

Aspects of Campus Novel in Makarand Paranjape's *The Narrator: A Novel*

Shridevi P.G.

The Narrator: A Novel is the well-known critic Makarand Paranjape's debut novel, published in 1995. It is a mishmash of several stories woven together and presented to us from view-points of several writer-narrators or character-narrators. This novel has attracted considerable interest in the academicians because of the unique narratology of the novel which is different from the rest of the Indian novels written in English. The novel is experimental, and breaks away from the conventional methods of story-telling used in Indian English Fiction. Throughout the narrative, the readers notice that there is little attempt to create an illusion of realism or naturalism.¹ With the use of multivoiced and polyphonic narration, as in the great epics Ramayana and Mahabharata, the writer tries to relocate himself with the ancient Indian tradition of the narratology.²

The story of the novel can be divided into three main threads:

The first is the story of Rahul Patwardhan, lecturer in English at Asafia University, Hyderabad who is suffering from creative schizophrenia since his childhood and, in the process has a libidinal alter ego, Baddy.

The second is the story of Badrinath Dhanda, who comes out of Rahul through emanation.

The final thread is that of the movie script, *Manpasand*.

Campus novel is a kind of novel which originated in the West but is emerging as a very prominent sub-genre in Indian English Fiction. As David Lodge, a well-known practitioner of this sub-genre opines, Campus Novel is mainly concerned with the lives of University professors and junior teachers.³ The present paper attempts to explore the aspects of campus novel in this novel.

The novel centers around Rahul Patwardhan who is a lecturer in English at the Asafia University, Hyderabad. His reputation as a lecturer is displayed when he meets his Head of the Department in the novel. The Head of the Department does not doubt him when he lies; asking for leave for four days on the pretext of illness and reading accepts it. This is because, this type

of aberration was a recent development in Rahul's character, and is therefore unknown to the Head of Department.

The author presents the characteristics of a good lecturer through Rahul Patwardhan's character. He is responsible about his duties as a lecturer:

...tomorrow was Monday. I had to teach. It was the beginning of a new week.
I couldn't afford to have a very late night today. But meeting him
tomorrow would screw up Tuesday's schedule. [TNAN 67]

His anxiety to complete the syllabus is also depicted in the novel. He abstains from listening to the gory details of incest when Badrinath is narrating his story. When Badri goes on describing how the ugly women are better partners than the beautiful ones, Rahul is unable to contribute his view as he is a loyal husband to Neha and thus had slept only with her.

It is the curiosity generated in him by his literary sensibility or on humanitarian inclination that he expresses his wish of meeting prostitutes. He thinks,

What were these women like? What did they feel? What was the meaning
of their lives.....I was interested in getting to see them at close quarters.
I told myself I didn't want the sex, but only the experience of meeting a
prostitute, of talking to her, getting to know her.[TNAN 168]

Rahul immediately revolts at Badri's mention of co-habitation with college girls.

"For heaven's sake, Badri, I teach them myself". "You never know", he
continued, "you may even meet one of your students!" "Please, Badri,
stop it". [TNAN 168]

This conversation indicates Rahul's strong professional ethics. He has also followed certain principles in life which are unfortunately jettisoned after his acquaintance with Badri.

- He leaves a lot of food on his table, much against his principle of not wasting food
- He starts lying and finds people believing it easily
- He consumes beer
- He cohabits with a prostitute.

This shows that he had been morally corrupted to a certain extent. This task of corrupting Rahul had been attempted several times by Baddy but all of them had been found fruitless. But years later Badri proves successful in this.

The Novel sketches Rahul's academic progress and his strict regimen for his Ph.D., degree quite conspicuously. He would religiously enter the library every morning and work till the evening, often skipping his lunch.

Sometimes, I wondered if I would ever get out of the library alive. I mean, I was losing all sense of time. I thought to myself that one day they would find my bones in the musty corridors, resting somewhere among the shelves full of books. [TNAN 75]

He describes his guide as a 'cool guy' whose motto was "Do what you like, but show me the final draft within five years". [TNAN 75] The under note of sarcasm does not go unnoticed in this line which highlights the negligence or failure of some guides to train their research scholars.

The procedure of Ph.D. degree is also briefly explained. He says, "My five years in Hyderabad passed. I submitted my thesis in October 1986; the viva was held next year in April". [TNAN 75]

The whole description of this kind reminds one of Saros Cowasjee's novel *Goodbye to Elsa* where similar kind of description of the research methodology is found.

Rahul also writes an introductory guide to fiction entitled "*Indian English Fiction – Theory and Practice*" the first 500 copies of which are sold out in six months and it then goes into second edition.

The relation between colleagues also forms an important aspect of the campus. Here this is displayed through Rahul's relationship with Raghavan. Their addressing each other with abusive words indicates their intimacy. Both were doing doctoral research. Though Rahul is younger of the two, he had got the job before Raghavan and thus was technically senior to him and which made Raghavan grumble. "We were, in a sense, rivals, but had never stopped being friends". [TNAN 148]

One interesting point found here is the absence of professional jealousy which is very common among colleagues and which is found in most of the campus novels like M.K.Naik's *Corridors of Knowledge*, Ranga Rao's *The Drunk Tantra*, Rita Joshi's *The Awakening – A Novella in Rhyme*.

Students are the inevitable and the most significant aspect of campus novels. Even in this novel, the behavior and misadventures of students are pictured in an amiable way. Rahul presents two sets of students – his classmates when he was studying and his students, after he becomes a lecturer.

Rahul joins Tambaram College, which had a history of 150 years but had become a semi-wild campus with the kind of behavior of the students. Music and drugs were the two things which dominated the college. “Bunking classes, acting wild, breaking rules, and doing the unconventional thing were considered hip. There was nothing worse than being a good boy; it was the most despicable way to live”. [TNAN 55-56]

The students think of themselves as the lost generation, India’s equivalent of the hippies. The senior students spent most of their time smoking and listening to music. The mention of a ‘drunken brawl’ among students is made in such a way that it is not very uncommon in colleges. In one such quarrel a student was stabbed. An instance of suicide committed by a student is also pictured. He had consumed downers and jumped off the top floor of the International Students’ Hostel because he had stolen a large sum of money from one of his friends and had blown it all on drugs.

With these instances the novelist seems to be indicating the lack of discipline and control among the students.

The novelist then describes the drinking bouts of the students and the way they acquired booze. The first of the two ways of getting booze was through someone in the Air Force Station which was quite near the college. When this became much difficult by the Commanding Officer’s instructions, the students were left with the second and the more strenuous way. The students would travel five long hours to Pondicherry and would lounge about the beaches the whole day, drinking and chattering continuously on all sorts of topics.

They would then take the night bus back with one or two bottles of rum with them. They would try to trick the cops by using a very cheap bag and keeping it away from themselves. So that even in a surprise check they wouldn’t get caught. And if by chance they get caught red-handed, they would simply give it away to the cop so that he would let them go.

The students did not even hesitate to start ‘visiting’- a word used by the author for visiting a prostitute. And they were available right outside the college gates after dark. About affairs, the writer says that only rich guys could afford them by giving expensive gifts to the ‘chicks’ from the women’s college. Love affairs are an indispensable aspect of the campus and so forms one of the aspects of campus novel. But most of the campus novels exhibit a very frank treatment of sex. a few examples are- Saros Cowasjee’s *Goodbye to Elsa*, K.M. Trishanku’s *Onion Peel*, Rani Dharker’s *The Virgin Syndrome*, etc. The Narrator also depicts sex quite freely.

The novel abounds in extramarital relationships, child abuse, incest, sodomy, mental adultery, voluptuousness and pure love.

Rahul's students are brought in only in one scene but this one episode reveals a lot about the students of the present generation. When Rahul enters 15 minutes late to the class, giving the reason that he had a late night, some students titter taking his words as an indication of a private encounter. Many students had left for coffee not to return to the class. Their lack of patience and audacity is expressed in the words-“Oh Sir, they went of for coffee when you didn't show up until ten-fifteen”. [TNAN 96] and today's teachers also seem to accept this kind of behavior.

The novel can also be considered Crit-Fiction. “Crit-Fiction” is a kind of novel which is written by a lecturer or a professor. In the recent years many professors have started writing novels. A few examples of such Indian writers are Manju Kapoor, M.K. Naik, Amitav Ghosh, Anita Desai, Meena Alexander and others.

As Elaine Showalter puts it, the novelist before writing his novel should create or imagine a world which has some kind of logical relation to the real world, within which he can explore the themes that interest him through the narrative. The university or college provides such a world ready-made – a small world which is a kind of microcosm of the larger world.

An author's writing will be realistic if it is inspired by his experience. The author Makarand Paranjape has been able to write about the campus so lucidly because he was a professor and has the first-hand information about the aspects of campus. It is quite interesting that in the novel *The Narrator*, the protagonist, Rahul Patwardhan is also a lecturer and he too is a writer.

Finally one cannot afford to overlook the very unique and exalting theme of the novel which is the difficulty of writing a work of art. Rahul had such an extensive knowledge about the narratology or the art of the narrative, that he had become an inhibiting influence on Baddy, the other half of his split personality, as he shot down Baddy's attempts of writing narratives.

I knew too bloody much about the theory to let even my imagination
do the actual writing.[TNAN 75]

He discusses his difficulty with Dr. Jenny O'Sullivan, a visiting British Council scholar, who had come to visit Hyderabad, researching on a book to be set in India.

I am too critical; I cannot get to put pen to paper without scratching out
what I've written.[TNAN 258]

By O'Sullivan's suggestion, he finds out the solution:

Every attempt at creation is founded upon a similar act of deconstruction.
Writing, thus, is a cruel activity. Before one writes one had to give birth
to a writing self. This is the self which will then invent characters, situations,
and themes.[TNAN 269]

The novel *The Narrator: A Novel* has many aspects of campus novel in it like the kind of life lead by a lecturer, his loyalty and involvement in his academic pursuits, his struggle to produce substantial literary works, his relations with his colleagues and students; the behavior of the students, their misadventures; the lavish lifestyles of students who are not disciplined either by the parents or the authorities in the college, their love affairs etc. are delineated in a very conducive way. The protagonist's views both as a student and then as a lecturer are involved in the novel. Makarand Paranjape has been able to throw sufficient light on all these aspects of campus life as he has been a professor and very well-acquainted with the campus. So with the points discussed so far, *The Narrator: A Novel* can be considered a campus novel.

Works Cited

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