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Tales of Camaraderie in the Contemporary Indian English Campus Novels

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Abstract:

Campus novel as a sub genre has gained popularity in the Contemporary Indian English Literature with the publication of Five Point Someone by Chetan Bhagat in 2004. One of the important facets of the campus novel is its multidisciplinary approach. Writers belonging to the fields of humanity, management and medicine have penned down their experiences of studying at some of the elite educational institutions in India. As soon as the academic session starts with ample of mixed feelings among its stakeholders, i.e. students, teachers and parents, strong bonds are formed among them and many a times promising everlasting ties. The present paper focuses on the camaraderie which is shared by the prominent characters of the contemporary Indian English campus novels.

Keywords: Contemporary Indian English Campus Novels, Camaraderie among students, teachers and parents

Introduction

Students, teachers and parents are the triumvirs under scrutiny of the readers in the contemporary Indian English campus novels. Their interaction, whether cordial or conflicting, keeps the course of action thriving and throbbing. The flow of varied emotions among the characters, in the miniature society, helps us comprehend their personalities minutely and meticulously.

2.1. Definition of Camaraderie

In Merriam-Webster Dictionary camaraderie is defined as,

A feeling of good friendship among the people in a group.

Camaraderie is a goodwill, light-hearted rapport and mutual trust experienced among people who spend a lot of time together and share their experiences with one another. In the ten

contemporary Indian English campus novels under study, the major characters come in contact with one another under various situations and their contact and communication build up circumstantial or permanent bonding among them.

2.2. Factors Influencing Camaraderie in the Contemporary Indian English Campus Novels

Several factors comprise collectively which influence as well as stimulate the sense of camaraderie among the characters in the contemporary Indian English campus novels. These factors facilitate better understanding and bonding among the characters.

2.2.1. Proximity

Campus is a small world with boundaries and thus the people residing in it come in close proximity to one another. By living in the same room of the hostel, studying in the same class, by visiting the various sites inside and at the adjoining joints of the campus, the characters often end up developing strong and lasting bonds of friendship among themselves.

Hari, Ryan and Alok in Five Point Someone, Abbey, Rusty and Pappu in Mediocre But Arrogant, Tejas and Rishabh in Anything for You Ma'am, Kaya, Shubhra and Ragini in Sumthing of a Mocktale, Harsh, Tushar, Dipendu, Divya and Priya in Everything You Desire, Shekhar, Anoushka and Gautam in Joker in the Pack, Adi, Pheru, Harsha, Rajiv, Sam and Toshi in Bombay Rains, Bombay Girls, Prashant, Varun, Berrywala, Daddu and Prasad in Second Degree, Samar, Pranav, Skimpy and Jiya in Love, A Rather Bad Idea are the prominent characters who remain loyal to one another in the times of whether fritz or frenzy or cool and cordial.

2.2.2. Similarity of Interests

The limited, but in no way insignificant, years spent by the students in campus influence bonding among them by working on projects, assignments, preparation for examinations, quizzes, cultural and co-curricular activities or even by following the trends in vogue.

Harshdeep Jolly, in his novel Everything You Desire mentions many events both curricular and cultural ones like Aarambh, Unmaad, welcome party, L-square parties conducted every fortnight by the students on the campus and Vista Annual management functions which prove to be truly functional in bonding of characters in the novel.

Creative bonding between teachers and students is well displayed in the characters of Prof. Veera and Ryan in Five Point Someone. Ryan's dynamic views on the education system make him an

unappreciated and disobedient student among the other faculty members who are reluctant to change and advocate the age old teacher-oriented, teaching-learning methods. Prof. Veera on the other hand, is open to change and accepts the relevant changes much required to boast up and reform the current education system. Ryan finds a sympathetic person in Prof. Veera who understands his innovative and creative zeal. Ryan ends up working as a research assistant for Prof. Veera. Prof. P. P. Siddhu in Anything for You Ma'am is quite stubborn and unfriendly with his students while in college. In Chennai, he is very friendly, understanding and cordial with Tejas when he comes to know about Tejas' purpose of missing the educational tour for the sake of meeting his lady love Shreya.

2.2.3. Common Complaints

Students who enroll themselves in different courses at IIT, IIM, JNU, Bombay University and in other universities often avail hostel facilities provided by the universities. Once away from the comfort zones of their homes, they start making attempts of adjustment and bring forth their interactive skills to establish their own stance among others and also to get acceptance of others. New and vivid experiences help them find a voice that speaks their thoughts and feelings.

Majority of the students share common issues, thus they are able to find not only audience but also companions.

In spite of having systematic arrangements and fixed menus at the campus canteen, students reciprocate their dislike towards the food served at the campus canteen. This attitude leads them to venture about nearby food joints which are famous in one or the other way.

In Love, A Rather Bad Idea, Samar and his friends often go to Timpoos.

'Let's go down to Timpoos'. Skimpy alluded to the legendary Timpoos dhaba. Actually a sting of thatched food joindts behind IIT; Timpoos was renowned for its innovative maggi preparations and some lip smacking parathas. Located in the middle of an area cluttered with educational institutes, Timpoos would do rip roaring business any time of the day. (19, 20)

Seniors do their best in guiding the juniors and in doing so they pass on their take on the faculty members as well. Seniors beware the juniors about the strict and reserved faculty members and also about their counter parts. In Mediocre But Arrogant, Abbey gets to know about Professor Tathagato Chattopadhyay, better popular as Prof. Chatto, from his seniors. Seniors make Abbey and his friends apprehensive about the Professor.

He was short and walked with an air of confidence which comes from the awareness of one's powers. He knew when to Drop the guillotine and no, he was

not known to have mercy on the hapless. When he walked into the class in white pants, a large floral printed shirt (alps AKA Alpana said it was probably made from his living room curtains) and addressed us in a squeaky high pitched nasal voice in a strong Bengali accent, he instantly became the subject of mimicry among the back benchers. But none of us dared to make eye contact with him as he peered at us through his thick glasses, for we had been warned by every senior that Chatto was the ultimate king of sadism. Batch after batch of MIJ students had been the victims of his terror tactics. His accent and marking style were both unique. He had unleashed a reign of terror in MIJ from the time he joined the faculty. For, to get to the final year at MIJ, one had to have gone through the Chamber of Horrors known as Chatto. There was no escape. (25, 26)

Pressure of submitting the assignments, projects and presentations on time toll heavy on students throughout their journey of academic life. General understanding and mutual sympathy thus develop among students.

Harshdeep Jolly in Everything You Desire describes this pressure well. The protagonist Harsh experiences the stress and turmoil that come along while studying at IIM, one of the elite educational institutions of India,

As we entered the last month of the term papers, there was increasing pressure of projects, case study presentations and term papers, which were suddenly consuming quite a lot of time. In addition, there was one quiz or the other still to go in most subjects. In the Marketing course at least, our group was lucky as we had finished with the MAP presentation before the midterms. Those who still had to go through it were slogging like anything. (70)

My fears came true the next day as well into the evening, Our Economics project report was still getting finalized. After this we still had to work on the presentation. On top of it, everyone had to submit the OB project reports also on Wednesday. While I had done my part as far as the OB project went, everyone's contribution needed to be integrated to form a logical document. But for the moment, the Economics project was the immediate concern. By dinner time, we managed to finish the project report. Now we planned to meet after dinner to work out the presentation. That would take another 4-5 hours. I would need another 2-3 hours to finalize the OB project report. That meant the earliest I could think of sleeping was 4 a.m. (77)

2.2.4. Spirit of Adventure

The contemporary Indian English campus novels break the perspective and notion of the common people about all the students studying in the elite and reputed educational institutions of being just highly intellectuals, disciplined and obedient.

Some of the protagonists and the other characters in these campus novels do not mind breaking the rules and indulge in the activities that evoke in them a sense of freedom and individuality.

Faculty members make sure to warn students against any indisciplinary act or poor performance in academics. As Father Hathaway does in *Mediocre But Arrogant*.

'In MIJ Campus, three Ds can get you expelled—Drinks, Drugs, Dames.' You could also get thrown out if you got three Ds in academic of course. (202)

In spite of warnings, some students do not completely abide to the advice. Liquor party is quite prominent among students and they also bunk classes. This is a breakthrough in the common conception of general people about these students being away from any kind of vices.

Soma Das in *Sumthing of a Mocktale* talk about a particular place called the Parthasarathy Rocks –a beautiful scenic place named in honour of the first vice chancellor of JNU. The place absolutely bears a different connotation among the JNU junta.

If Ganga Dhaba is the official pre-dating destination of JNU, Parthasarathy Rocks (PSR) is undoubtedly the official dating spot. Once couples sign the agreement of love, they most definitely visit the love shrine of PSR and, with the blessing of Lord PS proceed on the path of love. (51)

PSR bears the consequences of the three sure shot ways to the altered state of consciousness.

1. Doping
2. Drinking
3. Making love

It has produced many an Aristotle and Plato who themselves forgot the next morning that they actually propounded theories with such Profound philosophy in their sense of *déjà vu*.

An intruding peep into the private world of dopers, Drinkers and lovers, whey they were in their trance. (52, 53)

Hari, Ryan and Alok in Five Point Someone do not hesitate to challenge the system now and again. They consume liquor on the roof of the institution and also, all the three ride together on Ryan's scooter.

When Ryan got it to Kumaon, all the students gathered around it to pay homage, but only Alok and I got to park our butts on it. It was for two people, but Ryan carried both of us; we went to class, canteen and on rare occasions to movies like the Terminator zipping away on Ryan's Kinetic, letting the world watch us in envy and the scooter in probable pity, groaning as it was under our combined weight. (32)

In the first chapter of the novel, Love, A Rather Bad Idea, Anirban Mukherjee dismisses the delusion of an IIT campus.

To cut a long story short, the entire 'Come September' theme was caused by the commencement of 'Rendezvous' the annual cultural festival of IIT Delhi. Even though the festival is widely touted as a 'cultural' one, especially by the organizing board and the well-meaning faculty of the institute, it could not be farther from the truth. Well yes, if the only culture you embrace is one of the open sex (free too, at that) and perpetual intoxication on illegal products, the Rendezvous is all about culture. For the rest of humanity, it is the time to get as uncultured as possible. So in some ways, one could say that September is as best of times, as it is the worst of times. (1)

2.2.5. C2D: Cooperate to Dominate

Most of the students work very hard to get themselves admitted in educational institutions like IIM, IIT and other institutions of great repute and honour. Shekar Verma too, the protagonist of Joker in the Pack is able to secure admission in IIM to realize his dreams.

One day I too would be a larger than life icon. (14)

In pursuit of accomplishing a big dream, students get admitted in the reputed institutions but soon they become aware of the academic pressure which they alone could not partake. Hence, they come up with the theory of C2D which means cooperate to dominate. Ryan in Five Point Someone talks about the essence of C2D theory prevalent in IIT.

Cooperate to Dominate. The IIT system is unfair because:

1. It suppresses talent and individual spirit.
2. It extracts the best years of one's life from the country's brightest minds.
3. It judges you with Draconian GPA system that destroys relationships.

4. The Profs don't care for the students.
5. IITs have hardly contributed to the country. (107, 108)

Ryan also puts up the points in front of Hari and Alok in which the C2D theory functions.

1. All assignments to be shared- one person will do each assignment by turn. The others will simply copy it. Saves time, saves duplication of effort.
2. We will divide up the course responsibilities. For instance, if there are six courses in the semester, we will take care of only two each. One must attend all classes that one is responsible for, but can skip all others, (note: Ryan gets all Prof Veera courses). In each class you attend for your course – take copious notes. The rest will merely copy them.
3. We share lab experiment observations.
4. Our friendship is above GPAs. With all the new spare time, we live our lives to the fullest.
5. We combine our hostel rooms into one living unit—one common bedroom, one study room and one fun party room.
6. We split the cost of vodka regardless of how many Drinks each person has had. (108)

Ryan is of the view that through this C2D theory, they can have good domination over their grades, image and career.

2.2.6. Compliance

Once admitted to the university, students in order to comply and adhere to the set standards adopt the ongoing trend. Compliance is the most common strategy adopted by the students to adapt well with the surroundings. In this way they do not feel isolated and the odd one out. Kaya, in Sumthing of a Mocktale feels the same.

Welcome to this crispy cottony handloomy world of JNU.

This place where it doesn't matter where you hail from, which fashion statements you made earlier.....whether you wore chiffon salwar kameez, DKNY tank tops, nylon shirts with tiny mango motif prints over terycot trousers. This is the end of all diversities.

No one really knows what forces of standardization operate here, people consciously or subconsciously shed their individual tastes and preferences and submit to the great JNU tradition. Fab India in Vasant Kunj has strategically located its outlet.

Over and above the cotton unisex kurtas and ethnic chappals, the jhola is the final stamp of a JNUite.

Those who don't adhere to the above rule themselves feel alienated. (1, 2)

2.2.7. Feeling of Love

Although academics surface the major themes of all the contemporary Indian English campus novels under study, the theme of love proves to be a breather amidst the cut-throat competition for grades, elections and other curricular as well as co-curricular activities.

These campus novels do not claim to indulge in immemorial love sagas. The theme of love is relatively silent and complementary to the main theme of academics. Love relationships presented in these novels are sweet, fragile, complicated, confusing and sometimes fake. Relationships continue but sometimes the partners keep on changing. The tenure of these relationships is also limited so that we cannot swear by them for their authenticity and eternity.

Among the ten primary sources only one novel, *Anything for You Ma'am* revolves majorly around the theme of love, not forsaking the academics of course. The author Tushar Raheja cleverly weaves the incidents of academic life around the love story of the protagonists Tejas and Shreya. The national daily 'The Pioneer' complimented Tushar Raheja for the same.

'Raheja writes a touching book about a young lover's story...that engrosses the reader, with its high speed rather hilarious turn of events... Amidst all the chaos are the sweet love moments... be it their date or their telephonic conversation... It is the story of a boy-next-door, which any youngster can relate to. Raheja moves back and forth in time, reminding of ace writers like Virginia Woolf and Amitav Ghosh...' (Review)

Tejas' journey of love, which meant bunking the educational tour and indulging in all the activities strictly prohibited by the institution, finally reaches its destination when he meets Shreya in Chennai.

There are some instances of love relationships which leaves us with a hope of unison in future. Abbey and Keya in *Mediocre But Arrogant*, Hari and Neha in *Five Point Someone*, Samar and Jiya in *Love, A Rather Bad Idea*, Adi and Isha in *Bombay Rains*, *Bombay Girls*, Deb and Avantika in *Of Course, I Love You..!*, Harsh and Divya in *Everything You Desire* and Prashant and Priya in *Second Degree* are the lovers who seem to promise to remain a couple post their college days.

Among these, there are instances found in the case of Shekhar and Anoushka in Joker in the Pack and Kaya and Abhimanyu in Sumthing of a Mocktail, where love transcends into oblivion leaving no traces of hope and anticipation in their love relationship. Such relationships are trivial and temporary.

2.2.8. Parental Support

In most of the contemporary Indian English campus novel under study, parents are either non supportive or indifferent towards the conflicts and tensions that their children undergo. Only in Second Degree, Prashant John is happy to converse with his mother who loves him unconditionally.

No expectations, no conditions. Mom just wanted me back home – to loiter around on the sofa, to hog like a pig, read comics in bed and on the dinner table. She didn't judge me by grades or marks. She didn't even care whether I was in IIM or not. It hadn't mattered to her when I got in, it didn't ruffle her when I told her I was last in the class and it didn't bother her when I told her I might flunk a couple of courses this term. "There are always remedial examinations," she said on the phone, when we had talked. "Life isn't decided by one examinations is it?"
(168)

2.3. Conclusion

The feeling of camaraderie among the three prominent facets i.e. students, parents and teachers give us a glimpse of the innermost feelings of the characters which often prove to be beneficial in their holistic development. Campus life amidst the bonds of camaraderie and perils of friendship remain exciting and the action continues to thrill, motivate and entertain us. Life inside campus is thus reflected in an interesting manner in the process of communication, interaction and boding of varied characters.

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