

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **CONCLUSION**

This thesis proposed to offer a study of the Indian English essay through analyses of the selected texts by R. K. Narayan, Amitav Ghosh and Arundhati Roy. The attempt was undertaken against a wider background of a steadily growing body of critical thinking on the generic nuances and potentialities of the essay available in the Western academy. It made an attempt at interrogating the longstanding academic negligence of the essay and the conditions and presuppositions underlying the process of evaluation and also aimed at negotiating alternative routes to the study of the essay. It further proposed to bring the insight, gained by the study of the essay in general, to the study of the Indian English essay which has suffered a similar generic marginalization.

The study found that due to the extraordinary flexibility and variety of the essay the search for its generic core had to be directed to its point of origin in Montaigne and the discursive frame of the Renaissance. This line of enquiry revealed that the essay's form was intentionally shaped by Montaigne as different from the traditionally accepted forms of discourse and that this oppositional form of the essay was designed to perform a kind of discursive function. Montaigne shaped the essay as disarmingly simple, structurally and thematically flexible and essentially personal to pose it against the rigorous, methodical and objective modes of the academically accepted traditions of medieval Scholasticism. In the process, the essay became the formal or generic embodiment of the Renaissance principles of individuality, discovery and experiment reacting against the rigid and prescriptive discourse of Scholasticism. The analysis leads to a view of the essay as having potential for representing a modern, critical and experimental epistemological stance that stands against any form of closed and absolutist view of reality. It locates the essay's generic core in a principle of discursive function rather than its appearance. It was found that the different traditions of essay criticism in Germany, in Anglo-America and in Latin America have evaluated their respective essay traditions in

terms of the various ideological functions that the essay can perform within the socio-historical and discursive specificities of their respective societies.

The incorporation of the theoretical insight, thus acquired, was then put to the analysis of the selected texts by the three writers against the broader generic interrogation of the three subforms of the familiar essay, the narrative essay and the political essay. The study found that there is a unique line of development running through the texts reflecting the genre's gradually increasing maturity, and complexity accompanied by a steadily developing sense of independence and stability. Thus in the case of R. K. Narayan, the simplistic form of the familiar essay meets with a categorization of absolute secondariness in relation to the form of the novel not only from the critics but from the writer himself. In Amitav Ghosh, on the other hand, the form acquires a level of maturity where it can share a relation of hybridity and interdependency with fiction—it manifests as the narrative essay—rather than any exclusive relation of secondariness. In Arundhati Roy's case the essay surpasses the novel to become the writer's chosen form of expression and shows itself to be capable of negotiating a complex interplay of political and discursive elements.

The form of the familiar essay, in Narayan's case, is found to be facing a kind of double marginalization. The quality of being "familiar" becomes synonymous with an overall impression of ordinariness which leads to the essays' marginalization; it is further accentuated through a comparison with the amount of significance bestowed on Narayan's novels in terms of their supposed grasp of a quintessential Indianness and their capacity to reach up to abstract philosophical postulations regarding life through a use of mundane and ordinary details. The essays' image of inferiority is further strengthened by the fact that against the artistic and creative values related with the novel as a form, the familiar essays are shaped by the commercial determinants of the popular press, popular readership and day-to-day sale.

The study employed an alternative line of analysis of the essays in terms of their function as a mode of discourse operating in a specific discursive space. The history of the

familiar essay shows that the effect of familiarity created by the engagement with mundane realities of ordinary existence on the one hand and by the use of easy, conversational, and unspecialized language on the other is actually a discursive strategy to meet the needs of self – reflection and self-representation of a modern urban society. In Narayan’s case the analysis of the essays shows that such a mode of self – reflection is present in the essays in the form of a subtle but persistent strand of social criticism of diverse areas of post independence middle class Indian life. More importantly, analysis of the material conditions under which Narayan produced his work reveals that whereas Narayan’s representation of the nuances of ordinary Indian life in his essays was received entirely by a middle class home readership, his supposed representation of quintessential Indianness in the novels was determined to a great extent by the social and psychological expectations of the readership in Britain where his books were initially published. At the same time the direct and exclusive negotiation of the lived realities of ordinary Indian life that Narayan took up in the essays reveals a rare side of Narayan as a person with a sense of social engagement with issues affecting the same. This is significant in view of the commonly found charges of Narayan’s lack of commitment and involvement with such issues in his novels. From such a line of analysis it can be summed up that instead of an axiomatic scale of artistic value and generic majority and minority on which the essay is commonly weighed against the novel, a functional and discursive framework of analysis capable of accommodating the generic distinctiveness of the essay and its manifestations can help in analyzing the genre in the proper and better way.

The study finds that the supposedly essential difference of the essay as a form from that of the novel does not need to be avoided because, at a later stage of development, the essay comes to adopt qualities and functions specific to not only the novel but fiction as a whole and appears in the form of the narrative essay. The study of Amitav Ghosh’s narrative essays has been taken up to illuminate the various ways in which such a hybrid mingling of factual and fictional elements may take place within the form of the essay. It is found to be a very significant stage of development for the genre in terms of thematic and stylistic maturity insofar as here the genre can be seen as transcending its own traditional image as an essentially nonfictional form. The modern and postmodern

problematization of the exclusivity of categories like fact and fiction or real and imaginary come to be accommodated within the genre of the essay at this stage. Amitav Ghosh's writing has been located in such a hybrid site of creativity because of his connections with creative writing on the one hand and fields like history, anthropology and journalism on the other. It is found that the narrative essay, as is practiced by Ghosh, can be located within broader streams of contemporary writing like creative or artistic nonfiction because Ghosh's essays take up themes from history and contemporary life and mould them in the form of narrative or story by employing various narrative techniques. This dynamic between narrative and fact or "story" and the essay undertakes the discursive function of opening up routes to illuminate the complex and problematic nature of reality and engages, in the ultimate analysis, with the question of knowledge itself through its negotiation with what has been called the "real stories". At this stage, the essay is seen as growing into an intellectual and critical form of writing with an epistemological enquiry of the categories of truth, fact and reality.

However, questions of knowledge automatically turns out to be questions of ideology and more importantly ideological politics and the essay in such engagements finds the way to the next level of development where it manifests itself as the political/activist essay—a form that negotiates the construction and dissemination of public knowledge related to issues affecting people's life. Arundhati Roy's political essays are one of the most visible representations of this form within Indian Writing in English. Roy's selection of the genre of the essay over the novel is found to be extremely significant. Though at the primary level Roy's engagement seems to be lying at the concrete and material spaces where these problems are located, at a deeper level her engagement reaches down to the sphere of political and ideological construction of knowledge regarding these issues. It is realized that what Roy ultimately attacks through her writing is the construction of partial knowledge and falsehood as absolute and correct knowledge by people in power. For Roy, then, an important aspect of her activism lies in creating an alternative discourse critical of the pseudo-scientific claims of the official discourse of power. The form of the essay, in Roy's hands, thus becomes this political instrument of discursive retaliation. It becomes a form essentially related to questions of existence and knowledge and in being

so echoes the original existential and epistemological preoccupation of the Monaitgnian essay.

In a way this study finds that the qualities for which the essay has traditionally been marginalized may turn out to be its unique generic potentialities. The simplicity, accessibility, adaptability and subjectivity that overall mark the essay as a genre can function to turn it into a mode of writing that is best suitable for dealing with apparently ordinary but significant aspects related to life and existence, knowledge and reality. The essay's essential smallness, in this sense, is a power that makes it capable of bringing abstract, specialized or general areas of knowledge down to comprehensible particular and human details. That may be the reason behind the genre's consistent and steady growth into more and more areas and its manifestations of more and more forms. This thesis has been able to offer only a very preliminary insight into the potentiality of the genre. However, it expects to be able to direct attention to the need of studying as many various forms of this intriguingly delightful genre. As Joel Haefner said: "The house of the essay has many doors, some real, some illusive. The joy comes in trying all" (Introduction 205).