

**"THE THEME OF AGONIZED CHILDHOOD IN
THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS AND THE WHITE TIGER"**

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Received: 15 May 2018

Accepted: 23 May 2018

Published: 30 May 2018

ABSTRACT

The present paper "The Theme of Agonized Childhood in The God of Small Things and The White Tiger" deals with the analytical study of the present topic. Here it is attempted to discover how they have dealt with the traditional subject with inventive style; how their method for saying things cause a stir in the minds. In this manner, the detail study uncovers that the genuine idea behind their writing is to strip and assault the roots of ordeals. The emphasis has been on how they have displayed in the topic of the loss of youth, which choked and rotted the buoyant qualities of childhood. Both the writers have created a new dimension not only escaping from the mire of stale themes, but evolving new artistic styles, which have definitely strengthened the Indian writing in English.

KEYWORDS: *Blackmail, Disaster, Fundamental, Inhuman, Murder, Motif*

INTRODUCTION

Theme: an overview

The germination of the plot lies in the theme. An occurrence or delineation builds up a motif; a series of motif build up a theme; arrangement of themes makes a plot, the life and soul of a novel, which is the most essential of the six developmental components of a novel. Accordingly, the theme is the blend of the episodes of the story; it is the focal thoughts regarding particular human conduct at a given time. It is a thought frequently proposed all through the text. Hence, it is implied rather than stated outright by the author. The theme, being abstract, is made concrete to the readers through artistic embellishing devices, for example, images, metaphors, metonymies, symbols etc by imitation of the actions. Consequently, it is used deliberately by the author to convey his/her ideas.

Plot is the order of actions in a story while the theme is the core of the story. A plot can be practised physically by setting energy and clashes in the story that could heighten one's emotions. A theme deals with the practice of one's psychological and enthusiastic capacity through the moral 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) Thus grasping the theme the reader enters the mazes of a writer's mind which is the principal desiderium 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 functions in literary patterns is attempted to make all the more clear with the accompanying statements;

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)

Regardless of whether it may be called an embellishment, or a monitor, or germination, it brings together the entire idea of the artistic 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* envelop several themes. Roy, in an interview, has expressed, she didn't think she offered one thing. If there's trouble there's likewise bliss. *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) *Science*, a social novel, resembles tragedy; it is *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 a corruption-made-misery saga. In *The God of Small Things* there appears to be no obstruction or speed breaker in the smooth current of disasters and tragedies exacted upon Ammu and company by different frameworks – family, society, government, and administration. In *The White Tiger* the incidents and agonies take their breaks in halfway in the life of Balram. Be that as it may, the said tragedies and adversities are exchanged not with the assistance of any transferred epithet, but rather by the power of *glass* and *fire*. With glass Balram murders Mr. Ashok the master; with fire Balram's entire family is burnt alive by Mr. Ashok's family in exact retribution. Being preeminent sinner Mr. Ashok has sinned appropriately while Balram's relatives have sinned against innocence and Balram the Anti hero thrives. In *The White Tiger* corruption occurs to be the frequent recurrent motif and thus it turns into the main theme of the novel.

Vital to the books is a vision of the continuity between knowing the world through experience and struggle and breaking the socio-administrative-bureaucratic nexus through satirical-armed skills. The very nexuses caused power-corruption which sustains and make the world what it is. Furthermore, subalternized characters in the books, particularly youngsters, divorced ladies, and underdogs challenge taboos and bloodlines of kinship and caste to censure the workings that suspend the jolly quality and personal satisfaction of life in general.

A close perusing of books uncovers numerous diverse issues that are raised, like the position of a lady in a patriarchal society, child abuse, treatment of pariahs, environmental problems, and stratification of society on the bases of caste and class. Thus, these can likewise be viewed as protest novels that are radical, subversive and taboo-breaking. Furthermore, the novel shows an effective presentation of all power structures like religion, education, society, organization, bureaucracy, politics and other legislative frameworks that abuse the personae non grata including youngsters, ladies, and the underdogs. They suggest that race, proletariat, peasantry, caste and debasement have sounded sturdier in our so-called postcolonial world. But, in the meantime, they additionally celebrate and laud the idea of the *Small Things* or marginalized that add importance and euphoria to life. All these themes are aesthetically made fit and woven together all through the texts to give shape to a unified whole.

THE THEME OF THE BEGUILLED CHILDHOOD

The theme of agonized childhood occurs much of the time in both the books. The word childhood, its related motifs and events happen over and over to reflect the agonized childhood as the fundamental theme of the books. In fact, Roy presents the childhood of numerous characters in the novel; however, the fundamental spotlight is on the twins, Estha and Rahel. Similarly, in *The White Tiger* it is on Balram.

Childhood tiptoed out.

*Silence slid in like a bolt.*⁹(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 it's 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)

Strategically, this theme is figured by Roy all through the novel. *The God of Small Things* and in addition *The White Tiger* presents psychological and mental torturing scars of youth. Both the novelists demonstrate what it implies being a youngster, particularly one who originates from a broken/dysfunctional family. Here kids experience the ill effects of the absence of parental love and affection, they are deserted and dismissed by merciless adults, and their awful youth encounters stunt their passionate improvement as adults and lead to abnormal and deviant behaviors.

The twins are destined to meet fathers as well as mother's outrage 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 distresses will never be sufficiently pitiful because Ammu is there to comfort. Their delights will never be sufficiently glad on the grounds that their Baba, their Ammu-cum-Baba and their Velutha 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 sufficiently huge on the grounds that there is nobody to help and fill. Their lives will never be sufficiently important since they are made wretched by framework. 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)

All through their stay at Ayemenem, they and also their mom Ammu were made to feel that they had no “*Locust Stand I.*” Baby Kochamma viewed them as nothing superior but *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 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 awful mishaps that took in grasp the twins leave perpetual scars on their mind and which are the source of proceeding with fear in their life. These events are certainly destructive, and leave their engraving on the lives of the twins. Indeed, even Baby Kochamma, the grandma, who is by and large, considered in each Indian family the picture of maternal affection, deceits them through tricky procedure and emotional blackmail that have coerced the twins into testifying the dying Velutha, their darling companion who could be as their Baba, as their abductor and responsible for Sophie Mol’s death. The defenselessness and honesty of youngsters are misused by the grown-ups.

The Kottayam Police had acted on the basis of a false F.I.R. with the allegation of rape, kidnapping and blah-blah filed by Baby Kochamma. But after the encounter and verbal statement of the twins, it was exposed 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 *cartoon platoon'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 shocked and shaken 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 the 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). On witnessing such horrible brutality being inflicted on a man to whom they love dearly and the events that followed left a hurt on their tender sensitive 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*? Definitely, it is not a small one. Later on it proved the biggest and worst price that could be. The reply "yes" marred *Two lives. Two children's childhoods*. And reflected a *history lesson for future offenders*. (Roy, *The God of Small Things* 320)

The misguided, blackmailed, frightened and terrified twins had been given a selection. They hadn't given any time for second thought so 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 permanently;

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 disastrous and distressing 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 Ammu-Velutha affairs coincides with the drowning death of Sophie Mol for which the twins are held responsible. Chacko becomes violent and with chrome handle in his hand, cries at Ammu to leave the home, “*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 parts 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 hurt on Rahel. The twins suffer from a series of bad lucks; the loss of their father, the loss of mutual kinship between brother and sister through enforced separation, the loss of their cousin Sophie Mol due to unnatural drowning death, the loss of Velutha due to intended massacre, 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 assassinate. Thus undoubtedly, 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. Those 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).

In *The White Tiger*, Munna whose mother passed away with a hope that her son should study at school, whom the teacher gave the right name Balram, who was his father’s dream, whose father died with a longing that *one son of mine—at least one—should live like a man*¹⁰, whom the school inspector gave a new name the White Tiger presenting him a gift – a book and assuring 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 fated to pawn his life thanks to bonded labor! 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 very hard for dowry. The large mortgage from Stork for giving a good dowry for cousin-sister Reena’s wedding bounded him to leave school and do bonded labor 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 whose blood freezes (Adiga, *The White Tiger* 28) murder his master? Definitely, there must have been highly provoking 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) Maybe this type of education has the germs of the actions that follow. 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 the 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)

Being shocked by the brutal suppressing long ordeals mated to the marginalized children, and having energetically energized by the excruciatingly overabundance infringement of their rights, both the authors wryly raised their voices against the long damaging disfiguring mutilating moral less mangles to make comprehend the illegal unending tribulation against them.

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