

Narrative Slowness as Resistance: Anti-Capitalist Temporalities in the Consciousness of Vinod Kumar Shukla

Siddharth Shandilya

Researcher, RRS College, Mokama, Patliputra University, India

Abstract. *In modern capitalistic cultures, time has been organized more and more according to speed, efficiency and productivity, tending to symbolize human experience in terms of output. In this sense, literature becomes an important critical space in which alternative temporalities are possible to imagine and experience. This paper will discuss the theme of narrative slowness in the writings of Vinod Kumar Shukla as subtle but effective resistance to capitalist time construction. The simplicity, pauses, repetition and focus on the familiar in the writing of Shukla disrupts the logic of acceleration that is dominant and brings the reader into a reflective and contemplative state of reading.*

Based on theoretical ideas of authors like E.P Thompson, Hartmut Rosa and Henri Bergson, this paper suggests that the narrative style Shukla uses creates an anti-capitalist temporality that questions the time discipline of clock and forces of productivity. The texts by Shukla are filled with the sense of stillness, interiority, and daily life, unlike usual mainstream narratives, which are focused on action, progress, and resolution. This conscious slackening of narrative time makes reconfigures of consciousness in which value ceases to be linked to speed or productivity but experience, perception, and existence.

*The paper also examines how the characters in the article by Shukla are mostly not tied to usual aspirations but rather have a time zone that cannot be commodified. Their lives are not written in terms of speed but in terms of slight changes in consciousness and feeling, what according to Bergson can be defined as *duree* the quality life experience of time. By thus doing so, Shukla not only criticizes alienating influence of capitalist temporality but also proposes the alternative idea of life that would rely on slowness, sensitivity and ethical contemplation.*

Finally, this paper establishes narrative slowness as an aesthetic technique and a political act. It underlines the possibilities of literature to oppose the atheists of time and imagine more humane modes of living time. Slowness, being prefigured in the works by Shukla, creates a field of reexamination of the correlation between time, consciousness and resistance in the modern world.

Key words: *Narrative Slowness; Anti-Capitalist Temporality; Vinod Kumar Shukla; Time Consciousness; Resistance; Literary Time.*

1. Introduction

Time is one of the most controlled and commercialized human aspects in the modern world. In the capitalist modernity, time can no longer be experienced as a subjective and flexible flow but rather a quantifiable resource related to productivity, efficiency and value. The life is organized through deadlines, schedules, and performance goals causing a constant stress to perform faster. This change has not only remodelled work practices but also the consciousness of individuals, whereby value is usually defined by speed and productivity. Capitalism, as Karl Marx (1867/1976) believes, is a form

of human activity that is dehumanized, with time being transformed into a commodity, which, as Marx puts it, can be purchased, sold, and abused.

To counter such preeminence of accelerated time, literature offers a significant location of envisioning alternative experiences of time. Among these options, the concept of narrative slowness is a literary form that opposes the hurly-burly of contemporary life by highlighting the concept of stillness, reflection, and the focus on mundane things. The slow stories are not driven to dramatic events and quick conclusions but rather ask the reader to slow down and concentrate on the feel of the everyday life. Such narration questions what Byung-Chul Han (2015) has it as a burnout society the one in which people are caught in the cycle of overworking, self-exploitation, and constant movement.

The examples of literature written by Vinod Kumar Shukla provide an interesting perspective on the application of narrative slowness. The simplicity, subtlety and concentrating on the daily lives of his characters characterize his writing. Instead of providing the large-scale accounts of success or struggle, Shukla prefigures minor life events, silent observations, and reflections. His stories evolve slowly, and there is a tendency to confuse the real and the imaginary with the recollection and the imagination. This is a slowing of narrative time that interferes with hegemonic temporality of capitalists who are obsessed with speed, efficiency, and quantifiable gains.

Further, the narratives by Shukla represent a different concept of time that makes sense according to the notion of messianic time that Walter Benjamin (1968) introduces, where moments are not merely a part of something that proceeds in a certain direction but can be reflected upon and changed. His works experience time as experienced, meaningless instead of time and mechanical. His characters tend to rebel against the demands of ambition and competition and reflect a lifestyle where presence is more important than productivity. In this way, Shukla forms a kind of consciousness that opposes the instrumental concept of time in the capitalistic society.

This paper will analyze the role of narrative slowness in the works of Vinod Kumar Shukla as a resistance to capitalistic time. It states that his style of narration is not just a critique of the culture of speed, but also a form of alternative, more humane time experience, in which reflection, sensitivity, and ethical interaction with the world are the focus.

2. Theoretical Framework

Time as a phenomenon in capitalist modernity is strongly organized by the apparatus of production, effectiveness and domination. Time is turned into an economic resource under capitalism - time that is measured, time that is regulated, time that is commodified. Karl Marx reviews this process critically by associating the value with socially necessary labour time and contends that human activity is diminished to exchangeable units in the industrial production (Marx, 1867/1990). Not only is this restructuring of work, but it is also a restructuring of everyday life, with the result that it becomes what we might call a regime of accelerated, instrumental time, that is more focused on output than lived experience.

Continuing on this criticism, Hartmut Rosa proposes an idea of social acceleration, which states that social societies are motivated by the acceleration of the pace of technological, social, and cultural advancements (Rosa, 2013). This speed gives some form of time scarcity in that people are always on a time crunch regardless of the presence of technologies that are supposed to conserve time. This kind of state enhances alienation and isolates a person to get in touch with the world.

Whereas in the literary study, time works otherwise. Narrative time does not follow the clock-time but it is determined by the consciousness, memory and perception. According to Paul Ricoeur, narrative temporalizes time because it incorporates subjective experience along with time series, which enables literature to render the sense of time as experienced, but not as quantified (Ricoeur, 1984). It is through this flexibility that literary texts can transgress linear temporality and develop alternative temporalities that work against the structures of the dominant.

The disruptions of time further explain the meaning of such disruptions in time as captured in theories of resistance. Gilles Deleuze understands resistance as invention of alternative ways of life that are

not subject to the prevailing forms of control (Deleuze, 1995). In effect, Michel Foucault points out that resistance exists within relations of power and it is usually, through minor practices, that disrupt normative regimes (Foucault, 1977). When extended to the narrative, the theories imply that the act of modifying musical forms through manipulating the time flow, like the slowing down of the narrative, can serve as a means to resist capitalist discipline.

The idea of anti-capitalist temporality is born at the point of these notions. It is the method of experience and presentation of time that opposes commodification and emphasizes lived, affective, and relational aspects. Literarily, this temporality can be expressed in discontinuous narration, stops and an emphasis on the life of everyday people. Anti-capitalist temporality poses a challenge to the linear, goal-oriented logic of capitalist time, allowing space to reflect, imagine and discover alternative forms of being.

Narrative slowness can, therefore, be perceived as not just a stylistic trait, but as a form of critical intervention. It does not submit to the accelerated, commodified time, but reposes temporality as a realm of human experience, opposition, and significance.

3. Literature Review

Vinod Kumar Shukla has always been a focus of scholarly interest because of his unusual style of narration, which was characterized by simplicity, inwardness, and acute sensitivity to ordinary everyday life. The writing of Shukla has been critiqued by critics like Namvar Singh as something that defies traditional realism by preempting the minor uses of psychology and the banal. His novels, such as *Naukar Ki Kameez* and *Deewar Mein Ek Khidki Rehti Thi* have been interpreted as examination of inner consciousness in which time moves slow and is often not connected to what is going on in the outside world. Nonetheless, most of the literature is inclined, to thematic issues like rural life, edges, and poetic language, and pays a relatively minor attention to the political consequences of his narrative temporality.

The idea of narrative temporality has also been widely theorized in the wider area of literary studies. Paul Ricoeur understands narrative as an intermediary structure that forms human experience of time and that narrative enables fragmented temporal experience to gain some sense (Ricoeur, 1984). Equally, Mikhail Bakhtin brings the concept of the chronotope, which stresses the inherent bondage between time and space in the story (Bakhtin, 1981). These theoretical developments have come up with significant paradigms to the interpretation of how literature is capable of redefining time-perception. However, these arguments are usually placed in the context of Western literary traditions creating a relative hole in its implementation in contemporary Hindi literature and authors such as Shukla.

The concept of a slow narration has also found its way into the discussions of modern literature, especially, in reaction to the speeding up of life in modern society. David M. Levy is among the scholars who suggest that slowing down cultural practices, such as reading and writing, might be used to offset the pressures of speed and efficiency in the digital capitalism (Levy, 2007). Having slow narration which implies low plot development, extensive attention to detail, and hesitations encourages readers to have a stronger involvement in the reading and to experience the time reflectively. Although this idea has been addressed in the global literary discourse, its interconnection with the Indian literary tradition and individual writers is still poorly developed.

Although these are helpful contributions, there remain a number of gaps in the current research. First, the analysis of the role played by narrative slowness as a source of resistance in the works of Shukla is not specific. Second, the concept of theories of temporality and slowness has been established well but there has been inadequate incorporation of theory with postcolonial or regional literary settings, especially, the Hindi literature. Third, the relation of narrative form and anti-capitalist critique, in particular, by use of disrupted time, has not been adequately analyzed in regard to the narrative consciousness of Shukla.

Against these gaps, the current paper aims at filling the bridging gap between literary analysis and critical theory, through studying narrative slowness as a manifestation of anti-capitalist temporality

in the works of Vinod Kumar Shukla. Placing his writing in the context of wider discussion of time, resistance, modernity, this research will be useful to provide a more nuanced account of how literary form could be used to challenge hegemonic socio-economic frameworks. In this way, it does not only contribute to Shukla studies, but it also broadens the horizons of the temporality studies in the context of Indian literature criticism.

4. Concept of Narrative Slowness

Narrative slowness is a literary style where the flow of the action is deliberately reduced to a crawl so as to make experience, perception, and reflection more important than plot movement. In contrast to traditional stories that emphasize action and linear progression, slow narration puts emphasis on the flow of time as experienced and perceived. According to David Herman, narratives do not just follow chronology of events but patterns which determine an arrangement of time and human experience (Herman, 2009). In this regard, narrative slowness reoriented the storytelling towards interiority and subjective temporality.

Liking detail and everyday life can be regarded as one of the major properties of narrative slowness. The narration does not move on to the plot using dramatic events but remains stuck on the regular events, daily activities, nuanced feelings, and small details. It makes this a very dense and immersive experience in time, and even seemingly mundane details come to be understood. According to Franco Moretti, literary genre may be influenced by the overarching societal rhythms, and a slower style of narration may serve as a response to the need to speed up life (Moretti, 2013). In that way, slowness is not only a stylistic quality but also a reaction to the cultural circumstances predetermined by the speed and efficiency.

There is the need to differentiate between slow narration and inactivity or narrative stagnation. Slowness should not be taken to imply nothing is going on but it indicates a change in the nature of events that are deemed significant. The movement in slow narratives is often an internal movement, based on thought, memory, and perception, but not action. Peter Brooks claims that the narrative meaning occurs due to rhythm, delay, and anticipation rather than the occurrence of events (Brooks, 1984). Delay in this scenario is an effective rhetorical device of narrative that enhances involvement as opposed to frustrating it.

Narrative slowness is often achieved through a number of methods. To begin with, there is very little plot action, which decreases the focus on dramatic action and prefigures continuity and routine. Second, the description of every-day life through detailed observation, i.e. descriptions of spaces, objects, and routines helps to relate the narrative to the present moment. Third, pauses and silence are also important. The breaks of continuity in the story provide spaces of contemplation, in which the reader is able to participate in what is being avoided rather than what is actually being stated. Collectively, these methods slow down the reading process of the text and promote a more thoughtful and careful reading style.

Finally, narrative-slowness is considered an aesthetic decision, which undermines prevailing demands of speed, productivity, and efficiency. It transforms the objective of storytelling by changing the emphasis to experience. Slowness is a way of allowing time to be had as qualitative and valuable and not just measurable. Through this, it reveals other ways of experiencing and living in time, which makes it a strong literary technique against the demands of the modern life that is accelerated.

5. Vinod Kumar Shukla's Narrative Consciousness

Vinod Kumar Shukla has an unusual inwardness in his narrative consciousness which is characterized by a philosophical thought and a psychological sensitivity. His prose is not based on dramatic action, or elaborate structure of a plot, but on the delicate pulses of thinking, feeling and perception. This self-centered attention forms a narrative space, which makes the mundane not of no value, and the inner life of the characters becomes more significant than the outer action. Through the words of Gaston Bachelard, ordinary spaces and experiences usually have a profound psychological meaning, in the way people visualize and perceive the world (Bachelard, 1964). The stories set by Shukla also make the ordinary a place of reflection and revelation.

One of the important aspects of his narrative consciousness is that it describes the life of the ordinary. The settings around his characters are frequently ordinary and plain, but the experiences that they go through are described in an extraordinary depth and sensitivity. This attention disrupts the major literary traditions where extraordinary happenings are given first place, and it preempts the unremarkable rhythm of everyday life. Georg Lukacs sees that the issue of realism in literature has the ability of exposing the hidden truths of social life using common people and circumstances (Lukacs, 1971). Shukla goes a step farther by adding intellectual and almost spiritual consciousness to the mundane life.

One more significant point is the conflict between the inner consciousness and the outer reality. The works of Shukla seem to feature outside forces as minor to the story, whereas the inner thoughts of characters determine the plot. This provides a time and reality layer effect, in which the line between thought and action dissolves. This is further contributed by his simplicity and subtlety. The language is not obscure and it has deep philosophical overtones, which enable the reader to work with complicated concepts by using a seemingly simplistic language.

In this way, the story consciousness of Shukla reinvents the narrative by placing focus on introspection, mundane life and subtle expression. It provides a subtle perception of human experience, in which the meaning is not created by any large-scale events but in the subtle interaction of thought, perception, and lived reality.

6. Anti-Capitalist Temporalities in Shukla's Works

The stories of Vinod Kumar Shukla embody a unique sort of anti-capitalist time, in an unobtrusive way they are in opposition to the general logic of speed, productivity, and efficiency. In capitalist modernity, time is organized into a quantifiable resource, that is to be used, to be optimized and to be traded. In this context, the writing of Shukla become slower in the movement of the narrative and shifts focus to the lived experience. His writings are not guided by the urgency of the goal-oriented development; they live in moments, letting time go on in a reflective and non-instrumental way.

One of the main sides of this opposition is the denial of market-based time. Shukla does not conform narrative structure to productivity or achievement and instead favors stillness, repetition, and contemplation in her works. E. P. Thompson had also written of the process by which industrial capitalism subjected ordinary life to clock time discipline, substituting more adaptable, task-based time frames (Thompson, 1967). The stories by Shukla may be interpreted as a degrading of such discipline, in which time is no longer dictated by the extrinsic time table, but rather by the inner times of thinking and perception. His characters tend to seem out of the stress of functioning, living in the time as something to be lived through past rather than one that can be controlled.

This anti-capitalist position is further reinforced by the celebration of immobility and reflection. The periods of breaks, silence and contemplation are not seen as vacuity or unproductive, on the contrary, they are the sites of meaning. According to Byung-Chul Han, the modern world is overwhelmed by the culture of being busy at all times and leaves not much time to think (Han, 2015). The narrative world of Shukla, on the contrary, recovers the importance of slowness, in which thinking, observing, and being are all valued. This focus disproves the notion that value is associated with observable output.

The other dimension that is significant is how the everyday life is represented as a place of resistance. The emphasis on banal locations and banal experiences used by Shukla does not mean that one is passive but instead it shows that alternative temporalities are possible in the mundane world. The witty is a world where the demands of capitalist acceleration are understatedly challenged by the vigilance, patience and looking within. This is in line with the fact that according to Henri Lefebvre everyday life is full of opportunities to upset the prevalent social rhythms (Lefebvre, 2004).

Finally, the works by Shukla reestablish time as experience and not as quantifiable commodity. The time of his stories is qualitative, formed by the power of memory, perception and the depth of emotions. His writing creates a void in time and productivity and economic value which allows other forms of living, in which the accumulation and speed of any form of life never seem to bring meaning,

but the present moment and consciousness. In this regard, the narrative temporality of Shukla has a muted, yet, very strong critique of the capitalist modernity, which turns slowness into a response and repositioning time as a space of human freedom.

7. Slowness as Political and Ethical Resistance

Slowness, in literary and cultural sense, could be interpreted as a political as well as ethical way of not complying with the disciplinary arrangements of capitalism. The contemporary modes of capitalist society are fast, efficient, and perpetually productive, which condition people to mold their lives according to quantifiable results. Karl Marx points out the fact that these systems devalue human labor to abstract units of time and usually overlook the qualitative nature of human experience (Marx, 1867/1990). In this regard, slowness overturns the principles of capitalist discipline by not equating human value to productivity.

Slowness is a political act that interrupts normalization of accelerated life. It does not give in to the pressure of always performing, producing, and competing. According to Byung-Chul Han, the modern world is marked by a culture of performance in which people internalize the policy of productivity, which causes exhaustion and burnout (Han, 2015). Slowness thus is a counter-practice, reclaiming time to rest, meditate and be mindful of oneself. It breaks the circle of ceaseless motion and provides the available space to other forms of being.

Slowness is ethically a precursor of the value of human dignity against economic efficiency. It enables a person to interact more with themselves, with others and their environment. Hartmut Rosa presents the idea of resonance by implying that meaningful human existence is formed in the form of profoundly responsive relations to the world, but not in the form of accelerated consumption (Rosa, 2019). Such resonance is achieved through slowness, which makes it possible to be attentive and present.

Additionally, slowness provides alternative methods of temporarily experiencing and living. It redefines time as a space of experience and relation as opposed to time being viewed as something to be consumed. Such a change carries serious ethical consequences, as it questions what is considered to be a principle in values and promotes healthier and more sustainable, humane lifestyles.

Therefore, the concept of slowness is not a matter of style or individual choice: it is an essential intervention that changes the way time, value, and human life are defined. It challenges capitalist discipline and asserts human dignity, thus creating possibilities of more thoughtful and purposeful ways of life.

8. Discussion

This relationship between style of narration and ideology is especially clear when the role of slowness in the literary texts is considered. Narrative slowness in the works by Vinod Kumar Shukla is not only a stylistic preference that is an ideological approach to the strongest capitalist values. Shukla interrupts the anticipation of speed, efficiency, and productivity upon which modern life is based. The focus of his attention on the mundane details, introspection, and interruptions indicate a different worldview according to which time is passed instead of being eaten up. Narrative form in this regard itself is a form of resistance, as it demonstrates the ideological undertones of aesthetic decisions which can run deep.

This is one of the approaches that are highly relevant in the current busy, technical society, where time is becoming more commercial and fragmented. The unending need to be productive may result in the inability to be reflective and meaningfully engaged. Some scholars like Hartmut Rosa believe that social acceleration has enhanced a sense of alienation and disconnection in the contemporary life (Rosa, 2013). In this regard, with slower narratives, the reader is given a counter-experience, to stop, to reflect, to re-engage with the rhythm of experienced life. Literature then creates a space in which other temporalities may be envisioned and experimented upon.

In comparison with the international slack literature movements, the work by Shukla echoes on the larger trends of criticizing the culture of speed. Theorists and authors of the so-called slow movement

such as Carl Honore highlight the importance of slowing down many spheres of life, including food and culture (Honore, 2004). Nevertheless, the contribution by Shukla is unique in its own locus in India and Indian socio-cultural settings where slowness is not a way of life but a story sense that is defined by real-life situations.

9. Conclusion

This paper has discussed the functioning of narrative slowness as a rhetorical and aesthetic technique in the writings of Vinod Kumar Shukla. Through the analysis of his narrative styles as well as the theoretical approaches to time, one can easily realize that the slowness is not just a stylistic device but rather a rethinking of the perception and experience of time. Unlike the increased pace of capitalist modernity which is marked by productivity, Shukla writes in advance of lived experience, inner consciousness, and silent rhythm of daily lives.

The main discovery of this study is that narrative slowness is an effective, but the least evident mode of resistance. Instead of explicitly arguing against the systems of capitalism and its structure, the narratives of Shukla do so by not attempting to fit themselves into their time. The lack of urgency, the focusing on stillness, and the interest in mundane events are all a challenge to the notion that time should be productive or goal-oriented. By so doing, his works bring about a space within which time can be qualitative, reflective and very human.

The central role of consciousness in the development of narrative temporality is also mentioned. The inner world of characters also dominates the outer world in Shukla's texts, and the story structure becomes non-linear and introspective. This change back and forth between action and perception enables the reader to experience time in a more subtle manner wherein the meaning is developed as time passes and not through a dramatic resolution. Such a strategy does not just recreate storytelling, but also promotes an alternative reading habit, the one that appreciates patience, attentiveness, and cogitation.

Moreover, the paper shows that the everyday life, which is frequently disregarded in traditional discourses, turns into an important place of opposition in the work by Shukla. His writing challenges the mainstream cultural values that emphasize speed, achievement and visibility by uplifting the common place and the mundane. Such emphasis is consistent with other wider debates of anti-capitalist temporality in which alternative forms of living and understanding time are envisioned and framed in literature.

To sum up, the slowness of the narrative in the works by Vinod Kumar Shukla presents a critical assessment of the modern forms of time, but at the same time suggests a new image of time. It challenges readers to leave the demands of speeding up and redefine the importance of stopping and thinking as well as the experience in the moment. With the modern life still being conditioned by the sense of speed and efficiency, such literary interventions are still important in reconsidering the correlation of time, consciousness, and human being.

References

1. Bergson, H. (1910). *Time and free will: An essay on the immediate data of consciousness*. George Allen & Unwin.
2. Rosa, H. (2013). *Social acceleration: A new theory of modernity*. Columbia University Press.
3. Thompson, E. P. (1967). Time, work-discipline, and industrial capitalism. *Past & Present*, 38, 56–97.
4. Benjamin, W. (1968). *Illuminations* (H. Arendt, Ed., H. Zohn, Trans.). Schocken Books.
5. Han, B.-C. (2015). *The burnout society*. Stanford University Press.
6. Marx, K. (1976). *Capital: A critique of political economy (Vol. 1)* (B. Fowkes, Trans.). Penguin Books. (Original work published 1867)
7. Deleuze, G. (1995). *Negotiations, 1972–1990* (M. Joughin, Trans.). Columbia University Press.

8. Ricoeur, P. (1984). *Time and narrative* (Vol. 1, K. McLaughlin & D. Pellauer, Trans.). University of Chicago Press.
9. Rosa, H. (2013). *Social acceleration: A new theory of modernity* (J. Trejo-Mathys, Trans.). Columbia University Press.
10. Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays* (M. Holquist, Ed.; C. Emerson & M. Holquist, Trans.). University of Texas Press.
11. Levy, D. M. (2007). No time to think: Reflections on information technology and contemplative scholarship. *Ethics and Information Technology*, 9(4), 237–249.
12. Ricoeur, P. (1984). *Time and narrative* (Vol. 1). University of Chicago Press.
13. Brooks, P. (1984). *Reading for the plot: Design and intention in narrative*. Harvard University Press.
14. Herman, D. (2009). *Basic elements of narrative*. Wiley-Blackwell.
15. Moretti, F. (2013). *Distant reading*. Verso.
16. Bachelard, G. (1964). *The poetics of space* (M. Jolas, Trans.). Beacon Press.
17. Lukács, G. (1971). *The theory of the novel* (A. Bostock, Trans.). MIT Press.
18. Nagar, N. (2012). *Vinod Kumar Shukla: Sahitya aur samvedana*. Rajkamal Prakashan.
19. Han, B.-C. (2015). *The burnout society* (E. Butler, Trans.). Stanford University Press.
20. Lefebvre, H. (2004). *Rhythmanalysis: Space, time and everyday life* (S. Elden & G. Moore, Trans.). Continuum.
21. Thompson, E. P. (1967). Time, work-discipline, and industrial capitalism. *Past & Present*, 38, 56–97.
22. Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays* (M. Holquist, Ed.). University of Texas Press.
23. Cohn, D. (1978). *Transparent minds: Narrative modes for presenting consciousness in fiction*. Princeton University Press.
24. Richardson, B. (2006). *Unnatural voices: Extreme narration in modern and contemporary fiction*. Ohio State University Press.
25. Han, B.-C. (2015). *The burnout society* (E. Butler, Trans.). Stanford University Press.
26. Marx, K. (1990). *Capital: A critique of political economy* (Vol. 1, B. Fowkes, Trans.). Penguin Books. (Original work published 1867)
27. Rosa, H. (2019). *Resonance: A sociology of our relationship to the world* (J. Wagner, Trans.). Polity Press.