



Narratological and Artistic Analysis of Khaled Hossieni's A Thousand Splendid Suns

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Abstract- This research endeavors to examine narrative strategies used by Khaled Hosseini in his novel A Thousand Splendid Suns. Gerard Genette's Narrative Discourse Model provides theoretical framework in which textual references from the primary source of data have been analyzed. This research is carried out in qualitative and analytical design. It is not what is being told is important from narratological perspective, rather it is how of what is told that matters most in narratological analysis of a text. Genette's narrative theory is divided into three main categories voice, tense and mood. First category is divided into sub categories like time, level and person. Hosseini has used past tense and third person narration like many other narratives. In more than this narrative, chronological order is used but at some places analepsis and prolepsis are used using the external focalization because the narrator knows more than the characters of the novel. It found out that the use of various narrative devices was as a peculiar strategy in particular the techniques such as time, duration, frequency, ellipses, and focalization made the novel an impressive piece of writing.

Keywords: Narrative, Voice, Frequency, Focalization

I. INTRODUCTION

The age in which we are living, is an age of narratives. It is an era where the narratives are generally commemorated and studious for their significance. The narratives are all around us. Narratology has been a propitious subject of scholarship, as scholiasts and experts since Aristotle have expressed their interpretations about the narratives. A scholarly tradition answers that there is no paucity of literature on narratology. Innumerable experts, writers, exegetes, and theorists have played a part in formation of narratology as an acknowledged field. Narratology deals with the study of a narrative and the ways that affect our perception.

Gerard Genette, who has been considered the best critic and theorist in the Narratology so far, proposed his own model of narrative structure. He opines that a narrative is consisted of three main elements: Story, the narrative and the narration. Story is the narrative content or the series of happenings and the narrative is the statement that comprises the discourse and narrating is the entire fictional situation which holds the action of the story. In Genette's narrative model, the medium of the narrative matters a lot i.e. how the story is told and in which way. He dissected the narrative structure into three classes. These are tense, mood and voice. Tense: it tells about the time of the happening of events or it's like a temporal cord between the story and narrative. Mood: it's the atmosphere of the given narrative and the voice is the actual narration, it is related to the narrator or narrating instance.

Gerard Genette's narrative model has been used as a framework while analyzing Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid Suns. Hosseini has used almost all techniques presented by Genette who himself applied on Marcel Proust's novel. Khaled Hosseini an Afghan American writer is most explored. His prolificacy of mind gives many interpretations of A Thousand Splendid Suns.

Research Question

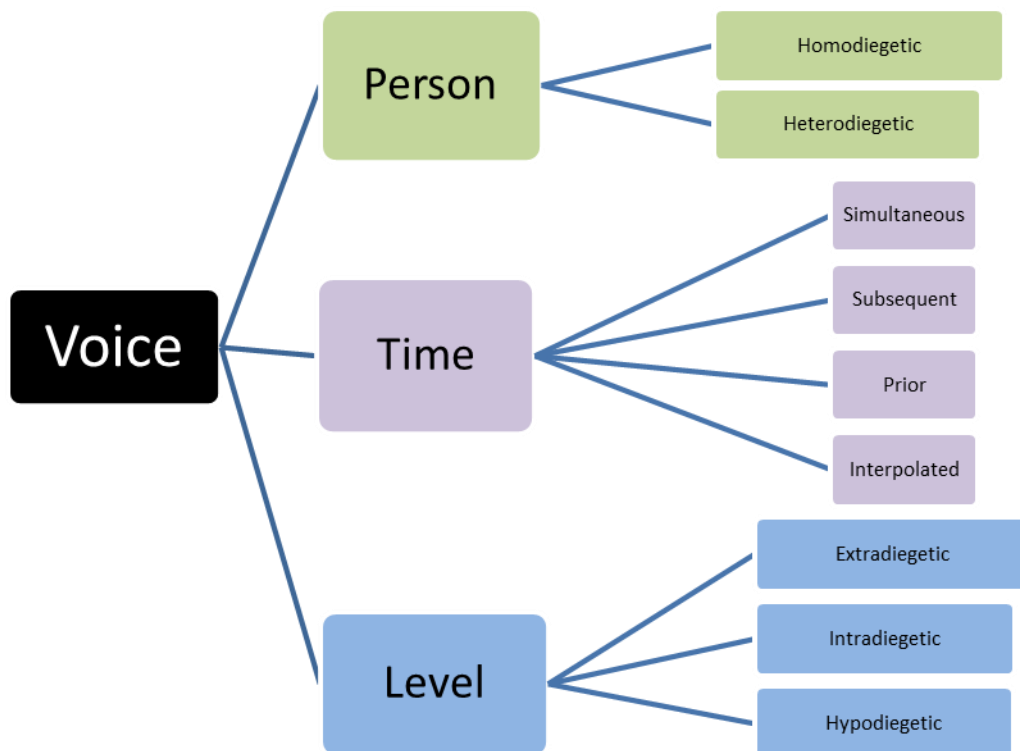
What narrative techniques of Genette's theory are applicable on Khaled Hosseini's novel A Thousand Splendid Suns and does it concede with the theory of narratology?

II. METHODOLOGY

Close reading technique has been used to collect the authentic data. Gerard Genette's narrative theory which is consisted on voice, tense, mood has been used for narratological analysis of the given novel.

III. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The novel A Thousand Splendid Suns is a narrative in the form of a text not as an utterance. The person who is narrating the story is unidentified. The events in this novel are imaginary. The story is very simple. It is a story of three generations.



Genette used the word narrating instance instead of narrator. He had also cleared the difference between narrating instance and writing instance. The narrator may acquire a particular status depending on the way the story is delivered. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, it is very much clear that the writing instance is recognizable. He is Khaled Hosseini. It is very difficult to find the narrating instance (voice) of the story. The story is told by a person but readers are unaware of him. The dialogues of this novel (narrative) may be considered simultaneous narration because these are written in the present tense. It provides the reader an instant acquaintance of the situation in which these words are spoken. For example, the dialogue between Nana, Mullah and Mariam is an example of this type of narration.

“Learn? Learn what? What is there to learn?

What’s the sense of schooling a girl like you? ...

There is only a woman like you and me needs in life.

Look at me.

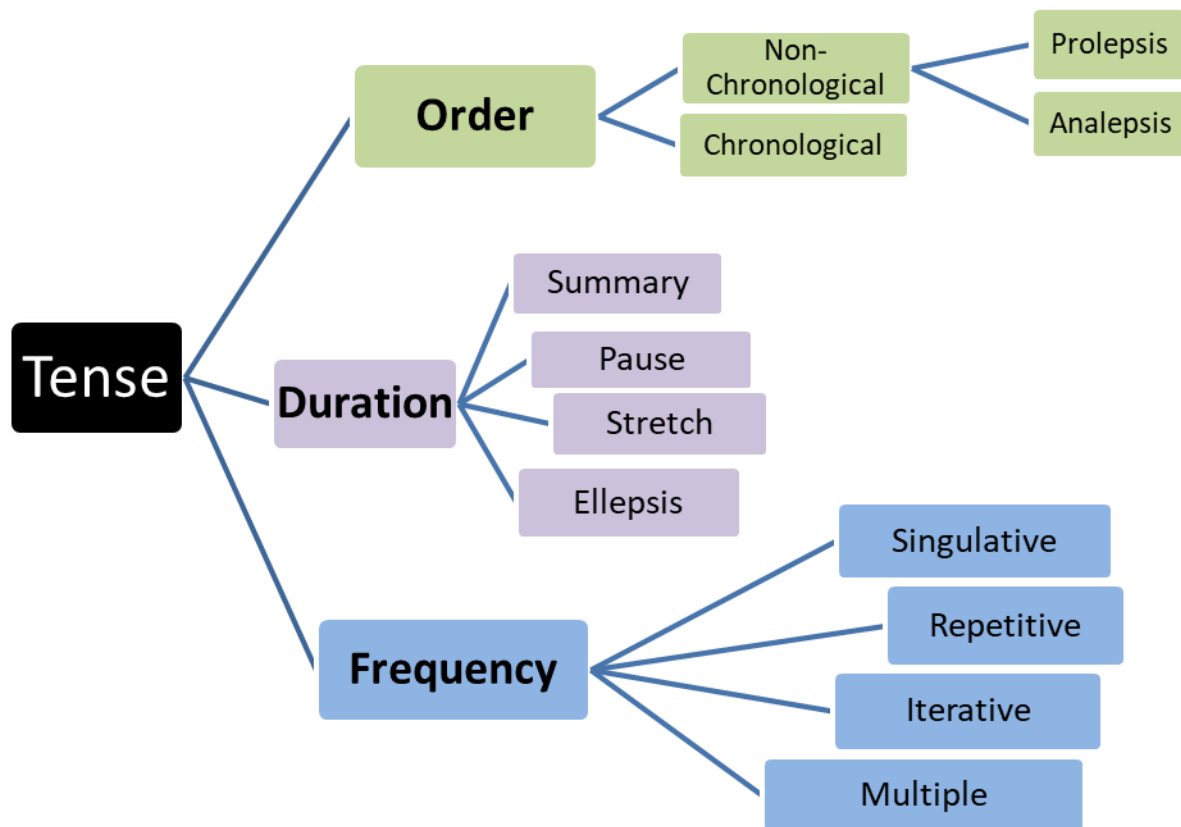
Only one skill. And it’s this: tahamul” (17).

A Thousand Splendid Suns is not prior narration on the whole but in a few sentences some prolepsis are used and these are not in a proper way. Nana asked Mariam that in her absence she will die. She is the only asset in her life and without her; she has nothing (26). It came true and Nana committed suicide when Mariam went to Herat and her life was disturbed very much (34).

Hasina, one of Laila’s childhood friend said to her “I know one day I’ll pick up a newspaper and find your picture on the front page” (149). It also came true when Laila worked for an orphanage and one of Kabul’s newspaper named *Anis* printed her picture with Zaman, Tariq and one of the attendants was printed (364). Subsequent narration is regular practice of narrating a story. In this novel, mostly the events are narrated in past tense. These events have already occurred. The story moves step by step so overall this narrative contains subsequent narration. Mostly the writers use this type of narration.

The level at which the events of the story take place and at which the characters exist is called the diegetic level. This story contains only one level and that is extradiegetic level. The whole text is on the same level. It is a frame story. In it events make up a background to the main story.

In *A Thousand Splendid Suns* the narrator is not the character within the story. In this novel the narrator is not the character. He is anonymous. He is heterodiegetic narrator. He has not appeared in the novel and all the unpleasant events occurring in the story does not affect him. He has no feelings. He stays impersonal, unresponsive and maintains unemotional attitude. In this novel the narrator is also unemotional when he tells about the suicide of Nana. She was hanging beneath a tree at the end of its branch. They buried her in the graveyard of Gul Daman (34). The level at which a character within the story narrates another story is called the metadiegetic level. In this novel there is no story in the main story.



According to Genette, Tense has concern with those features of a narrative in which the relationship of discourse time and story time is shown. The story time in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is more than forty four years but it takes few hours to read it. It is spread on four hundred pages. It can be said that story time and discourse time is different. Most of the time, this narrative follows chronological order but there are glimpses of past and foreseeing of future as well. The story starts when Mariam, the protagonist is five years old. This is the year 1964. All the ups and downs of Mariam's life are described in sequence.

Almost all the events in this novel are in sequence. There are few things that are told about their past and future. When events are not described in chronological order this disorderliness is called anachronism. It can be divided in analepsis and prolepsis. When the story begins, Mariam is five years old but Nana's first engagement is told through this technique. Nana was going to be married with a boy belongs to Shindad. She was then fifteen years old. It was probably just one time in her life that she was so much happy. She was almost married but before one week of her wedding, her in laws came to know about Nana's Jin who entered her body. They cancelled the marriage and after that no suitor came for Nana (9).

Mariam's birth moments occurred before the story starts but it has also been narrated, how the Nana suffered these two days. She spent these two days without eating and sleeping. No one came to her help and she was all alone in kolba (11).

Laila's parents love story is also told through past memories. They were cousins and like each other. Mammy was a bold girl. They used to see each other before their marriage (108).

Analepsis is important in a narrative. These are used to narrate the detail of a new character. They give a covered exposition of a narrative by suggesting its entanglement of the truth.

The novel *A thousand splendid suns* is overall in chronological order but in few places some characters foresee the future events. We also see that their predictions come true.

Nana told her daughter to learn how to bear pains. The tahamul is very much important for a female even more than education. It will help her in future life as well. It came true. After the death of Nana, Mariam bore all pains. It was tahamul that worked and it helped her lot (17).

Hasina, one of Laila's friend said that we will be married but Laila will be a well-known lady one day and her picture will be on front page of a newspaper. It comes true. Laila came back to Kabul. She settled here with Tariq and her kids. She visited the orphanage where Aziza was sent for some time. Tariq and Laila worked for it. They arranged many things like beds, windows and swings. One of a newspaper of Kabul 'Anis' published an article about it and the picture of Laila was also printed. At that time Laila recalled Hasina's prediction (149).

This gives a narrative predictive and prophetic quality. In this novel, the writer has not used it properly. It is just in two to three sentences and in a very light way. The analepsis can be used to fill in details, bringing out the context into layers.

A story can be read in few hours or days but it takes many years to happen. It means that discourse time is short but narrative time is long. The events that occurred in a story may be shortened or lengthened by the author. It is concerned with the connection between narrative time and discourse time. The novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is overall an example of a summary. The main details are described in an order. All the events are summarized. It is a story of three generations and it covers forty four years but it takes few hours to read.

In any narrative, a pause occurs when the narrator describes his observation or idea on a character, setting or situation.

Mariam was taken by Jalil to his home. The guest room where she was going to be stayed had been described in a good way. The curtains and bed sheet were matching. Everything was put in a proper place. The room was decorated with different pictures and flower vase. There were a collection of wooden dolls arranged in a line. (37)

Ellipses are totally different from pause. Here narrative discontinues but the action continues. The main purpose of the ellipses is to create suspense and thrill in a story. When the narration is stopped and action is going on, the reader of the story is eager to know what is going to be happened next. The ellipses technique creates interest of the reader.

When Laila and her family were collecting their luggage to move from Kabul, she heard the sound of rocket. What happened next the reader is curious to know. She was in hospital. She remembered nothing. Suddenly Laila saw a woman's face in front of her and she fainted (175).

In *Duration*, stretch means that discourse time is more than narrative time. There are not many examples of stretch in this novel. In Mariam's death scene, when Taliban were going to kill her, she thought of her previous life. She recalled that she was entered in this world as an unwanted thing and stated: "This was a legitimate end to a life of illegitimate beginning" (329).

In a story an event may be occurred once and also described only one time. Some events are occurred once but described many times and similarly an event that had occurred many times but recounted once. Some events occurred many times and these are also described many times.

The narrator can use this aspect to make the narrative beautiful. He divides frequency into the following categories.

In *A Thousand Splendid Suns* many events occurred once and narrated once. Usually through this technique those events are narrated that are not of much importance or to cover lengthy chronology.

Mariam left kolba and went to Herat. She was searching Jalil's house. An old man owner of a horse gari mentioned once who took her to her father's home. He gave her a toffee. This event has a minor role in the story (29).

A person brought the news of Laila's brothers' shahadat. He came to their house and told them about Ahmad and Noor. It happened once and had also been narrated only one time (123).

There are many events in this novel that happened once but repeated. Mariam was an illegitimate child. It was mistake of her parents but it is repeated many times.

When the story begins, Jalil came to see Mariam. She was five years old. She took the Chinese set of her mother for Jalil but its tea pot was broken. At that time Nana used the word harami although Mariam was not aware of this new word. It was for the first time that Mariam listen the word 'harami' (1).

Mariam went to Herat to watch a movie on cinema with her father. Her mother asked her not to go there because she was harami and no one will accept her. But when she reached Herat she thought that Nana was wrong. Everyone was busy in his own work (28).

After her marriage, she went to tandoor to make bread but she was very confused. She thought that these all people know about her past. She felt guilty at this outrageous truth of her past. "She imagined they all knew that she'd been born a harami" (60).

Rasheed got married with Laila. One day when they were sitting together, he compared Laila with Mariam. He compared them with cars and said Laila is Benz whereas Mariam is Volga. He asked Mariam that whether she had told her that she was born a harami child (199).

During her pregnancy, one night Laila wept bitterly. Rasheed was upset to see her. He asked her whether the baby was fine or Mariam gave her pain. He thought that Mariam was the reason of her pain. At this time again, he called Mariam harami. He said that he will teach a lesson to that harami woman (206).

One day Laila told her secret that Aziza was also illegitimate child. She offered her to run away with them. Mariam, who was disappointed, thought that there may be a new life. She recalled the words of Nana that a harami deserves nothing but now she had some hope (229).

In the final moments of her life, Mariam thought about her birth as a bastard (harami) child. Now it is the legitimate end of her illegitimate start. She thought that her entry into this world was like an unwanted

thing. But now it is good end (329).

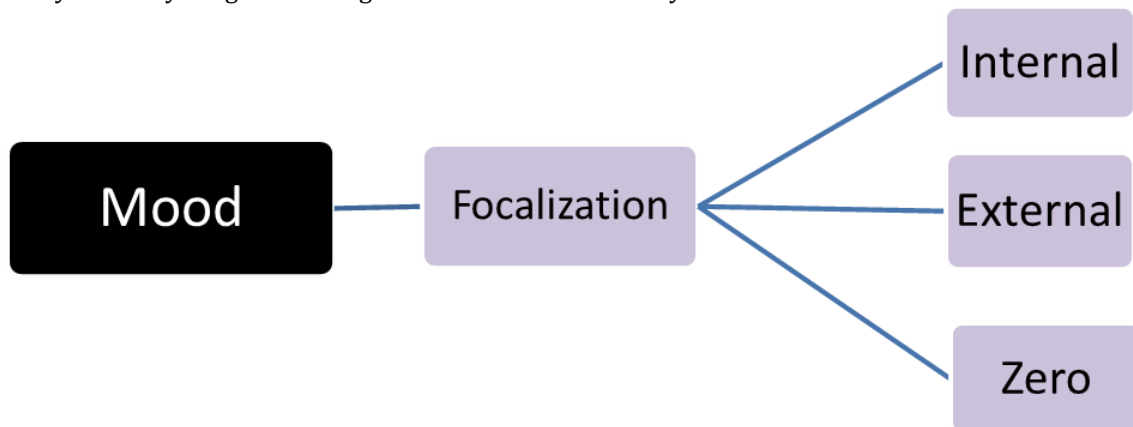
In iterative an event happened few or many times but it is described just only one time. For example, Nana was living far away from Herat. Jalil's sons brought things for them every month and it is described just once. Jalil's sons used to bring things for Nana and Mariam on a wheel barrow. Sometimes Mohsin and Ramin had come and sometimes Ramin and Fahad. This is mentioned only one time in the novel (13).

Rasheed took Mariam for outing usually on Fridays. He brought gifts and ice cream for her. He always told about the places and their names during their Friday visit. It was a routine. But after her miscarriage, he took her outside but never liked to talk to her (85).

Any event happened many times and it is also narrated many times it is called multiple narration.

Jalil visit kolba every Thursday to meet Mariam. It was his routine to come and spend time with her. In this novel it is also repeated. For the first time, it has been mentioned in the very beginning. She was waiting Jalil. He used to come on Thursdays and tell the stories of Herat (1). Another example of multiple frequencies is the coming of jinn in Nana's body. A jinn has been mentioned again and again in the novel. For the first time it happened when Nana was getting married. She was very happy. But before one week of her marriage, a jinn was entered her body ant this engagement was broken (9).

Frequency therefore brings forth the notion of repetition, and implies a choice between telling once and telling several times an event that took place only once. Fictions, and writings, in general aim to avoid needless repetition most of the time but repetition is indeed used to cause different results. This involves a study of the layering and folding of narrative time and story time.



Apparently, Mood is the difference between telling and showing. There is a difference between voice and mood. The voice focuses on the narrator that who is he? Mood concentrate on one point and that is whose the view point the narrator is using is. In connection with *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, it can be noted that Hosseini has used external focalization which is quiet similar to omniscient narrator, who is well aware of mental condition of the characters. His use of this type of focalization provides convenience to narrate the inner and psychological state of characters. Their thoughts and interests have also been told.

IV. CONCLUSION AND FINDINGS

The findings of the study have provided indispensable awareness into the working of narrative procedure .The aim was to examine the techniques used by Hosseini to make it an impressive narrative. The outcome of this particular research has provided valued understanding. As this study has shown that by using focalization and narration techniques, Hosseini has made his narrative real and outstanding. It is not very much important that what is said. The most important point is that how it is said. In this novel the writer had conveyed the story in a skillful manner. Hosseini's style of narration is stolidly direct, and he intends to explain away not only the political but also the personal, presenting each experience in a wrapper on which the emotion is carefully labeled.

He has made it a real narrative. While reading and analyzing we feel that we are the part of the story. In this novel, the writer conveyed the story in a beautiful way and skillfully.

He has the ability to dig into the emotions of his characters to make them feel real, almost if he were telling the story of real people he has long known. The characters dynamics in the book are so complex that offers a while; they truly seem like real people. All the events are intertwined. These seem real events, happening

in real world. The characters are affected by internal issues as well as external issues. To understand the idea of time, allow the reader to access the logical relationship of the narrative. It had enabled the writer to make broad, comprehensive and various exegesis. The sub categories of order like flashback and flash forward cannot exhaust the reader. These give a reader more understanding about the story and characters.

V. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this particular research was to explore the arrangements and framework of the narratives of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by applying Genette's narrative theory. This research has manifested the convincibility of Hosseini's narrative. He has skillfully used different narrative strategies like voice, tense and mood. The analysis shows that all the narrative elements have been used skillfully. Tense is linked with time that in which instances the story has been narrated either this time is past, present, or future. After making a critical narratological analysis of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* it is acknowledged that Hosseini make excellent use of narrative methods and concedes with the theory of narratology.

Hosseini used the narrative techniques i.e. simultaneous narration to provide the instance acquaintance of the situation. He does not complicate the situation by switching the tenses with the same situation. This makes the reader at ease in grasping the situation and the themes of the novel. He doesn't gloss over the horrors, his characters live through, but something about his direct, explanatory style and the senses you are moving towards a redemptive ending makes the whole narrative, for all its tragedies, slip down rather easily. Even no loose strands are seen in the novel.

The writer has used the chronological order to describe the events of the story but few anachronies to look back in past and to predict the future, are used to make the narrative beautiful. Chronological order is followed while narrating the story which gives a sequence to the events. As the novel based on the story of three generations so Hosseini uses flash backs and fore telling techniques to make the text compact and effective. Hosseini used this technique in order to provide deeper meaning to the reader and help the reader to visualize the situation. He has done a great job by keeping the novel compact by following Genette's order model.

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