Conclusion

This thesis explores non-fictional works of Arundhati Roy and Pankaj Mishra in the light of trans-disciplinary idea of justice to evidence that much of their writings can be viewed as a substantive contribution to the discourse of justice. There may be other motifs/tropes in their work; nonetheless, it may be arguably claimed that none is as preponderant as the need of more just a world. Even though it is truer of Roy’s essays; yet Mishra’s later work falls in the same category as it seeks justice in the world.

The introduction offers a preliminary overview of the present thesis. It earmarks the terminology necessary to understand the notion of justice and its implications. It argues the normative need of attribution of freedom, equality and a measure of rationality to human beings so that they can be moral agents in societies while pursuing their own interests in life. Through such a pursuit a plethora of social institutions develop which can be analysed whether they carry biases or exhibit equipoise. Thereafter, a brief history of notion of justice has also been culled from diverse sources in the introduction. Many names associated with idea of justice from Socrates to Amartya Sen figure here even though briefly. The introduction also provides brief biographical notes and comprehensive literature review of criticism available on Roy and Mishra. The last section outlines briefly the chapter plan.

The first chapter “Literature and Idea of Justice” selects nearly a third of the total of the essays by Roy and Mishra particularly dealing with the discourse of justice. Most of the essays studied here have a pan-international trajectory and I have employed variety of philosophical tools from history of justice and the contemporary history to argue about the presence of discourse of justice. Counterarguments too have been included wherever necessary. Roy’s essays dealing with nuclear weapons, development strategies such as big-dams, terrorism and wars on terrorism and corporate globalization in capitalistic vein have been closely studied in this chapter to demonstrate how these are related to the idea of justice.
Mishra’s essays concerning Indian subcontinent such as on Kashmir or on elections in Allahabad have been studied from the perspective of justice. His book, *From the Ruins of Empire* dealing with colonial excesses of the West, varieties of Asian responses, and how all these altered Asia and its people’s lives has also been undertaken for analysis. The purpose is to show how Mishra delineates diverse dimensions of justice through analysing individual stories and historical and literary materials revealing the underside of these Asian societies.

The idea of democracy which is intrinsically related with moral self-rule and justice has also been dealt with to have played important part in select essays by Roy and Mishra. This aspect of justice, as it comes to fruition in democracy, has been discussed in the second chapter on “Literature, Democratic Practices, and Delivery of Justice” of this thesis. Roy’s essays examined herein expose casteist and religious attitudes as these are antithetical to the spirit of democracy and thus to the ideas of equality and fairness. Her essays on media and developmental paradigm vis-à-vis indigenous peoples/Adivasis evidencing how these themes explain flaws of democracy in India have been analysed in detail. Mishra’s *Butter Chicken in Ludhiana* has been analysed to show how it represents small-town India, which is yet to align its attitudes to those required by a democracy. Ingrained hierarchies and power politics, rather than a sense of equality and shared humanity are also visible in Nepal, Tibet, China and some of its neighbours. Mishra’s several essays on these regions have been viewed from the perspective of democracy and its urgent need. His essays on China contained in *A Great Clamour* allow seeing deficit of democracy and problems of ideology; essays on Indonesia allow seeing interesting and edifying parallels with Indian political conditions; and those on Japan query culmination of economic wealth and how it relates to democratic culture in a society.

Third chapter “Canon, Genre and Political Writer” argues that these writers’ non-fictional corpus has been treated with a bias that can largely be attributed to two factors—first
being nature of the work as it dealt with political issues of contemporary world which implies that literature keeps a noticeable distance from politics of the day; and second is the genre called essay itself which is non-fictional and is somehow not considered central to literature, which accords this hallowed status to more privileged genres viz. novel, poetry and drama. The chapter offers evidence to denounce this bias of canon-forming forces against Roy and Mishra with a view to argue that contemporary times warrant a greater need of non-fictional genres compared to conventionally preferred ones.

The last chapter, “Towards Defining the Role of a Writer in Society” examines remainder of Roy and Mishra’s non-fictional writings to exemplify how their work contributes to the ideas that help ascertain the role of writers in any society. This issue is also pertinent to the overarching theme of justice because writers who perpetuate existing biases/prejudices and are parochial or myopic in their concerns, and who systematically ignore central issues of justice/injustices, are rarely remembered by the posterity. The bulk of this chapter deals with Mishra’s essays in the form of extended reviews and articles on hundreds of books as an engaged literary critic with a view to reflect on writers and their craft.

Humanity has ever aspired for justice to prevail in all walks of life. Other virtues like order and honour lose meaning in the absence of justice. Honour without justice, for instance, is a form of barbarism in which one person’s honour needlessly demands other’s submission and sometimes even life. Order without justice is tyrannical. For many, order comes prior to justice but justice is a necessary pivot to order. Tyranny is a harsh word ringing with loud clanging of chains so is order without justice. Conversely justice without order is an improbability because the former alone can ensure and provide the latter. In fact, the universe comprising an amazing system of galaxies, stars, and planets is called cosmos because it has an order. Human world is largely devoid of that order as it lacks minimal justice. For instance, as C. Wright Mills puts it, as long as family remains a unit where women are treated
as “darling little slaves,” marriage, even the best of them, cannot provide “private solution” to a larger social issue of gender injustice leading to erosion of institution of family.

Ever since human beings started to use language as symbols, the idea of justice has been crucial to their worldview, which is socio-cultural and political rather than psychological. The probable genesis of a sense of justice in people may be a) proportional nature of cause and effect in the world, b) felt and shared humanity, c) experiential reality of equality among individuals in any species, d) human rationality that seeks to justify actions as best as it can. Usual suspects that waylay this sense and push human beings to commit injustice are an almost primitive instinct of hoarding power, influence and wealth beyond one’s due/need.

The history of idea of justice in the western world is a vast and specialized subject. Starting with Plato’s Republic justice gained currency in the modern world with Thomas Hobbes and John Locke who provided political-theoretical frameworks for social organization based on mutual agreements among people. A unique tradition of social contract in which people implicitly/explicitly arrive at a political arrangement to reduce strife in absence of any authority begins with them. Hobbes’ idea of sovereign with absolute power of arbitration and law-making, though unmitigated and harsh, is a step towards devolution and legitimacy derived from the social contract.

Immanuel Kant changes the terrain of justice by arguing for absolute equality of human beings. He also postulates freedom and rationality as starting points to think about human society to further formulate categorical imperatives which help understand near-universal implications of personal opinions and convictions. Paradoxically, Kant’s philosophy leads to legitimacy of coercive state and, by inference, of order prior to justice. Later scholars of Kant try to assuage authoritarian streak in Kant’s conception of justice wherein all opposition to the state is contrary to justice. Marx contributed indirectly to justice
even though directly he is sceptical of the whole idea because it is too close to the bourgeois idea of rights, which manifests in private property rights. His contribution to theory of justice largely comes through proposition of secular nature of the world and laying it bare as a non-divine existence. His efforts to view history in material terms, and to view society as an increasingly industrial one like that of Europe, have lastingly radicalized the discourse of justice. It is not surprising that justice is a pivotal concept for all the left leaning people despite the fact that Marx himself writes little about it.

Later twentieth century reinvigorates the debate on justice when John Rawls writes *A Theory of Justice* (1971) and keeps sharpening its contents until his death in 2002. His is a libertarian stance where social institutions are so devised as to allow equal liberty for all. Inequalities are justified only so far as they benefit the poorest the most. He abandons the correlation of merit with justice because he thinks that traits like hard-work are arbitrary from moral perspective because they are strongly influenced by environment.

Amartya Sen’s *The Idea of Justice* (2009) responds to the whole traditional discourse on justice in general, to Rawls’ *Theory* in particular. Sen’s commonsensical arguments bring justice out of the clutches of pure theory to the real world where lives are deeply altered by what and how is thought about justice. He also finds that the whole effort to devise a society and its institutions towards some ideal is misdirected because even if successful the effort will only be so far laudable as to make people behave according to that ideal of justice. Instead Sen focuses on removable injustices, why they exist and how can they be removed. He unravels systemic biases that arise due to parochial or faulty reasoning in individuals and groups.

Thus, Sen’s ideas on justice have direct affinity with literary non-fiction of Roy and Mishra who have persistently highlighted the large scale removable injustices in world that have been ruining lives on daily and hourly basis. This is how Roy and Mishra’s non-fiction
can be seen as a voluble contribution from literature towards the discourse of justice in the world.

The analyses of Roy’s non-fictional work starts with her essay on nuclear tests conducted by India and Pakistan. The piling up of nuclear capabilities across the globe is an outstanding instance of faulty priorities in which the world that needs more food and drinking water is told that it requires nuclear weapons more urgently. Existence of nuclear weapons can never be justified because they create an environment of fear when not used, and of total destruction when used. With ample textual evidence it has been argued that possession of nuclear weapons for any country, especially two poorest of the countries namely India and Pakistan, is not merely ineptitude and hubris but dangerous as well as antithetical to the demands of justice. None of the major criteria of justice (i.e. based on rights, merits or needs) warrants nuclearization. One can arguably claim that justice precludes possession of nuclear weapons by nation states.

Roy’s essays also expose paradigms of what is called ‘development’ across the globe. These paradigms tend to selectively heed certain interest groups and overlook others. The arguments are based on political philosophy where the role of the state is as keeper of the trust of people and as custodian of their common resources. If these common resources are given away to private companies leaving dependent populations in conditions of want and in throes of suffering, it is a travesty of justice. This process has been going on for quite some time now and the result is an unnerving inequality wherein, to put a number on it, top 62 people own more wealth than half of the poorest population of the planet. Roy’s contribution, if any, is using skills that usually employed in literature to create narratives that highlight a tectonic shift in distribution of wealth of societies in fewer and fewer hands.

Roy’s essays on the aftermath of 9/11 deal with the phenomenon called terrorism and counter-terrorism. She claims that to act in the way the USA and its allies did in Afghanistan
and Iraq, is counterproductive. Such events need broad-based, multipronged analyses and neither ethics nor pragmatism allows a dragooning of societies into dangerous warfare out of sheer vengeance. The spectre of Islamic State is largely the consequence of that warfare in Iraq. There are too many dimensions to these events and it is glib to claim that what Roy wrote on the events is the last word; nevertheless, she raises important questions, tries to answer them, and also invites debates with a view to enhance our understanding of contemporary curve of human history. She thus exhorts the agents (countries and their institutions) involved in these processes to be cautious and avoid a large scale derailing, curtailing and extinguishing of human life. To pare down the rhetoric of justice to bare facts in such international conflicts is also a move towards ensuring justice.

The ideology of capitalism envisions an economic structure based on tenets of level-playing-field/fair competition unleashing human potential leading to individual success and growth in overall social wealth. Though fundamentals of capitalism are far more reasonable; its consequences are horrifying, particularly for the environment. Roy in her essays on capitalism writes that because capitalism is not what it claims to be, its processes are exactly opposite as the playing field is biased and there is hardly any real competition. This is the key to understand the problem of accumulation of wealth in very few hands. Roy’s counter-narrative to capitalism unravels those opaque and nefarious parts of processes and institutions that have led to ethically unacceptable inequality.

Roy’s India-centric non-fictional writings enquire and complaint about nascent democracy, its promises, failures and at times these writings suggest ways of improving things. According to her understanding, the theory and reality of caste is a moral and intellectual challenge to the modern idea of democracy. In fact, caste sabotages ideas of justice and democracy. Caste is a recurring ugly truth of Indian society and some of Roy’s choicest diatribe is directed at its consequences. She marshals a lot of empirical evidence and
via using her rhetorical powers, deploys the arguments strengthened by authentic data to show that not only caste acts as a great wedge between communities and people, it also allocates social benefits and burdens in blatantly biased ways. The practice suits beneficiary groups and is primarily kept alive by people of those groups. It also surfaces in myriad forms of violence (mainly against so-called low caste people) which is inimical to the idea of democracy and justice.

Communalism too, Roy argues, is anathema to the idea of democracy because it segregates people on religious lines thereby rendering fundamentals of equality negated or obliterated. Like caste, communalism also encourages people to resort to violence by employing private and faulty reasoning to settle issues that otherwise can be resolved by public/open reasoning and dialogue. In this way, democracy constantly keeps threatening to become a vile majoritarianism, or more regrettably, a form of religious fascism. Both caste and communal problems can be viewed to emanate from narrow perceptions of identity, which actually is a fluid and complex matrix of roles and duties.

A society that seethes with the suppressed discontentment due to several reasons such as dire poverty, lack of education and opportunities, caste and communal divide, and relentlessly self-seeking interest groups that misappropriate social resources is likely to remain a cauldron of inequities. In such a society, role of media as a stern watchdog and critical analyst is necessary so that people remain informed and alert about issues and problems that need to be collectively addressed. Critiquing media, Roy points out that it has partly relinquished its obligation in a democracy to remain fair and free. From perspective of democracy and justice, Roy’s indictment of media is based on the latter’s failure to adhere to its own rudimentary principles. The overall gist of her critique underscores media’s changing role and modes (her analogy of buffalo and the bees for old and the new media respectively is
remarkable) and how a crisis fetish in media overlooks structural and larger injustices of an incipient democracy.

Though processes of modernity have rendered older ways of life marginalized everywhere, yet indigenous people in India have faced a relatively harsher fate in the hands of the potent state. Roy ardently argues against the conditions imposed on the tribal people of India largely because they live in jungles where it is now being discovered that minerals worth trillions of dollars lie buried beneath the earth. Roy thus takes up cudgels with matters pertaining to Adivasis as her essays powerfully portray their plight before the world.

Pankaj Mishra’s *Butter Chicken in Ludhiana* is a near-empirical evidence of how Indian democracy works and how much/little ideals of democracy have penetrated in the collective psyche of Indians. All forms of impediments to democracy and justice are flagrantly on show through this book viz. casteism, communalism, violence, corruption, dysfunctional institutions, social evils, middle-class apathy, nascent chauvinism and jingoism, remains of feudal values, etc. The same findings are also conspicuous in his *Temptations of the West* wherein Mishra covers a larger south-Asian territory including Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tibet and Nepal. While Indian travels reveal a distressing poverty but some hopes to recover from it; in Pakistan and Afghanistan hope to ameliorate it is rarer as distress caused by it is larger and deeper.

All these facts about these places can be seen as outcomes and processes. They accumulate, intersect and become causes and effects in turns to create a whole complex reality. This reality is not inevitable and human lives need not become what they have. The antidote to this reality is a combative awareness, rather than a sense of fatigue or resignation, that allows people and institutions in these places to respond better to the demands of justice. Mishra’s essays emphasise need of that form of awareness which calls forth a more humane
and compassionate participation in the process of uplifting human lives. These essays above all demand more justice and democracy in the world.

Mishra’s major contribution to discourse of justice is his book, *From the Ruins of Empire* because it argues how western imperialism has shaped colonial peoples and how, even though the phenomenon has ended, its impacts are still visible in the world. The way Roy finds capitalism forcing itself into the older societies and changing their patterns of life, Mishra too shows consequences of western colonial excursions still unfolding and unpleasantly so. In a substantial way, Mishra diagnoses that some of the major issues in the subjugated societies of Asia and Africa are results of historical injustices caused by nefarious western imperial designs. Mishra emphasises the crucial roles played by Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838-97), Liang Qichao (1873-1929) and Rabindranath Tagore (1862-1941) as individuals in responding to colonialism and its immoral excesses with intellectual ingenuity and deep commitment. He leaves little doubt for the readers that contemporary problems of the world—such as religious fundamentalism, hardening of nationalistic sentiments, race for power through armaments and wealth—have an umbilical relationship with history of undue dominance by the west.

Mishra’s take on such countries that are non-democratic, or struggling to install democracy also reasserts his unflinching commitment to ideals of democratic spirit. His travels and commentary on Nepal, Tibet and China stress need of democracy for people of these countries. His method of investigations in these societies is via reading key texts, and meeting with and talking to diverse people there. Though Roy employs this method less often, Mishra’s frequent travels into these lands reveal that everywhere people face same kinds of problems.

Justice and democracy require a wide-gazed, multi-pronged vision to look at a situation in particular and the world in general. Mishra’s excursions into and narratives culled
from communist/capitalist China also point out how ideologies work against true spirit of
democracy and justice, and how they tend to simplify and tilt history to privilege a particular
viewpoint at the cost of suppressing the others, usually significant ones. Thus, ideologies are
faulty and dangerous ways to understand the world, and to envision a future based on such a
faulty understanding is to abrogate true spirit of democracy and justice.

One important finding of this study is that Roy and Mishra’s non-fictional corpus
retains a peripheral existence in canons of literature that are dominated by traditional genres
like novel, poetry, drama. Critical analyses of their essays reveal that they have not received
due recognition owing to their overtly political nature and also on account of genre politics in
literary canon. In Roy’s case, publication of such standing as Oxford, Permanent Black and
Sahitya Akademi have shown to harbour an uncharitable and unjustified bias. Even though
Mishra is feted as an important non-fiction writer in the western world but despite his
hundreds of essays on literature and politics in few of the best journals and magazines, he
barely finds mention as a writer in incipient Indian canon of literature in English.

Apart from generic hierarchies in the literary arena, their work is reflexively ignored
by literary canon because of its contrarian and confrontational nature. To view the
contemporary world and to overlook the presence of the following is morally unjustified:
heart-breaking poverty amidst an obscene richness; terror and equally horrible counter-terror;
hierarchies in the minds of people based on caste, colour, religion, gender, education,
location, and wealth; along with wars among ideologies and their human and environmental
costs.

A writer who has been accorded aesthetic autonomy and freedom is also a citizen of
the society who makes certain choices through her/his writings. These choices lend
themselves to analyses to ascertain as to whether there are ingrained and systematic biases
and prejudices in the mind of the writer that have tinted/tainted the work. The extended
analyses of this kind have been part of the critic’s profession. In Mishra’s essays, this aspect is amply manifest, whereas in Roy’s, only marginally but eloquently. This allows us to clearly determine the role of writers in a society. Do they propagate popular prejudices or provide necessary correction in the discourse, or speak from unscrutinized or insufficiently weighed subjective positions? Do they side with the few or many, and on what rationale? Do they distrust and keep distance from power, question it, particularly when it tends to be unscrupulous? These are some of the questions that help situate a writer and his/her work. A more rough-and-ready tool for appraisal could be framed on the basis of twin virtues of power and justice. The artists and works that help bridge the gap between them, without being ponderous and propagandist may well be called to come closest to fulfilling role of writers in the world.

Wordsworth’s famous line, “The World is too much with us,” is getting more relevant with each passing day in today’s globalizing world. No event, people, or monument of history could be scooped out and analysed without disturbing the whole seedbed. This complexity is unprecedented and needs innovative literary strategies to stay relevant in a way that helps unravel some of that complexity. Only then the vision of more just a world could be accomplished. It could be a slow and arduous process; nevertheless, it is germane to our existence in contemporary scenario. Roy and Mishra’s non-fictional corpus points to this tendency, and it can be safely argued that such works powerfully arrest our attention via delineating discourses of justice through hitherto marginalized genre of essay.

Summing up, justice is a stringent virtue which resists compromises, as far as it can, and insists on its demands. This is why non-fictional works of Roy and Mishra are tinged with pungency and pave ways to debate about the way the world is being configured, viewed and run. Both these writers are still active professionally and continue to demand our attention through ever-fresh perspectives about justice in today’s fast changing world. Both
Mishra and Roy have announced new books entitled *The Age of Anger: A History of the Present* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* respectively. Roy thus has returned back to writing novel whereas Mishra seems to continue his broad-ranged intellectual analyses in the forthcoming book where newer forms of language and intelligence is required to understand the contemporary world wherein ideologies of left, right and centre have short-circuited themselves thereby rendering the current assumptions and vocabulary largely useless (“Welcome”). Mishra’s book certainly pursues discourse on justice further, whereas Roy’s may or may not proceed in the same vein.