

Chapter Three:

Velutha the Obscure: the Man Who Left No Footprints

In the previous chapter, we have seen how Roy uses mythical stories as a metaphor to show how the individual subject is integrated into the grand narrative. The dominant discourse excludes all kinds of differences. Looking into the differences, or in Roy's term, into all the small things expressed in the novel, it is not hard for us to be aware that the author's sympathy is for those who suffer: the ones who live at the bottom of the social hierarchy or those who try to cross the boundary. They are condemned to be impure objects, doomed to be excluded. In this chapter, my primary concern is to show how the idea of impurity is deeply related to the malicious treatment on Velutha and how Roy handles the topics about the power asymmetry between people from different classes, castes or genders. Velutha's story shows Roy's concern about the inequity which the untouchables are forced to accept for a long time in the Indian society. In the novel she utilizes ample space to delineate how an untouchable as Velutha can only be the mediation of pollution. Thus in this chapter, I will first reiterate Roy's narration about the untouchables, which is cardinal for later discussion. After all, to understand the weak position of a subaltern figure like Velutha under the hegemonic system, we must start from scrutinizing the so called "common sense." The common sense about the indigenous caste system which is taken for granted by the Hindus but not by the readers outside the Hindu community. Then I will combine it with many scholars' researches to explain the ritually impure essence of Velutha in the caste system. A critical study of this long-established system and analysis of its existing impact help us comprehend

how Ammu's family is torn apart because they violate the monotonic values of the caste system, which is very complicated that dictates each individual's acts and fate. Though to posit Velutha's polluted identity in the social context allows us to realize the animosity towards the untouchables in the light of the Hindu community, it is not sufficient enough to explain how the impact of the pollution matters to every individual when he attempts to form his subjectivity, and how each of us can be tormented when facing the purifying procedure of the social hierarchy. In *The God of Small things*, Roy represents the horror underneath the proclaimed justice and copes it with humanistic and psychoanalytic depth, which deserves to be more highlighted. So in this chapter, the idea of "abjection" will be adapted to understand the protagonists' genuine reflections, such as repression, hatred, fear and all the other traumatic emotion originated from the act of purification. The abject, "a burden both repellent and repelled, a deep well of memory that is unapproachable and intimate" (Kristeva 6), appears whenever the self confronts with the other so as to assert its territory. The abject takes place when the Syrian Christian community try to expel Velutha, bracketing off the violence and horror hidden beneath the excluding process. The traumatic feelings of the protagonists are engulfed by the abject and negated in the grand narratives. Only through this psychoanalytic analysis can we uncover the condensed wound: a wound which is always caused by the prosecutors in disguise.

Broken People, Broken Fate

Whenever Dalits have tried to organize themselves or assert their rights, there has been a backlash from

the feudal lords resulting in mass killings of Dalits.

*National Commission for Scheduled Castes and
Scheduled Tribes*¹

Velutha, referred by Roy as “The God of Small Things,” is the tragic hero of the story. You may well say that he is the only positive male character in whom Roy endows with abundant good traits. He is a talented carpenter who is in charge of all pieces of furniture in the Ayemenem house and could have been an engineer if he were not an “untouchable². ” Growing up in an environment never without upper-castes’ humiliation, Velutha owns a sureness about himself which is something rarely found in a Paravan [means the untouchable in Malayalam]. To the twins, he is their beloved friend, a father figure, and a man who would delightfully have a tea party with children, “taking care not to decimate it with adult carelessness. Or affection” (181). To Ammu, he is a lover and a companion with whom she wants to fight against the insane world. Yet no matter how much Velutha means to Ammu and her children, Velutha’s existence means only one thing to the other characters in the story: a man who brings disgrace to the community. To them, Velutha has only

¹ National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, *Highlights of the Report of the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes for the Years 1994-95 & 1995-96*, New Delhi: Government of India, 1997,.2.

² This is a group that falls below the four principal categories of the caste system. What is followed is a brief introduction about the caste system. “India’s caste system is perhaps the world’s longest surviving social hierarchy. A defining feature of Hinduism, caste encompasses a complex ordering of social groups on the basis of ritual purity. A person is considered a member of the caste into which he or she is born and remains within that caste until death, although the particular ranking of that caste may vary among regions and over time. [...] Traditional scholarship has described this more than 2,000-year-old system within the context of the four principal *varnas*, or large caste categories. In order of precedence these are the *Brahmins* (priests and teachers), the *Kshatriyas* (rulers and soldiers), the *Vaisyas* (merchants and traders), and the *Shudras* (laborers and artisans). A fifth category falls outside the *varna* system and consists of those known as “untouchables” or *Dalits*” (24). *Broken People: Caste Violence against India’s Untouchables*, Human Rights Watch: New York, 1998.

one identity, and any attempt to alter it is inexcusable. This unbreakable ideology ultimately leads Velutha to death. For Ammu's little family, Velutha is the man whom they love so deeply that the memory of his death becomes a ghost haunting them all the time; for other people outside the Ayemenem House, Velutha is only a man "left no footprint," recalling nothing. Nevertheless, Velutha comes out as a central figure who outshines other petty characters like Baby Kochamma or Comrade Pillai.

Roy may not be the first Indian writer who tries to unshackle the lock on the misery of the untouchables, but her vivid description about the injustice these people suffer definitely intrigues and moves both western and Indian readers. For those who are not so familiar with the caste system or take it as only another version of social class division in the western society, Velutha's story could be an appalling revelation. Velutha is condemned to the extent that he is forever disparaged by the higher castes only because of being an untouchable. From Mammachi's description we learn that in the old days before M. K. Gandhi's liberation of the untouchables,

They [untouchables] were not allowed to touch anything that Touchables touched. Caste Hindus and Caste Christians. [...] Paravans were expected to crawl backwards with a broom, sweeping away their footprints so that Brahmins or Syrian Christians would not defile themselves by accidentally stepping into a Paravan's footprint. (71)

From this account, it is obvious that the untouchables are not only assigned to do the filthy jobs like sweeping or garbage collecting, but their behaviors are also restricted. This firm "untouchable" logic is so internalized that many Paravans are so used to

regard themselves unworthy. Such is the case of Velutha's father: Vellya Paapen. He completely devotes himself to the Ipe family, and "his gratitude to Mammachi and her family for all that they had done for him was as wide and deep as a river in spate" (73). This is the psychology that leads Vellya Pappen to rat on his own son and offers to kill Velutha himself when he finds out Ammu and Velutha's affair. This impenetrable servility is reinforced by upper castes' attitude. When the affair is known to Mammachi, the very one who sends Velutha to Untouchables' School to learn a carpenter's skill, her instant reaction is to verbally insult Velutha in order to keep this Paravan in his place. This well-bred Brahmin woman calls him a "pariah dog" and claims that would have him killed (269). The following violence enforced upon Velutha shows even more how the whole society willfully boycotts Paravans once they overstep the rules.

Since the caste system is the product of the Hinduism and the main source of discrimination toward the untouchables, many untouchables convert to another religion to avoid the obnoxious violence against them. However, they are considered as the untouchables by most Hindus. In the novel, Roy gives a clear account to this desperate and irreversible fate which the untouchables are confronted with in 1969's Kerala. The force upon these Paravans is so strong that even in the colonial time when Velutha's grandfather Kelan converts to the Christianity, this action does not help to make their life better. They are labeled as Rice Christians to show their pre-untouchable identity. This title reveals that the regulation between castes proves a firm doctrine to the local Syrian Christians. Eventually these Rice Christians are segregated to the churches which are for the untouchables exclusively,

never allowed to have services with higher-caste Christians. Ironically, although these Paravans join the Christian churches because they are harassed for their lower-caste identity, this very act lets them not be able to get any subsidy from the government for the untouchables: since they have converted from Hinduism to Christianity, nominally they have no caste at all³. These untouchables can not earn the deserved respect in the new religion, and neither can they keep the benefit from their old identity. This Catch-22 situation makes the untouchables a captive caught in the snare.

Since Christianity does not help to improve the plight, Velutha turns to a different belief: Marxism. It is an actual fact that the Marxist party came into power in 1967's Kerala. In the chapter "Pappachi's Moth," there is a scene that the Ipe family witnesses Velutha's participation in the famous workers' strike in 1969. Rahel finds out that "Verlutha marching with a red flag. In white shirt and mundu with angry veins in his neck" (58). As a member of the communist party, he joins the parade, raising the flag to those landlords who exploits the labors and demanding work benefits and raises. Moreover, he and other untouchable members ask for not being addressed by their caste names. To be known as a member in the work union could make him lose his job, but he stands up to fight for his right. Though being a faithful believer in Marxist principle, Velutha is taken as a hinder by the party leader Comrade K. N. M. Pillai. The ideal of the communism is to be egalitarian, to diminish the hierarchy of class and caste systems, but the ancient taboo breaks the

³ In the novel, Roy declares this ambiguous condition: "After Independence they [the untouchables found they were not entitled to any government benefits like job reservations or bank loans at low interest rates, because officially, on paper, they were Christians, and therefore casteless" (71).

promises that the party has made to the untouchable members. However polished the manifestos or the campaign slogans of the party are, the other touchable members obstinately see that the untouchables are inferior to them and thus do not accept untouchables as their equals. So when Velutha turns to Comrade Pillai for help, this “Soviet Stooge” refuses to offer any salvage. Again, like Christianity fails his grandfather, this time Marxism fails him. The function of Marxism serves only a disappointment in the novel: “Another religion turned against itself. Another edifice constructed by the human mind, decimated by human nature” (272).

Pollution and Defilement

In the novel, whenever people talk about Velutha, they would always address him with acrid and harsh words. The local police kill him because they liken him with an epidemic; Baby Kochamma repetitively mentions that Velutha has a particular Paravan smell that she could never stand. In other words, he is taken as a despised object, endowed with dirt and defilement which every folk tries hard to keep off. In fact, descriptions of the filthy or abjective images fill the whole book and are related to many different characters. Some narrations even directly concern with excrement, such as one scene in the chapter “Saving Ammu.” There is a clear account of how Baby Kochamma dribbles her stool in Inspector Thomas’s toilet because her sudden diarrhea, and how she feels “embarrassed that the Inspector would see the color and consistency of her stool” (303); others are about vomits, such as Rahel’s enigmatic obsession about the vomit streaks in the bus. Strangely enough, these coprophilous lines have never been associated with Velutha till he is pushed to the verge of living

dead. Velutha's last image engrained in Estha's mind is his distorted body in blood and excreta. This stained scene even accompanies "the smell of shit" (303) which causes nauseous feeling in Estha. However, except for this dead scene, it is probable to say that there is no other male character's body more embodied of physical beauty than Velutha's. In him, we see "a swimmer's body. A swimmer-carpenter's body. Polished with a high-wax body polish" (167). His vigorous and god-like appearance is highly incongruous with the supposedly not-to-be-touched identity. Only by means of asserting authority of Law, the connection between dirt and Velutha can firstly be made. In other words, the Law is enforced to make sure Velutha's untouchability and is performed under a righteous cause. Roy defines the police's act as "a clinical demonstration in controlled conditions of human nature's pursuit of ascendancy. Structure. Order. Complete monopoly," and regards that "it was human history, masquerading as God's Purpose" (293). That is to say, the police's deed to Velutha is a means to maintain the category by resorting to force. If we see this event in this perspective, we shall understand that the legitimacy of the apparatus is thus more solid through the annihilation of a marginal character as Velutha. In this case, being of the marginal becomes a necessary existence for establishing the hierarchy. But before we go on this part, there is much to explicate on this dichotomy of cleanliness and dirt.

In Roy's novel, when it comes to the question of dividing the self from the other, the idea of cleanliness proves to be one imperative criterion, no matter how contradictory it may seem. Like what was mentioned earlier, Velutha is not considered unclean in the superficial or hygienic aspect. He serves as a symbol of

disease because he is from the lower caste which is more comparatively polluted in the context of the caste system. The ideology of cleanliness penetrates through the novel. Ammu used to be badly irritated by the twins when they make themselves dirty by playing with the airport curtain in front of the guests. She is angry that they do not know the “difference between Clean and Dirty,” which is the concept that she believes is important, “especially in this country” (142). For the twins, it takes them some time to appreciate the essence of being clean after being publicly rebuked by their mother. The kids gradually grasp the idea that being clean potentially serves multiple meanings. It could mean that they are as well-educated and cultivated as their English cousin Sophie Mol in the “politeness contest.” Then it indirectly proves the success of Ammu as their mother. Or it even means that they do a great job as ambassadors of India before the westerners. The readers go through the same education of cleanliness from Velutha’s case. Only after Velutha takes the penalty more than he deserves, the readers are let out the fact how deeply the pollution he represents to the Hindu community. Different from the cleanliness in the hygienic sense, he is burdened by the ritually “impure” identity, which is preordained. Through the filtering mechanism of the caste system the untouchable are perceived as the disturbing pollution. This established assumption forces most untouchables to accept this fatal arrangement submissively. According to Pauline Rolend, the ideology of purity/impurity is so pervasive in the whole caste system that we can use it to explain the phenomenon in this hierarchy. Compiling researches of many other scholars, she forms the belief that the stratification in the caste system is made by the degrees of pollution. On the top of the system are the Brahmin priests who must be

completely pure to serve the gods but through certain action such as contacts with death, child birth, or human excrement they would be in a temporarily state of impurity. So for these high priests and other higher castes, they need others to be in charge of these chores. That is the function of the lower castes: to absorb the pollution for the higher-caste people. Yet while the higher castes can purify themselves by bathing or wearing clean clothes, the lower castes stay permanently impure. From Louise Dumont's *Homo Hierarchicus*, the major work on caste hierarchy, we can also find similar analysis. Dumont holds the opinion that the very principle of purity/impurity has interlaced with the binary opposition of the superior and the inferior and causes separation among social groups in the Hindu society⁴. The obsession with purity "leads at many levels to reclusion, isolation. [...] The ban on certain contact corresponds to the idea of untouchability, and all sorts of rules govern food and marriage" (60). The prohibition on bodily contact evolves into a taboo on intermarriage among the castes. This endogamy closes the possibility for the lower castes to change their social status. Though segregated into varied groups, it is also important for the caste system to hold these groups together so that the upper castes can keep lower castes to be their menials. In short, the caste system creates different identities and makes sure each of them static to maintain it as a unity.

The untouchables become sin-ridden based on the idea that the untouchables are impure. They present the loathed objects because of one simple logic: the purity can only be fully manifested when contrasting with the pollution. Mary Douglas

⁴ Dumont specially stresses that his theory about the opposition of purity and impurity in the caste system is not out of his invention, but an essential factor in Hindu life. He feels that only by the reference to this opposition, "the society of castes appears consistent and rational to those who live in it. In my opinion the fact is central, nothing more" (44).

discusses this relativism in the ideology of purity in her book *Purity and Danger*.

After combining the ritual impurity conception in the Hindu society and the context of pathogenicity in Europe, Douglas abstracts her thought and concludes that “dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements. This idea of dirt takes us straight into the field of symbolism and promises a link-up with more obviously symbolic systems of purity” (44). Consequently the existence of pollution proves essential to the social stratification: to ensure the solidity and the authenticity of the order. Assuming that the untouchables are like the dirt excluded from the caste system, the more a high caste man abominates an untouchable, the more he is in conformity with the system.

Based on this consideration, Velutha’s behavior definitely disturbs the social mentality. He thus becomes one extraordinarily annoying Paravan who is repulsive to those who firmly obey the purity code. He transcends the foul identity which is assigned by the system. Though in the eyes of others the untouchables are defined as intellectually feeble, Velutha proves this opinion untrue by turning out to be an outstanding carpenter. Rather than subordinating to the inequity as other Paravans, he joins the work union to rebel. His sense of dignity is also incompatible to his caste. In Velutha, we can find “a lack of hesitation. An unwarranted assurance. In the way he walked. The way he held his head. The quiet way he offers suggestions without being asked. Or the quiet way in which he disregarded suggestions without appearing to rebel” (73). In other words, he possesses the traits that would be considered inappropriate in an untouchable. Undoubtedly, his gestures have already shown how he ignores the tactile order which is orthodox to his people.

Now let us take Douglas's body metaphor to explain the anxiety of the higher castes. She finds that to discuss the cultural pollution by the bodily analogy is an appropriate way. She parallels the caste system with the human body and states that "the whole system represents a body in which by the division of labour the head does the thinking and praying and the most despised parts carry away waste matter" (153). So the lower castes including the untouchables are likened to margins of the body such as anus or nostrils. Through these orifices the bodily refuse traverses the boundary of the body. And like it is these parts that are responsible for the handling the faeces, the lower castes are deemed to deal with the dingy matters like toilet cleaning, cremating corpses or street sweeping. The lower castes are needed in the society as much as the body requires those orifices to let the polluted elements out. Nevertheless, this fact does not reduce the higher castes' ambiguous feeling towards the minority groups. For the higher castes, the untouchables are mediators of filth, and through them the higher castes are possibly be polluted. For this reason the untouchables can "express danger to group survival" (154).

The incongruousness between what Velutha should be and what he really behaves inflames this latent fear. To others, the role which Velutha enacts is extremely unpleasant; it is like what should be responsible for the excretory now does the thinking for the brain. Through Velutha's transgression, the firm boundary between the high and low, the clean and the dirty, is blurred and so is the hierarchical structure of the society. Since the definition of purity is threatened, the odds are high that there will be a possible chink in the circle of purity. Velutha's liaison with a Brahmin woman is the last straw. He deliberately touches something he should not

touch. For a woman, especially a high caste woman, to have sexual intercourse with any other man who is not her husband is unthinkable, let alone with an untouchable. In the caste system each individual inherits his mother's caste, "therefore women are the gates of entry to the caste. Female purity is carefully guarded" (Douglas 155). The act of adultery is no less than to invite the polluted objects into her caste. This jeopardy to the Syrian Christians community offers the ground for the police to execute Velutha. The act that pushes Velutha to the verge of death restores the category: let what is of dust turn to dust again. Roy quips that this violence is "man's subliminal urge to destroy what he could neither subdue nor deify" (292). What the police do only mean to bring back the original order to the people in the community.

In sum, the principle of purity provides a binary category in which each individual's demeanor is rigidly defined in the community. Douglas believes that this cultural code has its authority, and is not that easy to revise. It is an inevitable fact that once the system of classification is constructed, the anomaly is also given birth. Yet, "it [the system] cannot ignore the anomalies which its scheme produces" (48). This is the essence of the one week affair between Velutha and Ammu. It is labeled as a form of aberration which can not be tolerant. This explains why the authorities in the novel spontaneously work together to punish this pair of dissentients. When Inspector Thomas Mathew and Comrad Pillai send the police for Velutha and connive their brutality, they attempts to reaffirm and repair the challenged category. There is a description about them: "They looked out at the world and never wondered how it worked, because they knew. They worked it. They were mechanics who

serviced different parts of the same machine” (248). They work jointly to condemn the marginal figures who dare to defy and contravene the systematic ordering, and they cover the brutality towards the underdogs with fiction. The fiction they create becomes the orthodox history in which the transgressive desire, the terror and the traumatic memory are obliterated. The same process repeats when Baby Kochamma makes up her own “story.” In the police station, she reiterates the event in a distorted version and persuades the twins to accuse Velutha as a criminal. Velutha is addressed by her as a rapist and a kidnaper. The twins are indicated as murderers who take Sophie Mol’s life. Her narration is drastically deviating from the truth and thus declares how truth is concealed once the interest of majority group is at stake.

The Primal Fear Hidden Behind the Violence

Velutha thus turns out to be an otherness which is denied as a repulsive object. And this concept of this transgressors being repulsive is assembled in this mechanic world. The fear of impurity which Velutha triggers the chain of violent reaction towards him. Roy dictates that those policemen are “impelled by feelings that were primal yet paradoxically wholly impersonal. Feeling of contempt born of inchoate, unacknowledged fear: civilization’s fear of nature, men’s fear of women, power’s fear of powerless” (292). To conquer the feared other, the majority transforms it into the loathed and despised. We can find that Roy’s demonstration about how the other is exploited and subjugated under this ideology has a close correlation with Julia Kristeva’s convoluted reasoning in her work *Powers of Horror*. Kristeva offers the idea about abjection as a beginning to discuss the universal impulses of fear and

horror towards the unnameable other, so that will be ours in this essay as well. To describe the violent rejection against any object heterogeneous to the original system, Kristeva coins the term “abjection.” She uses the term as the springboard and also the center of her discourse about the relationship between the self and the other, and applies it to explain the phenomenon in the human bodies and in the society. By referring to abjection, we get to decompose each character’s behaviors and take a closer look at the covered wound in the protagonists that have not yet to be revealed.

Mary Douglas employs the human bodies as a site from which the purity conception is originated from. Likewise, Kristeva uses the basic human instinct to explain the term she calls “abjection.” She defines it as neither subject nor object, but as “the jettisoned object,” which “is radically excluded and draws me forward the place where meaning collapses” (2). By reinforcing the word “collapses,” she actually suggests that abjection is a state of in-between: an eerie force which keeps thrusting at the borderline of ego and blurs the demarcation between the inside and outside. Kristeva takes the nauseous feelings and the act of vomiting as examples and sees them as primary implications of abjection. The human bodies reject the elements that are different and heterogeneous to themselves through these gestures. Thus by disposing the unwanted there is an attempt of forming one homogenous “I.” But because the food has already been in my body, it has become a part of me, so through the process of vomiting, I exactly reject myself. These two processes, forming and rejecting of the self, proceed simultaneously and imbue abjection with ambiguous meanings. In this regard, abjection arises not only from the uncleanness or ill body condition, but from refusing to be invaded by anything outside the settled

system or identity. The fear of being intruded by the other becomes one essential trigger for abjection. Once the self feels insecure about another world and seeks for building up its own sacred zone, the abjection occurs to make sure the boundary is well-set. The vehement rejection leads to an extreme estrangement between the self and the otherness. That is what Kristeva's description about abjection. To her, abjection is "elaborated through a failure to recognize its kin; nothing is familiar, not even the shadow of a memory" (5). The lack of recognition and linkage with outside world can petrify a person and thus induce abjection.

This concept illuminates the childhood trauma of Estha. He has been sexually harassed by a vendor besides the Abhilash Talkies theater where Ammu takes the twins to see the film *The Sound of Music*. When Estha stands outside the theater alone, the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man beguiles Estha to go behind the counter with him by offering Estha free juice. This man asks Estha to hold his penis in one hand while holding the juice in the other. During this perverted action, there is a bizarre detachment in Estha attitude. It seems to him the semen of that man becomes another kind of drink. Even the juxtaposition of some grotesque song and the product list of his grandmother's factory come up into his mind. At the moment he obviously lacks the ability to grip the full essence of the incident. Only after the man stops, Estha regains his senses and starts to feel fearful. To this seven-year-old boy, he fails to reiterate this fear to anyone because this situation is unfamiliar to him. The very unfamiliarity constitutes his fear, because what could not to be named is precarious, and this unnameability frightens him more. What follows the unknown fear is retching, the spontaneous gesture out of self-protection. Mainly, he is

terrified at the possibility that the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man would repeat what he has done. And also, according to Love Law, “the laws that lay down who should be loved, and how. And how much” (33), he believes Ammu would love him much less if she knows about this. Roy makes a lively portrait about how Estha is tortured by making a list of questions from the Love Law:

(a) *Are they [Estha and Rahel] clean white children?*

No. (*But Sophie Mol is.*)

(b) *Do they blow spit bubbles?*

Yes. (*But Sophie Mol doesn't.*)

(c) *Do they shiver their legs? Like clerks?*

Yes. (*But Sophie Mol doesn't.*)

(d) *Have they, either or both, ever held strangers' soo-soo?*

N ...Nyes. (But Sophie Mol hasn't.) (101).

Due to the realization that he does not qualify the requirement of being loved, Estha's body becomes the prey of this catastrophic emotion. His disgorging literally speaks for the unspeakable repressive mood. The venom from the world outside gives rise to Estha's fear that he would be displaced and unable to be integrated into any proper identity. The fear conjures up Estha's abjective reaction. The impulsion to vomit helps him reject the drink and at the same time the abominable semen he has been forced to accept earlier. It also shows Estha's self-loath: a violent repugnance towards himself. He acknowledges his inability to situate himself in the social norm and considers himself as inferior to Sophie Mol before Love Law.

Similar depiction is applied to Velutha. Right after Mammachi scolds Velutha

and spits on him for his having an affair with Ammu, Velutha experiences the same repugnant feelings. He feels that “somebody had lifted off his head and vomited into his body. Lumpy vomit dribbling down his insides. Over his heart. His lungs. The slow thick drip into the pit of his stomach. All his organs awash in vomit” (270). Literally, Mammachi only spits on Velutha’s face; nevertheless Velutha’s imagination makes the spit much more abominable by turning it from outside his body to inside. The thought of spit being resorbed inwardly represents the piercing horror, the fright of being torn inside out by the penetrating logic of purity. Velutha camouflages his fear by stuffing himself with this abjective image. The intolerable wallowing in other’s excreta brings us closer to the pain of Velutha and also brings to light his ambiguous status. Velutha himself is regarded as that unnatural spit, what should have exited the body but have entered instead. He fails to be incorporated into the fixed category, which makes him as misplaced as the phantasmagoric spit. The abjection recurs when he gets caught by the police. They put him into a state of living-dead, disabling him to live after he is accused as a murderer. The way Velutha is tortured is hideous:

Four of his ribs were splintered, one had pierced his left lung, which was what made him bleed from his mouth. The blood on his breath bright red. Fresh. Frothy. His lower intestine was ruptured and hemorrhaged, the blood collected in his abdominal cavity. His spine was damaged in two places, the concussion had paralyzed his right arm and resulted in a loss of control over his bladder and rectum (294).

Contrasting with the nauseous feeling before he is lynched, the phantasmagorical spit

which soaks his organs is only a preview of his blood, which should stay inside but is then roughly pouring all over Velutha's body. The abjection is exposed through Velutha's falling-apart body. The police's torture of Velutha is an attempt no less drastic as Estha's reaction to throw up. By discharging the impure liquid through vomiting, Estha tries to regain his originally unpolluted body. Likewise, the machination of the Ipe family and the police reflects the desire to maintain the sacredness of the communal selves by vehemently beating up Velutha, who is taken as the contaminative other who crosses the threshold of the untouchability. Moreover, Roy exposes the unbearably abjective scene by narrating how the police gain pleasure from their sadistic deeds. Even after Velutha has already been hurt severely, the police lock his arms with handcuffs and drag him back to the station because he could not walk. This wretched representation is disturbingly tainted with animality by the police's wryly laughter at the red varnish on his nails, calling Velutha as an "AC-DC," when Estha and Rahel just sit aside and witness the whole thing in the mean time.

During the whole procedure of killing, from the beginning to the end, the police show no mercy and remain unrepentant to their unreasonable behavior. This is due to the fact that their cruelty has been sanctioned beforehand. When they face Velutha, they see him as only a source of pollution and feel obliged to dispose of it rather than take him a human being. Furthermore, Friedman analyzes the mentality of the police, and believes that their mission means to "constrain his [Velutha's] desire by methodically beating him to borderlands between life and death, leaving him just enough alive to suffer through the consequences of his transgression, to see the child he befriended deny him and the family he enriched denounce him" (122). The

importance of boundary is shown by how hard the police try to maintain it. And the abjection will always occur whenever the homogenous self and the heterogeneous other collide.

Apart from allusion to the concept of abjection to explain human's urges to maintain the territory, Kristeva also surveys the primary origin of abjection and believes that abjection takes shapes when the subject enters the symbolic system. To be recognized by the symbolic world, the subject has to cut the linkage with his mother and the maternal flux which can not to be defined in any classification and thus is resisted by the symbolic world. To fully realize Kristeva's discourse about the maternal influences, we need to grasp the idea of *chora* first. In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva borrows the term *chora* from Plato's *Tmaeus* and uses it to designate a mythical space or phrase anterior to the mirror stage and child's acquisition of language. She defines *chora* as a preverbal and "rhythmic space, which has no thesis and no position" (25). Because of the unfixed state of this space, the maternal flux which is fluid and enigmatic is allowed to exist in *chora*. She elaborates the idea and states that since the maternal influence is incorporeal and is outside the frontier of the symbolic world, it is regarded as horror and is misinterpreted in the Name of the Father. The maternity, and the femininity, due to the fact that their existences produce confusion about the border and the boundary, are bestowed with baleful power. The symbolic world firmly guards its territory against the maternal entity just as the people in the primary society segregate themselves from the animals for the fear of being threatened. Accordingly, the subject is enforced to repel any maternal drive in himself for the symbolic world annihilates his

identification with the maternity. Kristeva remarks that abjection thus appears when the subject tries anxiously to disavow the maternal drive, the “natural mansion” (13), and to earn the authentication from the world outside. Provided that abjection is a designated reaction while the subject is at the crossroad of maternal and paternal drives, the dissociation between the child and the mother is inevitable.

In the story, the abjection directed to the mother can be best described on one occasion: Rahel’s last meeting with Ammu after Ammu no longer has any *Locusts Stand I*⁵. At that time Rahel is just expelled from the boarding school for misbehavior, and Ammu is laid off from the hotel where she used to work because of her ill health. Unfortunately, the similar condition of the mother and the daughter does not form any bonding. Instead, the spatial separation between the two leads Rahel more or less to be influenced by social values and to internalize them in her. Rahel shares the same abomination towards her mother with other family members back then. So in Rahel’s eyes, the woman in front of her is no more the beautiful mother in her childhood memory. Rahel’s portrait of Ammu is full of grotesque: Ammu’s face is moonfaced, her body is swollen and her skin is crumpled. Besides, many animal metaphors are attached to Ammu: how the hair in her eyebrow is long like palp, or she stands like “a road sign with birds shitting on her” (153). Moreover, in the whole meeting, what Rahel notices most is her mother’s dejection. She recalls how Ammu spits out phlegm and shows it to her. All in all, these reflections of Rahel reveal her unsettled abomination towards her mother. Both the feeling of

⁵ It is a Latin word for “place to stand.” It appears on page 56 in the novel, Chacko uses this term to address Ammu, inferring that as a divorced woman, she has no legal claim to any things in her parents’ house. After Ammu is kicked out from her parents’ house by her own brother Chacko, she does not even have right to keep her children. She could only meet Rahel occasionally.

fascination and repulsion grow in Rahel and make her mother become an ambiguous entity that Rahel can only react with abjection: “She[Rahel] thought of the phlegm and nearly retched. She hated her mother then. Hated her” (153). From this account we see once again how maternity is connected with the rejected body fluid, and how both of them are regarded unwelcome. What Rahel is not aware of is her mother’s latent love beneath all these ostensible hideous things. Ammu buys a gift for her even though she is unemployed at that time; and Ammu has to travel across long distance just to see her daughter once even though her health is in a bad condition. The sacrifices that Ammu has made are hard to be concretized, and is such as to be devalorized. The hatred aiming at the mother is incorporated into abjection which turns the kinship between mother and child into a blank. The hostility which Rahel harbors towards her mother or her mother’s ordure is deeply rooted in the social pattern.

Given that ambiguity and heterogeneity are the traits of the maternity, we can trace the abjection towards maternity back to the questions about the boundary. In the novel, Roy continuously preaches to the readers one concept: anything which can not be concretely identified gives rise to abjection and is doomed to be destroyed in this big world. To highlight this thought, Roy deftly uses images of fruit to capture the circumstances. In one paragraph, Rahel mentions that the products from her grandmother’s factory have once been banned by Food Products Organization, because the products can not be specified. According to the classification, their products are regarded as “neither jam nor jelly,” because they are “too thin for jelly and too thick for jam. An ambiguous, unclassifiable consistency” (31). Velutha

and Ammu's little family are confronted with the same difficulty, that they are as unclassified as those neither-jelly-nor-jams. Due to the reason that no definite title could be tagged with them, they are bound to be overcome with crisis.

All in all, the abjection which originates from repelling maternal force or any thing similar to the force explicates the malice placed upon Velutha. Containing Douglas's study into her discourse, Kristeva agrees with Douglas on her insight about how impurity can threaten the boundary, yet Kristeva goes deeply into the core of the categorization and unveils that the real target of the systematic order is the destructive maternal power. Furthermore, Kristeva explains the brutalization upon minority group by combining the opposition of purity/ impurity and the abjection. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva takes the communal violence toward the Jew as an example to explicate the recurring uncivilized force against the minority group in the human history. When Kristeva analyzes L. F. Céline's hatred against the Jew in his works⁶, she deduces that the Jew is metamorphosed into all kinds of abjective forms, from corpse, excreta to women. That is, the Jew is depicted as "abjection itself," and "I who identify with him, who desire to share with him a brotherly, mortal embrace in which I lose my own limits, I find myself reduced to the same abjection, a fecalized, feminized, passivated rot" (185). Céline's treatment about his disgust towards the Jew serves as a parallel to Roy's lines about the organized revenge on the untouchable Velutha. Like the Jew, Velutha is abnormally humiliated because his is an otherness

⁶ L. F. Céline is a French writer who is famous for his taking side with fascism and anti-Semitism. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva uses half of the book to discuss Céline's works including *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, *Guignol's Band*, *Mort à crédit* and many others. Kristeva discloses the abjection in Céline's writing, focusing on his obsession about depicting his repulsive feeling towards his mother, other women and the Jew.

from the secondary race, the marginal group in the caste system. Thus he is endowed with feminine traits, and considered as emasculating, so to speak. The police symbolically castrate him by undressing Velutha's *mundu*⁷ and using the stick to flick at his penis. Subsequently they make fun of his sexual ability: "Come on, show us your special secret. Show us how big it gets when you blow it up" (294). Those Big Brothers find this rupture of unmanliness in him and transform him into a ridiculed object to avoid the fear that they might be reduced to the same abjective item. For Comrade Pillai's, the greatest fear is that one day the other workers' discrimination toward Velutha would make him lose his leadership in the party; for Baby Mammachi's, she fears of the thought that she might be downtrodden by the Marxist workers such as Velutha because she is from a landlord's family; Inspector Thomas takes Velutha's life because he is afraid that if he does not give punishment to Velutha he could lose control to the other untouchables. Their cooperation to expel Velutha mirrors their fear of being powerless, unauthoritative and minor. The possibility of being conceived as the otherness is the fear nurtured behind their ostensible excuses. In order to be more firmly identified by the social norm, Baby Mammachi, Comrade Pillai, Inspector Thomas and other "History's Henchmen" conceal the horrible violence by wearing the mask as the vigilante. By blemishing Velutha and bestowing a putrid identity on him, those people are allowed a momentary relief from the horror by considering themselves as licit representatives of the Law. This chain of raging boycott works in such a refined and precise way that it

⁷ It is the traditional Indian dress. *Mundu* is a piece of cloth used to cover the lower limbs as a sort of loose pair of trousers. It is tied at the waist, worn by both men and women.

brings the readers face to face with abjection.

In this case, the abjection even dictates sexuality, which we can see from the affair of Velutha and Ammu. In the novel, we see how individual desire has to follow certain gender politics. This can be declared by Mammachi's different attitudes towards her son Chacko's random sex and her daughter Ammu's affair. Mammachi grants her son to fulfill his "men's needs" with female workers in their factory. Conversely, she harbors enormous fury about her daughter's coitus with Velutha, because obviously their relationship can not be defined in the same way. What looks dreadful to her is that instead of being forced, it is Ammu who willfully devotes herself to the untouchable Velutha. To Mammachi, Ammu's sexuality is totally infamous and intolerable, for "she had defiled generations of breeding and brought the family to its knees" (244). In short, the sex is only legitimated when it is made sure to serve the need of the people at the top of the social hierarchy. So, the substance of Velutha and Ammu's desire does not qualify the community's expectation and subjection to each individual. Nonetheless, while both of them believe that they are soothed from their desire and gain ephemeral alleviation from pain in the reality, the gaze from the panoptical Law is always on them: Vellya Pappen keeps watching them among the bushes all the time. By and large, this voyeurism presents that the watch from the symbolic order always sneaks into the personal sphere and that is why the love between them could never really offer salvation. Abjection always intrudes during their sexual transgression. That might be the reason why the readers could feel that their sexual intercourse is tinged with both masochistic images and death omen. When Ammu fidgets about whether or not she

should meet Velutha, she is watching “the frenzy of insects flitting around the light, vying to kill themselves” (314). These self-tortured insects are the perfect portraiture of Ammu, and her deliberate death-seeking crossing. Other than this, Roy reveals a sense of death omen by an interjection about a spider. There is a spider found outside the History House earns the attention of Velutha and Ammu for it refuses to cover itself with anything. In addition, it stubbornly insists to live in piles of rubbish so Velutha gives it a name “Lord Rubbish.” Its suicidal impulse makes Ammu and Velutha “linked their fates, their futures (their Love, their Madness, their Hope, their Infinate Joy), to his” (320). The masochistic drive unfolded in the spider reflects the awareness of death in Velutha and Ammu. The abjection takes shape in the omnipresent death images and always interrupts their world of fantasy. They know the cost of their deed, but they willfully pursue it. Death becomes an unavoidable boomerang to their transgression.

Little by little, we realize the trajectory of why and how Velutha is situated as the marginal in the social organization. For being named as the untouchable, he can never go beyond his not-to-be-touched identity. He can never remove himself from the impure, abjective, maternal or feminine substance. He is transformed into an object of horror and fear to serve many purposes. As Kristeva puts it,

The system of abominations sets in motion the persecuting machine
in which I assume the place of the victim in order to justify the
purification that will separate me from that place as it will from any other,
from all others. [...] slyly build a victimizing and persecuting machine
at the cost of which I become subject of the symbolic as well as Other of

the Abject (*Powers of Horror* 112).

From this statement, Kristeva concludes that how abjection works to grant the legitimacy of the process of purification, the procedure that the powerful ones take to compel the less powerful ones to yield. This purifying process helps to make the symbolic system more solid by excluding all the heterogeneous objects, and any attempt to shake the boarder in the system. So far, we have discussed how the network of purity/ impurity manipulates the stratification between the higher castes and the untouchables. In the next chapter, I will delve into how the purity code constitutes the essence of the stratification between genders as well.