

“Does Consciousness Control the Life of Characters in the Novels of Virginia Woolf”

MD SUJAN SEKH

Research Scholar

Dept.of English (Humanities)

B.R.A. Bihar University.

Muzaffarpur, Bihar

Abstract: There is no limit to the power of the human mind. There is no other controller of an individual but his/her own consciousness. The consciousness of the characters are not merely their consciousness which means the whole mental activity and process. You are aware of physical environment and you give response to it till consciousness works properly. If one does some work without thinking, you should keep mind that one is unconsciously conscious. The great psychologists like Freud, Adler and Jung probed deeper and deeper into the human consciousness. They studied it very carefully and conceived of it as nothing static or fixed. To them it was something in a state of flux, constantly changing and becoming different. We cannot call ourselves free. We do not govern our minds rather minds govern us. It is our own mental attitude which makes the world what it is for us. Our thoughts make things beautiful, our thoughts make things ugly. Consciousness, like a river, is ever flowing and always changing. A stream is never the same one second to the next, just as a consciousness is not the same one second to the next. The changing of consciousness of a character means the changing of his/her behaviour. Almost all the characters in the novels of Virginia Woolf are controlled by their consciousness or sub-consciousness aspect of mind. The main aim of discussing the present topic is to explore that nothing affects the characters in her novels more than their consciousness

Keywords: Consciousness, Sub-consciousness, Unconsciousness, Aberration, Epiphany, Kaleidoscopic, Intuition, Engulfment.

Who is the real agent in the individual? By whom commended does life make its first move? By whom willed and directed does the mind focus light on its objects? At whose will do people utter speech? The answer of the above questions is consciousness i.e. awareness of our mental state. The psychologists like Freud, Alder and Jung probed deeper and deeper into the human consciousness. Their researchers revealed that there are layers within layers in the human consciousness. Beneath the conscious there is the subconscious and the unconscious. In the modern fiction, the point of interest lies very often in the dark places of psychology. Psychology is the science of mental life both of the phenomenon and of their conditions,

reasoning which are concerned with feelings, desires, cognition and decisions of the mind. Consciousness has been recorded in many ways from Plato and Plotinus to Kate, Hegel. Guven Guzeldere observes, Sartre and others have used two possible meanings of consciousness: “The state or faculty of being conscious, as a condition and concomitant of all thought, feeling and volition (as distinct psychologically from the Freudian / Jungian unconsciousness)” and “the state of being conscious, regarded as the normal condition of healthy walking life (as distinct ontologically from the non consciousness.)” The modern Western history of the study of consciousness begins with the early work of William James.

The narrative technique Virginia Woolf used in *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse* and *Jacob's Room* marks a departure from previous novels. Her view of life is stated in the essay on Modern Fiction:

Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged,
Life is a luminous halo, a semi transparent envelope,
Surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end.
It is not the task of the novelist to convey
this unknown circumscribed spirit,
whatever aberration or complexity it may display

with as little mixture of the alien and the external as possible “.(*The common reader* p. 154) This View of life had a profound influence on Virginia Woolf’s literary endeavours . For if one were to generalise an author’s purpose or aim in writing, Woolf’s world of necessity includes the portrayal of this flux of life in the psyche of human being .

Lily lived in her past memories and thinking that governed her life as well as painting. Her mind as force distracts her concentration from painting. Her mind as force distracts her concentration from painting. Nevertheless, Lily does not give in. “Considering what her plan of attack should be” Lily again dips her brush and moves it on canvas “as if it has fallen with some in rhythm which is dictated to her by what she saw, so that while her hand quivered with life, this rhythm is strong enough to bear along with it on its current” (*To the lighthouse* p.215). Thus the waving rhythm of life coming out her mind pours itself upon the canvas, filling the space with “green and blues”. Virginia Woolf used stream of consciousness technique to express Lily’s consciousness. Stream of consciousness technique is a way of rendering the ‘psyche’ or the ‘soul’ the characters accurately or truthfully. And to know a character really or truthfully, we must know what happening inside the mind; we must plunge into his pre-speech level of consciousness. The inside struggle of Lily’s painting, though descriptively details her combat against voices of the past, it also represents how had Woolf strives through the voices from the past to write down after words for *To the lighthouse*”

The paternal conflict in James's mind manifests itself explicitly in the beginning of the story: "had there been an axe handy, a poker, or any weapon that would have gashed a hole in his father's breast and killed him ... James would have seized it" (*To the Lighthouse* p. 2). It is not his external events but internal conflicts made him understand and judged his father. Once the subconscious mind accepts an idea, it begins to execute it. It is true that low of the subconscious mind works for good and bad ideas alike. If your mind accepts negative thinking and you begin to think and feel in evil way the result would be unhappy. The low of your mind is this: the reaction or response you get from your subconscious mind will be determined by the nature of the thought or idea you hold in your conscious mind. If you consciously assume that something is true, even though it may be false, your subconscious mind will accept it as true. The same case is happen in the life of James. The hatred for his father was not deleted rather stored in his subconscious and unconscious layers. After ten year's postponement, the seemingly forgotten paternal hatred is coming back on the lagging boat. The past memory of how his father disappointed, him rejecting him, with the sovereignty of the lord of a family and of a scholar, comes back" He had always kept this old symbol of taking a knife and striking his father to the heart.

The isolation of the individual consciousness steadily becomes the most important psychological fact in a world from which public value seemed to have departed and where every individual was seen to be. he prisoner of his unique stream of consciousness. David Daiches says that "Our response to every new event is conditioned by our private past: Mrs. Dalloway in Virginia Woolf's novel of that name opens her front door to go out into the London streets and as she does so is aware with one part of her mind of a similar feeling on opening the French window onto the lawn in the house she had lived in as a girl "(*A critical History of English Literature, Volume II* p. 1154)

According to Robert Humphrey's *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel*, novels that are said to use stream of consciousness technique are "novels which have as their essential subject matter the consciousness of one or more characters" And to say such novels are focusing on "revealing the psychic being of the character" Moreover, the presented aspects of the consciousness of the characters are not merely their consciousness which means the whole mental activity and process. Specially speaking, novels of stream of consciousness utilize different technique of narration to explore the pre-speech level of their fictional characters, so that the reader can go inside the character's mind, sharing his most spontaneous unpolished thought just as they are born. Although stream of consciousness novels are probing into the non-communicative levels of the consciousness of characters, the material based on which the text is written is mental and spiritual experience of human consciousness. It should be noted that it is a technique of representing the psychic content processes at various levels of the conscious control; that is of entirely unuttered for it represents the content of consciousness in its inchoate stage before it is formulated for deliberate speech. Clarissa's thoughts contradict her feelings. She thinks in a way that appears to contradict her feelings. Same case is in the character of Peter Walsh. He identifies

with conformist boys or rebellious youngmen. He laughs at the conformists and respect them. He has been through the troubles of the flesh or he ‘trampled under... temptations’ in great renunciations. The critical situation of minds of Clarissa and Septimus are highlighted through the novel. In the opening paragraphs, Clarissa Dalloway recalls the mixture of excitement and fear she experienced as young woman at Bourton. The eighteen year old Clarissa plunges into the day at Bourton as if it were an aqueous space, in the same way that the present day Clarissa Dalloway’s plunges into memory.

Ostensibly there is only a thin connection between the Septimus and Clarissa - near the end of the novel, Clarissa is informed of the suicide of Septimus, a young man whose name just goes into her ears with this sorrowful news – their relationships are already established by the tunnelling process or the beautiful consciousness of characters. The stream of conscious technique, thus, is not only important concerning the structure of the novel, it also helps to illuminate the most profound motif in *Mrs. Dalloway* the relationship between the inevitable death and everyday life Septimus is socially restricted to mourn for his friend while Clarissa controls her grief over the loss of her friend to sustain her normal life as a perfect hostess. The only one who sees through relation between life and death is Clarissa, and her epiphany of this fact is presented as a final vision in the form of stream of consciousness near the end of the novel.

Rezia’s psychic content and process is clearly shown. Darkness prevails in Rezia’s mind when she thinks of her unhappy marriage. The narrator slips into the consciousness of Rezia, pictures her helpless feeling of suffering and symbolizes such depressive sensation as darkness ‘night’, ‘dark’, and ‘darkness’ appear several times in the novel to reinforce the impression of helplessness and losing one’s way as Rezia feels. Her conscious and subconscious mind put both a soliloquy “ I am alone, I am alone ! She cried, by the fountain in Regent’s Park (staring at the Indian and his cross)” (*Mrs. Dalloway*; P. 20.) Through consciousness we run our lives with little thought to many physical situation. Parents impart on initial store of information and skills to prepare their infants for life activities and the process of consciousness development continue through socialization and education. Awareness is the background radar of consciousness. The claim has two implications : that consciousness itself is an all pervasive ground to international knowledge; and that access to this ground is not only an innate capacity but also promoted by excesses of a world that compel us to let go of our fixed attachments. The minds of the children in Ramsay family are fully developed. Their uncertainties of going to the lighthouse provide a vehicle for going beyond the clouds of conceptual boundaries to the light of freedom associated with non-international consciousness. Waiting for the lighthouse in a kind of no activity which is self-erasing.

Consciousness is not an independent quality but arose as a natural evolutionally consequence of the biological adaptation of brains and nervous systems. This view holds that consciousness emerged as a property of complex biological composition during the course of

evolution. Furthermore, consciousness depends on connection within the brain. The parts of the brain that control speech, movement, etc. seem to have little to do with mental awareness and hence consciousness. Consciousness is a result of the appropriate parts of the brain being fully functional. When someone become unconscious, it is that she / he completely lost awareness of her physical environment. Perhaps it therefore reasonable to define unconsciousness as total lack of awareness. The characters in the novels of Virginia Woolf do some work without thinking. Hence they are unconsciously conscious. We can walk up and down stairs without thinking, we don't have relearn how to ride a bicycle each time we get on one. Day by day characters reconcile an inner conflict, artistic vision, or gains a greater understanding their connection to the world.

Time is not series of chronological moments to be presented by the novelist in sequence with an occasional deliberate retrospect, but a continuous flow in the consciousness of the individual. Psychological time and its representation are part of a larger trend of exploring the depths of human consciousness. The image of time as a continuous flow creates a perpetual present in which past, present and future function together to create a a kaleidoscopic vision of time. The continuous influence of the past on the present and the co-existence of the past, present and future in the mind are features of psychological time. Modernism is interested in both the nation of the flux of time and the possibility of multiple levels of consciousness. Its evident that the stream of consciousness technique is used to present characters' private thoughts for the reader to understand the complex tangles of the character's past, present and future. It is especially a good technique for the characters to speak for themselves rather than to be oppressed by the intuition. If we use such an attitude to examine the four female characters in *Mrs. Dalloway*, we can clearly see what they are thinking worrying about and how they find a way out under the extremely severe situations; they are either in a negligible condition because of limited social resources or in a severely regulated situation with rigid social etiquette. Her characters do not always work in a logical or rational way. We cannot expect to know what they will or what they feel from reading about their thoughts. In other words, Woolf presents most complicated characters whose feelings and thinking can be properly understood only by an analysis of their mental process. This is seen in almost all her novels where the characters' thoughts seem to contradict their feelings.

Mrs. Ramsay's mental cell is like a pole standing still to support every one coming up to her patronizing every one's need for sympathy and comforting everyone with her immense patience. Mrs. Ramsay, who busies herself in life's daily tasks, also undergoes a transition in consciousness as described through water imagery. In the minds of a household task, the 'sound of the ocean evokes terrifying thought of engulfment and destruction. As wife and mother, she is more concerned with the intuitive than the intellectual. She understands intuitively her young son's joy and wonder in expected expedition. She executes in joining and gathering people as she joins the treads of her knitting. Mrs. Ramsay's conscious control of her mind is relaxing and the part of her mind that is normally hidden, her unconscious, is rising to the surface. We know that her son James has been hurt by his father, and that he

only resolves the dispute on the eventual journey to the lighthouse years later, after Mrs. Ramsay's death. Mrs. Ramsay's has negotiated between her husband and her sin and has tried to calm the boy's feeling but the underlying truth she knows is that 'children don't forget'. Moving deeper into the novel we find the tone of internal argument. We see the mind of Mrs. Ramsay arguing against the 'lie' the unwelcome thought, trying to banish it thoroughly from her mind. She has fought her 'firm', 'stiffened', and 'in a habit' of 'sternness'. The novel reveals her mental process. Her repetitive, passive state is conveyed as a kind of trance suggested by hypnotic agents (the lighthouse) and automatic activities (her knitting). Woolf tries to expose how the prominent features of a personality especially their aims and dreams, have their origin in something else which has been rejected or repressed. For example Mrs. Ramsay's preoccupation with marriage is seem to arise out of her ambivalence about death and her repressed desire for a religious faith She creates moments of unity, which have an effect as Lily realizes like a work of art. "At other times suddenly and unexpectedly, especially when (Mrs. Ramsay's) mind raised itself slightly from the task actually in hard, had no such kindly meaning but like a ghostly roll of drums remorselessly beat the measure of life, made one third of the destruction of the island and its engulfment in the sea and warned her whose day had slipped past in one quick doing after another that is was all ephemeral as a rainbow this sound which had been obscured and concerted under the sounds suddenly thundered hollow in her ears and made her look up with an impulse of terror"(To the Lighthouse). The sound of the ocean takes her out of the concrete task at hand and changed her perspective to one of abstract thoughts, feeling and fears. The cycle from involvement to detachment and back to involvement again complete itself when she hears Mrs. Ramsay chanting a poem off in the distance, rhythmically soothing her once more like the sound of the ocean back to domestic involvement.

The word "stream" in the term stream of consciousness describes the phenomenon of a fluid consciousness. A stream, like consciousness, is ever flowing and always changing. A stream is never the same one second to the next, just as a consciousness is not the same one second to the next. A person's awareness and perspective is constantly changing, not static or changing every so often. Stream of consciousness, from psychological perspective, describes metaphorically the phenomenon the continuous and adjoining flow of sensations, impressions, images, memories and thoughts-experienced by each person, at all levels of consciousness and which is generally associated with each person's subjectivity or sense of self. There is little exposition between these transitions, thus allowing the "Stream" to flow seamlessly. For example, in *Mrs. Dalloway* the opening paragraphs jump from present to past without the narration indicating this transition. The novel begins: "Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself. For Lucy had her work cut out for her. The doors would be taken off their hinges; Rumpelmayer's men were coming. And then, thought Clarissa Dalloway, what a morning-fresh as if issued to children on a beach. What a lark ! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her, when with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the

open air”(Mrs. Dalloway).The narrative transitions from the present, when Mrs. Dalloway is buying flowers, to her memory from her young adulthood at Bourton, with little exposition.

In the novels of Virginia Woolf’s, the sea and seascapes, the wave and water imagery play an important role in the development of each character’s consciousness and interaction with the outside world. In *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf uses the stream of consciousness narrative technique, though there is an omniscient narrator in both to describe what is happening outside of the character’s consciousness. Woolf’s use imagery to connect different moments in the novel, and to from apart form character and plot, becomes more confident and consistent in Mrs. Dalloway. Images are carried over from one book to another. Darkness drops like a knife over Greece’s *Jacob’s Room*; Mrs. Dalloway sliced like a knife through everything again in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Peter Walsh is frequently described as playing with knife. The use of the background of the rhythm of the waves when evoking these isolated, significant moments in experience with which woolf is so concerned, appears in *Mrs. Dalloway*, looking forward to the extended use of this image in *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*. A mood of serenity and registration is usually conveyed by this image though sometimes the thundering of the waves can suggest terror and violence. The hypnotic rhythms of the falling waves induce the appropriate response in *Mrs. Dalloway* : ‘fear no more”, says heart, committing its burden to some sea, “which sighs collectively for all sorrows, and renews, brings, collects, lets fall”

“The Waves” covers the mental lives of six people or “Voices” though the interludes suggest only a day has gone by. It is woolf’s attempt to write pure consciousness to break the surface of the human shell in a way she felt had not been adequately achieved by contemporaries. During isolated moments of intense experience, life takes on the intensity of art. The long steady stroke of the lighthouse beam is Mrs. Ramsay’s stroke and symbolizes the stability and security which her presence imposes on the flux of life. The flashing of the beam is the equivalent in life to the movements of the painter’s brush - Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe are equally artists and the novel ends with the long steady stroke of the brush that also completes Lily Briscoe’s Picture in mind, of the perfect woman whom she loves. Both in the novel and in painting, formality and discipline are imposed on the chaos of experience.

More or less, conscious or subconscious mind is responsible for the activities in the life of Virginia Woolf’s characters. When we analyse the characters of Virginia Woolf, we find that she chiefly goes into the mental process, psychological reaction and various other psychological exploration of her characters. Such psychoanalytical study adds new dimensions to her novels as well as makes her characters most lively and realistic. Woolf allow the character’s consciousness to flow from one thought to the next, without the narrator indicating how or why the transition happened. This is meant to represent how in real life one is not necessarily aware of how their thought travels, but it is an unconscious, seamless process. This “river” or ‘stream” of conscious in psychology flows like water and leads the life.

WORK CITED:

Butler, Gillian and McManus, Freda. *Psychology: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2014.

Humphrey, Robert. *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel*. Berkley: California University Press.

Hunt, Morton. *The story of Psychology*. New York: Anchor Books, a Division of Random House, Inc, 1993

James, William. *The Principles of Psychology*. New York: Cosimo Inc., 1890.

Murphy, Joseph. *The Power of Your Subconscious Mind*. Penguin Books Ltd.

Satsangi, Prem Saran and Stuart, Hameroff. *Consciousness: Integrating Eastern and Western Perspectives* Delhi: New Age Books, 2016.

Woolf, Virginia. *Mrs. Dalloway*. London: Oxford University Press, 1992.

-----*To the Lighthouse*. London: Oxford University Press, 1999.

-----*. The Waves*. Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1951.

Woolf, Virginia. *The Common Reader*. London: The Hogarth Press, 1925.