CHAPTER V
VOICES – REMEMBERED, ACQUIRED AND ASSERTED

Margaret Atwood writes in *Survival: a Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*. ‘Literature is not only a mirror, it is also a map, a geography of the mind’. Just as images and symbols acquire a different tone when used by a woman writer, the authorial voice also reveals different characteristics, a different geography of the mind. The reason behind this, as underscored by Elaine Showalter in her essay ‘A Criticism of Our Own: Autonomy and Assimilation in Afro-American and Feminist Literary Theory’ is that subject matter and its treatment is not only culture-determined but also gender-determined. It is becoming increasingly evident that the specifics of sex are also meaningful aspects of creative activity as they determine the relationship between experience and art. The Female Aesthetic, evolved during the early years of the women’s liberation movement maintained that women’s writing expressed a distinct female consciousness and constituted a unique and coherent literary tradition. The actualities of a woman’s world seep into imagination and color the fabric of expression. Imagination cannot be genderless. Rather a woman writer who denied her female identity restricted or even crippled her art.

For long, the woman writer has been perceived as ‘a gap or a silence, the invisible and unheard sex’ in the ‘psycholinguistic world structured by father-son resemblance and the primacy of male logic’ (Showalter). The thought processes of male-dominated thinking are described as phallocentrism and the language shaped by that ideology is described as phallogocentrism. Patriarchy has given a firm but arbitrary direction to human language. Eventually, when a woman does speak and breaks the silence, she uses the paternal language. That is why writers like Cora Kaplan have felt that all their narrative or reflexive writing, including letters and diaries, are ‘haunted by the language of others’. It is as if women speak from the margins of language. The problem of women writing being marginal is such a fact that makes many a writer like Shashi Deshpande reluctant to don the mantle of a woman writer.
Writing by women involves them in complex moments that are simultaneously resistant and submissive to the dominant phallogocentrism. It is through the framework of the paternal language that a woman writer shapes her craft and yet the very act of writing involves defiance as a component. Shashi Deshpande in her interview in *Tense Past, Tense Present* asserts the need to have a different language in order to relate the women-specific experiences. Language should be used as a tool for constructing a different reality by initiating different forms of its use. It is in seizing and refashioning the patriarchal language that the ‘silenced’ voice can be heard. Language can be reformed from the margins by what Wilson Harris calls an ‘infinite rehearsal’ which allows it to erode its own biases and continually regenerate itself by being molded by reality (28).

Similarly, a narrative strategy also needs to be shaped up in order to express fully the imagination of the woman writer. Jasbir Jain in her article ‘Gender and Narrative Strategy’ succinctly sums up: ‘when the experience which is being narrated moves against the current, is unconventional or unusual, is radical in its standpoint, or displays a strength which may be best muted for the time being, strategy is resorted to.’ ‘Women must write their bodies’ (Cixous 245), must put themselves into the text by reconstructing, re-visioning the body as a site of difference by a process of liberation from static metaphors.

In *Toward a Feminist Aesthetic* (1978) Julia Penelope Stanley and Susan J. Wolfe (Robbins) proposed that ‘the unique perceptions and interpretations of women require a literary style that reflects, captures and embodies the quality of our thought’, a ‘discursive, conjunctive style instead of the complex, subordinating, linear style of classification and distinction’ (Showalter). Dwivedi in *Arundhati Roy’s Fictional World* endorses by adding: ‘The preoccupation with coherent meanings and a unified subject or struggle for unity is a male characteristic while the feminine characteristics are marked by plurality and diversity. The linear narrative is further fractured by the random, incoherent, and unresolvable extemporaneous discourse of the narrator’ (78).

The language of women is ‘interruptive’, avers Rukmini Bhaya Nair (Joseph 147). It has an open ended structure which ‘allows a space for the other’. It breaks the
‘ad infinitum narrative structure of the patriarchal monologue’. Nair further goes on to say that there is ‘tremendous plenitude’ in the speech of women, which has been traditionally dismissed as childlike, untutored, and naïve but which is ‘actually full of tremendous sophistication’ and creeps into literature by women and gives it its unique stamp.

The difference that emerges is not a difference of form. One cannot simply get away by saying that women write about internal life while men write about the external; or that men write about a multitude of characters and women about solitary figures. Since all writers borrow from their own life in way or the other, the characters around which the narrative revolves would also reveal feminist leanings and would be a way to voice their concerns about the intricacies of a woman’s world. The difference, therefore, lies in perspective; in the responses of women to, quoting Jasbir Jain, ‘the shadows which they alone can see, and the anguish they alone can feel’. Jain further says in her essay ‘Gender and Narrative Strategy’: ‘it makes a lot of difference if you are, like Rochester, able to command power and obedience, or like Jane hidden away in a dark corner and treated as absent even when present. In order to be heard one has to find a voice, in order to be seen one has to light the dark corners.’

The task of lighting up the dark corners is not an easy one, especially for the Indian women writers writing in English. In his essay “Imagination and the ‘Other’: Postmodern Feminist Poetics and Indo-Anglian Fiction”, Manjit Inder Singh writes: ‘both the women and the post colonial speak from the margins of language.’ Since they are doubly ‘other’, they have a double problem on their hands. Not only do they have to step out of the framework defined by men and by patriarchal values, they also have to identify and create a tradition of their own which is distanced and different from the imperial influences and the whole packet of complexes related to them.

Not only this, the Indian woman writer also struggles with the image of woman in spiritual literature and legends that is in total contrast with the actual existing reality, especially in the contemporary society. Even though the spiritual texts reverse the western binary pair of father-mother by referring to it as mata-pita, amma-
appa; even though marriage is not looked upon as a subordination of one to the other but the common pursuit of an elevating 'dharma'; even though women are deified and apotheosized in legends and myths; the ground realities remain starkly different. To borrow a phrase from Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction,* ‘in our world where true chaos of things has at last been realized, only a technique that seems to leave characters genuinely free to face that chaos is tolerable’ (5). The Indian woman struggles to free herself from this framework as well and create a narrative strategy that would let her voice her present concerns rather than wallowing in mythical archetypes.

Rukmini Bhaya Nair considers the capacity to tell joint stories, to quickly make mind jumps as ‘basic intellectual tools’ available to the woman writer due to the features that are inherent in women’s speech—‘more comparators, more descriptors, more exclamations, more of everything, more silence, reformulations…’(Joseph 151). This technique, this ‘gossipy’ mode of narration comes naturally to the women writers even though, according to Nair, it is not peculiar to just the females. Since literature is recreation of the past, this recreation from multiple points of view allows the realistic surface and the psychic interior to meet and restructure the past.

The mixing of the tense form is also a strategy used to fracture the patriarchal construct. Memory of the past in some way or the other is used as an important narrative technique. The protagonist, in order to grow towards harmony and in order to appraise the self, needs to step out of oneself. One of the ways of doing this is by going through the processes of recollecting the past.

Memory also helps unfold the world of fantasy—again a conscious narrative technique. The juxtaposition of the past and the present; of the alternate worlds of fantasy and reality help to bring into focus relationships and the actual position of the protagonist. Fantasy allows an extension of the self and becomes a survival strategy; but when indulged in by the writer and not the character, it signifies the desire to cross the boundaries. Freud writes in his essay, ‘The Relation of the Poet to Daydreaming’ (as quoted by Bergler in *The Writer and Psychanalysis*): ‘The driving powers behind fantasies are unsatisfied wishes; every separate phantasy contains the fulfillment of
the wish and improves on unsatisfactory reality’ (8-9). According to Freud, some actual experience that made a strong impression on the writer had stirred up a memory of an earlier experience, generally belonging to childhood, which then arouses a wish that finds fulfillment in the work in question. Those possibilities of destiny that were not fulfilled become the subject matter for the artist. Just as in the dream, creative art is a means of presenting as reality those possibilities in one’s own character or fate that remained concealed. What the fate of the artist might have been now becomes the fate of one of his fictitious characters, be it a happy or unhappy one.

Artistic creation, in its deepest roots, has its origins in suffering; it is conditioned by conflict from within, which the artist cannot gain control of by normal means. An artist creates by giving artistic form to the unconscious fantasies which, through the process of repression, have become unpleasurable, but which, in art, find and retain a more sublime method of gratification and pleasure.

Anamika, an Indian writer who writes in Hindi hints at another technique resorted to by women writers. According to her, ‘women internalize more... women have a knack of making much of small things and trivializing big ones’ (Joseph 199). Going over the same ground repeatedly has also been found to be a woman writer-specific technique. Women also use body language when they write fiction. The actions of the characters are not simply events or happenings; they indicate the state of mind—withdrawal, rebellion, or some similar stance.

The figure of the mother looms large on the artistic horizon of the woman writer. Cixous rather exhorts the woman writers to write of the maternal body and , Julia Kristeva points out the importance of motherhood in feminine creation. Maternity, according to her, is the chief indicator of feminine difference and holds a great potential, hence the libido must be expressed in terms of maternity. A woman is ‘never far from the mother’ and desires to return to her, to repossess her and be repossessed by her and relive the equation that she once shared with her. For many feminists, it is in the pre-patriarchal, pre-oedipal relationship of mothers and daughters that a feminine language might seem to be grounded. In the Indian context, however, one of the paradoxes that have occupied Indian feminism is that maternity.
traditionally a source of symbolic power, does not empower the mother. The mother figure then generally occupies a position of no-position. In fiction representing childhood, such a mother-figure becomes the extension of the lack of any position of the child too. The Indian woman writer strives to arrive at and represent and foreground the contemporary truth of her position through her mother against the backdrop of myths and legends. The re-invention of the child takes place through this re-inventing the mother. According to Jasbir Jain in her article ‘Gender and Narrative Strategy’, even the ending of the novel is a narrative strategy. In keeping with the incoherent, non-linear structure of the rest of the narrative even the end is not “the logical conclusion of a tale as the ordering of the plot would lead us to believe. The way a novel ends is a statement on the self-on its ability or inability to survive, specially when the ‘self’ is a woman cornered in a world which does not provide for herself—expression.”

Despite the differences between male and female writing, the fact, as underlined by Rukmini Bhaya Nair, is that ‘writing is not just sociological and women are not just sociological objects’ (Joseph 153). Essentially, despite an urge to subvert the patriarchal literary form, literature remains charged by a genuine urge for expression. Helen Cixous’ rendition of what the woman writer wants to say all along is this:

I overflow; my desires have invented new desires; my body knows unheard-of-songs. [. . .] I could burst—burst with forms much more beautiful than those which are put up in frames and sold for a stinking fortune. (260)

Writing is a form of pleasure and a form of giving pleasure. Even though the woman wants to go beyond these forms in frames and ‘place the binaries in a relationship with patterns that are more subtle and perhaps have a different kind of morality attached to them’ (Joseph 153), the basic altruistic literary impulse of giving pleasure to the reader, and form to the ‘luminous torrents’ of thought never leaves the artist. However, this ‘pleasure’ principle is also infused with certain binary oppositions. The woman writer wants to create patterns that matter in culture,
specially goaded by the fact that men have had the prerogative to create ‘beautiful, seductive things within patriarchies’ so that every form that ‘we really value in culture is, in a way, a form imbued with maleness down the ages’ (Joseph 150).

The representation of childhood in writing by women then, is bound to have a different stamp. The narrative techniques, including the experiments with language, would definitely bring in uniqueness to the portrayal of children. It would be erroneous to think that all these factors have an equal impact on all writing by women, e.g. Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai use memory as a technique as does Roy in their respective works. In both Desai and Deshpande, memory serves the purpose of delineating the present. Roy resorts to memory just as one would air the house, throw open all the doors and windows, let out all the junk and stale air in order to begin living afresh. Memory also serves the purpose of fracturing the linear narrative in these three novels by the constant, to-and-fro movement of the past and the present, thereby subverting the patriarchal construct. While The God of Small Things moves from adulthood to childhood and vice-versa with the alacrity of a flash of memory, That Long Silence recollects the past, which consists of both childhood and adulthood, in not-so-tranquil moments snatched out of the routine. Nanda Kaul’s unpleasant past life sometimes gets jumbled up with impossible fantasies, thereby pointing at Nanda Kaul’s need for a survival strategy, bringing into focus her actual position in the present. Bunty and Shakun also revisit their past, broadly to see what went wrong, especially in Shakun’s case. Bunty spills the details from his past with a child-like innocence, giving the reader a better understanding.

The stream-of-consciousness technique used in all the four novels reflects the inner world of the protagonists more than the action. The small, seemingly trivial details: the world of pots and pans, of cooking and cleaning as in That Long Silence: the birds, crickets and even knick-knacks like the statue of Buddha in the house in Fire on the Mountain; the toys, the drawings, tables and almirahs in Aap ka Bunty; and moths, soft drinks and welcome cakes as in The God of Small Things—are made much of and hold great significance in the lives of the protagonists in these writings by women. Alternately, the Communist Revolution, though a movement of huge
proportions in Kerela, serves just the purpose of underscoring further the dichotomies of Roy’s fictional world.

Literature does retain its individual stamp, leaving the author to try all the various permutations and combinations that are available and arrive at the one that suits the purpose, besides the purpose of giving pleasure, which all the four novels amply do. For example, the purpose in *Aap ka Bunty* is didactic, which is to highlight the impact of divorce on all the people involved. The author, Mannu Bhandari takes over the role of an objective observer and recedes into the background for most of the time while the characters speak for themselves.

The impression that the author wants to convey is that of a responsible chronicler of the contemporary society, delving into the psychological implications of the sociological and behavioral patterns. In order to do it faithfully, Mannu Bhandari has tried to see the world from various points of view, literally stepping into one shoe after the other. The narration is, interestingly, not first person but third person universal observer. It is not only the action but also even a majority of dialogues that are presented this way even though the first person is also resorted to at times. The technique succeeds in bringing out the simultaneously occurring inner and outer worlds of the characters.

The ‘I’ of the child is life-like in the sense of having ‘inadequate access to necessary information’ (Booth 150). However, despite the stream of consciousness technique, it is clear that Bhandari seeks to paint a picture that would shake the reader and force him/her to take notice of the situation in which any child with circumstances similar to Bunty could find itself. The quick succession of one difficult situation after the other leading to further isolation, unredeemed by any happy incident, does seem contrived at times and cannot always be justified by a child’s tendency towards self pity. All the same, the images of Bunty’s suffering remain freshly imprinted, reminding the reader of the dire consequences of tampering with some sacrosanct social institutions.

Mannu Bhandari has created *Aap Ka Bunty* and her presentation of the situation and characters is based on her experiences and her association with similar
characters, being a witness to the dilemma and isolation of several Bunty-like characters. But the factor that made her choose Bunty as the central character, as per the introduction to the book, was that Bunty has suffered rejection and is a useless, ignored entity in the new set up created separately by his parents for their own convenience. Bhandari speaks for herself as a feminist when she says that a novelist is attracted to make those characters central to his/her work that are relegated to be nameless entities of the society; that are marginalized. The author in Aap ka Bunty betrays her leanings also by dealing with the inner world of the mother and the child. Moreover, the telling of the linked, joint story of the mother and the child is in keeping with the feminist narrative.

Both Shakun and Bunty share the same world and the milieu. Their stories are linked because of their linked destinies; because of the bond of the umbilical cord and because of the bond of oppression. Despite all this, there occurs a distancing between the two. Their inner worlds hold the key to this distancing. Bhandari focuses on the ups and downs in the mother-child relationship, illustrating vividly for the reader the child logic and the adult perception through the ‘dialogue’ which Bunty and Shakun keep on having with themselves. The question of her own loneliness and the anxiety for Bunty’s future bothers Shakun. These questions milling over in her mind are actually echoes of the societal pressures that she feels mounting on herself. She grapples within herself with the problems that external agencies in the shape of acquaintances and relatives pose at her. It is difficult for Shakun to snap the umbilical cord joining her with her child. The child shares a bond of love with his mother. A peep into his inner world reveals that a majority of his thoughts center on his mother, even though the child has his share of anxieties. The subsequent distancing between the mother and the child is ironical as well as sad and indicates the world-view of the writer.

Shashi Deshpande defines her own brand of feminism: ‘it was with the articulation of all that had been in me through the years that I came to feminism, to a consciousness of myself as a feminist … my idea of feminism came to me out of my own life, my own experiences and thinking.’ According to Deshpande in her article
‘Of Concerns, Of Anxieties’, That Long Silence is the ‘most autobiographical’ of all her writing. ‘A lifetime of introspection went into this novel…not in the personal details but in the thinking and ideas.’ Deshpande felt as if she had ‘crossed another barrier’ after having written the novel. To quote Deshpande: “It was with this novel that I as Naipaul says ‘defined myself through my work’.”

Anita Desai belongs to the nascent tradition of feminism. The manner in which Desai explores the various dimensions of the female psyche—as a child and as a grown woman, is in itself a feminist position. For Anita Desai, as per her interview to Jasbir Jain in Stairs to the Attic, the experiences of childhood are the most vivid and lasting ones. However, adult life too has its share of many traumatic experiences that leave a deep impression on the psyche. Her creation of characters is autobiographical in the sense that even though they are colored by imagination, they are generally an amalgamation of several different characters in real life. These characters are continuously engaged in trying to find out their hidden selves either through expiation or through re-examination.

The novel The God of Small Things is considered a fiercely reinvented memoir. By the author’s own admission, Small Things is a story that has always been with her. Several parallels have already been drawn between the major characters of the story and the characters in the novel. Rahel, as has been mentioned earlier, has been modelled largely on Roy’s own experiences as a child. Dr. Rama Kundu in her essay ‘Arundhati Roy: In the Light of Linguistics and Literary Criticism,’ finds the narration in The God of Small Things in the tenor of confessional literature. This means ‘not exactly recalling things/ digging into one’s memory, but rather trying to find some way to escape/ overcome the traumatic memory of some past experience that has remained too vivid and haunting…the urgency here is not to remember, but rather to overcome the anguish of a persistent memory by […] blurring it out’ (Dwivedi 96).

Deshpande terms That Long Silence as a hysterical novel ‘in the sense that inside of me I was kind of screaming’. However, when these traumatic, hysterical experiences are transmuted to literature, a kind of distancing has to be effected. That
is why, as put by Deshpande, ‘one steps back from that screaming self—and one says, look’ (Kuortti 38). At this juncture, an inward questioning begins when an author lives ‘without words if words are to acquire any meaning, to live with images, so that they can cohere and emerge’ (Jain 6). *Fire on the Mountain* is based on memories and experiences related to Anita Desai’s more than one visit to Kasauli and the Ila Das-like friend of her mother. However, these memories are recreated in Bombay so that Kasauli becomes a finely etched background in which characters that are begun from outside are explored for inner definitions. The creative process reinvents the experience and creates a fresher, deeper one by shedding the irrelevant.

Memory does not always tell the same story. When one looks back on a happening and tries to recreate it, the selective process has already come into being.

In life our eye is attracted now here now there; our attention wanders and spreads. Fiction not only focuses our attention on one action, assembling everything necessary for understanding it and rigorously excluding everything which is not. [. . .] Fiction permits us to gather experience economically. (Lesser 166)

The incoherence is given up in favor of cohesiveness of art which is made up of ‘innumerable miniscule fragments coming together from various directions... and finally falling into place to sustain a larger whole’ (J.Jain 6). Fiction translates ‘what was internal, and therefore incoherent and amorphous, or too close to us to be seen clearly, into something outside ourselves and easy to perceive: a series of images delineating a specific action, its causes, and consequences’ (Lesser 151).

Memory, therefore, replaces automatic, instinctual, simple responses. Reality is distorted in the very process of storing. By its very nature, memory is incomplete. Even our conscious responses at a particular time may later be hidden or repressed and thus pushed into the unconscious. The child and childhood that are recreated in fiction are not always ‘actual’ when represented. Jenks comments: ‘Much of what is said about children and childhood is not really about children and childhood at all’ (13). According to Jenks, child and childhood are terms for a mode of existence, perception, and emotion, which we still today insist, belongs to actual children, so that
we construct a world for them following our need to place this fantasy somewhere in actuality. In any case, Jenks opines, childhood constitutes a way of conduct that cannot properly be evaluated and routinely incorporated within the grammar of existing social systems. The children, as illustrated by the recorded observations of I. And P. Opie, have a language of their own which is not only a means of symbolizing their attitudes and formulating their behavior, but also an instrument of their individual and social development. Further, as per Freud’s concept of unconscious dynamic organization of personality, the ego of the child takes shape out of the id as a child becomes aware of his hitherto unconscious strivings, as he symbolizes them in language, and so gradually forms a verbalized picture of his actual self, his ego. While this is going on, the ego ideal also begins to emerge. The child gradually forms for himself a picture of an ideal self, fashioned from the constant interplay between himself and all those who influence his behavior--who approve or disapprove of him and of whom he approves and disapproves. The child’s awareness of himself is only partial in the early years of his life. Some aspects of the child’s personality will be symbolized by words, some by non-verbal imagery, some not at all. When an adult novelist describes a child-character, it is inevitable that the adult vision will not only color the image of the child but also be hampered by that partial awareness. It has already been discussed in chapter IV how the image of the child is a projection of the inner complexes and turmoil of the writer. The representation of the child, therefore, cannot be strictly real. It can only be made to look realistic by using those experiences from the past as well as the present--that of language, behavior and relationships--which seem to the author as signifying and elucidating the child’s world specifically.

Despite Sartre’s plea for novels that are viewed not as ‘products of men’ but as natural products, like plants or events, the fact remains that a great deal of pruning goes on and the shape of the plant would depend on who bears the shears. As Booth says in Rhetoric of Fiction, even if the author does not use his/her own voice, ‘the act of narration as performed by even the most highly dramatized narrator is itself the author’s presentation of a prolonged “inside view” of a character’ (18). The author is present in every speech given by any character. So, the learned responses of a woman
writer to her memories, especially those of childhood, her own and others’, would be presented in a unique way. The different narrative techniques and language that a woman writer tries to use would also add to the expressions, as discussed in the following section.

Reconstruction of Childhood & Positioning the Present

Jaya, the lead character in That Long Silence, wants to retrieve her past and the past consciousness in order to reconstruct it. In the process of doing so, she relives all those miniscule fragments from various directions that have made up her present consciousness--philosophical and psychological concepts, external details, abstractions, and facts. Her real self exposes itself in her irrational, irrelevant, and fragmented currents of thoughts and emotions rather than in well-thought out responses to life. Deshpande uses the stream of consciousness technique to project ‘the psychic reverberations of her characters in order to make the story more real and authentic’ (Swain 67). Even though the narrative is in first person, the author obliterating herself, Jaya’s voice comes across as muted and lays bare her psyche that is ‘reluctantly responsive and passively secluded’.

However, in reconstructing Jaya’s past, this broken stream-of-consciousness, the various digressions and interruptions, the author in a way constructs her own life as a writer and as a woman. It is not only the content that bears the stamp of her ‘introspection of a life-time’: even the technique serves to underscore the making of Deshpande, the writer, in the garb of making of Jaya. The routine happenings that interrupt Jaya’s analysis--the coming of milkman, the neighbors knocking, and the maid relating the crisis in her life--are interruptions on the surface. On the deeper level, these interruptions perform the task of polishing the central thought even further. The digressions in the narrative present the subterranean and subliminal impressions of human life.

These muted responses of the adult who is in charge of the narrative and the fragmentary stream-of-consciousness then become the reference points from which
the image of Jaya as a child is constructed. It is through the voice of the adult that the child is positioned, with the adult painfully conscious of their mutually contrasting positions. Despite the adding-on of years, experience has caused a kind of regression in Jaya. The childish outbursts, rather than maturing into sane protests, have been made to die while the adult Jaya’s love for advertisements remains as furtive as the child’s love for film songs.

Jaya gives up the pattern of her life since childhood in which ‘things strayed cheerfully from their places’ in favor of the systematic pattern that is shown to her, literally shoved under the nose, after her marriage. She is given the training that she had missed in her childhood, that of being the traditional Indian female who realizes her position vis-à-vis the male, who fulfills her household duties to perfection, who listens and keeps her opinions to herself. The adult Jaya strives to fill up the “gap” that her childhood could not fill in order to become a “complete” woman. Her mother, she realizes, did not measure up to the ideal of a good mother because she was not a good housekeeper herself. The contrast between a female child and a male child is evident in the fact that while Jaya cringes because her mother was never a good cook; Mohan cringes because his mother made a living as a cook.

It is not everything from her childhood that is shaken away in the course of growing up. One thing that clings to her is ‘the monstrous ego of a child’ and its inherent complexes and prejudices. It is this ego, this inability to let go and to understand the inevitability of death for a long time that does not allow her to forgive her father because ‘he died’ and left her to the kindness and favors of her uncles and the harshness of the matrilineal forces. It is after the death of her father that Jaya gets to see the cruel face of life. She holds her father responsible for driving her into a position where she would have to be dependent on the charity of other people and lose the house that was so dear to her. The dependency weighs so much on her mind that it makes her agree to Mohan’s proposal as he asked for no dowry and therefore relieved her of the burden of having to take one more favor from her uncles. Since there was no one to listen to her during her childhood and thrash out these prejudices, Jaya carries this strange hostility against her father and in a way, holds him responsible for
driving her towards the kind of marriage that she has with Mohan. The memories of her embittered childhood lead her to make this observation: ‘It’s not just that life is cruel, but that in the very process of our birth we submit to life’s cruelty’ (102).

Jaya is not totally a silent sufferer. She is an actor-participant as well as an observer in the novel. She steps out of the narrative-action as a witness, as a critic to perceive the tenor of the story of childhood, filtered through female consciousness. Deshpande gives full freedom to the protagonist to unveil herself using her resilient mind to document her vision of life. This has imparted a credibility and realism to the stream of Jaya’s consciousness.

In the words of William Walsh: ‘a turmoil of feeling is conveyed in cool, idiomatic and sensitive prose. And it is served by a memory which is so rich and minutely specific and able to produce not just bright discrete images but rather a flow of naturally related scenes [. . .] making past life live again in the present’ (117). Deshpande has succeeded in taking the reader directly into the interior life of the characters without any intervention by way of comment or explanation on the part of the author.

At once conversational and formal, analytical and detached, the reminiscences of Jaya evoke a deeper and more tragic sense of vanished time, fleeting moments and personal losses during childhood. However, due to the distancing of experience, the recounting is done in a ‘quiet and calm voice characterized by sobriety’. The voice follows the natural movement of the mind that registers experience in ‘a prose of recollection and nostalgia’, letting the child and its claustrophobia come alive through those recollections from the past. The reader is able to construct the image of the child through these snippets from the past without the author intervening ever to make that image absolute by making a decisive/ judgmental statement. The reader arrives at the understanding along with the protagonist after the reading of the novel that the child cannot ever be sawed away from the adult. The adult speaks the language learnt as a child and reacts to life in accordance with the experiences of childhood. A part of that child follows through the passage of time but is visualized only through the eyes and
the language of the adult. Thus, there is a common area between childhood and adulthood.

The ability to travel from one to the other requires a certain flexibility of attitude. This however is in keeping with the flow of the novel. Since the delving into the past is undertaken in order to understand the present in a better way, the reconstruction of childhood through the ‘structured’ adult is also natural, rather necessary. It serves the author’s purpose of finding a self-hood, an identity that keeps her in touch with the foundation of her personality.

**Journeys into the interior**

Desai has unconsciously and intuitively not opted for the novel as a social document that demands the creation of realistic and typical dialogue. She rather writes what can be called the psychological, the purely subjective novel and is therefore, ‘left free to employ, simply, the language of the interior’ (J.Jain 4). She creates solitary and introspective people who seem to be ‘more aware than others of what lies on the other side’ (10). A solitary, isolated heroine, in the words of Booth, ‘can do what no other narrator could possibly do for her. Very little heightening of her character is needed to make us unite with her against the hostile world around her, simply because she is the only sensitive person visible’ (276). Any reliable commentator, attempting to heighten our sympathy and pity, would probably do more harm than good. A good deal of poignancy and truth of her inward cry would be lost if anyone, even an unspecified, omniscient narrator, could accompany her on her desperate journey.

Desai, with the astuteness and expertise of an experienced writer has created two isolated characters in *Fire on the Mountain*—an aged woman and a child. While the inner world of the child, Raka, is sometimes analyzed through Nanda Kaul’s observations, the usual method employed by Desai is to present the appearance and the body language of the characters more than the language they speak. The reader is left to form his/her opinions. Largely then, Raka is presented as not what she might
really be but as what she comes across. She drags her foot as she comes to meet
Nanda Kaul for the first time. Nanda Kaul notices her ‘despairing attitude’. Unlike
any other child, Raka does not jump into the volubility that is usually associated with
children but looks around, observant. Her noticing Ram Lal and his slipslop slippers
brings out her child-like interest in different sounds. It is almost as if Raka would
compare Ram Lal to some cartoon or a fairy tale character in her mind. However, the
author prefers to draw the line at Raka looking at Ram Lal, without any further
indicators.

Raka’s laying her head on the ‘comfortable guillotine’ of the windowsill once
again just about hints at the world of storybooks that clings to her. At the same time, it
also underscores Raka’s sense of claustrophobia, a sense of being sent somewhere she
does not really like. When Nanda Kaul asks her a question at teatime, she ducks her
head and lifts the cup to her mouth in order to evade and answer. Later, she always
slips past Nanda Kaul, on her way to her bath, unwilling to share a word with her.

Nanda Kaul’s observations about Raka are also more on the outward level, the
body kinetics making up for the absence of any dialogue. Consider this:

Occasionally she caught a glimpse of her scrambling up a stony hillside, grasping at tufts of grass or bushes of Spanish broom, her small white-knickered bottom showing above a pair of desperately clinging heels. Or wandering down a lane in a slow, straying manner, stopping to strip a thorny bush of its few berries or to examine an insect under a leaf. Then she would round a boulder or drop from the lip of a cliff and vanish. (46)

Raka’s scrambling up the hill speaks of her ease with the rugged landscape; her wandering in a ‘slow, straying manner’ shows the purposelessness and the inherent despondency of the child. Her examining an insect under a leaf mirrors her curiosity whereas the ‘small, white-knickered bottom’ shows the puniness of the child against the big world on the one hand and also brings in the element of tenderness of a woman’s voice. Her compulsive escapades to the ravine are enjoyable and this is betrayed only by her ‘still and thoughtful’ eyes, which give the impression as if ‘she
had visited strange lands and seen fantastic improbable things that lingered on in her mind. Her sucking at the hurt finger, her bruised knees, her picking at a ‘nicely, crusted scab’ are actions that lend credibility to the portrait of a child.

The imaginative element, so common in children, can be detected in Raka too. Things become entities in her mind. The club seems ‘asleep’ to her in the afternoon because of the fact that it is deserted. The factory is like a ‘square dragon’. The charred bark is like burnt toast. The fire in the kitchen is like ‘an inflamed eye’ that glowed and smoldered by itself. The thrum of the *hamam* is like that of a steamboat. Her childhood imagination turns the blue mountains into waves and the tip of the Monkey point the middle of the sea, where she stands shipwrecked in the world of her mind. At night, the dark mountains become the dark sea-waves and the lights of the houses become the lights of countless ships floating by. The chimneys of the Pasteur institute are like swords piercing the white sky. Fact and imagination mingle when she sniffs and smells cinders, boiling serum, chloroform, and spirit. Imagination brings to her nose smells of dogs’ brains boiling in vats, and images of guinea pigs guts, of rabbits secreting fear in cages packed with coiled snakes, watched by doctors in white.

Later, when a fire ravages the forest, Raka thinks that she can hear the cries of animals and birds burning in the fire. The fire itself looks like ‘a display of fireworks in the distance’–it was ‘like a fire in a dream–silent, swift and threatening’ (74)–‘dream-specters that follow one, trap one’ (76).

The noise of the crickets, raised in alarm at being disturbed makes her wonder at the language they speak. Since they are the only dissonant elements in this green world, Raka cannot understand them. The tendency of a child to string together the known and the unknown comes to the surface when she tries to guess if the language of the crickets is Sanskrit, once again letting the fairy tale element creep in. According to various fairy tales, the animals were supposed to speak the language of humans in the ancient times.

Bhandari in *Aap ka Bunty* also explores beautifully how images from stories and fairy tales cling to the mind of the child. The whole pageant of the queen with
tinkling anklets, princes turned into sheep, a princess turned into a bird, magic caps and snake women follows Bunty wherever he goes. While the housekeeper relates the story of the queen who ate her own children, the concept of the ‘bad mother’ takes root in Bunty’s mind. The mother too, unknowingly, introduces him to the concept of stepfather and stepmother through the stories that she tells him. The concept of magic and the desire to experiment with it in his own life occupy Bunty’s attention largely. Without doubt, this tendency is gifted to him by the world of fiction of which the adults are the agents.

In *Fire on the Mountain* too, the adults are responsible for creating concepts in the mind of the child. It is Ram Lal who portrays a grim and sickly picture of the on goings inside the Pasteur institute; the bright picture of ‘hill-station club life’; of the prowling jackals in the ravine; of raging fires in Kasauli; of the English lady who burnt her eyelashes in trying to save her cat. He supplements Raka’s world of ghosts and *churails* when he slips in a little bit of fiction in the story of the burnt house—‘The watchman says he can still hear the cat howling in the ruins at night’, he says, just in order to keep Raka away from the burnt house.

Interestingly, even though Nanda Kaul envies Ram Lal’s easy rapport with Raka, Ram Lal actually plays the role of an adult trying to hem in the wanderings and the curiosity of the child that could prove to be hazardous. However, since he issues warnings in the garb of fantasy, he makes them more palatable for Raka. It is another matter that Raka, despite her pursed ‘pale lips’, still ventures into places that he forbids and has contrary experiences in places where he encourages her to go. This way, Anita Desai portrays a child who remains willful despite a formidable list of dos and don’ts. Raka is unpredictable because she is perceptive as well as curious and imaginative.

The world of imagination and fantasy is portrayed well in *Aap ka Bunty* too, as has been discussed earlier. But whereas Bunty cannot get out of the world of fantasy, Raka somehow always knows where to draw the line. Fantasy remains a means of escape for both, though Raka also has the ability to reject fantasy. Her response to her great-grandmother’s stories has been discussed in detail in the previous chapter. These
two contrasting elements in her nature and her willfulness in reacting to fantasy only
go on to show the conflict between the desire to remain a child and the compulsions
of growing up. Raka has already had a brush with the real world. Bunty is still
fumbling at it. His limited exposure has caused him to remain tied to that stage of
mental growth where a child believes that Santa Claus is for real and comes down the
chimney every Christmas eve to stuff goodies into the waiting stocking. Raka seems
to be a child who is clear in her mind that no Santa exists. She can play along with the
charade just for the fun of it if she wants to or she can turn away her face in silent
contempt.

Fear, however, remains an integral part of her psyche and a reference point
between belief and disbelief. Therefore, Raka’s eyes grow black hoops around them
when Ram Lal describes the *churails* in the ravine; his playacting showing signs of a
veteran when his own eyes grow great black hoops as he supplies the details of how
the *churails* look like. The fear in Raka finds an anchor, making everything he says
credible, when Ram Lal vouchsafes that a particular stone at the side of a road is
actually a woman turned into stone by a *churail*. Again, it is fear that is behind the
reserve that comes naturally to Raka and leads her to set the forest on fire.

The character of Raka has been created with sparse strokes and yet the
characterization brings in all the elements of childhood into play—loneliness,
inquisitiveness, and fertility of imagination and total belief in own opinions. The
ultimate action of setting the forest on fire does seem an aberration but is in keeping
with the tone and tenor of the narrative that drops many a hint along the way of the
impending tragedy. It is perhaps an effort to live a fantasy, a move towards liberation
from childhood fears, and a violent realization of the future. All the same, the last act
of Raka retains the same kind of ambiguity that characterizes the rest of the narrative,
the images, symbols, and metaphors as also the action and reaction of the characters.
Perhaps the ambiguity is a deliberate device used to underscore the confusing world
that confronts Raka.

A similar realism is found in the representation of childhood in *Aap ka Bunty*.
The opportunist that lurks in every child; the child’s adeptness at noticing each flicker
of expression on the face of elders and yet the inability to comprehend the total meaning; the struggle to understand new words that float in the vocabulary; the little conflicts that disturb the child and the mixing of fact and fiction are some of the aspects that Bhandari uses to make the narrative involving the child realistic.

The incoherence and irregularity of the interior monologue and the excess of questions in the child’s stream-of-consciousness deftly bring out the way thoughts quickly flock to the child’s mind which are further made to look complete and natural with all the exclamatory expressions, particularly the lisping that is likely to stick to a 7-8 year old child. Bhandari lucidly brings out the process of concept-formation through the device of the simultaneous presentation of interior monologue, dialogue, and story telling. New characters and new ideas come to people the imaginative world of the child through the conscious and unconscious efforts of the adults. The fact that one stray, small thought triggers off many related thoughts that lead to formation of concepts is true of every age group but in child it serves to underscore the inherent innocence and credulity of his mind.

Mannu Bhandari does not sentimentalize and brings out even the negative shades that mark the world of children. The way Titu strikes at Bunty’s soft spot—that of absence of the father—brings out the latent cruelty present in a child, sparked off in this case by envy for Bunty’s new toy gun. When Titu breaks the news of divorce of Bunty’s parents to him, Bunty tries to level the score of the hurt by not allowing Titu to play with his gun. The unreasonableness that Bunty displays when he is in Dr. Joshi’s house and the difference between what he says and what he actually wants are some other things that go on to make the portrayal heart-felt and sometimes heart-wrenching. All said and done, Bunty is the kind of character that can easily be found in the present-day society.

Anita Desai, like Deshpande in That Long Silence, uses nostalgia and reliving the past as a technique. In her interview to Jasbir Jain in Stairs to the Attic, Anita Desai talks of using this technique, not deliberately but because of the fact that according to her, ‘every human being’s territory is really very-very small. And all you can explore, is a very tiny section of this territory’ (14). Anita Desai uses memories of
the past as a method of evaluating the individual’s relationship with the present. The movement backwards is both a medium of self-knowledge and of confrontation with reality. Jasbir Jain writes in the chapter ‘Assent and Refusal’ in *Stairs to the Attic*: ‘Her protagonists are caught in adult life and it is from a particular stage in their life that they try to relate their past to their present. Nostalgia is both—merely a backward glance and a backward glance with longing’ (33). However, nostalgia in *Fire on the Mountain* is used for distancing the past too as is clear in Ila Das’s babble about the old times.

Memory also helps unfold the world of fantasy which is again a narrative technique used by Anita Desai. In *Fire on the Mountain*, fantasy manages to bring together the adult world and the child’s world when Nanda Kaul weaves a fantasy around her childhood. Later, however, it serves as a mirror of the hollow self she has created and shocks her into an awareness of the present. It is an artificial construct and thus extremely limiting. Nanda Kaul, in her unusual confrontation with reality via fantasy is pushed into an emptiness that signals the end.

Both the characters, Nanda Kaul and Raka, mirror Anita Desai’s philosophy about life that everyone is solitary and involvement in human relationships invariably lead to disaster. When characters are created with such firm conviction, they are bound to be convincing. Nanda Kaul and Raka are like two representatives of this philosophy belonging to two different age groups. Characters can surely qualify to be one of those aspects of the novel which have lead Anita Desai to have ‘something closest to satisfaction’ with it. In her own words, a novel ‘in which I have come closest to what I set out to do [. . .] is *Fire on the Mountain*’ (J.Jain12). Anita Desai, without the aid of many dialogues or molding of language has succeeded in bringing the character of Raka alive through narrative technique and imagery that reflect her ‘nascent’ feminism.
Childhood through Abracadabra in Language

On the contrary, language is the tool that Roy uses in *The God of Small Things* to hold together ‘the powerful narrative’ with a ‘transformative effect’. In the opinion of many critics like A.N. Dwivedi in his essay ‘Reversing the Gear: A Critique of Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* ’: ‘Roy is modernistic in her approach to life as well as to her art. Her style of writing and her language show that’ (11). She uses the grammar of her own mind and does away with the traditional grammar. She puts her impressions of life into her own way of usage. Distortions, new coinages, rearranged phrases, words and sentences are the literary instruments that abound in the novel. The prose is dense with unusual compound words, unusual use of present and past participle and clubbing together of abstract and concrete images. The language springs many surprises in the course of reading.

The intricate weaving of disparate elements can be taken to be suggestive of intricacy of ideas. To add to it is the need of an Indian writer writing in English to mould the language as per his/her need. Malliarjun Patil quotes Raja Rao in his article:

> The tempo of Indian life must be infused into our expression... We, in India, think quickly... there must be something in the Sun of India that makes us rush and run, tumble and run on... when our thoughts stop, our breath stops, and we move on to another thought. (60)

Raja Rao talks of sticking to this form of storytelling. Roy too uses language to express the same torrential, rushing flow of thoughts. In this rush, this hurry to express all that comes in profusion to the author’s mind, grammar does take a backseat. However, it would be putting things too straight by terming the experimentation with language as ‘unpardonable linguistic peculiarities’ (Patil). Sometimes ungrammatical language also serves a purpose. Anita Desai endorses its usage:
Ungainly, ungrammatical language...did not merely deserve print but had an earthly gusto and verve that made it peculiarly suitable to convey the Indian character and spirit, atmosphere and condition. (J. Jain 5).

Not only this, a smattering of the Indian regional language, Malayalam in case of *The God of Small Things*, is a device with which English, the ‘single grooved’ patriarchal tongue is made to reverberate with a profusion of possibilities of discourse. With the intervention of the post-colonial vernacular, in particular the regional language idiom of India and Africa, the imperial fiction of standard English has been blown up to accommodate a profusion of ‘Englishes’ (Singh 93-94).

As discussed earlier, since the Indian woman writer is the ‘doubly other’ and has to doubly break through the ‘patriarchal tongue’, all these linguistic experiments acquire a different perspective.

To return to the question of ‘unpardonable linguistic peculiarities’, Mallikarjun Patil lists clubbed words (Thiswayandthat), reverse words, ungrammatical sentences (‘no, we can’t not go to school’), distorted words (stoppit, thang God), absurd songs, senseless sounds (verry, Enee Vee ee aar), wordy sentences (Is. That. Clear.), needless capitals (Lay Ter) etc. as some of the linguistic digressions Roy is guilty of. However, before launching into a critique of the rules broken and followed, it is important to note what is the purpose of the book. *The God of Small Things* is a story told from the point of view of Rahel and centers around her childhood happenings when she was a 7-yr old child along with her twin brother Estha. Since the novel is pervaded by two persons’ childhood memory, the spellings often follow a child’s pronunciation, perception, and level of comprehension. Most of the words quoted above perfectly bring out the world of the language of children and their perceptions. Jenks has already warned that language is inadequate to bring out the nuances of childhood. Roy’s experimentation with language is then a bold attempt to get nearer reality by bending and twisting certain rules.

Most of the time when Roy digresses from the traditional usage of words, she is trying to represent how the words spoken by adults register in the mind of the child. Therefore, words like ‘Getup or Shutup’ and ‘Thiswayandthat’ are written the way
they are spoken. Spoken language is generally learnt first by the child. All the variations in pronunciation and hearing certain words wrongly are a part of that. Moreover, rhythm is also intrinsic to a child’s usage of language. The phrase ‘Thiswayandthat’ has a certain rhythm associated with it that corresponds with the act of the audience moving its legs in order to let Estha pass. ‘Thang God’ is also a way of showing a child’s grasp of words.

‘Enee Vee ee aar’ brings out the child’s tendency to visualize the spelling of the words that he knows. The clubbing of the sound of the alphabets ‘n’ and ‘e’ as ‘Enee’ once again throws light on the child’s grasp of language in a rhythmic pattern. One often comes across pre-school children trying to learn the alphabet on a rhythmic pattern, with most of the children saying ‘LOMenP’ instead of ‘LMNOP’. ‘Lay Ter’ is another such example where the child does not know the spelling of the word and therefore visualizes the single word as two words that already exist in his vocabulary. ‘Lay’ is a word that a seven-year old ought to know. ‘Ter’ is based on a child’s tendency to generalize and discover new spelling on his own. It is common occurrence for children to analyze a new word that they hear and try to guess at the spelling by generalizing as it flashes in their mind’s eye. ‘Gnap’, ‘Gnickers’ and ‘Locusts Stand’ are other words that belong to the same category.

The phrase ‘Is. That.Clear.’ with a period after each word brings out the way it must have been said by Ammu, playing the role of a stern mother to the hilt. It also underscores in a suggestive manner how the words spoken by the adults to the children, especially when spoken in anger, carry an air of finality about them. As far as the child is concerned, his/her fate is sealed with these words and each period is like hammering down a nail with a single stroke on any other possibility.

This behavior and reaction to language, although common in most of the children with their eagerness towards language, brings out the specific circumstances in which the twins find themselves. They are being groomed to be suitable representatives of India when Sophie Mol and Margaret come to visit them. The ‘anglophiles’ that they are by their own admission, they want to put their best foot forward before the visitors. Since the elders have now reached a stage where it is
possible for them to switch over languages easily, the twins receive the lion’s share of drilling. They are strictly told not to use any other language but English in their conversation with everyone. Using any other language is made a punishable offence. Since the days of the children are full of learning English coupled with the burden of coming face-to-face with a person who would be ‘loved from the beginning’, unlike themselves, it is but natural that the wisps of words from the English language float all around them all day long, occupying their every conscious thought. They would also know intuitively that they have to carry the tradition of their ‘anglophile’ family ahead. Both the children feel a surge of ‘real affection for the English language’ when they get to understand that there is something logical like ‘cuff-links’ in an otherwise illogical language. Therefore, Rahel happily reaches out for the phrase ‘infinite joy’ as a child would reach out for a balloon, filing it away as ‘infinnate joy’ in her mind. She also displays what M.M.Lewis calls ‘the force of attraction towards adult language’ in Language, Thought and Personality in Infancy and Childhood (170). Children show a characteristic eagerness to show familiarity with adult vocabulary and locution--long words’ and complex constructions. often used tentatively and experimentally. It is obvious that this is a necessary and valuable part of growing up--however bizarre, amusing, and even irritating to adults some of its manifestations may be. Rahel catches hold of the word ‘humbling’ as spoken by Chacko and finds its context, wrongly, in the sentence she might have heard earlier: ‘humbling along without a care in the world,’ she thinks, and feels happy with the acquisition of a ‘nice word’ from the adult vocabulary.

All the same, there is an inherent resistance to adult influence also. It finds expression in a child’s conformity with its contemporary group and gains strength from this conformity. The child acquires and enjoys a sub language--a group lingo. Group influence is seen in the flowering of a special vocabulary, rich in words that are foreign to the adult language. In fact, the use of foreign words becomes one of the ways in which a child asserts his independence of his elders and allegiance to his contemporaries and lays siege to the barriers that exclude him from the adult way of life. Children sometimes produce a word that the outsiders cannot understand. Its use
sets them off from the other children (Denzin). The twins have evolved, though involuntarily, a habit of backward reading which they generally put to use in stressful times such as when they sit in the Plymouth, anxious and insecure, and read the signs like ‘STOP’ and ‘Be Indian, Buy Indian’ backwards; or when Baby Kochamma’s Australian missionary friend, Miss Mitten, gifts them a book meant for babies. Being already voracious readers, they feel offended by the gift and show their annoyance by reading backward the story aloud to Miss Mitten. When she complains to Baby Kochamma about their rudeness and declares that she had seen ‘Satan in their eyes’, the twins speak even this phrase backwards and earn the punishment of writing ‘In future we will not read backwards’ a hundred times. This backward reading may have sprung up from the lore that surrounds every religion. According to Iona Opie and Peter Opie in the essay ‘The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren’: “to a child it can be a ‘known fact’ that the Lord’s Prayer said backwards raises the devil...” In this sense, by reading backwards at odd moments, the children can be said to be going against set norms and rules. It could also be the author’s comment on and the twins’ awareness of denial of Christianity and the right to visit a church to them.

The children coin their own words out of their existing language experience, generalizing for themselves. ‘Afternoon-mare’ and ‘stoppited’ are such expressions that throw light on children’s tendency to generalize.

Snippets from songs and rhymes that occur in the course of narration of the twins’ childhood once again add the natural and realistic element. Since the twins have already been introduced to abridged versions of Shakespeare’s works, Estha and Rahel go about chanting—‘Where the bee sucks, there suck I/ In a cowslip’s bell I lie.’ After watching ‘A Tale of Two Cities’. Rahel practices sad faces in the mirror and says: ‘It is a far far better thing that I do, than I have ever done.’

Such is the hold of the movies they see that life itself becomes a reference point for the scenes. The people in the Communist procession look ‘like extras who had wandered off the sets of the Malyalam version of Sindbad: the Last Voyage because they too were wearing handkerchiefs on their heads like sailors. When Chacko calls the twins millstones, they associate the word with the movie Mutiny on
the Bounty in which when people died at sea, they were wrapped in white sheets and thrown overboard with millstones around their necks. The child’s imagination that always goes a step further is illustrated when Estha wonders how the exact number of millstones to be taken along was decided before setting off on the voyage.

‘The pale daymoon that hung hugely in the sky and went wherever they went’ is a thought typical of a seven-year old child who, as discussed in the previous chapter, invests even inanimate objects with a life and purpose of their own. But the thought of the moon being ‘as big as the belly of a beer-drinking man’ (87) obviously comes from some movie or illustrated comic.

It is quite clear that the unusual application of language by Roy is a feminist stand as is the ‘gossipy’ mode of narration (‘Ammu explained later that Too Briefly meant For Too Short a While’) but is guided by the demand of the story. The story, as is widely known, is the story of Roy’s own childhood. This could be one of the reasons that contribute to the life-like representation of childhood. In Roy’s words, as quoted in the epilogue of *The God of Small Things: a Saga of Lost Dreams*:

> Often I think if you have a sort of a strange childhood, two things happen. As a child you grow up very quickly but obviously the part, i.e., a child remains a child. And when you become an adult there is a part of you that remains a child. So the communication between you and your childhood remains open. It isn’t an effort for me to see things through that mirror.

There are things aplenty that Roy sees in this mirror. The childhood concepts such as the Earth Woman, or free bus rides for children born on bus; childhood imagination such as Rahel hearing the ‘soft sounds’ and ‘hard sounds’, as if from inside the coffin on Sophie’s behalf, or hearing the Plymouth talking to the other cars in the hotel parking area; childhood actions such as Estha crooning Elvis Presley’s songs while strumming a badminton racquet; childhood-specific nomenclature such as ‘Elvis the Pelvis’ and ‘Stick Insect’ are some of the elements that make up any child’s world and with which Roy suffuses her narrative.

It is Roy’s unusually close positioning with her childhood that facilitates the portrayal of Rahel and Estha in credible terms. Children, when they speak and act, do
come across as children with their heart-breaking innocence, their soul-searching curiosity, and their innovative experimentation with language. However, at times, the adult voice of the author does divulge its presence when Roy attempts at social criticism. As Estha reads backwards the police code of conduct in the police station, Roy shows the very normal habit of observation in children as also the growing incoherence due to the trauma of abnormal circumstances. The virtues of politeness, courtesy, and efficiency that are enumerated on the board stand out in stark contrast with the police inspector’s actual behavior, especially with Ammu. The author, to expose the hypocrisy of police avowals and the social system, uses the action of the police inspector in particular and the police force in general as seen through the eyes of the twins. Roy skillfully brings out the co-existence of the child’s world along with the adult undercurrents of thought. The policeman’s misbehavior with Ammu might not have registered in the mind of Estha along with its sexual connotations, but a general idea of a hostile world is transmitted to him. Saxena sums up this technique to the advantage in *In the Beginning is Desire*. She writes: ‘the novel protests against adult systems that seem even more grotesque particularly because the tale is told from the perspective of the child’ (269).

The entries in the notebook used by Estha when six years old, which record certain events and sentiments in the spelling-mistake-ridden language of a child, is once again an instrument used by the author to do many things surreptitiously. For one, the labored form of each letter and the irregular space between words reflects ‘struggle for control over the errant, self-willed pencil’ (156), a struggle of a child trying to learn the ropes of the adult world. The sentiment expressed in the note-book, complete with the wrong usage of capitals and wrong spelling--‘I hate Miss Mitten and I Think Her gnickers are Torn’--shows how it is not always possible for a child to express his inner feelings; how early on in life a child becomes caught in hostility: how deeply he feels it and how he, adequately or inadequately, gives vent to it. The choice of the passage on Ulysses and his son points at the father-son relationship motif that would naturally be deeply embedded in Estha’s mind. The other passage titled ‘Safety First’ brings through irony, the concerns that dog a seven year old.
insecure child, and the resultant morbidity that creeps in. The passage ‘Little Ammu’ brings out the tenderness of the bond between the children and their mother; the little, happy moments that they share with Ammu playing the role of a strict teacher in correcting even this passage that records her birthday eve. The entry in Ammu’s hand instructing Estha not to interrupt her publicly without saying ‘Excuse me’ is of course an autobiographical touch by Roy, but it also serves to show how communication takes place between the mother and the children at various levels.

The story is told from Rahel’s perspective, her memories unplugged with her arrival in Ayemenem. The adult Rahel is the narrator. However, the child Rahel is a narrator in disguise too. The memories are all hers, the author justifying Rahel’s knowledge about Estha’s experiences by talking about the ‘Siamese Souls’ earlier on. With this justification, Rahel can reproduce not only what happens to Estha, including the taste of the tomato sandwiches that he eats, but also his stream of thoughts that is etched clearly in Rahel’s mind:

Finish the drink
Watch the picture
Think of all the poor people
Lucky rich boy with porkemunny
No worries. (107)

The stream-of-consciousness not only brings forth the thoughts going around in a whirl in Estha’s mind but is also a comment on how a child’s world is usually made up of instructions from the adult world.

In fact, the passage quoted above is one of the many instances in the narrative of The God of Small Things that reflect the feminist technique of multiple points of view. Roy makes the reader hear with a single stroke the babble of voices that echo in the mind of the writer. The whirl in Estha’s mind is shared by Rahel, making it the child’s voice on the surface. Contained within this is the authoritative adult’s discourse. Out of all this pipes out yet another, unpleasant voice of the threatening adult—the man at Abhilash Talkies. The last phrase ‘No worries’ brings out the underlying irony. The world of the children might seem to be carefree, but it is
actually ridden with much anxiety, unseen by the adults. The adults are smug in their
knowledge that they are taking good care of the children, even providing them
entertainment and outings. The first two imperatives: ‘Finish the drink’ and ‘Watch
the picture’ seem to hint at that smugness besides the authority. The passage then also
brings out the author’s viewpoint that, many a times, there is a distance between the
world of children and that of the adults, besides showing on a wider scale the distance
between the rich and the poor classes. Slapping together of the slogan-like sentences
facilitates the author to bring out the hypocrisy of even the most ardent supporters of
Communism. Roy then manages to weave into the narrative the voice of the author as
not only a social but also a political commentator thereby causing the realistic surface
and the psychic interior to meet and restructure the past.

The multiple voices then make the text multi-layered. Picking up of one layer
sometimes leads to an inadvertent picking of a second layer. The reader then is
pleasantly surprised as the suggestion of yet another meaning wafts over. Besides
adding to the density of the text and making the novel a classic worthy of many
readings, this textual layering also underscores the challenge that life poses to a child-
that of sifting through bits and pieces of the many voices that make up its psyche.

This naïve, childlike chunk of the stream-of-consciousness of Estha is
characterized by the plenitude typical to the speech of women. However, when probed
deeper, it emerges as a complex and well-studied technique to say succinctly
whatever the writer wants to. The terse sentences and phrases strung together in this
excerpt can also be seen as an attempt to subvert the patriarchal language and syntax.
Roy seems to be putting across her impressions and expression of life in her own,
unique way, while leaving space for the reader to initiate a personal dialogue with the
text while reading.

The thoughts of a twin brother come very well within Rahel’s perspective.
However, there are certain thoughts that do not. e.g. the description of the visit to the
doctor, especially the reference to the doctor feeling up the mothers of his little
patients, oversteps the limits of the child’s perceptions. Similarly, Rahel could not
have witnessed the scenes between Chacko and Comrade Pillai, between Velutha and
Ammu, or Baby Kochamma and Father Mulligan and yet these are described graphically. One of the advantages of having a child narrator is that some events can remain hazy or just based on conjecture. However, it is not so in *The God of Small Things* and this erodes realism to a certain extent. One could say that their mother, as part of the family lore to be reconstructed with adult hindsight later, may have talked about Baby Kochamma’s ‘adventures’ in the past to the children. The meetings between Ammu and Velutha might be a construction of Rahel’s imagination, when their relationship becomes clear later. All these instances show the stepping in of the third person omniscient narrator after having hovered in the background for long; holding together the strings from the past, present and future for Rahel to examine; supplying a sudden realization and enabling her to understand in a new light some past event; to make some sense and a story out of her life experiences.

Conversely, the same technique that of third person omniscient narrator allows the narration to retain its largely realistic mode. The world of the children is presented without any authorial critical comment, without sentimentalizing the child characters. But what is added to the representation is Rahel’s insight as an adult. John O’Neill in his essay ‘Embodiment and Child’s Development’ writes that a child ‘subjects neither his thoughts, in which he believes as they present themselves, without attempting to link them to each other, nor our words, to any sort of criticism.’ Further on, he writes: ‘The intellectual and linguistic elaboration of our experience of the world always rests upon the ‘deep structures’ of our affective experience of the interpersonal world against which we elaborate only later our modes of inductive and deductive thinking.’

Rahel’s memories are then naturally colored by her experiences as an adult, her own exposure to the world adding to her ‘inductive and deductive thinking’, enabling her to view the happening on a wider canvas, and arrive at conclusions. It is adult vision that paints Velutha with such tender, loving strokes; Ammu with that uncertainty of a love/less-love relationship that children usually share with their mothers; Mammachi with the simultaneous strains of the oppressor and the oppressed; Chacko with that half-mocking, half-loving attention that belongs to a shattered icon, an ideal who does not quite live up to expectations. But it is Baby Kochamma who
gets the worst descriptions—‘Yellow slivers of cucumber skin flecked her bosom. Her hair, dyed jet-black, was arranged across her scalp like unspooled thread’ (21). Or ‘when the car moved, her armfat swung like heavy washing in the wind’ (62). Or ‘Terror, sweat and talcum powder blended into a mauve paste between Baby Kochamma’s rings of neckfat’ (79). Unlike the lucid sentiment expressed by Estha in his notebook, these descriptions hint at Rahel’s dormant hatred for Baby Kochamma since childhood and recognition of her as the villain of her story as Rahel attains adulthood. Thus, the adult Rahel, the child Rahel, and the third person omniscient narrator come together in presenting the composite judgment about Kochamma. Roy uses the technique of ‘embedding’ of narratives to reflect the overlaps in perspective. The perspective of the adult narrator (which, as pointed out before, has autobiographical overtones) is overlapped by the perspective of the adult Rahel—an actor in the drama of The God of Small Things.

The novel opens with the omniscient narrator commenting on the month of May being a ‘hot, brooding month’. By the second paragraph, it is clear, however, that the month in focus is not May but June, when ‘the South-west monsoon breaks’ (1). It is from the narrator’s perspective that the reader is taken on a tour of Ayemenem and sees the ‘PWD Potholes’ on the highway, ‘pepper vines snake up electric poles’, and the boats plying in the bazaars. In the third paragraph, Rahel enters the picture. It is still raining and now, it is the house that is in focus. Obviously the narrator’s perspective now overlaps with that of adult Rahel, who would understandably have eyes only for the house as seen through the ‘slanting silver ropes’ of rain slamming into the earth. It is again through Rahel’s eyes that we see Estha and also Rahel as they were many years back: ‘thin armed, flat chested, worm-ridden and Elvis Presley puffed [. . .]’ (2). Rahel’s memories take her back to her childhood and very smoothly, unobtrusively, the ropes of the narration slide into the hands of child Rahel who stands a little away from her extended family and notices Sophie Mol, ‘awake for her funeral’. The child Estha cannot be far behind once the child Rahel steps in.
The perspectives of both the children, almost similar because of their ‘joint identities’ overlap in the presentation of the scene, where Rahel’s childhood imagination even brings in the perspective of the dead Sophie Mol. The author uses memory as a feminist technique to restructure the past and thereby appraise the present. The omniscient narrator steps in once again to tell the reader how ‘Her [Mammachi’s] own grief grieved her. His [Chacko’s] devastated her’ (5). This observation could also be Ammu’s perspective, who watches from a distance yet another spectacle of discrimination. This plurality and diversity of perspective is a marked feminine characteristic as discussed in the beginning of the chapter. It is also in keeping with the feminine trait of the narrative being open-ended and is in total contrast with the monotonity of the ‘patriarchal monologue’.

_The God of Small Things_ is pre-eminently a novel by a woman seen through the eyes of a woman. The narrative is authentic feminine narrative. The plot is broken into several parts that are then galvanized into one harmonious whole. The chronological sequence of events is also broken. Time perspective is tampered with and deconstructed totally. T.S.Eliot’s statement about the beginning having the end is carried out in showing Velutha in handcuffs right in the beginning of the narrative. The breaking of form and the consistent breaking of sentences and words are made to serve in the novel as objective correlative for the fractured sensibility and the broken and fragmented world of women. Arundhati Roy then represents the childhood imagination, to quote Elaine Showalter, in ‘the genuine accent of womanhood’.

Closely related to the theme of childhood is the theme of motherhood. As such, and understandably due to the shared bonds, the concept of ‘bad mother’ does not surface in the novels taken up for study except to a certain extent in _Aap ka Bunti_ and _That Long Silence_. Deshpande presents various shades of motherhood through a collection of _Ajjis, Ais and Kakis_ where a mother does not give the comfort of her lap to the child and the other holds on so tightly to the children as to cause them to shrivel up. The mother is also shown as prisoner of circumstances and at some junctures, the mother turns out to be a little inadequate. The child shares the no-position of the mother. However, the peculiarity of all the novels lies in another thing. All the works
bring out the concerns that are typical to a modern woman and also attempt at re-inventing the woman and, as a natural consequence, the mother, in keeping with the image of the emerging image of the new woman. Women writers are increasingly identifying this new woman as someone fit to play the role of balancing equations due to her sensitivity and capacity to empathize. Mridula Garg, an eminent writer in Hindi, expressed the same opinion in a programme ‘Samvad’ on DD News (aired on July 18, 2005) and added that for the society to grow in real terms, even the male would have to be more female than the female.

The mother in *The God of Small Things* is re-invented in the modern context. She gives vent to her sexual urges the same way as she expresses her maternal instinct. The two roles do not clash. She is a woman who no longer has Sita as her ideal who switches on to the role of a devoted mother while in exile in a manner that carries no suggestions of her previous role as a wife. Ammu, owing to her divorce, is also like a wife in exile according to the social psyche. She, however, asserts her sexual being. Somewhere within her assertion is rooted the twins’ subsequent rebellion against the social norms. Despite the lonely death and the stigma that she faces, she conveys to her children that it is possible for the oppressed and the marginalized to realize their dreams of a world of love and belongingness and reject the archetypal roles thrust on them.

Nanda Kaul too rejects the traditional ideal of the loving, fawning great grandmother. Howsoever pathetic her withdrawal might seem, the fact remains that this withdrawal is also an assertion. Raka’s mother, Tara, who belongs to the younger bracket, also does not fall easily into the slot of a dutiful wife. She is a “freak” case in not learning the ropes of domesticity and the tricks to keep her husband attracted towards her like the Manekas and Rambhas of our myths. Raka carries these “juvenile”(as these seem in comparison) attempts to their logical consequence by making an assertion that is hard to miss in setting the forest on fire. If isolation is what she would get, then she would protect it fiercely, even at the risk of self-destruction, and not let anybody make inroads into it.
Bunty’s imagined escape in his dream coincides with the way his mother finds a way to escape the complexity arisen in her life by sending Bunty away to his father. Clearly, things are not easy for the child in case a woman decides to break away from the mould of the sacrificing mother. Bunty’s discomfiture is partly the reflection of the society’s inability to come to terms with a woman’s assertion of her selfhood in the Indian context. Bunty symbolizes the new, though not the happy child, reinvented by the changing social and personal circumstances due to the changed priorities of his mother.

Jaya is redefined as a daughter once the mother ceases to be the strong influence in the family. On the other hand, her own proposed changeover towards the end, targeted at being more assertive, promises to bring over a change in her children, Rahul and Rati, also.

Clearly, the mother figure emerges as quite a presence in the narrative. Not only do the authors show the emergence of a new woman, a new mother grappling with her share of problems; they also invest her with a kind of power in terms of the space and freedom they give to her in the narrative. Nanda Kaul, Ammu and Jaya are powerful re-inventions in being contradictory to the stereotypes. They are all important in terms of the text—their foregrounding in the narrative is a pointer to that. The narratives assert the voice of the re-invented mother-child duo and are distinctly feminine in creating a counter-discourse centering on them and mirroring their concerns.

The ending of the novels is also in synchronization with this counter-discourse. Arundhati Roy ends her novel with something not in keeping with the temporal continuity but by once again dashing back to the past and reconstructing the scene and circumstances of the union between Ammu and Velutha. In representing this scene, she is repeating what she has already made clear to the reader. However, this time, she brings out the details and the tenderness of the happening. Not only does Roy re-invent Ammu through this scene, but in juxtaposing the short lived nature of the relationship with its intensity, she more than hints at the restrictive nature of the present. This restrictiveness makes the emergence of the new woman very logical. The fantasy-like element in the scene hints at a kind of wish fulfillment and the
author’s desire at improving the ‘unsatisfactory reality’. She, however, also invests the infinite promise that the future holds in one word in the end: ‘Tomorrow’.

Fire on the Mountain also ends on an extraordinary, different note. Desai has presented the problem in the course of the narrative. The ending does not offer a solution. Rather, the reader is left wondering whether Raka is safe, with Nanda Kaul probably dead in the house and fire and smoke leaping fast over the mountain. Probably, that is the question that the author wants the reader to mull over. Aap ka Bunti also ends on a similar note, with Bunty’s tears washing away all that was coherent and known in his mind: his father’s face melting with the crowd of strangers that he is surrounded with. However, going by the independence displayed earlier by her, Raka can probably look after herself well. Bunty has still some way to go in this regard. The effort, however, will have to begin.

The ending of That Long Silence is the culmination of the process of writing that Jaya equates with the process of childbirth in the beginning of the novel. The pain and the fear associated with writing are similar to the feelings a mother feels during childbirth. At the end of it, however, emerges a new Jaya, as if from the womb of the old one. She has torn herself through the wall of silence. The unborn child, who was afraid to face this world, but has arrived now, says: ‘life has always to be made possible’. The statement seems to be the assertion of the female consciousness of not only Deshpande but of all the writers discussed in the study. In this phrase lies the awareness and optimism that the social parameters would have to be altered to give space to the new mother as well as the child. Their needs that are specific to the present would have to be understood. However, it would largely be the mother herself who would take the initiative to show the child into the new world.