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**CAMPUS NOVELS PRESENT CIVILIZED ENTERTAINMENT RATHER
THAN CATHARSIS TO THE READERS: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF
CAMPUS NOVELS OF DAVID LODGE (SMALL WORLD)
AND KARAN BAJAJ (KEEP OFF THE GRASS)**



V. Kalpana

**Assistant Professor of English, Velammal Engineering College, Chennai, Tamil Nadu &
Ph.D. Scholar of English, University of Madras, Chennai, Tamil Nadue.**

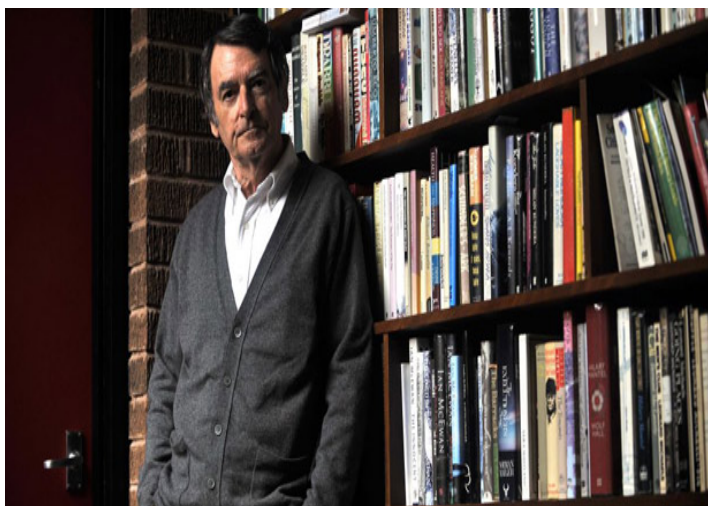
Co - Author Details :

Bala Agarwal

**Assistant Professor of English, Research Supervisor, Quaid-e-Milleth College
for Women, Chennai, Tamil Nadu**

ABSTRACT

Academic Infightings, Couplings touching, funny and frightful, set pieces, dark humor, sharp wit and plain farce---here is everything one expects from this author....." The Sunday Telegraph writes this review for Small World by David Lodge. This review is applicable to almost all the campus novels written globally. This paper attempts to analyze how these campus novels guide the readers through the maze of the small world within the world and zoom in the follies and foibles present there with the telescope called humor and stop at that and leave the rest to the readers. catharsis is left to the own call of the individual readers. This paper purports to analyze the aforesaid proposition through David Lodge's Small World and Karan Bajai's Keep off the Grass. Though they belong to different nations, different periods and different culture, they represent the campus novelists present globally.



KEYWORDS : *Academic Infightings, Couplings touching, funny and frightful, set pieces ,the campus novelists*

INTRODUCTION:

In today's globalized world which gets shaped up by the colossal presence of mass media and information and technology, the role and the status of academia have become dynamic and a moot point. And it calls for a time travelling to its function and evaluating its strength and weaknesses. Novels that are set in colleges and universities focus their attention on the life, politics and relationships of academic faculty and students. These novels provide an insight into the life inside the campus which is normally impervious to the outside world.

The writers of the Campus novels begin and end their stories satirizing the usually glorified image of academicians. The teachers are presented as comic and ridiculous figures that have long forgotten their intellectual pursuits but have become highly competitive when it comes to chair or

power politics. 'Matha, Pitha, Guru, God' is the way our Indian culture conceived the very notion of the teachers' role next to the parents and occupying an important place even before God. Irrespective of country, culture and language, the academy which is perceived as the temple of intellects and scholars, is portrayed as a mere shallow place accommodating lots of power mongers in campus novels. The students are portrayed as money mongers who attend college not for quenching the intellectual quest but for learning the ways and means for minting quick money. Though they are not generalized, most of the campus novels show them in this light.

The campus novels can be identified with social documents. The factor that resulted in the emergence of campus novels was sociological indeed. After the World War II, the proliferation of the universities and educational institutions opened up the gate for creative writing and creative writers. The professional writers were employed a regular or part time staff to teach the art of creative writing which was the main paper in the curriculum. Teaching what they are passionate about and paid well for what they are passionate about and provided with flexible timing to do what they are passionate about drew lots of professional writers to take up teaching job at the universities. These writers found the campuses a fertile ground for infinite themes and interesting plots. And they started writing about the very place they inhabited. Hence when we look at the campus novels, we can wonder at how well they capture and mirror the important reflexes of the education system, the curriculum, and their impact on the personal and professional lives of the teachers and the taught, and the dialectic relationship between the teacher and the students and in return, the cumulative impact on the society at large.

The campus novels, which had the universities, the higher seat of learning, as an institution as well as the setting for the stories, had the power to criticize the society. Every campus novelist is either a teacher or a student, hence, as they have the first-hand experience of the campus they portray in their novels, get transgressed when laughing at the follies and foibles of the academic environment. But they stop with the point of laughing at them and ensure that they do not pass any judgment on them. The campus novelists do leave it to the readers to pass judgments on the small world within the world. One of the major exponents of campus novels and an all-time favorite of the readers, David Lodge is the one who set the path easy for his upcoming juniors to tread carefully without falling prey to the desire of passing judgments and trying to achieve catharsis. Out of all the campus novels he has written, his *Small World* does what he really wanted to. This academic romance is entirely dedicated to satirizing the culture of attending seminars where the resource persons are paid and promoted and sponsored for travelling around the world from one conference to another, disseminating their so called knowledge and leave their own students at the university to fend for themselves and the scholars are allowed to take a paid holiday from work and bring back loads and loads of newly acquired knowledge. The novels goes on to mock at love affairs, legal/illegal in and around the campus.

David Lodge writes in his prologue to his *Small World*, "Geoffrey Chaucer observed many years ago, folk long to go on pilgrimages. Only, these days, Professional people call them conferences. "The modern conference resembles the pilgrimage of medieval Christendom in that it allows the participants to indulge themselves in all the pleasures and diversions of travel while appearing to be austere bent on self-improvement. To be sure, there are certain penitential exercises to be performed- the presentation of a paper, perhaps, and certainly listening to the papers of others. But with this excuse you journey to new and interesting places, meet new and interesting people, and form new and interesting relationships with them, and vice versa; eat, drink and make merry in their company every evening and yet at the end of it all, return home with an enhanced reputation for seriousness of mind. Today's conferences have an additional advantage over the pilgrims of old in that their expenses are usually paid, or at least subsidized, by the institution to which they belong, be it

government department, a commercial firm or, most commonly perhaps, a university.

There are conferences on almost everything these days, including the.....Chaucer looks down from the eighth sphere of heaven on..... And observes all the frantic traffic around the globe that he and other great writers have set in motion- the jet trails that criss-cross the oceans, marking the passage of scholars from one continent to another, their paths converging and intersecting and passing as they hasten to hotel, country house or ancient seat of learning, there to confer and carouse, so that English and other academic subjects may be kept up - what does Geoffrey Chaucer think?"(Prologue, *Small World*).

It is with these pearls of wisdom, one would really sit down to analyze how these campus novels abstain themselves from the usual cathartic function of any literary piece.

Small world, the academic romance deals with events that happen ten years after the two university professors exchange their job and wives, and whatever that happen in the romantic lives of the scholars in the campus. The whole novel is abounding with hilarious references to stagnant system governing the universities and colossal presence of power politics. Mr. Dempsey says, "I used to work here, in the department.....What a retarded lot they were ...same old faces...Nobody ever seems to move. Old Sutcliffe, for instance, has been here forty years, man and boy.....no place for ambitious man. The last straw was when they gave a senior lectureship to Philip Swallow instead of me, though I had three books out by then, and he'd published practically nothing....they have gone and given him the Chair here, and he's still published practically nothing".(p.6)

This novel, page after page, makes it a point to laugh at the frivolousness with which academic conferences are conducted and attended. Lodge describes a scene inside a lecture hall. "persse yawned and shifted his weight from one buttock to another in his seat at the back of the lecture-room. He could not see the faces of many of his colleagues, but as far as could be judged from their postures, most of them were as disengaged from the discourse as him. Some were leaning back as far as their seats allowed, staring vacantly at the ceiling, others were slumped forwards onto the desks that separated each row, resting their chins on folded arms, and others again were sprawled sidewaysIn the third row a man was surreptitiously doing The Times crossword and at least three people appeared to be asleep. Someone, a student presumably had carved into the surface of the deskBORING.... Persse had no reason to dissent from this judgment".

Lodge, a teacher at the university, never hesitates to delineate the sexual exploitations by the teachers and the students inside the campus and their sexual adventures and misadventures while on commuting to the conference locations abroad. The students who get exploited, trade their virginity for the marks and grades. A closer look at these situations will leave the reader with an unsettling feeling towards the whole academic set up. The universities, churning out graduates to compete in the dog-eat-dog competitive world outside, do not seem to be teaching any lessons for anybody transgressing the moral code of conduct. A girl writes and submits her answer sheet to her tutor, mentioning in between her answer that she would go public about his seducing her and expose him (the same tutor), if he did not pass her. She writes in her answer sheet, ".....'Paradise Lost' is an epic poem in blank verse, which is another way of justifying the ways of god to man because if it rhymed it would seem pat. My tutor Professor Swallow seduced me in his office last February, if I don't pass this exam I will tell everybody. John Milton was the greatest English poet after Shakespeare..... he locked the door and made me lie on the floor so nobody could see us through the window. I banged my head on the wastepaper bin. He also considered writing his epic poem about King Arthur....."(p.60). The professor's wife receives this answer sheet through an anonymous letter from the university. When the girl fails in her exam, the professors gets exposed and confronted by the department, for

which he passes the buck on the girl, stating that it was the girl who tried to seduce him for the sake of marks. The girl does not take this issue further and leaves shortly. The professor goes scot free and continues enjoying his prestigious chair in the department. He goes about rampaging on prospective victims in students and widens his 'knowledge' and career prospects. These stinking issues do not get leaked out of the campus. The rumor storm rises and settles down at the same place in the campus. This small world within the world is impervious and secret laden. More than the professor, it is the academic system that gets exposed and shows the amount of compromises students and scholars make in order to achieve academic goals. We don't find any negative transformations happening in the lives of people involved in these sexual and power scams. The concept of 'Good wins and the bad perishes' goes in vain. The perpetrators do not undergo any character change or any purgative realization at the end of the novel. The scams become part and parcel of the life inside the campus.

What a great predictor David Lodge is! Probability is there that he could be talking about any university or college campus that was to come by. After reading a campus novel by Karan Bajaj, an Indian writer in English, one would really wonder how easily Mr. Lodge transcends the time, and how relevant are his perceptions to the interpretation of present day academic scene. *Keep off the Grass* by Karan Bajaj takes us through a maze called IIM, Bangalore, where graduating with a good grade and bumping onto a job at the placement is nothing less than chasing an illusion.

In *Keep off the Grass*, Samrat, an NRI who lives a fairytale life as an investment banker at Wall street, USA, suffer from an identity crisis and a sense of not belonging to the place and comes to India enrolling himself as a student at IIM, Bangalore, to quench his quest for identity. His life inside and outside the campus takes us through the students' attitude, aptitude and their concept towards love and life.

"Ensure your own house is in perfect order even if everything around you is in a shambles" (p.30) this seems to be the unofficial motto of the denizens of the business school campuses. The campus seems to be abound with students and scholars with no clear ambitions, no governing interests, just drifting along.

Students go high on smoking marijuana, and do not mind missing the classes due to the hangover from too much of alcohol and one of them says, "I smoke it in protest, man; Marijuana exists naturally as a plant. Who is the government to ban God's creation? It's like me wanting to make potatoes illegal because I don't like the way they taste." (p.45)

Sarkar, one of the three main characters in this novel seems to be the mouthpiece of the author. Sarkar talks about the Indian educational system, "The whole system is completely screwed up. There are billion people in this country. Most of them are at the bottom of the food chain. Hence, there is no mass market for anything other than the basics and certainly not for nobler pursuits like philosophy, literature or music or other fancy liberal arts kind of stuff. The only sure way to make a livelihood is to be in engineering or medicine and while medicine requires a certain degree of patience and aptitude, being a software engineer in India requires neither. Look at me, for example. Despite being computer engineering major, I have barely seen the computer lab at the IIT. India manages to churn out a million worthless engineers like me every year, and they all apply to business school to escape the futility of running backend computer operations for..." (p. 48)

I hope these sums up the kind of educational system available in India. Though it is not to talk about a particular country and its educational system, it is show how people take everything in their stride and co-exist.

The possibility of the relationship of the staff and student going beyond the classroom does not seem to be that farfetched. Here Samrat is sitting in his accounting class, wondering how nice it would

be to have a future together with the accounts teacher. He imagines, "May be we could have a future together. We could live in one those nice, spacious campus houses with a beautiful garden, have a couple of kids together, and I would teach at the IIM as well. But would it be right if we both taught the same subject? May be I could...." (p.52)

CONCLUSION

Every piece of literature is believed to be cathartic in nature. These campus novels are true to very nature of literary pieces. They too are cathartic but in a different way. They make the readers to judge the situations and learn from them. As the readers laugh along with the author, catharsis takes place. The authors provide the civilized humor and the readers take upon the onerous task of purifying their own emotions.

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