

Chapter Four:

The Hidden Myth of the Dirty Goddess

Other than concern on the untouchables, paragraphs about women's situation in India occupy most of the novel. The syllogism on the reason why Velutha is downtrodden for his caste can also be applied to explain the misfortune of Ammu and Rahel. We will find out that the paradigm of purity imposed on the female is no less stressful yet more sophisticated than that on the untouchables. Just as what Mary Douglas argues in the beginning of *Purity and Danger*, human society utilizes the conception of purity to build up the order:

[The] ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience. It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, above and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created. (4)

There is a semblance of order shared between the immutable caste system and the gender hierarchy, whereas there exists inevitable difference. The distinction, as I will suggest, is made by man's long-established ambivalent feeling about femininity and maternity. In the preceding chapter, there is an inchoate discussion about how people tend to liken the femininity to the loathed subject. In Kristeva's discourse, the demeaning of the certain group in the human society (including the massacre of the Jews during the Second World War and, of course, the violence against the untouchables in India) has its psychosocial root. The intention of eliminating specific ethnic groups is aroused by the unnameable fear, and Kristeva connects this

very emotion to man's fear toward woman. Simultaneously, the other aspects toward women as a mother are not to be revealed. The dealing of femininity is more complicated by the fact that the mother is socially constructed as two-faced. This originates from the interworking of the two drastically opposite feelings: the antipathy against the mother and the idealization of the mother. Without speaking of this complex about motherhood, it is impossible for us to get a full glimpse of the impinged female identity. The power enforced on the women is exercised trickily by interchangeably permitting certain traits in women while at the same time excluding the others. Before we delve into this issue, we need to go back to the discussion of the female body which is prescribed with the code of purity as well.

Purity Code: Female Bodies as the Container of Pollution

In the previous chapter, we have discussed the Hindu religious prohibitions upon defilement which may intrude the human body. The excreta and the organ dealing with it are thus feared and loathed because their potentiality of pollution. It is mentioned that in the novel there are many occasions in which the imagery of defecation appears, and it is often related either to Velutha the untouchable or the female characters. To the superior groups in the society, it seems that only by using the coprophagous terminology to address the secondary groups, can they thoroughly divide their pure selves from the impure others. Based on the same strategy, women's bodies are considered as containers of the pollution which induces abjection in any homogenous institution. The remarks that misrepresent female bodies are so abundant that we can collect similar examples in many other literary works. One

can hardly forget one scene in *The Name of the Rose* when Ubertino da Casale makes comments about women, which is obviously indebted to the Odo of Cluny's motto, he says: "The beauty of the body stops at the skin. [...] If you think of what is hidden in the nostrils, in the throat, and in the belly, you will find only filth. And if it revolts you to touch mucus or dung with your fingertip, how could we desire to embrace the sack that contains that dung" (330-1). This disgust-inducing sermon intends to give rise to the abject feelings towards women. This rigid equalization of women and the waste products can quickly be associated with people's treatment about Velutha. As a man from the debased social group, he is taken as the body reject and the initiation of pollution. In the same sense, women in India suffer from this ideology. Dhruvarajan concludes that it is a prevailing ideology in India that "men are ritually *pure*, physically strong, and emotionally mature; women, on the other hand, are ritually *pollutable*, physically weak, and lack strong will power" (emphasis added, 27). Like the untouchables, women are bound with the impurity essence. What makes woman's situation more sophisticated is their gender and their different body structures.

In his essay "Cleanliness Prohibitions and Self-Creation," Georges Bataille dwells on the issue of human bodies. He explicates his perception about the prohibition of the human bodies. Likewise, Bataille shares the same view with Mary Douglas that the unexplainable horror towards the excreta is one of the resorts of the authority to build up the social classification. Yet, instead of focusing on the fear of corruption initiated by feces as Douglas does, he is more prone to believe that this filth-phobic reaction is the genuine humanity which reflects "*the negation of nature*

establishes” (61). Bataille aims for revealing the intense ethical issue about the aversion of evacuation, with which he links to human snobbishness. To Bataille, all the measures which people take to perform prohibition upon defecation is a way for the human beings to prove they are different from the nature and the animality. Were it not for the obliteration of the primitive traces in the human bodies, it is liable that man is no nobler than the other more “debased” creatures. To directly put it, “we have removed from it everything that might recall the way in which we come out of it. Mankind as a whole resembles those parvenus who are ashamed of their humble origin. They rid themselves of anything suggesting it” (62). And this attempt leads to the compelling alienation from the flesh and the ultimate suspension from appreciating the carnal beauty. Bataille deduces this observation from everyday life in which the adults teach the children to be away from the human nature, to make them share their “horror of the life of the flesh, of life naked, undisguised, a horror without which we would resemble the animals” (63). Learning to feel repugnance toward the body thus helps to consolidate the social classification, and announces the authenticity of humanity. The alleged anti-foulness differentiates human from animals, the civilized from the savage.

Erich Fromm shares the similar view up this human ethics: that we tend to associate the body and its needs with guilt. To reach the goal of effective prohibition of bodily needs, the social authoritatives postulate that the inherent sinfulness of the body. More often than not, under this dictatorship children quickly grasp the idea of guilt toward their bodies “because the conflict between his natural impulses and their moral evaluation by his parents constitutes a constantly generating source of guilt

feelings” (*Men for Himself*, 256).

From the aversion to the feces to the aversion to the body which produces feces, the moralists or the spiritualists have sufficient reasons to deny the body. The human body becomes an unfavorable reminder of the fact that he is a creature born of the nature after all. Mankind’s urgent need to deny their bodies is originated from the mentality that they want to cancel this shameful fact. The reason why this humanistic issue is brought up is because by following this transition of thought, we can deduce the root of the hatred for female bodies. Compared with men’s bodies, women’s bodies are more victimized by all cultural taboos for the deep-rooted category that defines woman as of nature while man as of culture¹. Women are designated to be responsible for giving birth to the future generations because only the women’s womb can nurture new life. Yet just this very characteristic of female bodies becomes the firm thread which links women and the nature together. Originated from the fear toward the female’s life-giving capabilities which their opposite sex does not own, the male often links women’s bodies to the mystic or nonhuman instances.

Moreover, Hays assumes this is a symptom that reveals the male’s anxiety to connect the female bodies that they are not familiar with to the fearful super-nature by adapting the evidences from many different cultures. “Women, in short, are dangerous,” Hays concludes, “taboo and fears of contagion, however, are not limited to the physical crises in their lives. When we investigate the ideas of contact still

¹ The idea of female belonging to the nature seems to be wild-spread in different cultures. See S. B. Ortner’s, “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?,” *Women, Culture, and Society*, ed. M. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1973) 67-87.

further, a host of activities require avoidance of women in general” (44).

For a long time, that the female in general is regarded as a *thing* needed to be cautious of is so thoroughly deep-rooted in the male-centered language that we are not consciously aware of it. In *TGOST*, examples of this can be easily picked up. For instance, Meenachal River which takes away Sophie Mol’s life and brings catastrophe to every member in Ayemenem house is figuratively addressed as “she.” Before the accident happens, Kuttappen (Verlutha’s brother) once warns the twins to be cautious of the river because she is not “a little old churchgoing ammooma [grandma]” as she pretended to be because she “minded *other* people’s business” (201). His remark conveys the animosity towards femininity in the collective consciousness. The devouring monster that lurks behind the look of a prudent old woman reveals how the social bias toward women is so perpetuating through the tool of language. The appearance of the woman metaphor can not help but to be tagged along with the brittle image in this name-calling verbal game. This quality in the everyday language can certainly make woman’s self-esteem wear off by suggesting that the vileness of the femininity and referring them to the subspecies.

If we look into the social contexts, we can find that Kuttappen’s analogy does not come out of nowhere. Dhruvarajan states that it is a conventional ideology in India that “the female is closer to nature because of her role in the reproductive process; she provides the soil to nurture the seed provided by the male” (30). This analogy is blended with the male’s ambiguous feelings toward the fertility of females. Though both man and woman are indispensable in the procreation process, connotatively man is blessed with active attributes while woman is tainted with

passive defect. The transformation of women into a weak receptor justifies the idea that women should be dominated since women cannot hold control of their bodies. More precisely speaking, this domination would be under the title of ‘protection’ because of woman’s weakness. This conception can again be traced back to the early learning behavior in childhood.

In *Male and Female*, Margaret Mead collects and documents all kinds of gender arrangements in different cultures². Her statement about the children’s learning to treat their bodies is compensatory rather than contrary to the standpoints about how the bodies are debased, which we have already discussed of earlier. She makes the observation that there is a common phenomenon in all these different societies. That is at about the age of four or five, children, especially girls, are taught not to touch their genitals and insisted by their parents to wear clothes. Mead thus stresses that “the fact that in all these societies it is girls who are permanently clothed first is again an expression that they are waiting women” (105). A girl-child who grows up with this penetrating idea, that the body is shameful and should be covered, can hardly take pride in her own body. Moreover, the covering of the femininity always proceeds under the disguise of ethical codes: immature girls need to be protected because their bodies have already had great attraction to men while they have no ability to guard themselves. Yet under the grand rationalization of the motive, this prevalent behavior reveals the inchoate sign that the female bodies are being concealed desperately by force.

² *Male and Female* is a work about the formation and the polar differences between two sexes. As an anthropologist, Mead makes a convincing observation to the local people’s different attitudes towards the male body and the female body in the South Pacific and the East Indies. Her studies offer a sociological basis for the other feminists to develop upon.

In *TGOST*, this condition is presented by Rahel's failure to reconcile with the Christian education she receives in the boarding school. It is described that Rahel hides behind the door and collides with her senior classmates deliberately. The intention of doing so is that she wants to know whether the breasts hurt. Due to the fact that in that Christian institution breasts were "not supposed to exist," Rahel thus comes up with the question: "if they didn't could they hurt?" (18) The outcome of this improper inquiry is the expelling of Rahel from the school. She is disqualified to be a good girl by her teachers just because she wants to learn more about the most sensual part of her body. The school's penalty on Rahel reveals its fierce intention to maintain the order, rejecting the impure ingredients which may cause chaos.

Learning how not to exhibit their bodies seems to be a common sense to the Syrian Christian women in the novel. Roy mentions that while the servant Kochu Maria is preparing the party to welcome Sophie Mol, she wears a bodice "which tied *tightly* around her chest to flatten her unchristian breasts" (emphasis added 162). This self-deceiving policy obviously prevents Rahel to identify with what is disapproved by the communal selves, and obviously troubles the adolescent Rahel. Odd enough, during the same period Rahel extends her discovery not only to her own body, but also to the animal excreta. Her decorating the dung with flowers along with her quest of the breasts are two major aberrations which offend her teachers most. Both Rahel's intense interest about her body and her fancy to dejecta are taken as wicked thoughts by the school, and thus make her characterized as morally perverted. Roy's picture of Rahel's curiosity about scatology ironically reflects the medieval priests' view about a woman's body. Above all, it shows that both the female bodies and the

evacuation become the projector of abjection. In the educational institution where the students form their subjectivities and construct their identification, the abjection of any female traits symbolizes the institutional self's attempt to wipe out these impure components. In this episode of Rahel's story, it is shown that the breasts, the most 'natural' part in woman's body, from which every human baby fulfills their infantile drive, is a door shut for a girl to understand her own body, since the identification with female bodies is perceived as perverse in the purifying stratification. The only impression about her breasts Rahel gets from the Christian institution only recalls shame.

As what Dinnerstein has pointed out, since the woman is regarded a debased form all altogether, "the love of the flesh that woman stand for thus includes an ashamed love for something actively loathsome" (147). The debasement of the flesh actually strengthens men's sense of priority, because "woman is available for the dirty-goddess role, and man can thus be relatively exempt [...] from the baseness that she carries" (148). This argument is quite compatible to Bataille's. According to Bataille's saying, we can interpret the institution's denial of women's sensual bodies as man's refusal to face his origin and his fear towards it. If he wants to remain superior to the opposite sex then it is necessary for him to cancel the fact that he is originated in and from the woman's body. The disastrous effect which this negation brings is the female's incapability to identify her own body. Many passages in the novel show that Rahel grows aloof both towards her own body and her own sexuality. Rahel keeps distance to her body just like she to the world and even to her ex-husband. Rahel's husband even divorces her because he can not interpret her expression.

Before Rahel meets Estha again, she is never able to reconcile with her body nor experience any sexual pleasure. The penetration of the ideology, the abjection to the vile body, penetrates into the minds of juvenile Rahel and leaves wounds to her self-respect as she grows up as a woman.

Yet, comparing to the absolute impure identity of the untouchables, the female's purity code is more complicated because of man's strategic manipulation of iconographical motherhood. The erasing of the female body has a similarity to that of the untouchables. However, the overt euphemism of the gracious maternity more or less compensates women for the demeaning of their bodies. The prosecution towards the femininity may seem to be reduced by the orthodox idea about motherhood, because the woman regains her superiority ethically by being a mother. The ambiguous part of motherhood lays on the fact that, as Mary Layoun perceives, it "could be a privileged site for women and also a potential challenge to patriarchal systems through its admitting of, in Kristeva's terms, an 'otherness within the self'" (83). Motherhood is privileged owing to people's paying respect to the romanticized mothers. The personalities such as selflessness and devotion are attributed to mothers. However, women's condition as being an "otherness" does not change in the essence if people keep showering eulogies to a mother without fully recognizing that there is no pure identity can fully define a mother. In the *TGOST*, among all the major female characters there are only two mothers. One is Mammachi and the other is Ammu. Both can be said as much diverted from the phantasmagorical motherhood. We can see that the exaggeration of the ideal mother becomes only an ongoing process of appropriating and abjective reaction to the individuality in both of

the two. They are both inevitably positioned in the pure framework of motherhood and suffer the unbearable weight from the dictation of the Law. Firstly to see how the image of a mother is constructed, I will refer to Kristeva's essay "Stabat Mater" (Moi 161-85)

The Rejecting/ Rejected Mother

The misogynists' attack and the hostile discourse toward women change into a polar direction once these women become mothers. The severe disparagement towards the female body only shows the fragility of the gratified motherhood. In the essay "Stabat Mater," Kristeva gives a vivid illustration to the meretricious applause to the women who are in conformity with the image of the holy mother: Virgin Mary. Finding evidence in the history of the Christianity, Kristeva explicates the fictional image of Virgin Mary. Her image had been through many transitions to meet the churches' need: she was deprived of sin and death in the religious council before the Middle Ages; she was incorporated into the imagery of the Lady during the Middle Ages; her body was only allowed to expose the insignificant parts such as her ears while the other sensual parts like breasts were covered under the blue dress to reinforce her humbleness in the Byzantine icons (Moi 165-77). All in all, through this record about Christianity, Kristeva implies that the construction of the ideal maternity is masculine appropriation. This progressive appropriation constitutes and reconstitutes the pure category in the motherhood which fails to subsume many different facets of motherhood. Worse still, the encouragement of women to identify with the pure and divine image is problematic because this strategy disables any other

ways to present the femininity. This phenomenon, Kristeva says, is not limited only in Christian civilization. Indeed, Ranganathananda writes about how motherhood is worshipped by every man in India: “the culture of the Hindu trains him to look upon all women, nay, to look upon the female of all species, as forms of the one Divine Mother” (Allen and Mukherjee 10). The sorption of femininity into motherhood can not be better expressed by this sentence. The undertone of this ethic is that women can only earn the respect by being the Divine Mother. This attitude is reflected in Comrade Pillai when he takes pity on Rahel because of Rahel’s status as a divorcee so that she does not look promising to bear a child. Her possible incapability to be a mother is seen as misfortunate to Comrade Pillai. Just this ethic which is encompassing and deteriorating the individual distinctiveness of every woman permeates through the story and pushes Ammu to the edge of self-destruction. Roy’s depiction presents the great rupture between the general expectation about maternity and how the idea of The Good Mother and The Family tortures this single-parent family in Ayemenem house.

While talking about the motherhood, Kristeva believes that one of the most urgent issues which is muted for a long time is a mother’s need to raise her children according to the Law of the society in order to be recognized by the norms. Kristeva calls it “feminine perversion,” considering that woman “allows herself a coded, fundamental, perverse behavior, ultimate guarantee of society, without which society will not reproduce and will not maintain a constancy of standardized household” (Moi 183). Kristeva believes, through this masochistic procedure, women silently give up themselves by being tolerant of the only way that would satisfy the male-dominated

society. This sacrifice is performed overtly since the women willfully pander to regulation.

If we see how a mother behaves in the novel in the light of Kristeva's view, Mammachi will be the one orthodox mother who is representative of this psyche. Mammachi, whose real name is never mentioned in the novel, raises a son who goes to the Oxford and a daughter who only finishes high school. Though the education of the children is probably not up to her to decide, she properly disposes her love thoroughly to her son and chooses to withdraw her concern from her daughter, since the son will be the future heir of the house. She brings up her children in her husband's house in which she is violently abused, yet she never tries to protest against her husband's tyranny and even gradually gets used to it. In the funeral of Pappachi, Mammachi laments her husband's death with much tears. Ammu gives a wry comment on her mother's behavior: "human beings were creatures of habit, and it was amazing the kind of things they could get used to. [...] beating with brass vases were the least of them" (49). Mammachi repeats her self-tortured process once again by depending whole-heartedly on her son after Pappachi dies, yet her son only returns her with shame and disdain. The torment which Mammachi undergoes from her husband only transforms into a perverted obsession about her son. Under the camouflage of the *standardized household*, Mammachi lives as a respected Brahmin woman who develops some kind of pleasure by being demanded. The need to perfectly enact her role as a mother and an obedient wife ultimately drives her to parcel out her maternity in a very twisted way.

As for the twins' mother Ammu Ipe, though she is a nonconformist, it is also

impossible to see Ammu as an autonomous individual without considering her as a mother. Roy highlights this point in the novel. She plays the tricks on words and makes many readers who do not know Malayalam confused by never explaining whether the twins call their mother Ammu simply because the word means ‘mother’ or they call her by her first name to show the closeness. The former explanation is less likable since other characters also call her Ammu. In fact, the Malayalam term for mother is ‘Amma,’ which is very close to the name Ammu. When the twins call their relatives by the relationship but only call their mother by her first name, they have already assigned the name ‘Ammu’ to the meaning of the mother. Throughout the whole story, this identity does not prove itself capable of any flexibility for Ammu. While Mammachi’s unhappiness might be compensated by her seemingly flawless reputation, the situation of Ammu can hardly be claimed as the same. It is because there is another identity which she could never leave behind: a divorced woman.

Back to the purity code in the caste system, H. N. C. Stevenson delineates what the purity means to an upper caste woman: “to be pure, a high caste woman should have only a single sexual partner throughout her life. [...] When a Brahman *jati* [work-union] is said to have *no divorce*, what is meant is that a woman is not allowed to have a second husband” (Pauline 65). This background knowledge is helpful for us to have a closer look at Ammu’s unfavorable situation. Considering that Ammu is brutalized and asked to be another man’s mistress by her husband, she only acts out her right by resorting to divorce. Yet, the act of divorcing does not bring her more freedom as she expects it to. More than that, her womanhood is blemished by the infamous divorce. In no ways she could restore her life back under the shelter of a

decent woman, and she is aware of that “for her, life had been lived. She had had one chance. She made a mistake. She married the wrong man” (38). Mammachi even once parallels Ammu’s divorce to the ill-health of the Ipe family which results from the inbreeding between the Syrian Christians, and believes the former is much worse. Baby Kochamma even has malice against Ammu because she subscribes to “the commonly held view that a married daughter had no position in her parents’ home. As for a married daughter: according to Baby Kochamma, she had no position anywhere at all” (45). Ammu is literally bound by this defied status ever since she gets divorced. The divorce subjects Ammu to criticism, and forces her to confront with this bitter yet ambiguous attitude against a woman’s body. In one sense the woman’s body is an unworthy ‘otherness’ and is banished from the male-dominated territory. Yet in another sense, it comes to be the central being of the purity ideology once it is a mother’s body. It is transformed into a forte to defend for the honor of the orthodox communal identity. The tenet which asks for absolute subordination of the women to the matrimonial system naturally delineates the selfhood to fulfill the profound motherhood defined by this patriarchal society. Mammachi’s numbness toward the domestic abuse is one example.

In the contemporary milieu of the story, a mother is not only regulated to conform to the requirement of chaste maternity, but she also is obligated to perform it within the one and only matrimonial relationship. The dialogic asks every mother to act in the similar way or she is under the pressure of not being identified by others. Therefore, though Ammu claims that her children do not need a father because she is her children’s “Ammu *and* their Baba and she had loved them Double” (155), the

twins are always aware of the differences between their family with other *normal* ones. Too many times the twins are reminded that they own no right in Mammachi's house and hinted that they should go back to their Papa's house. The other people's discrimination to these two fatherless children is so harsh that even in their most carefree time they could grasp the importance of having a father and always craves for a father figure. They could cheer up simply because a passenger mistakes Chacko as their father. Roy describes how Ammu is extremely annoyed by her children's impractical expectation. The panoptic gaze from the Law which always makes Estha and Rahel creep is represented by Pappachi's moth. As a proud Imperial Entomologist, Pappachi's greatest defeat is that the moth of the new breed which he discovers is not able to be named after him. The reason is that the entomological academics world does not admit that moth is a new breed. After many years, the moth is finally recognized as a new species. Yet, rather than doing justice to Pappachi, the naming honor is given to another man who claims to have discovered the moth first. So after that the family members tend to attribute the moth as the cause of the grumpy character and ill temper of Pappachi. The moth thus becomes a "pernicious ghost—gray, furry and with unusually dense dorsal tufts—haunted every house that he ever lived in. It tormented him and his children and his children's children" (48). The moth's spooky dorsal tuft turns out to become the imagery which displays the horror of being excluded by the rational category. This imagery is recurring in the twins' childhood whenever they find themselves not being categorized as being loved. The moth always cuts in and destroys the mask of one happy family. The very image occurs to Rahel in one distinctive occasion: that

Chacko claims he loves Sophie Mol for sure because he is Sophie's father. It totally destroys Rahel's hope that Chacko could one day be their father instead. So in her mind, "a cold moth lifted a cold leg" (113).

The anxiety of not being concretely named overshadows the twins' life. A different pain tortures their mother. That is the infamous name of being a divorced mother. There are those days that "a liquid ache spread under her skin, and she walked out of the world like a witch, to a better, happier place. On days like this there was something restless and untamed about her. As though she had temporarily set aside the morality of motherhood and divorcée-hood" (43). As a highly self-conscious person, Ammu tries hard to battle with the name tagged on her. Nevertheless, since an individual self, especially a feminine self, is unavoidably woven into the communal selves, it is not feasible for Ammu to escape from this totalizing ideology no matter what a rebel she is. The regulation on motherhood is like the violent Love Law merging from the story, rewarding those who abide by the law and punishing those who do not. In the end, Ammu is wronged for the accidental drowning of Sophie Mol. It is Estha who is blamed to be responsible for her cousin's death, so as the mother of Estha, Ammu is considered to be an admittedly one to be punished. She is expelled from her parents' house and forced to send her son back to her divorced husband who never a day fulfills the responsibility of a father. What constrains and dissolves Ammu is a problematic discourse based on the myth that the presence of a father is necessary for a family. The performing of a mother's right is never valid until there is a 'father' who is on her side.

What is more, the ethical purity subsumes far more than just subordinating to

the Law. To a woman, the purity criterion also means the discarding of the sexuality, which again concerns the division of purity and impurity. The problematical focus on maternal body's asexuality to underscore a mother's purity makes people easily forget that even mothers have their desires and sexual needs. Drawing on this issue, Jessica Benjamin argues that this far-fetching ideal of women as willing guardian angels of children without any need for compensation is next to nothing different from denying their humanity. She believes that "the idea that mother is or should be all-giving and perfect expresses the mentality of omnipotence, the inability to experience the mother as an independently existing subject" (214). The assumption that motherly love is self-sufficient has a strong connection with the mystification of the ideal of motherhood, which produces discrepancy to the real mothers. In the relationship between Mammachi and Chacko, Mammachi and Ammu, Ammu and Estha and Rahel, we can see how this over-celebration of a female body produces unnerved tension in the mother-children relationships. The relationship of each pair can help to illuminate the dilemma of the troubling motherhood. Before Chacko, Mammachi plays a part as a socially-approved mother who devotes herself completely to her son. Yet, though she satisfies the superficial requirement as a mother, she does not quite carry out the ideal womanhood; before Ammu, Mammachi is a typical passive mother who never gives her sufficient care; before Estha and Rahel, Ammu is their only dependence. Nevertheless, more often than not, they feel insecure about their mother, because Ammu is not a steady mother, but a woman walks on the edge instead. Their relationships reflect the multifold of real maternity which presents the variation covered under the shadow of one underpinning principle.

In the mother-son relationship, Mammachi is assimilated by the homogenous identity of the mother who dedicates her whole life to her son. Yet, despite the fact that Mammachi lives up to the conviction of being a conformist mother, as a woman, she is not able to annihilate her own sexual flux completely. Her maternity love towards her son is not purely selfless. The restriction on Mammachi's sexuality only reinforces her tabooed incestuous love toward her son. Mammachi's revelation about her amour to her son Chacko sets contrast to the Freudian discourse on Oedipal Complex, which is whirling around the boy child's forbidden love towards his mother. In Freudian's discourse, the mother is forever taken as the object of desire rather than an autonomous subject who has capability to act out. In this case, conversely, Mammachi acts as an activist who dares to invest her desire in her son. Her affection to Chacko has been intensified by Chacko's rescuing her from Pappachi's beating many years ago, and grows in a crooked direction afterwards. She is devastated by hearing the news that her son has married; she feels hurt by that fact her son has lascivious relationships with many a woman; she holds "the undercurrent of sexual jealousy" towards Margaret Kochamma for she is the only woman who occupies her son's mind all the time (312). Moreover, she even asks people to check out her son's mattresses to ensure that Margaret has not had sex with her son. Obviously, the repudiation of female sexuality backfires on Mammachi: all the regulation to keep her docile in the domestic area only makes her grow a more rampant desire toward the only man in the house other than her husband: her own son. In other words, the male violence posed on Mammachi does not work to make her desire wane, only alters it to a deviant way. Just as what is described in the novel,

“Mammachi packed her wifely luggage and committed it to Chacko’s care. From then onwards he became the repository of all her womanly feelings. Her Man. Her only Love” (160). Caught in the net of social sanction, Mammachi’s desire can only be conveyed through the masquerade of maternity love. Her plea for love from her son is resulted from her genuine thirst for the bodily need she has never attained to in her marriage. In contrast to the expected image of altruistic mother, Mammachi’s personal need makes her exactly like the devouring mother Kunti in Indian lore, who compels Karna to recognize that the motherly love is not really demanding no return and altruistic³. Failing to give full weight to the sacrifice that a mother shall make to raise a child, Chacko learns to despise Mammachi for this monstrous feature looming in her. It ends up that to Chacko, Mammachi is the one to be blamed for his messed life and his unsuccessful marriage. The only reciprocation Mammachi gets from her indulgence of Chacko is being rejected. Obviously, the performance of the ideal motherhood does not provide a well-being for the mother as promised.

Ammu thus presents herself as a contrary personage. She dares to break the rule to raise her children, but it does not mean she is not in conflict with her discordance to the identity as a mother. Her struggles in mind are expressed by her midnight swimming, smoking cigarettes and sudden temper. What at war in her is “the infinite tenderness of motherhood and the reckless rage of a suicide bomber” (44). Compared to Mammachi, Ammu resorts to a much more drastic means to expose how her personality is repressed. There is one scene in the novel that narrates Ammu’s

³ To see the analysis about Kunti as a devouring mother, please refer back to the Chapter One of the thesis.

sudden resistance to be her children's "mother." One afternoon after she has an elegiac dream which contains her desire towards Velutha, the twins interrupt her dream and wake her up. The twins cuddle up with their mother and come up with a series of questions about their births and their father. The intimacy does not arouse Ammu's maternity. Instead, she feels only antipathy. She "grew tired of their proprietary handling of her. She wanted her body back. It was hers. She shrugged her children off the way a bitch shrugs off her pups when she's had enough of them" (211). This sudden temper of Ammu appears quite often and always makes the twins have doubts about the reliability of their mother's love. Adrienne Rich points out the general belief, that "mother-love is supposed to be continuous, unconditional. Love and anger cannot coexist. Female anger threatens the institution of motherhood" (46). However, adopting from the personal experience as a mother, she reveals that the tantrum is inevitably for every mother now and then, because a mother simply cannot afford to offer her love to her children twenty-four hours a day as she needs to be loved herself. The thrust of seemingly unreasonable temper of Ammu serves as a sign of the outburst of her unsatisfied needs. Hence what follows is her locking herself inside the bathroom. For first time Ammu scrutinizes her body from the mirror. Her female body that is excluded as abject thing in her Syrian Christian community is exposed before her gaze for the first time. There are Lawrence's stylistic lines about how Ammu touches her body⁴:

Where she touched herself her flesh was taut and smooth. Under her

⁴ Aijaz Ahmad, "Reading Arundhati Roy Politically," *Frontline*. 8 Aug. 1997: 103-8. In the essay, Ahmad firstly drew a parallel between Arundhati Roy and D. H. Lawrence for Roy's boldly erotic description, suggesting that Roy follows Lawrence's tradition to build up an utopia for sexual transgression in the last chapter of her novel.

hands her nipples wrinkled and hardened like dark nuts, pulling at the soft skin on her breasts. The thin line of down from her belly button led over the gentle curve of the base of her belly, to her dark triangle. Like an arrow directing a lost traveler. An inexperienced lover. (212)

Through this self-examining process, Ammu positively transforms her body from the silenced site into the erotic zone. This gesture shows Ammu's potency to disrupt the dualistic paradigm of being a mother. As what we have discussed earlier, women's alluring bodies are always deliberately confounded with sin by men. Yet, a mother's body is demarcated from the impurity essence by man's appropriating it as the representative of pure plus authentic womanhood. A mother's body thus has been tamed as a vehicle via which multiple networks of male power are allowed to take shape and perform their including/excluding logic. The female's seductive body is indicated as a dangerous space in this binary dynamic, thus a woman gradually becomes indifferent to her body after she becomes a mother. The same defining power also clutches Ammu, and her children are the reminders to her identity as a mother. Resisting the constraining focus on her, Ammu defies the binary logic and tries to reconstitute her body by her visual and tactile sense. She begins to discover the heterogeneous possibility of her body other than just uses it to nurture her children. It is this awakening of bodily sense that inaugurates Ammu's sexual exploration with Velutha. What has hindered the two lovers is the spatial distance: Ammu on the one side of the Meenachal River and Velutha on the other. So it is for the help of the boat that Estha finds Ammu gets to cross the river and meet her lover. This crossing does not only literally alter the geographical space she is in, but also metaphysically

posits her body on a different side which is temporarily immune from the play of monolithic force. On the other side of the river bank, the side where Velutha lives, Ammu is capable of escaping the misery single-parent role which she plays everyday. She shifts from the pure role of a mother to a more complicated identity: as a lover and woman.

Under the formulation of the decent motherhood, Ammu's search for variation of femininity is doubtlessly prohibited. Brinda Bose thus draws a conclusion: "women's transgressions are generally more easily condemned, as are those to do with the 'Love Law.' When women seek to transgress the rules that govern love and desire, the penalty is death" (66). In fact, even before Ammu's ultimate death, she has to go through other kinds of penalties. After she is expelled from the Ayemenem House, she is continuously haunted by the nightmare in which she is harassed publicly by the policemen⁵. The dream clearly unveils how a woman can hardly be immune from the identification of the community. Given that Ammu is categorized as impure ethically, she is always under the threat that she can not even keep her own hair in the land where "long, oiled hair was only for the morally upright" (154). In Ammu, we see how the monolithic logic of purity in the Hindu community is constructed on a women's body. In addition to the possible abuse from the policemen, the community's identification is manipulated through the family unit. The Ipe family practices the abjective power by deliberate invisibility of Ammu,

⁵ In the story, the police officer deliberately refutes Ammu verbally by calling her *veshyas* [whore], and humiliates her physically by patting her breast with a baton. Ever since then, she is always disturbed by dreams in which the local policemen approach her with scissors in order to cut off her hair as what they always do to the prostitutes in the marketplace. The dream recurs even at the same night when Ammu dies.

making Ammu endure the pain of separation from her children and die alone. Sarcastically, this penalty oppressed upon Ammu is mediated mostly through her mother Mammachi. It is Mammachi who regards that Ammu “had defiled generations of breeding and brought the family to its knees” (244) and disregards the motives behind her daughter’s immoral acts. Mammachi not only agrees to expel Ammu after the accident and never intends to offer any financial support afterward, but also literally cuts the spiritual cord linked between Ammu and Rahel by discouraging the meeting between the two. As the mother who survives the institutionalized motherhood, Mammachi becomes the accomplice of the normative power and clutches away the last ray of hope in her daughter’s life without mercy. In Mammachi, we see a fantasy mother who is so appropriated by the traditional values that her affection toward her daughter has been thoroughly nullified. Rather than inherently motherly love, what Mammachi carries from her life to Ammu’s is her grudges and destruction. Mammachi thus works as an official speaker for the male dominated society which disavows Ammu’s attempts to be an unorthodox mother. To sum up, Mammachi shows a varied facet of the darkness in the fantasy motherhood before Ammu.

Due to the fact that throughout her life Ammu remains a nomadic subject, incapable of being incorporated into any category, she never has any bonding with her mother. Roy catches the more ambiguous ingredients and the complexity of mother-daughter relationship revealed between Ammu and Rahel. In Roy’s depiction of them we can perceive what Adrienne Rich refers to the motherhood and daughterhood. Rich writes, “this cathexis between mother and daughter— essential,

distorted, misused— is the great unwritten story. Probably there is nothing in human nature more resonant with charges than the flow of energy between two biologically alike bodies” (Rich 225). Indeed, Rahel’s story resonates with her mother’s in many aspects. In Roy’s portrait, Rahel not only inherits her mother’s appearance, she has also been through the same journey of abjection as her mother has, considering that both of them represent “what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (4). They have to face their fate that they are drastically rejected by any kinds of symbolic system. While the institutionalized motherhood leaves Ammu abandoned psychologically by her mother, it repeats the same situation all over again on Rahel. Both Ammu and Rahel grow up in an environment in which the mother is absent most of the time. Rahel experiences the same hatred toward her mother in the juvenile period just like Ammu does. As a mother, Ammu unconsciously follows the pattern of Mammachi: Ammu behaves exactly as an unhappy mother as Mammachi used to do. The stress on Ammu makes her bitter, and as a result, after Rahel grows up her reminiscences of Ammu is barely about the motherly caress, but mostly about the occasions in which she is punished by Ammu for different reasons. The loath toward the mother leads Rahel drawn to the shield of marriage as a means to avoid her loveless biological family just like what Ammu has done. So needless to say, marriage proves again to Rahel a wrong place for escapism. Rahel turns out to be a divorced woman just like her mother. The only difference between the two is that the abject eventually forfeits Ammu’s right to live, but it does not defeat Rahel in the end. Ammu ends up being dislocated in some anonymous hotel room and dies a

dog's death without fulfilling her dream to get away from India, where "personal despair could never be desperate enough" (20). Rahel at least outgoes Ammu in the fact that she geographically circulates inside and outside the national border, extricating herself from her home country and is privileged with more rights to do what she wants.

However, tracing the life pattern of Rahel, we may say that no matter how far she goes, she cannot help but to be situated into an inflexible category. When she is away from her country, Rahel has to face a different kind of twisted view: to be regarded as a creature from "some damn godforsaken tribe that's just been discovered"⁶ (171) or being addressed as a "black bitch." Her selfhood is thwarted by the biased way people judge her. In the transnational scope, Rahel who is a woman from the third world stays as an inappropriate other, not being incorporated into the first world women nor being recognized as a full subject. Yet when she returns to her country, her individual self is unavoidably again be conceptualized into communal selves. She falls back into the dualistic framework of purity/ impurity and is socialized into a role defined by the valorized ethics of womanhood, in which Ammu is once trapped. After tracking down this life pattern of Rahel, we will read her incest with her twin brother in the end of the story with no surprise. After all, she only repeats the sexual transgression which has happened between Ammu and Velutha. Roy lightens the supposedly shocking incestuous scene with a few words:

⁶ This line is of Ammu, expressing her anger towards general Englishmen's orientalism toward Indian culture. When the servant smells Sophie Mol's palm to welcome her arrival, Chacko explains to Margaret Kochamma that this gesture equals to kissing. Margaret feels the gesture novel and asks if in India man does this to woman too. Ammu ridicules her question, refusing to "behave like some damn godforsaken tribe that's just been discovered" and storms out.

“There is very little that anyone could say to clarify what happened next. [...] Only that once again they broke the Love Laws. That lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much” (310-1).

The resembling trajectory of life shared between Ammu and Rahel is no coincidence. Becoming the embodiment of male power, the paradigm of femininity can only repetitively drive any woman who craves for a difference into the same pattern. Otherwise, far more than a simple replicate of Ammu’s deed, Rahel’s reunion with Estha makes her homecoming complete. They are joined once again by sharing the memory of their mother after many years of separation. In the passage of self-discovery, Rahel proceeds from rejection of the mother, through the realization, and to the final identification with Ammu. Parallel to Ammu’s instinctively pursuing for her desire like “an insect following a chemical trail” (314), Rahel’s passing the symbolical order accentuates the thorny path for every woman who dares not to abide the ethics. That Roy arranges the two events happening in the different timelines in sequence makes the catastrophe of this tragic story more appealing.

In *The God of Small Things*, the problematic ethics of motherhood or womanhood spawned in the contemporary ethos emerges from the story. The exercising of the doctrine of the righteous femininity works as a two edged sword which deteriorates the woman to the extent while the scars it makes are not that visible to all. Women like Mammachi or Baby Kochamma, learn to repress their bodily needs and keep silent to the male brutality for abiding by the intrinsic virtue. Through Rahel’s nomadic tour, the lost pieces of these women’s stories are sewn into a complete one. From her eyes, we get to witness the buried truth under the constructive myth of

motherhood. Within the stifling confinement in the so-called perfect motherhood, neither the household nor the society harbors any emancipatory possibilities for the women. Moreover, from Roy's portrayal of Ammu, we get to realize that for a mandatory society, a woman who is reluctant to comply with the purity code, is too far gone into the heart of the darkness. Even Ammu's own mother and aunt betray her and willfully collude in the social norm to make sure the Name unaltered. The annihilation of the heterogeneous femininity takes the form of the defense to danger, which is provoked by Ammu's avowed change to moral purity. Only when we have a clear perception of purity criterion, can we realize the latent meaning lurked behind the punishment upon Ammu.