CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1. Introduction

This thesis attempts to study Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* and some of her select essays as multi-voiced narratives, using Bakhtin’s concepts of dialogism, where literary and extra literary concerns interact and inform to function as dialogues across cultures, literatures, themes, concepts, genders, genres and styles. The dialogic relationships that ensue between her fiction and nonfiction will highlight the subversive power of Roy’s language. Bakhtin’s theoretical approach posits that an entity acquires meaning not in isolation, but in dialogue with the myriads of other factors that surround it. It is in the interaction between the self and the others that reality begins to emerge and take shape. Thus, it is posited that in Roy’s works, no voice, ideology or meaning is absolute or the only truth; truth is rather the outcome of the dialogue between various voices and that it is the dynamic and subversive nature of language that makes truth elusive.

Arundhati Roy is one of India’s most important writers in English. Her fiction and nonfiction have both made an indelible mark on the Anglophone literary landscape. Her only novel, *The God of Small Things* is multifaceted and cannot be confined to any one literary canon. It has been widely acclaimed for its excellent portrayal of the marginalized, verbal exuberance, outstanding architectural pattern and its repertoire of human emotions. Recently even her works of nonfiction have drawn the attention of critics and the media. The essays attracted worldwide attention as “the voice of a
brilliant Indian writer speaking out with clarity and conscience against nuclear weapons, illusory benefits of big dams, corporate globalization and the US Government’s war against terror.” All these issues are dealt with in an original, unique style in her three collections of essays: An Ordinary Person’s Guide to the Empire (AOPGE), The Algebra of Infinite Justice (TAIJ) and Listening to Grasshoppers (LG).

Roy’s fiction has been especially explored for its feminist and post-colonial implications. It is also a commonly held view that she articulates the marginalized in various sectors of human community as well as the natural environment in her oeuvre - both fiction and nonfiction. But what makes her work special is that she authenticates her ideologies by a multi-voiced representation of the same. Her works are not monologues. A careful reading of her opus reveals a number of unmerged voices with individual standing that engage in a dialogue.

A brief review of the literature on Roy reveals that her works can never be studied in isolation. No single viewpoint can be taken as the only one, but the success of her novel lies in the dialogic relationship between all these critiques. Roy’s novel The God of Small Things has been extolled for her excellent portrayal of the marginalized and her “verbal exuberance” as well as criticized for the so-called “over-writing,” “typographical sweetness,” and “self-indulgence.” But writers and critics will uniformly agree that her book has evoked responses with an envious magnitude like no other work of fiction in India, given the currency of its publication. While the novel delights the readers with its virtuosities, Roy remains an en-fant terrible for those who are shocked by the telling tales and the technical tools she employs to highlight her vision. Roy hands over the novel to her readers when she says, “When I write, I lay down my
weapons and give the book to the reader” (Salon Interview). The enormity of the response it has generated can be summed up in the words of the renowned novelist Shashi Deshpande: “Yes, I did envy Arundhati Roy - in not the fame or money, but the attention her book got.”

1.2. Review of Literature

The review her novel has received is indeed enviable. A good number of critics have highlighted her as campaigner for the deserted and the dispossessed. Dr. Ruby Malhotra feels that “The novelist has a unique gift of being able to see even the smallest, apparently meaningless details and create a complex, significant and aesthetically satisfying mosaic of life” in which the question of smallness is relative (147-148). Rosy Misra compares Roy to the likes of Mulk Raj Anand by calling her a social reformer (209) while Ashwini Kumar Vishnu highlights the sociological imagination (158-159) pervading Roy’s fiction. Usha Jesudasan brackets Roy with the likes of Medha Patkar and Vandana Shiva “who show up areas of injustices and raise moral and ethical question to our way of life” (5). Antonia Navarro-Tejero quips that Roy “questions the power structures and attempts to change them through the power embodied in literature” (101). For attaining this change “She fashions subversive strategies to expose the inherently diminishing forces as well as to mirror the balance of power between the characters” states Murari Prasad (158).

Ranjana Harish too asserts that Roy “records Mombattis’ brave, though unfortunate, struggle to survive against crazy winds of caste, class and gender in independent India” (108). Janet Wilson (157) and Rama Kundu (96) emphasize on the theme of gender subjugation and the ‘cankerous social evils’ of casteism represented in
the novel. A.N Dwivedi praises Roy’s ability to hold “the mirror up to nature and reality in order to evoke powerfully the image of suffering class” (p.iv.) while Lakshmi Sistla feels that the novelist presents “child abuse, woman’s needs and politics … the brutalities are of different kinds from social to personal or psychological” (132.) Laxmi Parasuram believes that “the world of big things within the book remain inextricably bound to that of the small and we are unable to draw any clear dividing lines between the small and the big in the flow of the story that deals with different levels of perception as well as of narrative stances to rake up the many issues of the past and present (100). Seema Bhaduri deems that “the dynamics of power that constitute human society remain the same through all the changes of history” (205). “Roy devises a pattern that shows how frustration sustains perpetual suffering in the life of the characters in the novel” according to Prahlad. A. Kulkarni (193). K.M. Pandey on the other hand opines that The God of Small Things observes a kind of dialectical cosmology of suffering and sublimity, in fact, in every culture love is presented as an emotion of subversion and conventions are always challenged by love (53-54).

Many critics like Mohit Kumar Ray and Prathibha Verma have made a feminist analysis of the novel. Jacob C. George is slightly different in his approach and finds Roy’s use of humour as a unique mode of feminist protest, “with its sharply functional and vibrant brand of humour, cast in the feminist mould, falsifies and shakes the foundations of the culturally dominant ingroup’s complacent domain” (76). Equally, Madhumalati Adhikari, states that Roy “has followed the tradition of female writers of creating the ‘submerged meanings’ as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have posited .... This is not a feminist novel and yet, quite naturally, it contains the vision of a female
Nirmala C. Prakash however, posits that the primary concern of the book is human relationship, particularly man-woman relationship (78) and N.P. Singh makes a study of the three generations of women in the novel (69-70). Bimaljit Saini notes in “… The God of Small Things Roy implicitly presses for greater social reform in the rigid positioning of women and the intolerable plight of the deprived class (96). O.P. Mathur finds Roy advocating the equality of sexes (217-218). Some critics like Mohit K. Ray have successfully brought out the resistant texture in the novel that reflects the resistant female structure (64-81). Elleke Boehmer finds that Roy’s novel serves as an example of how women, too, can use “symbolic vocabularies of entitlement . . . to lay claim to the nation’s public and imaginary spaces” (219).

But there are others who are more than critical of Roy’s depiction of a caste transgressive act: the forbidden sexual encounter between the Touchable Ammu and the Untouchable Velutha and the incestuous love between Rahel and Estha. S.P. Swain accuses her of pornographic writing and states that this vulgarity can never be called ‘gender socialization’ (146-147). Sumanyu Satpathy finds the allusions to the Heart of Darkness point to the theme of moral corruption in Ayemenem (135). Aijaz Ahmed concludes that “What we get … is a closed, fatalistic world at the heart of individual choice: deaths foretold, as the obverse of phallic ecstasy. One sins, and then one waits for the wages of sin, which is death” (39). Amina Amin also airs a similar view when she remarks “While she is offering a scathing critique of societal laws, which oppress the underprivileged, the marginalized and the defenseless, she also shows how certain laws, which human beings have to obey by virtue of their being human beings, have punishment written into them almost deterministically. The cycle of the twenty years of
life of the Ayemenem family moves with ‘Karmic’ irrevocability” (110). Brinda Bose, on the contrary argues “There is an exploration of shame and defeat here, certainly, but the politics of the novel is contained in the subversion of this shame and defeat through the valorization of erotic desire - To know that there may be death at the end of it - and still to desire – is not necessarily to accept a just punishment but to believe that such death is not a shame and defeat” (59-72). Others however, comment upon Roy’s moral aspects. N.K.Mishra and Sabitha Tripathy feel that “the novelist makes a dig at the falling standard of social morality in modern Indian society” (121-122). Shankar Ojha, Uday and Gajendra feel Arundhati Roy justifies the Lawrentian approach that the closest human intimacy is possible only through sexual intercourse, an experience that is marked by a momentary but complete unity of man and woman and of the two with the very soul of life (216). Simon G. Barnabas examines that “…the values of the locale and the House have been responsible for shaping of the rebellious spirit of the leading character in the novel- Ammu” (297). Urbashi Barat on the other hand is assertive when she says “To deny love its “Locusts Stand I”… is to bring about the destruction of the other social mores (96). J.P Tripathi opines that “The different scenes of exposure of human foible and hypocrisy put the novel in the rank of literature that lasts” (44).

Almost all readers and reviewers have appreciated the narrative skill of Arundhati Roy. Madhu Benoit appreciates the “metatemporal narrative mode” (77-78) while A. K. Mukherjee says Roy “employs a circuitous narrative so that events emerge elliptically and out of chronological sequence. This is quite in keeping with the new Indian novel starting in the 1980s in which the narratology has altered” (198). Uday Shankar Ojha and Gajendra come to the conclusion that “The narrative strategy of this
work of art mollifies time and invests a polytemporal scheme of time where there is a constant shift from the past to the present and to the future” (212). Susan Stanford Friedman focuses on how Roy’s “spatial poetics” reveals ways in which the novelist uses the local, Kerala, to address the “politics of regional, national and transnational landscapes through time” (198).

Prem Prakash finds that the structure of the novel undergoes a kind of deconstruction which “destroys chronology, history, time-narrative, character, characteristics and leads into aphoria-vacant situation” (202-203). Prayag D. Tripathi finds “the rambling movement of episodes” specifically remarkable about the narrative technique (310). Pradeep Trikha attributes Roy’s architechtonic technique to the author’s architect background (280). Murari Prasad considers the narratology in The God of Small Things a success because it exemplifies efficient use of what “Gerard Genette has called, variously, paralepsis (the narrator’s omission of some action pertaining to the main characters focalized), prolepsis (the reference to some future event of the story by the omniscient narrator), analepsis (retrospective narration) and ellipsis (omission of some events)” (Fictional World 17). According to Padma Rani Hari, a close scrutiny of the novel reveals that there is more to its structure than meets the eye and extols the poetic quality of the novel (338). Devon Cambell-Hall compares Roy to Ondaatje because “The characters become social commentators and voices of “narrative truth” through which Ondaatje and Roy tackle those issues that are too risky to address through a narrative persona” (52). Émilienne Baneth Nouailhetas reveals how the narrative structure is arranged around the process of recollection and ‘rememoration’ 143-154.
Indeed there are a large number of critics who do eulogize the language and the poetic quality in the novel, including the Booker jury. Jason Cowley welcomes the extraordinary linguistic inventiveness of Roy. Alessandro Monti comments on how Arundhati Roy “‘re-pidgins’ English with a vengeance- a mischievous stylist, she puns through comedy and tragedy, love and gore’ (384). Corrado Micheli considers the language employed by Roy as eccentric and highly evocative and feels that only such language can make feel the strength and vividness of Indian history and mythology to the outsider and to be felt simultaneously by the insider (211). Rama Nair feels that the language stands out due to the aesthetic effect created by the symbolic use of language (248). Prayag Tripathi compares the narrative technique to the modernist approaches of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce and considers its innovative language with metaphors, alliteration and musicality fascinating (307). O.P Mathur is more psychological in his approach when he connects the multifarious linguistic confusion, so amusing and often meaningful, to the underlying confusion of moral values and natural order (219) and O.P. Budholia too holds a similar view when he says “Deviating from the traditional pattern of language, the novelist also deviates from the established code of social norms” but he is appreciative of Roy when he states that “She had undoubtedly succeeded in her efforts to use synchronic and sensory language in this novel with an apt use of modern images, metaphors and symbols” (94). Anna Sujatha Mathai enjoys Roy’s sense of the language, her constant exploration and tasting, testing, balancing of it and feels that it adds to the originality and joy of the book (180). Rama Nair states that “In The God of Small Things, the real world of transgression and brutality is juxtaposed with the ideal
world of love and commitment. Language by the sheer force of its symbolic power is the link between the two worlds” (250).

Such acclamations are not without condemnations. There are those doyens of criticism who are downright harsh in their comments. Mallikarjun Patil finds that “Every para, every page, every chapter points out the linguistic as well as grammatical absurdities any ideal reader will dislike … repetitions, words running into other words, clichés, distorted words, coinages, foreign words, obscure expressions, typical imagery and finally vague abstractions go together in downgrading the standards” of The God of Small Things (62). Louella Lobo Prabhu too finds Roy’s endless similes and metaphors “a self conscious and tedious exercise (12) as opposed to Madhu Singh who finds the metaphors and similes arresting (6). C.D.Narasimhaiah calls them “‘Mental Bombasts’, as Coleridge would have called it, with feelings for words, not into them” (p.V). Suresh Shukla on the other hand disagrees with Prof. C.D.N. when he says “Mrs. Roy impresses readers, as a writer of impulse rather than premeditation” (220). Aijaz Ahmed, too, is not happy with her overwrought style. Shirley Chew is a bit lenient in her analysis when she says “Its weaknesses are the kind one might expect in a first novel; the most glaring being a tendency to overwrite.”

M.L.Pandit feels that “the relationship of the seven-year old twins, Estha and Rahel and the depth of their feeling for each other and those who genuinely love them that has an enduring impact on the mind of the reader (246). Usha Mahadevan too subscribes to this view when she says that “ Roy captures the child’s consciousness with remarkable sensitivity and lets us see the joys and sorrow of childhood, the love, the fun, the insecurity and even the terror of childhood” (84). A.N. Dwivedi however, points to
the more serious issues of child-abuse and child negligence recorded in the novel (135). R.S. Sharma considers the incestuous relationship of Estha and Rahel as something more than psychological aberration. It is “a metaphor for the reunion of the two selves” (75).

Critics like Christel Devadawson accuse Roy for her display of exoticism (287). Mary Conde (171) says that Indian reviewers in particular have found the financial success of her book impossible to ignore. Michael Gorra opens his review: “Here, with the cloud of a six-figure advance trailing behind her, comes Arundhati Roy” (22). Rukmini Bhaya Nair writes: “…but few I imagine would disagree with me that had a whole chorus of Englishmen sung hosannas to Roy, but not paid up, it would have been difficult to secure for her the kind of reception she got here, no matter what the merits of her book” (4). Aparna Dharwadkar thinks Roy’s fiction “is Indian Made Foreign fiction of the same kind as Foreign Made Indian Fiction of Rushdie and Mistry, meant for the same markets and audiences, though not dependent on any of them for its techniques, methods and strategies, (162-163).

Some other observations made: For M.K.Naik the central theme of the God of Small Things has existential implications (225). Pradeep Trikha studies the novel in terms of childhood perception and struggle against Christian morals and redemption (278). Shyam. S. Agarwalla, explores traces of the Naxal sensibility of the sixties and seventies in India (267). Yogesh Kumar Sinha acknowledges that the novel also “provides an intriguingly hermeneutic experience by withholding something significant for the reader who has to look intently into the woofings and warpings of the texture in order to attain the knowledge of that elusive ‘truth’” (137). For Surendra Narayan Jha “It is exactly the overpowering, all-pervading dream world that wholly monitors, operates
and governs the entire activities of worldly life in The God of Small Things as well” (169). Nishi Chawla states that Arundhati Roy’s novel has all “the reek of the human” which Bakhtin glorifies and celebrates (343-344) and she highlights Roy’s use of grotesque realism. David Myers on the other hand compares the novel to a Greek tragedy (357). The novel has also been studied for its psychological implications. O.P Budholia’s analysis reveals that Roy’s “prime concern in this novel is to reveal two aspects of human behavior: the psychic depth of motive-led impulses and the creation of a new linguasphere with a specific concern for its functional aspects (82-83). Dr. Amar Nath Prasad, states that the “whole novel revolves around two types of psychology-needs psychology and trauma psychology” (114-115). Sanjay Kumar opines that the Ipe family undergoes “acute and insoluble psychological problems in their lives because of the loosening traditional values of Indian society in regard to love and marriage and family life” (38).

There are those who have analyzed the novel in terms of post-colonialism. Cynthia vanden Driesen calls it a postcolonial text, “its language constantly interrogating and displacing the hegemony of the colonialist master text” (374). Madhumalati Adhikari states that the colonial forces, active through the colonized, create a pattern of master-slave relationship that realigns the entire power structure (46). Murari Prasad states that she articulates the need for the abrogation of the marginalizing power of the dominant center (Fictional World 158) while Victor Ramraj states that her criticism of India, “comes from an affection, not from standing outside and sneering and laughing” (85). Sahu Nandini states that Roy’s lines contain open statements about her passage from alienation to the awareness of a sense of discovering the world and its
values and roots (47). Amitabh Roy talks of how Roy addresses issues related to 
environment both in her fiction and nonfiction (130) and K.V. Surendran claims that the 
“ecological problem is only one among the several issues dealt with in the novel” (175) 
and Murari Prasad finds that she elaborates on this concern for the environment in her 
onfiction (“Articulating the Marginal” 157-177).

Critiques on Roy’s only novel are numerous, but only a few significant ones 
have been included here. At the same time her essays have not been studied for their 
literary value but have been acclaimed as the voice of a brilliant activist for the 
marginalized by some reviewers. The multiple reviews above point to the popularity of 
the author but what really needs to be studied are the multiple voices within Roy’s texts 
that account for such varied and groundbreaking reviews. It is also noted that Roy’s 
works, especially her essays have not been approached from a Bakhtinian perspective.

When John Berger in the epigraph to the novel says “Never again will a 
single story be told as though it’s the only one”, one is prompted to look for the many 
sides to the same story as well as the multiple viewpoints present and the multiple 
genres and styles used. When we say that The God of Small Things is a postcolonial 
novel or a feminist novel, it is not just one voice that proves the claim. These ideologies 
operate at different levels of meanings under differing circumstances, ages and cultures, 
projecting a kind of polyphony of voices entering into dialogue. Her essays too are not 
just the monologic voice of the author for the marginalized, but rather a heteroglossia of 
genres and styles that are multi-vocal. Bakhtin’s concepts prove apt critical tools to 
study and promote such heterogeneity.
1.3. Bakhtin’s Concepts

Bakhtin’s ideas and concepts are elaborately explained in his works *Dialogic Imagination (DI)*, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics (PDP)* and *Rebelais and his World (RHW)*. “Robert Crawford, for example, calls Bakhtin the critic for the 1990s, as one who has much to offer those interested ‘in the construction of regional and national territorial voices in literature’” (Vice 3). In fact Bakhtin’s influence on theoretical and critical thought in the English-speaking world has been massive ever since his work started to appear in English translation from the late 1960s onwards. His work became accessible in English at a time when the influence of new criticism was on the decline and critics were keen to replace its insistence on the autonomy of the text with approaches which respected the particularity of text while exploring its dependency on and contribution to specific historical and intellectual contexts. Bakhtin posited that the forms and meanings of language are constantly shaped by literature, history and culture and this is an ongoing process. Among Bakhtin's most influential concepts are “heteroglossia,” “polyphony”, “dialogism” and “carnivalism”.

‘Heteroglossia’ is Bakhtin’s key term which means differentiated speech. It is the idea that culture and its narratives, no matter how monolithic they appear, are comprised of a complex mixture of language varieties and discourses. A detailed description of heteroglossia in Bakhtin’s words:

The novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized. The internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional
jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour (each day has its own slogan, its own vocabulary, its own emphases) – this internal stratification present in every language at any given moment of its historical existence is the indispensable prerequisite of the novel as genre. (*DI* 262-263)

In other words heteroglossia refers to the ideologies inherent in the various languages to which we all lay claim as social beings and by which we are constituted as individuals - the language and the inherent ideologies of one’s profession, of one’s age group, of the decade, of one’s social class, geographical region, family, circle of friends, etc. Heteroglossia is also the mutual inter-animation of these forms. “Once it enters the novel, heteroglossia does not simply consist of neutral series of different languages; these languages are bound to conflict at the very least with the ‘author’s’ language, with each other, and with any surrounding languages which do not necessarily appear in the text” (*Vice* 19). The means by which heteroglossia enters the novel are authorial speech, the speeches of narrators and other characters and inserted speech genres.

Bakhtin describes heteroglossia as a complex mixture of languages and world views that are always, except in some imagined ideal condition, dialogized, as each language is viewed from the perspective of the others. Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson state that this dialogization of languages or dialogized heteroglossia, creates a complex unity, for whatever meaning language has, resides neither in the intention of the speaker or author nor entirely in the text but at a point between speaker or writer, listener...
or reader (285-86). It is only when such heteroglossia is present that works generally grow in meaning over time. This kind of dialogization of languages, according to them is always taking place, and language is always changing, as a result of what Bakhtin calls ‘hybridization’, the mixture of two or more languages within a single utterance. Even stratification of different registers in a language is termed as ‘heteroglossia’.

‘Polyphony’, on the other hand, as its musical metaphor refers, is the coexistence of independent but interconnected voices. Its etymological roots suggest ‘many voices’. The characters and author occupy an equal position in a polyphonic work, making it a democratic platform where all voices have equal importance. Polyphony is basically a new theory of point of view propounded by Bakhtin which encourages a dialogic sense of truth.

Many critics have appreciated Bakhtin’s concept of polyphony. David Lodge states that a polyphonic novel is a “novel in which a variety of conflicting ideological positions are given a voice and set in play both between and within individual speaking subjects without being placed and judged by an authoritative authorial voice” (86). Bakhtin stresses that polyphony is not an attribute of all novels and he feels that Dostoevsky was the first polyphonic writer. He believed that Dostoevsky was the initiator of “a fundamentally new novelistic genre” (PDP 7) which allowed for the entry of multiple consciousnesses. He achieved this by undertaking “the task of constructing a polyphonic world and destroying the established forms of the fundamentally monologic (homophonic) European novel” (ibid. 8).

This kind of polyphony is seen when the author is not dominant and allows great freedom to the characters to the extent that they can argue or agree with each other or
even with the author. In a polyphonic novel a character’s word about himself and his world is just as fully weighted as the author’s word. Bakhtin believed that a character’s voice “possesses extraordinary independence in the structure of the work itself; it sounds as it were, alongside the author’s word and in a special way combines both with it and with the fully and equally valid voices of other characters” (PDP 7). This allows for the interaction of a plurality of unmerged consciousnesses on the same plane.

Polyphony is not a theory that posits the absence of authorial point of view as claimed by some critics. Bakhtin explicitly states that the polyphonic author neither lacks nor fails to express his ideas and values. In a polyphonic novel the author acts as “an organizer and participant in the dialogue without retaining for himself the final word” (PDP 72). Bakhtin further states that the story would reflect not only the pure intonations of the author but also the intonations of the “noblewoman and the coachman; that is, words would be double-voiced, in each word an argument (a microdialogue) would ring out, and there could be heard echoes of the great dialogue” (ibid.). This reflects the dialogic nature of human life and human thought itself. Bakhtin also maintains that a work without “an authorial position . . . is in general impossible. . . . The issue here is not an absence of, but a radical change in, the author's position” This is not easy and presupposes an enormous “power of poetic creativity” (PDP 67). The author’s voice is one among the other voices. In short ‘polyphony’ constitutes “a plurality of unmerged and independent voices and consciousnesses,... fully valid voices ... with equal rights and each with its own world” (PDP 6).

Polyphony which literally means “multi-voicedness” (PDP 279) is also a way of identifying heteroglossia without being identical to it. Sue Vice differentiates the two:
“'Polyphony’ means ‘multi-voicedness’, while ‘heteroglossia’ means ‘multilingualizedness’, and this apparently small difference in meaning is very significant” (113). While heteroglossia involves the incorporation of different dialects, jargons, personal idiosyncrasies of utterance, polyphony deals with the way in which characters are represented, their relation to the narrator, the autonomy which their voices and viewpoints have within the text. Pam Morris views the shift of terminology from “polyphony” to “heteroglossia” as a “shift of emphasis towards social languages rather than individual voices which were more the focus of analysis in the study of Dostoevsky’s prose” (113). This explanation compels us to decipher that polyphony deals more with the dialogic relationship among individual voices while heteroglossia deals with social voices.

Polyphony refers to not only the presence of many voices but also to the collective quality of an individual utterance; that is, the capacity of an utterance to embody someone else’s utterance even while it belongs to somebody else, which thereby creates a dialogic relationship between two voices. In this sense heteroglossia can be said to be polyphonic. Intertextuality is also a kind of polyphony as it allows for the existence of multiple voices simultaneously. A polyphonic work carries on a continual dialogue with other works of literature and other authors. It does not merely answer, correct, silence, or extend a previous work, but informs and is continually informed by the previous work. This is a Janus-faced influence and is akin to what T.S. Eliot says in *Tradition and the Individual Talent*: “the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past.”
‘Dialogics’ or ‘Dialogism’ is the process by which meaning is evolved not only out of interactions among the author, the work, the characters and the reader but also among the different styles, genres, tones, inter-textual references and the context in which it is placed. Implicit in dialogic philosophy is an accent on dialogue as an ongoing social process of meaning making. Dialogue is a special type of interaction. Morson and Emerson state: “As Bakhtin used the term, dialogue cannot be equated with argument, nor is it equivalent to ‘compositionally expressed dialogue,’ that is, the sequential representation of transcribed voices in a novel or play. Bakhtin also warns us against confusing dialogue with logical contradiction” (Creation of a Prosaics 49). According to Bakhtin meaning is generated in Dostoevsky’s dialogic novel as follows:

It is constructed not as the whole of a single consciousness, absorbing other consciousnesses as objects into itself, but as a whole formed by the interaction of several consciousnesses, none of which entirely becomes an object for the other; this interaction provides no support for the reviewer who would objectify an entire event according to some ordinary monologic category (thematically, lyrically or cognitively) – and this consequently makes the viewer also a participant. (PDP 18)

Dialogism then is at the heart of communication. Communication manifests itself not only among individual voices but in the utterance as well. Utterance for Bakhtin was vital to any communication as he considered it a unit between two speaking subjects, one of these subjects may even be the reader of a text from whom responses are elicited. An utterance may be a single word or a long commentary, but no utterance is isolated. Every utterance is a response to a previous utterance and also exists in anticipation of a
response. This signifies the importance of contextual meaning that is encouraged in a dialogic study. By making the utterance his object of meta-linguistics, Bakhtin brought these extra-linguistic aspects back to the study of language. Bakhtin states:

> Dialogic relationships are reducible neither to logical relationships nor to relationships oriented semantically toward their referential object, relationships *in and of themselves* devoid of any dialogic element. They must clothe themselves in discourse, become utterances, become the positions of various subjects expressed in discourse, in order that dialogic relationships might arise among them. (*PDP* 183)

The term dialogic does not apply only to literature. Bakhtin considered all thought and language to be dialogic as long as these presuppose earlier statements and anticipate future responses. The term ‘dialogue’ is used by Bakhtin in multiple contexts and in such diverse senses that it often seems to be devoid of clear definition. Sometimes the dialogue is seen to function within an utterance and this is referred to as a micro-dialogue. Bakhtin also opines that a work of art will live only if it engages in a dialogue and dialogue is possible only in works that are open-ended. By ‘open-ended’, Bakhtin alludes to those authors who do not retain the final word about their characters nor the plot. The author’s surplus vision was considered by Bakhtin as a hindrance to the freedom of the characters and exerted total control over them. An author’s surplus “finalizes a character and definitively establishes his identity” (Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics* 241). Bakhtin also states that some basic knowledge about the characters has to be known by the author for carrying the story forward. Sometimes the other characters share a surplus of vision with respect to the hero or others. One cannot
always know himself completely. There may be some details that can be deciphered only by outsiders. This surplus is also essential in the ensuing of a dialogue for the better understanding of the characters.

The author creates the world in which the unfinalizable character lives, and may put chance encounters or provocative incidents in his way, but will not retain for himself a superior position beyond these purely pragmatic necessities. In a polyphonic work we do not find such surplus knowledge exhibited by the author. The characters also participate in this ongoing dialogue not as objects of the author’s consciousness but as “free people, capable of standing alongside,” agreeing or disagreeing with, even rebelling against, their creator (PDP 6). These characters are “not only objects of authorial discourse but also subjects of their own directly signifying discourse,” and together they become “a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices” (6-7). In the polyphonic novel, the reader is also an important participant in the dialogue as his/her consciousness also constitutes an important voice in that work.

Polyphony is sometimes taken to be synonymous with either dialogism or heteroglossia. Bakhtin makes a crucial connection between a “polyphonic novel and a “dialogic” novel. He states “The polyphonic novel is dialogic through and through” (PDP 40). Katerina Clark and Michael Holoquist also see the two terms interchangeable and write: “The phenomenon that Bakhtin calls ‘polyphony’ is simply another name for dialogism” (242). David Lodge also observes the interconnectedness between the two words when he says “In Bakhtin’s theory, ‘polyphonic is virtually synonymous with ‘dialogic’” (86). Lynne Pearce makes a subtle distinction between the two terms even though she also suggests the interrelatedness of the two terms. She writes: “‘polyphony’
is associated with the macrocosmic structure of the text (literally, its ‘many voices’) and ‘dialogue’ to reciprocating mechanisms within the smaller units of exchange, down to the individual word” (21). In a polyphonic work, authorial viewpoint differs in kind and method of expression from its monologic counterparts. Neither does a polyphonic work lack unity, as critics of Bakhtin often understand him to be saying. By Bakhtin's criteria, a work without some kind of unity would simply be a flawed work. Rather, polyphony demands a different kind of unity, which Bakhtin calls “a unity of a higher order” (PDP 298).

Morson and Emerson state that Bakhtin characterizes the monologic world as “‘Ptolemaic”: the earth representing the author’s consciousness, is the center around which all other consciousnesses revolve. The polyphonic world is Copernican; as the earth is but one of many planets, the author’s consciousness is but one of many consciousnesses Bakhtin compares the move from the monologic to the dialogic authorship to a shift from the heliocentric to the Copernican universe (Creation of a Prosaics 240).

Bakhtin distinguishes monologue from dialogue as an attempt to provide another way of talking about and critiquing the long-celebrated objectivist (i.e., modernist) tradition. Bakhtin thus introduces the term “dialogic” as a way of identifying social processes as central to any understanding of our worlds. Therefore, the most important thing about voices is not what is contained within them, but what transpires between them.

As a result, all language is dynamic, relational and engaged in a process of continuous modification of the world. Bakhtin also emphasized certain uses of language
that maximized the dialogic nature of words, and discouraged other uses that attempted to limit or restrict their polyvocality. It is the use of such literary devices that enhance the dialogic quality of the texts. Bakhtin considered only those novels polyphonic which allowed the “possibility of employing on the plane of a single work discourses of various types, with all their expressive capacities intact, without reducing them to a common denominator” (*PDP* 200). Bakhtin considers the “double-voiced” discourse, the “chief hero” among various novelistic discourses and it arises from the dialogic interaction of language (*PDP* 185). He also finds it one of the chief objects of study for metalinguistics. In a “double-voiced discourse” two semantic intentions or two voices occur simultaneously. The author of a double-voiced discourse will take an “objectified” discourse and infuse it with his own private intentions and consciousness. He will at the same time retain the original speaker’s intentions. We can hear the point of view of the original speaker as well as the point of view of the second speaker in the double-voiced discourse. Therefore the audience of a double-voiced work is “meant to hear both a version of the original utterance as the embodiment of its speaker’s point of view (or “semantic position”) and the second speaker’s evaluation of that utterance from a different point of view” (Morson and Emerson, *Rethinking Bakhtin* 65).

Bakhtin considers speech phenomena such as ‘stylization’, ‘skaz’ and ‘parody’, the off-shoots of double-voiced discourse as highly dialogic in nature. By ‘stylization,’ Bakthin means the borrowing by one voice of the recognizable style and the timbre of another; “it is an artistic representation of another’s linguistic style, it is an artistic image of another’s language” (*DI* 362). In stylization at least two individualized linguistic consciousnesses must be present: one that represents and the one that is represented
Thus hybridity can also be taken to be a kind of stylization where different social languages mix within a single utterance. Even cases of intertextuality could be said to be stylized because David Lodge states that “Stylization occurs when the writer borrows another’s discourse and uses it for his own purposes - with the same general intention as the original but in the process casting a ‘a slight shadow of objectification over it’” (After Bakthin 59). A ‘parody’ has a semantic intention directly opposed to the original one (PDP 193) and ‘skaz’ is nothing but a stylization of the various forms of oral everyday narrative (DI 262). Dialogue, thus in its narrow or limited sense as a subset of human discourse, distinct from monologue includes several specific types of dialogue, among them stylization, parody, and hidden polemic.

Another one of Bakhtin’s interesting concepts is the idea of carnivalism. As a way of life, it is an expression of universal freedom: “a pageant without foot lights and without division into performers and spectators. In a carnival everyone is an active participant, everyone communes in the carnival act. Carnival is not contemplated and strictly speaking, not even performed; its participants live in it, they live by its laws as long as those laws are in effect; that is, they live a carnivalistic life” (PDP 122). During carnival time “life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom” (RHW 7). As a mode of language, carnival is specifically an expression of freedom from official norms and values. A liberating consciousness functions at the level of language, freeing one from the norms of etiquette and decency imposed by one’s class and position. Carnival in language also allows for the levelling of hierarchies by certain subversive techniques. While a carnival square permits the intermingling of people of all social and political strata without any restrictions, the carnival square of a text allows
for the incorporation of various discourses that enter into a dialogue, including the profane and the indecent. It is the carnival nature of texts that permits the entry of heteroglossia and polyphony.

In other words it is an upside down world where law and order does not exist. Thus carnivalesque language, an expression of freedom from official norms, stands also in binary opposition to the authority of church and state (Clark and Holquist 299-302; Morson and Emerson 445-46). This language of laughter “builds its own world versus the official world, its own church versus the official church, its own state versus the official state” (RHW 88). The novelistic genre has been acknowledged by Bakhtin to permit the entry of various consciousnesses through various discourses but this can be extended to other genres as well.

The roots of carnivalized literature can be traced to the serio-comical genres of the ancient past, which is believed to be the origin of the polyphonic novel. The “Socratic dialogues” and “Menippean Satire” are some of these sources. The oldest grotesque parody “Cyprian’s Supper” which transformed all sacred history from Adam to Christ into a clownish banquet and Grammatical Virgil Maro, a parody of Latin grammar (RHW 20) are examples. Bakhtin believed that present day parody springs from these origins and is an important part of carnivalized literature. It is a situation where all sense of decorum and decency are temporarily suspended. The epic and classical literature deemed such measures below the dignity of literature. But Bakhtin sees it as subversive means to topple all sorts of hierarchies.

The folk culture is the basis of carnivals. This is realized in literature by what Bakhtin calls “grotesque realism.” Grotesque literature is opposed to all forms of ‘high’
literature. All discourses that bring down to earth or degrade anything ineffable or authoritarian come under this genre. ‘Degradation’ is an important aspect of grotesque realism. It means the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal and abstract to the material level. ‘Degradation’ here does not simply mean ‘insulting’ but rather bringing into close contact with the earth, “as an element that swallows up and gives birth at the same time.” Bakhtin further elaborates: “To degrade also means to concern oneself with the lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly and the reproductive organs; it therefore relates to acts of defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy, and birth. Degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth” (*RHW* 24).

The main functions of the grotesque body take place in the lower stratum. This is opposed to the epic literature that considered the head and the upper stratum superior to the rest of the body. The association with the lower bodily references relates it to fertility and growth. This is further explained in terms of ‘upward’ and ‘downward’ movements. ‘Upward’ is directed at the heavens and ‘downward’ means movement towards the earth. The earth is similar to the lower stratum that includes the stomach and the womb. These devour everything and simultaneously aid in birth and resurrection. Therefore to degrade something means to throw something into the womb of the earth to foster rebirth.

Bakhtin condemns monologic habits of thought nurtured by centuries of what he earlier called theoretism. In the concluding sentence of *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, he calls on critics to think in fundamentally new ways: “We must renounce our monologic habits so that we might come to feel at home in the new artistic sphere which
Dostoevsky discovered, so that we might orient ourselves in that incomparably more complex artistic model of the world which he created” (272).

Bakhtin’s use of central concepts may shift according to context. Sometimes, individual concepts of Bakhtin may include incompatible ideas, as he does for example in the case of dialogism and heteroglossia. Voice, as theorized by Bakhtin, does not refer solely to spoken words, but also to themes, styles and actions of characters. Heteroglossia, polyphony and the carnivalesque together form the framework for the dialogic Bakhtinian study.

The second chapter elicits polyphony of hybrid voices in The God of Small Things. These voices will be analyzed mainly in terms of postcolonial theory. The concept of hybridity in relation to the characters and their place in history and how the theme of the colonized-colonizer can be extended to other power structures operating in the novel will be discussed in this chapter. The voices of the various characters will be located in the three phases of ‘Adopt’, ‘Adapt’ and ‘Adept’ and this will establish a dialogue with Aurobindo’s three famous phases of Renaissance. Hybridity as an interstitial space of creativity and subversive force will be dealt with in detail.

The third chapter is an attempt to delineate the multiple feminist voices in the novel. The feminists we come across in the novel belong to different points in time and to a culture that is in constant flux. It is not a single story of the subjugated woman and her protest but rather we hear several voices reacting to the recurring theme of patriarchy and providing insights into different perceptions of this age old phenomenon. It is not enough to have just one viewpoint to understand a problem or a situation. The creative orchestration of the feminist polyphony in the novel is elicited in the thesis to have a
better understanding of the perennial battle between the sexes. Though after reading the novel one is always under the impression that it is always the women who are at the receiving end, the various voices clearly go with the dictum that every action has an equal and opposite reaction. The muted voice of the natural environment also exhibits solidarity with the feminist movement. Moreover, it deals with the changing phases of feminism over time and the subversive power inherent in a feminine text. This subversive language forms a dialogic relationship with Bakhtin’s notion of the carnivalesque where hegemonies are toppled.

A dialogic study of multiple voices in Roy’s select essays is carried out in the fourth chapter. The essays selected for study are: “Baby Bush Go Home”, “Animal Farm-II”, “Ladies Have Feelings, so…”, “The Most Cowardly War in History”, “Algebra of Infinite Justice” and “The End of Imagination”. Her short story “The Briefing”, which borders on fiction and nonfiction, is also included under this section. These texts will be analyzed in terms of heteroglossia, parody and stylization to elicit the multiple voices buried in the seemingly monologic musings of the author. The subversive power of language in this section, too leads to the deconstruction of meanings and hierarchies.

This study thus, involves a clear statement of the basic tenets of Bakhtin’s concepts of multiple voices and some later developments in critical theory that contribute to this open-ended polyphony. It aims at identifying a working paradigm to be applied to Arundhati Roy’s works, establishing her as a dialogic writer. The common tendency is to take what is stated, to be the personal ideas, feelings and thoughts of a writer. However, modern theory looks upon all speech and writing as discourse, which
has a context and a co-text. No communication activity takes place *sui generis*. There are always other voices to which the present one is a response. The application of the concept of ‘multiple voices’ will place the statements as relative, than absolute, based on the socio-cultural matrix.

Bakhtinian theoretical approach is applied with reference to its possible ramification when applied with reference to modern critical theories of feminism, post colonialism, eco-feminism, deconstruction, reader- response theory and stylistics. Such an approach promotes a dialogue of various external voices in the study of Roy’s fiction and nonfiction and leads to a better understanding of the same. These multiple perspectives shall enter into a dialogue to further establish Roy as a writer of extraordinary calibre.