



Research Paper

Diving into the Depths of Symbolism: Dual Significance of Water in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

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ABSTRACT: In *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy, water is a recurring motif that is used to convey both positive and negative aspects of the characters' lives. The novel uses water as a symbol of both freedom and entrapment, and the relationship between the characters and the water in the novel is a reflection of the social and political issues that the novel explores. This article explores the role of water as a symbol of freedom and entrapment in "*The God of Small Things*" and how it contributes to the novel's themes of social inequality, forbidden love, and the loss of innocence.

KEYWORDS: *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy, water, symbolism, freedom, entrapment.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is a literary masterpiece that delves into the complex themes of love, family, society, and the human condition. Set in Kerala, India, the novel portrays the lives of the twins Estha and Rahel, their mother Ammu, and the rest of their family as they navigate the oppressive caste system and societal norms that dictate their lives. In this article, we will explore the various aspects that make *The God of Small Things* an exceptional work of literature. One of the most striking aspects of the novel is the use of language. Roy's writing is poetic and lyrical, with vivid descriptions that bring the setting and characters to life. She uses imagery to great effect, with the recurring motifs of water and the color red serving as symbols of both freedom and oppression. The language is not only beautiful but also serves to convey the emotions and themes of the novel, creating a sensory experience for the reader that stays with them long after the book is finished. Symbolism is a powerful literary device that is used to create deeper meaning in literature. It is the use of objects, people, or situations to represent something else that is significant.

The God of Small Things, is a complex and powerful work of literature that explores various themes and motifs. Water is a powerful and recurring motif in "*The God of Small Things*" by Arundhati Roy. Throughout the novel, water is used to symbolize both freedom and entrapment, and its presence and absence are closely tied to the characters' experiences of love, loss, and oppression. In this article, I will explore the dual symbolism of water in *The God of Small Things* and how it contributes to the novel's themes of social inequality, forbidden love, and the loss of innocence.

The author masterfully uses the symbol of water throughout the novel to convey these themes in a powerful and evocative way. Water serves as a multifaceted symbol throughout the novel. On one hand, it represents purity and cleansing, with the characters often seeking refuge in its cool, refreshing embrace. On the other hand, water also represents danger and unpredictability, with characters facing peril and death in its depths. One of the most significant ways that water is used to explore social inequality is through the stark contrast between the river and the canal. The river is a symbol of purity and life, with characters seeking refuge in its cool embrace. However, the canal is a stark contrast, being a symbol of decay and death. This contrast highlights the social inequality that exists in the novel, with the privileged characters living in luxury by the river while the less fortunate characters are forced to live in squalor by the canal.

Water is also used to explore the theme of forbidden love in the novel. The river serves as a symbol of the forbidden love between Ammu and Velutha, with their secret meetings taking place on its banks. The purity and cleansing qualities of the river are juxtaposed against the social taboos and restrictions that prevent their love from being accepted. Finally, the symbol of water is used to explore the theme of the loss of innocence. The novel is

set during a time of great change in India, with traditional values being challenged by modern ideas. Water serves as a symbol of this change, with the old ways of life being washed away by the rising tide of modernity. This theme is most evident in the character of Estha, who is forced to grow up and confront the harsh realities of the world after a traumatic experience in the water.

Water as a Symbol of Freedom

One of the most prominent uses of water in *The God of Small Things* is as a symbol of freedom. The river that runs through the novel is a source of liberation and escape for Estha and Rahel, the novel's central characters. As children, Estha and Rahel are fascinated by the river, and they spend hours playing in its waters. For them, the river is a place of joy and freedom, where they can escape the restrictions and conventions of their society. However, as they grow older, the river takes on a darker meaning. The river becomes a place of danger and violence, and its currents carry with them the weight of social and political oppression. The opening scene of the novel shows the twins, Estha and Rahel, playing in the river, which represents their escape from the suffocating world of social norms and expectations. The river is a place where they can be themselves, where they can let go of their fears and anxieties, and where they can experience a sense of freedom that is not available to them in their everyday lives. As the novel progresses, water continues to serve as a symbol of freedom, particularly for characters who are oppressed or marginalized in some way.

One of the most powerful uses of water as a symbol of freedom is in the relationship between Ammu and Velutha. Ammu is a woman who is trapped by the strict social norms of her community, particularly when it comes to love and sexuality. She falls in love with Velutha, a lower-caste man who is considered untouchable by society. Their relationship is forbidden, and they know that they will face severe consequences if they are discovered. However, when they are together by the river, they are free from the constraints of their society. The river becomes a symbol of their love and their desire for freedom, and they use it as a place to express their passion for each other and escape from the oppressive world around them.

Water is also used as a symbol of freedom in the novel to represent the loss of innocence. For example, the scene in which Sophie Mol drowns in the river is a powerful symbol of the loss of childhood innocence. The river, which was once a place of joy and freedom for the twins, becomes a place of tragedy and loss. In this way, water represents the fragility of innocence and the ways in which it can be destroyed by the harsh realities of the world. Finally, water is used in the novel as a symbol of renewal. After the tragedy of Sophie Mol's death, the river is no longer a place of freedom and joy for the twins. However, by the end of the novel, the river is once again a place of renewal and hope. The twins return to the river, and in doing so, they find a sense of closure and renewal. Water serves as a symbol of the possibility of starting anew, of finding hope and freedom even in the face of tragedy and loss.

Water as a Symbol of Entrapment

While water is used to symbolize freedom in *The God of Small Things*, it also serves as a symbol of entrapment. The river that runs through the novel is a site of violence and oppression, and it is used by the characters in the novel to exert control over others. For example, the police use the river to intimidate and torture the workers at the nearby factory. Similarly, Ammu, the children's mother, feels trapped by her surroundings and by her own desires. Her love for Velutha, a worker at the factory, is seen as a threat to the social order, and her attempts to escape her situation are met with violence and resistance. One of the most significant examples of water as a symbol of entrapment is the character of Ammu, the mother of the main protagonists, Estha and Rahel. Ammu's desire for love and intimacy with Velutha, a lower-caste carpenter, is seen as a threat to the rigid caste system that governs the society in which they live. The lovers' secret rendezvous by the river are described as moments of freedom and escape, but ultimately, their forbidden love is doomed to end in tragedy. The river that once symbolized their love and freedom becomes the site of Velutha's brutal murder, a stark reminder of the consequences of defying societal norms.

Water is also used to symbolize the entrapment of women in traditional gender roles. The character of Baby Kochamma, Ammu's aunt, is trapped in a life of servitude and unrequited love due to societal expectations of women. She spends her days obsessing over Father Mulligan, a Catholic priest who represents an idealized form of masculinity, but she is never able to act on her desires. Her unrequited love is symbolized by her constant need to bathe in the river, a futile attempt to cleanse herself of her unfulfilled desires.

Finally, water is used to symbolize the loss of innocence in the novel. The tragic events that occur by the river ultimately destroy the lives of the main characters, leading to a loss of innocence and a bleak future. The river, which initially represented freedom and possibility, ultimately becomes a symbol of the characters' entrapment and destruction.

The Dual Symbolism of Water

In *The God of Small Things*, water is a symbol of both freedom and entrapment, and its dual symbolism reflects the complex social and political issues that the novel explores. Water is a powerful force that can both liberate and oppress, and the characters in the novel are caught between these two extremes. For Estha and Rahel, the river is a place of freedom and escape, but it is also a site of danger and violence. Similarly, for Ammu, water represents both the possibility of love and the threat of punishment.

The motif of rain is also used to represent the dual symbolism of water in the novel. The monsoon rains bring relief from the scorching heat and provide sustenance for the crops, representing the hope for a better life. However, the same rains also lead to flooding and destruction, symbolizing the unpredictable and destructive nature of life. Similarly, the rain that falls on Ammu and Velutha during their brief moment of happiness represents their freedom and escape from the societal norms that bind them. However, this freedom is short-lived, as they are punished severely for their transgressions.

II. CONCLUSION

In *The God of Small Things*, water is a powerful symbol that conveys both positive and negative aspects of the characters' lives. The novel uses water to explore themes of social inequality, forbidden love, and the loss of innocence, and its dual symbolism reflects the complex social and political issues that the novel engages with. The river that runs through the novel is a reminder of the power of nature and the ways in which it can be used to both liberate and oppress. The extensive use of water symbolism by Arundhati Roy serves to highlight the themes of social inequality, forbidden love, and the loss of innocence. Through her use of water as a symbol, Roy creates a richly layered narrative that is both engaging and thought-provoking. The river Meenachal serves as a powerful metaphor for the divide between the rich and poor, while the forbidden love between Ammu and Velutha is represented through the freedom and passion of the river. Finally, the loss of innocence is explored through the tragic events that take place at the river bank. Overall, Roy's use of water symbolism adds depth and complexity to the novel, making it a timeless classic that will continue to resonate with readers for generations to come.

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