

## VIRGINIA WOOLF: NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE IN HER NOVELS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCES TO ‘MRS DALLOWAY’

*Suchitra Vashisth*

*Associate Professor, FmeH, MRIIRS, Faridabad, Haryana, India*

**Received: 05 Oct 2019**

**Accepted: 15 Oct 2019**

**Published: 31 Oct 2019**

### **ABSTRACT**

*Virginia Woolf, who made the most exciting use of the stream of consciousness technique, was the most distinguished woman writer of the first half of the 20th century. Before we make a detailed study of her narrative technique, we briefly state it according to B. I. for Evans, the famous literary historian. She usually accepts a plot, which has a simple outline. She next exploits this plot with an impressionism which seizes upon every detail; however, minute, and orders these details not in a rational arrangement, but as they stream through the consciousness of her characters. The novel thus becomes an interior soliloquy (interior monologue) in which diffuseness is avoided by the retention of the central and well-ordered theme. Her acute intelligence makes the perception of every evanescent mood possible, while a diffuse romantic quality adds to the buoyancy of the narration, which accompanies her intelligence and a tenderness without sentimentality aids her in evoking these previously unapprehended human relations. The characters thus captured in the undress of their mental life are such that they share her intelligence and her decencies. We may not be aware of it as we read her novels, but we can see it once Virginia Woolf's work is compared with the work of James Joyce.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Virginia Woolf, Modern, Conventional*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Virginia Woolf is an exquisite experimentalist. She uses the novel as a vehicle for subjective lyrical self-expression, haunted by characters, who float half-embodied between the ground of actuality and the sky of idealism. Virginia Woolf is an exquisite craftsman. She carries her fiction both forward and backward by a cyclic process to the spring of all fiction and poetry. Her novels are a beautiful monument to excessive delicacy of that kind. She creates a fictional world, which is not a reflection of the outer actual world but only a world made in the image of her own exquisite sensibilities, a better world maybe but a body-less world. **All Virginia Woolf's characters are aspects of herself. She is a great writer, but not a great novelist. She has the ability to put her characters into interesting situations but she is incapable of telling a story.**

Modern novelists after Henry James have come to believe that a story is unnecessary. As a result of this belief, which may be due to many reasons, and mostly due to the decline in the inventive power, which is so essential to the art and craft of storytelling, both plot and character suffered indifference at the hand of the novelist. The novel in the accepted sense of the term has exposition of events, leading to climax and then to a denouement, but Virginia Woolf in 'Modern Fiction' refutes this. She observes: "The writer seems constrained, not by his own free will but by

some powerful and unscrupulous tyrant, who has him in thrall, to provide a plot, to provide comedy, tragedy, love interest and an air of probability embalming the whole, so impeccable that if all his figures were to come to life, they would find themselves dressed down to the last button of their coats, in the fashion of the hour, but sometimes...., we suspect a momentary doubt, a stream of rebellion, is life like this? Must novels be like this?

“Look within and life is very far from being like this. Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms, and as they fall, and shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old; the moment of importance came not here, but there; so that if a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, not what he must, if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style, and perhaps not a single button sewn on as the Bond Street tailors would have it. 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”.

In the opinion of Virginia Woolf, it is the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible. Thus, Virginia Woolf has given the rationale of ignoring the conventional technique of taking plot as a chronologically arranged sequence of events. In her opinion, such a convention is artificial.

It is for the reason described above that Virginia Woolf does not care for the chronologically arranged events and for the same reason, there are no climaxes and denouements in her novels. The importance of scenes and events does not depend upon their function in the plot but on the effect on the consciousness of her characters. She does not strive or care for conclusion. Logical interrelation of events has no meaning for her. The sequence of events is governed by their emotional connection with each other. The action takes place backward and forward, in the consciousness of the characters whose life story is related.

Her emphasis in the story is on continuity and fluidity of experience. She only aims at conveying the rhythm of the life experience of her characters. There is nothing concluded in her novels. Virginia Woolf ignores the conventional plot. The events and climaxes are submerged beneath the current of continuous flow of life. The profoundest sorrow of death is also absorbed by the rhythm of life. She is interested in conveying the continuity, the healing power of time, habit and the demands made by life. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the death of Septimus Warren Smith is depicted as a part of the texture of living and not as a climax or conclusion of the story.

Virginia Woolf does not make a conventional depiction of love in her novels. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, also when the novel begins, the love between Clarissa and Peter Walsh is already over. She only conveys the nature of experience of love in the whole rhythm of life. Clarissa is a married woman – Mrs Dalloway. Her love is long over but her different love experiences have become a part of the very texture of her life. With the arrival of Peter Walsh, Mrs Dalloway’s memories flood back and the past of her for him is reconstructed for the reader. Then there is her love for others, Richard, Sally Seton, Elizabeth and also her hatred for Doris Kilman. Thus, Virginia Woolf, the novelist, like a poet, conveys what it feels to be in love and also how love experience can shape the course of one’s life. A single, brief scene is enough to convey effectively the hatred of Clarissa (Mrs Dalloway) for Dorris Kilman.

Virginia Woolf's novels give us an insight into the consciousness of human beings and into their experience of one another. Her novels are dramatic lyrics depicting the souls of her characters through a sequence of scenes and moments. Such scenes and moments hold the interest of the reader and take up the place of the thrilling and sensational events of the conventional novels.

Virginia Woolf used symbolism as a part of her technique to present the inner world of perception and she endeavored to relate it to a deeper philosophic purpose. She finds a symbol, for instance, Lighthouse in *To the Lighthouse*, to depict the "reality", which is never experienced. She assembles a strange pattern of symbolic ideas.

It is admitted that by accepted canons of fiction, Virginia Woolf does not possess the temperament of a novelist, she cannot "tell a story". Her formula for the novel is not humanity in action but in a state of infinite perception. She does not shed the illusion that the rest of mankind is equally cultured and intelligent and equally responsive to the "finer vibrations" (as she herself or those of her group). She is, in fact, a poet who lacks the technical equipment of a verse writer and so she is fated to at least a partial frustration in whatever prose form she adopts. Her work has the form and substances of lyrical poetry.

Virginia Woolf is truly a great writer. "Her medium was the written word in the fullness of evocative magic through pattern and color and harmony. As a writer in this sense, her range was unique. She could touch upon every string of sensibility and at times produce a tension that is painful, as she stretches beyond the octave to which the common reader is ordinarily responsive. To read her is to have one's capacity for sensation enlarged and sharpened beyond measure".

Virginia Woolf was on the threshold of discovery in transferring the drama of life from the outer sphere of action to the mind, where everything has its beginning. The psychological possibilities of this discovery are enormous. Within the pattern of straightforward narration and the variations upon it, there was no vitality, and the dull worthlessness of much fiction cast in the mold is ample proof that genius has rejected it.

## **REFERENCES**

1. [Englishnotesyahiya.blogspot.com/2010/09](http://Englishnotesyahiya.blogspot.com/2010/09)
2. <https://icai.nic.in/caresult/>
3. <https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/w/woolf/>
4. <https://maenglishpdfworld.blogspot.com/2>
5. <https://englishtii.blogspot.com/2014/11>

## **AUTHOR PROFILE**



Dr Suchitra Vashisth is currently working as Assistant professor in Gurugram University, Gurugram. She is a doctorate in American literature. Her international publications are 14 in number.



