



INTERPLAY OF VOICES IN ANITA DESAI'S NOVEL *VOICES IN THE CITY*: A STUDY IN THE LIGHT OF BAKHTIN'S POLYPHONY, HETEROGLOSSIA AND DIALOGISM

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ABSTRACT

The concepts of heteroglossia, polyphony and dialogic nature of novel, as conceived by Mikhail Bakhtin, open immense possibility of both representing and analysing more and more diverse verbal entities in a narrative. The primacy of context to textual meaning becomes also relevant in exploring the possible multiplicity and plurality of voice in the individual narrative text. The present research paper attempts to explore Anita Desai's novel *Voices in the City* in the light of Bakhtin's primary concepts. The study focuses on how Desai's categorical third person, omniscient, authorial narration is negotiated at different junctures by different voices, tonalities, techniques and devices, making the narrative a contextually pregnant site of varying ideas/intentions on creativity, family, parenthood, gender, and other phenomena entailing human existence and experience.

Keywords: heteroglossia, polyphony, dialogic nature, novel, voice, text, context.

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The term 'voice' has remained crucial in narrative studies from quite an earlier time and is a complex and problematic category. At the simplest level 'voice' stands for the answer to the question 'who speaks or tells the story?' as conceived in Genette. While reading a fiction, we never see a story directly, but instead, we come in contact with it through its narrative discourse or how the narrator renders the story into narrative form. However, structural narratology was more or less inclined to consider 'voice' as a textual/narrative element the variety of which is dealt with extensive typologies. With time the term 'voice' has gained more meaning and significance and now it entails a large number of concepts like point-of-view/perspective, narrative mode, focalization, intention and even gender. This is because as an entity, attributed to written texts, the concept of voice inevitably raises questions of ontology and metaphoricality which remain inseparable from its

more technical delimitation as a textual function or effect.

Percy Lubbock mainly introduced the term 'voice' as a complex phenomenon to Western literary studies (68). Lubbock harboured the notion that an author can make use of both his own language and the language of his characters. According to Manfred Jahn "voice is also understood as a characteristic vocal or tonal quality projected through a text" (*Narratology: a Guide to the Theory of Narrative*, web, Sc. N3.1). Chatman also speaks on narratorial stance or 'stant' which, he explicates, is "the psychological, sociological and ideological ramifications of the narrator's attitudes, which may range from neutral to highly charged" (*Coming to Terms* 143). In his essay "Form and Context: An Essay in the History of Narratology" Darby David notes that as narratology shifts from pure structuralism to more liberal and inclusive platform, it starts to take under its compass more contextually

driven concerns like gender, culture and power relation in society etc. There are a number of choices the writer makes during the writing process which are decisive in the creation of voice. So along with other factors the choice of gender of narrator, narrative voice and focalizers of narratives and the contextual inclinations are of crucial importance in the analysis of discourse in any particular novel.

But far before Chatman, Jahn and others, Mikhail Bakhtin time and again had been emphasising upon novel as a potential site for bringing in the phenomena of 'heteroglossia' and 'polyphony'. Bakhtin's concepts on narrative were not widely and impressively noticed in the West until the early 1980s. Bakhtin, in both *The Dialogic Imagination* and *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, holds up novel as a more flexible and dynamic genre than all other categories. The narrative text is produced not by a single voice, but by several voices, interacting, conceding, contrasting and even opposing each other at different levels and in different degrees. The dynamic verbal act of narration in a novel thus gains multivoicedness and multilanguagedness.

In a monological novel characters exist solely to transmit the author's ideology and the author represents only her/his own idea, not anyone else's. Any differences between characters occur as if within a single consciousness. Such novels, Bakhtin claims, tend to be flat and monodimensional, marked by a single tone. Bakhtin is suspicious of a monologic authorial voice, as it often restricts the autonomy of the other's voice. In contrast, dialogism recognises the multiplicity of perspectives and voices. So it is also referred to as 'double-voiced' or 'multi-voiced' discourse that does not logically unfold but interacts. This makes dialogical works a lot more 'objective' and 'realistic' than their monological counterparts, since they don't subordinate reality to the ideology of the author.

According to Bakhtin the nature of narrative as a whole utterance is dialogical and "within the arena of almost every utterance an intense interaction and struggle between one's own and another's word is being waged" (*The Dialogic Imagination* 354). So the discourse of utterance, both at the minimum and the maximum levels,

becomes heterogeneous. Bakhtin's contribution to our understanding of language and the theory of the novel is substantial and, extremely pertinent to interpretation and analysis of the modern novelistic discourse.

The heteroglossality and polyphony of the novel open immense possibility of representing more and more diverse verbal entities. Bakhtin appreciates the scope of plasticity and openness of the novelistic genre in his essays collected in *The Dialogic Imagination*, particularly in 'Epic and Novel' (3,7 and 11). Bakhtin also observes that the composition of the novel "is determined by experience, knowledge and practice (the future)." (15). Behind the narrative discourse of the novel lies a certain cultural, ideological, linguistic, socio-psychological and axiological horizon of those who are speaking/writing. Thus, both the narrated or told and the narrating become contextualised creating "a dialogising background". The verbal presentation of narration necessarily showcases particular linguistic and tonal qualities that produce the effect of voice. Bakhtin again holds that the stylistic colours, the tonality of emotions and the intentions in a narrative are centrifugal, not centripetal. A centripetal narrative is the outcome of a monologic discourse issued by an omniscient narrator who tends to control the narrative in all its levels. On the other hand, the inherent dialogic nature of novelistic discourse resists or tries to resist this tendency with its essence of multiplicity and plurality. Thus the polyphonic heteroglossia of the multivoiced text of the novel has subverted the monologic discourse of the epic narration. Bakhtin's theory offers a useful framework for the study and the interpretation of modern novel as it acknowledges the social, cultural, and political and many other diverse dimensions working behind and being represented in the narrative discourse. The primacy of context to textual meaning helps in explaining, among many other things, the complexity of a novel's narrative voice or more specifically the 'many-voicedness' of a novel. In her seminal essay 'Toward a Feminist Narratology' Susan S. Lanser also makes reference to Bakhtin's concept of 'heteroglossia' while exemplifying the tacit, intentional multivoicedness

of a text written presumably by and for a woman. Lanser writes -

“This double text recalls an even sharper lesson about narrative voice, the lesson formulated by Bakhtin: that in narrative there is no single voice, that in far subtler situations than this one, voice impinges upon voice, yielding a structure in which discourse of and for the other constitute the discourse of self; that to go as far as Wayne Booth does, “We are constituted in polyphony” (51) [quoted in original text].” (617)

Bakhtin’s notions thus become relevant in exploring the possible multiplicity and plurality of voice and other verbal entities in the individual narrative text. They also help to focus on the contextual meaning of narrative utterances at different levels.

In accordance with the above discussion on the potential plurality of novel as a genre, the present paper attempts to explore Anita Desai’s novel *Voices in the City*. The study focuses on how Desai’s categorical third person, omniscient, authorial narration negotiates at different junctures with different voices, tonalities, techniques and devices, making the narrative a contextually pregnant site of varying ideas/intentions on creativity, family, parenthood, gender, and other phenomena entailing human existence and experience.

Voices in the City, Desai’s second novel, explores the problem of articulation and communication among three siblings in an urban social context. Desai brings to her service a seemingly experimental narrative design in this novel which is different from her first novel *Cry, the Peacock*. The presentational sequencing of four parts of this novel is as follows- ‘Nirode’, ‘Monisha: Her Diary’, ‘Amla’, and ‘Mother’. Desai’s narrative design in *Voices in the City* is a complex one from various angles. First of all, there are two major narrative discourses adopted by the author- one is the authorial omniscient narrative design adopted in the first, third and fourth parts of the novel while for the second part the literary device of diary-entry is adopted. But within these two apparently distinct discourses of narration, Desai incorporates several

other narrating perspectives which create the effect of multiple voices in the narrative.

The real world of a novel is a complex play of values and tones. The most important site where this complexity is developed is in the voice of the author. Bakhtin holds that the novelness of a novel is constituted mainly in the dialogised, double-voiced heteroglossia of the author’s own voice. Authorial narration performs the hybridisations of discourse. It also incorporates character zones and other genres in organisation of heteroglossia in the novel (*The Dialogic Imagination* 320). Let us now have some textual illustrations of how far Desai’s strategies of narration incorporate and organise things in the novel as per the Bakhtinian concepts of dialogism, polyphony and heteroglossia.

The conventional third person, omniscient narrative perspective in *Voices in the City* is compromised at different levels with the different characters’ voices which remain unmerged into any single (monologic) perspective. The authorial narration does not impose its own narrative voice on all parts of what is told, rather, it allows characters to shock and subvert, to see and show. Instead of a single objective world, held together by the authorial narrator’s voice, there is a plurality of consciousness. The reader sees an event or issue not from a single standpoint, but can experience a spectrum of perspectives encircling that event or issue. We may cite one textual example from the novel’s first part ‘Nirode’ to explicate the above mentioned narrative phenomenon.

Then he flung his cigarette down into the river and spoke to its vanished glow. ‘Three drinks’, he said, coldly, decisively, three drinks a night and a room of his own. If he could have that certain and secret, for six months, then he could accomplish it. Three drinks for inspiration- hackneyed word, not one a journalist ought to use but, hang it all, he was no journalist, had put an end to that pretence- three drinks for inspiration then and courage, but no more, for fear of courage going to his head or ruining his stomach. And a room in which to write it! Here he groaned with impatience, with agony, walked away from the river, feeling

wisps of mist cling to him, brushing them away. How, how, how-he beat his hand upon his flank, as though urging on his mount, as though he longed, at last, to arrive. But how? Three drinks and a room-a princedom, too far away, how to be reached, how captured? To acquire them he must lay another plan, more complicated, involving others, involving money. (13)

The first line corroborates to conventional omniscient third person narration in syntax and tone but is modified in closing phrase 'vanishing glow' which posits the active character agent as the focalizer who presently sees the 'vanishing glow'. From the halfway of the next sentence and onwards we find the breaking down of typical sentence norms of narrated speech. Quotation marks are not used, nor any reporting verb for the indirect speech. Free Indirect Discourse of narration is repeatedly used in the passage to give almost an oral utterance of the character's inward thought. Use of hyphens, expression like 'hang it all', use of phatic markers like that of exclamation and interrogation create an immediate speech effect curbing the pervasive power of the authorial narration. The author appointed narrator's perspective incorporates the character's voice through both overt and covert orientation of different speech elements.

We also find a trace of another voice, a third voice, that of a polished, highbrowed journalist's, which holds the character's petty thought on source of inspiration as 'hackneyed' and unsuitable for a journalist proper. The tension is created with the use of those words 'Three drinks for inspiration' and the character's perspective dismisses the tension by positing himself as a common, creative man, not as a journalist. The interrogative expressions towards the end of the passage establish the primacy of the character's voice in literary term. It is the (Nirode's) perspective of a young, unemployed, emotional man to whom 'three drinks and a room' is equal to 'a princedom' for cultivating his creative potentials. These emotionally charged questions project intellectual interests of the character and also contextually reflects upon the social and other ideological and

material barriers that hinder a free play of enthusiastic mind and intellect in a society.

Thus many layers of narration embed each other in Desai's novel creating the impact of many voices. Such discourse relieves the narrative from monotony of a single stand point. The tone of the novel is primarily determined by an effort to grasp the meaning of life amidst the din of the city on one side, and in the socially restricted familial and private worlds of women on the other side. The third person narrating voice is found commenting, reflecting and evaluative at times. Yet, characteristically, Desai yields her narration to different characters' consciousness. As a result the narrative turns out to be a concourse of voices which are not always concordant.

On the other hand, though not wholly female centred, *Voices in the City* considerably delineates upon female experience in different dimensions and gives access to inward emotions and impressions of women in forced subservience. The second part with the title 'Monisha: Her Diary' completely withdraws to the private world of the 'self'. In reaction to the oppressive demands of her material environment Monisha retreats into self-indulgent emotionalism. Desai lends a voice to this defeated woman through the mode of diary writing which enables a candid, confessional and subjective mode of communication in writing. Yet the first person narrative voice of this part does not remain intact and singular in dimension. As per the demand of polyphonic nature of a novel's narrative voice, the diary entries of Monisha gain the qualities of dramatised voices of both individuals and communities at different points.

Heteroglossia and polyphony are the base conditions "governing the operation of meaning in any utterance." (*The Dialogic Imagination* 7). To Bakhtin heteroglossia not only means the conglomeration of the ideologies of leading national languages, but also to the language and inherent ideologies of the speaker's profession, of the period, of age group, of social class, of geographical region, of family and friend circle etc. To these widening dimensions, we may add the context of gender as well which, as a social construct, plays certain role in determining one's actions, reactions and speech acts

and literary narration. And to Bakhtin polyphony refers not literally to a number of voices, but to the collective quality of an individual utterance. An utterance of an individual speaker has the capacity to embody someone else's utterance even while it remains her/his. Thus it creates a dialogic relationship between two voices. Bakhtin further maintains that polyphony is inherent in all words or forms: "Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions" (9). Such layering of voices with meanings and intensions can be found in Monisha's categorical and apparently mono-dimensional first person narration.

The narrator or the diarist Monisha is the most timid of the four siblings in a depression-ridden family where love and tenderness among the members are constantly threatened by an uncaring parenthood, unequal distribution of attention and a shadowy, unpleasant hint of extramarital relationship of the mother. Though the diary entries are of a much later period and is primarily about Monisha's unhappy marital life, the familial ties or rather the lack of them resonates in her present life also. So we immediately hear the personal voice of Monisha in the following extract:

If only love existed that is not binding, that is free of rules, obligations, complicity and all stirrings of mind or conscience, then-but there is no such love. It is not there in my relationship with Jibon, which is filled only by loneliness and a desperate urge to succeed and once plunged me into the most calamitous pleasures and pains, fears and regrets and never again will it possess me. Nor is it in my relationship with mother which is filled with an inbred and invalid sense of duty, of honour, of concern. (134)

But the very passage also echoes other voices or perspectives with which Monisha's voice is contending. Here are people and family members who confer and receive love as a 'binding', an 'obligation', or a means of extending the mere chain of succession. We can perceive the voice of Jibon, of Monisha's mother and other unnamed family

members whose perspectives are different from that of Monisha but they are anyhow part of her own utterance and thus in dialogue with her own voice. She speaks for herself yet retains the words and notions of others' speeches in her verbal/written act and thus her words achieve polyphonic impact on the reader.

The diary chronicles not only the personal impressions of a helpless woman but in numerous passages it breaks out and functions as a whole community's voice, a spokesperson for the grievances of all Bengali women who are suffering behind the iron-bar of customs ridden with gender discriminations: We may peep into Monisha's Diary entry where she relates her individual bondage to household drudgery and her society-imposed isolation to the suffering lot of Bengali women.

I think of generations of Bengali women hidden behind the barred windows of half-dark rooms, spending centuries in washing clothes, kneading dough and murmuring aloud verses from the Bhagavad-Gita and the Ramayana, in the dim light of sooty lamps. Lives spent waiting for nothing, waiting on men self-centred and indifferent and hungry and demanding and critical, waiting for death and dying misunderstood, always behind bars, those terrifying black bars that shut us in, in the old houses, in the old city. (120)

We can see that the singular first person pronoun 'I' of the earlier part has gained plurality and has become 'us' toward the end of this passage. This layering of the communal voice within the personal mode of expression further testifies to the notion of Bakhtinian polyphonic voice. Not only this, Monisha's perspective on discriminated roles of woman and man is culture specific. The reference to the 'Bengali women', 'barred windows', 'sooty lamps', 'murmuring verses from the Bhagavad-Gita and the Ramayana' all accumulate to the fact that she is identifying herself with the suffering lot of Indian women, particularly of the Bengali women.

The reflecting mode of narration in Monisha's diary is not monologic for another reason. It often erupts into direct contact with the reader as in an oral narration, in spite of being a

literary device. The undulation of voices within a single voice can be perceived in the following passages:

What does it all mean? Why are lives such as these lived? At their conclusions, what solution, what truth falls into the waiting palm of one's hand, the still pit of one's heart?

Here is the answer-here, here, here. 'Look', I will scream. I cannot believe- but here it is. Look through these bars, into this cage of doves-look at the terrible answer. Doves like balls of rain cloud, but in each soft breast a great open wound, bleeding, scarlet seeping over tiny feathers in a blot of fresh blood... The dove's stigmata- what does it mean? How can it be possible? How can they live, eat, work, sing, bleeding through life? (120-21)

The character (Monisha) here breaks out of the literary convention (diary writing) and engages in direct address to the implied reader, entailing oral intonation with the intention of drawing attention at least, if not sympathy. The urge of the voice to draw the readers' attention is marked in the multiple bewildering questions addressed apparently not to any character in the novel and in the imperative 'look'. The questioning tone also registers a voice of disagreement with the subjugating status of women of her class. A dialogue is thus established between the dominant social norms of feminine submissiveness and a deviant woman's role that feels uncomfortable in those norms and is doubtful about their righteousness. In addition to bringing in narratorial variety, the subtle manipulation of these devices in Desai's narratives also subverts the myths of superiority of men constructed by patriarchy by exposing their superficiality and hollowness.

The next two parts of the novel once again sustain the external format of third person omniscience. But more than often it negotiates its apparent tonal objectivity with the voices and consciousness of different characters. The authorial or literary narrator here does not participate in the narrated events and actions. This voice never leaves a self-referential clue or any other marker of identity. We do not know the educational,

intellectual marital or social status of this authorial narrator in *Voices in the City*. However, the narrating agent not participating in the narrated events does not necessarily mean that the narrating perspective is neutral. In course of the narrative we can certainly perceive some voice markers that speak for the inclinations and intentions of the narrating agent. The language, the tonality, the tendency to accommodate or to exclude the characters' point of view, the use of different discourses like mediation, focalization etc. build up the sense of perspective and voicedness of a narrative as well as of the narrator.

The third person voice, when not intimately dialogising with the characters' speech, runs through an apparently distanced perspective, metaphorical imagery, and an elevated language style which in turn contribute to the building up of the ideological clarity, structure, and verbal delineations necessary to showcase the characters' individual speech act or thought process. The monologism of the authorial narration is ruptured as it continually shifts its tone either to associate or to mockingly dissociate itself from the voice and speech of someone else. One more extract of narration would explicate well how Desai's narrative art achieves such multiplicity of voices and perspectives blended in one single voice.

As they collected their belongings and said their farewells, Amla wondered how and why it was that Monisha had been married to his boring nonentity, this blind moralist, . . . this rotund and minute-minded and limited official . . . Was it merely because Jibon was so unquestionably safe, sound and secure, so utterly predictable? Or was it because fathers did, unconsciously, spite their daughters who were unavailable to them? And why had Monisha, with that powerful silent stubbornness of hers, never rebelled? Amla tried to picture an evening of theirs- . . . - but she could not, by any stretch of imagination, see Monisha seated beside him with her mending, or a book, discussing his day at the office or her day in the kitchen. Monisha she saw as seated upright and mute in one corner, her gaze fixed on some mysterious point as though it

were a secret window opening on to darkness, gazing and gazing, with not a word to say of what she saw. (195-96)

Here within the third person omniscient narrative frame Amla, the character concerned, performs the role of reflector-narrator ('Amla wondered') and immediately the narration takes on her perspective mediating/commenting on the character of Jibon and speculating on the hidden intention in a father's choice. The character's voice rises to and reflects oral nature in interrogative sentences of the quoted passage. The same character further attains the role of focaliser from the point 'Amla tried to picture an evening of theirs...' and within this focalizing frame there is another layer when a second character (Monisha) is attributed the act of 'gazing' in 'her gaze fixed on some mysterious point...'. This multi-layering of voices, perspectives and focalisations reduces the formal or literary distance of the author-narrator from the characters and narrated events and renders the narrative a semblance of lived experience. The notion of purely objective, detached aesthetic is thus subverted by blurring the distinctions between narrator and character situations and it also accounts for the narrator's capacity as a dynamic unifying and diversifying force in the novel.

We can also observe that Monisha's diary entries describe the social context in vividly concrete terms. There is directness and poignancy in Monisha's first-person narrative which exposes the enforced subservience faced by a young, educated, thinking married woman within the periphery of traditional, patriarchal joint-family system. Her diary records that she has been unable to resolve the contradictions between her private and public self because of the rigidity and lack of feeling in her in-laws. Though her inaction and the final self-destructing act (suicide) lends negative impression on Monisha's character, her graphic detail of the imprisoned, stagnant, meaningless, and unrecognised status of women behind the 'barred windows' of big Bengali houses gives us the impression that she has been aware of these malaises of patriarchal culture.

The tacit orientation of gender context is found in other characters' narrative situations too.

After the discovery of Monisha's suicide one male voice, representative of shared, patriarchally inclined public voice explains the situation- "Later, a voice explained to them, "At that time there was no one in the house. We were all away. Only the women were there, in the hall. They did not even notice when she left the room-...And being only women, they could not break it down" (244).

The authorial voice does not associate it with this unnamed character's speech though she incorporates it with the intention to show the reader the stereotypical notion of society where the in-law's family is more keen to wash their hands in the suicide of a daughter-in-law than to focus on 'its long preparation'. The character's voice also functions as a dialogical cue that women are next to 'no one' . '...there was none in the house' and 'only the women were there'- these two apparently contradictory statements bares the deep rooted prejudice that women are not capable of action in emergency. Their physical inferiority is typically emphasised next in 'And being only women . . .'.The dialogic implication of such notions lies in the fact that these are socially charged and tends to appear as prefixed both for the dominating and the dominated groups, but in reality ,are not stable and all pervasive as they are meant to be.

On the other plane Norode's iconoclastic explorations of vocation in the intellectual arena of city of Calcutta, Monisha's inactive questing to and alienation from the conventional role of woman and her final resignation to that behind the 'barred window', and Amla's more observant and inquisitive journey in the same city do not drive the narrative to any predictable goal. The closure in *Voices in the City* remains further open as the brother and the sister contends each other in assessment of their mother.

In the last chapter 'Mother' the myth of the all-powerful female deity 'Kali'is metamorphosed into the urban saga of dwindling hope and disillusionment. Amla, through her journey along the city's lanes, both shadowy and bright, learns to survive by selection. Amla accepts the split of the myth and the material and comes in terms with the latter. On the other hand in Nirode's perception the figure of their mother appears in the last section and

along with the city, it merges into the image of 'Kali'. However, the last part to some extent neutralises the protesting or plaintive tone of the earlier parts and the social context appears to collapse as the narrative takes turn and tends to jump onto a metaphysical realm.

The four different parts are interlinked by the common temporal and spatial mobility. The city of Calcutta looms large as the novel's setting and as an embodiment and extension of the turbulent emotions and experiences of the characters. While Nirode and Amla's interactions with the city and its people take place in actual spatial dimension of the city, Monisha, the unsuitably married sister, interacts with it from behind her barred, cage-like in-laws's house. The monopoly of the conventional, all pervasive authorial narrator is compromised throughout the narrative discourse of Desai's novel *Voices in the City*. The temporal, spatial and casual arrangement of the story material in is done chiefly from the view point of the siblings. The mediating voice merges with characters' reflection and focalisation allowing them to give the version of their life as they see and feel it. Throughout the narrative, we can observe considerable examples of Desai's narrative art blending focalization, free indirect discourse and interior monologue within the scope of both third person and first person narrative structure.

Again, Bakhtin considers the 'incorporated genres' as "one of the most basic and fundamental forms for incorporating and organising heteroglossia in the novel..." (*The Dialogic Imagination* 320). By 'incorporated genres' Bakhtin means mainly short stories, songs, poems, dramatic scenes, scholarly or religious genres etc. But he also mentions a 'special group of genres that play an especially significant role in structuring novels, . . ." (321). The genres of confession, travel notes, diary, biography, the personal letter are some examples of such special genres. The incorporations of such genres are ample in *Voices in the City*. Story from *Pancharatna* (P 24-25), Landor's song (P 43), extracts from *Bhagavatgeeta* (p 127-128), Monisha's Diary (the whole of the second chapter), Monisha's confessional monologue within third person frame (p 236-238) and several of letters written by the

characters to each other testify to Desai's ingenuity of organising the diverse genres into the larger novelistic genre. While contributing to the main discourse (novel) they retain their own structural and linguistic diversity and also signify the incapability of pure authorial narration to assimilate reality in words. It is always in need of other/multiple genres intersecting its own discourse to present a truly multiple-viewed world.

Instead of a monodimensional, author-dominated narrative discourse, Desai invests her narrative with multivoicedness. Very seldom Desai's omniscient narrator in *Voices in the City* does take such a role as to give, in Bakhtinian term, "a stenographer's report of *finished* dialogue" (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 63). [emphasis original]. The authorial narrative voice takes up the tone and immediacy of the characters' consciousness and experience at different points and blurs the distance between the author and the character. Even the minor characters are in dialogue with each other and with the main characters. Thus almost each of the character's voice can be found having a space within the narrative world and with reference to the contextual forces of production of voice they also extend their spatiality beyond the immediate boundaries of the narrative world. The production of voices in *Voices in the City* novel thus contributes to the dialogic progress of the novel which ends with no 'finished closure'.

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