

The term 'Stream of Consciousness' was used by William James to describe the unconnected and illogical working of human mind. He showed that the thoughts, impressions and feelings that cross the mind at a particular moment are not wholly governed by logic or a fixed principle. This was a statement of a common but invaluable experience into scientific terms.

The creative use of this principle in literature was made first of all by Marcel Proust who wrote an autobiographical novel detailing his thoughts and feelings in a disorganised fashion to convey their naturalness or their accurate transcription. His work was received with acclaim all over Europe. The writers felt that the disturbed condition of the modern man, ravished by war and social changes, could not find a better form of expression.

In England Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson and James Joyce were the first to patronize this form. Virginia Woolf was the theoretician of this school of writers. She explained



the theory clearly and set out to write novels like 'Mrs Dalloway', 'To the Lighthouse', 'The Waves' which expounded it so beautifully. In all these novels she captured the different moments of characters from their everyday life. She did not select situations of dramatic interest. She rather chose ordinary movements and activities to highlight the psychic processes of observation and response. In course of shopping or taking tea or looking at a landscape, the characters relapse into memory, into perceiving relations which are not casual. The mood or state of mind at a particular moment governs the entire description.

There is no sign of the development of plot. There is rather a record of the progress of states of mind in these novels. The definite relations between space and time have been abandoned. Action is also missing in these novels because the individual is not engaged at all in the resolution of a conflict.

This fact distinguishes these



novels from psychological novels written by Samuel Richardson. Only Lawrence Sterne's novel comes closer to these novels in texture and motif.

The novels written by James Joyce are more complex. He was bolder than Virginia Woolf and he adopted this technique to probe the morbidity of the modern man. In his novel 'Ulysses' he recorded the thoughts of his characters in a way as to represent the arbitrary working of their minds, their moments of despair and degradation as well as of apocalyptic apprehension which is known as epiphany. He dispensed with the normal order of syntax and semantic construction to convey the thought pattern of man. As he saw the common language was too rigid and mechanical to register the flux of human perception, the stability which marks perception and assimilation of experiences.

Many writers did not adopt the stream of consciousness technique wholly. By its partial and limited use they achieved better results. For



instance, D. H. Lawrence and E. M. Forster used this technique in their novels which have a normal plot. Yet they allowed their characters moments when they reacted to the phenomena quite freely. This makes the picture of the individual complete as he is in and out of the social setting at one moment.

Two American novelists William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway made great use of this technique to convey a picture of reality which is symbolic in form. Indian writers of fiction also adopted this technique to give expression to new angles of vision. And they chose such diverse characters as an untouchable, an old widow and a lecturer, as is the case in 'The Untouchable', 'Kanthapura' and 'The Serpent and the Rope'.

In our own times this technique is held in esteem but not used so frequently. With the lapse of time its limitations have come to surface. The major weakness of this technique is its emphasis on irrationality. But it is true only partially. Normal human mind is not all that irrational nor are all the impressions and singling out moments of intense perception these novels fail to grasp the totality of life.