THE ‘VOICE’ OF THE AUTHOR : A BAKHTINIAN PERSPECTIVE

"The one who understands ... becomes himself a participant in the dialogue."
- Bakhtin
("Toward a Methodology of the Human Sciences")

The variable features of the author’s voice may be studied against a vast background of novelistic discourse, from which the name of Mikhail Bakhtin naturally emerges as one of the most discerning theorists of authorship of literary texts. The act of authorship is synonymous to the act of ‘creating’; – ‘authoring’ an event may be a deed indicating a physical action, a thought, an utterance, or a written text. The chief form of authorial activity which is central to the theme of this study focuses on the relations between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ and the ways in which literary authors position their characters and the relation of those characters to each other in a unified work of fiction.

The above features have been discussed and analysed by the Bakhtin in Chapter three of “The Architectonics of Answerability” where he critically questions the act of authorship, which is also the master trope of all Bakhtin’s work. The encounter of the author with the
heroes which they themselves create and weave into literary texts brings about the organizing role of authorship in other disciplines as well. Assuming that Pasternak holds a substantial authorial role in “Dr. Zhivago”, it is pertinent to study Yuri Zhivago and other characters in the novel in the light of two of Bakhtin’s path-breaking theories - (i) the building of the ‘text’ by the author and the activity of human existence, which is the building of the ‘self’ – The communication between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ is never convergent; the reciprocal independence of the two is of paramount concern. This becomes a central issue in the discourse required for a dialogue between all selves and all others, (ii) the concept of authorship illustrated through Dostoevsky’s use of “polyphony” which also forms a discourse on the understanding of the self and the dual relationship in human interaction. In the ‘polyphonic’ novel, Dostoevsky establishes a unique relationship with his characters, in which free-thinking people are created, who are not voiceless slaves, but capable of standing alongside their creator and also capable of mounting powerful arguments of their own. The phenomenon that Bakhtin calls polyphony is simply another name for dialogism. As Bakhtin admits –

"Every thought of Dostoevsky’s heroes senses itself to be from the very beginning a rejoinder in an unfinalized dialogue. Such thought is not impelled toward a well-rounded finalized, systematically
As an elaboration of the above views, it is assumed that 'polyphony' is another name of dialogism; considering that dialogue is the primal structure of any particular existence, the self-other distinction is the primary opposition on which all other differences are based. The highest structural principles of the actual word of deeds is the concrete architectonic and epistemological opposition between I and the 'other'. "Authoring" of a literary text is the particular deed through which 'meaning' takes several hues. In epistemology, the I/other distinction takes on a new significance, while in the aesthetics of Bakhtin, the distinction between the author – who occupies a position analogous to the 'self', offers a new dimension to the concept of the hero, who occupies a position analogous to the 'other' while pondering on the analytical scope of Bakhtins theory of the 'self other; and 'author-hero', and its application to the author Pasternak and his hero Yuri Zhivago, a more comprehensive understanding can be achieved of the authorial voice identifying itself with the protagonist.

As Bakhtin explains, 'The artists' struggle to achieve a well-defined and fixed image of his hero is, to large degree, his struggle with
himself. The total reaction [of the author] creating the whole of the work manifests itself actively, but [such a total reaction] is not experienced as a reaction to anything specifically. Its specificity is to be found precisely in the product it creates .......... the author serves as a reflector for the emotional and volitional position of the hero, but the author does not reflect his own position vis-à-vis the hero. The author creates but sees his creation only in the object which he forms, i.e.- he sees only the product of creation as it comes into being, but not its inner, psychologically determined process."^2

An interesting outline of the above may be perceived in the fact that there may be a theoretical as well as literary distinction between the actual author and the creator/narrator; as Michael Holquist explains about Tolstoy – the biological entity who was born in 1828 and died in 1910 between the actual person and the being who participated in the process of creating War and Peace, there is some sort of connection. But the reader will know the author-creator only as a representation of his created, finished product – and not his ‘self’ as a person. As an extended reading of the ‘self’ and the other, the author Pasternak, son of a well known painter and a concert-pianist, though bearing some striking similarities with his hero Yuri is actually presenting his creation as the “other”, the legacy of the author-creator’s artistic creativity and the pride
of human rights. The ‘self’ which is projected in Pasternaks’ biographical sketch “Safe Conduct”– his philosophic affinities and his association with the Symbolist Movement presumably differs from the created “other” – Yuri. So the author-narrator diverges into a new image as the author-creator through the words of Yuri –

“I should like to be of use as a doctor or a farmer, and at the same time to be at work on something lasting, something fundamental; I should so very much like to be writing a work of art or science.

Every man is born a Faust with a longing to embrace and experience and express everything in the world. Faust became a scientist thanks to the mistakes of his predecessors and contemporaries. Progress in science follows the laws of repulsion – every step forward is made by reaction against the delusions and false theories prevailing at the time. That Faust was an artist he owed to the example of his masters. Forward steps in art are made by attraction, through the artist’s admiration and desire to follow the example of the predecessors he admires most.

What is it that prevents me from being useful as a doctor or a writer? I think it is not so much our privations or our wanderings of our constantly changing and unsettled lives, as the power in our day of rhetoric, of the cliché – all this “dawn of the future”, “building a new world”, “torch-bearers of mankind”. The first time you hear it you think
“What wealth of imagination!” But in fact the reason it is so pompous is that there is no imagination at the back of it, because the thought is second-rate.”

Thus, Bakhtin evolves a new concept of authorship which is not only applied to human existence, but which spread to literary representations of life. The co-ordinated processes of narrative devices enable the author narrator Pasternak to conceptualize the creator in himself to project Yuri as the chief character protagonist who speaks in the ‘third person’ but bears the stamp of the narrator as an implied I. In this manner, the author-creator becomes “the secret legislator” of the text with the life and energy of the characters which he himself has created. Even when the text contains a figure who has been nominated as the first-person narrator, the author does not complete identify himself with the characters or the chief character. In other words, he is on a different plane from the characters who are in the text. As Bakhtin explains – the author of War and Peace is not Pierre Bezukhov and the author of “Notes from the Underground” is not the first person narrator of the work; even such an “omniscient author” such as the one in “Madame Bovary” or “The Ambassadors” does not constitute a presence whose figure is adequate to the wholeness of the author – creator’s presence in the text.
The apparent contradiction in the author’s being in the text, which is invisible at the same time – presents itself in the narratorial process in the novel “Dr. Zhivago”. The young Pasternak who had deep-seated affinities with the composers Skyrabin and Rachmaninov, and had associations with the neo-Kantian philosopher Hermann Cohen cannot be identified sometimes with his hero Yuri. Instead, the presence of the third-person narrator is presumably detected in the words of the true-blood Russian orthodox Yuri in his conversation with Misha Gordon, as they reflect on the terrible miseries of the Jewish population in war-time Russia :-

“It’s terrible”, said Yuri. “You cannot imagine what this wretched Jewish population is going through in this war. The fighting happens to be in their Pale of Settlement. And as if punitive taxation, the destruction of their property and all their other sufferings were not enough, they have to put up with pogroms, insults and the charge that they lack patriotism. And why should they be patriotic while the enemy offers them equal rights and we do nothing but persecute them? There is something paradoxical at the very root of this hatred of them. It is stimulated by the very things which should arouse sympathy – their poverty, their overcrowding, their weakness and their inability to fight back. I can’t understand it. There is something fateful about it.”*4
The author-creator is thus to the text as the self is to consciousness. This fine and co-ordinated relationship between the author, his narratorial ‘self’ and the characters who can be ‘seen’ governs self/other interactions in lived experience and offers a suitable definition to the scope of the authorial voice in Dr. Zhivago.

It is essential, at this juncture, to trace a pivotal link between the consciousness of the author (which Bakhtin has already analysed on his treatise on literary authorship) and his narratorial voice which he gives full play in his fictional representation : i.e. the novel.

David Lodge, in his celebrated work “Consciousness and the Novel”, offers an interesting insight into the continuity of the interiority of experience which the author transfers onto his character, and which also provides a significant indicator to the ‘voice; beyond that of Yuri, Lara Pasha Antipov, Misha Gordon etc. As a historical process of literary authorship both Defoe and Richardson; represented the process of individual self-consciousness. Fielding’s approach was much more overtly fictive, than Defoe’s or Richardson’s while they removed all trace of themselves from their texts, Fielding’s authorial voice is everywhere in his novels. He comments on the characters and their actions with an omniscience which establishes his perspectives on his creations. It was not until the twentieth century in English literary
history that the realism of assessment blended in a wondrous way with the realism of presentation; a combination of first-person narration with third person narration led the later novelists to discover the free indirect style, which allowed the narrative discourse to move freely back and forth between the author's voice and the character's voice, till a clear boundary between the two faded and the 'voice' became one. Novelists as Austen and Fanny Burney posed as the authorial narrator, who summarized what the characters felt and thought, instead of what they did, - focusing on their thought -- processes, and by letting them express themselves in reported and unvoiced speech.

As one moved more into the modern period, the emphasis was discerned to fall more on the construction of the 'real' within the individual's consciousness, the difficulty of communication between there separate worlds, the distorting effects of the unconscious or consciousness and the limits of human understanding.

Henry James, for whom consciousness is one of the key words in his criticism of fiction, sees the problem of characterization as one of representing consciousness other than one's own:

"To project yourself into a consciousness of a person essentially your opposite requires the audacity of great genius; and even men of genius are cautious in approaching the problem."**5

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In his famous essay of 1884, "The Art of Fiction", James says -

"Experience is never limited and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness, catching every air-borne particle in its tissue."  

A new type of narrative discourse was begun by James Joyce, which was third person past tense, yet was increasingly focalized through his protagonist and coloured by his (the protogonist) consciousness, it was a new combination of third-person and first-person discourse. The interior monologue sometimes points out to the "doubly oriented discourse" of Mikhail Bakhtin, in which a speech act not only refers to something but responds to, and argues with pre-existing discourse. According to Lodge, literary novelists show a reluctance to assume the narrative stance of godlike omniscience that is implied by any third person representation of consciousness, however covert and impersonal. They prefer, instead, to create character as a "Voice", reporting his or her experience in his or her own words.

In his continuing analysis of the author’s consciousness and the building of a parallel consciousness of the protagonist (which is termed
by Bakhtin as the ‘self-other’ pro-active process in literary authorship)

David Lodge states –

"Even Philip Roth prefers to use his alter ego Nathan Zuckerman as narrator, rather than claim direct authorial knowledge of the minds and hearts of his characters. Zuckerman reports, reconstructs, imagines the inner lives of the character just as a novelist would—because he is a novelist. But he is also an alibi that the author can claim if held to account for any of the opinions stated in the text."**7

Again, he mentions – “In a world where nothing is certain, in which transcendental belief has been undermined by scientific materialism, and even the objectivity of science is qualified by relatively and uncertainty, the single human voice, telling its own story, can seem the only authentic way of rendering consciousness. Of course, in fiction this is just as artful, or artificial, a method as writing about a character in the third person, but it creates an illusion of reality, it commands the willing suspension of the reader’s disbelief, by modeling itself on the discourses of personal witness.”**8

Thus, the absorption of the author’s consciousness into the third-person narrator is an integral device of authorial participation, and may also be observed in the third-person narration of Yuri Zhivago. In a
monograph on “Dr. Zhivago, the novel”, Neil Cornwell offers an insight into diverse range of opinions occasioned by Pasternak’s controversial novel. Instead of puzzling the reader through interrogatory critical assessment he analyses the divergent opinions, and in Part-II of the monograph, he begins to unfold his own views on various aspects of the novel. One such aspect is the Novel’s ‘narration’. Proceeding from the narratological studies of F.K. Stanzel, he addresses the complex handling of the ‘point of view’ in the novel and attempts to identify the salient characteristics of the basic narrator. In the course of the discussion, he offers the intriguing hypothesis that Evgraf Zhivago may serve as “a possible hidden basic narrator, and thus represents, along with Yuri Zhivago, one of the two poles in the “real author’s consciousness.””

Apart from the above assumption, it can be presumed that Yuri Zhivago, forms the consciousness of the ‘other’ as focused against the ‘self’ – i.e. the author. He is the protagonist as well as the third-person narrator who reveals the interiority of experience which is the mainstay of all fictional representation. The author Pasternak lends his authorial voice to Yuri, in a dual-representation of the narratorial process, as theorized by Bakhtin – and which can be observed in the following
passage, in which Yuri ruminates over loss, death and the passage of
time –

"When his mother had died ten years earlier he had been a child. He could still remember his tears of inconsolable grief and terror. In those days his self was not important to him. He could hardly even realize that such a being as Yura existed on its own or had any value of interest. What mattered then was everything outside and around him. From every side, the external world pressed in on him, dense, undeniable, tangible as a forest, and the reason why he was so shaken by his mother's death was that, at her side, he had lost himself in the forest, and now suddenly found her gone and himself alone in it.

Now it was quite different. In his twelve years at school and college Yura had studied the classics and Scripture, legends and poets, history and natural science, reading all these things as if they were the chronicles of his house, his family tree. Now he was afraid of nothing, neither of life nor of death; everything in the world, each things in it, was named in his dictionary. He felt he was on an equal footing with the universe, and the prayers for Anna now had a different sound for him from the prayers he had heard for his mother as a child."
As an extension of the Bakhtinian study, the following quote is significant:

"They have become accustomed to seeing the author's mug in everything; I did not show mine. And it does not even occur to them that Devushkin is speaking and not I, and that Devushkin cannot speak in any other way. They find the novel long-winded, but there is not a superfluous word in it."*11

............[Dostoevsky's letter of February 1, 1846. Apropos of Poor Folk]

The above extract is an indicator to a vital section of this chapter, where we have made an attempt to develop the concept of authorship with relation to Bakhtin's views on the 'polyphonic' novel, where he draws on the novels of Dostoevsky, whose influence was decisive in shaping Bakhtin's thought. Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics. "Polyphony" or the multi-voiced response of the characters explains how the consciousness of the self works in literary authorship and even in human existence. As is mentioned in "Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics", - "He (i.e. Dostoev) creates, not voiceless slaves, but free people, capable of standing along side their creator, capable of not agreeing with him and even of rebelling against him."*12
The relation of each character to the words of the others contains
the essence of novelistic art in Dostoevsky's novels. "The Brothers
Karamazov" is one of the striking examples of the polyphonic novel,
due to which Bakhtin calls Dostoevsky "the originator of a
fundamentally new novelistic genre, the first and only author to succeed
in the new artistic task .... of constructing a polyphonic world and
destroying the established forms of the fundamentally monologic
(homophonic European novel)".¹³

Bakhtin argues that Dostoevsky handles an extremely complex
author-character relationship that goes beyond the traditional concept of
authorship; this concept has been essentially monologic. Theories of
literature have taken it for granted that authors are able to control their
characters so as to have a predictable effect on the readers.
Communication, according to Bakhtin, assumes a different scenario in
everyday life, and the method through which authors shape meaning in a
text is also radically different. Therefore he states:

"The author is profoundly active but his activity is of a ..........
dialogical nature. It is one thing to be active in relation to an inanimate
thing voiceless stuff that can be moulded at will; it is quite another thing
to be active in relation to another living, equally privileged
consciousness."¹⁴ To move from a monologic to a dialogical
conception of the world is to make an almost revolutionary shift in
textual and novelistic interpretation. Bakhtin believed that much as the
Copernican world view moved the sun out of its central place to make
room for one of his complex theories, authors are removed from the
centre of the textual world to assume their place in the give and take of
narrative energy in which Dostoevsky’s characters exert their own
forces. In “Brothers Karamazov”, Ivan Karamazov is distinguished not
by his own philosophy, but by the way he shapes that philosophy in the
face of all the objections and additions from the other characters in the
novel, each of whom, such as Smerdyakov or the devil is equally
capable of mounting powerful arguments of his own. Ivans’ so-called
monologues echo the consciousness of the other. Each of his speeches is
a dialogue, not only with himself or Alyosha, but many other points of
view as well.

Dostoevsky and the polyphonic novel may be further probed to
assess the scope of the author-character relationship in “Dr. Zhivago;,
and put forward a direct question, may the novel be called “polyphonic”,
considering the fact that several musings and reflections have been
attributed by the author Pasternak to several characters in the novel,
including Lara, Misha Gordon and Vedeniapin. Misha holds similar
views on the Jewish philosophy along with Pasternak, as does Lara
regarding aesthetics and life. The presence of multiple voices in “Dr. Zhivago” may be determined on the basis of the contradictory nature of a time of chaotic transition in urban Russia in Pasternak’s novel, which carry echoes of clashing points of view in “Crime and Punishment” or “Brothers Karamazov”. In this connection, Donald Fanger makes some illuminating observations on the diverse scope of the “polyphonic” voice in his essay: “Apogee: Crime and Punishment”:

“His novels are as the Soviet critic Bakhtin has shown “polyphonic”, in the sense that they are peopled with incarnate points of view which the author allows full and independent play, and which he neither complements nor resolves as do traditional omniscient narrators. Viewpoints clash in the open, as it were outside of any governing moral convention or “parti pris”. ‘The polyphonic novel’, Bakhtin says, [in “Problems in Dostoevsky’s poetics”] ‘was possible only in the period of capitalism …………. The development of capitalism in Russia [and especially in Peterburg], peculiarly favoured this new literary mutation, because capitalism had come suddenly and ‘caught intact a variety of social worlds and groups which had not, as in the West, begun to lose their distinct apartness’. For aristocratic writers with their roots in the relatively changeless countryside, a stable and inclusive point of view might till be possible; but in the cities, the contradictions of a time of
transition were "bound to manifest themselves specially, while at the same time the individuality of those worlds that had been thrown off their ideological balance and into "collision" was bound to be specially full and clear. In this way, Bakhtin argues "the objective preconditions were created for the essential multilevel and multivoice structure of the polyphonic novel"."¹⁵

The 'voices' which rise from the common rootlessness of the mythical city of Dostoevsky may have some echoes in Pasternak's "Dr. Zhivago". The tumult and chaos of the Revolution and spiritual disintegration may have influenced the urban consciousness of the author to 'utter' his thoughts not only through Yuri, but also through Misha Gordon, Nikolay Nikolayvich (his uncle) and Lara the image of the real-life companion Olga Ivanskaya, who was arrested with her daughter after the death of the author, point out that the author's musings on religion, aesthetics and philosophy are similar to the monologues of Nikolayvich and Lara.

While contesting the views of the 'dialogic' voice of the narrator or the mutli-voiced 'polyphony' of the author's art, it is interesting to note some comments by Miriam Taylor Sajkovic, (Mount Holyoke College). In "Notes on Boris Pasternak's Doktor Zivago, she writes that
in his artistic methodology, Pasternak has tried to fuse three approaches: the epic structure in the expansive historical canvas, akin to Tolstoy; the symbolistic poetics (metaphor & simile), and the polyphonic or many-voiced structural development of characterization of Dostoevsky.

Dmitry Grigorieff has written that Pasternak's literary method is “a fusion of the realistic and mythological layers of the material”. V. Ivanov\(^*^{16}\) class it “realistic symbolism”. This comes close to an understanding of Pasternak’s method, but for a more adequate analysis, epic-symbolistic, poetic-polyphonic.

Diverse views on the authorial perspective in the novel “Dr. Zhivago” as discussed through the essays of Fanger, Miriam Taylor Sajkovic and Dmitry Grigorieff, are further illuminated by author and critic Edith. W. Clowes, who probes into the genre of “Dr. Zhivago” to justify the ‘monologic’ role of the voice of the author – narrator. She states:

"The difficult plot construction the characters seeming paleness and the "monologism", of Dr. Zhivago (i.e. the characters subjection to one single philosophical voice) all lead us to the major structural question: What is the genre of Pasternak's crowning work? Is it a novel in any conventional sense? And what does the form suggest about how
we are to interpret Dr. Zhivago? Using even the most capacious definition of a novel, that of M. Bakhtin in such essays as "Epic and Novel" and "Discourse in the Novel", Dr. Zhivago presents problems. Bakhtin defines the novel rhetorically, in terms of the character of its discourse, as well as poetically, in terms of the nature of its structural images of place and time."

In both, Bakhtin sees qualities of being-in-the-present, flux, heterogeneity and rhetorical tension (in contract to temporal distance, isolation, fixity, monolithic and monological stylistic unity) as being central to the novel. Certainly, Pasternak's work is present-minded and it challenges the ritualized epic past long consecrated in Soviet historiography. Still, its philosophical rhetoric is largely pronounced in one tone, that introduced by Vedenyapin in Part I and carried on through Yuri, Misha, Lara and Sima Tuntseva. There never seems to be any challenge or risk within the text, except in Yuri's talks with Antipov - (Strelnikov) and with Liberius, who ignores him anyway and thus will not be challenged. One risk is obviously in the collision between Vedenyapin's neo-Christian ideology of lichnost (individual selfhood) and the Stalinist "party-minded", hard mentality of the 'official' reader; between the act of bearing witness to one's own historical truth and the reader who refuses to consider a re-reading of history.
David K. Danow maintains that the structure of Dr. Zhivago is unique in many respects. The concluding chapter is actually a collection of poems composed by the central figure of the novel. The preceding sixteen prose chapters are themselves further divided into numerous individual scenes, focused on a predominant image, that may be likened to separate cinematic shots. This aspect leads us to the discussion of the relations between narrative and cinematic technique. It also seeks a certain reconciliation between specific incidents documented in prose and then later reformulated as poetry, affording a sense of dialogue between the two classic modes of expression. Danow also outlines the intent of his study on the dialogic structure of the novel and the attempt to demonstrate that within this singular work, they are worthy of attention as principal features accounting for its singularity.

Upon initial consideration, "Dr. Zhivago" may not appear appropriate for dialogic analysis—since, in a work strongly disposed toward metaphoric formulation and figurative description, the diachronic aspect strongly predominates over the mimetic. Far more is told, in other words, than is shown. In a striking number of instances, the reader is simply informed of an event's occurrence rather than presented the
causal detail by which it took place. Zhivago’s most profound liaison is thus communicated in these spare terms –

“Proshlo bolee dvukh mesiatsev s teh por, kak v odnu iz svoikh poezdok v gorod on ne vernulsia k vecheru domoi i ostalsia u Larisy Fedorovny”.

(More than two months have passed since the day, when during one of his visit to the city, he did not return home and stayed with Larissa Fyodorovna. – “Dr. Zhivago”, published by Vintage, 2002, p-274)

“In conformity with such terse narrative mode”, he says, “The characters speech, in particular, is presented in utterly sparing, laconic fashion. The frequency between the authors recapitulation of events by presenting his characters’ exchanges in the form of either indirect or quasi direct speech appears to outweigh greatly the presentation of their direct speech.”

Hence, it is understood that the reader is made privy at first hand to the characters dialogical engagements only rarely – and with the added in escapable sense of their “truncation”. One must, therefore, rely mainly on the authors accounts, within which are, in corporated, at times, only isolated fragments of his character speeches. Taking “Dr. Zhivago” on its own terms, one must acknowledge the novels striking
paucity of dialogue within a study whose aim is to concentrate on the various contrasting modes depicting such communication. From among these, most challenging to the reader is the following statement made by Mikhail Bakhtin in one of his essays.

"Ouasi – direct speech involves a discourse that is formally authorial a discourse that is formally authorial but that, belong in its 'emotional' structure to a represented character whose inner speech is transmitted and regulated by the author."¹²⁰

The above reflections and opinions assert the principle of the combination of voices, but in a deeper and complex form. The typical dialogic communication of Ivan Karamazov where he projects his thoughts through a single, dissociated consciousness is mentioned here – and which is followed by another dialogue of the inner consciousness in "Dr. Zhivago". But the stark difference of the two speeches below – further reinstates the view the Pasternak’s "Voices" do not resemble "polyphony". They are rather projections of the author’s dissimilar and conflicting opinions, as absorbed by his own experiences of life.

Here is an excerpt from "The Brothers Karamazov"¹⁰
He teased me! And cleverly, you know, cleverly: ‘Conscience! What is conscience? I create it myself. Why do I torment myself? Out of habit. Out of a universal human habit seven thousand years old. When we get out of the habit, we will be gods.’ That’s what he said, that’s what he said!......

Yes, but he is evil. He laughed at me. He was insolent, Alyosha, said Ivan with an offended shudder. And he slandered me, he slandered me in may ways. He lied about me to my face. ‘Oh, you are going to perform an heroic deed of virtue, you are going to announce that you killed your father, that you incited the lackey to kill your father......

That’s what he says, he, and he knows it. ‘You are going to perform an heroic deed of virtue, but you do not believe in virtue – that is what torments and enrages you, that is why you are so vindictive.’ He told me these things about myself, and he knows what he is talking about....

No, he knows how to torture, he is cruel,” continued Ivan, not listening. “I always had the feeling I knew why he was coming. ‘Let us assume that you went out of pride, but still there was the hope that they would find Smerdyakov out and send him to prison, exonerate Mitya, and only morally condemn you (he laughed here, do you hear?), and others would praise you. But then Smerdyakov died, hanged himself – well, now who is going to take your word alone in court? but still you
are going, you are going, you will go anyway, you have resolved to go.

But why are you going now? this is terrible, Alyosha, I can’t endure such questions!"21

It is pertinent, at this point, to also quote a passage from one of the climactic chapters of “Dr. Zhivago”, when Yuri fears his separation from Lara under the behest of Komarovsky.

What have I done? What have I done? I’ve given her up, renounced her, given her away. I must run after them. Lara! Lara!

‘They can’t hear. The wind is against me and they are probably talking at the tops of their voices. She has every reason to feel happy, reassured. She has no idea of the trick I’ve played on her.

‘She is thinking, it’s wonderful that things have gone so well, they couldn’t be better. Her absurd, obstinate Yura has relented at last, thank heavens; we are going to a nice, safe place, where people are more sensible than we are, where you can be sure of law and order. Suppose even, just to be awkward, he doesn’t come on tomorrow’s train, Komarovsky will send another to fetch him, and he’ll join us in no time at all. And at the moment, of course, he’s in the stables, hurrying,
excited, fumbling with the harness, and he’ll rush after us full tilt and catch up with us before we get into the forest.”

In the above passage, the voice of a “single” consciousness, that of Yuri rings in our ears. In the words of Ivan Karamazov, there are the “loopholes” of his thoughts which glance of the other’s speech and consciousness which are brought to a focus and intensified. The result is an eventful combination of voices, which causes a complete dialogization of Ivan’s self-awareness. As a suitable conclusion to the problem of “polyphony” in “Dr. Zhivago”, it is evident that the interior monologue which occurs in parts of the novel is essentially ‘monologic’ or a projection of a single sensibility-in most cases, – that of the protagonist Yuri.

“A comparison of Dostoevsky’s and Tolstoy’s heroes raises some interesting questions about Bakhtin’s famous, and far too facile, categorization of Dostoevsky as a “polyphonic” thinker and of Tolstoy as a “monologic” one.”

Caryl Emerson

The above statement by Caryl Emerson offers a further dimension to the question of authorial voice in the novel “Dr. Zhivago”; it supports the immediate hypothesis that the narrator’s voice (mainly that of Yuri) contains the tone of the author, which is “monologic” or which controls all other conflicting voices in the novel. It is also more or
less presumed that the author/narrator Pasternak creates a protagonist of the fictional narrator (Yuri); most of the thoughts and emotional expressions of the author are voiced through Yuri, even though (as discussed earlier) the voices of a non-conformist heroine like Lara and self-assertive champions of a bourgeois "utopian" state like Uncle Kolya or Nikolay Nikolayevich make strong statements on political philosophy in the novel. Even Strelnikov stirs the compassion of the reader by airing his Bolshevik views on the righteous justice of his mission, against oppression. But the basic ideology of the lonely physician-poet, his life and his passion consummates in a poetic epilogue at the end of the novel, creating a tone that is clearly monologic.

Caryl Emerson further clarifies Tolstoy's authorial stand in the following passage:

Both, it is clear (Dostoevsky and Tolstoy) exhibit a genius for multiplicity). But each writer has a different way of connecting multiplicity with language and with the formation of a self. For Dostoevsky, multiplicity is spatial, coexistent and for want of a better word — immoral Voices are refracted, juxtaposed but never assimilated or eliminated. For Tolstoy, multiplicity is located elsewhere. It is more linear and temporal than spatial and coexistent. Life is a manner, not of
seeking external confrontation with other equally and eternally valid ideas, but of processing an idea or a situation at the proper time to guarantee the survival of the organism. The emphasis is the natural result of a fictive world in which ideological systems exist to serve individual personality and not the other way around. When the personality is cut off by death, there is an absolute cut off of one person's unique, unrepeatable accumulation of ideas and interactions. No one but the author is left to step in and fill the gap, with his absolute language and extra personal perspective.  

Emerson also maintains that according to Bakhtin the activity of the author does not allow the consummation of the 'self', as he has an "unfairly privileged" position, sitting above and apart from his characters. The Tolstoyan self has no single point of crystallization, and no ideational center, only focusing on a select sequence of events. The I, in the world of Tolstoy, can be profoundly and irreversibly moved by random environmental factors.

The authorial voice in the novels/stories of Tolstoy can best be defined by two character – narrators (in the third person) in the novels "Anna Karenina" and "The Death of Ivan Ilyich". They are the voices of Levin and Ivan Ilyich himself. It is believed that Levin is only a proto
type of the author Tolstoy, and the auto-biographical overtones are strong in “Anna Karenina”. The monologic tone of the author in “Dr. Zhivago” is reminiscent of the life and philosophy of Levin, who presents a portrait of stability and dignity along side the tumultuous and passionate life of Anna Karenina. Just as Yuri in “Dr. Zhivago Levin is preoccupied with the instinct for ‘life’ and survival of the spirit.

The author Pasternak encloses his thoughts through Yuri, which dominates all other ‘thought-processes in the novel. Tolstoy follows the righteous and upright voice of his authorial ‘self’ through Levin, and hence the authorial stance is “monologic”.

In a referential mode of explanation, the lone voice of the author, essentially monologic, is described in the essay “Two Kinds of Human Understanding” and the Narrator’s Voice in “Anna Karenina” by George Gibian.

What is the relationship between the various ways in which Tolstoy conveys to us his characters’ failure in the rational sphere and their great sensitivities in intuitive perceptions and also creates a sense of simplicity and order?
The key to an answer is in the need to distinguish carefully between the characters’ experience and the voice of the narrator. Life is a mystery to the characters. Whence the sense of clarity and order in the novel, then? They are the narrator’s. He is the only one exempt from the blind man’s buff played by the characters. The characters do not comprehend what they are doing; he does. He understands both the realms of reason and non-reason. It is he who constructs triple concessive constructions; he tells us the rich complexities of what one glance signified to another character. Experiences too complex for the intellect of the character are simple to the author. The veil of confusion is lifted for him.25

“The Death of Ivan Ilyich” is essentially the author’s viewpoint in religious philosophy, written at a time when Tolstoy was preoccupied with the meaning or significance of life and death related with human conduct. In the ‘Introduction’ to “The Death of Ivan Ilyich”, Rosemary Edmonds makes a valid statement –

“The Death of Ivan Ilyich” gives what Tolstoy required art to give: it is kinetic, moving the reader to intense pity and awareness of the spiritually therapeutic properties of prolonged physical suffering finally resolved in death. As soon as Ivan Ilyich could admit to himself that his life had been wrong, he was able to die. Until then ‘what
hindered him was his claim that his life had been good. That very justification of his life held him fast and prevented him from advancing, and caused him more agony than everything else.' But once he recognizes that 'his life had not been what it ought to have been but that it was still possible to put it right' all his pain is as nothing and his fear of death. In place of death there was light. 'Within an hour Ivan Ilyich is dead. It was the end, and the beginning.'

Tolstoy’s understanding of Ivan Ilyich’s moral life is acute and akin to a self-portrait; it is in consonance with Levin’s agonized observations on Nicholas Levin, his brother who is terminally ill and almost waiting for death. Levin’s reflections on a dying man throw light on the intense “awareness” of the authorial intervention, i.e. the voice of Tolstoy speaking somberly on the terrible reality of death—

Impossible that this terrible body can be my brother Nicholas, he thought. But he drew nearer, saw the face, and doubt was no longer possible. The glittering eyes glanced severely and reproachfully at the brother who was entering and this glance immediately established living relations between living people. Levin at once felt the reproach in the look fixed on him and a sense of repentance because of his own happiness.
The similarity of this ‘awareness’, is discernible in Pasternak’s commentary on life and death through the narrative voice – mostly that of Yuri, and surprisingly even through Lara. As she bends sorrow fully over the coffin in which Yuri lay, her thoughts on the entire mystery of life and death holds the ‘monologic’ tone of the author. It can be assessed also, from the above arguments, that the ‘monologic’ form of authorial participation is a manifestation of the diversity of the narratorial voice.

Notes & References:


2. Ibid; Chapter – III, p - 88.


4. Ibid; Part-I, Chapter-IV, p - 114.

6. Ibid; p - 51.

7. Ibid; (David Lodge mentioned Philip Roth to illustrate his point) p-87.

8. Ibid; p - 87.


13. Ibid; p-241.

14. Ibid; p-244.


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24. Ibid; p-169.


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