



Bhupendra Narayan Bhattacharya's Marudyan and the 'Stream of Consciousness Style

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ABSTRACT

Marudyan aru Ananya, a much-discussed novel by Bhupendra Narayan Bhattacharyya, is recognized as a notable example of modernist Assamese literature. This novel successfully employs the stream-of-consciousness technique. It delves into the intricacies of the human mind, focusing on the "study of the environment of the mind," which forms the core of this genre. Through its protagonist, Shiladitya, the novel explores the introspective journey of an individual grappling with existential questions about life, the world, and society. It lacks a conventional storyline or narrative structure, defying the traditional norms of a novel. Despite this, it vividly portrays the modern globalized society's sense of alienation, social detachment, and the isolation of the individual.

The character of Shiladitya, driven by his whimsical nature, gradually loses control over his domestic life. Although he never entirely loses self-restraint, he succumbs to failure, despair, and loneliness. His inner world is in constant turmoil, marked by incongruous thoughts and emotions. Gradually, he becomes estranged from everyone around him, yet this detachment fails to bring him contentment. He is repeatedly drawn back to the past, which dominates his consciousness, creating a sense of confusion and chaos in his mind. This very chaos reflects both Shiladitya's mental state and the central message of the novel. In essence, novels constructed in the stream-of-consciousness style present the psychological world of characters in a distinctive manner, capturing the endless flow of human consciousness—an essential feature of modernist literature. Marudyan strives to unravel this truth. This discussion aims to explore various aspects of Bhupendra Narayan Bhattacharyya's Marudyan while also shedding light on the concept of the stream-of-consciousness technique.

Keywords: Stream of consciousness, isolation, detachment, lack of restraint, chaos, restlessness, failure, despair, incapability.

Methodology

To analyze Bhupendra Narayan Bhattacharya's Marudyan in the context of the 'stream of consciousness' narrative style, the following methodology will be employed:

This study adopts a qualitative research design, focusing on textual analysis and literary criticism. The research aims to explore the narrative techniques used in Marudyan and examine their alignment with the stream-of-consciousness style.

To present this paper data collection is being done in two ways. The primary source will be Bhupendra Narayan Bhattacharya's Marudyan. The text will be closely read to identify instances of stream-of-consciousness narration, including internal monologues, fragmented thoughts, and subjective time perception.

Secondary source will be Literary criticism and essays on Bhattacharya's works, Scholarly articles and books discussing the stream-of-consciousness style, Assamese literary journals like Prantik, Sadin, and others that have featured critiques of Marudyan.

Objectives:

- 1.To determine the role of Bhupendra Narayan Bhattacharyya's novel Marudyan in the development of modern Assamese novels.
- 2.To highlight the use of the stream-of-consciousness technique in the novel.
- 3.To analyze the psychological aspects expressed through the novel.
- 4.To examine the novelist's social responsibility as reflected in the novel.
- 5.To ascertain Bhupendra Narayan Bhattacharyya's place in Assamese literature, particularly in the realm of novels.

Significance:

- 1.There has not been extensive discussion on the artistic techniques and style of Bhupendra Narayan Bhattacharyya's novel Marudyan, which underscores the importance of this study.
- 2.The use of the stream-of-consciousness technique in Marudyan is quite rare in Assamese novels, necessitating further exploration of this aspect.
- 3.The psychological dimensions presented in Marudyan have not yet been thoroughly analyzed.
- 4.The novel's portrayal of new perspectives on life, the world, and society remains highly relevant to contemporary society, making this discussion significant.

Literature review:

In the 1920s, James Joyce pioneered the stream-of-consciousness technique in novel writing. Following him, Virginia Woolf became one of the most prominent proponents of this narrative style. With the publication of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), this technique began to gain momentum in modern novel writing. In Assamese literature, this narrative style was first observed in Dr. Prafulla Dutta Goswami's renowned novel *Kechapatari Kapani*. Additionally, the influence of this technique can also be seen in Chandraprasad Saikia's *Edin* and Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya's *Rajpathe Ringiai*.

Introduction

Bupendra Narayan Bhattacharya's *Marudyan* has come to occupy a special place in the history of Assamese literature. Although very small in size, this contemporary novel's extremely sophisticated 'stream of consciousness' style of narrative has put it on a high pedestal. In *Upanyash and Axomiya Upanyash*, Govinda Prasad Sharma has spoken thus about *Marudyan*: "Although very small in size, Bhupendra Narayan Bhattacharya's 'Marudyan' deserves a special place in Assamese literature. This is because, although in Assamese literature a number of famous and accomplished writers have been attempting to write in the contemporary 'Stream of Consciousness' style, it is only in the new and young contemporary writer, Bhupendra Narayan Bhattacharya's novella that we see the true essence of this form of narrative."¹

Before discussing 'Marudyan' as an example of the 'stream of consciousness' style of writing, let us find out what exactly is the 'stream of consciousness' style and whether it has been correctly used on the novella. It is thus important to discuss regarding this. In this analysis of ours, after concluding our thoughts on these two directions, it is being sought to present a summary of 'Marudyan' as a contemporary novel. The phrase 'stream of consciousness' means the flow of consciousness. Throughout our life till death, a current of thoughts and consciousness influences us. This consciousness never ends. That which is once awakened ceaselessly continues to flow. We can talk of two primary views regarding stream of consciousness – the multifaceted characteristics of consciousness and the silent flow of time and the accordingly of consciousness also. In other words, many thoughts may come to a person's mind at the same time, of which one may not have any connection with the other. In other words, a constant flow. While thinking of one thing, without completing the thought, another one thing comes to mind. While thinking of someone, it is possible to think of someone else too. There is no rest, no end to consciousness. On the other hand, it is disorganised too where past, present and future becomes one. One thing is sure – the mind also does not remain fixed place. It is restless, oscillating and easily distracted – because of which different experiences can mark it differently and swing it in an unimaginable manner. ²

Come to think of it, human life itself is based on an amazing synchronization. It does not have any fixed or formed from a definite mould. Life's experiences envelop the mind and covering the mind life goes on. Virginia Woolfe has spoken thus about life's consciousness –

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.³

It is with this view and theory of life that Virginia Woolf wrote her novels with stream of consciousness narrative. It is important to state here that even before her, French writer, Michael Proust's monumental novel *À la recherche du temps perdu* was published in seven parts from 1913 to 1927. Apart from this, James Joyce too had used the stream of consciousness style in the early twentieth century. However, even though published later, Virginia Woolf was the strongest spokesperson for this style of writing. After James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), this narrative came into vogue into contemporary novels.

Result and discussion:

Even though stream of consciousness narrative influenced literature in most countries, it's influence was not felt in Assamese literature in a substantial manner. Only in Chandra Prasad Saikia's *Edin* and Biren Kumar Bhattacharya's *Raj Pothe Ringiyai* there can be seen minor influences of this style of narrative according to many critics. In this regard, literary critic Mahendra Bora has said thus –

Many critics take the name of two novels in this context – *Chandra Prasad Saikia's Edin and Biren Kumar Bhattacharya's Raj Pothe Ringiyai*. However, there is only one glimpse of stream of consciousness in these two novels; In both the novels, more than news from within the mind, there is news from within the streets.⁴

Regarding Stream of Consciousness narrative, it is extremely important to point out one thing –unlike the usual novels, there is absolutely no fixed story, characters, dialogue or plot. There is no story here that can be measured precisely by the hands of the clock, nor can there been seen a picture in which one character speaks up against the other. Instead of dialogue, we have an unending monologue. It is through this continuous conversation with oneself that the plot moves ahead. Even though there isn't a story to be found with a definite plot, there is an eternal present or present circumstances that can seen without anything hidden or any aim. Actually, there is no conflict to be seen too in the course of events. The story is nothing more than the entwined conscious and unconscious experiences of man.

In this way, in these novels, the primary emphasis is on the mental directions of a person. Discussion is done after seriously examining the depth of the character's mind and the internal world. It is important that there has been various scientific experiments on the different states of the human mind since early years. Famous psychologist, Sigmund Freud has also done serious research on the various levels of the human mind, and also described the philosophical methods. In this Iceberg Theory, Freud days: "The human mind can be divided into three parts. Conscious mind, Sub-conscious mind and Unconscious mind." He compared the human mind to an iceberg and said that the visible part that is seen above the water is our conscious mind, the part below this is the sub-conscious mind and the largest bit, hidden deep below the ocean that we cannot see at all is our unconscious mind. He compares the unconscious mind to a library where stacks of forgotten memories are stored. If wished, any book from this library can be read. According to time and situation, if the sub-conscious mind wants it can come out. Our sub-conscious mind has more influence on us than our conscious mind. According to him, the conscious mind is not the entirety of the human mind. The dimensions of the human mind are very vast and amazing.

Therefore it is very important to keep the above facts in mind while discussing the stream of consciousness form of writing.

Even though there is no story in Marudyan, the basic story that exists is of a different kind –

The hero of the novel, Shiladitya, is a person with a thoughtful bent of mind. He is a resident of Kolkata. At one time he was the area manager in a company but after the company shut down for some reason, he had nothing to do with his time. He earned a little money by writing poems intermittently for some magazines and painting a few pictures. However, this money was not enough to run his home and family. As for property, he just had a small, old ancestral house. He was not just poor but also lacked a sense of responsibility and remained lost in his thoughts. For this reasons, his wife who was also his girlfriend at one time, Pranamika also left him to live with another man, Hemanta. Even this he accepted easily and said thus: "Finally I myself took the decision and said goodbye. As I have no right to curtail the freedom of anyone, I am joyfully accepting the reality".⁵

Having a deep belief in his own freedom, the hero of the novel did not want to impinge on the freedom of another, and respected wholeheartedly in individual personalities. However, loneliness too didn't stop from influencing him. Gradually losing control over his family life, the protagonist faces wastefulness, loneliness, despair and chaos but he does not lose his sanity. Within the kingdom of his mind, there ran continuously ran a number of thoughts which had no connection to each other. In reality the human mind is like this, there can't be absolute control or be controlled. Within his mind, many thoughts from the past, future and present play with each other. To his life had come at various times many women. Of these, the primary position was of his one-time lover and now wife, Pronamika. However, as a husband he was not able to fulfil his obligations towards his wife. Frustrated, she finally left him for another man. Shiladitya's mother too had left his father in exactly similar circumstances for another man. Pronamika is now the mother of that person's son.

"Her son too has become quite big. He is now four years old, goes to school. Pronamika goes to leave at school daily".⁶

Pronamika and his only child had died at the age of three. Shilditya, however, doesn't know of the death of his son till now. According to him –

"He hasn't died since he is alive between the two of us. As per this theory, he will never die".⁷

As someone who cannot remain steadfast in anything, Shiladitya acknowledges the fact that besides her, he has had emotional attachments with many other women. His childhood friend and colleague, Anjali Banerjee. Erstwhile friend, lover and now someone who understands his literary talent, Mekhla who has been a reader

and source of his literary works. He had also been attracted towards a lady he met in Albert Hall. That woman, who was a journalist had married five years earlier and unfortunately had also lost her child three years ago.

He also mentions a student of Shanti Niketan's music school, Nibedita. Apparently, even though he was eager for intimacy with her at one time, he was unsuccessful in his efforts. However, having seen this Nibedita in the arms of Siddharth Basu today, suicidal thoughts engulfed him from within –

"Ever since I saw Basu embracing Nibeta today, I have been feeling suicidal from within. However, after seeing the white blossoms of the parijat, these views have changed".⁸

The girl wearing a flimsy gown at the party has also kindled some feelings in his mind.

"Looking at the girl in the flimsy transparent gown, I felt as if, adrift in the mad wave of youth, she was waiting in front of the gate just to welcome the sky, the wind, the sun and silence".⁹

He has also acknowledged that thoughts about her kept returning to his mind. However, despite all this, he kept remembering Pronamika. It was as if he saw the form of Pronalika on every young woman's face. This past he could not forget, even if he wanted to.

"The more I tried to forget Pronamika, the more I remembered her. Perhaps, this past will never be erased".¹⁰

Reminiscing over these pieces of memory, he lived out the days of his disorganised life. His entire day passes through some extraordinary circumstances. Into his mind, various characters enter and leave. There is a continuous change. If at this moment, in his consciousness appear the past and various memories and experiences, the next moment the net of isolation and chaos of the present engulfs him. In other words, this mix of the past and present in the vast dimensions of the consciousness squashes the hero. If he becomes restless at times, at other times he becomes calm, as if nothing has happened. Many a time, the hero seems ready to cross the limits of normal behaviour and moves towards the realm of abnormality. For example, he puts his watch inside his shoe, keeps his fountain pen inside the jar of turmeric, and also finds the book he was reading in the hollow of a tree. The manner in which his behavioural abnormalities affected the novel's direction has been described by literary critic, Gobinda Prasad Sharma as –

From this angle, even though the hero of the book is someone lost in his thoughts, he need not have been a man with abnormal characteristics or there wasn't any need for the writer to have portrayed him as such. However, instead of bringing forth the subject matter of the novel through the small nuances of the workings of an ordinary mind and giving it an universal appeal, the hero..... This affected the publicity and depth of the subject matter. ¹¹

Till the end of the novel, he has not been able to establish a congenial relationship with anyone and has even mentioned that he felt that even his best friend wished to cut off relationship with him. Even though he wants to meet Siddharth Basu to discuss his final volume of poems and have a heart-to-heart conversation regarding the soul of his poems, he could not meet him.

"While coming, I thought – when I meet Basu, there will be in front of us two cups of coffee, two cigarettes and a matchbox. After that I will talk to him about the soul of my poems from my heart. Cheeh! What I imagined and what happened!".¹²

Later he too loses the mentality of greeting such people himself, and he realises this himself in the case of Anjali Banerjee.

Shiladitya appears to have become the leader of people who have become disconnected from society. It is perhaps to portray the disorganised nature and isolation of the character that the author used the stream of consciousness form of narration. As a unique characteristic of contemporary literature, this novel has accepted the limitlessness of the stream of the human intellect. Even though the novel progresses through the experiences and feelings of the protagonist, no solution to his problems is seen even at the end of the story. There is also no hope of there even being any solution to the problems. His life simply goes on, just as our lives go on. Just as, despite being enveloped in failures and incapability, we have to carry on in this world, under no circumstances it stops. For, to live means to go on. It is as if exactly such a thought has been sought to be expressed through the novel. Come to think of it, a very simple view is being sought to be established through the story. Even the protagonist has not been made to face the problems of life face-to-face with seriousness. If we look at it this way, we can say that there has been a correct use of the stream of consciousness style of narrative. As the perfect medium for expressing the subject matter, the novel itself has been used as a tool. We will understand this if we look at some dialogues or phrases used in the novel –

Even though separate and many in number, it is as if through the thoughts of the present there comes a sense of order. A feeling such as this.¹³

Since a few days, I have noticed it is as if there is disorder in everything. Chaos and restlessness. Why so much restlessness? Thinking of this, I myself get amazed at times. ¹⁴

But the surprisingly thing is that after drowning in loneliness, I have come up with more inspiration. The fact that loneliness can inspire I realised for the first time today and consoled my mind with this thought. I am alone, have come alone and will leave alone.¹⁵

Therefore, even though selecting and using it as an useful tool, the writer has put it forward as a special novel in Assamese literature, because fo the simplicity of the subject matter, it's extraordinariness was overlooked. 16

On the other hand, if the setting of the novel had not been Kolkata and the characters had not been Bengali, and if it had instead been set in his own city or state, then it would have been stronger. Only a setting that connects to one's soul or that of the writer can leave a mark on the mind of the reader. Thus it has to be acknowledged that due to the inappropriate setting of the story as well as selection of characters, the novel has to some extent decreased its importance.

In this novel that has no kind of division in the form of chapters, the narration is entirely in the first person. Skilled imagery, sensory details and descriptive writing has made the novel quite emotional. The language of the novel too has helped to make it contemporary. Just as in modern poetry, the following are seen here – realistic imagery, use of colour, sensory imagery, animal and nature imagery. All of these contribute to giving the novel a poetic quality. Here is an example of the poetic imagistic language used in the novel –

So many feelings in my mind, as if it's a weaver bird's nest. Just like the nest woven with tiny, tiny myriad twigs, hangs on tall areca palms, the canvas of my mind too seems to be filled with myriad emotions from the past and present. Just as the nest swings in emptiness, oscillating, similarly my mind too was restless.

Two examples of imagery –

I know it all too well, the leaves of trees of this city are always green, we used to take morning walks along Rabindra Sarani through the fog – when the rays of the winter sun used to paint the windows orange, then the pair of salika birds (the common myna) who lived near the window overlooking the study would twitter and rustle and I would become thoughtful. 18

...the curtains of the doors and windows of the house played with the breeze like waves, making a 'phik, phik' sound. A black crow on the nearby mango tree made frightful, abnormal cries.In front, peeping out from between the green leaves, the blood-burning red hot chillies were calling out to me to eat them. 19

Even though the protagonist has been established as having an abnormal mindset, many a times the presence of a deep, serious mind is also seen in such characters. Sometimes they show such a philosophical understanding towards life as if no one has any problems, everyone is calm and in order. At most times, their intellect is awake. The conscious and active state of intellect is also seen a number of times in Marudyan's hero, Shiladitya. In the beginning of the story, we get a glimpse of such a thought –

There is no comparison between the thoughts of the past with the thoughts and consciousness of the present, or I have tried to keep it so. To keep myself away from such events, I have started thinking this way. 20

In stabling the character of Shiladitya in his novel, Bhupendra Narayan Bhattacharyya focuses on the internal workings of his mind rather than his external world. Just as the conscious mind of man bears social thoughts, similarly Shiladitya tries to keep it together with thoughts about his wife, mother and friends. On the other hand, the unconscious or subconscious mind tries to break away from the social rules and feelings piece by piece and explore the world of dreams, which also happens with Shiladitya. But as a result of the imbalance caused between the social conditions and the workings of his unconscious mind, chaos entered Shiladitya's world, which is not abnormal.

Another important aspect of the novel was – through the protagonist, a view regarding an unyielding attitude and continuity towards life has been expressed. Life has failures, sorrows and disappointments but it still goes on. Just like a flowing river, life flows on and it needs to flow on till eternity. This is life. On the other hand, through him it has also been expressed that to live is not a very big deal. No matter how much disappointment is there or unhappiness is there, both are cheap.

Secondly, another important theory put forward through the novel is – oneness with nature. It is only through this oneness with nature that Shiladitya gets motivated to live. Even the memory of the nest of the spotted dove seen during his childhood fills him with so much happiness that it is because of this he decides to return home and comes back one step at a time.

In my childhood, a pair of spotted doves made a nest there. Is the nest still there today? If still there, do they still coo? Thinking of this, I brought a sense of warm joy into my mind. After this, the thought came to my mind that it would be best to return home, at least for necessity. 21

Apart from this, many more examples are seen in the novel of how, because of nature, the protagonist does not get depressed or disheartened. The fact that it is because of the presence of the romantic, artistic mind in the hero that he is able to remain immersed in nature and keep his soul alive is something that can be felt in each instance of the novel. Perhaps because of some shortcomings during the publication of the novel, in many places some spelling errors are seen. Apart from this, it can be said that the novel has achieved success. Over all, as a successful embodiment of contemporary writing and correct use of the stream of consciousness narrative, this novel has earned a prominent place for itself in the world of Assamese literature. In present times, this is a true contemporary novel.

Conclusion:

In the realm of Assamese novel literature, *Marudyan* can truly claim novelty, as it stands as a successful modernist novel. Breaking completely away from the traditional mold of Assamese novels, it skillfully analyzes the modern human psyche while using that very psychology as a narrative style. Without hesitation, one can say that this is a commendable effort.

By making the character *Shiladitya* a symbolic representation, the novel highlights the fragmented, disconnected, and chaotic nature of contemporary human thoughts and consciousness. The primary objective of the novel is to depict the true essence of both the individual and society in the present era. Alongside this, the novelist beautifully portrays the crisis of personal existence and the depths of sorrow and suffering. In doing so, the novelist successfully employs the stream-of-consciousness technique, achieving a remarkable artistic expression.

At the end of this discussion, we can draw a few conclusions:

1. *Marudyan* does not follow a conventional storyline.
2. It vividly portrays the disordered life of a self-absorbed and sensitive protagonist.
3. The protagonist's chaotic thought process and abnormal mentality create crises in his domestic life, pushing him further into a state of unrest.
4. The novel is notable for its use of suggestive and pictorial language.
5. The intense stream-of-consciousness narration makes the novel unique.
6. Through the protagonist's connection with nature, the novel conveys a message of perseverance and the will to live.
7. The dynamic essence of life is beautifully expressed through the novel.
8. The novel conveys the idea that *"merely existing is not significant; hope and despair are both trivial, yet life is an endlessly flowing river."*
9. It also suggests that reminiscing about the past or cherishing old memories can bring pure joy and peace to the human mind.

Footnote:

1. Gobinda Prasad Sharma, 'Uponyas Aru Asomiya Uponyas', page no, 161
2. Gobinda Prasad Sharma, 'Uponyas Aru Asomiya Uponyas', page no, 151
3. Gobinda Prasad Sharma, 'Uponyas Aru Asomiya Uponyas', page no, 150
4. Mohendra Bora, 'Sahitya Upokramonika', page no, 157
5. Bhupendra Narayana Bhattasarya, 'Marudyan', page no, 33
6. Bhupendra Narayana Bhattasarya, 'Marudyan', page no, 18
7. Bhupendra Narayana Bhattasarya, 'Marudyan', page no, 22
8. Bhupendra Narayana Bhattasarya, 'Marudyan', page no, 49
9. Bhupendra Narayana Bhattasarya, 'Marudyan', page no, 41
10. Bhupendra Narayana Bhattasarya, 'Marudyan', page no, 44
11. Gobinda Prasad Sharma, 'Uponyas Aru Asomiya Uponyas', page no, 165
12. Bhupendra Narayana Bhattasarya, 'Marudyan', page no, 9
13. Bhupendra Narayana Bhattasarya, 'Marudyan', page no, 8
14. Bhupendra Narayana Bhattasarya, 'Marudyan', page no, 2
15. Bhupendra Narayana Bhattasarya, 'Marudyan', page no, 29
16. Bhupendra Narayana Bhattasarya, 'Marudyan', page no, 1
17. Bhupendra Narayana Bhattasarya, 'Marudyan', page no, 51
18. Bhupendra Narayana Bhattasarya, 'Marudyan', page no, 2
19. Bhupendra Narayana Bhattasarya, 'Marudyan', page no, 29
20. Bhupendra Narayana Bhattasarya, 'Marudyan', page no, 1
21. Bhupendra Narayana Bhattasarya, 'Marudyan', page no, 51

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