



Article : Mikhail Bakhtin's Dialogism and Intertextuality: A Perspective

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INTRODUCTION :

The upsurge of current literary theory has become something of significant phenomenon in contemporary literature, emerging as formidable force in interdisciplinary subjects. Dialogic criticism proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin is one of the new perspectives to study literary work. To Bakhtin, text is not a self contained organism and the language represented in text is not alien entity, instead a site for dialogic interaction of multiple voices or modes of discourse. This research paper briefly attempts to introduce dialogic criticism and its theoretical concepts like polyphony, heteroglossia and their relation to literary work. It also concentrates on the theory of dialogism in relation to the notion of intertextuality in contemporary critical theory. The revival and reinterpretation of Bakhtin has become a part of the contemporary critical trend. Mikhail Bakhtin's Dialogic Criticism concentrates on plurality of text and plurality of independent unmerged voices. He stood against Russian Formalists views that text as independent and impersonal linguistic or cultural force. To Bakhtin, text is not merely a verbal but a social phenomenon. The literary work, according to Bakhtin, is the product of manifold determinants that are a specific to a class, social group and speech community.

Bakhtin's prime interest is in novel, and especially in the ways that the voices constitute the text of the any novel disrupt the authority of author's single voice. He finds the novel to be most effective instrument of exploiting and strengthening heteroglossia. The heteroglot novel is more efficient in bringing the gap between self-other dichotomy. In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1929,trans by Caryl Emerson, 1984), he contrasts monolithic novels of writers such as Leo Tolstoy to dialogic form or polyphonic form of Dostoevsky's novels. Polyphonic voice undertakes to subordinate the voice of all the characters to the authoritative discourse and controlling purposes of the author. In Dostoevsky's novels the characters are liberated to speak a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousness, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices. In an essay on

'Discourse in the Novel', Bakhtin develops his view that novel is constituted by multiplicity of divergent and contending social voices. He makes the basic difference in prose and poetry. According to him, prose is opposed to poetry in the sense that prose is intertextual but poetry is not. The poem is a direct uttering whereas prose, particularly novel, represents an uttering act. The language of the poet is his own language; he is wholly immersed in it and inseparable from it. The language of the poetry is highly personal, authoritative and monolithic. The prose writers speak through language represents many voices and conflictual modes that surround the language. Bakhtin constantly cites Pushkin's using 'Eugene Onegin' as an example of novel not of poetry, for it avails itself of this discourse. In that sense Robert Frost's 'The Telephone' is a poem of dialogical imagination. The drama, for Bakhtin, is hostile to dialogism, and dramatic discourse is made up only of objectified speeches utterly subordinates to an ultimate semantic authority. This is the view appropriate to naturalist drama. Instead, Brecht's Epic Theatre and Dramas written on Brechtian mode which makes use of narrative elements are examples of non dramatic dialogism.

Bakhtin's 'polyphony' is equivalent term to 'intertextuality.' Intertextuality is the term coined and expounded by Julia Kristeva in her interpretation of Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism in her seminal work 'Word, Dialogue and Novel'. She writes, "What allows a dynamic dimension to structuralism is Bakhtin's conception of 'the literary word' as an intersection of textual surfaces rather than a point of (a fixed meaning) as a dialogue among several writings. Tzvetan Todorov in his 'Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle' has also used Kristeva's term intertextuality in an inclusive sense to denote dialogism. The theory of intertextuality postulates that a text cannot exist alone as a self contained, hermetic whole. It is shaped by the repetition and transformation of other textual structures. The writer is a reader of texts and texts as structures of writing in a narrow sense, text as signifying matters in a broad sense before he is creator of texts. Therefore the work of art gets inevitably inflected with references, quotations and influences of every kind.

The theory of intertextuality in different forms and expressions has been presented by Bakhtin in his works like 'Marxism and Philosophy of Language', 'Freudianism: A Marxist Critique', 'Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics', 'Rabelias and His World'. Bakhtin's theory proposes that all discourse is in dialogue with prior discourse on the same subject, as well as with discourse yet to come. It

foresees or anticipates is a statement on intertextuality. My plan in the paper is to trace his theory of dialogism through his concepts of human science, language, meaning, utterance and novel and link it to structuralism and post structuralism. Bakhtin's concept of human science is different from that of natural science. While natural science reduces everything including human being to objects, human science deals with man as a subject expressing and speaking subject, who is always creating a text actual or potential. A text is the object of human science and the knowledge of subject is dialogical. A subject internalizes the other in him, so he is not 'I', he is 'we', who contains many voices, his own voice as well as other voices which he constantly appropriates for communication. Man's selfhood is itself dialogical in nature. Man is basically a socially organized individual, and exchange takes place between two socially organized individuals. The self is composed and constituted of the social forces which are always in conflict. Selfhood derives from the internalization of voices a person has heard and each of these voices is saturated with social and ideological values. The essence of man, Bakhtin argues, is not an abstraction inherent in each separate individual. In its reality it is the aggregate of social relationships.

Language, for Bakhtin, is both a cognitive and social practice. While social forces are always in conflict, language is where social struggles are engaged most comprehensively and at the same time most intimately and personally. Michael Holquist, one of the most influential expositors of Bakhtin, calls language as "politics of representation". It lies in the border line between oneself and the other. According to him there are three dominant ways in which language has come to be understood and the ownership of the meaning of words has to come to be interpreted. One is personalist view expressed as "I own meaning". Meaning, in this sense is a product of intention willed by a sovereign or transcendent ego.

Bakhtin's theory of dialogism is sometimes used as an equivalent term to deconstruction. Derrida's theory of free play or dissemination is deeper probing of intertextuality that dialogism emphasizes. It presupposes a sense of immediate presence, simultaneous logo-centrism and phono-centrism. But there is slight difference between Bakhtin's theory of dialogism and Derrida's deconstruction. Deconstructionist view is, "no one owns meaning". Located in the structure of difference, caught in the arbitrary play of differences between signs and meaning becomes perpetually elusive. Instead Bakhtin's dialogism states, "We own meaning". Meaning is rooted in the social discourse but the social discourse

conceived in a particular way. Bakhtin observes that, apart from linguistic matter, there exists another part of the utterance, which is non verbal, which corresponds to the context of enunciation. The basic difference between Bakhtin and Derrida is that the former does not reject altogether the conception of an original self as the latter does. The dialogism is based on the dialogue between individual and the social, text and context, and text and text, and as manifestation of the principles of intertextuality in life.

The appeal of dialogism to New Historists like Stephen Greenblatt lies in its challenge to the text/ context opposition. In its insistence on listening to and giving free play to various voices, which indicates that one can hope to combat official monological history by listening to voices that have been repressed or marginalized. Words, according to Bakhtin, are not purely lexical but contextualized in a heterogeneous social or ideological field and this conflictual model of language is termed as heteroglossia. This limitlessness or rather multiplicity of context that goes beyond linguistics has come to known as Bakhtin's translinguistics.

In conclusion, Bakhtin's theory of dialogism owes much to theory of intertextuality. It remains not only a significant point of reference but also an impulse for many critical theories, such as Deconstruction, New Historicism, Marxism, to grapple with text-text, text-context, text-life relationship.

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