

R. K. Narayan's Pioneering Role in the Indian English Campus Novel

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ABSTRACT

R. K. Narayan, whose works are composed to reveal the commonness of daily routine in an uncommon style, is one of the most amusing names not only in Indian English Literature but also in World fiction. His canvas is rich with the characters- adult and senile, next door to us, struggling in their academic and personal lives. He has penned in the background of Malgudi, an imaginary region in southern India, and has explored diverse aspects of Indian society. His literary journey started with the publication of *Swami and Friends* and spanned approximately five decades. His novels and short stories explore various issues of the traditional and the modern generation, examining them from social, cultural, philosophical, and psychological perspectives. With M. R. Anand and Raja Rao, he helped Indian English fiction develop a distinct identity, moving away from imitating English literary styles and presenting them from Indian perspectives. Due to his thematic depth, narrative techniques, and straightforward, humorous writing style, he is often compared with the best writers of English and other languages. Campus fiction, which explores the complex lives of academicians and pupils within a university setting, has been popular since the second decade of the 20th century. Narayan's novels are introspection into the academic and professional lives of the protagonists and give a glimpse into an intellectual inquiry and daily activities of academicians and criticize imposed English education on the natives- students and their struggle for personal and social upliftment. The present research paper is a study of Narayan's selected novels from the perspective of campus elements.

Keywords: *Academicians, Ambitions, Dissatisfaction, Agitation, Outlook.*

A novel is the disciplined organization of human thoughts that carries the message with various structures and styles. It is the society and time that gives vent to ideas, ideals, and emotions through the novelist. After the World War, the scenario of society, as well as literature, underwent a transformation. In literature, sub-genres of significant importance emerged.

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Campus Fiction is one of the recent genres of fiction that is highly popular among lovers of fiction. 'The Campus Novel' is the latest genre of fiction, and its origin dates back a few decades. It is also referred to as an academic novel as it deals with the Academic and emotional progress and confrontation of the characters; the University Novel setting is on a University Campus with educated characters. *The Oxford Companion of Twentieth Century Literature in English* (1996) defines a Campus novel as: "A type of narratives, usually satirical or comic, which have a campus or academic setting and academics as chief characters." (143), while for *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (1992), a Campus Novel is "a type of a novel, typically comic or satiric, in which the action is established within the enclosed world of academia (or similar bench of learning) and highlights the foolishness of academic life. Many novels have presented sentimental recreations of college days..." (120). For Janice Rossen, a Campus Novel is a 'social document' containing 'several disparate but related threads' (3). In's opinion of William, there is a basic difference in the nouns of 'Campus' and 'Academic' fiction on the basis of their protagonists; Campus fiction has a student at its core, while Academic fiction runs with day to day of faculty (565). She approves the combination of fiction and fact that creates interest for both composers and followers since they express the ecstasy of the members' cognizance from insiders. Elaine Showalter called the campus novel, mainly related to the teaching fraternity 'Professorromane.' (4)

An Analysis of the above definitions reveals the following traits of the Campus Novel:

- 01- Its plot centers on the Academicians- faculty and students, their fraternity and their confrontations.
- 02- Its leading characters are generally hard-working but day- dreamers who sweat a lot to fill the hues in the sky of their dreams.
- 03- They are generally satirical and comical, leaving no solution to problems.
- 04- Mainly, campus novels highlight the negative side of the Educational system.
- 05- They are set in an atmosphere of enlightenment and education in universities and colleges.
- 06- They are the novels of the coming generation and their struggle to adjust to the situation.
- 07- These novels evoke nostalgic emotions of the characters.
- 08- It covers politics, crime, suffering, ragging, dynamic relations, etc.
- 09- There is always a struggle in the practical and idealistic approach to life in the lives of characters.

10- They blow the bugle of democratic vision over the imposed Autocratic atmosphere.

11- An intertextual approach to study is a common bond in campus fiction as the department of English is prominent, generally, in most literary works.

Generally, the Campus novels are composed by the University educators- faculty or the followers, having first-hand experience in teaching. In the early age of the 18th century, a special place at the Princeton University was specified as 'Campus'. Later, some colleges of the U.S.A. used this term to identify their academies. It was only in the 20th century that this term was expanded to academic institutions. Originating from the Latin term, 'Campus' stands for 'field', i.e., the physical land covered by a college or university. It reached England in 1950 when the *Oxford English Dictionary* used the term for the first time for the University of East Anglia. In England, C.P.Snow's *The Masters* (1951), Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* (1954), Angus Wilson's *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* (1956), Sir Malcolm Bradbury's *Eating People is Wrong* (1959), Prof. David Lodge's *Changing Places* (1975), *Small World* (1984) and *Nice Work* (1988) enriched the corners of the libraries with campus fiction. With the advancement of literary principles and the cooperation of other theories like feminism, feminist campus novels like Rebecca Goldstein's *The Mind-Body Problem* (1983) emerged. In India, true campus fiction was produced after Independence. It was with the publications of *The Long Long Days* (1960) by P.M. Nityanandan, *The Farewell Party* (1971) by M.V. Rama Sarma, *Onion Peel* (1973) by K.M. Trisanku, *Goodbye to Elsa* (1974) by Saros Cowasjee. Finally, a complete Campus Fiction Atom and the Serpent (1982) by Prema Nandakumar, we were well acquainted with this new genre.

The Indian English novel is not too old; it is the result of the cultural confrontation with the West. With the introduction of English education, there was a stream of literature in English from the pens of Indians that changed into a flood and, from the flood, an independent literary tribenary in the world of literature. The trio of Indian English fiction- Narayan, Anand, and Raja Rao did the herculean task of establishing Indian fiction so adeptly that the basil of fiction soon turned into the Bunyan with various branches (genres) after Independence. R. K. Narayan is a household word for the lover of literature. Setting his fiction and short stories in a fictional city, Malgudi, somewhere in Southern India, he explored various themes in fiction. He is the forerunner in some of the sub-genres of Indian English Fiction. As far as Campus fiction is concerned, his novels and 'Malgudi Days' have some traces of such fiction, though not entirely in that stream.

R. K. Narayan is the sparkling signature of Indian English fiction in the book *World Literature*; his Malgudi is mini India. Though by nature, comic and gentle in expression in his fourteen novels and two hundred stories, he has a variety of themes concerned with the culture of the nation, and he has given vent to the themes, equivalent to the world fiction. This winner of the Sahitya Academy Award for the Guide 1970, he is famous as the ‘Crusader Scholar’ and the ‘idealist missionary’ for his universal appeal. He has presented the family relations, imbued with humor and irony, structured within a tightly-knit and visionary narrative. There have been many novels after Independence that can be studied solely on the basis of university or academic study, but the sparks of campus fiction were first remarked in the literature of R. K. Narayan. Satish Kumar connects three characters- Swami, Chandran, and Krishna in the light of character development; all three characters are Campus characters of different ages as they are part of Albert School and College. Satish Kumar asserts Narayan's presentation of academic days "with all its oddities and eccentricities." (115)

Though *Swami and Friends* is a study into childhood and is not set in any university, it is a scrutiny of school life, teachers, friends, examinations, results, innocent jealousy among children, and many more from Albert Mission School in Malgudi. For Iyenger, *Swami and Friends* is ‘the most enjoyable of the novels’ and ‘this universal epic of all our boyhood yesterdays that are now no more’ for ‘as one reads it, one becomes nostalgic almost, for one has been oneself one of these boys.....one has also studied under the “fire-eyed” Vedanayagam and the fanatical Ebenezer’ (366). *Swami and Friends* begins with the reluctant activities of W. S. Swaminathan, son of W. T. Sreenivasan and student of First A, for going to school on Monday. He had to do much work in arithmetic, English, and geography. Thinking of “that dismal yellow building; the fire-eyed Vedanayagam, his class-teacher; and the Head Master with his thin long cane” (*Swami and Friends* 2) made him shudder. There was no mathematics teacher in the school, which is why the students were forced to attend the monotonous class of Vedanayagam. When he was getting his copies checked, he scrutinized the countenances of teachers. As the writer comments, "his criticism of the teacher's face was that his eyes were too near each other, that there was more hair on his chin than one saw from the bench, and that he was very, very bad-looking (*Swami and Friends* 3). He was given corporal punishment, and all his sums of 'profit and loss' were crossed red. All the students appreciated the nature and teaching style of D. Pillai; he used to teach visually and present scenes from History as vividly as ‘one heard the clash of arms and groans of the slain’ (*Swami and Friends* 3). Like

Vedanayagam, he never insulted or frowned at any student. Mr. Ebenezer, an expert in Christian theology, was a fanatic who used to criticize Indian deities. He used to criticize the Hindu deities and prove the supremacy of Christianity over them. Mr. Ebenezer's intolerable criticism of Hindu deities angered Swaminathan, who retorted by asking why Jesus was crucified. School life is incomplete without friends and classmates. Swaminathan is blessed with classmates whose character is fully developed in the novel. Among his friends, four friends were very close to him- Somu, the monitor; Mani, 'the uncle of the class' (Swami and Friends 6); Sankar, the most brilliant boy in the class; Samuel, the short structured and weak boy and another one was Rajam who used to come to school in a car and speak English in European style.

Examinations are always a terror to students, and their passing is a relief, so we see in the ninth chapter, 'School Breaks Up' of the novel. When two weeks remained for examinations, Swami's father controlled his activities like chatting with granny, wandering behind his mother, and waking after nine lest he should fail. The examinations had a negative effect on everyone as Sankar forgot how to smile for weeks, Somu became serious, Mani was engaged in clearing his doubts with Sankar, and Rajam did his answer sheet without talking to anybody. Narayan portrays Swami's picture when he is out of the examination room, "With dry lips, parched throat, and ink-stained fingers, and exhaustion on one side and exaltation on the other, Swaminathan strode out of the examination hall, on the last day." (Swami and Friends 48) How lively is the picture of the examination hall, "One supervisor was drowsing in his chair; another was pacing up and down, with an abstracted look in his eyes. The scratchy noise of active nibs, the rustle of papers, and the clearing of the throats came through the brooding silence of the hall. (Swami and Friends 48)

The novel does not portray the student- agitation for their motives, but the impact of the Indian Struggle for Freedom is apparent through the character of the protagonist when he breaks the window of the headmaster's room. With the speech of 'an earnest-looking man clad in khaddar' (Swami and Friends SF 82), Swami wept 'wept over the plight of the Indian peasant; resolved to boycott English goods' (Swami and Friends 84). He threw a stone at the pane of the window of the headmaster's room; the breaking of the window pane was both the national call as well as Swami's fury against British colonialism and British negative outlook and blasphemy towards Hindu culture. The witness, Singaram, the peon, was suspended from two schools, first for his participating in a Non-cooperative movement, and the second time, he was

rusticated from the school for committing truancy after requesting a doctor to give him an absence note. The novelist beautifully portrays a cricket match, after which Swami's friendship with Rajam ends. The novel ends with the transfer of Rajam's family and the reconciliation of Rajam and Swami.

The Bachelor of Arts (1937) is an excellent novel about Chandran. The novel is divided into three parts, with the first part focusing on Chandran's academic life. This novel by Narayan is the story of a student, his aimlessness, his failure in love, his escapism, and his victory over circumstances. The novel highlights some brilliant scenes of college life. H.V. Chandran, a student in their final year of B.A. at Albert College, is a first-rank mover in debate. Natesan, the secretary of the student union, pursues him as the chief mover in the debate on 'Historians should be slaughtered first.' In the presence of Mr. Brown, the principal of the college, he presented his subject and returned with flying colors. Like other boys of his age group, he has some habits like passing comments on professors, chewing betel leaves and nuts, lighting cigarettes, inhaling the fumes, watching late-night cinemas, having hot coffees at midnight, wandering on roads, and reaching home late at night. Mostly, the students who spend time in recreation when they should study shiver when the days of examinations are at their ears, and this happens with our Chandran, too. The writer comments that, like other students, Chandran wasted his precious four months who "got up in the morning, studied a bit, attended the classes, promenaded the banks of Sarayu River in the evenings, returned home at about eight-thirty, talked a little about things in general with the people at home, and then went to bed." (*The Bachelor of Arts* 17).

Now, the days of academic struggle have begun for Chandran. He made a plan of getting up early, coming home on time in the evening, and leaving smoking to cover 'Modern History, Ancient History, Political Theories, Greek Drama, Eighteenth-Century Prose, and Shakespeare' (*The Bachelor of Arts* 18) and marched on it with determination. The writer describes vividly how Chandran meshed up with the arrangements of the subjects; he was confused about where to begin. Like a college student, he is full-throat for some of his professors and a bit dissatisfied with some other professors. About the teaching of Ragavachar, the professor of History, he opined, "His lectures are the essence of all the books on the subject. If one reads his notes, one can pass even the I. C. S. examination." (*The Bachelor of Arts* 20) Ragavachar called him to meet him, and it was a tension for him. He thought that he had not made any mistake; no book in the library was lent, and only one or two test papers were left. Why was he called? Actually,

Ragavachar made him the secretary of the History Association, which he accepted reluctantly. However, as there was no chance to leave, he left no stone unturned to make it a great event. The success of the event filled him with such confidence that he managed eight History events till March. This secretariatship caused him to waste much time, and he had to revise his plan of study thrice.

In the Campus Novel, teacher-student relationships are often strained. The teachers whose methods of teaching are least liked are caricatured by the pupils. The same thing happens with our Chandran. Chandran, a student in the good book of a History professor, is not appreciated by Mr. Gajapati, an Assistant Professor of English, 'with a meager moustache and heavy spectacles' (The Bachelor of Arts 24). His style of teaching is satirized as he used to teach Shakespeare 'in a sing-song fashion and with a vernacular twang' (The Bachelor of Arts 24). For his personality, he is named 'Elephant Master' (The Bachelor of Arts 25). He thinks himself an authority on his subject and finds faults in the lectures of other professors, too. His colleagues are not happy with him for his conceit, and as far as the students are concerned, they are too dissatisfied with his teaching and his never giving more than forty percent. During his teaching, he criticizes the well-known authority on Shakespeare like Dowden and A. C. Bradley. Chandran is not interested in his lecture on Othello; therefore, instead of taking notes, he sketches an elephant with spectacles on it. On account of his monotonous teaching, no one is interested. As soon as the bell rang, all the students closed their books in a thud without caring that their English Professor intended to continue his lecture.

The satiric tone continues even in the History Association. When the meeting started, Professor Ragavachar said that we would not interfere with the content and presenter, but he kept on talking for more than forty minutes. The meeting is presided over by Brown, the principal for whom History is "as treacherous as a bog at night" (The Bachelor of Arts 38). His keen interest is commented in his sentence that in History, he remembers only a single date, '1066'.

Student politics is an interesting aspect of the campus novel; the campus novels delineate the students' desire for idealism and high aspirations in life. India was under the direct thumb of the British, but the novelist has not shown any direct struggle with the Royal flag. The novelist limited this agitation through the mentality of Brown, who did not allow any Indian to present new ideas in literature and with the introduction of a revolutionary. During the Historical Association, Chandran met Veeraswami, the revolutionary, and Mohan, the poet.

Veerasawmi's paper 'The Aids to British Expansion in India' made Ragavachar very uncomfortable. Veeraswami was a revolutionary who planned to do everything to uproot the British. When his other paper, 'The Subtleties of Imperialism', was rejected by Chandran as he did not like to be rusticated from college, Veeraswami called him 'a coward' (The Bachelor of Arts 46). Chandran concluded all his relations with Veeraswami, but he haunted him forever. The struggle of a new poet turning into an established poet is remarked in the case of Mohan, the poet whose poetic intellectuality has not bloomed in the absence of his true admirers.

Chandran likes his poetry and advises him to get them published; he says, "By every post, I receive my poems back," said the poet. "For the last five years, I have been trying to get my poems accepted. I have tried almost all the papers and magazines in the world-- England, America, Canada, South Africa, Australia, and our own country. I must have spent a fortune in postage." (The Bachelor of Arts 50) The Campus element came to a pause when all the professors ended their lectures with the hope that the students would relish their notes in the examinations; they shook hands with the students and enjoyed a party and coffee with them. Finally, Chandran was 'very tender and depressed' (The Bachelor of Arts 51) when he left Albert College. The sweet remembrances or nostalgia of the college follow him everywhere when he escapes from studentship to renunciation. Foster is correct when he comments, "For nostalgia lurks as a built-in function of the campus's neoclassical architecture and Greek-life customs, lending an aura of timelessness to everyday experience." (479)

Only getting a degree is not complete in itself; the real struggle begins when a young one goes from his Romantic dream of campus to the world of a harsh, realistic world. After sixteen years of study, Chandran got six months of freedom from regular study, and he wanted to relish his freedom, but it was soon disturbed. After his graduation was complete, he was attacked by his kith and kin with bullets of ideas that he should do this or that. Their advice concluded that he must get a suitable job. Chandran was of a different opinion; he wanted to go to England to obtain a PhD degree and then resume the duties of 'some quiet lectureship in some college' as it would provide him with 'plenty of independence and leisure.' (The Bachelor of Arts 32). This quietness, Independence and leisure are in direct sharp contrast with the restlessness, dependency on seniors and controlled atmosphere of the English Teacher.

The dissatisfaction of the teachers with their jobs, unnecessary workload on faculty, the staff room atmosphere, the poor condition of the hostels, and many other things that take the work

in the compass of 'Campus fiction' are part of *The English Teacher*. Not only college the premise but the characters of Gajapathy and Brown of the Bachelor of Arts also carry their journey in *The English Teacher*; the difference is only of the protagonist. *The English Teacher*, an autobiographical novel with eight chapters, is a fascinating study of college life and atmosphere in the first chapter. Written in the first person narration, the story is spoken by Krishna, a devoted, ideal but 'a self-rebellion' (The English Teacher 01) lecturer at Albert Mission College. Krishna is characterized by enthusiasm and attention to detail. He started his career in college, where he was a student, but resigned from his job after an unhappy turn in his life. Teaching is not an avocation to him; he is teaching because he receives one hundred rupees on the very first day of the month. The days in college are full of worry and conflict, but he takes a sigh of relief that the day of narration has passed without conflict and tension. The contemporary education system seems futile as it aims to fill the minds of students with irrelevant facts; it is like 'mugging up Shakespeare before teaching.' Successful teaching is always an emotional endeavour, attached to students, but Krishna, though brilliant, is uninspired for his students. The closing of the classroom is a great relief for him. Though there is dissatisfaction in his professional and routine life, that day, he does what he likes and feels 'heroic and satisfied' (The English Teacher 01). One day, he, along with his colleagues, is summoned by Mr. Brown, the principal, as one of the students of English Honours, spelled 'Honours' without 'u.'

Education has always been dancing at the hints of the rulers; it was the British period in India, and the British focused only on developing clerks for their offices, as we find Chandran getting suggestions to be a clerk in any Government office. English was prominent in getting an order from the rulers and following it attentively. The contemporary education system neglected regional languages. It is through Krishna that Narayan retorts this issue. When Brown and Gajapathy remarked on the values of the English language and the need for taking care of its correct pronunciation, calming his "thirty years in India had not been ill-spent if they had opened the eyes of the Indians to the need for speaking and writing correct English" (The English Teacher 6). Krishna retorts by stating: Let us be fair; ask Mr. Brown if he can say in any one of the two hundred Indian languages: 'The cat chases the rat.' He has spent thirty years in India. It is all irrelevant, said Gajapathy. Why should he think the responsibility for leaving is all on our side and none on his? Why does he magnify his importance? (The English Teacher

6) Krishna feels that the blind following of a foreign language has derailed him from his culture and civilization.

The diligent and creative teachers like the protagonist in the Albert School were dissatisfied with the heads of the departments, who, in case of their negligence, may overload their subordinates with extra work without considering their capacities; as Krishna says, “he might give me an hour of extra work every day, or compel me to teach the history of language, of which I knew nothing.”(The English Teacher 2)

Like other novels, this one satirizes the professors for their behavior. Rangappa is noticed as ‘ever-questioning philosopher’, ‘a dry philosopher’; Ganesh, the mathematician is commented as ‘sharp as a knife-edge’ in his command on subject but ‘very dumb and stupid in other matters.’ (The English Teacher) Humorously, Krishna describes his alarm clock, which has been repaired many times, letting out noise, and it seemed difficult to control it; Krishna decided to put Taine's History of English Literature to stop its shrieking sound. The novel interestingly throws light on how the professors who do not prepare their lectures pass the time in the classroom for the least important work like noting attendance, etc. When Krishna got five minutes in the classroom because of his walking and composing a poem of fifty lines entitled 'Nature,' he kept the class busy by noting the attendance of the students in spite of their request to mark it in the last. His presence in the class was dull to him, and when the bell rang, it was the greatest relief for him. Narayan describes the college staff-room atmosphere vividly; some scholars transfer their knowledge from one aspect to another.

The hostel is presented satirically; Krishna comments that the hostels are no better than the hell on Earth. When the Almighty wants to send a person to hell, He orders his assistants to throw the man in a college hostel. There were no separate bathrooms for teachers and students; the students were not decent enough to come out of the bathroom after getting a quick shower. They used to sing songs there, no matter if their professor was in urgency.

There was no doubt when he started penning fiction and short stories, Indian English literature was taking the fundamental themes in their compass, which were a general touch to human life with psychological and social concerns. Narayan did his best to walk with the thematic concern of contemporary fiction. To some extent, he was ahead of the writers of his generation. Who could think that such a jovial writer of modernism would cover the post-modern themes? If we take the dictum of Lyons (12) that novels, lacking in seriousness in the treatment of higher

Education with disciplines or faculty as characters, can not be termed as 'Campus fiction.' Summing up the opinions of Lyons, Dr. Prasanta Kumar Padhi opines that Narayan's novels "sowed the seeds for writers becoming conscious of the campus setting, rather than as full-fledged campus novels." (3) In the time of Narayan, co-education was least applied; therefore we do not notice any female character or love-episodes in the Campus scenes of his fiction. His primary novels cover all the subjects of Campus Fiction; his Campus fiction is free from the negativity prevalent in the present colleges and universities. Since Narayan's novels are not purely campus fiction, they are free from the absurdities and crimes that are standard features of present Academic life. Through his novels, he criticized the Macaulian pattern of Education, lay upon us, and paved the way to contemporary Indian English Campus fiction.

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