

Mirage of Academic Seminars as Reflected in the story 'Giroh Ka Brahmboj'

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Abstract: The present study explores the artificiality, insincerity, and intellectual bankruptcy of academic seminars as depicted in Indian campus fiction. The paper examines the culture of attending seminars. The research questions guiding this study are: Are the academicians genuinely interested in attending seminars? Do seminars serve as platforms of scholarly discussion? Do academic seminars succeed in achieving their academic goals? To seek answer to these question, Shashank Shukla's short story "*Giroh Ka Brahmboj*" has been selected for the study. The critical analysis of the story will be done from postcolonial perspective. The study adopts a descriptive and explanatory research method. The secondary sources include literary texts, postmodern studies, research papers, articles, reviews and newspapers. The study shows that the academic activity of seminars is carried out in unacademic manner, making it a mockery of the scholarship in academia. It reveals that seminars have been reduced to mere means of enjoyment, and merry-making. Instead of serving academic purposes, they serve tourist purpose. The study also shows that the objective of attending seminars is to increase publication counts to secure jobs, and not to produce any genuine academic results in terms of enhancing knowledge and advancing learning. The paper makes some recommendations for improving the culture of seminars.

Keywords: Intellectual Pretension, Entertainment In Seminars, Academic Hypocrisy, Higher Education, etc.

Introduction: Seminar is an official gathering of academicians, and researchers to discuss a specific topic or theme. Seminars bring together academic experts and scholars to share insights and exchange ideas. They are meant to facilitate discussion, debate, and knowledge sharing among scholars. They are essential for building academic community and fostering collaboration. Hence, Seminars can be taken as a "critical professional learning site" (Burford 7). David and Kwapong contend that seminars "offer both students and faculty the opportunity to engage in scholarly dialogue" (1). In the same way, Reynolds and Henderson maintain that conferences and seminars are "vital sites for: career development, creating international networks, developing publication collaborations, field-specific learning, and accessing the latest developments in the field" (8). However, in reality, they often become mere formalities or opportunities for networking. Seminars are poorly attended, with only a handful of people actively participating. This raises questions about their value and impact.

It has been observed that seminars have indeed become more ritualistic than meaningful academic exercises. Seminars often follow a predictable format, with presenters rushing through their work without much engagement or discussion. People are seen attending seminars to tick a box, rather than genuinely engaging with the topic or presenter. The format can stifle creative thinking and genuine discussion. Seminars have become opportunities for networking, rather than in-depth discussions. This ritualization leads to superficial engagement because attendees don't engage deeply with the material. Henderson and Reynolds argue that conferences epitomize critiques of academia because “they are often portrayed as excessive and elitist, and concomitantly, useless and boring” (1202). It is also true in case of seminars. Hence seminars serve as tool to understand the structure of academia as portrayed in campus fiction. That’s why the researcher has taken up the story of “*Giroh Ka Brahmbhoj*” to examine the culture of seminars in higher education.

Discussion: In the story, “*Giroh Ka Brahmbhoj*” Shashank Shukla portrays seminars as a source of entertainment, humour or even drama. He criticizes the culture of attending seminars and the pseud-academicians who use academic seminars as venues of enjoyment and merry-making instead of being a platform of scholarly discussion and academic inquiry. The writer depicts an international gang of academicians who enjoy the pleasures of life on the pretext of attending national and international seminars. This gang includes the members like Professor Sukhechhu, Professor Ashleel, Professor Gambhir, Professor Bhramnath, Professor Loveguru, Professor Avakash, Dr. Asantusht, Dr. Bahuvachan, Dr. Ardhanarishwar, Dr. Shuddha, Dr. Kaya, Dr. Grahya, Dr. Raktpipas, and Dr. Gargi. The leader of this gang is Prof. Vidhvansak. The writer exposes the artificiality of seminars through the portrayal of these academic characters, particularly Professor *Vidhvansak*. Prof. Vidhvansak is especially fond of seminars. He particularly enjoys meeting, eating, feeding, and drinking. He is social, committed to the upliftment of women, conducting research exclusively for women. He particularly enjoys helping those women who have been abandoned by their husbands, widows, and dissatisfied women. He is devoted not to intellectualism but to materialism. Project development, organizing seminars, making friends, traveling, working for women's empowerment, meeting prominent figures, and discussing ideas are his life's principles. A few days ago, the gang held a seminar. The attraction of this seminar was the feast offered in the seminar. In this context, in the novel *Small World*, David Lodge rightly comments, “Food and accommodation are the most important things about any conferences. If the people are happy with *those*, they’ll generate intellectual excitement. If they’re not, they’ll sulk, and sneer, and cut lectures” (Lodge 275). This observation is also true in the case of academic seminars.

Display of Bad Behaviour in Seminars

In this story, Vidhvansak is a nature lover, finding one way or another to be in nature. He often holds his seminars in the lap of nature. This brings him closer to nature and distances him from unnecessary people. (13). He is very hectic these days because he has to conduct four seminars within a month. Henderson and Reynolds contend that academic events like seminars and conferences act as “the stage upon which a range of academic ‘bad behavior’ plays out” (1211). They are used to “signal the decadent nature of academia, with a focus on food, alcohol and particularly sexual encounters” (Henderson 1214). In the seminars, the members of this international gang perform group dance and singing because they hold that they are also a part of arts. But the narrator objects to their “shouting after drinking alcohol... holding a girl's hand... misuse of university money” (Shukla 14) in seminars. But Prof. Vidhvansak clarifies:

Drinking alcohol these days is supposed to create an intellectual atmosphere... No matter what the drink is, it's not bad... You seem like a religious person, or a dull person. Holding a girl's hand is a sign of companionship. You're a literary person, yet you don't even know this much. What's the connotation of 'holding hands'? We take everyone along. There are equal numbers of men and women in my group. There's no distinction” (Shukla 14)

This passage exposes the hypocrisy, pseudo-intellectualism and performative modernity of campus culture, especially in elite or self-proclaimed “intellectual” circles. The author ironically suggests that certain behaviours like drinking are treated as shortcuts to appearing intellectual. He critiques campus elitism, where intellectual identity is reduced to lifestyle choices. Shukla is questioning whether universities are nurturing critical thinkers or merely producing fashionable replicas of modern intellectuals. Similar is the case with academic conferences. In the novel, *No Onions Nor Garlic* Shrividya Natarajan argues that people come to attend conferences with two purposes in mind. The first is “to renew their desiccated erotic lives” (284) and the second purpose is to upgrade their clothes, and enjoy shopping and experiences of life (Natarajan 284).

Vidhvansak holds that seminars serve as platforms of bringing women on par with men. The members of the gang maintain that they expand the horizon of thinking and promote the name of the university by organising seminars. This time the international gang is going to organize another *Brahmabhoj* or Seminar- even bigger than the previous one. This feast will be of international standard. A large number of people from India and abroad are eager to attend this feast. But the narrator has not been invited to this seminar. Vidhvansak explains the reason of it:

Look! You [narrator] are a vegetarian. You neither eat nor drink... You are a misfit. You keep croaking about principles. You are an unlucky person... boring. It is better for us that boring people stay away from our group and our feast. Secondly, you are also a critic. We stay away from moral critics.” (Shukla 15).

This quotation presents a sharp social critique of exclusion, conformity, and moral intimidation within campus culture. Here, food and alcohol become symbols of group identity. Intellectualism is not based on ideas or intellect but on lifestyle conformity. Principles are portrayed as obstacles to enjoyment, not foundations of thought. This reveals a culture where comfort and luxury are valued over conscience. This type of approach clearly shows the hollowness of the seminars where serious-minded academicians and real intellectuals are not welcomed because they are interested in the exchange of ideas and not in exchange of pleasantries. Only those people are suitable to be invited in seminars who are given to eating and drinking.

Seminars Portrayed as Market: In this story, seminar has been presented as a market which provides job opportunities to the participants. The discussion of ideas is not the real purpose behind organizing seminars. *Vidhvasnak* explains the purpose of organising seminars in the story. As he clarifies, “After all, some people get jobs from my seminar... Some lonely people get 'company'... Some get inspiration to write... Some 'environment' is created” (Shukla 16). Vidhvansak tells the narrator

Look, the seminar is usually attended by unemployed young men and women. Initially, they are happy just by meeting senior professors like us and getting their photos clicked. But among them, some are smart... bright students... some are ambitious... some are devotees... some are dissatisfied... some are abandoned... in other words, the entire 'society of the helpless' gathers here. It is our responsibility to help them. They fulfil their needs" and maintain a sociology of the oppressed and deprived. (Shukla 16-17)

Shukla satirises the power relations operating within academic seminars in university spaces. He ironically reveals deep exploitation, and hypocrisy where seminars are presented as spaces of hierarchy, not learning. Seminars reduce participants to their economic vulnerability, not their intellectual curiosity. Their happiness at merely meeting “senior professors” and taking photographs shows how academic prestige replaces genuine knowledge exchange. Learning is sidelined and status worship dominates. Shukla condemns the academic opportunisms and an academic culture where the marginalized exist to sustain the authority and relevance of elites. He argues that such seminars do not challenge oppression; they institutionalize it under the language of care and sociology.

Seminars as Critique of Interdisciplinary Knowledge: In this story, the author makes a critique of the idea of interdisciplinary seminars which results in confusion without any fruitful outcomes. When the narrator asks him, “So, what's new in this feast?” (Shukla 16), Vidvanashak tells him that this seminar has focused on both thought and entertainment. The chairman of the entertainment committee is Professor *Ashleel*. To participate in this game, 'coupleship' is essential. Under this pretext, they will also try to realize the concept of '*Ardha Narishwar*' of Indian culture. Furthermore, they are also incorporating a tour into the seminar to promote Indian tourism. In this tour, we will go to remote areas and search for herbs and plants...” (Shukla 17). But the narrator interrupts, “But... the topic of the seminar is something else and your topic is also something else... still...?????” (Shukla 17). Vidhvansak replies, “This is the problem with people like you... You are unable to understand 'interdisciplinary knowledge'... Every subject is interconnected... We are trying to connect education with life and society” (Shukla 17).

The narrator has received an invitation to the gang's *Brahmabhoj* (seminar). He is quite surprised at receiving this invitation from the gang's leader, Professor *Vidhvanak*. Dr. Raktipasu has given the narrator invitation with some special instructions. The narrator is not allowed to stay overnight at the seminar. He must attend only as a listener. He will come in physical form and leave in the same form. He must not speak, “because if you speak, you will only spew venom... etc. etc.” (Shukla 17). He may expose the reality of seminars. The narrator thinks that he will get a chance to see the “international gang” up close. A few days ago, there was a major controversy in the gang's *Brahmabhoj* when a fight broke out between Prof. Ashleel and Prof. Sukhechhu. The cause of the fight isn't clearly known. Some blame *Gargi*, others blame *Kaya*. The dispute was finally ended with the intervention of Professor *Vidhvanak*. Since then, this new seminar is being held again. Preparations have been underway for the past six months. Though seminars is an academic event which is supposed to be attended by academics and scholars. But the author ironically remarks that this feast includes “literary figures, thinkers, politicians, and the elite, social workers, businessmen, police, criminals, and members from all walks of life” (Shukla 15). The organizers have given full attention to all the preparations of this seminar. But no one has thought about the topic of this seminar. The author ridicules the process of conducting seminars:

The topic of the seminar??? Don't ask. Whatever be the topic, this group can speak on it and discuss it with equal authority. The gang leaders get irritated when they hear subversive/destructive topics. They say that ordinary people discuss the topic... we are beyond the topic. The group is the champion of “interdisciplinary knowledge. (Shukla16)

The writer satirises academic elitism and hollow intellectualism in university seminar culture. He exposes the superficial nature of their knowledge where actual subject no longer matters for intellectuals. This so-called intellectual group is actually deeply conservative in practice. Anything that questions existing power structures, caste hierarchies, or institutional comfort zones is dismissed as something “ordinary people” talk about. They reject real critique because it threatens their authority. This group places itself above common social concerns. This reflects a mindset where intellectuals detach themselves from lived realities like poverty, inequality, injustice, and treat engagement with such issues as intellectually inferior. They mask intellectual laziness under the term “interdisciplinary knowledge”. Interdisciplinarity becomes a badge of status, not a method of inquiry. Shukla exposes campus intellectual culture where seminars become rituals of self-display, not learning.

Seminars as Site of Entertainment and opportunism: The organizers have focused all their attention on the element of entertainment in the seminar because high dignitaries, ministers, vice-chancellors, and renowned academicians are coming to attend the seminar. So, they have made all the arrangements keeping in view the stature of their guests. In this seminar, they want to form an international team that will find cultural solutions to each other's problems. And this is the central idea behind organizing this

seminar. It is going to be a historic academic event. They have assembled a team that includes people from all disciplines. Vidhvansak tells the narrator, “No matter where a seminar is being held, on any topic, our members can attend and speak fluently... and thus we play our part in promoting culture...”(Shukla 18). Vidhvansak reveals the secret that they catch the basic emotions. Emotions such as Love, hate, greed, jealousy, and enthusiasm are at the root of every event. Whatever be the subject, they connect these basic emotions to it. The narrator is curious to know how they manage to arrange such a large number of speakers for the seminars because it is not an easy task. Prof. Vidhvansak discloses his secret before the narrator:

What happens is that some members of our team keep checking on the internet to find out when and where seminars on which topic are being held... We get many of the speakers who come to our area to give lectures at our place. They get the benefit of ‘*ek panth, do kaaj*’, and our work gets done too. Many people come for sightseeing... some come for weddings, and we take their interviews at that time... we make films on them. (Shukla 18)

This passage is a biting satire on academic opportunism and intellectual parasitism within university culture. Shukla depicts how knowledge production becomes exploitative, convenience-driven, and ethically hollow. By tracking seminars online and pulling speakers into their own space, the group treats academic events not as sites of dialogue but as resources to be harvested. Seminars become raw material, not intellectual engagements. The proverb “*Ek panth, do kaaj*” (one shot, two targets) exposes a mindset where efficiency replaces integrity and ethics. Speakers are invited not for meaningful exchange but because it is convenient and cost-effective. Intellectual interaction is reduced to logistics and gains. Private moments like interviewing people during weddings or sightseeing trips are turned into academic capital. Shukla exposes predatory research culture and condemns an academic culture where research is driven by convenience, not commitment. Ethics are sacrificed for visibility, productivity, and career advancement.

Vidhvansak offers the narrators to join his international gang by leaving his narrow-mindedness. By joining their gang, the narrator will be able to roam around the world by attending seminars in foreign countries. He tries to reason him out, “The joy of life lies in expansion, not contraction. What you consider 'immorality,' we call 'opportunity seeking.'... What you call 'values,' we call 'inertia.' What you call expertise, we call 'monotony.' What you call 'purity,' we call 'frustration.' So, what will you create by living with such frustration? Creation requires the warmth of human life, companionship, and a spirit of mutual connection. And for this, is there a better way than our feast?” But the author wishes him well for his seminar and leaves for the university. On the way, he keeps thinking about “how hardworking Prof. Vidhvansak’s group is... how energetic... how intelligent... If only they had a little heart... a little honesty... It's true, in the absence of honesty, our intellect creates amazing illusions of luxury. (Shukla 19). Shukla ultimately argues that intelligence without honesty becomes manipulation. Academia without ethics becomes a factory of illusions. He advocates morality, suggesting that true intellectual work must be grounded in truth, empathy, and responsibility, not just brilliance or success.

Conclusion: It is evident from the analysis of the story “Giroh Ka Brahmbhoj” that seminars, which are often considered a crucial part of academic life, are deceptive in achieving their intended goals. Seminars are illusions, lacking substance or reality. They have become empty rituals or mere formalities, lacking genuine intellectual engagement. They are a form of collective deception where participants pretend to engage with ideas. Through this story, the writer reveals the superficiality and pretentiousness in academic circles. The “publish or perish” pressure in academia contributes immensely to the ritualization of seminars. When academics are under pressure to publish, they prioritize quantity over quality. They tend to see seminars as a necessary step towards publication, rather than an opportunity for genuine feedback and growth. Hence, this pressure can lead to a culture where seminars become mere rituals, rather than vibrant forums for intellectual exchange. Therefore,

there is need to move beyond publication counts and impact factors, and to consider quality, impact, and contribution to the field. Early-career researchers must be provided with ample support by offering mentorship, resources, and guidance to help them navigate the pressure. A culture of quality over quantity needs to be fostered to encourage in-depth research and meaningful engagement over rapid publication.

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