

## **The Power of Narration and Stream of Consciousness in *The God of Small Things***

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### **ABSTRACT**

Indian writers are always levelled down in the concept of narration which is a myth. If western writers experiment with style consciously, Indians unconsciously attempt this, understanding the content to such an extent that it overflows in narration. This paper tries to study the narrative style of the novel *The God of Small Things* that created a tremor revealing the hidden issues and motives inside the class conscious people. Roy uses 'stream of consciousness', moves away from the ties of grammar, transports the myriad thoughts to the text with an effective focalization. The 'how' of the text appeals the reader and then the message is carried through the medium of language. Thus, this paper explores how stream of consciousness works in this novel.

### **KEYWORDS**

Stream of consciousness; Myriad thoughts; Focalization; Stylistic deviance.

Arundhati Roy is a renowned activist and a writer who won the Booker Prize in 1997 for her first novel *The God of Small Things*. After winning the Booker Prize, she shifted her focus in her writing towards political matters. These encompass various issues such as the Narmada Dam project, India's Nuclear Weapons program, and the questionable activities of the corrupt power company Enron in India. Emerging as a prominent figure in the anti-globalization movement, she vehemently criticises neo-imperialism. Her dedication has led her to exclusively engage in nonfiction and political discourse, resulting in the publication of two additional essay collections alongside her involvement in social causes. Recognized for her impactful work, she received the Sydney Peace Prize in May 2004 for her

activism and advocacy of non-violence. Participating in the World Tribunal on Iraq in June 2005 showcased her commitment to justice and human rights. Despite being honoured with the Sahitya Akademi award in January 2006 for her essay collection "The Algebra of Infinite Justice," she chose to decline the recognition.

The setting of *The God of Small Things* is Ayemenem, and the narrative spans between 1969 and 1993. It revolves around Ammu, who hails from a Syrian Christian family, and her twin children. Ammu's love affair with a Paraya man following her failed marriage, leading to the death of Velutha, the Paraya man, and the tragic demise of her niece due to her children's negligence, drives the tension throughout the story. The eventual reunion of the twins Rahel and Estha in their 31st year, amidst conflicts, dilemmas, and their

mother's passing, signals the story's conclusion. Addressing themes of gender inequality, the hypocrisy of the upper class, and the intimate bond between twins, the narrative portrays love as a defiant force against societal divisions. The novel concludes on a hopeful note with the word "Tomorrow." To convey this message effectively, Roy employs unconventional narrative patterns, which are further explored in the subsequent paragraphs.

### **Thought Process and Stream of Consciousness**

Philosophies and studies argued, comparing speech and writing initially. Later, it became a war between thought and speech of what comes first. Derrida gives a totally deconstructive view that thinking is superior and comes first because before we speak or write, we imitate our thoughts which is a rehearsal for speech and written discourse. Taking this point, it is obvious that while thinking a new fresh idea is born whereas in the case of writing, the thought process is modified a little unconsciously and it cannot be new.

As modernity progressed, people experimented with their writing and narrative forms where they found a new method to express coined as "Stream of Consciousness". It became an attempt to retain the freshness of thought by translating the exact thought. Writers like Faulkner, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf exploited this technique and imprinted themselves in the new pages of canon. Stream of Consciousness can be defined as an irregular flow of ideas, thoughts and feelings that run in the minds of people. Bowling defined it as the "narrative method by which the author attempts to give a direct quotation of the mind –not merely of the language area but of the whole consciousness" (345). This flow is pictured in the form of narration. Though the process is hard to understand, it captivated the readers by its novelty. And

slowly tried to identify such descriptive discourse in relation to their own thinking capacity. As it was prevalent among western writers, there was no trace of such technique in Indian Literature in the point of view of the Occident. But, Indian writers use it unconsciously and unusually in their works and Roy is one of such few writers.

### **Focalization**

The novel touches sensitive issues like class distinction, colonising impacts, political mischief, patriarchal system and forbidden love. The solutions Roy provides in this novel are astonishing, trend setting and lawbreaking. In spite of this activist voice, she never speaks directly but through a third person narrator. She travels in the mind of Rahel from her childhood till the present and we find the variance in the tone unveiling innocence, mischief, fear and maturity at the end. This becomes an important part of the narrative. The narration does not continue with Rahel alone. The omniscient narrator interrupts and changes the perspective then and there. Deepa. K and P. Nagarai have noted the non-sequential narrative style of Arundhati Roy which is evident in the following statement (1). As a narrator recounting the story, she shows us the level of authenticity of the story and resembles evidence or rather a witness of the whole event.

"Now, these years later, Rahel has a memory of waking up one night giggling at Estha's funny dream. She has other memories too that she has no right to have." (Roy 1)

The focalization of the text relies mostly on Rahel but still the status of the text is zero focalization where the narrator's voice supersedes the characters' voice. The reason for choosing Rahel to share the perspective can be because of her "emptiness", "innocence" and resemblance to the main protagonist Ammu. Though it is not said by the narrator, there are implications. It is Rahel who observes

things in a different light and mainly it can refer to the writer herself, her autobiography self.

### **Stylistic deviance**

The format of every single space of the text signifies many things. Reading the text as a reader of entertainment gets annoyed by the way the words are scattered and spaces unused. These are the evidence of perfect translation of thoughts. When we think, we don't actually think words framing sentences, pauses, punctuations and other grammatical systems. We reflect in bits and pieces ranging from silence to expanding noises. And a fiction trying to pour words directly from thoughts ends up with the same procedure defying the rigid form.

*There was  
A girl,  
Tall and  
Thin and Fair.  
Her hair—  
Her hair  
Was the delicate colorriv  
Gin-nnn-ger (left-lef-right)  
There was  
A girl—*

Margaret Kochamma told her to Stoppit.

So she Stoppited. (Roy 67)

These lines enact the scene of Rahel saying them. In addition to this kind, we also identify the sentences that don't adhere to grammatical rules are also void of semantic unity.

The Terror was past. Overcome by the smell of food. Silenced by the humming of cooks. The cheerful chop-chop-chopping of ginger and garlic. The disemboweling of lesser mammals-pigs, goats. The dicing of meat. The scaling of fish. Something lay buried in the ground. Under grass. Under twenty-three years of June rain. A small forgotten thing. Nothing that the world would miss.

A child's plastic wristwatch with the time painted on it Ten to two, it said. A band of children followed Rahel on her walk. (Roy 61)

### **Shift in time**

The writer has employed this type of narration to evoke us to question, to play the guessing game in the quest of the myriad thoughts and their hidden messages and motives of the characters. The to and fro movement of time and the changes that take place are signified in the above passage.

So, these formats add flavour to the action part and attributes to the description part. Descriptions are made by the clean observations in the thought process which recollects the story and takes it back to the past and present and sometimes future in dreams.

The plot of the story progresses in a nonlinear way. The story begins in the end. The end is not in the end actually. This unpredictable story shifts at different times in the same chapter. The shift happens gradually in some places and suddenly in a few places.

Gentle half-moons have gathered under their eyes and they are as old as Ammu was when she died. Thirty-one. Not old. Not young. But a viable die-able age. They were nearly born on a bus, Estha and Rahel. (Roy 3)

The passage begins with the death of Ammu and continues with the birth of the twins thirty years back and only a space divides both the scenes. The significance of shifting time is not just authorial play to make the readers awake and aware but also to show the connectivity of events and time. The above passage explains how time has changed and how the twins have become like their mother fully grown as an adult from childhood. Birth, growth and death are parts of life interconnected to each other. This is one example from

among the many that has interconnected shifts in time.

### Image

As the river image used in the text, the readers are carried in a stream of consciousness. The river is used in many places as a forbidden place where characters Ammu, Velutha and the twins love to see, live and rest. Ammu spend her time on the river banks to stay away from the haunting past and troubling family. She directs herself towards Velutha who sleeps near the river and finds himself peaceful and loved. The children develop a curiosity on the river banks and the history house. They pursue a journey one night to the river side that changes everything. Hence, River becomes a place free from distinctions and changes to a uprising war field.

“You couldn’t see the river from the window anymore” (Roy 15)

....

Though you couldn’t see the river from the house anymore, like a seashell always has a sea-sense, the Ayemenem House still had a river-

sense. A rushing, rolling, fishswimming sense. (15)

“He longed for the river. Because water always helps.” (54)

“They dreamed of their river.” (59)

The storyline picks up the note of the river and so the way the story is narrated journeys across the river not in a linear way but moves in the path of wind. However, the river stays stable. In the same way, the plot flows from one end to the other end of time but still with one constant plot consisting of Ammu and Velutha, their attempt against all the odds.

Thus, the narration is intertwined with a story that can be hardly separated. In the effort of tracing the thought process, Roy has interlinked the plot, image and narration together to achieve the result. To an extent, it has succeeded and it has further kindled the thought process of the readers where lies the power of narration. Hereby, my study proves that the art of narration, especially stream of consciousness, creates a different and effective form to the story contrary to its definition.

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