

# Psychological Realism in Stream of Consciousness Narratives: A Comparative Analysis of Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Deshpande's *That Long Silence*

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**Abstract:** This research paper explores the elements of psychological realism and social commentary in the use of stream of consciousness narratives in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*. The paper focuses on the portrayal of gender roles, family issues, and the social narratives in both the novels, through a comparative analysis, and investigates how the authors use stream of consciousness to unveil the inner lives of their characters to illuminate broader social issues. Narrations in both the novels play significant part in navigating the characters personal journey within the larger social context. The inner workings of their characters' minds reveal their thoughts, emotions of the current and the past memories forming a resonance in reflections of present experiences. Roy's narratives give more expansive treatment of social and political issues as they delineate huge impact on individual lives whereas Deshpande focuses more on psychological introspection, narrowly deals the social structures.

**Keywords:** psychological realism, stream of consciousness, introspection

## INTRODUCTION

Stream of consciousness has been one of the strongest tools of novel narrations which expose the personal and psychological feelings of the narrating mind. It is capable of presenting the continuous stream of thoughts, imaginations and feelings and provides a deep exploration of the nuances of human psychology. Psychological realism is crucial in use the stream of consciousness technique in two influential works of Indian novelists: Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*. Through a comparative study of the two novels, this paper aims to assess the authors' use of stream of

consciousness to unveil the tapestry of psychological realism in depth and the complicity of their narrators. Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things* is hailed for its psychologically complex and nuanced narrative structure which amalgamates past and present circumstances through the multitudes of different characters. The plot of the novel presents a strong exploration of the existence and interplay of social institutions, political unrest, and personal sufferings on its characters inextricably, particularly the innocent twins Rahel and Estha. Roy's characters in the novel show their inner world in relation to the bigger structure that controls and organise them in their stream of consciousness and "its reading also makes the readers realise the prevalent social evils... violence against women and those belonging to the lower strata of society, sexual abuse etc. All such things are narrated in the third person, through flashbacks and a stream consciousness technique." (Deepa and Nagarai 1) Shashi Deshpande's novel *That Long Silence* is set in the dynamics of family and the traumatic experience in the psychology of Jaya. Jaya goes through events in her life which establishes her thoughts to be in the multitudes of her past memories, which primarily includes her strained relationship with her mother. Deshpande's Protagonist Jaya, in her stream of consciousness unravels her psyche, showing the deep layers of her emotional breakdown in her struggles to balance between her inner world and married life. The narrator's emotional journey is vividly explored in the novel where Deshpande gives a complex view of the psychology of her character's, in relation to her social world. Shyla comments- "Reading her Deshpande's) books is like peeping into the hidden corners of one's own mind" as she "generally has the heroine as the narrator and employs

a kind of stream of consciousness technique.” (53) This paper aims to achieve the nuanced assessment of the use of Stream of Consciousness narrative in both the novels in the exposition of psychological realism and to reflect a complex idea on how narration has an effective role in the understanding of the deep complexities of human psychology and to contribute enrichment in literary experience.

#### THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

Roy tells the entire story from the perspectives of Rahel, one of the central characters of the novel, in a third-person narrative which revolves around Rahel's separated twin sibling Estha, Sophie Mol, and her family solely through Rahel's lens. Rahel is referred to as Roy. Rahel visits her native place after twenty-three years of separation from her brother Estha, and the story begins with her return to Ayemenem. She is now thirty one years old and married, still the return to her place evokes in her the memories of the horrific past events in Ayemenem which she narrates as an omniscient narrator. The novel contains, apart from its broad social discourse, aesthetic and thematic richness as depicted in its use of imagery and lyrical prose. The novel's sudden end in the middle of the event where Ammu and Velutha are having a romantic time secluded from the tensions of the nexus they are surrounded in, pushing off the fear from the moment of intimacy when Velutha “took her face in his hands and drew it towards his...he closed his eyes and smelled her skin...Ammu laughed”. (Roy 340) Kaur points the social discourse that the novel is part of and how Roy has used the stream of consciousness to show events of present and past together as “Rahel is the witness of tragedy in Ayemenem house or she describes the elements of her childhood experiences as well. The woman's condition was not much better during the time when this story was being written.” (32) Roy doesn't fail to provide readers with intimate access to the inner thoughts, creating an immersive reading experience with the exposition of psychological realism in memories of her characters. As the narrative explains how “Estha saw...Baby Kochamma's neckmole licked its chops and throbbed with delicious anticipation. Der-Dhoom, Der-Dhoom. It changed color like a chameleon. Der-green, der-blueblack, dermustardyelllow.” (Roy 141). Roy uses multitudes of language for different purposes which marks different

types of departure from the standard use of language to focus on the nuances of her narratives. Her nonstandard use of capital letters can be witnessed as Rahel “walked to the window and opened it...For a Breath of Fresh Air”. (Roy 37)

Stream of consciousness, its nonlinear and fragmented nature has been greatly used by Roy mirroring the chaotic and non-linear stream of human emotions as evident when Baby Kochamma tells Rahel to keep the letter and the letter softens like a cloth in the weather of Ayemenem –

She had forgotten just how damp the monsoon air in Ayemenem could be. Swollen cupboards creaked. Locked windows burst open. Books got soft and wavy between their covers. Strange insects appeared like ideas in the evenings and burned themselves on Baby Kochamma's dim forty-watt bulbs. In the daytime their crisp, incinerated corpses littered the floor and windowsills, and untilKochu Maria swept them away in her plastic dustpan, the air smelled of Something Burning. (Roy 19)

Rahel gradually observes changes suddenly in her non-linear flow of imaginations of “the grass” that “looked wetgreen and pleased. Happy earthworms frolicked purple in the slush. Green nettles nodded. Trees bent.” (Roy 19) The narrative echoes between past and present, memories and current experiences, mostly with partial or no transitions. Roy establishes that the nonlinear expressions of the characters' thoughts doesn't only reflect the complicated flow of emotions but also highlights how inter their past experiences share a bond with their present emotions and actions –

Short creatures with long shadows, patrolling the Blurry End. 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. The car in which Babà, their father,

was taking Ammu, their mother,  
to hospital in Shillong to have  
them, broke down on the  
winding teaestate road in Assam.  
(Roy 13)

Torres notes the deviation Roy takes with use of Indianised English in her “portrayal of Rahel and Estha’s use of English throughout the novel reveals ...the author’s reappropriation of the imperial English to release it from the ideology and the political loadness of the old colonial discourse.” (196)

#### THAT LONG SILENCE

Shashi Deshpande’s *That Long Silence* narrates the life of an Indian woman who is always bounded to be silent as raising voice or presenting a point of view being a revolt against the established system of womanhood who finally break that silence. The protagonist is Jaya Kulkarni, who in search for her identity and voice undergoes the process of discovery which Deshpande starts from within the domestic sphere. The unconscious mind and its influence on conscious thoughts and actions in the novel, Deshpande Makes Jaya go through her stream of consciousness reflecting the struggle she has between her conscious and unconscious realms. Jaya’s husband has a large part in the events and the thoughts she goes through “as Mohan tells Jaya about the accidental situation with him, he takes Nair’s name by which Jaya starts imagining the whole incidence of Nair’s life and death. It also happens so naturally in her mind that she can see them live. All this is just her unconscious mind’s creativity”. (Kaushik 627) In Deshpande’s *That Long Silence*, stream of consciousness is employed for the exposition of psychological realism unveiling Jaya’s inner world, who narrates her story in an introspective and reflective way. Deshpande reveals the depths in Jaya’s thoughts, emotions, and memories depicting her complex and unstable psychological state. Jaya’s mind’s depth and sensitivity is captured in her narration of her thoughts out which she reveals learning to understand the world in a way to absorb strength and courage to break her long silence. The protagonist Jaya despite being an ardent woman possessing academic achievement and skills remains a failure to gain a status in her husband Mohan’s life. Jaya is succumbed in loneliness, living within the walls of an old shabby flat cut off from the world

outside, by no choice, gets into self-evaluation and overthinking as if she has something to contribute to the relationship. Jaya gets immersed in the memories of her childhood and the reminiscences of her memories, she goes deep into them where she lived and grew with imposed assumptions without questioning but living in a hope. The predicament of Jaya’s childhood has been limited to her getting informed that male supremacy is justified. Jaya’s stream of consciousness elucidates her internal conflicts and her silence that witnesses the gradual development and awakening of suppressed soul which she forms against her inner turmoil and expectations. When she gets married to Mohan, she gets advice from a lot of people including Ramukaka who says, “Remember, Jaya, the happiness of your husband and home depends entirely on you.” (Deshpande 138) In her struggle to understand the Mohan and realise that she wouldn’t receive any solution having a resistant view against the wills of Mohan as they only intensify her trauma. Jaya in her deep thought makes this realisation that, “The ghost most fearful to confront is the ghost of one’s old self (Deshpande 13). Deshpande has created a situation for Jaya in which she needs to be objectively strong in her pursuit of strengthening her identity and producing a stand for her own thoughts as she fails in her prior experiences to view herself without the notions of others given to her, Jaya exclaims, “I have to be honest with myself. It was not he who had relinquished his authority, it was I who no longer conceded any authority to him. But I have to be fair to myself as well.” (Deshpande 9) Mohan belongs to a traditional environment where he has witnesses his mother and sisters highly submissive to his father, he takes all the decisions of financial or important concerns. Mohan always perceives his wife to be sharing attributes of Indian heroines like Sita, Savitri. Engulfed in this structure Jaya is bound to question everything in her mind and as she wonders the reality of marriage – “...As we grew into young women, we realized it was not...love, but marriage that was the destiny waiting for us...It had been our parents who had taken vague desires of ours and translated them into hard facts.” (Deshpande 19) Jaya in her struggles in her mind goes deep to unravel the structure of the system that justifies every subjugation she goes through and connects the memories with the current circumstance she is inevitably a part of. She remembers what she receives as advice from her

mother that her husband is valuable as he is like a “sheltering tree” and “without the tree you’re dangerously unprotected and vulnerable” and to remain in the shelter she has to do anything it takes “even if you have to water it with deceit and lies...” (32) Deshpande depicts the predicament of marriage institution of India through Jaya’s expectations of marriage as she always dreams of love before getting into sexual acts with her husband but it’s sinful and immoral to talk about these. Jaya perceives in her mind and identifies that the relationship she has with her husband is greatly forced and finds herself tired of just a sexual closeness without any emotional comfort, always feels a vacuum of silence after the physical closeness. She observes about that as if “it had been as if the experience was erased each time after it happened, it never existed in words.” (95)

#### COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Shashi Deshpande's characterization is greatly limited in exploration of feminist themes beyond the domestic sphere, resulting in a perceived limited treatment and a lack of engagement with broader societal structures. The stream of consciousness employed by Deshpande, particularly in the psychological exploration of Jaya, pays its focus on the personal thoughts and emotions rather than on the broader societal context that shapes the experiences which greatly reduce Deshpande's works in addressing beyond personal issues related to gender inequality and patriarchy. As Singh discusses Deshpande’s treatment of gender issues, he observes that Deshpande’s “themes and motifs are based on the lives and problems of women only. Her work passionately concentrates on the predicament of women, and men are pushed towards the periphery”. Roy in her novel *The God of Small Things* provides a wide exploration of the inner psychological stream of thoughts of its characters, can be witnesses in its portrayal of the affair between Ammu and Velutha, and the lives of Rahel and Estha. The novel depicts the the characters’ inner worlds and shows their persistence for hope in imaginations and innermost thoughts amidst their experiences of sufferings. Roy uses the stream of consciousness narrative technique offering nuances of the broader social structures that influence the characters’ lives. In her narration Rahel doesn’t only connect with her past but forms a nexus of solidarity of broader political and social causes that

affect their existences. Velutha stands for social hierarchy and power dynamics, beyond the individual, that determines the intricate subordination of positions in social structures which goes deep into the power structure transcending gender-specific issues.

Jaya seems to be an individual trying to claim her power in a personal fight with her husband, overlooks the societal actions and interactions and their implications and narrowly speaks for the social dynamics. In this space Jaya explores more nuances of personal experiences, her thoughts being more occupied in self-analysis, finds a balance in its own way. Rahe and Estha being born to Ammu’s marriage beyond the community faces extreme negligence and remain unwelcomed along with their mother. Ayemenem prohibits sexual instincts, considers it a taboo, excludes from the part of normal human life despite almost everyone is tortured having repressed instincts as Baby Kochamma lives her life suppressing her desires for father Mulligan. Sibi observes that most intrinsic desires which don’t get expressions tend to find some way, Baby Kochamma repressed of her desires finds it apt to destroy the life of Ammu and sees it as “her greatest fulfilment when both were annihilated from the face of the earth. Her actions were given by nothing but jealousy.” Roy presents the entire establishment of “all the patriarchal forces along with their women use all the dubious ways to destroy such a sexual relationship to teach a lesson to the posterity of both the powerful and the powerless.” (Sibi) Jaya in *That Long Silence* meets Kamat, her neighbour who coaxes her to think beyond just the typically destined perspective but to look in herself and talk her heart out which makes her realise of her expressions and she finally breaks her ‘long silence’. Somya TG points on her relationship with Mohan that “he inspires and cheers her to get serious, to be real and true to herself. This made her regain her self-confidence which had been lost. He further makes her to speak frankly about sex. What she could not speak with Mohan...” Jaya’s fight isn’t limited to the social forces but also the silence she has been living with, vows to respect her individual expression and write down everything about her silence of seventeen years. Jaya expresses – “With this man I had not been a woman. I had been just myself—Jaya. There had been ease in our relationship, I had never known in any other. There had been nothing I could not say to him.” (Deshpande 153)

Roy's character's suffer at the hands of inevitable tyranny whereas Jaya Deshpande observers "that it is not only the male-centric values which can be blamed for the women's condition in the Indian culture. The responsibility also lies on the victim to refuse to speak loudly and to accomplish the objective." (Kulkarni 2) Ammu stands as a tragic figure who fights her family, motherhood, and the whole social structure, trapped not just with the social struggles but also with herself dies very young dealing with severe sufferings as she loses everything, her marriage, parents, her love for her children, as she violates social laws to attain freedom. Ammu breaks societal laws to have her own expression of repressed desires, recognises the inextricable fate of women society, endures as a voiceless individual and finds a hope with Velutha, recognises that the social hierarchy is identically cruel to women and the untouchables; Roy brings both of them together as victims of social injustice and meets death. Roy makes use of nonstandard fragmented sentences in rahel's narration, making an aesthetic choice, deviates from typical prose in its pauses creating a resonance with the stream of thought as Rahel thinks not typically in either of the typical language – prose or verse, "but in a series of connected ideas". (Torres 198) Jaya, being educated and aware of her individual expression, violates against the traditional silence women keep and strongly advocates for her rights recognising her role in her victimisation. In her stream of consciousness Jaya speaks her determination to confront and challenge the subjugating attitude of families for a woman. In a marriage it's important that a woman "should first respect herself as a human being...adjustment in marriage is but natural but a woman should not be servile". (Bopaiah 8)

#### CONCLUSION

The two novels use Stream of Consciousness to expose the social reality, both have entirely different treatment of gender and family issues as Jaya stands for her individual voice but Ammu is sacrificed just by claiming her desires. Both engage in unconventional relationships - Ammu gets Velutha and Jaya gets Kamat, but the case of Ammu has political and social implications which quite superfluously influence Jaya's life. Jaya ultimately claims her voice, learns to

answer and express her individuality because she has just Mohan to fight with but Ammu loses as she has the world beyond and individual's capacity to stand and fight against.

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