

# A Study of Temper and Tenor in Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things

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**ABSTRACT:** While creating a work of art or a piece of literature whether it be a poem or a play or a story or a novel, the writer's mind works as a catalyst agent. It is he or she who decides what must be the atmosphere or setting or ever all environment of a work of literature. When we study the general atmosphere and the language of a work, we find a way to judge the writer's mood, temper and tenor in a particular work. If we take into account the poems like sailing to Byzantium, The Thought Fox, Hawk Roosting, Mirror and The Waste Land, the poets have used different moods and setting in these poems. Similarly in Virginia Woolf's To the Light House, fits of moods and emotions and idiosyncrasies of characters and the writer herself come on the surface. A fiction is a made-up story. It generates its meaning in many ways. To quote Robert Scholes-'Fiction is justified not as a means of conveying ideas but as a means of generating attitudes toward ideas. The meaning of fiction must finally be seen in terms of emotions directed toward impressions of experience or toward ideas about life'. There are some key images in the novel which show the horror embedded in the structure of the novel and on the other reveal the beauty and strength of nature, the sweet innocence of childhood, the maturing power of love and friendship. It is true that the novel abounds in metaphors and imagery most of the metaphors appear in appropriate yet dominant images are attuned to the basic contrasts in the novel.

**Keyword:** metaphor, artistic, somber, similes, atmosphere, fiction, idiosyncrasies, tone, dialogue.

## INTRODUCTION

We can understand the temper and tenor by analyzing the point of view. It is a technical term for the way a story is told. When we compare a play with a novel, we find that a play normally has no particular point of view. Between the audience and the actor, no one stands. But through the stage direction we come to know the writer's attitudes. Robert Scholes says, a story told all in dialogue would be similarly without a point of view. But as soon as a descriptive phrase is added such as 'he said cruelly' or 'she whined viciously'- we begin to have a special viewpoint. And again in our experience of fiction, the attitude we develop toward the events presented, and our understanding of those events, will usually be controlled by the author through his or her technical management of point of view. It is necessary to perceive the viewpoint in a novel or a story. This fictional viewpoint has two related parts. One dealing with the nature of the story teller in any given novel, the other dealing with his language. Hence different kinds of narration require different kinds of language. A reader must not ignore the 'tone' and 'metaphor'. It is tone and metaphor through which wit and artistic intelligence function: A novelist like a poet takes up a certain poetic mode which may include the use of landscape, the kind of imagery which suits to the writer, the use of satire and irony, and above all the language. In this paper will be discussed all the aspects so that the writer's temper and tenor could be traced out. Let us look at the following comments on 'The God of Small Things' comparing this book with Rushdie's works Manorama Mathai says, the book is certainly well written and some comparison has been made with Rushdie. However, unlike Rushdie's work, this is easy reading and very accessible. John Updike complains about the novel's artiness. Some other critics feel that Arundhati Roy has not depicted India in a positive light. But many critics have praised the book for magic realism. Mr. C. Sengupta in his essay, 'The God of Small Things: A Chairoscuro of Light and Shade' quotes The Times of India's editorial scrap in which the book has been praised for its innovative idiom intensely rooted in the lush landscape of Kerala and yet informed with a universal resonance of theme, The God of Small Things works at many levels to perform the wonder of transnational and cross-cultural communication.

The writer has used beautiful landscapes in the novel. The very beginning lines are reminiscent of Chaucer's Preface to Canterbury Tales. The whole atmosphere appears somber. It appears as if nature is in the mood of blessing. Through Nature's objects the writer has been capable of using various kinds of imagery. So far as the temper and the tenor of the novel is concerned, she has used different vehicles for the same tenor as the situations vary. Mr. Talwar says, her choice of the vehicle reveals its sensitivity to the context and feeling sought to be expressed through a figurative expression. Two notable objects in this respect are eyes and silence, which have been variously imaged in the novel. The novel, The God of Small Things has a beautiful setting. It is set in Ayemenem, near Kottayam in Kerala. The writer has painted surrealistic portrayal of life at Ayemenem House. But this surrealism has been suffused with natural landscapes, the bitterness has been minimized by the intrusion of Nature in the novel. She has employed nature to militate the bitterness of situations. In the opening section 'Paradise Pickles and Preserves', Nature predominates: May in Ayemenem is a hot, brooding month. The days are long and humid. The river shrinks and black crows gorge on bright mangoes in still, dust-green trees. Red bananas ripen. Jackfruits burst. Dissolute bluebottles hum vacuously in the fruity air. Then they stun themselves against clear windowpanes and die, fatly baffled in the sun. The author presents a portrayal of the Ayemenem House in May, 'hot and brooding month' in which 'the days are hot and humid'. She says: but by early June the southwest monsoon breaks and there are three months of wind and water with short spells of sharp, glittering sunshine that thrilled children snatch to play with. The countryside turns an immodest green. Boundaries blur tapioca fences take root and bloom. Brick walls turn moss green. Pepper vines shake up electric Poles. Wild creepers burst through Laterite bands and spill across the flooded roads. Boats ply in the bazaars. And small fish appear in the puddles that fill the PWD potholes on the highways. These lines give us the similar impressions as we get in the opening lines of The Wasteland, 'April is the cruelest

month'. In these lines the mood of the writer is not of joy but pensive and the narration swings from the present to the past. The casual reference to death and funeral makes the atmosphere more pensive. In section 'Big Man the Laltain, small Man the Mombati', the description of Ayemenem House is devoid of pleasure and happiness. She writes, faith had laid siege to the ayemenem House like a medieval army advancing on an enemy castle. In clotted every crevice and lung to the windowpanes. And again, the floor was sticky. White walls had turned an uneven grey. Brass hinges and door handles were dull and greasy to the touch. Infrequently used plug points were clogged with grime. Light bulbs had a film of oil on them. The only things that shone were the giant cockroaches that scurried around like varnished gofers on a film set. Here again the mood swings to Stark realism. If the purpose of literature is to please and teach, the novel hinders such purpose. Instead of pleasure, it reveals only pain, the ugly situations in the first half of the novel emerges. We certainly get a sticky and repulsive feeling when the man on the Refreshments counter starts master bating before Estha. The entire atmosphere is full of grimness and bitterness. No doubt the writer has presented satirically the social abuses of the Kerala society. These descriptions may be real because the society is always full of evils like this. Particularly in the case of women, the society is not safe. So the grimness of experience comes on the surface of this novel with the writer's bitterness and pungency. The example of Inspector Thomas Mathew's ill treatment with Ammu. How does he glare at her, he spoke the coarse kottayam dialect of Malayam. He stared at Ammu's breasts as he spoke. He said the police knew all they needed to know and that the Kottayam Police didn't take statements from Vishay's or their illegitimate children. Ammu said she'd see about that inspector Thomas Mathew came around his desk and approached Ammu with his baton. If were you, 'he said, 'I'd go home quietly. Then he tapped her breast with his baton'. It is at this juncture that the social evils prevalent in police department comes on the surge. Ammu was called a 'Veshya' which is a vulgar and insulting word for Ammu. It is a nasty activity. Nature in this novel may have been used to alleviate the nastiness of experience. The grimness of feeling can be traced out through the experience and expressions of various characters. Pleasure and happiness are rare things in Ayemenem House. Pappachi, Mammachi, Ammu, Velutha, Ammu's children, Baby Kochamma's all of these persons suffer from bitterness. It is not that they are born with this bitterness, it is the writer who has imbued in them such bitterness. Arundhati's personal life and family life was, as the critical writings suggest, full of ambivalences. Her preoccupied thinking and mind for the Syrian Christian Society forced to create such a world of human beings. Where people are suffused with crankiness and grimness. She chooses such images and language that suits to the temper and tenor of this novel. Both Men and Women are the victim of economic and emotional deprivation in this novel. Perhaps she might have in mind what Jonathan Swift had once said that man is the most pernicious race crawling upon the surface of the earth that God had created. Once William Golding had said that man could not absolve himself from the darkness of his heart. His novel 'Lord of the Flies' is based on this idea. Golding observed that man is the enemy of man himself. This is true in some instances of The God of Small Things also. Take example for Baby Kochamma's attitude to Ammu. When Ammu is divorced from her husband, she returns to her parent's home. Baby Kochamma's reiterates in the words, as far a divorced daughter according to Baby Kochamma, she had no position anywhere at all. And as for a divorced daughter from a love marriage, well, words could not describe Baby Kochamma's outrage. As for a divorced daughter from an intercommunity love marriage Baby Kochamma chose to remain quaveringly silent on the subject. The entire atmosphere of the novel is grim and vicious. It creates an atmosphere of brooding none of the characters feel happy and elated. In the description of places, persons and incidents, the writer's mood of anger, dissatisfaction are explicit. In the description of landscapes and characters, the author has used satirical tone and sarcasm. For instance, we hardly miss the devastating sarcasm in the portrayal of Inspector Thomas Mathew and the dealings in the Kottayam police station. The denomination of the word Police is itself a satirical exposition. The words Politeness, Obedience, Loyalty, Intelligence, Courtesy, and Efficiency all stand in Contrast. All these traits are missing in the behavior of police. The author agrees that the book delves deep very deep...into human nature. The story tells of the brutality we're capable of, but also that of aching intimate love. And for me the twins are what that is about... the ability to actually dream each other's dream and to share each other's happiness and pain. Mr. C. Sengupta truly remarks the strength of the book lies not so much in the story but in the ability of the novelist to light up her scenes and characters with appropriate imagery. Roy makes us look at the child's world a new, through humour, through that special brand of language and diction that belongs to child. Imagery taken from Nature pacifies to some extent the brooding and tense situations in this novel. But her use of simile and metaphor is always in accordance with the tense situation and frustration. He goes a nice example, at night, Estha would stand on his bed with his sheet wrapped around him and say, "Et to? Then fall Caesar! " and crash into bed without bending his knees, like a stabbed Corpse. Irony and humour go hand in hand. There is an ironical description of almost every character. Pappachi with his moth. Mammachi and her contact lenses, Baby Kochamma's unabated passion for Father Mulligan and more. There is stark irony when Ammu explains to her children about Mammachi's behavior at Pappachi's funeral. There are some key images in the novel which show the horror embedded in the structure of the novel and on the other reveal "the beauty and strength of nature, the sweet innocence of childhood, the maturing power of love and friendship". It is true that the novel abounds in metaphors and imagery. Most of the metaphors appear inappropriate, yet dominant images are attuned to the basic contrasts in the novel. She says, the inspiration for the book was not an idea or a character but an image. The image of this sky-blue Plymouth stuck at the railroad crossing with the twins inside and the Marxist procession raging around it. In the section 'The River in the Boat' the pleasant river of childhood is contrasted against the unpleasant grimy river of the present. Similarly the boat also has been described with loving care and appropriate imagery. There is not only lyricism in the description but novelty and freshness also. The writer putsit: slowly the old boat sank and settled on the sixth step. And a pair of two-egg twin hearts sank and settled on the step above the sixth. The deep-swimming fish covered their mouths with their fins laughed sideways at the spectacle. Both the river and the boat are the integral part of that beauty and strength of nature and sweet innocence of childhood which have been fully destroyed and so also the river and the boat. Roy has used two effective symbols of nurturing power of love and friendship in Ammu and Velutha. Ammu is an incarnation of maternal love. The warmth and poignancy of Ammu's love for her children is one of the high points of the novel. While analyzing imagery in The God of Small Things, we observe that there are very few examples of single sense images. A

pale day moon hung hugely in the sky and went where they went. As big as the belly of a beer-drinking man. This is a beautiful visual imagery. Roy has also used auditory image in these lines: "And once more the yellow church swelled like a throat with voices. Similarly there is gustatory image in touching it with their tongues, sucking it like a sweet. The loss of Sophie Mol grew robust and alive. Like a fruit in season. Finally we perceive an olfactory image in the novel, history's smell of lover's skin. The purpose of using imagery is explicitly to vivify expressions. The novel abounds in numerous interesting olfactory images. Apart from these, there are large number of olfactory images in the book. The book also encompasses kinetic, kinaesthetic and static imagery. We can have a look upon them. The examples of kinetic imagery are, he left behind a Hole in the Universe through which darkness poured like liquid tar. It's all he has to keep him from crashing through the world like a falling stone.

In many similes the tenor is abstract but the vehicle is concrete. For instance, as soon as Estha had said 'yes' to the Inspector's query, childhood tiptoed out and silence slid in like a bolt. 'Silence' here is abstract but it is compared to bolt, which is concrete. By the perusal of the text we come to know how much it costs Estha to say 'yes' –the act of betrayal of love to which he was forced. As soon as he uttered this word, his mind was benumbed. Silence itself was felt like a hard metallic thing piercing his minded abruptly. Hence explaining something abstract with the help of a concrete object is a familiar use of simile. Arundhati Roy is equally skilled in comparing concrete with abstract. Here she reminds us of Shelley's famous image of the dead leaves being driven away from the Westwind like "ghosts from an enchanter fleeing." Let us compare it with an example in *The God of Small Things*. At the Ayemenem House .Strange insects appeared like ideas in the evenings and burned themselves. On Baby Kochamma's dim 40 watt bulbs. When we try to perceive temper and tenor through literary devices like simile and metaphors we find that the brooding silence predominates all through *The God of Small things*. Grave and serious moods and emotions have been conveyed through various symbols, similes and metaphors. The term 'tenor' and 'Vehicle' is applied by I.A. Richards. By 'tenor', Richards suggests 'the thing meant' and by 'vehicle' he suggests 'the thing said'. These two terms are especially applied for the analysis of metaphor. Although in a simile the thing meant is clearly stated and not implied. We find it convenient to employ these terms in our dis of literary device like simile because the other expressions such as ' major and ' minor' terms and 'meaning' and 'picture' not so well marked as formal terms. On analyzing various similes, we find a sense of pain, not pleasure. Through similes and metaphors, the writer's sadism is reflected. For example, the seats had been killed, A Swath of dirty yellow sponge spilled out and shivered on the backseat like an immense jaundice liver.

## **Conclusion**

We can understand the temper and tenor by analyzing the point of view. It is a technical term for the way a story is told. When we compare a play with a novel, we find that a play normally has no particular point of view. Between the audience and the actor, no one stands. But through the stage direction we come to know the writer's attitudes. To sum up Roy exploits common everyday issues in her novel. Her story involves sorrow, grief, problematic marital relationships, non-marital affairs, and violent punishment for breaking social rules involving incest, the caste system and so forth. We also see personal challenges, courage to stand against the taboos, women seeking their identity as human beings, as individuals, but the dominant masculine voice is suppressive that these women are silenced in various ways. The novel depicts women as subalterns, some of whom try to confront the existing social inequalities in order to bring about a change. This novel was a revolutionary attempt on the part of Arundhati who tried to open the eyes of Indian Community towards the Callousness of treating women as objects. Women thus treated are considered soulless beings, sub-human and playthings for men. This imbalance in society explains much of the unhappiness prevailing in our families and the battered lives of children who are exposed to this very partial and unjust view of life.

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