

Women in Academic Fiction: Reshaping the Gender Stereotypes in Anuradha Marwah Roy's *The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta*

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Abstract: The campus fiction genre focuses on education and academic life in an academic setting, with the major action taking place on or near the university's campus. The campus romances reflect educational experience in various ways by presenting a thorough and even contradictory portrait of university. In the latter half of the twentieth century, universities took off and developed. As a result, both instructor representations and student protagonists in college fiction reflect a skewed gender ratio. Anuradha Marwah Roy's *The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta* (1993), from the didactic segment of the Indian types of campus narrative, recounts intertwining narratives of middle-class Indian women who have recently moved to Delhi in search of liberation and to surpass the narrowly defined pathways of prejudice and derogatory male domination clichés. Drawing on the selected novel, the current study would want to investigate the moral topic of women's rights in India, in order to 'problematize' the much-appropriated disruption of gender norms, as evidenced by the seemingly disparate experiences.

Keywords: Campus novel, Academic novel, Indian English fiction, Academicians, Women empowerment.

Introduction: There has been a flood of modern fictional writings since the publishing business exploded in the twentieth century. As a result of the expansion of vocations, there is an increase in the further division of genres. For example, today's thriller or detective fiction includes medical thrillers, legal crime novels, and other categories. Numerous socioeconomic transformations occurred during the twentieth century, resulting in a new form of people and events. Fiction writers were inspired to write about recent issues by cultural and ideological occurrences. Novelists tried a variety of fictional plots, gradually moving away from the function of an author who directs the plot's action. New cinematic approaches, such as flashbacks and emulating symbolist art, have been tried. Physical action was pushed to the background in favour of the character's inner thoughts. The approach was labelled as, 'stream of consciousness'. Realism is amongst the most prominent synthesizing aspects in the contemporary narrative. History,

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mythology, and symbolism are held with each other in a turbulent combination by pragmatism, which act as a bridge between both the world of factual evidence and the realm of creativity and fantasy.

George Watson claims that university life is "the closest thing English Novel has had to an area of study since 1945" (*Campus Clowns and Canons* 12) in this world of facts and customs. We might say that the origins of academic literature can be traced back to the Nineteenth century.

This is another contribution to the imaginary assortment that we have come to expect. A novel can be classified as a campus novel if the activity is carried in a university or college setting and features instructors and learners. Instructors are known in the USA as 'faculty', in the United Kingdom as 'teaching staff', and in India as 'professors', but their basic functions and characteristics are the same. In university romance, learners are usually described how faculty see them, instead of as cross individuals.

The learning environment has been highly systematized, and today everyone has some involvement with educational journeys. Furthermore, as the financial system has moved from industrialization to a digital economy, education, particularly higher education, has become extremely relevant. With the educational field's domination in many domains, the form of the university romance has grown immensely popular in the present academic landscape. Most significantly, the apparent division of professions has taken a back seat to interdisciplinarity to the point where academics have created a strong, even in the most established of professions and domains, from farming to sports. When current events create discussion topics on campuses, sentiments are sparked. In the fire of concepts formed in academic institutions, the intensity of renaissance is felt. The civilized society owes a great deal to the inhabitants of the institution, whether it is a nation's effort to shift its leadership to constitutional principles or the creation of artistic activity. These works of fiction depict the chaotic world of academia, with all its oddities and vanities, as well as how eroticism and rivalry function inside the small group of knowledgeable men and women who act in a primitive fashion. These novels also depict the amusing side of academia, where laughter lurks beneath the surface of a situation in which people dedicated to a cause are forced to work together. These writings also depict the amusing side of academia, where humour lurks in the circumstance where individuals who are dedicated to perfection get by making a fool of themselves.

Campus Novel or Academic Novel is an interesting sub-genre of Fiction that has gained universal readership. Campuses spread all over the world deliver rich creative fresh material for this type of fiction. The movement of academic novels started back a century before in European nations. The term 'Campus' originates from the Latin term, campus, meaning 'a plain, open field'. It was originally used to define the parklands of

Princeton Campus, New Jersey, in 1776. Some other American universities also adopted this word, later, to describe the arenas of their own institutions. The genre has thereafter grown since 1950 with the rapid growth of American Campuses. In *Faculty Towers: The Academic Novel and its Discontents*, Showalter remarks about the beginning of the genre: “Academic or Campus Fiction, which dates back to the mid-nineteenth century, depicts a culture and community with its own set of rules and traditions, cut off from the outside environment, a familiar, womb-like, and, to put it bluntly, overwhelming world.” (14).

Campus novels are also known as University Novels, since these novels emphasize on University campuses. University is a place that fascinates most people because of its imaginary idealistic notions. In his essay *Nabokov and the Other Campus Novel* (2008), David Lodge examines the word campus and discovers that it comes from the Latin word ‘field’, which refers to the physical space used by a college or institution. It is a word that was synonymously used for the campus by the Americans from the beginning of the nineteenth century and was later used by the Britishers also. Now the term frequently applies to any seat of learning for a university or any other educational organization.

The Oxford Companion of Twentieth Century Literature in English (1996) explains on Campus novel as: “A genre of tale with a university or educational setting and academicians as main characters, frequently sarcastic or comedic.” (143)

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In the latter half of the 20th century, universities took off then and expanded. As a result, both teacher portrayals and student lead characters in college fiction reflect a skewed gender ratio. Excluding Olivia and Jane in *Eating People is Wrong*, Margaret in *The History Man*, Bernie, Desi, and Teresa in *Changing Places* and *Small World*, female instructors and learners in Bradbury and Lodge are marginalised. There are no female professors on the IIT campus in 21st-century India, just as there were few female students on the British campus in the late 20th century. The academy was almost entirely male-dominated. Communication is mostly a ‘guy’ system, and it is the most efficient method of distributing power. Women are minor characters who are utilised to add emphasis to ethical liberality, which is often disguised as power struggle.

In the 1990s, a few Indian female authors started their careers, writing books that exposed the actual reality of Indian society and its treatment of women. Over the last four decades, the image of women in literature has evolved. Women’s fiction has shifted away from the conventional portrayal of strong, self-sacrificing, self-evasive women and toward conflicted female protagonists yearning for identity. Female protagonists from the late 1980s express independently and oppose matrimony and heavy reliance on males, in comparison to previous works.

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Dr. Alvira in *No Onions nor Garlic*, Mohanna in *The Drunk Tantra*, and JR in *The Awakening – A Novella in Rhyme* are prominent women who battle not only for a position on academia for themselves but also for fundamental inequity to make the university more balanced for themselves and their learners. Their biological sex does not prevent women from fighting for equality in the face of male colleagues who abuse their power. Regardless of the fact that Shefali Rani is portrayed as a villain in *Atom and the Serpent*, she struggles about her own goals. Although today's campuses are distinct from those of the past, they brilliantly depict the prejudice of the old days. Male instructors, whose mentality is that university is one's domain, express provincial views. Female rights are generally subordinate, as wife/lover/student, and men's careless attitude toward women is justified by selfish enjoyment. Relationship breakdown or betrayal is a means for people to avoid dealing with emotional life that develops from a lack of cooperation, which causes their marriages to collapse. Female students who really are victimized due to their masculinity are also victims of the learner as a lover; female students consent toward this victimization because many feel that their quietness will bring them back to their ambitions, which would eventually release them from such parasites.

Fewer women than men talk about their encounters in academia in the category of university romances. Soma Das' *Something of a Mocktale* is one of the ten current Indian English university novels under investigation, with females as lead characters and the most significant figures. *Of Course I Love You...!* was co-written by Maanvi Ahuja and Durjoy Dutta. Women characters are underrepresented in the books depicting MIJ, IIT, and IIM courses, according to the novels studied for this study. As seen in *Something of a Mocktale and Bombay Rains*, *Bombay Girls*, female figures are more prevalent in degrees pertaining to humanities and medical. These novels depict both positive and bad aspects of female identity.

Women are growing, encouraging, interactive, creative, clever, powerful, driven, and passionate about their own work, recognising the important attributes. Prof Cherian's child Neha appears in *Five Point Someone*. She is a free-spirited stylist who has the bravery to defy her father's wishes and be in an affair with Hari, whom Prof Cherian despises. The main female protagonists in *Mediocre But Arrogant* are Kaya and Asha. They are ambitious as well as they attend MIJ, and are subsequently successful in finding jobs.

Radhika is the companion of the hero Tanuj in *Anything for You, Ma'am*, for whom he skips his orientation program and flies to Tamilnadu to visit her. Nothing is spoken about Radhika except that she is exceptionally attractive and a true cherisher. Soma Das is the author of *Something of a Mocktale*, and the novel's major protagonists are all female. Zara walks into Jawaharlal Nehru University to encounter an unauthorised salwar kameez uniform policy and a miniature India that quickly divides into different

sections. Zara, Shbhra, and Rani, among other outcasts, establish a multicultural zone between others. They start on an exhilarating journey through University's trivia, architecture, philosophy, religion, and much more.

Anuradha's *The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta* and Gender Trouble:

Anuradha Marwah Roy, writer of *The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta* (1993), was born in 1964. Roy began writing poetry and children's books as early as the age of eleven. With the arrival of her younger son, she felt compelled to establish her personality as a novelist and, as a result, began writing novels. In 10 months, she completed *The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta*, a novel that revealed her intellectual side. It's a great work that presents an intriguing tale of a young woman's formative years in a compassionate way. In fact, in addition to being a female Coming of age story, it is the first university fiction to depict college experience from the perspectives of both learners and lecturers. The novel by Roy is about both instructors and pupils.

Anuradha Marwah Roy, who was brought up as multilingual, chose English for her book writing process and proved to be an excellent narrator. She is currently employed as an English professor at New Delhi's Zakir Hussain University. Her years as a professor have educated her how to talk authoritatively. In her second book, *Idol Love* (1999), she demonstrates her credibility by addressing cultural issues such as the mistreatment of female and lower-class individuals.

Dirty Picture (1999), Roy's third book, exposes the physical violence of young girl by legislators and even the authorities in isolated villages. She based her work on a true story that occurred in her homeland of Rajasthan in the mid-nineties. Roy felt compelled to accurately reflect the true horrors after reading a social victim's account in the local media. She has produced a story that is both heart-breaking and captivating as a result of doing so and empathising so well with the wounded heroine.

Females are no longer identified and categorised solely as sufferers. Female equality is becoming more important, and this is a topic explored in Roy's novel, *The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta*. University education as well as life and activities in academia offer flexibility and strength. As a result, the work discusses themes of education institutions in addition to the concept of women's empowerment. Some heart-breaking aspects of the heroine's life at university are detailed in this work. Geetika might be seen as a learner, a PhD student, and a lecturer in this scene. As a child, sister, colleague, lover, wife, and motherhood she undergoes a transition. M. Eswara Rao in her article, *Evolution of Campus Novel in India* (2018) describes this novel:

Anuradha Marwah Roy's acclaimed novel *The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta* similarly features a character who is both a student and a teacher (1993). A small-town girl who wants to be a civil servant

enrols in an M.Phil programme at Jana University but has trouble with her research adviser. The novel deals with three facets of campus life: her decision to become a lecturer in order to live independently and her intentions to start writing. (13)

The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta by Anuradha Marwah Roy is all about Geetika's development as a person. Geetika, a doctoral candidate of English literature, is the protagonist of the novel; Geetika's encounters with other personalities are a form of self-discovery. Vinita is being groomed for marriage among her classmates. Geetika's friends are essential in her understanding of her own feelings and desires. According to Geetika: "Blood was mentioned by Booba. Boys did things that caused one to bleed. That did not sit well with me. The Hindi cinema version, which I saw it with my parents, was my favourite. Later, they had an academic conversation about it." (Roy 9)

Geeta's companion Sangeeta hails from a traditional Religious background. Sangeeta is depicted as a terrible student with a bad reputation. Despite the fact that she is sixteen years old, she is still in tenth grade. She comes from a vegan family, but she defies her morals by eating biryani with her Dalit beau. Geetika comments:

She had a small waist and several blemishes. The girls claimed it was because she was on the pill. She had previously been close with a merchant who was said to have lavished her with cash. Because of him, she had an abortion. Her parents were traditionalists. (Roy 11)

Garima, Geetika's third-grade tutor, is another significant female person in the story. Vijaya, is a student whose dad is a lecturer and whose mom is a housewife. Katie is a White European, who is her eighth standard school friend. Sandra is another white European character. She is well-known in Desertvadi for being an excellent swimmer. Sandra's dad served at Macaulay Academy as an Aerobic Conditioning Teacher. As a result, she was likely to stay on university premises. Geetika comments:

The hostel girls were substantially wealthier than us, the day scholars. My father used to argue that convent schools only exist because of the hostellers; if they just accepted day scholars, they would have to close since no one in Desertvadi would pay such high fees, and people didn't believe in spending money on education. (Roy 12)

Meena who is also a student in Geetika's community college gets married in 12th standard to Virendra of nearby town. Girls are trained for weddings in the society surrounding Geetika. Desertvadi is depicted as a little village with little awareness of the importance of academic learning. Weddings appear to be a better alternative for women's education than bringing them to academic institutions.

Geetika is from a well-educated household. Her dad works as a faculty member. Her family continually urges her to achieve higher in career. Her father, who works as a teacher, believes that Faculty position gives individuals little freedom. He encourages Geetika to pursue a career in the government bureaucracy. Women like Bhumbai, who serves as a maid at Geetika's home, is also there. Geetika comments:

Bhumbai stated that working was unnecessary. But what did she know? She was uneducated, and her husband abused her. When I inquired why she worked, she explained that her husband spent his whole salary on alcohol, but that my father was a godlike man who served tea for everyone every morning, and that my mother was extremely fortunate. (Roy 18).

Education is the sole means through which women can achieve economic independence. When Geetika talks about her mother, she adds that in an Indian household, girls learned Hindi and a little English, while guys learned English and other languages. After their maid, Bhumi, goes on break, Geetika's mother hires a Muslim woman to wash the kitchenware. Since they are aided by a Muslim helper, Geetika's mother's co-workers denied drinking *chai*. Sex and faith are two forces that keep a woman in her place. Religious preconceptions and unequal treatment are attributed. Despite the fact that social workers' primary responsibility is to serve the nation, their perspectives to communal behaviours stay constant.

The English Department at Kamla Nehru College is mostly female teachers with nine of the eleven faculty members being women. It's labelled a 'witches' conference' by Geetika. They contradict the widespread notion that teaching is a paid vacation. The department's weekly courses, their exploration of new aspects, and their passionate debates demonstrate that it is an effective and active department. In a majority male institution, the English faculty was a paradise of feminine. "It was a paragon of effectiveness and academic honesty in a university where the instructors' dedication to their work had become suspect." (Roy 112)

This implies that women are much more productive and dedicated than men. Ravina is a doctoral candidate who believes that people should carry out research and earn degrees in our nation in order to improve the nation's research institutions. The majority of those in the faculty have international research degrees. Anuradha, one of Geetika's examiners had a Cornell research degree who had also authored three novels and was popular in scholarly communities.

Women seem to have understood that they need not pine all their lives, bearing the atrocities meted out to them by men. They can break free from the bond of marriage when life becomes miserable by their husbands. Education plays an important role in supporting these women. It is by virtue of their education that they can look after

themselves and their families. In the novel, Ravina and Meena are relative concepts. Ravina is raising her two kids on her own following her relationship breakdown and endures the difficulties of living alone. She develops her boy a physician and her daughter a clothing designer, her maid says: “She works like a man, doing everything from purchasing veggies to reimbursing the electric power bill.” (Roy 134)

Meena’s initial relationship left her ‘damaged and devastated’ by her sadist partner. She had kids to support and decided to pursue a career as a lecturer. Her remarriage, which was planned by her parents, likewise fails due to her spouse, an entrepreneur who regards her as little more than a ‘nice parlor interior.’ Rajiv, her third spouse and a reporter who lives elsewhere, made her very happy. Their lifestyles are completely different, but it works. They even have their own different apartments. Anuradha, Madhu, and Mona, the faculty’s other three outstanding women, are housewives and self-sufficient. However, this does not imply that women can only be empowered if men are denied. Prachi and Geetika’s mother are good instances of this. Prachi, despite her wealth, did not rely on her family for her schooling. She received a scholarship after graduation and has been self-sufficient. She works as a gynecologist in Mumbai and is well compensated. She is completely focused on her profession and ignores any interruptions, including her own child that might cause her to stray from her path. In her own words, she is emancipated and content with her marriage.

Rita is a lecturer who works at Marwari Public University. She lived with her family as a bachelor. People in Desertvadi created rumours that she had abandoned her love for her family, who were opposed to her dating a non-vegetarian from a marginalized community, because she was an unmarried lady. A woman has become a general societal target. The woman gains status through marriage. As a result, females like Meena, Geetika’s classmate, marry at an early age.

Anndy and Geetika’s special relationship comes to an end. When she visits the sport-complex in Lutyenabad, she encounters Ravish. He protects her from certain thugs who are bothering her. She develops feelings for Ravish. Ravish is opposed to her Public Administration preparedness. Administrative Services, he feels, would make her appear as an ‘intimidating women officer.’ He claims that Teaching assistantship was better for women since it provided them opportunity to advance up to societal standards: “The lectureship is unique. It is the best career for women currently available. You can work while caring for your family and home.” (Roy 90).

Geetika’s mom, a counsellor in Desertvadi and a Hindi teacher, used her own personality. She, too, is free and democratic with her hubby in leading her kids in the correct direction after they are old enough to make their own decisions. She is given a significant role in the family. Despite the fact that Geetika is living alone in Lutyenabad, she avoids drinking at parties due to her dread of her mother – “I couldn’t force myself to

consume any of the potent substances. Mom was constantly in the back of my mind for some reason.” (Roy 184)

Geetika’s mom encourages her to just be competitive and courageous. She moulds her into a strong, liberal woman. But Geetika’s mother’s death from the disease is perhaps the destruction of the girl that Geetika’s mom wants her to be. Geetika lives with Ravish in Lutyenabad. His mother disapproves of her appearance as well as her professional training. When Geetika’s mom looks for a female for Ravish, he becomes enraged.

Geetika sails her own boat thanks to her knowledge. She doesn’t like to be labeled or moulded by somebody else, and she prefers to be herself. Ravish’s mother and sister have both provided her a saree and jewellery, but she refuses to be branded by them. “Was she (Ravish’s mother) attempting to build me though with a bright orange, costly sari that was silky and perfumed?” (Roy 208)

Ravish holds her responsible for his family’ lack of communication. She disputes his choice of lifestyle with his family after the wedding. She endures Ravish’s family’ insults, but then when Ravish offends her, it is a major shock to her self-esteem, and she never accepts him. She musters the strength to leave Ravish and raise Vasant, her child, as a single mother, on the strength of her degree and, with it, her talent to write fiction. She desires to rip free from the system of relationship of established conventions. Ravish mentions both economical and psychological reasons for not relocating after getting married. Ravish, on the other hand, does not leave her. Geetika makes the decision to end the marriage. She becomes pregnant as a result of him, but she does not terminate the pregnancy. Her plan to raise the child born to adolescent mothers demonstrates her knowledge of what higher education entails. She believes that “Higher education may indeed signify overcoming a constricting value system.” (Roy 195).

University is depicted in this work in an extremely scathing light. The discourse has shed a lot of light on the research guide. Geetika’s guide does not even do credit to her responsibilities, yet she is nonetheless invited to join the President’s new morning club, where he meets scholars on a frequent basis. Geetika’s boss only talks around the subject and never helps the kids with their requirements. The work also depicts the thirst for foreign-returned teachers. Her foreign degree is of such value to her that she receives an opportunity from a well-known University. She is unable to educate research methodology to her research scholars that are enrolled under her supervision. Her subordinates have no idea what her Sorbonne-trained intellect is saying. In front of Prof. Rakesh, Geetika expresses her frustration.: "I can’t understand a word my supervisor says," I said, "she just says study the text or read Freud, Camus, Foucault, and so on...but she doesn’t tell what I’m supposed to do with all of them.” (Roy 213) The weakness of the contemporaries of such individuals is portrayed in the confrontations of Prof. Rakesh

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in the form of answer and relief to Geetika- “What she has said to you makes absolutely no sense to me. Regrettably, citizens like her persist and thrive in our college system, and that is all I have to say about it” (Roy 214). But he is the one who supports Geetika in such tough periods by supervising her properly. Shyamala Narayan in his article ‘*The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta and Other Campus Novels*, (1998) said:

University Education is not essentially a campus novel; however, it does contain some excellent satire of Indian higher education when Geetika enrolls at the Postgraduate University (JNU) in Lutyenabad to pursue her M.Phil. Her research coordinator never talks to Geetika about the book; instead, she offers her a long list of French authors to read. Trying to advance in academics by appearing to be up to date on critical literary theory is not unique to India. The protagonist of Malcolm Bradbury’s collegiate novel *The History Man* gets away with hawking fresh hypotheses. (115)

Conclusion: In a patriarchal society, authors like Anita Desai used the picture of a struggling woman, her pouting dissatisfaction, and the tempest within to make demands for a good future for women. Female issues must be forceful and demanding in these times. The concept of female empowerment is not limited to Geetika in this story, but also appears in other female characters such as Ravina, Meena, Lakshmi, Geetika’s mom, and so on. Instead of confining women’s lives to one standard, current writers have used such protagonists to represent both the uniqueness of women and the variation inside every woman.

Several Indian women authors on campus have strived to develop a female identity that is not dictated by conservative order. As a result, the Coming of age story, or story about growing older from early life to adulthood, is a favourite method among these authors. This book is a bildungsroman as well. The tale follows the transition of a little girl into a mature, responsible lady. Her parents have sent her to Lutyenabad to seek an academic achievement that is considered important for women in today’s society. But Geetika does manage to secure a high level of education, albeit in a limited sense. She gains significant courage toward the end of the novel to face the problems she would face in life and disproves the myth that the freedom to live one’s life as one wishes is reserved for the social elite.

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