

The Innovative Narrative Techniques in Virginia Woolf's Fiction: A Study of Stream of Consciousness, Interior Monologue, and Shifting Perspectives

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Abstract

The narrative techniques employed in a novel reveals the vision of a novelist. Traditional way of writing novels was discarded by Virginia Woolf because she is a kind of writer who thinks that human life is ever changing. Novelists like Arnold Bennett, H.G.Wells and John Galsworthy adopted conventional mode of writing and Virginia Woolf found them unappealing because they lacked real perspectives of human life. According to Woolf real life is full of challenges that never remain static. It can be one of the reasons that Virginia Woolf adopted techniques like stream of consciousness in most of her novels. She believed that smooth narration cannot represent reality of life because life is full of ups and downs. The time schemes, voices and characters that she represents in her novels is nonlinear and it provides a glimpse of realism. Inner reality and an eternal flux of human psychology are reflected through her characters. In the beginning of twentieth century Virginia Woolf followed her own instincts and joined novelists like James Joyce. It has already been stated in chapter one of the present research work that James Joyce was a modern writer who experimented with modern techniques of writing novels. Prime concern of novelists like James Joyce and Virginia Woolf was to establish a pattern out of chaotic flow of consciousness. Critics and scholar may argue that in the work of fiction much emphasis on consciousness of characters can divert the plot and a balance between plot and setting can further be distorted. We will be surprised to know that in the novels of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce there is a perfect balance between the plot and the setting. The experiment with new methods of writing was result oriented and characters were capable of expressing their mind and intuitions.

Keywords:- *Consciousness, Reality, Psychology, Flux, Narrative technique*

Mrs Woolf successfully captured impressions that reflected random memories, thoughts and sensations of her characters. In an essay Mrs Woolf has written that the pattern taken out of the chaotic mind is coherent both in nature and appearance. It is fragmented but original (Woolf 107). It can also be said that novels of Virginia Woolf are the result of modern experiments. Critics and scholars are of the opinion that Virginia Woolf uses deliberate techniques in almost all of her novels. Mitchell A Leaska has remarked that the narrative technique of Virginia Woolf is not luck but a result of hard work. In other words, it can be said that it is by choice not by chance. In most

of her novels we can find that her views regarding the world are idiosyncratic. There is a parallel world of human consciousness which is reflected through most of her characters. Thus, it becomes evident that she disapproves narrative techniques that remains consistent and static (Amigoni17). In *Rhetoric of Fiction* Wayne C. Booth has also remarked that consistent narrative technique provides less space to characters and it can be one of the reasons that characters feel that they have been trapped in a web like fabricated plot. In most of the novels written by Virginia Woolf we find that her characters are able to express themselves in a proper way because the novelist is not inclined towards a particular character. Every character has their own space in most of her novels. In major novels of Virginia Woolf like *Jacob's Room*, *To the Lighthouse*, *Mrs Dalloway* and *The Waves* we find that there is a different reading experience. If we compare these novels to novels like *Night and Day* and *The Voyage Out* we also find that narrative techniques of these novels are different because they have been written with different point of views. In the first two novels like *Day and Night* and *The Voyage Out* the approach of the novelist is inclined towards traditional methods of writing but at the same moment she has also given some glimpses of modern writing. A sudden shift of narrative technique from storytelling to direct description is visible in these two novels. Such style of writing is also visible in the novels of James Joyce. I have talked about techniques like direct description because authors like Henry James, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf believe that this technique is like a mile stone in modern writing. It provides justice to the characters because characters are ever changing and they are capable to reflect their school of thoughts in an innovative way. Overt commentary along with direct description and point of view narration is the technique employed by Henry James. In the initial two novels of Virginia Woolf, we can find that there are certain new narrative techniques like flashback, montage, fluid characters and fragmentary impressions. If we talk about conventional method of writing we find that there is a chronological pattern of incidents that is reflected through episodes. Dialogues are smooth and observations of characters are direct. Thus, it can be said that in the initial two novels of Mrs Woolf we can find both traditional as well as modern approach of writing. It seems that her artistic genius was continuously evolving. Her artistic evolution was rapid and in her later novels we find that she completely adopted new methods of writing. In *Jacob's Room* we find that sequences are not in chronological order and it suggest that the novelist has experimented with narrative techniques like stream of consciousness in her own way. Virginia Woolf has remarked that major incidents of life are never chronological in nature. It is disjointed and thus she follows free association while dealing with most of her plots and settings. Joan Bennett has also remarked that traditional methods of writing impose an order on flux of ideas and incidents and as a result plot becomes fabricated and stuffed with boredom. It fails in generating interest among readers (Bennett 12-13). Critics and scholars may argue that in chronological sequence there is a well-arranged story and it can be one of the reasons that most of the novelists adopted this technique of writing. With the advancement of time such techniques failed to express the sensibilities and anguish of a modern man. In novels of Virginia Woolf there is a well-arranged storyline and the plot is nonlinear but still it successfully generates interest among readers. We can find it in novels like *To the Lighthouse* and *Mrs Dalloway*. The story in these two novels is not chronological in nature. Flashback technique has also been employed by the novelist in these two novels. It highlights the simultaneous existence of major and minor incidents. It is noteworthy to find that later novels of Virginia Woolf are more subjective in comparison to her earlier novels. She has tried to show us the mental condition of her characters. Scott Donaldson has remarked that a true writer knows about the mental condition of his or her characters. It is applicable to Mrs Woolf because she understands the agonies of a modern man. She knows that human condition changed a lot drastically after 1910. We have already seen that Virginia Woolf considers 1910 as the beginning of modernism. She is a kind of novelist who dives deep into the head and heart of her characters. Let us analyze *Jacob's Room* to understand it. This novel highlights the personality of Jacob Flanders. Jacob finds the skull of a sheep near the beach. He is a boy of mixed sensibilities. When he grows up, we find that he goes to Cambridge and generates affinity for literature and philosophy. He loves to join the night party of Guy Fawkes. He enjoys reading Marlowe and he has relationships with different women. At the climax we come to know that he joins the Great War and gets killed in that war. Kate Campbell has remarked that *Jacob's Room* was a failure because it was concerned with humanity and human conditions at different levels. It is noteworthy to find that this novel has so many interpretations that come to a conclusion that it was not written in conventional style. This novel has been written in a modern style and other novelists who used to write in conventional way were surprised and shocked after reading this novel. Virginia Woolf's motive was not to write about suspense and captivate readers in finding the suspense but she wanted to project Jacob Flanders in a realistic way. She has not talked about her characters in this novel but she has presented them as they are from within. She does not intend to disclose the conduct of these characters but she has tried to show us the behaviour of such characters in different situations. It has been left up to readers to analyse the novel because the novelist has not given her own opinion about any incident or character in particular. It is the style of modern writers to present situations or characters as they are. In this novel Virginia Woolf has presented the life of Jacob Flanders not in a coherent manner and it can be one of the reasons that this novel is not easy to understand. It

is a complex novel where several incidents are linked together but they have not been represented chronologically. The development of the story seems arbitrary and as a result it becomes tough to analyse different characters of this novel. There are several isolated moments in the life of Jacob. It seems that sometimes the narrative of this novel is fragmented and discontinuous. In this novel the novelist struggles with techniques like stream of consciousness and it can be the reason behind fragmented narrative technique in this novel. Virginia Woolf has tried to define life that it is nonlinear and arbitrary. Nothing is fixed and it can be said that incidents of life are fragmented. It is the modern life where every day is not the repetition of the previous day. Human character is changing every moment and Virginia Woolf was aware of such life. Her characters are not similar to each other and we can say that they are not stereotypes. They are fresh because they are not static. In this novel we can also find that the novelist has highlighted the subject like human mind. There are a lot of ideas that keep on coming and going in human mind at a time. It is the flux of ideas and it is based upon life experiences. Readers can find that they are not recipients who receive the story written by the novelist but they are spectators who can witness the incidents happening in the life of characters. Scholars and critics may argue that readers find themselves not in a comfortable position because they are like creative agents who may draw their own conclusion from a particular incident. It is interesting to note that major and minor life impressions of Jacob are recorded in this novel from his childhood to death yet a chronology is missing. We cannot deny that a proper chronology is missing from this novel but we can also find that the chronology has not been destroyed completely. It is also important to find that although several life impressions of Jacob are recorded in this novel yet his characteristic features are blurred. There can be a reason for this blurred character sketch of Jacob because the novelist is trying to extract realities that are not static. It is the reality of situation that is ever changing and continuously evolving. Throughout the novel we can find that there are multiple voices and there is a little presence of the third person narrator. These multiple voices are of Jacob's mother, his relatives and friends whom he meets. It is through these characters and voices we come to know about the personality of Jacob. It is amazing to find that there is a little role of the narrator in this novel. Jacob Flanders is represented through other characters. In this novel there is also an omniscient narrator but his role is limited and we find that this narrator reveals the inner consciousness of characters to an intrusive level. In modern writing we often find that the role of narrators is limited and impersonal. He speaks in first person narrative and hints that the use of 'we' is not personal in nature. Virginia Woolf takes care of such features of the narrator and it means that the novel plays with the mind of the reader. It is noteworthy to find that Jacob dies in the Great War but the novelist has not mentioned it in detail. She has just suggested through Betty Flanders and Bonamy that Jacob was no more to be found again. The Great War has engulfed great men of the century. Bonamy says after entering to his room that he left everything to its place and it suggest that the Great War was also at its place and death was inevitable in the war. Modern form of writing is also a kind of reaction against war and war like situations. It changed the taste of readers. It is amazing to find that readers were no more interested in love and romance. They wanted something real and the theme of war was new to them. Every modern writer knew that the onset of modernism was formless but realistic in both nature and appeal. It can be one of the reasons that realism is a part of modernism. Human characters started changing a lot and realism was redefined through modern characters, plot, theme and setting. When Bonamy cried for Jacob we come to know that Jacob was dead. Thus, the indirect references of Jacob's death provide silence to the mind of readers and surprisingly they are taken a back at this suggestion. At the climax of the novel we find that the novelist uses direct speech to report the dialogues. She also uses third person narrative technique in this novel and it further suggest that the narrator is just like a spectator who reports about the major and minor incidents in a fragmented way. It also hints at the broken narrative technique employed by the novelist from *Jacob's Room* onwards. Critics and scholars are of the opinion that this novel is like a landmark for Virginia Woolf because it hints at the evolutionary career of the novelist. It is the first novel in which Virginia Woolf deviates from a linear chronology. Mrs. Woolf has remarked that she was capable to "create the situations not the plot" (Woolf 118).

Looking into the dynamics of *Mrs Dalloway* we find that this novel was published in 1925. Richard Dalloway is a politically active man and his wife is Clarissa Dalloway. She is a fashionable woman who is about to give an important party. She prepares herself to make this event as a successful party. At this moment we find that Peter Walsh who was her one-time suitor returns from India. She feels disturbed because he returned from India after five years. Everything was changed now but she was still thinking about this man because she was haunted by her memories. In the party Sally Seton provide her some comfort because she is her childhood friend. In the party one of the guests report that Warren Smith commits suicide. He was very unfortunate because he was a shell shock victim who always lived in his own world. If we talk about the narrative technique employed in this novel we find that it is not like *Jacob's Room*. In this novel, events occur in a single day. Effects and presence of the past can easily be felt in this novel. Thus, it can be said that Virginia Woolf has played with the concept of time in this novel. In this novel Virginia Woolf has highlighted human awareness and intuition in detail. This kind of detailed analysis of awareness

and intuition provides us a sense of realism and it seems that we are not reading the novel but we are watching the single day life events of Clarissa Dalloway and other characters. A continuous flux and rhythm of ideas has been maintained by the novelist in this novel. We can also feel that major and minor incidents of the novel are not in chronological order but still there is a rhythm that maintains interest among readers. Readers can also find that in this novel time and space is interwoven in each other. Critics and scholars are of the opinion that time and space has been limited in this novel. In *Nocturne*, written by Frank Swinnerton the incidents of a single night have been recorded that anticipates Joyce's *Ulysses*. Virginia Woolf follows this pattern of James Joyce and it can be one of the reasons that in *Mrs Dalloway* she has recorded life events of Clarissa Dalloway that occurs in a single day. Major action of the novel goes backward and forward. It suggests that the narrative technique employed by the novelist in this novel is nonlinear. It has already been stated that the past and the present seems yoked in a way that readers find themselves occupied in the plot. The novelist has given a texture of experience that encompasses all the basic human feelings (Beach 24). Stream of consciousness technique has been employed by Mrs Woolf in this novel. It is interesting to note that it is the most successful technique that encompasses psychic and subjective state of mind. It is the direct way of reporting realities around us. It was the modern technique that brought revolution in modern writing. Indirect and common methods of description have been rejected by the novelist Virginia Woolf. In direct description plot moves in the direction of time. It can be one of the reasons that time and space seems interwoven in each other.

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