CHAPTER 5

Summing Up

The present thesis analyses Arundhati Roy’s fiction and nonfiction from a Bakhtinian perspective. This has enabled the researcher to identify Roy as a writer of high competence. Bakhtin posited that the forms and meanings of language are constantly shaped by history and culture. He believed that culture and its narratives, no matter how monolithic they appear, are comprised of a polyphony of competing voices. His concept of ‘dialogism,’ also holds that culture is inherently responsive and interactive, involving individuals who act and react in a particular way at a particular point in time and space. Bakhtin’s concepts of ‘polyphony’, ‘heteroglossia’, ‘dialogism’ and the ‘carnivalesque’ have proved a useful framework for studying Arundhati Roy’s works as they allow for not only an aesthetic appreciation of the individual texts but also acknowledge the social, cultural and political ideologies woven into the texts in addition to the contribution of the context to textual meaning.

Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* as seen is a multifaceted work and cannot be scrutinized from a single angle. Bakhtin’s concepts allow for a comprehensive understanding of a literary work. He originally formulated his ideas with respect to the novel. In this thesis it has been demonstrated that even works of nonfiction can be subjected to such analysis. This kind of an approach has helped the present researcher in the establishment of the true merit of the author. It establishes not only the cultural,
social, linguistic, and political agendas of the texts but also ascertains their artistic and aesthetic values.

Rather than resorting to any one particular critical theory, the application of Bakhtin’s concepts to Arundhati Roy’s works saves one from comprehending it from a monologic stand. A multi-faceted writer like Roy cannot be pinned down to a particular ideology. No voice or meaning or perspective can be taken as absolute. All the perspectives have to be laid side by side to comment on and to be commented upon by each voice.

In the second and third chapters of this study the term polyphony does not only imply the presence of many voices within the ambit of a single utterance, but rather an array of voices that comment on a single concept but from multiple perspectives. Multiple voices of hybridity form the core of the second chapter. The focus is mainly on the postcolonial voices of hybridity. All the members of the Ipe family are segregated to fit into various slots of hybrid existence. Pappachi, Mammachi and Baby Kochamma have adopted the ways of the British wholeheartedly. Their hybridity is marked by a culture that is predominantly British.

The relationship between the West and the natives is manifest in their affinity for the English language and English ways. It is an ambiguous relationship that changes from generation to generation. These members of the Ipe family are very comfortable with the western cultural intrusion. Pappachi particularly acknowledges the contributions of the British. But this never has been a one-way relationship of uncritical acceptance. The later generations prove that its acceptance is a laboured process of adaptation and contestation. Chacko is shown to detest his anglophilia but at the same time is unable to retrace his
steps because his hybridity or interstitial space is not a privileged one. Ammu, his sibling on the other hand, does not display the dilemma exhibited by Chacko. She is more tolerant in her attitude.

The children are further away from the direct effects of colonialism and takes to English naturally without the consciousness of the elders. They are more the refracted voice of the author and it is through them that Roy manages to achieve decolonization of English. Roy’s decolonization process is politically motivated and also shapes her identity. While Pappachi, Mammachi and Baby Kochamma willingly adopt the English culture, Chacko is forced to adapt to the circumstances. Rahel and Estha, the alter ego of the author, on the other hand is adept in their use and abuse of the English language. These postcolonial phases are shown to dialogize with the three phases of renaissance outlined by Sri Aurobindo where the first phase indicates the complete rejection of native values and third stage hopes for the fusion of the best of two worlds. This process of somewhat undifferentiated hybridization of cultural and linguistic influences can be identified as what Bakhtin calls unconscious ‘organic’ hybridity, a mixing of various cultural mores and languages co-existing within the boundaries of a single mind. Such hybridization in language has been illustrated in the decolonization process undertaken by Roy.

The third chapter deals with the various voices of feminism from the perspectives of the various characters as well as the author. No voice is belittled. Mammachi displays her feminist streak in her entrepreneurial skills. She speaks with the élan of a true business woman. Even though her husband Pappachi dislikes her indulging in pickle making and had been a compulsive wife-beater, Mammachi moves forward with her
chosen vocation. This decision of Mammachi stifles Pappachi’s existence. Mammachi’s voice stands opposed to the patriarchal voice of Pappachi.

Similarly, Ammu avenges the forces of patriarchy by her transgressive act. Her body is her site of protest. Her sexual relation with Velutha of the lower caste topples the notions of caste-class hierarchies. Her entry into the forbidden zone is impelled by the atrocities inflicted upon her by the male-dominated society. She had been subjected to torture - mental or physical by her Imperial father, her husband, her brother Chacko, Inspector Thomas Mathew and even her own mother and aunt. While she destabilizes the pseudo values of her patriarchal family by bringing disgrace to them through her daring act of transgression, she subverts the ego and phallic impulses of the other males - her husband, Mr. Hollicks and Inspector Mathew by willingly taking an initiative to establish a sexual relationship with a lower caste, economically poorer Paravan.

Rahel of the third generation is not bound by any societal fetters as experienced by Mammachi and Ammu. She is in a more privileged position as far as opportunities for women are concerned. Moreover we find that she is not bothered by the social mores that govern Ayemenem at the time. She does unconventional jobs like working as a waitress and also as a night clerk in a gas station outside Washington frequented by pimps and other hooligans. This again subverts the false sense of honour carried by her ancestors. This also calls to mind how Mammachi used to look down upon her daughter-in-law Margaret Kochamma for the simple reason that she was a waitress. Rahel’s approach to divorce is also that of nonchalance unlike the elders. It has also been noted how Rahel bears an uncanny resemblance to Roy. The only difference being that Rahel’s childhood play with words is Roy’s weapon of subversion.
Words, as illustrated are a whip for Roy. She bends them and lashes with them at her will. The flexibility and novelty displayed by her language allows it to be grouped under what the French feminist critics refer to as *écriture féminine*. Roy’s experimentation with language has also been explained in terms of the decolonization process. Women of the third world have always been said to be weighed down by the double bind of colonization. Thus, Roy’s language, in addition to being a toy in the hands of the twins, acts as vehicles of subversion from a feminist and a postcolonial standpoint, resulting in the interaction of three different consciousnesses of mutual consent but of individual standing.

The processes of subversion are specially facilitated in an atmosphere of Bakhtinian carnival where hierarchies are levelled and hegemonies toppled. Roy also makes use of grotesque realism to subvert the values of the epic. The carnival atmosphere is made livelier with the presence of music throughout the novel. Music too functions as a distinctive voice in the novel. As illustrated, it is a mode of empowerment for the female characters Ammu and Mammachi as also for the author. Moreover the various musical bits form a musical montage of voices, a true polyphony. These voices allow for the incorporation of various consciousnesses which at times enforce an idea, while at times undermine a thought or an ideology. The inclusion of scatological songs challenges the epic, the religious and the sublime. Recitations from *Julius Caesar* and “Lochinvar” with a Malayalam accent subvert Queen’s English. The fact that rhymes and limericks exist on the same plane as lyrics of exquisite quality, again emphasises the carnivalesque texture of *The God of Small Things*. 
The muted voice of Nature is also made audible in the novel. Nature as a nurturer and sustainer has been compared to women. It has also been shown how nature too reacts when it is subjected to atrocities at the hands of a man-made culture. The women characters enter into a dialogue of mutual agreement with the natural landscape in their dissent against patriarchy and at the same time they differ in their modes of protest.

In *The God of Small Things* we find that patriarchy is a force that has been operating since time immemorial in different degrees. These phallocentric forces have been countered in different ways. The feminist modes of protest and their perspectives differ in accordance with the varying cultural codes of the respective periods. Bakhtin notes about utterance that no utterance exists in isolation. Similarly, Arundhati Roy is also successful in conveying that Feminism is not unitary but has various shades to it and can be understood only in the light of a dialogue between these various shades. It has been highlighted that the voices of these women are only reactions to the perennial problem of patriarchy. This has been countered in a zigzag dialogic pattern by the various characters and the author. “These voices are “neither monolithic nor static but continuously striated by and in dialogue with its changing regional, national and local contexts” (Mullaney 111). Thus the belief that feminism is not a unitary theory but a polyphony arising out of various circumstances and cultural codes is clearly wrought in *The God of Small Things*. A multi-voiced narrative offers a clearer understanding of the condition of women and serves as a key factor in analyzing the novel from a feminist perspective. In this chapter the study of feminist voices becomes one ‘great dialogue in which the object is precisely the passing of a theme through many and varied voices” *(PDP 265).*
It is acknowledged that Arundhati Roy is basically a spokesperson for the marginalized. The exploitation of the powerless by the powerful is her concern. While she highlights the predicament of women, untouchables, children of broken homes and Mother Earth in *The God of Small Things* and their subjugation by the forces of patriarchy operating in the novel, she talks about those affected by Neo-imperialism, corporate globalization, nuclear weapons and Big Dams in her works of nonfiction. In this context too, as it has been explained, there ensues a dialogue between her fiction and nonfiction. The shift is from the personal to the public. Polyphony of marginal voices as well as dominant voices is made explicit here. The continuing struggle between the powerful and the powerless shifts from the personal voices of her characters in the novel to the public voices in her nonfiction, engaging in a dialogue of power politics operating at a wider level. In *Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things*, Alex Tickell states that “Roy’s strategy in TGST is to develop an ‘aesthetic of connection’ – in other words an artistic process of forging meanings and tracing the reach of power that has at its heart, the creative potential of dissent” (10). This aesthetic of connection is nothing but the aesthetic of dialogue which connects the various voices of dissent. Roy herself notes that ‘the theme of much of what I write, fiction as well as nonfiction, is the relationship between power and powerlessness and the endless circular conflict they’re engaged in’ (*AOPGE* 13).

While one finds subversive voices in the novel manifest in different cryptic codes like *écriture féminine*, carnivalization and the decolonization processes, one does not expect such literary tools or modes or other stylistic devices to be present in her essays. In this study even her select essays have been analyzed to highlight the heteroglossia in
them. Roy achieves this by the use of various stylistic devices and not just the voice of a conscientious writer lashing out manifestly at the perpetrators of injustice.

In the essay “Baby Bush Go Home”, we find that Roy brings about polyphony and subversion with a play on words. This is achieved by a dialogization of thoughts and ideas by the use of the polemical, the parodic and the ironic. Roy’s argument is wrought in a cleverly and creatively crafted use of language. President Bush’s larger than life status is inverted by her by the mere power of language. Roy exhibits two voices by way of tonal variations – that of endearment and the other, authoritative, to echo the double standards in policies exhibited by President Bush. All the stylistic devices enter into a dialogic relationship to mirror Bush’s monologic policies.

In “Animal Farm II- In Which George Bush Says What He Really Means” is only an extension of the previous voice. Here the multiplicity of voices is manifest in the multiple genres used in the seemingly simple ‘play.’ Various genres of drama interact to portray Bush in a poor light and in exposing the mask of civility. Moreover the use of multiple genres checks the dominance of any one genre and stands symbolic of the deconstruction of Bush’s monologic policies once again. The author uses the very character of Bush to turn against himself. This is achieved by the use of skaz where the President’s peculiar dialect is directed against himself. His language turns his enemy and mirrors his inner motives.

In the next section, Roy again topples the notions of single meaning by operating on the nuances of a double-voiced discourse. The essay entitled “The Ladies Have Feelings, so…,” discusses the issues on the role of writers, disparity in power and corporate globalization. The title engages in a dialogue with these issues discussed
explicitly to expose the women’s issues submerged in the text. Each issue functions as a dialogized heteroglossia to highlight concerns of ‘the ladies’. Gender discrimination, commodification of women and writing as a process of female assertion are the issues realized in the dialogic study of the same.

“The Most Cowardly War in History” is studied from the perspective of the ‘dialogical self’ where the author is shown to contradict herself and the deconstruction of absolutism is achieved. “Briefing,” the last section in this chapter is a Janus-faced discourse that points at fiction and non-fiction. Though the write-up is said to be a short story, it has been proved how elements of fiction and non-fiction establish a dialogic relationship to subvert notions of hegemony. The multiple voices are generated by the heteroglossia of social registers that aim to collapse the ‘indomitable fort’ that emblematizes domination of all sorts.

On the whole we find that Arundhati Roy uses “various forms of literary but extra-artistic authorial speech” (Vice 60) to drive home her point. Roy, as a polyphonic author plays two roles in the work: she creates a world in which many contrasting points of view enter into dialogue, and, in a quite distinct role she herself participates in that dialogue. She is one of the interlocutors in the “great dialogue” that she herself has created (Morson and Emerson 239). In the case of The God of Small Things, the author’s polyphonic approach enables one to comprehend the concepts of ‘hybridity’ and feminism, from multiple perspectives and saves the reader from coming down to a monologic conclusion.
The above quote holds true for Roy’s essays as well. She supplements her views with the help of such “voices”, creating an organic whole, though that “whole” may not be linear. By combining an array of voices with the rigour of scholarship she highlights her vision. Roy is a spokesperson for the masses. Therefore she herself stands for multiple views and voices. This is one possible reason that multiplicity finds its way to her nonfiction as well. Bakhtin’s dialogics provide the right lens for understanding a writer of Arundhati Roy’s calibre.

The different voices of feminism, postcolonial hybridity, carnivalism and other discourses that have been demonstrated in this study of *The God of Small Things* and some selected essays of Roy point to the fact that any phenomenon, whether it be culture or language is never static. It is under constant process of evolution and change. No truth remains absolute; it changes with reference to time and space. Language is always modified by culture and vice versa, both expanding the vistas of the other.

Such an approach views culture as emergent and dynamic, rather than as stable and given. Application of Bakhtin’s concepts thus offers an open and flexible theory of culture, where moving beyond what is given is a main axiom. This kind of approach finds special significance with reference to Roy’s works. Roy like Bakhtin is against a monoculture and hegemony of any sort. Studying Roy’s works with the aid of a single critical theory is akin to an exercise in monologism. Bakhtin opines that most of the theories of novel try to delink the connections between the content and the style in the novel. He rather believes that “verbal discourse is a social phenomenon – social throughout its entire range and in each and every of its factors, from the sound image to the furthest reaches of abstract meaning” (*DI* 259). This holds true for both Roy’s fiction
and the essays under taken for study. Great literature is never simply the outcome of mere craftsmanship, nor great philosophies, ideologies and sentiments, but is rather shaped by the multiple discourses that permeate it. It is these voices that weave the form and content by a dialogization of the same.

In addition to the internal voices in the texts selected for analysis there is also polyphony of external voices. External voices, in the sense that the voices emanating from the text have been studied from the perspective of feminism, ecofeminism, postcolonialism, stylistics, deconstruction and reader response to have a better understanding of her works. It is the application of Bakhtinian dialogics that has facilitated the use of various other critical tools as well because Arundhati Roy’s works can have a better understanding only when viewed from different perspectives. Bakhtin believed that the existing modes of knowledge always tried to monologize the world by converting open-ended dialogues to monologic statements. He also felt that a dialogic concept of truth is represented only in certain literary works. We have seen that Roy’s works definitely fall into this category. Each analysis has been carried out with the aid of multiple critical tools. The second chapter involves postcolonialism and it includes the perspectives of Homi Bhaba, Fanon and others to give us a better understanding of hybridity. These postcolonialists further establish a dialogue with Sri Aurobindo in highlighting the merits and demerits of cultural contact zones. This has further revealed the phenomenon of culture that is in constant flux.

Similarly when Feminist voices are elicited, the study is viewed from the standpoint of different feminist theories that include French feminist criticism and ecofeminism as well. The explanations and illustrations of certain features of écriture
féminine are the outcome of a dialogue between certain stylistic features and reader-response theory based on contextual meanings and the reader’s experience. The essays are shown to have been analyzed mainly based on certain stylistic devices that bring about the deconstruction of meanings.

The texture of voices that has been drawn provides rich examples illustrative of Bakhtin's concepts of heteroglossia and polyphony. These voices by engendering a dialogue with various critical theories are able to achieve a unity of a higher order. Conversely Roy’s works demonstrate Bakhtin’s perceptions of language and literature as dynamic, ideology infused processes. So it is a mutual dialogue of affirmation and of reciprocation. Roy’s works are shown to “represent the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present between tendencies, schools, circles, and so forth, all given bodily form” (DI 291).

Bakhtin’s tenets illumine not only the novel but other genres like the essay as well. The thesis proves that the essays in question and The God of Small Things are expressions of a “Galilean perception of language, one that denies the absolutism of a single and unitary language - that is, that refuses to acknowledge its own language as the sole verbal and semantic center of the ideological world”(DI 366). Moreover it has established Roy as a writer with a Bakhtinian perspective revelling in subversive tactics. The multiplicity of meanings and voices analyzed substantiate the above quote and support the thesis statement. Bakhtin’s theoretical approach is universal and can be applied to any narrative text from any culture. He states in Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics:
The single adequate form for *verbally expressing* authentic human life is the *open-ended dialogue*. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium. (293)

Likewise meaning of any given text or context can be arrived at only by considering the conjunction of various faculties and never in the isolated study of a phenomenon or entity. The meaning derived, too, is never conclusive because it is likely to change with respect to persons or contexts. This leads to the fact that life itself is an ongoing process of unfinalizable open-ended dialogue. The thesis can be extended to represent all processes that engage in agreement and contradiction that make up the huge dialogue of life itself. The thesis will also not end on a note of conclusion as that would go against the tenets of Bakhtin and impose finalizability. The present study would serve as a practical approach to evaluate texts with special reference to Bakhtinian concepts as a surer method for comprehension.