Mapping campuses as an archetype of "non-places" through a study of select Indian campus fictions

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Abstract

College campuses imbibe the empirical trends of social life: network societies, social divisions, and fantasies of opulence where the forces of global capital interact within the campuses. This paper understands the "market logic" as in Augéan non-places, an archetype of frontier-less ontology that has evolved like a rhizome within the college campuses. Auge's Non-Places are ephemeral, sans frontiers, governed by audio-visual technology, and find their existence on the campuses in its commodified capacity of brand logos, internet connectivity, hypermediated consumption, cafés, commerce, cash machines, and transitory relationships. The theoretical framework speculates campuses as ontological spaces bereft of conventional demarcations, intricately bourgeoning institutionally akin to the rhizomatic presence. The present analysis scrutinizes the pivotal role played by the imperatives of global capital and market dynamics with the aim of furnishing educational campuses and making them Augean non-places. Employing literary-discourse analysis, this idea has been interrogated through the study of three Indian Campus Fictions (elite institutes) to explore the campuses of Indian Institutes of Technology as Augéan non-places through the lens of brand, US life, and relationships that attest further to the porosity, fragility, and the customized nature; all-encompassing the campuses as places of commerce, true to Augéan non-places.

KEYWORDS: Indian campus fiction, non-places, supermodernity, commerce and mobility, supermarkets

The multiplication of what we may call empirical Non-Places is characteristic of the contemporary world. Spaces of circulation (freeways, airways), consumption (department stores, supermarkets), and communication (telephones, faxes, television, cable networks) are taking up more room all over the earth today. They are spaces where people coexist or cohabit without living together. (Augé, 2008)

Introduction

This research paper endeavors to undertake a discerning inquiry into the instantiation of select campus novels using Augéan non-places within the precincts of esteemed academic institutions in India. It examines how these scholastic domains function as microcosmic reflections of prevailing social phenomena, encompassing intricate facets such as network societies, social stratifications, and ostentatious fantasies. The theoretical paradigm of "market-logic" constitutes the analytical basis of this study, facilitating an exploration into the archetype of Augéan non-places. This conceptual framework posits these locales as frontier-less ontologies that have organically proliferated within the institutional tapestry of higher education, analogous to the rhizomatic growth of a botanical structure. The emphasis is directed towards unraveling the evanescent and boundless attributes characterizing Augéan non-places, their governance by audio-visual technological interfaces, and their existence in a commodified capacity. Paramount constituents such as brand logos, internet connectivity, hypermediated consumption, cafés, commercial enterprises, automated banking facilities, and ephemeral relationships are identified as integral components constituting these non-places within the academic milieu. The paper undertakes a scrutiny of the pivotal role played by these constituent elements in molding the identity of educational campuses as domains profoundly swayed by the imperatives of global capital and market dynamics. In its culmination, this research aspires to furnish a nuanced comprehension of educational campuses as veritable hubs of commercial activity, aligning with the quintessence of Augéan non-places.

Within the purview of this study, literary discourse analysis constitutes the instrumental lens through which the representations and narratives inherent in three discerningly chosen Indian Campus Fictions are subjected to meticulous examination. These literary works serve as pivotal and judiciously selected case studies, forming the crux of the inquiry into the representation of Augéan non-places within the revered precincts of the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs). The selection of Indian Campus Fictions is a deliberate choice rooted in the recognition of fiction as an intellectually fecund source of cultural representation that encapsulates the manifold tapestry of societal values, norms,

and aspirational constructs. This strategic selection of literary works aims to navigate the imaginative depictions of campus life proffered by authors, with an explicit focus on discerning the resonance or divergence from the theoretical underpinnings of Augéan non-places. The chosen corpus of fiction thus serves as an intricate lens through which the socio-cultural dynamics inherent within the enclaves of IIT campuses are scrutinized with nuance and depth.

The operationalization of literary discourse analysis unfolds in a meticulous deconstruction of the language, thematic substrates, and representational elements interwoven within the chosen fictions. Each narrative is subjected to a rigorous dissection, methodically identifying instances where the salient attributes of Augéan non-places, such as the commodification of elements such as brand logos, internet connectivity, and ephemeral relationships, are either articulated or subjected to contestation. This analytical process necessitates a systematic unraveling of the textual fabric, with an astute focus on pinpointing linguistic subtleties and narrative strategies that substantiate the conceptualization of IIT campuses as veritable non-places. The research method isolates and scrutinizes three pivotal dimensions (brand, representations of U.S. lifestyle, and the dynamics of relationships) as focal points for intense analysis. It encompasses a meticulous examination of how these thematic dimensions are intricately woven into the narrative tapestry, thereby laying bare the nuanced ways in which they either fortify or challenge the established notion of IIT campuses as Augéan non-places. Through this perceptive methodological lens, the research aims to deliver a nuanced comprehension of the contributory role of fiction in shaping the campus environment, thereby affording profound insights into the inherent porosity, fragility, and bespoke nature characterizing interactions within these academic spaces. By employing fictional campuses as Non-Places, specificities inherent to real-world institutions are enhanced. This facilitates a nuanced analysis and exploration of the principles governing spatial identity and sociocultural dynamics. Moreover, fictional campuses offer a productive ground for imaginative speculation, enabling the extrapolation of hypothetical scenarios and the delineation of alternative paradigms. Through this methodological approach, the conceptual framework outlining campuses as non-places is explained, bringing out the inconsistencies inherent to contemporary educational landscapes.

The first section of the article employs Augéan non-places as the theoretical framework to interpret campuses as encompassing consumer logic. The second section brings out the characters of marketplaces as evidenced in campus fiction. The third section of the article explains the nature of corporates as imbibed on campuses. The next section ex-

plains how the presence of market logic and corporate nature fashions the fluid relationships within the fictional campuses. The essay concludes by highlighting how Indian campuses represented in fiction can be considered as an archetype for market logic, corporate nature, and fluid relations intersecting across fictional campuses.

Campuses and the consumer logic

Comparable to the transcendent, airy, borderless, and tangled wires of the computers in our homes and offices are the rhizomatic times we live in.[1] Campuses are rhizomatically patterned, connecting with and becoming an extension of the Nonplaces[2] such as airports, highways, subways, stations, freeways, supermarkets, department stores, and burgeoning apartment complexes. Nonplaces correspond to uncluttered, disjointed, and "nonstructured horizons of meaning as well as to transitions and experiences of liminality" (Everts & Jackson, 2009). They are viewed as an apolitical space of hypermediated consumption, commerce, and mobility. This idea sets the tone and the tenor of this article. As these nonplaces are transitory and ephemeral, they mirror the empirical trends of social life, such as network societies, social divisions, and fantasies of opulence sustaining a chronically unequal global regime. With the presence of global corporate forces, the campuses have become a similar archetype (Crang, 2000). It would perhaps be an exaggeration to say that campuses refer, not unlike Augéan non-places, to signs on motorways, brand logos, and the use of cash machines. It, nonetheless, contains and gives rise to a postmodern condition characterized by *excess*, what we understand as accelerated transformations of time, space, and ego. Places have the potential to fashion an "organic society" where suitable behavior and social relations are accommodated by those present. With the dispersion of non-places, people experience a "nondiscursive reality" (Everts & Jackson, 2009). Surprisingly, if what Augé calls non-places, borderless spaces having no frontiers, are appropriated by audio-visual technology and management of space, making the presence of networks they rely on highly visible (Augé, 2008), the campuses also have similarly patterned ontologies. If place and non-place are nothing but dialectic, then campus is modeled on the latter, which continues relations and identities of anthropological space in highly commodified terms.

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[1] Deleuze and Guattari's "rhizome" refers to relations and connectedness of heterogeneous things. Without any direction, like roots, rhizomes are disseminated without a beginning and an end. They are connected with things of different nature. (See Deleuze and Guattari, Anti-Oedipus, Chapter 1)

[2] In his non-places: Introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity (1992), Augé introduces the term "non-places" referring to temporary anthropological spaces where we remain nameless, undisclosed and unidentified.

Campuses resemble the marketplace characteristically: the narrational spaces, the transnational movements, and the signs on the roadways all exist in a wired commune. These spaces of passage and movement of people are related to "loss of a strong sense of place: places which once had been the center and locale of sociality and everyday life" (Everts & Jackson, 2009, p. 930). Similarly, campus fictions are market-driven in its creativity. The lives of the post-moderns in this contemporary world, observes Augé, identify an ontological space that creates "neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude and similitude" (2008, p. 103). Simultaneously, the campuses that identify with a set of super-market-like institutions are populated with flows of students, cultural events, conferences, annual fests, and *tech* fests inviting student participants across the country and world witnessing a transnational movement, the transient population of the cities. Similar to non-places, campuses have become spaces of "transition and transience, spaces of mobility where people rush through in post-modern restlessness" (Everts & Jackson, 2009, p. 930). Moreover, the constitution of the campuses bears semblance to the frame of the market as in generic landmarks of departments, conference rooms, banners for international programs or seminars, directions and signs to libraries, global brand logos, parking lots, tea stalls or coffee parlors and canteens, concomitant to sites of commercial interchange, and positioned as hubs for a new transnational class (Rosler, 1994).

Ritzer's *The globalization of nothing* (2004) furthers the analysis of the concept of *nothing*. It is defined as "generally centrally conceived and controlled social forms that are comparatively devoid of distinctive substantive content" then this is precisely what the campus is all about" (p. xi). Further, nonplaces indicate "the 'not-anymore' and the 'not-yet.' Therefore, nonplaces can allow tentative crossings of established cultural and meanings and social norms" (Everts & Jackson, 2009, p. 931). Substantiating "nothing" distinguishes non-places as in shopping malls and casinos, non-things such as branded clothing, non-people like workers in fast-food outlets or call centers, and non-services such as self-servicing using ATMs or the Internet. So, if it is this "nothing" that is globalized, then it permeates as the central force of the campus. The campus is garnished with non-things like wearing branded clothes, gadgets, and cosmetics. US brands, such as *GAP* or *Gillette*, which the faculty and the students wear alike, or use laptops of *Sony*, *Dell*, and *Apple*, or shoes like *Nike*, *Adidas*, Reebok, and mobile phones are standard. Additionally, non-services such as ATMs or automated transactions are present in the libraries. Moreover, campuses comparable to nonplaces, as suggested by Everts & Jackson (2009), are not merely:

liminal or threshold spaces, homogenized places of commodified experience, and of the rationality of scheduling and flow management, but places of fantasy and desire, inclusion and exclusion, and a social milieu different group of people, not least for those who as workers spend most of their day in the airport, supermarket, or subway station. But what makes the supermarket a nonplace for the customers cited above is exactly its anonymous and modern air in comparison with "their" small shops. (p. 930)

Rutheiser mentions the "quasi-public domains of commodified space" as in the shopping malls (see more in Thornton, 1997). Collective gatherings are spaces for incongruities. Augé (2008) observes that:

when individuals come together, they engender the social and organize places. However, the space of supermodernity is inhabited by this contradiction: it deals only with individuals (customers, passengers, users, listeners), but they are identified (name, occupation, places of birth, address) only when entering or leaving . (p. 111)

Correspondingly, the internationalism in IIT[3] campuses is marked by student exchange programs, placements, summer internships, research programs, guest lectures, industrial training, sponsored research projects, conferences, seminars, workshops, advertisements of sponsors as witnessed during *tech* fests, brands of US T-shirts, shoes, laptops, computers, cell-phones, coffee chains and also the near-instantaneous wireless network system that commodifies the essence of "the power of money, all manner of social transactions inexorably drawn into the web of the market" (Aldridge, 2005, p. 112).

The campus connects the experiences of a diverse range of young men and women. Campuses witness a constant flow among their visitors, students, and their habitué, as if the motion, movement, and endless waiting are by others' rules, convenience, and timetables. An important feature of campus as a nonplace would be "the copresent negotiation of appropriated and approved behavior, whereas nonplaces are governed by a set of rules conveyed by impersonal institutions imposed on every individual" (Everts & Jackson, 2009, p. 930). Rules do not depend on humans but are rather accomplished through text. Interaction between human beings is replaced by communication via text.[4] Trust relies on text rather than human commitments.

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[3] IIT-Indian Institute of Technology.

[4] "The customer wanders round in silence, reads labels, weighs fruit and vegetables on a machine that gives the price along with the weight; then hands his credit card to a young woman as silent as himself—anyway, not very chatty—who runs each article past the sensor of a decoding machine before checking the validity of the customer's credit card" (Auge, 2008, pp. 99-100).

Campus fiction as marketplaces

The three contemporary Indian campus fictions in the discussion *Five Point Someone* (2004) by Chetan Bhagat, *Above Average* (2007) by Amitabha Bagchi, and *Heartbreaks and Dreams! The Girls@IIT* (2010) by Parul A. Mittal are set within the campuses of IITs, and they resemble that of writing on the walls, or better still, graffiti, placards, or even popular movie themes. While campus fictions are shaped out of the innate creativity of the market, they foreground an equally marketized character dynamics, narrational discourse, language, and the academic environment. This market "is like the author of a book or God in his universe: present everywhere and visible nowhere" (Flaubert, 1980, as cited in Aldridge, 2005, p. 7). Further, it is interesting to note how fiction, emerging out of the campus, is created for the consumption of the market and how the capital emerges as the driving self-reflexive subject of social life in this economically liberalized economy. The campuses have been dependent on their environment: social, political, and economic circumstances. The dependency seems to have reached new heights in recent years, and so have uncertainties and chaos. It is the increasing growth of economic rationalism modeled on the capitalist paradigm that has not even spared the educational campuses, which to "maximize profit" has brought rapid changes to examination, study regulations, and the structure of faculties and design of course modules. Campuses are managed like business enterprises, submitting themselves to the market economy (Niemann, 2011). Consequently, the rapid changes brought to the campuses and the departments assert the fact that students, professors, and even deans confront a considerable degree of finiteness and transience of the institutional structure and bring solutions to the anxieties. So, be it a car factory, warehouse, or campus, they disseminate similar aims. The intention to maximize profit and reduce expenses with tailor-made courses catering to the needs of industry and faculty alike are executed through online lectures, short-term programs, and international conferences.

The campus, which forms a major constitutive site for youth, administers engineering courses across the country, a kind of unified identity under the banner of IIT. However, this process is fragmentary and dissociated in its identity, creating fear and indescribable anxiety among students, synonymous with romance, exams, assignments, peer pressure, grade sheets, and finally, placements. They withstand the terrible truth that they are swarming alone in a crowd of challenges. Capital shapes new forms of subjectivity and identity entwined and grounded in the campus, pushing educational campuses (to be referred as campuses of IITs) in a homogenizing direction and rendering them to be non-places or bearing semblance to signs on motorways "or dozens of fast-food places, cinemas, and ice-cream parlours" (Bhagat, 2004, p. 172) or the annual technical fest *Tryst*,

the annual fest *Rendezvous* and *Stu Week*. IITD's[5] internal fest showcases talents with events similar to that which the malls host and pull the crowd. Moreover, the campus has the music of Pink Floyd, vodka for a drink, *samosa-chutney*, *idli-sambhar*, or *rajma-chawal* (Bhagat, 2004) as food for its populace, showing the prevalent diversity and the convergence of the global and the local.

Marc Augé points to scripted interactions between passengers and staff in lounges, airports, and other transits of commerce through global communication technologies. An excerpt from FPS[6] shows when Ryan, Hari, and Alok, the protagonists, enter Prof. Cherian's cabin to steal the Indem Major paper; they are trapped by the telephone call made by Alok to his home. The protagonist, Hari, talks of the surveillance system prevalent on the campus of IIT Delhi:

> I did not know this then, but this is how the insti phone system works. Each Prof. has a phone in the room that is part of the IIT network. One uses it mainly to dial internal campus external lines. When nine is pressed, the internal phone requests an external line, and the campus telecom exchange switches the lines. A control switchboard in the telecom exchange does this automatically. The switchboard lights up a small red bulb for every engaged line. Every time one requests an external line, the light turns green … the operator had the option to listen in to the conversation if he wanted, and he did … the patrolling guard was joined by another guard as he walked up to the sixth floor. (Bhagat, 2004, p. 162)

This shows how most public spaces are under surveillance.[7] The more you are connected, the easier you come under surveillance because you step into the world of data. Supermarkets have CCTVs that put a private eye into the public lives of the customers. The wired connectivity is again seen in the telephonic conversation between Ryan and Prof. Veera before the disco[8] and again when Hari feels the urge to write a letter and leaves Kumaon at 4 a.m. "and went to the computer center. The twenty-four-hour center

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[5] IITD – Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, one of the premier science and technology institutes of India.

[6] FPS (2004): *Five Point Someone* authored by Chetan Bhagat.

[7] Surveillance has become the norm of the day. Surveillance progresses with the aim of configuring the contemporary individual. Foucauldian disciplinary gaze reminds how the inmates of hospitals, asylums, prisons, schools, orphanages and factories adopt to a certain posture of surveillance. Today surveillance is made possible through innovative methods. These methods "operate to transform individuals; to act on those it shelters, to provide hold on their conduct, to carry the effects of power right to them, to make possible to know them, to alter them" (Foucault, 1995, p. 72). The ubiquity of surveillance, accordingly, results in a self-monitoring process which makes one aware that he or she is watched. Therefore, one adjusts his/her behavior accordingly keeping in mind that he/she is constantly under surveillance.

[8] Disco – disciplinary committee, truncated word. It takes action against severe misconduct of students.

had students working away on their resumes" (p. 244). This is an example of how the campuses work around the clock like corporations. It suggests how the invisible wired cosmic forces govern the invincible time-space dimension irrespective of mind, heart, world, or even the minuscule computer center. This is evident in the romance that blooms over the telephone for Champ and Tanu in Parul A. Mittal's H&D![9] and how the relationship loses its luster and crumbles. The examples from AA[10] reflect how Rindu would invariably "find himself going to the department at midnight, aimlessly surfing the web, trying to read what [he] was supposed to have read during the day" (p. 275). These illustrations bear evidence as to how organizational apparatuses are connected through a wired commune in campuses, malls, or supermarkets. It is as if the electronic cameras keep an eye on their customers and are connected in an invisibly branched manner as coupled wires among the producers, customers, payment gateways, and the like.

The textual analyses also shed light on how the students are like commodities in their desire, flow, treatment, and fate. Academic performance is conserved in the hands of the customers (the professors, placement companies, and multinational corporations) and those commodities that are not fairly packaged in terms of semester suspension or poor academic grades; their fate is potted forever. In FPS, Prof. Cherian, after enquiring about Hari's final semester course load, speaks the following words:

> You know if I sanction you all to work with Prof. Veera this semester to follow on this project, we could get you laboratory credits.

> Now, what was that supposed to mean—"if I sanction"? Was Cherian just reminding me of how much he controlled my fate. (p. 249)

Further, Alok's reflects on Ryan's placement record:

> "It's hard for him. He is only 5.01, and the last in class. It is difficult for him to get placed," Alok said.

> "But he is so smart. I mean the lube project is basically all his," I said.

> "GPAs matter," Alok said and walked away. (p. 256)

The undertone of Alok talks about three things: first, commodities only get sold (here students) with their high GPAs. Second, students within a business-like organizational apparatus appreciate final results more than developing and learning processes and, in

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[9] H&D (2010): *Heartbreaks and Dreams! The Girls @IIT* authored by Parul A. Mittal.

[10] AA (2007): *Above Average* authored by Amitabha Bagchi.

the process, become a (mass) product themselves (Niemann, 2011). Third, the porosity of the relationship is ascertained, showing how relations in a marketplace are solitary, contractualized, and hollow, characterizing non-places. After admission to the IITs, students harbor the feeling of being sold to multinational corporations, and all the preparation goes into catering to the particular segment. Another example shows it was likely for Alok to leave the company of his friends Ryan and Hari to better his grades and join Venkat, a persevering and competitive student. The day before the submission of one of the semester assignments, Alok falls prey to his father's illness, needs to go home, and seeks help from Venkat for his assignment. Venkat replies: "I have to maintain *my* rank. The second guy in the department is only 0.03 behind me as you know. Now should I finish this group assignment or read my notes?" (p. 92).

The anonymity and the contractuality of characters have also been portrayed in a letter written by Neha to Samir, her dead brother, where she talks of her friend Hari and his group of friends, Ryan and Alok:

> I don't think this guy Ryan is all that cool. Wears branded clothes, but this is only because his parents are loaded. I personally think behind all this guy's aggression there is a vacuum.

See, that is the thing with these IIT guys and their college, they all are too wrapped up in the bricks and walls to know who they really are and what they really want. (p. 136)

In AA, the protagonist, Rindu, from the Department of Computer Science, has instances with his two other close friends, Neeraj and Sheikhu, of the same department that are suggestive of non-experience and non-significance of relations. Rindu recollected his emotions just before their presentation to Prof. Kanitkar:

> Neeraj and I had spent a couple of long evenings writing programs, almost exactly a year after that first time we had met in the CompC. But this time it was just business. (p. 219)

Again, the same philosophy is applied to Kartik, a close acquaintance of the protagonist, an institute topper who has his drumming band "Instigate." Kartik's forging of relations is aptly put by Rindu:

> Kartik's friendships were clearly compartmentalized. His friends from school, his friends from the department, his friends from the world of rock and his friends in the hostel were kept separate. (p. 116)

These campuses are "increasingly characterized by situations of non-relationship and non-experience. Close relations are no longer established, experiences are avoided, and

significance is not established" (Niemann, 2011, p. 5), which shows how the strict functionality of the institute's structures or the following of the modules, leads to such an extremity of dehumanization of relationships.

Corporates as non-places

The extreme urge to have a packaged, finished product and receive labels of placement in US companies shows trends in how commodities are packaged and promoted for the consumers. The discussions on placement interviews for Ryan, Alok, and Hari revolve around Technosoft Software companies from the US (Bhagat, 2004), which speaks of the invisible wired networks and the proliferation of commerce through globalization in terms of placement companies and the capital dominance of the US. The conversation between the five-pointer friends highlights software, "… That is the hot sector this year. They hire in droves and don't have GPA-based short-listing criteria." (p. 251)

A striking parallel has been drawn as to how students are hired as "contract labour at cheap prices for foreigners" (Bhagat, 2004, p. 184), similar to the selling of global brands in such non-places, the campuses. It further exemplifies how the products find a place in software companies being sold and emerge as finished products in the learning factories by getting "officially employed" (p. 258). Students like Alok, Hari, and Ryan eventually aim for the degree after all the events that happened during their engineering course. In the previous chapters, Alok simply remarks, "who cares, I want to get the degree and land a good job" (p. 35). This justifies Niemann's views on how "students' learning is minimized when the focus is on programs that deliver a degree in the shortest time, and are customer focused to that extent of providing a learning package" (2011, p. 6). Moreover, in AA, the Compguys from Rindu's department appear for the GRE, and Rindu's thought fell in the following lines: "That afternoon between the exams, fifteen compguys running on the grass, was the launching pad for a long association that would carry itself forward to America" (p. 254).

In introspection, when one of Rindu's friends, Sheikhu, opted out of higher studies and research, the option he learned was to enroll in a management school. Rindu realizes:

> Every year the salary figures for graduating classes from IIMA seemed to climb higher and higher. They were beginning to get direct job offers from American companies with six-figure salaries in dollars. (p. 251)

The above lines talk about how "the campus and its students seem to have found answers to the global accesses signifying everyone's life" (Niemann, 2011, p. 3). Aldridge,

in his book *Market*, speaks of the dehumanizing nature of the market as it only caters well to those who have capital.[11] In this epoch of late capitalism and neo-liberalism, "IIT cared about America" (Bhagat, 2004, p. 72). The conversational exchange between Rindu and Kartik in AA in choosing career goals after their graduation brings to the fore the US dreams in the students:

> I am going to apply to business school next year ...
>
> You want to do an MBA? ...There's no funding for that in the US.
>
> Not an MBA … I am going to apply for a Ph.D. Just the top schools, Wharton, Stanford, MIT, Sloan, Kellogg … the top people in any company are always management people, not engineering people. Besides, the only technology area which has big money in it is Computer Science, and that's not my area. (pp. 120-121)

Puja leaves for the US to attend a summer internship program. Tanu aspires to get into one of the prestigious US universities. Champ has already left for the US to pursue his higher studies, and Rindu and Neeraj, the prominent characters in AA, pursue their Ph.D. programmes at US universities.

The play of language by the characters in Campus Fictions also speaks of the age of transnational corporations, late capitalism, and neo-liberalism, thereby homogenizing the existence of these corporate hubs the world over. Certain excerpts from the text exemplify the following:

> Ryan pressed the nozzle of his Gillette shaving gel and prepared his twin blade sensor razor … Ryan wiped his face with a towel. He opened a bottle of some fancy overpriced American aftershave and splashed it liberally on his cheeks. (pp. 151-152)

Also, Prof. Veera, a newly joined faculty in the campus of IIT Delhi, comes to the class, bearing signs of globality:

> Prof. Veera was no more than thirty, he dressed in jeans and T-shirt, which bore his US university logos. He had like five degrees from all the top universities— MIT, Cornell, Princeton etc. and T-shirts from all of them. He carried his CD-man with him, and after class, he would plug into his ears before he left. (p. 84)

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[11] The market is ineffective in dispensing and advocating common good to human beings. It generates short-term profits by maintaining trickle-down effect rather than helping the consumers in a long-time benefit. Accordingly, market creates an imperceptible and illusory dream rather than contributing to the common good of the people. Riddled with ideologies, markets do nothing for human need.

In malls, a common sight is that of plugged earphones, and Prof. Veera was no exception. The wildfire of capital and the desire to be recognized with the US brands are synonymous with being the best in the world. The US syndrome also resonates in the words of Surd:

> I just want to reach the US. With my GPA, it's impossible, but just somehow, someplace, somewhere I don't know, I just want to be in the US of A. (p. 99)

In H&D!, in a conversational exchange between Champ and Divya, Champ, in a matter-of-fact manner, mentions to Divya that he made it to Inter IIT. He remarks: "'I usually manage to get what I desire,' he boasted, confidence oozing through his smile like mayonnaise from a Mcdonald's burger" (p. 127). This invariably emphasizes the supermarket-like language, which has food chains and the presence of globality interspersed through the texts.

The opening lines on Augé's supermodernity (contemporary world) and the habitus of postmodern individuals make the readers conscious of the status of campuses flooded with postmodern youth. In H&D!, Tanu speaks to her father when her first surprise quiz marks her as an *average* student in relative grading, and then she gets the second blow by being rejected by a boy. Feeling anxious, she called up her father to share her agony. The afterthought of Tanu bespeaks her mind: "He was calm and understanding, but he had no idea how hard things were at IIT and how lonely and insecure [she] felt" (Mittal, 2010, p. 41). Also, Tanu felt utterly lonely and solitary, entering the campus where relationships were hardly humane. Her words gauge the helplessness and the fragmented state of her inner self:

> Sometimes I felt that my inability to escape each weekend was largely responsible for my obsession with the campus, the studies, the Profs., and the boys. It was one vicious cycle I seemed unable to break. (p. 39)

In AA, by way of self-introspection, the protagonist Rindu also bares his soul before the readers and the turmoil within:

> But there was a part of me that knew even then that for people like me safe harbours were an illusion; you could stay but you would inevitably become the only one left behind, lonely and dissatisfied. (p. 176)

The middle-class aspirations of the Indians anchor lofty ambitions and hard work to secure a stable future. Neeraj, one of the compguys in Rindu's department, testifies to this:

From a small dhaba in a Market to the Turing Award, it was an ambition on an unbelievably audacious scale. On reflection, I realized that Neeraj's aspiration was like a gas which expanded to fill whatever space it occupied. (p. 208)

The above discussion divulges the predicament of youth, the fragmentary individuals who form the major corpus of the campus and are synonymous with commodities or objects as in malls, only to be picked up by customer preference. In H&D!, Tanu, the protagonist on a confessional note, speaks like a commodity to be picked up: "This was my first dose of fierce rivalry at IIT, be it for grades or boys" (p. 22).

Fluid relationships

Relationships forged at the counter, the by-lanes of the malls, in-between the aisles, or in the cash counter have the element of fragility and are customized. Tanu talks about relational dynamics and their vagaries and the way they forge on campuses. Puja is excited to be in love with Sukhi, and she expresses that he is worthy of liking. Getting Sukhi, for Puja, would be a definite achievement. So, she looks upon Sukhi with great respect. A relationship is moderated by want and predetermined with wishes. The porosity or even the encrusted shades of relationships are opened bare by Tanu's words, which started after the crank call a night before the exams:

While we were unaware that Sukhi really liked Puja and Champ seriously fancied me, for the moment, we seemed to enjoy the fact that I was pining for Commode, he for Puja, she for Sukhi, and Sukhi for me ...something akin to a vicious circle. (p. 45)

Relationships vacillate as if they are forged only for that temporal moment and move away from it. Earlier, Champ was shifting registers to build a relationship. First, Tanu, now a dame from Delhi University. The talk about DD's dumping was going around, and the rumor that Champ found a DU dame was the hot talk. They were able to empathize with each other and share the setbacks in their love lives (p. 53). It shows the commodification of female students and stands as a testimony of changing hands like that of capital. An excerpt exemplifies further:

A bus load of DU girls, considered a better attraction compared to IIT girls, attended the event at the boy's hostels specifically for the purpose. It was a civilized and arranged dating system invented by the geeks to minimize the effort and maximize the output. (p. 85)

It looks as if the branded commodities or the packaged girls will fetch a better relational pick by the customers on the campuses in forging relationships. Further, the porosity and the loose bind of the relationships are ascertained in Tanu's thoughts while showcasing herself as a commodity. She knew that Champ was not pursuing her. She was certain that he was in love with the DU dame. However, she was not ready to lose hope because he was worth having. One should also note that every other guy in IIT coveted a DU girlfriend, but only a few were lucky to have gotten one (pp. 100–101).

In the chapter titled "Exploring newer pastures" from H&D!, Tanu talks of those amorous flings that Puja had for Sukhi and now has looked for greener pastures in a boy called Rahul, whom she met in her summer internship program at a US University. The dialogue between Tanu and Puja is suggestive of the fragility and temporality of relations. While Puja criticized Sukhi for being excessively irrational and overemotional, she herself exchanged her boyfriend:

> the fifth semester had just started, and Puja was back from her exchange program, having also managed to exchange her boyfriend while on the trip . . .You liked the cover page, read the first few chapters, and then lost interest and returned the book back to the stack. How can you be so self-centered? … This isn't control engineering Tanu, I can't regulate what I feel for whom and when … Boldness is relative to what is acceptable in a society. Here our parents select whom we marry. Back in the US, you take many test drives before clinching the deal expounded an enterprising Puja. (p. 155, 158)

This shows the uncertainty and the flimsiness of relationships like the one forged in supermarkets. The campus is foregrounding the same. Relationships are "just a numeric valuation of the cosine distance between diverging paths" (Mittal, 2010, p. 115). Interestingly, the USA is inadvertently brought to discussions, be it familiarity in the young adult population, or the liberation it offers. Divya, another member of the gang of four, unintentionally invites comments from Piya on her (Divya) and Saurabh's relationship. Piya considers Saurabh as a courteous guy: "All for a free ride, as long as there are no strings attached, but you try to tie him down, and bang, he will disappear without a trace" (p. 145).

In continuation of the above passages, when Tanu and Divya board the train to IIT Mumbai to attend a sports meet, Saurabh and Champ also come along. In the station, when Saurabh gulps down *samosas*, whose bill Divya pays for having lost in some bet to Saurabh, he comments that it would be hard to find a "comparable replacement" at IIM. Annoyed by his talk of replacing Divya and his lack of emotional involvement, she chal-

lenges him to first get into IIM. Challenging Divya's cause, Tanu was bothered by his "use and throw attitude … Clearly friendship was merely a station on the way to his destination" (p. 124). Strangely enough, in moments of tension like a proposal and waiting for the most expected and unexpected answer, as happens between Tanu and Silver, Tanu tries to ease off the tension when Silver replies: "Souls can't be wired like electronic gadgets. Their connection just happens. Silver theorized. Well, if only this was true! When everything fails, ideology comes to the rescue" (p.149). Also, when Champ, in a romantic relationship with Tanu, leaves for the US for higher studies, they exchange a few words that will only speak the nature of relationships:

> Won't you be lonesome without me once I leave for the US i.e. if we are still together?

> I thought you just proposed to me, and now you are considering a breakup? (p. 196)

These non-places in relationships lead human beings to act against their nature. Such situations force them to live in an inhuman situation. This inhumanity finds its expression in de-personalization, non-staying, disobliging, and mechanical-impersonal communication (Niemann, 2011). Love blooms between Rindu, the protagonist in AA, and Aparna, a girl from Delhi University. When Rindu leaves for the US to pursue his research in computer engineering, the relationship loses its warmth. As days pass by, Aparna finds Rindu being selfish. What started with an exchange of constant phone calls and emails, after arguments, diminished into "one-line missive" (Bhaduri, 2007, p. 270). When she started emailing him, she started talking about her friend, Bijit, with whom she was spending a lot of time with. Aparna opens up about her liking to Bijit, which brings the relationship to a halt, "She would like us to not talk or email for a while…" (p. 280). Rindu returns to India in between his research and meets Aparna, only to find that she is seeing her friend, Bijit. Therefore, the preceding excerpts make clear the anonymity, the impersonality, and the loss of relations evident in academic campuses.

Interestingly and paradoxically, even before relationships bloom, love has a marketized quality. Neha, Hari's girlfriend in FPS, asks for a gift from him, and Hari is at a loss, not knowing what to give, and the investment on his part also comes into question. The conversational exchange between Ryan and Hari shows the marketized dimension:

> I mean, it was asinine logic if you ask me, as there were things she could be giving *me*, and without much capital investment. To have the nerve to ask for a gift

on top of this deprivation is something only a woman can do, as they are made differently after all …

It seemed like an interesting idea, even though completely impractical. And what if she was expecting me to spend more money …

I tried to think of Neha's life. She had this big purse full of things." How about a little box to keep her lipsticks? …

Now you are thinking customer's needs. (Bhagat, 2004, pp. 103-104)

We find market-like language, the language of capital, sellers, and consumers, the principal incumbents of a market. To emphasize the market-like language of the campuses, in H&D! Tanu speaks of her friend Puja, who becomes engaged before completion of her graduation and plans to go back to the same university in the US where they (Puja and Rahul) had been for an exchange program. Being reflective, Tanu adds: "Sounds the end of season sale. Why wait for the need to rise? Stock while the discount is on" (p. 207). Relationships have become something like the old saying, *make hay while the sun shines*, or the Latin phrase, *carpe diem* stock good matrimonial matches, when the discount (could be read as opportunities) season is at its best. Champ also, in trying to win over Tanu, in H&D!, reveals to Sukhi that, "Tanu does not love me yet, so I will cash in on her feelings for Commode"(p. 62).

Relative grading

We witness incidents in the texts in which the students resist the hegemonic nature of draconian institutional laws and grading systems – the voices of resistance and blasphemy towards the gospel of academic institutions assert:

Thank you for coming tonight. As I am sure you have figured out, you are the lowest GPA holders in our wing. We are, gentlemen, the underdogs. Cheers to the underdogs …

And this IIT system is nothing but a mice race. It is not a rat race, mind you, as rats sound somewhat shrewd and clever. So, it is not about that. It is about mindlessly running a race for four years, in every class, every assignment and every test …

Anyway, Ryan continued, screw the profs. Coming back, this system is an unfair race. (p. 101)

The merchandized students also showcase themselves as stereotyped and cannot nurture their innovation quotient as that is what the learning factories or production houses want them to be. In FPS, the professor of design, Prof. Vohra, asked the class to design a car jack to lift the chassis in case of a flat tire. Ryan wanted to do something resourceful. Unfortunately, Hari's words remind us how commodities are stereotyped and are constrained not to offer anything new:

> What are you doing?" I said, worried about Ryan's sketches of the car battery, obviously irrelevant to the current task... "I stuck to my traditional screw-jack like the rest of the class. The course was called Design, not Original Design after all. (p. 118)

In the chapter titled "Line Drawing," Hari and his friends Ryan and Alok by way of ruminating over technology, engineering, research, and innovation in its right spirit, Ryan muses by saying, "Over thirty years of IITs, yet, all it does is train some bright kids to work in multinationals" (p. 34). This shows the students' knowledge and working within the same organizational apparatus seem to have found how global accesses are dominating individuals. Individually and collectively, they submit themselves to widespread global economic necessities in an unthinking subjugation (Niemann, 2011). In H&D! Prof. Dutta, while introducing his course of Mathematics, petrifies the class with his opening words,

> in theory, you have cleared the IIT entrance exams and are supposedly the brightest minds in the nation. In practice, only a few that apply practical knowledge along with theory will earn an "A" grade in my course" (pp. 11-13).

By the end of the text, Tanu self-introspects and reveals how the desire for fame has turned the students over-ambitious, thereby losing sight of humanity:

> When I had got into IIT, I had proved to and convinced the whole city of my desire to excel. For the last three years I had been gunning for the Director's gold medal so that the whole of IIT would remember me … perhaps make me famous for posterity. So the next logical step would have to be for the whole of India to get to know me. My ambitions were steadily growing and knew no bounds. (p. 204)

Excerpts from AA, consolidate how the academic minds of the individuals are guided by societal choices, CGPAs[12] and are motivated or de-motivated by the mentors. In IIT, it is CG and DR that define who a student is. Students are branded like cattle as they me-

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[12] CGPA- Cumulative Grade Point Average.

andered into the campus (p. 179). When Rindu, Neeraj, and Sheikhu approach Prof. Kanitkar for research guidance, they receive a tart reply: "'I don't know,' said Kanitkar. 'I don't know if you guys are PhD material'" (p. 217). Karthik reminds Rindu, "'Research is for naukkis and dassis. And even that is stupid, there's no money in it unless you start a company or something." (p. 121) Moreover, it is Sheikhu who established his company, Trikon Technologies, after completing his management programme from IIMA.[13] When he meets Rindu, he asks him to join his company as India needs people like Rindu. When Rindu looks quizzically and explains to Sheikhu:

> You know, all that we learned at IIT was total bullshit. Not one thing is of any use. All those pushdown automata and first-order logic are good for nothing. All we need in India is a solid understanding of what is available …

> We don't just need cutting-edge research, *yaar*, we just need to know what people have done and we need to know how to put it together for our own market. The real thing is to develop our own products …

> We need marketing, we need to create brand recognition. Most importantly, we need people who know technology but aren't just techies. (p. 292)

This shows how individuals mindlessly become participants in the mice race, observes Ryan in FPS. Research is guided not by innovative minds but by CGPAs. This signals that ideals of "free thinking" and liberty of teaching and learning have also been lost and become unimportant. These explorations converge to signal educational institutions as sites of sacrifices to opposed ideals or prepare students for a performance-driven world, which is demanded (Niemann, 2011), churning out students who are more machine-made in nature and learning.

Conclusion

By exploring the applicability of fictional campuses as archetypal constructs, this study endeavors to substantiate the intersection between non-places and educational environments. Central to this discourse is the prospect of extrapolating insights derived from fictional narratives to inform understandings of real-world campuses. This study illuminates the universalities underlying the non-place characterization while acknowledging the specificity of its manifestation within the Indian educational landscape. "Indian fiction" occupies a unique position within the broader spectrum of ethnic and national literature, characterized by its cultural specificities and historical resonances. This dis-

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[13] IIMA- Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad.

tinctiveness, imbued with the complexities of post-colonial identity formation and cultural hybridity, renders "Indian campus fiction" a compelling locus for scholarly inquiry and theoretical engagement within the broader academic discourse. IIT campuses, from the above discussion, we come to know, are homogenizing spaces and places of transit and commerce, where individuals are everywhere or nowhere. A constellation of trends is pushing academic institutions in the same direction: whether they are the signs on the motorways, the brand logos, transnational movement, transient population, conferences, annual fests, coffee parlors, summer internship programs, parking lots, identity cards, ATM counters and the like. In this context, these campuses would likely cease to be differentiated as specific places with distinctive personalities that would undermine the intellectual diversity that would have otherwise continued to ignite innovation in young minds. Even the campus fictions that have been carved out of the need of the market are explicit in the words of Chetan Bhagat. In the Acknowledgement of FPS, the author talks of his dream, materialising as a *product*, which shows the irreversible side of the market. This substantiates Murphet: "The great ruse of postmodern spatiality is that it hides nothing. Everything is now on show, individuals are 'bodies' rather than 'subjects' and acts of literature are 'texts' rather than 'works'" (2004, p. 119). We witness various online portals, newspaper articles, and social networking sites that trumpet the spaces of circulation, distribution, and consumption of the empirical figures of the sales of these "texts" with the respective publication houses. Accordingly, the market has governed not only the creation of campus fiction but also been instrumental in the promotion of readership.

A final note on the homogenising trends is observed by the President and Vice-Chancellor of the University of British Columbia about the drivers to uniformity, the first of them being the list of global university ranking schemes. The second is the impetus towards homogeneity in the increasing tendency to manage research programs and enrolment strategies. It is so that academic institutions are pushing students to pursue courses in STEM disciplines to find jobs thereby generating and fueling short-term courses. Furthermore, the fixation with the promise of virtual learning (online) is exemplified by Silicon Valley's investments in Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). So, academic campuses sometimes lose sight of where they are rooted and succumb to uniformity, encouraged by global rankings. Government attempts to promote generic economic strategies, and "applied" research and the siren call of online learning show how these campuses are at risk of already pushing themselves to market-like (non-places) conditions, which Augé decries and the market-driven creativity of these fictions, which this article attempts to foreground.

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Povzetek

Univerzitetni kampusi v Indiji so pogosto prežeti s sodobnimi trendi družbenega življenja, na primer omrežnimi družbami, družbenimi delitvami in fantazijami o razkošju, kjer sile globalnega kapitala delujejo znotraj kampusov. Članek razume "tržno logiko" podobno kot v Augéjevi knjigi Nekraji – arhetip brezmejne ontologije, ki se rizomsko razpreda znotraj univerzitetnih kampusov. Augéjevi nekraji so efemerna mesta brez mej, ki jim vlada avdiovizualna tehnologija, v univerzitetnih kampusih pa obstajajo v svoji komodificirani obliki logotipov posameznih blagovnih znamk, internetne povezljivosti, pretirane promocije potrošnje, kavarn, trgovin, bankomatov in kratkotrajnih odnosov. Članek z literarno-diskurzivno analizo treh univerzitetnih kampusov (elitnih inštitutov) v Indiji raziskuje ključno vlogo, ki jo imajo imperativi globalnega kapitala in tržne dinamike s spreminjanjem izobraževalnih kampusov v t. i. Augéjeve nekraje. Pri tem se še posebej osredinja na pomen blagovne znamke, življenje študentov v ZDA, na njihove luknjičave in krhke odnose, ki generirajo univerzitetne kampuse kot Augéjeve nekraje.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: fikcija univerzitetnih kampusov, nekraji, supermodernost, trgovina in mobilnost, supermarketi, Indija

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