

# The Truth (Almost) About Bharat - A True Saga Of Cultural Change

Parnav Kumar Vaidik

Research Scholar GKV Haridwar.

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## Abstract:

Change is the ultimate reality of the world. And this change can be seen in culture as well. The change can be traced through Indian Campus novels. These novels not only peep inside academy but also present the real image of the nation. The present paper is an attempt to analyse The Truth (Almost) About Bharat from the perspective of cultural change. Campus is the mini world where several issues and happenings are routine exercises and change and changing behaviour of the students is on focal point. Campus is the reflection of the society, and campus novels are the tools to understand the campus practically.

**Keywords:** campus, exploitation, injustice, culture, college.

## Introduction

The Campus Novels have a long history in India. Traces of campus in Indian novels could be seen in the novels of 1960s. In 1960s they had academic themes and had examined the demeanour of professors, faculty, students and academics within the bounded borders of any higher educational institution either from the viewpoint of a teacher or narrated from the viewpoint of a student who gave a panoramic account of the experiences of a campus life. With the passage of time this new genre of literature became mature, wide, more evident and practical. The genre always welcomes new thoughts and motifs in portraying the mysterious and traumatic lives of academicians as well as these novels cross the boundaries of campus in order to define the life in and around the campus. Meena Alexander the prominent Indian campus novelist does this in her well-known novel The Truth (Almost) About Bharat here in this novel Vishwanath the main character of this novel escapes the bounded life of a campus to realize new truths about Bharat, the country.

The campus life is a mixture of various issues that are sometimes hidden behind the masks of learning and knowledge. It is usually thought that a campus is a holy area that provides a clear, moral and hopeful vision to the scholars. But time has changed now; the materialistic storms are polluting the purity of the 'temples of knowledge'. This pollution can be seen through the newspapers and TV News Channels. News and TV programmes are filled with the news of the blunders and absurdities that are created in the educational institutions and society as well. They are loaded with the news of heinous crimes that are committed in schools,

colleges, universities, educational institutions or in the very department of education itself. Watching a News Channel or reading a newspaper on a daily basis means perceiving at least ten to twenty such cases per day that forces us to think over the degrading condition of the so called 'domes of wisdom'. There is news such as, a girl student is raped by the teacher, students committing suicide from the fear of bad result, a student brutally beaten by the teacher, and the cases of sexual harassment/murder/gang rape in school/college/university have become common now. Ragging, drug addiction or suicides are increasing day by day. These are some of the horrible issues that are polluting campus as well as societies.

The educational establishments are the 'pillars of a nation' thereby a slight change in their situation can change the concept of a nation. Globalization, liberalization and the growing competition have changed the culture of a nation. Since the term 'culture' itself is dynamic in nature. Hence, whether it may be the campus culture or the culture of a nation, it is subject to change. Change is a complicated module in framing the concept of nation or nationalism. The Campus Novels try to show this adventurous change.

The novel *The Truth* almost about Bharat tries to trace the change and changing culture throws light upon the behaviour and lifestyle of the friends of the protagonist. Shank, Vishwanath's childhood friend, is the son of an MP but is popular in the campus because of his own abilities. He has a muscular body and famous amongst girls as he is "the handsomest creature" who could beat "Anil Kapoor smiles", "Sylvester Stallone shoulders", "Schwarzenegger thighs", "Killer Khan hips" and "Vinod Khanna sex appeal" (5). This comparison of Shanks shows that modern youth has given their hearts to Bollywood. Bollywood personalities have become their fashion icons. This reflects how shallow young men become, they idealise those who are merely imitators; and not just hypocrites but fools who are polluting the poor Indian culture just for the sake of handful money. These so called entertainers just entertain absurdity, nudity and nakedness. And for young generation a Bollywood actor is "the only macho brute" who is very much conscious about his dressing as he "squeeze[s] his assets into tight, tight pants and not look obscene, he's bursting with common sense. His brain moves faster than the gossip in the Girls' Hostel" (5). Shanks too have "a weakness for underpants, it's his area of special interest. He's always on the lookout for a new style or something" (4) and is also interested in girls. His craze for new fashions of underpants even occupies a place in his chats. It is clearly seen in this novel that Shanks is deeply influenced by Bollywood and its cheap thrills.

It is sad to see that Shanks and Vishwanath (the narrator) are amongst the top students of the Medical College, even than they are not talking about their future plans, their career, but they are talking about undergarments. Rishi, one more modern day character in this novel is an engineering student is a chain-smoker who is found holding a "Charminar" (cigarette) in his hand (4). It seems that he tries to imitate Bollywood or its filmy heroes. Like Rishi modern day young students have forgotten the lives of real heroes and they have become the blind imitator of charming but noxious B-world. This noxious world of lust and fashion has blinded young students; because of this ill-dose young students are dreamy but disillusioned, they are serious for non-serious things and non-serious for serious things, they are wasting their precious time, polluting their brilliant mind, and destroying their character that is sublime and supreme to all.

Today's condition is more miserable than the discussed condition. This new world is the world of OTT where everything is easily accessible; here youth is experiencing porn videos, porn movies, and adult stories, nude songs and vulgar dialogues. It is ironical to say that all these OTT acts are highly popular and they have star ratings. Bollywood actors and makers are also active on OTT platforms. There will be no exaggeration here if it is said that the dirty river of Bollywood has now turned into a gutter, which is making money by making dirty films, spoiling the culture. To earn money, Bollywood actors also started selling paan, tobacco, bidi and liquor etc. And the pain happens when society gives importance to such people and they are given big rewards. False heroism is harmful for a healthy society. One must realize real heroes.

The author also sarcastically points out the parasitic nature of medical colleges who charge massive amount of admission fees but fail to provide satisfactory salary to the mess workers even when they are forced to work for longer duration due to which they become careless towards their job. As Hasmukh, the poet exposed the dead body of "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). As Elaine Showalter also counts that "The best Academic Novels comment on contemporary issues, satirize professorial stereotypes and educational trends, and convey the pain of intellectuals called upon to measure themselves against each other and against their internalized expectations of brilliance" (4).

The college campus of this novel too is not free from the 'gunda-raj' of the dishonest, greedy and "the most unpopular guy on the campus" (7) like Vidya who first manage to be elected as College secretary and start abusing their fellow students under their dictatorial rule. Vidya is a hypocrite. When Vishwanath suggests Shanks to talk to Vidya regarding the problem of mess workers, Shanks rejects the idea saying "Vidya will say yes-yes, then he'll lick the Board's but and kick the Mess boys" (6). Vishwanath humbly says, "I am sure the sweet bastard will become Health Minister one day and succeed gloriously in keeping things botched" (7). Vidya is the only student who is famous amongst the hostler for he keeps his room clean all the time; "Vidya's is like a deluxe suite at Le Merdien: curtains and pictures on the walls, flowers in pots, table-covers, chair cushions and the room reeking of some crazed-out deodorant" (6). Vidya is evil minded and greedy. His room is available for rent at five rupees per hour to the students whose parents suddenly appear and are eager to see the hostel and the moment the parents leave in a mood of happiness at seeing the neat and clean hostel life of their brotherly "Vidya knocks on the victim's door, smiles his beautiful smile and says, 'Pay up or the interest doubles in a week'. That's why he's called Vidya Macchad. (No self-respecting mosquito would like the comparison)" (6). Vidya is a fraud who "wears a benign, flaccid smile on his face and a scowl in his heart" (6). But he was ashamed and shamed by Shanks in front of other students when he tried to be over smart by playing upon Hasmukh who went to Vidya, the College secretary to complain about the carelessness of the mess workers who found a cockroach in his cutlet. Vidya "smiled his ghee smile" and insulted Hasmukh by saying that it is "a special cutlet with a piece of cinnamon thrown in just for you" (7). But Vidya stepped upon axe by making this pained remark as Shanks, "the God of Death" (7)

The author also exposes hypocrite people like Karan Singh who is a successful Police Officer by the virtue of which he could “afford a Maruti van and holidays in Simla and Goa . . . Karan had the future of half-a-dozen ministers squeezed inside the pockets of his tight trousers” (Nambisan 59). The author also highlights the patriarchal mind-set of society through Bhojvi Singh. He orders to abort the baby of his six-month pregnant niece, an unwed mother despite the fact that aborting the baby at this stage may prove harmful for the health of a sixteen year old girl.

Fake Sadhus or saints are exposed in this novel. Such false - religious, evil -minded people claim that they are blessed by the God with supreme powers and that they can perform magical banquets but in reality they are bluff masters who satisfy their crooked desires under the semblance of saints. Actually they are the real enemies of religion. They victimize both the soft-hearted innocent people as well as the people of greedy nature who willingly become their victim. The narrator shares his experience when he came across such dishonest beings, “Two sadhus boarded the train at Hyderabad and sat opposite me. Long matted hair in top knots, ash-smearred chests, brown beads, bright saffron cloth knotted across right shoulder, wooden sandals” (68). They tried to trap Vishwanath by telling him about their holy “yatra to Kanyakumari and the Kumbha Mela in Allahabad” (68) and asked for any offering in cash from him that would shower heavenly blessings upon the narrator. “Their deceptive sadhu- like personality contradicts with the smell of ‘beedis’ emanating from them” Dahiya and Dahiya 54). Not only uneducated or less educated people are fooled by the fake personality of such type of ‘jholachaap babas/sadhus’ but even educated people like Vishwanath’s mother are also easy victims of such people. Besides these ‘jholachaap babas/sadhus’, there are ‘Modern babas’ like the MSG. – They are rich, sooted-booted babas who don’t appear on railway stations or bus- stands but they have air-conditioned cars and five-star hotels. In this novel Swami represents all these modern money-minded fake babas. He lives in California and his ashram is run by his female disciples/sadhus. He is a hypocrite and materialistic who sits on a “red and gold throne” (Nambisan 85) and enjoys a deluxe life. His foolish disciples blindly follow his orders as the one Ahalya, an MBBS MD and her sister Radha, and designer trained in California who gave up their careers as per the orders of the Swami. Moreover, the insanity of superstitious Indian women is also portrayed. There is a mad rush amongst barren women who crowd to seek the blessings of the Swami in the form of a flower or a fruit, touch it to their eyes and walk away “with beatific expression of joy” (85) with a belief that the Swami owns the divine power which can make them fertile. Dr. Frank also informs the narrator that “they fight to be the favourite devotees of the swami like teenagers fight over pop idols” (85).

Thus, Kavery Nambisan exposes the hidden absurdities of modern day culture; that seems to be so much advance but frustrated and fractured. Deadly evils like corruption, political meddling, injustice, incompetent law, different types of exploitation, lack of fellow feeling, violence, etc., are crushing it day by day.

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