CHAPTER – III

BAKHTIN’S DIALOGIC THEORY

Any discourse on modern literary theories cannot be adequate, without special reference to the dialogic theory of the Russian philosopher, theorist and literary critic Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895 – 1975). Though Bakhtin’s major writings were published in the 1920s and 1930s, he remained almost unknown beyond the Soviet Union until translations of his works in the 1970s brought him to the attention of the literary world and gave him a massive and growing impact. Bakhtin’s life and writings, and the critical acclaim and immense popularity of his work in his country and abroad both before and particularly after his death, “constitute one of the most remarkable stories in modern intellectual history.”

Michael Holquist in his Introduction to the first edition of Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World (1990) has judiciously warned the readers of Bakhtin that any attempt to make “comprehensive” and “authoritative” discourse on dialogism is bound to be dangerously misleading as the concept is a phenomenon that remains still “an open event.” The dialogic concept of language, as evolved by Bakhtin, is of central significance in his philosophy, which according to Holquist, is “pragmatically oriented theory of knowledge.” Bakhtin’s lifelong meditation on dialogue has inevitably constituted the core of all his writings. That is why Holquist has unwaveringly defined dialogue as an “obvious master key” to the assumptions guiding his work consistently.
Dialogism, as interpreted in the Glossary of Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination* (trans. Emerson and Holquist, 1981) is basically "the characteristic epistemological mode of a world dominated by heteroglossia. Everything means, is understood as a part of a greater whole – there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others." This "mode," in the opinion of Sue Vice, "refers to the ceaselessly shifting power relations between words, their sensitivity to each other, and the relativizing force of their historically motivated clashes and temporary resolutions." The term 'Dialogism' meaning "double-voicedness" is basically related to Bakhtin's concept of historicity of languages that is determined internally by social existence. Bakhtin in his humanistic approach to language makes departure from his contemporary Russian formalists, who were inspired by Saussure, and considered language "more as a heterogeneous field and medium of activity than as a system." Language for Bakhtin is a "discourse" and should obviously be accepted as a "social phenomenon" characterized by diversity:

Thus at any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form.
These “languages” of heteroglossia, as Bakhtin emphasizes strongly, interact each other in diverse forms and make new socially oriented “languages.”

Language, as Bakhtin has perceived it, is inevitably ‘dialogic’; any utterance or a speech act, springing from previous utterances and being constructed in anticipation of a future response, is either a question or an answer or an agreement or disagreement. Language is essentially characterized by inherent “addressivity”; all language is unquestionably addressed to somebody, developing always a consciously constructed relationship between the speaker and the addressee. The “polemic thrust” of Bakhtin’s theory lies in the fact that a person’s speech, constructed out of languages from variety of social contexts is not a reflection of “hallowed” autonomous individuality, which is an illusion. In reality, there is no “I”; there is always “we”, as the “I” that speaks is simultaneously producing a polyphony of languages drawn from conflicting social situations. The contradictions in language can by no means be ignored; they basically imply the “concrete” and “living” human reality inherent in language. All utterances, Bakhtin firmly argues, are dialogical: they all hint at a situation of dialogue or are turned to a listener. All utterances are embedded in a context of dialogue. The most important point to note in this connection is that the words and phrases spoken by any person have already circulated through other conversations, and, thus, they bear with them traces of the meanings of the conversations referred to. A work of literature for Bakhtin is not a text in which meanings emerge by the “play of impersonal linguistic or economic or cultural forces,” but a site for the dialogic interactions of polyphonic voices determined by specific context, situation, class, social group and speech community.
Bakhtin’s dialogic theory presenting a literary text as a clash of voices and positions within a historical period comes closer to the Marxist criticism.

A literary text in Bakhtin’s considered opinion is a text where double and multiple voices meet and clash in an open relationship between them. The total effect of the interactions of the voices “jostling for attention in the text” is essentially a semantic indeterminacy which is opposed to a closed view of meaning. The closed or monologic view of meaning, if accepted, will inevitably be a blow to human freedom. David Lodge has emphatically defended his interest in dialogic theory for its “widening of options”:

Instead of trying desperately to defend the notion that individual utterances, or texts, have a fixed, original meaning which it is the business of criticism to recover, we can locate meaning in the dialogic process of interaction between speaking subjects, between texts and readers, between texts themselves.

Bakhtin celebrates novel from the dialogic point of view as a super genre compared to poetry and epic; this specific genre which has always been a potential force in the western culture is always remarkable for making departure from the traditional assumptions about form, distinguishing it as basically “anticanonical.” Most theories related to novelistic discourse, Bakhtin points out, try to divorce the style, content and “formal” form from its “ideological” components. He, however, considers the novel by contrast as a social phenomenon both at the levels of content and form. "The novel as a whole,” Bakhtin asserts, “is a phenomenon multiform in
style and uniform in speech and voice. In it the investigator is confronted with several heterogeneous stylistic unities often located on different linguistic levels and subject to different stylistic controls. Bakhtin in “Discourse in the Novel” (The Dialogic Imagination) lists the “basic types of compositional – stylistic unities” out of which the novel is “usually” produced:

(1) Direct authorial literary – artistic narration (in all its diverse variants);
(2) Stylization of the various forms of oral everyday narration (skaz);
(3) Stylization of the various forms of semiliterary (written) everyday narration (the letter, the diary etc);
(4) Various forms of literary but extra-artistic authorial speech (moral, philosophical or scientific statements, oratory, ethnographic descriptions, memoranda and so forth);
(5) The stylistically individualized speech of characters.

These five “basic types” Sue Vice thinks, unravels the “layers of dialogic discourse in a novel, particularly one from a past era.” Bakhtin attributes importance duly to “a profound understanding of each language’s socio-ideological meaning and an exact knowledge of the social distribution and ordering of all the other ideological voices of the era.”
Sue Vice in *Introducing Bakhtin* also illustrates how Bakhtin distinguishes three types of dialogic relation between utterances in the novel. They include, first, “the primordial dialogism of discourse”, between individuals’ “utterances inside a single language”; second, between “social languages” voiced “within a single national language”, and third, between “different national languages within the same culture, that is, the same social-ideological conceptual horizon.” Bakhtin’s emphasis on stylization, Sue Vice points out, is a vital component in the dialogic theory. Bakhtin’s concept of stylization, Sue Vice reminds the readers of the Soviet critic, is outstandingly revolutionary; he does not consider the traditional stylistics fit for “the way various kinds of stylization work”. "The specific feel for language and discourse," Bakhtin articulates, “one gets in stylizations, in skaz, in parodies, and in various forms of masquerade”. Skaz for Bakhtin is a ‘mode of narration’ remarkable for its imitation of the “oral speech of an individualized narrator.” It is one of “the forms in which heteroglossia can enter the novel”. Bakhtin is of the view that ‘internally dialogized’ heteroglot discourse within the novel includes parody (“parodied stylizations”) too. In world literature, Bakhtin observes, parodic nature has not been detected in several works. He, however, confirms in the “Sophistic novel” the “presence of parodic stylization (and other variants of double-voiced discourse).” He at the same time adds that “it is difficult to determine the actual weight such discourse carried in them.” Cervantes, Rabelais, Fielding, Smollett, Sterne and others stand for the models of stylistics in the novelistic prose. By “stylization,” Bakhtin suggests “the borrowing by one voice of the recognizable style and timbre of another.” “Every authentic stylization,” according to Bakhtin, “is an artistic representation of another’s linguistic style, an artistic image of another’s language.”
Hybridity is considered one instance of stylization; it is a mixture "within a single concrete utterance, of two or more different linguistic consciousness, often widely separated in time and social space." Hybridization has been accepted as a major device for bringing into existence images in the novel along "with dialogization of languages and pure dialogues." 18

The language in a novel is constructed out of the system of its "languages," and, so, the discourse of one novel is fundamentally at variance with the other. "The novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized." 19 A novel grows dialogic, Sue interprets, when these languages within the novel give equal importance to each other, reply each other back and do not exclude the alien fragments within themselves. The relationship between 'individual voices' and 'artistic organization' is very vital. The diversity of the novel is determined by allowing the theme to make progress through as many 'different languages and speech types' as possible, rather than by permitting the novelistic theme itself to give rise to diverse languages. Bakhtin's idea of dialogicity reduces the importance of plot, which is traditionally regarded as the primary component in which all the complications in the novel right from the beginning to the end are settled. Instead, in Bakhtinian concept "the task of co-ordinating and exposing languages to each other "is given prime significance, and plot is subordinated to it, as the novel as a genre is stylistically concerned with creation of "images of languages." Bakhtin is, thus in other words, is opposed to Aristotle's theory of plot as defined in Poetics in which plot is awarded the prime importance in narrative forms. Bakhtin, on the contrary,
elevates discourse which is a heterogeneous mixture of differingly irreconcilable “voices, social attitudes and values.” All these components in the discourse are involved in interactions with each other leaving the novel” unresolved and open-ended.”

Dostoevsky’s work, Sue Vice mentions, surfaces in terms of Bakhtinian analysis the dialogic nature of the word with so much “enormous force” that even critics feel encouraged to evolve a dialogic relation with his texts. Bakhtin defines brilliantly the “predisposition” Dostoevsky reveals towards dialogism:

In every voice he could hear
two contending voices, in every expression a crack, and the readiness
to go over immediately to another extraordinary expression; in every
gesture he detected confidence and lack of confidence simultaneously;
his perceived the profound ambiguity, even multiple ambiguity,
of every phenomenon.20

In Crime and Punishment the murder that Raskolnikov commits is not of primary importance as the text does not portray the protagonist as a murderer through “legal investigative psychology”; instead, the text makes the actions and ideas of Raskolnikov into dialogized voices allowing him to reveal the state of his soul which remains “unfinalized and unresolved.”

The key terms which are intrinsically associated with dialogic theory, are ‘heteroglossia’ and ‘polyphony.’ Heteroglossia as a critical tool means, “differentiated
speech" Michael Holquist gives inimitably the philosophical interpretation of the term heteroglossia:

Dialogism's drive to meaning should not be confused with the Hegelian impulse toward a single state of higher consciousness in the future. In Bakhtin there is no one meaning being striven for: the world is a vast congeries of contesting meanings, a heteroglossia so varied that no single term capable of unifying its diversifying energies is possible. 21

Dialogism in the Glossary of The Dialogic Imagination has been defined basically as the “epistemological mode of a world dominated by the heteroglossia.” Everything definitely means; this meaning is to be understood as a part of a greater whole, and so, the meaning is not confined to a single one; there is ceaselessly a constant interaction between meanings, “all of which have the potential of conditioning others.”

Heteroglossia, once incorporated into the novel, constitutes “double-voiced discourse,” serving two speakers at the same time and expressing simultaneously two conflicting intentions. These intentions include the intention of the character speaking and the “refracted” intention expressed by the author. “In such discourse there are two voices, two meanings and two expressions”.22 These two voices, as they are dialogically interrelated, appear to hold conversations with each other, as they are supposedly in possession of mutual knowledge of each other. Double-voiced discourse, Bakhtin articulates, always tends to be “internally dialogized.” The
examples, Bakhtin cites, include “comic, ironic or parodic discourse, the refracting discourse of a narrator, refracting discourse in the language of a character, and finally the discourse of a whole incorporated genre.”23 A potential dialogue, which is embedded in the discourse referred to, is fundamentally “a concentrated dialogue of two voices, two worldviews, two languages.” Thus double-voiced construction is possible not only through characters or narrators, since characters constitute only one means of novelization achieved through heteroglossia. David Lodge considers “doubly-oriented or doubly voiced speech” as “Bakhtin’s most original and valuable contribution to stylistic analysis”.24

Sue Vice draws the attention of the readers of Bakhtin to a very important point: “If we think of language itself as dialogic, then we can see that, as we live among the many languages of social heteroglossia, dialogism is necessarily the way in which we construct meaning.”25 The language we use in personal or textual discourse, according to Bakhtin, is itself constructed out of several languages, which have all been put into use before, “At any moment, our discourse will be synchronically informed by the contemporary languages we live among, and diachronically informed by their historical roles and the future roles we anticipate for them.”26 Each utterance in any context of life is the “unique orchestration of well-worn words.” Bakhtin’s application of the term dialogism may be subdivided into three categories to be understood with reference to a particular textual utterance. The first one to mention is an “intertextual dialogic relation” to be found in the intersecting voices” of “different texts, and response and anticipation” taking place within “the chain of culture” in its entirety. The second refers to “the concept of
addressivity and the alien word Bakhtin anticipates the reader’s response in dialogic understanding.” The third category lies “in the analysis of the interaction between author and hero.” Sue Vice mentions that these are the arguments of the Russian critic L. Chernets, and they are summarized by Carol Adlam. Bakhtin, however, gives specific stress on “intertextual dialogic relations.”

The term polyphony, which is etymologically Greek and means “many voices,” is another important critical tool in Bakhtin’s dialogic theory; it has often been considered to be identical with heteroglossia. Heteroglossia means ‘multilanguagedness’; while polyphony means ‘multi-voicedness’ of texts in which the voices of the characters as well as of the author interact with each other without curtailing each other’s freedom. In other words, characters and narrator enjoy the freedom to speak on equal terms. Michael Holquist states brilliantly the history of the coinage of the term “polyphony” by Bakhtin:

The author of a novel, for instance, can manipulate the other not only as an other, but as a self. This is, in fact, what the very greatest writers have always done, but the paradigmatic example is provided by Dostoevsky, who so successfully permits his characters to have the status of an “I” standing over against the claims of his own authorial other that Bakhtin felt compelled to coin the special term “polyphony” to describe it.27
The characters and the narrator within a text, Bakhtin arguably asserts, are identified not by any other idiosyncrasy but by their exchange of voices ensuring the polyphonic character of the text.

_Bakhtin's prime interest naturally lies in the voices which construct the text_ and may subvert the authority of the ideology as focussed in a single voice of the author in a novel. He finds in Dostoevsky a paradigmatic polyphonic discourse where the author's voice is only one among others, and the characters are allowed to make free speech without experiencing interruption from the narrator. Bakhtin makes majestic analysis of his polyphonic discourse in his book _Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics_ (1929, trans. Caryl Emerson, 1984); he contrasts in this book the monologic novels of authors like Leo Tolstoy with the dialogic novels of Fyodor Dostoevsky. Bakhtin believes that Dostoevsky is basically interested in "voices" rather than in "ideas"; and his novels are thus constructed to present primarily dialogic exchanges in them. Professor L. N. Gupta in his article "Re-Reading _The Waste Land_: A Bakhtinian Approach" has sounded judicious warning: "At this point I consider it necessary to enter a caveat to avoid the pitfall of a facile oversimplification." Professor Gupta reminds the reader that "it is possible to show how even Tolstoy could be dialogical in his own style. Dostoevsky makes one idea pass through many characters whereas Tolstoy makes many ideas pass through one character."28 Sue Vice in the third chapter of _Introducing Bakhtin_ refers to Bakhtin's analysis of Raskolnikov's "dialogized interior monologue" from _Crime and Punishment_ as an illuminating example of the "dialogic content of the voices" constructed polyphonically: "all words in it are double-voiced, and in each of them a conflict of voices takes place."29
The author, at the same time, does not take liberty for himself to retain any authorial prerogative, any essential "surplus" of meaning and has no hesitation to stand on equal ground with Raskolnikov, so that he can enter into the "great dialogue of the novel as a whole." Dostoevsky in his dialogically polyphonic novels maintains distance from Tolstoy, who subordinates the voices of all the characters in his novels to an "overriding authorial voice," in the sense that the narrator acts as a "participant in the dialogue without retaining for himself the final word." The concept of polyphony, as illustrated by Bakhtin, highlights the democratic character of the novel in which "equality of utterance" is given the central importance. Polyphonic novel, in other works, ensures the freedom of human soul, which cannot be made subject to inhibitions imposed by any "ism."

Another important feature Bakhtin seems to enunciate in his concept of polyphonic discourse is that an author like Dostoevsky is primarily concerned with "voices" rather than with "ideas", and produces novels basically meant for dialogic exchanges. What is important in writers such as Dostoevsky, as Bakhtin perceives, is not the presentation of facts related to a character, but the "significance of facts voiced to the hero himself and to other characters." In Bakhtinian concept the hero is not a fact in himself, instead, he is considered as a "word." Bakhtin in Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics comes to profoundly recognize the idea adequately:

The idea is a live event, played out at the point of dialogic meeting between two or several consciousness. In this sense the idea is similar to the word, with which it is dialogically united. Like the word, the idea wants to
be heard, understood, and "answered" by other voices from other positions. Like the word, the idea is by nature dialogic...31

Bakhtin's rejection of monologic novel aiming at accepting a single perspective in favour of the dialogically polyphonic novel constructed out of plurality of voices gives his readers the impression that he is opposed to the danger of confining knowledge inside or outside text from a particular point of view. Knowledge can be best used, when it is made dialogic rather than monologic. It should be dialogically open to all rather than monologically closed. Characters in a polyphonic novel, thus, are "represented not as objects, who are manipulated and commented upon by an omniscient narrator, but as subjects, on an equal footing with the narrator (their voices are constructed in exactly the same way as this figure's voice), whose own word about themselves and each other is all that we know about them."32 Dostoevsky's characters like Raskolnikov (Crime and Punishment), Bakhtin asserts, are proof of this view as the contesting voices in them seem so individual, autonomous and independent that "readers feel it appropriate to enter directly into debate with them."33

Dialogism is thus a general principle that organizes both polyphony and heteroglossia. "In the latter, social registers of language interact in a friction-filled way to produce meaning. Polyphony is the name for one method by which heteroglossia can enter the novel, in the form of character's discourse; these discourses are arranged in a way which allows them maximum freedom."34 Bakhtin's
scholars tend to share the view expressed by Sherrill Grace that dialogism is Bakhtin’s prime achievement.

The concept of carnivalization is no less significant in understanding adequately Bakhtin’s dialogic theory. Robert Young implied in his book *Torn Halves* (1996) that Dialogism was the spirit and Carnival was its body. Michael Holquist defines the importance of carnival in the theory of dialogism: “It is no wonder, then, that carnival is one of Bakhtin’s great obsessions, because in his understanding of it, carnival like the novel, is *a means for displaying otherness*: carnival makes familiar strange”35 Bakhtin elucidates his notion of carnival in both *Rabelais and His World* and *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*. Sue Vice draws the reader’s attention to the fact that Bakhtin attaches importance to Rabelais for giving emphasis on the forgotten tradition of “popular humour”; while in Dostoevsky Bakhtin discovers “polyphony’s roots in a similar, although more distant, carnival past.”

Bakhtin’s concept of carnival is invariably associated with the literary genre of “grotesque realism” in which the image of the grotesque body is of central importance. Controversies have been sparked off in the areas of gender and psychoanalysis with the body as a “critical category” being given contemporary attention. The grotesque realism which, according to Bakhtin, is medieval in origin and “opposed to all forms of high art and literature,” 36 aims at subverting the tyranny of authority principally through parody and mockery. The people’s (or popular) laughter, Bakhtin perceives, is at the centre of all forms of grotesque realism from “immemorial times;” and is invariably “linked with the bodily lower stratum.”
Holquist brilliantly analyses Bakhtin's notion of the novel, and "his vision of the body as set forth in the Rabelais book" is known as the "grotesque body." 37

Degradation which is dialogically ambivalent constitutes one of the major components in grotesque realism. Degradation, Bakhtin interprets, emphasizes on "coming down to earth, the contact with the earth as an element that swallows up and gives birth at the same time." 38 The ambivalence involving the "new birth implicit in death" constructs one of the guiding principles operating both in grotesque realism and carnival itself. The novel is remarkable for making celebration of the grotesque body in the world:

Dialogism figures a close relation between bodies and novels because they both militate against monadism, the illusion of closed-off bodies or isolated psyches in bourgeois individualism, and the concept of a pristine, closed-off, static identity and truth whatever it may be found. 39

Carnival like the novel is a "historically instanced thing," and Bakhtin traces the presence of the seriocomic, dialogic and satiric carnivalesque tradition in ancient, medieval and Renaissance writings, especially up to the time of Rabelais in the sixteenth century. They include Socratic dialogue and Menippian satire, Apuleius, Boethius, the mystery plays of the Middle Ages, Rabelais and others. Bakhtin also asserts that the carnivalesque mode recurs in subsequent time, particularly in
Dostoevsky who has exhibited extraordinary ingenuity in constructing dialogically “irreverent, parodic and subversive” novels.

Bakhtin has attached importance specifically to the role played by the carnival in the life of the ordinary people in the Middle Ages both socially and politically. The ordinary people experienced a dual existence: one official and another unofficial. This duality or ambivalence constituted a very vital component of the dialogic theory. The official existence of the common people in the medieval age was characterized by the authority exercised by the church and the feudal system simultaneously; while, the unofficial, characterized by “reversal, parody, song and laughter”, was associated with the carnival. The carnivalization of literature, Bakhtin realizes unwaveringly, has far-reaching socio-political and economic effects in literature:

It proved remarkably productive as a means for capturing in art the developing relationships under capitalism, at a time when previous forms of life, moral principles and beliefs were being turned into “rotten cords” and the previously concealed, ambivalent, and unfinalized nature of man, human thought was being nakedly exposed.40

Carnival is a festivity, a gay abandon, a revelry, wild riotous liberty and frivolity. During this festival in a season of carnival social hierarchies in many cultures are permittedly subverted with a view to questioning the power exercised by them. Just as the public rituals of carnival make inversion of traditionally accepted values to challenge them, so many novels seek justification of the “closed meanings.” The ritual in carnivals involving crowning and decrowning of a mock king presented
grotesquely is dialogically significant conveying a note of ambivalence in it; the ritual surfaces the victimization of the common people in a community by the authority and at the same time brings to focus the intention of the victims of power to subvert institutions or social hierarchies. The function of the carnival is achieved by novel by way of introducing in its structure diversities of speech and voice from various social strata that face no impediment to “mock and subvert authority, to flout social norms by ribaldry, and to exhibit various ways of profaning what is ordinarily regarded as sacrosanct.”41 While carnival makes its presence in the public square, the novel’s position is consolidated in the public sphere of the middle class. “Carnival and the novel make power relative by addressing it.”42

“Dialogism”, as Sue Vice thinks, “is a relational property, like carnival, while heteroglossia is a linguistic description, and polyphony and the chronotope are terms for literary forms”.43 Don H. Bialostosky foregrounds a continual conversation which involves all critical theories and underscores Bakhtin’s centrality in literary criticism today (“Dialogics as an Art of Discourse in Literary Criticism”, PMLA, 1986).

The novel in the context of dialogism surpasses all other genres in literature as it incorporates all the major principles of the dialogic theory. The principle of indeterminacies, the freedom of the hero and other characters, or, in other words, the non-interference of the author with the characters in the text allowing them to make free speech, give the impression that the novel is left unfinished. The free speech of the characters as allowed by the author is a means that works against the use of the “narrowing design” in the novel; and in so doing, the narrator must create a “design
for discourse" that effectively gives liberty to the reader so that he or she may construct his or her own interpretations of the actions and words of the characters figured in the text without direct interference from the author. The novel does not accord recognition to the monologically closed-view of meaning outside the world of its dialogue; instead, the indeterminacy of the dialogic opposition in all respects is unquestionably designed in the text ensuring that not a single component inside it is incorporated “from the point of view of a non-participating ‘third person’.”

Bakhtin expresses his reservations categorically for poetry in the sense that poetry arguably cannot be dialogic. He finds in the language of poetry some components which are directed against the principles of dialogism. He is of the view that “the language of the poetic genres, when they approach their stylistic limit, often becomes authoritarian, dogmatic and conservative, sealing itself off from the influence of extra-literary social dialects.” The artificially created language of poetry is directly “intentional language, unitary and singular.” A dialogized image, Bakhtin agrees, may appear in all the poetic genres, even in the lyric; but at the same time he articulates that such an image cannot fully unfold, attain complexity in full and depth and obviously the true artistic focus under the conditions present in the genre of the poetry. All these traits can dialogically be achieved only in the structure of the novel. Poetry in the Bakhtinian concept is considered to be the “univocal utterance of a single subject.” Bakhtin treats a poet’s lyric persona “biographically” taking for granted that the poet’s language has its origin in the “unified poetic self.” Bakhtin clarifies his point of view:
The language of the poet is *his* language, he is utterly immersed in it, inseparable from it, he makes use of each form, each word, each expression according to its unmediated power to assign meaning (as it were, "without quotation marks"), that is, as a pure and direct expression of his own intention. 46

Sue Vice defines Bakhtin’s reservations that are instrumental for his conclusion that poetry cannot be dialogic. Poetry, Bakhtin firmly believes, is immune to the "internal dialogism of the word," suggesting that poetry in its structure is unable to accommodate two voices within an utterance. Style in poetry "permeates the object directly and without any mediation."47 The phenomenon of internal dialogization which is a crucial force for the novel is not "put to artistic use" in poetic discourse, "it does not enter into the work’s "aesthetic object," and is artificially extinguished."48 Anything that makes its entry into the poetic discourse, Bakhtin asserts, "‘must immerse itself in Lethe, and forget its previous life in any other contexts’."49 Rhythm, a major component in the poetic discourse, contributes to this "amnesiac process": "Rhythm, by creating an unmediated involvement between every aspect of the accentual system of the whole (via the most immediate rhythmic unities), destroys in embryo those social worlds of speech and of persons that are potentially embedded in the word."50 Language, Bakhtin emphasizes, is in the process of uninterrupted ideological evolution which is already "fragmented" into "languages." Poetry also finds its own language encircled by other languages — "literary and extraliterary heteroglossia." But poetry with a view to achieving "maximal purity" depends upon its own language, "as if that language were unitary, the only language,
as if there were no heteroglossia outside it.” Poetry, thus, inevitably keeps distance from “dialogic contact with heteroglossia.” And even during “an epoch of language crises,” Bakhtin asserts, poetry “immediately” re-canonizes “the new language as one that is unitary and singular, as if no other language existed.”  

Bakhtin’s argument that poetry cannot be dialogic has been contested by many critics. Major properties involved in the dialogic structure are not alien to poetic discourse. “Lodge suggests that Browning, who uses double-voiced discourse in his poetic monologues, and T. S Eliot, whose The Waste Land (1922) is constructed particularly polyglotically seem to be counter-example to Bakhtin’s distinction of the novel’s polyglossia and poetry’s monoglossia.” David Lodge reminds the readers that Bakhtin considered Eugene Onegin, a verse novel by Pushkin, as one of his “favourite sources of examples of dialogic discourse.” Again, Bakhtin had defined Byron’s Childe Harold and “especially” Don Juan and the lyrical verse of Heine as dialogic. Walter Pater said that all art aspires to the condition of music. T. S Eliot said that all art aspires to the condition of drama. And one may add that according to Bakhtin, all art aspires to the condition of the novel. This may be described as “novelization” of all genres.  

The proposed study on Philip Larkin is an attempt to show that his poetry can also be interpreted dialogically. Encouraged by the insights derived from the Bakhtinian concept of dialogism I wish to show that Larkin’s poetry may be considered as a site where double and multiple voices dialogically interact and clash, producing indeterminacy at the semantic level which resists monological closure.
Rooted in the social realities in general, the contesting polyphonic voices in Larkin's poetry have the effects of "dialogized heteroglossia." The words or the utterances used in the texts of his poems exhibit "fissures" representing diversity in various social, literary and extraliterary contexts as well as echoes from them. The texts in the poems like "Wedding-Wind" "Church Going," "The Whitsun Weddings", "Mr. Bleaney" and "Annus Mirabilis" are constructed out of the juxtaposition of romanticism and realism, sentiment and scepticism, intensity and irony, solemnity and satire. The poem, "I Remember, I Remember" includes in its structure the process of carnivalization; the traditionally accepted romantic notion associated with childhood is subverted or undercut by ironic strokes in the poem. The effect of carnivalization in poems like "Sunny Prestatyn" and "High Windows" is achieved in a different way.

The abusive or irreverent or sexually evocative language in these poems obviously shocks the refined taste of the readers. This 'language', however, at the same time serves to expose the crude reality with reference to man's sexual desire and its fulfilment in given social and moral contexts. Larkin's poems are supposed to be embedded largely in biographical materials, instead; they may be considered as texts constructing strategically fictional identities or masks expressing themselves in the polyphonic or play of different voices through "dramatised speech-acts."

No wonder this was inevitable. For it is significant that Larkin too tried his hand at fiction. He was a practising novelist who produced two novels. His poems thrash out similar themes presented with the novelist's acute social observation and the inescapable dialectic between involvement and irony, romanticism and cynicism or, some say, nihilism.
NOTES & REFERENCES


   Chapter one in the book by Holquist is invaluable for a brief account of Bakhtin’s life.


Sue Vice in chapter two ("Dialogism") of *Introducing Bakhtin* identifies the five "basic types" of the novelistic discourse with reference to the novel *Under the Volcano* (1947) by Malcom Lowry.

Sue Vice in chapter two ("Dialogism") of *Introducing Bakhtin* gives examples of all three categories of utterances from Malcom Lowry's novel *Under the Volcano* (1947).

Sue Vice makes elaboration of the term *Skaz* in pp. 21-22 in *Introducing Bakhtin*.

*Hybridization* is interpreted in page 429 of Glossary in *The Dialogic Imagination*.


27 M. Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World*, 34.


35 M. Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World*, 89.


49 qtd. in S. Vice, *Introducing Bakhtin*, 77.


52 S. Vice, *Introducing Bakhtin*, 74-75.