

Modern Psychological Novel/ Stream of Consciousness Novel/ 20th Century

Modern Novels

[B.A. (Part-1, Paper-1)]

Mr. Subrata Kumar Das

Head, Dept. of English

VSJ College, Rajnagar

subrata.hcu@gmail.com

‘Psychological Novel’, a vague term was coined by the modernists to denote and describe that kind of fictional art which is mostly concerned with the spiritual, emotional and mental, rather say, psychological lives and whereabouts of the characters, every moment, at any place. It was between 1913 and 1915, the period with the publication of Marcel Proust’s *Remembrance of the Things Past* (1914) and Miss Dorothy Richardson’s first volume of *Pilgrimage* (1913) that such kind of innovative fictional art began to emerge as a magnificent literary art world wide rapidly. Presently Dr. Sigmund Freud appeared with his brilliant thesis on psychoanalysis, which violently knocked the foundations of human psychology-that human has a sub-conscious stage a literature, at any form, is not beyond of such impression. Herein lies the relevance of psychological novels.

William James used the phrase ‘streams of consciousness’ in his epoch-making book *Principles of Psychology* (1890). The metaphor was invoked by him to describe the flux of the mind, its continuity and yet continuous change. The ‘stream of consciousness’, according to M. H. Abrams, “is the name applied specifically to a mode of narration that undertakes to reproduce the full spectrum and continuous flow of a character’s mental process, in which

sense perceptions mingle with conscious and half-conscious thoughts, memories, expectations, feelings, and random associations.” Thus, it is clear that the ‘stream of consciousness’ novel, otherwise named as psychological novel, is immediately related with the actions and flow of the mind of the relevant characters.

The psychological novel opened out new horizons for the art of the novelists. It showed novelists the ways to bring the readers into direct contact with all that was going on inside the human mind. The temperament, moods, anger, fantasies, associative memories, momentary observations and sub-conscious thoughts of the leading persons in the novels assumed a greater significance than before. Thus, James Joyce in *Ulysses* and Virginia Woolf’s in *Mrs. Dalloway* present some sets of momentary experiences which, when revealed, become not only detailed but also distinctive and experimented. In Joyce’s, for instance, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, one of the best psychological novels of the 20th century modern prose-literature, the fragmented experiences of a mere child have been captured so that every moment, like the stream of river flow, can be enjoyed and experimented by the readers.

The object of the ‘stream of consciousness’ is less aesthetic than self-seeking. Through this genre, modern novelists like Proust and Joyce, want to break the bar and chain of ‘Time’ and ‘Space’ in their novels. As David Daiches argues, “The stream of consciousness technique is a means of escape from the tyranny of the time dimension” and it is the place “where past, present and future are fused and inter-mingled with some strange feelings”. However, in such a novel, the flux of consciousness lacks form and coherence and it has no logical sequence but apparently quite chaotic. Thus, the distorted, disorganised series have to be symmetrically arranged by the readers. Virginia Woolf rightly commented:

Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; but a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not 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?

Even if the psychological novel or 'stream of consciousness' novel has undergone some baffling critical attacks like detesting it as 'copious emptiness' and 'terrible fluidity', it can't be disputed that such kind of novels added a new province and glory at the same time to the fictional art of modern literary world.