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**A Study in Narrative Technique of Interior Monologue in Khaled Hosseini's lyrical novel,
'A Thousand Splendid Suns'**

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Abstract

Interior monologue is a literary technique used by the author to voice the protagonist's thoughts, feelings and reactions to his world. It is one of those techniques that make a novel a 'poetic fiction'. Though internal monologue is perceived largely as soliloquy, direct depiction of mind's content does not give fiction a lyrical form. This term is many times associated with 'stream of consciousness'. In lyrical narrative, use of external representation of images and patterns, is formed out of a character's mental association with the external world. Interior monologue not only represents the world of a character but also helps a narrative attain depth and meaning that creates an understanding of actions and occurrences of the exterior world. It clarifies the effect of worldly affairs on the mind and life of a protagonist.

This paper studies the use of Interior Monologue as one of the Narrative techniques in Khaled Hosseini's 'A Splendid Thousand Suns'. Set in the political turmoil and socially primitive milieu of Afghanistan, 'A Thousand Splendid Suns' depicts the highly pathetic predicament of three women Nana, Mariam and Laila. This paper deliberates diverse issues on women's right and her identity, social degeneration and women's defenseless struggle against these odds by analyzing Interior Monologue of these characters. It is this very use of narrative that gives the novel its 'Lyrical Form'.

Keywords: Lyrical Novel, Interior Monologue, Narrative Technique, A Splendid Thousand Suns

Introduction

The phrase 'stream of consciousness', coined by William James gave birth to a unique literary movement of presenting continuous flow of thoughts that characterize human mind. As such, 'monologue' for 'soliloquy' is not a new concept as its presence is evident since Shakespearean



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literature. What makes interior monologue different and a more prominent literary device in the 20th century are certain unique characteristics of it which are discussed in this paper. At the outset of 20th century, 'subjective conscious' was perceived as a great need of the hour as traditional techniques were incapable of portraying complexity of modern human mind. Interior monologue is used to show the inner turmoil of the protagonist's perturbed mind.

Literary reviews, in similar research, describe interior monologue as the verbal expression of physical phenomenon while 'stream of consciousness' is the psychic phenomenon. Unlike 'stream of consciousness', Interior Monologue is the 'verbal expression of a physical phenomenon while 'stream of consciousness' is more of a psychic phenomenon. Although both interior monologue and stream of consciousness have been identified with poetic fiction they share with the 'confession' and 'epistolary' form.

However, only direct depiction of a mind's content does not make it a lyrical form. It must represent exactly all objects and figures through the protagonist's perception. Interior monologue, in a lyrical form presents only those images and motifs which are emerging out of the mental association of the protagonist.

Literature Review

Ralph Freedman (1963), in his classic book '*The Lyrical Novel*' propounded the theory of lyrical novels. Talking about interior monologue he states that a narrator represents himself while apparently reflecting the world of his perception. Instead of one narrator (including in himself the monologues of others), we encounter three equally important interior monologues which together create a web of motifs. Bloom, Stephen, and Mollie function as a triple lyrical self, a divided point of view in **James Joyce's (1922) 'Ulysses'**. Their monologues transform the streets of the city, its tower, library, and bawdy-house, into a significant design which uses the way stations of the epic quest to lend it symbolic weight.

Similarly, **Proust's (1930) *In Search of Lost Time*** opens the interior monologue to a poetic version of the novel. More often, these novels seem even more appropriately lyrical than *Ulysses*. No epic structure establishes a consecutive order to which levels of time must be conventional. The plot mixes with the variance of memory. The opening pages of the proposition



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shows clearly that Proust has blended the worlds of present and past and the turn into them as a design. Self and world appear undivided, and Proust presents a lyrical point of view.

We find a complete juxtaposition of the 'lyrical form' with the 'stream of consciousness' in many novels by **Virginia Woolf (1931)**. The reflections of her individual characters are part of a "public" monologue in which they share a monologue spoken in the language and inherent in the imagery of the pansophical author. This technique is useful in her purely lyrical novel, especially, '*The Waves*', in which an artful design is created out of the soliloquies of some characters.

Many lyrical novels present patterns of monologues either in contrast or in connection with interlocked images. A lyrical novel, like *S* derives its aesthetic arrangements of time and life from such pattern of formal monologues, each of them shaping the individual world.

Types of Interior Monologue

Many attempts have been made to use this device in 20th century novels. So far four major types of interior monologues are identified in variety of novels that shows skillful deployment of interior monologue in them.

1. **Direct Interior Monologue:** This type of interior monologue is straightforward and is presented by the author himself, often for narrating hero's thoughts. It is a form of introduction or objective description that guide's readers into understanding the hero's mind.
2. **Two levels of Narration:** As portrayed in James Joyce's *Ulysses*, it could be used in third person narration by either second person talking to a character's mind which in turn is being replied by the internal mind of a character. It also depicts the component of *space* where character remains stable at one space and 'consciousness' flows freely in time. All experiences are happening in the inner realm of a hero.
3. **Mind Level of Narration:** In this type of interior monologue, protagonist's thoughts flow beyond time frame. Moreover, a character floats into altogether different frames of time without being interrupted by present constraints of time. Everything happens in logical sequence but events are interconnected in present, past and future.



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4. **Extreme Interior Monologue:** James Joyce propounded this technique using for the first time in '*Finnegan's Wake*'. In this type of interior monologue, the narration occurs in the mind of a protagonist when he is dreaming. It is also known as 'dream sequence' – a kind of subconscious state of mind where variety of words are freely associated with mixed ideas giving altogether novel and thrilling expressions to hero's words.

Features of Interior Monologue that make novel Lyrical

- i. Interior monologue is verbal expression of a physical phenomenon. It means, unlike stream of consciousness, which occurs at psychic level of a character, Interior monologue is the verbal expression that gives words to a character's inner world in connection to his external world. In fact, symbols and images created around him are nothing but representations of his inner world.
- ii. **Lyrical Immediacy:** As defined by Ralph Freedman, Lyrical Immediacy is an 'immediacy of portraiture'. It makes themes and motifs available to readers, without author positioning a narrative world.
- iii. There is presence of two different levels of narration. One is Exterior to character's mind and the other is Internal
- iv. It is free from introductory expressions by author like, "... he thought..." etc. . . These are the phrases that prepare the readers to understand what the author is trying to present through either a dialogue given to a character or an incident happening in the text.
- v. It lacks the chronological order. Chronology is arrangements of the events in successive order, or a sequence in which they occur. The order is to facilitate the reader or the audience to link the consecutive events occurring in timely manner. A use of sequential or cause and effect words can help achieve this. When ideas are put in chronological order, they make a linear image. But lyrical mode of narrative lacks this chronological order as monologue of a character moves beyond the time frame of past, present and future.



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vi. It also lacks formal logical order. Logical order means presenting the ideas of the order in a cohesive manner, in a way exactly as in the sequence of their occurrence. This narrative technique is used by the order to make reader grasp the coherence. Interior monologue lacks this logical order presenting character uttering words and ideas which are not in connection. This makes it sometimes sound absurd and difficult to understand if taken out of context.

vii. Presence of subjective time is also found in interior monologue. This feature is called as 'Portrait of Time' in Lyrical mode of narrative. Subjective time is the perception of time in association with character's experience. It shows the particular duration which absolutely gives only present but nothing. And this is with context to protagonist's relation with exterior world.

viii. Interior monologue also has absence of punctuation. It refers to dialogues not having formal punctuation marks. Sometimes even the direct speech also lacks punctuations.

Interior Monologue in 'A Splendid Thousand Suns'

This paper attempts to analyze some of the parameters of Interior Monologue employed in Khaled Hosseini's, '*A Thousand Splendid Suns*' (ATSS). ATSS is an adroit narrative of Afghan women, their pathetic plight and struggle for identity in Afghan society. It portrays, masterfully, female suffering and endurance in Kabul under Taliban rule.

The story revolves around three women, *Nana*, her illegitimate daughter *Mariam* and local teenage girl *Laila*. Hosseini has an innate knack of storytelling and ATSS is a captivating story of desperate struggle of women against starvation, brutality of a man dominated society and fear. Among all these odds a ray of hope is kindled out of unexpected love towards fellow humans and that helps overcome most challenging obstacles of life using amazing heroism.

Mariam is the illegitimate child of *Nana* and a wealthy man of Kabul, *Jalil*. *Nana* and *Mariam* have never got social acceptance in the elite society of *Jalil* and that gives scornful start to *Nana's* lifelong pain and *Mariam's* crucial life lessons.



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The novel has multiple discourses which depict these characters' state of mind in context to various situations of their life. These monologues are nothing but reflection of a milieu in which they are placed. *Nana* wanted "to live somewhere removed, detached where neighbours wouldn't stare at her belly, point at her, snicker or worse yet, assault her with insincere kindness...". This shows tremendous self-respect of *Nana* that she carried throughout her life after being rejected by *Jalil* as his wife. *Jalil* rejected her, in spite of her bearing his child, only because she belonged to the lower strata of society. This monologue is free from introductory expression by author and it reflects the firmness of *Nana's* nature and her strong determination to give birth to a child. She was aware that her path is not going to be smoother but rather more prone to hardships. At one point of time, she shared with *Mariam* that she also felt that *Jalil* was in great relief due to her decision.

The second chapter of the novel depicts the third type of interior monologue which is a *mind level narration* where thoughts flow beyond time frame. *Nana* apparently never accepted her secret pleasure in talking about her wedding which was planned by her family and unfortunately could not materialize. But *Mariam* could always feel that through the glint in mother's eyes.

Mariam heard the story very casually from her mother but imagined it in a more realistic way. As *Khaled* narrates, "... *Mariam* imagined her (mother) on horseback, smiling shyly behind veiled green gown, her palms painted red with henna, her hair parted with silver dust, the braids held together by tree sap. She saw musicians blowing the *Shehnai* flute and banging on *Dhol* drums, street children hooting and giving chase..." This monologue is truly mind level narration for two reasons. 1. *Mariam* experiences the story of *Nana's* wedding with her senses of hearing, seeing and feeling. She not only sees *Nana* in bridal dressing but she also hears music of flute and drums. 2. She remains seated in her mother's lap but her imagination floats beyond the portrait of time which is somewhere in the unseen past. Her mental travel to present and past makes internal monologue which lacks chronological order.

Part two of the book depicts another type of interior monologue that is flashback. When *Laila* recalls her dialogue with *Tariq*, before he left for *Ghazni* for thirteen days. Her reaction to those many days away from her friend was more of an unexpected kind while *Tariq* took it so casually saying, "It is not so long. You are making a face, *Laila*." In this span of almost two weeks of



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separation, after five days Laila learnt a fundamental truth about time. The dialogue between her and Tariq was as fresh as flowers in her mind. As she keeps on moving to this flashback back and forth in the present time,, she misses Tariq, in these five days miserably, and compares time with the stretched and contracted rhythm of accordion played by Tariq's father. His absence and presence is similar to those tunes of accordion. Laila is apparently getting engaged in daily chores of going to school, witnessing parents quarrelling, looking around in the neighborhood etc. but her world before her eyes and inner world are two different worlds. She fancies going back to her inner world again and again. Sitting on the carrier pack of the cycle while going to school, she recalls moments how her mother once found ineptitude of Babi (her father) very charming. Two different portrait of time, *Flashback* and *Forward* is a common phenomenon Laila experiences in her Inner world.

Khaled uses extreme interior monologue technique when Mammy is criticizing Babi for sending two sons to war and pleading him not to do so. Laila in her thoughts was evaluating the righteousness of the two and always ending up in dilemma. Laila travels into present and past time evaluating fairness of people around her. Khalid has skillfully used technique of making readers travel through two different time zones making them aware of past events having their effects in present. Extreme monologue is also used while sitting in the class, Laila travels into time which is not here. She thinks of the absence of Tariq and fight between her parents. Even her teacher catches her saying, "... have I disturbed your daydreaming...?"

Nana's monologues are floating in to past and present which reflects her perturbed state of mind. Her conversation with *Mariam* and continuous mood swings and babbling before her death shows delirium state of her mind where her monologue has no punctuations. Her assumption that *Mariam* would desert her is so frightening that this perceived fear leads her to commit suicide.

Presence of two different level of narration is obvious in a scene when *Nana* and *Mariam* go to the stream side on a Ration Day. *Jalils* ends two of his sons with a wheelbarrow carrying ration for *Nana* and *Mariam*. *Nana* always perceived this help as 'his idea of penance' while *Mariam* valued it as a great help and found some connect with those boys. Khaled depicts two states of narration by portraying one picture perceived differently by two closely related



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characters. *Nana* has so much of hatred for those boys that she carries pebbles in her pocket and throwing them at the boys, cursing their mothers and making faces full of hatred to which boys were unresponsive. *Mariam*, on the other hand perceived this as a great help from father. She also felt sorry for those boys for carrying such a heavy load with their arms. She wished to offer him water and show concern but just to please her mother, she also starts abusing them. This narration shows *Nana*'s hatred and *Mariam*'s love for one immediate object.

When *Jalil* narrates a cartoon film story of an old man and a puppet boy to *Mariam*, Khaled's craft can be seen in presenting *Lyrical Immediacy*. The fancy world of cartoon film, where 'an illusion that drawings were moving', is beautifully presented in front of *Mariam*. The lyrical immediacy is achieved by presenting the theme and motifs of cartoon film's story and characters. The story, as told by *Jalil* to *Mariam*, "of an old childless toymaker who is lonely and desperately wants a son. So he carves a puppet, a boy, who magically comes to life. The old man and a puppet had all kinds of pleasure in a Pleasure Land where bad boys turning into donkeys and at the end father and a son being swallowed by whale" (5. 25) This story has much resemblance to how *Jalil* perceived the world around human, where daughter is not desired, an imaginary journey to pleasure land because he cannot have open and accepted relationship with *Mariam*.

Mariam insists *Jalil* to take her to watch a film which is on air in his cinema and the other day he narrated the story. When *Mariam* decides to go to Heart, to see her father *Jalil*'s family, *Nana* first gets restless and she angrily scolds *Mariam* for not listening to her. "Why did God give me an ungrateful one like you?" She was so much tormented with the idea of *Mariam* leaving her that she calls her most beloved daughter 'treacherous'. Very soon her angry mood changes to mockery criticizing *Jalil* saying "...man's heart is a wretched one where you won't get comfort like Mother's womb. I am the only one who loves you. When I am gone, you'll have nothing, you'll have nothing, you're nothing...". This mood of mockery switches to a guilt consciousness by her pleading to *Mariam* emotionally not to leave her. She says she would die without her. *Mariam* took this melodrama as a trick and an obstacle in fulfilling her dreams. She thought *Nana* is afraid that *Mariam* "might find happiness which she never had. She does not want her to be happy, does not want her to have good life, she is the one with wretched heart". These two



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different states of inner realms of a mother and a daughter are beautifully presented by Khaled by keeping the narrative free from introductory expression from author. It is their monologues, feelings and apprehensions, fear and miseries that give readers a hint of some occurrence which culminates into *Nana* committing suicide and *Mariam* reaching at a crucial turn of her life.

Conclusion

A Splendid Thousand Suns is a masterful narrative demonstrating almost all features of Lyrical Narrative. Khaled's acumen of keeping novel vivid and fascinating by portraying daily life of the people and depicting a broad array of human emotions is commendable. This very use of narrative techniques gives ATSS a form of Lyrical Narrative. This paper is an attempt to study only one characteristic of Lyrical novel and that is, the Interior Monologue. A study of selected extracts of novel taken from different chapters, and their random analysis, surprisingly falls into each of the type of monologue technique and that is the appreciation worthy outcome of this study. It displays great art of storytelling combining features of both, poetry and a narrative. It cleverly and smoothly shifts the reader's attention from characters and events to a formal design.

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