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INTELLECTUAL PRETENSIONS AMONG THE ACADEMICIANS THROUGH THE NOVEL *ATOM AND THE SERPENT*

Dr.K.Geetha Swamy,
Assistant Professor in English,
Government Arts College (A), Coimbatore – 18 .

Abstract: Intellectual pretension is one of the worst features that one would come across in the educational institution and this defect in the educational system is ignored by the academicians and other officials. The novelist Prema Nandakumar in her novel *Atom and the Serpent* brings out the hypocrisy of academicians and the various ways in which both students and teachers are exploited. The paper aims at bringing out the unethical practices adopted by the teachers of higher educational institution and how they have neglected their duties towards students. The teachers who are responsible for the righteous behavior of the students are seen distracting and degrading their positions.

Keyword: Campus Fiction, educational system, intellectual pretension.

Sacredness is associated with the educational institutions because it is the seat of learning. It is this place that promotes values to young minds and guides them towards the path of righteousness. Hence it is stressed that educational institutions must be free from illegal and unethical practices thereby it must be able to eradicate the corruption in the minds of young people. There should be no favoritism or selfish impulses in the educational institution and the place must be ideal enough for the young students to acquire knowledge and to improve their manners. It goes without saying that every young individual enters the campus of learning with the mindset to achieve their goals and ambitions in his or her life. The reality is seen farfetched from this idealistic notion of education. The campus novelists have made it their goal to exhibit the harsh realities that exist in the educational system. The Indian campus novelists through their novels bring out the differences

that exist between the reality and ideal notion and show how education has degraded to a state where unethical and corrupted practices are seen done by the students, teachers and other academicians.

The satirical writing in the campus novels has helped the novelists in bringing out the exploitation and victimization of campus inmates that happen in the premises of educational institutions. The campus inmates include students, teachers and administrative staff members and the exploitation that happen in the campus revolve around these three groups of people. The struggle for power is a common phenomenon that is seen occurring in the campus and the position, the officials occupy based on the hierarchical position in the institution instigates greed and jealousy among the academicians. The campus novelists have projected the reality that teachers are no sacred beings; they are capable of getting attracted towards money and fame. Thus they highlight the instances of few teachers exploiting the students. In some cases there are students who take the advantage of the teachers and make their situation favorable to them.

The novel *Atom and the Serpent* by Prema Nandakumar shows the various instances where students are exploited by the teachers in the educational institution. The novelist brings out the selfish acts of teachers in the campus who are struck with the desire to acquire more power and money. One such selfish teacher portrayed in the novel is Prof Yaugandharayana, a foreign returned professor working as the Head of the Atomic Research department. Using his position to his advantage he exploits his students monetarily as well as sexually. He is “a lustful unacademic academician” (AS 115) who has no regards to his duty and responsibilities as a professor. He uses his unsophisticated foreign lifestyle and American ways of living to his advantage and attracts the students. He forgets that he has the moral responsibility in guiding his students and he asks his rich students to bear the expenses for his parties which he holds in Silka Pinta Bar. The place is known for lavish parties and shady operations. The persons who come frequently to this place will be rich merchants and powerful politicians. The place is very expensive and it is said that “an honest worker (even if he were an officer drawing a four-figure salary) could not hope to afford a cup of tea in that hotel, unless his entertainment allowance took charge of it” (AS 117). Prof. Yana’s way of exploiting his students is described as follows:

For most of the denizens of the University, the Bar was nothing more than a landmark in the town; they had no idea and no hope of seeing its insides. But there were pluckier teachers who impressed their richer students with their prerogative and gained easy entry into the Bar's portals. Prof. Yana was an adept in this art, seasoned by his frequent foreign trips which gave him an irresistible glamour in the eyes of his students (AS 117)

Sheela Rani also exploits her students and she has no guilt feeling for abandoning her duties and misguiding her students. She accepts expensive Banarasi saree as a gift from one of her students and claims those gifts as "small tokens of affection". The novelist Prema Nandakumar brings out the painful situation of Indian educational system where students are pushed towards the path of destruction by their teachers. Through the acts of selfish professors like Prof. Yana and Sheela Rani, the novelist highlights the degrading system of education in India.

It is not the teachers who exploit the campus inmates, the students also take advantage of their teachers and try to make things favorable for them. Prof. Yana depends on Rajshekar for monetary benefits. Using this to his advantage, Rajshekar does not respect the professor and has no seriousness towards his studies. His lethargic behavior can be seen through his way of quitting the seminar in which he has to present a paper without prior permission. Prof Yana is very much irritated by his act but he does not make a big issue because he is also not serious about his work and he holds the seminar for namesake only. Vandana is also another student used by Yana for students' related works and she also takes advantage on her professor. The novelist highlights the point that if the teachers exploit the students, the students will take undue advantage on them and use for their own benefits.

The power politics that operate between the teachers is the worse and demeaning situation that a person can come across. The Dattatreya couple goes far to involve the brother of Sheela Rani, an ugly politician in the academic affairs. He demonstrates an allegation against the VC to increase the Dearness Allowance for the workers. But his main motive is not to address the issues of poor workers but to secure the promotion and position of his sister and brother-in-law. He exploits the innocence of the poor workers and uses them for his personal advantage.

The VC also adopts several strategies to counteract the ploy of the politician Kshema Rao. He also uses his connection and develops connection with another established person in the university. He has to use several methods and cunning strategies to sustain the power and position and it is with the same motive he appoints Sheela Rani as the Professor in the university.

The novelist Prema Nandakumar makes it apparent that the teachers who have the responsibilities to inspire their students with their behavior and imbibe moral cultural values within the young minds are seen fighting arrogantly and unethically over power and position in the campus. They have lost their sense of reason by their lust to acquire money and luxuries. These teachers involve in dirty politics forgetting that they have students who look up to them. Amongst the teachers, Dr. Adhyaksha has the potential to become a great teacher but the corruption and jealousy of other teachers have reduced his passion to teach and become a role model for his students. He is regarded as a scholar in his subject and he can be a great professor in teaching history. Observing his attitude, the novelist remarks that “the scholar was a memory, while the politician has become the reality” (AS 19). His thoughts and behavior are completely influenced by the battle for power that goes inside the campus and in this mess he conveniently forgets his duty towards his students.

Prema Nandakumar, through her novel has brought out the realistic picture of the Indian education system. She highlights the corruption and unethical practices that are common in the modern universities. Through the campus inmates portrayed in the novel it becomes clear that people will not hesitate in wasting their time and money in conducting strikes and protests in order to achieve their selfish pursuits. The novelist has portrayed the corruption that prevails in the campus premises and also insists on the immediate changes that are supposed to be brought out in the educational system.

Steven Connor expresses that the university is similar to a closed environment and it has “its own norms and values, which is thick with the possibilities of intrigue. Indeed, the very restriction of elements in the academic world, with the stock characters, with their cozily familiar routines of evasion and abstraction and their conspicuous, if always insecure, hierarchical structures, and the well established situations and plot-lines, seem to generate a sense of permutative abundance.” (qtd. in Showalter, “Campus Follies,” par. 13). Hence it has to be noted that educational institution is not a divine place that is filled with sacred beings. The institution has human beings who are capable of having normal desires and wishes. Hence it has to be realized that academy is a place filled with pretensions and hypocrisy because the academicians try to hide their obsession towards power and money but in reality they do not try to abandon those obsessions.

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