Chapter-II

AESTHETICS, LANGUAGE AND THE NOVEL: AN OVERVIEW OF BAKHTIN’S THEORY

I

Although ordinarily the word aesthetic means the study and appreciation of the beautiful, over the centuries some of its concerns have been developed into critical theorization. The aesthetic as a necessary condition of the arts and its interpretation has gradually permeated into ideological formations. From idealistic abstraction to physical, psychological, political, sociological, moral, and ethical turns of aesthetic theories, the study of aesthetic has followed a discursive trajectory. Before embarking upon an exploration of Bakhtin’s aesthetic theory it is necessary to trace its historical development.

According to The New Encyclopaedia Brittanica (1980) the discipline called aesthetics may be described broadly as the study of beauty and, to a lesser extent, its opposite the ugly. It may include general or theoretical studies of the arts and of related types of experience such as those of the philosophy of art, art criticism and the psychology or sociology of the arts. Aesthetics has often been defined
more specifically as the science of the beautiful, a definition implying an organized body of knowledge covering a special field of subject matter.

Among the ancients, Democritus regarded sensuous knowledge as important, as it provides reason with all its arguments. Yet the properties of things perceived by the senses exist only in opinions. Atom is the final point of the divisible object, according to atomists. It has properties like weight, shape, arrangement, yet the atom cannot be perceived by the senses. While Democritus divided cognition into the sensuous and the rational, Plato emphasized that knowledge of a thing is its unique idea, but this idea is not the sum total of the various properties realized by our sense organs; archetypes are true and universal, while the material world is the mirrored image of the archetype, and hence is its transitory representation. Aristotle attempted to bridge the gap between Plato’s two worlds, and spoke of the internal form or structure which gives meaning to an object.

Taking epistemology as the starting point of philosophy, Descartes maintains that the soul has the ability to perceive the universal essence of things through the transitory, possessing innate
ideas gifted to man by God. Cartesian Rationalism became decisive in neoclassical aesthetics. Cartesian and Aristotelian elements combined in the richly polysemous concepts of reason and nature, which became central to all theories of the arts within the project of Enlightenment.

The name *aesthetics* first appeared in *Reflections on Poetry* (1735) by Alexander Baumgarten, a Rationalist influenced by René Descartes, and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, a polymath German philosopher, who focussed upon what Descartes had distinguished as clear and distinct ideas, or systematic thought as developed in logic and mathematics. This distinction restricted cognition to conceptual knowledge. Baumgarten noticed that sensory and perceptual cognition, which is developed in poetry and other arts, was thus excluded. Drawing upon the Greek word for perception (aisthēsis), Baumgarten coined the word *aesthetics* for the science of perceptual cognition.

The problem of aesthetic pleasure in art haunted 18th century aesthetic thought. John Locke’s *An Essay* negotiates the question: how do ideas generate? The central, though mysterious, role of imagination in artistic creation had long been acknowledged, but its mode of operation had not been systematically investigated. The rationalist
Bacon placed it as a faculty alongside memory and reason and assigned poetry to it. Hobbe’s stated that the mind’s trains of thought are guided by the principle of association. This theory was developed into a systematic psychology by Hume and Hartley. Locke, however, dismissed ‘fancy’ as a tendency of poetic language to be figurative.

Kant recast the problems of eighteenth century aesthetic thought in the characteristic form of the critical philosophy: how are judgements of the beautiful and the sublime possible? In view of their ardent subjectivity, how is their implicit claim to general validity to be vindicated? According to Kant, empirical knowledge is possible because the faculty of judgement can bring together general concepts and particular sense. The formal purposiveness of an object as experienced can induce ‘a free-play of the imagination’, an intense disinterested pleasure that depends not on our particular knowledge but just on the consciousness of the harmony of the two cognitive powers – imagination and understanding. This is the pleasure we affirm in the judgement of taste. Since the general possibility of sharing knowledge with each other presupposes that in each of us there is a co-operation of imagination and understanding, so every rational being has the capacity
to feel this harmony of cognitive power. Therefore, true judgement of
taste can legitimately claim to be true for all.

Schilling was the first philosopher to claim to have ‘absolute
standpoint’ from which the dualism of self and nature of Kant’s
epistemology could be overcome. In his System of Transcendental
Idealism (1800), he attempted a reconciliation of all oppositions
between the self and nature through the idea of art. In the artistic
intuition, the self is both conscious and unconscious at once: there is
both deliberation and inspiration. For him transcendental idealism
becomes absolute idealism and art becomes the medium through which
the infinite ideas become embodied in finite form, and therefore the
medium through which the absolute is fully revealed. This romantic
revolution in feeling and taste was fully under way in Schilling’s
philosophy.

In the romantic revolution, a new version of the cognitive view of
art becomes dominant in the concept of imagination as a faculty of
immediate insight into truth, distinct from, and perhaps superior to
reason and understanding — the special gift of the artist. Blake, Shelly,
Hazlitt, Baudelaire and many others spoke of the imagination in these
terms. Coleridge, with his famous distinction between fancy and imagination provides one of the fullest formulations: the fancy is a mode of memory, operating associatively to recombine the elementary data of sense; the imagination is the coadunating faculty that dissolves and transforms the data and creates novelty and emergent quality. His theory of imagination where he distinguishes between the ‘primary’ and the ‘secondary’ imagination, ultimately replace the theory of association of Hartley.

The Romantics considered a work of art as an organic whole, bound together by deeper and more subtle unity than that explicated in the neoclassic rules and having a vitality that grows from within.

During the 20th century the understanding and theorization of the ‘aesthetic’ has followed different paths. The propagators of Art for Art’s sake indeed argued that art exists only for itself. This distancing of art from its creator was further strengthened by the objective theories of Croce, Ogden and Richards. Croce developed his thesis centralizing logic as the foundation of conceptual understanding. Taking a detour of Coleridgean concepts of awareness, intuition etc. Croce identified the lower consciousness as the area of raw data while intuition occupies a
level of higher consciousness. Ultimately, the aesthetic understanding is formalized because of the merging of the two. Echoing Croce, Henri Bergson maintains that while intuition or instinct becomes self-conscious it enables us to penetrate into the ultimate reality which our spatializing intellects inevitably distort.

C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards in their work *The Foundation of Aesthetics* explore the context of aesthetic experience. In applying the semiotic analysis they found that earlier theoreticians of beauty had used expressions very loosely in that similar language involves similar thoughts and similar things thought of. Early aesthetic theory, according to the authors lacked in logic and scientific language of analysis. Richards manages to give the impression that he is the first rationalistic thinker on aesthetics. Although he used scientific language he lacked scientific accuracy.

One of the features of the 20th century is that it is remarkably historicist, disposed to apocalyptic, crisis centred views of history. Herbert Read, writing in 1933 points out that though there have been revolutions in the history of art before, one can discern a difference in kind in the contemporary revolution; instead of turning over or even
turning back, it is a break-up, a devolution. Its character is catastrophic. Contemplating the impact of Gauguin and Van Gogh, and then Picasso, Read claimed that ‘we are not concerned, not with a logical development of the art of painting in Europe, not even with a development for which there is any historical parallel, but with an abrupt break with all tradition ... The aim of five centuries of European effort is openly abandoned.’ (Read, quoted in Modernism, 1976: 20) In the view of C.S. Lewis, in politics, religion, social values, art and literature, a chasm lies between the present age and the age of Jane Austen and Walter Scott that is greater than all divisions in the entire history of Western man:

I do not think that any previous age produced work which was, in its own time, as shatteringly and bewilderingly new as that of the Cubists, the Dadaists, the Surrealists, as Picasso has been in ours. And I am quite sure this is true ... of poetry ... I do not see how anyone can doubt that modern poetry is not only a greater novelty than any other 'new poetry' but new in a new way, almost in a new dimension. (Lewis, C.S. quoted in Modernism, 1976: 21)

Later, Roland Barthes attempts to locate the Great Divide more precisely: he identifies it with the pluralization of world-views deriving from the evolution of new classes and communications: ‘Around 1850 ... classical writing therefore disintegrated, and the whole of literature,
from Flaubert to the present day, became the problematics of language.’ (Barthes, R. quoted in Modernism, 1976: 21)

The concept of modernism during the 20th century came to be associated with modernist doctrines of the absolute autonomy of art. This argument underlines the non-referential and non-mimetic nature of art and its meaning was considered to be part of its structure. Its compliment in literary criticism was to be found in the formalist analysis of New Criticism. With the advent of political and social activism in the 1960s which dictated that art be socially relevant, that is it should reflect, the aestheticism of art entered into new debates and theoretical speculations.

Marxism underlined the social context of art. Emerging out of Marx’s assumptions that art belongs to the ‘superstructure’ having its material origin at the base, for the first time a materialistic interpretation of aesthetics was offered. Probably, the most famous assertion in The German Ideology is the belief that under a communist form of social organization grounded on redistribution of wealth, abolition of private property and the end of class relations — man could be hunter, fisherman, shepherd, critic — all in the same day. He could realize his
full potential, emancipate his true qualities and build a world based on cooperation instead of competition. Though it says very little about Marxist aesthetics, *The German Ideology*, however, criticizes liberalism as the legitimating ideology of capitalism with its assertion of universal human nature, of the autonomy and freedom of the individual and the rational and unencumbered transcendence of mind. Marx and Engels thus provided a foundation for the later development of a Marxist literary theory which would begin to critique the claims of idealist and humanist aesthetics.

Marxists would address the ways in which art is both implicated in and critically distanced from cultural ideologies, recognizing that art is a powerful political force capable of organizing what Kant referred to as the ‘rabble of senses’ through its capacity to give pleasure and to present ideas in the form of embodied experience. Art can encourage conformism with desired models of social cohesion or be seized upon as the site for disruption, subversion and challenge.

In the writings of Lukás, Adorno and Benjamin, the understanding of the assumptions of ‘aesthetics’ underwent radical changes. According to Benjamin in his celebrated essay “The Work of
Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, the autonomous work of art loses its traditional status (‘aura’) as an effect of mechanical reproduction. Art is thereby removed from the realm of ritual to that of politics, and a new, distracted but critical audience is mobilized in the direction of greater democracy by the new mass art.

Patricia Waugh in *Practicing Postmodernism Reading Modernism* views postmodernism as a late phase in a tradition of aestheticist thought inaugurated by philosophers such as Kant and embodied in Romantic and modernist art: “Postmodernism as an aesthetic and body of thought can be seen as a late flowering Romanticism. What distinguishes its mood from earlier Romanticisms, however, is that its aesthetic impulses have spilled out of the self-consciously defined sphere of art and into the spheres of what Kant referred to as the cognitive or scientific on the one hand and the practical or moral on the other. This mood reveals itself on both sides of the Atlantic. In its European forms, it tends to draw on a theoretical or philosophical tradition through writers such as Nietzsche, Bataille, Artaud and post-phenomenological critiques arising out of thinkers such as Heidegger, Derrida and post-structuralist Lacan …” (1992: 3)
The Romantic notion of imagination was conceived as a non-conceptualizable and effectively divine power with human being. Though this idealism invoked the ire of Nietzsche, he too took resort to aesthetics, though as the only substitute of metaphysics.

The autonomy of aesthetics continued to be felt in the following modern and postmodern thought. Patricia Waugh argues that once the metaphysical frame of Idealism began to weaken, however, the concept of autonomy began to be transferred from self entirely to the work of art itself conceived of as an internally coherent, self-contained and linguistically self-legitimating system. Though referring back to Kant and Schiller, this modernist aestheticism is however different. For neither of them could conceive autonomy as a withdrawal into a realm utterly distinct from the historical world, but New Criticism meant such complete isolation. According to the French philosopher Lyotard, the modern systems of knowledge were compartmentalized, art being one distinct compartment, each supported by some meta-narrative or grand discourse. The sense of fragmentariness still haunting the modern consciousness, the era became a constant fight for universal agreement – between art and religion, science or political ideologies.
Although generally post-modernism is viewed as a fall from modernist grace and a break with modernist formalism, Patricia Waugh points out a still increasing aesthetic concern to be continued in postmodernism: “The aesthetic has now entered the ‘hard’ core of the human sciences: philosophy, political theory, social science.” (1992: 6) In both Post-Nietzschean and Post-Heideggerian modes it is seen as inseparable from the world or knowledge. This implies, according to Waugh, that in postmodernism truth cannot be distinguished from fiction. Richard Rorty greets this implication of aesthetics as a potential to reshape a new world by abandoning altogether the outworn rhetoric of metaphysical truth. On the other hand, for some critics, this is seen as the ‘comodification’ of art, or as a dangerous displacement of the cognitive and moral by the aesthetic. Habermas criticized postmodernism for attempting to over-extend the aesthetic and to confuse the boundaries of these orders of discourse.

Lyotard, in his attempt to find a way out of the commodifying effects of post-modernity, reverts back to Kant’s idea of the sublime, to a value of the aesthetic as a form of non-utilitarian autonomy, a mode which is resistant to any form of conceptualization. The post-modern
expression of the sublime is a form of resistance to the banal and automatising effects of modern life. In literature this is expressed through various self-cancelling techniques like parodies, ironies, etc. or self-referential language games. Lyotard’s post-modernism is an extension of modernism or romanticism and their faith in the autonomy of art. He resists the belief that forms of the aesthetic can be translated into the forms and concepts of the historical world.

In the context of unending debates on aestheticism in post-modern discourse, the apprehensive observation of Raymond Williams brings a different note. Tracing the history of the word ‘aesthetic’, Williams shows that the use of this word has always been biased towards what is ‘fine’ or ‘beautiful’ which emphasized and isolated subjective sense activity as the basis of art, and distinct from social and cultural interpretation (it may be recalled that in the discourse of post-modernism, the possibility of aesthetics invading all other fields of discourse is implied). Williams shows his apprehension: “... the isolation can be damaging for there is something irresistibly displaced and marginal about the now common and limiting phrase ‘aesthetic consideration’, ...” (1976: 31)
Williams here expresses the Marxist concern for the need of ethics in literature. Marxist approach to literature is social rather than aesthetic with an idealistic aspiration for a welfare of humankind and improvement of the conditions of life. The ambitious project of Enlightenment for human liberation and progress had been based on the sole reliance on human reason. This project was discredited by the modern capitalist forces of efficiency which defined reason increasingly in terms of a narrow and specialized expertise. This system brought fragmentation and isolation. On the other hand, Marxist materialism, with a solid social and economic project maintains a distance from any form of abstraction. Lukás contrasts Marxism as a philosophy that integrated the individual in society with all modern philosophies of crisis and evasion, particularly existentialism which isolated man outside social and economic relation. Lukás’ stress on social relationships became the basis of his aesthetics.

While Lukás’ aesthetic thought draws on Nietzschean ‘will to power’, Bakhtin perceives a close bond between the artist and society through the dialectic nature of language. His dialogic worldview spills out from his concept of language to all other social discourses including
aesthetics. For Bakhtin, as for Marx, aesthetics is something more capacious than the usual sense of the word — it includes the fundamental questions of ethics, epistemology and ontology.

In *Art and Answerability* Bakhtin uses the word aesthetics implying a sort of activity: “the activity of a subject engaged in making sense out of the world by fixing the flux of its disparate elements into meaningful wholes …” (1990: XXIV) This reminds one of Kant’s necessary interaction between the mind and the world, which Bakhtin came to interpret as ‘dialogue.’

Aesthetic activity is the activity of at least two different subjects perceiving each other. Here, as in the dialectical theory — there is the interaction of two opposites, but there is no negation of negation. On the contrary the two opposites or distinct subjects require each other to consummate a meaningful whole. Bakhtin creates a very positive and dynamic relation of the ‘I’ and the ‘other’. Unlike the idealists or rationalists to whom the materiality of the body posed great philosophical problem, Bakhtin paid homage to the body as the locus for making judgement. The ‘I’ and the ‘other’ gaze at each other and two different worlds are revealed. These are two bodies occupying
unique places in space. From their unique positions each is rewarded with a unique angle of perception: “I shall always see and know something that he, from his place outside and over against me, cannot see himself: parts of his body that are inaccessible to his own gaze (his head, his face and its expression), the world behind his back and a whole series of objects and relations, which in any of our mutual relations are accessible to me but not to him.” (1990: 23) This position is convertible and the inadequacy of one’s perception necessitates the help of the other person. Holquist’s restatement of Bakhtin’s metaphorizing of this condition is eloquent: “We not only interrogate each other, we inter-locate each other, and it is the inter-locative or dialogic self that is the subject of Bakhtin’s archetectonics. The inter-locative self is one that can change places with another — that must, in fact, change places to see where it is. A logical implication of the fact that I can see things you cannot, is that our excess of seeing is defined by a lack of seeing: my excess is your lack, and vice-versa. If we wish to overcome this lack, we try to see what is there together. We must share each other’s excess in order to overcome our mutual lack.” (1990: XXVI)
The mutual interdependence of two different worlds create a 'whole'. For Bakhtin, wholeness is a fiction which can be created from a particular point of view at a particular space and time, and since everything is in a state of constant motion and shift, and nothing remains the same, the wholeness cannot be absolute.

This may apparently seem dire skepticism on the part of Bakhtin, but to a reader who has gone through all of his works it would seem otherwise. Bakhtin's was a philosophy which found truth in fragmentariness, in the loopholes of all metaphysical categories — since they bring to him the promise of change as against stagnation, an urge of the fragmented living being to survive. Completion would stop the world, inadequacy would activate it to reach out for the promise of completion. It somehow reminds one of the Heraclitian metaphor of the river universally flowing, giving the appearance of wholeness, yet which is never the same.

The young Bakhtin wrote under the gloom of World War-I, which had erased the former myth of humanity with mass homicide, and thus could not recapture the old metaphysical truths of philosophers. Bakhtin sought a unique niche for man which would allow reclusive
individuality as also social intercourse. His ‘I’ welcomes the ‘other’ as a
great possibility, the relationship described as ‘love’. *Art and
Answerability* is important and interesting as it has certain self-
contradictory elements or loopholes, which prevent the work from
remaining as a dead-end in Bakhtin’s career. Identifying the weakness
of idealism implied in the work, Bakhtin went further to find a more real
and complex relation the he came to name as ‘the dialogic relation’.

However, in the post-world-war era, and amid the chaotic
circumstances of his own nation, Bakhtin sought to find for man and art
(specially verbal art) a living relationship kept alive with certain
responsibilities of remaining answerable to each other. This ethics in
aesthetics would save it from a damaging isolation into the ephemeral
world of the ‘fine’ and ‘beautiful’. Bakhtin, exploring the inner
structural interrelations or archetectonics sought to bring the human soul
and art closer to each other. To Bakhtin, art that is not bound to answer
for life, a pure isolated world evoked by Pushkin in his dialogue-poem
“The Poet and the Crowd”, which is made of “inspiration, sweet sounds,
and prayers” is high flown. This self-satisfied complacency generates
stagnation. Answerability to life entails liability and guilt. The artist,
who is also a human being bound to the fretful cares of everyday life should not detach himself from that life while creating his art. "It is not only mutual answerability that art and life must assume, but also mutual liability to blame. The poet must remember that it is his poetry which bears the guilt for the vulgar prose of life, whereas the man of everyday life ought to know that the fruitlessness of art is due to his willingness to be unexacting and to the unseriousness of the concerns in his life."

(1990: 1-2) In "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity" Bakhtin explores the archetectonics of this mutual and very dynamic relationship. Thus the young author impregnates this work with such possibilities which later flower into his more popular theories on polyphony and the carnival. In the author-hero relationship the author holds a privileged position over the hero from where he perceives the hero as a whole human being.

But the process of aesthetic activity is not as simple as it sounds. The author, though privileged, should also be answerable to life. He must reflect the hero's 'emotional-volitional' position and not his own in relation to the hero. This requires much caution and psychological restraint on the part of the author because his own whims, his own
socio-political outlook may get juxtaposed with the hero’s world which is different from the author’s. “The artist’s struggle to achieve a determinate and stable image of the hero is to a considerable extent a struggle with himself.” (1990:6) This sort of juxtaposition often takes place and Bakhtin, in his later writings demarcates them as ‘monologic’ writing, where the hero becomes the author’s tool or mouthpiece. Monologic writings miss the multidimensional and intricate interrelationships of the subjects of society each of whom possess unique determinate positions and outlooks. Monologic writings or tendentious writings are often written to serve some special historical purpose. Trotsky writes in his essay “The Limitations of Formalism” that in Russia, tendentiousness was the banner of the intelligentsia, who, crushed by Tsarism and deprived of a cultural environment, sought support in the lower strata of society and tried to prove to the “people” that it was thinking only of them. This sort of writing does not reflect a holistic picture of man or his epoch. Supporting Marxist aesthetics Lukačs in his essay “Historical Truth in Fiction” stresses the moral, humanitarian and historical importance of the role of literature. He finds the paradigm of true realism in the writings of Balzac and Tolstoy, and
supporting Engel’s remarks on Balzac writes that a great realist such as Balzac, if the intrinsic artistic development of situations and characters he has created comes into conflict with his most cherished prejudices or even his most sacred convictions, will, without an instant’s hesitation, set aside these his own prejudices and convictions and describe what he really sees, not what he would prefer to see. Lukács stresses on ethics as the criteria of genuine literature. Balzac, though a royalist, could not help exposing the vices and weaknesses of royalist feudal France. Lukács praised the active participation of the author to his epoch. Bakhtin, it may be noted, had also invoked an unbiased and active author. But when we say that Bakhtin did not consider the realisms of Tolstoy, Gorky or Balzac unbiased, we hit the point where Bakhtin’s analysis of the author-hero relationship proves unique. In order to understand Bakhtin, we may venture to start with the point that in the question of unbiased writing Lukács stresses on the theme or topicality of the realists while Bakhtin delves deeper into the aesthetic process and explores the structure of art in relation with the creator or author.

In Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics (1929), a work of much later period, Bakhtin shows how Tolstoy in his story Three Deaths describes
the deaths in a single day of a noblewoman, a coachman and a tree, who are totally unknown to each other. The author externally connects them with the help of Seryoga the coachman who was transporting the ailing noblewomen. Seryoga removes the boots from a dying coachman in a roadside station and then after the coachman’s death cuts down a tree to make a cross for him. These three deaths are self-enclosed and the thematic unity is brought externally by the author. These three self-enclosed worlds are detached and never interpenetrate. It is the author’s own unified field of vision, which externally connects them and renders them meaningful. The theme externally lends an appearance of heterogeneity. The noblewoman, the poor coachman and a tree in the forest belong to totally different planes of life and Tolstoy seems to handle them with an unbiased mindset, bringing them on a level plane with the help of death. But have the characters been allowed the freedom to express what they think of their situation or of one another? Is there any revolt, non-acceptance or frustration? Is there any hidden polemic, discord or ambivalence? Do they stand on dialogic relation to one another? Bakhtin write – “The three lives and deaths illuminate each other, but only for the author, who is external to them and takes
advantage of his *external location* to definitely interpret and finalize them.” (1973: 57)

Thus in a monologic writing the theme may provide an appearance of heterogeneity along with language diversity and speech characterizations, but the characters are not counter-posed in a dialogic angle so that the meaning of each remains unfinalizable, debatable and open. The author, with his privilege of surplus of vision renders them as final.

Praising Dostoevsky’s polyphonic style Bakhtin writes that if it had been written by Dostoevsky, the story of the three deaths would have taken a totally different dimension. Firstly, Bakhtin says, Dostoevsky would have bound the three characters together with dialogic relationships. He would have introduced the life and death of each character into the consciousnesses of each other. Secondly, he would have made his characters see those essential elements that he as an author sees and knows. (Therefore, we may say that Dostoevsky’s writings are not among those tragedies which stand on the very foundation of man’s blindness to his fate). Finally: “He would not have retained for himself any *essential* authorial ‘surplus’.” (quoted in *The

However, it cannot be denied that Bakhtin had always maintained that the author should not transgress the spatial, temporal and situational frame within which his characters are placed. “These actions of contemplation do not go beyond the bounds of the other as a given; they merely unify and order that given.” (1990: 24)

In Art and Answerability, Bakhtin provides us with an interesting analysis of the aesthetic process happening between the author and his hero. According to Bakhtin, the hero is not the author’s consciousness, but the author is the consciousness of the hero’s consciousness.

The starting point of this aesthetic activity is empathy on the part of the author with the hero. This empathy is aesthetic in nature and not ethical which excludes actions like consolation, assistance, etc. The author projects himself into his hero to experience the hero’s life from
within. In this he is assisted by the outward expressedness, the body-language of the hero, which guides the author into the hero’s soul: “In other words, the outward expressed-ness of such features is the path by which I penetrate him and almost merge or become one with him from within.” (1990: 26) But this merging is an ethical action: “… the pathological phenomenon of experiencing another’s suffering as one’s own would result – an infection with another’s suffering, and nothing more.” (1990: 26)

Aesthetic action proper starts only when the author returns to his own place outside his hero, from where the material derived from the merging of consciousnesses become meaningful ethically, cognitively and aesthetically. Bakhtin hints about the true aesthetic moment when two consciousnesses juxtapose or counterpose and a plethora of meanings ooze out. But in *Art and Answerability* this idea is hidden or at the stage of germination. A few sentences like “the hero’s self-utterances are encompassed and permeated by the utterances of the author about the hero”, (1990: 13) and “The hero’s consciousness, his feeling, and his desire of the world (his object-directed emotional and volitional attitude or posture) are enclosed on all sides, as if within a
band, by the author’s *consummating* consciousness of the hero and his world” (1990: 13), forecast the dialogic and polyphonic concepts that he so successfully developed in his later writings. However, in *Art and Answerability* it is not difficult to sense the germination of those ideas that proved indispensable to certain fields of literary criticism. Here, Bakhtin’s criticism of expressive and impressive theories prove his tendency to reach that subtle point of balance where two consciousnesses meet creating a living moment of truth cradled by both life and art.

To Bakhtin, the expressive theories seem impoverished and incomplete because in them the merging of the author with the hero happens but the return never takes place. For Bakhtin: “Aesthetic activity proper actually begins at the point when we return into ourselves …” (1990: 26) and start to communicate the material gathered from experiencing the other from within himself. This consummation is effected by the author completing that material with features transgressient to the entire object world of the hero’s consciousness. (It has already been mentioned how the two participants in the aesthetic event, according to Bakhtin, are incomplete and need each other for
consummation). But in the expressive theories, the author merges with the hero and what one gains in this way is a purely theoretical transcription of an already accomplished event. It is the work of a single consciousness. A single consciousness can be philosophic, ethical or moral, but it is only through the counterpoising of two active consciousnesses that the aesthetic moment is born. However, in *Art and Answerability* Bakhtin contradicts his own conception of aesthetic activity by uttering sentences like “All of the moments that actively consummate the hero render the hero passive, the way a part is passive in relation to the whole which encompasses and consummate it.” (1990: 14) If the hero remains passive he no longer remains a subject, though Bakhtin meant him to be a subject. A subject is a thinking and feeling entity. Can a thinking entity who is bound to be a determinant by nature remain passive? While criticizing expressive theories, Bakhtin says that the idea of formal achievement and not material achievement is the motif behind cultural creation. This formal enrichment is impossible if the author merges with the object of his creation.

According to Bakhtin, form is not pure expression of the hero and his life, but an expression that gives expression to the hero, and
underlies the author’s relationship to the hero. It is this relationship of living and in principle, non-merging participants in the event that constitutes the specifically aesthetic moment of form. Thus the question arises, can a living relationship happen between a thinking and active subject and a passive agent? According to Bakhtin, this creative reaction of the author to his passive hero is aesthetic love. But should we call it love or conquest? Even in a dominant and subordinate relationship the passive agent not only accepts anything as fate accompli, but suppresses his/her inner voice that silently cries for freedom and space. A thinking individual, however passive, cannot help leaving some marks of constraint and reaction on the partner of the event who is a different personality.

As the expressive, so do the impressive theories seem incomplete. While criticizing the impressive theories in aesthetics, Bakhtin says that here the artist’s act of creation is one sided, who confronts not another subject but an object or material to be worked upon. For in impressive aesthetics only the author exists without a hero.

In spite of certain self-contradictory and questionable utterances, it is however not impossible to grasp Bakhtin’s attitude. He is trying to
reach at a complete and satisfactory aesthetic theory hitherto unaccomplished by both the expressive and impressive schools of thought. In expressive theory the author merely transcripts the hero’s inner world. In impressive theory the author expresses himself through the hero. As Bakhtin had already said, it is the point of returning of the author to himself that the aesthetic even occurs. What Bakhtin fails to impress upon us in *Art and Answerability* but later develops in his other works is that at this point of returning the author’s own consciousness dialogically faces the hero’s consciousness which he brings out. This is aesthetically a creative moment that is dialogic; open-ended and sites meaning.

Thus, the most important point in an aesthetic activity is the necessity of two consciousnesses. Bakhtin delves deep into the analysis of aesthetic activity to impress his point upon us. If form is the prime idea of cultural creation it is necessary to understand the archetectonic behind formal achievement. The aesthetic moment of double-consciousness blossoms into form. Form cannot be understood from within the hero’s single consciousness. If the hero suffers, his inner being can only suffer, but he cannot name his suffering as tragic, as he
is incapable of having a holistic view of himself that is necessary for the form of tragedy. From within itself, inner life is not rhythmic, not even lyrical. It is introduced from outside. The hero himself misses his bodily expression, his gait, his stupor, the light and shade of his face. He misses the horizon that enframes him — he can see the horizon but not himself placed against it. He is naïve in the sense that he is totally ignorant of his finitude, his fate, as given, is known to the author. This blindness of the hero and the surplus of vision enjoyed by the author create the form of tragedy. The example that drives home is that of the figure of King Lear in the ‘storm scene’. The flying white locks of the old king, his childish suffering eyes and the stormy horizon embracing and engulfing his lonely frame is completely missed by the suffering soul of Lear, which in itself is in a state of chaos. It is the author’s excess of vision that gifts Lear with such lyrics (the author’s own emotions regarding Lear) in that he turns out as the epitome of tragedy. It is the givenness of the old king’s fate and his own naiveté that creates the tragedy of Lear. It is created at the meeting point where the king’s consciousness stands against and disagrees with the author’s consciousness against the king’s finitude.
The single consciousness, the ‘I’ experiences oneself as endless and incapable of being contained in the finitude of the body. “In the deepest part of myself, I live by eternal faith and hope in the constant possibility of the inner miracle of a new birth.” (1990: 127) Bakhtin calls this insanity of faith and hope that remains as the last word of an individual’s life. A human being cannot experience himself outwardly as a whole. So, there is the absolute need for the other to create the finished personality that depicts the hero’s finitude. In this outside position, the relationship is of absolute mutual contradiction: “…at the point where the other, from within himself, negates himself, negates his own being as a given, at that point I, from my own unique place in the event of being, affirm and validate axiologically the givenness of his being that he himself negates, and his very act of negation is, for me, no more than a moment in that givenness of his being. What the other rightfully negates in himself, I rightfully affirm and preserve in him, and, in so doing, I give birth to his soul on a new axiological plane of being.” (1990: 128) The anticipation of death proves the hero’s entire life null and void and the author seeks to create forms of justification for his life that the hero himself is incapable of finding.
Does not this argument of Bakhtin sound as a crusade against death? ‘I’ experience myself as infinite, and it is only the other’s bodiliness that speaks out against my faith and hope and reminds me that I too am finite and mortal. It is a shock that we experience while looking at the lifeless body of some near and dear one. But in an aesthetic moment this contradiction helps the birth of the soul on a new plane of being. This does not signify that the soul is thus captured into a permanent metaphysical realm. Bakhtin would never agree with Plato, who said that verbal art rescues an event from its spatial and temporal limitations. Rather Bakhtin found in textualization a sort of sterility and fixity, and in order to rescue art from such stagnation he worked against all ideology of literature and depicted the aesthetic activity which is radically perspectival and situational. Thus the soul which is posited on the aesthetic plane of being is perspectival and situational and, therefore, unfinalizable. This unfinalizability of the soul or its eternal possibility of meanings rescues it from death. Years later, in his theory of the carnival, Bakhtin concretized what we find here as a germinating aesthetic idea. Unfolding the pages of traditional folk culture, Bakhtin found a positive ambivalence in the unique folk world-view where life
and death are integral and not isolated, and where the eternal man continues as the unfinalizable entity of this world. This continuity is possible only through human intercourse, through the acceptance of one another as a functional necessity.

Certain weaknesses in *Art and Answerability* anticipate Bakhtin’s conception of the carnival theory. Here we find the young author valorizing the formal death of the hero for the full realization of meaning. But somehow the use of the term ‘death’ sounds discordant and self-defeating, and it seems impossible that the author himself would find it satisfactory and leave it to that. It was quite natural for Bakhtin to be apprehensive of the diminution of the human soul or any sacrifice of human freedom under authoritarian centralization and finalization of meaning. Bakhtin had lived through the oppressions of the Czars, and also the gloomy years of Stalin’s dictatorship. He was even arrested and lived in exile for six years. So, the authorial vision which he valorizes in “*Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity*” cannot be taken as final, as there seems to be an inner tension in the essay itself. Pam Morris points out that this tension is evident when Bakhtin links the authority of authorial knowledge with death. Morris quotes Bakhtin:
“Artistic vision presents us with the whole hero, measured in full and added up in every detail; there must be no secrets for us in the hero in respect to meaning ... From the very outset, we must experience all of him, deal with the whole of him: in respect to meaning, he must be dead for us, formally dead.” (quoted in The Bakhtin Reader, 1994: 7) This authorial vision is dismissed by Bakhtin in Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics where he criticizes Tolstoy’s monologic (authorial narration) style. It is the excess authorial knowledge which is able to consummate the characters in accounts of their deaths, as Tolstoy did in his story Three Deaths. Bakhtin writes: “Of course, Dostoevsky would never have depicted three deaths: in his world, where self-consciousness is the dominant of a person’s image and where the interaction of full autonomous consciousnesses is the fundamental event, death cannot function as something that finalizes and elucidates life ... Dostoevsky would not have depicted deaths of his heroes, but the crises and turning points in their lives; that is, he would have depicted their lives on the threshold.” (quoted in Morris, 1994: 96) Authorial knowledge leads to a dead end. But is not life more mysterious, more ambivalent, full of unanswered questions and quest for meanings? Is not the meaning of
myself always yet to be completed? Is not there more attraction towards the sense of unfinalizability of self than de Vinci’s perfect knowledge of human anatomy? These questions directly relate to representation. As representation in Bakhtin’s understanding is a product of dialogism, language and communication become crucial. The following section deals with Bakhtin’s understanding of language and representation.

II

Literature is language in which the various elements and components of the text are brought into a complex relation. According to Jonathan Culler, “‘Literariness’ is often said to lie above all in the organization of language that makes literature distinguishable from language used for other purposes. Literature is language that ‘foregrounds’ language itself: makes it strange, thrusts it at you – ‘Look! I’m language!’ – so you can’t forget that you are dealing with language shaped in odd ways.” (1997: 28) The ‘odd ways’ in which language foregrounds literature has been subject to linguistic and critical speculation. Literature is an aesthetic object too and its aestheticist character is formalized through language. Jan Mukaiovsky has argued that language has a material base. It enters the work of art from outside as a sensorily perceptible structure.
of the work. Unlike other materials, language has a semiotic dimension in that it is a sign outside literature. Because of its semiotic character language is relatively independent from sensory perception. However, it is indebted to the world outside art for its semantic definiteness and its close contact with the contexts of everyday human life.

Ferdinand de Saussure developed his theory of language with the central concern that language is primarily a sign. Although a sign is divided into a signifier and signified, the relationship between the two is arbitrary. Saussure argued that the object of study for linguistics is the underlying system of conventions (words and grammar) by virtue of which a sign (word) can ‘mean’. The signifier and the signified, according to Saussure, are however separable on the analytic level, they are not separable at the level of thought. Further, Saussure speculated that language is a system of difference where any one term has meaning only by virtue of its differential place within that system. As Eagleton has maintained, the Russian Formalists led by Viktor Shklovsky initiated a new literary movement as a reaction against symbolism’s mystification of poetry (though not against its emphasis on form). The formalists sought to place the study of literature on a scientific basis;
their investigation concentrated on the language and the formal devices of literary works.

Though likened to the American New Criticism of the 1950s, Russian Formalism emphasized a differential definition of literature, as opposed to the New Criticism’s isolation and objectification of the single text; they also rejected the mimetic/expressive function of literature more strongly. Unlike New Criticism, Russian Formalism does not see the text as reflecting an essential unity of moral or humanistic significance. The central focus of the movement was not literature *per se*, but literariness of the work. Their interest in texts centred on the functioning of literary devices rather than on content; literariness was to do with special use of language.

Shklovsky made the initial important contribution to the movement through his essay ‘Art as Technique’ where he develops the key notion of ‘defamiliarization’. It is a literary device that impedes perception, draws attention to the artifice of the text and dehabituates automatized perception.
The implication of Formalism is that it leads us to view literature as a relational system and not an absolute one and so it is bound to change with history. So to avoid automatization as literary devices cannot remain strange forever, literature has to produce new defamiliarizational device. Such a view must see the literary tradition not as a seamless continuity, but as discontinuity where breaks and reformations in form and devices continue to renew the system.

In defining the object of inquiry as that of ‘literariness’ the Russian Formalists gave a systematic inflection to the study of literature that went beyond intrinsic study of the individual text. The work of Volosinov/Bakhtin first emerged alongside Russian Formalism in the 1920s. In recent years their work has proved fertile ground for literary theorists, for In spite of having the marks of its time, the work contains some remarkably post structural themes.

*Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1929) is a powerful critique of the ‘abstract objectivism’ of Saussure’s theory of language. The basis of the critique is the recognition that language is a social process; language is utterance emerging from concrete social communication not from any abstract objective system of langue. In its
social context language is a generative and continuous process; as utterances which respond to and anticipate other utterances. These utterances form the arena of struggle between different social groups who inflect the same sign-forms with different 'evaluative accents' to produce different 'ideological themes' or meanings. While acknowledging that the sign is not stable, they add that 'multiplicity of meaning' has to be seen in relation to 'multi-accentuality', i.e., its openness to different evaluative orientations.

Bakhtin develops this view, seeing language not as singular and monolithic, but as plural and multiple; languages inscribed with various evaluative accents become socio-ideological languages intimately bound up with material and social conditions and with the contexts of their production — i.e. their 'heteroglossia'. Bakhtin applies this to the novel, the form which is exemplary in its ability to represent a dialogic interanimation of socio-ideological languages. The dialogic nature of language can either be open or closed; the author can either let the interplay of languages speak for itself or can impose a privileged authorial metalanguage. In Bakhtin the dialogic is closely linked to his notion of carnivalization — the popular forms that disrupt and relativize
meaning in opposition to the ‘official’ discourse and its attempt to close down the polysemy of language.

In the quest for meaning, Bakhtin went forward with an interdisciplinary approach to man’s socio-cultural life manifested through dialogic interaction. Bakhtin’s dialogism, which is essentially a philosophy of language, is a ‘translinguistics’, which provides the optics to perceive all aspects of human life through the different categories rooted in language. Instead of describing language as a system, Bakhtin exploited the immense possibilities lurking in the semiotic value of words to mean. Bakhtin ventured into those areas which the linguists avoided – to consider all the social, cultural, political, economical or situational factors outside words that had profound bearing on their meaning. In language Bakhtin identified multitudes of speech genres, which he named ‘heteroglossia’. He looked at heteroglossia as a counter-force that frustrates and decentralizes the monistic black and white social existence. The spirit is to encourage social diversity by deconstructing official discourses and subverting any authoritarianism. He had immense faith in the liberating power of the diverse popular cultures which are usually overshadowed by the monolithic bureaucratic
form of society. Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist in their biographical study of Bakhtin write: "Political and ethical concerns are still the main force animating his philosophy of language." (1984: 237)

The philosophy of language depicted in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* starts with the Marxist approach to language as a social construct, and this idea remains the central tenet throughout. Yet the approach to language is unique and not totally Marxist in the sense that the Bakhtin circle considered language as ideologue overlooking the Marxist rejection of ideology as 'false consciousness', and underlines it as essential to the shaping of all social relations. Bakhtin’s conception of ideology is not epistemological but semiotic, which is produced in a particular social context. For him the domain of ideology coincides with the domain of signs. Ideology did not simply reflect reality, it refracted, or presented a mediated form of reality. This presentation of reflected and refracted reality depended on the semiotic material and their social perspective. It also depended on how the speech of others are presented. For these reasons Bakhtin found language to be ‘double-voiced.’ Michael Gardiner, in his analysis of the concept of ‘ideology’ used by the Bakhtin circle writes: ‘... language,
being inherently ‘dialogic’, is always the site of ideological contestation.” (Gardiner, 1992: 70) Gardiner further argues that the Bakhtin circle that conceived of the sign as the arena of power struggle revealed a deep-rooted semantic ambivalence. The sign is not self-evident with a unitary meaning but is rather transient, depending upon the “prevailing state of interacting and opposed class forces and the wider historical context.” (Gardiner, 1992: 70) The Bakhtin circle took account of a wide range of semiotic material from words, utterances, gestures, and intonations to the human body itself, which accounts for Bakhtin’s highlighting the human body as the locus of all his discussions.

Thus, with their interdisciplinary approach, the Bakhtin circle nullified the Marxist binary of science/ideology, or the economic reductionism in the structure-superstructure theory. For them ideology is that ‘meaning endowing activity’ which is centrally implicated in all symbolic constitutions of human thought and action, or any human endeavour in the sciences or arts, in revolutions as well as in everyday life.

*Marxism* offers critiques of two diametrically opposite schools of thought – the school of abstract objectivism of Saussure, and the school
of individual subjectivism or the idealist school of Dilthey, Vossler and Croce. Saussure, the acknowledged forerunner of structuralism and semiotics considered language as a fixed system, as *sui genesis*. He distinguished between the *langue*, or the system of any language from the *parole* which meant the unique utterances of particular individual. However, the Russian Formalists contested some of the core concepts of Saussure. The question posed by the Baktin circle is — are linguistic forms eternally stable and always self-equivalent signals? "Does language really exist for the speaker’s subjective consciousness as an objective system of incontestable, normatively identical forms?" (in Morris 1994: 32) According to the writer of Marxism, the linguistic form exists for the speaker and the listener who belong to the same language community, only in a specific ideological context, and the divorce of language from its ideological impletion is one of the most serious errors of the followers of Saussure.

On the other hand, the subjectivists underlined the ‘parole’ as important in the historicity of language, as it is the creative externalization of the individual’s intentions, emotions and thoughts.
The subjectivists located the source of this creativity in the individual’s psyche.

Both schools take language in isolation, away from any social context. Bakhtin writes: “The social environment is what has given a person words and what has joined words with specific meanings and value judgements: the same environment continues ceaselessly to determine and control a person’s verbal reaction throughout his entire life.” (in Morris, 1994: 44) Thus, the social utterances or living speech were considered important by the Bakhtin circle as dynamic and real, existing in historical time and space. They further argued that utterances should be considered not merely from the point of view of the speaker’s consciousness but also from the reciprocation and understanding of the listener. Even in the absence of any listener, language is ‘inherently dialogic’, as every utterance is a response to past utterances and is uttered in anticipation to future responses. However, language loses significance without its understandability, and this blossoming of meaning happens just outside the utterance: “In essence, meaning belongs to a word in its position between speakers; that is, meaning is realized only in the process of active, responsive understanding.” (in
Morris, 1994: 35) For any understanding the listener has to orient himself in response to other’s utterances. This position interrogates the status of evaluation and with it the context, the social background, the values and ideologies that have gone in creating the subjects, who are now participating in the conversation. Bakhtin, in spite of his critique of abstract objectivism, found its semiotic approach to language useful. “Everything ideological possesses meaning: it represents, depicts, or stands for something lying outside itself. In other words, it is a sign. Without signs there is no ideology.” (in Morris, 1994: 50) Verbal signs, for Bakhtin, are the arena of constant interaction of individual consciousnesses in the micro level and class struggle in the macro level. Bakhtin takes language, not as an abstract self-enclosed system, but as ideologically saturated and as world-view. For him, the basic reality of language lies in its dialogic interaction. In his philosophy of language, Bakhtin includes even the inner feeling which is materialized by the inner speech. Bakhtin finds the inner speech resembling a dialogue, for inner feelings, like the conflict of Freud’s conscious and unconscious, are in a constant interaction between the subjective and the social. Accordingly, verbal signs are also very sensitive to any socio-economic
change which influences human feelings, affects human relations, and which further results in a change in the verbal structure. Language cannot help but reflect society.

It is undeniable that in a Copernican revolution, Marxian philosophy shifted the focus from the explanation of the human mind to the material condition of man’s existence. Language is considered as an essential part of man’s material existence, and this idea remains as a linchpin in Bakhtin’s philosophy of language.

Bakhtin’s penchant for answerability in art to life and vice-versa propelled him to probe into all intricacies in society and human consciousness. In his search for truth, he discovered society as a field of numerous opposed forces, forces that cannot be classified. Power in society is arbitrary and transient, as resistance is always complimentary to power, and in such an agonistic situation the king is decrowned, the power shifting to the subaltern, and vice-versa. This power shifting may happen at any moment, and even among people belonging to the same economic class. For Bakhtin, freedom can never be termed as sui-genesis, but it is just the other face of power. Bakhtin’s new theoretic position is achieved through his experience in Russia, the Russia of the
Tsars, the Lenins and the Stalins. To him, any kind of relationship cannot be viewed in terms of the active and the passive, thus disclaiming his previous approach to the author-hero relationship in *Art and Answerability*. He had witnessed the forceful suppression of all subversive endeavours, and bulks of propagandist writings produced for the machination of certain socio-political goals. In spite of this black and white monistic appearance, the existence of alternative ideals, counterforces and tensions are bound to erupt, and Bakhtin found the language to be as sensitive to these conflicts as a seismograph to the quake. He perceived two contradictory forces working within language – the centripetal force that tries to create a unitary or official language, as against centrifugal forces or the social heteroglossia. The former force tries to monologize or finalize, while the dialogic relations of heteroglossia ensure that meaning remains in process, unfinalizable. It is undeniable that verbal signs are the arena of continuous class struggle: the ruling class will always try to narrow and centralize meaning and make social signs uni-accentual. Bakhtin underlines the importance of heteroglossia, which brings out the potentiality of the linguistic sign for multiple accents or meanings. This generative force takes into account
the numerous social voices and their individual intentions and expressions; it asserts the way contexts define the meanings of utterances and how social interactions transform a single voice, giving the impression of unity and closure into a voice that is prismatically potential. This he calls the social heteroglossia that helps the process of evolution of meaning. Bakhtin uses the term ‘heteroglossia’ in a later and more matured essay “Discourse in the Novel”, which he wrote in 1935. It was one of the four essays under the title *Dialogic Imagination* and can be called the sequel to *Marxism*.

**III**

In *Formal Method* (1928), the Bakhtin circle launched a debate to rebuke the Formalists for their excessive avoidance of the social dimension in literature and also to provide the Marxists with an appropriate poetics. The Bakhtin circle confronted the Formalists with a deconstructive approach. For the Formalists, the content was unimportant and form became the hallmark of literariness. The literary artefact, according to the Formalists, can have no relation outside of itself save through the mediation of form, and anything beyond form was considered non-literary. The Formalists avoided history and their
only conception of literary history was in the device of defamiliarization, which distinguished one text from the other. The reader would start reading a text with the perceptual expectations built from his or hers previous readings. "Defamiliarization then is the means by which one text distinguishes itself from its predecessors in the intertextual field in which it comes into being, and as such it becomes the agent of literary history." (Bakhtin/Medvedev 1985: XI) This history, however, has no theory of change or any concept of transformational agency. In this, it manages to avoid all extraneous factors, like authorial intentions, social effect, ideological resonances and so on. Thus they were demarcated by the Marxists as representing the bourgeois.

The Formalists later re-oriented themselves towards a full-scale structuralism, which helped them to avoid any external evaluative medium (the reading subject who, with a historical consciousness of previous readings was bound to take an agential role) and determine the meaning of all signifying activities in the text with the help of a linguistic system, which was basically autonomous. The previous device of defamiliarization had to include the reader to recognise the inter-
textual gaps and differences. This was ultimately stopped by the appropriation of structuralism, which completed the elitist status of modern literature in Russia.

Yet, the Bakhtin circle was too sensitive to overlook the hidden possibility existing like an embryo in the structural turn of Formalism. It was possible for the Formalists to provide very rich analysis of all complex and even conflictual social relations by postmortemng the terminological resources of rhetoric and discourse. After all, any sort of discourse is ultimately social in origin and thus the social reference is unavoidable. On the other hand, the Bakhtin circle apprehended the hegemonic tendency of the Marxists during the emerging Stalin era. This tendency would invite too much authoritarianism and thus would spoil and corrupt literature. The Bakhtin circle chose a midway, a critical approach that moved beyond materialism and idealism, with the intention of a blissful marriage of form and content.

Bakhtin’s semiotic approach to verbal art as well as his belief that ideology nested in every sign enabled him to rise beyond typical binaries like science and aesthetics, idealism and materialism, etc. and provide us with a critical approach which is, according to Holquist, not
too hot, not too cold, but just right. He is a Marxist in his sociological accounting. He is also a Formalist to that extent where he realized the importance of rhetorical signs as the most sensitive index of society. It is this tremendous sense of balance, which led Bakhtin to respect the voices of all and sundry in society. After all, can society really exist without the existence of the nondescript agents who either act as subverting forces or are exploited?

This very consideration led to him to discover in Dostoevsky a fellow who, in his novels affirms the right of each and every character to be treated as subjects and not objects. In the *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (1928) Bakhtin uses a new word ‘polyphony’ to describe Dostoevsky’s ‘multi voiced’ novels, which contained numerous unmerged consciousnesses and valid voices interacting with each other. These numerous subjects signify interacting autonomous ideological worlds where the author, abandoning his authoritarian position, stands on the same plane with his characters. This new integral authorial position allows for an unprecedented method of visualizing the human being in the sphere of art. He allows his heroes maximum semantic independence and the power to mean is not mediated by the
author. The characters in Dostoevsky’s novels are existential beings who are responsible for their deeds and words. The lack of any apparent authorial intention or scheme and the relative freedom of the characters make them unpredictable beings, and so open to meaning. Dostoevsky, like Goethe’s Prometheus creates “free people who are capable of standing beside their creator, of disagreeing with him, and even of rebelling against him.” (Bakhtin, 1973: 4)

In a polyphonic novel element of plot, characterization, style, imagery, portrayal of time and space are so structured that they make dialogic opposition inescapable. This dialogic world peopled by equally active agents makes it possible to project the complexities, contradictoriness and multi-voicedness of the real social world. Bakhtin’s was an ultra-sensitive soul placed in an epoch when Russia was bubbling with various cultural, political, and religious activities, with diverse groups and schools, each equally strong and violated; a Russia constantly torn between contradictory ideological structures, some indigenous and some imported from the West. Bakhtin found an ideal in the writings of Dostoevsky, which adequately expressed this experience of Russia — the strengths, complexities and dilemmas.
Dostoevsky’s polyphonic novel, which can also be called the Heteroglot novel, creates a world of autonomous subjects. These novels should not be judged with the same criteria applied to the traditional novel form imported from the West. The usual idea of such a novel is that it is written with a scheme or purpose with pragmatic links at the level of the plot. This kind of writing is linear in pattern, evolving in a time scheme. In such novels, Bakhtin says, characters become “fixed elements in the author’s design; such links bind and combine finalized images of people in the unity of a monologically perceived and understood world; there is no presumption of plurality of equally valid consciousnesses, each with its own world.” (in Morris, 1994: 89) Bakhtin calls it monologic writing where everything is subordinated to authorial knowledge.

There may be, even in a traditional novel, multitude of characters and fates; there may be interaction, contradiction and debate among the characters, but they are ultimately illuminated by the author’s aesthetic scheme, his unified consciousness. The words that are spoken by the heroes are part of the author’s creative design subordinated to be a part of the characteristics of the objectified hero. These characters often
serve as the author's mouthpiece. But Dostoevsky's heroes possess —
"an exceptional independence in the structure of the work, standing as if
alongside the author's word and in a peculiar way combining with it and
with the full-valued voices of the other heroes." (Bakhtin, 1973: 4)

However, this is not to deny the existence of any artistic plan. It is
not possible to write a novel without any artistic plan. So the hero's
freedom should be recognized within the bounds of the creator's design.
The author creates the artistic image that possesses its own artistic logic
and inherent order. After this the creator subordinates himself to that
inherent order. He allows that image the freedom to express itself in its
own manner without the author's own consciousness to determine it.
Thus it is removed from any monologic field of vision and saves itself
from becoming a finalized image. Paradoxically, removing the artistic
image from any authorial intention is the prime intention of the author.
This does not imply a 'death' of the author, but a radical alteration of
the author's position in his own creation. The author is not passive, but
along with his characters he is dialogically active: he is a counterpoint
among other counterpoints.
Bakhtin's conception of the archetectonics of creation in *Art and Answerability* may be cited to show that neither the simple objective description of the hero's inner state, nor the author's sympathetic conception and projection of the hero is the right aesthetic state; true aesthetic moment starts at the midpoint where the author's consciousness stands face to face with the hero's equally valid consciousness and a plethora of meanings emerge. Thus meaning is always double-voiced in a polyphonic novel — there is always an inner conflict. This aesthetic moment, when expressed in words, becomes dynamically meaningful, as each word contains in itself two contending autonomous counterpoints. Thus a multi-structural word is created where, in every voice Dostoevsky could hear two contending voices — "in every expression a split and willingness to immediately turn into another, contradictory expression. In every gesture perceived confidence and lack of confidence simultaneously; he perceived the profound ambiguity of every phenomenon." (Bakhtin, 1973: 25)

We may conclude that Dostoevsky's novels are multi-accented, embracing contradictory values. They destroy the organic unity of material, which we find in a conventional novel. In fact, everything in
the polyphonic novel is so constructed as to make the dialogical opposition perpetual. In it there is no scope for any non-participating third party in the composition or in the meaning of the novel. The author actively prevents the reification of characters and helps them to develop all the counterpoints to their extreme strength and depth, to the maximum plausibility. The most important thing, Bakhtin says, is the final dialogicality, i.e., the dialogical nature of the total work.

In a polyphonic novel the different ideological worlds never merge with each other, nor are they dialectically unified to create a philosophical whole. In fact, the development and growth which is required in the dialectical process is completely absent in Dostoevsky’s novels. As in Dante’s formally polyphonic world, Bakhtin says, Dostoevsky’s novels contain unmerging consciousnesses who combine to form a frozen event in the form of dramatic juxtaposition. Dostoevsky uses space and not time to present the maximum diversity in a single focus. Thus they almost give the impression of the newspaper, where, within a single space stories of diverse and even contradictory nature are juxtaposed. Bakhtin uses the image of the church to describe Dostoevsky’s polyphony, as the church presents “the
communion of unmerged spirits, the meeting place of the sinner and the righteous man, or, perhaps, Dante's world, where there are the penitent and the unrepentant, the saved and the damned.” (Bakhtin, 1973: 22)

Dialogism thus is not merely language but a world-view which naturally permeates into any field or category that refer to life and society. Bakhtin discovered in the novel the utmost scope for the manifestation of the dialogic truth, a scope for an unbiased and democratic exploration of the mystery that is life. Bakhtin, with the guidance of his unique philosophy of language found that magic-touch which, according to the Shakespeare critic John Palmer is the “touch of nature which makes the whole world kin.” (Palmer, 1962: 346)

Bakhtin discovered the profound ambiguity of every phenomenon through the artistic perception of Dostoevsky. He was not ready to accept any finalizing definition or any final truth about man. Therefore, he was opposed to the epical expression of reality in literature, which depicted a monolithic, complete world, sacred and incontrovertible. The epical approach is the approach of the official system which dominates society, and which, for its own convenience, creates a value-system valorizing past epic values. Past is always better, bigger, more graceful
and inaccessible. It is a finished and complete world, which cannot be changed or revaluated. In literature this epic world-view creates genres that are cut-off from the present. Bakhtin preferred the novel, the form used by Dostoevsky that he called the *genre* of the imperfect present world. Not bound by definitive formal characteristics, the novel had the potential of generating new forms. It was kinetic and iconoclastic. For Bakhtin the novel was the most significant force at work in the history consciousness even in periods when no novels were written. He assigns the term ‘novel’ — “to whatever form of expression within a given literary system reveals the limits of that system as inadequate, imposed, or arbitrary. Literary systems are composed of canons, and the novel is fundamentally anti-canonical.” (Clark & Holquist, 1984: 276)

While retracing the path of history in the evolution of the novel, Bakhtin finds two fundamental considerations as important — attitudes to space and time and attitudes to language in the history of human consciousness. He insists that at different times, diverse combinations of space and time have been used to model external reality. He calls this concept of engaging reality in the combination of space and time ‘chronotope’. The significant combination of space and time springs
from certain world-views. In literature, it is precisely the differing ways that people are represented that determine the difference between chronotopes. For example, we find Dostoevsky preferring instantaneous time — the time of crisis and metamorphosis, while Tolstoy loved to stretch it out — the chronological time of biography. This reveals that the two great authors situated at opposite poles had different ways of perceiving man and life. In a broader sense, the chronotope defines genres and generic differences.

Again, Bakhtin’s account of chronotope and literary evolution is bound up with his analysis of different ways in which language is perceived and used. For example, the epic, lyric and tragedy spring from the world of direct word. Here the author believes that his own language is the only tool which is adequate enough in realizing the word’s direct objectivized meaning. But on the other hand, the language of laughter, through the tools like irony, satire or parody, called the sanctity of the unified meaning into question. The role of this language is corrective and taboo destroying. It criticizes the straightforward genres, styles, languages and voices. It leads us down beneath these straightforward categories to a contradictory reality, which the straightforward language
is incapable of capturing: "... in place of a simple ... sealed off
Ptolemic world of language, there appeared the open Galilean world of
many languages, mutually animating each other." (Clark & Holquist,
1984: 289)

Thus, it is important to consider chronotope and use of language
because, it is through the analysis of these that we reach out to the
significance and meaning of a particular novel form. Even in ages when
the novel was not formally invented, the novel-ness can be traced in
literature, either in complete forms or in fragments, with the help of
chronotope, language and finally the spirit imbued in that literary piece.
Even in the medieval period Bakhtin discovers novel-ness in the
canonical Gospels. For example, in the ‘King of the Jews’ Christ is
shown entering the Jewish capital on a lowly donkey and the crown of
thorns that is an anti-crown on his head. This picture of a king stands as
a living word, dialogically questioning and upsetting the epigonic and
the stasis. It reminds us of carnivals where things come out ‘upside
down’ or ‘inside out’. It is a sort of laughter against man’s wise
presumptuousness and incapability to perceive the profound ambiguity
imbued deep in the nature of human life and the cosmos. In fact, as
Clark and Holquist point out, that both Dostoevsky and Bakhtin conceived the figure of Christ as part of an inner dialogue and not a God in whom one bestow blind faith. The life model that Christ provided can always be referred back to everyday experiences of man, can be relativized and polemicized. One can ask about Christ: “What would he do?” According to Clark and Holquist: “It is from such an understanding of Christ that Dostoevsky’s innovative novelistic techniques derive.” (1984: 248)

IV

The idea of Bakhtin’s ‘novelness’ as a subversive force automatically leads to the carnival which subverts and materializes. In fact, Bakhtin traces the root of the many-voiced open-ended twentieth century novel to the carnival tradition in folk culture. The rich tradition of the serio-comic and dialogic literature is found in Socratic dialogues, Menippian satire, and during the Renaissance in the works of Boccaccio, Rabelais, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Voltaire, Balzac and Hugo. It is quite interesting that this kind of serio-comic and satiric literature always evolved at times which are threshold periods characterized by intense rivalry among contradictory philosophical, religious and political
systems. These are times not yet sedimented by self-satisfaction and tranquility. Retracing the literary memory of Dostoevsky's form of novel, Bakhtin explored the unified and the sanctified epic world-view that was on the verge of breakdown, when writers parodied and mocked the grand heroes and grand styles, the apparently unimpeachable world-view, which were previously considered immutable or fixed. A very good example of this breakdown is Don Quixote of Cervantes. Another style of writing considered by Bakhtin as one of the forebears of the modern novel is the Socratic dialogue. Socrates believed in the dialogical nature of truth and of human thought. He believed that truth is not born and does not reside in the head of an individual; it is born of the dialogical intercourse between people. After the Socratic dialogue the Menippia came into existence for the traditional ideals of dignity and seemliness were breaking down. It was a time when the academics were not the sole authorities to finalize on ultimate questions. Debates were held in market places and taverns – places previously looked down upon. It was a period of decrowning, a radical overturning of authority, when Christ wins the hearts of the people as a very simple human being. He is the epitome of ambivalence. In spite of being a
carpenter’s son, he is considered a king, and again, In spite of being a king, he is mistreated as an ordinary criminal. This ambiguity, humility and overturning of seemly world-view mark the formative period of Christianity. According to Clark and Holquist, it was not unusual at that time “... carpenters proclaiming a new order or fishermen preaching in harbours or along the highroads.” (1984: 250)

Literature was carnivalized again during the Renaissance, which was a reawakening from the tranquilized sleep of the Middle Ages — a monologic period of calm and unity. It was a time when Christianity was confident of a strong foothold. This carnivalization brought inversions in social hierarchy, welcomed free appreciation of naturalism, turning from blind faith to a sort of skepticism.

Again, away from Europe proper and at a different time when Dostoevsky was writing his novels, Russia too was experiencing turmoil. It was a battlefield of the leftists and capitalists, the Westernizers (followers of Peter the Great) and the nationalists or orientalists, the theists and the atheists, the bourgeois and proletariats. Bakhtin writes: “Thus the objective contradictions of the age determined Dostoevsky’s art not in that he was able to overcome them
Dostoevsky broke the tradition of monologic writing with a distinct use of time and space and a distinct artistic vision. He created a genre foreign to his contemporaries, while valorizing the carnival tradition.

Bakhtin’s radical theory on the carnival and his appreciation of Rabelais in his book *Rabelais and His World* (1965) has greatly perturbed critics who tended to evaluate him from the point of view of the cultural history, or attempted to apply ethical or moral criteria to judge him. This resulted in extreme and polarized views, which are totally foreign to Bakhtin’s tendencies of balance and moderation. Those who ventured in Christian interpretations said that in his thesis, Bakhtin condemned the institutionalized Catholic Church of Rabelais’ time and instead upheld the Orthodox Liturgy which incorporated all the participatory, self-humbling aspects of the carnival. For them, Bakhtin’s carnival was the song of incarnation. The critics of the other extreme, devilized Bakhtin’s carnival by showing that in Russia laughter was considered a sin at all times. Because of this demonic connotation of laughter it was considered as a license — a sort of utopia. This kind of
analysis reveals only the Russian paradox — the conflict between comic genius and orthodox conscience. Further, cultural-historians too have pointed out that actual carnivals are often bloody and violent and lack the jolly positivism that Bakhtin tried to uphold.

These confusions are easily avoided if we stop bothering about the biographical or socio-cultural aspects of a work, i.e. tying the work to non-literary causes. Moreover, instead of alienating it as an individual work, we should install it as a part of Bakhtin’s greater work, which is a sort of journey in the Socratic tradition— a dialogic search for truth. It may be noted that in spite of the diverse aspirations of his works — which range from subjects like aesthetics or linguistics, to genres and chronotopes — certain common tendencies and links are easily perceptible. Bakhtin, we find, is the eternal seeker of the balance, of restraint and moderation, which are the key to the mystery of existence.

Bakhtin is never totally absorbed in the values of material-reality, nor is he the singer of purity in art and literature. Bakhtin sought for the truth in-between, on the borders of life and art. The carnival of actuality or real life metamorphosed on its way towards literature, which is also
true of anything else that ever treaded the literary path. This metamorphosed truth in literature is a truth that cannot be denied by life itself, but which cannot be judged by the criteria of material reality. Bakhtin, at the beginning of his career, had bound life and art with the question of answerability and there is no evidence to show that Bakhtin ever retraced this critical position. Bakhtin's carnival with its jolly positivism counterposes and questions carnival violence and misappropriation of freedom, while all that is carnivalized in art and literature is accountable to life for its truth. Life, on the other hand, finds a compatible code in the aesthetic forms of literature.

Bakhtin's appreciation of Rabelais' novel signifies his appreciation of a certain world-view, a certain perceptual angle which negotiates with a truth that lurks in the grotesque sphere of the world. The essential principle of this grotesque form of realism is degradation, lowering of all that is ideal and spiritual. As against the upward movement of the official value-system, grotesque realism moves downward, respecting earth's gravity. By way of degradation, the grotesque world brings all its subjects down to earth, materializes them
and turns them to flesh. It embraces the life of defecation, copulation, conception, pregnancy and birth.

Contrary to the official world where the value-system is flat and uni-dimensional, grotesque values and images are ambivalent. It signifies a world that dies to be born, which devours but at the same time gets devoured that grows but at the same time degenerates. The grotesque body's contact with the earth shows it in the light of earthly ambivalence. Thus, like the earth, it is the grave and the womb, it gets destroyed and regenerates.

In the official world, whether of philosophy or literature the human body has always been the locus of ambiguity. The official value-system has always perceived the body and its natural needs as a threat to man's spiritual endeavours and aspirations. Hunger, pain, sexual life — the functions and needs of the body were considered shameful and private. In the 19th century, these were transferred to the psychological level, torn away from their direct relation to the life of society and to the cosmic whole. The official bodily canon always presented an entirely finished body, which looked as something individual from the outside.
It is the lonely human body, alien to the huge cosmos in which it is placed.

This completed individual body is countered by the grotesque body of the carnival and folk tradition. It is an open, unfinished body which makes no pretence of its independence from the earth. It retains all its orifices which are taboo to the official canon, and through these orifices it maintains communication with society, earth and cosmos. The cosmic and universal nature of the grotesque body renders it positive and fearless, as it feels at one with society and the cosmos.

The sense of security which the grotesque body finds in its relation to society and the cosmos is denied to the individuated body of the official realm. Bakhtin writes that the abstract memory of the past cosmic upheavals and the dim fear of future catastrophe form the basis of human thought, speech and images. This is used by religious systems to oppress man and his consciousness. In this system, death comes as a punishment, an avoidable moment of terror because it signifies dead end. But in the grotesque body of the folk culture death brings nothing to an end. Bakhtin writes: “One body offers its death, the other its birth, but they are merged in a two-bodied image.” (quoted in Morris, 1994:
The folk tradition is aware of the cosmos within man himself, especially the lower stratum that is linked to the earth. The cosmic fear finds its equivalent in the human body itself, and by creating carnivalesque disasters and parodical prophecies; the carnival laughs away the terror. Laughter, which is the keynote to carnival and all folkfestivals, lightens the burden of time and turns time into a gay sequence of transformation.

It cannot be said that all laughers are positive, but folk laughter is definitely so. It knows no inhibitions, no fear or limitations. Being a festive laughter it is the laughter of all the people, directed at all, including itself. It is philosophic, as it is directed towards the highest sphere and even the deity is not excluded. Thus the carnival laughter is permeated with a deep ambivalence. Bakhtin says that this laughter is genetically related to the most ancient form of ritual laughter, which was directed towards the gods, specially the sun, which were disparaged and ridiculed, and thereby forced to renew themselves.

In fact mocking, thrashing, abusing are part of carnival performance. The primary performance is the mock crowning and subsequent discrowning the king of the carnival. In this system the
clown is elected as the king and he is abused and beaten when the time of his reign is over. His costume is then changed or 'travestied' and he once more turns into a clown. This two-in-one ambivalent ritual expresses the inevitability of change and renewal, the jolly relativity of every authority, system or position. Carnival symbols always include within themselves perspectives of negation and affirmation.

The main arena of carnival performance is the public square. Public places like the market place, the banquet hall or wherever people meet, speak loudly, openly and freely without inhibition and free from official boundaries turn carnivalesque. In the crowded festival or marketplace physical contact of bodies brings the awareness of sensual material bodily unity; consequently follows the consciousness of the people's mass body and its relative historic immortality. The people perceive their continuity in greater time and the metamorphosis of death and renewal (an individual dies but people never die). Thus the victory of the future is ensured in the people's immortality.

The carnival spirit and its locus in the public square, banquet-hall or marketplace suspends temporarily all hierarchic distinctions and barriers. With the carnival familiarity among people, a new type of
communication with new speech patterns and meanings emerged. Abusive language, profanities and oaths, excluded from official speech, are legalized in the carnival and become ambivalent. These abuses, while humiliating and mortifying, revived and renewed. Unlike the modern satire, it is not high-handed and includes itself in the degradation. The use of colloquialism created the atmosphere of frankness, inspired a certain unofficial truth of the people and all became conscious participants in the world of laughter.

Bakhtin’s praise of the carnival in Rabelais’ novel should be understood in the context of the age-old folk culture and with the help of the folk psyche which had been so rich and active in the past, which is still there camouflaged in modern society and will always be there as long as the human body remains essentially social and cosmic. The keynote to this age-old folk culture is carnival laughter or the unofficial laughter, which is actually a certain position or perspective of conceiving the world. It is an all-embracing and broad-minded world-view, which is never pedagogic, humourless or biased. It has the strength to take the incongruous world in its stride, fearlessly laughing away the strictures and threatenings of the official value system. This
elasticity helps the exposure of broader spectrum of life, if not deeper. The ambivalence imbued in its nature compels one to face a greater reality that evades the mind, which is trained in a biased education system of the official world. Bakhtin discovered this laughter in a series of literary or verbal art — starting from the time of Socrates, who had to pay the heaviest price in sacrificing his life for finding an alternative way of discerning truth and thus democratizing the process. This laughter lurks in diverse works either temperately or in a louder form. For example, Rabelais’ world is a world of open laughter, while in Dostoevsky it is in a subdued form. Positing Rabelais and Dostoevsky as the same generic brothers naturally leads to some confusion. Dostoevsky’s closeted and self-absorbed Raskolnikov is polarly opposite to the generous Gargantua in Rabelais’ novel. This confusion is caused by a thematic analysis, which is the first thing that one habitually tends to do. But an overview of Bakhtin’s theories would lead to the option of a structural approach for a convincing solution. This is to realize the overall approach, expectation and coherence of the work. It requires focusing on the language, the tone, the attitude and the perspective of the whole work. These considerations expose links that
can bind these works together. The first point to be underlined is the
dialogic, open-ended language, or the overall dialogism of the work,
which leads to multiplicity of meaning. The position of the author in the
context of the work is significant. In both the novels, the authors stand
dialogically on the same level with their characters. These authors do
not take sides – as a result of which, characters and situations come out
with all their natural ambiguities and ambivalences. These are
polyphonic worlds crowded with equally valid characters. The
democratic world of polyphony naturally extends to the participatory
world of the carnival. Thus a world is created by each of these
apparently dissimilar novels, which rises beyond the black and white
official world, fearless enough to lay bare its weaknesses and black
spots along with its laudable qualities, humble and broadminded enough
to laugh at itself along with others.

Bakhtin, through his sociological accounting of human
consciousness and his study of language as dialogic, outgrows himself
from the stage of Art and Answerability, where he has endowed human
relationship with a monistic idealism of love. The matured Bakhtin
discovered that relationships cannot be reduced to the metaphysical
dualism of the lover and the beloved, the active and the passive, as we find in John Donne's "The Sunne Rising": "She is all States, and all Princes, I". For Bakhtin, nothing is permanent, and society is a ground of constant changing and shifting of roles. He finds the ideal mode of expressing social truth in the polyphonic novel where different voices and ideas engage one another in an unending process of summons and response and truth is born in the process.

Works Cited


