



Volume: 2, Issue: 5, 270-273
May 2015
www.allsubjectjournal.com
e-ISSN: 2349-4182
p-ISSN: 2349-5979
Impact Factor: 3.762

Krishma
M. phil Scholar Dept. of
English, Chaudhary Devi Lal
University, Sirsa, Haryana,
India

The "Symbolic Significance" and the "Stream of Consciousness" technique in Virginia Woolf's novel "Mrs. Dalloway"

Krishma

Abstract

The Present research work deals with the "stream of consciousness" technique and the "symbolic significance" of Virginia Woolf in the novel "Mrs. Dalloway" (1925). Virginia Woolf was born on 26 January 1882. The novel "Mrs. Dalloway" was published in 1925. This is her first great and remarkable novel. This novel shows how remarkably the novelist has succeeded in adopting "the stream of consciousness technique". There are only five major characters moving round each other in two concentric circles, Clarissa, Peter Walsh and Richard Dalloway in the one and Septimus, Rezia Warren Smith in the other. The entire action takes place in one day. It moves between Mrs. Dalloway's preparation for her party in the morning and her presiding over it in the evening on the same day. The theme of the novel is basically psychological. The "stream of consciousness" technique is remarkably used by Mrs. Woolf in the novel. So, the present research work deals with the "stream of consciousness" and the "symbolic significance" of the novel "Mrs. Dalloway" written by Virginia Woolf.

Keywords: Stream consciousness, symbolic significance, Mrs. Dalloway, Virginia Woolf

1. Introduction

Virginia Woolf was born in a high cultured and educated family in London on 26 January, 1882. Her father, Sir Leslie Stephen was a renowned critic, historian, scholar and author of a large number of critical, biographical and philosophical essays. He was a great friend of scholars and men of letters having remarkable influence. After her father's death her house became famous as a locale of Bloomsbury group, a literary club founded by Virginia Woolf. Her literary career began in 1905, when she started writing critical reviews in the "Times Literary Supplement" and in some other periodicals. After her marriage with Leonard Woolf, they started the "Hogarth Press" in 1917 which published the writings of eminent men of letters of the day. She also liberally contributed to this Press. She is best known as a novelist and some of her novels are undisputedly great works of art.

Mrs. Virginia Woolf is truthfully called "a tireless experimenter" in whose hands the novel tends to become something different from a more fictional narrative of "Characters". Virginia Woolf was totally dissatisfied with the current form of the novel of the Edwardians like Bennett, Wells and Galsworthy. According to her, in their novels life escapes because life is not what they, especially Bennett presents in their famous novels. Thus we find Virginia Woolf setting herself to destroy the current form of the novel and then driven to invent one which would express her own vision of life. Virginia Woolf was a great lover of beauty and this love of beauty guides her in her selection and ordering of reality. According to David Cecil, Virginia Woolf could find beauty "as much in a scrap of orange peel lying in the gutter as in the Venus de Melo, as easily walking down the Euston Road as within the consecrated portals of the National Gallery."

Virginia Woolf is adequately conscious of the frailty of life and transience of beauty. This fleeting and changing life makes her sad and melancholic. According to a critic:-

"The fact of beauty, on the other hand the fact of mutability, on the other."

Virginia Woolf conveys about her "stream of consciousness" technique:-

"There would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, and no love interest or catastrophic in the accepted style." and the great task of novelist should be: - "to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit of man."

'Mrs. Dalloway' is a well known novel by Virginia Woolf. She gave a new meaning to the stream of consciousness technique in novel. "Mrs. Dalloway" is a psychological study of the lady of fifty who belongs to the upper class English society. The novel has certainly its serious

Correspondence:

Krishma
M. phil Scholar Dept. of
English, Chaudhary Devi Lal
University, Sirsa, Haryana,
India

and grim aspects. The outlook of the novelist is clearly presented through the novel. The novel presents a picture not only of the character of Clarissa Dalloway but also of the contemporary western civilization. The novel is symbolical in the sense that various characters represent different sections of society. "At a deeper level, the novel deals with the universal theme of life itself."

According to David Daiches, "Mrs. Dalloway is the novel of time, death and personality and the relation of the three to each other." Joan Bennett remarks that 'Mrs. Dalloway' is neither the story of Clarissa Dalloway nor of Septimus Smith, but of Human life itself. It presents the picture of life with all colours and variety. Some critics, on the other hand, hold the opinion that the novel is a satirical presentation of the picture of contemporary society. They are of the opinion that the novel gives a picture of modern world with its faces of class struggle, economic insecurity and war. The novel thus has a number of interpretations and it conveys a serious philosophy of life.

The central character of the novel is certainly Mrs. Clarissa Dalloway and the novel is basically about her life, personality and experiences. But at a deeper level, the novel deals with the critical issue of life itself. The action of the novel takes place within a single day in the month of June. It begins in the morning with Clarissa buying flowers for the party and ends in the evening with her presiding over the party. But by means of contrasts she makes and the memories they invoke in her, her life story from girlhood to her present age of fifty is revealed. The attention is mainly paid to her love experiences. Her attitude towards life is presented through her experiences of love. She loved Peter Walsh and it is interesting that she still loves him. But she is married to a rich and popular man called Richard Dalloway. She rejected her lover because he was too demanding and too assertive. Her life shows the tension between the self and social contacts.

The background of the novel is a picture of the English life after First World War. Various characters of the novel represent various aspects of contemporary civilization. The Dalloway's symbolise the pomp and show, outer glitter of the civilization that is suffering from spiritual barrenness. They are rich and wealthy but they are also not comfortable from within. They are full of hypocrisy, vanity, pride and pretension. Miss Kilman is the symbol of the corrupting influence of religion on humans. It is made clear that religion also has failed to bring the peace of mind. Then, there are Dr. Holmes and William Bradshaw who represent the evils of modern medical profession. They are completely insensitive to the feelings of their patients. They want the patients to follow their advice whether they are right or wrong. Virginia Woolf has depicted Dr. Holmes in the most unfavourable light.

Richard Dalloway is on the whole presented as a good man. But he too suffers from certain faults of character which have ironically been depicted in the novel. Both Peter and Sally express their views about Richard to be "a through good sort, a bit limited, a bit thick in the head but a through good sort (type)." Sally thinks Richard to be just a sportsman who cares only for dogs. She feels greatly surprised by Clarissa's decision of marrying Richard. Sally also believes that Richard has a second rate brain even though he has a heart full of love for his daughter.

Peter Walsh on the other hand, is symbolic of knowledge and spirit of adventure. Peter Walsh and Sally Saton represent new ideas which stand against the orthodox views. They always look forward to challenge certain set conventions of society.

They detest Dalloway for doing nothing and thinking nothing. It is interesting to note that they have a considerably good understanding of human nature. Peter's failure is an ironic comment on the modern civilization which doesn't promote the originality of ideas. In modern society second rate brain like Richard succeeds.

The tragedy of Septimus Smith is again a critical comment on the effects of war. The story of Smith and his wife constitute the sub-plot of the novel. Septimus and Rezia were married four years ago and Rezia had left Italy for the sake of her husband. Septimus was a young man full of passion, hope, bravery and patriotic feelings. The war made him a nervous wreck (mentally disturb). His friend Evans was killed before his own eyes in the war.

This and the general effect of the war had a shocking effect on his mind. Now, he suffers from hallucinations (imaginary fear) due to the effects of the war. The world seems to him very painful and horrible. The person, who was once full of energy and bravery, is now full of fear and anxiety. His wife also suffers greatly due to his mental illness. She is young and beautiful but she is tied to a man who shouts time and again "I will kill myself."

Virginia Woolf had also made great use of nature symbols and images in the novel. Calm and fresh morning air represents the youth of Clarissa. Flowers and green fields symbolise peace and contentment. Rose is a symbol of love in the novel. These symbols reflect the inner feelings of various characters. Ultimately, the novel is about human life in all its colours. The themes like Clarissa's isolation, her love for Peter, the destructive effects of war and the superficiality of doctors like Holmes are skilfully woven together.

Discussion

Virginia Woolf occupies a position of high importance in 20th century fiction. According to her, proper stuff of a novel is not what takes place outside or in the world. It is the inner reality of human beings. The modern novelists of England like James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Dorothy Richardson have made the English novels truly psychological in nature. To Virginia Woolf, "life is a luminous halo, a semi transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end." And according to her, the task of a novelist is "to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity, it may display". The most important aspect of this type of psychological or stream of consciousness novel is that such novels have mainly as the subject matter the consciousness for one or more characters.

'Mrs. Dalloway' is Woolf's first novel in which she has made a brilliant use of the stream of consciousness technique. In it, the novelist has drawn her main attention on recording various impressions which Clarissa receives in a single day. She is mainly interested in interpreting the inner life of her character. She probes deeper and deeper into the inner consciousness of characters. 'Mrs. Dalloway' is a record of the backward and forward movement of human consciousness.

Through, Virginia Woolf has not followed the pattern of conventional novel, the incidents in 'Mrs. Dalloway' are not incoherent or chaotic (confusing). She has evolved a new technique that suits her purpose. The whole action of the novel takes place within the narrow framework of a single day. It starts with Clarissa's preparing for the party in the morning and ends with her presiding over it in the evening. The relation she has developed with various persons and her associated memories to them is the fabric of the novel. The

major characters in the novel are no more than five. They move around each other in two concentric circles.

The action of novel is limited to a single day in the life of the chief character. R. L. chambers observe, "It is limited spatially to a single place, London and emotionally to the relations of Mrs. Dalloway with some other people." These are skilful association of the psychological time with the clock time. Whenever the big ban strikes, there is a shift from past to present or from one personality to the other. There is a sudden transition in the narration from one character to the other character. When Clarissa is at the market place, the author tells what is going on her mind. But suddenly the action shifts from Clarissa's mind to Peter Walsh. There is no continuity in the sequence of the thoughts of the characters. "The whole novel is constructed in two dimensions of space and time, remarks David Daiches." We either stand still in time or are led to contemplate events in space or we stand still in space and are allowed to move up and down in the consciousness of the individual.

Virginia Woolf has used the stream of consciousness technique to throw light on nature and personality of various characters. The image of the characters become clear partly from their own thoughts and ideas are partly from the thoughts and ideas of others about them. Clarissa's character, for example, is developed through the thoughts which pass through her mind in the course of a single day at different times. Her memories about her past life and her lover Peter Walsh throw much light on her character as well as the character of Peter Walsh. She recalls his eyes, his pocket and his knife. Similarly, Clarissa's character is revealed through the thoughts in the mind of Peter Walsh. It becomes clear from his thoughts that Clarissa is worldly kind of woman who cares too much for the rank. However, Clarissa herself is one of the opinion that Peter is mistaken about her because what she likes is simply life.

The novelist has used some devices to give clarity and design to the novel. From the beginning till the end, big ban's strike is heard. When we shift from one consciousness to another, the striking of the clock indicates the change. Similarly, the back firing of the motor engine shifts the attention of the reader from Clarissa to Septimus Smith and his wife. Septimus is not in his right mind and he keeps seeing hallucinations. He shouts time and again, "I will kill myself". Septimus insanity (madness) is conveyed through his own thoughts and also through the thoughts of Lucrezia. The horror of Septimus's madness is presented through Lucrezia's terror.

The interior monologue is a device closely related to the stream of consciousness technique. This device is quite useful in revealing the mental wake up of the character. Virginia Woolf has made an effective use of the technique of interior monologue. When Clarissa and Peter Walsh are talking to each other, each of them is at the same time talking inwardly also. Peter here reminds himself that how unhappy he had left when Clarissa refused to marry him. Clarissa also inwardly talks to herself when she looks at Peter who is playing with knife. She says, "what an extraordinary habit that was always playing with a knife." Lucrezia also talks inwardly to herself at various occasions when she is with her husband.

'Mrs. Dalloway' is not formless like other stream of consciousness novels. The novel has been printed in one piece from beginning till end without parts or chapters. The stream of consciousness technique has no adverse effect on the artistic beauty of the novel. Woolf has certainly made a brilliant use of this technique in "Mrs. Dalloway." So for

Virginia Woolf: - "There would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style" and the great task of the novelist should be "to convey this varying this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit" of man.

So, the purpose of the novelist should be the rendering the inner reality or psyche of its characters, the inner reality rather than the outer one. We may call it the stream of consciousness technique and Mrs. Woolf has made brilliant use of this technique.

The structure and construction of the novel is compact and quite satisfactory. The main reason for the tight structure of the novel is that the whole action is concentrated in the short time span of a single day. The novel presents a unity of impression because most of the happenings are closely interconnected with each other. Most of the action of the novel takes place in the minds of the characters. The main concentration of the novelist is on the exploration of the consciousness of various characters. It is interesting to note that the thinking of each character is absolutely different from the thinking of the other characters but certain links and connections have been provided to produce the unity effect.

The whole story of the life of Clarissa is told to us through the contexts she makes and the persons she meets. The movement of the novel is in the mind of Clarissa and a small group of characters. When Clarissa buying flowers at the market she goes back into the memories of her past life. She starts thinking of Peter Walsh who was her lover. As she thinks about Peter, she remembers many things about him like his pocket knife, his eyes and his smile. She meets a number of people when she is passing through the streets of London. She reaches the Bond streets and visits a flower shop, she moves from one jar of flowers to another.

The next part of the action begins with Clarissa's arrival at home; the servant informs her that Mr. Richard will take lunch with lady Burton. Mrs. Dalloway feels bad because she was not invited. She, then, takes out her dress and finds a hole in it. She suddenly hears the sound of the doorbell. As she opens the door, she finds Peter Walsh. There is a long conversation between Clarissa and Peter Walsh. They start remembering their past. Peter Walsh tells her that he is also going to marry Daisy, the wife of a major in India. As Peter goes out Clarissa asks him to remember her party.

The attention of the reader is once again shifted to Septimus Smith and Lucrezia. Septimus is shown talking to Lucrezia and he is quite normal at this time. But suddenly he starts getting fits and hears the voices of the dead. Suddenly some voices are heard down stairs and Dr. Holmes is shown coming to visit Mrs. Smith. Lucrezia tries to stop him but he pushes her aside to make his way upstairs. Mr. Smith has already decided to free himself from the power of Dr. Holmes. He jumps down on the railing with the cry, "I will give it to you."

The next development in the action of the novel starts with the party of Mrs. Dalloway in the evening. Clarissa is busy with the guests and she feels surprised to see Sally Setan at the party who was not invited. Mrs. Bradshaw is also there who tells Clarissa that Septimus has killed himself. Clarissa feels annoyed at the talk of someone dead at her party. Then, she slips away from the party and goes into her little room in order to be alone. Peter feels surprise over Clarissa's absence from the party but Sally says that she must be attending her guests. Peter and Sally start talking to each other. As Peter decides to leave the party, Clarissa comes and Peter finds her purse, and adorable with all her faults and shortcomings. The novel comes to an end with this episode.

Conclusion

It is concluded that all the themes of the novel have been developed by the novelist through the portrayal of the thought process of various characters. The novel, thus, presents a picture of life in all its colours and varieties. Thus, the structure of "Mrs. Dalloway" is quite compact. The novel is successful in providing the unity of impression. The incidents of the novel are successfully connected with each other. The action of the novel takes place in the minds of various characters. But the use of stream of consciousness technique does not have any adverse effect on the structure of the novel.

References

1. Woolf Virginia, "Mrs. Dalloway." Oxford University Press, 2009 Print.
2. Dowling David, "Mrs. Dalloway: Mapping stream of consciousness". Twayne Publishers, 1991 Print.