

Chapter Five:

Conclusion

The God of Small Things is a fiction that examines the most delicate human emotions. It touches the fear towards the unknown, the anxiety and the uncertainty towards our loved ones, the rejoicing for being loved and the desperation brought up by the hopeless love. This is also a novel that is filled with many facets of human conditions. During one interview, Roy indicates that her story is about “over years, human society continues to behave in very similar ways” (Frumkes 23). Indeed, the story portrays how a woman can be put into a pathetic life once she digresses from the “righteous” way, how the sense of guilt can deteriorate a young man to the extent of mental aberration, and how a girl leads an adrift life for the lack of affection. These depictions are tempered by Roy’s piercing insight to the interpersonal relationships. Roy successfully restrains the rampant overflow of feelings in the novel and keeps the story away from being too melodramatic. In *The God of Small Things*, Roy explores the line drawn to define and confine human relationships, and at the same time tries to lay bare the limitation of it. The tragedy of the protagonist mainly results from the brutalization of the rigid definition. By repetitively mentioning the Love Law, Roy more or less reminds the readers the omnipresent boundary. Roy deftly indicates the tension produced by the stiff definition. In the novel, there is a strong psychological bond between the Siamese twins Rahel and Estha, and they always regard themselves one joint being. However, people fail to recognize that and split up those two for twenty three years. Inevitably, “Edges, Border, Boundaries, Brinks and Limits have appeared like a team of trolls on their separate horizons” (5). Even though for the

twin, “there *was* no Each, no Other [sic]” (215), the existing boundary keeps ruling them. The very boundary separates the self from the other, dictates each one’s identity, and how one should behave according to his identity.

The question may be raised is that what exactly makes up the boundary, and what decides that “some basics, and some family values are privileged, as the pure, immutable ‘truth’ that are to define the community or the nation, while others are disqualified, thus marking off, hardening and hierarchising categories of racial, ethnic and class difference” (Gedalof 224). I rely on the model of purity to answer this question and identify its influences in many aspects, no matter in the region of religion, culture, gender or ethics. The word purity refers to the paradigm which tends to solidify distinctive division, retaining what is approved and wiping off what is not. This criterion solidly builds up and constitutes each person’s identity. When it comes to the reasons why the untouchables are regarded filthy, it is about how the concept of purity is defined in the Hinduism; when it comes to the female sexuality, it concerns deep-laid ideology that women should maintain the purity of their bodies for the sake of communal reputation. The permeable domination of purity framework functions just as the Roy’s Bid God, who yields only for subordination of others. Yet the notion of purity is so embodied with appropriating power that most people are complicit with it, which only situates individuals into a more suffocative place. This is what I believe one major implication in the novel and also the perception I try to bring up in this thesis. So in the first chapter I start with the mythical pattern in *The God of Small Things* and delve into Roy’s anti-nostalgia towards one unitary saying, for the tactics of which make the identifying process fixed and closed. In the

following two chapters, I start to conceptualize the notion of purity with different approaches. To locate precisely Velutha's position in the networks of purity, I first rely on Mary Douglas's insight about people's negative perception of impurity, then lead the discussion more deeply into the fear aroused by the danger with Kristeva's arguments about abjection. The reference to Kristeva's concept of theory is probable not only because her thought about purity derives from Douglas's theory, but also because her theory about abjection mainly deals with the boundary between inside and outside, the privileged self and the abject others, major and minor, center and margin, which offer a perfect ground to understand the formation of the underlying principle. The complicated web of purity model shows more its power on the female protagonists than on the untouchable Velutha. In one way, it excludes women's bodies from being approved in the overarching social order by redeeming the female body as impure; in the other way, it enables woman to be taken as the emblem of purity once she abides by the authentic norms of womanhood: to be a subservient daughter, a chaste wife, and a devoted mother. Roy's heroes and heroines struggle hard to resist this confining ideology and attempt to live outside the dualistic paradigm. Thus they become the misfits, unable to follow the trajectory and can only live a drifter's life. This nomadic spirit sets contrast to the orthodox social belief, and thus becomes the convergence of tension in the story.

Fiction or Historical Reality

Fiction and non-fiction are only different techniques of storytelling. For reasons I do not

fully understand, fiction dances out of me.

Non-fiction is wrenched out by the aching, broken
world I wake up to every morning.

Arundhati Roy, *Frontline*

The God of Small Things is a fiction that contains a great many ingredients both from the personal life of Arundhati Roy and from the social reality in India. The former intrigues the readers' curiosity, while the latter brings about controversies. More often than not, Roy's cynical undertone toward the authorities' brutalization leads many Indian reviewers take the book as a skit, a social-realistic satire to the condition of Kerala or even India as a whole. To the western critics, the background of Roy only reinforces this impression. Since she is a third-world female writer, she must have something to say about the suppressed history of her nation. If we see Roy's text in this perspective, we will find it reliable to explain the story to a certain degree. Just like what has been discussed in the previous chapters, the recurring capitalized word History easily gives the readers an impression that Roy means to lay bare the history of the nation or the society, not to mention the ever-looming state power represented by the police force. The social imbalance not only takes away Velutha's life, but also haunts Ammu severely. In addition to this, there are many other sequences which reveal that the contemporary India is under the surveillance of the British Empire even in the postcolonial period. Roy is obviously disturbed by how upper-class Indian people willfully pander to their former rulers and does not hesitate to show her discontent in her book. To cite the Pappachi's attitude as an instance, this former imperial entomologist refuses to believe that the English

manager has asked Ammu to be his mistress because he does not think that any Englishman “would covet another man’s wife” (42). As an Anglophile as Pappachi is, Baby Kochamma tries hard to impress the English girl Sophie Mol by quoting lines from *The Tempest* while welcoming her at the airport. She does that because she wants to separate herself from her fellowman and show how cultivated she is. More than national-historical ingredients, Roy also reveals her concerns about social problems. In the novel, Roy’s vivid depictions about the pollution of Meenachal River bears a witness to the disastrous effects that India’s economic development has given rise to. Roy also narrates how the international tourists change the traditional dance into a cheap show, to show the fact that the globalization actually makes the orthodox Indian culture marginalized. These examples all serve social-satiric functions and tell readers how an intelligentsia like Roy is upset by the postcolonial Indian society and the non-escapable western appropriation over it.

Only there is one thing that we have to bear in mind, besides the topics about public affair, *The God of Small Things* is mainly a book about the trauma and anguish which exclusively belongs to the private sphere, and extremely personal. In other Indo-Anglian writers’ work, such as Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, the vision and reflection about the nation do play a major part in the novel, and “the fate of the narrator still mirrors the fate of the nation” (Mee 127). Conversely, Roy uses the national or historical imagery to reflect the individuals’ fate. From beginning to end Roy’s focus remains on the “small things,” on the insignificant but treasurable events or memories in the ordinary life. These trivial things do not always have anything to do with the national consciousness. This may be the reason why Roy openly denies

that she shares Rushdie's tendency that "the novel must speak for the whole Indian subcontinent, and thus for history" (Wood 32). So to position this novel entirely into its social context does not do justice to the author. Besides, it is also dangerous to see the society and national history presented in the novel as a true version, since Roy is not only a documentary socialist, but also a writer. The artistic license may grant her to maneuver the national imagery to fit the tone of her novel. Even if whatever said in the novel is based on truth, "in a nation battling numerous secessionist movements— regional specificity is inevitably in conflict with generalized national traits" (Chandra 7). In other words, Kerala is only one region in India, so the presentation of it can not be conceived as that of the general state of India. Eventually, if we try to locate the genuine "Indianness" in Roy's writing, it is effortless and digressive.

All in all, Roy's representation recollects the scattered pieces in the personal history and also the communal history. By giving an eclipsed image of the locale, Roy's narration is not so much about the representation but about literary transgression. When we are mesmerized by her literary world, we should keep an artistic distance to her depiction rather than simply take it as guidance to a different culture. To ask one author, or his book, to be the representative the whole social group is unfair to the author, and to his social entity as well. Ultimately, Roy writes *The God of the Small Things* to speak for herself, not for her people or her nation.