

## Unveiling the Elements of a Fairy Tale: An Exploration of Proppian Narrative Functions in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

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### Abstract

In contemporary literature, Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* has often been celebrated for its everlasting appeal of storytelling. This study aims to identify the narrative functions of a fairy tale existing in the structure of the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. To serve this purpose, the study examines the plot of the novel through the lens of Vladimir Propp's narrative theory presented in *Morphology of Folktale*. The current research maps the plot development of the novel onto Propp's narrative schema. Hence, through the rigorous examination of the plot's schematic description, the findings of the study discern the presence of twenty-one out of twenty-two archetypal functions of a fairy tale. Moreover, the key features of fairy tales, i.e., absention of parents from their children's life and the lack of parental affection, are also salient characteristics of this novel, as they play a major role in the progression of the plot. Lastly, by highlighting the subtle existence of fairy tale(s) structures in the plot, the paper foregrounds the domination, yearning and hope for fairy tales in the real life of human beings. These findings imply a deeper cultural and psychological significance, as they reveal how traditional fairy tale structures continue to resonate with contemporary narratives, bridging timeless storytelling patterns with modern societal issues. This suggests that such structures provide a universal framework for understanding human experiences, emotions, and resilience in the face of adversity. Finally, the study would be beneficial for all those who want to study and conduct research in the field of Structuralism and narratology.

**Keywords:** A Thousand Splendid Suns, Fairy Tales, Narrative structure, Narratology, plot analysis, Structuralism

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Doi: <https://doi.org/10.54672/jelle.2024.0604239>

### **Introduction**

Storytelling is considered one of the fundamental characteristics of human understanding (Yilmaz et al., 2018). It is believed to have existed since the very beginning of time (Garza, 2011). The rock paintings drawn by cavemen are evidence that narratives have existed since the Stone Age (Tomascikova, 2009). Societies with reference to their cultures and realms are often searching for various ways to secure, shape and define their existence. Since the dawn of time, to strengthen the traditions and cultures, the elders of any society have utilised and transferred stories from the previous generation to the next (Benjamin, 2006). This legacy of narrating stories is still followed in today's world and can be seen in newspapers, books, radio, films, plays and the shows we watch on television every day (Tomascikova, 2009). Storytelling includes myths, beliefs, tribal and family gossip, secular and religious teachings, history, philosophy, propaganda, scientific writings, television plays and stories, movies, advertising etc. (Hamilton, 1996). Hence, with the passage of time, the forms and functions of storytelling have undergone major transformations (Yilmaz et al., 2018).

From its elementary and humble beginning, storytelling in its scope and power has immensely grown. Today, it includes almost all aspects of human experiences and endeavours. In today's world, one is continuously surrounded by stories as one is incessantly bombarded by friends, families, media, etc. (Hamilton, 1996). One of the oldest forms of storytelling is fairy tales. According to Elizabeth Harries, a fairy tale contains supernatural and magical aspects as well as "elements of folk tradition" along with a "certain predictable structure" (Harries, 2001, p. 6). For thousands of years, fairy tales have existed as oral folklore/tales. Since their inception, the impact and influence of these tales have been felt across diverse communities and cultures, where these tales have not only been utilised as a medium for entertainment but also as a tool for instructing and teaching the masses. Hence, the tales caught the attention of many great writers and authors, who took inspiration and guidance from their plot structures and themes overtly or subtly presented them in their own works (Baskara, 2010). On the other hand, in literature, the novel, as it is known today, arrived late; thus, many novelists might have been familiar with and used techniques and themes utilised by writers before them (Milligan, 1983). Despite the divergences and contradictions among American, English, French, and Russian novelists, they were all aware of the common traditions (Milligan, 1983). To a large measure, it was the product of the middle class, which mainly appealed to their sensibilities and ideals (Daiches, 1979).

Narrative is considered one of the fundamental elements of storytelling (Onega & Landa, 2014). According to Thornham and Purvis (2005), the way in which stories of a culture are put together is a narrative. The word narrative is linked to ‘narre,’ a Latin root that means ‘to convey information or make known’ (Tomascikova, 2009). In simple words, it is defined as a chain of events, a semiotic representation connected meaningfully in a causal and temporal way (Onega & Landa, 2014). Storytellers have utilised narrative to fulfil the purpose of instruction and persuasion. Therefore, one should look closely at the ways which the writers have used to organise their narrative(s) into paragraphs and chapters. Thus, one should not only be conscious and aware of the techniques and ways that the novelists use to organise and order their materials but also attention should be given to “the patterns into which” writers arrange their materials to draw readers’ focus toward the links among structure (Milligan, 1983, p.38).

In the narrow sense, the narrative is purely a linguistic event. It is considered a speech act consisting of a speaker or, more accurately, a narrator and verbal text. Hence, such an explanation restricts the scope of analysis to only oral and written narratives, and with regard to literary studies, it encompasses novels, short stories, jokes, ballades, and poetry (Onega & Landa, 2014). For the success of any novel, the main criterion is that the action of the novel should be unified and coherent (Milligan, 1983), as action and characters are closely linked. In simple words, action refers to what characters do in the novel. A sense of pattern, in some novels, might be chiefly conveyed “through action and the interplay of characters” (Milligan, 1983, p. 149). The process of ordering a novel is governed by various principles and methods that the writers might have when they are writing a story, and the human agents that carry the action make both action and character subordinate to the overall design of the novel (Milligan, 1983).

### **Problem Statement**

Despite categorising *A Thousand Splendid Suns* as a novel, the present study revolves around the hypothesis that it manifests the structure of a fairy tale. To serve the purpose, the research utilises Vladimir Propp’s theoretical framework, which prompts examining the novel’s plot development. Hence, by examining how closely it adheres to Propp’s established and recognised morphological categories, the study seeks to determine the extent to which the selected novel follows or deviates from a traditional pattern of a fairy tale. The present research will also utilise close reading along with Vladimir Propp’s narrative theory to investigate this hypothesis. Lastly, the study also utilises Propp’s synchronic approach to study the syntactical structure of the novel.

### **Research Objective**

- To explore the fairy tale's narrative functions as they manifest with the plot development of the novel.

### **Research Question**

- What narrative functions of a fairy tale are present in the plot dynamics of the novel?

### **Significance of Study**

The significance of the study lies in the fact that the present study contributes to the current discourse on the universality and adaptability of fairy tale structures to modern and contemporary literature. Hence, it provides insight into how the archetypes of traditional narratives are incorporated, reimagined, and adapted in contemporary novels. Moreover, in broader terms, the present research adds to literary analysts' toolkit, presenting a methodology for analysing and investigating literary works through an established and recognised theoretical framework. Thus, this contributes to the ongoing debate regarding the applicability and pertinence of classical literary theories in comprehending and appreciating contemporary literature. Moreover, the study would also contribute to Propp's model as it highlights the functions that have been modified over time or have become obsolete, providing a space for new functions that could be added to the model.

### **Rationale**

The examination of the historical, political, and sociological contexts, as well as the ethnic and gender perspectives, offer contextual symbols and meanings in a given narrative. By focusing on a content-based examination, the current critical environment of literary scholarship ignores the underlying laws that constitute the structure of narratives. This failure to examine and describe any narrative discourse without studying its rules and components is significant and must be addressed. Hence, as the present study focuses on structural narrative analysis, it studies the schematic description and representation of structural components of the novel, and by doing so, it studies the laws and rules that underlie and constitute the narrative structure of the novel.

### **Delimitation of Study**

The focus of Propp was on structural elements; therefore, the present research is confined to Propp's narrative theory and is delimited to the study of novel's plot. Moreover, Propp states that although there are generally thirty-one narrative functions in a fairy tale, in the stories where the villain dies and no new villain or villainy occurs, such tales end at

function twenty-two (1968). Hence, the present study is also delimited to twenty-two functions, as no new villain or act of villainy occurs after the death of Rasheed, the villain.

### **Literature Review**

The types of questions regarding the study and analysis of fairy tales raised by Russian folklorists and Propp can find “their counterparts in linguistics” (Milne, 1982, p. 20). Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss linguist, began working in linguistics a few years before the publication of *Morphology of Folktale* (Milne, 1982). The distinction made regarding the “three levels of linguistic activity”, namely, language, langue, and parole, is the beginning point of general linguistics (Milne, 1982, p. 21). Language, the broadest among the three, refers to the potential that humans possess for speech. Langue points to a system of language, an independent and complete sign system presenting ideas and appearing meaningful to those who share the same language. Lastly, the act of speaking is parole. Among all three levels, Langue is regarded by Saussure as a concrete and integral part of linguistics (Milne, 1982).

The arbitrary nature of a sign was the second salient concept that Saussure introduced. A sign is not arbitrary in nature but becomes one when it is associated with culture; that is when a sign and signified are linked by virtue of convention or law. This new field, envisioned by Saussure, to study sign systems was called ‘Semiology’. The aim of the study was to, rather than examining separate signs, unveil the internal “coherent system from which signs derive” (Milne, 1982, p. 22).

The third important concept Saussure introduced was the contrast between synchronic and diachronic linguistics, where the study of things related to the static part of language is synchronic. In contrast, the study of things associated with language evolution is diachronic. For Saussure to use language, studying the historical development of language is unnecessary. Thus, for him, linguistics should focus on langue, which should be studied synchronically (Milne, 1982).

The fourth and last concept presented by Saussure is related to the type of relationships which link one sign with another; i.e., he differentiated between paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationships (Milne, 1982). According to him, paradigmatic relations are vertical and associative and deal with group(s) of signs which might be swapped for the given sign. On the other hand, syntagmatic relationships are horizontal or linear. For Saussure, they are the ones where the focus is put on the position or placement of a given sign with regard to what comes before and after it. A certain value, as a result of the position that a sign has in the chain, is acquired by it. In any event, there is, undoubtedly, “a general similarity between the ways in which Saussure studied language and the way in which Propp.... studied works

of literature” (Milne, 1982, p. 25). However, before one can draw out similarities between them, it is important to study and understand the intellectual context most immediate to Propp. It appears that he was quite aware of the approach originated and flourished by Saussure. One could claim this, as a closer analysis of Propp’s work would highlight the subtle similarities among the ways language was studied by Saussure and Propp.

Russian formalism is considered to be the most immediate to Propp. As a consequence of the downfall of positivism and romanticism, most disciplines faced methodological crises. In Russia, two groups of scholars confronted this crisis of literary criticism. The one working in Moscow was known as ‘Moscow Linguistic Circle’ while the other in Petersburg was called ‘OPOJAZ’. Linguists, literary historians, folklorists and philologists were all members of both groups and collectively came to be known as ‘Russian Formalists.’ The followers of this type of criticism separated ‘form’ from ‘content.’ Formalists, hence once divorcing these elements, only studied ‘form’. According to Marxists, one can truly understand and examine a piece of literature when it is placed under social, political and economic context which plays a significant role in its production (Choi, 2004).

Formalists were not interested in studying ‘how’ and ‘by whom’ a piece of literature was created; instead, what intrigued them was ‘how it was created.’ In other words, they were interested in the ‘*aesthetic norms*’ inherited in the piece of literature rather than psychological temperament or social pressure, which help the author shape any piece of art. Hence, one could easily hear the echoes of Saussure’s notion that language is a system. Although formalists always attempted to synchronically describe and elucidate a work of literature, however, they never forgot that the object under their scrutiny was never static or stationary. Hence, for them, the works they studied were considered parole with regard to the langue, the formal, generic structure which gives rise to any piece of art (Milne, 1982).

Among the ‘Russian Formalists’, one of the folklorists was Vladimir Propp. His book, *Morphology of Folktale*, in which he studies plot formation and composition of Russian fairy tales, is not only an archetype of the formalist approach but also one of the most precious contributions made to the study of narratives. Propp, similar to Saussure, was concerned with discovering and highlighting the general rules and laws that governed and regulated the system. Moreover, similar to Saussure, his approach was also synchronic. The works of Propp include studying individual fairy tales, which stand equal to Saussure’s notion of parole, to the study of langue or collective features shared by all of them. The plot structure of a fairy tale was the specific system that Propp studied. He developed a linear model based

on the pattern of constant components of narrative. In Saussure's words, this linear model can be described as an example of syntagmatic relationships (Milne, 1982).

The concept that there are underlying universal structures of everything, either man-made or natural, is the main ontology espoused by Structuralism (Piaget, 1970). A familiarity in '*Morphology of Folktales*' was found by structuralists, and hereafter, the book was studied in this new prospect of 'structuralism.' Scholars have described *Structuralism* as 'an outlook to study reality' etc. According to it, everything has a particular structure or pattern that can be identified and discerned. Structuralism defines 'Structure' as "a system of relationships among the parts of a whole and between the parts and the whole" (Milne, 1982, p. 30). Propp is one of the pioneers of this school of thought and many known French scholars, such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes and A.J. Greimas, based their work on his work, which influenced further many French structuralists (Tomascikova, 2009).

The work of Claude Levi-Strauss, a French structuralist, is often compared with Propp's work; as both of them were interested in studying whole systems, the connections existing between components and elements of the system and the laws which govern these connections. The outcomes of structural linguistics highly influenced both Levi-Strauss and Propp to such an extent that they attempted to apply these results to the subject matters of their own fields and domains (Milne, 1982). Propp and Levi-Strauss considered narrative structure(s) as language. Both structuralists asserted that what was accurate for the language system was more accurate for fairy tales and myths. Hence, for them, words and grammatical laws, which create actions and images, are followed naturally by both fairy tales and myths (Choi, 2004). However, the types of structural analysis conducted by them were significantly contrasting from one another; while Propp was more concerned with narrative, construction of plots, and examined syntagmatic relations, Levi-Strauss was more interested in a deeper level, also described as latent structure or mythic, that lies under surface structure (Milne, 1982).

In his '*Morphology of Folktales*,' Propp examined a hundred folktales to establish a precise scientific formula (morphology) to categorise these tales. He identified thirty-one functions that are performed by dramatis personae within a fairy tale. Every function was "understood as an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of action" (Propp, 1968, p. 21). The model he developed is linear, based on the pattern of constant components of narrative, and such sequencing of the plot can be taken as a type of syntax consisting of the composition's lexicon and laws. Propp's work caught the attention of

the Western world when the translated version of his book first appeared in 1958, and this interest is often linked with Structuralism (Milne, 1982).

The primary ontology espoused by Structuralism is that there are underlying universal structures of everything, either man-made or natural (Piaget, 1970). It studies the functions and relations of elements or components in diverse systems (Tomascikova, 2009). By analysing Russian fairy tales, Propp made the following observations regarding functions:

- a. “Functions of characters serve as stable, constant elements in a tale independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled. They constitute the fundamental components of a tale.
- b. The number of functions known to a fairy tale is limited.
- c. The sequence of functions is always identical.
- d. All fairy tales are one type in regard to their structure” (1968, p. 21-3).

One can carry on this linguistic comparison by stating that *Morphology of Folktale* is basically an attempt by Propp, to show that a fairy tale’s plot is ordered syntactically and that there are rules responsible for governing the sequence of its components. Such sequencing of the plot can be taken as a type of syntax that consists of the composition’s lexicon and laws. Similar to other formalists, Propp’s work is a significant move in translating syntagmatic relationships which exist “between signs within a system from linguistic level to the level of narrative” (Milne, 1982, p. 28). According to Propp, characters are just the mechanism through which functions can be distributed around any story (Barry, 2002). Propp further adds that the narrative functions are logically joined “together in certain spheres” and these spheres completely “respond to their respective performers” (1968, p. 79). Consequently, these spheres become *roles* rather than *characters*, highlighting the superiority of *action* over *character* (Barry, 2002; Wake, 2006).

Now, the question is, how are these spheres of actions/functions being distributed among the characters of any single tale? Propp provides the answer by suggesting three ways of distribution: firstly, an individual sphere of action may correspond accurately to only one character. Secondly, multiple spheres of action may involve only a single character. Lastly, various characters are involved in the fulfilment of an individual action of a sphere (1968). The focal point of his analysis was the action of a particular character to fulfil the criteria of a specific function. For example, the action or role assigned to a villain is that of someone who disrupts peace, creates havoc, damages, harms or instils some sort of misfortune, and this can be performed by a stepmother, witch, dragon, bandits etc. (Propp, 1968).



The structuralist approach bore by Propp and his contemporaries provides the firm base and foundation upon which narrative analysis, by recent critics, is based. In past years, critics have started to advance towards examining and analysing narratives concerning how tales generate meanings and how a narrative works to encode a tale (Thornham & Purvis, 2005). Propp's model represents a specific kind of structure, which he describes as an underlying scheme for the composition of plots. Thus, the scheme has become a source which helps in the construction of plots. In comparison to other kinds of analysis, Propp's model for narrative structure is particularly selected for the present study. This does not suggest that his approach is the best or only approach for a structural analysis rather, it is selected as the one, among various possible types of analysis, which is the central and essential part of an overall synchronic examination of structures of narratives; hence, the synchronic study of the selected novel, makes the analysis 'structural.'

### **Research Methodology**

To explore the novel from the perspective of structural narrative analysis, the research utilises the schematic description and representation of structural components, as propagated by Propp. For analysis, the present segment has divided the structural model into three sections:

- 1) Propp's theory
- 2) Propp's structural model for analysing a fairy tale
- 3) Schematic representation of the structure of a fairy tale

### **Theoretical Framework**

As the main aim of Propp's work was to create an instrument to identify a fairytale, his theory regarding the composition and formation of a fairy tale and the method for analysing the material is utilised in the analysis of the novel. After studying and examining fairy tales, Propp noticed that the stories contain constant and reoccurring components and units of plot, which he termed '*functions*.' For him, the basic element of any tale is that these functions are performed by 'dramatis personae' and must be extracted first (1968). In this study, the researcher would apply these narrative functions to the novel's plot to analyse how the narrative structure of the novel resembles that of a fairy tale.

### **Propp's Model**

In his book, Propp gave each function:

- 1) In a single word, an abridged definition
- 2) A conventional symbol
- 3) A small summary regarding its essence

For instance, the first function is ‘*absentation*,’ which is represented by the ‘*beta*’ symbol, and according to the summary, one of the family members is absent from the home. (The appendix at the end of the article gives a detailed description of Propp’s narrative functions and characterisation.)

Another important concept introduced by Propp is ‘*move*.’ While analysing the structure of fairy tales, he divided tales into major components of a narrative, which he named ‘*moves*.’ It is considered a miniature story which develops from a lack of villainy and moves towards denouement while passing through an “intermediary function” (1968, p. 92). In a tale, the least amount of ‘*moves*’ is one, while, theoretically, there is no highest number. The moves may follow, overlap or share a common conclusion. Moreover, Propp observed two phenomena regarding amalgamation and the merger of functions. The first is assimilation, which occurs when a specific action fulfils two unassociated functions. Whereas, when a single function simultaneously fulfils another function, this highlights that the single function “has double morphological meaning” (Nichol, 1981, p. 169).

### **Schematic Representation**

Propp’s grammar for a story can be summarised and illustrated as follows:

Initial Situation (a)	A king, soldier, tsar
Absentation ( $\beta$ )	the king’s daughter goes for a walk
Violation ( $\delta$ )	the daughter violates an interdiction
Villainy (A)	the villain kidnaps her
Mediation (B)	a cry or call for help is made
Counteraction (C)	journey of hero
Struggle, Marking, Victory (H, J, I)	A combat or fight with a villain
Misfortune is liquidated (K)	the victim is rescued
Return ( $\downarrow$ )	the return of a hero
Wedding (W)	the hero is rewarded

Propp’s methodology demonstrates and suggests that formal rules regarding the composition of a fairy tale are fixed and that the content of a story can be analysed objectively and scientifically.

### **Research Design**

The study is qualitative in nature. It utilises the syntagmatic approach to identify the presence of narrative function as the plot progresses. Furthermore, Close Reading, in

collaboration with Propp's model, is particularly selected as it focuses on analysing individual sentences, words, dialogues and actions of characters present within a literary text (Griffin, 2018).

### **Analysis and Discussion**

The novel has three moves in the novel, i.e. the first is Mariam's story, the second is Laila's, and the third is Tariq's. All these moves are linked as they overlap one another. Due to this intersection, many functions are shared among moves. Most developed moves are first and second, as these follow the greatest number of functions.

#### **Move One: Mariam's Story**

Propp states that a story usually starts with an '*initial situation (α)*,' though it is not a function but plays an important part in the structure of a narrative as the main purpose is to introduce the hero –his/her name, status, occupation- or the family which will suffer from misfortune or villainy. It also paves the way for the impending misfortune or villainy, which invisibly hovers over the victim. The novel opens with the introduction of the hero; readers come to know that the hero's name is Mariam, a five-year-old illegitimate child. Thus, the readers, in the first two lines, learn about the hero's name, age and status.

At this point, it is essential to mention that sometimes the hero or some other family member lacks something (function 8a); due to this, the functions specific to the middle of a story are transferred to the beginning of a story. The desire to fulfil this lack acts as a driving force behind the actions of a victimised hero or the victim (Propp, 1968). Similarly, Mariam's lack of fatherly love, home, family and acceptance moves the narrative forward. For instance, although Nana repeatedly urges Mariam not to trust Jalil, she turns a deaf ear to all her warnings and leaves for his house. Hence, this particular act plays a crucial role, as the narrative revolves around the repercussions of this particular action of Mariam.

According to Propp's model, the first function of a tale is '*absentation (β)*;' that is, one of the family members absent themselves from home. However, he states that in some stories, the second function, '*interdiction (γ)*,' a warning addressed to a hero or a family member, can occur first (1968). Similarly, the second function occurs before the first one in move one. Throughout the first move, one could see that a number of soft or inverted interdictions are addressed to Mariam before the final and strongest one (regarding leaving Nana), which she refuses to believe, and this refusal or *violation (function 3)* (leaves for Jalil's house) leads towards absentation, (death of her mother) and villainy (exiled to Kabul). Propp states that the death of a parent is "an intensified form of absentation" and children, after the death of parents, are left on their own and become defenseless in front of a villain

(1968, p. 12). Additionally, there are two kinds of absentions in move 1: physical and emotional absention of Mariam's father, Jalil, from her life.

Moreover, before the occurrence of actual villainy, that is, the expulsion of the hero, there are functions of '*trickery*' and '*complicity*.' Propp states that the sixth function, '*trickery* ( $\eta$ )' occurs when the villain tries to delude his/her victim in order to take hold of his/her possessions or the victim himself (1968). Likewise, disguised as a loving and caring father, Jalil tries to trick Mariam into winning her sympathy, pity, and compassion. While on the other hand, '*complicity* ( $\theta$ ),' function 7, occurs when the victim succumbs to the villain's deception and consequently unintentionally helps his/her enemy (Propp, 1968). Hence, Jalil is quite successful in tricking Mariam through his lies and deception, and he also allures her into believing that he is the only person who truly cares for her and loves her.

The function of **villainy** is exceptionally significant as it is from here that "the actual movement" of the story is created (Propp, 1968, p. 16). The first seven functions are regarded as a '*preparatory section*' while the second segment, '*complication*,' begins with villainy (Propp, 1968). The ninth category of villainy says that the villain expels the victim. In the novel, this category occurs in the form of a marriage. Mariam's stepmothers and Jalil fix her marriage with Rasheed- a cobbler in Kabul.

The ninth function, '*mediation* (**B**)', is significant as it brings out the hero in the story and causes his/her departure from home (Propp, 1968). Secondly, it is a demand of the tale's structure that, at any cost, the hero must leave home. According to the fifth category of this function, the banished hero is transported or sent far away from home. It is essential for this category to apply a connective incident of parent-senders; usually, the father sends his daughter to a faraway land on the demand of stepmother (s) (Propp, 1968). Similarly, in the novel, Jalil sends Mariam, at the insistence of her stepmother (s), to Kabul, which is 650 km away from Herat, with Rasheed, a future villain.

On Mariam's arrival to Kabul, readers are introduced to a Tajik family: Fariba and her husband Hakim, their children Noor, Ahmed and Laila, the second lead in the novel, and her love interest Tariq who is a Pashtun. Hakim's family is poles apart from Rasheed, and in move two, both families unwittingly have to depend on each other for survival, specifically Laila.

The functions of **villainy**, **trickery** and **complicity** appear back and forth multiple times in the story. For some time, Mariam's story comes to a halt, and Laila's story will be taken as Move Two; however, Move One overlaps the second move in the third section of the novel. In short, during the analysis, it is observed that there are seven functions, along with an

initial situation, that are fulfilled in the first move. Moreover, it has been noticed that there are a few functions that occur multiple times. Few occur in their modified form; however, most occur in their original form, while some occur in their modified and original forms. Most importantly, the majority of the functions occur in the same order established by Propp. Lastly, when Move One and Two combine, it is hypothesised that more functions would be followed.

### **Move Two: Laila's Story**

As a tale usually begins with an '*initial situation (a)*' and introduces the hero, Move Two begins with the introduction of nine years old Laila who is from a Persian-speaking Tajik family from Panjshir. By the physical description, it becomes clear that she is quite beautiful. Furthermore, the readers also learn about Tariq, whom she values dearly and who is a part of her existence.

The first function of Propp's model, '*absentation ( $\beta$ )*' suggests that a family member absences themselves from home (1968). Similarly, in Move Two, Laila's mother, Fariba, is emotionally absent from her life. Similar to Mariam, Laila also suffers from the physical absentation of her parents when both Hakim and Fariba die in a bomb blast, and she becomes vulnerable to Rasheed. Like Mariam, Laila also suffers from a '*lack (function 8a)*' of parental love, specifically her mother's love and a proper household. She craves for her mother's attention. This lack attracts her towards Tariq and his family because he fulfils this lack. Later on, she develops a romantic and physical relationship with him.

The second function, '*interdiction ( $\gamma$ )*,' is a sort of warning addressed to a hero or a family member. It can be strong, such as a command; weak, such as an advice request or it can be inverted, such as a suggestion (Propp, 1968). In move two, it occurs in an inverted form, that is, in the form of a suggestion, occurs again and again when Hakim keeps trying to convince Fariba to leave the country. However, Fariba continuously **violates** them as she keeps rejecting the idea (Hosseini, 2007).

Moreover, **interdiction**, in its strong form, also occurs when Fariba warns Laila about maintaining a distance from Tariq, as neither of them are children anymore. However, Laila does not pay any heed to her mother's words and **violates** them by sleeping with him, thus fulfilling the third function of '*violation ( $\delta$ )*.' Moreover, as Propp stated after the violation, the villain enters the tale and tries to take advantage of the victim, who is in a vulnerable state (1968). Similarly, as a result, the death of both Hakim and Fariba paves the way for a villain, Rasheed, to enter into Laila's life as he is the one who rescues her from the blast. From this point onwards, Move One and Two become one as they overlap each other. Additionally, the

researcher would like to highlight that few functions are common in both moves. For instance, during the analysis of the **initial situation** of both moves, it becomes clear that Mariam and Laila are protected by their parents from the wretchedness of the world, respectively. Both suffer from the **emotional absentation** of their parent, and this absentation creates a **lack** of a proper household, which they both try to fulfil through different means. Moreover, both suffer from an **intensified form of absentation**, that is, the death of a parent, which causes the entry of a villain in their lives. Similarly, both of them receive **interdictions** from their mothers, which are **violated** by both the heroes, leaving them vulnerable in front of the villain (Rasheed) as he entraps them.

According to the fifth function, '**delivery** ( $\zeta$ )', "the villain receives information" about his/her victim (Propp, 1968). This function occurs in a modified form when Rasheed rescues Laila and provides her shelter in his house (Hosseini, 2007). The first category of the sixth function, '**trickery** ( $\eta$ )' suggests that a villain, to attain the possession of the victim or his/her belongings, deceives him/her through persuasion (Propp, 1968). Chapter twenty-eight of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* can be taken as trickery where Rasheed sends his friend Abdul Sharif, who narrates a fake incident of how he met Tariq in a hospital where the latter succumbs to his injuries. He describes the event with so much conviction that Laila cannot recognise that the person is a sham planted by Rasheed and thus falls for his deception and fulfils the seventh function of **complicity** ( $\theta$ ).

'**Preliminary Misfortune**' ( $\lambda$ ), which Propp describes as a situation where the villain presents a deceitful proposal and the victim accepts. According to it, the villain takes advantage of a difficult situation in which the victim is trapped. Likewise, one of the categories of lack states that the victim sometimes lacks a means of survival (1968). The deceitful agreement in the novel occurs when Rasheed traps Laila in marriage, and she agrees just to save her daughter (Hosseini, 2007).

The second category of **villainy** states that the villain forcibly seizes the magical agent (Propp, 1968); however, instead of a magical agent, Rasheed seizes Laila's freedom. As Laila is also a victim hero, her '**departure** ( $\uparrow$ )' is also without a search. In move 2, the departure occurs both in traditional and modified forms. Laila departs not only from her home but also from her previous life. Moreover, Propp also states that sometimes the departure occurs without "the spatial transference of hero" (1968, p. 23). Same as Move One, function ten, '**beginning counteraction** ( $C$ ),' also does not occur as Laila is a victim hero.

Various forms of villainy occur during the course of the novel; for instance, when Laila and Mariam fail to run away from Rasheed, he beats both of them, fulfilling the sixth

category of villainy. Secondly, the fifteenth category of villainy, imprisonment, occurs when he locks Laila in the room and Mariam in a tool shed. Lastly, the fourth category of villainy states that “the villain seizes the daylight” (Propp, 1968, p. 17). It occurs when Rasheed blocks all sources of light in the room where Laila is locked. He sends Aziza to an orphanage, stating that he cannot afford five people as his business is slow (Hosseini, 2007).

After villainy, the donor enters into a story. The hero obtains some kind of magical agent from him/her, which eventually helps the hero liquidate the misfortune. However, the hero is interrogated or tested before receiving a magical agent. As of now, Move One and Two are merged; therefore, Mariam and Laila are donors to each other. Hence, the twelfth and thirteenth functions of ‘the first function of donor (D)’ and ‘reaction of hero (E)’ are fulfilled in each other’s move. Although both protagonists are hostile towards each other at the beginning, as the story builds, their relationship also progresses. For example, Laila saves Mariam from getting beaten by Rasheed. Mariam provides clothes for Aziza, which she bought a long time ago for her unborn child (Hosseini, 2007). This particular act falls under the first category of the fourteenth function, ‘*provision and receipt of a magical agent (F)*,’ which states that sometimes the hero is provided with a gift which “amounts to certain material value” rather than a magical agent (Propp, 1968, p. 27). Moreover, even after her death, Mariam fulfils her role as a donor as Laila becomes the beneficiary of money that Jalil left for Mariam. According to Propp, magical agents can be qualities or capabilities and (1968). In this novel, the magical agent is love, support, companionship, and friendship, which Mariam and Laila have for each other.

Function sixteen, ‘*struggle (H)*,’ states that the hero and villain fight with each other. In the novel, the first category of this function occurs when both Laila and Mariam get involved in a physical altercation with Rasheed. The seventeenth function, ‘*branding (J)*,’ states that the hero receives an injury or wound during the fight. This function occurs twice i.e., when he hits Laila with his belt on her temple and secondly when he starts hitting her relentlessly and blood starts oozing out from different parts of her body (Hosseini, 2007). According to the eighteenth function, ‘*victory (I)*,’ the villain is beaten or defeated in the struggle (Propp, 1968). This function occurs when Mariam hits Rasheed twice with a shovel and kills him (Hosseini, 2007).

Lastly, it is essential to mention that the struggle between Laila, Mariam and Rasheed can be studied from the viewpoint of Move One and Move Two. If one studies it from the standpoint of Move One, where Mariam is the hero, it is the hero who defeats (kills) the villain; while, according to Move Two, where Mariam is the donor, it is the donor who

defeats the villain and rescues hero. According to the fifth category of the twenty-first function, '*pursuit (Pr)*', "the pursuer tries to devour the hero;" (Propp, 1968). However, in the story, Mariam is pursued by the guilt of depriving a child of his father's love. Chapter forty-seven of the novel appears as a circle of Mariam's life. She metaphorically returns to her mud house as her prison-a square shaped drab building- is similar to a mud house; thus, fulfilling function twenty '*return (↙)*,' but this time she is not an illegitimate child; rather, someone who is loved, cherished, appreciated, revered and admired.

She leaves this world as a guardian, companion, and friend but, most importantly, as a mother. These particular thoughts of Mariam indicate that her *initial lack* of love and belongingness is *liquidated*; thus, **function nineteen** gets fulfilled. Moreover, when Mariam leaves this world, she does not "feel herself faltering" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 328). This implies she no longer feels any regret and is rescued from the pursuit of her guilt. Hence, function twenty-two, '*rescue (Rs)*,' is fulfilled. Lastly, with Mariam's death, move 1 comes to an end.

### **Move Three: Tariq's Story**

For the first time, Tariq is introduced in Move Two, where the reader learns that he holds a special place in Laila's life and heart. As the story begins with an '*initial situation (a)*' where the hero and his status are introduced (Propp, 1968), the audience comes to know that he is eleven years old ethnic Pashtun and uses an artificial leg. As the story progresses, he reciprocates the same feelings and emotions of attachment, love and intimacy that Laila holds for him, developing a romantic and physical relationship with her.

Propp states that in some tales, villainy is absent, and the function of *lack (8a)*' takes its place. Moreover, the stories usually begin with function nine of '*dispatch*' (1968). Similarly, Tariq's tale also starts with a lack, but his lack is different from that of Laila and Mariam as it is his parents who suffer from a worldly lack in the form of **means of existence**-the fifth category of function 8a. He informs Laila that his parents are quite old and can no longer live in a place where uncertainty, violence and savagery are a regular thing. So, he is leaving the country with them (Hosseini, 2007). Hence, this particular proclamation of Tariq fulfils function ten, '*beginning counteraction (C)*.'

The third category of the ninth function, '*mediation (B)*,' states that a "hero is allowed to depart from home" (Propp, 1986, p. 21). In move 3, it occurs when Laila asks Tariq to leave without saying good-byes (Hosseini, 2007). This lack plays a crucial role in Tariq's tale as it causes his father's death, fulfilling the first function of '*absentation (β)*' and pushing him to procure means to save his mother as she nearly dies because of pneumonia in the refugee camp.



Not being able to find a decent job, Tariq opts for a shady job when a shopkeeper asks him to deliver a coat to his friend in Lahore (Hosseini, 2007). This particular situation falls under the third category of the twelfth function, *'the first function of the donor (D).'* According to it, the donor asks the hero to render his/her services (Propp, 1968). However, Tariq fails to perform the task, fulfilling the third category of the thirteenth function- *'hero's reaction (E).'* This failure highlights a special category of the fourteenth function, *'receipt or provision of magical agent (F).'* known as **F contr**. According to this, the hero is punished severely (Propp, 1968), and as a result of this debacle, Tariq spends seven years in prison (Hosseini, 2007).

According to the second category of the fourteenth function, a magical agent is pointed out. In jail, Tariq's cellmate sends him to his brother, who owns a hotel in Murree. It also fulfils the third category of the fifteenth function- *'spatial transference between two kingdoms (G).'* According to it, the hero is led to another kingdom, which is high up, and Murree is a hill station at the foothills of Pir Panjal. Though Tariq begins his journey of finding a safe and peaceful place for his parents, he rescues Laila and Aziza from their misery and brings them to Murree, which becomes a safe haven for his new family.

Coming to Murree fulfils function fifteen of *'spatial transference between two kingdoms (G)* but also the nineteenth function of **liquidation** in Move Two as Laila felt blessed to be just beside Tariq and watch her children sleep peacefully without care; with him, she feels anchored and sheltered. However, Laila is pursued by the guilt of leaving Mariam behind, fulfilling the fifth category of the twenty-first function, *'pursuit (Pr)*. Laila is rescued from the pursuit when she returns to Kabul and pays Mariam her last respects. Hence, in this way, she fulfils the eighth category of the twenty-second function, *'rescue (Rs).'* which states that the hero does not allow him/herself "to be devoured" (Propp, 1968).

Function twenty-two, *'return (↓).'* occurs when Laila returns back to Kabul and her old self. Hence, she is once again the same old girl who is an independent, headstrong and free woman. Likewise, she follows Hakim's advice and realises her responsibility to play a part in rebuilding Afghanistan, which was destroyed by wars, and, as a result, becomes a teacher at Zaman's orphanage.

## Conclusions

This research was conducted to identify the narrative functions as they occur with the plot development of the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. The findings of the study were ascertained through the method of close reading in collaboration with Propp's narrative

theory. The researcher successfully achieved the objective, as the narrative structure of the novel highly correlates with the criteria for fairy tales proposed by Propp. Most of the functions that drive the narrative forward were instantaneously recognisable; however, few functions have been modified. The novel fulfils twenty-one out of twenty-two functions. It was found that out of twenty-one, five functions are present in both traditional and modified forms, while only three functions are present in their modified forms. The two most important aspects of a fairy tale, the lack and abandonment of children at the hands of parents, are also the most significant aspect of the novel, as they drive the narrative forward. These two functions are present in all three Moves, where the heroes either suffer from the lack of proper household and family or means of survival and are left abandoned by the parents either in the form of emotional absentation or death. Moreover, this research paves the way for future comparative studies that explore how Propp's narrative functions are adapted across different cultural contexts and modern narratives. Such comparative studies could reveal deeper insights into the cultural specificity and universality of Propp's theory. Lastly, although decades have passed since the time when Propp first published his book and fairy tales have also adopted new changes, by looking at the result, one could say no matter how much time has passed, the writers of today's world still follow the conventions that were set down by the people even before Propp. This demonstrates the enduring influence of fairy tale structures, even within modern, culturally nuanced storytelling frameworks.

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