

Maze of Plot Construction in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

DR. HITESH D. RAVIYA

Associate Professor

Department of English

Faculty of Arts

The M. S. University of Baroda, Vadodara, Gujarat

India

Abstract:

In The God of Small Things, in place of plot, we get people: mothers, fathers, uncles, great aunts, grandparents, a kind of web of people. No character submerges cleanly into the narrative. The novel opens with a quote from John Berger: "Never again will a single story be told as though it's the only one." This makes for sluggish going, especially at first, when the principals are being introduced. Thus, the researcher is attempting to map out the maze of plot construction in The God of Small Things.

Key words: Arundhati Roy, Plot Structure, Plot Construction, Post-colonial

Plot is an important aspect of the novel. It should be handled with great care. Whichever plot the author opts, it must have some substantial value and genuine correspondence between the author and the imagined world. W. H. Hudson is of the opinion that

a novel is really great only when it lays its foundations broad and deep in the things which most constantly and seriously appeal to us in the struggle and fortunes of our common humanity.¹

Arundhati Roy has not written the novel from beginning to end, but she followed the architectural methodology. She rightly observes, "I would start somewhere, and I'd colour in a bit and then I would deeply stretch back and then stretch forward. It was like designing an intricate balanced structure."²

The novel begins with Rahel coming back to Ayemenem to see her twin brother, Estha, and it ends with the beginning of the word "Naaley" (tomorrow). In the very beginning of the story, the author very judiciously presents a hint or a concise story of the later course of actions.

The first chapter is the sum total of the consequent chapters. A close study of it shows that the whole story of the book is concisely revealed in it. The scene opens with a town of Ayemenem in the southern Indian province of Kerala. The setting is almost unbearably abundant and full of life. We encounter Rahel, who returns home to Ayemenem to see her twin brother, Estha. Still living in the same house is her grand aunt, Baby Kochamma. Rahel and Estha have a peculiar relationship. As children they considered themselves to be one person. Roy tells us that "they were a rare breed of Siamese twins, physically separate, but with mixed identities." Rahel used to share experiences, dreams, and memories with Estha. But as 31-year-old adults, the twins have become individual emotionally as well as physically. As young children they lived in the famous tea province of Assam. Later on, their parents divorced and Ammu returned to live in Ayemenem.

The narrative turns to the funeral of Sophie Mol, Rahel's and Estha's cousin. Sophie was drowned at the age of nine while visiting Ayemenem from England. Rahel and Estha were seven years old at the time. Among those in attendance were Sophie's parents, Margaret Kochamma and Chacko, Baby Kochamma, and Rahel's and Estha's blind grandmother, Mamachi. Ammu, Rahel, and Estha had to stand separately from the rest of the family, and no one acknowledged their presence. Rahel was unusually aware of the "small things"

going on during the funeral; she believed that Sophie Mol was awake during the funeral and showed Rahel two things. The first was the unusual paintwork on the ceiling of the cathedral; it showed a blue sky complete with clouds and tiny airplanes. Rahel imagined the artist who painted it falling from his perch and cracking his head open, "dark blood spilling from his skull like a secret..." The second thing was a baby bat that crawled up Baby Kochamma's sari and may have bit her. Rahel saw Sophie Mol with a "secret cartwheel in her coffin" when this happened, Rahel also heard Sophie's screams burying her-alive, according to Rahel. After the funeral, Estha and Rahel went with Ammu to the police station, where Ammu told the officer that there had been a terrible mistake. The officer was rude to Ammu and prodded her breasts. On the train-ride back to Ayemenem, Ammu was in a trance and could say only "He's dead ... I've killed him."

Two weeks later, Baba forced Ammu to send Estha to live with him in Calcutta. Rahel and Estha have not seen each other since; they had spent twenty-three years apart from each other. But now Estha has returned to Ayemenem; Baba moved to Australia and could not take his son along.

Estha walks alone in the rain. We learn that he stopped talking as a child and does not blend into his surroundings so that he "occupies very little space in the world," leading a withdrawn, mediocre existence. After graduating from school, he mortified Babu and his stepmother by doing the household work instead of going to college. He began with a habit of taking long walks by himself. But once Rahel returned to Ayemenem, suddenly the world's noise infiltrated Estha's thoughts.

Rahel herself was wandering from school to school after Ammu died. As a child, she was expelled from three schools for her curiosity and inappropriate behavior. She attended architectural college in Delhi for eight years, never making the effort to graduate because she found the lifestyle comfortable.

Her architectural designs were artless and impractical. She met her husband, Larry McCaslin, and immigrated to the United States with him. Their marriage crumbled due to a sense of disconnection. When Rahel found out that Estha had returned to Ayemenem, she too returned home.

We next learn about Baby Kochamma, whose interesting life story belies her current, lazy existence. When she was eighteen, she fell in love with a visiting Irish monk, Father Mulligan. He was working with her father, Reverend John Ipe, who was famous for having been touched by the church Patriarch. Baby Kochamma tried to seduce Father Mulligan by pretending to be interested in religion and even by joining the convent. When she realized that her attempts were in vain, she instead attended the University of Rochester in New York, graduating much heavier with a degree in Ornamental Gardening. When she returned to the house in Ayemenem she kept a marvelous garden, which grew wild from neglect when she discovered her stronger love for television. This love she now shares with the midget housekeeper, Kochu Maria. Baby Kochamma is anxious now that the twins are back in Ayemenem, worrying as though they will steal the house from her. Rahel looks out on her grandmother's old pickle factory, Paradise Pickles & Preserves. She remembers that the government banned their banana jam for being unclassifiable as either jam or jelly. She considers how this event encapsulates her family's way of life, which involves constantly transgressing different types of boundaries. In particular, she thinks about the mystery and uncomfortable atmosphere surrounding Estha's being sent away from Ayemenem. He carried with him a terrible memory of looking into the face of a beloved "young man with an old man's mouth" and saying "Yes." Rahel considers that the strangeness in the family can be traced back to Sophie Mol's death, or perhaps all the way back to a time when India was not yet colonized by the British.

Thus we see that actual event is the arrival of Rahel to Ayemenem. The remaining part of the plot has been dealt through Rahel's memory and the narrator's information with a bit mixture of the point of view of some other characters. Rahel remembers what the "Orangedrink Lemondrink Man" did to Estha in Abhilash Talkies. She also remembers the taste of tomato "sandwiches" that Estha ate on Madras Mail. We also come to know that Ammu breathed her last at the age of thirty-one. Sophie Mol, the twin's cousin paid her debt to Nature when she, alongwith her mother paid a visit to India. After the funeral of Sophie Mol, Ammu, along with Rahel and Estha went to police station to see Velutha. But she was humiliated by the Inspector. The first chapter also deals with the life of Estha in Calcutta. He is imagined as a "quiet bubble floating on a sea of noise."³ The novelists very beautifully provides us the hints of the future events under the cover of some enigmatic sentence.

Thus the narrator holds the view about Estha,
Slowly, over the years, Estha withdrew from the world. He grew accustomed to the uneasy octopus that lived inside him and squirted its inky tranquillizer on his past. Gradually, the reason for the silence was hidden away, entombed somewhere deep in the soothing folds of the fact of it.⁴

We see that in a very epigrammatic way, the narrator gives a fine portrayal of the reticent character of Estha. Now the reader is curious to know about the cause of the silence that is entombed somewhere deep in the heart of Estha. And the reader gets acquainted with the inner depth of the 'child psyche' only in the forthcoming chapter.

In other words, this novel starts from all over the text rendered by the interplay of various themes with so many beautiful images and symbols, foreground capitals, sprinkling of italics with some purpose. In it we find dissolute blue bottles which "stun themselves against clear windowpanes and die flatly baffled in the sun"⁵ or where the fish has died and "the ones that survived suffered from fin-rot and hard broken out in

boils”⁶ or “where A platoons of ants carried a dead cockroach sedately through the door, demonstrating what should be done with corpses”⁷. It is a novel in which one can know how to make Banana Jam,

Crush ripe banana. Add water to cover and cook on a very hot fire till fruit is soft (...) Prepare the gelatin (pectin) thus: Proportion 1:5 i.e.: 4 teaspoons Pectin: 20 teaspoons sugar.⁸

Through minutely analysis of the novel, we find that the narrator like a good surgeon examines the cause of the disease objectively and tries to probe the recess of the decayed organs. R.S. Sharma assumes,

the text is an intricate organism with external and internal injuries. The whole creature is brought to our view with an invisible hand that holds it by the tail. We are invited to inspect this being as a whole and grasp the contours of its body. We are unaware of the internal constitution and the chemistry and cannot perceive the functions of the various limbs and joints nor do we realize the nature and location of the damage that lies deep beneath the skin.⁹

Thus Arundhati Roy has yielded most of the important events and their chronological signposts in the first chapter in a very cryptic and abbreviative way. An expert architecture draws the whole picture of the building in his brain; and later on plasters the wall and gives a finishing touch. Similarly, here the novelist has yielded a strong foundation. But in the proceeding chapters, the reader gets a glance of the inner construction of the building and after the last chapter the reader is allowed to have the whole vision of mansion. The author herself rightly holds the view.

Constructing my book was actually an architectural thing. It was one of the first things that the publishers would remark on when my book was being sent to them. They said that normally first novels are not structured, because people are not in complete control of their material. And for me it was so

clear, the bones of the story were so clear-it was almost like a drawing, I could see the structure so clearly.¹⁰

The second chapter describes the trip in which Rahel, Estha, Ammu, Chacko, and Baby Kochamma travel to the town of Cochin in order to pick up Margaret Kochamma and Sophie Mol from the airport in a Plymouth car which was the property of Pappachi, Chacko's father. We get next some background information about Chacko like being a Rhodes Scholar. They are on the way to see- *The Sound of Music*, but they are delayed at a train crossing by a Marxist demonstration in which Rahel sees her friend Velutha, who is a Paravan, or Untouchable Hindu, employed by the Kochamma family. When she yells to him out of the window, Ammu scolds her furiously.

A flashback describes Velutha and his relations with the Kochamma family, and then one of the protesters opens Rahel's door and makes Baby Kochamma wave a Marxist flag. Before they drive away, Chacko says that Ammu, Estha, and Rahel are "millstones around his neck."

A chapter three takes place in the present day. The narrator describes the filthiness of the Ayemenem House which is presently occupied by Baby Kochamma and Kochu Maria. Estha comes home, goes upstairs, and takes off his clothes to wash them while Rahel watches. Enough indications are given in this chapter about incestuous relations of Estha and Rahel. Ammu's room which now belongs to Estha's is also described.

Chapter 4 continues the story of the family trip at the point when they arrive at the movie theater. The main focus here is about the incident of Orangedrink Lemondrink Man at Abhilash Talkies where Ammu, Estha, Rahel, and Baby Kochamma went to see *The Sound of Music*.

Ammu makes Estha go to the lobby because he cannot resist singing along, and the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man at the refreshments counter forces Estha to masturbate him. The family leaves early to the hotel room to join Chacko because Ammu sees that Estha will be sick, and on the way out she

comments on the sweetness of the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man. Rahel says “why don’t you marry him, then?” Ammu tells her that comments like these make people love you a little less. Rahel worries that Ammu will love Sophie Mol more than her. The twins fall asleep next to each other in Chacko’s room at the hotel.

Here we come to know about the political ambition of Comrade Pillai and how he treated an untouchable Velutha. We can see the reference to Mammachi’s handling of the factory affairs. In the concluding part of the chapter the limelight is on Chacko who is planning to pre-empt Comrade Pillai.

The fifth chapter is back in the present day, the narrator describes the filthiness of the river, just a stream now because of a saltwater barrage, and the five-star hotel that has taken over the “History House,” which was formerly the home of an Englishman who took on traditional Indian customs. There is a story of Rahel twenty-three years later. She meets Comrade Pillai. Here she then answers Comrade Pillai’s number of invasive questions and remembers his son Lenin. The scene passes on to Lenin’s childhood when she along with him, Estha and Sophie Mol posed for a photograph. With a reference to Sophie Mol’s arrival the chapter ends.

In chapter 6, the family picks up Margaret and Sophie Mol from the Cochin Airport. Chacko and others receive both and they all exchange pleasantries. Baby Kochamma tells the twins that they are the ambassadors of India. Chacko happily introduces everyone, but Estha does not say “How do you do?” as Ammu requests, and Rahel hides behind a curtain. Ammu later scolds them angrily, and the twins talk with Sophie Mol. Here Estha and Rahel are made to sing in English in an obedient voice.

Chapter 7 is in the present day. It is about Rahel’s visit to Ayemenem after twenty-three years of Sophie Mol’s death. Rahel is busy with searching old notebooks which brings back to her mind old memories. When Rahel finds her and Estha’s

“Wisdom Exercise Notebooks” and reads the corrections that Ammu made in them. She remembers Ammu’s last visit before she died and the lonely circumstances of her mother’s death. In the concluding part we find Rahel with her notebooks -carrying old memories. The chapter ends where it began.

In chapter eight the narrator compares the situation to a play, when the family arrives at the Ayemenem House with Margaret and Sophie Mol from England. Mammachi remembers her old ‘pickle days’. The detail of Chacko’s younger days when Mammachi had a separate entrance built for his room are given. The arrival of Chacko with Sophie Mol and others is announced. Everybody welcomes her and she is introduced to everyone. Some details are vividly described about Velutha and Ammu’s affair with him. Later he is seen in the company of Estha and Rahel.

Then there is a scene in which Kochu Maria and Sophie Mole are together. She takes her hands and inhales them which embarrass Sophie Mol. Then there is account of Ammu’s childhood when her father did not care much for her. The scene again shifts to Sophie Mol and Chacko. Velutha and Rahel appear which is followed by a scene where Kochu Maria distributes pieces of cake. Rahel escapes from the distribution of Sophie Mol’s cake to play with Velutha. Thus the scene changes to Velutha and Rahel. Then we find Ammu calling her to have her nap. Sophie Mol, Margaret Kochamma, Mammachi, Baby Kochamma are all seen together. Sophie Mol moves from Kochu Maria and then she tries to establish a friendship with Rahel in the concluding of the chapter.

Chapter 9, in the present day, begins with an account of Rahel twenty-three years after the death of Sophie Mol. She is found impressed in Washington thoughts. Then Rahel remembers her and Estha becoming friends with Sophie Mol. There is an account of her visit to Velutha’s house along with Estha and Sophie Mol. All of them visited him in Saris. Next onwards there is a description of the day; three days before the

death of Sophie Mol. The chapter ends in the present day, Rahel walks into the abandoned factory Paradise Pickles and Preserves.

Chapter 10 describes Estha's thoughts while he wandered from Sophie Mol's reception at the house and into the pickle factory. While Kochu Maria distributes cake Estha walks out past green mangoes cut and stuffed, past a heap of banana peels on the floor, etc. The Orangedrink Lemondrink man is very much there in his mind. Then we find him along with Rahel who asks him why he is rowing the jam. His answer is "India's a Free Country" A description of Vellya Paapen who claims to be the last human being to have set eyes on Kari Saipu's house comes next. It is followed by an account of this house as it appears to Vellya Paapen.

Again we have reference of Estha and Rahel who was sitting under the magnosteen tree. We also find Rahel going for her afternoon nap on the instructions of Ammu. The scene shifts to a description of the old days of Estha and Rahel when they used to go to Velutha's house in the boat which they repaired with the help of Velutha. The same boat is used by Ammu to cross the river. Velutha and Vellya Paapen were not at home and they heard the voice of Velutha's elder brother, Kuttappen. Later Velutha also appeared on the scene. He set the boat for Estha and Rahel. It is followed by Rahel's apprehensions about her being caught by her mother for going away, skipping her afternoon nap.

In chapter 11, Ammu dreams of one-armed man until the twins wake her, and she realizes that Velutha is the man of whom she dreamed, the God of Small Things. What goes on here is almost a continuation of what happened in the previous chapter. Estha wonders whether he should wake her mother up. The story of the Malayalam film *Chemmen* which may have some parallel in Ammu's own life is briefly narrated here.

Then we also find a brief mention of the electrocuted elephant. Ammu notices her children covered in a fine dust.

Then we see that Ammu is undressing and putting a red toothbrush under her breast to see if it would stay. Then there is reference to the high incidence of insanity in the family and among Syrian Christians. We have reference to Ammu's old days and also her daughter's returning to mother's room years later.

Chapter twelve is in the present day, after twenty three years, Rahel is found near the temple elephant. Rahel goes to see the traditional kathakali dance in the Ayemenem temple. The detailed account of the decadence of Kathakali and the pathetic condition of the Kathakali artist is given here. Some details are also given about a couple of stories of that evening's performance. Estha also is there shows up as well. Later at the end of performance they meet Pillai who expresses surprise to see that they are still interested in Kathakali.

Chapter 13 recalls the story of Margaret and Chacko's relationship. We have pretty long account of Margaret Kochamma's early life, her love affairs with Chacko, her marriage, divorce from Chacko, meeting with Joe, marriage with him, and his second husband, Joe's death. We can also find a reference to invitation of Chacko to Ayemenem followed by an account of strong feeling of Margaret Kochamma's for leaving Sophie Mol alone and going to Cochin to confirm their return ticket.

After this there is description of the circumstances leading up to Sophie Mol's drowning, beginning with Vellya Paapen's visit to the Ayemenem House. Mammachi and Baby Kochamma getting news of Sophie Mol's death. Vellya Paapen tells Mammachi of Velutha's affair with Ammu and offers to kill his son, and Mammachi loses the control and she shouts, spits at him, and pushes him to the ground. Mammachi and Baby Kochamma then manage to lock Ammu in her bedroom in connection with the Velutha episode, and the next morning they receive the news that a white child was found drowned in

the river. In a short paragraph we are told that how the fisherman traced the body of Sophie Mol.

At the police station, Baby Kochamma lies to Inspector Thomas Mathew that Velutha threatened them and tried to force himself on Ammu. The inspector then interviews Comrade Pillai about whether Velutha has any political support and, discovering that he does not, instructs his men to attack Velutha.

Margaret Kochamma slaps Estha back in Ayemenem. We have also a reference to her writing an apologetic letter. But there was only Rahel to receive it in Ayemenem. It is followed by very short reference to the fact that Margaret Kochamma knew nothing about Velutha.

In the end of the chapter Sophie Mol is 'back to life' searching for things to be given away to the twins as presents. And then Sophie Mol becomes a memory.

In chapter 14, Chacko visits Comrade Pillai and asks him about Velutha. There is description of Comrade Pillai's wife also. His Lenin and his niece Latha from Kottayam also make their appearance. Lenin recites a few lines from Shakespeare while Latha recites a poem. Chacko discusses with Pillai the lay out for the new label that he wants Pillai to print. Then the discussion focuses on Velutha and her role as a worker. Comrade Pillai, because of his own ambitions in the Communist Party, tells Chacko that Velutha is a dangerous party member who should be fired.

How victory was gifted to Pillai "wrapped and be-ribboned, on a silver tray."¹¹ The closer of Paradise Pickles, Chacko's emigration to Canada, etc. are also discussed in this chapter.

A detailed account of Velutha making his appearance at the Ayemenem house is given where Mammachi insults him and he suffers humiliation passively. Velutha comes to see Comrade Pillai in the hope that he will help to rescue him, after Mammachi screams at him and fires him. But Comrade Pillai

tells Velutha that he has no support from the party. He adds that the worker's indiscipline cannot be tolerated. He tells that violating party discipline means violating party unity. Pillai shuts the door of his house and returns to his wife. Velutha realizes that his end is near.

In chapter 15 entitled 'The Crossing' Velutha make his appearance. He becomes lonely man as lonely as wolf. Velutha swims across the river to the History House.

He left no ripples in the water. No footprints on the shore. He held his mundu spread above his head to dry. The wind lifted it like a sail. He was suddenly happy. *Things will get worse, he thought to himself, Then better.* He was walking swiftly now, towards the Heart of Darkness. As lonely as a wolf.¹²

The twins and Sophie Mol run away from home in chapter 16. They went to the river and are in a boat. How Sophie Mol gets drowned is described in some detail here. Early morning at four o'clock the twins "exhausted, distraught and covered in mud, made their way through the swamp and approached the History House."¹³ They did not notice Velutha lying asleep in the shadows. "As lonely as a wolf. A brown leaf on his black back."¹⁴ Sophie Mol drowns after their boat trips over on the way to the History House.

Chapter 17, in the present day, describes Rahel and Estha lying in bed, remembering their childhood. We are told that four years after Chacko left for Canada Baby Kochamma had had the Plymouth car washed regularly. Then there is appearance of Baby Kochamma and Kochu Maria. First one is busy with her diary writing. Then we have details about the death of Father Mulligan.

Rahel is found lying on Estha's bed. Estha remembers his mother's mouth "that had kissed his hand through the barred train window. First class, on the Madras Mail"¹⁵ Rahel remembers Chacko's marching order to Ammu after the episode

of Velutha. Then there is reference of Estha's return to his father. The chapter ends with another reference to Sophie Mol's death, Velutha is charged with kidnapping and murder, Communist Party siege of Paradise Pickles and Preserves and the policemen picking "their way through the wet undergrowth, clumping into the Heart of Darkness"¹⁶

In chapter 18, this is again a twenty –three years old story. The Kottayam police find Velutha sleeping next to Rahel and Estha at the History House, they beat him until he is nearly dead. He is not able to walk at the end of police operation. The twins are totally helpless, they remain mute witness.

In chapter 19, this is also a twenty –three years old story. Inspector Mathew interviews the twins and discovers that Velutha is innocent. In Kottayam police station the words 'politeness', 'Obedience', 'Loyalty', 'Intelligence', 'courtesy', and 'Efficiency' have taken the reverse order at least in the eyes of Estha. Inspector Mathew tells Baby Kochamma that if the children do not identify Velutha as their abductor, he will accuse Baby Kochamma of filing a false report. Baby Kochamma makes the children tell a lie by telling the twins that they and Ammu will go to jail unless they accuse Velutha. Estha goes into Velutha's cell where he finds Velutha almost dead to condemn him. It is not until the next morning, after Velutha has died, that Ammu goes to the police station to set the record straight. In the end of chapter we find Baby Kochamma joining hands with Chacko to drive away Ammu from the house.

Chapter 20 describes the scene at the train station when Estha is leaving for Calcutta and his train journey to his father by the Madras Mail. This is almost a continuation of the action of the earlier chapter. On the platform "Rahel doubled over and screamed and screamed"¹⁷ and then changes to the present tense, when Estha and Rahel begin to make love. Estha and Rahel are found together again. "Once again they broke the

Love Laws. That lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much.”¹⁸ Then we are taken to Sophie Mol again. Rahel and Ammu also are there. Ammu longs for Velutha. “Ached for him with the whole of her biology”¹⁹

Chapter 21 flashes back to the point at which Ammu finds Velutha at the river and she and Velutha make love for the first time. We find Ammu who is restless now, wearing Chacko’s old shirts over a long white petticoat. She moves quickly through the darkness to reach Velutha. Then a detailed account of Velutha having physical relation with Ammu is given. Thirteen nights follow this one. “They knew that there was nowhere for them to go. They had nothing. No future. So they stuck to the small things.”²⁰ In the last part there is a talk about the night on the day Sophie Mol Arrives in Ayemenem.

“He (Velutha) took her face in his hands and drew it towards his. He closed his eyes and smelled her skin. Ammu laughed. *Yes, Margaret*, she thought. *We do it to each other too*. She kissed his closed eyes and stood up. Velutha with his back against the mangosteen tree watched her walk away. She had a dry rose in her hair. She turned to say it once again: ‘*Naaley*’ Tomorrow”²¹

This way the novel ends with the word ‘*Naaley*’ Tomorrow” With Rahel’s visit to Ayemenem house twenty-three years after the death of Sophie Mol the novel begins and ends with a day in the life of Ammu when she has an affair with Velutha.

The scenes in the novel change one after the other so we can say that the approach of Roy is rather cinematic. From Rahel’s visit to Ayemenem the scene changes to the birth of the twins, Sophie Mol’s funeral seven years later, Estha’s return to his father week later, and again to Rahel’s visit. We hear about the younger days of Estha followed by Rahel’s visit twenty-three years after the death of Sophie Mol. There are some incidents which take place in between like Mammachi’s and Ammu’s death and Chacko’s migration to Canada. It is back to Rahel’s education, her marriage etc. followed by Rahel’s return

again. Baby Kochamma's past years is described. It is followed by Rahel's visit to Ayemenem after twenty-three years of death of Sophie Mol.

In the first chapter all major characters are introduced and more interesting thing is that it consists almost the whole story. This pattern is almost repeated in the second chapter also. Ammu's affair with Velutha, a turning point of the novel, is revealed here. In the third chapter scene without passing anywhere else focuses wholly on the Ayemenem house.

In the next chapter also there is cinematic effect where there is quick succession of scenes. In his respect the repetition is done in the fifth chapter also. Only about Sophie Mol's arrival is given in chapter six. And different scenes are made available in chapter seven. Chapter eight with a minor distraction –to Ammu's affair with Velutha mainly discusses Sophie Mol's arrival. There are multiple scenes in the chapter nine. In chapter ten again we have scenes which shift from one to the other. With some reference to Ammu's earlier days this chapter is mainly about Ammu. The only scene in this chapter is that Rahel and Estha are in the temple to watch Kathakali performance. In chapter thirteen also the focus shifts from one action to another at different periods. Then there is a focus on Pillai's house and at different times Chacko and Velutha visit him at his house. Next chapter has only Velutha. The same is the case with the next chapter where we meet the twins and Sophie Mol in the boat. Different scenes are enacted one after the other in chapter seventeen. The focus turns to Kottayam police station in the following chapter. Then in one another chapter focus is on the police station. In the chapter twenty-one we are taken back to the Estha's return to his father after the death of Sophie Mol followed by Rahel's return to Ayemenem twenty-three years later and then back to Sophie Mol. Description of Ammu's sexual relation with Velutha which is unique for its description is in the concluding chapter.

In short if we put there are two factors which are important for novelist how to approach to his work. First his own temperament and second the nature of his subject. Every great artist necessarily creates his\her own form. And Roy also has created form of her own fit to narrate the life of history of five generations.

Problem with the plot of the novel is that it does not involve a hero's journey and trails. Several minor characters of the novel, all of them in some sense or other get linked to the main plot. The same novel has several reading also.

A psychologist may find that a particular novel's main plot involves the painful but necessary loss of innocence for the protagonist, an anthropologist may note that the story embodies a mythic pattern of journey, trail and renewal for the protagonist, a sociologist may be struck by the fact that protagonist's movement from the country to the city shapes his or her experience; a Marxist historian may feel that the narrative fundamentally celebrates the rise of a member of the petite bourgeoisie at the expense of the lower classes²²

It is interesting enough to note that almost all these above mentioned issues we find discussed in the novel somehow without getting affected to the development of the plot and the novel becomes highly readable. The action of the plot covers a period of December, 1969 to 1993. However, a meticulous study of the book shows that a reader is also made to acquaint with the events of as far back as 1876 when Baby Kochamma's and Pappachi's father was seven years old. In this regard, the author has employed different modes for conveying time. Let us see the chronological order of the time in this book which runs thus:

- 1869: Birth of Baby Kochamma's and Pappachi's father.
- 1900: Birth of Pappachi, Chacko and Ammu's father.
- 1910: Birth of Baby Kochamma.
- 1917: Birth of Mammachi, Chacko and Ammu's mother.

- 1928 ----- Baby Kochamma falls in love with Father Mulligan this year.
- 1938: Birth of Chacko, Ammu's brother.
- 1842: (17th November) Birth of Ammu the central character of the novel who suffer the most and dies lonely.
- 1945: Birth of Velutha, a paravan, a lover of Ammu for whom Ammu ached with whole of her biology.
- 1956: Pappachi and Mammachi on vacation from Delhi.
- 1957: The communist won the State Assembly election in Kerala E.M.S. Namboodiripad becomes the Chief Minister.
- 1958: Returning of Pappachi to Ayemenem after his retirement from his job as the imperial entomologist.
- 1959: Johann Klein comes to Kottayam and Velutha receives training from him.
- 1959: (Summer) Chacko meets Margaret Kochamma.
- 1959: (Winter) Chacko marries Margaret Kochamma.
- 1960: Chacko returns to India. Gets a teaching assignment at the Madras Christian College.
- 1960: Birth of Sophie Mol.
- 1960: Establishment of Paradise & Pickles.
- 1961: Ammu's marriage with Bengali Hindu.
- 1961: Velutha finishes High School.
- 1962: (November) Birth of Twins (Estha and Rahel).
- 1965: Ammu leaves her husband and comes to Ayemenem.
- 1967: Pappachi already dead by this year.
- 1967: the coalition of the C.P.I. and the C.P.I. (M) wins the election.
- 1969: (Early) –Joe killed in a car accident this year.
- 1969: (December) The trip in which family goes to Cochin to receive Sophie Mol.
- 1969: (December) Death of Sophie Mol by drowning in the river.

1969: (December) Ammu is asked to leave Ayemenem and Estha is returned to his father by Chacko and Baby Kochamma.

1973: Ammu's last visit to the Ayemenem House. Ammu dies.

1973: Rahel blacklisted in Nazareth Convent.

1974: (May) Rahel expelled from the convent.

1989: Death of Father Mulligan.

1992: Re-returning of Estha to Ayemenem.

1993: (June) Rahel Estha's sister returns to Ayemenem from America. Both Rahel and Estha are 31 years old. Baby Kochamma, 83 years old.

We knew that Roy has got her degree in the field of architecture from Delhi. So it is natural to have the clear tinge of her knowledge in architecture in her novel. The book has an architectural shape. Like an expert architect who is in a habit of creating new and attractive models, she has also coined some new words and phrases and has turned and twisted language to conform to the feeling, as a result of which we have sentences, illogical statements, unrestricted sprinkling of italics, bizarre phrases, ungrammatical constructions, unconventional rhythm etc. In other words, the author has tried her best to assimilate those things in such a way that they suggest the sense of very well or to quote T. S. Eliot they have Objective Correlative or Emotional Equivalent.

Roy's plot construction is not in the line of the traditional novelists who systematically arrange the episodes. There are no episodic plots in her novels as there are in Fielding or Dickens. She has plotted about single individual and has portrayed with a psychological force and study.

In this matter the technique of Virginia Woolf has certainly exercised a great influence on Roy's novel *The God of Small Things*. Various episodes are not in order but are in a haphazard way making the novel complex. The author is

concerned more with the examination of the different characters than with the plot construction.

Roy caresses her novel until it seems not merely well wrought but over wrought. It is to be noted that while comparing novel to drama, W. H. Hudson exhibits a very poor opinion about a novel. To him, to write a novel is a very easy work. He observes: "the drama is the most rigorous form of literary art; prose fiction is the loosest. It is a familiar fact that for the writing of play a long preliminary discipline in technique and thorough knowledge of the stage are requisite, while anyone can write a novel who has a pen, ink and paper at command, and a certain amount of leisure and patience"²³

We agree that it is very easy to write cheap novels, which only appeal to our wild sentiments. But these novels are lost into oblivion as soon as they see the light of the day. They seldom have any permanent bearing in our mind. But to write a novel of classical nature, a novel which makes a correspondence between the present and the past with an eye to the future – is really very difficult. Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things* comes under this category. It is beautiful in form and content, matter and manner. It has heralded a new conception in the realm of traditional thinking. In technique and style it lulls us away from the world of cheap writing to the world of metaphorical structure, architectural pattern or to quote T. S. Eliot's phrase, in the world of 'Objective Correlative' or 'Emotional Equivalent'. In one of the interview, Roy herself has said,

I never believed that there was any sort of direct link between studying architecture and building buildings. So far as I am concerned, I still practice architecture, constructing my book was actually an architectural thing.²⁴

It is obvious that to create a novel like *The God of Small Things* is not a layman's work. Because it is not only pen, ink, paper and patience that are essential, but an aesthetic sense

saturated with images and symbols, rhythm and diction is also needed.

There are certain drawbacks of the plot too. For instance the entire fourth chapter titled “Abhilash Talkies” is like a cancer in the body of the novel. It is completely useless and purposeless, and does not add in any way to the progression of the plot. After reading this chapter, it is evident that the writer has set her eye either on swelling the size of the novel or on catching the attention of foreign readers. The chapter renders one tired and bored. The behavior of the Orange-drink Lemon drink Man towards an innocent boy, Estha, at the Refreshment Counter during the film interval is unquestionably objectionable. But it is in the nature of Arundhati Roy to exult in lewd and lecherous scenes. This is how she writes about the man-boy encounter, “Now if you’ll kindly hold this for me; the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man said, handing Estha his penis through his soft white muslin dhoti, ‘I’ll get you your drink. Orange? Lemon?’”²⁵

And she does not stop here and moves forward, “Then the gristly-bristly face of the Man contorted, and Estha’s hand was wet and hot and sticky. It had egg white on it. White egg white. Quarter-boiled.”²⁶

This beastly act of man causes headache and vomiting for Estha. All this is useless and serves no purpose in the text. The entire episode is smelly, stinky, and un-esthetic, and it would have been much better if she avoided it.

Similarly at other place in the novel it is really distasteful to watch twins—a brother and a sister—to get involved in incestuous relationship, “There is very little that anyone could say to clarify what happened next. Nothing that (in Mammachi’s book) would separate Sex from Love. Or Needs from Feelings.”²⁷

Roy elsewhere also shows her expertise in depicting erotic and passionate scenes, as in the last chapter titled “The Cost of Living” where man-woman relationship reaches full

consummation. But there is reason for it—Ammu, the mother of the twins, has been a day-dreamer having afternoon-mares, and as an abandoned woman she remains unrequited physically. Roy, in portraying restless feelings and passion of Ammu, is more womanlike, more earthly and more natural. She is not perverted and unnatural here as in the chapter titled “Abhilash Talkies” Ammu’s divorced and lonely life pays its full price in the last chapter. She always longs to get united to Velutha, a Paravan. Being highly dreamy by nature, presumably through her dreams she fulfills her unsatisfied desires. The writer paints her consummation in unequivocal terms, “Ammu, naked now, crouched over Velutha, her mouth on his. He drew her hair around them like a tent. Like her children did when they wanted to exclude the outside world. She slid further down, introducing herself to the rest of him. His neck. His nipples. His chocolate stomach. She sipped the last of the river from the hollow of his navel. She pressed the heat of his erection against her eyelids. She tasted him, salty, in her mouth... She felt belly tighten under her, hard as a board. She felt her wetness slipping on his skin. He took her nipple in his mouth and cradled her other breast in his callused palm. Velvet gloved in sandpaper.

At the moment that she guided him into her, she caught a passing glimpse of his youth, his *youngness*, the wonder in his eyes at the secret he had unearthed and she smiled down at him as though he was her child.”²⁸

And further Roy narrates,

Once he was inside her, fear was derailed and biology took over. The cost of living climbed to unaffordable heights; though later, Baby Kochamma would say it was a Small Price to Pay.

She was as wide and deep as a river in space. He sailed on her waters. She could feel him moving deeper and deeper into her. Frantic, Frenzied. Asking to be let in further. Further. Stopped only by the shape of her. The shape of him. And when

he was refused, when he had touched the deepest depths of her, with a sobbing, shuddering sigh, he drowned.²⁹

This kind of intense -highly intense, almost volcanic – relationship between a man and a woman is quite understandable, but not the one we come across in the chapter entitled “Abhilash Talkies.”

In case of the English novelist Thomas Hardy and the Indian novelist Arundhati Roy, their training as an architect has played a great role in building the plot of their novel. Both these writers wrote fiction and built architectonic plots.

It is beyond doubt that Arundhati Roy is the master of constructing plot.

A cursory reading of the text gives us the impression that the novel is quite simple, but a close study reveals that it is a well-planned work and has a subtle and complex plot. It is composed of memories treated artistically by the author. Even though the reader knows the story right at the outset, he never loses interest in the long narrative, and finds its events absorbing and interesting.³⁰

The sub-plots in *The God of Small Things* contribute to strength of the main plot. Arundhati Roy's talent as an architect is profusely exhibited in her design of the plot of *The God of Small Things*.

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