Myths, Legends and Imagery

The term ‘myth’ is derived from the Greek word “mythos” which means a traditional tale common to the member of a tribe, race or nation. It commonly takes the supernatural elements to explain some natural phenomenon in boldly imaginative terms. Mythology is an intuitive form of apprehending and expressing universal truths. It is the body of a primitive people’s beliefs concerning its origin, early history, heroes, and deities. The goal of myth is to affect a reconciliation of the individual’s consciousness with the universal will.

Today myth has become one of the most prominent terms in the contemporary literature analysis. It has always been the part and an operating factor in almost all forms of literature. The postcolonial and postmodern literature has seen a significant and strong increase of interest and outpouring of creative myth. Indian writers have been more significant in the realm of the novel and storytelling, which involves the recounting of legends, myths, and the tales of one’s family and familial history.

6.1 Myths and Legends

Salman Rushdie has created a modern day version of the epic Mahabharata, with all significant aspects of modern Indian experience. It is said that whatever is not in the Mahabharata is not in Bharata (India). Rushdie has used the epic conventions of numerous digressions and narration of multiple stories woven into each other. The novel includes all aspects of Indian life from myths, legends, history to bollywood movies. A popular bollywood movie theme, the exchange of the babies is a central trope of the novel.

Midnight’s Children create a fantasy world with characters, description and the excitement of a completing real complex country sprinkled with magic.
Rushdie has used myth in his novel to bring out the human myth condition and to trace reality, which widened the scope of the English fiction. It reflects countless mythic influences from both Eastern and Western culture. William Walsh points out, “The novel is a piece of ‘fiction - faction’, by one born in India but settled abroad who tries to recreate his homeland, mixing memory and desire, fact and fantasy reality and vision, time and timelessness.” (Walsh, 257)

Several myths and legends are invoked as Saleem’s fable like story unfolds. Characters and legends from the Hindu epics like Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Rama, Arjuna, Bhima and the battle of Kuruksetra are referred in the novel. There are multiple references to the Musa or Moses, Quran and Muhammad, especially in Ahmed Sinai’s preoccupations with reordering the Quran (224) Saleem identifies himself with the elephant-headed Lord Ganesh, (123) because of his nose and his love for writing, but Mujeebuddin Syed suggests that he actually plays the role of Vishnu throughout the novel. Like Lord Vishnu, he sees himself as the agent of everything that happens in the world of the text, and presents his character as being so much a part of him that they appear, as Vishnu’s various avatars to be avatars of Saleem (154).

The child identifies himself with one of the plenty Hindu Gods the Indian people cherished. Saleem perceives the context of his birth as magical:

Soothsayers had prophesied me, newspapers celebrated my arrival, and the politicians ratified my authenticity. I was left entirely without a say in the matter. I, Saleem Sinai, later variously called Snotnose, Stain face, Baldy, Sniffer, Buddha and even Piece-of-the-Moon, had become heavily embroiled in Fate-at the best of times a dangerous sort of involvement. (MC, 3)

Saleem starts his story as being Sniffer and towards the end of the novel becomes a Buddha in other’s eyes. Saleem is young and old at the same time. The
soothsayers have predicted that the boy would not be younger or older than his country, but of the same age. (114) Saleem in his self-definition says, “I am the sum total of everything that went before me, of all I have been seen done, of everything done-to-me. I am everyone everything whose being-in-the-world affected was affected by mine.”(Bhagavat Gita, 457-58). This self-description echoes the Bhagavat Gita where Krishna, the avatar of Vishnu of that age, defines himself as everything and everyone, the beginning, the existence, and the end of the world.

Midnight’s Children also has the traditional, Shiva- Parvati myth. After the death of his wife, Sati the Hindu God Shiva abandons his position, as military defender of the gods and becomes an ascetic. The Gods reincarnate Sati as Parvati, a beautiful daughter of the Himavan, God of the Himalayas. When Parvati tries to recapture his attention and Shiva continues to ignore Parvati, the Gods send Kama, the God of love, who prices Shiva with one of his arrows. When her love for Shiva proves true, Shiva reveals his identity to her, and, going back to her father’s house, they begin what soon becomes a turbulent marriage that eventually produces two sons (Ions Veronica, 91). The same Shiva- Parvati myth is projected in the novel. For example, Shiva-of-the-knees and Saleem, whose fates have been intertwined since they were switched at birth, dually portray the traditional Hindu God Shiva and they alternatively share the consort Parvati-the-Witch. The fictional relationship between these two struggling opponents, Saleem and Shiva-of-the-knees, also resembles the mythic traditional opposition between Hindu gods Vishnu, the preserver, and Shiva, the Destroyer. Another dynamic identity, Pravati-the-Witch (76) often represents her name, her magical power. She also doubles as
the traditional Kama, the God of love, when she magically summons Shiva-of-the-knees and then releases him after becoming pregnant as planned.

Wendy B. Faris suggests, it is quite conceivable that *Midnight's children's* characters could actually be incarnations of Hindu gods. Faris writes,

In India, of course, beliefs regarding reincarnation make metamorphoses through time, particularly ubiquitous, and many of the characters in *Midnight’s children* duplicates a deity, Saleem’s much mentioned nose (to city only one instance) corresponding to Ganesh the elephant-headed god’s trunk. (Faris, 179)

Parvati-the-Witch marries Saleem and gives birth to Aadam Sinai. The character of Saleem, embody two gods in one person, Vishnu and Ganesh. The reference of Ganesh, the God of good fortune is seen from the opening pages to the concluding chapter in the novel. Aadam Aziz’s nose is compared to the trunk of the elephant-headed Ganesh. (MC, 9) He has the qualities of Ganesh, the ability to overcome difficulties. Saleem’s son Aadam Sinai is described as, “He was the true great-grand-son of his great-grandfather; but elephantiasis attacked him in the ears instead of the nose—because he was also the true son of Shiva-and-Parvati; he was the elephant headed Ganesh.” (587) Saleem's over sized nose, his ability to have an omniscient perspective and his intellectual skills all link him to the Hindu God Ganesha, a God with an elephant's head attributed to be the remover of all barriers, destroying vanity and selfishness.

The names of the characters in the novel have mythic resonances. Rushdie uses various mythologies into making Saleem’s history. Shiva is the Hindu God of destruction and thus in the novel the midnight’s children, Shiva is an embodiment of chaos, a threat to order and stability. In addition, Shiva represents Shiva lingam the creator, who is the father of many illegitimate children in the novel. Parvati, the
daughter of the Mountain King Himalayas, is Shiva’s wife and the mother goddess. Saleem’s son Adam is actually the son of Shiva and Parvati and bears a remarkable resemblance to Ganesh the mythical son of the Hindu gods Shiva and Parvati.

In the novel, the only midnight’s children who are not rendered impotent during the Emergency are Parvati and Shiva. They together create a new life in the form of Aadam. Durga is the name for Parvati in her incarnation as the destroyer of evil; Padma or the lotus is the national flower and an emblem of peace. Padma, an illiterate girl, named after the ‘lotus goddess’ (MC, 270). Padma is,

Lotus calyx, which grew out of Vishnu’s navel, and from which Brahma himself was born; Padma the source, the mother of Time… (270)

Uma Parameshwaran writes, “She is the collective consciousness, the spirit of the country… Padma is Saleem’s contact with the earth.” (MC, 19) She is deeply attached to Saleem and performs her duty of a nurse. She provides the necessary ear to Saleem’s autobiography, but does not succeed in attracting him.

The last name Sinai, as Timothy Brennan suggests, is a cross between the secular philosopher Ibn Sina and the failed Muslim prophet Ibn Sinan. Brennan states that Sinai means barrenness, infertility, and end, and, therefore, the protagonist’s last name “prepares us for the castration of the Midnight’s Children, Saleem’s future as ‘bits of voiceless dust,’ and the apocalypse of history with which the novel closes” (93). Religious charlatanism, a common practice in India, is parodied through Cyrus, who is transformed into “India’s richest guru” (MC, 374). The traits of Sufism can be detected in the text. Padma often refers to Saleem as the “Madman from somewhere,” and madness is an attribute of the Sufi tradition. (MC, 423)
The conflict between Saleem and Shiva emblematizes the clash of the haves and the have-nots, declaration of Emergency and Sanjay Gandhi’s vasectomy project symbolizes erasure of the democratic prospects generated by independence, and castration of the *Midnight’s Children* epitomizes the temporary lapse of hopes of natural growth and development in the country. Tim S. Gauthier comments, “Rushdie can be perceived as approaching the idea of India, the question of India, from a largely Western point of view.” (139)

Rushdie presents a panoramic vision of India in an epic saga, the *Midnight’s Children*. He highlights the diverse elements that come together to create the Indian experience. The novel also covers the vast range of Indian history from the pre-independence era to the first thirty years following the independence of the country. An event like the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy is narrated in a comic vein. *Midnight’s Children* records history as recollected by an individual and that too, what Rushdie terms, an unreliable narrator. Reena Mitra writes on the trajectory of the novel thus:

*Midnight’s Children* is a literary response to a series of real life situations that have been cleverly fictionalized through allusions, disguised as well as direct, to the country’s recent as well as not so recent past. The novel has an epic sweep covering about six decades in the history of the Indian subcontinent. Book One covers the time from the Jallianwala Bagh incident to April, 1919 to the birth of the protagonist, Saleem, on 15 August, 1947; Book Two extends up to the end of the Indo-Pakistan war in September, 1965, and Book Three envelops the period up to the end of the Emergency in March, 1977, and includes the Bangladesh war as well. (Mitra, 2)

Rushdie personify history to the extent that history almost seems to be generated within the space of the text. For example, the negotiations concerning India’s independence are presented as an Englishman Methwold compelling
the Indian buyers of his estate to maintain it. The moment of independence is epitomized by Saleem’s birth at the midnight hour of the country with the birth of a country or nation. Rushdie writes, “History is always ambiguous. Facts are always hard to establish, and capable of being given many meanings ... The reading of Saleem’s unreliable narration might be ... a useful analogy for the way in which we all, every day, attempt to “read” the world. (‘Errata,’ 1991:25)

In Midnight’s Children, Rushdie infuses the supernatural into everyday experiences. Literary traditions are combined with techniques like non-linear progression of events, lengthy digressions, and recursive inconsistent narration adopted from Indian epic literature and oral forms of storytelling. Hybridity operates at the level of characterization and handling of language as well in the novel. Saleem is a hybrid figure of self and his other, Shiva. At their birth, Mary Pereira switches the infants of disparate social backgrounds. Saleem, thus is actually Shiva, while Shiva is Saleem. Saleem, whose various parental figures are British (Methwold), Hindu (Wee Willie Winkie), Muslim (Nadir Khan, Ahmed Sinai, Amina Sinai), and Catholic (Mary Periera) is like India a product of diverse influences.

The hybrid nature of Midnight’s Children is manifested in Rushdie combining western influences with eastern literary traditions. Influences of The Arabian Nights, Gabriel Garcia-Marquez’s One Hundred Years of Solitude, Günter Grass’s The Tin Drum, and Laurence Sterne’s Tristram Shandy on Midnight’s Children can be clearly perceived. The allusion to Scheherazade in The Arabian Nights narrating a new story every night to King Shahryar in order to prevent herself from being killed is explicit. According to Dubravka Juraga, Rushdie emphasizes the allegorical nature of his text mainly by drawing attention to
Saleem’s allegorical nature. (176) The genesis of *Midnight’s Children* is to be found in a familiar joke: two months after Rushdie was born, the British ran away from India.

The novel begins with the birth of Saleem Sinai, the protagonist of the novel, at the stroke of midnight on August 15, 1947, at the precise moment of India’s independence. Saleem’s birth is celebrated by Pandit Nehru, newspapers, and many others in the country. At the very beginning of the novel, hints are offered that historical events would be important in the novel and that Saleem was inextricably linked to his nation, i.e. India. Saleem said:

I was born in the city of Bombay… once upon a time. No, that won’t do, there’s no getting away from the date: I was born in Doctor Narlikar’s Nursing Home on August 15th, 1947. And the time? The time matters, too. Well then: at night No, it’s important to be more… On the stroke of midnight, as a matter of fact. Clock hands joined palms in respectful greeting as I came. Oh, spell it out, spell it out: at the precise instant of India’s arrival at independence, I tumbled forth into the world… I had been mysteriously handcuffed to history…. And there are so many stories to tell, too many, such an excess of intertwined lives events miracles places rumours, so dense a commingling of the improbable and the mundane. (MC, 3)

Rushdie reconstructs an impeccable historical record. *Midnight’s Children* is the story of an emerging nation, i.e. India, though it also relates to the birth and growth of Pakistan and Bangladesh and even offers details about Great Britain. Rushdie successfully draws a parallel between the private destiny of Saleem and the public destiny of India. Saleem sometimes thinks that from the moment of his conception, he has been a public property. *Midnight’s Children* can also be looked as a sequel of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru’s *An Autobiography*. The dream that Nehru
had about India’s freedom turns into a reality only with the birth of Saleem Sinai. Rushdie ironically makes Nehru to say:

Dear Baby Saleem, My belated congratulations on the happy accident of your birth… We shall be watching over your life with the closest attention, it will be in a sense, the mirror of our own…” (MC, 167)

Rushdie had provided Saleem and the other midnight’s children with magical powers. Further, the rendering of the various magical faculties to the peer group of Saleem’s other thousand children could be found below:

So, among the Midnight’s Children were infants with powers of transmutation, flight, prophecy and wizardry… but two of us were born on the stroke of midnight. Saleem and Shiva … to Shiva the hour had given the gifts of war (of Ram who could draw the undrawable bow; of Arjuna and Bhima, the ancient prowess of Kurus and Pandavas united unstoppably in him!). (MC, 277)

Saleem is also gifted with a magical faculty of telepathy, which plays a vital role in connecting the Midnight’s Children on a common stage and thus helping the narrative to move forward. India is compared to a woman, defined as female, and, is unambiguously named Bharat Mata within the novel. Considerably, then, India is compared to a woman. Mary Pereira is also Saleem’s role model as a creator- a creator of history. It is at her factory, where Saleem learns and refines the art of pickling, and, meets Padma, the woman to whom he narrates his tale. Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children make use of fantasy and myth within the novel. Bombay the so-called Gateway to India is described by Saleem to Padma:

Prima in Indis,
Gateway to India,
Star of the East
With her face to the west. (MC, 122)
Saleem’s story is inextricably associated with that of the newly emerging democracy that is India. Again, in the chapter entitled Jamila Singer, a brief history of the conquest of India is presented. The narrative tells us that:

My invasion of Pakistan, armed (if that’s the right word) only with a new manifestation of nasal inheritance, gave me the powers of sniffing-out-the-truth... the strength to conquer my foes. (427)

Saleem represents Rushdie’s own position of marginality. He is enlisted in the Pakistan army as a man-dog because of his powers of smell. He gets lost in the Sunderbans of the Ganges delta and enters a new world where space and time disappear. Saleem Sinai reinvents his identity in the process of reinventing Indian history. Rushdie authenticates his description by precise historical signposts sprinkled all through Midnight’s Children. The birth of the movement for Indian Independence, the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre at Amritsar, the language marches in Bombay, the creation of Bangladesh and the Emergency are described in details. M.H. Abrams says, “The novel employs the formal technique of magical realism, through myth and historical events, and Rushdie simultaneously represents ordinary events alongside fantastic elements.” (Abrams, 203)

Jawaharlal Nehru in his famous address to the nation quotes about the moment of Indian’s birth as a nation and the birth of Saleem Sinai:

At the stroke of the Midnight hours, while the world sleeps, India awakens to life and freedom yells cries, bellows, and the howls of children arriving in the world ... (MC, 156)

Ever incident that takes place in the novel is associated with an historical event or moment. S. H. Bounse, says, “Through magical realism the novel provides a more accurate and vivid images of events by combining the characters, their personal histories, and mythologies and histories of various culture” (Bounse, 27).
Saleem’s son is born on 25th June, 1975, the very day the Emergency was declared by Indira Gandhi. Saleem’s story is further authenticated by giving dates and places of many important historical figures, from Mountbatten, to Nehru, to Yahya Khan and Z.A. Bhutto. The references of places and date in Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* are real and accurate, unlike in the novels of J.G. Farell’s *The siege of Krishnapur* and Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura*. Yet Saleem slips up disarmingly in his chronology of Mahatma Gandhi’s death; Re-reading my work, I have discovered an error in chronology ... in my India, Gandhi will continue to die at the wrong time.

India’s Independence itself is seen as a myth as;

> The birth of this new nation was nothing more than...an extra festival on the calendar, a new myth to celebrate, because a nation which had never previously existed was about to win its freedom, catapulting us into a world which is although it had five thousand years of history, although has invented the game of chess and traded with middle Kingdom Egypt, was nevertheless quite imaginary; into a mythical land, a country which would never exist except by the efforts of a phenomenal collective will --- expect in a dream we all agreed to dream ... India, the new myth - a collective fiction in which anything was possible. (MC, 150)

In *Midnight’s Children*, Rushdie emphasizes the fact that there are as many India’s as there are Indians and as many histories as there are historians. The identity is not simply a matter of religion or place, but also of language. We are told:

> India had been divided a new, into fourteen states and six centrally administered ‘territories’. But the boundaries of these states were not formed by... natural features of the terrain; they were, instead, walls of words. Language divided us... (MC, 261)

Roy has taken advantage of the features of Kerala to construct her narrative of myth. The Meenachal river, which takes away the life of little Sophie Mol,
signifies the potential danger of transgression and the dooms of the Ipe family. Moreover, this river reminds each character of the traumatic memories since on the other side of the river lies the ancient Ayemenem house. It is the place where Ammu and Velutha meet secretly at night and Velutha ends his life. Here, the house symbolizes the good old days of the Ipe family when they own the pickle factory, and when the original Syrian Christian were not replaced by the communist newcomers. For each member of the Ipe family, the river is crossed and re-crossed, from generation to generation. Yet to cross the river does not mean that they can easily leave the traumatic memories behind. Since borders have their ways of insisting on separation while at the same time acknowledging connection, what they have crossed is the physical borders instead of the mental boundaries.

There is a reference about Kathakali men in the novel. They enact the stories from the Mahabharata. They play their roles with warmth and zeal and more the hearts of the audience. However, when ‘the Kathakali men took off their makeup and go home, they beat their wives, even Kunti, the soft one, with breast’ (GOST, 236). That is, the man who played the role of Kunti, also beat his wife on the other hand, there is Pappachi, an imperial Entomologist at the Pusa Institute. Sometimes the Kathakali artist would be stoned all because of the tattered and darned skirt, crowns with hollows and bald velvet blouse. Roy consistently uses ironic tone to point out how the dancers cannot fit in today’s modern India. The kathakali Man is alienated by the society for his dying profession, Therefore “he turns to tourism. He enters the market. He hawks the only thing he owns. The stories that his body cell can tell.” (GOST, 230)

The title *The God of Small Things* is ironic and presents the predicament of untouchables as Velutha, God of loss. He has a magical power to carve intricate
things, but he is not able to carve a better future for himself. Velutha’s plight in this ‘war of histories’ is problematical due to the paradoxical depictions of him as a God in the novel, in particular as the Hindu God Krishna. Keralite society in the novel utilised the Vedic past to keep power structures in place to keep Velutha powerless. Roy on the other hand, offers a new vision of men like Velutha by comparing them to the gods; in this case, striking allusions with the Hindu God, Krishna. While Ammu, Rahel and Estha see Velutha as the god of small things, the god of loss, Roy casts him as Krishna, a god of salvation. Although Velutha is an inverted Krishna, the two bear overt textual similarities. Velutha is ultimately destroyed by powerful hierarchies, yet Ammu and the twins deify him repeatedly throughout the text as The God of Small Things… The God of Goose Bumps and Sudden Smiles… (GOST, 217) Repeated reference to the beauty of Velutha’s dark body evokes the eroticisation of the body of Krishna. Krishna means a ‘god who is beauty… [who]… inhabits a body for us’ to worship, a god eroticised by the gaze of his worshippers. Sanskrit mythology and later ensuing poetry note Krishna’s ‘lovely body… dark as lamp-black’ and ‘dark … as the blue neytal lily …’ (Hopkins, 131)

Roy’s represent Velutha to one of the most celebrated deities in Sanskrit mythology, the God Krishna. Like Jesus Christ, Krishna was cast as a personal saviour, a deity who took mortal form to redeem humankind from evil forces. The tragic and doomed love of Velutha and Ammu mirrors the sexual union of Krishna and Radha in the Gita Govinda, a blissful union, symbol of the salvation of the human soul, the uniting of the human soul with the Divine. Roy’s depiction of Velutha evokes the dark, erotic physicality of Krishna. Velutha in turn, is deified by Ammu, Rahel and Estha.
Similarly, Velutha is eroticised under the gaze of Ammu as he plays with Rahel:

She saw the ridges of muscle on Velutha’s stomach grow taught and rise under his skin like the divisions on a slab of chocolate … how his body had changed – so quietly, from a flat muscled boy’s body into a man’s body. Contoured and hard. A swimmer’s body. (GOST, 175)

The gaze binds mortal to deity as in Radha and Krishna, or ‘Touchable’ to ‘Untouchable’ as Ammu and Velutha. The gaze in *The God of Small Things* gives hope, albeit a brief interlude, to Ammu who felt that her ‘life had been lived’ and that ‘her cup was full of dust.’ (GOST, 222) Velutha also has a Christ-like correlation. Like Christ, he was a carpenter who suffered a lot in life. Both were betrayed and brutally murdered. Both are sacrificed for a greater cause, one for the salvation of humanity, the other in order to salvage the stratified social order and to keep an upper-caste family name intact. Biblical Christian allusions and mythology are all pervading in *The God of Small Things* and help to draw a constant and ironic parallel between what should be and what actually is, between the search for values and the realities of the human situation. The Vedic traditions relay the religious origins of power structures in India and form a mythical justification for the ‘Love Laws’ and for Velutha’s untouchability. These epics help to make sense of the modern effects of the Indian caste - system.

Kiran Desai has blended myth and imagery in a very beautiful way in *The Inheritance of Loss*. When the police in search of thief, pass through cook’s hut near an oddly well-maintained patch behind the water tank, they find a saucer of milk and a pile of mithai had been spilled and pocked by the sleet. The cook explains them about angering of two snakes, mia-bibi, husband, and wife, who lived in a hole nearby. The cook told the police officer of the drama.
I wasn’t bitten, but mysteriously my body swelled up to ten times my size. I went to the temple and they told me that I must ask forgiveness of the snakes. So I made a clay cobra and put it behind the water tank, made the area around it clean with cow dung, and did Puja. Immediately the swelling went down.’ The policemen approved of this. “Pray to them and they will always protect you, they will never bite you.” The cook agreed, ”they don’t bite, the two of them, and they never steal chickens or eggs. In the winter, you don’t see them much, but otherwise they come out all the time and check if everything is all right. Do a round of the property. We were going to make this part a garden, but we left it to them. They go along the fence all around Cho Oyu and back to their home.” “What kind of snake?” ‘Black cobras, thick as that,” he said and pointed at the melamine biscuit jar that a policeman was carrying in a plastic bag. “Husband and wife”. (IHL, 12-13)

Adiga creates a protagonist who, in his social background could well be India’s Everyman. Balram explains to the Chinese Premier that in India the origin of the entire river has religious connotations. Balram says one of them is called mother Ganga, the daughter of the Vedas, river of illumination, protector of us, all breakers of the chain of birth and rebirth. Millions of devotees bath each year in the holy water of these sacrosanct rivers. It is belief that if you bath in the holy water of Ganga all your sins will get washed at that very moment. Balram further suggests Mr. Premier: “No- Mr. Jiabao, I urge you not to dip in the Ganga, unless you want your mouth full of faeces, straw, soggy parts of human bodies, buffalo carrion and seven different kinds of industrial acids.” (TWT, 15)

Every place on the map of India near the ocean is well off. The river Ganga gives life to our plants, animals and people, but the river also brings darkness to India – the black river.
Which black river am I talking of – which river of Death, whose banks are full of rich, dark, sticky mud whose grip traps everything that is planted in it, suffocating and choking and stunting it? Why, I am talking of Mother Ganga, daughter of the Vedas, river of illumination, protector of us all, breaker of the chain of birth and rebirth. Everywhere this river flows, that area is the Darkness. (TWT, 14-15)

Balram’s description indicates what has often been called the “Hindu heartland” of India, the northern states such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar through which the sacred Ganges flows, and where most of the holiest Hindu sites are found. In doing so, he essentially refutes the whole notion of India as Hindu nation, and “Hindutva” as its way of life. This refutation of Hinduism – its pantheon, beliefs and rituals, its caste system – is crucial to Balram’s story of his rise from poverty and oppression through ruthless self-interestedness. He blames Hinduism for the oppression of the poor and the retardation of social progress in India, beginning with the pantheon itself, which (together with the Muslim and Christian Gods) imposes “36,000,004 divine arses” for supplicants like Balram to kiss. (TWT, 8) He also rebels against the doctrines of servitude that he sees enshrined in Hinduism and its narratives:

Do you know about Hanuman, sir? He was the faithful servant of the god Rama, and we worship him in our temples because he is a shining example of how to serve your masters with absolute fidelity, love, and devotion. These are the kinds of gods they have foisted on us, Mr. Jiabao. Understand, now, how hard it is for a man to win his freedom in India. (TWT, 19)

Balram finds similarity in his work, as a driver for Ashok and his wife Pinky to the sacred story. The two of them would talk sitting in car and he would drive them wherever they wanted, as faithfully as the servant-god Hanuman carried about his master and mistress, Ram and Sita. The lord Hanuman, half man and half
monkey is most famous god for the common person. He was the faithful servant of Lord Rama and therefore worshipped by the common people in India. Balram also resembles to God Krishna. There is an episode in the Bhagavad-Gita when Lord Krishna – another history’s famous chauffeurs stops the chariot he is driving and gives his passenger some excellent advice on the question of life and death. Just like God Krishna, Balram’s philosophy is to make his master feel better by joking and singing a song for him. This indicates that myth from religious sermon not only gives peace and consolation to humanity in their miserable condition, but they are the best guideline to lead a happy, prosperous, and religious life with moralities and human values.

6.2 Imagery, Symbolism and Simile

Literature is a mirror that shows the reflection of human life. Literary work consists of figurative language that is full of images and symbols. Imagination is built up through the repeated usage of the same images in a literary work. According to Earl J. Wilcox “imagery, in its basic sense, is a product of literary language. Simply defined, imagery is the impression or impressions, we receive when one, or more of our senses are stimulated by language.” (Wilcox, 186) Imagery obtains the readers’ attention and guides them towards the viewpoint of the authors. Many writers have used this imagery in their literary works to create certain environment.

The use of symbolic images is a common practice among the artists and authors. Through symbols, they can convey more than direct description. “Symbol is an object, animate or inanimate, which represents or stands for something else.” (Cuddon) A dove, for example, symbolizes peace; the tiger, power and bravery; the rose, beauty; the owl, intellect; the moon, purity and beauty, white colour,
peace. A symbol contains many layers of meanings; it can refer to many things at the same moment. These layers of meanings are identified with the three basic associations a symbol possesses; which can be personal, cultural and universal. Aristotle also advocates the use of symbols in a literary work. Aristotle initiated the idea of logic; he introduced the symbolic logic as its branch.

In postcolonial Indian novels, Midnight’s Children, The God of Small Things and The Inheritance of Loss, food carry multiple meanings that serve to drive the action of the plots, characterize the characters, and reflect on aspects of the Indian culture. The authors use food and eating to symbolize cultural issues of acceptance, resistance, and preservation of culture, as well as symbols of memory, emotions, narrative history, relationships, power, and consumption. “Forbidden fruit” is a common metaphorical phrase, which refers to this Biblical account and describes an object of desire that should not be acquired because it is immoral or possibly harmful.

In Midnight’s Children, Saleem’s life has never-ending list of delicious descriptions of Indian foods: mango pickles, samosas, sweetmeats, cucumber kasaundies, lime chutneys, coconut milk, masala, cheese pakoras, and pathoras. Saleem has several impressive gifts including telepathic powers, which he uses to connect the midnight’s children and a powerful sense of smell. Although his “cucumber nose” (190) is stopped up for half of the novel, through most of the novel he is able to sniff out the slightest smells, as well as emotions. He shares precisely how he preserves his memories for future generations: “Every pickle-jar contains, therefore, the most exalted of possibilities: the feasibility of the chutnification of history; the grand hope of the pickling of time! I, however, have pickled chapters . . . in words and pickles, I have immortalized my memories”
(642). With Saleem’s sensitive nose, he easily connects current scents and tastes with events or people from the past, once even stating that just the fumes from pickles was enough to “stimulate the juice of memory.”

The use of chutney represents a powerful memory trigger that changes the attitudes of those listening to Saleem’s story. When the green chutney is brought to him, he shares with those around him, and soon the chutney “carried them back into the world of my past... mellowed them and made them receptive,” and Saleem went on to describe how “the green chutney was filling them with thoughts of years ago; I saw guilt appear on their faces, and shame.” (291-92) Near the end, Saleem himself is transported back in time by chutney he is served on his trip back to Bombay with Picture Singh. By just tasting the food, he remembered the exact moment when he had tasted it before, and his mind was carried back to those days in the past.

Food is often utilized as a metaphor, especially in literature, for ability and status. Saleem states, “Reverend Mother doled out the curries and meatballs of intransigence, dishes imbued with the personality of their creator; Amina ate the fish salans of stubbornness and the birianis of determination,” influencing the eaters in various ways (190). The use of food characterizes Reverend Mother as strong, defined, and prideful. She would not give in to her husband and family. Other women in the novel, Mary’s chutneys are filled with guilt and fear from her lingering sin. Amina made pickles together with Mary as they talked, and Amina stirred her disappointments into hot lime chutney, which never failed to bring tears to the eyes.

Food is used as a medium used to express the repressed desire and sexuality. The narrator describes, “Pia kissed an apple, sensuously, with all the rich
fullness of her painted lips; then passed it to Nayyar; who planted, upon its opposite face, a virilely passionate mouth. This was the birth of what came to be known as the indirect kiss... how pregnant with longing and eroticism!” (196) The couple in the film move on to kissing “cups of pink Kashmiri tea; . . . kissing mangoes” (196). Rushdie uses the images of men and women kissing in a film opposite sides of apples, mangoes, and cups of tea to represent their passion and desire for each other. Similarly, even as a child, Saleem knew something was not right about the intimate way Amina and Nadir shared a glass. This scene also represents the desire that the two characters hold for each other.

The way to a man’s heart is through his stomach. Parvati-the-witch used her supernatural powers, along with some pampering and a good meal, to win over Shiva until she could get what she wanted from him. The narrator explains, “she took off his boots, pressed his feet, brought him water flavoured with freshly-squeezed limes, dismissed his batman, oiled his moustache, caressed his knees and after all that produced a dinner of biriani so exquisite that he stopped wondering what was happening to him and began to enjoy it instead” (574). Bread is used as a metaphor in the novel to represent Saleem’s relationship with Jamila, in particular his forbidden love for her, which he tries throughout the remainder of the novel to repress. Because of her passion for bread, particularly leavened bread, Saleem visits the nuns at Saint Ignacio regularly to obtain the “yeasty loaves” Jamila so enjoys. Bread is a sacred symbol in Christianity as described in chapter one. By taking the yeast bread from the Christian nuns and giving it to Jamila, the bread becomes representative for a break in the continuity of the religion passed down from Saleem’s ancestors to him and, in some ways, a gentle acceptance of Western culture, Christianity, and change in general.
Arundhati Roy’s first and only novel *The God of Small Things* is not just a novel but is a fundamental mode of social enquiry as well. The opening passage of the novel is rich in symbolism. The richness of nature presents irony, as there is fullness in nature but in society there is emptiness. River Meenachal symbolises the flowing time. The children learn harsh realities of life near the river. Another symbol is the ‘boat’ which symbolises the frail vessel of life. The chapter ten of the novel is ‘River in the boat’ where both the symbols are fused.

Meenachal, a feminine figure, is also symbolic of the plight of women. The government, a patriarchal functionary is held responsible for the exploitation of Meenachal. Velutha in Ammu’s dream appears as a one-armed man, who is incapable of performing two things simultaneously: “He could do only one thing at a time. If he held her, he couldn’t kiss her. If he touched her, he couldn’t talk to her. If he loved her, he couldn’t leave her.” (GOST, 217) Velutha’s physical deformity indicates his inferior status due to his untouchable caste. His incapability to do two things at a time shows his incapability to invert the oppressive system.

In another incident, Comrade Pillai is curious and shocked about Rahel’s Divorce. His shocked utterance of ‘Die-vorced?’ symbolizes his patriarchal outlook. Divorce in a patriarchal society is symbolic of death for women.

‘We’re divorced’. Rahel hoped to shock him into silence.

‘Die-vorced?’ His voice rose to such a high register that it cracked on the question mark. He even pronounced the word as though it was a form of death. (GOST, 130)

The blackness of the sea symbolizes the hostile atmosphere. The darkness of night is akin to the blackness of the sea. Velutha’s elimination is also foreshadowed as, “He left no footprints in sand, no ripples in water, no image in mirror.” (GOST, 216) The narrator gives the attribute of “The God of Loss”, “The
God of Small Things” to Velutha. He is the God of Loss as in his efforts to give happiness to Ammu and her twins; he has lost his right to live.

The next story, Duradham Vadham, involves Bhima’s hunting down of Dushasana who had tried publicly to undress the Pandavas’ wife. The fierce battle between the two men culminates in the brutal, prolonged killing of Dushasana. Roy explicitly links this barbarous scene of slaughter with Velutha’s death:

There was madness there that morning. Under the rose bowl. It was no performance. Esthappen and Rahel recognized it. They had seen it work before. Another morning. Another stage. Another kind of frenzy (with millipedes on the soles of its shoes). The brutal extravagance of this matched by the savage economy of that. (GOST, 235)

Chacko is presented with physical traits such as a “fat man, with a body to match his laugh” (247), with “pus-filled, diabetic boil on his foot” (GOST, 249), “an old scab” (248) and ‘black oblong calluses” (GOST, 248) are suggestive of his ugly, inhuman patriarchal characteristics. Chacko’s womanish legs are also symbolic of his incapability to fulfil manly duties towards his family.

Food imagery and metaphor weaves through the novel, adding depth and multiple layers to the plot. Ammu struggles with the “normative rules of kinship in Kerala” that Mammachi and her family try to preserve, in the same way as the pickles and jams in their factory, ultimately leading to her forbidden love affair with an Untouchable, The God of Small Things, Velutha.

Mammachi remembers how her first batch of “professional pickles” leaked. This serves as a metaphor and foreshadows how secrets will also be leaked in the family. Chocolate is loved by women around the world for its rich flavour, creamy texture, and rumoured aphrodisiacal effects. Roy uses this well-known food image of chocolate and other foods to represent sexuality and desire between Rahel and
Estha. After returning to the house from a walk in the rain, Rahel watches Estha undress, describing his skin as darker in some places and “honey-colored” where his clothes were: “Chocolate with a twist of coffee” (GOST, 93). A similar chocolate description is used to depict Velutha as Ammu sees him, showing a more obvious attraction. Another food metaphor that drives the action in The God of Small Things is that of the “Orangedrink Lemondrink” man and the lemon drink, which come to represent disappointment, fear, and shame for Estha. Hybridity is represented in The God of Small Things by various foods.

Roy uses Sophie Mol’s cake to represent the Indian identity as influenced by colonialism. Like Rahel’s watch, Mammachi’s pickle factory can be viewed as another symbol of the freezing of time. Roy's novel is a treasure trove of rare similes, metaphors and idioms like, Christianity arrived in a boat and seeped into Kerala like tea from a tea bag. When she gave birth to twins, Ammu checked their bodies and found no deformity. But Rahel points out that, “she didn't notice the single, Siamese soul” (GOST, 41) The novel has a universal appeal and is great art in terms of images and symbols, irony and other aesthetic aspects of life.

Kiran Desai has used food to depict class difference and as measuring standard of religious identity. For Biju and Gyan food is a basic necessity, but for the Judge, Lola, Noni and Sai it is an indication of their appreciation for England. Eating beef is a major issue in the novel. Harish Harry is a mammon worshipper, but he is against serving beef. The remark “nobody eats beef in India and just look at it – it’s the shape of a big T-bone.” (IHL, 135) reveals the duality of Indians who in India worship cow, but in the host country eat it. Biju leaves his job when made to choose between serving beef or to work by killing his religious consciousness.
The judge Jemubhai is the sad symbol of the debris of India’s colonial history. Trapped in his brown skin, the judge becomes understandably possessive of his position as a civil servant. The sustained irony of Jemubhai’s position is that he could join the Civil Service only because attempts were being made to Indianize the service but he takes his civil service position to be a symbol of his “whiteness.” When the judge first saw the house, “he felt he was entering a sensibility rather than a house.” (28) The house symbolises both his asylum as well as his crucible; a sanctuary against the world’s onslaughts and at the same time, the reminder that his life is one of shame and guilt.

The floor was dark, almost black, wide planked; the ceiling resembled the rib cage of a whale, the marks of an axe still in the timber... He knew he could become aware here of depth, width, height and of a more elusive dimension. Outside, passionately coloured birds swooped and whistled, and the Himalayas rose layer upon layer until those gleaming peaks proved a man to be so small that it made sense to give it all up, empty it all out. The judge could live here, in this shell, this skull, with the solace of being a foreigner in his own country…. (IHL, 29)

Aravind Adiga, in his novel The White Tiger has used a vast imagery of animals. To present the hidden associations of human beings and the animal imagery is used in literature. Adiga has portrayed the inner souls of his characters by giving them animal titles, which can show their animalistic instincts. The White Tiger is the story of an Indian slave, who fulfils his desire of a rich living by slitting the throat of his master and stealing his capital. Though he knows his masters will treat his family ruthlessly afterwards, yet he goes to the rich living by any means. This is the major trait of his character turning him into a real white tiger.
Adiga has presented his protagonist, Balram, as a White Tiger in the novel; even the very title of the novel is suggesting this relation between the both. *The White Tiger* is famous for its lonely bloody hunts. It cannot run as fast as the other tigers, but it is a very good swimmer and climber. It usually hunts at night, remains alone and quiet, does not make friends and likes to stay alone, “A White Tiger keeps no friends.” (TWT, 302)

Balram, the son of an honest rickshaw-puller was seen as an intelligent child, but later he was exposed into a lot of corruption and immoral behaviour. Balram becomes very selfish; many of his actions were ambiguous in nature. The images used for Balram are of weak and meek animals when he is poor. However, as he is a different person from his lot and becomes a capitalist afterwards that is why the title of a white tiger is attached to his character. A white tiger symbolizes power and in East Asian cultures, such as in Vietnam, it is also a symbol of freedom and individuality (Warness). Balram is seen as different from those he grew up with. He is the one who got out of the Darkness and found his way into the Light.

The description of the white tigers continues throughout the narrative side by side. *The White Tiger* never hunts in groups because it cannot share its prey with the others. To show the selfishness and ruthlessness of his characters, Adiga has used the animal imagery very explicitly in the narrative. Different characters in the novel are called by the animal titles. Adiga portrays the distinction between the social class differences explicitly in the novel by associating different animal images to different social classes. He has associated the destructive and brutal traits of the wild animals with the high class, whereas the lower class is shown as the imprudent, meek and foolish animals. Adiga has used diverse imagery
for the distinctive social classes to present the inner nature of the rich and the poor and emphasized the wild emotions of the post-modern human beings who crave for the capital.

Adiga describes the four landlords from Balram’s local village, who are rich enough to control the lives of the poor habitants with the help of money. “All four of the animals lived in high-walled mansions…” (TWT, 25) Adiga has used certain wild animals’ titles for the characters of his novel; following is a list of such images used by him. The animal names of these landlords are:

- Buffalo
- Wild Bear
- The Stork
- The Raven (25)

All the four rich landlords are savage and wild animals. The true nature of them is same as well, they all destructive and bestial.

The Buffalo was greediest of the lot. He had eaten up the rickshaws and the roads. So, if you ran a rickshaw, or used the road, you had to pay him feed, one-third of whatever you earned, no loss. (TWT, 24)

The images used for “the Buffalo” clearly relate to the animal buffalo, which is greedy and hungry in nature; we have to “feed” it continuously.

“If you wanted to work on his (Wild Bear) lands, you had to bow down to his feet, and touch the dust under his feet...” (25)

“The Stork was a fat man with a fat moustache, thick and curved and pointy as the tips...he took a cut of every catch of fish caught by every fisherman in the river...” (24)

“(The Raven) took a cut from the goatherds who went up there to graze with their folks. If they didn’t have their money, he liked to dip his beak into their backsides, so they called him the Raven.” (TWT, 25)
Besides this, Adiga gives the title of “Mongoose” and “Lamb” to Mukesh, who is the son of Stork. The rich politician of Laxaman Gharh, the Socialist, is a corrupt person, who takes bribes. Adiga has described him as a person with “Bull neck”, a dangerous animal. There is a symbolic description of a Socialist as a “cat who has tasted blood” and who has a lust for capital, power and is harmful to the common people. Balram does not go to the school because he is scared of big poisonous lizard. As the lizard keeps him away from his studies, same as the landlords do not want him to study or to make any type of progress. Therefore, here the “lizard” represents the rich landlords.

“Only flicking its red tongue in and out of its mouth- the lizard came closer and closer to my face” (TWT, 29)

When Balram finalizes his plan of killing his master Mr. Ashok, he sees a dream of a bull that is very dangerous and terrifying. This “bull” represents the rich people who are continuously terrifying the poor people throughout their lives. Balram is called by different animal titles. When he is poor, his friends call him “the dog” who is a loyal animal. His grandma said, “He is as greedy as a pig” (TWT, 56). Balram calls himself, a donkey when he is working as a driver. The other drivers call him Country Mouse. All these titles show that he is a refereed to the weak animals time and again. He himself says about him “I was grinning like a donkey” (228). Balram calls the poor people, dogs, parrot and donkeys repeatedly in the novel. He also says

“They (the poor drivers) were crouching and jabbering like monkeys.” (201)

“They’re (the poor prostitutes) like parrots in a cage” (251)

“One of the human spiders dropped a wet rag on the floor…” (TWT, 265)
Adiga frequently mentions the rooster coop while describing the situation or characteristics of the servant class in India. The author first describes how the rooster coop looks like in the market in Old Delhi and compares those chickens living in a miserable condition with the poorer class in India. “The very same thing is done with human beings in this country” (TWT, 174). Adiga presents an image of cockroaches, while working as a driver. Balram’s room remains full of cockroaches, and he kills these cockroaches ruthlessly. This killing signifies the change in his character. He decides to kill his rich master and wants to become so powerful like rich, as he kills the small cockroaches he wishes to control the other people’s lives as well. At the end of the novel, Balram decides to open a school for the poor children where they will be given the education to become white tigers as well to destroy the rich of the country.

Rushdie has used myth in his novel to bring out the human myth condition and to trace reality which widened the scope of the English fiction. It reflects countless mythic influences from both Eastern and Western culture. Salman Rushdie, Roy, Desai and Adiga have used myths, mythologies and folklore as a source for their novels, not for the glorification, but to relate the myths to the present and to the past beliefs found in these myths.
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