of academic institutions. However, its emphasis on a radical improvement of the quality of teacher education, as a prerequisite to quality education and the evaluative measures is contingent on multitudes of factors. Apart from the self-evident claims of revival of the physical facilities, and promotion of emerging disciplines and interdisciplinary research, the commission's two imperative theses which draw my attention are its urgent plea for an amelioration of inter/intra institutional dialogic relation within the teaching fraternity through collaborative and faculty development projects, and recommendation of financial schemes and incentives for research activities. These propositions, the commission envisages, would encourage the university and college teachers for scholarly endeavors and would also prove to be conducive for an overall academic growth.

A provincial Indian university's establishment of an atomic physics (an emerging discipline) department in the mid-70s, its active participation in a number of scholarly activities, and its future plans to set up departments of new interdisciplinary subjects in line with shifting trajectories of the nation's orientation, call for an academic disposition of the administration, particularly the Vice-Chancellor, in addition to the dedication of its academic community. The narrative which employs a 'third person limited point of view', self-reflexively engages with the academic interests of the Vice-Chancellor. Starting from his brief, yet ingenious conversation with Vatsa on his topic of research, and dynamic approach towards academia, the novel gives us ample evidences of his gentle, often sarcastic queries on individual research works of the faculty members and also of his persuasion for further academic engagements. His equivocal question to Prof. Yana on the absence of his colleagues from the department in Vatsa's lecture: "How is it neither of your Readers is here?" (ATS 106); or his recognition of the scholarly works of Prof. Rajeswara- "I received your paper on the unfinished play of Visakhadatta. Very, very interesting...(and) When is your book on Visakhadatta's imagery coming out?" (ATS 106-107), evince his comprehensive knowledge on the academic-political temperament of the university and an active interest in the progress of the university beside his administrative duties.

The characterization of the Vice-Chancellor embodies the moral and professional responsibilities of a Vice-Chancellor of an Indian university underlined by scholars such as Iqbal Narain (1987) and A. H. Hommadi (1984, 1989). What Narain proposes on the imperative role of the Vice-Chancellor of a university in his essay: "Administration of Higher Education in India" (1987), is shared and further expatiated by A. H. Hommadi, whose mapping of the noble responsibilities of the Vice-Chancellor and their execution are foregrounded upon vulnerabilities of his/her position, caused by the external political influence.

Due to their financial status of State sponsored institutions, Indian universities are directly or indirectly swayed by the political parties to an extent, often under the pretense of public accountabilities. The politicization of the academic space that is willy-nilly, effectively outweighs the minimal resistance of the university, or that of the Vice-Chancellor, by asserting their functional autonomy in decision making. Thus, taking into account the lived reality of the Indian universities, Hommadi negotiates between the two extremes: an unconditional academic freedom and a curtailed one. On one hand, he acknowledges that “much of the success of an organization-educational institution and university being no exception-largely depends on the right type of leadership...on the integrity, scholarship, dynamism and, above all, on the freedom of decision-making powers of the Vice-Chancellor or the Director of such an institution in the academic world” (Hommadi, *University in the Third World: Perspectives in Planning and Management* 77). And on the other, he bemoans over the recruitment process of the administrative head of a university, and implied political restrictions on exercising his/her (Vice Chancellor’s) liberty in academic and administrative affairs – “Unfortunately, in the circumstances prevailing in our institutions of higher learning, and the way the...Vice Chancellor/President is appointed, there could hardly be any freedom for him to be an academic leader” (ibid. 81).

The unfolding of the plot discursively engages with the debatable questions on the degree and extent of the Vice-Chancellor’s autonomy in decision making, his academic foresight and more specifically on the teleological status of the Vice-Chancellor, i.e. is he just a mere caretaker, or a facilitator of the coveted changes? Since most of the Indian universities are public universities, statutory bodies of the university such as the Senate, Academic Council and Syndicate comprise Government nominated members from non-academic institutions, and also representatives of political parties. Though, the novel does not delve into the process of formation of these regulatory bodies, it wittily weaves an element of unrest of employees

within the narrative, as a possible repercussion of unrelenting politicization of academia. The rivalry between the two groups present within the administrative community of the university, i.e. “Employees’ Union” and “Karamchari Sangh”, which are led by the outsiders, Kshema Rao and Bansi Ram, further becomes subject of nuanced political equations amongst the faculty members. In the wake of uprising, Vatsa and Raj’s conversation subtly indicates the conflicting agenda of these organizations, and how a staged ‘gherao’ and mass demonstration of lower grade staff on the demands of salary hike and amelioration of other facilities were effectively hijacked and manipulated by the powerful members from opposing factions within the teaching and administrative fraternity.

That’s the trouble-maker Kshema Rao. He is their (Employees’ Union) president...This fellow is just a bumptious lawyer whose favorite hobby is creating trouble...He is Bansi Ram, President of the Karamchari Sangh...Since Kshema Rao has to be contained, father encourages the Karamchari Sangh. I learn that the sturdy fellow is an enterprising smuggler, but he keeps the power balance among the workers (ATS 83).

That the Vice-Chancellor is well-versed with how Sheela Rani, a lecturer of Econometrics, and her husband Prof. Dattatreya, “professor of Applied Politics, Civics and Administration” (ATS 12) are complicit in this unrest, is evident enough in his observation – “Why blame them, it’s Dattatreya’s foxy tail wagging viciously” (ATS 87). Therefore, in order to appease the dissenters, he rather yields to the demands of employees, instead of responding to Kshema Rao’s bargaining for the narrow self-interests of his sister, and of Sheela Rani and her husband, at the expense of some legitimate rights of the employees. The acumen he shows, and the professional ethics he follows in his diplomatic way of resolving the discord and thus destabilizing the wicked nexus between his colleagues and extraneous forces, situates the fictional interventions dialectically within the hermeneutics of academic leadership in the post-

colonial Indian academy. Here, it is worth stating that the Vice-Chancellor is often dubbed as ‘Chanakya’, ‘Tribal Chief’, and ‘Adhyaksha’ by his own colleagues from the university. Whereas, people like Sheela Rani, Prof. Dattatreya and Prof. Yana scornfully address him as ‘Tribal Chief’, the administrative staff, junior lecturers or professors like Rajeswara call him as ‘Adhyaksha’, either courteously or formidably. These nicknames are by no means innocuous gestures, but are rather evocative of the plurality of relation(s) among the members of a university, and their (university community) reflections on the approaches of the Vice-Chancellor.

For Dattatreya, it is his fear of losing control over his department and the staff, as well as his sovereignty as the Principal with the splitting of the department into specialized centers of learning, and for Sheela Rani, it is her promotion which serve as the impetus for their unethical acts of impeding the growth of the university and sabotaging the image of the Vice-Chancellor. Owing much to their privileged standing in the university and their longing for more power in the self-referential academic ivory tower, they consider him their arch-rival, as his emphasis on academic integrity and merit, and on research and scholarship often prove to be inimical to their narrow self-interests. Much to their chagrin, Prof. Rajeswara sees in him an accomplished administrator with a futuristic vision for the university, while dynamically engaging himself with the cause of its intellectual progress.

But the assessment of the Vice-Chancellor as ‘Chanakya’ by the narrator and Vatsa is imperative here, as it is predicated upon a distanced and unbiased observation of the protagonist, often performing as the impersonated voice of the novelist. Chanakya, an ancient Indian philosopher, economist and royal adviser who played a pivotal role in building up the Maurya Empire, is chiefly remembered for his work *Arthashastra*, and often revered as one of the greatest diplomats of all times. Therefore, the analogy places the Vice-Chancellor as the chief architect of the progress of a university, where the academic institution in many ways

resonates the formation vis-à-vis functioning of the 'Nation' as "imagined community" (Anderson, 1983).

Thus, the conviction and ingenuity demonstrated through many of his ventures in pursuit of academic excellence against the baneful consequences of the politicization of academia, manifests itself as a leitmotif of the text. The novelist purportedly brings in a contradistinction between the past and the present, in order to locate the positive changes made possible, dispensing with the plethora of constraints, under the active supervision of the present Vice-Chancellor.

Adhyaksha's predecessor had been a notorious politician who evoked strong likes and dislikes. It was in his time that the university had undergone a drastic transformation and become a seething un-academic pond of viperous ambitions and animosities. It must be said to Adhyaksha's credit, however, because of his impressive presence and Chanakyan capacities, open confrontations had become rather fewer than before (ATS 82).

But, apart from the vindication of multifarious roles and responsibilities of the Vice-Chancellor amidst various provocations, what is intriguing here is his preoccupation with the administrative intricacies often leaves a very little room for himself to concentrate on the problems of academic inconsistency, nepotism and discrimination plaguing the academic community and activities of the university. Though, the novel does not shed much light on the strained relation between the Vice-Chancellor and other administrative officers, it invests a great deal on how a ubiquitous animosity and hierarchies between the faculty members could be disadvantageous to the advancement of the university, where he (V.C.) often becomes a mere spectator of these academic conspiracies. Placing his earlier remark on Dattatreya's conspiracy at the wake of the employees' unrest, and his satiric observation on the academic stagnation, "Our academic life is so dull here that these excrescences are almost welcome

distractions” (ATS 82) would rather unmask the vulnerability of academic leadership before ‘claims of the political’. It is evident enough from the above discussion that the ‘Adhyaksha’ rightly embodies the academic and administrative insight expected of the head of an academic institution. Prof. K. B. Powar in his article: “Managing a University: The role of the Vice-Chancellor” (2004), aptly summarizes the essential academic-administrative qualities of a person to be appointed as the Vice-Chancellor of a university.

The Vice Chancellor needs to have, amongst other things, a clear perception about the goals and objectives of the institution, a yearning for success along with the willingness to accept setbacks with stoicism, a confidence in colleagues and subordinates but not over-dependence on them, equanimity coupled with a sensitivity to the feelings of co-workers, an understanding of strengths and weaknesses of the institution, a complete knowledge of the functioning of all divisions and units in the institution...the ability to take timely (and sometimes unpleasant) decisions, an appreciation of the need to change and the willingness to adopt new and innovative strategies, a commitment towards quality, and finally the ability to listen patiently and communicate effectively. He has to be not only a leader but also a motivator, coordinator and facilitator (Powar, ed. Venkatasubramanian 147-48).

Therefore, the questions which follow are: How free is the Vice-Chancellor in taking decisions or executing the policies for educational reform? And, how/why the top-down, bureaucratic temperament of the academic-administrators could be inimical to the university’s progress?

The corrosive influence of non-academic individuals, and of amoral, politically motivated academicians present in decision making bodies of the university, as manifest in the characterization of Prof. Dattatreya and Sheela Rani are expressive of the perpetual hindrances, the head of an academic institution encounters in engineering the changes indispensable for an

overall progress. The exploitation of the democratic ethos of the university and its status of public institution for political and narrow self-interests not just mars the scope of academic reform under the supervision of an efficient academic-administrator, but has far-reaching ramifications for ‘self-contained fiefdoms’ⁱⁱⁱ within the academy. Apart from the dissonance among members of the teaching community, the labelling of administrative staff as members of two opposing groups as discussed above, alludes to much intricate, often vindictive power struggle between the administrative officers of the university, in which the Vice-Chancellor either becomes an active or passive stakeholder notwithstanding his/her will.

A fictional critique of academic governance and ‘claims of the political’

Traversing along the contested questions of the administration of a newly-founded university in a small town called Akbarabad (from north-western India), *Whispers in the Tower* (2012) authored by Jose Palathingal, remarkably weaves in the elements of complexities as well as conspiracies within the narration which allows the reader to probe further their baleful influences on the academic wellbeing of the university. This novel employs a ‘polyphonic’^{iv} narration in its fictional portrayal of the vicissitudes of campus life, which according to J. Williams constitutes the third variant of academic novel in the west, as “a kind of panorama, orchestrating an ensemble of characters rather than focusing on the single hero of mid-life comedy or culture wars melodrama” (Williams 12). Set during the 1990s, though the novel draws upon a unanimous lack of scholarship and academic ethics in Indian universities, it is the entrenched form of hierarchies and hegemonic disposition of the academic-administrators, which are detrimental to the academic growth of a university, become the primary locus of fictional enquiry. Starting from inception of the Akbarabad University, the notion of the political seems to have overshadowed the academic goals of the university. “National Policy on Education 1986” (henceforth; NPE) pressed on the urgency of a sea change in the minority education of India, as an integral part of nation building. Based on the report of the Ministry

of Home Affairs, which identified the Muslim community (11.4%, as per 1981 Census) as one of the backward communities, the said committee put forward a set of proposals to develop individual as well as community consciousness concerning the value of education among them. Taking on the assumption of minority education imperative to equality and social justice, NPE 1986 insisted on building up of separate educational institutions for them in regions with large minority population, openings of fellowships, and other financial and logistic aid for different religious and linguistic minority groups in India.

The geo-political location and topography of the fictional town of Akbarabad resemble with that of the present day Agra, a town located in northern India with a profound historical heritage. Genealogically, its origin could be traced back to the pre-colonial times, when Akbarabad (now, Agra) was the capital of the Mughal Empire. Going by the demography of the district, i.e. an area of predominant Muslim concentration, the foundation of the Akbarabad University in the first half of the 1990s reflects upon some significant measures taken by the government to incorporate the educationally backward minority groups within the oeuvre of formal education. However, this inclusive drive of Indian higher education was co-opted by the prevalent political and other vested interests. Extending the hypothesis of politicization of Indian academia, this work of fiction brings about the pervasive undercurrent of communal politics in Indian educational sector. Though, it was Mustafa's fondness for his own kinsmen, which has been decisive enough for his keen interest in education of the Muslim community of Udhyan Pradesh as the education minister of the state, the historic decision of building a university seminally for the upward mobilization of the Muslims of the State was also backed by the vicious political intentions of his own image-building, alongside the assertion of some religio-political ideologies. Presently, this chapter is keen on unpacking the diverse matrices of the political, encompassing the administrative staff of a university, and how they rub shoulders with the external political forces.

Beginning with the appointment of the first Vice-Chancellor of the university, the selection of administrative officers such as, Registrar, Controller of Examinations, Finance Officer, and others rest predominantly on the external political equations. Citing the public accountability of the university and its dependence on the public money for sustenance as shields against the claims of university autonomy, Mustafa, the education minister of Udhyan Pradesh, subtly enforces his own choices over the appointment of academic and administrative members of the Akbarabad University and its academic-administrative functioning. With the UGC's recommendation for Prof. Shajah Kabir, a distinguished sociologist as the first Vice Chancellor of the university, Mustafa subtly asserts his preferences in the recruitment of academic-administrators, next in order.

A confidant of the minister, principal of a college, Ghulam Ahmed, having long work experience in his position, had taken charge on 1 November (as the registrar). Another confidante, Razak Abdul Rashid, was already positioned as the Finance Officer. With a VC taking over, Habib Abdulla was reverted to Special Officer and would be in charge of infrastructure; ordered by the chancellor, advised by the minister (Palathingal 54; henceforth WTT, page no).

Though among his own clan members, Mustafa is considered as a connoisseur of education, his persistent influence on the selection of these officials is willy-nilly political, as it is predicated on his longing for a hegemonic control over the university, and not on any kind of academic perspicacity. Responding to the above studies on the role and challenges of the Vice-Chancellors of the universities from the third world countries, this fictional narrative delves into the possibility of a Vice-Chancellor's decisions and choices in shaping the governance of the university, thereby carving out a niche for himself/herself as the head of the institution. Therefore, asserting his constitutional power, Prof. Kabir advances nomination of Ram Sudhakar as the Controller of Examinations. With Ram Sudhakar taking over as the

Controller of Examinations, it becomes quite evident that the administrative section of the Akbarabad University is divided into different conflicting factions. Apart from that, the vested self-interests of these academic-administrators coupled with their incessant desire of power exertion over their subordinate staff and their political affiliations, contribute largely to the marring of academic integrity and standard of the campus, and to the creation of self-contained fiefdoms among themselves. If we assume that the skewed enactment of reform policies owes much to these administrative anomalies, the portrayal of the fictional Akbarabad University gives the reader ample scope to critically locate the discursive traces of manifold administrative intricacies in the university, and their inverse relation with the academic ethos of the institution. The recruitment of Ram Sudhakar didn't go unnoticed by other administrative officials, and there had been considerable attempts from other influential individuals to deter the Vice-Chancellor from his envisaged direction of advancement of the newly-formed university. But Prof. Kabir has been resolute enough to stall the undercurrent of stagnation, lurking around the corner to invade upon the corridors of the Akbarabad University in its formative years. The swarming of transferees from erstwhile Arjunagiri University is not steered by their righteous approach of serving a new university for an all-encompassing growth, but, rather by a pervasive lack of interest for work, where the essential precarity of the new university provides a congenial atmosphere for such laxity to thrive.

The narrative further unfolds, how an unrest among the peripheral staff of the university could be effectively fabricated by those political and administrative helmsmen. The process of exploitation of the clerical staff, as constituent of academic bureaucratization, eventually culminates in disruption of academic and administrative functioning of the university, where an innocent employee (a lower grade official) becomes the scapegoat of this power struggle. When Vasanthi, a clerical staff from the finance section was asked for some added work by her superior authority, the employee unions tend to manipulate an individual's commitment

towards her duty and her individual will by feigning to protect the collective interests of the employees. But their latent intention was to win a political battle against the Vice-Chancellor over his success in stalling the process of transfers. However, the consequences which followed, lay bare the murkier reality of campus life, while discursively engaging with the contested dynamics of political nexus between the university authority and external political leaders. Sharing the critical trajectory with the scholarship of the critics such as, A. H. Hommadi (1984), Iqbal Narain (1985) and K. B. Powar (2004), Palathingal in his fictional narrative subtly weaves the nuances of an academic administrator's symbiotic association with the diverse 'claims of the political', which calls for further enquiry into a literary work's response to the debatable questions of the nature of appointment of the V.C.: is it political/academic, or a curious combination of both the factors?, and how/why the head of the institution is susceptible to the external and internal political equations?

While laying down the immense responsibilities of the head of a third world university in its functioning and progress as "a leader..., a motivator, coordinator and facilitator" (Powar 148), these critics also observed, how owing much to the status of Indian universities as public funded institutions, and the unseen teleology of recruitment and the job profile, his/her(V.C's) "own future depends on the favor from such persons who hardly have any academic interest or aptitude, (which) is enough to prove the contention that even academic contents are not free from political influences" (Hommadi, *University Administration in Developing Countries* 79). However, if we look into the reports of different commissions such as, Kothari Commission (1966), Gnanam Committee-UGC (1990), and Parikh Committee-UGC (1993), their unanimous concurrence with the theses of distinguished scholarship, "highest level of competence, integrity, morals and self-respect" (1990), and visionary leadership could be conspicuously located as some of the fundamental attributes of a Vice-Chancellor. It is through a literary defamiliarization of the power-ridden matrix of university administration, this novel

seeks to examine the discontinuities between the official rhetoric and the lived experiences of Indian universities.

The dialogues between Prof. Kabir and the political leaders that followed the unrest, in many ways resonate Aijaz Ahmad's (1987) reading of the third world experiences as essentially political, where boundaries between our public and private lives are blurry. In his response to Jameson's generalized presupposition that all third world literatures are 'national allegories', he adequately argues that pertaining to the muddled political histories of foreign invasion vis-à-vis colonialism and imperialism in Asian and African countries, and the former colonies' perpetually suspended status "outside the sphere of conflict between capitalism (First World) and socialism (Second World)", [the questions of] "unitary experience of national oppression" (Ahmad 102), combined with intra-national tensions emerge as the definitive markers of national as well as individualist identity, and the central thesis of historical or literary narratives from the Global South. He contends, "Politically, we are Calibans all. Formally, we are fated to be in the poststructuralist world of Repetition with Difference; the same allegory, the nationalist one, rewritten over and over again, until the end of time" (ibid. 102). Therefore, within the heterogeneous fabric of the post-independence India, its universities which have been politically volatile since its genesis gradually evolve as multivalent spaces of enquiry, where an eclectic mix of 'meanings' fight for ascendancy.

The power hierarchies in the university, which rub shoulders with the pyramidal structure of the greater political order of the nation, place the Vice-Chancellor as the bridge between the internal affairs of the university and the extrinsic political and socio-cultural forces. What we see in 'Adhyaksha' and Prof. Kabir are evocative of a righteous and steadfast approach towards the multifarious challenges of Indian public universities. Following the premise of the previous critics' argument and the commissions' reports on moral and academic responsibilities and political obligations of the V.C, it could be inferred that Prof. Kabir's

assertion of his own decisions despite various political compulsions to revoke the suspension order, and to yield to the unethical and academically inimical demands of the dissenters is symptomatic of an exemplary administrative prowess expected of the head of an academic institution. Understated political warnings from the leaders such as Harish Maharaj, a Proletarian party leader, or from Minister Mustafa couldn't dissuade Professor Kabir from his own professional morale. The narration clearly hovers around unerring adherence to the professional/academic ethics and a deliberate dismissal of it.

“Kabir Sahib, please be soft on them. These are young workers.”

“Of course we realize that, and we are soft with them.”

“But, the girl may not be punished.”

“We have absolutely no thought of punishing anybody.”

“But the girl is still being punished.”

“Mr. Maharaj, no harm can come to her if she just decides to follow office instructions.”

“But, she has to be a good member of her union, a worker in good standing.”

“So the difficulty for her is the union. Please instruct the union.”

“Vice-Chancellor, sir, these things have a way of their own, of going out of control, even spreading.”...

“It then becomes a bigger issue. We have to proceed as it develops.” (WTT 83).

The incidents which followed testify to a successful resistance and academic victory over the non-academic, political forces. “The offending employee was dismissed, and the strikers lost pay for nineteen days” (WTT 85). Behind this exemplary assertion of academic ethics, Professor Kabir's pivotal role as an enterprising administrator was adequately assisted by other stakeholders such as the Registrar, Assistant Registrar, and the Controller among others. It is through the disentanglement followed by resolution of frequent political and

sectarian intricacies, the novelist deftly sheds light on the potential of collective effort of the members of the university community, as appears in Hommadi's work on the universities in the third world, where he identifies the university as "...a democratic-scholarly space whose advancement is coterminous with collaborative ventures and a sense of unity among the employees from different departments of the university" (ibid. 81).

But a closer reading of the telephonic conversations between the Vice-Chancellor and the political leaders would divulge the extent of external political incursions in the academic corridors of the university, and how imperative the role of the V.C is in safeguarding the academic interests of the university. Whereas, Prof. Kabir remains undeterred by the political tensions and emanates an unfeigned academic spirit congenial for growth of the university, the novel also delves into the dire consequences of such politicization of the academia under the stewardship of a morally and academically incompetent academician having biased political alignments. Unlike the appointment of the first Vice-Chancellor, in the nomination of the next V.C, the academic parameters were subtly sidelined by larger political interests. The detailed description of Dr. Malik, the second Vice-Chancellor of Akbarabad University would corroborate the assumption of ubiquity of the drive of the 'political' superseding the *raison d'être* of academia.

Habib Razak Malik was announced the new vice-chancellor. Holder of a doctorate from Aligarh in Arabic, Malik was a career education officer; never worked on the faculty of any university, nor was known to be associated with research beyond the doctorate. He served as a translator of English documents in the Algerian Embassy in Delhi...taught at schools in Morocco...served UNESCO first as a Consultant Officer in the Middle East Department and finally as an Education Advisor for Mozambique...(WTT 122).

The narrative further unpacks, how with the beginning of the tenure of the new V.C, the setup of university administration is reshaped with the recruitment of the new registrar followed by his other confrères. In conversation with the generic definition of Campus fiction as a distinct fictional sub-type, Palathingal here, effectively resorts to the literary tool of satire in order to problematize the incremental politicization of Indian universities and the concomitant degradation in the academic merit. The satire is evident enough in the narration of recent turn of events with the reshuffling in the power hierarchies of the university- “With a new man coming as registrar, a man of distinct philosophy, it appeared that a novel style would reign at the university. Akbarabad would be in a making anew or in an unmaking” (WTT, 125). With further unfolding of the plot, the satire becomes conspicuous enough with the enactment of multitudes of complexities springing up owing much to their disdain for academic values and democratic ethos of the campus.

It is through an adept storytelling of a university’s rise into prominence followed by a gradual degradation of its merit, *Whispers in the Tower* (2012) negotiates between the two extremes of academic revisionism as evidenced in the reports of education commissions – such as, The Kothari Commission (1966), or NPE 1986, and of a collective concern expressed by the planners and several critics (Shils, 1969; Kamat, 1981; Ahmad, 1979; Beteille, 2010) with the gradual transmogrification of Indian universities into power-driven battle field of political and material interests. On one hand, the novel succinctly draws upon the innovative approaches of target-based performance indicators for higher educational institutions with a substantial increase in the funding, and a wider dissemination of education in backward regions and communities, as manifest in the report of NPE 1986, and on the other, the shifting paradigms of a university’s response to the proposed reforms.

Academic feudalism and fissures in leadership: A coup de grace to academic freedom and critical learning

Two competing narratives, ingeniously linked and interwoven, intersect this work of fiction in order to closely probe how administrative fallacies could prove to be dreadfully inimical to the growth of any university. Whereas, a strong-willed Vice-Chancellor like Professor Kabir demonstrates a considerable resistance to the unscrupulous forces in academia, as evidenced in his assertion of opening of “The School of Languages (which) would be a venue for the development of all the language faculties”, (WTT 75) surmounting desultory approach of other stakeholders, Dr. Malik succumbs to diverse calls of the ‘political’. Building the narrative upon the implementations of the policies pertaining to the VIII and IX Five-Year Plan of the UGC, the novel dialectically engages with the paradox of democratic and dialogic foundations of the campus. It is universally true that democracy in the university is intrinsic to safeguarding of academic ethics and freedom. But the novel deftly intervenes with the interpellation of the democratic ethos of the university by the overpowering internal/external political dynamics, culminating in its gradual distancing from the very ‘idea of the university’. Responding to a number of scholars’ discontentment with the penumbral spaces of hierarchy and bureaucracy within the democratic structure of the university, and curbs on the Vice-Chancellor’s autonomy in decision-making, the text effectively furthers the satire on the waning academic integrity and efficiency of the Akbarabad University through a sustained critique of the academic governance of Dr. Malik.

The statutory bodies such as Academic Council, Senate and Syndicate among others, play a pivotal role in shaping the university’s course of action, although they are very often crowded with members from non-academic background and also with teacher-politicians. Iqbal Narain (1987), and Hommadi (1989) have discussed in detail the problematics of university administration, where the university metamorphoses into an unrelenting repository and a breeding ground for manifold forms of power exertion and regulation of academic morale. In his study on the politicized university campuses, Narain gives a compelling account

of the practical difficulty faced by the university administration in dealing with the conniving strategies played by teacher-politicians in influencing the students and even non-academic staff, where the trade unions and their relentless strike upset the congenial atmosphere required for uninterrupted academic activities.

Furthering on the persistent crisis of mediocrity in Indian education, Hommadi, along the same lines of Johnstone's concern over the predicament of the universities from the developing countries, holds the presence of non-academic individuals in different decision-making bodies of the university liable for this. D. Bruce Johnstone, in his essay- "The Challenge of University Leadership in the Developing World" (2011) works through a set of incisive pointers in order to critically investigate the causality of the intellectual indigence of the third world universities. Among the five factors, contributing to ineluctable challenges to the academic leadership in developing nations, his fourth assumption is predicated upon different markers of intrusion of the government in the affairs of the university. He identifies a two-faceted intervention of the state, either as 'a source of patronage', or as a 'venue of opposition', apart from its overpowering influence in financing and governance.

Governments may look upon the university-especially a so-called flagship university-as a kind of political prize and therefore a source of patronage, installing leaders who may lack both the necessary familiarity with the nature of a university and the respect of the faculty. Governments may also view the university as venue of opposition, harboring radical faculty and students who may be allied with opposition parties (Johnstone, ed. Altbach 179).

What a critical reading would infer from the narration of the university administration during Malik's regime, is the novelist's deep sense of resentment with the lack of governance in many of the Indian universities. In Malik's appointment as the vice-chancellor, where the academic ideals are sidelined in favor of the political ones, soon resonate in the academic

paraphernalia of the university. When, given the enormity of political intrusion, the vice-chancellor needs to exercise his/her functional autonomy sensibly in mapping out the purpose and future course of action of a university, not just through an innovative formulation of policies, but by taking “the people in various statutory bodies like Syndicate, Academic Council and Senate along with him” (Hommadi, *University in the Third World: Perspectives in Planning and Management* 84), Dr. Malik on contrary, resorts to the populist tactics of appeasement and immoral indulgences in privileges attributed to the chair of the vice-chancellor. The ‘hubris’ in the character of Dr. Malik owes much to the two intersecting strands, i.e. his ignorance and dearth of familiarity with the novelty of the job of an academic administrator of an individual institution, followed by his ceaseless desire to rid himself of the moral and academic responsibilities. This aptly resonates in the selection of Veerendra as the new registrar of Akbarabad University. Palathingal comments through the voice of the narrator that, “Vice-Chancellor Malik looked for a registrar who would be in charge, a man who would love to take decisions on his own, make policies, and leave the boss unmolested. Veerendra seemed fit” (WTT 124). But, the paradox lies in the dynamics of his decision-making, as Veerendra seems to lack the foresight of an academic-administrator concerning the growth of a university, combined with his hostile concern for the recognition of diverse talents of Udhyan Pradesh.

A dialectical placement of fictional representations of the proceedings of regulatory bodies, such as the Senate or Executive Council of the Akbarabad University within the gamut of criticism on Indian academia would rather validate the collective discontent with the ever-rising politicization of the campus. The presence of non-academic individuals in these statutory bodies, which is endemic to Indian public universities is evident enough in the detailed description of “the first session of the elected Senate...on 1 July 2000” (WTT 137). Building upon the political discourses of university administration, *Whispers in the Tower* (2012)

pertinently places subplot characters such as Nasir, “the vice-chairman of the Confederation of Legal Assistants of Udhyan Pradesh” (WTT 139), Preema, “the general secretary of the IT Employees Union” (WTT, 139), and Manohar, a public activist in the Senate and the Executive Council of the university, so as to substantiate the satire on the malpractices in Indian higher education.

The episodic narration of meetings of the university bodies dialogically articulates the contemporary crisis of the Indian universities, caused by the members’ keen interest in remunerative clauses of their allowances, or in political patronage, while subtly evading from constructive criticism of the academic shortcomings of the university and from putting forward a few meaningful suggestions for an all-embracing growth of the university. Here, the novelist employs a subtle twist in chronicling the dissent of a few Senators with the hike in the travel and dearness allowances of the members of the executive council. A furor over the embezzlement of university fund, as manifest in the senators’ protest against the registrar’s new recommendation of a steep rise in the allowances of the executive council members was not steered by their concern for the finance of the university, but rather by a collective sense of threat to their precarious power hegemony, and a considerable material loss. ““You get personal car allowance while you ride in a line bus. Special, yes, I call it corruption special,” derided another senator” (WTT 146) soon turns into a round of applause, as the vice-chancellor Dr. Malik after a tête-à-tête with the registrar, approves an equal hike in their allowances.

Beside a critique of incursion of utilitarianism in academia, this storm in a teacup also exemplifies a literary premonition against the incompetent leadership in many of the Indian higher educational institution. Instead of setting up an enquiry committee against the financial mismanagement, allegedly done by the registrar, or exhibiting an administrative acumen through a dialogic resolution to the unanticipated crisis, he rather seeks the perpetrator’s advice in order to mollify the dissenters. Therefore, sharing the same concern with the above-

mentioned educationists over the causality of academic indigence in Indian universities, this fictional narrative, which is written in the form of an ‘expository novel’, deftly builds upon interplay of voices, so as to uncover the paradox entailing the lived reality of Indian universities.

The characterization of Dr. Malik aptly demonstrates a distinct fictional endeavor aiming to investigate the nuances of moral and academic implications of his administrative ineptitude. One such occasion includes Dr. Malik’s lack of interest in various UGC schemes for individual and institutional academic growth, followed by his seeking suggestions from Veerendra, which results either in partial fulfillment or in abrogation of many such projects. With the renewed emphasis on five-year plans of the UGC, Indian academia witnessed a significant rise in financing, as evidenced in the rising emphasis on cutting-edge research, democratization in grants allocation for career advancement programs for faculty members across the institutions, modernization of infrastructure and resources, and building up new educational institutions. Furthermore, the National Council for Teacher Education Act (NCTE Act) of 1993, also pressed on the imperative role of the Council in promoting planned and coordinated teachers’ training programs, and safeguarding academic merit or values across the universities of the country, as an indispensable condition for a holistic development of Indian academia. It is through a careful placement of the fictional evidences of administrative anomalies and negligence in fund allocation or processing of files related to particular projects, one could look into the literary matrices of engagement with the contested questions pertaining to the tension between the documented narratives and persistent crisis in Indian universities. Professor Sundaresh’s project of conducting UGC sponsored orientation program in Physics for college teachers, suffers an untimely death alongside many other projects like that of Balraj. Palathingal has deftly brought in a retrospective account of fostering scholarly activities and adherence to academic ethics, under the supervision of Professor Kabir, followed by a brief

stint of Professor Lakshmikanth as the acting Vice-Chancellor, in order to heighten the malaise of a dismal academic condition amply discernable at the present time.

Professor Kabir while being an ardent worshipper of knowledge, endorsed a wide-spread dissemination of learning through meaningful scholarly activities, contrary to the reluctance of Dr. Malik in carrying out the ongoing projects from Kabir's regime. The detailed narration of events leading to an unanticipated closure of the Physics project in turn divulges various hegemonic equations and accompanying unprofessionalism in the university administration culminating in the university's gradual departure from its prospective aims and objectives. Though, the proposal was tabled before the Executive Council and the course commenced after much deferment, it soon fizzled out due much to the maladministration in Akbarabad University. There had been an unwarranted irregularity in disbursement of fellowship among the participants, as "the lady assistant in charge of disbursements under the project had gone on pregnancy leave, and no substitute was available" (WTT 178). The above incident of administrative negligence exemplifies a remarkable fictional endeavor to examine a set of hindrances resulting in the often peripatetic outcome in Indian academy, i.e. understaffed administration with a severe shortage of skilled and committed professionals, and an acute financial mismanagement entailing the top echelons of university administration. Despite several promises by the registrar himself, preceded by a mass demonstration of the dissenting participants, there has been much of frivolous changes in the defrayal of fellowship, as "on 4 May, the participants received payment checks, the checks for February. Veerendra was apparently working with a strategy, a calculated time schedule" (WTT 179).

Palathingal deftly infuses elements of moral depravity in order to shed light on the perennial problem of the partial fulfilment of different projects funded by the UGC, ICSSR, AICTE, and other nodal bodies, which has almost become endemic to Indian higher education. Thus, after prolonged apprehension,

Participants felt that their best choice was to complete. And they did complete. 31 May 2001. Goodbye, Akbarabad. The March checks were received just before they left. Further payments, April and May, would be sent to the colleges... Bad news travels always fast. A new batch was invited for July; little response. The UGC physics program for the Akbarabad colleges went in a vertical drop. By decision of the Executive Council, the project was terminated on 2 June, buried without tears shed by the pall bearers (WTT 180).

Similarly, the research grant for the department of Biochemistry was curtailed by ten percent, instead of a hike of twelve percent, allegedly because of the personal feud between Professor Balraj and Veerendra. The underlying angst over the suspension of the project is indicative of an ever-waning interests of Indian academicians in such sponsored research projects, and a resulting chasm between the objectives of these cutting edge research and their further developments, which have sowed the seeds of the contemporary crisis of curtailment of funds in such research activities and dearth of such specialized research projects, as witnessed in the later stage of the UGC –XII Year Plan.

A closer look into recent turn of events following Balraj's resentment over the encroaching mediocrity in Akbarabad University would unravel the notorious power struggle crisscrossing the members of the university and the resulting "self-contained fiefdoms" among them. Following the letter Balraj wrote to the RRC regarding "the finance cut he was subjected to...adverse administrative trends...(and) the harm done to teaching and research" (WTT 165), Veerendra and the pro vice-chancellor- Vivek, driven by a sense of swollen ego embark upon a vindictive venture of power exertion with the proposal of suspension of Professor Balraj from the service; "charged with defamation of authority, indiscipline, and bad behavior" (WTT, 167). The detailed description of fervid exchange of words in the meeting of the Executive Council conspicuously brings to the fore how only a fear of backlash from the other

stakeholders could deter them from their vindictive predilection of power assertion. Thus, the complicit nexus of Veerendra and Vivek, premised upon their preoccupation with power hierarchies and their ceaseless manipulation of academics overlooking the necessary reforms could remould the academic corridors into “local feudal modes of functioning in the way of self-contained personal fiefdoms” (119), as Debaditya Bhattacharya argues in one of his recent piece on the governance of some of the new central universities (2019).

Drawing inferences from the recent cases of various gratuitous incidents such as hike in tuition fees and disaffiliation or invalidation of a few courses (B.Ed., M.Ed., B.Voc.) at CUSB, suspension of a faculty member of CUJ for the invited speaker’s (Professor from JNU) alleged affiliation with radical leftist associations, and brutal atrocities perpetrated on the student communities of UOH, JNU, CUH, and JU, only to mention a few, by the coercive state machineries, surreptitiously backed by the university authority, Bhattacharya develops a scathing and sustained criticism against the overpowering bureaucratization of academic administration. Taking on the claims of deterioration of academic merit as well as integrity, *Whispers in the Tower* further explicates, how the university space is divided into conflicting coteries among the academic and administrative communities. The unethical assertion of his power in proposing a hike in the pay structure of the registrar, after having identified some inconsistencies in the drafting of the ‘University Act’, or in circulating a specious letter to all the heads of the departments stating that “henceforth...all letters should be addressed to the registrar only” (WTT 155) was challenged, if not entirely quelled by his fellow stakeholders from the administrative as well as the academic faculties.

The conflict of interest among them in turn paves the way for the formation of similar fiefdoms of the top brass of the university, which the novel effectively sheds light on, so as to draw a clearer picture of the causality of academic mediocrity in the Indian universities. In the administrative section, Ram Sudhakar, “The controller was of the same administrative ranking

as the registrar and managed a fiefdom of his own, independent of the registrar” (WTT 152), and the “Finance Officer Rashid, another one of those having rank equal and distinct territory of operation” (WTT 153) also maintains his own peer group. The third person narration also elucidates how the rising fear of disavowal of academic values vis-à-vis scholarly activities, combined with a collective grievance over denigration of the teaching faculties often lays the foundation for further academic lobbying among them. Professor Shivram’s urgent call for a meeting of senior faculty members was triggered by the “undercurrents of ego... and more than ego,...(it was the) downplaying of academic work” (WTT 155). Therefore, building upon the propositions of Debaditya Bhattacharya, it could be rightly argued that, this work of fiction marks a departure from the official rhetoric of expansion of Indian higher education through an adept storytelling of an inverse relation, academic advancement of a higher educational institution shares with the prevalent feudal modalities of governance in Indian universities, and a discursive literary resistance to the debilitating forces.

Equality and Democratization of education: A distant dream?

Beside the suspension of research projects, the narrative further satirizes the paradox of expansion in the form of ‘autonomization’ of colleges, or commencement of new courses of higher learning in many of these colleges, which are lacking in adequate infrastructure and access to the vast intellectual resources. This naïve, politically driven modalities of democratic advancement of higher education, in a way accentuates the call for a detailed inquiry into how the nexus between the university administration and external political agencies could be complicit in the progress of scholarship. That there has been an urgency in safeguarding the autonomy of the university in laying down its academic curriculum, while promoting a strategic decentralization of higher education and augmentation of resources are discernable enough in the recommendations of NPE-1986. It vindicates-

The University system should be enabled to move centre-stage. It should have the freedom and responsibility to innovate in teaching and research. The emphasis on autonomy of colleges and departments, provision of means to interact across boundaries of institutions and funding agencies, better infrastructure, more rationalized funding for research, integration and teaching, search and evaluation, all these reflect this major concern (42).

Contrary to their envisagement, *Whispers in the Tower* lays bare the sordid postcolonial reality of Indian academia, where the dominant political equations tend to co-opt the academic prerequisites for setting up new institutions, or introducing new disciplines/courses. Complying with the cardinal questions raised in *Corridors of Knowledge* (2008), as evidenced in the inspection of a college conducted by Madhav and Ratibhai, here, the proposal for opening post-graduate program in Physics at the Thakoor Sahib Memorial College, unmasks the overpowering political drive as the primary impetus, thereby considerably undermining the distinct academic markers. Palathingal deftly locates the two opposing forces at play in the implementation of the educational policies, i.e. a) the hegemonic forces (internal and external), and b) the marginalized voices of a few committed intellectuals. Reminiscent of his earlier resolution of setting up a university at the Akbarabad province of Udhyan Pradesh, Mustafa's recent call to the Vice-Chancellor Dr. Malik for the project of masters in Physics was predicated upon his political image-building, as "he felt what should be felt. It was the people's pulse he was feeling, and hence to be empathized; the request would be granted" (WTT 212).

The narrative efficaciously captures the perpetual predicament of Indian universities, due to the detrimental effects of seamy political intrusions in the modus operandi of Indian universities, under the façade of manifold social responsibilities of the government and universities. The title of the twenty-first chapter of the novel- "For the People" clearly conveys the implicit satire in Palathingal's take on Mustafa's enthusiasm with the above project, which

he, having shared the similar trajectory with the criticism on tertiary education in India, discursively locates the paradox in the project of mass education, largely because of the implied political intentions. The gradual metamorphoses of the University into any other public institution also calls forth a set of questions pertaining to its separation from the genealogical and teleological principles of academic freedom, autonomy, and university as a democratic and self-reflexive space of critical enquiry. The 'third person objective narration' beautifully summarizes the co-option of these coveted academic morals with manifold 'claims of the political' over the campus and its paraphernalia, which could often culminate in unviable manifestations of the proposed reforms.

Government funds kept the university running. And the crass logic followed, the men who threw in the bucks would be in control; despite popular concepts on the contrary. Akbarabad, a public university, was said to be an autonomous institution; no scope for interference from the spinners. It should be free to make decisions, free over policies, and free over implementation. That was the concept, the theory. Theory and practice were as apart as piety and reality. The reality was evident. The Executive Council was loaded with powerful government officials; the Finance Secretary to ensure financial control and more, the Education Secretary to impart government wisdom and more, and another official, too, to provide extra punch...At the apex of tandem poles stood the vice chancellor and the pro-vice-chancellor, both granted to be there by the grace and consent of the Minister of Education, the pro-chancellor...University was undoubtedly under government control (WTT 212-213).

The subsequent developments reflect upon partitioning of the university community into antagonistic camps. On the one hand, there are privileged, politically patronized group of professors and educational administrators, such as Malik, Veerendra, and Ahmed Karim,

reader of Physics, and the other camp comprises people like Sundaresh and Gobind, a faculty member in the department of Physics at the concerned college. Whereas, the former group, driven by their desire of wielding power and a concomitant fear of expulsion, acquiesces before the vested political interests, Sundaresh could only demonstrate a minimal resistance by preparing an expert committee report with a detailed blueprint of the necessary changes before the commencement of the program, only to be summarily discarded by the bureaucracy of the statutory bodies of the university. The next committee headed by Karim readily sanctioned the proposal, while completely foreswearing the emphasis of the last commission on “the physical needs, books of post-graduate level and journals, major equipment and space, and ...additional teachers and laboratory staff...” (WTT 216). This approval of the post-graduate program in Physics, in no way connotes a celebration of academic values/ethics, rather clearly underlines an incremental departure from the ‘idea of the university’. As A. R. Kamat in one of his pieces, “Education Policy in India: Critical Issues” (1980), expressed his concern with the encroaching mediocrity in Indian college education since the late 60s, owing much to the multifaceted political intrusion in the campuses, this novel makes some substantial endeavors in order to delve into the continuing process of degradation of academic merit of Indian higher education even in the nineties.

The ever-widening chasm between the documented narratives and the murkier reality of Indian higher education reflects upon the discontinuities in the project of public funded academic institutions in post-independence India. The genesis of modern secular education goes back to Wilhelm von Humboldt’s theses on reformation of the Prussian education system in the early nineteenth century from an entrenched sense of stagnation over the decades. In order to effectuate the revolutionary changes in the larger framework of Prussian education system, Humboldt voices an urgency in safeguarding and advocating certain academic ideals, such as academic freedom, coherence between teaching and research, sense of community

between teachers and students, and revival of science and critical scholarship in the universities (1809/1810). His defense of academic freedom, contingent on a set of imperative pointers, marks a remarkable effort in weaving two supposedly irreconcilable forces, i.e. the State, and the autonomy of the university.

He maintains that the expansion and epistemic revival of the public universities hinge largely upon funding from the State, which, though validates its will over the recruitment of the university community, it must engage in symbiotic associations with its intellects, so as to substantially contribute to the project of academic dynamism, alongside the training of good officials for the democratic functioning of the state. Nevertheless, the regulatory power of the state, Humboldt argues, ought not to curb the unconditional freedom of the academicians in carrying out their teaching and research, or the assertion of autonomy in academic matters. In the view of the pervasive presence of the Prussian state apparatuses in the educational paraphernalia of the early nineteenth century, he voices his concern against the dominant drive of transmutation of the academic institutions into the State's *Gymnasien* or special schools, solely meant for the production of skilled professionals and officers for partaking in the functioning of the State. He, instead believes that, "the state should...adhere to a deep conviction that if the universities achieve their purpose, they will realise the purpose of the state as well, and on a higher plane" (Humboldt, as quoted in Ostling 41).

Drawing upon the lineage of the 'Humboldtian' tradition of university education, the visionary leaders of a newly independent India, such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Maulana Azad, while ushering in a new era in the history of Indian education, lays out a blueprint of a decolonized public funded university education. The emphasis on the humanistic ideals and advancement of scholarship amply resonates in their treatises and public lectures on education. Nehru contends (1947; pub. 1958)-

A university stands for Humanism, for Tolerance, for Reason, for the Adventure of Ideas and for the search for Truth. It stands for the onward march of human race towards ever-higher objectives. If the universities discharge their duties adequately then it is well with the nation and the people. But if the temple of learning itself becomes the home of narrow bigotry and petty objectives, how then will the nation prosper or people grow in stature? (Nehru 333).

In a similar vein, Maulana Azad, while hailing the spirit of equality and individual's birth-right to education, he concurred on the role of the state in securing the fundamental rights of its citizens. "A state cannot claim to have discharged its duty till it has provided for every single individual the means to the acquisition of knowledge and self-betterment" (quoted in Das 47).

What this work of fiction does, is to unmask the discontinuities in the project of public university education in India, and the implied political stratagems behind socialist notions of equality, an inclusive upward mobility of diverse castes and classes, and a comprehensive development of teaching and research, as their foundational principles. Placing the textual manifestations of the reality and the theoretical propositions in tandem would divulge, how, owing much to the multilayered political tensions and intrusions, the universities often fall short of synchronizing the socialist cause of inclusiveness, and an exclusivist academic excellence within their performative oeuvre. Several scholars (Shils, 1969; Altbach, 1972, 1980; Beteille, 2010; Ramdev, 2019) have time and again expressed their angst over the detrimental effects of politicization of the drive of social inclusion through education, which eventually reduces the idea of the university into a factory image for the mass production of mere literate citizens, instead of educated ones, what Paulo Freire defines as 'massification' (discussed in the previous chapter). Ranging from the appointment of academic and administrative staff of the university and presence of public officials and delegates from political parties, the hegemonic influence of the state could also be found in plenty in ideological monitoring of the course curriculum and research works. Furthermore, the

surveillance of the state in the academic activities entailing the affiliation of colleges and opening of new courses, which they assert; could undermine the critical ethos of the university, and further destabilize the democratic dynamics of its internal order.

A dialectical reading of the textual evidences of hierarchical power relations within the university community, overpowering presence of academic fiefdoms, and practical hindrances in academics and research, followed by deterioration in the merit of the university would vindicate the disquiet deftly voiced in their critique of Indian tertiary education. It is through the university's approval of master degree in Physics at the concerned college, the narrative deftly sheds light on the persistent problem of underfunding and uneven progress of college education in India, resulting in an unavoidable intellectual indigence. Gobind's unabashed confession on the insufficient number of teaching staff in the Physics department, where "none had experience teaching at the post-graduate level" (WTT, 215), dearth of government funds, and an indefinite delay, often discrimination in sanctioning and releasing funds among the colleges are indicative of a hegemonic and partial enactment of the proposed reformative measures – autonomy of colleges, focus on interdisciplinary studies and cutting edge research, and espousal of innovative practices and technologies in teaching and research. Academic freedom and values are compromised to the extent of silencing some of the professors who dare to censure the encroaching mediocrity at the Akbarabad University and its affiliated colleges, and question the devious political interests of image building and obtaining mass support to stay the course in the race of democracy behind this heedless move of expansion at the expense of academic concerns. Thus, despite the ostensible show of academic professionalism in going about with the Physics project at Thakoor Sahib Memorial College, the egalitarian and intellectual prerequisites of mass education suffer a thumping setback.

Enveloped by the towering presence of the political predilections, the holistic assumptions of upward mobility of hitherto underprivileged sections, and fostering a critical

consciousness in them through a democratic dissemination of education, turn into farcical ventures of mass literacy. Responding to the deep-rooted crisis of rote learning and ‘massification’ in post-independence India, Andre Beteille pertinently observes that though, diversity in/of representation could be felt “in customs and practices...in ideas, beliefs, and values...the diversity that was allowed to prevail was organized hierarchically and not democratically” (ibid. 100). Extending upon the nuanced manifestations of power circulation under the guise of safeguarding vis-à-vis bolstering the twofold claims of unity and diversity, he bemoans the performative ‘aporia’^v permeating the corridors of many secular public institutions.

The performance of our open and secular institutions, particularly those under the care of the state, has been best uneven. Disorder has grown in public life and public institutions have failed to become socially inclusive in the natural course of their growth. Where political pressure has been applied from outside to make them socially more inclusive, their internal order and efficiency has been seriously compromised. Nothing demonstrates this more clearly than the state of our institutions of higher learning today (ibid. 106).

‘Collective Unconscious’ of the clerical staff and the call for professional ethics

Furthermore, the above claims of misgovernance and a lack of academic acumen among the administrative staff of the Akbarabad University discursively engage with the vanishing cause célèbre pertaining to the nature of appointment of the clerical staff in the Indian universities, apart from the upper grade academic-administrators. Behind the grand narratives of the ‘political’ in the appointment of administrative heads of the university, the distinctive political matrices present in the recruitment and work ethics of their subordinates remain perpetually unheeded. Thus, a careful analysis of different subplot characters of the select novels would not just vindicate the above claim, but will also add to the purpose of

further scope of enquiry into the causality of the prevailing academic mediocrity and uneven progress of tertiary education in India.

The characterization of Veeru (a peon), Mehta (a clerk in the Accounts Section), or Dalal (a typist) in Naik's *Corridors of Knowledge* (2008), Sowbhagyappa in *Atom and the Serpent* (1982), Somnath (a clerical staff and the chairman of an employee union), and Vasanthi (a clerical assistant at payroll division) in *Whispers in the Tower* (2012) share some correlative traits pertaining to the 'politics of docilization'. Either they are ground level workers of different political parties, as evident in the cases of Veeru and Somnath, or they seek political patronage vis-à-vis affiliation for their selection and for subsistence in the university, as we find in Vasanthi and Sowbhagyappa. And, apart from these political underpinnings, another dominant characteristic, all of them share is their material greed, amply found in Veeru, Mehta and Dalal which often results in asking for bribes for academic purposes. They do it by masquerading a discontent with the unequal distribution of wealth within the democratic space of the university, thereby validating their claims of these material favors. In this process of denigration of academic values by the encroaching materiality and manifold 'claims of the political', the lower grade administrative staff, owing much to their political and material precarity, become subjects of endogenous and exogenous power struggle and political manipulation.

Taking on the discursive literary manifestations of ubiquitous lack of professional ethics of the clerical staff of the universities, it could be aptly inferred that there has been hardly any meaningful, or sloppy endeavors from the government, and from the Apex Educational Bodies in India for orientation of the administrative staff in higher educational institutions. An analogy between the textual evidences and the lived reality of Indian universities would, in turn, validate the above claims of a pervasive lack of integrity among the clerical members of the universities, preceded by a dearth of proper planning in augmenting their skills. Though,

the select campus novels have been compendious enough in their critique of discontinuities in the official narratives encompassing the different projects of teacher training programs for college and university professors, as evidenced in the above study, these fictional narratives suffer from an aporetic silence, when it comes to the training of lower grade administrative staff of the university. A complete absence of textual references pertaining to the induction programs for the growth of non-teaching community of an academic institution is not indicative of authorial incomprehension(s). It rather suggests a pervasive lack of collective consciousness among the policy makers and executors of the post-independence India with the urgency of inculcation of professional and academic ethics among the clerical staff through initiation of career advancement or skill enhancement courses across the institutions.

A diachronic placement of the recommendations of education commissions of India since independence would historically testify the unanimous lack of futuristic vision among the planners themselves with the project of orientation programs for non-teaching employees of the university. Whereas, the proposals for various teachers' training programs come to the fore as indispensable markers of progress of the university in the recommendations of the Radhakrishnan Commission (1948-49), Kothari Commission (1964-66), or of NPE 1986 and NCTE Act 1993 in order to corroborate the claims of specialized training programs for the teachers, the pertinent question of the training of non-teaching employees remains perpetually unattended. Thus, instead of a sense of commitment and integrity towards their professional duties, what is amply visible is a collective lack of consciousness and familiarity with the academic needs, and an incremental materialist and political interpellation of these subordinate office staff. Therefore, in the face of such multifaceted onslaught over its very reason of existence, the university's resistance against the bane of political-material ideologies, and scope for its upholding of intellectual ethos slowly become an inconceivable project, as this insidious drive effectively encompasses the faculty members as well.

Loss of academic values and performativity of the Professoriate

If one tries to concoct an analytical framework, contingent upon the intermittent textual evidences of lack of academic values and prevalence of academic self-gratification among the faculty members, it would be conducive enough to delve into the causality of academic mediocrity in many of the Indian universities, and how teaching and learning are threatened with a coup de grace with the uncritical celebration of academic scholarship. Instead of demonstrating a substantial endeavor towards working out possible interconnections between research and classroom teaching, what is conspicuous in the characterization of Professor Raj Narain is an academic's basking in self-indulgent glory of his academic fame. "Narain was a scholar of Urdu, rare for one born and brought up Brahmin, well acknowledged all over the country" (WTT 10). The appointment of Raj Narain as the professor in the department of Urdu was much endorsed by the vice-chancellor Professor Kabir, hoping for a renewed interest in study of the classical language and a vast gamut of literature written in it, and an inculcation of the spirit of critical enquiry in the students under the tutelage of a highly held academician. But, the paradox of reality records Professor Narain's condescending behavior with his own colleagues, and his exertion of hierarchy over the junior faculty members of his department. In a departmental meeting, a hue and cry over the distribution of work load between the faculty members of the Urdu department epitomizes the entrenched presence of the academic ivory tower within the dialogic-democratic space of Indian universities, where driven by their inflated ego of esoteric scholarly pursuits and accomplishments, the academics often distance themselves from the humanistic values of dialogism, coordination, collaboration, and equality in the division of intellectual labour.

Abdullah's (a lecturer in the Urdu department) outrage voices an individualist, vis-à-vis collective resentment against the academic tyranny of Professor Narain. His mild protest in "Professor, you are leaving the entire teaching load to us" (WTT 69), or after having been

snubbed by Narain “that is something you all can do” (WTT 69), and “You are assigned what you can handle” (WTT 69), his responses of “But sir, we too, wish to do other things” (WTT 69), and “We can try, sir” (WTT 69) are exemplary of exercising academic freedom and his scholarly pursuits. On the contrary, what is discernable in Raj Narain is a display of hegemonic disposition combined with a deliberate suppression of democratic voices of his subordinates. In order to quash the brewing indignation and to co-opt their voices, he resorts to an act of threatening, thereby dispensing with the academic morals of the university. ““Look, I do not want you to act as anyone’s representative. If anyone has a complaint, let him tell me straight...Do any of you have a complaint that I am not teaching?”” (WTT 70) represents a subtle fictional intervention with two familiar, yet understated problems, i.e. academic rivalry, and an egotistical arrogance among a section of Indian academicians, who hardly find it unethical to put up a show of public derision, and to look down upon the intellectual potential of other faculty members. Furthermore, his defense against the allegations was not marked by any form of scholasticism and an inclusive academic competitiveness, rather a sense of discriminatory pride and an inclination to arresting the academic growth of his colleagues are evident enough in his voice. ““Chance, you say? What chance? Nobody gave me a chance. It is all what I made.” There was anger in Narain’s tone. The professor was referring to his world-recognized accomplishments” (WTT 69).

An analogy between Professor Narain and Professor Yana from *Atom and the Serpent* would rather corroborate two of my above propositions pertaining to the teleology of academic rivalry within the shifting terrain of the liberal university structure of India. Dr. Yaugandharayana, aka Yana, who earned a doctorate in Physics from a non-ivy league American university in the early 1960s, is presently the head of the Atomic Research Department in the imaginary Indian university in question. A critical reading of some of his characteristic traits would uncover how his undiscerning idealization of American culture(s) is

accompanied by a speculative derision of the future prospects of Indian education, and a sense of false pride in his academic accomplishments. He embodies quite a homologous approach in his strained relation with his colleagues, evident enough in his unflinching manipulation of departmental research grants and other financial aids for his vested interests, thereby divesting his junior colleagues from their legitimate right of academic growth. Though there are persistent impediments of underfunding, unavailability of resources, and intrusion of ‘the political’, what both Narain, and Yana rightly indicate as ancillary to the academic and scholarly indigence of Indian public universities, these inconsistencies in the very rubric of higher education often rub shoulders with certain unethical practices of some professors, as manifest in the characterization of the above two characters.

Vatsa’s interaction with Dharma, a reader in Yana’s department clearly evinces how an undercurrent of hegemonic manipulation, exercised by Yana prevents them from going along with their scholarly pursuits, or to have fair access to several funds from different regulatory bodies like UGC, ICSSR, and others. Driven by his own vested interests, Yana resorts to subterfuge in distributing the UGC funds among his junior colleagues, and for the welfare of students. Having been asked by Vatsa, Kumar, a reader from Economics Department observes, how Dharma’s remonstrance is tenable enough, as “He (Yana) wants my colleague (Dharma) to divert part of his funds to help her (Yana’s scholar) to prolong her stay there for one whole year” (ATS 219). This is because “Yana is going to the same place in another six months’ time for stint of eight weeks” (ATS 219). Therefore, the study of the above two characters would symptomatically vindicate, how, often professors’ obsession with their academic ambitions and narrow self-interests, ill-founded criticism of others’ scholarly endeavors, and a resultant animosity between them culminate in an unforgiving state of academic inertia, despite policies contemplating the advancement of learning.

Janice Rossen (1993) in her penetrating analysis of British academy and its fictional representations in the campus novels, deftly argues, how the pursuit of knowledge combined with an idealization of excellence and the concomitant thrill of chasing, engender an abstract insecurity among the academicians, which eventually result in one's escape into the Ivory Tower. She further examines how the academic quest shares same trajectory with the matrices of power exertion.

Like their counterparts in any other profession, academics delight in reinforcing this view of themselves as comprising circles which are closed to the uninitiated. They also tend to compete with each other within that realm for positions of power. Academic fiction almost always takes this competitiveness as part of its basis, showing its characters' ambitions to gain more stature within the profession and often dramatizing this in terms of professional rivalry (4).

Therefore, building upon Rossen's assumptions, and her take on Western campus fiction's response to the paraphernalia of campus life, one could look into the plot formations of the two Indian novels in question as 'defamiliarized' gateway to the complex networks of power circulation crisscrossing the academic community of Indian universities.

In an attempt to understand the 'twisted roots and western influence on Asian higher education' (1989), Philip G. Altbach rightly observed how the "Two basic realities shape Asian higher education systems - the foreign origin of the basic academic model and the indigenization of the universities as part of the development process" (1). Altbach's insight is reminiscent of R. Havighurst's (1981) critique of Indian education as riddled between two competing, yet complementary goals of assimilation and self-determination. An analogy between miscellaneous goals of Indian higher education and inferences from the works of Altbach, or of Havighurst would also call for further investigation of the shifting paradigms of Western influence with the rising magnanimity of America. As the project of decolonizing the

Indian University is contingent upon an urgency to extricate itself from banal appropriation of the Western epistemic traditions alongside a much naturalized inferiority complex of the formerly colonized subjects, while being critical in our engagement with the western discourses, the epistemic, cultural and economic interpellation of post-colonial Indian academy, perpetuated by the Machiavellian drive of ‘Americanization’, alias Globalization, further muddled the divisions and hierarchies present among Indian academicians.

The neo-liberal fetish for academic excellence relegating the quintessential academic culture, humanistic ideals, sociopolitical mission of nation-building, and the very historicity of the university’s reason of existence, which sweeps across the American academia since the later years of ‘Cold-War’ era turns the contemporary American universities into, what Bill Readings defines as ‘posthistorical university’ (1997). For Readings, the term ‘posthistorical’ is endemic to the moral and academic predicament of the contemporary American universities, as, with the ascendancy of the neo-liberal market economy, “...the institution has outlived itself” (6), and “The University...no longer participates in the historical project for humanity...and of culture” (ibid. 5). The project of humanity which is predicated on two mutually interdependent cultures of ‘scientific humanities’ and ‘humanistic science’, as seminal prerequisites to a sustainable development of humanity, in coherence with the conservation of flora and fauna calls for an inculcation of a distinct consciousness, in order to re-conceptualize the paradigms knowledge with a more holistic approach.

Altbach elsewhere argued that the Indian universities suffer from a far severe crisis of academic stagnation, where “the structure and traditions of the Indian university substantially inhibit academic change” (Altbach, ed. Agarwal 33). In addition to this perpetual predicament, the partitioning of academic community into conflicting factions, contingent upon myriads of socio-cultural and geo-political determinants, and academic animosity relapse into disruption of academic life in the campus. Furthering Altbach’s critique, several other Indian scholars

have identified the fissures between ‘imagining’ and ‘making’ of a secular post-colonial education system. Apart from the historical deterrent of foreign origin, preceded by a complicated history of mutilation of the indigenous intellectual resources and a concomitant collective amnesia entailing our pre-colonial past, these critics are more keen on understanding the contemporary crisis in terms of external as well as internal political equations, professors’ lack of sincerity in classroom teaching, reluctance to critical thinking, diverse dynamics of professional rivalry, and an uneven progress, only to mention a few (Ghosh, 1987; Kamat, 1980; Ahmad, 1979; Narain, 1987).^{vi}

Taking on the above assumptions on causality of this ubiquitous inhibition to dynamicity in knowledge production, vis-à-vis circulation in Indian academy, it could be feasibly argued that, besides other markers of their interventions, these two fictional narratives from the literary subgenre-Indian Campus Fiction also situate the dearth of academic spirit and values under the purview of the teachers’ general reluctance to classroom teaching, often under the guise of their preoccupations with their research activities. The allegations brought against Raj Narain by his junior associates is grounded upon his insouciance towards his departmental duties. In a similar vein, Professor Yana also doesn’t take much active interest in teaching, or scholarly dialogues with students and other faculty members of the department. The third person narration clearly sheds light on the prevalent inertia in the Atomic Physics department, where “Yana was interested neither in his subject, nor in his Department. As for his colleagues, Yana seemed to have only a lofty contempt for them” (ATS 35). Instead of exercising professional ethics and inducting research into classroom teaching in order to inculcate in students the *jouissance* of critical thinking, he indulges in amorphous critique of inadequacies in Indian education, while carrying out his academic duties perfunctorily. In a jocund exchange of words between him and Vatsa concerning the culture of classroom teaching and paradigms of teacher-students relation in the campus, though he sarcastically concedes-“Classes

indeed...Mostly this is a Sleepy Hollow” (ATS 39), his discontent is not grounded on his own exercise of academic ethics.

The reformist policies require proper planning and a collective effort from the academic community for their veracious manifestation within the university space, and their reflection in the larger milieu. It further entails an academic’s expertise in the contemporary modes of knowledge production. But, an attempt to locate the fictional accounts within the lived experiences of academics’ deviation from their professional commitment would be imperative enough in re-mapping the fallacies in the project of a decolonized and liberal university education. Nandakumar’s adept story telling of the devaluation of academic merit and integrity in the campus weaves further disconcerting narratives of some of the professors’ skepticism over academic research, and an equal insouciance in classroom teaching, while much of their attention is devoted to the complex networks of power circulation in the university, and partaking in contemptuous rumoring. Sheela Rani, a Reader in Econometrics, derisively called as ‘Classic class cutter’ by her colleagues, and as “the Glittering Parrot by her students on account of her parrot-like repeated reasons for cancelling her classes” (ATS 28) embodies a number of qualities. Besides, Yana, and Raj Narain, an attempt to situate her characteristic traits and actions within the paradox of academic progress would corroborate the hypotheses of academics’ considerable contribution in this overwhelming crises of academic doldrums, followed by an ennui cutting across Indian academia.

Sheela Rani’s skepticism and ineptitude in research are marked by a naïve, speculative labelling of Indian scholarship as “bogus research” (ATS 137). This gives an impetus to the textual problematization of the paradox of wish-fulfillment of a section of Indian intellectuals in denigrating the credibility of research in India, while themselves being distant from the contemporary trajectories of academic research. Her critique of intellectual standards doesn’t ensue any substantial effort either in enhancement of her scholarship, or in familiarizing

students with the current pedagogical reformation. Instead, her strategic deviation from academic responsibilities as a teacher could remind the reader of Matangini Mistry from M. K. Naik's *The Corridors of Knowledge*. Though, a hypothetical statement from her part, it is through her labelling of research in India as 'bogus research', the novel seeks to re-examine the ramifications of a much debated proposal of the UGC to make Ph.D. compulsory for promotion of university teachers in the 1970s. Taking cue from Dr. Ganeshan's resentment with the prevalent utilitarian drive in Indian scholarship, and its immediate reflection in Matangini's interest in Ph.D. solely for her promotion to Professorship, as evidenced in the reading of Naik's *Corridors of Knowledge* (2008), it could be inferred that *Atom and the Serpent* (1982) uncovers the paradox of such insistence on Ph.D., which is either marked by a ubiquitous apathy among a segment of Indian academics, or by mass production of half-baked research works lacking scholarly perception.

In view of this intellectual bankruptcy sweeping across the Indian academia, N. Jayaram, and Philip G. Altbach rightly observed- "Insistence on a research degree (Ph. D. or M. Phil.) has become counterproductive. The rush for enrolment in doctoral programs, following the UGC's decision in the 1970s to make a Ph. D. the minimum qualification, has resulted in a deterioration of the quality of doctoral research at universities" (Jayaram and Altbach 404). However, the anomaly over considering Ph.D. as the minimum eligibility criteria for assistant professorship in an Indian university persists even in present times, sparked by a press release, issued by the MHRD in 2018, which clearly states that "Ph.D. degree will be mandatory for direct recruitment to Assistant Professors in universities w.e.f. 01.07.2021" (2018). This, in turn, vindicates the visionary quality of the novel in its engagement with the contradictions and an undercurrent of debasement of intellectual ethos, thwarting the growth of Indian higher education. The overwhelming number of academic institutions in the post-independence era was not accompanied by a corresponding development of infrastructure,

equality in fund allocation, and added financial support to the newly founded and provincial institutions, indispensable for the upgradation of their physical and intellectual resources, and quality of research.

Nandakumar's incisive placement of a dialogic interlude between Yana, Vatsa and Sheela aim at situating her characteristic traits as detrimental to her own academic progress and of the university. Vatsa's visit to Yana's office coincides with Sheela Rani's regular tour to his department, as a common excuse to refrain herself from taking classes, and to indulge in academic-political gossiping, defamation of others with her fictitious tales, and hatching plots in order to safeguard her vested interests and retention of her hegemonic control in the campus. Having been asked by Yana regarding her classes, Rani resorts to her carefully plotted pretense of other professional preoccupations in the university, resonant enough in her response: "No, I cancelled my first one to catch you in time, because I knew you would be very busy with our distinguished visitor. I must go now, and put in a word with my professor again. If possible meet the VC also, if only for formality's sake" (ATS 39). The episodic detailing of what followed hereafter, would further corroborate my intent of re-mapping the oft-mooted question of academic mediocrity in Indian universities, which as a recurring motif, creates a discursive fictional space to engage the critical attention of a literary scholar. Her act of accompanying Vatsa in his leisurely stroll around the campus eventually dissuades her from her commitment to classroom teaching. The narration deftly divulges how her deliberate act of not taking the first class also continues in following hours under the pretext of her official engagements. Having been asked by students regarding her class, she is prompt with her tailor-made reply of "Oh, I forgot. I'm so sorry; anyway, it is twenty minutes past. You can go. I shan't be lecturing today" (ATS 47).

The nonchalance intrinsic to Sheela Rani's approach as a teacher, cannot be conceived as an isolated practice in the campus, rather it seems to gradually encompass members of other

departments and administrative staff of the university, thereby setting up a precedence to be followed by a section from the posterity as well. While building its narrative on the perplexities in Indian universities, the novel also throws light on the baneful and contagious influence of professors' fallacies on the students. The recurring references of the student community's increasing lack of interest in academics as well as in the recent developments in knowledge production are evidenced in Vatsa's experience as a distinguished speaker for the Rao Bahadur Endowment lecture. An apparent sarcasm, resonant enough in the third person narration of a visible apathy among students and the faculty members with the scholarly ventures of the department or the university, vouchsafes a revisionist urgency in the novel's discursive engagement with the anomalies in the Indian academia.

This empty hall was an eye-opener to Vatsa. When he was told that he would have to lecture in the Colloquium Hall, a vision of a packed 200 foam-seated auditorium with gleaming mikes and noble lecterns and ever so many paintings of past academic worthies blessing those present, had filled his mind...When they came, there were only two boys and a girl distributed on the several benches...and they stood up when Yana and Vatsa entered (ATS, 103).

Having been inquired by Vatsa about the measly presence of audience for his lecture, Yana rightly observes- "In this goddamn place no one is interested in anything except scandal" (ATS 104).

Indian Students and the claims of Intellectual Peripeteia

Since, this research seeks to critique the fictional interventions with the historical-empirical contexts of Indian higher education, thus, an analogy between the portrayal of Indian students and their responses to the belaboring process of knowledge acquisition across the fictional works would insinuate an inverse relation between the quantitative growth and quality output. Therefore, beside the previous hypotheses on the notion of cultural alienation of an

average Indian student within the rubric of secular English education in the post-colony, if one attempts to situate the fictional representations of varied experiences of student community in *The Long Long Days* (1960) and in *Atom and the Serpent* (1982) within its evolutionary framework, a clearer picture of an undercurrent of erosion of scholarly ethos comes to the fore. Amidst multiple pointers as discussed earlier, Nithyanandan's intervention with the oft mooted question of intellectual mediocrity in Indian academia is also marked by a remarkable endeavor of investigating this emerging crisis, which is coterminous with a waning commitment permeating the academic community (students and faculty members). Building upon the theoretical premises of above-mentioned critics, it could be adequately argued, having been set in an imaginary college campus in the late 1950s, the novelist deftly foregrounds Indian academics' sweeping reluctance to the rigor of 'decolonization' within the problematics of course curriculum, and its demonstration in classroom teaching. As a corresponding aspect to the question of unemployment and employability of arts graduates in the post-colonial era, the narrative aptly inserts a sarcastic remark by a professor expressing his discontent with the lack of dynamicity among the members of the syllabus committee of the university—"I have to lecture the fourth-years on Chaucer. Twentieth year I'm exhuming the old gentleman" (TLLD, 49).

Taking this observation as the text's symbolic intervention with the prevalent stasis in Indian colleges, one could rightly problematize the project of 'decolonization' in shaping of the national education system in India. This predicament of college education in India is contingent on two interwoven, yet antithetical factors: a) education becoming homologous with employment and being judged solely by its employability, and b) the university's gradual distancing from its scholarly ethos. The realism in the novel which unfolds in the form of a linear narrative, brings together students' innovative approaches in order to free themselves from the travails of classroom learning and of examinations. The third person narration of

Kannan's skulduggery in order to pass the English examination, though ostensibly jocular, is further indicative of an implied satire on the examination process and pedagogic reform. The narrator observes-

Kannan revealed the resourceful chicanery that had finally led to the undoing of the Bard. The previous day he had blocked the water supply to an overhead flushing cistern, and temporarily converted it into a library. Every time he fell short of essential information, he had only to visit the closet, stretch for the lid...and help himself to the most authentic data available, though the books were damp and mouldy (TLLD 118).

The image of "damp and mouldy" books, and the 'anxiety of influence', emblematic of our antiquarian reading of Western literature could be interpreted further as the text's discursive engagement with the inconsistencies in the project of 'decolonization' of English studies in India, and the veracity of it, while having been enmeshed in the post-colonial contexts. Taking cue from my study on English education in India and its reflections in the fictional representations, it could be further argued, how the waning academic interests among the students, owing much to our fallacious perception of decolonizing English studies in India transmogrify the idea of the university from a dialogic gateway to critical thinking towards a factory image of mechanized learning. Therefore, the above description of books could also be evocative of the novella's point of departure from the predominant praxes of higher education, and its dialectical relation with the debate on the evolution of a decolonized university education in India, or a devolution of it.

Though the drive of democratization of education in the post-colonial era has been subject to a burgeoning growth, in terms of number of institutions and students, the discontent voiced by the visionary thinkers, such as Tagore, or Gandhi with the aftermath of rote learning on the fate of a newly independent nation proves imperative enough. Despite the inclusivism

vindicated by the policy makers, Indian higher education continues to remain exclusivist, as it fails to engender a quest for critical scholarship among a significant number of students, and is even mired in the crafty methods of categorization of academic institutions, contingent upon biased and equivocal matrices of academic excellence. Other than the few elite institutions held high as the face of Indian education, majority of academic institutions with an overwhelming number of students bear the brunt of underfunding, unequal distribution of resources, and dismal teacher-student ratio, followed by an irreversible peripatetic turn in the overall progress. Within the liminal literary landscapes of some Indian Campus novels, the causality of academic indigence in these institutions recur time and again as one of their pivotal markers of fictional expositions.

Rita Joshi's *The Awakening* (1993), a verse novel (novella), which employs the stylistic elements of 'Metafiction', brings together a distinct perspective of a woman novelist. Set in a fictitious women's college in the late 80s, the narrative is built upon the experiences of an Indian female professor in its endeavor to situate the ceaseless process of degradation of merit, thwarting the progress of college education in India. The protagonist, JR, who graduated from the Cambridge University comes back to India to take up the job as a lecturer of English in the Supreme College, located in New Delhi. Her initial encounters with the students of English literature unmask the distressing picture of academics in the college, where "her young students (are) mutual dependents...the course is vast, The texts are varied, offer contrast. The scholarship here is less, The library is a mess/ In some ways it is redundant,/ As guidebooks are abundant" (Joshi 1031; henceforth TA, page no.). The unavailability of intellectual resources in the college library of Supreme College refers to several factors pertaining to the diminishing relevance of education in Indian colleges, where the perpetual problem of underfunding rubs shoulders with the commensurable problems of lack of planning as well as equity in fund allocation, and mobilization of resources.

The root of this discrepancy in financing the institutions of higher learning could be traced back to the act of placing education in the concurrent list, which levies added responsibility on the State Governments for advancement of learning. As per the available statistics, the states look after more than eighty percent of the total financing of higher education in India, which, as Prof. M V Pylee pertinently argues in his piece- “Financial Management in Universities: Major Problems and Solutions” (2004) often results in ‘ad hocism in budgetary allocations’. Mapping the extent of ad hocism in distribution of funds, mobilization and augmentation of resources, he contends- “A major problem however arises from the fact that the States do not follow any mutually agreeable norms or procedure for determining the requirements of the universities” (Pylee, ed. Venkatasubramanian 93). When, “the university authorities and the officials of the state education departments are expected together to make an objective assessment of financial needs of the universities...The States, however, take unilateral and arbitrary decisions in arriving at amount of grants-in-aid to be given to the universities” (ibid. 93). Drawing inferences from my contention on the state’s complicity in the appointment of administrative staff in academic institutions, it could be stated that, the incongruity associated with the funding and management of resources in the colleges and universities further impair the intellectual potential of an institution and of the academic communities. A laconic portrayal of a collective dissent manifest in the public demonstration of academicians against the proposed bill of “freezing State aid to universities” (TA 1071), is indicative of a literary resistance against the state’s nonacademic and bureaucratic control over the fate of the academic institutions.

It further exemplifies a distinct fictional intention of a discursive critique of unpleasant consequences of such unbridled bureaucratization of higher education, where “Academics are marginalized, / Segregated, circumcised; / The intellectual’s word does not count, is just not heard...To corruption they will themselves lend, On sycophancy they thrive, / But academics

they will deprive” (TA 1071). Therefore, the epigrammatic style employed in the delineation of meagre resources in the college library foregrounds the textual satire on an inexorable nexus between the exogenous and endogenous determinants accountable for this irrevocable predicament. Taking on this alleged interface, a dialectical reading of the expression- “Library...is redundant” (TA 1027) would uncover how the synergistic interaction between these varied factors relapses into an irreversible deterioration of academic standards of many of these institutions, where students either resort to mechanized forms of learning, as evidenced in the thriving tuition culture across the country or to unfair means for securing good grades in the examination. The teachers on the other hand, often become susceptible to the hedonism of academic nonchalance, or preoccupy themselves in retaining the hallowed image of distinguished scholarship. Thus, the anecdote on students as ‘mutual dependents’ implies a succinct critique of the contemporary misappropriation of our indigenous ‘gurukula’ tradition in the form of private tutoring, and voices a premonition of an imminent danger of rote learning, where spoon feeding and repetitive reiteration of tutored materials in the examinations determine the worth of education, and not any avowed scholarly pursuit.

The re-birth of ‘Signpost University’ as a replica of the American ‘mass university’

In the early nineteenth century, Thomas Babington Macaulay introduced a new concept of ‘downward filtration’ in his infamous “Minute on Indian Education” (1835), as an indispensable imperial expedient of dissemination of English education in India. The British Government in India, which was not keen on promoting equal access to education among the natives, embarked on the project of an exclusivist English education in the colony chiefly for smooth functioning of colonial machineries. Therefore, Macaulay’s ‘downward filtration’ theory proved to be conducive enough for the specious project of colonial education in India, as it sought to encompass a minor section of native elites, and adapt them into subordinate, docile subjects befitting for second grade office-bearers. The discourse of the colonial

university education in India, which legitimizes the ‘master’ signifier’s hermeneutics of knowledge as the quintessential model for the natives to emulate, draws further on Paulo Freire’s Marxist critique of ‘banking concept of education’. In his groundbreaking work: *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Freire developed a polemic against this unmindful accumulation of prescribed knowledge, as it undermines the creative, analytical, transformative, and humanistic aspects of formal education. While dispensing with the scholarly pursuits of invention and re-invention, he contends, the ‘banking concept of education’ transmogrifies it into “an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat” (Freire, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos 72). It is the reification, and rhizomatic expansion of the self/other binary, that pave the way for a unilateral system of learning, where “knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing” (ibid. 72). While, the students are unequivocally labelled as ignorant lots, the teachers are held as unparalleled connoisseurs of knowledge. The poetics of oppression in the ‘banking concept of education’ is predicated upon the claim of adaptability, dispensing with the causes of critical or moral consciousness as the guiding principles of higher education. In such circumstances, the students are taught, disciplined, and spoken/thought about, instead of actively participating in the dialogic discourses of epistemic reproduction.

The praxes of English education during the British Raj embodies some of the key attributes of the ‘banking concept of education’. The skewed evolution of modern university education in the colonial India with their mathematics, literature, science, philosophy, history, ethics and culture as the basis of academic engagement of the colonized subjects was primarily designed to perpetuate the British rule under the garb of enlightenment of the natives. Having been oblivious with the occidental culture, and the nuanced historicism of epistemic

modernization in the west, the knowledge of an Indian student in Eurocentric education would be reduced into a superficial state, thereby fulfilling the insidious project of the Raj - production of acquiescent, second grade employees. As Freire argues, “the interests of the oppressors lie in changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them; for the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily they can be dominated” (ibid. 74), the British regime in India is also marked by a homologous approach towards education of the natives. It neither intended to cultivate the spirit of inquiry among the pupils, nor did it foster the pursuit of truth as a fundamental constituent of social change. The imperial system of education, along the lines of Freirean discourse on education builds upon the question of adaptability of the beneficiaries, and not a resuscitation of scholarship among the native subjects.

In the post-independence era, the ‘downward filtration theory’ was superseded by an inclusive drive of democratization of education across the country and equal right to education irrespective of caste, class, and gender identity, which manifest itself in the incremental rise in the number of institutions and of students. However, this burgeoning number was not adequately chaperoned by an egalitarian spirit in the allocation of resources and appointment of teachers and academic administrators in the institutions of higher learning. The paramount accomplishments of the post-colonial university education in India, and considerable possibilities of advancement in science and scholarship are often blurred, if not annulled by the prevalent inconsistencies in the system.

The paradox of the experience lies in the fact, that despite the democratic dissemination of education, the ontological elitism and discrimination seem to permeate the corridors of post-colonial academy, as evidenced in the literary representations of the discontinuities in the project of higher education in India. Beside the plight of college education and arts and humanities education, the dynamics of science education, as evidenced in Vatsa’s encounter

as a visiting professor with the academic community of the university, brings forth a clearer picture of a pervasive intellectual mediocrity in Indian academia. Unlike the atomic physics department at Vatsa's research institute at Mumbai, the department here in the university is tarnished by the unavailability and lack of mobilization of resources. Therefore, Yana's opinion on the academic culture of the university as 'sleepy hollow' could be interpreted as the narrative's synecdochic intervention with the larger politics of inter-institutional polarization of resources and intellect (both human and non-human), and the consequent normalization of the peripheral status of a significant number of public universities, as opposed to the status of 'excellence' of specialized research institutes.

As, a significant percentage of quality resources and human capital is amassed by a lesser number of such research institutes and elite universities, majority of Indian universities with more than half of the student population are faced with deplorable work conditions with meagre intellectual resources, inferior laboratories, and dearth of teaching staff and skilled lab assistants. Furthermore, many of these affiliating Indian universities, having been overwhelmed with enormous number of students often resort to diverse methods pertaining to decentralization of the authority, thereby scaling down the workload to an extent. Since the late 1980s, following the recommendations of NPE, 1986, one such practice entails the policy of 'autonomization' - i.e. granting autonomy to some of the colleges with better infrastructure and improved facilities for offering master degree courses in various disciplines, as a democratic means of reaching out to people from the margins. But this holistic goal gradually metamorphoses into a superficial venture of educational expansion because of the extrinsic as well as intrinsic political motives of image building and sycophancy, combined with entrenched material goals.

Drawing inferences from Madhav's disconcerting experience as the head of an inspection committee in *Corridors of Knowledge* (2008), an attempt to place the controversy

over opening of masters program in Physics in one of the affiliated colleges under Akbarabad University in *Whispers in the Tower* (2012), and Yana's pejorative, yet realistic assessment of academics as 'sleepy hollow' in a tandem, would unmask an overarching process of decline of academic merit perpetuated by an ensemble of factors, where 'the principle of reason' gives way to the Derridean signifier of 'hive'. Expounding the fallacies of modern university education, Derrida, in his essay: "The Principle of Reason: The University in the eyes of its Pupils" (1983), expresses his discontent with the slow metamorphoses of the idea of the university into a hive of mechanized learning, thereby desisting itself from "the principle of reason as principle of grounding, foundation or institution" (Derrida, et al. 11). Apathetic to the Heideggerian 'principle of reason'^{vii} as one of the foundational markers of modern university, Derrida argues that-

...if (in) today's university, locus of modern science, is grounded on the principle of grounding, that is on reason..., nowhere do we encounter within it the principle of reason itself, nowhere is this principle thought through, scrutinized, interrogated as to its origin. Nowhere, within the university as such, is anyone wondering from where that call of reason is voiced, nowhere is anyone inquiring into the origin of that demand for grounds, for reason that is to be provided, rendered, (and) delivered (ibid. 9).

In Palathingal's novel, the narration of events leading to the opening of masters program in Physics at Thakoor Saheb Memorial College clearly underlines, how in India, the notion of the political co-opts the 'principle of reason' as the cornerstone of the higher education. The case of this imaginary college symbolically unearths the liminal spaces of inquiry where, under the pretext of mass education and large scale dissemination of education, many of the Indian institutions of higher learning succumb to the extrinsic political pressures in their demographic and epistemic expansions. What is problematic here, is not the question

of academic growth, but the practices through which the progress is being effectuated. In the post-independence era, the burgeoning number of institutions and the increasing percentage of enrollment of students don't always reflect in an inclusive growth of infrastructure, resources, and human resource pool across the institutions, which eventually result in the compromise of academic integrity and merit in many of these provincial universities and colleges [Andre Beteille (2010), A. R. Kamat (2010), G. Haragopal and G. Sudarshanam (1996)]. Apart from the perpetuation of hegemonic disposition and of the binary of excellence and mediocrity, what is more unsettling are the implications of this wily discrimination and the demographic elitism on the fate of these peripheral institutions with an overwhelming number of students, assisted by an inadequate number of teaching staff and exiguous resources. Therefore, the vivid portrayal of the unplanned opening of master degree program in physics at the aforementioned college, while turning a deaf ear to the suggestions laid down by the expert committee, epitomizes a subtle fictional satire on the aftermath of an emerging culture of specious learning, an education which falls short of developing a symbiotic relation between the academic community and the subjects of enquiry.

As evidenced in the narration of the resentment of some of the faculty members of the college, the teachers are often overburdened with monstrous teaching assignments, which owes much to the pervasive irregularities in the recruitment of teachers in a considerable number of state run universities and colleges and the persistent crisis of shortage of teaching faculties. Faced with a humongous number of students and infinitesimal resources, the herculean work load often proves inimical to his/her critical engagement with the subject and could obviate both teacher and student from the 'belabouring' process of learning and reproduction of knowledge. In such debilitating circumstances, the students are reduced to the state of passive receivers of knowledge, where they fall prey to the mushrooming practice of private tutoring with its penchant for homogenized acquisition of knowledge/lessons, while drifting away from

the urgency of plurality in critical interventions and recognition of multiple subjectivities. Another peripatetic outcome of this culture of rote learning entails our gradual and incremental distancing from the moral foundations of education, i.e. character building and cultivation of a sense of integrity amongst its subjects. The moral degeneration is manifest not just in the nonchalant approaches of academic communities towards education and in the malpractices, students indulge in order to pass the examination, but is further demonstrated through immoral acts of threatening the invigilators during the examination. Palathingal's adept storytelling sententiously brings in one such occasion, "when a supervising lecturer decided to inquire, the intransigent had his left palm touch the knife handle, and the pen in his right hand point to his chest. The young supervisor left, his curiosity ended at once" (WTT 140).

In such quandary, the narrative effectively situates the university administration as a regulatory body, whose adherence to the academic morals could restore the academic integrity, and its lack of conscientiousness or ethics could prove to be abysmal for the progress of an institution. Drawing insight from the above segment on campus fiction's critique of academic administration, what is discernable here in the university authority's measures for redressal of inconsistencies in the evaluation system, is a willful act of downplaying the enormity of the crisis and an indefinite procrastination in investigation. Though an enquiry committee was formed, it couldn't prove its veracity in resolving the anomalies, caused by the unscrupulous behavior of the students. An air of despondency entailing the loss of academic ethos of the university resonates in the satiric portrayal of the laxity in investigation. "Months passed, the investigation was yet ongoing, and the apple story was getting sour, whereas the 'Bharat Natyam' college kept its pride for a record pass in the past season" (WTT 141). An inquiry into the causality of this complete loss of academic values, as manifest in a spate of occurrences, which is predicated on the paradigms of academia-political interface is evocative

of a larger predicament of a reprehensible transformation of many of the Indian universities into mere degree awarding and affiliating bodies, i.e. ‘Signpost University’.

Literature is willy-nilly allegorical. And fiction, which derives its resources from a wide range of socio-cultural or historico-political crosscurrents, is more prone to the category of political allegory. Therefore, taking on the claims of academic-political interface, various experiences of campus life entailing the decline of academic merit in Indian universities, as appear in the novelistic detailing of events, could be read as allegorical interventions into this ontological vis-à-vis teleological sea-change in the definition of the university. M. K. Naik’s well-wrought satire on the lack of professional integrity of university teachers in the inspection of degree colleges, conspicuous in the characterization of Ratibhai, is shared and further extended by Palathingal in his fictional critique of the entrenched political interests in the advancement of learning and their consequent ramifications. An irreversibly chaotic turn of events borne out of this unplanned and politically driven expansion of higher education, which is remarkably built upon the syncretic relation between the competing narratives on predominant unscrupulousness and laxity in the paradigms of academic engagement and modalities of evaluation in the said university, corroborates the above hypotheses on the literary re-examination of the rebirth of signpost universities in India.

When an increase in the number of students and of institutions are not supplemented with a corresponding growth in infrastructure, exercise of academic values, and in unbiased appointments of qualified, dedicated faculty members, the intellectual vacuum or the stasis it engenders, is not solely inimical to the scientific/scholarly scaffolding of the university, and rather unfolds the paradox in the ‘factory’ image of the university with the mass production of half-witted graduates and unskilled professionals. The question soon follows is, having been confronted with the unbridled commodification of higher education, presumably homologous with the drive of modernization, how hard-pressed are the Indian public universities in

safeguarding their moral and scholarly ethos? Thus, the cultural alienation of the beneficiaries from the pedantic approach of education could prove to be counterproductive enough in reconstructing an image of the university either as a mechanized platform for ‘massification’, instead of mass education, or as a haven for obscure scientific and scholarly activities performed by a smaller segment of entitled intellectuals.

The downward movement of Indian universities as discussed in the foregoing paragraphs, which could delimit the scope of intellectual potential of a university, tends to problematize the socialist vision of an inclusive growth of Indianized university education system across the states. The above assumption of ‘Signpost University’ also refers to a contemporaneous situation of their inability in forging an organic relation between education and the lived experiences of its subjects, eventually manifesting in a ubiquitous cultural alienation. An inverse relation between the demographic growth and waning academic merit of a considerable number of public universities in India further connotes to Edward Shils’s assumptions pertaining to the unabated growth of the ‘mass universities’ in America during the Second World War, and their concomitant subsumption into the category of ‘financially straitened’ ones in the following decades. In his posthumously published work: *The Calling of Education: The Academic Ethic and Other Essays on Higher Education* (1997), Shils argues that during and after the Second World War, keeping in tune with the changing paradigms of economic and socio-cultural milieu, the university education reconfigured itself in order to accommodate the swelling number of students and the shifting trajectories of their expectations from higher education.

In the first two decades, a massive influx of capital from various public bodies and philanthropic foundations were conducive enough for the inception of new universities, expansion of the existing ones, opening of new departments, development of infrastructure, augmentation of intellectual and human resources, and advancement in science and research.

The ceaseless flow of resources, enabled by introduction of cutting edge technologies and an impressive number of enthusiastic and erudite academicians gave the universities the necessary impetus to build upon the changing hermeneutics of their interaction with the socio-economic paradigms, and to navigate their research as per the growing needs. Nevertheless, this war-like accentuation and a radical restructuring of university education were not free from ‘aporia’ or contestations. The disjunctions in the newly formulated concept of the ‘mass university’ are marked by its gradual departure from a mutually rewarding relation between the teachers and students, academic and scientific ethos, and by an overpowering alienation of its academic communities from the scholarly ideals. When the exponential rise in the number of universities is further augmented by an equally unprecedented increase in size of student body and teaching staff, it becomes difficult to ascertain a balance in intra/inter departmental relations, prerequisite for a cohesive growth of academics.

Within the rubric of an unbridled expansion of university education in America, Shils’ discourse on the idea of the ‘mass university’ rightly charts the ramifications of intellectual activity and phenomenal achievements of some teachers and students both as “awakening and deceptive” (*The Calling of Education: The Academic Ethic and Other Essays on Higher Education* 14). The experience has been awakening for those, “who have been quickened by it into an intellectual curiosity and exertion which they did not know before and which they might not have reached had it not been for their contact with those persons in the teaching staffs and student bodies who have been the bearers in those mass universities of the scientific and academic ethic” (Shils, *ibid.* 15). However, the markers of academic excellence set by the individual and institutional scholarly output, often tend to homogenize the standard of intellect of the academic communities across the disciplines and institutions, disregarding the epistemic boundaries pertaining to their distinctive methodologies, approaches, and accountabilities. What follows is an inappropriate gradation, or categorization of disciplines and their respective

members, and incursion of a corporatized notion of academic excellence or elitism, which Shils identifies as the “deceptive light” (ibid. 17). This, he contends, often proves counterproductive for the progress of students and researchers from humanities and social sciences, compared to their counterparts in science and technology; their research works are of far less importance for the expansion of capitalist machineries, thereby perpetuating their ‘palimpsestic’ growth.

Contrary to the rising investments in such disciplines imperative enough for the proliferation of corporates and industries, the humanities and social sciences bear the brunt of lack of regularity in funding and tend to be gradually termed as expendable disciplines. Quite unfortunately, amidst this unparalleled growth of American university education during the post-war era, “many of the students in the humanities and the social sciences have been abandoned by the teachers to the domain of the unreclaimable...it has become part of the culture of mass universities in a number of countries...It is based on a conviction that the capacities of the students are weak and they cannot master an exacting syllabus” (Shils, ibid. 15). The fallacious assumption on the cognitive abilities of the students from humanities and social sciences predicated upon the homogenized notion of academic excellence, set by the materialist discourses on learning often reduces the arts and humanities education into a mass project of literacy. The ideological segregation also resonates in the physical isolation of teachers and students. With a sharp rise in the number of students and teachers and rapid expansion of the departments, it becomes increasingly difficult for them to retain an intra/inter (disciplinary) dialogism, fundamental to the idea of the university as a community devoted to intellectual enquiry.

But, despite their initial pledge to the scientific and scholarly advancement, and the high academic morals they once espoused with an unparalleled growth in the size of students and teachers, or of the university, they often fell short of redefining their *modus operandi* for larger welfare of the society and of the economy. Thus, with the shifting temperament of the

market economy since the 70s, and its reflection in the country's socio-cultural relations/order, the mass universities could neither keep up with the dynamicity expected from them, nor could they defend their scholarly ethos, thereby distorting the supply-demand chain of the university. The predicament of the mass universities, Shils argues, was supplemented with a sharp decline in the funding of the universities for scientific research, and an equal reduction in "the regular budget from which the salaries of teachers are paid" (ibid. 35). The cessation of growth in the income of the universities caused by underfunding on the part of the government, public bodies, and private philanthropic organizations slowed down the pace of research and scholarship in the universities, and marred the process of new appointments in the departments. With this strategic underfunding and a consequent academic stasis, while being overburdened with increasing number of students, Shils contends, the mass university gradually gives way to a subsidiary subtype of financially straitened university.

The predicament of many of the Indian public universities is in a way analogous to the thwarted growth of the mass universities in America. Apart from the curse of underfunding and top-down policy in the allocation of fund and resources, which have been a persistent threat to the progress of Indian higher education, the consequences of such implicit discrimination further obscure the academic culture of the universities. If we keep aside the decent flow of resources in a handful of metropolitan flagship universities (central and state funded), majority of Indian universities (mostly state run, provincial ones) often lack basic infrastructural facilities, adequate manpower, and intellectual materials for a satisfactory functioning of academic, or scholarly activities, let alone state of the art facilities. In such circumstances, which is quite unbecoming for carrying out meaningful research, the academic members either lose interest in science and scholarship, or they take refuge in their self-referential cocoon of academic excellence, as manifest in the cases of Yana and Sheela Rani from *Atom and the Serpent*, or of Professor Raj Narain from *Whispers in the Tower*. Therefore, the dearth of

resources that debunks the possibilities of cutting edge research, is also inimical to the correspondence between the disciplines and the academic community.

The resulting animosity is not solely restricted to the ideological realm of professional rivalry, or reification of academic/disciplinary hierarchies, but is also marked by the (inter)personal/departmental hostility and exertion of power hierarchy for a greater share in this meagre supply of resources and financial grants. In Nandakumar's *Atom and the Serpent* (1982), Yana's attempt of manipulation of departmental funds, and the tension between him and other faculty members from his department over the allocation of funds, alongside a distinct fictional critique on the questions of underfunding and academic rivalry in the Indian universities, also articulate a discursive problematization of asymmetrical expansion of higher education in India. Quite akin to the visible crisis of the American mass universities around 1970s, a large number of Indian public universities have been reckoning with the persistent problem of under-resourcing, and lack of qualified or competent manpower for a steady functioning of academics. If one tries to connect the problematics of 'signpost university', underfunding and shrinking employment in higher education sector, and the question of academic stasis diachronically, a deconstructive reading of the textual evidences could underline the far reaching consequences of such spurious democratization of education in the post-independence era with wasting of the intellectual potential of a generation of learners. Nandakumar's novel deftly foregrounds the inequity in distribution of resources as constitutive of the intellectual indigence of Indian academia. Vatsa's brief encounter with the teaching and non-teaching community of the university and his status as an external visiting faculty allowed the novelist to weave a comparative framework to build upon the entrenched crisis of inter/intra-departmental and inter-institutional incongruity in the supply of resources as anathema to the drive of a comprehensive development.

Contrary to an upgraded infrastructure and adequacy of sources in the centrally funded specialized institute of atomic physics where Vatsa works, the atomic physics department in the university has been reeling under the burden of manifold inconsistencies, which could only deter the academic community from their pursuit of knowledge. Therefore, Vatsa's active interests in scholarship in contradistinction to Yana or his colleagues' lack of commitment in classroom teaching, or in research situates the individualistic lack of critical consciousness of the faculty members within a larger rubric of discontinuities in the liberalization policy. Though the policy of liberalization has been a subject of multiple debate over its efficacy vis-à-vis contradictions, it is an unequivocal truth that this policy interwoven with Nehruvian vision of 'democratic socialism', which was grounded on its commitment towards assertion of individualist freedom of choices, academic freedom and inculcation of scientific approach in intellectual enquiry, accentuated the growth in science and technology education with the expansion of university education and establishment of specialized centers for scientific research and technological education. The challenge was enormous in bringing together the divergent ideas of modernization, democratic socialism, and liberalization as panacea to the plight of poverty, hunger, and illiteracy impeding the progress of a newly independent nation.

Besides, the slow GDP growth rate, and more importantly the investment of an infinitesimal percentage of it for the development of higher education (1.5 – 2% of the total GDP)^{viii} further exacerbated the crisis. But, the rub also lies in the implementation of policies, academic hegemonization, and bureaucratic intricacies in allocation and mobilization of resources. Responding to the skewed enactment of many of these reformative projects and 'claims of the political' in the larger rubric of liberalization, K. S. Krishnaswamy pertinently observes- "Many worthwhile objectives have remained elusive as the policies intended to attain them have lost their character and effectiveness in the process of conversion into government orders and procedural instructions or because of obvious manipulation by

politicians and their coteries” (2416). The plot development of *Whispers in the Tower*, which is centered around the interplay between the endogenous and exogenous political equations ingeniously brings together detrimental effects of a centralized bureaucracy at different levels of academic functioning of the university. Corresponding to my previous critique of external political influences and academic bureaucracy, a ‘contrapuntal reading’^{ix} of Minister Mustafa’s ‘panopticonic’^x influence over academic affairs of the university, the rivalry between the registrar and the controller, and academic-administrative lobbying entailing the distribution of funds for departmental and individual project works would situate the challenges of public universities in India within a transcultural framework of the shifting paradigms of the crisis of European/American mass universities as a result of unbridled bureaucratization.

The incessant politicization of the university, and the concomitant academic stratification also result in discriminatory practices across the disciplines, where, having been reminiscent of their American counterparts, humanities and social science education at non-metropolitan Indian universities often fall prey to the curse of underfunding, and the untenable labelling of surplus intellectual production. Vatsa’s shocking revelation on the “patched up look, suggesting that general decay... (which) had been temporarily halted by these frantic attempts to keep the things going” (ATS 40), embodies a comparative critique of the politics of an elitist favoritism entailing the funding of the institutions, and therefore, the post-colonial appropriation of a capitalist discourse of trickle down method in an essentially democratic setting of Indian higher education. The gritty fictional narrative on disjunctions in the project of liberalization of Indian higher education also entails a succinct critique of the triple marginalization of arts and social sciences education in non-metropolitan Indian universities. The third person narration of the dilapidated setting of Sheela Rani’s office, in contrast to Yana’s decent, modern one is exemplary of the pervasive crisis of underfunding, delimiting

the growth of arts and social science education in India with a larger number of students in such disciplines.

It was actually a cubicle, and a perfect contrast to Yana's...The room was a small rectangle or trapezium. There was a squalid table, a relic of the last century, surrounded by six heavy teakwood chairs in various stages of decay. Sheela Rani's chair...was slightly higher than the others. There were two uncouth pieces of granite, used as paper weights. An old wooden shelf tilted at an angle in a corner and a Godrej steel almirah were also there (ATS 44).

While inviting Vatsa to her office, the sarcasm evident in her voice on the shabby appearance of it—"Of course you won't find Prof. Yana's comforts here" (ATS 44) implies an inherent resentment present among the members of non-science disciplines, owing much to the lack of exposure, funding and scholarship, and often unavailability of basic resources in the departments. The resentment gradually culminating into a serious case of "inferiority complex" corroborate the claim of triple marginalization of humanities and social sciences in Indian universities. Firstly, Indian higher education is an underfunded sector; secondly, among the already underfinanced higher educational institutions, the provincial universities are doubly marginalized in terms of funding and access of resources; and, unlike the sciences, humanities and social science departments in these universities are susceptible to an acute shortage of under-resourcing and a naturalized status of disciplines of secondary importance, thereby suggesting their triple marginalization.

Quite antithetical to the official rhetoric of advancement, the palimpsestic growth of arts and social sciences education in non-elite universities through condoning anti-intellectualism, if not promoting it, deter the brilliant minds from opting a career in these disciplines, whereas, a whopping student population (mostly average ones), having been endowed with limited intellectual resources and unbefitting infrastructure, become more

vulnerable in a lopsided development, vis-à-vis uneven competition with the science graduates, thereby adding to the scourge of unemployment. Responding to the causality of this pervasive mediocrity, the description of humanities students as ‘mutual dependents’ in Rita Joshi’s *The Awakening* vindicates a discursive critique of commodification of education devoid of any critical enquiry and the backwardness of a significant number of provincial institutions, which is coterminous with Shil’s critique of the subsidiary growth of arts and humanities education in American mass universities in later era as “a little more than a simulacrum of a university education” (ibid. 19). An attempted intertextuality along the textual manifestations of the inconsistencies in Indian higher education divulges a multifaceted interrelation between the attributes of American mass universities and the diminishing academic ethos of the contemporary Indian universities.

Nevertheless, the underlying similarity in the vicissitudes of American mass universities and their Indian counterparts is not a mere normative comparison, and rather implies a shifting trajectory in the legacy of Western influence in Indian academia. The journey which began with adoption of Eurocentric model of modernity, vis-à-vis modernization as a panacea to our indigenous problems, and was incorporated into our education system as one of its essential constituent, not only deferred the prospect for a revival of a decolonized university system, but what is more perplexing is the emulation of academic hierarchies as well as hegemonies under the pretense of democratization, which could produce newer divisions and tension in the formative years of an education system of an underdeveloped and newly independent nation. The colonial era which is marked by a ceaseless plundering of our resources and mutilation of our native epistemic traditions by the capitalist-imperialist machineries render an entire race vulnerable towards the future prospects, as evidenced in the slower GDP growth rate and a fragmented development of public sector, including the education sector.

Having faced with the perennial impediments of a worn out bureaucratic system, and a stipulated fiscal deficit, it has become an insurmountable task to bolster the public sectors, to facilitate efficiency and return from them, and thus, generating considerable employment opportunities complying with the production of educated professionals. In such a precarious circumstance, when a nation was grappling with the challenge of carrying out the projects of modernization, and of liberalization, the subterranean incursion of neoliberal ideologies with the rise of the USA as one of the contenders for global power confounded the venture of qualitative and quantitative democratization of education. Though, a flourishing bilateral relation with America, introduction of advanced technologies and markers of Westernized academic excellence in Indian academia have been advantageous enough for a particular segment of scholars for further studies, and have triggered lucrative employment opportunities, the booming job industry is not free from contradictions, and is predicated upon a binary of commodified academic excellence and mediocrity.

Upholding the notion of commodified excellence extends the binary into two corresponding ones entailing the performativity of academicians and the categorization of institutions. The question of commodified academic excellence brings with it an embedded culture disposability, as evidenced in the surplus intellectual production, and therefore exacerbates the underlying tension between the elite intellectuals and the average ones. How such exclusivist elitism, enmeshed in this project of democratization of education tends to homogenize the intellectuality of the students, and what are the baleful consequences of such commodified, neo-liberal homogenization of intellectual production(s), and subsequent ‘GATS-ification’^{xi} of academia would be discussed in the next chapter through a dialectical reading of a select Indian campus novels published in the post-millennial era. But, presently, predicated upon the above study on the backwardness of many of the non-metropolitan Indian universities, it could be plausibly argued that, these ‘Indianized mass universities’, unlike their

American counterparts have perpetually remained underfunded and understaffed since their inception, which could upset the drive of democratic liberalization of/through education. It also replicates the division in American academia between Ivy League and Non Ivy League universities in a disparate socio-cultural milieu of the post-colony through fostering an uneven rivalry between the academic community across departments/institutions, and a concomitant homomorphous rift between the elite and mass universities in India. Therefore, in my opinion, the above works of Indian Campus fiction which are persuasive enough in drawing a teleological analogy between particular type(s) of universities across the two continents, and well-woven satire on the discontinuities in the contemporary Indian university education, perspicaciously situate the predicament of Indianized mass universities within the liminal space between awakening and deception.

Fictional departures from the documented narratives of post-colonial academy, and scope for discursive resolutions

The fictional critique of the post-independence Indian academia also articulates an individualistic concern over the imported ideological disjunctions between the contemporary discourses of scientific research, and that of humanities and social sciences. Nandakumar's portrayal of an individual's discontent with the disciplinary break up between sciences and humanities, and hegemonization of scientific research is interspersed with a discursive engagement with the possibilities of redressal of constraints by advocating an ontological harmony amongst the disciplines rooted in the paradigms of interdisciplinarity. The character Rajeswara from *Atom and the Serpent* (1982) who is a professor of Sanskrit, exemplifies a minimalist resistance against the unbridled expansion of modernization and subsequent scientific experimentations, dispensing with their moral or ecological repercussions. Within the purview of my previous contention on the naturalized subsidiary position of humanities and social sciences in this battle between the disciplines, Rajeswara's critical assessment of

the pros and cons of the disciplinary divisions is reminiscent of Snow's theory on the causality of an increasing discordance between the humanities and sciences in Europe in the middle of the twentieth century. Snow's critique of the Western academia is contingent upon his resentment with the incremental ideological gap between the literary intellectuals and the scientists. This, he believes, overshadows the similitude in the origin of their intellectual enquiry, while the alleged irreconcilability between the two discourses culminates in prejudiced perspectives entailing their scholarly pursuits. Snow incisively observes (1959) –

The non-scientists have a rooted impression that the scientists are shallowly optimistic, unaware of man's condition. On the other hand, the scientists believe that the literary intellectuals are totally lacking in foresight, peculiarly unconcerned with their brother men, in a deep sense anti-intellectual, anxious to restrict both art and thought to the existential moment (Snow 6).

Responding to an almost synonymous crisis, festering the postcolonial Indian academy, Rajeswara's plea is rooted in an underlying urgency in bridging the incomprehension often rivalry turned into hostility, through carving out newer markers of correspondences between the two intellectual communities and their respective research. He also endorses a similar perception for a holistic development of the university education in India, and in the pertinence of academic research for the wellbeing of the nation and its citizens. When Vatsa was surprised by Rajeswara's scientific disposition in a scholarly dialogue over the conflict between the faculties, his (Rajeswara's) response, beginning with a question instead, voices an urgency in working out the possibilities of intellectual interactions between sciences and non-science disciplines. "But can I be away from science? Isn't even the best scientist controlled by the values of humanism and the imperatives of the moral and spiritual world? Likewise every student of the humanities has necessarily to live in this scientific world" (ATS 65).

Having built upon the humanistic assumptions of interdisciplinarity, Rajeswara, quite sententiously resorts to the Gandhian discourses on education and a critique of the deleterious influence of the West on the native intellectuals. In his *Hind Swaraj* (1905), though, Gandhi often appears to have given in to the domination of Eurocentric modernization owing much to our allegiance towards western sciences and technology as an appendage to nearly two centuries of colonial rule and subsequent mutilation of our indigenous epistemologies, he unwaveringly asserts the pressing need for resuscitation of a distinct consciousness rooted in the lived experiences of the natives. The conversation between Rajeswara, Vatsa, and Yana, which followed the special lecture delivered by Vatsa at the Atomic Physics department dialogically places three divergent perspectives on academic and moral values, i.e. Rajeswara as a connoisseur of Gandhian philosophy, Vatsa as a ‘transformative intellectual’^{xii}, and Yana as an embodiment of the ‘lack’ in intellectual consciousness, thereby vindicating the democratic and self-reflexive character of the university. Rajeswara’s espousal of Gandhian philosophy of ‘self-restraint’ and ‘minimalist living’ situates him as an archetypal Gandhian academician, committed to the cause of the revival of erstwhile indigenous values. Expressing concern over the dreadful consequences of such cutting edge scientific experiments on human lives and the ecosystem itself, Rajeswara upholds an alternate idea of exploring “the Gandhian way of simple living, thus eliminating the need for nuclear energy” (ATS 116). Though he never trivializes the relevance of modern scientific discourses as a fulcrum of anthropocentric development, he feels perturbed by the lack of conscience and the possibility of human errors, which is deftly articulated in his apprehension of a bleak future “if something should go wrong, if the evil in man opts for a triumphant mischief...” (ATS 116).

The nonchalance in Yana, coupled with his endeavor to do away with the significant role played by the nuclear scientists in Earth’s carbon footprint by bringing in comparison with existing energy resources, clearly justifies Rajeswara’s fear entailing the bleak future

contingent upon the contemporary scientific developments. Yana's assertion of "when it comes to energy consumption it is always an upward curve" (ATS 115), and celebration of science and technology in catering to the dynamic needs of human beings are not foregrounded upon a careful evaluation of the pros and cons of scholarly endeavors, rather bring forth a spurious defense of such experiments, dispensing with their long-term implications on the life on earth. The recurring textual motif of the ecological predicament of advanced scientific researches, whose redressal has been a herculean challenge for the contemporary universities and academic community calls for an informed literary study on the idea of the university and its commitment to the ecosystem, and does not constitute the focal point of my enquiry. However, the plausibility of Rajeswara's philosophy of simple life when India's project of modernization was on the cusp of an epistemological shift, is not beyond oeuvre of scholarly debates.

In my opinion, the character of Vatsa assumes a pivotal role in bridging the two contradictory perspectives of Rajeswara and of Yana within the scope of scientific research. His lecture on the contemporary relevance and challenges of nuclear research does not comply with a linear narrative on an objective study of an emerging branch of science in the late 70s, rather it emphasizes the utmost discretion required for the radioactive waste disposal, and also on the psychological impact of such advances on the human civilization. The concluding statement of his lecture hovers around his commitment towards the humanistic values of/in sciences, and a distinct consciousness entailing the enormity of the reverse consequences of the co-option of modern sciences by the joint forces of capitalism and militant nationalism. His confession that, "I don't say it is absolutely safe, I should be the last person to say it having come too close to it" (ATS 113) follows an optimist assertion that, "but I'm sure science will make it safer and safer for humankind" (ATS 113).

His optimism embodies a subjective, humanist engagement with science and scholarship, which is quite coterminous with Dr. M. S. Swaminathan's understanding of the

universities as “centers for both humanistic science and scientific humanism” (Swaminathan, ed. Venkatasubramanian 32), as evidenced in his essay: “Higher Education: Pathway to Humanistic Science and Scientific Humanism”. Furthermore, his futuristic concern - “I am worried about the spiritual effects of atomic research. Perhaps I should really say psychological, as I have no qualification to speak of the spiritual in man’s life” (ATS 114), furthers the call for a humanistic science to a different realm of experience altogether, where human psyche and biological aspects complement each other, unlike in the much debated yet overarching hermeneutic of ‘hardcore objectivity’ in scientific research. Therefore, having upheld the intersectionality of ‘mind’ and ‘body’, as the quintessence of comprehensive development, Vatsa deftly integrates the scientific advancement with the Hegelian philosophical discourse of the “community (Gemeinschaft) of soul and body” (Hegel, trans. Wallace and Miller 389).

For Hegel, the departure from the erstwhile philosophy of ‘ontological dualism’^{xiii}, and his contrapuntal narrative of ‘Gemeinschaft’ assumed as the ‘fact’, hinge upon the challenge of a conceptual comprehension, triggered by the epistemological shift in the historical process of philosophical enquiry. Quite analogous to the Hegelian notion of ‘the problem of conceptual comprehension’, embedded in his centrifugal critique of the ontological dualism vis-à-vis objectivity, Vatsa’s prescription of ‘humanistic science’, as a panacea to the counter-effective potential of scientific studies, (susceptible to the capitalist forces and coercive state machineries) approaches the question of a radical reconceptualization of scientific practices through collective endeavor of academics in advancing the drive of collaborative research or studies across disciplines. The urgency is conspicuous enough in his final assertion. “This is the problem that thinking persons should concern themselves with; and the wise among them should come forward to show the right path to those scientists of the world self-lost in their worlds of pure research” (ATS 114).

The fictional demonstration of Vatsa's emphasis on the collective agency and a democratic interaction across the disciplines, dialectically locates the character within the theoretical ambit of Giroux's definition of educators as 'transformative intellectuals' (1985). Henry Giroux' concept of 'critical pedagogy' envisions the university space as a democratic, self-reflexive one, dedicated to the cause of critical learning. In this endeavor of critical pedagogy, the teachers are of paramount importance, owing much to their two-faceted role in practicing critical citizenship and ethics as well as inculcating in the students, the knowledge pertaining to the above values. The praxes of critical citizenship, and ethics, as central to the project of critical pedagogy hinge on advocating a radical restructuring of the pedagogy through breaking down disciplinary boundaries, and mulling over new dialogic spaces for reproduction of knowledge other than the conventional approach of classroom teaching. Therefore, it is through a percipient adoption of alternate pedagogic practices predicated upon a holistic response to interdisciplinarity, an academic could employ education as a potential tool for social change.

This radical reconceptualization of the performative matrix of teaching community is constitutive of Giroux' definition of the educator as transformative intellectual. The terminology also calls for a distinct political consciousness of the intellectuals as a scaffolding for their active participation in dissent, both within and outside the campus for defending the claim of academic freedom, and the image of the university as a site for critical scholarship. An academic's exposure to the political life of the campus, as well as the murky politics of the larger order as a mode of defense against the erroneous, unfounded allegation over the authenticity of his historical research, and to restore his position in the department forms one of the central arguments of my next chapter. But presently, Vatsa's call for an interdisciplinary approach, rooted in the assumption of a congenial correlation between the departments efficaciously situates him within the nomenclature of Giroux' 'transformative intellectuals'.

Therefore, if we place the characters such as Vidyasagar from *Campus on Fire* (1961), Madhav from *Corridors of Knowledge* (2008) and Vatsa from *Atom and the Serpent* (1982) in tandem, the individual resistance demonstrated by them against the waning academic merit of the campus, followed by their practice of academic ethics mark distinct fictional endeavors to re-imagine the idea of the university capable of effectuating the coveted changes, imperative enough for a comprehensive well-being of the nation and its citizens, and of the human civilization itself.

Conclusion

This chapter, through a dialectical reading of the select Indian campus novels delves into the contested trajectories of the evolution of Indian university education from the 1970s till the early 90s. Starting off with the fissures in the university administration owing much to their allegiance to the external political matrices, it went on examining how the perpetual crisis caused by underfunding and polarization of resources across institutions and departments often converts the reformatory policies into farcical ventures. The fictional interventions of Nandakumar and Palathingal with the academic indigence of the Indian universities divulge varied characteristics of the governance of universities, and the imperative role played by the academic administration in shaping of an academic culture and enhancement of scholarship. The study which draws upon the contrast between good and bad governance of the universities, as manifest in the texts, makes an endeavor to bring an analogy between the academic activities of the universities and administrative nuances. What could be inferred from the study is that, as the education in India comes in the concurrent list, i.e. essentially under the control of the nation-state, and academic institutions are mostly public funded institutions, the universities, despite being autonomous institutions often become susceptible to exogenous political influences. The politics of power exertion by the external political forces are manifold in their disposition, and their often counter-effective presence quite contrary to the official rhetoric,

could be permeably felt in terms of the appointment of administrative and even teaching staff, infrastructural growth, and also in the decision making bodies of the university.

Building upon the fictional satire as a site of critical enquiry, it seeks to assess the intellectual predicament of such pervasive political incursion in the academic affairs of the university. *Whispers in the Tower* (2012) deftly weaves the two contradictory pictures of academic governance, and their respective interactions with the political machineries within the oeuvre of its fictional critique of the post-colonial academy. Whereas, an unfeigned, righteous Vice-Chancellor such as Professor Kabir, could defend the academic interests of the university against the onslaught of multiple political interventions, as well as the power hierarchies present in the university itself, a comparatively weak Vice-Chancellor, as manifest in the character of Dr. Malik, succumbs to the diverse calls of the 'political', thereby retarding the academic progress of the university. Taking cue from my contention on the detrimental effects of administrative fallacies on the *raison d'être* of the university, the chapter also situates the lack of integrity of the academic community as constitutive of the academic stasis in many of the Indian universities. Drawing inferences from an ensemble of fictional characters, my study marks a critical endeavor in deciphering the lack in academic consciousness of a section of faculty members, uneven rivalry, and their propensity for the elusive power hegemonies of the university as anathema to their individualist academic growth and the of the institution as well, which eventually encompass the student community of the campus.

Taking on the emerging problem of dearth of critical consciousness among average Indian students, this chapter inquires the textual representations of the pervasive crisis through a set of incisive pointers, so as to unmask the causality of such laxity among a certain segment of academic community. Alongside the remonstrance of the students against the unavailability of resources and lack of sincerity among the teachers, followed by their demand for revocation of the examination, as appears in *Whispers in the Tower* (2012), Rita Joshi's discursive

intervention into the burgeoning tuition culture in her verse novel- *The Awakening* (1993) corroborate my assumptions on the uncritical accumulation of knowledge devoid of much of critical thinking, and a repetitive reiteration of tutored materials, which are predicted upon the devaluation of academics in many of the Indian institutions of higher learning. Quite antithetical to the envisaged projects of equality, democratic expansion, and inclusivity, the reality is quite marred with the discriminatory practices involved in the process of funding of the institutions, and distribution of resources across the institutions and also amongst the departments. It is by unmasking fiction's discursive engagement with the problematics of professional laxity, and of academic hegemonisation, pervasive enough in the undemocratic practices involved in financing of the institutions and also of the departments, my study has aimed at deciphering the fictional interventions as coterminous with the re-birth of 'signpost universities' in the post-independence India. Furthering on the claim of backwardness of the provincial non-elite Indian universities, my study also draws a parallel between the American mass universities and their Indian counterparts, as its final objective of enquiry, thereby validating one of my assumptions on the reprehensible denouement of the influences of the global north on the fate of the nation's higher education with the insertion of newer forms of divisions in our already porous democratic structure of higher education. Apart from the problematization of the fallacies in the project of higher education in India, the chapter also throws light on the redemptory qualities of literature in redressing the anomalies barring the upward movement of Indian higher education.

The poetics of fictional departures from the official rhetoric of democratic expansion and progress in science and scholarship divulge intermittent individualist resistance through assertion of alternate ideologies and espousal of a quintessential interdisciplinary interactions, while upholding the qualities of self-reflexive dialogism, critical thinking and a prudent democratic culture, as the university's reason of existence. This chapter in its attempt to

critically locate the discursive markers of shifting paradigms of academic ‘dasein’^{xiv} within the dynamic; though ambivalent rubric of the post-colonial nation builds upon the fictional narratives of the discontinuities and the possible ways of their remedial in the project of Indian higher education. Thus, the above study on the select representative works from a fictional subcategory constitutive of ‘Indian genre fiction’ prepares the ground for further investigation of the much contemporary provocations of the university education with the rhizomatic expansion of globalization in the post-millennial India, and how the most recent works of Indian Campus Fiction build their narratives on the newer modalities of fascist-capitalist intrusion into the academic corridors of the universities, and also come up with discursive literary resolutions.

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Notes

ⁱ See Katherine Wimpenny et al., “Curriculum Internationalization and the ‘decolonizing academic’” in *Higher Education Research and Development*, Open Access, (Dec. 2021), pp. 1-17; Lynn Lavalley, “Is Decolonization Possible in the Academy?” in *Decolonizing and Indigenizing Education in Canada*, edited by Sheila Cote-Meek and Taima Moeke Pickering (Canadian Scholars; CSP Books, 2020), pp. 117-134.

ⁱⁱ Refer to Viktor Shklovsky, “Art as Technique” (1917), reprinted in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader* (Longmans, 1988), pp. 16-30.

ⁱⁱⁱ Debaditya Bhattacharya, “Of feudal intellectual capital: The History of the new provincial universities”, pp. 113-136, *The Idea of the University: Histories and Contexts*, edited by Debaditya Bhattacharya, (Routledge, 2019)

^{iv} Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1963)

^v Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences” (1966); *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit, (Stanford University Press, 1993)

^{vi} Ratna Ghosh, “Introduction”, and Iqbal Narain, “Administration of Higher Education in India”, in *Education and the Process of Change*, edited by Ratna Ghosh and Mathew Zachariah, (Sage, 1987); A. R. Kamat, “Educational Policy in India: Critical Issues”, *Sociological Bulletin*, vol. 29, no. 2, (September, 1980), pp. 187-205; Karuna Ahmad, “Towards a Study of Education and Social Change”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (Jan. 27, 1979), pp. 157+159-164

^{vii} Martin Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, trans. Reginald Lilly, (Indiana University Press, 1962)

^{viii} Ved Prakash, “Trends in Growth and Financing of Higher Education in India”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 42, No. 31, (Aug. 4-10, 2007), pp. 3249-3258

^{ix} See Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (Penguin, 1977)

^x The concept of ‘panopticon’ is to allow all prisoners of an institution to be observed by a single security guard, without the inmates knowing whether they are being surveilled – Jeremy Bentham, in Sprigge, Timothy L. S. and Burns, J. H., eds. *Correspondence of Jeremy Bentham, Volume 1: 1752 to 1776*. (UCL Press, 2017). Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan, (Pantheon, 1977). For Foucault, the panoptic model of surveillance is diffused as a principle of social organization, affecting such disparate things as the university classroom, urban planning, and hospital and factory architecture, among others.

^{xi} See Nandini Chandra, “The Surplus University”, from *The Idea of the University: Histories and Contexts*, edited by Debaditya Bhattacharya, (Routledge, 2019)

^{xii} Henry A. Giroux, “Teachers as Transformative Intellectuals”, *Social Education*, vol.49 no.5, pp. 376-79 (May 1985)

^{xiii} G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. W. Wallace, and A. V. Miller. (OUP, 1971)

^{xiv} M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson., (S.C.M. Press, 1962)

Chapter - IV

Campus Fiction and a Critique of Post-liberalization Indian Academia: A

Select Study

Introducing the Novels: A re-configuration of the Problems of Post-liberalization Indian academy

The policy of liberalization of Indian higher education, which has triggered a spate of debate over its veracity was further plagued by a wide range of newfangled elements with the globalization in 1991, and a paradigm shift in the socio-economic, cultural, and political structure, vis-à-vis relations of the nation-state. An intrinsically bureaucratic culture endemic to the academic administration, and the commodification of education, which have lately come to the fore as an anathema to the university's pursuit of truth and of critical scholarship now become subject to the 'new brutality'ⁱ of right-wing nationalism, and the intrusion of neo-liberal machineries. The economic liberalization, alias, 'Globalization' in 1991, which is often held as the stepping stone for the formation of 'New India', accentuated the GDP growth of the nation by integrating Indian economy with the global economy. But, the concurrent influence of the corporate giants backed by an equally repressive nationalist forces, 'which the Indian academia has been encountering since then, could remold its ideological base, and academic, vis-à-vis social duties.

The policies of mobilizing donations, raising fees, "effecting some savings by efficient use of facilities" (and) "levying a cess or charge on the user agencies" (qtd. in Sharma 3), featured in the National Policy on Education – 1986 (NPE-86) are constitutive of its policy of augmenting resources and efficiency of the universities by reducing "the burden in State resources", (and) "instilling a greater sense of responsibility within the educational system" (qtd. in Sharma, *ibid.* 3). These recommendations which are indicative of a strategic shift from public and welfare model of higher education towards privatization were in consonance with

the reports of The World Bank on ‘financing Higher Education in Developing Countries’ (1986, 1994, 1995). In a later article titled- “Higher Education: The Lessons of Experience” (1994), and its sequel on educational planning of the global south (1995), the World Bank assertively advocates for gradual divestment and withdrawal of government subsidies from the higher education sector, thereby denouncing the welfare model of the public education system of a number of liberal democratic South Asian nations.

Its putative analysis is contingent upon an erroneous and generalized assumption that higher education in the third world countries essentially as an elitist platform is designed for the upward mobilization of the privileged section. The deliberate downplaying of the reformist policies adopted by different governments of the post-colonial nation-states towards equality follows a reform package strategically drafted by its select group of economic and educational advisors, which was aimed at transforming higher educational institutions into profit-making privatized bodies. What lies beneath their espousal of autonomy of the university and bolstering academic merit of the institutions is the latent intention of a corporatized co-option of state funded institutions by recovering costs of education from the students, and creating congenial circumstances for private institutions.

But, what is more disconcerting is that the Indian academia ever since globalization, witnessed quite a number of draft policies, educations bills, concept papers and model acts endorsing the cause of privatization of Indian higher education. The Private Universities’ Bill (1995), which could be construed as India’s first ever official entry into the realm of commercialization of higher education has prepared the bedrock for future; homologous ventures committed to the said cause such as, the country paper- “Higher Education in India: Vision and Action”, presented by Murali Manohar Joshi in 1998 at the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education, the Birla Ambani Report (2000), the UGC’s concept paper

on the “Model Act for Universities of the 21st Century in India” (2003), and the approach paper issued by The Planning Commission in June 2006, only to mention a few.

The shift in the status of education from public “merit-I good” to either “non-merit good” (NDA regime), or “merit-II good” (UPA regime) is indicative of an implied motif of gradual withdrawal of government support from the public education sector. One needs to observe the inconsistencies endemic to the government funding of the higher education, since globalization. The rise in the union government’s expenditure on higher education in one financial year is compensated with a sharp fall in the following years. The decline in the central government’s share in 1996-97 (16.71%) from 20.57% in 1990-91, or an equal rise to 26% in 1998-99, and a subsequent slip in 2003-04 to 19%, could be cited as examplesⁱⁱ. The then HRD Minister Murali Manohar Joshi’s address in the UNESCO conference in 1998, where he pressed on the need for self-reliance of the higher educational institutions by making “efforts to raise their own resources by raising the fee levels, encouraging private donations and by generating revenues through consultancy and other activities...” (qtd. in Sharma 6) was not just in accordance to The World Bank’s prescription, or emblematic of succumbing to the pressure of WTO, and other corporate giants, it also expedited the prospects for such future ventures espousing the notion of education as saleable commodity. Whereas, the infamous Ambani-Birla Report (2000) upholds a spirit of ‘mercantilization’ of education by a radical metamorphoses of our democratic public-funded higher educational institutions into mere profit making private agencies, dispensing with their commitments towards critical scholarship and public welfare, the UGC’s Model Act in 2007 voices a sense of urgency in enabling the hitherto public funded institutions to generate their own resources by actively engaging themselves with the paradigms of the market.

But, their strategic omission of liberal arts and performing arts education from the realm of commercialization, coupled with the persistent crisis of underfunding divulge a two-fold

politics of ‘dehumanization’ of pedagogy. On one hand, since arts and humanities education is not directly associated with the growth of the ‘market society’ and often problematizes its unabated expansion by engendering a critical consciousness rooted in democratic dialogism, the corporate giants don’t find them conducive enough for funding. The ‘parrhesiac’ potential of humanities and social science education, which endorses critical citizenship and social justice as one of their fundamental objectives of research could prove to be a potential tool of resistance against their promotion of a culture of adaptive and docile citizenship, is exemplary of the above-stated documents on educational reform in the post-globalized India. Therefore, the neoliberal discourses propagated by the market agencies, apart from desisting themselves from financing of institutions also influence the state and right wing machineries to regulate the elements of socio-cultural critique of the political order and dissent, the two seminal characteristics of studies in arts and social sciences.

Since the 90s, ‘the long march of the Hindutva’ⁱⁱⁱ ideology within the liberal democratic rubric of the Indian nation-state owes much to the power vacuum created at the center of the liberal democratic polity after the death of the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. The resultant precarity in the cultural-political milieu of the country was effectively seized by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its religio-political machineries in order to pursue its covert foundational goal of mobilizing the majority of the Hindus (around 80% of the total population) for the transformation of the secular nation-state into an essentially ‘Hindu Rashtra’ (Hindu Nation). Thus, the rise of the BJP as one of the ruling political parties under the shadowy presence of the RSS not just reflected in the sweeping victory of the BJP-led coalition front (NDA) in the 1999 general election, but its presence could be pervasively felt in modulating, if not reshaping the liberal democratic institutions of India according to their invidious objectives.

Responding to the problematics entailing the Hindutva propaganda, and Machiavellian ways of assuming control of the liberal democratic institutions by the BJP led government at the center, Professor Aijaz Ahmad incisively observes how after the landslide victory of the BJP in the 2014 general election, after two successive terms of the UPA government, the “liberal center keeps moving further and further to the right. The Indian polity of today seems to be undergoing a historically unprecedented process: the irresistible rise of the extreme right to dominance in vast areas of culture, society, ideology and economy, albeit with commitment to observe virtually all the institutional norms of liberal democracy” (*India: Liberal Democracy and the Extreme Right* 21). But, unlike the previous culture of ‘frontal seizure’, the present monitoring of our liberal democratic institutions by the right-wing forces is executed “through patiently engineered and legally legitimate takeover of those institutions by its personnel from within, while keeping the institutions intact” (ibid. 21).

The University, as one such liberal democratic institution becomes susceptible to the rightist onslaught, since strategic, or forceful repression of the idea of the university as a self-reflexive, dialogic space for critical thinking, or as a secular democratic space for dissent would fulfill the insidious motif of a culture of homogenization and conformity, endorsed by the complicit nexus between the neo-liberal and the right-wing State apparatuses. The move towards quashing the spirit of academic freedom and transmogrifying the university into a factory image meant for the production of skilled professionals, dispensing with its commitment towards critical or political consciousness, which has been endemic to the education policies since late 1990s, apart from accentuating the drive of ‘GATSification’ of higher education, embodies another vicious intention of ‘saffronization’ of education.

Drawing upon the contemporary crisis of the public universities in India, Supriya Chaudhuri deftly situates the problem of intellectual indigence within the Central and the State Governments’ common political agenda of “curtailing intellectual freedom and silencing

opinions critical of state power” (Chaudhuri, ed. Bhattacharya 77). She pertinently argues that, while the UPA regime is characterized by “a narrowly managerial vision of the modern university” (ibid. 77), thereby making provisions for further commodification of education by transforming India into a ‘knowledge economy’, the NDA (BJP) government “turned its attention towards ‘saffronization’ of academic bodies, research councils, and textbooks, together with police measures for the protection and surveillance of university campuses” (ibid. 78).

Another important element which needs to be interrogated is an incremental emphasis on scientific-technification in compliance with the attempts of neo-liberal interventions in Indian academics. As technological advancement is integral to the neo-liberal expansion of market economy and modernization, there has been a steady upward progress in public expenditure on technical education, though a sizeable portion of it is amassed by the elite technical institutions such as IITs, or NITs. In his incisive critique of the contemporary crises of the Indian higher education (2007), Vijender Sharma rightly argues, how a whopping 42% of the Union Government’s expenditure on the IITs, or a steady increase in the funding of the technical education (Rs. 753 crores in 1990-91 to Rs. 3182 crores in 2003-2004) were accomplished by depriving a humongous number of general degree colleges and public universities.

But, the paradox of such expansion in the technological education is contingent upon the State’s or the corporate agencies’ propensity towards mass production of skilled professionals befitting enough for functioning of the exploitative system, and not that of conscious citizenry. This is assertively articulated in one of the propositions of the Birla Ambani Report (2000), where the two top-brass Indian industrialists, Mukesh Ambani and Kumarmangalam Birla were summoned by the then Prime Minister of India A. B. Vajpayee to chalk out ‘a policy framework for reforms in education’ in the twenty-first century. Their

polemic against the government subsidies in the education sector, and emphasis on students bearing the expenses of their education with privatization of higher education, keeping it open for FDI also aim at divesting the Indian university space of its democratic-political ethos, evidenced enough in their exhortation of “banning any form of political activity on campuses of universities and educational institutions” (Birla and Ambani as qtd. in Sharma 6). Thus, the questions which could be posed pertaining to the unrelenting neoliberal assault on academia, and a right-wing; statist panopticon over the academic teleology of the public universities are: a) How does ‘The University’ respond to this enormous threat to its *raison d’être* and how well could it defend its public responsibilities and scholarly pursuits against the persistent onslaught? , b) How efficacious could be the role of teaching and student community in staving off such hostile advances?

This chapter sets out to study a number of Indian Campus novels written in the post-millennial era in order to understand the modalities of literary interventions with these diverse set of religio-political and economic factors festering the growth of higher education in India. The contemporary challenges of the Indian public universities, which though embody the academics’ response to the newer dynamics of power exertions, if one attempts to dialectically situate the literary representations within the paradigms of these post-globalization provocations, an upsetting picture of newer divisions exacerbating the entrenched tensions in Indian education would come to the fore. *In Times of Siege* (2003), authored by Githa Hariharan starts off with the question of Saffronization of academic bodies, and how an academician could fall victim to the political cross-currents for his historical research on the fall of Vijayanagara Empire, predicated upon his rigorous field trip and objective understanding of the crisis. *No Onions, Nor Garlic* (2006) by Srividya Natarajan, on the other hand, builds upon the reified problematics of caste politics in Indian academia, and Dalit intellectual’s eternal struggle against the Brahminical hegemony present in the supposedly secular democratic space

of a metropolitan university in the twenty-first century. The subsection on Caste and Indian Universities in the post-globalization times will also briefly refer to Avijit Ghosh's *Up Campus, Down Campus* (2016) and its fictionalized narrative on JNU and its academic community's response to the implementation of the Mandal Commission report in 1990.

On a different note, Chetan Bhagat's *Five Point Someone* (2004), and Amitabha Bagchi's *Above Average* (2007) by developing their narratives around the lives of students on the campus of the IIT Delhi, discursively engage with the debatable questions of neoliberal turn in the academic paradigms of the technological education in post-millennial India. Furthermore, this chapter aims to analyse how the diverse fictional representations, vis-à-vis critique of negative politicization of the university campus, and neoliberal incursion in the higher educational institutions are supplemented with individualistic and collective resistance against statist, as well as multinational co-option of the intellectual ethos of the university.

***In Times of Siege* and its 'metafictional' modes of examining the contemporary crisis of The University**

Set in the two fictional universities located in New Delhi, named KGU (Kasturba Gandhi University), and KNU (Kamala Nehru University), Githa Hariharan's *In Times of Siege* (2003) narrates the peripatetic turn in the life of Shiv Murthy, a professor of history at KGU (an open university), following his lesson on Basava, a medieval reformer-poet and a Hindu saint. His rendition of Basavanna as a social reformer and a political activist, who mobilized a prodigious group of people across the Vijayanagara Empire against the evils of caste system and the poetics of untouchability and inequality departs from the camouflaged, documented historical narrative of Basava as the pioneering figure of social democracy with a visionary approach towards social prejudices and caste divisions. With the surge in Hindutva politics in the post-globalization India, there has been a dominant trend amongst the right-wing ideologues to deify a number of mythical as well as historical figures from our Hindu Past as

icons, whose legacies they hold onto as their governing principles, and as validations for their present acts of violence. The title of the novel succinctly indicates the crisis the narrative seeks to unmask. The story, which spans about two and half months starting on 31st August, 2000 and ending on 15th October, 2000, efficaciously builds upon the intricate relations between academic, political, religious and public discourses, and how the tension caused by such problematic interfaces within the university space could mar the academic freedom imperative enough for intellectual productions. Shiv's module on Basavanna draws ire of the "Itihas Suraksha Manch" (History Protection Brigade), a self-proclaimed organization, which under the façade of its farcical claim of the protection of Indian history, endorses a fictitious glorification of the Hindu past. But ironically, the celebration of the ancient Hindu culture is marked by a coercive dissemination of Hindutva ideology within the secular fabric of the university.

In the first chapter, the narration of Shiv's cautious drive back to the KGU from the KNU, with Meena at the back seat with her fractured leg succinctly draws upon the stark contrast in the topography of both the campuses. The journey begins from KNU, which embodies "a vibrant island of green", (Hariharan 7; henceforth ITS page number) gradually enters "the arid stretches of his KGU" (ITS 7). At this point it is worth mentioning that the two fictional universities- KNU and KGU are modeled on their two real-life counterparts, i.e. Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), and Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) respectively. Shiv's journey could be construed as the narrative's symbolic intervention with the undercurrent of shift in the teleological markers of the public university education in the 'New India', owing much to the baneful influences of the above-mentioned factors. What Gittha Hariharan is critical about is not just the commodification of education being exercised in distant mode of learning, but more seminally the stringent regulation of academic culture and

the deliberate distortion of truth intrinsic to intellectual endeavor, by the joint force of right-wing nationalism and the market economy.

The narration of events is indicative of the adverse effects of such religious-political interventions in the democratic and intellectual paradigms of the university. The pre-emptive acts of vandalism and calculative threatening of faculty members by the hoodlums of certain political party are aimed at marring the integrity of academic institutions through disavowal of academic freedom and co-option of academia's commitment to the pursuit of truth. However, contrary to the tenets of realistic fiction, where reality is perceived as an objective, coherent, and meaningful entity, and very often, the dialogic element of a literary text is suppressed by the dominant voice of a god-like omniscient author, or the narrator *In Times of Siege* (2003) lays bare the illusion of such reality as something that could be objectively comprehended, while employing metafictional techniques. Although, the interpolation of a few fictional newspaper reports and letters addressed to Shiv as evidences of allegation testify its departure from conventional form of realism, these insertions, in turn, corroborate the realistic temperament of the novel.

In her path-breaking work *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (1984), Patricia Waugh rightly identifies "metafiction...as a tendency or function inherent in all novels" (5). Since the middle of the twentieth century, she argues, there has been a rising consciousness among the fictionists with the composition of the fiction and the complex matrices of interaction between the fictional representations and the outside reality. For them, the world ceases to be "coherent, meaningful and objective" (ibid. 3), which could be passively captured by the language. Furthermore, influenced by the structuralist and post-structuralist schools of thinking, Waugh argues, the metafictionists vindicate – "language is an independent, self-contained system which generates its own meanings. Its relationship to the phenomenal world is highly complex, problematic and regulated by convention. 'Meta' terms

therefore, are required in order to explore the relationship between this arbitrary linguistic system and the world to which it apparently refers” (ibid. 3).

Since reality is language bound, and language is a self-contained arbitrary system, thus linguistic translation/appropriation of reality would also be arbitrary in its disposition. Furthermore, extending upon the Heisenbergian “principle of uncertainty”, these novelists not just problematize the world/nature as an essentially linguistic construct, but also the process entailing the description of one’s relation to the world. Therefore, driven by an augmented sense of social/cultural self-consciousness and a dilemma pertaining to the ‘fictionality’ of fiction as such, they often supplement fictional narration with some non-fictional evidences in order to strengthen their critique of the reality.

Taking on metafiction’s vindication of reality as a linguistic artifact, and juxtaposition of fictional and non-fictional elements, *In Times of Siege* (2003) subtly weaves in fictional newspaper reports and press release in its discursive critique of a politicized linguistic (mis)appropriation of the intellectual reality of the nation. Furthermore, in the last paragraph of the acknowledgements, the careful placement of the disclaimer succinctly articulates the authorial intervention as well as discontentment with the politicization of the academy spearheaded by right-wing fundamentalists. She states:

...*In Times of Siege* is a work of fiction. It has used a variety of sources to imagine a life of Basava in a way meaningful to our times. Any resemblance to real individuals, places and events is purely coincidental. The same, alas, cannot be said for any resemblance to real life ignorance, prejudice or bigotry (ITS, 206).

The second sentence reflects upon the symbiotic relation a work of fiction shares with the external reality, so as to situate the fictional demonstrations of the contemporary challenges of the public universities in India within the corpus of criticism on the post-colonial academy.

But, the last sentence, through an unequivocal declaration of a conscious endeavor in drawing an analogy between textual manifestations and real-life instances of universities being plagued by the coercive influences of religio-political prejudices and bigotry, corroborates the fictional claims of problematization and its systematic departure from such corrosive influences. The post-script while affirming its symbolic relation with the provocations of the Indian public universities in the twenty-first century, demands this work of fiction to be read alongside the other critical volumes on post-colonial Indian universities.

Between literature and reality: ‘Saffronization’ of education/history and a fatwa against intellectual autonomy

The banning of Shiv’s module by an amorphous, self-proclaimed group for the protection of nation’s history is reminiscent of a similar fate faced by Sumit Sarkar and K. N. Panikkar over the publication of their volume on freedom movement of India in 2000. The two volumes of *Towards Freedom* (2007, 2009) which were slated to be published by the Oxford University Press in 2000 was the end result of the collaborative research project of the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) carried out by Sarkar and Panikkar^{iv}. But, their criticism of the Hindu communalist organizations’ contribution in the freedom movement and emphasis on the secular character of the Indian independence movement incurred the wrath of right-wing Hindu fundamentalists and the publication was temporarily suspended. Sarkar held that the pressure wielded by the right-wing fundamentalist group testifies an engineered attack carried out by the RSS and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to co-opt the secular temperament of pedagogy and academic research. Githa Hariharan, in one of her essays published in 2007, draws a parallel between Shiv’s predicament and the fatwa issued against the joint publication of Sumit Sarkar and K. N. Panikkar in her sustained critique of the state sponsored violence on academia. She rightly contends that “The Culture Protection Brigade does not seem to believe in scholarship or books or films or plays or arguments to express their disagreement. Because

the point is not disagreement, which could after all mean the need to debate. The point is to trash first, identify ‘hurt sentiments’ later” (Hariharan 127).

This state sponsored censoring of intellectual publications, as evidenced in the real-life experience of Sarkar and Panikkar, or of a fictional demonstration of a fatwa issued against Shiv’s volume on Basava sheds light on the perpetual tension between intellectual freedom and exogenous political incursions. The literary re-mapping of the shifting paradigms of the university-political interface under the NDA regime, and a concomitant rise of right wing politics discursively engages with the oft-mooted questions entailing the markers of historiography, the politics of Hindu nationalism and deification followed by a struggle for hegemonic control over the liberal-democratic public institutions. The essays by Christoph Senft, Madhuparna Mitra, and Sheeba S. Nair shed light on the aforementioned issues in their respective readings of the text. My research seeks to unmask, how such premeditated censoring of academic freedom coupled with an implicit regulation of academic scholarship by the cultural agencies of RSS and the right-wing political fronts sweeping across the university space could prove to be an anathema to the reason of university’s existence.

The newspaper report, dated 15th September, reads:

A senior professor of history at the Kasturba Gandhi Central University (KGU) in New Delhi has been charged with distorting facts and introducing an ideological bias into a lesson in the university’s medieval Indian history course. The Itihas Suraksha Manch, an independent social and cultural organization, issued a statement on Wednesday in the capital calling for ‘an end to tampering with our precious and glorious Indian history’. The statement, signed by one of the organization leaders Mr Anant Tripathi, said, ‘We will not allow our history to be polluted like this. Fifty years after independence, we cannot have Indian historians brainwashed by foreign theories and methods depriving us of our

pride in Hindu temples and priests. How are these historians different from the Muslims who invaded our land? (ITS 75-76).

What is problematic in their critique of Shiv's research is that, it is predicated upon 'post-truth' assumptions of historical knowledge, where jingoism prevails over scholarship. Nowhere, in their statement, one finds traces of ratiocination in its departure from Shiv's historical study on Basavanna, neither the criticism rests on historical evidences, however discursive they are. The Manch's claim of an alleged distortion of historical truth in Shiv's module follows a politics of conflation, demonstrated through an unfounded critique of writing people's history, or "history from below" to borrow it from E. P. Thomson (1966), and a further erroneous parallel between the Muslim rulers of precolonial era and the liberal Marxist historians. The analogy between them, which is aimed at affirmation of the lost glory of the nation's Hindu past at the cost of public humiliation of academicians for their scholarly engagements and publications, serves as one of those scheming strategies having been deliberately laid out by the electoral machineries of the extreme right in order to gain control of the nation-state by censoring the secular ethos of the liberal institutions such as academia, thereby replacing it with its saffronized counterparts, and by exploiting the state machineries for their vested political interests.

Tracing the genealogy of the present crisis of religious essentialism within the secular fabric of post-colonial India, Sumit Sarkar (2002) historically locates its discursive origin in the publications of V. D. Savarkar's *Hindutva/ Who is a Hindu* (1923), and M. S. Golwalkar's *We, or Our Nationhood Defined* (1939). What, Sarkar identifies as problematic in their celebration of the Hindu past are their erroneous assumption "of a mythical continuous struggle of 'Hindus' against 'Muslim' invaders and rulers throughout the 'medieval' centuries as the true national history" (Sarkar 249), and projection of 'Hindutva' not just as a discourse, but "a history in full" (Savarkar, 1989). In the chapter entitled: "Hindutva and History" from his book

Beyond Nationalist Frames: Postmodernism, Hindu Fundamentalism, History (2002), Sarkar traces the ideological origin of this resurgence of RSS's dream of a 'Hindu-Rashtra' (Hindu Nation), and an essentialized Hindu unity in Savarkar's rendition of Indian nation-state as the 'pitribhumi' (Fatherland), or 'punyabhumi' (Holy Land) for Hindus, and Golwalkar's idea of the 'purity of race' as a fundamental constituent of nation-building in the post-independence era (*We, or Our Nationhood Defined*, 1945).

What is contentious in their re-appropriation of the nation's pre-colonial past is that both the accounts are marred with their covert agenda of communal violence and ethnic cleansing, as manifest in their projection of Nazi Germany as the ideal model of nationhood. As ideological scaffolding to this abstract idea of a 'Hindu rashtra' (Hindu nation), both Savarkar and Golwalkar upheld a handful of mythical/historical Hindu kings, warriors or reformers as visionaries and the primary architects of the Hindu-nation. Their idea of the Hindu nation, on the pretext of safeguarding the Hindu culture and history strategically eschews the secular ethos of Indian nationalism, where people from other ethnic communities or the religious minorities are held as outsiders or emigrants, and expected to assimilate themselves with "the principal mass of population, the national Race (Hindus), by adopting its culture and language and sharing in its aspirations..." (Golwalkar as qtd. in Sarkar 252). Grounded upon their abstract dream of Hindu nation and an equally imaginary Hindu unity, the present day RSS and its cultural and electoral engines often target the secular democratic space of the university in order to saffronize the nation's history.

It is through the predicament of Shiv, *In Times of Siege* symptomatically intervenes with the contemporary crisis of the state-sponsored attack on academic freedom and the idea truth and scholarship as the benchmark of academic engagements. The allegation against Shiv is neither an accidental occurrence nor an apolitical reaction, rather it demonstrates a strategic invasion of the secular academic space by the right-wing watchdog organization such as 'Itihas

Suraksha Manch'. In its endeavor of cultural protectionism, this organization also ropes in a number of academicians so as to validate its claim of an egalitarian Hindu past. Shiv's lesson on Basavanna evinces a different approach of looking into the causality of the fall of Vijayanagara Empire. Unlike the organization's fictitious claims of Hindu unity in the pre-colonial past, his module unmasks the embedded casteism in the Indian society and places Basava and his 'veerashaivas' (warriors of Siva) as the early proponents of an egalitarian and caste free social order. In Kalyana, Shiv argues -

Basava and many of his followers took on the caste system, the iron net that held society so firmly in place; that reduced the common man and woman to hopeless captives. Thousands of these 'ordinary' men and women took part in Basava's egalitarian dream. The dream spread and took hold of people who had not been *people* before in Kalyana, people who had just been their functions; the makers of mirrors, the skinners of dead animals, the bearers of children. The people became movement; the movement swelled and surged, a wave that threatened to swallow social conventions and religious ritual, staple diet of tradition (ITS 61).

He further argues that the tension escalated with an inter-caste marriage between a Brahmin woman and a Dalit man, as the upper-caste Brahmins, the custodians of status-quo and caste hierarchies, couldn't digest this example of equality and were scared of losing their hegemonic control in the society. They persuaded the king Bijjala, and following the royal decree the fathers of bride and groom were sentenced to death. This despicable act of homicide infuriated the 'warriors of Siva', "those who had shed the stigma of their lower-caste status to become followers of Basava, retaliated" (ITS 62). What follows is a gory affair of inter-caste conflict, as "the city burned; now in the untouchable potters' colonies, now in the coffer heavy temples" (ITS 62). Neither Basava's preaching of non-violence nor could his charisma prevent

this onslaught now. “The king was assassinated, allegedly by two of Basava’s young followers...Basava too died under mysterious circumstances” (ITS 62). Alongside the natural calamity and foreign invasion, the internal conflict, the massacre, and the mutilation of the cityscape, according to Professor Shiv Murthy expedites the fall of the Vijayanagara Empire.

What the Hindu fundamentalist group for historical/cultural protectionism finds offensive is Shiv’s emphasis on Basvanna’s resentment against caste system and the practitioners of it, and his mysterious death as corollary to the tragic end of his dream of equality. In order to validate their fallacious claim of Shiv’s distortion of historical truth, paradoxically, the watchdog organization also ropes in people from academia itself. The narrative remarkably places a series of hate mails and reports in its critique of the rightist aggression against the secular, intellectual and democratic culture of the university. The witty narration interspersed with these simulated documents enrich the embedded satire. In one such report it is stated-

The Manch also quoted several historians, including retired Professor Shri A. A. Atre, to support their claim that ‘Basava was not against brahmins as such.’ All he wanted, like any saint, was that everyone should live in order and harmony... ‘To say that the saint Basava may have died in broken, disillusioned exile is as much a mischievous distortion of history as to say that he may have learnt anything from the Muslim Sufis of Persia (ITS 76).

In a similar vein, the hate mail which follows, does not refrain from indulging in personal attacks by labeling his academic endeavor as “ignorant and unpatriotic acts” (ITS 77). It further adds-

If you want to rewrite Indian history with our Hindu saints as cowards and failures in exile, why not go to Pakistan and do it? They will welcome you and give you all attention and praise you are desperate for. After seeing your

disrespect for our glorious temples and priests...I can only conclude that you are trying to undermine Hinduism (ITS 77-78).

In the above-quoted excerpts from the fictional documents, the first contentious issue that comes to the fore is a public avowal of a deep-seated hatred for a religious community, coupled with their uncritical glorification of Hinduism and a vindication of a militant Hindu nationalism. Neither their glorification of Hinduism, nor their idea of Hindu-nation uphold the spirit of social justice, secularism, communal harmony, and equality – the idea post-independent India stands for. Instead, what writ large is an intolerance for religious/ethnic minorities and a cultural appropriation of the age-old colonial binary of self and the other. This covert intention of ‘otherization’ also encompasses people from lower castes, as manifest in their emphasis on maintaining order and harmony in a caste-ridden society and defense of Brahminical hegemony. As stated earlier, previous works done by Sheeba S. Nair and Madhuparna Mitra shed light on the dynamics of fictional engagement with the politics of Hindu nationalism and a concomitant re-shaping of the power matrix in the post-independence India.

Taking cue from their essays, it could be argued that, this blurring of Hindutva with Hinduism, and their claim of a mythical Hindu unity owe much to the denial of any communal tension and a projection of an ideal religious syncretism in the pre-colonial times by the nationalist leaders for the immediate cause of driving away the British from India. In order to instill an image of an independent, unified India among its heterogeneous population, the top rung nationalist leaders of the Indian National Congress resorted to the populist politics of promoting a collective consciousness of an independent nation transcending every differences a multicultural society is constitutive of. Though the idea of freedom could manage to motivate the mass temporarily, the subterranean, sleazy undercurrent of social/religious/cultural prejudices, stereotypes, divisions, and hegemony continue to unmask the fissures in their

imagination and praxes of cultural or communal harmony amidst the differences. Furthermore, contingent upon the wicked politics of mobilizing the mass, while retaining the cultural/political hegemony of the upper caste, native elites, the freedom movement often camouflaged the rights and voices of the people from the fringes with the greater national interests.

These silences in the mainstream nationalism were strategically hijacked by the Hindu nationalist organizations and have been nurtured all through these years. The religious and communal tension, as well as divisions further persuaded the Hindutva brigade to cash in on the religious/communal sentiments of the majority of population, i.e. Hindus for their vested political interests. With the rise of the BJP (RSS's political wing) in the political milieu of India, there has been an incremental curve in disseminating the Hindutva ideology by seizing the liberal democratic space of the University. Shiv's predicament is almost analogous to Sumit Sarkar's criticism of the right-wing censoring of historical scholarship, vis-à-vis academic freedom. Reflecting upon the fatwa issued against the joint publication of Sarkar and Panikkar by an infamous Hindutva organization, Sarkar submits that the ire of the Hindutva circles, which is "directed ostensibly against the Marxist historians...actually (comprises) the whole state-of-the-art historical scholarship" (ibid. 255).

Building the narrative upon the contemporary crisis of curtailing of intellectual freedom by the flagbearers of Hindutva, Githa Hariharan has ingeniously re-imagined the consequent ploys efficaciously placed by the members of that amorphous group. Their insistence on withdrawal of Shiv's module was accompanied by two other disparaging demands of "separate apologies from Dr. Murthy and from the department, by extension the university...(and) the rewritten lesson should be submitted to the Manch before it is sent to our (university's) printing unit" (ITS 69). Taking on Sarkar's critique of the right-wing attack on the 'state-of-the-art historical scholarship', if one places these fictional evidences in tandem, it could evince a

clearer picture of loss of academic freedom and of institutional autonomy during the NDA regime. Extending my study on the fictional critique of the compromise of academic freedom in the post-independence Indian academia from the previous chapters, this chapter maintains that the circumstances haven't improved over these fifty years, rather, newer restrictions have crept in the path of free inquiry.

The silencing of academic freedom and intellectual autonomy by the dominant political discourses of the ruling government reminds me of John Higgins' analyses of academic freedom (2018) as a "startling paradox" as "the reference to it is usually motivated by its absence" (qtd. in Scott 5). Various scholars have come up against the present crisis of state sponsored attack on the university's autonomy and curtailing of academic freedom across the country. Responding to this right wing assault on intellectual freedom, Kalpana Kannabiran calls this as "...by far the biggest assault we have seen on academic freedoms, and one that will have far-reaching consequences for our collective futures" (ed. Apoorvanand 171).

In order to substantiate the claims of realism in its problematization of the state-sponsored 'mini surgical strike' launched by the right-wing machineries on the practice of academic freedom in critical pedagogy, Hariharan has drawn analogy from real life evidences of the threat to the individualistic as well as institutional freedom of critical and creative expressions. On the pretext of staging a demonstration against the allegations of the watchdog organization and contemporary crisis of co-option of academic values of the universities across the country, the conversations between Shiv, Meena, and Amar unearths some hideous details of the state-sponsored attack on artists and intellectuals for their artistic, or intellectual productions. Meena's reflection on "The attacks on artist M.F. Husain for painting Hindu goddesses in the nude..." (ITS 100) is followed by Shiv's recollection of similar deplorable incidents such as, "Teachers in Goa having their faces blackened for setting "politically incorrect" exams and the recall of a volume on the freedom struggle, ...(or) The disruption of

the shooting of a film on the plight of Hindu widows in Benares” (ITS, 100). The recalling of a volume on the freedom struggle refers to Sumit Sarkar and K. N. Panikkar’s two volumes of *Towards Freedom* (2007, 2009); the third reference of the film denotes the disruption in shooting of Deepa Mehta’s film *Water*, which was later released in 2005.

The textual chronicling of the real-life evidences of state-sponsored attack on the intellectuals’ right to free inquiry and critique of prejudices, or bigotry around the similar temporal frame of Shiv’s experience is indicative of the shrinking space for free intellectual expression in India with the spiraling of authoritarianism and religious/cultural essentialism under the first NDA government (1999-2004). Furthermore, in an interview with the ‘Newslight’, Shiv’s defense of his historical assumptions which rests on his urgency of a continuous re-examination of the threads of our pluralistic history, and his critique of the evident fear in the organization’s mini surgical strike over Shiv’s module further infuriate the cultural protectors, alias the hoodlums affiliated to RSS and its electoral engines. And, what follows is a well-planned act of violence by the Hindutva cadres, so as to coercively disseminate the Hindutva ideology by instilling fear among the fraternity of scholars. The pathos evident in the third person narration of ransacking of Shiv’s office, where “...the table and chairs and bookshelves are broken, the walls defaced...torn books everywhere, cupboard and files open-mouthed and in shambles...” (ITS, 130-31) divulges a deep sense of resentment against such acts of ‘new brutality’^v over the intelligentsia’s right to freedom of/in critical inquiry.

The dialogic synthesis of the historical evidences and literary re-imagination of restrictions on free speech/inquiry supplemented with a coercive incursion of the secular democratic space of the campus as a distinct fictional marker of its dialectical critique of strategic assault on the liberal-democratic institutions could further persuade a reader to situate the textual evidences within the present-day predicament of dwindling intellectual autonomy

under the incumbent government. Various newspaper and journal articles along with the critical essays, abound with plethora of evidences of the violation of academic freedom and state imposed injunctions on intellectual productions, often to the extent of public apology, arrest, or resignation of the concerned professor for his/her academic endeavors. Academicians and public intellectuals such as Hany Babu, Anand Teltumbde, Soma Sen, and Sudha Bharadwaj among many others have been harassed and even arrested since 2014 for their trenchant critique of the undemocratic functioning of the state under the present NDA government (The Print, 2020). They "...have been charged under the stringent Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) and are also accused of being members of banned outfit CPI (Maoist)" (Dasgupta), for being present at the event called 'Edgar Parishad', a conference organized by Dalit-Ambedkarite groups for commemorating the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Koregaon-Bhima – states, *The Print*, India's one of the leading digital newspapers.

Beside the public intellectuals, even the professors at private universities have come under the scanner of State-run suppression of dissenting voices and alternative perspectives. For instance, a prolific scholar and political critic Professor Pratap Bhanu Mehta had to step down as Professor at Ashoka University in 2021 for his vehement criticism of the policies of the present Central Government, which deprive people of their constitutional rights and freedom of expression. In an article published in *New Frame*, a Johannesburg based non-profit, social justice media publication, the excerpt from the resignation letter of Professor Mehta rightly summarizes the visible absence of democracy and freedom of speech in the present-day India. The article reads: "'My public writing in support of a politics that tries to honor constitutional values of freedom and equal respect for all citizens is perceived to carry risks for the university", Mehta wrote in his resignation letter" (Zargar). Very recently, a professor of Political science at Sharda University has been suspended from his duties for setting up a question on a politically contentious question on similarities between Fascism/Nazism and

Hindutva, as reported by *The Indian Express* on 7th May, 2022. These instances, apart from the attack on intellectual freedom, also seek to unmask the idea of ‘depoliticized’ education and the ‘myth of world class universities’. These two aspects will be taken up later in the section on Indian campus novels’ intervention with the commodification of education in post-globalization India.

The centrifugal orientation of the university and academics

At this juncture, it is quite worth asking – What are the teleological foundations of academic freedom? And, why/how is it instrumental to the ‘idea of the university’? Taking cue from one of the previous sections of the first chapter, where I referred to the debates concerning the definition of academic freedom, it could be argued that, it doesn’t entitle an academician with an unfettered freedom of expression, and essentially defends his/her academic engagements. Academia’s quest for truth and scholarship, its commitment to the cause of social welfare, and its right to dissent are some of the pivotal factors academic freedom seeks to safeguard against the extramural political along with cultural interventions. Responding to the university’s imperative role in social reformation(s), Matthew Finkin and Robert Post, two American legal scholars rightly observed that, “...academic freedom protects the interests of society in having a professoriate that can accomplish its mission” (qtd. in Scott 6). Therefore, the university which is considered as a democratic, self-reflexive, and dialogic space enables the academic community with the freedom in classroom teaching and further research, or academic endeavors. The idea of the modern secular university is rooted in the principles of social justice, equal rights, breaking of stereotypes and prejudices, and pledges to impart these values through diverse range epistemic inquiry and pedagogic praxes/reforms. Again, the sense of critical engagement and academic excellence, it seeks to impart through studies of humanities and social sciences, seem to unearth the discursive historical traces of hegemony and the subsequent divisions, exploitation, and marginalization in any unequal society. Thus,

the bigger challenge which awaits the university and its academic community in a deceptively liberal-democratic society is to combat the “panoptic machine”^{vi} of the state, so as to safeguard the institutional autonomy and the public role of ‘the intellectual’, what Edward Said (1993) defines as “...outsider, amateur, and disturber of the status quo” (x).

The post-colonial Indian University, which owes much to Humboldtian idea of ‘the modern university’- its concept of ‘bildung’^{vii}, promotion of science and scholarship, academic’s right to disinterested quest for truth et cetera, upon its inception, has espoused to be “an instrument of social change” (Radhakrishnan et al, 1948-49). Here, I must again refer to the socialist vision of the Nehruvian model of the university as it “...stands for Humanism, for Tolerance, for Reason, For the Adventure of ideas and the search for Truth” (ibid. 1958). Thus, the university as an institution, as well as a community of academicians and scholars ought to enjoy a considerable amount of freedom in its intellectual endeavors, so as to work towards the goals as ethically as possible. At this point, it is quite pertinent to ask how we define ‘truth’, and what is academia’s relation to it in a democratic multicultural society, where different subjectivities are always at war of ascendancy?

The truth is not a monolithic, absolute entity, neither it is beyond the reach of the power nor contradictions. It is discursive in its constitution and the pursuit of truth often tends to elude its proponents. It has always been a subject of co-option and appropriation by the power center. Following Foucault’s analyses of ‘Power’ as omnipresent, which is diffused and embodied in “discourses”, “knowledge” and “regime(s) of truth” (Foucault, 1975, 1977; Gordon, 1980; Rabinow, 1984), it could be inferred that, the institutions designated for shaping and dissemination of truth and knowledge often turn out to be the battlegrounds of manifold ramifications of power, negotiations, vis-à-vis tension between the discourses and their respective claims towards truth. With the paradigm shift in the world order and economy since the middle of the twentieth century, the concept of ‘universal truth’ which was intrinsic to

Eurocentric imperialism and its discourses, slowly gave way to pluralistic rendition of truth spearheaded by the anticolonial nationalisms across the continents, and the revisionist as well as radical perception of the postmodern, post-structural, and postcolonial thinkers. Subsequently, the shift in the political economy of the world, and the foundations of new independent socialist, democratic nations engender newer dynamics of power relations and tensions between multiple power centers interfacing each other. Thus, when, the ‘grand-narrative’ of meaning and truth is superseded by the “metanarratives” (Lyotard, 1979), the role of the intellectual also switches from “universal intellectual” to “specific intellectual” (Foucault, 1977).

An intellectual is no longer a purveyor of ‘universal truth’, rather a critic of it, and his/her position in a power-ridden society is enmeshed in the specific political questions cutting across our everyday experiences. Furthermore, the university also ceases to be an idyllic insular space in pursuit of abstract and eternal truth. And, a radical redefinition of the idea of the university efficaciously situates it within the political markers of the modern society, where its academic engagements, or its crisis shed light on the nuanced political assumptions it is subjected to. Taking on the power matrices and political provocations of the modern universities, Michel Foucault in his work, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* (1972-77) inquires through a set of incisive markers in order to vindicate “...the crisis of the universities...not...as a loss of power, but on the contrary as a multiplication and reinforcement of their power-effects as centres in a polymorphous ensemble of intellectuals who virtually pass through and relate themselves to the academic system” (127). Thus, in such politically volatile environment, Foucault further adds:

The figure in which the functions and prestige of this new intellectual are concentrated is no longer that of the ‘writer of genius’, but that of the ‘absolute savant’, no longer he who bears the values of all, opposes the unjust sovereign

or his ministers...It is rather he who, along with a handful of others, has at his disposal, whether in the service of the State or against it, powers which can either benefit or irrevocably destroy life (ibid. 129).

Keeping aside a handful of universal laws of human values, justice, property rights, et cetera, since, the truth is essentially 'regime' bound, one of the major problems the university and the academician encounter is predicated upon their problematization of the discontinuities in the present "regime of truth" and "knowledge" in order to ascertain "the possibility of constituting a new politics of truth" (ibid. 133). It is their endeavor to reformulate better truth(s) rooted in egalitarian ideals, which situates the academic as 'an outsider' and 'disturber of the status quo', history confirms, poses threat to their scholarly pursuits, individual's life and academic career ironically by the machineries of the democratic state.

The University moving right-ward: A fictional inquiry of the 'Hindutva' strategies and the emergence of 'depoliticized pedagogy'

Extending upon the above theoretical assumptions, it could be argued that, the ordeals of Shiv Murthy in *In Times of Siege*, or that of the liberal-minded Indian intellectuals in an arguably authoritarian regime are, indeed, emblematic of the struggle of the dominant ideology in the post-colonial 'state' and its apparatuses for their political/cultural supremacy over the discursive traces of emerging truth(s) and the 'history of the present'^{viii}. In his response to the interviewer's question on the whole furor over the distortion of historical truth, Shiv's emphasis on their "fear of history" (ITS 97) connotes to that anxiety of the power center over its hegemony. Talking about the fear or the struggle, it is but worth arguing that, here, the struggle embodies the struggle of the Hindutva forces against the secular historiography and the liberal-democratic ethos of higher educational institutions. Their struggle produces a fear, that their idealization of Hinduism and scheming strategies of cultural essentialism, or social divisions might get exposed to the public by the critical interventions of the secular academicians.

It is this fear combined with a propensity to homogenize the rich cultural heritage of India in their favor, which manifests itself in the form of a calculated violence upon academia. Upon the demand of the lesson to be rewritten and to be submitted to them for their approval (quoted before), set by the watchdog organization, the Dean's strong sense of disapproval of such external surveillance clearly indicates the strategic invasion of the autonomy of the university by the right-wing fundamentalists. "The dean frowns. 'We can't submit material to them for approval. That's outrageous and they know it. My hunch is that they are testing the waters to see how far they can go'" (ITS 69). The narrative further unfolds how such tactical attack on the intellectuals and on the university often succeeds in mobilizing a considerable number of academicians in their favor, as evidenced in the head's (the History department, KGU) fear-driven developing allegiance towards the Hindutva ideology. The fear is evident enough in his disappointment over Shiv refusal to apologize to the organization for his historical analyses. "The head snaps at Shiv, 'I didn't know you hankered to be a hero, Dr. Murthy. We are middle aged professors, not stuntmen'" (ITS 70). It is the nonchalance of a sizeable number of Indian academicians, which the right-wing state apparatuses try to exploit by threatening them with the dire consequences of being critical of the state.

Shiv's historical re-examination of Basavanna's revolutionary ideals and the fall of Vijayanagara Empire infuriate the Hindutva crusaders, as it seeks to debunk their myth-historical theory of a Hindu unity in the ancient past and unmask the cultural hypocrisies embedded in their politics of deification. Githa Hariharan, who is a staunch critic of religious fundamentalism, has meticulously deployed various strands of the incursion of Hindutva ideology on the secular and creative-critical ethos of the university as means of the novel's departure from such claims of homogenization of the nation's past. In one such letter addressed to Shiv, one of the defenders of the 'Manch's' paradoxical claim of the protection of history has been resolute enough in his labelling of these secular intellectuals and historians as

“misled...and...troublemakers (who) criticize Hinduism for its caste system and pull our saints off their pedestals” (ITS 118). The present excerpt from Professor M. M. Behoshi’s letter, or the previous one from Professor A. A. Atre’s remark are evocative of a discursive fictional engagement with a pernicious strategy of the RSS and its cultural machineries of pulling a number of self-indulgent, immoral academicians in their defense by alluring them with the prospects of their further promotion, or material interests. The careful dovetailing of a group of academics’ incremental allegiance towards the state endorsed Hindutva ideology, as an imperative tool in their war against the secular ethos of the university corroborates a dialectical correlation between the fictional narrative and the critical assumptions of academia moving rightward not just by ‘frontal seizure’, but more crucially by the advocates of Hindu fundamentalism within the academic space (Sharma, 2007; Ahmad, 2020).

The satire is implicit in the sender’s details at the end of the letter which reads: “Prof. (Shri) M .M. Behoshi (failed Oxon, 1942)” (ITS, 118). The wrong placement of two irreconcilable prefixes before his name, and his failure to pass his degree examination at Oxford are exemplary of his ignorance about India’s conflicting past, or the fallacies embedded in the Hindu cultural traditions. Furthermore, the careful selection of words, as evidenced in his surname ‘Behoshi’, a Hindi word, which means ‘unconsciousness’, in a way draws a parallel between the fictional critique of the semblance of truth in the tailored history of the Hindutva forces and Sumit Sarkar’s definition of their history as “pseudo history” (2002), devoid of any veracity. Professor Behoshi’s labeling of secular historians as misled and troublemakers is also symptomatic of a much recent categorization of Indian intellectuals as ‘anti-nationals’, who question the rise of communalism and the uncritical celebration of Hindu culture, or critique the undemocratic policies and practices of the present NDA government (2014-).

Since fiction as a discursive practice symbolically unpacks the nuances of the lived crisis and, also, could imagine the possible future(s), therefore, a deconstructive reading of the

demands of the right-wing organization and the subsequent ‘lumpenism’ could be indicative of a covert agenda of saffronization of higher education embedded in the present policies and direct interventions of the government in teaching and research of the university. Following a controversial order issued by the MHRD (which was later repealed), the Gujarat University has identified a list of 82 topics for research in humanities and social sciences (Nair, ed. Bhattacharya 54). The notice was issued in order to channelize the research in those disciplines to join the Hindutva bandwagon of hyper-nationalism and to serve the state in a more celebratory manner, while dispensing with their ideas of social critique, vis-à-vis reformation. In a similar vein, some of the recommendations of the New Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) have carefully emplaced this pernicious motif of sanskritization of pedagogy under the guise of amalgamating tradition and modernity.

Following the footsteps of the previous education commissions, though NEP 2020 presses on the need for a revival and global recognition of our native epistemic traditions, ironically, it is scarred with deliberate omission of the heterogeneous traditions modern India is constitutive of. Its reference to the past or tradition mostly comprises the scholarly works written in Sanskrit, or the values inscribed in them. For example, it resonates in the policy’s aim towards holistic and multidisciplinary education, where the vindication of India’s rich epistemic heritage emphasizes the values imprinted in the ancient works only written in Sanskrit, such as Banabhatta’s “Kadambari” (36). By carefully emplacing the call for multidisciplinary and holistic education solely around these Sanskrit texts, what this policy does, is a strategic disavowal of the pluralistic cultural/epistemic traditions, which have been instrumental in the foundation of the modern Indian university.

What is further disconcerting is, their desire for dissemination of Hindutva ideology through institutionalized pedagogy while retaining the liberal-democratic status of the university, exploits the internal power dynamics/relations of the university. Taking on this

issue, the novel brings about how the rivalry between the faculty members and individual's political affiliations could become susceptible towards the exogenous political incursions. The polyphony intrinsic to the narration of the faculty meetings at Shiv's department discursively engages with the emerging crisis of ideological divide amongst the professors over the idea of the 'pseudo history' of Hindu glory propagated by the right wing ideologues. In one such meeting, the heated argument between Shiv's two colleagues Menon and Arya, unearths the sordid truth of how even the academicians are prone to be brainwashed by the Hindutva ideology. While, Menon's suggestion of doing away with "...one or two questionable statements on minority communities..." (ITS 18), and keeping the rest of the lesson intact adheres to the dialogic and secular ethos of the university, Arya's remarks are marked with arrogance and his allegiance towards jingoistic culture of the Hindutva groups. In his defense of the Manch's demand, his own recommendations for rewriting of the lesson draws upon the homogenized historical assumption of India as the 'fatherland' of the Hindus, where religious minorities are equivalent to 'foreigners', as manifest in the works of Savarkar and Golwalkar. Furthermore, his prejudice and bigotry against the religious minorities in India is implicit in his affirmative, yet ignorant labelling of the "minority communities... (such as,) Muslims, Christians or Sikhs (as)... majority" (ITS 19) in many states. The narrative further explicates, how such controversial statements could destabilize the secular temperament of the department, as "there is an uncomfortable silence" (ITS 19), and following the head's consent, "The secretary, Mrs. Khan, (who) is a Muslim...is out of the room in a flash..." (ITS 19).

The novel also demonstrates, when, the professors such as Arya, or Dr. Kishan Lal fall short of defending their claims of 'pseudo history', they, quite analogous to the approaches of the Hindu fundamentalist group, often resort to verbal abuse so as to quell the voice of democracy emblematic of the university space. In a later meeting, the tension escalates after Shiv's refusal apologize to the organization for his lesson, followed by his colleague, Amita's

questioning of the credibility of the pro-Hindutva historians, whom the Manch hired. Her blatant criticism of “If the Manch is satisfied with the committee, the chances are the committee does not have a single historian we can take seriously” (ITS 125) provokes Arya and Lal to have come heavily upon them. Here, Arya’s observation epitomizes his resentment against secular approach of the university with the cause of the knowledge production, vis-à-vis dissemination. He asserts: “Manch represents public sentiment. History and everything else should respect this. For years leftist and pseudo-secular historians have been filling committees with their agents. Now their monopoly is over and they are making hue and cry” (ITS 126).

As the (meta)fictional realism intends to examine the nuances of lived reality by placing the practical/historical evidences and a literary re-imagination of their complex manifestations in tandem, and since literary satire is symbolic and elliptical, the character of Arya could further substantiate the novel’s discursive critique of the unholy nexus between the Hindutva organizations and a number of unethical right wing academics. Here, Arya’s allegiance towards Hindu fundamentalism is neither spontaneous nor rooted in his critical engagement with the Hindutva ideology. Instead, it is solely driven by his utilitarian interests and the reaffirmation of his position in the academic ‘ivory tower’. Hinting at the problem of his intellectual indigence and his growing correspondence with the right-wing organizations, the third person narrator observes:

It’s only recently that Arya has been promoted to being addressed as Doctor. Shiv still doesn’t know where the man got a doctorate from, or even if he has one in the first place. Arya was a mousy dogsbody for years...But over the last year or two, he has been revealing a more aggressive face, unveiling one tantalizing feature at a time. Shiv has heard that the guests have been seen leaving the house in khaki gear (ITS 17).

This succinct narration of Arya's intellectual mediocrity, and the frequent visit by RSS activists, (implied in the reference to the "khaki gear") exemplifies one of "the sneaky elliptical ways" (Hariharan 130), through which this work of fiction unpacks the nuances of the aforementioned unholy nexus. It symbolically unpacks a scheming strategy of the state funded extremist groups to take advantage of their scholarly ignorance, yet their longing for academic footholds by luring them with further academic prospects in return of their (professors) commitment and dissemination of their (Hindu nationalists) homogenized truth/knowledge, and tailored history. Amplifying my critique of the individual faculty's making use of his/her political associations in yearning for power could be complicit in the progress of the university, as evidenced in many of the characters from other campus novels such as, Ratibhai and Matangini from M. K. Naik's *Corridors of Knowledge* (2008), or Dattatreya, Sheela Rani, and Yana from *Atom and the Serpent* (1982), it could be inferred that, here too, the right wing fundamentalists have rightly located the loopholes in the democratic structure of the Indian universities. However, unlike the previous examples, *In Times of Siege* unveils a different side of the state's control over Indian universities, where the state's insidious motives of legitimization of its homogenized half-truth through institutionalized learning, and curtailing of academic freedom and institutional autonomy are carried out by the professors from the respective university itself, as manifest in the characters of Arya or Dr. Lal.

There are a number of problematic factors entrenched in Arya's assertion of the distorted historical truth(s) within the higher educational institutions. First, the university as a democratic platform doesn't endorse any specific political affiliation/ideology, and instead, provides a dialogic space for mutually exclusive ideas to interact. This, in turn, creates a distinct critical/political consciousness which would be rooted in the ideals of mutual tolerance and respect towards every possible differences, society is constitutive of. Second, though the Indian university is a public funded institution, and is committed to the cause of public welfare, it

hardly conforms to the public sentiments, which in many of the cases, are either perpetually prejudiced or are brainwashed by the fanatic beliefs of the fundamentalist organizations. On the contrary, the university seeks to replace the superstitious public beliefs with scientific reasoning, and bigotry with secular political consciousness. It is this renewed collective consciousness of the public rooted in critical thinking, which the university aspires to achieve as a public institution of higher learning.

The novel further explores how these right-wing intellectuals' espousal of what Shiv Visvanathan sees as "...the banalization of knowledge and its bowdlerization" (Visvanathan, ed. Apoorvanand 64), also manifests itself through physical assault on their secular counterparts, where the university space could metamorphose into a battleground of conflicting ideologies. After having been confronted by his colleagues such as Menon, Amita, and Shiv over his controversial statement, when Arya and Dr. Lal fail to hold onto their grounds with dialogic reason, "Arya has pounced on him (Shiv) and has him by the collar" (ITS 127). This untoward expression of misdirected anger in an academic meeting corroborates the textual satire on the loss of academic culture in the Indian universities, where the difference of opinion between the faculty members could culminate into a war-like situation that is very much unbecoming to the democratic and dialogic ethos of the university. The head's humble plea, "Please, let's remember we are in the university, not on the street" (ITS, 127), so as to restore normalcy in the department reiterates the text's concern with academia's vulnerability against the current state-controlled threat on its dialogic ethos. In a way, the examples of Dr. Arya and Dr. Lal discursively engage with Edward Said's critique of an intellectual's digression from the commitment towards "standards of truth about human misery and oppression (due to his/her) party affiliation, national background, and primeval loyalties" (ibid. xii). He further adds, "Nothing disfigures the intellectual's public performance as much as trimming, careful silence, patriotic bluster, and retrospective and self- dramatizing apostasy" (ibid. xiii).

What *In Times of Siege* as a representative Indian campus novel, aims to question here is, how the overpowering nature of right wing interventions into the academic affairs of the university could so thoroughly terrify the academic community that the university is left with nothing but complying with the anti-intellectual demands, those are detrimental to its academic growth. Following the pressure and premeditated ‘militantism’, the university’s withdrawal of the lesson is symptomatic of the compromise with its teleological autonomy. A newspaper report reads: “In a controversial move, the Kasturba Gandhi Central University has asked its students to return a booklet of lessons on medieval Indian history... The university authorities denied that asking their correspondence students to return the material amounted to meeting the demands of the Manch (ITS 89). This report is suggestive of the university’s double departure from its pursuit of truth and knowledge. One is by a passive submission to the demands, thereby the ‘post-truth’ assumptions of the Hindutva ideology with the history of the nation, and, second, by a diplomatic denial of the threat posed by the Manch.

In a secular democratic country, a university is bestowed with the noble task of social reformation while carefully reaffirming some of the social hierarchies. To work on the holistic goal of social transformation through education, which is contingent upon the vindication of ideas of social justice, equal rights, unmasking of social stereotypes and discursive traces of repression by the power center, the university and its academic community require a relative academic freedom and institutional autonomy from the external political compulsions. Furthermore, the university’s role in reaffirmation of certain social hierarchies involves a belaboring intellectual endeavor of a critical re-examination of all the possible hierarchies to decide upon which are more congenial to the socialist and secular foundations of a social system. Etymologically speaking, the studies in humanities and social sciences, which are laden with an ethical responsibility of bringing out the unsettling truths of social segregation, human suffering and oppression are ought to be critical of the hegemonic disposition of the state.

Therefore, the concept of reproduction of knowledge in these disciplines, which is essentially iconoclastic in nature tends to re-assert those alternate regime(s) of truth, which are more empathetic towards safeguarding the rights of the marginalized sections and strive for equal rights and social justice. This quest for parallel truth also evinces a renewed historical engagement with the past, so as to dissect the discursive traces of multiple divides embedded in the dominant traditions and cultural/religious beliefs.

India has a conflictual past, where its indigenous traditions are replete with traces of social stratifications and naturalization of different stereotypes combined with an exertion of cultural hegemony. Within the democratic rubric of the post-independence nationhood, the Indian University's status as a public institution and a democratic site for critical learning reify its imperative role in upholding the image of an egalitarian social order to the public, and infusing a distinct political/intellectual consciousness through academic engagements. A humanities or social science scholar, whose research interests are centered on Indian polity, culture, or history needs to be conversant with the differences in Indian society, and the discontinuities in the official rhetoric of Indian history or culture. His/her quest for truth calls for a critical engagement with the liminal junctures of ideological conditioning embedded in our cultures and traditions, in order to foster a distinct critical consciousness based on the democratic ideals of social justice, equality and mutual respect towards differences etc. It is this idea of subversive truth which seeks to upend the oppressive power hierarchies and to redress the social problems through scholarly productions, also reasserts the humanistic and transformative potential of the university in its pursuit of knowledge.

Since society with all its paraphernalia are subject to constant change, the knowledge, the university and its academic community aim to impart is essentially a dynamic process. Following Freirean principles on knowledge production, it could be argued that academic's dialectical engagement with an ensemble of discourses and ideas, or with social problems and

phenomenon in its pursuit of knowledge and re-assertion of ‘alternate regimes of truth’ is an incomplete project and is always in the process of “becoming” (Freire and Shor, 1987; Horton and Freire, 1990). Referring to the dynamics of university’s relation with truth and knowledge, Shiv’s lesson on Basavanna, or the fictional references of other intellectual and cultural productions as stated above could be read as intellectuals’ problematization of the fissures and silences in our history as well as traditions, which also corresponds to the university’s manifold intellectual and social responsibilities. The shifting paradigms of power equations in the post-globalization India, and rise of the politics of polarization further corroborate the university’s active role in social reformation by questioning the incongruities in the state-endorsed ideology and the dominant discourses. The question of being critical of the state sets up newer challenges for the university to safeguard its status as a democratic, dialogic, and self-reflexive public space for critical and free thinking. Thus, it is through the university’s gradual distancing from its pursuit of truth and knowledge, as evidenced in its scrapping of Shiv’s course on medieval Indian history, what this narrative intends to problematize is, how such state-sponsored atrocities could gradually dispossess the Indian university of its intellectual and political consciousness, those are inherent to its reason of existence.

Extending the premise of the ‘signpost university’ in the last chapter, I contend that, when the belaboring process of knowledge production and critical learning are replaced by standardized knowledge endorsed by the state, and rote learning, the idea of the university as a site for critical thinking also metamorphoses into a platform for “depoliticized pedagogy” (Giroux, “Pedagogy of the depressed: Beyond the new politics of cynicism” 5). For Giroux, the idea of “depoliticized pedagogy” is predicated upon two primary assumptions, i.e. stripping “students of any sense of critical and social agency (that) cuts across the ideological spectrum” (ibid. 5), and education as a commodity. Though, this standardization of knowledge enables the state to retain its political/cultural hegemony by producing docile, submissive subjects, it

could bring havoc upon the academia's intellectual potential and integrity by disengaging it from its pursuit of truth and knowledge, and curtailing its freedom in teaching and research. The head's apparently pro-rightist suggestion to Shiv not to involve in further scuffle with the fundamentalist group, though belittles the credibility of higher education, is symptomatic of academic's fear-driven resignation to the state's agenda of 'academic docilization'. He says, "We are here...to standardize knowledge...And besides, who has this lesson been written for? The readers are only BA students" (ITS 70). This drive of producing educated, docile individuals by standardizing the parameters of knowledge (re)production as per the demands of the state, and disseminating it through institutionalized learning could sound the death knell for the university's critical and dialogical ethos.

Critiquing distance education, 'commoditized learning' and the university's departure from critical consciousness

When higher education disengages itself from its disinterested objective criticism of social problems and practices, and the idea of knowledge and academic excellence get reduced to the level of acquisition of certain skills and information, the image of the university that stems from such pedagogic practices is that of a factory image aiming at the mass production of skilled professionals and shaping of social adaptability. Taking on the second attribute of Giroux' 'depoliticized pedagogy', the novel also discursively engages with the treatment of education as commodity in distance learning, and the university space as a market place which thrives upon awarding degrees against monetary considerations. The contrasting pictures of the two university campuses in the first chapter of the novel, as manifest in the delineation of the KNU campus as "...a vibrant island of green", and that of KGU as "arid stretches" are indicative of a laconic fictional critique of the distance education in India and the question of intellectual indigence. By situating KGU (modeled on IGNOU), which "...has been assigned the responsibility to coordinate the distance learning system in the country and determine its

standards” (NPE, 1986 50)”, at the center of its literary re-imagination of an ensuing crisis of academic mediocrity in the Indian universities, this novel voices a concern over the overall quality of education in the Indian Open Universities.

Distance education in India is a western import. The history of distance learning in the West divulges a rhizomatic narrative of its growth across the previous two centuries. Though, different universities such as the London University, or the University of Chicago started offering correspondence courses to their students in the late 19th century, distance education as a legitimate pedagogic practice with the establishment of open universities began in 1963, as argued by Hillary Perraton in his book *Open and Distance Learning in the Developing World* (2005). It is in this year, Perraton contends, a series of events, including the Robbins Report on Higher Education (1963) prepared the bedrock for the proliferation of distance learning in later decades (Perraton, 2005). In an edited volume on distance learning, Hillary Perraton and Keith Harry (2003) situate the pressing need and the concomitant rise of distance learning almost across the globe within the shifting paradigms of society and economy of the global north and the south with the expansion of the market economy, as well as the changing political structure of the world. In the first world countries, it was modernization, along with concomitant rise of late capitalism, which necessitated the demand for higher education for a larger number of population, eventually culminated in the non-conventional expansion of higher education through correspondence learning. But, in the developing nations from the global south, they contend, there is an added component of an increasing need for educated professionals for better performance of the public sector (Perraton and Harry, 2003).

In the third world countries, the governments have started reckoning with this concept of distance learning, or correspondence education as a convenient medium for democratization of higher education primarily for two intersecting reasons. First, unlike the conventional mode of university education, distance learning is much cost-effective and flexible in its approach

towards education, as it is far less dependent on the physical infrastructure of the university, or the library facilities, and ushers in an altogether new approach of correspondence education mostly through circulation of study materials and minimal number of interactive sessions at different centers. And second, its departure from regular classroom teaching-learning allows it to reach out to a larger section of people, who find it difficult to enroll into regular university courses for several constraints. Adding to their earlier assumptions on the unprecedented growth of distance education in both the developed and developing countries, H. Perraton further argued that the development of science and technology also expedited the growth of distance education. But, the expansion of higher education in the form of distance learning is not beyond contradictions and calls into question the quality and purpose of education (2005).

India too has significantly responded to this non-conventional mode of university education beyond the boundaries of classroom or laboratory based learning. Distance education in India began with the University of Delhi's pilot project of correspondence courses in 1962. Following the initiative of the Delhi University, various other Indian public universities also opened centers for distance education. In 1985, the foundation of the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) marks India's formal entry into the arena of open education. The emerging concept of the Open University and distance education also find a place in the National Policy of Education 1986. Its blueprint of the expansion of open education emphasized the need for further dissemination of distance education by building up new open universities in close association with IGNOU, and by bolstering the human and intellectual resources across the open universities in the country. The growing societal and economic demand for educated individuals and skilled professionals followed by the initiatives and technological advancement, spurred the development of distance education in India. The statistics of its success rate also testifies that the distance education program in India has been diligently carrying out its primary objective of mass education.

But the expansion of Open University education in India, and its increasing gross enrolment ratio (GER) shed light on a number of oft mooted questions entailing the quality and purpose of education in distance learning. By drawing inferences from a wide range of criticism on distance education, H. Perraton inquires through a set of incisive markers to examine the pros and cons of distance learning in developing countries (2005). Despite the speedy growth of correspondence education since the late twentieth century, Perraton argues that, these neoteric developments in the university education of the developing countries divulge a sordid tale "...of teaching without resources, of libraries without journals, of the desperate pursuit of research without equipment. Quality has inevitably suffered as education has been impoverished" (*Open and Distance Learning in the Developing World* 5). By extending the critique of the quality of education in distance learning, he further connects the question of academic standards in correspondence education with efficaciousness and its socio-economic consequences.

Perraton's dialectical comparison between the waning standards of distance education in the developing nations and its incremental departure from its academic and social objectives, which is quite homologous with the disjunctions in the project of distance education in India, demands further critical investigation of the whole idea of mass education and critical awareness through distance learning. Complying with the cardinal questions on the problematics of distance education in India, *In Times of Siege* (2003) in my reading, develops its discursive critique of open education in India essentially by drawing upon three assumptions of the shifting paradigms of teacher-student relation, dismaying teacher-student ratio, and standardization of knowledge. Thus, by placing KGU at the center of the fictional satire on the right-wing state's baneful influence over the intellectual ethos of the university, this work of fiction demonstrates a gritty narrative of the university's departure from its pursuit of truth and critical learning.

The head's denigration of the intellectual standards of the undergraduates and his discontent further imply a discursive critique of the paradigms of correspondence education in India. Adding on to the head's terse criticism of the intellectual crisis in Indian higher education, the third person narrator chips in with a pithy remark: "He does not say 'only correspondence students', though the thought crosses his mind" (ITS 70). What this novel is critical about the question of open learning in India, is the paradigm shift in the standards of the student-teacher relationship, i.e. from an organic, mutually rewarding one to a more target based client-server relationship, which owes much to the modalities of academic exchanges in distance education. On another occasion, the third person narrator's succinct portrayal of Shiv's sense of dissatisfaction with his academic duties is indicative of the text's implicit criticism of the degradation in the paradigms of teacher-student relationship. The narrator observes: "He no longer teaches students; as his department head likes to put it, he coordinates resources for his educational clients" (ITS 4). By treating students as "educational clients", and teachers as the service providers, what open learning paves the way for, as the text suggests, is commercialization of education.

This terse fictional critique of the degradation in the student-teacher relationship further indicates a parallel lack of dialogic learning in distance education, as it doesn't hinge upon regular classroom teaching and intellectual interactions within the academic community. Despite its claim for democratization of education, it could be argued, correspondence education in many ways, undermines the university's contribution towards critical learning and shaping of 'organic intellectuals'. Through this epigrammatic narration of the devolution of higher education into a rudimentary level of mere circulation of study materials among the students without adequate mutual interactions between teachers and students in classroom, or around the campus, what this novel intends to problematize is the metamorphoses of distance learning universities into a platform for rote learning. This absence of dialectical engagement

with the subject through frequent critical exchanges and accessibility to the vast intellectual resources of the university, which are endemic to distance learning in India, owe much to the waning status of student community as passive receivers of knowledge.

Furthering the critique of distance learning in India and its incremental departure from the question of critical pedagogy, the novel also brings into light the dismal teacher-student ratio in these open learning universities augmenting the intellectual predicament of distance education in India. On the pretext of a faculty meeting, the third person narrator's brief account of the number of professors in the department aptly underlines the satire on this deplorable picture of student-teacher ratio in these universities. The department only consists of six faculty members- Professor Sharma, the head, Shiv, "...Lal, Arya, Menon and Amita Sen. The core faculty, processors of historical resources for their unseen students" (ITS 14). Apart from the earlier assumptions on campus fiction's critique of underfunding and inadequate recruitment in higher education sector, what is further problematic here is, when a handful of professors are burdened with an awkward task of educating a large number of students through open learning, it also diminishes the prospect of higher education's symbiotic relation with its direct practitioners and the society, as a whole. And with this, it could be plausibly argued that, the idea of mass education through correspondence courses could be reduced to mere mass literacy programs, where the university's role is virtually restricted to the circulation of censored and standardized study materials, as evidenced in the whole furor over Shiv's lesson, and awarding of degrees to the half-educated learners. Probably, while questioning the drive of inclusivity in Indian higher education, André Beteille had in his mind the question of intellectual indigence in the distance university education in India as well (Beteille, 2015). Therefore, taking on Beteille's concern over the 'loss of academic excellence' in the Indian public universities, the textual expression of students as "unseen", and an analogy between professors and computer processors, which are emblematic of a fictional polemic against the deteriorating standards of

teacher-student relation, could also be read as the novelistic disquiet over the gradual move towards rote learning, and the subsequent departure of the university and its academic community from their pursuit of truth and knowledge.

A university campus is the meeting point of people from diverse communities and different social, cultural, or economic background in their common pursuit of knowledge. This melting pot of different cultures, traditions, and customs encourage learning through association and interactions between these heterogeneous groups of people, which is constitutive of its academic community. It is this quality of dialogism on the campus, which enables its academic community to build up and retain an organic relation amongst themselves, and also with the larger society. The classroom teaching and learning, as well as interpersonal interactions between the teachers and students also uphold this spirit of dialogic exchanges, which in turn, enable the university in opening up newer vistas of knowledge through collective efforts. Thus, the sense of organic unity, democratic relations, interactive learning, a distinct sense of critical/political consciousness, which define the campus life in a nutshell, all fall into place in shaping and harnessing of the ‘specific intellectual’, as Foucault names it. An intellectual who should not only be problematizing the social injustices, discriminations, prejudices, traces of bigotry, or the repressive state machineries in his/her academic research, but, should also be empathetic towards the rights of the marginalized sections, and should be vindicating these ‘alternate regimes of truth’ within the boundaries of academia, as well as outside it. Responding to the multiplex relation, the university campus develops with its stakeholders, and its lasting impression on the psyche of them, Pankaj Chandra (2017) has identified this mutual interdependence, and the ideological influence of the university campus as the ‘invisibles’ of the campus. He observes:

There are invisibles in a campus that shape the mind, heart, and behavior of those who walk its pathways. The intent of the university and the depth of its

audacity, the beliefs and lecture halls that become sharper and more compassionate with age, the books that teach you to be courageous in your thought and tempered in your action, and those that have left to never go away are all some of the invisibles at the university (11).

But the image of the university campus which is analogous to distance education is that of an abstract entity, that neither fosters self-reflection, nor dialogic enquiry through its academic endeavors. It might have apparently contributed to the government's policy of mass education and democratization of higher education, so as to fill the public sectors with educated professionals, or to respond to the growing demand of the market economy. Contrary to the official rhetoric of the success rate in distance education, what this novel finds problematic in this supposed democratization of higher education, is the reification of the state's agenda of production of docile citizens. While the right-wing state machineries attempt to co-opt the university's goal of cultivating critical or political consciousness amongst its residents by repression of its secular, democratic culture, and by their personnel from within the system, distance education on the other hand, sabotages the university's imperative role in the shaping of critical citizenship, and advancement of learning from within, as evidenced in the textual demonstration of the devaluation of academic merit and values of the university. The ever-increasing gross enrollment ratio (GER), and the simultaneous upward curve in the pass rate of the students in distance education in spite of the shortages in intellectual and human resources, are not just inimical to the intellectual ethos of the university, but could alter the public perception on the university as a socially inclusive space for exclusivist academic excellence. The crisis of academic standards and the ambiguity around the high success rate in the distance education, compared to its regular counterpart, further expose the utilitarian motif of the state, as well as the university, exercised through manipulation of higher education in order to augment their economic return.

As the fictional evidences suggest, this gradual distancing of correspondence education from critical learning, while insisting on increasing its GER, could eventually result in turning the university into a commercialized place, where both education and academic degrees are capital bound. The consumer culture, which gradually permeates the distance education in India, the text apprehends, could mutate the idea of education from a ‘public good’ to a ‘private good’. Therefore, it is through the adept storytelling of the bilateral attack on the critical and democratic ethos of the university, *In Times of Siege* discursively unpacks how the recent crisis of the Indian university education are in consonance with Giroux’s sustained critique of the neo-liberal invasion of higher education as a corollary of globalization in his theory of ‘depoliticized pedagogy’.

Changing paradigms of the middle class consciousness since globalization, and waning academic morale in technological education: A select fictional reading

By building upon these liminal spaces in the fictional imagination of the predicament of Indian Open universities in the post-globalization era, the novel also contains a laconic critique of the dwindling humanistic values in the technical education as well. Apart from the two dominant, competing narratives of the Hindutva watchdog organization’s strategic assault on the university’s teleological autonomy, and the intellectual mediocrity of Indian open learning universities, a parallel sub-narrative also traverses across the fictional space consisting of Tara, Shiv’s daughter. Tara who is a tech graduate has migrated to USA with a lucrative job in one of the multinational corporations. What the novel intends to examine through Tara’s example, is how the two primary attributes of ‘depoliticized pedagogy’ could also be symptomatic of the lack of historical or political consciousness visible among a significant section of Indian students from the technical institutions.

The terse fictional critique of the professional education and the praxes of depoliticized learning as an inescapable offshoot of neoliberal influences in higher education is implicit

enough in brief references to Tara's earlier conversations with Shiv over the relevance of historical research in academia. In the wake of the political ban on Shiv's module on Basavanna, Shiv's reminiscence of an earlier conversation between him and his daughter reveals her ignorance with the conflicts and social divisions emblematic of our past and native traditions, whose baneful influences could still be felt in the present-day India. "What does it matter one way or the other? It all happened long ago, didn't it? Only professors are obsessed with the details. The rest of us only need to know enough to be proud of our past" (ITS 166). Extending the text's elliptical critique of technical education and its practice of 'depoliticized pedagogy', the narrator further observes, "His daughter Tara's message remains consistent to her principled indifference to making a fuss over principles" (ITS 166).

These intermittent textual details of Tara's ignorance or lack of critical awareness with the social problems in India, and her primary concern with the material well-being and upward mobilization are indicative of a 'depoliticized citizenry', which owes much to the pervasive neoliberal influences in the professional education, especially since globalization. Furthering his critique of neoliberal model of education and the legitimization of "depoliticized pedagogy", Henry Giroux argues that, such conscious denial of academic values in education rubs shoulders with a simultaneous debasement of citizenship values. He contends (2001):

Central to the rise of a depoliticized citizenry marked by apathy and cynicism is the emergence of a view of education in which schools are defined as a private rather than a public good. This emergent view of education is clearly complicitous with the mounting vocationalization of public and higher education. In addition, it makes a strong claim for pedagogical practices that venerate political disinterestedness while fostering modes of aesthetic analysis that celebrate a retreat into private experience at the expense of critical inquiry and a social engagement with public life (ibid. 4-5).

Placing the character of Tara and Giroux' reservations against the neoliberal culture of education in tandem would bring to the fore another marker of discursive textual departure from the 'mercantilization' of higher education in the post-globalization era with the mushrooming of private institutions for technical education across the country. The implied analogy between the sad reality of professional education in the 'New India' and Giroux' critique of the commercialization of higher education adds a new dimension to the fictional satire on the contemporary crises of Indian higher education. This succinct critique of the paradigms of technical education in the early twenty-first century, and the disavowal of its commitment towards truth and critical knowledge prepares the ground for a further inquiry on socio-cultural and economic factors constitutive of this materialistic turn and their unpleasant reflections on the social lives and relations.

The modern Indian university as a liberal-democratic institution foregrounds the assumptions of dialogism and dialectical reasoning in its endeavor of (re)production of knowledge through critical learning. These qualities of dialogic and democratic relations between the members of the university corroborate the role of the university in upholding the elements of social justice, equality, and communal harmony through its academic and scholarly engagements. But on the other hand, professional education under the influence of neoliberal ideology prioritizes the question of material benefits over its moral and social responsibilities, thereby thwarting the education's claim for a distinct sense of critical citizenship rooted in problematization of social injustices and assertion of egalitarian values. Neither this commercialized higher education espouses the liberal-socialist ideals of the Indian university, as they could destabilize the different hierarchies and existing power relations in a capitalist framework, nor does it endorse a symbiotic relation between higher education and its beneficiaries.

Responding to the debate around the technological education's growing inclination towards neoliberal assumptions of 'depoliticized pedagogy' and 'depoliticized citizenry', a wide range of post-millennial Indian campus novels set out to investigate the academic reality of the elite public institutions for professional education or "technocratic universities" as Bill Readings has termed it (1997). Drawing references from the introductory chapter, I contend that, these novels having been primarily set along the campuses of IITs (Indian Institute of Technology) and IIMs (Indian Institute of Management), seek to unpack how such materialistic turn in higher education, which Githa Hariharan has been critical about in her novel, also engulfs the teaching-learning scenario of these elite technical institutions. Unlike the familiar trend of looking into the elements of campus life and the question of higher education from the lens of the professors, these novels present an altogether different approach of emplacing the experiences of the students at the locus of their fictional investigation of the invisible presence of neoliberal ideology in the academic paraphernalia of technical institutions. It is through detailing of students' lives, these novels delve into the contentious assumptions pertaining to academic performance and excellence in this increasingly commercialized fabric of technical education.

The select novels, Chetan Bhagat's *Five Point Someone* (2004) and Amitabha Bagchi's *Above Average* (2007), are set in the IIT Delhi in the early twenty first century. Both the novels are written in first person narrative, and it is through the narration of the protagonist in *Above Average*, and one of the major characters in *Five Point Someone*, they draw their student-centric fictional narratives on the nuances of IIT life. The first person narration of events in both the texts subtly draws upon the linguistic and cultural 'heteroglossia'^{ix}, a work of fiction and a university campus usually espouse. These two fictional works come under the new sub-category of post-millennial Indian campus fiction set in professional institutions. Though, they build their narratives around the popular middle class aspirations, and also supposedly cater to

the popular tastes, or the mainstream cultural aesthetics, the fictional demonstrations of the academic culture of the IIT unravel a discursive critique of the incongruities in the technical education.

What these two novels intend to critique about the IIT education is neither the quality of it nor the question of excellence and the rigor required to attain an IIT degree, but a gradual commodification of academic excellence with the incursion of neoliberal ideology within the academic space. In my reading, the portrayal of campus life and the treatment of the characters in these two campus novels are analogous to David Daiches' (1997) analyses of the rise of the novel, "as an essentially middle class form of literary art" (1049) in the Victorian England. For Daiches, the Victorian novelists (mostly the canonical ones), by presenting a relatable fictional simulation of the lived reality to their ordinary readers, "...often created complexes of symbolic meaning that reached far deeper than the superficial pattern of social action suggested to the casual reader..." (ibid. 1049). In a similar vein, these two novels symbolically intervene with the problem of corporatization of public-funded technical education in the postmillennial India, and a subsequent degradation in academic values, not by an overt criticism of the materialistic discourses, but by defamiliarized narratives of the lived experiences of campus life. Upon reading these texts, though "the ordinary reader may have had the illusion that, what he was reading was kind of a journalism, a transcript of life, as it was happening around him without the modifying effect of literary form and imagination" (ibid. 1049), a critical reading would rather uncover a deeper dialectical relation between the narratives and the collective unconscious of the IIT campus.

Amitabha Bagchi's *Above Average* (2008) deftly employs the first person narration of its protagonist Arindam in its endeavor of writing a coming-of-age narrative surrounding his student life at the IIT Delhi, and later on as a research scholar in a foreign university. Unlike *Five Point Someone*, this novel follows a non-linear recursive narrative structure, where the

frequent references to Arindam's past signify a prominent textual intention of looking at the past as a scaffolding for his present actions and life-choices. The consistent interchanges between the past and the present has been instrumental in accommodating intersecting, yet competing narratives of middle class aspiration, friendship and rivalry, materialistic dreams of his fellow IITians, the incremental presence of neoliberal ideology, and his individualist resistance against such neoliberal aggression. This fictional polyphony of multiple narratives help building up a life-like portrayal of the academic life of such premier institutions such as IIT in the post-globalization era.

The structure and the content of *Above Average*, which resemble with these of 'bildungsroman', evolve around the academic journey of its protagonist – a saga of his intellectual endeavors starting from his preparation for IIT entrance examination and ending with joining his alma mater as a lecturer. Drawing inferences from Richard G. Caram's term of 'Professorromane' in his essay on the lives of professors in select American fiction (1980), Elaine Showalter has developed this term further in her definition of a set of Western campus fiction written in the twentieth century on the lives of the professors in academia, and the stories of their growing up. Taking cue from Showalter's hypotheses, I contend that, since this piece of fictional work chronicles the pluralistic experiences of Arindam as a student, and is located within the temporal framework of the formative years of his life, it could be termed as an exemplary work of Indian *Studentromane*.

In India, the rising popularity of professional education is almost synonymous with the liberalization of economy since 1991, and the resultant changes in the social, cultural and economic paradigms of the nation. Along with this, a parallel shift in the consciousness, aspirations and the dynamics of composition of the middle class expedited the process of burgeoning growth of professional education, often at the expense of the quality of learning. The Indian middle class is not a homogenous category, and the essential heterogeneity of its

socio-cultural constitutions further complicates the process of a comprehensive definition of this intermediary class. The diverse community of Indian middle class could be classified into two broad sub-categories- the ‘elite fraction’, and the ‘mass fraction’. Drawing inferences from Gramscian analyses of ‘class’ and their distinctive qualities, various critics have time and again emphasized the crucial role played by the middle class in formulation of social and political hegemony and facilitating the growth of the post-colonial nation (Sridharan, 2004; Fernandes and Heller, 2006). While, the “elite fraction of the middle class specializes in the production of ideologies...its mass fraction engages in the exemplary consumption of ideologies thus investing them with social legitimacy” (Deshpande as qtd. in Sridharan 408). Contrary to the formative principles of the upper and lower class, and their performative dynamics, “...the middle class derives its power from cultural and educational capital, (and) it actively engages in hoarding and leveraging its accumulated privileges and in reproducing social distinctions” (Fernandes and Heller 496-497).

With the globalization, and an unprecedented influx of transnational capital in the Indian market, the economic reality of the country has gradually started moving towards increasing privatization by strategically desisting from the welfare economic model. The shrinking public sectors and their subsequent departure from the socialist foundations are also marked by an analogous shift in the matrices of cultural and educational capital of the nation. In such transitional times, when India was at the cusp of economic liberalization, the middle class has rightly identified the shifting trajectory of the nation’s economic and cultural capital – from a socialist and democratic structure towards a corporatized one that is rooted in private-public partnership. The unparalleled expansion of the market economy and the booming multinational industries generate a ceaseless demand for efficient white collared employees equipped with technical and managerial knowledge. Since the sustenance of this transnational capitalism is contingent upon skilled and educated professionals, it accelerated the growth of

technical education in the country. And, a large section of the Indian middle class upon realizing the increasing demand for tech graduates in this expanding market economy, gradually turn their attention towards the emerging sector of technical education by leaving behind their earlier aspirations for academic degrees offered by the universities. Professional education and its close ties with the capitalist ideology of thriving market economy have persuaded the middle class to switch their attention towards this relatively new branch of education, as it could prove to be more conducive for their upward mobilization and financial affluence.

The quintessential position of the public-funded; elite institutions, such as IIT, NIT and IIM among others, in the field of professional education made them the bullseye of the aspiring middle class of the post-liberalization India. The overwhelming success stories of their students, mostly measured by the highly remunerative jobs in multinational agencies further cemented their pivotal position. Amitabha Bagchi's *Above Average* (2008), while narrating the starting point of its protagonist Arindam's dream of studying in IIT, subtly brings up this shifting middle class aspirations with the economic liberalization. The narrator deftly observes:

I must have decided at some point in my school that I should try to get into one of the IITs. But, when I made that decision, if I ever made it consciously, I could never remember. It was not my parents...it was not my teachers...It may have been the people I studied with, it may have been the friends I played cricket with in the government colony we lived in before we moved to Mayur Vihar. It could have been anyone, or it could have been no one in particular (Bagchi 11; henceforth AA, page number).

Arindam's self-rumination over the possible influences of the external factors behind his ambition for joining IIT for higher studies is suggestive of the ever-growing interest of a particular section of the urban/semi-urban middle class in the promising field of technical

education. Arindam who belongs to a middle class family, clearly embodies the emerging middle class aspiration for professional education. The allusion to his classmates and playmates from the government colony, or the final assertion of an invisible presence of a collective influence of people from the similar social strata are paradigmatic of the ideological shift in the middle class' perception of educational and cultural capital.

Enlarging on the hypotheses of the paradigm shift in the urban/semi-urban Indian middle class' perception on education, and a contemporaneous turn in the evaluation of academic excellence based on elevation in one's social position or material accomplishment, Arindam's friend, Kartik's story further elucidates the multi-layered familial and societal pressure which are at work behind this new generation learners' unrelenting desire to outperform their previous generation at least by the material standards, if not the ideological one. The narrator observes:

He (Kartik) would often talk about how his father was the first PhD in their community, the first man from his village to become a college professor. But his children were to take it even further...His brother was studying in the US. He had almost won the President's Gold Medal in his time and was now studying business at Wharton...Kartik's project was to demonstrate success on a much larger scale than his father or his elder siblings; his project was to show them and the community how high one man could rise (AA 119).

His passion for higher studies, which is driven by an absurd imaginary rivalry also involving his family members, and not by the pursuit of knowledge is further indicative of baneful influences of neoliberalism on higher education, where, the material goal oriented education can altogether alter the academic and social values endemic to university education. Furthermore, this changing dynamics of professional education in 'New India', instead of

redressing the social problems and bridging the social divides, engender newer markers of social divisions predicated upon renewed class interests.

Chetan Bhagat's *Five Point Someone* (2004) tells the story of three friends- Hari, Alok, and Ryan which unfolds over their stay at the campus of IIT Delhi as undergraduate students of mechanical engineering. The novel which is written in a linear narrative, hinges upon the subjective observation vis-à-vis self-reflections of Hari around his student life at IIT. The linear narration of their experiences which spans around four years of their B.Tech. Degree program entails a detailed fictional demonstration of their hostel life, the classroom experiences and tremendous pressure of IIT education, interpersonal interactions, campus placement, and campus romance, in short, the pluralistic composition of IIT life. The heteroglossia evident enough in the careful placement of diverse viewpoints of the residents of the campus, which adds up to the realistic fervor of the text, also demonstrates a distinct fictional critique of the academic environment at the IIT. This fictional critique of technical education is also marked by a discursive attempt of bringing about an analogy between the 'mercantilization' of technical education and the shifting middle class aspirations.

Like Bagchi, Bhagat's *Five Point Someone* (2004), while underlining the middle class dream around the emerging sector of technological education, further draws attention to the active participation of the "mass fraction", or the lower middle class, who start envisioning an IIT degree as a gateway to economic empowerment, as manifest in the case of Alok. The first person narrative of Hari indicates the financial precarity of Alok's family, where her mother who is a schoolteacher "...was the only earning member...and half her salary regularly went to support her husband's medical treatment" (Bhagat 13; henceforth FPS, page number).

Responding to this phenomenal changes in the definition of academic credentials and efficaciousness of higher education among the middle class, Shalini Punjabi surveys ten middle class families in order to understand how these dynamic and contingent needs of the middle

class around tertiary education eventually engender a network of “shadow education” comprising an ensemble of coaching centers for the highly competitive IIT joint entrance examination which have lately sprouted mostly in the urban and semi-urban India (Punjabi, 2022). The description of IIT study circle “...in the Tamil School inside Lodi Estate...(where) people are milling around the school gate” (AA 9), or his admission in ‘Agrawals Classes’, a private coaching center dedicated to IIT entrance test indicate how the shifting paradigms of first generation middle class’ (the stakeholders of public sectors, as well as the medium and small scale enterprises) academic aspirations with the advent of economic liberalization are coeval with a simultaneous rise in the ‘shadow education’ in the urban and semi-urban India.

Taking this assumption of ‘shadow education’ further, *Above Average* also unfolds, how an analogous relation between the success rate of some of the coaching centers and their hefty tuition fees reproduces certain social hierarchies, which also effectively encompasses the student community. The conversation between Arindam, Bagga, and Karun on the preparation for the IIT entrance test which records their disquiet over the tough competition also exemplify subjective/collective concern over status quo and their individual position in the shifting paradigms of social hierarchies. The examples of Bagga and Karun further extend the textual critique of almost an obsession conspicuous among a section of the middle class with the professional education as a ready platform for upward mobilization, as manifest in the cases of Kartik and Alok.

In their discussion over what difference ten percent of marks could bring in the lives of the aspirants, Bagga’s remark of it “...can be the difference between Computer Science in Kanpur and Electrical in Bombay” (AA 13), and Karun’s addition of “Or Mechanical in Kharagpur and Metallurgy in BHU” (AA 13) could be indicative of how the new middle class generation is keen to take hold of the country’s educational capital in its pursuit of their material and social well-being. In *Above Average*, Arindam and his friends such as Bagga, Karun,

Kartik, Neeraj, or Rakesh, and in Bhagat's *Five Point Someone*, the characters of Hari, Ryan, Alok, Venkat, and others, who are constitutive of the 'new middle class', and mostly represent the second generation learners, or the third to an extent, and as the fictional narratives suggest, a significant portion of the new generation middle class learners tend to redefine the social hierarchy according to the shifting standards of the market economy. These characters from varied financial backgrounds constitutive of the Indian middle class, and the recurring textual references of their materialistic assumptions around academic degrees have been instrumental in laying the foundations for further fictional inquiry into professional education and its developing allegiance towards neoliberal agencies.

At this juncture, it is quite pertinent to ask what neoliberalism is, and how is it detrimental to the moral and democratic foundations of the university as well as its call for critical pedagogy? Neoliberalism is foregrounded on an anti-welfare model of perceiving every individual as consumers and stakeholders of the market, and almost all the social institutions and actions as potential commodity, or platform for the proliferation of the 'shareholder economy'. This strategic neoliberal takeover of the public institutions is also marked by a further degeneration of moral values and democratic life with the shifting power hegemony from the nation-state to the hands of private multinational corporations. The rise of neoliberalism which is coterminous with the economic liberalization "...is simultaneously understood as an ideology, a mode of governance, and a set of policies concerning deregulation, liberalization, and privatization of business" (Bulaitis 11). Responding to this pervasive range of neoliberal ideology, Wendy Brown has rightly observed (2005), "Neo-liberal rationality, while foregrounding the market, is not only or even primarily focused on the economy; rather it involves extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action, even as the market remains a distinctive player" (qtd. in Bulaitis, *ibid.* 11).

Why I find Brown's analyses relevant here, is because of Indian institutions for professional education and even the premier public institutions such as the IITs are being increasingly co-opted by the neoliberal ideology, and also being transformed into a platform for the surplus production of skilled manpower necessary for its expansion. The unfolding of the plots of both the novels gradually bring into discussion how the materialist discourses that permeate our domestic market and the psyche of the middle class at the wake of economic liberalization slowly enter the institutions of higher learning. The discursive fictional engagement with the extent of neoliberal influences upon the academic life of these elite technical institutes in the select Indian campus novels divulges a two-fold problematization of the academic culture of the IITs. First, both the fictional narratives seek to unearth the pervasive presence of neoliberal philosophy within the academic community which effectively encompasses the classroom teaching learning, and also reflects in the teachers' advices to the students regarding their future prospects. Another implicit critique as a possible corollary to the first assumption of the prevailing corporate culture in these institutions is constitutive of a distinct fictional concern over how these technical institutions are being increasingly stripped off their intellectual potential and ontological commitment towards critical pedagogy.

In *Five Point Someone*, Professor Dubey's valorization of the colossal academic workload in the IIT, followed by his set of instructions to his students to excel in their studies emphasize on the aspects of social adaptability and utilitarian interests, but not the scholarly pursuit of knowledge and critical learning. He alerts them by saying,

Remember, as your head of department Prof Cherian says, the tough workload is by design, to keep you on your toes. And respect the grading system. You get bad grades, and I assure you – you get no job, no school, and no future. If you do well, the world is your oyster. So, don't slip, not even once, or there will be no oyster, just slush (FPS 11).

The correlation between academic accomplishment and worldly pleasures, conspicuous in Dubey's suggestion to his students, in a way adheres to the neoliberal agenda of regulating the academic paraphernalia of the professional institutions to cater to the demand-supply chain of the market economy. His insistence on good academic record and its possible lucrative outcome is indicative of an institutional validation of the dominant middle class ideology of considering higher education as the most feasible platform for their upward economic mobility. But, what is further intriguing is the prevalent contradiction in his character, evident in his earlier suggestion of falling "...in love with the world around you...for you will become the masters of machines" (FPS 10). Unlike his previous warning, this advice is more of a humanistic one, which presses on the symbiotic relation between the campus and its student community. But unfortunately, neoliberalism doesn't uphold the organic relation between the academic institution and its subjects.

The essential disagreement between the two propositions of Professor Dubey is not an isolated incident. It is rather symptomatic of a larger dilemma, or the provocations of the Indian higher education in contemporary times. The question that comes forward is, whether these public funded elite institutions would be able to endure these overpowering neoliberal aggression and the dominant ideology of the market, so that to safeguard their academic values and manifold responsibility towards public welfare. Taking on the contemporary challenges of professional education, both the novels bring about ample evidences of how such predicament of these elite engineering colleges could divide their student community into several fractions over the ideological differences around the efficaciousness of higher education. In one of their regular hostel conversations, Ryan's question of "...how many great engineers or scientists have come out of IIT?" (FPS 340) was readily responded by Hari by equating scientists and engineers with "Many CEOs and entrepreneurs" (FPS 34). Adding on to Hari's statement, the conspicuous nonchalance in Alok's remark of "...who cares, I want to get the degree and land

a good job” (FPS 35) is not just evocative of the ideological differences between the students, but rather seeks to unfold the waning academic values caused by such ideological differences rooted in materialist philosophy.

In a similar tone, Arindam and Kartik’s tête-à-tête over their future plans locates a double edged fictional critique of this incremental consumerization of education. Upon hearing Arindam’s intention of ambition for a career in research, Kartik promptly cuts him short by interrupting “...You are a satti! Remember?... (and) Research is for naukkis and dassis. And even that is stupid, there’s no money in it unless you start a company or something” (AA 121). Taking along this populist assumption of professional education as a money spinning platform, his following assertion of “The more money you have, the more successful you are” (AA 121) is homologous with the perception of Hari and Alok from *Five Point Someone*. By underlining its student community’s adherence to the late-capitalist ideology of the market economy, what both the novels further intend to problematize is the categorization of academic performance, or academic grading as per the regulatory principles of neoliberalism.

The titles of the novels themselves are exemplary of a discursive fictional critique of the shifting parameters of academic grading in Indian academia with the wake of economic liberalization. This paradigm shift in the evaluative measures of the Indian institutions of higher learning, which owes much to the increasing ‘Americanization’ of our own liberal-democratic appropriation of the erstwhile Eurocentric modalities of academic distinction, brings with it a whole new approach of neoliberal corporatization of academic standards, vis-à-vis ethics. In a ten point grading system, those, who could hardly secure the lowest passing grade of five out of ten are labelled as “below average” (FPS 61) students, as evidenced in the case of Alok, Hari, and Ryan. In this era of ‘financialization’, it is the below average tag based on their grades in the examination, which is accountable for their marginalized status on the campus.

The title, “Five Point Someone” is emblematic of a discursive critique of the politics of discrimination in this Western import grading system, where the word ‘someone’ implies an authorial resentment over the professors’ and their own classmates’ unethical act of looking down upon the intellectual competence of the five pointers, unbefitting to the idea of academic competition/excellence. Taking cue from their examples, it could be rightly inferred that, since Arindam is a ‘seven pointer’, he has been clustered along the students just above the arbitrary marker of average grade of ‘six’, therefore the title “Above Average”. Whereas, the competitive relation between the students is instrumental to individual or collective growth of the institution, the discriminatory approach around the grading system at the professional institutions, and the IITs to be precise, stifles the creative-critical potential of the students. Instead of eradicating the social discordances by inculcating humanistic values within the learners by promoting democratic relations and academic values, this point based evaluation system creates newer social divides.

Kartik’s condescending tone which is manifest in his belittling of academic merits of those having lower grades, and his spurious comparison between the arbitrary grading system and academic research validates Alok’s apprehension of his bleak future prospects. His assumption that he has “...screwed up any chance of getting a US scholarship or a good job...” (FPS 61) is reminiscent of Professor Dubey’s warning in his inaugural lecture. Though Kartik and Dubey’s statements, or Alok’s discontent with his performance ascribe to the normative standards of academic excellence and also foreground the question of academic perseverance, these narratives intend to question the osmosis of neoliberal ideals which is ubiquitous to all of them. Drawing upon this dichotomy and the developing bond between higher education and the corporate sector, the texts further investigate how the concept of academic research are increasingly co-opted by the neoliberal ideology. In *Five Point Someone*, Ryan’s terse remark – “If there is value, the industry will pay for research even at IIT” (FPS 35) implies a

materialistic turn even in the academic research at such institutions. The notion of value here, doesn't signify the ontological values these institutions were supposed to impart through their academic engagements, rather it is exemplary of the teleological shift in the academic values in such institutions in the wake of globalization.

In the post-independence India, the technological Institutions of National Importance, such as the IITs were founded following the Nehruvian vision of facilitating the growth of engineering education in the newly independent nation, so that they could effectively contribute to the project of nation-building and modernization as well as achieve new heights in the fields of scientific and technological research. The journey which began with the inception of the first IIT at Kharagpur in 1951, has reached the present number of 23, with the IIT Goa as the latest member in the IIT fraternity. Over the years, the IITs have evolved as the premier institutions for technological education and have also left a significant impression on the public life and progress of the nation. The students who graduate from these IITs as well as the professors, through their individual and collective accomplishments set newer benchmarks of success, and have taken the brand image of the IIT to the global platform. Reflecting upon this multifarious role IIT plays in enriching the public and academic life, as well as bolstering the private industries, Arindam's first person narration rightly observes – "We had many role models at IIT: the famous alumni who headed large corporations, became civil servants, went to the US and became professors in eminent universities or researchers in big research labs" (AA 223).

In my reading, these fictional narratives are neither critical of the intellectual standards of the IIT education and its global outreach, nor do they trivialize their contribution in making of the 'New India'. They also don't investigate the technical education's role in the industrial revolution in the country, which is obviously not beyond repercussions, ranging from socio-political to environmental crisis. However, what they set out to problematize is the dire implications of this ever-growing nexus between the transnational corporate agencies and these

elite technological institutions on their ontological and teleological ethos. Quite contrary to their foundational principles and objectives, the emerging corporate culture as a corollary to economic liberalization, paves the way for a gradual metamorphosis in their role in reproduction and dissemination of cultural capital through higher education.

Responding to the higher education's role in shaping and distribution of cultural capital of a nation, Pierre Bourdieu in his essay "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction" (1973), has elaborated on the complexities and nuances attached to the whole process of demonstration. He rightly observes – "The educational system reproduces all the more perfectly the structure of the distribution of cultural capital among classes...in that the culture which it transmits is closer to the dominant culture and that the mode of inculcation to which it has recourse is less removed from the mode of inculcation practiced by the family" (Bourdieu, ed. Brown 80). Taking cue from Bourdieu's assumption of the institutionalized education's proximity with the dominant culture of an era or society, it could be argued that, the IIT education has been retaining a dialectical relation with the dominant culture of the post-independence India by its active participation in the project of shaping and circulation of cultural capital through distinctive pedagogic praxes. Ever since their inception, the IITs have been instrumental in India's rendezvous with the dominant discourse of modernization, and advancement in scientific or technological learning. Till the moment of economic liberalization and further, when the prospects of modernization and technological revolution were fundamentally centered on the endogenous drive of national interests, the IITs, despite having been subject to many contestations, have performed their academic duties by retaining a reciprocal relation with their *raison d'être*.

But the globalization, and a subsequent growth of economic liberalization, which are contingent upon deregulation of economy and privatization of domestic market, have further widened the rupture in our porous fabric of socialist economy and democratic structure.

Consequently, this neoliberal expansion is also marked by a parallel shift in the dynamics of the nation's cultural capital – from a socialist democratic one towards more of a capitalist one. This paradigm shift in the constitution of the nation's cultural and economic capital, which is responsible for the economic polarization and the creation of newer markers of class stratifications, could altogether alter the social and intellectual purpose of technological education in a third world country. Gradually, they turn out to be “technocratic universities” (Readings, 1997), where, their academic curriculum and the question of excellence are determined by the corporate values of the market economy, and not by the intellectual values intrinsic to their humanistic and liberal-democratic foundation.

In *Five Point Someone*, Ryan's partially true statement of what “...it does is train some bright kids to work in multinationals” (FPS 34) embodies a discursive fictional critique of the transformation of the public institutions such as the IITs into a factory image, dedicated to the cause of production of white-collar workers. It is also symptomatic of how the pervasive presence of neoliberal ideology in the epistemic paradigms, or in interpersonal dialogues, and moreover, its reflections in the output of these ‘institutes of eminence’ (IOE) facilitate the growth of a whole new section of the middle class, i.e. the new middle class. What is problematic with this particular subcategory of the middle class is that, driven by an unrelenting desire for an upward social and economic mobilization, the members of the new middle class often tend to compromise with the social and academic values integral to the idea of the higher education, as manifest in the characters of Kartik, Alok, or Hari. It is not that, in the present day, these elite technical institutions and their academic community do not contribute to the economic development of the nation, and in elevating the global image of Indian higher education through individual or collective accomplishments, yet, paradoxically, they are characterized by academia's gradual dissociation from the democratic-socialist scaffolding of its intellectual convictions, and therefore a considerable disengagement from any social

sensitivity. It is this visible digression of the institution and a significant portion of its academic community from the pursuit of critical knowledge, as well as the moral principles of it, which is coterminous with the neoliberal reformulation of the dominant cultural paradigms of the nation, comes to the fore as one of the seminal markers of fictional engagement with the decline of academic ethics, and that of scholarly merit at such esteemed public institutions.

Though, this gradual departure from their constitutional objectives conforms to the dominant culture of the era, as the texts suggest, could severely impair the intellectual potential of these elite technical institutions. A potential, which is defined by an academic institution's obligation to critical pedagogy, and 'problematization' of not just the diverse range of social evils and their ramifications, but also of the process of 'problematization' itself (Freire, 1974)^x, in its endeavor of reproducing 'alternate regimes of truth', and laying the foundation for a comparatively less inegalitarian social order. The degradation in the teleological ethics of these public technological institutes of national importance, as well as their academic community, apart from bringing in newer dynamics of corporatized academic divides in the democratic space of the campus, also takes away this inherent responsibility of higher educational institutions in harnessing critically engaged student community. Ryan's discontent with "this system of relative grading and overburdening the students" (FPS 35) also comprises a terse criticism of the contemporary problem of intellectual indigence caused by the neoliberal advances, and the lack of creative-critical engagement with the subject(s) in the sector of technological education. A sense of urgency is conspicuous in his pointed criticism of the IIT education – "But it kills something else. Where is the room for original thought? Where is the time for creativity? It is not fair" (FPS 35).

In its endeavor to expand the scope of this fictional satire on the degradation in the critical standards of the IIT education, and the fetishized assumptions of academic excellence and intellectual endeavor around the arbitrary grading system, Bhagat's novel draws a further

analogy between the IIT education and ‘a mice race’. On another occasion, in a friendly conversation over the discontinuities in the teaching-learning paradigms of the IITs, Ryan chips in with his witty observation – “And this IIT system is nothing but a mice race. It is not a rat race, mind you, as rats sound somewhat shrewd and clever. So it is not about that. It is about mindlessly running a race for four years, in every class, every assignment and every test. It is a race where profs judge you every ten steps, with a GPA stamped on you every semester” (FPS, 101). It is true that, Ryan’s denunciation of academic life at the IIT, and his subjective disapproval of a resuscitation of rote learning are not entirely free from generalized assumptions. But, a symptomatic reading of these fictional manifestations, while keeping aside the residues of generalization, would divulge a discursive textual engagement with Giroux’ idea of ‘depoliticized pedagogy’ as an unavoidable outcome of technical education’s tryst with neoliberal agencies.

The text’s intervention with the corporatization of academic markers of the campus, and the departure of a considerable section of its intellectual community from critical, as well as moral responsibilities, which is reminiscent of Giroux’ criticism of the neoliberal footprints on the public education sector, manifest in his conceptualization of ‘depoliticized pedagogy’, further situates the fictional critique within a broader realm of academia’s distancing from its imperative role in dialectical criticism of power relations, as well as circulation, and thereby reproducing ‘alternate regimes of truth’. This degradation in the critical and dialogic ethos as manifest in recurrent fictional evidences, reasserts the neoliberal policy of ‘academic docilization’. Responding to this calculative neoliberal savagery against the intellectual potential of the public higher education, Henry Giroux argues –

What the apostles of neoliberalism have learned is that the educational force of culture and its diverse public apparatuses can be a threat to established orthodoxy. Such apparatuses can produce modes of public pedagogy that can

change how people view the world, and that pedagogy can be dangerous because it holds the potential for not only creating critically engaged students, intellectuals and artists but can strengthen and expand the capacity of the imagination to think otherwise in order to act otherwise, hold power accountable, and imagine the unimaginable (Giroux, “Neoliberal savagery and the assault on higher education as a democratic public sphere”, ed. Bhattacharya 224).

In an almost similar fictional attempt of negotiating the cardinal questions of the contemporary debate over engineering education’s ever-growing inclination towards depoliticization of pedagogy, *Above Average* seeks to unfold how such incremental diversion of these institutes of eminence from the critical and political base of scholarly inquiry, in turn, induces an altogether philistine culture of “mugging” (AA). Going along with the textual critique of the neoliberal makeover of academic temperament of the IITs, the narrative further draws a symbolic relation between the waning standards of humanistic science and the decline of humanities education in these institutions. The primary objective of humanistic science is to bolster the base of scientific reasoning and technological learning under the light of humanism. This inherent humanistic quality of the institutions of higher learning serves as a tenable shield against the Machiavellian scheme of the market economy to metamorphose them into a commercialized platform for the surplus manufacturing of socially adaptive citizens and conformist group of skilled professionals devoid of distinct critical consciousness.

It is true that, the educational policies such as NPE 1986, and the latest NEP 2020 have pressed on the need for opening humanities and social science departments in the institutions for professional education, and developing them in order to impart humanistic values among their student community as a key constituent of technological education. Following promulgations of these policies, there has been a substantial growth in the humanities and social

science education, as evidenced in opening of new departments, and increasing size of their academic community. But the official rhetoric of expansion of humanities and social science education in technical institutions are marred with multiple contradictions. Though Bagchi's novel does not delve into the discontinuities in the project of humanities and social science education in the IITs, it briefly refers to their secondary status among other disciplines, so that to enhance the textual critique of these institutions' departure from the critical and humanistic values attached to the idea of higher education.

A sense of pride, which is conspicuous in Arindam's first person narration of his "own position in the middle of the class was buoyed by...(his) good grades in Humanities classes" (AA 201), is further symptomatic of a ubiquitous aversion of most of his classmates for humanities courses. Thus, Neeraj's fear of flunking in humanities and social science papers despite being a meritorious student, or the desperation among his classmates to mug up the lessons to secure the minimum qualifying marks, which are paradigmatic of the failing standards of humanities education in such prestigious institutions, symbolically expand the textual critique of a general lack of social and critical consciousness in the sector of professional education since economic liberalization.

Intensifying the fictional satire on the peripatetic turn in the critical ethos and academic integrity of the technical education, the novel also throws a cursory glance on the mushrooming of private engineering and management colleges in urban and semi urban India since economic liberalization. The narration of Arindam's chance meeting with one of his childhood friends from the government colony who is studying engineering at "a college in the south, one of the places where you could buy a seat" (AA 66) connotes to this contemporary phenomenon of burgeoning academic industry around the professional education in the post-millennial era. What is problematic with this commercialization of higher education is that, by turning

educational institutions into profit making platforms and compromising with their intellectual standards, it renders them virtually powerless against the statist and neoliberal provocations.

Depoliticization of academic consciousness and subsequent commoditization of education, the two seminal markers of fictional critique of the intellectual life of technical institutes could also be read along with the recommendations of the Ambani Birla Report (2000) on depoliticization and privatization of higher education. In order to expand the scope of privatization, the report has proposed a set of policies expedient to the neoliberal goal of bringing in the public education sector under its control for the proliferation of market economy. Amongst a flurry of guidelines, the mutual relation between the two recommendations of “education must shape adaptable, competitive workers who can readily acquire new skills and innovate” (Ambani and Birla as qtd. in Sharma 6), and “banning any form of political activity on campuses of universities and educational institutions” (ibid. 6-7), in my reading, validates the select fictional narratives’ discursive engagement with the discordances in the sector of professional education. Whereas, the first proposal corresponds to the objective of academic docilization, the second one sets out to prepare the bedrock for the fulfillment of the first objective by transforming the academic space into a corporatized factory solely dedicated to the cause of mass production of ‘adaptable’, ‘competitive’ and ‘innovative’ workers (Ambani and Birla, 2000).

Prohibition of political activities on campuses does not only imply a physical prohibition of political activities across the campuses of academic institutions, but is further indicative of a larger politics of draining the academia from its deep-rooted ideals of critical or political consciousness, and therefore, its seminal role in social transformation and critical citizenship. In this context, it is but worth mentioning that the non-existence of student unions, and hardly any evidences of campus activism on the campuses of higher educational institutions such as IITs, NITs, or IIMs can strengthen my contention on academic

consumerism and loss of critical pedagogy. Responding to the gradual devolution of public academic institution into a neoliberal factory image, and a persistent threat to its intellectual as well as social responsibilities, Prabhat Patnaik in one of his essays unearths some of the oft mooted questions pertaining to rise of ‘commoditized education’ (2019). He argues that, one of the “obvious problem(s) with commoditized education is its total dissociation from any social sensitivity. Such education, in short, is intrinsically incapable of playing any social role, of creating in the minds of those receiving education any concern for the “human condition” in general, or any awareness of the lives of fellow human beings” (Patnaik, ed. Bhattacharya 213-214).

The university, or any public institution of higher education as a democratic space for critical learning upholds the method of dialectical reasoning, and dialogic interrelation between diverse opinions and ideologies. The inherent diversity present in the constitutive matrix of the university also reflects in its pedagogic praxes as well as academic research. It is the public acknowledgement of heterogeneity of perceptions and their manifestations, from which the university derives the essence of its socially inclusive culture, in turn, enables it to retain a dynamic relation with the public life. University’s dynamic relation with the public life is also marked by its commitment towards mass enlightenment as an imperative constituent of its active role in social transformation. In order to work on its two faceted goal of social transformation and intellectual progress, the university vouches for an ‘exclusivist academic excellence’^{xi}, which in turn, reproduces certain hierarchies within its territorial boundary and beyond. But, in no way, the hierarchies, the university seeks to recreate through its academic endeavors are anti-egalitarian in their disposition, or are inclined to the culture of commodification of every possible relations embedded in the neoliberal ideology. Instead, the academic hierarchies, it seeks to rebuild by resorting to the strict academic standards of

excellence and belaboring process of knowledge acquisition are devoted to strengthening an individual's relation with the world or 'Dasein', as Heidegger calls it^{xii}.

But, as the texts suggest, the neoliberal takeover of public engineering institutions, (more precisely the elite ones) marked by a two-fold co-option of their intellectual paradigms, instead of producing 'savant' and critically engaged community of engineers, manufacture *carbon copies of success* devoid of any form of social/scholarly consciousness. The transition in their academic objectives – from a value based education to a corporatized one is analogous to the idea of 'post-historical university' (Readings, 1997). In his book: *The University in Ruins* (1997) which was published posthumously, Bill Readings has extensively studied the post-Cold War predicaments of the European universities which are marred with "the betrayal and bankruptcy" (1) in the drive of liberal education. He has identified 'Americanization', alias 'globalization' as an ineluctable factor behind this devaluation in the humanistic values and socio-political mission of the university. The degeneration owes a great deal to the shrinking humanities and social science education in the contemporary academy which Readings interprets as the "essence of the university" (ibid. 4).

The combined effect of multifarious impediments gradually divests the university from participating "...in the historical project of humanity...the historical project of culture" (ibid. 5). For him, the contemporary Western universities suffer from the disease of "dereferentialization" – a condition where the academic culture and excellence "...no longer have specific (social, cultural and intellectual) referents; they no longer refer to specific set of things or ideas" (ibid. 17). But instead, they seem to be regulated by the abstract rubrics of the market economy chiefly concerned with its proliferation, at the cost of the project of liberal education. By inquiring the present neoliberal turn in the Western academia through a set of incisive pointers, Readings asserts that the contemporary universities could be best defined as 'posthistorical university' because of their disengagement from the historical, social and

intellectual foundations. The university slowly metamorphoses into an “...institution (which) has outlived itself, (and) is now a survivor of the era in which it defined itself in terms of the project of the historical development, affirmation, and inculcation of national culture” (ibid. 6).

In a liberal-democratic society, as in the context of post-colonial India, the historical foundation of public higher educational institutions responds to a vast range of socio-cultural and intellectual objectives – strengthening the base of democracy, espousal of social justice, ensuring social change, advancement of science and technology, shaping of ‘specific intellectuals’ vis-à-vis critical citizenry, and so forth. University’s pursuit of truth and knowledge, as well as its distinctiveness are reciprocally associated with the degree of truthfulness of the institution and its academic community towards diverse matrices of their historical underpinnings. The euphemistic fictional representations of neoliberal incursion into the academic territory of elite institutions such as IITs further indicate, how by deviating from historical markers of their reason of existence, these academic institutions are dissociating themselves from their pursuit of truth and knowledge.

Drawing inferences from the vast repertoire of scholarship on the idea of the university and its quest for truth and knowledge (discussed throughout the chapter), it could be plausibly argued that the knowledge university reproduces and the ‘truth’ it seeks to reassert through academic or public engagements are socially transformative in their manifestations, subversive in disposition, and critical to the hegemonic character of the power center(s). However, the commercialized education, by delimiting the university’s intellectual potential, and by turning them into a profit-making platform for the market economy restricts the scope for the cultivation of ‘alternate regimes of truth’ and knowledge. Therefore, the above-stated discursive relation between the fictionalized predicament of Indian educational institutions in the current times and Readings’ idea of the ‘posthistorical university’ could be further located

in the larger context of intellectual indigence of the Indian Public University caused by its departure from crucial social and academic responsibilities.

By placing the fictional narratives across the three texts in tandem, it could be also argued, that the teleological markers of the neoliberal agenda of depoliticization of pedagogy and circumscription of academia's role within a subsidiary culture of production of skilled, apolitical professionals, as appear in Bagchi and Bhagat's respective works of fiction, and of the right wing state's policy of 'depoliticized citizenry', evident in Hariharan's gritty fictional polemic against the right wing brutality upon the university's autonomy, are somewhat similar in disposition. In both the cases, they are directed towards retaining the hegemonic control of the state and neoliberal apparatuses over the denizens of a post-colonial nation-state by strategic co-option of the dialogic, liberal-democratic, and self-reflexive space of the university.

'Caste'(ing) the Campus: Prejudice, Discrimination and Intellectual predicament

Apart from the above studied deterrents of 'Hindutva', 'Commercialization', and 'Neoliberalism', which pose a serious threat to the very idea of the university, another crucial factor contributing to the weakening of the liberal-democratic base of the Indian university education even in the 21st century is the persistence of caste hegemony and inequality on the campus. Before I go on, I must clarify that, this section does not attempt a detailed study on diverse aspects of caste politics cutting across the corridors of Indian academic institutions, neither does it seek to engage with the debates on the promulgation of reservation policies in the post-independence India. They don't come under the purview of the thesis statement as well. Rather, complying with the primary aims of the chapter, this section would draw upon a select fictional characters and evidences from Srividya Natarajan's *No Onions nor Garlic* (2006) to study, how the undercurrent of caste politics and caste discrimination within the

Indian academic space could prove to be an anathema to the university's project of social transformation through social inclusion and exclusivist academic excellence.

Indian Caste system which has a long history of social exclusion and exploitation of the people from the lower castes and especially the Dalit community(s) in the hands of the dominant castes, and more precisely the Brahmins, dates back to the Vedic era of "Manusmriti" and the "Sutras" (c. 1500 – 500 BCE). The previously quoted excerpt from Ambedkar's scathing criticism of the division of laborer in Indian caste system as "watertight compartments" and hierarchical, those are neither "spontaneous", nor do they respond to the "natural aptitudes" (1936; 2014, n. pag.), also encompass a historical process of naturalization of merit based on the caste identity of an individual, and not by his/her intellectual potential. In the hegemonic narratives of the Caste system, while the central position of the Brahmins in the caste hierarchy arbitrarily justifies their merit and right to education and scholarship, the positioning of the 'Scheduled Castes', then known as "the untouchables" (Ambedkar, 1948) outside its pyramidal structure consisting of four 'Varnas', denies them any access to social and educational institutions. What is further reprehensible is that, the metaphors of 'purity', and sustenance of social order, which these ancient Hindu *Dharmasastras* carefully drafted in order to retain the cultural hegemony of the Brahmins in the society also reflected in the coercive manifestations of exploitation of people from the lower castes, thereby, exerting the claim of social segregation.

They are these different practices of social segregation by the Brahmins and the upper caste people against the Dalits and Sudras – from caste stereotypes and question of untouchability to delimitation of their social role within menial duties and simultaneous social ostracism, the pioneering critics of Indian caste system such as, Ambedkar and G. S. Ghurye have problematized in order to lay the foundation of an egalitarian casteless social order^{xiii}. And, since the idea of modern India is rooted in the ideals of equality and democracy, the Indian

Government following independence, has been quite active in defending the constitutional rights of the hitherto marginalized sections, and in eradicating the caste hierarchies by introducing new laws aiming at social inclusivity, and through various reservation policies. Responding to the various government schemes of reservation of certain percentage of seats in public sectors, and in education for the historically oppressed sections of Indian society, Srividya Natarajan in her novel neatly identifies the perspective of the government. The third person narrator observes: “Now, the government described the Reservation Policy as a kind of positive discrimination that favored hitherto downtrodden minorities and castes” (Natarajan 83; henceforth NONG, page no).

Taking cue from my argument in the first chapter, where I discussed the relevance of reservation policies in the initial decades after the independence, so to safeguard the constitutional rights of the Scheduled Castes, and to bring them within the rubric of the mainstream society through a critical reading of M. K. Naik’s novel, this particular section argues, how, despite successful implementation of different policies aiming at equal rights of the downtrodden sections, and socially inclusive changes in the academic demography of Indian universities, paradoxically, the academic space is still riddled with multiple forms of caste hegemony vis-à-vis discrimination, if not at the physical level, but obviously at the ideological end. Building its fictional narrative upon the intricate patterns of caste politics and inequality in contemporary India, Natarajan’s *No Onions Nor Garlic* (2006) deftly situates the contemporary crisis of Indian universities with the biased perception of a sizeable section of upper caste Indian professors against the students and their own counterparts from lower castes followed by unfounded denigration of their academic merit.

Set in the Chennai University, a metropolitan university in the southern state of Tamil Nadu considered to be a hot-bed of caste politics, the novel remarkably weaves in interrelated narratives of caste politics on the campus which are embroiled in an eternal war of ascension

against each other. It is through consistent interactions between the fictional characters from different caste backgrounds, the fictional narrative recreates ample evidences of tension within the university space along the lines of caste hegemony and discrimination. Whereas, characters such as Professor Ram and Professor Natarajan represent the age-old Brahmanical prejudice against the merit of ‘reserved category’ academics and students, Dr. Arul and P. Jiva embody the perpetual struggle of lower caste intellectuals against the prevalent casteism in Indian academia. The dialectical engagement of the narrative with the discursive elements of caste politics in the university, and subsequent marginalization of academics from reserved categories even in the 21st century, discursively situates the textual criticism within the contemporary evidences of caste atrocities, and injustices meted out to many of the Indian students and academicians due to their lower caste identity.

The elaborate fictional satire on the subterranean flow of casteism in Indian academia, which predominantly centers on the biased perception of a number of upper caste faculty members at the English department, and their unwarranted practice of discrimination of people from the lower castes starts off with the unveiling of a bronze statue of Babasaheb Ambedkar in the entrance of the Chennai University. On this occasion, while addressing the gathering crowd, the Vice Chancellor’s observation – “It stands very appropriately in the lobby facing the stairs which all our students take to go their classrooms” (NONG 76-77) emphasizes the secular and democratic ethos of the university. But, on the contrary, the resentment visible in Professor Ram, and his colleague Natarajan with the ceremony doesn’t merely exemplify an upper caste prejudice against the lower castes, but connotes to a reified form of caste-based discrimination rooted in misleading assumptions on reservation policy, and fallacious practice of looking down upon the intellectual potential of scholars from the margins, thereby disavowing the secular ethos of the university.

The conversation between Professor Ram and Natarajan subtly unearths their casteist tendencies. Natarajan's contempt over the ceremonious unveiling of the bronze image of Ambedkar, evident in his sense of feigned exclamation – “Can you believe what this university has come to?” (NONG 79) is also symptomatic of his disapproval of the secular academic culture of Indian universities. This is aptly reciprocated by Professor Ram, who calls the entire event as “...an abomination! Just another instance of that studied low-caste insolence” (NONG 79). Continuing his tirade against the upward mobilization of the hitherto marginalized sections, more precisely the Dalit academicians, he further adds – “It is all the fault of that Arul woman, for starting this Ambedkar statue business. It is going to become a cult, mark my words, Nagarajan” (NONG 80). What the fictional narrative finds problematic in their discontentment is the continuation or resuscitation of a dangerous historical concept of brightness based on the caste identity of a person, and not by his/her individual merit. In a secular-democratic nation, and most importantly, within the democratic and dialogic space of the university, these deterrents of upper caste prejudice and caste-based discrimination of academic merit could severely thwart the prospect of epistemological empowerment of the Dalits and backward castes, by creating unfavorable condition for their intellectual engagement. An unfavorable condition which negates the urgency of “...a conscious moral choice to use their sense of freedom for understanding and reflecting on the Dalit experience” (Guru and Sarukkai 28).

The narrative briefly refers to the implementation of the Mandal Commission report (1979-80) in 1990 (when V. P. Singh was the prime minister of India) as the starting point of Professor Ram's intensified hatred or prejudice against the marginalized sections. The promulgation of the report which has sent ripples through the campuses of Indian universities also resulted in an unprecedented transmogrification of the campus of the Chennai University almost into a battleground of caste politics. It further unpacks a succinct critique of the sense

of deprivation, and insecurity of Professor Ram along with a number of his Brahmin and upper-caste students following the promulgation of Mandal Commission report, and deepening of his hostility towards the lower-castes. The sarcasm is implied in the witty narrative of the third person narrator – “Professor Ram went to the hardware store and bought a plastic broom so that he could join his Brahmin students as they swept the streets in protest, to show how the educated and up-pressed upper castes could not get any decent jobs in this benighted land” (NONG 85). The above terse account of Professor Ram’s response to implementation of Mandal Commission report, and campus unrest following the promulgation, apart from satirizing the feigning sense of exploitation among the upper castes, is further evocative of the upsetting picture of several fractions within the academic community of many of the metropolitan universities.

Responding to the post-Mandal agitation across the university campuses, another representative work of post-millennial Indian Academic Novel, *Up Campus, Down Campus* (2016) authored by Avijit Ghosh, locates the pro – anti (Mandal) binary within the academic/student community of the JNU. Talking about the nature of the campus unrest, or upper caste scorn over an added 27% reservation for the OBCs (Other backward class/castes) following the implementation of Mandal Commission report, the narration underlines how JNU, whose history is rooted in anti-caste consciousness and egalitarian ideals, could still be susceptible to the willy-nilly political foundation of Caste. It states: “The anti-Mandal agitation proved that JNU’s internationalism and modernity was no match to India’s primeval formation: caste” (Ghosh 179; henceforth UCDC, page no.). Developing on the university’s vulnerability to hold its democratic and intellectual ethos in such trying times, the narration further satirizes how the supposedly liberal-minded and secular academic/student community of the JNU could be divided on the grounds of vested interests. Lamenting over the crisis of the political and intellectual life of the campus, the narrator observes – “...the students’ union and the campus

political parties became irrelevant. For them, the world was divided into those who were in support of the movement and those who were not... Post-MCR, everyone started identifying students from an OBC or a non- OBC point of view” (UCDC 180).

Coming back to Natarajan’s novel, the unfolding of the plot further divulges how such upper caste prejudice and discrimination against the low-caste intellectuals are driven by two simultaneous forces of retaining the Brahmanical hegemonic control in the society, and an insecurity of losing it with the rise of secularism and democracy since independence. Looking into the causality of the unfavorable conditions, the narrative also unpacks the scheming strategies of many upper caste professors who hold significant positions in different decision making bodies of the university, and are also sent as experts, or levied with responsibilities of shortlisting candidates for academic positions. Since they can’t reverse the drive of democratization and reservation in Indian education, they try to restrict the entry of lower caste intellectuals in the universities by other insidious means, as evidenced in Professor Ram and his other likeminded colleagues’ discriminatory gestures against reserved category candidates. The narrator observes:

Whenever the posts that were reserved for scheduled or backward-caste lecturers came up, Professor Ram and all his friends at the university scrutinized the applications sent in by the candidates, and they were always shattered and disappointed to find that no candidate was worthy of initiation into the august priesthood that performed the rights of higher education in Chennai (NONG 86).

And, when finally, Dr. Arul was appointed as a lecturer in the English department against a reserved category post, Ram and Natarajan, the two chief defenders of Brahmanism in the university embark on an altogether different ideological war against Dr. Arul. The text is replete with euphemistic narratives of verbal duel between Professor Ram and Dr. Arul, and

Ram and Natarajan's unfounded criticism of her scholarship. For example, Professor Ram compares her scholarship on "Marx and Fanon and feminist criticism (with that of) babes and sucklings" (NONG 87). His denunciation of Arul's academic merit embodies a patriarchal and casteist prejudice against the Dalit-feminist scholarship of Dr. Arul, and invokes a wide range of debates over justifiability of such derisive statement within the democratic-dialogic space of the university campus. It is also evocative of how such fallacious assumptions of the representatives of dominant caste professors and the subsequent attempts of co-opting the alternate voice vis-à-vis scholarship could divert the university's attention from making of, what Gramsci calls, "organic intellectuals" (1949).

Their superiority complex, and an unethical practice of eliminating the applications, vis-à-vis looking down upon the intellectual standards of academicians depending on their caste identity, and not by an individual's merit or academic credentials are exemplary of the upper castes' fear of losing their dominant position in the post-colonial Indian academy. Professor Ram, who in "a career of nearly three decades...had never supervised a single Ph.D. by a student who wasn't a Brahmin" (NONG 92), was finally pressurized by the university administration to supervise at least one Scheduled Caste scholar, so to retain the democratic and socially inclusive image of the university in the post-millennial times. But the paradox is, Professor Ram, upon hearing that his only scholar from reserved category, named P. Jiva has applied for an 'open category' lecturer post in the Drama and Folklore department, he, instead of boosting her self-confidence, tries to dissuade her from attending the interview under the guise of "a little token of your self-esteem for your (her) supervisor" (NONG 93).

In order to corroborate the fictional satire on Professor Ram's lack of academic morals, the narrative effectively switches to a first person narration of his manipulation of Jiva, coupled with a covert threat of the possible repercussions on her career, if she disobeys his suggestion. It reads: "I am sure you will see the logic of it. I have your best interests at heart, you know.

The reason I am saying this is that the Reserved Category seat will be falling vacant six months from now...It will be easier for me to guarantee you that job if you don't antagonize the department by competing for an Open Category post" (NONG 93). There are two problematic assumptions embedded in his suggestion. First, given the active role of Ram and other influential members from his anti-reservation squad in downsizing the lower caste representation in the university, especially since the implementation of Mandal Commission Report in 1990, how could Jiva count on his superficial assurance of her guaranteed position against the upcoming advertisement for 'reserved category' post? And, second, what does make him so insecure about Jiva's appearing in the interview, when he perceives them as intellectually inferior to their upper-caste counterparts?

Reflecting upon the above two questions, the text further problematizes, how, apart from his obsession over the hegemonic control of the upper castes in the university, it was also his narrow self-interest of making a safe passage for his son Sankaranarayanan, alias 'Chunky', who had a Ph.D. from a Canadian University to obtain the position, with as little competition as possible. It was not that Chunky was not a deserving candidate, or he needed his father's support at the cost of his academic values. But, "It was just that he did not wish to put himself even temporarily at the mercy of one of these low-caste Ambedkarites who was probably a closet anarchist and an anti-Brahmin insurgent to boot" (NONG, 92). What could be inferred from the pithy sarcastic narration of his covert warning to Jiva, and undermining of his academic ethics is a discursive fictional engagement with a subconscious fear, and the scheming strategies followed by a number of professors from the dominant castes to retain their central position in the ivory tower by impeding the academic growth of lower caste intellectuals.

A textual via discourse analysis of the novel's dialectical criticism of the tension in Indian universities along the lines of the Caste system and invidious tactics of discrimination

further situates the fictional demonstrations within the analytical orbit of M. N. Srinivas' ethnographic study of the dominant castes and their unrelenting desire to "...occupy a strategic position to exploit the new opportunities to their advantage" (Srinivas 91). In his essay, "The Indian Road to Equality" from his book – *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays* (1962), M. N. Srinivas argues that the representatives of the dominant castes who "...are shrewd and intelligent people...have a feeling for political power and economic opportunity" (ibid. 89). For him, the category of "the dominant castes" are mostly constitutive of Brahmins, Kayasthas, and Banias, who were the first among the lots to receive western education, which gave them an added advantage and urge to retain their hegemonic position in the post-independence era. Drawing inferences from different ethnic communities, the study gives an ethnographic account of an overall ruling position of the dominant castes in the village politics as well as economy. Responding to the dominant castes' penchant for political and economic power, and the historical process of their evolution, Srinivas contends – "While the leaders of the dominant castes are sensitive to economic and political opportunities, they are socially conservative. They do not, for instance, like the condition of Harijans to improve. They have a vested interest in keeping Harijans poor and ignorant" (ibid. 91).

Taking cue from Srinivas' ethnographic study on the dominant castes and their inclination to regulate the nation's economic and political capital in their favor, my contention is that their exertion of power is not just circumscribed within the spectrum of village politics and economy, but effectively encompasses the academic corridors of the university campus, as manifest in the above study. By a dialectical reading of the fictional evidences, the study contends that the shrewd mechanisms of academic discrimination practiced by the upper caste professors could prove to be life-threatening to the lower caste academicians and thus, lead to larger deterioration of the university's academic and social standards.

First, it is but worth examining the psychological distress, Jiva has been put into just before the interview, by the discouraging words and warning of Professor Ram. When, she refuses to comply with his suggestion of not attending the interview, interestingly, his polite warning soon gives way to near threatening of blighting her career prospects. Ram says – “Before you refuse, Jiva...consider how you are placed in relation to your viva voce examination. I think a wise acceptance of truth is better than an argument. You are going to need my recommendation letters, you know” (NONG 94). His nepotism followed by the final admonition which are very much unlikely of a professor could precipitate a deeper psychological crisis in her, as manifest in the narration of her almost running away from the precincts of Professor Ram’s office, while “focusing all her energies on not crying”(NONG 95). Responding to this predicament of Indian intelligentsia, Ashok D. Rangari in his book, *Indian Caste System and Education* (1984) argues that, how this caste prejudice culminates in “...a certain amount of hostility,...discrimination and atrocities on the Scheduled Castes by other people...” (30).

Jiva’s experience, which is exemplary of a psychological trauma the Dalit academicians are subjected to due to the Brahmanical hegemony on the campus, situates the narrative within the contemporary crisis of caste politics in the Indian universities and the aftermath of it. In the recent years, there has been a spate of incidents of public humiliation and persecution of Dalit academicians across the university campuses, which have also culminated in untimely death of many of them. On January 17, 2016, Rohit Vemula, a research scholar from the University of Hyderabad committed suicide; on 13th March, 2017, Muthukrishnan, a Dalit research scholar from Jawaharlal Nehru University took his own life; Pallavi Tadvi, a second year masters student from a medical college in Mumbai, after having multiple experiences of caste based discrimination, harassment, and threatening by her own seniors also committed suicide in May, 2019 (EPW, 2021). My friend, Vemula’s words from his suicide note – “My birth is my fatal

accident” and “I am happy dead than being alive” (Vemireddy) still echo around the campus of the University of Hyderabad.

Reflecting upon the present-day atrocities against students and teachers from the lower strata of the society on the campus, a significant number of public intellectuals and scholars such as, Anand Teltumbde, Ramdas Rupavath, Drishadwati Bargi, Ramratan Dhumal and Sthabir Khora, among many others, have questioned the undercurrent of Brahminism, and domination of the upper castes in the administration of the university, as well as its academic community. Though the novel does not delve into the contentious markers of university administration, the detailed portrayal of a group of upper caste professors’ prejudice against the empowerment of Dalits, and their despicable ramifications within the democratic space of the university is indicative of the university’s ideological and performative departure from its espousal of equality, social justice and inclusion. Therefore, from the above study, it could be plausibly inferred that the fictional critique of casteism in Indian universities, and an insidious praxes of ‘reverse orientalism’ exemplary of the behavior of academics from dominant castes towards lower caste intellectuals, dialectically situates the narrative within the contemporary debate on the epistemological shift in its pursuit of ‘alternate regimes of truth’ and knowledge, as well as production of ‘specific intellectuals’.

The Post-truth University?

The socialist, secular, and democratic constitution of the post-colonial Indian university set the ground for its intellectual inquiry and public responsibilities. Consequently, its notion of excellence is also measured by the degree of its academic engagement with the historical imperative of social transformation through pedagogic reforms. The parameters of manifold accountabilities of the university and standards of its intellectual excellence have been discussed throughout the chapter. By foregrounding the study on the contemporary hindrances of ‘Hindutva’, ‘Commercialization’, ‘Neoliberalism’ and ‘Caste’, it sought to uncover their

cumulative effect on the waning standards of intellectual and democratic culture of the post-liberalization Indian university. While, admitting the limited ambit of the research, I still contend that, the retrogressive movement of Indian higher education towards ‘commercialized rote learning’, and social exclusion, as manifest in the study of the select campus novels, which rub shoulder with Readings’ idea of the ‘posthistorical university’, also lay the foundation of a disgraceful metamorphosis of the cotemporary public universities into what could be called as the ‘*Post-truth*’ University.

Oxford English Dictionary defines its ‘word of the year 2016’ – “Post-truth” ‘as relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief’ (n. pag.). The prefix ‘post’ in ‘Post-truth’, though is homologous with the ‘post’ in Postmodern, in terms of its acknowledgement of the multiple subject positions in defining the objective reality, it altogether misses out the ethical connotations of its theoretical precursor. Unlike the assertion of multiple subjective positions, vis-à-vis perceptions in postmodern philosophy, those are firmly rooted in the ‘metanarratives’ of truth and reason, ‘Post-truth’ endorses an egregious position “...that truth has been eclipsed – that it is irrelevant” (McIntyre 5). While postmodernism debunks the notion of any form of grand-narrative of truth, as it tends to be hegemonic, discordant, non-comprehensive, and elusive, Post-truth on the other hand, negates the whole idea of the truth or authenticity of knowledge and information, and their efficaciousness in shaping the political, social and cultural life of an era, or a nation. Pointing at banality, superstition, and conjectural assumptions, Sergio Sismondo (2017) identifies the present times as the ‘Post-truth’ era in terms of its “steady stream of fake news, its easily debunked but widely circulating conspiracy theories, and outright lies placed front and center” (3).

Taking on the historical entry of the term in the Oxford English Dictionary in 2016, a number of scholars such as Lee McIntyre and Sergio Sismondo have located the beginning of

the ‘post-truth’ era around the same time in the twenty-first century – an era, which is marked by a ubiquitous downward turn in the political life and consciousness almost across the globe. By drawing inferences from a spate of recent political ‘disinformation campaigns’ - from Donald Trump’s campaigns preceding the election and following his swearing in as the president of the USA in 2017 to the fact-free campaigns around Britain’s Brexit vote, “and the growing use of disinformation campaigns by politicians against their own people in Hungary, Russia, and Turkey” (McIntyre, *ibid.* 5), McIntyre situates the ‘post-truth’ praxes/politics within an emerging international trend of bending “reality to fit their opinions...(and not) the other way around” (*ibid.* 5-6). Underlining its fondness for fiction over facts, his analyses further brings about the ideological and psychological dynamics behind the distortion of truth or facts in ‘post-truth’ politics. “This is not necessarily a campaign to say that facts do not matter, but instead a conviction that facts can always be shaded, selected, and presented within a political context that favors one interpretation of truth over another” (*ibid.* 6).

Taking cue from their assumptions, it could be observed that the political reality of the post-millennial/present-day India is no different from McIntyre and Sismondo’s analyses of ‘Post-truth’ era, or politics in the Global North. It is true, that the political beliefs and dictums of some top brass leaders of the present central government, or different state governments including the AITMC (All India Trinamool Congress) led government in the state of West Bengal, are akin to their criticism of the current political life of mostly the Western nations. However, the study, neither seeks to critique the political culture of the contemporary India and its allegiance to post-truth, nor is it concerned with the disinformation campaigns and falsehoods of our political leaders. Rather, by drawing an analogy between the textual demonstrations of the causality of contemporary challenges of the public universities, as well as elite engineering institutions in India and hermeneutics of ‘Post-truth’, the study vindicates that the Indian University, having been affected by exogenous religio-political, neoliberal, and

social apparatuses, is almost on the verge of a complete breakdown in its critical engagement with truth and knowledge.

An unyielding critique of Hindutva and commoditized education in *In Times of Siege*; *Above Average* and *Five Point Someone*, by problematizing the discursive traces of neoliberalism in technical education sector, and *No Onions, Nor Garlic* through a satire on the entrenched presence of Caste politics in Indian universities, dialectically locate how objective and subversive character of academic truth is being increasingly superseded by prejudiced, tailored, and regulated discourses of truth. In each of the texts, as the study unpacks, the dominant political and economic ideologies of the post-globalization India strategically target the academic institutions to bend the intellectual reality of academic institutions to accommodate their perspectives, and do not allow them to be revised under the light of critical, secular and democratic scholarship of the university.

These extraneous factors complicit in co-opting the university's pursuit of truth in their favor, do not just strive after regulating, often delimiting the question of academic freedom or ethics, but through it, the complex intellectual process of epistemic reformulation, and the scope for 'knowledge as becoming'. Therefore, when the very idea of the university as a democratic and self-reflexive site of critical learning is under threat, and academia's dialectical engagement with the objective reality as an essential constituent of its quest for truth and knowledge is jeopardized in order to legitimize certain vested interests of political parties and ulterior motives of the dominant class/caste(s) and those of transnational corporations, what borne out of such undesired negotiation is nothing but a *post-truth university*. A university, which is stripped off its scholarly potential, and has outlived its historical project of social transformation through advocacy of discursive traces of truth and alternate avenues of knowledge.

Fictionalizing the dissent and academic resistance: Freedom as 'becoming'?

And now the question which follows, is – how do the university and its academic community resist these orthodox, anti-intellectual forces so to forestall, if not fully extirpate this specious transmogrification of the post-liberalisation Indian University into a post-truth one? Therefore, coming to the concluding part of the chapter, I would like to discuss briefly, how the discursive critique of the select works of friction are also juxtaposed with liminal spaces of resistance against the newfangled approaches of monitoring and controlling of the university space. Academic resistance could be broadly categorized into two types – a) a collective dissent against these baneful advances and curtailing of academic freedom, and b) individual resistance usually in the form of resolutions and righteousness. Bringing into discussion academia's call for dissent, critics such as, Edward Said, Benita Parry, and Judith Butler among many others have pressed on the ethical responsibilities of being "...mindful of the individual and the collective wretched of the earth" (Parry 263), checking and undoing the sovereign commands or claims of the 'state' (Butler, 2009), and thereby, re-asserting the role of an intellectual/academic as "disturber of the status quo" (Said, 1993). For them, dissent in/of the university is emblematic of its speaking "the truth to power" (Said, *ibid.* xvi), and is intrinsic to the reason of its existence.

First, let me talk about the fictional demonstration of collective resistance against the deleterious effects of Hindutva and Caste politics on the idea of the university. Condemning the 'new brutality' of Hindutva forces against the autonomy of the university, Githa Hariharan's *In Times of Siege* gives a comprehensive account of unified dissent of the intellectual community. A fictional newspaper report dated, 22 September, 2000, denotes the unanimous dissent of liberal minded academics against the university's disgraceful act of withdrawing Shiv's lesson on Basavanna following the right-wing state's fatwa against it. It reads –

The decision to withdraw a lesson on the medieval reformer Basavanna by KGU professor Shiv Murthy has sparked a round of sharp criticism in academic circles...On Wednesday, a large number of academics, including eminent historians Amit Kumar Mookherjee, N.A. Parthasarathy and Amir Qureishi, deplored this action. They said it was ‘clear this was a response to the demands of the Manch. These demands actually add up to a plan to perpetrate a fictitious and homogenous golden Hindu history that will legitimize their programme of one language, one religion, one nation (ITS 92-93).

Without any hemming and hawing, their pointed criticism of Hindutva politics of de-secularization and sanskritization of higher education embodies academia’s collective resistance against attempted homogenization of its dialogic and heterogeneous culture of knowledge production.

Talking about the modalities of literary resistance, Githa Hariharan, in her above cited article, emphasized its “sneaky, elliptical ways” (ibid. 130), where, “The overall object of resistance – in the Indian context...is resisting the marking of this heterogeneity as a disputed structure, allowing it to grow weak, turn divisive when attacked by the various homogenizing religious and cultural nationalisms” (ibid. 130). Thus, expanding the scope of academic dissent in the form of demonstrations on campus, the narrative suitably places a protest rally organized by the leftist students’ bodies of KNU (fictionalized form of JNU) against the banning of Shiv’s module, and the concomitant engineered attack of the Hindutva organization. The collective disposition of the protest is evident in the description of a huge gathering of academics and students across the universities for a unified cause of denouncing the hegemonic controlling of academic space by the right-wing apparatuses, and their post-truth narratives of cultural or historical knowledge.

The resistance visible in the courageous portrayal of "...placards saying everything from STOP TALIBANIZATION OF INDIA to HISTORY DESTROYED! to WHO'S AFRAID OF THE MANCH?" (ITS, 145), corroborates the realism in the novel. The realism further situates the narrative within the plethora of contemporary evidences of intelligentsia's collective dissent against the right-wing invasion of academic space. In a newspaper report on the pervasive threat to the critical ethos and autonomy of the university in the present-day India, published in "The Telegraph" on May 16, 2022, the columnist Pheroze L. Vincent draws references from the remarks made by some eminent academicians in a webinar, pillorying upsurge of Hindutva 'militantism' and how it is up against the liberal-democratic culture of the nation and our public institutions of higher education. Having reflected on the deployment of draconian laws to curb dissent in a democratic society, and the heart-rending consequences of flouting the fascist dictates of a democratically elected government, the dialogue between Romila Thapar, Gyanendra Pandey, Partha Chatterjee, Tanika Sarkar, and others underline the sharp decline of citizenship rights in a democratic nation-state. They have further decried the undemocratic acts of labelling intellectuals as 'anti-nationals' and putting them on trial against charges of sedition for their acts of dissent against religious fundamentalism and curtailing of freedom of speech (Vincent). What is optimistic in their unfeigned criticism of the divisive, pro-right wing politics of the government and stifling of democratic values in the present times, is a vindication of academia's potential for resistance, and writing back to the power center of the state.

The notion of collective resistance as endemic to the idea of the modern university also constitutes one of the fictional arguments in other novels. Responding to the assumptions of the above mentioned scholars on the intersections between academic responsibilities and resistance, *No Onions Nor Garlic* brings about another mode of resistance against caste discrimination and exertion of hegemony within the democratic space of the campus. Though,

quite implicit unlike Hariharan's text, the narration of unveiling of the bronze image of Ambedkar in front of the entrance of the Chennai University and the Vice-Chancellor's address could be read as a discursive fictional engagement with a collective recognition, vis-à-vis espousal of democracy and equality on the campus. Here, the assertion visible in the Vice-Chancellor's voice is comparable to an ideological resistance against the undercurrent of caste politics on the campus.

But, the 'sneaky, elliptical ways' of fictional problematization which prepare the platform for its resistance against multifarious contemporary provocations of the Indian university education, further entails an oblique critique of the lack of forbearance, or historical and political consciousness among the dissenters. As, Paulo Freire analyses critical education not as a mere platform for problematization of social phenomenon and problems, but also of the process of problematization itself, these select fictional narratives as discursive source of knowledge, also symbolically unearth, how, often, the drive of collective dissent as a resistance against authoritarian forces is marred with multiple contradictions.

In the public meeting on the KNU campus, upon being provoked by the derogatory remarks of an allegedly ABVP (student political outfit of the RSS and BJP) supporter from the gathering crowd, one of the dissenters and a student of KNU supporting the cause of dissent, responds back with an equally derisive remark of "Usko medical kar do?" (ITS, 145). The quoted question which could be translated as *shall we reserve a hospital bed for him?*, implies a penchant for counter violence as a distinct marker of resistance, while dispensing with the dialogic potential of the university campus and its academic community. Though terse and discursive, the fictional narration of a number of left-wing students' inclination towards violence exposes the inconsistencies in the teleology of collective dissent on the university campus and its susceptibility to the laden trap of the right-wing state. It is further symptomatic of how, due to the instigations and possible violence, these instances of campus activism

instead of defending the rights and autonomy of the university, often end up jeopardizing claims of the dissent, and could also prove to be conducive for the coercive state machineries to intervene in the academic affairs of the university, thereby paradoxically satisfying the Hindutva policy of conditioning of the university space. On a different scale, a dialectical inquiry of the celebration around the unveiling of the bronze image of Ambedkar in Natarajan's novel also divulges an implied critique of a general lack of knowledge on Ambedkar and his own iconoclastic views on idolatry. Resenting the dominant practice of idol worship in India, Ambedkar once said – "I am no worshipper of idols. I believe in breaking them...I have hopes that my countrymen will someday learn that the country is greater than the men..." (1943). But unfortunately, even many of the academics in the 21st century are still ignorant about Ambedkar and his philosophy.

Extending the range of fictional resistance, the select novels also delve into the idea of individualistic resistance through non-acquiescence, righteousness, and resolution, as manifest in some major as well as minor characters. The fictional characters who hail from diverse social and cultural backgrounds, represent certain distinct characteristics those are fundamental to the constitution of their intellectual identity and notion of academic integrity. These characteristics further reverberate in their unswerving acts of not giving in to the exploitative engines of a deceptively democratic state and the market economy, so to defend the academic objectives. In addition, these multiple evidences of individualistic resistance are marked by the heterogeneity of their ideological and intellectual temperament. Furthermore, the semi-autobiographical narratives of resistance in *Above Average* and *No Onions Nor Garlic* to an extent, also call for a phenomenological reading of fictional resistance against the deceptive mechanisms of the neoliberal economy and Brahminism. But, my study neither seeks to address the plethora of components constitutive of the novelistic demonstrations of an individual's reaction against the baneful influences nor does it attempt to examine the heterogeneous traits

of resistance in an ensemble of fictional characters. Rather, by situating the argument within the modalities of resistance of a handful of major characters from the novels, this concluding section asserts that these exemplary resistance and resolutions of an individual academic or student, in turn reaffirms the self-reflexive and transformative potential of the university.

Taking cue from the examples of Vidyasagar, Madhav, and Vatsa from the previous chapters, here I contend that the characters such as, Shiv, Arindam, and Jiva, who all are located in the post-globalization milieu exemplify much contemporaneous representations of ‘transformative intellectuals’^{xiv}. Shiv’s character from *In Times of Siege*, comprehensively embodies a sharp political and intellectual consciousness that is instrumental to Giroux’ analyses of educators as ‘transformative intellectuals’. His firm decision of neither to apologize and resign, nor to cede his ground of self-defense in his confrontation with the Manch and the right-wing ideologues, as manifest in his statements in the interviews and departmental meetings, or his participation in the public demonstration in KNU against the Hindutva atrocities on academic freedom, bespeak his persistence in vindicating the autonomy of the intelligentsia and of the university in their pursuit of truth and knowledge. The character of Arindam in *Above Average* on the other hand, exhibits a different dimension of individualistic resistance against the mercantilization of higher education, and a neoliberal refashioning of technological education in the post-millennial India. Early in his student life, he has settled for an academic ambition of doing “...something better than making a lot of money” (AA 120). And, the unfolding of the narrative further divulges how he pursues his dream by opting a career in research after his completion of M. Tech from IIT Delhi, and later joins his own alma mater as a faculty member in the department of Computer Science. Finally, in *No Onions Nor Garlic*, Jiva, through an unassailable sense of will power and perseverance ‘speaks truth to power’. The threatening of Professor Ram couldn’t enervate her self-confidence, or deter her from attending the interview. It is through a combined force of sangfroid and conviction in her

scholarship, she wades through the difficulties posed by the caste hegemony in the campus, and successfully secures her position as a lecturer in the English department of the Chennai University.

No public institution in a democratic society could be beyond contradictions and contradistinctions, let alone the university. And, neither any 'ism'(s), the political and cultural engines of any era, or society hinge on, are beyond debates. Since the idea of dissent or protests in the universities are contingent upon prevalent matrices, and mostly comprise the heterogeneous academic community who are products of this porous system itself, the whole question of resistance against the oppressive power hierarchies is, also, not free from discontinuities. Having acknowledged the liminalities in their execution, what these fictional representations of dissent and individualistic resistance foreground, are that the university's espousal of freedom or liberation through education is intrinsically nuanced, and is always in the process of becoming.

In a different geo-political context of education as a tool for liberation of the oppressed, Paulo Freire (1970) understands the idea of freedom as "the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion" (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 47), and locates it within a collective yearning to be free. For him, "Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly" (ibid. 47). The dialectical fictional engagements with idea of the 'freedom' university upholds through active resistance against the multifarious detrimental forces are rooted in the Freirean assumptions of 'lifelong yearning' and a 'constant and responsible struggle', that denies any possibility of being defined as an absolute and universal entity. As, the political reality(s) of nations are constantly evolving as well as their paraphernalia and modalities of exercise of power, the academia's imperative role in dissent and thus, speaking back truth to power are also subject to continuous revisions and reformulations. It is this ever-evolving nature of academic dissent, I conclude, strengthens the

university's intellectual potential, and persuades the academic community to re-visit, thereby re-articulate the ideas of social justice and transformation in their scholarly engagements, or on other public platforms, in relation to the vicissitudes of contemporary India.

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Notes

ⁱ Sumit Sarkar, "Indian Nationalism and the Politics of Hindutva", pp. 270-294, in *Contesting the Nation : Religion, Community, and the Politics of Democracy in India*, edited by David Ludden (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996)

ⁱⁱ Vijender Sharma, "Indian Higher Education: Commodification and Foreign Direct Investment." *The Marxist*, vol. XXIII, no. 2, (April-June. 2007), p. 11

ⁱⁱⁱ See Aijaz Ahmad, *India: Liberal Democracy and the Extreme Right*. (Nava Telengana Publishing House, 2020)

^{iv} See 'They tried to bring pressure', an Interview with Professor S. Settar, former Chairman, ICHR, published in *Frontline*, India's National Magazine, 18 March 2000, available at:

<https://frontline.thehindu.com/other/article30253626.ece>; "Past and prejudice", by Sukumar Muralidharan and S.K. Pande, published in *Frontline*, Mar 04, 2000, available at:

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^v Sumit Sarkar, "Indian Nationalism and the Politics of Hindutva", pp. 270-294, in *Contesting the Nation : Religion, Community, and the Politics of Democracy in India*, edited by David Ludden (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996)

^{vi} "Panopticism" by Michel Foucault, in *The Information Society Reader*, edited by Raimo Blom, et al., (Routledge, 2004)

^{vii} Johan Ostling, *Humboldt and the Modern German University*. Translated by Lena Olsson, Lund University Press, 2018

^{viii} Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", in *The Foucault Reader* by P. Rabinow, (Pantheon, 1984)

^{ix} Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel" (1934), in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, trans. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson, (University of Texas Press, 1981)

^x See Peter Roberts, *Education, Literacy, and Humanization: Exploring the Work of Paulo Freire*, (Bergin and Garvey, 2000), p. 38; Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (1974)

^{xi} Paramita Banerjee, "The Presidential Transition", in *The Idea of the University: Histories and Contexts*, edited by Debaditya Bhattacharya, (Routledge, 2019)

^{xii} M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson., (S.C.M. Press, 1962)

^{xiii} B. R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*. 1936. edited and annotated by S. Anand, (Navayana Publishing Pvt. Ltd., 2014); *Caste and Race in India*. By G. S. Ghurye, (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1932)

^{xiv} Henry A. Giroux, "Teachers as Transformative Intellectuals", in *Social Education*, vol. 49 no. 5, pp. 376-79 (May 1985)

Chapter – V

Conclusion

In the end, let me briefly take a note of the key points discussed in the thesis. I have argued that the idea of modern university in India is genealogically western, which complicates, often delays the process of decolonizing education. The projects of chalking out plans for future course of development and educational reform confront, appropriate and often assimilate those vestiges of the imperial past. The hybrid modalities and praxes are conspicuous in the intellectual, cultural, linguistic and political matrices of the campus. But, apart from these foreign influences, as the thesis contends, it is the local factors which have been plaguing the development of higher education in India ever since its independence. Amongst plethora of domestic elements what the thesis identifies as the most deplorable, is politicization of the campus by the external political forces. Politicization of the campus does not imply academia's seminal role in shaping and harnessing the political consciousness, rather it is linked with the practice of utilizing the university space as a significant platform by the political parties for their vested interests and to legitimize their respective ideologies. The research unpacks the underlying historical connotations of Indian campus fiction's discursive engagement with the varied approaches of exertion of power by the political parties upon academia – from placing their favored candidates in decision-making bodies of the university and manipulating recruitments of employees to launching unprovoked attack by their cultural-political wings and fascist-capitalist co-option of the academic space. Taking on the political base of the campus, the dissertation also foregrounds the internal tensions and power dynamics within the teaching and administrative fraternity of the university, and how they eventually engird the student community as well.

It is not that every aspect of the political is inimical to intellectual progress of the university and some of them are integral to the critical or political consciousness higher

education espouses and seeks to impart to its beneficiaries. Nevertheless, Indian campus fiction is more akin to satire as a tool of re-imagining the post-colonial university campus and thus, the thesis draws upon the fictional evidences of satirizing professional stereotypes, hegemonic relations and academic skullduggery to problematize the discontinuities in the project of tertiary education in India. The repercussions of such politicization and power struggle in the campus, as the study asserts, are pervasive and sundry in their expressions. On one hand, they mar the self-reflexive, dialogic and democratic ethos of the university campus which are constitutive of its academic culture and values. On the other, they also reify the divides between disciplines, which end up perpetuating the plight of humanities and social sciences against the proliferation of science and technology education in India. Furthermore, my reading of the novels unpacks another threat to the critical-creative orientation of the varsity posed by the commercialization of education since the late 1990s, which is indicative of a much complex, often unrighteous nexus between the government and neoliberal agencies. Taking cue from the above findings, the thesis maintains that what beget out of such developments are the ‘Signpost University’ where the university is reduced into a mere degree awarding body renouncing the belaboring process of scholarship, and the *Post-truth University* that disavows academia’s role in forging a dialectic between ‘alternate regimes of truth’ⁱ and knowledge re-production, and instead encourages tailored, homogenized and distorted versions of them.

Unlike the popular notion of reading ‘literature as ideology’ⁱⁱ, ‘Ethical literary criticism’ emphasizes the ethical scaffolding of literature and aims to unravel literature’s pivotal role in moral enlightenment and ethical education. Expounding on an ethical imperative in this type of literary criticism, Nie Zhenzhao (2015) notes that “The overarching aim of ethical literary criticism is to uncover ethical factors that bring literature into existence and the ethical elements that affect characters and events in literary works” (84). Zhenzhao also maintains that ethical criticism “...emphasizes ‘historicism’, that is, the examination of the ethical values in a given

work with reference to a particular historical context or a period of time in which the text under discussion is written” (ibid. 84). Inferring from the markers of ethical criticism, I have examined the select campus novels from an ethical perspective, i.e. locating the fictive representations of the campus within the ethics of higher education in India, and how these ethical underpinnings evince simultaneous fictional interventions with the historical-empirical contexts of its (tertiary education) expansion. By systematically unpacking how the novelists make use of the ethical foundations of literature in their creative re-imagination of the university campus, the thesis analyses the characters, their actions as well as a range of fictional events, and connect them with its primary goal of literary re-mapping of post-colonial Indian academia.

In the three chapters, I have tested out my propositions concerning a literary re-mapping of post-colonial Indian academia. In the second chapter, I have discussed how K. S. Nayak, and M. K. Naik in their respective works of fiction have unearthed the colonial legacies and the challenges of decolonizing the university in a newly independent third world nation. The chapter argues that the novels which register such tensions endemic to the process of Indianizing and democratic expansion of higher education are capable of capturing the discordances between policy-making and their promulgations. I have showed how the discussed novels’ interventions with the inconsistencies, as manifest in politicization and bureaucratization of academe, rivalry among professors and administrative officials, devaluation of academic merit, ethics and freedom, underfunding and uneven growth followed by lack of resources and infrastructure, etc. embody a dialectic between fictional inquiry and the historical conjunctures entailing the development of higher education in India. Taking cue from the embedded historicity in the fictional accounts of life on campus, I have also argued that the project of gradually replacing English with the native languages as medium of instruction has been an unfinished one, evident in the continued domination of English in

academia. Furthermore, by taking up evidences from the select texts, it maintains that the discrimination and segregation based on caste gave an urgency to the cause of reservations for backward castes in higher education as a means for their upward mobilization. Extending the problematization of waning academic values and standards coupled with the crisis of unemployment and an increasing fear among students over their future, P. M. Nityanandan in his novel alleges that their root could be located in the worn out and amorphous college system in India in its embryonic stage of its independence, where, often the students themselves are to be held liable for the predicament.

The third chapter contends that the academic modernization and development in science and research depend a great deal on academic acumen and sagacity of the university administration. In my reading of Prema Nandakumar and Jose Palathingal's works of fiction, I have brought a comparison between resolute and weak administration so to understand their impact on the academic merit, culture and dynamicity of an academic institution. The reading locates how a strong-willed Vice Chancellor with an academic bent of mind is instrumental in safeguarding the autonomy of the university and the right to academic freedom against relentless pressure from the external political forces, if not eliminating their debilitating influence in the varsity, manifest in myriads of forms as mentioned above. On the other hand, the ineptitude of a Vice Chancellor is largely liable for factionalism within the administration, thereby allowing the university to become more vulnerable towards extramural political strategies and manipulations. Furthering the critique of the causality of intellectual mediocrity in many of the provincial universities despite significant endeavors of expansion vis-à-vis revolutionizing the higher education from the 1970s onwards, the chapter shows how the studied novels bring out into open the laxity, indifference to teaching and research, professional rivalry and lack of integrity among a sizeable portion of the teaching community as major deterrents to the intellectual growth of an institution. Taking from my argument in the second

chapter, I have observed how Rita Joshi's text aptly records the plight of student community owing to the academic lobbying and apathy among teachers with their professional responsibilities, which in a way compel them in turning to private tutors for assistance. This, I assert, not just mars the critical reasoning of the students and replaces it with mechanical learning, but irrevocably impairs the creative-critical potential of the university. Thus, the university's incremental departure from its intellectual and ethical foundations, the chapter concludes, metamorphoses it into a 'signpost university' or mere degree awarding institution, where the university space is reduced into a factory image of mass producing ill-educated graduates and unskilled professionals.

Through a select reading of the campus novels by Githa Hariharan, Chetan Bhagat, Amitabha Bagchi, Srividya Natarajan and Avijit Ghosh, the fourth and final chapter looks into the contemporary challenges faced by public higher education in India owing to the present political dispensation, commercialization of education and persistence of caste hegemony in the varsity. Taking cue from my earlier propositions of disavowal of university's autonomy and intellectual freedom in the last two chapters, this chapter further argues that these newfangled provocations only augment the predicament of Indian academia. Hariharan deftly satirizes the propagandist conditioning of the intellectual consciousness by right-wing cultural engines in the post-millennial times. What I infer from my reading of the text is that the strategic co-option of academic space by right-wing extremists is driven by the greater political agenda of 'Sanskritization' of higher education as an indispensable constituent of building the 'Hindu Rashtra' (Hindu Nation). I find this incursion and a tendency to regulate or curb the university's autonomy problematic because they threaten its academic community and curtail their freedom in academic research, thereby diverting the university from its secular and dialogic base of knowledge (re)production. Apart from a fictional criticism of 'new brutality'ⁱⁱⁱ of the so-called Hindu fundamentalists on academic space, what Hariharan further satirizes is

an escalating degradation of academic standard and values of Indian universities in contemporary times due to their increasing recourse to distance education as expedient to bring India's vast population within the compass of mainstream education. Under the façade of democratizing the access to higher education, what distance learning does, is reifying the concept of the 'Signpost University' because of its overdependence on ready-made articles and handouts much without classroom interactions and emphasis on critical inquiry. It also brings education down to the level of tradable commodity, where academic degrees could be acquired against monetary considerations.

The commoditization of education which begins with distance learning culminates in the neoliberal takeover of technological education since the late 90s and early twenty-first century. Bhagat and Bagchi in their respective novels, through student centric narratives of life in the IITs, critique the growing negotiation between neoliberalism and technological education in India. In my reading of the novels, I have identified how this commercialization of education replaces the critical and ethical consciousness intrinsic to higher education with that of a utilitarian perspective solely rooted in one's material wellbeing and growth. Another important issue cutting across academic space, often at the cost of its democratic and dialogic ethos is the discursive presence of caste politics and discrimination, upon which the narrative of Srividya Natarajan's novel and a segment of Avijit Ghosh's novel are built. Based on the reading of these texts, what I inferred is that the Brahminical hegemony in the university as a part of academic lobbying not just segregates students and teachers depending upon their caste identity instead of the merit, but what's even worse is that it incurs the wrath of the academicians from lower castes and thus, paving the way for 'alternate hegemonies'^{iv} and turning the university space often into a battleground of conflicting ideologies. Therefore, in the end, taking upon the fictional manifestations of a threefold attack on the autonomy of the university, and its democratic, dialogic and self-reflexive ethos, I conclude that the contemporary crises of Indian

universities could be best defined as that of the *Post-truth University* – the university which does not entirely negate its project of truth and knowledge but rather, distorts them in favor of certain ideologies, political parties, multinational organizations and castes.

Now after having observed the major findings, I think it is time to quickly note the limitations of my research and gaps and silences in the studied texts. No research is beyond limitations and in my research the first weakness which comes to my notice is that the thesis falls short of foregrounding plurality of relations permeating the varsity life in its literary re-mapping of post-colonial academia. It is true that different dynamics of interpersonal and professional relations – from teacher-student relation, friendship and romance to the professionally or academically determined ones involving the administrative, teaching and student community of the university are crucial to the idea of the university. They are these relations which give the university its particularity of goals and they also help in shaping and formulating strategies and future course of its intellectual advancement. It is not that the research in its investigation of Indian academy has not drawn upon this pluralistic nature of relations cutting across the varsity space, and the thesis would have been an incomplete project without having examined how these relations could be boon as well as bane for the individualistic and collective growth of academia. But, these relations require further attention with regard to how they are imperative to academic's role in 'speaking truth to power' as well as its right to dissent. Furthermore, friendship and romance which are the respite from rigors of academic life also need a close scrutiny as they interact with the larger society, and the liberal-dialogic often unorthodox nature of campus relations influence and redesign human relations in a nation, where it is rife with age-old stereotypes, prejudices and conflicts.

The idea of dissent brings me to my second observation on the role of student community in campus activism, which in my opinion has not been discussed in detail. It is partly because fictional engagements with the above point are quite sparse and inadequate and

also due to the limited scope of literary research, where the focal point of inquiry is the literary text and not real-life examples. Although a discernible portion of the plots of *Campus on Fire* (1961), *In Times of Siege* (2003) and *Up Campus Down Campus* (2016) revolve around the student politics and activism on the campus, and I have underlined how realistically these novels capture the spirit of campus activism within the purview of their fictional landscape, yet all is not said and neither the novels have shed light on every nuances of it. Finally, before I briefly point out further scope of research on this area at the end of my thesis, I would also like to state that the narration of academic life in Indian campus novels lack a comprehensive critique of Caste in Indian higher education. Throughout these years of doctoral research, I have come across only a handful of texts which weave in the elements of caste politics in Indian academy within the range of their fictional narratives. Apart from Srividya Natarajan's text, which builds its narrative upon the struggle of Dalit intellectuals within the university space, in M. K. Naik and Avijit Ghosh's novels, the caste question is often diluted by their emphasis on other issues pertaining to the university system. It is not that these texts don't discursively engage with the problematics of Caste in Indian academia, but in both the novels it constitutes a minor subplot and often the narrations miss out the historical nuances and liminal experiences of caste and reservation in higher education.

In Freirean philosophy, knowledge is interpreted as an essentially incomplete and ever-evolving project. For Freire, "[K]nowledge always is becoming. That is, if the act of knowing has historicity, then today's knowledge about something is not necessarily the same tomorrow. Knowledge is changed to the extent that reality also moves and changes" (Horton and Freire as qtd. in Roberts 38). Therefore, Campus Novel as a source of knowledge and, which is dialectically connected with the material reality of Indian academia, ought to be in the process of becoming. Today's knowledge about Indian campus fiction will not be similar tomorrow, despite having common grounds of experiences and relations accompanied by a correlation

with the past. This is not solely because of evolving dynamics of the university, but it also connotes to the certainty of new novels to be published in coming years with their newer or distinct matrices of ‘meanings’ and the possibility of existing corpus of campus fiction to be reread and re-examined from other perspectives so to engage with the uncharted realms of university campus.

As discussed in the introductory chapter, a set of women centric campus novels extensively talk about the idea of female education in India and the role or position of women in post-colonial academy. Thus, a dialectical reading of these novels in my opinion, would unpack almost synonymously with the studied novels in the thesis, a discursive fictional critique of the historical-empirical contexts and contestations over education of women and female empowerment in India. Again, taking cue from the Introduction, I finally contend that as Indian diaspora has been a major topic of investigation in literature as well as in social sciences for quite some decades now, Indian Campus Fiction offers a whole new viewpoint of looking into diaspora identities and experiences from the perspectives of Indian professors residing in the West. In Saros Cowasjee and Rajeev Balasubramanyam’s works of fiction, the characters of Indian diaspora professors and their ventures, in many ways embody the real-life experiences, the question of adaptation in the host university, problems of assertion and the overall challenges of sustenance in an often rigorously competitive framework of western academia, and therefore, these texts demand to be critically read alongside other diaspora novels in order to enrich and expand the scope vis-à-vis discourses of diaspora criticism. Research is always a continuous process, which is why I believe, the above stated assumptions would renew the claim for further research on this comparatively less explored fictional subgenre of Indian English literature.

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Notes

ⁱ See Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, translated and edited by Colin Gordon, et al. (The Harvester Press, 1980), pp. 109-133.

ⁱⁱ James T. Farrell, "Literature and Ideology" in *The English Journal*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (Apr., 1942), pp. 261-273; Michael Gardiner, "English Literature as Ideology", in *Literature of an Independent England Revisions of England, Englishness and English Literature*, edited by Claire Westall and Michael Gardiner (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

ⁱⁱⁱ Sumit Sarkar, "Indian Nationalism and the Politics of Hindutva", pp. 270-294, in *Contesting the Nation : Religion, Community, and the Politics of Democracy in India*, edited by David Ludden (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).

^{iv} See Vinayak Chaturvedi, *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial*, pp. 1-23, (Verso, 2000).

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Appendix (Publications, Seminar Presentations and Plagiarism Report)

Indian Campus and the Question of Campus-Caste Interface: A Study of Select Indian Campus Novels in English

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Abstract: Campus Fiction as a distinct subgenre of fiction rose into prominence in the West during 1950s, which following the words of Raymond Williams can be stated as a kind of emergent cultural form. In a similar vein, Indian academia has also contributed to the 'palimpsestic' growth of a similar kind of fiction, written in English on Indian campuses, since 1950s, which has hitherto remained unheeded in the existing body of criticism on Indian English Fiction. Unlike their Western counterpart, Indian Campus Novels, since their inception tend to depict a picture of the campus which actively participates in the formation of the constitutive narrative of the 'political' in larger socio-political order of post-independence India. This paper would attempt to study Srividya Natarajan's *No Onions Nor Garlic* (2006) and M.K. Naik's *Corridors of Knowledge* (2008), so as to probe how these two novels manifest two different discursive traces of approaches, concerning the deep rooted problematics of Indian caste system in two different Indian university campuses, located in culturally/geographically two different spaces in post-independence India. While Natarajan questions the prevailing Brahminical hegemony in the Chennai University; M.K. Naik on the other hand highlights the slow downfall of Indian academia, due to its over-inclusive nature. Hence the study would draw upon the works of Andre Beteille, Derek Bok, Paulo Freire, the Education Commission reports, the writings of Ambedkar, Partha Chatterjee, Gopal Guru and Sundar Sarukkai, in order to address the complex dynamics of the social responsibilities of Indian universities. Thus by bringing into account the institutionalization of caste-based discourses, this paper would finally strive to locate the changing dynamics of campus-caste interface.

Keywords: Campus, 'Political', Caste, Academia, Consciousness, Liberation.

University as a distinct field of study has not only produced studies on diverse aspects of pedagogy, access to higher education, the question of the autonomy of the university, academia-political interface, and so on, but has also engendered a subgenre of fiction, i.e., academic fiction/campus fiction in the West during the middle of the twentieth century. This particular genre of writing has engaged quite a number of critics like David Lodge, John O. Lyons, Elaine Showalter, Janice Rossen, M.R. Proctor, Steven Connor and John Kramer, who have endeavoured to define the genre 'campus fiction'. Though critics like Janice Rossen, Steven Connor and Crammer in their works have discussed certain elements of campus life such as campus as a microcosm and academia-political interface; it is Elaine Showalter who in her path-breaking work on Campus Fiction; *Faculty Towers: The Academic Novel and its Discontents* (2005) aptly defines the genre, by bringing in all the ends together. Academic novels, she states, should:

experiment and play with the genre of fiction itself, comment on contemporary issues, satirize professorial stereotypes and educational trends, and convey the pain of intellectuals called upon to measure themselves against each other and against their internalized expectations of brilliance. (4)

In a similar vein, though Indian academia has also been instrumental in the 'palimpsestic' growth of a similar kind of fiction on Indian Campuses, written in English since 1950s, this entire body of fictional works has not been adequately addressed in the existing criticism on Indian English literature. Despite having considerable amount of resemblances with their Western counterpart in terms of form and content, the representation/fictionalization of Indian campus in Indian Campus Novels in English since their very inception in a way differs from their western counterpart, due to the ever-pervading political nature of Indian Universities, evident enough in their active participation in the formation of the constitutive narratives of the 'political' in the larger order of post-independence India.

The diverse scales of interpretation of the 'political' as a discourse by theorists of different schools; besides establishing it as a domain of knowledge, constitutive of disparate and interrelated ways of theorization also attempt to divulge multiple shades of influence of the 'political' on the production/institutionalization/dissemination/

'problematization' of the governing modalities of education across time and space. This essentially discursive nature of the 'political' entails the deep-rooted problematics of caste in Indian society, as a genealogical study of Indian caste system would evince its historical significance behind various forms of segregation of the people from the lower castes under the façade of purity, piety and so on. The *Sutras* and texts like *Manu Smriti* played pivotal role in these processes of segregation/ostracism and the prevalence of the Brahmins in Hindu Society through propagation/institutionalization of caste based boundaries; ostensibly based on occupation. These, according to most of the critics of Indian caste system have not only strengthened the claims of the Brahmins as superior to others but have also pushed the people from the lower castes perennially into the fringes.

Criticisms of caste which hinge largely upon the gaps and silences in the documented narratives of history in a way tend to look into the discursive traces of manifold forms of caste discrimination/oppression and sporadic resistance, so as to divulge new intelligible grounds for the liberation of the people from this enduring stigma attached to their identities over the ages. This process of liberation also entails shift in the social order and the perception of the people, as the epistemological paradigms of a society hinge largely upon what Foucault stated as 'social alignments', which involve various social, educational and other institutions; aimed towards (re)validation/definition of the dominant discourse/ideologies.

Thus an epistemological shift also encompasses a sea change in the very nature of the objective reality, constitutive of these institutions, which is reminiscent of Ambedkar's argument on the caste based hierarchies and the need for a social change. Ambedkar, in the first volume of his *Writings and Speeches* (1989-91) throws light on the insidious methods of circulation of power, embedded in the caste system, as it doesn't hinge upon the division of labour, based on expertise or choice of individuals. It is a hierarchy, where one labourer is graded above the other, based on predestinations and social status of parents. Hence, being an economic organization caste "involved the subordinations of man's natural powers and inclination to the exigencies of social rules" (Ambedkar 37), which had a harrowing impact upon the untouchables or the 'broken people'. Thus social upliftment of these people, which Ambedkar emphasized also requires certain forms of social transformation, as Hindus, he claimed had been lacking a sense

of unity and a consciousness of their own being, due to the ever pervading presence of caste-ridden boundaries.

This paper would attempt to study two select Indian Campus Novels in English, i.e., Srividya Natarajan's *No Onions Nor Garlic* (2006) and M.K. Naik's *Corridors of Knowledge* (2008), which are set against the backdrop of two Indian universities, temporally/spatially discrete from each other. The portrayal of these two university campuses, alongside the diverse tenets of Indian higher education bring to the fore two distinct pictures of the reservation policy in educational institutions, aimed towards the social advancement of Dalits.

Srividya Natarajan's *No Onions Nor Garlic* (2006), which is mostly centered on the academic paraphernalia of the Chennai University brings in the deeper nuances of caste hegemony/discrimination in a metropolis university in early twenty first century. With the unfolding of the narrative, the sordid picture of the reality of caste discrimination and deprivation of people from the lower castes; despite the privileges of reservation recur time and again. Prof. Ram, one of the central characters of the novel harbours an exclusivist and Brahminical approach towards academia, which is aptly reflected in the successful endeavour of him along with some of his colleagues from upper castes to prevent the candidates from the lower castes from having appointed as faculty members for many decades. This retrogressive and biased nature of Prof. Ram, which also resonates in his many attempts to question and denigrate the intellectual credibility of the students from lower castes is indeed exemplary of the deep rooted prejudices against the reservation policy and academic standards of the reserved candidates, prevalent among many of the Indian academicians. This strong sense of resentment towards reserved candidates is also reflective of another consideration of academic institutions as essentially sacred in its demeanour, which is against the true nature of Indian academia as a socially inclusive and secular platform, largely evident enough in the Education Commission reports like Radhakrishnan and Kothari Commission Reports; apart from other treatises on Indian education system.

The denigration of the academic standards of these silenced lots, alongside the supposed sacredness of academic institutions is emblematic of Dipankar Gupta's argument in his article "Caste and Politics: Identity Over System" (2005) on caste system as primarily

governed by manifold forms of exertion of power. He also held that “castes are discrete entities with deep pockets of ideological heritage. As they are discrete phenomena, it is both logically and empirically true that there should be multiple hierarchies as each caste always overvalues itself. The element of caste competition is, therefore a characteristic of the caste order...” (412). These concepts of the competition and manifold forms of exertion of power are also exemplary of the Foucauldian concept of changing paradigms of the relation between the dominant and the subordinated. Foucault, in his work *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-77* (1980) states that these complex networks through which power circulates are inherently dynamic in nature; hence power is something which circulates and is being produced from one moment to the next. Thus a shift in the very fabric of these networks/discourses would lead towards the ‘problematization’ of existing power hierarchies in favour of the discursive traces of representation of/by the oppressed.

The unfolding of the plot opens up not only the latent intention of the faculty members like Prof. Ram and Prof. Nagarajan to exert power over the subjugated lots; but also of ideological acquiescence. Prof. Ram decries the decision of the university to unveil a statue of Ambedkar in front of the main entrance of the university and argues that “It is going to become a cult, mark my words, Nagarajan. What right have these people to bring their private icons and idols into the university’s premises?” (Natarajan 80). But the latent motif behind this denunciation is his deep sense of antipathy towards this shifting paradigms of power structure, which is aptly resonated in his alternate strategy of unveiling another much bigger statue of Goddess Saraswati, as a true symbol of knowledge in front of the other entrance of the university. The casteist approach and a perennial desire to prevail over others, two essential characteristics of Prof. Ram in a way exemplify a general trend, prevalent among certain section of Indian academicians. An analogy with the incursion of state machineries, external political forces and the responses from a certain number of teaching and non-teaching staffs, at the wake of the student movements in India in different phases of Post-independence India and most importantly in recent times, in the universities like Jadavpur University, University of Hyderabad and JNU, among others would further strengthen the argument.

Srividya Natarajan is critical of this casteist perception, which not only prevents these people from the fringes to evolve a consciousness of their own, but also thwarts the chances for social reforms/changes, conducive for a greater sense of equality, under the light of a secular education. Besides this satirization, the novel also casts enough light on the problematics and shifting paradigms of subaltern consciousness; at par with the changes in modalities/norms of Indian education. Her awareness of the lack of subaltern consciousness among the academicians from the lower castes during the initial decades of reservation policy is evident enough in the characterization of Dr. Ariyanayagam, a professor from backward caste. Despite not being a good scholar, he managed to become professor emeritus and was “still a force on these premises right through the Eighties” (Natarajan 84), due to his political patronages. This lack of a consciousness of their own is emblematic of Antonio Gramsci’s argument in his dawn-breaking work *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (1971), where he held that a ubiquitous trend, present among the subalterns to borrow the intellectual models, followed by the dominant groups leads them towards a perpetual form of intellectual subordination. He also insisted on the need of a newer form of collective consciousness among the subalterns, based on their heterogeneous experiences, so as to arrive at their own understanding of the world, distinct from the dominant models of interpretation.

This lack of subaltern consciousness and its severe impact on academia are discussed in much detail in M.K. Naik’s *Corridors of Knowledge* (2008), which is set against the backdrop of 70s and 80s, in an imaginary campus of Gandhi University, located in a remote area of Gujarat. The novel which is essentially a satire on the lack of academic integrity in Indian academia, due to the pervading presence of diverse forms of corruption also incorporates the lack of a newer form of consciousness and a sense of academic ethics among the people from the fringes, as contributing factors. A detailed study of the character; Matangini Mistri, a lecturer from the English Department, who allegedly hails from a lower caste background and her slow rise in the academic ladder would further strengthen the argument. Since the time of her appointment as a lecturer in Gandhi University, she never hesitates to follow crooked methods to succeed in academic endeavours. The lack of a sense of an academic integrity and dearth of a desire to contribute to the formation of newer forms of episteme,

based on her own understanding of the objective reality as a Dalit woman come to the fore time and again.

As a Ph.D. Scholar, instead of engaging herself in pursuance of viable research, she rather resorts to certain conniving methods, such as persuading her supervisor through unfair means, and copying from other sources; without substantial effort to bring in newer realms of meaning. Her lack of scholarship; along with the lack of academic integrity also resonate in her attempt to publish her Ph.D. thesis in the form of a book, as a requirement for her promotion to professorhood. Her act of not revising her work under the light of contemporary criticisms and manipulation of the subject expert; exploiting her caste and gender identity are indicative of what Andre Beteille considers in his work *Universities at the Crossroads* (2010), essentially as inadequacies of Indian Education System. Drawing largely upon the surveys on education in post-independence India, he argues that unplanned expansion of academic institutions in India, without proper augmentation of the resources, coupled with the over-inclusive nature of Indian academia result in the compromise of academic standards. "Universities cannot become socially more inclusive and at the same time maintain and enhance their academic standards unless the supply of the talent on which they depend is continuously augmented" (Beteille 18).

The novel also throws light on an alternate form of authority, as an inverted image of the authority it replaces, discernable at length among certain groups of academicians from the lower castes. M.K. Naik's critique of this equally corrupt form power hegemony is culminated in his attempt to satirize Matangini's next venture to become the Vice-Chancellor of the university, following similar forms of deceitful strategies. This lack of a consciousness of their own and a tendency to imitate the models, set by the dominant ideologies are exemplary of Paulo Freire's theorization of the complex dynamics of relation between oppressor and oppressed, studied extensively in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). He uses the term 'prescription', as one of the basic elements of this relation.

Every prescription represents the imposition of one individual's choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber's consciousness. Thus, the behaviour of the oppressed is a prescribed behaviour, following as it does the guidelines of the oppressor (47).

Though this novel attempts to satirize many evils, which owe much to the degradation of academic standards of Indian academia, it does not much illuminate the undercurrent of changes in the perception of those from the lower strata of the society as a potential tool to resist the oppressive forces in Indian academia. But unlike M.K. Naik, Srividya Natarajan has brought into account certain aspects of this rising consciousness among the Dalits, which is evident enough in the depiction of the movements and plays organized by the Students for Democracy as a kind of reaction against these multiple forms of social stratification. The concept of 'subaltern consciousness' in Indian reality, as Partha Chatterjee defines in his essay "Caste and Subaltern Consciousness" (1989) is "contradictory, fragmented, held together in a more or less haphazard whole—the common sense" (Chatterjee 172). He also argues that the pervading presence of Western theories in Indian academia and inadequacies of Indian versions of theories, grounded in the lived Indian materiality owe much to the difficulties, concerning the definition. This view of Chatterjee is also shared by other critics like Gopal Guru and Sundar Sarukkai. They propose that the Dalit Scholars should strive towards building up newer theoretical grounds, rooted in their manifold experiences and their perception of the objective lived reality.

Srividya Natarajan's resistance against the prevalent Brahminism in Indian academia is consummated in the graphic portrayal of the character Jeeva, a Dalit Scholar. She not only defies the suggestion of her supervisor Prof. Ram, but successfully secures the job of a lecturer of English, under the general category, solely based on her own merit. Her quest for empowerment and the enduring success story are not only exemplary of the rising consciousness among the Dalit students with time, but also exemplify Paulo Freire's conceptualization of education as a tool for liberation of the oppressed.

Freedom would require them to eject this image (image of the oppressor) and replace it with autonomy and responsibility. Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly. Freedom is not an ideal located outside of man; nor is it an idea which becomes myth. It is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion. (47)

Thus a comparative study of these two novels which is emblematic of the changing dynamics of campus-caste interface, with the rise of a consciousness among the muted sections of the society/campus, in

a way justifies the claims of Radhakrishnan and others, proposed in *The Report of the University Education Commission 1948-1949*. They regarded education as “an instrument for social change. It should not be its aim merely to enable us to adjust ourselves to the social environment.... The aim of education should be to break ground for new values and make them possible” (38). The revelation of newer values through education, as one of its seminal motifs also encompasses other forms of public platforms as sites of intellectual interaction, which is aptly reflected in the description of student movements and staging of plays like ‘Ekalavya’ in public theatres, in order to enlighten the mass against age-old caste prejudices. These attempts to transcend the boundaries of educational institutions, so as to reach a wider audience are characteristics of the concept of public pedagogy, defined by critics like Henry Giroux, who held that pedagogy does not only entail social production of knowledge and values, but also takes into account diverse forms of performativity through interactions among educators, audiences and texts in various public spaces like parks, museums and other civic and commercial spaces.

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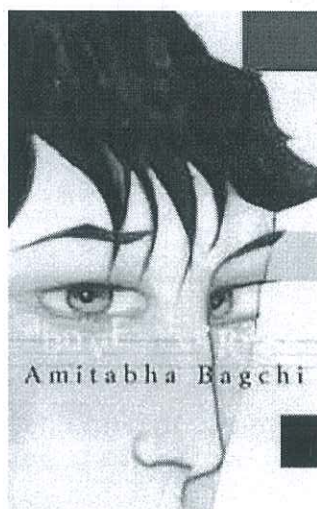
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Indian Universities and the Crisis in/of Academia – A Study of Select Indian Campus Novels in English

Krishanu Adhikari



University as a distinct field of study, has not only produced studies on diverse aspects of pedagogy, access to higher education, the question of the autonomy of the university, academia-political interface, and so on, but has also engendered a sub-genre of fiction, i.e., academic fiction/campus fiction in the West during the middle of the twentieth century. This particular genre of writing has engaged quite a number of critics like David Lodge, John O. Lyons, Elaine Showalter, Janice Rossen, M. R. Proctor, Steven Connor and John Kramer, who have endeavored to define the genre 'campus fiction'. Though critics like Janice Rossen, Steven Connor and Crammer in their works have discussed certain elements of campus life such as campus as a microcosm and academia-political interface; it is Elaine Showalter who in her path-breaking work on Campus Fiction; *Faculty Towers: The Academic Novel and its Discontents* (2005) aptly defines the genre, by bringing in all the ends together. Academic novels, she states, should;

experiment and play with the genre of fiction itself, comment on contemporary issues, satirize professorial stereotypes and educational trends, and convey the pain of intellectuals called upon to measure themselves against each other and against their internalized expectations of brilliance. (4)

In a similar vein, though Indian academia has also been instrumental in the 'palimpsestic' growth of a similar kind of fiction on Indian Campuses, written in English since 1950s, this 'subgenre' has not been adequately addressed in the existing criticism on Indian English literature. Despite having considerable amount of resemblances with their western counterpart in terms of form and content, the representation/fictionalization of Indian campus in Indian Campus Novels in English since their very inception in a way differs from their western counterpart, due to the ever-pervading political nature of Indian Universities, evident enough in their active participation in the formation of the constitutive narratives of the 'political' in the larger order of post-independence India.

Modern Indian universities which started evolving since the middle of the nineteenth century, as a part

of the existing colonial strategy to produce more number educated conformists were essentially exclusive in nature and resorted largely on the diverse forms of innate social divisions of Indian society. The independence expedites the much-awaited change in the very demeanour of Indian higher education, as it embarks on what Jawaharlal Nehru envisaged decades back 'In India, at any rate, we must aim at equality'. The post-independence era has also witnessed a relative expansion in higher education in terms of growing number of institutions of higher learning, infrastructure, teaching, research, opportunities and so on. The quest for equality and various policies; concerning the growth of higher education along with the ever-dynamic nexus between academia and politics in turn raise some crucial questions on the quality and social viability of higher education, within the ever-shifting terrain of Indian education.

This paper would attempt to study two select Indian campus novels in English, i.e., Prema Nandakumar's *Atom and the Serpent* (1982), and Amitabha Bagchi's *Above Average* (2007), which are set in two different university campuses, discrete from each other not only temporally/spatially/culturally, but also in terms of academic norms. The portrayal of diverse aspects of Indian academia, centred on these two different campuses of two different times, besides locating the shift in academic trends, also attempt to satirize certain follies in academia. The satirization, coupled with an implied sense of 'problematization' of the ever-pervading/changing nature of political incursion in academics, in a way pose some fundamental questions on academic ethics, integrity, autonomy and the reason behind university's existence.

Prema Nandakumar's *Atom and the Serpent* (1982), set in a metropolitan university campus during the later years of 1970s and early 80s aptly captures the spirit of this era, following the suggestions; proposed by the Kothari Commission. Advancement in scientific research, a sense of social and national integration through education and improving the quality of teacher education, as some of the seminal issues; discussed in the Kothari Commission report find ample resonance in the novel. The protagonist and the narrator Dr. Kamalapati Vatsa, an atomic scientist from a scientific research institute in Mumbai who is invited to deliver Rao Bahadur Vidya Sagara Endowment lecture on the Biological effects of Atomic Research manifests the rising trend in the milieu of Indian higher education towards a substantial progress in scientific research.

The unfolding of the narrative divulges other characteristic traits of Vatsa, which not only establishes him as the novelist's own vision of the ideal intellectual, but also as the impersonated voice of the novelist. The portrayal of the transformation of his intellect and ideology from a Eurocentric one towards more of a nationalist one reaches its consummation in his lecture, which attempts to weave the scientific revolution viably with larger national interests and of mankind in general. His notion of holistic enlightenment of the nation and mankind through education is emblematic of Shashi Tharoor's evaluation of quality/excellence as something larger and substantial in purpose and national in its demeanour, as manifest in his book *India Shastra: Reflections on the Nation in our Time* (2015). He also insists on the need for a social cohesion, community development and a conscious and active citizenship, as some essential motifs of education.

The character sketch of Vatsa, alongside the evolution of himself as an enlightened individual also entails the need for a critical education of the citizens, which as Paulo Freire suggests; would enable them to 'discuss courageously the problems of their context- and to intervene in that context... the dangers of the time and offer them the confidence and the strength to confront those dangers instead of surrendering their sense of self through submission to the decisions of others' (Freire 30). The validation of subjectivity through education, conspicuously visible in him leads him not only to question the social prejudices and evils, but also makes him anxious over the psychological crisis, lately taking its toll in the Indian society and more seminally in the Indian academia, despite the promises of bringing in social change through education. The psychological crisis entails multiple forms of rivalry among the academicians and an ambience of hostility concerning the material goals, evident among the faculties of the university. The feud between Sheela Rani and the head of the department over her promotion, a sense of hypocritical ambivalence of Dr. Yana and the deprivation of some faculties from pursuing research due to their lack of affinity with the administration, among many other instances embody such crisis.

The shifting trend in academia from an elitist platform towards a more socially inclusive one is deftly highlighted in the novel through many encounters of Prof. Vatsa with the faculties from diverse social strata. These interactions also unveil certain darker sides of post-independence Indian academia, evident enough in the acts of exploitation of junior faculties and the students in the hands of senior faculties like Yana and Sheela Rani and the subsequent resentment among them. Dr. Yana's act of depriving one of his juniors Dr. Dharma, Sheela Rani's lack of academic demeanour, resonant enough in her lack of interest in supervising a scholar, yet her ambition of becoming a professor and manipulation of others to attain her desire, among many others are exemplary of such innate flaws. These blots not only resonate the lack of academic integrity and consciousness, but also throw light on the exploitation of academic freedom and a need to re-define its trajectory. Academic freedom, though tends to defend the ethical/academic rights of academicians against multiple forms of internal and external incursions and bestows upon them certain privileges to problematize the follies in society/academia, it cannot be

perpetrated at the cost of academic values and obligations, as Stanley Fish proposes in his book *Versions of Academic Freedom: From Professionalism to Revolution* (2014).

Prema Nandakumar also throws light on the increasing number of participation of women in Indian academia, and with this the growing propensity towards relocation of the power hierarchy, which in a way follows the Foucauldian notion of dynamic nature of power circulation, as with the shift in the center; in terms of agents and the social alignments, the entire power structure redefines itself. Sheela Rani, who is exemplary of such changes also heightens the novelist's resentment towards the ever-growing gap between the propositions and execution of the same. Her conspiring nature, coupled with her ceaseless desire to uplift herself in the illusory ivory tower culminates in her act of manipulation of the gherao and mass demonstration of non-teaching lower grade staffs against the administration and Vice Chancellor for salary hike and other facilities, led by her brother Kshema Rao, for her own self-interest. These incidents in a way exemplify the novelist's strong sense of indignation towards the functioning and the administration of the universities in post-independence milieu, which despite many ideal propositions and promises; i.e. equality, pursuit of excellence and a sustainable contribution to the greater welfare of the society and the nation; among others, very often fails to cater to these due to the scheming and hierarchical nature.

The representation of exploitation of the muted sections of the university for the wish fulfilment of the dominant group, demonstration for salary hike and the rivalry among the faculties over professional/personal interests are emblematic of Andre Beteille's analysis of a general degradation of the Indian universities. He clearly states that instead of promoting democracy, harmony and a kind of critical consciousness among the people, Indian 'universities have become battlegrounds for the promotion of every kind of personal and sectional interest...and the distribution of seats and posts among different castes, communities, and factions' (Beteille 45). Janice Rossen; in his book *The University in Modern Fiction: When Power is Academic* (1993) looked deep into the different shades of this perpetual struggle for power and professional/personal rivalry among the academicians, which not only mar the academic integrity, but also enlarge the scope of external political incursion within the university; insular, yet a politically volatile space, hence resulting in the compromise of the autonomy of the university.

This essentially political nature of Indian academia, though deftly fictionalized through the mass protests in the university and the participation of the political leaders like Kshema Rao in the internal affairs of the university, the depiction of another major character Prof. Yaugandharayan, who prefers to be called as Yana; a distorted anglicized abbreviation of his name unveils a distinct picture of the 'political'. He epitomizes a dominant trend in post-independence Indian academia, i.e. an over inclination towards Western academia, as a result of the deep-rooted colonial hangover. His attempts to imitate the western models/standards of academics blindly, decrying the indigenous parameters as naïve and flawed ones underlines the emergence of a new elite class in academia, which also justifies Rey Chow's conceptualization of hybridity as 'lack'. With the advent of globalization, Chow argues that Said's concept of parasitic relation between western knowledge and production and non-western world ceases to exist and is replaced by a neo-orientalist anxiety, as the natives no longer consider themselves as pure, due to the relentless flow of incursion of western models in their lives. This in turn transforms themselves into 'dangerously unotherable', where they consider ethnicity as lack. It is through the experiences and association of Yana, the novelist subtly problematizes this shifting terrain in the perception of the people. 'The Silka Pinta Bar is a symbol of the urbanized Indian's constant search to find a foreign identity coupled with a Maharaja-esque dome of pleasure' (Nandakumar, 117).

This lack of a consciousness of their own and a tendency to imitate the models, set by the dominant ideologies are exemplary of Paulo Freire's theorization of the complex dynamics of relation between oppressor and oppressed, studied extensively in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). He uses the term 'prescription', as one of the basic elements of this relation.

Every prescription represents the imposition of one individual's choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber's consciousness. Thus, the behavior of the oppressed is a prescribed behavior, following as it does the guidelines of the oppressor (47).

The manifestation of the ideas of 'dangerously unotherable' and 'prescription' is much nuanced in Amitabha Bagchi's *Above Average* (2007). The novel which is set at the backdrop of late 20th century; in the campus of IIT Delhi brings to the fore the multidirectional impact of neoliberal machineries on Indian academia. It is mostly through the heterogeneous experiences of the protagonist Arindam at different stages of his education, the novelist apart from locating the paradigm shift in the parameters of pedagogy; post-globalization, subtly questions the very process of transition towards more of a commodification of education. The conversations of Arindam and his schoolmates divulges an innate sense of rivalry alongside an incessant process of inculcation of class consciousness through education, lacking the solidarity mark the departure from a 'conscious and active citizenship', as essential motifs of school education.

The material conditions, which determine/shape the standards of Indian education in this globalized world are further endorsed and largely permeate the realm of higher education. Bagchi has beautifully evinced the incursion of such material aspects within the paraphernalia of Indian higher education through the graphic portrayal of IIT life. The adoption of late capitalist American models of education in the disparate socio-cultural Indian milieu, evident enough in the introduction of grading system and defining the quality of the students solely based on the grades they secure recurs time and again with the unfolding of the narrative. Arindam's friend Kartik's evaluation of academic standards, centered solely on grades and accumulation of wealth resonate vividly when he questions Arindam's interest in research as unlike Kartik, he has not secured higher grade. 'Oh Rindu...Research is for naukkis and dassis' (Bagchi 121). Besides the shift towards materiality, the appropriation of the American models reflects upon a post 90's propensity to homogenize the parameters of higher education in India, dispensing with the innate heterogeneity and several challenges, encountered by a developing nation like India, i.e. economical, geographical, and cultural among others.

Thus Kartik; who exemplifies this shifting trend in Indian academia, towards a commodification/commercialization of education is reminiscent of Bill Readings' view on the late development in academia, with the rise of globalization, as manifest in his book *The University in Ruins* (1997). He argues that the late capitalist machineries and consumer oriented corporation commodify the educational milieu in such a manner that the universities cease to exist as a platform for promotion of newer pathways of knowledge and accounting takes over the social/cultural accountability of university education. The ever-growing obsession with the material benefits of education and imposition of homogenous global parameters, irrespective of the spatial disparities/diversities of different places result in distortion/appropriation of the indigenous realities and subsequent 'massification', as the subjects concerned, without being aware of their position in the social/political/educational milieu tend to acquiesce to the western ideals. An analogy with the recent move of UGC to introduce the CBCS system in the universities and their affiliated colleges, notwithstanding the spatial and cultural differences would further corroborate this claim.

Amitabha Bagchi has expressed his indignation towards such advancement in higher education mostly through the resistance, demonstrated by Arindam. Instead of succumbing to the material goals, he opts to do research, solely governed by the drive to explore newer approaches/paths of episteme. This approach of Arindam is exemplary of Paulo Freire's conceptualization of education as a tool for liberation of the oppressed.

Freedom would require them to eject this image (image of the oppressor) and replace it with autonomy and responsibility. Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly. Freedom is not an ideal located outside of man; nor is it an idea which becomes myth. It is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion. (47)

Thus these two novels, as representative works of the 'sub-genre' Indian Campus Fiction in English aim at mapping the shifting trajectories of Indian higher education, by bringing into account different pictures of the two campuses; temporally/spatially discrete from each other. These two narratives, by hinging on two seemingly different pictures of post-independence Indian academia, aptly capture the crisis of the university as an institution, presumably autonomous and insular space, not only resembles the other public institutions, but itself is a public institution in India, hence answerable to the public; yet susceptible to internal/external political/ideological interventions. A critical inquiry into the diverse shades of academia, as the seminal motif of such works places them outside the gamut of the canonical works of Indian English fiction. Though the studies on Western Campus Fiction have established it as a distinct sub-genre, which distances itself from the generic norms of mainstream fiction, Indian Campus Fiction has hitherto remained largely unheeded in the existing criticism on Indian English literature, despite having a strong genealogy of its evolution over the decades. Alastair Fowler provides an apt definition of 'sub-genre' in his book *Kinds of Literature* (1982), where he states that division of sub-genres "goes by subject matter or motifs" (Fowler 112). This exploration of newer themes and motifs, alongside distancing from the trends of dominant form of writing places this form of fiction close to the definition of popular literature, as proposed by Adorno and Williams' idea of 'emergent culture'. But without substantial research on this particular sub-genre; the taxonomical categorization of this body of writing, in my view stands equivocal, as any such attempt would eventually lead us to give in to the prejudiced binary of high and low culture, propounded by the late 19th and early 20th century critics like Matthew Arnold and F. R. Leavis.

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Women at Crossroads: Reconfiguring the Gender Roles in Select Indian Genre Fiction

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Abstract

The inherent discursivity, entailing the composite category of 'The third world women' hinges on many contentious contours of female subjectivity, its genealogical and teleological subservience and submission to patriarchy, and the subsequent re-assertion of their identities and different female roles within the given rubric of patriarchal capitalist social order of the former colonies through strategic subversion, vis-à-vis negotiation of certain patriarchal ideals. The select novels, i.e. Anuradha Marwah Roy's *The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta* (1993) and Advaita Kala's *Almost Single* (2007); from the discursive category of Indian genre fiction narrate two intersecting stories of two middle class Indian women, who have migrated to Delhi in pursuit of empowerment and to transcend the circumscribed trajectories of parochialism and stereotypical tropes of patriarchal order. Drawing inferences from these two texts, the present paper would like to look into the ethical question of women's empowerment in India, so as to 'problematize' the much appropriated subversion of gender roles, through a 'palimpsestic' assertion of female subjectivity, as evidenced in the seemingly divergent experiences of the two protagonists, within the unstable contexts of a postcolonial nation. Having engaged with the contested notion 'female consciousness', the paper further seeks to examine the veracity of such changes in the lived experiences of the women within the ever-shifting paradigms of 'post-national' and 'post-globalization' Indian milieu, while being placed against the multifaceted impediments, faced by them to bridge the two extremes; personal and professional affairs. Last but not least, the paper would also seek to shed some light on the equivocality, bordering the genealogical and generic classification(s) of the 'genre fiction', often under the charade of 'literary aesthetics' and critical/wide reception of these literary narratives.

Keywords: Third-World Feminism, Neoliberalism, Women empowerment, Indian middle class women, Indian genre fiction.

Introduction

The varying degrees of the concept of 'women empowerment' have engaged generations of scholars across the globe. One of the churning dialogues, crisscrossing the global feminist scholarship, roughly since the middle of the twentieth century is the underlying tension between the first world feminism and its oriental counterparts (postcolonial and third world feminisms), and the immanent differential and overlapping markers between them, depending upon the geopolitical, social and cultural contexts of their enquiry. The prevalent tensions within the intersectional approaches of global feminist criticisms, further, lead towards the much

contemporary debates, grounded on the performative assumptions, adhering to the complex network of identity politics. The theory 'political' in/of identity formation, as well as an assertion, divulges the chauvinist elements in defining the female subjectivity as a subservient cultural construct. The methodology of resisting such regressive cultural labelling espouses to "disarticulate 'woman' from 'culture', deconstruct woman as symbol, reconstruct women as human beings and problematize women's rights as human rights" (Moghadam, 1993, p. 22). As the definition of 'the third world', by the postcolonial thinkers departs from the imperial praxes of homogenized 'othering' of the East by the Western "orientalist" discourses, the persistent call for an "intellectual decolonization" (Nigam, 2019) hinges on the assumptions of resuscitation of discursive traces of indigeneity(s), within the volatile and hegemonic political order of the post-colonies, which encourages heterogeneous expressions, through a collective adherence to normative social roles. Thus, within these complicit tropes of reified gender/power relations, the re-assertion of 'the Female' identity, through a gradual and incremental re-positioning and defiance of stipulated gender roles entails a persistent critique of heteronormativity as the only adaptive model, and an active resistance to the 'mainstreaming' of gendered narratives. Following Spivakian proposition of unlearning; through 'problematization' of the first world feminist theories, and a re-evaluation of ethnographic, cultural and functional 'differences' in the experiences of the women from the South-Asian countries, it could be plausibly argued, that the third world feminist scholarship ought to replace the commodity centered, patriarchal approach of "predictive usefulness" with a more gender-neutral, "mental-metric view" of individual potential, i.e. "what actual capabilities a person has" (Kynch and Sen, 1983, pp 363-36).

India as an exemplary third world nation, has substantially contributed to the existing criticism on 'developing' and 'underdeveloped' countries. The ontological, vis a vis teleological contradictions, characteristic of 'the third world women', and also of the 'third world', apart from these sociological studies, find ample resonance in the literary imagination(s) of the third world writers(located in/out[side] the geo-political boundaries). The present study aims to critically interrogate the literary ramifications of these churning questions, permeating the various social roles, played by the Indian middle class women, through a comparative reading of the select Indian genre fiction, i.e. Anuradha Marwah Roy's *The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta* (1993) and Advaita Kala's *Almost Single* (2007). Despite having temporal/spatial/cultural contradistinctions, as evidenced in the lived experiences of the protagonists, a 'symptomatic' reading of these two texts would rather divulge some heretical questions, concerning the contested notion of 'women empowerment', located in New India, within the span of some twenty years; from the 1980s to early post-millennial era. Responding to the underlying tensions in mapping the empowered status of Indian women, this paper further strives to understand how these two fictional narratives discursively engage with such challenges, through a systematic departure from embedded cultural prejudices and Daedalian gender stereotypes. Chronicling the transition in the 'performative' gestures/actions of Indian women also validates the drive to situate the evolution in the third world feminist discourses, within the shifting paradigms of the 'post-national' era, and to decipher how/why the female characters of the novels effectively endorse to and distance from much envisaged social reforms.

Fragmented developments in the upward social mobility for women

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's essay, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist and Colonial Discourses" (1988), which in a way marks the beginning of the feminist studies on the broader category of the third world women, works through certain incisive pointers to decipher the 'difference' and

disjunction between the multifocal experiences of the women of color and their western counterparts. The works of feminist scholars such as Esther Chow, Catherine Berheide (1994), and Lourdes Beneria (1979, 1995), delve into the diverse range of socio-cultural and geo-political factors in the third world countries, responsible for the 'difference'(s) in patriarchal interpellation of women's subjectivity and its feminist counter expressions/discourses. While Beneria's criticism of patriarchy is more discursively and locally rooted in her firm belief on women's collective resistance to patriarchal domination, followed by the active re-assertion of female subjectivities through their claims of equality in terms of the financial, performative and other socio-cultural rights of women, Chow and Berheide further situate the demographic distinctions in the patriarchal attitude of the third world within the rubric of age, class, race, as well as geo-political 'difference'(s). The metaphor of 'difference', interfacing the feminisms of the first and the third world is further examined by Mohanty in the sequel; "Under Western Eyes" Revisited" (2003). The essay investigates the fragmented developments in the upward social mobility for women from the emergent nations with the changing economic conditions, due to globalization, thereby documenting an epistemological shift from an earlier persistence of ethnographic 'difference'(s), towards bridging the gap between 'difference' and 'commonality' in the third world and cross-cultural feminist discourses. She proposes:

...(I)n knowing differences and particularities, we can better see the connections and commonalities, because no border or boundary is ever complete or rigidly determining. The challenge is to see how differences allow us to explain the connections and border crossings better and more accurately, how specifying difference allows us to theorize universal concerns more fully (Mohanty, p. 505).

This further unfolds the urgency of demystification, re-examination and theorization of newer forms of economic, racial and gender inequalities, within the deceptively homologous tropes of neoliberal economy and the national contexts of right-wing fundamentalism with their masculinist and racist narratives. This gradually indicates a repositioning in the third world feminist scholarship towards a more sustained 'anti-global' political critique of patriarchal and racist relations and structures.

A genealogical study of Indian Genre fiction/Pulp fiction traces back to a larger historical backdrop of their evolution in vernacular mediums. Tabish Khair, in the purview of two distinctive fictional subcategories—'Indian Fantasy Fiction' and 'Indian Romance Fiction', situates their origins in the marginal cluster of 'Bhasha-languages', and also brings in the wide public reception of such popular narratives within their respective regional trajectories (Khair, 2008, p.60, also see Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay, et al., 2018). In a similar vein, many of the exemplary fictional subgenres from this discursive category of 'Indian Genre Fiction' such as Indian Campus Fiction and Indian Chick-Lit, have much profound historical heritages both in English and other native languages. However, the proliferation of a diverse range of Indian Genre fiction in English, especially after the 1990s, indicates the shaping of a homomorphous urban culture in New India, with large-scale neo-liberal economic expansion and rise of the new middle class. This image of a changing nation is geared up by what might be termed as a 'post-millennial Indian moment' (Varughese, 2017), resulting in the opening of a liberal, domestic market for enhanced fiscal and cultural activities, thereby laying the foundation for a 'globalised' India. Dawson Varughese remarks: "It was Manmohan Singh, in his role as finance minister, who took the Indian economy forward from the 1990s into the 2000s prior to him becoming prime minister in 2004" (2017, p. 2). The debate over 'Globalization', as a 'boon' or 'bane' for the developing nations further evinces

larger questions on the cultural homogenization/heterogenization, and the duality in the third world's position (self-reflexivity and compliance) with the neo-liberal market economy.

Functional duality and the 'political unconscious'

Following Jameson's analyses of the bi-directional, paradoxical response of the third world to the postmodern late-capitalist cultural praxes, it could be tenably argued that this functional duality effectuates the shaping of a distinct 'political unconscious', through thoroughgoing experimentations with emergent fictional genres and much contemporary social challenges of 'globalised' India. The 'palimpsestic' growth of Indian genre fiction in English discursively brings in several issues, pertaining to female empowerment in India; its accomplishments and ambivalences. Indian Campus novels in English, written by women writers, such as Rita Joshi's *The Awakening* (1992), Srividya Natarajan's *No Onions Nor Garlic* (2006), and Soma Das' *Sumthing of a Mocktale* (2007) conspicuously throw light on the crucial question of the role of women's education in India in safeguarding/reinforcing the gender equality and elevating the social status of women, both in family and in larger structure. *The Awakening* (1992) delineates a realistic portrayal of women's education in a provincial Indian college during late 1980s, so as to problematize the 'discontinuities' in the practical manifestations of reformative measures, espousing female literacy. While Natarajan, and Das, in their respective novels explore the contradictions/complicities, entailing the different female positions at the metropolitan Indian universities in the 21st century, *No Onions Nor Garlic* (2006) also traverses through the oft-mooted question of 'subaltern women' in Indian academia. On the other hand, Indian Chick Lit, a relatively new fictional genre in Indian English literature engages with the lived experiences of middle class urban women in the post-millennial Indian milieu. Despite having disparagingly labelled as 'fluffy', "formulaic vapid prose" (Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 157), these works of fiction very often provide a broader, 'heterotopic' perspective in re-imagining the "(trans)national racialized feminine subject embedded within neoliberalism, heteronormativity and racism" (Butler, and Desai, 2008, p.2). Amulya Malladi's *The Mango Season* (2003), and Kavita Daswani's *The Village Bride of Beverly Hills* (2005) present such neoliberal and (trans)national/cultural female subjects within the ever-dynamic contexts of a postcolonial nation, and also tend to analyze the perpetual ambivalence in patriarchy in acknowledging the individual choices/decisions of women in the purview of their marriage, evident enough in the post-liberal urban spaces of new India, often carrying the "burden of culture" (Ashcroft 2011). While Anuja Chauhan's *Battle of Bittora* (2010) draws a feminist fictional historiography of such transitions and envisaged changes in their life choices, through the evolution of its female protagonist, Rekha Waheed's *A-Z Guide to Arranged Marriage* (2005) hovers around the idea of marriage in Muslim community and the problematics of identity formation of Muslim women.

The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta (1993), which is written in the form of 'bildungsroman', and set in a post-independent India between the late 1970s and 80s, dialectically engages with the multilateral scholarly debates on the concept of female education in India, as an indispensable tool for women empowerment. The protagonist Geetika, hailing from a small town in Rajasthan embodies different perspectives on women's liberation through her formal education. Anuradha Marwah Roy's imperative questions/propositions on the crumbling collective consciousness with respect to the dissemination vis a vis reception of women's education in India are articulated through the prevalent antinomies, discernible in the responses of Geetika's family and her friend Vini's. Vini's undiscerning acceptance of the regressive presuppositions and stereotypes of the patriarchal order, is adequately echoed in her attempt to

persuade Geetika to compromise with her individual aspirations and abide by the norms of heteronormative social order.

What is so unreasonable about it, Geetika?...you will have to meet his parents, ultimately. You said you were going to marry him...Why you are twenty already, aren't you? You can't wait till you are thirty...Come on Geeti, go and charm them. They will be so glad that their son has chosen such a fair complexioned bahu and one so intelligent... (Marwah, 1993, p. 15).

This symbolically re-affirms the essential patriarchal disposition of restricting/appropriating the female gender roles within the prescribed trajectories of domesticity, through a deliberate co-option of female subjectivity, as argued by Karuna Chanana in her essay: "The Dialectics of Tradition and Modernity and Women's Education in India" (1990). "Notwithstanding the accent on women's education, the gender role expectation of and about women continues to be that of a home maker. This role definition has been internalized by even those women who have had access to modern education and to career opportunities" (p. 76).

Geetika's much precarious and tedious academic journey which began in an imaginary provincial town called 'Desertvadi' and culminated in her acquiring a lectureship in a govt. degree college in Delhi, is emblematic of a radical distancing from the parochial patriarchal morals of post-national India. Geetika's school education clearly reflects upon the reformative measures taken after the independence to advocate female literacy, such as free primary education and several fellowships for women, owing much to the feminist and liberal clairvoyance of the social reformers. The committees such as National Committee on Women's Education (1958-59), Committee on Differentiation of Curricula for Boys and Girls (1964), and Committee on the Status of Women in India (1971), in their reports expressed great concern over the staggered progress of women's education in the initial decades after independence and pressed on the urgency of uniformity in promotion of female education, by opening up educational institutions for women in peripheral areas, and enlightening people about the domestic and larger socio-economic interests of educating the girl child. Their recommendations urging the government to consider the challenge of women's education "as a major and special problem of education for a good many years to come" (1958-59, p. 5) and "to close the existing gap between the education of men and women in as short a time as possible" (p. 6) witnessed a considerable rise in enrollment of female students, with an increasing number of girls' educational institutions and recruitment of female teachers. But despite these liberal endeavors to revolutionize the female education in India, the stumbling blocks of patriarchal tradition and much naturalized female identity, essentially tied up with marriage and her role in the family are discursively addressed by Anuradha Marwah, through Geetika's resentment and questioning of her friend Mahima Kumari's marriage, even before she turned eighteen. This in turn unmasks the liminalities, permeating the perennial challenges of women's education and its lopsided development, as evidenced in "different states, different regions in a state, rural and urban areas and socio-economic strata" (Kamat, 1976, p. 8).

With the unfolding of the narrative, the nuanced presence of patriarchal and capitalist discourses, coupled with a conniving political strategy of 'appropriation' of female roles become much discernable, irrespective of temporal and spatial differences. The novelist has deftly demonstrated the socio-cultural tensions and prejudices, present in average middle-class Indian families, concerning the *raison d'être* of female education. After the completion of her college education, Geetika's decision of joining a university in a fictitious city of Lutyenabad, which is tenably analogous to JNU, Delhi; to pursue higher studies during the early 1980s; was much resented by some of her family members, her boyfriend and even his family members. Andy's

insistence on their marriage and emphasis on Geetika's primary role as 'wife' and 'mother', also visible in Ratish and his family's expectations from her later on, dispensing with her academic aspirations, unveil the ever-widening rupture between theoretical propositions and their realistic manifestations, while problematizing the atavistic demeanor of New Indian men. Thus, despite the visionary ideals of strengthening the female social roles and upliftment of women's social status in post-independence India, the underlying contradictions in the dominant patriarchal attitude of the nation, tend to delimit/appropriate the socio-cultural virtue of women's education within the restricted boundaries of the family. Drawing references from the historical evidence and contemporary records, Vina Mazumdar rightly problematizes this over-powering patriarchal trend in the introductory chapter of her edited volume: *Education, Equality and Development: Persistent Paradoxes in Indian Women's History* (2012). She questions: "Was the main objective strengthening women's primary social role-as rearers of the young generation, or to bridge the mental gap vis a vis their husbands? Or was it to assist their men's social advance?" (Mazumdar, p. xx).

Thus questioning the stereotypical expectations of patriarchy and socio-political matrices of a supposedly liberal India and transcending the complicit boundaries during the 1980s were the radical challenges, encountered by a third world middle-class woman in her early 20s. The road, leading to a feminist assertion of her individuality, through an unrelenting subversion of fixed gender roles, is fettered with multiple conflicts, ranging from a persistent 'lack' in her personal life to a ceaseless battle for her 'existence' and assertion of her identity in a power-ridden Indian society. Geetika's decision of opting for a career in academics, breaking off the engagement with Ratish even after the news of her pregnancy, and her final decision of being a single mother to her child exemplify a paradigm shift from the over-powering chauvinist ethos. The positioning of single motherhood as a taboo/stigma in the society is often identified as an act of adultery and even prostitution. The public defamation of her as a prostitute, by her own students, apart from reiterating the entrenched patriarchal prejudices, and the moral degradation of Indian men, also subtly satirizes the lack of a collective non-gendered consciousness, amongst them. The following reaction of the principal, which is characterized by a hostile intention of professional harassment, instead of empathy, is further evocative of the dominant patriarchal ideology of segregating and controlling women's individuality through vindictive coercive approaches. Thus Geetika's resistance, through retaining her individualist choices is symptomatic of a projection of an identity which is not always self-evident, within a definitive structural position, but is created and emerges through a process of a prolonged collective struggle (Berger 1992, Ray and Korteweg 1999).

The multifaceted projection of her 'emancipated' self through her life-choices, bears an index of a radical, yet mediatory positioning of female representation in the ever-shifting Indian contexts. This constant oscillation between these two extremes reflects in her self-revelation:

"Mummy...I lost Ratish...I became too much your daughter...I became Geetika who earned her living, I became Geetika who was trying to write. I wrote incessantly, resolutely turning Ratish away in the evenings. I was trying to work out a system in which to exist" (Marwah, 1993, p. 189).

Her creative writings create a 'heterotopic' space for a palimpsestic utterance of her own struggle with normativity and of the devious presence of loneliness, schizophrenia and emotional vulnerability, confronting the lived experiences of 'empowered' Indian women. The underlying existential crisis, as a perpetual signifier of her self-discovery, through denial and transcendence of conventional boundaries, exemplifies an average middle-class third world woman's ceaseless

intrapersonal and interpersonal struggle with the dominant phallogentric ideologies in her claim for equal gender rights.

Market society and postmodern individualism

In the neoliberal-capitalist 'market society', the discourse of gender representation is more than a challenging one. The fragmented salience of 'postmodern individualism' within the domain of the new wave feminist discourses constitutes an explanatory frame for this 'progressive', an emblematic of neoliberal ideologies, yet complex matrix of self-efficacious and self-formulated definition of identity. One of the strengths of this 'progressivism' lies in its refusal of any 'singular-liberal-humanist subjectivity' (Reed, 1997, p. 124). Judith Butler (1990) has explained that the concept of gender as essentially "a performative repetition of acts" that can be associated with any male or female body. She further rejects the singularity of the biological determinant to assign the 'gender role' and stresses more on the act of "behaviour" which through revisions, reassertions and reformulations over the time, can achieve a position of identity. Thus, the idea of 'femininity' is inadvertently characterized by diversity, fragmentation and a series of contestation, thereby, questioning its monolithic definition and the subsequent representations. The regime of representation has shifted from political rights (a second-wave phenomenon) to subjective choices (essentially based on those rights), hence, dialectically producing a palimpsestic effect of 'female identity'. Within this framework, Advita Kala's *Almost Single* (2007) attempts to delineate certain dimensions to assess the nature of this cosmopolitan identity of young, middle-class, working-women through the lens of postcolonial-feminism, contouring the neoliberal discourses.

The protagonist of *Almost Single* (2007), Aisha Bhatia, who migrates from Nashik to New Delhi, the metropolitan hub of corporate agencies for 'progressive' career options, is "on the wrong side of twenty-nine" (Kala, p. 4), i.e. still unmarried, adhering to the orthodox Indian culture. Aisha as a young successful working-woman (she works as the 'Guest Relations Manager' at the Grand Orchid Hotel) takes an active part in the grand culture of capitalism and consumerism, thus, becomes a signifier to 'an autonomous subject position'. She represents the prototype of the "new woman" as articulated by Rajeswari SunderRajan(1993), who asserts "She (Indian woman) is 'new' in the senses both of having evolved and arrived in response to the times, as well as being intrinsically 'modern' and 'liberated'"(p. 124). Aisha's social circle is loosely confined to Misha and Anushka, her childhood friends along with Nic and Ric, the gay couple with whom she drinks, shops and goes to parties. Her position as a 'liberated' woman aptly places her at the centre of conflict between tradition and modernity. For that, Aisha is under the constant pressure of finding her 'Mr. Right'. Her everyday flow of work and socialization is frequently interspersed with her mother's call who constantly persists her to obtain a 'perfect' groom which indicates an NRI or someone with close proximity to that, without which her social acceptability is disparaged; but when Aisha seems disinterested, Mrs Bhatia dishearteningly complains: "Everyone is getting married now. Chalo, it's all karma at the end of the day" (Kala, p. 12). The struggle to incorporate this conflict between the traditional norms of marriage, within a stipulated age and the modern cultural ideals of maintaining a position of choice, creates a complex juncture for particularly the young working-women for whom the limits to overcoming so are attributed with an undue psychic cost for individual failures as they oftentimes fail to bridge the unbending gap between the 'right' choice and unquestioned submission to normative structure (Budgeon, 2011, p. 286). In their article, Pamela Butler and Jigna Desai (2008) have convincingly argued:

As the postcolonial nation-state modulates the binary of traditional and modern, one of the most significant sites of contestation and negotiation is family, specially the joint

Indian family that is framed as being able to withstand the onslaughts of modernity...(p. 16)

Therefore, marriage becomes a problematic site for contested ideas to contrast as well as discursively converge. On the same length the novel also underscores the liminalities of arranged marriage as a mode of celebrating endogamous marital practices through cultural affiliation. Aisha's cousin, LataDidi, confesses dishearteningly, "Now he drinks to get drunk. But what do I do? It's been over ten years now and I'm only a college graduate. Where can I go? Papa has also retired. Aisha, it's good you have waited. You have a job, a life, friends, an identity... you know something, you will never be lonely" (Kala, p. 266). The predicament of women in unsuccessful marriage, even after being approved by the families, is the locus of ideological struggle that third wave feminism exceptionally promotes. As argued by Shelley Budgeon (2011), the key concept of female emancipation is permeably tied to the shifting modalities of economic progression, advanced information technologies, demographic changes, and diverse modes of sexuality, among other drives. According to her:

Third-wave feminism represents one strategy for negotiating the contradictions that constitute a late modern female empowerment discourse. This discourse is underwritten by the assertion that women's access to an autonomous subject position increased significantly in the latter half of the twentieth century resulting in women's ability to define their own identities independent of their relations to others (p. 284).

She explains the trajectory of modern women, shedding the 'victim' self behind and achieving the position of 'power feminism'. Heywood and Drake (2004) expound this paradigm shift by examining the new levels of gender parity in educational as well as occupational attainments by which, they assume, women are more attuned with their *generation* rather than *gender*. Such circumstances, by and large, help to produce generative knowledge that can flexibly address the heterogeneous nature of the feminist agenda.

The novel revolves around the multiple threads of 'acceptability', both personal and societal, which is questioned, refused and negotiated by almost all the characters. Misha's groom-hunting lands her on the wrong side of the rope for multiple times, her 'living alone' status has brought numerous misjudgments from the co-inmates of her building as Mrs. Mukherjee, her neighbour "has a fixed notion of bhadrakalok and Misha just doesn't cut it" (Kala, p. 78), Anushka refuses to compromise her position in the marriage when she discovers her husband's infidelity, Aisha never plans to settle in with any random man just because she is nearing her thirties. In fact, her non-conformist nature impels her to question the very way society wants the women to represent themselves; as at times she has to drape her saree over jeans instead of the petticoat, disdaining the hotel protocol, she laments:

People always wonder why I have not met a nice man at work yet. It's because of the saree—I call it the male repellent. Yes, I know a lot of women look stunning in it. I am not one of those women... Its basic design flaw, sarees should come with a stitched-on petticoat (Kala, p. 183).

By playing these subversive roles, deploying the disruptive practices of normative society, as A. C. Licona (2005) proposes, the third-wave female subjects create self-assertive identities which evade the effects of 'phallogocentric' representational strategies. These spaces are exponentially fertile as they allow to formulate certain forms of hybridized female subjectivity. The conflict between traditional arranged marriage and the neo-liberal tropes of 'choice' plays an intriguing part in the life of young working-women. The institution of marriage has a

preponderant power position in Indian cultural repository; that is why there is a constant brewing tension among Aisha and her friends. As a liberal woman, Aisha prefers to exercise her rights of 'choice' in the domain of marriage that can incorporate the elements of love and compatibility. Although she occasionally consults the Swamiji (a Hindu astrologer) to check for a suitable time for marital connection, at heart she knows that marriage is not a divine conspiracy, rather a thoroughly-charted calculative move. Even after being proposed by Karan with whom Aisha feels an emotional connection, she takes a step back and asserts:

"So we are together then? Together because we love each other's company? Not because we're bound to do the right thing or what's expected?"

"Meaning?" He asks, looking really confused.

"What I'm trying to say is that I'm okay being the oldest bride in India just as long as when I do get to be a bride it is the right man." (Kala, p. 281).

This is how the competing discourses of female agency, the politics of identity, and the moment of empowerment are addressed, if not completely achieved, in the contemporary trans-cultural social milieu. Through her assertive position, Aisha attempts to create a generative space that further indicates how the intersectional ideas of individuality and empowerment bridge with the micro-politics of the contemporary changing society of the New India.

Following Fredric Jameson's definition of the fictional narrative as a potential site, which symbolically engages with substantial, yet unconsciously felt socio-cultural tensions/predicaments (1981), it could be argued that the role of criticism lies in not only locating the discursive traces of 'the political unconscious' in the particular work, but also in examining/critiquing the text's 'dialectical' position, with respect to the prevalent problems. Anuradha Marwah Roy's *The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta* (1993) and Advaita Kala's *Almost Single* (2007), as representative works of Indian genre fiction effectively bring in the socio-cultural hindrances, faced by an average Indian middle class woman in reformulating the gender roles, set by the patriarchy, through reification of adverse psychological crisis/trauma, the protagonists and other female characters from the novels are subjected to. While Geetika's quest for an individual female identity in 1980s, coupled with her persistent loneliness, gradually give way to Aisha's much homogenized notion of a social acknowledgement in 'globalized' India, with its own claims of feminist re-assertion and the concomitant baggage of mental trauma, a 'dialectical' positioning of the underlying interstitial junctures in their subjective experiences, allows us to locate the fictional subjectivity within the larger connotations of transitional development of female empowerment in India. The narrative structure of both the novels proves conducive enough to investigate the contradictions, and the partial accomplishment of female empowerment in post-independence India from a self-reflexive 'defamiliarized' point of view. A synchronic, vis a vis diachronic reading of the moments of variations/intersections in their pursuits, situates the two texts dialogically with the larger question of the shift in public consciousness, through an incremental advancement of learning among Indian women. Whereas Geetika's decisions in life were not much favored by many, and signify a radical subversion of patriarchal ideals, the estrangement in Aisha's life is comparatively lesser, which is symbolic of a gradual transfiguration in the collective patriarchal psyche of the urban areas, along with the progression in the consciousness of women.

Conclusion

The above discussion on the scope of re-imagining the Indian women through reparation, and re-assertion of female selves, as manifest in the two select Indian genre fiction in English, in a way accentuates the call for an eclectic enquiry on how the controversies, surrounding the peripheral status of the genre fiction generate a dialogic space for a 'polyphonic' engagement with the multifaceted, yet marginalized socio-political and cultural issues, among which the formation of female agency and its diverse manifestations constitute a vital part. Historically the origin of 'genre fiction' could be traced back to the popular Victorian romances, fantasy tales, detective and science fiction of the late 19th century. The clustering and a homogenized classification of some fictional works as 'genre fiction'/'pulp fiction'/'popular fiction' very often rest on the ambivalent and equivocal grounds of literary aesthetics. The rise in scholarly debates on the use of 'popular' in literature/culture is attributed to Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci's (1929-35) definition of 'popular' culture and literature in an early twentieth century Italy, as a collective national resistance against the dominant bourgeois socialist culture. On a similar tone, though in a different context, Deleuze and Guattari in their essay, "What is a Minor Literature" (1983) essentially worked through three incisive pointers, in understanding a minor/political/resistant literature —i) 'the deterritorialization of language', ii) 'the connection of an individual to a political immediacy', and iii) 'the collective arrangement of utterance'. Within a post-structural fabric, they formulate the use of language as 'deterritorialized' i.e. free from any semiotic constraints, constantly in a state of 'becoming' which eventually frees literature from monolithic identity, and therefore opens up newer avenues for exploration. Adhering to this 'revolutionary' structure, Indian genre fiction with its inherent ambivalences as well as ambiguities congruously employs its marginalized status to encompass numerous strands of critical junctures. This article, in its attempt to critically situate the discursive markers of a feminist 'dasein', within the chameleonic fabric of a postcolonial nation, builds upon the textual representations of territorial conflicts between the problematics of identity formation in (post)national/globalized Indian contexts and the tradition of patriarchy. Thus, a wider social recognition of emancipatory life choices of Indian women, as evidenced in the above mentioned works of Indian genre fiction in English prepares the ground for further evaluation of broader issues such as-- female sexuality and its transgression, disjunctions in practical manifestations of women labor, and the culture of 'ageing', with the enmeshed patriarchal 'interpellation'. Such interventions hope to expedite the process of re-writing an alternate feminist version of Foucault's "history of the present", with a systematic resurgence in the global consciousness on the baneful consequences of the women's roles as gendered subjects.

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THIS CERTIFIES THAT

KRISHANU ADHIKARI

Of

University of Hyderabad

has presented a paper titled **"Power-Ridden Academic Corridors: A Study of Select Indian Campus Fiction"** in the national level Graduate Research Meet 2015 organized by the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Guwahati during 28-30 October, 2015.

Arupjyoti Saikia

Head of the Department
Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati



Box T-0300, Stephenville, TX 76401
SouthAsianLiteraryAssociation.Org

January 9, 2017

Krishanu Adhikari
University of Hyderabad

Subject: Acknowledgment of Attendance at the 2017 SALA Conference in Philadelphia,
Pennsylvania

Dear Dr. Adhikari:

This letter is to acknowledge, as the president of the South Asian Literary Association (SALA), that you presented your paper, "Indian Campus and the Problematics of Caste : A Study of Select Indian Campus Novels in English," in person on January 4, at the 17th Annual SALA Conference, held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, held January 2-4, 2017.

As SALA's mission is to advance the knowledge and study of South Asian literatures, arts, and cultures; promote and disseminate an understanding of diasporic writing; and mentor graduate students and junior colleagues as they pursue new scholarship in South Asian studies and/or publish new works of creative writing in various genres, we appreciate your participating with us.

Again, thank you for supporting SALA. We hope you will plan to present again, in New York, New York, in 2018.

Sincerely,

Moumin Quazi
President, SALA

Associate Professor
Tarleton State University
Box T-0300
Stephenville, TX 76401

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This is to certify that Mr. Krishanu Adhikari, Assistant Professor of English *of* Kandra Radha Kanta Kundu Mahavidyalaya, W.B. *participated in the seminar. He presented a paper entitled* "Educating/Massifying' the Mass: A Study of Select Indian Campus Novels in English".


Dr. Vivek Singh
Convener


Prof. M.S. Pandey
Head

Post-colonial Indian Academia: A Literary Re-mapping through Indian Campus Fiction in English

by Krishanu Adhikari

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