

Meenachal: A Silent Symbolic Presence in The God of Small Things

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ABSTRACT

“The God of Small Things” is novel rich in symbolism, and the Meenachal River is a recurring element that is woven into the narrative quite adroitly by the writer Arundhati Roy who successfully bagged the much-coveted Booker Prize for her maiden novel.

The river is a powerful and symbolic force in the story, representing both life and death. It is associated with the tragic events surrounding Velutha and the forbidden love story between him and Ammu. The river becomes a witness to the unfolding events, and its flow seems to parallel the turbulent and uncontrollable nature of the characters' lives.

Velutha, as a lower-caste individual, faces discrimination and oppression in society. His connection with the Meenachal River might be interpreted symbolically, suggesting a link between his fate and the larger currents of societal norms and prejudices. However, this connection is more metaphorical than explicitly spiritual.

While there are spiritual and cultural elements in the novel, and the river itself holds cultural significance, the spiritual ties between Velutha, the titular character, and the Meenachal River are not explicitly explored in the text but understated. The novel primarily delves into social, political, and personal aspects, using symbolism to convey the complexities of the characters' lives and the society in which they live.

Keywords: Symbolic, Associated, Discrimination, Oppression, Societal, Forbidden, Metaphorical.

INTRODUCTION

“The river itself has no beginning or end. In the beginning it is not yet the river, in its end, it is no longer the river. What we call the headwaters is only a selection from among the innumerable sources which flow together to compose it. At what point in its course, does the Mississippi become what the Mississippi means?”

(A-Z Quotes)

-T.S. Eliot.

The God of Small Things, set in 1960s reflects the mentality and socio-cultural environment of Ayemenem, the actual town in Kerala, an Indian state which is full of natural grandeur. Roy herself spent a greater part of her childhood days in this village in harmonious relationship with nature. She furnishes a pictographic portrayal of the village greenery and the river Meenachal:

“The nights are clear but suffered with sloth and sullen expectation. But by early June, the south-west monsoon breaks and there are three months of wind and water with short spells of sharp, glittering sunshine that thrilled children snatch to play with. The countryside turns an immodest green. Boundaries blur as tapioca fences take root and bloom. Brick walls turn moss green. Pepper vines snake up electric poles. Wild creepers burst through laterite banks and spill across the flooded roots. Boats ply in the bazaars.” (p.1)

She picks up the Meenachal river from her childhood days and entwines all the big and small character of the novel in its encircling heart. River Meenachal narrates the story of Ayemenem, the people living on its bank and their lives revolving around its abundant water. The river is a powerful and symbolic force in the story,

representing both life and death. It is associated with the tragic events surrounding Velutha and the forbidden love story between him and Ammu. The river becomes a witness to the unfolding events, and its flow seems to parallel the turbulent and uncontrollable nature of the characters' lives.

Arundhati Roy clearly shows the river as an inseparable component in the lives of the characters Velutha, Ammu, Chako, Pappachi, Rahel, Estha and others where they learnt the invaluable lessons of life. Velutha, a born Paravan- an untouchable, is 'The God of Small Things' in the novel. He is a man of ecology who makes small pretty things from the materials gained from nature. He has been described as making, "...tiny wind mills, rattle, minute jewels boxes out of dried palm reeds; he could carve perfect boats out of tapioca stems and figurines on cashew nuts." (p.74)

When driven out of his house by his mother, he takes shelter in the trustworthy company of nature near the bank of the river Meenachal. He catches fish from the river, cooks it in open fire and sleeps on the bank of river. Being betrayed by his family and comrade Pillai, he unintentionally moves towards the river to find solace. Velutha, as a lower-caste individual, faces discrimination and oppression in society. His connection with the Meenachal River might be interpreted symbolically, suggesting a link between his fate and the larger currents of societal norms and prejudices. However, this connection is more metaphorical than explicitly spiritual.

He belonged to the river Meenachal as much as it belonged to him. Velutha exhibits an affinity with his surroundings. He acquires a 'river -sense' which he passes on to the twins- Rahel and Estha- for example by teaching them how to fish. He made Rahel her luckiest ever fishing rod. River Meenachal's complacent exterior with a turbulent spirit beneath, characterized itself in Velutha's personality. The novel primarily delves into social, political, and personal aspects, using symbolism to convey the complexities of the characters' lives and the society in which they live.

In "The God of Small Things" by Arundhati Roy, the character Velutha and the Meenachal River are symbolically connected, representing various themes and serving as metaphors within the novel.

Velutha, a lower-caste Paravan, and Ammu, a member of a higher caste, engage in a forbidden love affair. There is a lot which runs common between Velutha and the river. The reckless spirit of the river turning him into a muscular River God, drives him to make love to an upper-class woman, Ammu. Velutha possessed by the wild spirit of the river satirizes on the demarcation of race and culture so apparently practiced in Ayemenem. Meenachal is the witness of his thirteen nights physical relationship with Ammu. The Meenachal River becomes a symbol of the forbidden and unconventional nature of their love. Like the river's course, their relationship flows against the rigid societal norms, challenging the established caste hierarchy and norms. In other words, Meenachal is lifeline for Velutha.

The river, with its inexorable flow, represents the unstoppable force of fate. Velutha, despite being a skilled carpenter and a kind-hearted individual, faces a tragic fate due to the societal prejudices. The Meenachal River mirrors the inevitability of his destiny, just as the river's flow cannot be altered or controlled. The river is portrayed as a silent witness to the injustices that occur in the story. Similarly, Velutha, as a marginalized individual, becomes a victim of societal injustice and discrimination. The Meenachal River reflects the silent but powerful role of nature in observing and encapsulating the tragic events that unfold.

The river, as a natural element, is often used metaphorically in literature to represent various aspects of life. In this case, it symbolizes the complex and interconnected web of human relationships, societal structures, and the inevitable consequences of going against established norms. The Meenachal River is a unifying element in the landscape, but it also creates divisions. Similarly, Velutha's relationship with Ammu bridges societal gaps but leads to severe consequences. The river becomes a reflection of both connection and separation.

The association between Velutha and the Meenachal River is a poignant metaphor in the novel, emphasizing the social and cultural complexities that lead to tragedy and highlighting the destructive consequences of

challenging societal norms. The river serves as a powerful symbol of the forces that shape the characters' lives and destinies in the novel.

In Arundhati Roy's "The God of Small Things," the Meenachal River is symbolically associated with Ammu, one of the central characters in the novel. The river serves as a metaphor for the course of Ammu's life and the challenges she faces.

Ammu, mother of Rahel and Estha and the central figure of the novel, retreats to the soulful proximity of nature to forgo the patriarchal oppression after taking divorce from her husband. For her, Meenachal was her only savior and a true companion. She spent hours on the river bank with her little plastic transistor and had midnight swims. The Meenachal River is a constant presence in the narrative, and its flow represents the unstoppable force of time and fate. The river witnesses the forbidden love affair between Ammu and Velutha, a lower-caste man. She would arrive on the banks of Meenachal panting to meet her forbidden lover. The bank of Meenachal functions as a backdrop for their illicit love and a commitment for their uncertain future. The river at night with its dark depths, turbulent waters and rugged banks adds a symbolic connotation to the tragic tale of Velutha-Ammu love and their doomed fates.

The river becomes a silent observer to the tragic consequences that befall them. The river symbolizes the uncontrollable and indifferent nature of societal norms and expectations that dictate the characters' lives.

Ammu's association with the river reflects her own struggles against societal constraints. She is a woman who defies societal expectations and enters into a relationship deemed unacceptable by the rigid caste system. The river, like Ammu, becomes a symbol of rebellion and resistance against the oppressive norms of society.

The Meenachal River also represents the fluidity of time and memory in the narrative structure of the novel. The story is nonlinear, and events from the past flow into the present, much like the river's course. Ammu's memories, regrets, and reflections are intertwined with the river's presence, adding to the overall thematic richness of the novel.

In summary, the association between Ammu and the Meenachal River in "The God of Small Things" is symbolic, highlighting themes of resistance, rebellion, and the inevitability of fate in the face of societal norms.

In Arundhati Roy's "The God of Small Things," the character Estha is symbolically associated with the Meenachal River, much like his twin sister Rahel. The Meenachal River serves as a recurring motif and a powerful symbol in the novel, representing the flow of time, memory, and the inevitable course of life.

Estha's connection to the river is multifaceted and symbolic. The tragic events that unfold in Estha's childhood, particularly the separation from his sister Rahel and the traumatic incident at the History House, leave a lasting impact on him. The Meenachal River, with its turbulent and unpredictable flow, mirrors the turbulence of Estha's emotional state and the losses he experiences. That was the reason, in the wind and rain, in the sudden thunder darkness of the day Estha always took to walks down the banks of the river.

The novel employs a non-linear narrative structure, with events from the past and present interwoven. Similarly, the Meenachal River is used as a symbol of the fluidity of time and memory. Estha's memories and experiences are interconnected with the river, reflecting the novel's exploration of the complexity of memory and the impact of the past on the present.

The river, like fate, is an uncontrollable force. Estha's life is shaped by external forces and societal expectations, much like the river's course shaped by nature. The novel suggests that Estha, like the river, is subject to larger societal and cultural currents that influence his destiny. The Meenachal River silently witnesses the events of the novel, much like Estha's silence and inability to express his traumatic experiences. The river becomes a silent observer to the small and big things that happen in the characters' lives.

After returning from his father, Estha embraced Meenachal as a dear and trusted friend. Although Estha had always been a quiet child, but his quietness makes a muted communication with the soul of the river. Estha

remained pleasantly forgetful of the ugly little changes in the river, the wetness of the sand under his shoes, the cold puppy shivering and the goings on of the world as long as he had Meenachal near him.

In summary, the association between Estha and the Meenachal River in "The God of Small Things" is symbolic, representing the complexities of time, memory, trauma, and the inescapable forces that shape Estha's life. The river serves as a rich and evocative metaphor throughout the novel.

In "The God of Small Things" by Arundhati Roy, Rahel, one of the central characters, is symbolically associated with the Meenachal River. The river serves as a recurring motif in the novel, representing various themes such as the passage of time, societal constraints, and the inevitability of fate. Rahel's connection to the river can be understood in several ways.

The Meenachal River is described as a turbulent and unpredictable force. Similarly, Rahel's life is marked by turbulence, especially due to the traumatic events of her childhood, including the separation from her brother Estha and the tragic incident at the History House. The river becomes a symbol of the emotional turmoil Rahel experiences.

The Meenachal River silently observes the unfolding events in the novel. Similarly, Rahel, especially as an adult returning to her childhood home, reflects on and bears witness to the past. The river becomes a silent witness to both the small joys and profound tragedies in Rahel's life.

Overall, the association between Rahel and the Meenachal River in "The God of Small Things" is symbolic, reflecting the novel's exploration of time, memory, societal constraints, and the complex interplay of personal and cultural forces in shaping the characters' destinies. The river serves as a potent metaphor throughout the narrative.

The river is a powerful and symbolic force in the story, representing both life and death. The three children on the river bank, Estha, Rahel and Sophie Mol frolicking in the thick outgrowth on the river bank hatch up a plot. The twins and Sophie Mol climbed onto the boat to sail down the dark and quiet Meenachal. As per the plan, after absenting themselves from the grownups for a time enough to arouse their remorse and the elders ending up believing about the death of all three of them, they would come back triumphantly only to be loved and valued more by them. But the rain-fed Meenachal deceived them. The boat got into trouble Estha and Rahel somehow managed to scramble out, all muddy and wet only to discover that Sophie Mol was not along. The dark river, suggestive of death incarnation, had just accepted the boat's offering. It was 'Just quiet handing over ceremony,' Meenachal accepting the offering of one small life.

Jason Cawley, one of the five Booker Judges writes: "Roy's achievement ...is never to forget about small things in life, insects and flowers, wind and water, the outcaste and despised."

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