



# PORTRAYAL OF CAMPUS CULTURE IN KAVERI NAMBISAN'S *THE TRUTH {ALMOST}* *ABOUT BHARAT*

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*Abstract:* This article focusses on the Campus culture in Kaveri Nambisan's *The Truth (almost) about Bharath*.

## INTRODUCTION

The genus of campus novel ponders on academics and academic life in an academia locale where the focal feat is set in and around the campus of a university. At times it depicts the ecosphere of academe as conceited, otiose and impermeable to the exterior world, and at other times as a miniature for society. The goals of such novels array from broad disdain of the educational world, to social and political critique or critical scrutiny of the role of Academia. The writers of campus novels inscribe not only for the moot readers, but also for the non-academics, coveting to be coherent to general public as well. These novels are therefore highly readable, full of glee, merriment and humanity.

Campus fiction dithers between rationality and experiment and that is why it is alarmed with the finicky realism, on the one hand, and the comic mode of fiction espousing rudiments of caricature and farce, on the other hand. Campus novels make use of several styles and narrative modes like satiric, absurdist, romanticized, meta-fictional, self-reflective as well as satirical devices and literary techniques like wit, epigram, sarcasm, repartee, allusion, tone and irony to bring out the satire in campus novels.

The Campus novel is one sub-genre which has augmented Indian English fiction. In India, the sub-genre of campus novel came into limelight with the unique accomplishment of Chetan Bhagat's *Five Point*

Someone published in 2004, but the ancestries of Indian campus novels can be dawdled back to R.K. Narayan's *The Bachelor of Arts* published in 1937. The Campus novel had a sluggish commencement in India. The first proper Indian campus novel *The Long Long Days* by P.M. Nityanandan was published in 1960. After that novels like *The Farewell Party* by M.V. Rama Sarma, *Onion Peel* by K.M. Trisanku and *Goodbye to Elsa* by Saros Cowasjee were published in long intervals. It was after the publication of Prema Nandkumar's *Atom and the Serpent*, in 1982, that a large number of writers could be seen making challenges to illustrate the college life in India.

In the present scenario, many Indian novelists are getting riveted by campus novels and are subsidising to this sub-genre with a lot of experimentations and variations. These variations contribute not only in cumulating the diversities of campus novels but also in remedying the idiocies of the people allied to the campus. Campuses across the country have become a fecund ground for fiction and this genre has decisively customary itself with its portion of plea and readership. This sub-genre has also brought a big change in Indian writing in English. The Indian writing is no longer reliant on commendation of the West. The authors write keeping in mind the Indian readers. The language, theme and setting of these novels are unlikely to be comprehended by non-Indian readers. Indians want to read about issues related to their lives and surroundings. Since these novels are written for the Indian readers, the language and the narrative style of these books very conspicuously reflect the Indian mood. The use of uncomplicated and simple sentences along with easy vocabulary adds to the conversational tone of these novels. These devices and techniques add comic shade in these novels and make them attractive to read for every Indian reader.

Some novels concentrate on the positive as well as the negative attitudes of the faculty, some others on the behaviour of the students whereas others throw light on the predicament of the Head of an institution. Some others focus on the non-teaching staff and corruption in the campus.

This article focusses on the Campus culture in Kaveri Nambisan's *The Truth (almost) about Bharath*.

Varsity novel is one of the sub genres of campus novel. Varsity novels are set in and around college or university campus but here the main focus is on students rather than faculty members. In Indian context, Kavery Nambisan's *The Truth (Almost) about Bharat* is an example of varsity novel as it centers on the lifespan of pupils rather than faculty. Kavery Nambisan is a popular novelist born in Coorg, Karnataka. She

is a doctor by profession and practices in rural India. Her literary works are greatly influenced by her medical profession. She studied medicine from St. John's Medical College, Bangalore and then studied surgery at the University of Liverpool, England before moving to Lonavala, Mumbai to start a free medical centre for migrant laborers. She works as a surgeon as well as medical advisor at the Tata Coffee Hospital in Kodagu, Karnataka, and is the Chief Medical Officer for Tata Coffee. She has generated several programs for child immunization and family planning for the rural communities. She is vocal in her critiques of urban centered health planning. She began her writing career by writing for children's magazines. She has authored several novels like *The Truth (Almost) about Bharat* (1991), *The Scent of Pepper* (1996) *Mango-coloured Fish* (1998) *On Wings of Butterflies* (2002), *The Hills of Angheri* (2005), *The Story that Must Not Be Told* which was shortlisted for the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature in 2012 as well as the Man Asian Literary Prize in 2008. She has also contributed fiction to the journal published by the Sahitya Akademi . Nambisan's first novel *The Truth {Almost} about Bharat* was published in 1991 and reissued by the publisher in 2002. It is a campus novel as it focuses on life of students, teachers and other people associated with the campus. The first part has accurately revealed the lifetime within the campus like student's lifestyle, their changing attitudes and deeds, consultations among them, college faculty, life of students in hostel, derelict state of mess and so on. In the novel, Engineering and Medical colleges are on the same site and students from the both colleges share the same hostel and mess and Board of Directors. Nambisan who had been a medical student herself has unswerving experience of life of students in the medical college. In fact, in the novel, she is conveying her own indulgences which she gained during her stay at the medical college. The novel focuses around the character named Bharat also called as Vishwanath in the novel. He is famous among his college friends as Tarzan. He is nineteen and a half years old. He is in medical college and in the final year of his studies. He is one of the top students of the college. The first part of the novel titled "Mess" illustrates the happenings that take place in the medical college. Here the students including Medical and Engineering have united hands to sit on strike to voice the unfairness meted out to the poor mess workers who are getting scanty remunerations from the campus authorities. Mess plays a vital part in the life of the students. Bharat, terms the importance of college mess, "Most important events begin in the great big Mess Hall. Here we line-maros dames, challenge each other's superior superiority in Sexademics and occasionally talk of noble causes like the plight of the mess staff" (8).

Nambisan has explained the plight of low earner mess workers through the protagonist, Bharat. Everyone consider the institutions as Temple of Learning and Worship but in real these become the source of bias wreaked on the people who are interlinked with the institution. Here she has portrayed the real condition of mess which was in reality too. The college authorities concern only about the money and not about the condition of mess, quality of food, workers condition. Bharat describes about the pitiable state of the campus mess, "It's a great big hall, our Mess, about two miles long with huge glass-paned windows, six ceiling fans that creak away for nine months in the year, cheap steel tables and steel chairs that give you a pain in the ass. By the Fifth Year you get used to it" (3). Nambisan clearly mentions about the owners of higher institutions, those people care about the beautification of buildings in order to attract the students. They charge a huge amount of fees from them but on the other side, they are blind eyed to the other issues which are similarly significant for the harmonious working of the whole campus. The novel, *The Truth (Almost) about Bharat* also exposes the life of college students. Bharat's, juvenile friend Shanks who is popular among the college students for his well-built body. He is the son of M.P (Member of Parliament) but he is popular in the campus for his personality. In the novel, he has been compared with cine stars like Anil Kapoor, Vinod Khanna, Killer Khan, Sylvester Stallone and Schwarzenegger. During College years, the students are very much sensible about their dressing and dress up according to the latest fashion as in the case of Shanks. He has a weakness for underpants and it is his topic of discussion with his friends. He is always in search of new fashion. He is not only interested in fashion but in girls too. So many of them have an opinion that medical students are book works and they will always engage themselves in studies. But in reality they are also human beings they also concentrates on the new fashions instead of studying their final year syllabus. Besides fashion, the subject of debate among Bharat, Shanks and Rishi is about marriage, love and sex which again is taking them away from their studies and future goals. Shanks has pre-marital relations with a number of girls and he takes pride in this. But it shows they are also normal youngsters like others who are in the same age. Here the writer tries to bring out the mentality of college students which is working in the negative direction but that's reality too. Not all the students have involved themselves in the act of concentrating on the current educational trends but some of them have their own perceptions because all the five fingers are not same in our own hand. Rishi is an engineering student who is more interested in computer viruses. He is a good listener and a chain smoker. He know that he will be affected by cancer but he does not bother about his state. But in reality also the students it's easy for them to fall a prey to drug addiction, smoking, alcoholism which will spoil their health

and future life. But they are not in the position to understand the problems which they are going to face in the future. It's because of their adolescent age. They are not ready to listen anybody else. Bharat and Shanks are also prey to alcoholism and they regard it as a means to purify their spirits. So, it is a serious problem for higher education authorities and steps need to be taken to curb this menace. In the novel, the higher authorities who turn deaf ear to the needs of the mess workers incite the college students to join hands to fight for the rights of poor mess workers who are arduous to raise their wages from "measly three hundred a month" (4). A college mess worker named Srimi informs Shanks and his partners about the longer working hours and also of the pathetic condition of his family. Due to long working hours, they become tired and sometimes become lazy while concocting the eatables which in turn disturb the health of students which should be the chief concern of the higher institutions. As the character named Hansmukh finds "a cockroach in his cutlet. He had just bitten into the cutlet when he saw the shiny, varnish-brown, two-inch-long beauty lying peacefully inside the cutlet with all its arms, legs, whiskers and wings intact" (7). The novel also emphasizes on the students' fear of examination. The students shiver in fear at impending examination. Shanks tells Bharat that he is terrified of examinations and much is left to be ready for the examination. Rishi is also anxious of examination as Bharat says, "You can bet your last rupee that two days before the exams he'll begin to wheeze. His chest gets so bad, it sounds like a bleeding milk boiler when you put your stet to it ...Every time when the exam are over, Rishi's wheezing stops" (97-98).

Nambisan in the novel also converses about the anti-social elements that produce uproar in the campus environment. Vidyasagar in the novel first gets designated as college secretary and then he flinches abusing the fellow students by his rule. His duplicitous nature is exposed when Bharat says, "Vidya is the most unpopular guy on the campus, that's why he's been elected College Sec (Secretary) for the third running year. I am sure the sweet bastard will become Health Minister one day and succeed gloriously in keeping things botched" (7). When Bharat proposes Shanks that Vidya will speak to the Board of Directors on the behalf of mess workers, Shanks rejects the idea by saying, "Vidya will say yes-yes, then he'll lick the Board's but and kick the Mess boys" (6). Nambisan has vividly defined the hostel life of the college students also. They do not care about the cleanliness in the hostel. The setting of their rooms is topsy-turvy. Students are not interested in cleaning their rooms themselves, they need somebody to do it. But the management also didn't bother about this. The College secretary, Vidyasagar's room is neat and clean, who rents his room at five rupees per hours to the students, when their parents visited them. Bharat, Shanks and Rishi along with the help of other college

students launch a signature campaign and in the Annual Day Function, they submit the petition signed to the Dean and Board of Directors that hassles the scramble in the income of mess workers. But the request is vetoed by the Board of Directors. This infuriates Bharat and they will go on a strike. As a result, the college is locked for a week and they are deferred from the college until further notice. But the students they vigorously join for a hunger strike for a noble cause. Here the student's initiative is very much appreciative because they are doing hunger strike not for their own sake but for the sake of poor employers.

The state worsens, when the pacific famine assault shots ferocious and the students in rage twitch shelling pebbles at the campus building and vehicles of the officials of the college. The stone thrown by Bharat hits the Shafruddin, the gate keeper of the college. Shafruddin belongs to a poor community so Dr.Aloknath feels very bad to take him to the hospital in his car. Bharat starts getting nightmares like seeing Shafruddin is about to recognize him as the culprit. After being suspended from the college, they decide to enjoy their freedom. Rishi who influences Bharat and Shanks to join hunger strike finally joins the college by apologizing to the authorities. Shanks too join him due to political crisis but Bharat is not ready to apologize the authorities so he take his bike and go for a ride but he know very well that he has to return home and ask pardon from the authorities to continue his studies. Thus this novel describes the campus culture and also the campus politics in a detailed manner. But it clearly implies that only rich can live in this world but poor can't live in a peaceful manner.

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