

## Chapter Two:

### What Myth Are We Living In?

History is made up of wisps of narratives, stories that one tells, that one hears, that one acts out; the people does not exist as a subject but as a mass of millions of insignificant and serious little stories that sometimes let themselves be collected together to constitute big stories and sometimes disperse into digressive elements.

Jean-François Lyotard, *Instruction païennes*

In Chapter Twelve of *The God of the Small Things*, “Kochu Thomban<sup>1</sup>,” Roy first introduces us the “Regional Flavor” (219): *Kathakali* dance. In this part, through Roy’s tantalizing lines, the readers have a short glimpse of this traditional dance. And when it comes to *Kathakali* dance, the dancers are certainly the center of the focus. Just like Noh drama or Pekingese Opera, all parts in the play are enacted by male dancers who are trained ever since they were children: “From the age of three it has been planned and polished, pared down, harnessed wholly to the task of storytelling” (219). Yet rather than portrayed as serious art performers, these *kathakali* dancers are one of many symbols which Roy employs to stress that what used to be respected in India had become no more than a laughingstock. She uses her consistently ironic tone to point out how these dancers cannot fit in modern India.

---

<sup>1</sup> It means “small tusker” in Malayalee. “Kochu Thomban” (217) is a necessary animal in the ritual before the performance of dance.

These *Kathakali* Man is alienated by the society for the only thing they are good at is a dying profession. That is the reason why “he turns to tourism. He enters the market. He hawks the only thing he owns. The stories that his body can tell” (219). As for the dance drama itself, Roy does not compliment much on it either. The *Kathakali* dances are degraded as tourists’ entertainment. The hotel runners call it “small attention spans,” and so “ancient stories were collapsed and amputated. Six-hour classics were slashed to twenty-minute cameos” (121).

This chapter is seemingly irrelevant to the other parts of the book. On the surface, it serves as an introduction to the traditional dance, the local culture or mythical stories while the protagonist Rahel becomes a passive observer. However, the dance is displayed right after the previous chapter “The God of Small Things,” in which we have learned that Ammu and her children are forced to be separated and ever since then three of them never really unite. In this chapter, before the platform of *Kathakali* dance, Rahel and Estha, nevertheless, are “joined by a story. And the memory of another mother” (222). This “story within the story” framework works as an archetype to stress the primary elements, like love, hatred and violence which exist both in the epic stories and Ipe family. Furthermore, through narrating the events about Karna and Bhima (two great heroes in *Mahabharata*), Roy deftly brings out the major theme in *The God of the Small Thing*: the unequal power relationship between Big God and Small God. In other words, the intention of retelling the myth is to interpret the main idea of the novel which has only been slightly stated in the earlier chapters in the novel. Since the first chapter, Roy has started to play upon the tropes of Big God and Small God to explain how the past causes the aloofness in

grown-up Rahel's eyes. At that point the readers are not informed thoroughly what has really happened. With the progress of the plot, we are more and more aware of what Roy refers to. Big God represents the strong force, the definitive authority which stresses on all the other heterogeneous voices. The fate of Ammu, her dizygotic twins and *Dalit*<sup>2</sup> Verlutha is somehow swayed by it. What has really happened is trivialized, neglected and wiped off. The only verified truth becomes the policemen's saying: "All that had been in the papers. The Official Version" (287). In the "Official Version" of the narrative, the absolute hierarchy which defines each person's position is most rigid. By using a lot of literary techniques, Roy thus means to defy "the search for originary absolutes, or genuine and authentic manifestations of a stable, pre-given, unchanging identity; for pristine, pure customs and traditions or unsullied glorious pasts" in this kind of narratives (Brah 196). Among all the other issues revealed in *The God of the Small Things*, how Roy ridicules the brutalization of the One authoritative saying by embedding all sorts of personal utterances will be the central topic of this chapter.

### **Looking Back in Anguish: the Myth in Disgrace**

For several times in the novel, Roy tries to lay bare the fact that the India Myth, or the grand epic, is no more glorious subjects in the modern India. To delve into this, it is appropriate to learn more about the *Kathakali* dance and the myth behind it

---

<sup>2</sup> See Andrew K. J. Wyatt, "Dalit Christians and Identity Politics in India," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 30.4 (1998): 16. Wyatt explains the term *Dalit*. *Dalit* is a favorable term since 1970s to address those who used to be known as "untouchables" or *harijans*. "Literally translated, 'dalit' means 'crushed' and oppressed [...], it is also an attempt to transcend the various local caste identities that have often inhibited united political action by the various untouchable communities."

first. The *Kathakali* dance is a localized ritual dance which is prevalent in Kerala<sup>3</sup>. *Kathakali*'s plots are mostly adopted from two Indian great epics: *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, in which there are thousands of stories about mythical gods. And the two episodes mentioned in the novel, *Karna Shabadam* (Karna's Oath) and *Duryodhana Vadba* (the Death of Duryodhana and his brother Dushasana), are the stories exactly originating from *Mahabharata*.

Roy narrates these two epic stories concretely and makes them related to the events happening to the fictional characters<sup>4</sup>. In the "*Karna Shabadam*," we have learned that Karna promises his mother Kunti, who abandons him when he is a child, to make sacrifices for his half brothers: one hundred Pandavas. This kind of figure seems to reflect Velutha's character in the novel. Though unfairly-treated, Velutha is willing to give up his life for the ones he loves. As for *Duryodhana Vadba*, the story is about the other warrior Bhima, whose name meaning "the terrible one" in Hindustani, keeps hunting down Dushasana who publicly unrobes the beautiful Draupadi. Abnormally, Roy lavishes with lots of violent words while narrating this story. She describes Bhima's bloody actions as followed: "

He [Bhima] continued to kill him [Dushasana] after he was dead. Then, with his bare hands, he tore the body open. He ripped its innards out and

---

<sup>3</sup> *Kathakali* literally means "story-play." It is famous for its combination of literature (*Sahithyam*), music (*Sangeetham*), painting (*Chithram*), acting (*Natyam*), and dance (*Nritham*). It is generally performed in the country around temples or around the house of local landlords. There would be a brief passage of drumming to announce the performance at 6 in the afternoon, and continues thorough the night and till the dawn of the next day, which symbolizes the Good concurs the Evil. Yet, the traditional form has transformed into a more commercialized one which a full-length story is cut into pieces and is finished within few hours, just as Roy's description in the novel. More information about *Kathakali* dance can be checked out in the following websites: "Kathakali," *Art Indian Net*. 23 October. 2004 <<http://www.umich.edu/~iinet/journal/vol4no2/kathak.html>>.

<sup>4</sup> A more specific description about the protagonists and the storyline in *Karna Shabadam* and *Duryodhana Vadba* will be given in the latter part of this chapter.

stooped to lap blood straight from the bowl of the torn carcass, his crazed eyes peeping over rim, glittering with rage and hate and mad fulfillment.

(224)

And this scene is not totally unfamiliar to the twins. Back to the time when they are seven-year-old kids, they have witnessed the same cannibalized frenzy. The beastly Bhima reflects the policemen's image in the twins' minds. These lines give a background knowledge to Estha and Rahel's traumatized past. For the readers, this episode also foretells what those "touchable" policemen have done to Velutha. Eventually we will learn that Velutha faces the same fate as Dushasana does in the myth. Velutha the Paravan is brutally beaten to death by the policemen because they believe it is Veltutha that has physically assaulted a woman of higher caste and kidnapped her twins. And like Bhima, the policemen think they represent justice.

Applying mythological or Biblical pattern to the story is a long-lasting tradition in Western literature because these stories have been already one part of the collective unconsciousness and thus form an archetype that "represents a special, psychological instance of biological 'pattern of behavior,' which gives all living creatures their specific qualities" (Jung 149). The readers who are from the same cultural background form a certain cosmology, and their innate feelings are easily aroused by these patterns. So if we read *The God of Small Things* from this perspective, these Hindu myths bring the same effects to the Hindu readers as what Biblical stories to the western readers. Induced by these widely known stories, the readers will naturally have heartfelt sympathy for Ipe family's fate. Besides, it produces an epic-poetic mood that the hero and heroines are only puppet-figures who cannot

control their own fates. Moreover, these mythical stories work more than an archetype from which Roy develops her story. Roy adopts this frame-story format as a vehicle for a reason. Rather than simply retelling the mythology and putting her story inside the frame, Roy “grafts” mythology into her story instead. By using the verb “grafts,” I mean she embeds mythical stories into her composition without being taken over by them. In the original story of *Duryodhana Vadba*, Bhima is portrayed as a noble figure who becomes blood-crazed only because he is too eager for revenge. After all, all these vehement deeds he has done are justified by the fact that he wants to avenge Draupadi. Cleverly, Roy parallels Bhima’s revenge for Draupadi and the policemen’s lynching Velutha. Even while Roy is telling an epic story, she negates the grand tone in the epic tradition. Rather than romanticizing it, Roy demotes Bhima’s behavior as an act of mental distortion and regards it as a “murder,” which is motivated by “the aura of rage” (224). These defects and foulness shown by a deity are repeated and even amplified by the policemen. They enact the role of a modern Bhima with the same terrifying acts. Ironically, both acts are euphemized before they are actually “staged” before the public. The former is performed as one part of rituals to glorify the gods, while the latter becomes an article in the newspaper with the headline: “DESPERADO CAUGHT IN POLICE DRAGNET” (292). An act of killing is purified as a just deed, and the truth is buried in the name of maintaining social order.

In other words, Roy’s own version of myth is presented from a varied perspective from those people who simply accept the asymmetric relationship revealed in the myth. In *Duryodhana Vadba*, there is a very strong sense of

dichotomy between the powerful one and the weak one. Owing to the force which Big God like Bhima possesses, the Small God like Dushasana is pushed to the corner and deprived of life. The weak one is responsible for all the turmoil and is meant to be destroyed. The absolutely overwhelming authority that Big God owns proceeds through a systematic way to exclude and repress the powerless Small God. This dichotomy is transmitted from the myth through all the passing years to Ayemenem in 1960s whence “that Big God howled like a hot wind, and demanded obeisance. The Small God (cozy and contained, private and limited) came away cauterized, laughing numbly at his own temerity” (20). This fearful imbalance is taken for granted in the larger-than-life Indian epic scope. The Big God’s power represented by the police force is much enhanced rather than weakened nowadays. Furthermore, not only the opposition between the Big God and Small God comes in as a point of focus, but also that between the Great Stories and the small ones. For the traditional narratives, the Great Stories, like mythical tales, always see things from a great man’s or a hero’s angle. The insignificant life is buried into these stories of grandeur and never would have his say. In the chapter “Kochu Thomban,” Roy uses Velutha’s death as a parody to the epic in which the act of killing is interpreted as a noble gesture, an act of justice. The mythology may be reiterated for thousands of times, but the basic elements of it are forever static. The scenario, the fate of characters, and the other stereotypes never change. In Roy’s conception, this ever-the-same trait of the myth walks hand in hand with the myth’s transcendental status. In one paragraph, she quips that:

The Great Stories are the ones you have heard and want to hear again.

The ones you can enter anywhere and inhabit comfortably. [...] In the Great Stories you know who lives, who dies, who finds love, who doesn't. And yet you want to know again. That is their mystery and their magic. (219)

Even the repetition and monotony become forgivable considering that they are "Great Stories." The Great Stories own their own formula which demands submission. What privileges Great Stories is their power, which makes whatever told turn to be uncontested truth.

### **The Encompassing Power of Myths**

Roy reveals the significant symptom of the Great Stories: that they are handed down through the past of years by repetitively told and without any progressive meaning. The narrative pattern of the Great Stories performed in *Kathakali* dance corresponds with the oral traditions in many primal tribes. In both *The Postmodern Condition* and *Just Gaming*, Jean-François Lyotard brings out the narrative tradition of Cashinahuan<sup>5</sup> as an example to explicate his points about the mythic narratives. Lyotard believes that the narration knowledge "usually obeys rules that define the pragmatics of their transmission" (*The Postmodern Condition* 20). In this line he means that the transition of Cashinahuan legends relies solely on a line of selected narrators which claim they are once the audience of these stories before and would repeat the story exactly as the way they have heard. The storyteller always starts his

---

<sup>6</sup> Cashinahua is an Indian group located in the eastern Peru and also Brazil. Lyotard adopts his knowledge from André Marcel d'Ans's study.

tale with an introduction of the hero in the story which someone has told him, and ends with announcing his name. In this way, the same story can last “forever,” and so can this formula. The formula is that the one who has heard the story owns the authority of telling, and at the same time, it “bestows legitimacy upon social institutions (the function of myths), or represent positive or negative models (the successful or unsuccessful hero) of integration into established institutions (legends and tales)” (TPC 20). By these iterating rules, the story can easily gain a prestigious and transcendental status as such. In the meantime, the flexibility is thus limited. The rhythm of this narrative is regulated within certain time periods and accents, let alone the fact that some of Cashinahua tales are with ritual performances in which only obscured language is used and the stories are sung in a monotonous chant. The description above is in many ways similar to our realization about *Kathakali* dance. Through all the years, the *Kathakali* dancers enact as a narrator who tells the Great Stories. Before the gods’ shrine, they perform what they are taught since their childhood. For a *Kathakali* dancer, these stories are where “he has grown up within,” and they are “the house he was raised in” (219). These dances are just like those designated storytellers of *Cashinahua*. And in the old days, this dance about gods’ story has its own sanctity so the people should appreciate the story with a full-length scale. The Great Story may gain its distinguished place by this narrative cycle, being handed down over all the past years, but it does not mean the narrators can thus be glorified as the heroes or the great gods in the myth. When Roy refers to those *Kathakali* dancers, she says: “He tells stories of the gods, but his yarn is spun from the ungodly, human heart” (219). These dancers are portrayed as pathetic

mortals who obviously do not share the glamour of gods. It is because in the repetition of the storytelling, the narrator is not a free subject who creates his story.

In *Just Gaming*, Lyotard restates his understanding about *Cashinahua*, and he finds out that the addressee in this culture is under certain obligation: “any *Cashinahua* having heard a story is bound to retell it, because, to refuse to retell it would mean that he does not want to share, which is something that has a very derogatory name in *Cashinahua* and is a great abomination to them” (37). Woven in the web of social responsibility even during narrating, the addressers situated in narrative tradition are intertwined with the fixed rules, so how can these storytellers possibly gain their subjectivity? Eventually, they are no more than god’s passive messengers. Their position may temporarily be elevated when they narrate stories, but these narrators can never freely arrange the stories they tell. The transmission of the myth only secures the fact that it will not be forgotten, but it does not give the same credits to those narrators. Lyotard thus objects to this tradition in the mythic stories, that in a sense they are “closed narrative,” and believes that in this kind of narrative “you don’t therefore enter into the narrative cycle, you are always already there, or you are never there. Such is the genre of mythic narrative. It is not cyclical in its theme, but in its transmission. That is why tradition obeys a ritual protocol” (*The Differend* 105).

Over and over again, the rhythm of the story takes away the autonomy of the narrator rather than renders him one. This is the destiny of the *Kathakali* dancers. Their existence is intricately interwoven with the mythic story they perform. Since the glories of the myth have already diminished, the performers of the myth are

deprived of respect. Therefore, they are forced to perform by the rich men's swimming pool, as Roy's description. The performance is truncated into small episodes to satisfy the tourists' need. The dancers at the same time become "condemned goods," and "left dangling somewhere between heaven and earth, cannot do what they do" (219).

The recycling of the storytelling does not offer a chance for the narrator's development in the narrative process. Consequently, the context of the tales becomes the counterpart to the situation of the narrator. The storytelling process restricts any possible changes which can invoke progressive meaning in the mythic discourse. Lyotard reveals that this univocal aspect of myth originates from its legitimating power: "With the normative, whatever its supposed legitimation and whatever the form of this legitimation (myth, revelation, deliberation), one genre seizes upon heterogeneous phrases and subordinates them to the same set of stakes" (*TD* 144). In other words, the myth's big structure walls off other different discourses, such as common people's utterances. We can take the episode *Karna Shabadam* as an example. The half-god-half-human warrior Karna is brought up by a humble charioteer, but is "born sheathed in light, with gold earrings in his ears and a gold breastplate on his chest" (221). The depiction about him lays emphasis on his divine parts rather than human parts. Even when he faces his mother Kunti who abandons him and comes to him only to negotiate for her five other favorable sons, he acts like a respectable figure. He qualifies the evaluation of him in the epic *Mahabharata*: the generous. Confronted with his mother, Karna could have unfolded many layers in his characteristics, his hatred towards the irresponsible

mother or his jealousy against his more beloved brothers. There could have been more portraits about the ambiguous feelings between the mother and son.

Nevertheless, the episode cannot penetrate the frame of the epic. The story puts emphasis on how Karna generously makes a pact with Kunti and at the same time without violating the fealty to his king. Karna ultimately acts as a great man, and does only the things which conform to his lofty figure. Instead of expressing personal feelings, Karna's oath helps only to construct his majestic position.

Aiming at the central idea of the great myth, or epic, Bakhtin indicates that they are the worlds that belong to the forefathers and founders. They are situated at the golden time. The backdrop is always sometime back in the national heroic past which distances themselves from the contemporary times. In short, as David Carroll summarizes, the epic literature to Bakhtin is a genre "rooted in tradition that is nationalistic (tribal), religious, and authoritarian, a literature that is univocal and imposes its discourse on its listeners, that demands narrators who respect its authority and never try to counter it" (98). Indeed, the performance of the myth in *Kathakali* dances bear symbolic meaning for the Malayalees. Not really relished as a piece of fine literature, the dances are seen as a part of "Indian culture"(225) by many local people, such as Comrade K. N. N. Pillai. They only take this traditional dance as an intermediary by which the individuals can identify with their nations. Comrade Pillai knows the dance in detail and it is he who first introduces *Raudra Bhima* to Estha and Rahel. Even so, as much as he is aware of every language and gesture in the dance, Comrade Pillai is not able to see the inhuman part of it as the twins do. He is one of the tamed crowd who succumb to the monotonous thought preached in

the myth without ever suspecting the incoherent and unreasonable ideology revealed in it. Lyotard specially dismisses the myth for its lack of communicative capability, regarding that “speculative dialectics get stuck in the genre of mythic narrative. The latter yields no result, only identical repetition” (*TD* 106). The individuality thus surely dissolves before the myth. The repression of the multiplicity leads to one monolithic structure that wipes out other sayings.

Such is the essence of the myth in which the national responsibility, the duty to the others and the loyalty to the lord always surpass each single human subject. To Lyotard, the mythic discourse qualifies what he defines as *metanarrative* or *grand narrative*. A grand narrative is always setting up rules in the *language games*, and is “obliged to legitimate the rules of its own game” (*TPC* xxii). Lyotard questions the validity of its legitimating power. Hence he evokes heterogeneity in *small narratives* (*petit narrative*) which “is faithful to regime and to differences,” while the grand narratives “do not seek to dissipate but only to neutralize” (*TD* 159). Close to Lyotard’s ideas, in the chapter “Epic and Novel” of *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin senses, in spite of the fact that the circulation of epic discourses depends on the oral tradition, “by its very nature the epic world of the absolute past is inaccessible to personal experience and does not permit an individual, personal point of view or evaluation” (16). Void of participation of the empirical ideas, the myth is only a closed authoritative institution. Even if unreliable the knowledge contained in a mythical concept may be, due to the myth’s “imperative, buttonholing character,” the individual is “subjected to its intentional force” and “to receive its expansive

ambiguity<sup>6</sup>.” All in all, due to all the reasons which have mentioned above, the myth lacks “heteroglossia (*raznorečie*),”<sup>7</sup> as Bakhtin terms it. He opposes to the epic’s monolanguage and wants to replace it with the novel’s heteroglossia. In his point of view, the epic is both “monochromic and valorized (hierarchical)” (15). The differences of languages, the multiplicity of social background, and heterogeneous personalities of the characters can not be declared successfully in the epic genre. The myth defends for the conception of wholeness, using the unified national language to assert the One idea. Bakhtin thus celebrates the novel, redeeming it as a suitable intermediacy for diversity. He believes that individual voices can thrive in it, by the help of “authorial speech, the speeches of narrators,” which are “fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia can enter the novel” (*TDI* 263). By appealing to both Lyotard and Bakhtin’s thoughts about differentiating and diverse voices in the novel, we would see more clearly how Roy’s insertion of mythic episodes and the other small stories in the novel as a boomerang against the grand narrative in the following section.

### **Revising the Authentic Story: Let Them Have a Say**

To the impact of Great Stories, Roy obviously begs to differ. The two mythic episodes show how it also keeps amplifying the straightforward binary opposition when the traditional narrative closes off the opportunities for the peripheral: Man/

---

<sup>6</sup> Roland Barthes, Trans. Jonathan Cape, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972) 124. On page 119, he also gives a similar remark: “In actual fact, the knowledge contained in a mythical concept is confused, made of yielding, shapeless associations.”

<sup>7</sup> M. M Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1981) 263. The word *heteroglossia* in Russian literally means “social diversity of speech types.”

Woman, Prosecutor/ Victim, Loyalty/ Disloyalty, Kindness/ Meanness. In *Karna Shabadam* and *Duryodhana Vadham*, there are two female protagonists, Kunti and Draupadi. The former one, blessed by the deity, gets pregnant when she is young. And because she is not married when the child Karna is born, Kunti abandons him by putting him on the river. After many years of separation, she finally comes to Karna and demands him not to fight with his half brothers. To ask Karna not to fight means disloyalty to Karna's lord Duryodhana and will lead Karna to dishonorable destruction. After Karna's desperate questions in despair: "did you ever hold me in your arms? Did you feed me? Did you ever look for me? Did you wonder where I might be?" (221), Kunti's only reply is to urge Karna to make promises. Depriving her child of nurture and care, Kunti seems like a distressful mother whose image is similar to the definition of the Terrible Mother in Carl Jung's discussion about the Great Mother Archetype<sup>8</sup>. The Terrible Mother stands for all the negative side of motherhood like dismay or destruction which constitutes Kunti's personality and is what Karna wants to escape from. As for the latter one, the beautiful princess Draupadi, is in fact the prize won by Arjuna, one of Pandava brothers. Afterwards, because of the order of her mother-in-law Kunti, she is shared by Arjuna and his brothers. What is more, she is again taken as a bet in the dice game by her husbands. And because her husbands lose in the game, she is forced to be undressed in public by Dushasana who wins her in the game. This humiliation leads to Bhima's slaughter

---

<sup>8</sup> The Great Mother archetype is a Jungian conception which addresses the maternal image in the human psyche. Both Good and Terrible Mother images are contained in this archetype. As Erich Neumann points out: "The Great Mother is the giver not only of life but also of death. Withdrawal of love can appear as a withdrawal of all the functions constitution the positive side of the elementary character (67)". See Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother*, Trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Princeton University Press, 1963).

to avenge her. Although in *Mahabharata* she is praised as an intelligent and virtuous female, Roy calls Draupadi's anger in question; that Draupadi is "strangely angry only with the men that won her, not the ones that stake her" (223). Draupadi may not be a passive woman who would simply yield to her misfortune, but only through Bhima's help can she find justice. She even dares not to confront with her husbands who mistreat her. Both Kunti and Draupadi either repeat the stock female image or show the frequent situation women have been put into. No wonder that Roy disrupts the epic narrative and foregrounds the parts that are obviously offensive to the femininity. After all, as Friedman puts it, "women would have every reason, one would suppose, to resist conventions of epic narrative within which WOMAN often functions without subjectivity as muse, booty, occasion for masculine quest, or idealized symbol" (*Mappings* 234).

Actually even in the western mythic discourse, it is not unusual to see goddesses serve only as decorations or emblems of gods' victories. In *The Mad Woman in the Attic*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar conclude that most women are sorted in the western mythology "as created by, from and for men, the children of male brains, ribs and ingenuity" (88). According to Madhumalati Adhikari's observation, "in Indian Mythology also Durga, Sita and Sayitri, are no better. They are the creation of male imagination and either empowered by the male gods Vishnu, Brahma, Mahesh or are the symbols of sacrifice and service expected to live and die for their lords" (Bhatt 40). Karna's unfair death in the battle field becomes even more tragic and inevitable for Kunti's persuasion before the war; Bhima's outrageous vengeance can never be justified if Draupadi has not vowed to bath her hair in Dushasana's blood. Through

these females' words and bodies, the male protagonists get to display their gallantry in the epic. The goddesses thus become easy instruments which are made to contrast with the gods' virtue. Through the format of the epic this false ideology about the female is transmitted. It is probably the reason why Roy has neither much respect nor nostalgia towards the whole epic tradition.

In her version of the *Kathakali* dances, she describes that after the performance, the dancers "took off their makeup and went home to beat their wives. Even Kunti [the actor who plays Kunti]; the soft one with breasts" (224). Off the stage, these pseudo-gods' demeanors can hardly be related to any glorious manners. The quips on these actor-dancers' wife-beating reveals Roy's distrust towards the grand discourse. Her exasperation can be properly reflected by her protagonists Estha and Rahel's lukewarm reactions towards the dance. Roy's attitude justly qualifies what Lyotard has commented to the people in the postmodern age: "Most people have lost the nostalgia for the lost narrative. It in no way follows that they are reduced to barbarity. What saves them from it is their knowledge that legitimation can only spring from their own linguistic practice and communicational interaction" (*TPC* 41). Lyotard's notions of "linguistic practice" and "communicational interaction" have a mesmerizing manifestation in Roy's book. All the small things, all the neglected and trivial thoughts or gestures of every persona, are put under the spotlight in turns. These small things become a transparent medium which emancipates the individual subject from the regulations in the grand narratives. Instead of being drawn into the totalizing power of the grand narrative, Roy utilizes a subtle way to unveil the incredibility of it.

In the first chapter “Paradise Pickles & Preserves,” Roy has revealed the major plot of the story. In other words, she follows the rules of Great Stories: “You know that one who lives, who dies, who find love, who doesn’t” (218). In short, there seems nothing more to be explored after we finish the first chapter of the story. It begins where generally other stories end. We have learned that the twins’ mother has died many years ago; the twins have grown up in separate places because they are responsible for their cousin’s death. If this novel is no more than another conventional grand narrative, these pieces of information may be the only truth to be told. There will be only one version of truth, just as what Chacko believes; that is, the evilness of the twins results in the death of his only daughter Sophie. To keep on reading will make us aware that even though so many clues that Roy has already given us, these clues function as red herrings, tricking you to believe in something untrue. There are many mysteries waiting to be discovered behind the apparent “truth”, such as this one passage about Rahel reminiscing her childhood and her mystic bond with her twin brother Estha:

She remembers, for instance (though she hadn’t bee there), what the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man did to Estah in Abhilash Talkies. She remembers that taste of the tomato sandwiches—Estha’s sandwiches, that Estha ate—on the Madras Mail to Madras. And these are only the *small things*. (5)

The seemingly small thing explains what the twins have done cannot be interpreted as the unavoidable vice in the single-parented children. All the little things revealed in the first chapter are being recombined and the apparently solid facts therefore collapse

and turn into different stories. This is what will never happen in the Great Stories and what Lyotard looks for in the small stories: the plurality and diversity. Roy imitates the contour of the grand myth to construct an epic belonging to the Ipes. Then, she strategically ridicules the grand design by the complexities of all the occurrences. The author invests her labors to make whatever plot or characters that has already established in the earlier part of the novel overthrown along with the progress of reading. Without dismissing the mythic discourses entirely, Roy disposes them into her manifestation and let them consumed away by a variety of personal utterances and sayings. We can recognize Roy's techniques and agree that this book consists of "only the Small Things" and "The Big Things lurked unsaid inside" (165).

The mythic discourse is not the only target of attack from Roy, since it is not the only omnipresent narrative which subjects heterogeneities. One of the most notable things would be Roy's impressive analogy to the history in her tale. One memorable passage is about while Velutha is crossing the river without knowing the policemen are waiting for him in his house, the water force is so turbulent that he can barely stand firmly. It is described that "his feet walked him to the river. As though they were the leash and he was the dog. History walking the dog" (272). Roy's History is like the gods in the Greek mythology: it plays tricks with human beings, and most of the time every individual has no other choices but to accept his pathetic fate. It is the cruel History that hunts down Velutha and gives him a lethal blow. Roy embodies History with all the overwhelming forces possessed by the Big Gods, and she also visualizes its dark force by telling the story of the History House. The

History House is a ghastly house alongside the Meenachal River, built originally by an Englishman and deserted for so many years that rumor has it that the house is always full of whispers of the Englishman's ghost. Thus local people dare not to approach the house. By giving an eerie image to the History House, Roy conveys her bleak vision of History: a life-snatching machine. It is called "History House" because to the local folks it is a living witness to the colonial time, the shameful period that India is under the surveillance of the empire. To the twins, it is a site which reminds them "how history negotiates its terms and collects its dues from those who break its laws" (54). In this very place, they watch how Velutha takes the penalty for transgression and is beaten up by the police. Before the twins have this face-to-face look on dark core of the History, Chacko has given them a historical lesson. He takes the metaphor that the earth is like a very ancient woman and every single event to her is as ephemeral as a blink of an eye. Chacko thus concludes that the human beings should be humble and respectful to her. Yet, what the History has really demonstrated before the twins is another story. It is paraded as a faulty performance, setting contrast to the awe-aspiring version which their uncle has taught them.

What Roy wants to tell us through the cruelty of History is not different from what she tries to do by telling so many small stories: the hypocrisy of the grand narrative. In Chapter Nineteen of the novel, "Saving Ammu," while the terrified twins are being examined by the inspector at the police station, they comfort themselves by playing a word game, spelling the sentence backward as they usually do.

Estha read aloud from the board on the wall.

‘ssenetilo**P**,’ he said. “sseneti**lP**, ecneide**bO**.’

‘ytlayo**L**, ecnegilletn**I**,’ Rahel said.

‘ysetruo**C**.’

‘ycneiciff**E**’ (298)”

The twins express themselves through a language which means only abyss to the adults. They create their language games which obviously do not follow grammatical rules in proper English. The normative in regular English works as another form of grand narratives that can allow no alternatives. The grownups cannot appreciate the playfulness in the children’s language game just as the policemen cannot see the discrepancy between the motto on the wall, “Politeness. Obedience. Loyalty. Intelligence. Courtesy. Efficiency (10),” and their deeds. Parallel to the policemen’s murder and the latter inspector’s teasing against Ammu (intentionally tapping her breast with his baton), the backward spelling connotatively points out how the slogan is distortedly applied to the real world. The twins’ little language game helps us to see the rupture of the official version of truth. Over and over again, the display of these small narratives pushes the traditional narratives to the limits and put them at stake. Under the dominance of the social/national history the peripheral figures’ history is forever repressed. Roy intends to discover them: the unknown histories of divorced daughters (Ammu and Rahel), the boy who has been sexually-harassed (Estha) and the man who is not allowed to leave his footprint (Velutha).

Being aware of the condition that the History forces the unwilling minorities to

play an unfair game as Roy is, Janet Thormann, however, does not concede that the small narrative can outshine the historical discourse. In her essay “The Ethical Subject of *The God of Small Things*,” she says that History is “the mechanical reproduction of rules of exchange perpetuating power in everyday life, and the narrative is just the enactment of the operations of history in and through individual histories, as personal strategies, motives, and needs are caught up in social law and thereby to enact it” (303). Indeed, personal history, or individual utterances is deeply embedded in the grand narrative and just as what is told in the epigraph of this chapter, it is also Lyotard’s belief that a subject is summoned by the historical discourses. Yet instead of simply being unified by the hierarchies, in Roy’s version of history, *heterogeneous* kinds of personal histories are displayed. On many occasions, the twins change the spelling of the words which either arouses ironic effects or an eerie mood. They would spell the word “pronunciation” before Baby Kochamama as “Per NuN sea ayshun” to mock her pre-nun identity (36). When their mother tells them that she will give them punishment later, the word “later” emerges in their minds as “Lay Ter” to represent their horror toward the unknown penalty (139). Other than this deliberately misspelling, the capitalization of the words intersects the whole novel and disrupts the normal usage of English. Also, the vernacular language Malayalee in Kerala juxtaposes the British English used by the higher class. Roy uses lots of Malayalee in the characters’ everyday conversions that may produce reading difficulties for the readers outside India. The effects that produced by this usage may well be characterized as “parodic, and aimed sharply and polemically against the official languages of its given time” (*TDI* 273). Roy’s

mixing of languages makes the composition reflect the differences between adults and children, the lower class and the higher class, and also contradictions between ethnic groups.

Furthermore, Roy mixes different genres and texts into her work to help all kinds of social discourses enter the novel, such as when Ammu hesitates about whether or not to go to meet Velutha, there is a song playing in the radio:

*There's no time to lose*

*I heard her say*

*Cash your dreams before*

*They slip away*

*Dying all the time*

*Lose your dreams and you*

*Will lose your mind (314)<sup>9</sup>*

The appearance of this song not only reminds readers the time setting of the novel, but also urges Ammu to fulfill her desire about Velutha. On another occasion Roy recites the Banana jam recipe which Estha borrows from Mammachi's factory (196-7). Harriet Blodgett points out that Roy embeds the recipe into the novel as a discourse, "requiring a context, not just a list of ingredients" (273). The recipe thus serves far more than a metaphor. Indeed, while Estha is mechanically making the recipe, he comes up with a list of thoughts. The last thought on his list is a boat, by which he would like to run away from the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man. It is the same boat that takes Ammu to Velutha and makes Sophie Mol drowned. The detailed reference

---

<sup>9</sup> The song is from the one famous bands of the 60s, The Rolling Stone.

of recipe thus adds up to a chain reaction leading to the inevitable tragedy. Roy interweaves varied subtexts into her text. These subtexts serve more than stock allegory but also demand an interaction between the readers and the texts. Roy also employs this dialogism to lay bare the phony illusion. The contradiction between the twins' single parent family and the idyllic Baron von Trapp family in the film *Sound of the Music* is one of the examples. The twins crave for this made-up family for its perfect image without being aware that it is a pure fiction. Unlike the twins who are always feeling insecure about their mother's love, the family in the celluloid obviously never needs to bother themselves with these doubts. In this airy family, "he [Baron] pretended not to love them [the children], but he did. He loved them. He loved her (Julia Andrews), she loved him, they loved the children, the children loved them. They all loved each other. They are clean, white children, and their beds were soft with Ei. Der. Downs" (100). This perfect picture of one happy family on screen forms a striking contrast to the real family off screen, since Baron's family seems to possess everything which Ammu's family does not. Roy deliberately highlights the discrepancy between the cinematic fantasy and the reality, dampening the glamorous vision of the celluloid.

Through these subtexts, the readers get to involve in the world built by the author more deeply. Not only that, Roy blends popular forms, such as the recipe for the jam, the pop-song in the radio and the film *Sound of the Music* with a more high-brow ones, such as the lines from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the quotation of Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness* and Kipling's verses, which make the body of the novel a kaleidoscope. These texts do not exclude each other in the novel, but work together

to enhance the diversity. Through Roy's developing these multiple voices, the novel is filled with the inward tension among all these contradictory utterances. This carnivalesque narrative may not necessarily promise absolute freedom to a human subject, but it certainly voices the individualized stories: the stories of the people whose names would never be mentioned in the official version. In a nation where "the personal despair could never be desperate enough" (20), Roy chooses to rely on these trivial things.

Taking examples from two mythic books of Native Americans, Claude Lévi-Strauss concludes that "mythology is static, we find the same mythical elements combined over and over again, but they are in a closed system" (40). If we apply his theory to the mythical stories or other kinds the traditional Hindu narratives, we will find it true. These grand narratives were and still are constructed and reconstructed in the manner in which the jurisdiction is forever held by the certified favorable ones, or as Roy terms it, the Big God. Yet just as many audiences in the past grew spellbound by the myth, many individuals are unaware of their passive position before the traditional, regional or national narrative. The linkage tied to the traditional saying makes the brutality reinforced upon the small gods, the minority. What even worse is that this process is polished and transformed into an unreliable version. We can see this through Roy's imaginative creation, and will discuss more of the question of depressed human subjects in *TGOST* in the following chapters.