



ISSN-2321-7065



UGC Approved Journal



IJELLH

**International Journal of English Language,
Literature in Humanities**

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed) Journal

Impact Factor : 5.7



**Volume 6, Issue 1
January 2018
www.ijellh.com**

Prof. Vishnu Kumar Sharma
Dean
Yagyavalkya Institute of Technology
Jaipur
Rajasthan
India
vk_english75@yahoo.in

The theme of the loss of childhood in *The God of Small Things* and *The White Tiger*

Abstract

The present paper “The theme of the loss of childhood in *The God of Small Things* and *The White Tiger*” deals with the study of the comparative thematic analysis with amazing, innovative artistic skills with which the reader is enthralled. Here it is tried to find out how they have managed the new theme with innovative style; how their way of say things create a stir in the minds. Thus a detailed study reveals that the true nature of their thematic presentation is to ransack and attack the roots of ordeals. The focus has been on how they have presented the theme of the loss of childhood which choked and putrefied the buoyant quality of childhood. Both the authors have created a new dimension not only escaping from the mire of stale themes but evolving new artistic styles, which have definitely strengthen the Indian writing in English.

Key words: beguiled, germination, heighten, monitor, motif, traumatic

Theme: metalanguage

The germination of plot lies in theme. An incident or illustration develops a motif; sequence of motifs develop a theme; series of themes make a plot, the life and soul of a novel, which is the most important of the six formative elements of a novel. Thus theme is the combination of the incidents of the story; it is the central ideas about specific human behaviour at a given time. It is an idea repeatedly suggested throughout the text. Hence, it is implied rather than stated outright by the author. The theme, being abstract, is made concrete to the readers through literary techniques such as symbols, metaphors, and imagery for representing action, characterization and behaviour. Consequently, it is used deliberately by the author to convey his/her ideas.

Plot is the order of actions in a story while theme is the essence of the story. A plot can exercise physically by placing excitement and conflicts in the story that could heighten one's senses. A theme is more on exercising one's mental and emotional capacity through the morals and message of the story. Literary patterns of theme, like the artistic-delineating patterns, *control emphasis and deploy a reader's attention*.¹ (Turner, *Stylistics* 237) Grasping the theme the reader enters the labyrinths of writer's mind which is the first requirement for understanding a novel because *the work of fiction is as much the creation of the reader as of the writer*.² (Mandell, *Fiction: Reading, Reacting, Writing* 294)

Further what is the theme and how it works in literary patterns is tried to make more clear with the following quotes;

In *Form and Meaning in Fiction*, N. Friedman writes, *Theme in one of those crucial but shifting terms in contemporary criticism which for the old-fashioned critics means message or moral, while for the new critic it means total meaning and form. It can also refer variously to the basic problems, issues or questions embodied in the work*.³ (Friedman, *Form and Meaning in Fiction* 56)

Theme is to plot as meaning is to form; theme is what which plot constitutes a temporal projection of; theme is what is made of a topic; theme is a main idea in a text, a central thread, a minimum generalization; theme is highly abstract semantic category subsuming a set of motifs or minimal and concrete thematic units, theme is a frame, a macrostructure, a reality model, a system organizing knowledge about some phenomenon in the world; theme is what a text or a part thereof is about, theme is general thought, unifying and summarizing a series of sentences: theme is a proposition entailed by a discourse sequence....A theme involves only general and abstract entities; ideas, thoughts, beliefs and so on...A motif is not a theme, but a possible illustration of one or put it differently and more precisely a motif is a number of the set of objects characterizing a theme extensionally; relative to a given semantic domain.⁴(Gerald. *Narrative as Theme* 1-3)

Theme is the central or dominating idea in a literary work, often an abstract concept which is made concrete through characters and action... details are important because they take us closer to the deeper underlying meaning of the story – what we call its theme.⁵ (Roy. *Studying Fiction: A Guide and Study Programme* 212)

Whether it may be called an embellishment or a monitor or germination but it unifies the whole concept of the literary work. It is a key to plot both for encoding and decoding to writer and reader respectively.

The God of Small Things and *The White Tiger* enfold several themes. Roy, in an interview, has stated, she didn't think she offered one thing. If there's sadness there's also happiness. *You see tragedy in comedy and you see happiness in sorrow, you see everything in everything and that is part of the process of living. So, in my book there is horrible sorrow but there is also the most delicate happiness.*⁶ (Sokol "Like Sculpting Smoke Arundhati Roy on Fame, Writing and India") *But happiness is the occasional episode in a general drama of pain.*⁷ (Kramer, ed Thomas Hardy *The Mayor of Casterbridge* 327) A social novel is like tragedy, *essentially an imitation not of persons but of action and life, of happiness and misery.*⁸ (Bywater, *Aristotle: On the Art of Poetry* 37) *The God of Small Things* is a family-made-misery saga while *The White Tiger* is corruption-made-misery saga. In *The God of Small Things* there seems no obstacle or speed breaker in the smooth current of misfortunes and miseries inflicted upon Ammu and company by various systems – family, society, government, and bureaucracy. In *The White Tiger* the misfortunes and miseries take their breaks in midway in the life of Balram. But the said miseries and misfortunes are transferred not with the help of any transferred epithet but by the power of *glass* and *fire*. With glass Balram murders Mr. Ashok the master; with fire Balram's whole family is burnt alive by Mr. Ashok's family in revenge. Being supreme sinner Mr. Ashok is sinned rightly while Balram's family members are sinned against innocence and Balram the Anti hero prospers. In *The White Tiger* corruption occurs the frequent recurrent motif and thus it turns into the main theme of the novel.

Central to the novels is a vision of the continuity between knowing the world through experience and struggle and breaking the socio-governmental-bureaucratic nexus through satirical-armed skills. The very nexuses caused power-corruption which sustain and make the world what it is. Additionally, subalternized characters in the novels, especially children, divorced women, and underdogs challenge taboos and bloodlines of kinship and caste to condemn the workings that suspend the buoyant quality of life in general.

A close reading of novels reveal many motley matters that are raised, like position of woman in a patriarchal society, child abuse, treatment of marginalized, environmental problems, and stratification of society on the bases of caste and class. So, these can also be seen as protest novels that are radical, subversive and taboo-breaking. Besides, the novel presents a powerful critique of all power structures like religion, education, society, bureaucracy and politics that oppress the marginalized including children, women, and the underdogs. They suggest that race, peasantry, caste and corruption have proven to be more durable in our so-called

postcolonial world. But at the same time, they also celebrate and glorify the nature of the *small things* or marginalized that add meaning and joy to life. All these themes are artistically meshed and woven together throughout the text to form a unified whole.

The theme of the loss of childhood

The theme of the beguiled childhood occurs frequently in both the novels. The word childhood, its related motifs and events occur again and again to reflect the beguiled childhood as the main theme of the novels. In fact, Roy presents the childhood of many characters in the novel, though the main focus is always on the twins, Estha and Rahel. Likewise in *The White Tiger* it is on Balram.

Childhood tiptoed out.

Silence slid in like a bolt⁹ (Roy, The God of Small Things 320).

While other children of their age learned other things, Estha and Rahel learned how history negotiates its terms and collects its dues from those who break its laws. They heard its sickening thud. They smelled its smell and never forgot it. History's smell.... They would grow up grappling with ways of living with what happened. They would try to tell themselves that in terms of geological time it was an insignificant event. Just a blink of the Earth Woman's eye. (Roy, The God of Small Things 47)

Very strategically, this theme is figured by Roy throughout the novel. *The God of Small Things* as well as *The White Tiger* presents psychological scars of childhood. Both the writers show what it means being a child, especially one who comes from a broken/dysfunctional family. Here children suffer from lack of parental love and affection, they are abandoned and neglected by uncaring adults, and their traumatic childhood experiences stunt their emotional development as individuals and lead to abnormal and deviant behaviours.

The twins are fated to meet father's as well as mother's anger since the very beginning of the rearing up stage. *They remembered being pushed around a room once, from Ammu to Baba to Ammu to Baba like billiard balls. Ammu pushing Estha away. Here, you keep one of them. I can't look after them both. (Roy, The God of Small Things 75)*

For practical purposes they are living in a hopelessly practical world. They are divorced from parental affection as *Mammachi said that what her grandchildren suffered from was far worse than Inbreeding. She meant having parents who were divorced. As though these were the only choices available to people: Inbreeding or Divorce. (Roy, The God of Small Things 53)*

Their sorrows will never be sad enough perhaps Ammu is there to solace. Their joys will never be happy enough because their Baba, their Ammu-cum-Baba and their Veutha who could be as Baba were snatched away either by separation or death or slaughter *Not old. Not young. But (in) a viable die-able age.* (Roy, *The God of Small Things* 03) Their dreams will never be big enough because there is no one to help and fill. Their lives will never be important enough because they are made wretched by system. As it is felt *We belong nowhere. We sail unanchored on troubled seas. We may never be allowed ashore.* (Roy, *The God of Small Things* 46)

Throughout their stay at Ayemenem, they as well as their mother Ammu were made to feel that they had no “*Locust Stand I.*” Baby Kochamma regarded them as nothing better than *doomed, fatherless waifs.* (Roy, *The God of Small Things* 44) She felt that, *worse still, they were Half-Hindu. Hybrids whom no self respecting Syrian Christian would ever marry.* (Roy, *The God of Small Things* 45) Chacko considered *that Ammu and Estha and Rahel were millstones around his neck* (Roy, *The God of Small Things* 77) and felt they were not his responsibility. All of them including “vinegar-hearted” Kochu Maria, their cook, lost no opportunity in constantly reminding them *that they lived on sufferance in the Ayemenem House, their maternal grandmother’s house, where they really had no right to be.* (Roy, *The God of Small Things* 39) Stigmatized and subjected to a series of taunts by family members, the occasional episode of happiness occurs in their lives’ general drama of traumatic taunts only when they are with Velutha, the low-caste paravan. The twins are like *a pair of small bewildered frogs engrossed in each other’s company, lolloping arm in arm down a highway full of hurtling traffic. Entirely oblivious of what trucks can do to frogs.* (Roy, *The God of Small Things* 43).

What happened to Estha behind the Refreshments Counter, in the Abhilash Talkies Princess Circle lobby is a heinous sexual abuse.

“Now if you’ll kindly hold this for me,” the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man said, handing Estha his penis through his soft white muslin dhoti, “I’ll get you your drink. Orange? Lemon?” ...The Orangedrink Lemondrink Man’s hand closed over Estha’s. His thumbnail was long like a woman’s. He moved Estha’s hand up and down. First slowly. Then fastly. (Roy, *The God of Small Things* 94) Frightened Estha returned into the hall and *sat up and watched. His stomach heaved. He had a greenwavy, thick-watery, lumpy, seaweedy, floaty bottomless-bottomful feeling.* (Roy, *The God of Small Things* 101) After sometime, his state is as if *“Feeling vomity.” Ammu saw her son’s bright feverbutton eyes. “Estha’s sick,”*

Ammu said. "Come on!" (Roy, *The God of Small Things* 102) And the family compels to leave home in-between the movie show. But "*these are only the small things*". The novel gradually discloses that throughout the formative years of their lives, they have been subjected to psychological trauma that leaves deep unhealable scars in their lives.

The traumatic events that took in grip the twins leave permanent scars on their psyche and which are the source of continuing fear in their life. These events are in fact cataclysmic, and leave their imprint on the lives of the twins. Even Baby Kochamma, the grandmother, who is in general, sought in every Indian family the image of affection, deceits them through cunning strategy and emotional blackmail that have coerced the twins into testifying the dying Velutha, their beloved friend who could be as their Baba, as their abductor and the person responsible for Sophie Mol's death. The vulnerability and innocence of children are exploited by the adults.

The Kottayam Police had acted on the basis of a false F.I.R. with allegation of rape, kidnapping and blah-blah filed by Baby Kochamma. But after the encounter and verbal statement of the twins it was proved that the beaten to dismember victim Velutha was innocent which left the police saddled with the *Death in Custody of a technically innocent man*. Inspector threatens Baby Kochamma that "*The matter is very simple. Either the rape-victim must file a complaint. Or the children must identify the Paravan as their abductor in the presence of a police witness. "Or I must charge you with lodging a false F.I.R. Criminal offense."* (Roy, *The God of Small Things* 302). Here the balloon of false arrogance punctured in no time. It seemed that *cartoonplatoon's* arrogance breakfasted with plenty, dined with poverty and supped with infamy.

And cunning-deceitful Baby Kochamma emotionally blackmails and terrifies the twins; who were already horrified due to previous night Velutha's inhuman beating scene in which Estha and Rahel wake up to the shout of sleep, surprised by shattered kneecaps: *They heard the thud of wood on flesh. Boot on bone. On teeth. The muffled grunt when a stomach is kicked in. The muted crunch of skull on cement. The gurgle of blood on a man's breath when his lung is torn by the jagged end of a broken rib* (Roy, *The God of Small Things* 308). To witness such horrible brutality being inflicted on a man they love and the incidents that followed left a wound on their tender impressionable mind which even time could not heal. They were pawns in the power game.

"So now you'll have to go to jail," Baby Kochamma said kindly. "And your mother will go to jail because of you. Would you like that?" ... If you want to save her, all you have to do is to

go with the Uncle with the big meeshas. He'll ask you a question. One question. All you have to do is to say 'Yes.' Then we can all go home. It's so easy. It's a small price to pay." (Roy, *The God of Small Things* 302)

Is it really *a small price to pay*? Certainly it is not. Later on it proved the biggest and worst price that could be. The reply "yes" destroyed *Two lives. Two children's childhoods.* And showed *a history lesson for future offenders.* (Roy, *The God of Small Things* 320)

The misguided, blackmailed, frightened and terrified twins had been given a choice. They hadn't given it more than a second of thought before they looked up and said "*Save Ammu. Save us. Save our mother.*" (Roy, *The God of Small Things* 304) *But worst of all, he carried inside him the memory of a young man with an old man's mouth. The memory of a swollen face and a smashed, upside-down smile. Of a spreading pool of clear liquid with a bare bulb reflected in it. Of a bloodshot eye that had opened, wandered and then fixed its gaze on him. Estha. And what had Estha done? He had looked into that beloved face and said: Yes.* (Roy, *The God of Small Things* 32).

Estha's "yes" led to dire consequences. (Roy, *The God of Small Things* 199) *Sealed the secret.* (Roy, *The God of Small Things* 194) *Twins Prepare to prepare to be prepared* (Roy, *The God of Small Things* 194) for their doom. All was lost forever;

Velutha left behind a Hole in the Universe through which darkness poured like liquid tar. Through which their mother followed without even turning to wave good-bye. She left them behind, spinning in the dark, with no moorings, in a place with no foundation. (Roy, *The God of Small Things* 191)

In the years to come they would replay this scene in their heads. As children. As teenagers. As adults. Had they been deceived into doing what they did? Had they been tricked into condemnation? (Roy, *The God of Small Things* 304)

Consequently, this tragic and traumatic event silences Estha forever: *Once the quietness arrived, it stayed and spread in Estha.... It sent its stealthy, suckered tentacles inching along the insides of his skull, hovering the knolls and dells of his memory;... Slowly, over the years, Estha withdrew from the world. He grew accustomed to the uneasy octopus that lived inside him and squirted its inky tranquilizer on his past.* (Roy, *The God of Small Things* 12).

The discovery of the Ammu-Velutha affairs coincides with the drowning death of Sophie Mol for which the twins are held responsible. Chacko becomes violent and with a chrome handle in his hand, screams at Ammu to send her children back, "*Pack your things and go.*" (Roy, *The God of Small Things* 222) Even Kochu Maria, the vinegar-hearted, short-tempered,

midget cook orders to Estha “*Tell your mother to take you to your father’s house. There you can break as many beds as you like. These aren’t your beds. This isn’t your house.*” (Roy, *The God of Small Things* 75) And poor Ammu with her *trying-not-to-cry mouth* (Roy, *The God of Small Things* 300) forced to send Estha back to his father (“Returned”). This tragedy separates the twins and years later Estha is sent back by his father to Ayemenem, “Re-returned”. Returned and Re-returned like a library book. Ammu, their mother dies a lonely and miserable death and the sight of her dead body wrapped in dirty bed sheet inflicts the last blow on Rahel. The twins suffer from a cavalcade of misfortunes; the loss of their father, the loss of mutual kinship between brother and sister through enforced separation, the loss of Sophie Mol due to unnatural drowning death, the loss of Velutha due to intended slaughter, the loss of Ammu (*their Ammu and their Baba and she had loved them Double* (Roy, *The God of Small Things* 222)) due to enforced systematic murder. Whoever loved them could love them only for a brief while. Their *tragic hood of victimhood* is not end stopped. (Roy, *The God of Small Things* 184)

In their life *Worse Things had happened. That Worse Things kept happening. But they would find no comfort in the thought.* (Roy, *The God of Small Things* 47) They are stumbling through their whole life, *nursing someone else’s sorrow. Grieving someone else’s grief. ... “You’re not the Sinners. You’re the Sinned Against You were only children. You had no control. You are the victims, not the perpetrators.”* (Roy, *The God of Small Things* 191) .

The word ‘childhood’ is also used in derogatory sense in both the novels as in connection with the two custodians of law and justice in society, Inspector Mathew and Comrade Pillai. As the narrator comments: *They were both men whom childhood had abandoned without a trace ...* (Roy, *The God of Small Things* 262). Go to a tea shop anywhere along the Ganga, generally the men working in that tea shops are *in their thirties or forties or fifties but still “boys.”*¹⁰ (Adiga, *The White Tiger* 51)

In *The White Tiger*, Munna whose mother died with a wish that her son should be sent to school, whom the teacher gave the proper name Balram, who was his father’s plan, whose father died with an ardour that *one son of mine—at least one—should live like a man*, whom the school inspector gave a new name the White Tiger offering him a gift – a book plus promising him a government scholarship and real education on finding that he was *an intelligent, honest, vivacious fellow in this crowd of thugs and idiots* (Adiga, *The White Tiger* 35) is destined to pawn his life thanks to bonded labour! There is no way to escape due to *one infallible law of life in the Darkness that good news becomes bad news—and soon.*

(Adiga, *The White Tiger* 36) Being from girl's family, Balram's family is to be screwed hard for dowry. The big loan from Stork for giving a good dowry for cousin-sister Reena's marriage compelled him to leave school and do bonded labour for Stork with his whole family as Balram laments;

The family had taken a big loan from the Stork so they could have a lavish wedding and a lavish dowry for my cousin-sister. Now the Stork had called in his loan. He wanted all the members of the family working for him and he had seen me in school, or his collector had. So they had to hand me over too. (Adiga, *The White Tiger* 36) So Kishan approaches to school to fetch Balram.

Kishan was standing in the doorway of the classroom. He gestured with his fingers. "What is it, Kishan? Are we going somewhere?" Still he said nothing. "Should I bring my book along? And my chalk?" "Why not?" he said. And then, with his hand on my head, he led me out.... I was taken to the tea shop. Kishan folded his hands and bowed to the shopkeeper. I bowed to the shopkeeper too. (Adiga, *The White Tiger* 36)

Thus, the White Tiger! *The rarest of animals—the creature that comes along only once in a generation becomes "The coal breaker!" fated to Working in a tea shop. Smashing coals. Wiping tables.* (Adiga, *The White Tiger* 28) Otherwise they (the Stork and his men) will get much easier to breaking Balram's skull like coal.

How can a boy who gets *fainted on seeing a lizard, or turns into a girl, or blood freezes* (Adiga, *The White Tiger* 28) murder his master. Certainly there must have been highly engendering and compelling causes. As Balram states *I gave myself a better education at the tea shop than I could have got at any school.* (Adiga, *The White Tiger* 38) Perhaps this type of education has the germs of the such actions. *Many of my best ideas are, in fact, borrowed from my ex-employer or his brother or someone else whom I was driving about. (I confess, Mr. Premier: I am not an original thinker—but I am an original listener.)* (Adiga, *The White Tiger* 47) During his work at tea shop *I did my job with near total dishonesty, lack of dedication, and insincerity—and so the tea shop was a profoundly enriching experience.* (Adiga, *The White Tiger* 51) *Miners came to eat at my tea shop—I always gave them the best service, because they had the best tales to tell.* (Adiga, *The White Tiger* 53) *And it was at the tea shop in this city built by coal, while wiping a table and lingering to overhear a conversation, that my life changed.* (Adiga, *The White Tiger* 53)

References

-
- Turner, G. W. *Stylistics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd. 1979)237.
- Laurie G Kirszner, and Stephen R Mandell . *Fiction: Reading, Reacting, Writing* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1993)294.
- Friedman, Noman. *Form and Meaning in Fiction* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1975) 56.
- Gerald, Prince. *Narrative as Theme*. (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1992) 1-3.
- Johnson, Roy. *Studying Fiction: A Guide and Study Programme*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992) 212.
- Sokol, Kathy Arlyn. “Like Sculpting Smoke Arundhati Roy on Fame, Writing and India”
<http://www.kyotojournal.org/the-journal/conversations/arundhati-roy-on-fame-writing-and-india/>
- Kramer, Dale ed *Thomas Hardy The Mayor of Casterbridge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998)327.
- Bywater, Ingram *Aristotle: On the Art of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1967) 37.
- Roy, Arundhati *The God of Small Things* (New Delhi: India Ink, 1997) 320.
- Adiga, Aravind *The White Tiger* (Noida: Harper Collins Publishers, 2008) 51.