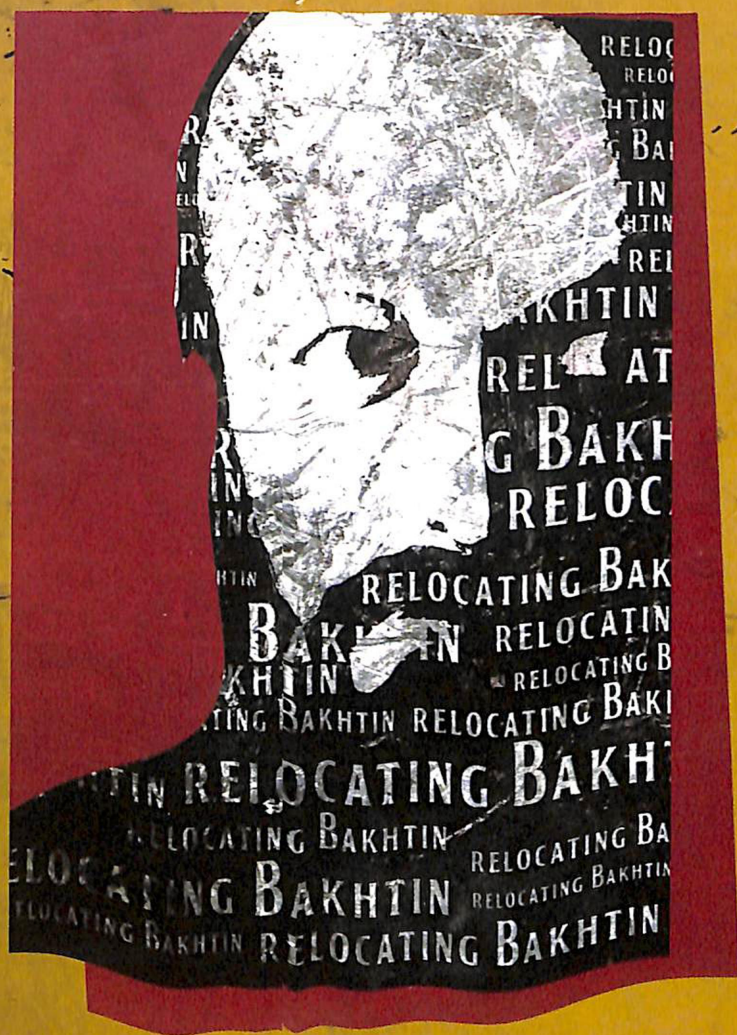
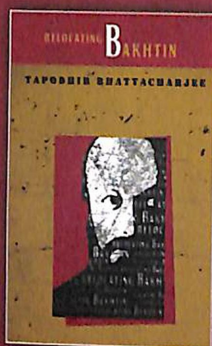


RELOCATING BAKHTIN

TAPODHIR BHATTACHARJEE





Relocating Bakhtin is a unique discourse that proposes to decipher the nuances of polyphonic Bakhtinian thoughts in varying contexts of lived experiences. Ever since Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin arrived with a bang in the firmament of international literary theory and criticism, the generic features and phenomenal possibilities of the Novel are being redefined and rediscovered everywhere. In the Indian sub-continent too, the scholars and creative thinkers are equally inspired by Bakhtin. His cardinal concept of dialogue and its supplements like heteroglossia, carnival, chronotope, simultaneity of existence, unfinalisability, answerability etc. have in fact transformed the thought processes of the connoisseurs of literature. The author, widely acclaimed for his erudition and unputdownable contribution to the theoretical exposition and critical interpretation of world literature, has traced the deepening impact of Bakhtin on the receptive Indian readers in general and contemporary Bengali novels in particular.

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Tapodhir Bhattacharjee



RELOCATING BAKHTIN
by
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for their continuing dialogue ad infinitum

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PREFACE

For a very long time indeed Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895-1975) has remained exclusive intellectual property of the West. His works have been analysed, appropriated and debated zealously in the last two decades of twentieth century. Interpretations have been absorbing but sometimes at variance with each other. One who had unflinching faith in the dynamics of openness and unfinalizability can never be completely grasped without everrenewable engagement with his never-ending dialogue. But any close and careful reading would reveal that the Bakhtinian postulates can never be confined within any particular geographical domain. On the contrary his developments as a thinker can be easily addressed to our own world of culture. In fact, Bakhtin's famous concept of positionality as determinant of truth proves that we, in Indian sub-continent, can also address and respond to Bakhtin's conceptual world from our historically different perspective and enhance our understanding of the hermeneutics and aesthetics of existence and cultural worldview. Bakhtin has been a philosophical activist who sought to enhance the potentiality and efficiency of life by harping on the essential interrelatedness of various ingredients of existence. Thus he provides us an interesting opportunity to compare his concepts as well as the resultant discourses with that of several prominent philosophers and thinkers. Through the prism of comparison, the uniqueness of Bakhtin may become more explicit and one can be convinced about his singular position in the history of human thoughts. His undeniable influence on the contemporary literary and philosophical world of not only Europe, but also Bengali intellectual firmament in the Indian

sub-continent is immensely significant. Bakhtin inspires us to transform dialogue, his central key idea, into one continuous text which, in its turn, implores us to erase the division between voices, appearances and contexts. Though meaning is basically contextual, it is always dynamic because of this continuous erasure and repositioning. Now we have to reassess the role of our creative consciousness as well as methodologies of expression and understanding.

With our newly discovered awareness of repositioning and recontextualization, we may now propose to reeefine the concept of marginality. In fact, notwithstanding our firm belief in the discovery of the multiple voices from the margin, the perennial distance from the hegemonic centre and the process of inversion initiated through carnival, subtle presence of interrelatedness in historically conditioned existence of late tends to deconstruct the efficacy of given marginal spaces. Sometimes a counterquestion is articulated : marginal to whom or in respect of which space? In the contemporary world, the givenness of marginality is being interrogated and it is argued that even the hitherto accepted margins are at the edge. It is not to claim that hegemonic arrogance has ceased to exist or all the repressed and negated existences have suddenly recovered their cherished spaces throughout the world. On the contrary, in spite of the celebration of inter-relatedness, the decentred spaces remain where they have been. It is only argued here that Bakhtinian dialogics can be profitably interpreted and applied in a completely different non-western cultural context, which has always been the perpetual Other — the margin of the margins shrouded in impenetrable darkness.

Yes, one readily agrees with the famous introductory statement by Clark and Holquist in their widely read book, 'there is always a gap between what someone does and what the world perceives that person to have done.' The perceiver world is never homogeneous and hence the perception and the

meaning accrued therefrom cannot be identical. The gap is not only between the import of Bakhtin's life-as-event and life-as-text; it is also between our positions as observers. Therefore, the readers in Indian subcontinent would also deduce their own meanings and interpret the hidden nuances in accordance with the positions they adopt. Bakhtin's constant struggle with himself and also the non appreciative world around for achieving the true dialogics of meaning kindles and rekindles our desire to be the integral part of the constant struggle for meaning. The key idea, that existence is unfinalizable and it is imperative to continue the act of being as ever-renewable addressivity, particularly fascinates us. We tend to understand not only the textual microcosms, but also the dramatics of life in the theoretical context of the architectonics of answerability. The dialogics of self and other promises to be all-pervasive. In the historically determined pluralistic canvas of Indian subcontinent, Bakhtinian concepts of polyphony and heteroglossia as well as the unfading importance of faith in simultaneity of existences can never remain confined to the territories of literature. Rather these concepts promise to be illustrative of multifoliated Indian existence. Besides there is the concept of carnival whose multiple resonances in the socio-cultural milieu on the one hand and the subversive literatures on the other can never be denied. Only the site of Bakhtin has to be revisited again and again for the sake of rediscovering his great relevance in different epochs.

In spite of discrepancies in the facts of his life and belated discovery of his unique achievements as a thinker, Bakhtin has been subjected to close scrutiny by various scholars in last two decades. But these western scholars have been frankly biased against the historical epoch which fashioned his multidimensional world-view. Therefore, some Bakhtinian concepts have been overread while some other basic ingredients of his thought process have been underplayed. One can say that it posits margins of meaning where third world readers can find enough

clues for recontextualization of various discourses. The concepts of carnival and polyphony of simultaneities may be cited as two most important theoretical sites for the readers and researchers of Indian sub-continent. Undoubtedly the central concept of dialogue is heavily loaded with political nuances as well. Interpretations hovering on the dynamics of power, ethical imperatives and the domain of cultural politics undoubtedly reveal to us an endless vistas of possibilities. Many a margins amalgamate and proliferate into several architectonics of utterances. Bakhtin teaches us to propel dialogism into a fully blossomed worldview which can be shared by all participant observers. We comprehend meaning of event and objects only by participating in them dialogically.

Our own history has placed us in plenitudes of differences. We have to confront paradoxes, contradictions, discordant varieties, disruptions in linearity in our civil society. We swear by pluralism but nevertheless its manifestations both in public and private spaces even now remain elusive and enigmatic. Bakhtin can be our true preceptor in preparing the existential manifesto as well as the practical manual for the civil society plagued with hitherto unresolved differences and contradictions. However, one has to be aware that the task of reading Bakhtin is not quite easy and simplistic. Even the celebrated experts of Bakhtinian thought have also misled the readers with their biased and opinionated stance. The pronounced enthusiasm of the western scholars to disclaim ideological positions have often dragged them into the aporias of reason. In the wake of postmodernism, anything ideological is either frowned upon or ridiculed. The reception of Bakhtin in the west has been conditioned by this overriding tendency. Some critical observations suggest opportunistic duplicity in Bakhtin which is farthest from truth: "He discriminated between his public activities and his private life of the mind treasuring the last most. In his public utterances he accommodated the regime and its rhetoric. He

did not think ill of those who compromised, and he assumed for himself whatever guises political expediency dictated' (Clark and Holquist : 1984:2). This comment is, to say the least, most unfair and unkindest cut. Though the critics quoted here are profound Bakhtin scholars, their self-imposed blindness has blurred insight to a lamentable extent.

Ideology is mere rhetoric for those who submit themselves willfully to the guiles of the hegemonic official positions. They employ all their skill in building up counterrhetoric against any semblance of ideology in the social or intellectual arena. For them ideology is a grand narrative and should be obliterated with cleverly designed rhetoric. That is why they have zealously misinterpreted Bakhtin because that was in the interest of the domineering west. They pretend that those who do not subscribe to the official discourse, they only reduce the apparent scope of his works and fail to see through the authorial disguises in different stages of his career. The various representations of Bakhtin only reveal the eagerness of critics to think on behalf of Bakhtin and thus, in spite of their proclaimed preferences, they ultimately turn out to be covert ideologues of the hegemonic west. Therefore, though it has been subtly alleged that Bakhtin was 'an impassive ventriloquist, for politically acceptable locutions,' the critics themselves prove to be as such. Precisely here there is enough scope for developing a non-western, non-hegemonic, non-official perspective for studying Bakhtin. Let us be mediators but that mediation should not interfere with his life-long dialogics. That is to say, while revisiting the site of Bakhtin, we have to be particularly careful about the existing western interpretations which sometimes seem to choke the original voice of Bakhtin. Our singular motto shall be : Let Bakhtin speak for himself.



READING BAKHTIN

Bakhtin's world is, for all practical purposes, limitless and enormous. Many a readings are possible on the discourses of this unique doyen of simultaneity. Ever since his discovery by the American and European scholars, diverse schools of thought emerged which transgress the established frontiers of disciplines. The Bengali readers in the Indian sub-continent became aware of immense possibilities of Bakhtinian thoughts in the late eighties of the last century. But the overriding habit of Euro-centrism prevailed upon the recipients even in the post-colonial phase of social history. Only a few critics and thinkers of Bengali intellectual community felt the urgency of re-reading Bakhtinian conceptual frames and discourses with emphatic primacy on our own situatedness. Since positionality determines the nuances of the truth inherent in varying human situations, these scholars also had to interrogate the basic ingredients of the European and American commentators. A thorough reexamination of their intentions and basic postulates about Bakhtinian concepts is being undertaken. Because the western hegemonic framework of knowledge industry have all along been casting its deep shadow over the third world intellectuals and the Bengali literary firmament in the Indian sub-continent is no exception. Particularly in the latest phase of total domination of cyber technology, all the socio-cultural spaces belonging to the margin of margins are under threat of extinction. The other has to make its presence felt through reaffirmation of its identity, independence and relative sovereignty. It can be achieved by discovering and re-chiselling the alterities inspite of the implosion and domination of the western modes of thought in all spheres of contemporary life.

Though it is fashionable now to talk animatedly about postmodern decentredness, the time is just right for evaluation of Bakhtin from our postcolonial position. Yes, we cannot deny the distorting influence of various counterideologies as well as elitist polemics of the so-called liberal west. Bakhtin's ideas have always been appropriated by a wide range of multidisciplinary recipients. Our task is to comprehend the synthetic approach by which we can extend his ideas further. As our readings are entirely dependent on English translations of the original discourses, we have to accept the possibility of inadequacies and complications due to occasional slippages and loss of nuances. In spite of such exigencies, our positional readings can nevertheless explore and decipher the conceptual richness of Bakhtin's thoughts. Throughout his life, the great thinker sought to situate Man through continuing dialogical relationship with various formations.

The basic question is : what is Bakhtin for? Or, if we frame it in a different way, how we should utilize his ideas? He is definitely one of the greatest theoreticians of novel. But his uniqueness is not confined to the exploration of a particular genre. He is also one of the foremost thinkers of philosophical anthropology. Moreover his impact on literary hermeneutics and criticism is immeasurable. The poststructuralists, feminists, Marxists, phenomenologists and post-modernists tend to celebrate many of his ideas. In the sphere of cultural studies, Bakhtin is equally important. That is why we are arguing in favour of a synthetic approach to his ideas as otherwise his profoundly inter-disciplinary and complex ideas can hardly be scaled properly.

Bakhtin's life has been described as an extraordinary odyssey through many an abrupt turns and plethora of eventfulness. But this has provided the western critics with the arsenal to represent his dissent not as crystallization of non-official countervoices against official discourses negating the

possibilities of the other, but as his revolt against the Soviet socialist formations.

Having exclusive support of the hegemonic scholarship and subservient media, the misrepresentation of Bakhtin led to fortification of the capitalism-friendly tutored image of the great thinker. As it has been indicated already, such misappropriations are to be scrutinised thoroughly and alternative appropriation of his thought process should be attempted from our non-western perspective. The task is not easy because we have to encounter a whole array of well-publicized literature of cleverly manipulated counterdiscourses. Yet we propose to adhere to the basic dialogics of the texts of the Bakhtin cycle and would not enter into the debate regarding authorship of the texts. If we carefully follow the genuine manifestations of dialogue in his life and works, we would be able to comprehend as to how creative insight is integrally connected with chronotopic consciousness and why the participant observers can always have the scope of nourishing openendedness in existence, creativity and reception of the contextualized time and space. Over and above, the omnipresent dialogue is never finalisable. Therefore, the very process resists hegemony and its guiles everywhere. Such understanding of Bakhtin secures our present and future as well.

Of late there has been considerable reexamination of his thought process emphasizing on the special nuances of his early and late works. Likewise, Bakhtin's so-called middle period works have been subjected to close scrutiny. Though it is impossible to consign him to a single territory of understanding, various theoretical schools have nevertheless tried to interpret his projects in their own idiosyncratic ways. But we would prefer to look at him from a non-reductionist position, emphasizing on his syncretism and open-ended dialogism. Our situatedness prompts us to develop the central notion of addressivity not only as aesthetic and cultural paradigm, but as the key concept for

understanding the multiple phenomena of existence. When the onslaught of the consumer society is at its worst, the task of situating Bakhtin in our historically different perspective has indeed become challenging. In the Indian sub-continent, the experience of the multiplicity of different languages, ethnic behaviours, discourses, priorities and symbolizing practices on the one hand and the disruptive, isolationist and non-conformist tendencies on the other, has made dialogical understanding both inviting and perplexing. We are required to reformulate Bakhtin in such a scenario. In spite of the imposing presence of the western interpretations, we are to highlight the dialogical interrelatedness between different socio-cultural and aesthetic system and practices as wonderful manifestations of simultaneity. Besides, we are to privilege the marginal, the decentred, the contingent and the unofficial. However, the overwhelming process of globalization has rendered all the aforesaid spaces complicated, hybridized and tentative. Then there is the phenomenon of multi-culturalism which has redefined the notion of addressivity. It is, therefore, advisable to explore anew the key concepts like carnival, polyphony, heteroglossia, unfinalizability and simultaneity in the context of our own experiences.

We are expected to read Bakhtin in his totality, keeping in mind his own dialogic progress as thinker. We should avoid over-reading the alleged dichotomy between his early and late works or his subtle and apparent 'compromises' with the official positions. Our first requirement is to develop such a Bakhtinian model which holds considerable promise with respect to proper theorization of our own chronotopic organization of lived time and space.

When globalization is sweeping across all geographical and cultural domains, our familiar world is fast losing stability and responsiveness. Time and space is in a flux and the Bakhtinian notion of interpenetrating unity seems to be out of place. In the

horribly individualist contemporary world, how can we posit our otherness and claim us to be co-beings to the non-obliging partner? When globalization has assumed the character of new orthodoxy, it refuses to accept any respondent other than subscribers to its worldview. Hence, Bakhtinian scheme of things seems to be completely irrelevant. One wonders as to how we can salvage ourselves with the help of Bakhtin. If his thoughts are context specific, how we can reinterpret his ideas in a thoroughly changed and decentred world? What then would be the nuances of answerability and addressivity which he has so emphatically put forward? Bakhtinian ontology and epistemology are basically participatory. If we venture to situate him in a dehumanized world, we have to reaffirm that inspite of blatant hegemonic aggressions, our world remains essentially human and it is participative to the extent that the aesthetic, social and philosophical activities required in comprehending it is indeed an acknowledgement of continuing dialogics of self and other.

II

Let us reread Bakhtin's *Art and Answerability*, where he states clearly: 'aesthetic activity collects the world scattered in meaning and condenses It into a finished and self-contained image. Aesthetic activity finds an emotional equivalent for what is transient in the world (for its past and present, for its present-on-hand-being), an emotional equivalent that gives life to this transient being and safeguards it; that is, it finds an axiological position from which the transient in the world acquires the axiological weight of an event, acquires validity and stable determinateness. The aesthetic act gives birth to being on a new axiological plane of the world; a new human being is born and a new axiological context — a new plane of thinking about the human world.' (1990 : 191)

From our own situatedness, we may attempt logical extension of Bakhtin's thoughts on authoring our own individual and socio-cultural selves. In the context of that eventfulness of authoring, we may come to terms with the participatory construction of our own world of life and culture. Though globalization is threatening our old convictions including Bakhtinian faith in the dialogic sharing of existence and the unrepeatable simultaneity of being, we can profitably call back upon the cardinal concept of polyphony which has the ability to effectively counter the false claims of globalization to release being from the chains of habits. A truly differentiated notion of culture is an important prerequisite for Bakhtinian free world. Globalization can only undo all existential obligations and can never attain the co-participative uniqueness in socio-cultural and aesthetic domains because its hegemonic intentions become apparent in no time. When Bakhtin speaks of the event of the birth of a new human being as socio-aesthetic act that culminates in uniqueness, we understand immediately that with our historically differentiated positions, we are expected to live socially and aesthetically to author a new world order. As meaning is always contextual, the inhabitants of the Indian sub-continent in general and the Bengali people and also those who belong to the marginalized nationalities in particular must recognize the central fact that the acknowledgement of situationally unique otherness is indeed unrepeatable. This non-repeatability constitutes our being whose recognition is obligatory for all participants in the social and aesthetic eventfulness. The onslaught of globalization is an undeniable fact. But even then the recognition of the process of unfinalizable authoring of simultaneous presence of the other and relocation of an alternative existence un-enamored by fantasies of power are undeniable. Bakhtin teaches us the unsubvertible paths of alterities by dint of which we would be able to recollect 'the world scattered in meaning'. This automatically elevates us to completely new thought process positing a renovated human world.

Bakhtin emphasizes not merely on the assumption of differences but concentrates on dynamic struggle over differences because the basic concept of dialogism attaches much prominence on the process of inter-activity and inter-relatedness. It automatically transgresses the standardized frontiers between various disciplines and provokes us to extend our faculties of cognition and imagination further while we author ourselves and our world. If we can realize the inherent strength and potentialities of such a process of dialogism that always renews our capacities for addressivity and answerability. We can propose an effective encounter with the hegemonistic approaches of globalization. The notions of participation and responsibility need to be comprehended anew which paves the way towards positing an alternative world order beyond predictivity and finalization.

As situatedness is constantly historicized, the task of the commentators and interpreters in the Indian subcontinent automatically calls for a reorientation of the thought process and re-contextualization of disjunctive and differentiated experiences. During the heyday of colonialism, western model of hegemonic modernism made inroads into the psyche of Indian people but could not wholly unsettle the feudal remnants of the civil society. Concomitantly paradoxical situations emerged and hybridized cultural paradigms gradually took shape which, in their turn, resulted into concoctions of multicultural mix. With the advent of post-modernism mainly among the metropolitan elites, complications and confusions percolated to some extent even to the otherwise sensitive cultural activists. More particularly the Bengali intellectuals afflicted with displacement, diasporas, migration and intense form of localization in various regions of the subcontinent had to grapple in the space between the aesthetic and the political. Their experience of responsiveness and answerability is characteristically different from that of other ethnic strata in the subcontinent. The projects of authoring the

inter-penetrative worlds of simultaneity and polyphony have been articulated in various ways. The questions of perfection or profusion are valid to a certain extent; but the more important thing is to scale the process of dialogism through apparently discursive practices.

III

In situating Bakhtin for their own benefit, the Bengali scholars are actually venturing to relocate themselves in varying socio-cultural spaces. In interpreting Bakhtin, the projects of re-contextualization are required to emphasise that the thinkers and critical commentators should never cease to pursue differing responses to the same set of questions posed by the pulsating life. The Bengali community is thoroughly conditioned and historicized and their exposure first to colonial modernism and then to post-colonial sensibilities bespeaks of contradictory chronotopic formations. The contamination of global post-modernist tendencies in the nineties of the last century ushered in a new phase of complicated dialogics of displacement and localization. But the dynamics of the discourses did not come to an end. On the contrary, the process of interrogation from within gradually crystallized into a vigorous search for alterities from the eighties which may now be described as the formations of counterhegemonic resistance. Though on the wake of renewed onslaught of the hegemonic post-modern ideas, the search for an alternative dynamics of literary and cultural discourses seems to be rather subdued, the dialogics continues even now in the life-world of the Bengali people.

The process of situating Bakhtin invariably leads us to the rewarding exploration of space between socialized and communicative men where void can be bridged by the human acts of utterances and formulation of worlds. In seeking connectivity and inter-relatedness, we endow our own world

with reinforced vitality and articulateness. This is our best response to the increasingly decentred and dehumanized counter-world because by concentrating on the life-affirming forces enabling connections in our tension-prone society and mask-stricken space of language, we situate the architectonics of insatiable existence. Bakhtin implores us to understand and interpret our life as the structure of quest or a project which constantly renovates the dialogic relations between self and other in the context of openness and unfinalizability. It is almost intriguing as to how the appearances of sameness emerge from the reality of difference. This cardinal concept is immensely significant for comprehending the basic dialogics of simultaneity and difference richly manifested through multifarious lived experiences of the Bengali people. In fact, by making judicious use of the Bakhtinian conceptual framework, one can better understand the historicised evolution of the multi-linear Bengali society, culture and creative milieu as well as blatant interference of history.

The lived experiences of a community and their literary and cultural manifestations unmistakably prove that historicity of given situatedness is indeed one of the most powerful proponents of becoming. Inside such a community, the spaces of individual selves exist dialogically. As self is never a self-sufficient site for eventfulness and performances, it can never be such a presence where any ultimate privilege of the real is lodged. Its relationship with other selves and their sites conditions the flourish or decline of the existential performance. Self no doubt constructs itself but it is always answerable to the sites of all others which include history of communal existence. Bakhtin's cardinal concept known as the architectonics of answerability is no metaphysics, rather it is a hermeneutics of dialogical performance. It may be justified in the context of constantly shifting experiences of the Bengali community, for instance, and the individual selves residing within that site. Those who prefer

to be bubbles in the ocean of namelessness under the pretext of achieving global citizenship, their cessation from communal existence means they are answerable to nothing. They forfeit all claims whatsoever either to historicity or to articulation of values in deeds. Bakhtin has taught us that we have answerability for our unique place in existence and at the same time we are endowed with the means by dint of which we are able to relate our uniqueness to the expansive space of others.

The cessationists refuse to be responsive towards their community and remain confined within monological and non-convergent presumptions. They can never recognize that as participant residents in a historically evolved society, we must ourselves be responsible or answerable to ourselves and be always prepared for interactivity and collective performance. Each individual occupies a unique time and space in the dramatics of life and though it is dependent on the recipient others, nevertheless, its role and place is unchangeable and non-negotiable. In any given historical epoch, the position of individual self engrossed in society is always shifting and hence dialogics with the others also cannot remain static. In fact, the dynamics of relationship and sharing of existence with other human beings as well as the world around is essentially dynamic. This dynamism is spontaneously evaluative of the deeds and eventfulness articulated by the individual self in the context of a participant society. Concomitantly this process is deeply ethical as well because, in the performance of such deeds in the life-world, there is a constant affirmation and renewal of the faculties of addressivity to other selves and the world. Their ideas are indeed put to test in the Indian sub-continent whose variegated cultural history as well as multi-linear social history offer us rare opportunity to interpret Bakhtin's cardinal concept of the architectonics of answerability. If it is negated, there is calamity and cataclysm in Indian history. It is our responsibility to situate Bakhtin properly so that we can

interpret the implicit emphasis on the dialogics of action, movement, energy and performance in a community. As dialogism celebrates alterity, the quest for meaning in communal existence becomes a coherent performance. We understand that our achievement of meaning is entirely dependent on the cultivation of relationship between self and others. This is the architectonics of human existence reflected in social and philosophical thoughts whose parallels are found in various domains of human creativity reflected in the construction of texts or discourses. Likewise individual self is also constructed through interactive performances. That is why the process of communication in the life-world is never imposed but a spontaneous presence. Bakhtin says with conviction that dialogue is everywhere—always renewable and never finalizable. The reciprocal interdependence of the addresser and addressee is always discernible in all discourses of human life and language. Bakhtin loves to speak about utterances which is always performance and hence utterances occur not only in words or texts but also in thoughts and deeds.

Therefore, even in our uniquely different socio-historical perspective, Bakhtinian concepts promise a rich harvest. We are only to prepare ourselves for reinterpreting the apparent differences as manifestations of dialogic simultaneities. We are to carefully build up new sets of questionnaire for the socio-cultural milieu. This has to be initiated on several planes to examine whether through continuous performances of manifold actions, we have been able to celebrate alterity or failed to establish our authorship. In the contemporary times it is very difficult for both an individual and a community to effectively counter all-pervading decentredness and feel the urgency to devote the entire life to dialogism. In Bakhtinian thoughts, life is unique site for constant renewal of manifold struggles since meaning is achieved only through struggles of various kinds. Both the individual and the community has to prepare for

transformations of human consciousness through modulation of constant exchange between the activities of the self and all others. As we have noted earlier, both differences and simultaneities are celebrated through unfinalizable dialogue in the lived experiences of both an individual and a community. Precisely for this reason the task of situating Bakhtin becomes important for those who have all along been relegated to the unenviable position of the excluded other. In the era of explosion of theory, all non-European recipients have been passive onlookers only. There was no space for any alternative mode of thought which could stimulate responsiveness in various strata of individual and communal life. But by emphasizing on the cardinal concepts of dialogism, addressivity, alterity and interdependence, Bakhtin has glorified the role of participant observers. Now the utterance from and of the margins are recognized as distinctive and possessor of the validity of answerability. Therefore the task of situating Bakhtin is being undertaken by the erstwhile excluded others in the Indian sub-continent.

THEORIST IN QUEST OF LIFE-WORLD

Every meaning is achieved through struggle : this was most emphatically assured by Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, one of the most prominent thinkers of twentieth century. He lived through exceptionally interesting times in the history of Soviet Russia. In his youth, he saw the traumatic phases of the emergence of a new social order on the wake of Bolshevik Revolution spearheaded by Lenin. Alongwith his close associates, he also experienced personally the cruel repressive powers of the state. Gradually he went into total oblivion while his friends were eliminated. He escaped the possible exile to Siberia but had to undergo an obligatory extradition in a minor township. His right leg was amputated in the beginning of 1938. His movement was in fact restricted due to prolonged illness as far back as 1920. The most fundamental concept propagated by Bakhtin, viz., Life is Dialogical, was corroborated by his own life. Because it was that illness which brought Elena Alexandrovna Okolovich to intimate proximity. They married at the end of that year.

Elena was an exceptional lady who might be regarded as an epitome of co-being. It is because of her that Bakhtin could survive physically and also escaped certain death. While he was in exile at Kustanai in Kazakhstan, Elena had to work incessantly to make both ends meet. Their precarious condition continued till the end of the turbulent thirties when they stayed in Saransk and Sabhelova. That was the period of dialogical recontextualization of the life-world because turmoils of the political society were sharpening Bakhtin's intellectual and

philosophical concepts. His thoughts on novelistic discourse, dialogical imagination, chronotopic consciousness, bildungsroman as well as hermeneutics of carnival crystallized when both historically and personally, time was most unsparingly deconstructive. It required exceptional courage, patience, faith and perseverance, conviction and insight to come to terms with the gradually unfolding polyphonic dialogics of life. Bakhtin proved beyond doubt that he possessed those indefatigable ingredients because of which in a single life he could live a hundred. His own text of life is symphony of ideas, possibilities and signifiers. Since positionality is singularly important determinant of truth, we would venture to decipher his discourses from our own historically conditioned, culturally structured and locationally emphasized positions. Bakhtin's thought-world has not only multiple entrances and exits but it also suggests alternative routes towards several layers of the discourse dynamics. The task is definitely not too easy.

As Russian history was deconstructing itself through many upheavals, Bakhtin's life-world as well as thought-world were absorbing nuances of the interesting time. His journey of life commenced on 16th November, 1895 and continued till 7th March, 1975. According to his conception, the end of personal journey is apparent only, it is not a finalized event. His life-long quest for meaning suggests that his physical death is nothing but a dialogical mirror that reflects upon the ever-renewed struggles for meaning in his life. The famous controversy of authorship needs to be understood in the dialogical perspective only. There is no use lamenting over the lack of definitive continuum in his thought-world. Both the civil society as well as the political society in the most uncertain historical time were going through ceaseless deconstructive processes and hence no linearity can be expected there. The rhythm of Bakhtin's personal life was integrally synchronized with that of history and therefore, Bakhtin's interrogation of the world around for truth

was in fact a tryst with temporality. When everything was in a flux, he had to struggle incessantly to renew his quest for meaning amidst tentative situations that teasingly bespoke of unfinalizable positions.

Researchers and critics find it difficult to negotiate with Bakhtin's multi-polar thought-world. In fact, in spite of several interpretations and commentaries, Bakhtin continues to elude us. Through several phases of his life, he has deconstructed himself many a times and hence it is not easy to determine which position may be regarded as central and which are comparatively peripheral. Bakhtin-scholars dispute with each other with regard to any semblance of centrality in such positions and the debate is inconclusive. There cannot be any final comment on Bakhtin's dialogical thought-process because it has naturally touched upon or, better still, transgressed the frontiers of several theoretical discourses. That is why, in contemporary analysis, his texts are being negotiated and deciphered in various ways.

Perhaps because of that, totality of Bakhtin's thought-world is not being attended to. On the contrary, some interesting ingredients of his thought are being overemphasized according to the choice of the particular reader. It might remind Indian readers of the famous metaphor of six blind men seeing an elephant. Bakhtin's untiring efforts to establish the dialogical essence of truth need to be understood in the right perspective. What does he really mean by his cardinal concept, "Being is simultaneity", discourse as well as the principal notions of polyphony and heteroglossia in life-as-discourse and discourse-as-life are also to be deciphered as the foundations of his theoretical universe.

II

His is a unique narrative of continuous unfoldment of self in the context of ceaseless discovery of new hermeneutics of

multipolar and multidimensional world. Bakhtin's primary understanding about the human world is as follows :

The dialogics of difference and simultaneity is the basic precondition of existence. That is why nothing remains static and unchangeable. Finiteness and conclusiveness resist transformation and natural growth of life through deconstruction. Hence the theorist par excellence loves to talk about the continuous process of chiselling out many alternatives from the existential possibilities. This also proves that the progress of signification can never end. That is why meaning can never be singular, it is always plural. The inherent polyvalence is obliterating all boundaries and linear tendencies as well as monological positions.

Since we author ourselves on the one hand and our own historical perspective shapes that authorship on the other, dynamics of discourse is inevitable. It also assures polyphony in creative discourses. Our positions cannot but be at variance with each other due to multiplicity of experiences and plurality of utterances which provide foundation for our life-world. As we speak of differences, we actually mean almost incessant varieties in existential and epistemological experiences. Their implicit dialogue with the unfoldment of simultaneities in and through socialization of individuals is indeed revealing. Bakhtin did not gloss over manifold contradictions and paradoxes experienced by social self while re-contextualizing given situations. His notion of heteroglossia is in fact studied response to the enigmatic aporias of life-as-discourse and discourse-as-life.

Bakhtin said in his inimitable way, 'I always have a loophole' (*Art and Answerability*: 1990: 40) meaning thereby, no representation of self can be complete, final and fully satisfying. That is, no representation of self can claim to possess totality of truth. Even though we author ourselves, the representation of the space known as I is always tentative and it is forever

enticed by the most elusive notion of perfection. Bakhtin develops this important idea in his famous book, *'Dostoevsky and his Poetics'*. There he argues that the final comprehension of significance is sought by those writers who are guided by monological visions. In their works, a protagonist in a novel is emblem of virtue and perfection. In their representation of such protagonists, all meanings are exhausted in text. There is no mystery to unveil and hence the readers have nothing to do. For all practical purposes, such virtuous, perfect protagonists are dead and spent out. Bakhtin described such an exhausted position as 'The form of aesthetic consummation of an individual.' (1990 : 131).

But dialogue means an inexhaustible continuum which refuses to admit finality and predetermined conclusion. In fact, the depicted figures in the dialogical novels enter into an everrenewable communion with their authors on the one hand and the implied readers on the other. Sometimes these figures confront their authors and readers thereby transforming the texts into battlefields. As we have already noted, such struggles are preconditions for generating new meanings. Bakhtin has tried to prove that only through such struggles aesthetic constructions are activated. In fact, these ensure the process of organizing form and content as centre of artistic vision in any significant discourse. The inner vision of an artist shapes and controls the creative tools in the speech genres. The vision renovates words and sentences in order to make them perfect vehicles for manifestation of intense feelings and experiences of human existences.

This process is intrinsically and immanently sociological because it is sustained only through cultivation of inter-relatedness and dialogic understanding of all facts and actions. In the Bakhtinian thought-world, individual existence is true only in the context of multiple relationships and open-ended possibilities. That is why throughout his life Bakhtin traversed

in various arenas of humanities. The scholars are sometimes perplexed by his seemingly contradictory positions not only in separate texts but also in the same discourse. There are many a border areas in his texts where subjective experience and social signifiers intermingle. It is very difficult to comprehend the true import of tentativeness in Bakhtin's conceptual microcosm because the process of signification is never passive and linear.

Even in the active participation of the self in the activities emanated from the world around, there is always conglomeration of mutually contradictory ingredients. No discourse is assuredly linear and conclusive since counterdiscourse may crystallize at any point of time. In his formative period Bakhtin (Voloshinov/Bakhtin) called it 'Social multi-accentuality' (1973 : 23) of signifiers. Since social, economic and political structures continually transform existential interrelatedness, verbal discourses can never be static and stratified.

Bakhtin implores us to comprehend that each reading of the text of life is basically reading of theory. Likewise every reading of theory is nothing but intense reading of the text of human life. He inspires us to prepare for the quest of poststructural openness because no theory can blossom in closures. That is why on the wake of epidemic of simulations and designification, we may try to relocate and rediscover him for the sake of our own revaluation and reconstruction. Some may argue that the primary meaning of liberation, perfection and zenith has been changed thoroughly. History of humanism and aesthetic consciousness have been denuded of relevance. Yet we have to re-examine even this undecipherable void. At the same time we are required to explore the proposition of ever-renewable architectonics of existence. If we author ourselves, the responsibility or lack of it to construct the moments of seeking answers lies squarely on us alone. Otherwise we would be ourselves held responsible for engineering the degeneration of existence. The project of self to sculpt out channels of

communications with otherness has to be re-affirmed again and again. But in the blatantly dehumanized contemporary times, how can we negotiate with the terrorizing anti-representations and overwhelming irrelevance? Bakhtin seems to be out of place. We are now engulfed by the simulacrum of the simulacrum.

When post-modern situation is exploding with a vehemence in a unipolar world fraught with deceptive inter-relatedness, time itself is transformed as it were into poison of intoxication. Our present is decentred, impatient, restless and incongruous to such an extent that drowsy numbness has become signature of our existence. The assumption of all models of representation is suspended as a result of which all discourses have suddenly become tentative. Every situation is carnivalesque and profaned without any hope of redemption because of total loss of essence and propriety. It seems that everything is in a flux : reality, imagination, logic, argument, analysis, crisis and signification.

It appears that we are now confronting the moments of total anarchical negative liberation. We are hopelessly drugged with counter-ideology, virtual reality and counter-signification which unleash excess of message and desire connoting thereby unprecedented void that defies description. Surely Bakhtin could not visualize such an onslaught of counter-memory, counter-world and counter-narrative that would threaten to swallow all position, itinerary and objectives. How then do we relocate Bakhtin and his cardinal concepts of answerability, architectonics, philosophy of act and penetrative seeing eye? In order to reread him in the context of extreme restlessness and decentredness of contemporary times, we have to address dialogism in an altogether new way. The process of anthropomorphization of values attempted by Bakhtin is to be comprehended anew. Through his intellectual pursuits of polyphony, many a nuances of human situatedness have been rediscovered which process may now also be extended to confront the most difficult of times.

No one can deny now that Bakhtin was one of the foremost thinkers of twentieth century. His uniqueness is due not only to refreshing theoretical projects but because of emphasizing on infinite possibilities of human universe. He survived exceptionally difficult circumstances and most exacting situations of history. In his early youth, he went through traumatic experiences of socialist revolution and hence it is plausible that he shared all the uncertainties, skepticism, violence, dreams of reconstruction and warmth of the expectation for a new world-order. Definitely his quiet childhood and adolescence were suddenly outshined by an overpowering new schemata of socialized existence.

It can be easily guessed as to what an extent and pace, Bakhtin had to deconstruct his own self as well as the conceptual framework to grasp the significance of the society in turmoil. The initial euphoria was, however, marred by civil war and then there was the early phase of Stalinism. In the thirties Bakhtin's personal and intellectual life was rudely shattered by state terrorism so much so that he could escape certain death only through the intervention of co-beings. However, he had to leave Leningrad and had to maintain his livelihood with extreme difficulty. He almost went into oblivion for the outside world and was resuscitated in the mid-fifties again through sustained endeavours of his younger co-beings. In the meantime Nazi invasion on the wake of second world war was also experienced by Bakhtin. He could escape the great purge of intellectuals initiated by Stalin. Then he went through the phase of revisionism first initiated by Nikita Krushchev and then its natural impact on a degenerating Soviet society during the tenure of Breznev. Thus the chronicle of Bakhtin's personal history is unique in many respects because very few thinkers passed through such exceptional socio-political upheavals. Bakhtin's utterances are intertwined with the gradual contextual transformations in social and cultural history to such an extent that no one can analyse them outside dialogical perspective.

According to Bakhtin, there cannot be a figure without a ground and there cannot be any significance outside a specific context. As it has been noted already, comprehension of such meanings, contexts, utterances and events is achieved through relentless struggle. Abrupt changes in his life are definitely extraordinary but nevertheless close reading may suggest a deeply embedded continuity.

IV

The history of reception of Bakhtin is highly interesting. In the twenties, he was merely a marginal personality in the intellectual society of Soviet Russia. He had no relation whatsoever with any university or institution. He was known only among a handful of close friends and admirers. His own experiences prove the correctness and efficacy of cardinal concepts with regard to sharing of existence with the co-beings, celebration of simultaneity as well as inherent incompleteness and unfinalizability of existence. Even his exile in Kazakhstan corroborated with these concepts in discursive manner as it were. His rehabilitation through rediscovery is one of the very rare events in the cultural history of the world. It is only due to the exceptionally sincere efforts of a few researchers, Bakhtin came through a fairytale revival.

One who does not believe in finality and conclusiveness, affirms the truth of his own concept by the events of life. Otherwise, it would have been all curtains for him as far back as in 1929 or at several points of time after that. He did not exist for many during two important decades of Soviet history. Yet his book on Dostoevsky was republished in 1963 only because a handful of his younger co-beings worked untiringly for this. In 1965, *Rabelais and his world* was published. Bakhtin became a cult figure for the younger generations of scholars and what happened thereafter is pure fantasy.

Bakhtin's texts were smuggled to the United States of America in the early sixties and in quick succession the books on Dostoevsky and Rabelais were translated in English. His electrifying impact on the European and American intellectual firmament was unprecedented. It was almost an explosion of ideas. Already in the aftermath of structuralism and its scions, western thought-world was vibrant with interactive literary and cultural theories. With the discovery of Bakhtin, new nuances and directions were added to the existing schools of thought. Bakhtin's presence was increasingly felt in literary hermeneutics and in study of the novel as the most competent genre of contemporary times. His intricate utterances are akin to passwords which provide us access to deeply embedded socio-historical as well as anthropomorphic values. For Bakhtin, any significant verbal act connotes a territory which is shared by both addresser and addressee. According to him, words can have meaning only in dialogue. These are directed 'towards who that addressee might be ... each person's inner world and thought has it stabilized social audience that comprises the environment in which reasons, motives, values and so on are fashioned..... the word is a two-sided act. It is determined equally by whose word it is and for whom it is meant. As word, it is precisely the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, and addresser and addressee. Each and every word expresses the one in relation to the other' (1973 : 85-86).

The words being two-sided acts in a socially conditioned environment strongly suggest that they are structured by cultural politics. Bakhtin made this famous comment : 'The internal politics of a style is determined by its external politics.' (1981 : 204). The process of dialogue is automatically extended to history, anthropology, linguistics, oral poetics, philosophy and sociology. Their cumulative effect is discernible in the feminist, post-colonial and post-structural approaches to literature and

life. Therefore Bakhtin is now not one but many. Both in respect of various details of his active intellectual life and varied dialogics of theory and practice, we have to confront enigmatic openness due to which no meaning is static at any point of these discourses. This has become more complicated because of the much debated authorship question. It is well known that young intellectuals of Leningrad were fascinated by Bakhtin and together they formed the famous Bakhtin cycle during pre-Stalinist era of Soviet revolution.

They used to debate and discuss many issues pertaining to various aspects of contemporary society and philosophy. As it has been noted already, their close association inspired Bakhtin to formulate his cardinal concepts of co-being, dialogics of existence and inter-relatedness of difference and simultaneity. The following young thinkers and writers were his close associates : Valentin Nikolayovich Voloshinov, Pavel Nikolayovich Medvedev, Vladimir Zinoviyovich Rugevich, Boris Mikhayelovich Zubakin, Lev Vasiliyevich Pumplyanski, Maria Veniyaminovna Yudina, Matvei Isayavich Pagan etc. Each of them was remarkable for talent and penchant for multifarious academic and intellectual pursuits. Just after the revolution, new Soviet society was in turmoil because of bitterly complicated and anarchical conditions of civil war. On the one hand there was economic crisis while on the other the security of the intellectuals was being increasingly threatened.

But that was also the most fruitful time for the Bakhtin cycle to formulate the poetics of struggle in all human pursuits. At that time publication was difficult due to economic and political uncertainty. This necessitated the sharpening of verbal discourses and debates as modes of self-expression and crystallization of new theoretical paradigms. In spite of such extremely difficult even hostile situations, Bakhtin and his associates took everything into their stride and sought to transform the historically conditioned aporias into points of strength and continuous

upliftment of knowledge. It also led Bakhtin to conceptualize 'Situatenedness' which again perhaps inspired him to devise a stratagem! The so-called authorship puzzle may be explained from this viewpoint.

V

Medvedev (1891-1938) and Voloshinov (1884/85-1936) did not live long and hence three books ascribed to them remain debatable with regard to authorship. They were prominent figures in the famous Bakhtin cycle and also two of the most intimate co-beings of Mikhail Bakhtin. Among themselves they must have shared their thoughts as well as strategies during most perilous situations.

While Medvedev perished in state terrorism, Voloshinov died of consumption. Bakhtin himself, as it has been already noted, escaped certain annihilation but nevertheless was mercilessly dislodged from his natural and intellectual environment. All relevant papers are now lost for ever and hence there is no factual evidence either to support co-authorship or deny it altogether. The scholars are sharply divided over this issue. According to one opinion, historical situations in the twenties compelled Bakhtin to assume camouflage and ascribe the authorship of his own books to his close associates. It is also presumed that Medvedev and Voloshinov might have actively contributed both in crystallization of thoughts and actual process of composition. There is another opinion to the contrary according to which these three books were indeed authored by Medvedev and Voloshinov and that Bakhtin had nothing to do with it. But such debates have only intensified that veil of mystery around those particular books. There is no direct evidence and all efforts ended in smoke during Bakhtin's rehabilitation process in the seventies. The scholars could not find out anybody among Bakhtin's relatives, friends and

associates inspite of their prolonged efforts nor there was any diary of personal notes and documents from which Bakhtin's personal details could be reconstructed. Only a few letters could be traced but these were hardly sufficient for formulating any tangible opinion about him. Though Kanayev was still alive in the seventies, he was not quite helpful for the researchers. Those who were close associates in his later life, their memoirs, interviews and personal writings were the only sources to fall back upon. Obviously it had its own limitation and hence the attempts to reconstruct Bakhtin's life-world only intensified the mystic penumbras around him.

Throughout his life Bakhtin has sought to discover the renewal of dialogics between existence and theory. Hence we may decipher the significance of his exceptional lived experiences in the context and light of his own theoretical paradigms. Likewise, we may seek the justification and efficacy of his theories in the polyphonic discourses of his eventful life. One who interprets life-world as incessantly dialogic expression of human truth and knows every utterance as the manifestation of social voice and for whom every being is a co-being, that is, complimentary to each other, he conceptualizes the process of writing and authorship as the manifestation of collective existence. For him, writing or authoring a discourse is an unfinalizable act of establishing the dialogic inter-relatedness of the addresser and addressee. In this context, the mode of addressivity is basically accommodating in the presence of co-beings and it makes the process more loaded with significance. Therefore, having Voloshinov or Medvedev as very close associate and co-being in the project of writing and authoring discourse is quite possible for an exceptional theoretician like Bakhtin. Only he can keep him concealed or assume the role of a co-participant in the project of textualisation. It may be explained as Bakhtin's admission of dignity of his co-beings as well as accepting them as co-participants in the unfoldment of

ontological and intellectual existence. Of course, the question of co-authorship may be interpreted as a simple stratagem on the wake of Stalinist repression. But if we take into account the essence of Bakhtin's life in its entirety, such an opinion appears to be too simplistic and incongruous with his belief system. The master key-word of Bakhtin's theoretical world, that is, dialogism was practised in all respects and therefore accommodation of the co-authors is both schematic and inevitable. Those who want to delink Bakhtin from Medvedev and Voloshinov, actually do so to deny any impact of Marxian thoughts on the philosopher of dialogism. This is nothing but a calculated assault of the vanguards of counter-ideology on Bakhtin. It has to be noted that Bakhtin's lifelong pursuit of meaning, truth and polyphonic discourse is the convincing evidence of his faith in architectonics of difference and simultaneity. It connotes that co-existence of apparently contradictory thoughts and entities is acceptable in Bakhtinian project. There is no finality, only a series of contexts and positions.

It is well known that Bakhtin has not only discovered a new horizon in theorisation of the novel but he has established a hitherto unknown interactive relation between life and novelistic discourses. He is now considered an insurmountable summit among the philosophers of the genre of novel. Bakhtin is a unique thinker not only because of his rare range and depth but because of his penchant for subtlety and expansiveness. He considered life to be a continuous manifestation of the process of novelisation. That is why he looks not only for multitudes of linearity in this genre, but also visualizes the expression of heteroglossia in the simultaneous discourses of life and novel. He intends to convince us that the dynamics of life connotes a continuous passage from one mode of utterance to another. It enriches both the form and content of discourse. The novel is generically indefatigable because of this continuous dialogic movement. Like life, the novel is also forever opened where

all closures even though aesthetically necessitated are indeed apparent closures. Bakhtin has armed us with the ideas of bildungsroman, carnival and polyphonic narrative. He was nurtured by the basic inspiration of an enlivening faith in existence as simultaneity and also simultaneity embedded in the presence of otherness. In this world nothing is complete in itself. When we are aware of the endless denotative space, only then life and world become true for the negotiating self. There cannot be any self-sustained utterance which blossoms and fades in itself. Every utterance is inevitably addressed to a possible addressee either present or absent occupant of space defined as other. Therefore all expressions and discourses fraught with meaning can never be monological; these are essentially dialogical. As life is vibrant with novelness, the novelistic discourses cannot but be dialogic.

Any proper utterance is simultaneously individual and social and hence its dialogic essence is inevitable. Such essence is again established in the context of inter-relatedness as well as continuum with other human utterances. This process is obviously dialogic and provides the foundation of life as novelness. Bakhtin considers the ever-renewable and decipherable novelness as the foundation of the speech genre whose manifestation brings about the dynamics of novelistic discourses. It is imperative that any true novel would cultivate the inter-relatedness of utterances in order to prove and explore the inherent tendencies of heteroglossia in a society through relevant narrative. Though such a unique conception of the novel is known as the hallmark of Bakhtin's genius, this is not his only contribution to the thought-world. The great thinker did not confine himself in linearity of any conceptual framework. In the concluding years of his life, he had again resumed the exploration of the convictions of his early life. One who emphatically declared that no meaning is ever lost and that all past meanings may have a new lease of life in dialogue, is

expected to resume the search of meaning both in his lived experiences and theoretical discourses. In fact, re-contextualization is an essential ingredient of dialogism in ontological and epistemological enquiries. Dialogue being the masterkey or metatheory of existence, cannot but be present at any point of time in the life-world of the great master and he would himself examine the efficacy of his own concepts by extending and sharpening the process of struggle throughout his life.

As we talk of maturity and exclaim 'ripeness is all', we can never altogether discard the revelations and experiences of early life. Even through manifestations of multiple changes and transformations, the essence of continuity still remains dormant. Thus in one's own life, space for dialogic other is created endlessly. Bakhtin therefore discovered dialogue everywhere and realised its implicit unfinalizability. His famous statement in *'Speech genres and other late essays'* would always remain relevant for any human creative and intellectual pursuit: 'There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limit to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and the boundless future). Even past meanings, that is, those born in the dialogue of the past centuries, can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all). They will always change (be renewed) in the process of subsequent, future development of the dialogue. At any moment in the development of the dialogue there are immense, boundless masses of forgotten contextual meanings, but at certain moments of the dialogues, subsequent development along the way they are recalled and invigorated in renewed form (in a next context). Nothing is absolutely dead; every meaning will have its homecoming festival.' (1986 : 170).

In the context of this famous utterance, the incessant and ever-renewing exposition of the novelness of life becomes a mystique as it were. The discovery of fresh nuances in the process of novelisation has not only aesthetic but also

existential and sociological connotations. That is why Bakhtin is now universally accepted as the doyen of the novel-theorists. He has given a new lease of life to the popular genre by endowing it with subtitles of philosophical anthropology and cultural hermeneutics. In the multi-dimensional dialogue of lived experiences and the process of novelisation, heteroglossia is very deeply embedded. Even the lack of harmony and linearity does not impair the growth of dialogue in the symphony of utterances. As life is continuously enriched through the shift of voices and positions, the novelistic discourses also excel as the unrivalled work of art. Lived experiences are finite. But life is infinite and hence its novelisation is always free, beyond mediation and interference. In spite of inevitability of death in life, all closures are apparent and tentative in its novelistic exposition. Though death in life is associated with finality, it nevertheless acts as the dialogical mirror for scaling all lived experiences in order to decipher their true meaning and evaluate them.

The novel enacts existential drama in which the process of addressivity continuously unfolds the various attempts of harmonisation among seemingly contradictory position. Perhaps harmonisation is not the appropriate word; instead dialogisation of individual and social accents in all events and situations may be noticed. This process has also been termed as social multi-accentuality (1973 : 23) which mirrors both inter-relatedness and deconstructive tendencies inherent in socio-political and historical structures. Consciousness of self in dialogue and its novelisation originates from such ideologically conditioned multi-accentualities of a particular epoch. It suggests that the exterior is never expendable because it has its own dialogue with the interior world. The process of signification and understanding can never flourish in isolation; it emanates from active participation in the exposition of simultaneities. Though the imposing presence of power tries to monologise all utterances and stalls plurality of meaning as well as polyphony of naiveties, ideology strikes

back through new sets of signifiers. Dialogical thought and language seeks to consolidate that counter-hegemonic position which stratifies and fragments ideological thought into multiple views of the world.

Bakhtin's discourses are not examples of canonical texts of the academy. He teaches us to communicate dialogically and makes us understand how each act and every word expresses the one in relation to the other. We learn to negotiate with our post-humanist, post-communist, post-colonialist, post-modernist time which like a stream has entered an ocean and lost its fluency and singularity altogether. Bakhtin has armed us with a renovated language that creates rather than conveys reality. We feel inspired to extend Bakhtinian process of addressivity further and propose more co-existent options in space.

UNDERSTANDING FREE UTTERANCES

Since any true understanding is dialogic in nature, the landscape of language is the most perfect manifestation of freedom. Language enters life through concrete utterances: this is the basic postulate. Such utterances are essentially chronotopic because all human acts and experiences are conditioned in time and space. As human being is saturated in historical existence, his ontological and epistemological perspectives determine and mould linguistic consciousness. Yet the domain of language has freedom of its own. The socio-ideological perspectives only ensure multiple accents in language and discourses. Michel Foucault commented in *'The Order of Thing'*, Language is no longer linked to the knowing of things, but to men's freedom. Bakhtin also explores this fundamental concept of freedom in his own inimitable way.

His various discourses explore human situatedness in depth. He touches upon various aspects of existence which are constantly mediated through production of ideologically saturated signifiers. This process is never possible in bondage since truly human endeavours are always already embedded in free space. Expression of hegemony of the material world is resisted in the socio-culturally constructed counterhegemonic texts. As basically enterprises of language, textual projects resist authoritarian repression and posit freedom in the never-ending dialogical context. Bakhtin's concept of novelness and manifestation of dialogue through chronotopic arrangement of lived experiences can perfectly flourish only in freedom. However this does not obviate history; rather the process discovers new space for significance through critical evaluation of given-ness. Bakhtin's well-known emphasis on polyphony and

multilinearity of the perfectly executed novels suggests automatically that the discourse cannot have any typical closure.

Since closure eliminates freedom, Bakhtin speaks of renewal and unimpaired beginning. Because the omnipresent dialogue destroys the walls and obstinate barriers which imprison consciousness within its own discourse. This inspires us to engage in the process of re-reading Bakhtin in order to relocate his relevance and efficacy. In the Indian sub-continent, contemporary civil society is afflicted with contradictions and paradoxes of various kinds; with the pronouncement of end of history, incongruities and hallucination are increasingly overpowering the sophisticated elite mind. Bakhtin can steer us through the difficult terrain of post-modernist times by dispelling many illusions and monological tendencies. We may go back to the fundamental concept of situatedness as the principal arbiter of truth. In spite of all proclamations to the contrary, history lives on. None and nothing of us is beyond history; moments are transitory hence perishable but history is a living entity through a plethora of deconstructive activities. Bakhtin's thoughts are equally defined, shaped and reformulated in the pluralistic contexts of history. The discourses of history are nothing but narratives of struggle between the hegemonic and power-centered psycho-ideological material constrictions and the deconstructive counterexposition of the excluded other. We are expected to interpret the process of struggle in order to establish the presence of alternative history of ideas. Our existence remains vibrant so long achieving significance through struggle is present and interactive. When our literary, philosophical, pragmatic and sociological quests are posited on the basis of pluralistic inter-relatedness, all-embracing dialogue ensues that elevates and rekindles our existential frames.

Bakhtin's unflinching faith in the architectonics of possibilities helps us to encounter the eccentric and skeptical world around.

In spite of the overwhelming affliction of death and decay, freedom remains the unique space of responsiveness for the mankind. An author rejuvenates himself by mastering the aesthetic techniques of negotiation with both the implicit and explicit spaces of freedom. An author does not only construct semblance of reality, he discovers models of alternative reality. He does not wield a magic wand. He creates magic out of lived experiences by way of extending its frontiers. He is able to do so more because he can foretell the responses of the implied readers in the mirror of their expected interrogative stances. This is the magic play of freedom which operates in an infinite and mysterious virtual space. A true author is one who initiates a never-ending process of interrogation about the contexts and essences of life which have been textualized. Obviously, this process is extended and sharpened further by the readers. Bakhtin explored the immensely significant architectonics of answerability and evolved an interesting theoretical exposition of the act of addressivity through which addresser is integrally and dialogically related with the prospective addressee.

Bakhtin exclaimed poetically, 'Life can be consciously comprehended only in concrete answerability. A philosophy of life can be only a moral philosophy; life can be consciously comprehended only as an ongoing event and not as being qua given. A life that has fallen away from answerability cannot have a philosophy; it is, in its very principle, fortuitous and incapable of being rooted.' (1995 : 46). This basic concept of answerability is deeply embedded in dialogical responsiveness. Every meaning is essentially a project which is realized only through participatory activities of the addresser and addressee. It also anticipates mutual illumination of the subjective and objective spaces. Dramatic situations inherent in the pluralist expositions of existence are negotiated in the act of addressivity. The project has interplay of loss and discovery, denial and revitalisation. There is neither finality nor completeness in the project of

meaning. Its continuity is reaffirmed again and again. Hence the contexts of meaning achieved through dialogue are without limit. Since time is both temporal and beyond, human experiences are concomitantly both spatial and beyond. It suggests presence of deep structures of multilayered meaning underneath the surface structures of text. Any true text contains treasures of intertexts as well as metatexts. These are never static as their presence may be affirmed and negated or transformed at the subsequent levels of the reception of text.

In another way one can say that such texts have both before-life and after-life. This signifies a continuum which effectively dismantles particularity and closure. In this context past is never completely dead and exhausted since at any point of time in the expanse of future, the feelings and experiences germinated in the bygone days may be renewed, rediscovered and re-invigorated. So past is not a closure because it has not been finalized and proclaimed as irrelevant. Likewise present too has no closure because we cannot create an artificial boundary in it which is regulatory and impregnable. Meaning accumulated by the predecessors may no longer have the support of the dead and exhausted world but nevertheless these are renewed and rejuvenated in a strong way. On the one hand, past addresses present while on the other is addressed in turn. Past may be felt as the absent present in the contemporary chain of events. There is both affirmation and negation in it which are subject to constant change and readjustment. Time and space are intertwined which make human utterances essentially dialogical. The journey of the signifiers continues from past to future through different stages of intervening series of present moments. Each utterance is an undertaking for possible response. The anticipation of a refreshing dialogue with the respondents suggests that the process of addressivity is always dynamic. The addresser and addressee may not belong to the same time and space; yet there is spontaneous, mutual and

interactive illumination. No position is ever-fixed because the dialogical addressivity continuously restructures the positions of the addresser and the addressee irrespective of their temporal and spatial affiliation. Bakhtin says therefore : 'Every word is directed toward an answer and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering words that anticipates.' (1981 : 280)

II

The dialogical essence of addressivity is obviously social to the core. Anthropomorphisation of values presupposes thorough restructuring of ontological and epistemological experiences in welldefined historical context. In spite of the proclamation of the death-knell of historicity, human beings continue to author themselves and their own worlds of habitation in history.

Every text as a cluster of utterances is deeply social since such cluster originates in the process of sharing existence. We author our positions and values always in dialogue and never in isolation. This is what constitutes textual perspective where there is no scope for monologue and linearity. Because utterances crystallize in and through continuously renewed struggle between manifest and latent dimensions of our lived experiences. This connotes inter-relatedness between the voiced and the unvoiced which is integrally woven with the manifold dialogics of self and other. Treasure of intertextualities is therefore expected in the significant narratives and discourses since the texture of the voiced and the unvoiced is located in the generative process of anticipated response. Its uniqueness is beyond dispute. As a linguistic formulation the textual projects testify that meaning fully exists only through dialogical movements. When one talks of dialogical movement, it automatically suggests intertwinement of time and space. In all verbal projects, language realized and promoted in dialogue is the medium through which multiplicity of human subject positions is negotiated for the act of self-construction.

In Bakhtinian scheme of things, self is always multi-dimensional and dialogically integrated with the world around. Hence construction of self cannot but be construction of manifold schemata of responsiveness and addressivity. Various worldviews as manifested through different linguistic enterprises having constant interplay of the voiced and the unvoiced as well as tonalities and counter-tonalities, are interiorized quite often. We are expected to read these worldviews correctly so that the varied significance of texts in context is perfectly recognized and interpreted. However, the response of the addressee to the implicit addresser may vary from time to time because the changing contexts of historicity may restructure the plausible reading experiences of the addressee to a considerable extent. It is claimed that there are as many texts within one individual as there are readings to which the reader returns to read a particular text. This means that even the position of the otherwise static addresser in a text may be substantially transformed according to the response of the new addressee.

Therefore, the significance of addressivity is essentially dynamic and dialogical *ad infinitum*. The prospective reader thus accumulates contexts of his own in the perspective of which he attempts close reading of given texts and anytime he/she returns and resumes the process of reading, those contexts become different from those used before. Since all languages are social, all utterances are performative being produced and comprehended within the assumption of some socially conceived dimension of assessment and interpretation. No verbal expression in a text can be considered apart from how it engages into an animated relationship with the reader. Each new engagement is a renovated deconstructive process. Hence each new encounter of a reader with a text makes it different because of the impact of new process of addressivity. As each reading crystallizes different ideas in the response of the prospective

reader, the possible variation in reading of texts is quite high. If we carefully follow Bakhtin's views on socio-ideological contexts of language and the dialogic inter-relatedness reflected in various speech acts including addressivity it would be evident that distinctive generic features influence the process of dialogue to a considerable extent. Different generic interpretations indeed bespeak of constant renegotiation of language experience which obviously call for a new reading, a new text and new hermeneutics. This leads to the formation of a new model of socialization in the sharing of existence among the members of interpretive community. In this context, Bakhtin speaks about the cultural and historical significance of the aesthetics of langue and parole. He tells us : 'every utterance in the business of life is akin to a password.' (1997 : 106)

Being a password, it is unique, unrepeatable and non-negotiable. As it cannot be exchanged under any pretext whatsoever, no extraneous ingredient can mould it, Being integrally connected and processed by life, its existential perspective is the sole arbiter of the process of signification. The inspiration of social evaluation regarding the dialogics of self and other is subtly related to it. Generally we tend to differentiate between aesthetic and sociological properties of utterances. But if we closely follow the hints of Bakhtinian school of thoughts, we cannot but conclude that aesthetics is basically privileged expression of social sensibilities. Therefore theorization of artistic and literary utterances emanates from sociology of creativity. All true and successful human creations are known for their communicative efficacy which again is forever dynamic. That is why utterances are continuously transformed in accordance with the variable social context for communication. The role of ideology is relevant here. Any speaker responds to changing situations according to either conscious or unconscious ideological stance and hence he/she can never change his/her own mode of utterance or style of expression. On the other hand, the organic relationship between

context and text being posited through utterance and speech-acts, the dialogue and evaluation of selfhood and otherness is inherent in the process itself. Neither the addressee nor the addresser is ahistorical, rootless, insubstantial and non-chronotopic. Since life-as-text and text-as-life are synchronized with each other in the pursuit of meaning, transformation in context automatically brings about substantial change in the dynamics of discourses and their significances sought for. Thus there cannot be any closure in life-as-text and text-as-life. Rather these are unimpaired, uninterfered, open-ended and free. But such openness and freedom do not offer any apology for anarchy because utterance is fundamental component of being and text can never be completely autonomous.

Any cultural construct is always fashioned and regulated by either allegiance or opposition to hegemonic sections of the class-ridden society. Naturally all utterances are inevitably poetical. In the official discourses, the imposing presence of hegemonic voices makes them monological. These deny possibility of any other truth other than their own. This politics of truth is resisted in unofficial discourses where absence speaks eloquently from the space of the unvoiced. Cultural politics implicit in the texts is thus the site of struggle from which alternate modes of meaning emerge. Through complicated interactions these models also undergo changes. Thus the site of struggle also becomes site of understanding differences and positing resistance to hegemonic textual politics. As long as we realise the possibilities of emergence of difference in the cluster of utterances, cultural politics of the ruling elites can be correctly located and counter-discourses of the marginalized existence discovered. When Bakhtin says, 'The internal politics of a style is determined by its external politics' (1981 : 204), he makes us aware of the implicit cultural politics of style and also hints at the historical compulsion of its own external and internal struggle as ideo-linguistic artefact. From amongst different alternatives, it has to choose the most appropriate mode of

expression. That is to say, not only utterances have politics of their own, they are ingredients of politics themselves. One can speak of their aesthetics and freedom only on the basis of this. As long as utterances are free, there can be celebration of freedom in human spaces. Discourses are born through obliteration of frontiers and these gradually blossom in the same way as well. Even if we accept the dialogical role of context, language has a natural tendency to transcend contextual limits. That is why the nuances of language formulate interesting mystique and connote elevation. Though the discipline of usage is undeniable, unquenchable thirst for freedom makes language challenge such bondages frequently. Because otherwise structural closure would bring about paralytic stupor and the process of addressivity would come to a grinding halt.

III

Yes, Bakhtin recognizes discipline and boundaries; but nevertheless he is never prepared to compromise with freedom. Human quest for freedom as manifested through utterances is both an aesthetic and political process. Their inter-relationship is fashioned and determined by ideologies. Any attempt to explore and explain this inter-relationship leads us to a close study of the philosophy of language because the true import of changing social relations in a particular historical epoch is best understood in the domain of ideology. Voloshinov/Bakhtin considers the philosophy of language as 'the philosophy of the ideological sign' because material representation of culture in temporal and spatial context as well as history of mankind as social agent through consecutive chain of events is established mainly through language. Though there are other processes, the domain of language is the most coveted sphere for free human acts. Let us make it clear that ideology is no closure and hence language can simultaneously connote and explore freedom and

ideology. Therefore language is conceptualized as a semiotic social entity that exists within the domain of ideologies.

The responsiveness of the addressee to the addresser is a deeply social act. Articulation of thought in language is not confined to exterior and specific function. Some words perform the role of the semiotic material of inner life that bespeaks of deep and vast abyss of human consciousness. Their articulation does not only describe or narrate; it signifies and explores the inner speech. Signification is not simply a verbal play. It is intricately social and ideological. Voloshinov/Bakhtin thinks that 'each and every word is ideological and each and every application of language involves ideological change' (1973: 94). Being an embodiment of ideology, sign represents communication of historically organized semiotics. Hence its temporal and spatial composition can never be lost sight of. Yet, as it has been already noted, human yearning for freedom is subtly manifested through these compositions. The different modes of addressivity suggest infinite forms of social communication in the domain of language. In fact, there is no society without ideologically conditioned signs and no sign can exist outside society, the true arbiter of all ideologies. Understanding is always a shared territory between the speaker and the listener or the author and the recipient. It is shaped in time and space which remain Bakhtin's basic categories for organizing the world through the process of addressivity. As no one can claim to be a conscious human being by living a value-neutral life, the ability to articulate a conscious discourse connotes acceptance of responsibility on behalf of the society. Constant mediation between different categories of self and other is the evidence of responsiveness. As every thought is connected to other thoughts, being always means simultaneity and sharing of existential projects with co-beings. Thus there cannot be any isolation or alienation in the scheme of all-pervasive responsiveness and answerability. Language is an

architectonic privilege for conscious human beings whose projects testify that it is impossible to be neutral in the unitary and unique event of existence.

We are in constant search for such utterances and verbal enactments whose understanding is accepted and shared universally surpassing the barriers of geography, culture and epoch. It is of course not to deny that specific historical situations shape distinctive perception of self about the dialogic others. There are certain differences which can never be overcome. It is imperative in the Bakhtinian scheme of things to respect difference, simultaneity and distinctiveness. Since we need others to be ourselves, respect of difference is more than a desideratum. With conviction about never-ending dialogue, we ourselves have to shape the others in order to be complete. Through the projects of language, we not only register our presence in the world but also prove that we are in the process of creating and thereby completing ourselves. While positing and constructing the others, we proclaim our ongoing dialogue with difference and simultaneity. Both temporally and spatially self remains open, unfinished and unfinalized; hence as addresser, his perception of difference is somewhat tentative and privileged. Encounter of self with the others cannot but have many dimensions in the projects of language. That is why dynamism of utterances paves the way for renewed significations of openness. Ultimately it results in enhancement of reciprocity in all speech-acts that the human imagination and creativity can possibly think of.

Throughout his life Bakhtin has sought to continuously develop the problematics of interactive self and other and explore the mystique of appearance of sameness along with the reality of difference. The project of language upholds the fundamental quest in a great variety of ways of which the most significant theoretical project is the architectonics of answerability. As it has been already noted, Bakhtin's world-view has

commenced its absorbing journey towards multifoliated blossoming of all human possibilities from this fundamental theoretical position. Language is enactment of existential projects and prerogatives which emerge in the world of everyday experience. The ethical questions inherent in such emergence are addressed through the unique conceptual framework of responsiveness, that is, dialogics of answerability. Bakhtin conceives ethical activity as a deed which automatically emphasizes on the process of its authoring. The impact of any deed or action may be important but, for Bakhtin, the process of creating and performing it is more note-worthy. This deed is not only a physical action, it is also an event of becoming as well as a thought, an utterance or a textual presence. None of this is possible without being responsible for particular performances. As responsiveness means sharing of responsibilities, without it there can neither be articulation nor evaluation of any performance. Through the project of language, manifold dialogues between self and others are assessed as well as fundamental alterity is celebrated. Since emphasis is on performer of a deed or architect of an utterance, his/her ability to reach out to the world inhabited by others is an evidence of dialogic extension of self. In spite of constant slippages between self and other, communication takes shape always through their reciprocal interdependence.

Bakhtin's inter-related theoretical world leads us from the sphere of architectonics of answerability to the expansion of dialogical philosophy of language. Therefore, Bakhtin/Voloshinov, absorbs our attention through *Marxism and the philosophy of language*. Whether disputed due to authorship question or not, this text also falls back upon familiar Bakhtinian notions like inner speech, implied addressee and stress or context and intonation in meaning. Whether we term them as highly idiosyncratic vocabulary or not, Bakhtin's central ideas reverberate throughout the text. We are required to explore the very depth

of such formulations : a meaning resides not in the word itself but in its relationship to author, addressee and hero. Since there cannot be a figure without a ground, contexts are to be properly understood and their variances appropriately scaled. Though contextual changes bring about semantic readjustments, many other factors influence the process of transformation. On the one hand, there is the undeniable presence of grammatical system while on the other there is almost limitless presence of trans-regulative and unfinalizable contexts. It is not easy to wish away the insurmountable differences between these two positions.

Bakhtin thought about the possibility of minimizing this difference through some projects of language. He emphasized on the act of addressivity through which words create new worlds. Emergence of a discourse signifies birth of a territory which is shared by both addresser and addressee even though their positions are apart in time and space. Let us read the following extract carefully : 'Each person's inner world and thought has its stabilized social audience that comprises the environment in which reasons, motives, values and so on are fashioned. The word is a two-sided act. It is determined equally whose word it is and for whom it is meant. As word, it is precisely the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener and addresser and addressee. Each act and every word expresses the one in relation to the other.' (1973:85-86).

IV

Thus Bakhtinian notion of architectonics of answerability proves to be the epicenter of many other important conceptions which developed subsequently as inseparable ingredients of his synchronic thought-world. That is why the exponents of phenomenological aesthetics, philosophy of language, hermeneutics, reception-aesthetics, neoformalism—all fall back upon Bakhtinian scheme of the dialogics of addressivity in different ways. Hence

interpretations of various nuances as well as sequence of schemata offered by Bakhtin cannot but be different. It is not easy to reach an agreement with regards to Bakhtin's views. The commentators belonging to different schools of thought could not agree with each other as to how various utterances or texts of the great theorist should be consummated. Particularly Bakhtinian notion of unfinalizability of meaning is not so easy to be reconciled with. When neither the text nor the interpreter is ideologically neutral, historicity of language attains more affirmation. In the two discourses entitled *The formal method in literary scholarship: A critical introduction to sociological poetics* and *Marxism and the philosophy of language*, Bakhtin has made it vivid that language is the most fundamental connection between life and art. It has been emphasized that literary language is the most complex ideological language. Because language is the site where authors should not only consummate aesthetic moments but should also conceptualize those consummations explicitly in the language of a text. Bakhtin differentiates between the discourses in life and art by opining that their difference is a matter of the degree of contextualized language in an utterance or text. The reception aestheticians do not agree with Bakhtin and put forward certain subtle counterquestions. But let us not enter into any debate here. Rather one may emphasize that Bakhtin holds that the author consummates a moment or situation and writes it in language which is by definition ideological material. When that consummated material is accepted by an addressee or a reading subject, he/she in turn consummates that language for himself/herself from within his/her own ideologically situated position.

It has been debated as to what extent Bakhtin provides a true alternative in the study of reoriented language for a new hermeneutic perspective. Moreover, it has been argued that the historical situation of the interpreter/addressee does not always

have specific identity though there are claims of gender, class, race or ideology. Bakhtin only provides possible alternative routes to understanding multiple resonances of situatedness. Language is deeply embedded in dialogism which includes historicity as well without which no verbal aesthetic construct can communicate. Being historically conditioned, language is able to continuously reinvigorate the process of signification. This entails answerability in any text. Bakhtinian alternatives influence the process of anticipation of meaning by emphasizing on the consistent re-contextualization of the philosophy of human relations.

It has been argued that textual disjunctions are part of the aesthetic whole and await fixing. These are the latent spheres of blindness which are illuminated by the insight of readers. To read is to interpret and to interpret is to effectively counter the resistance in the form of unintelligibility of text. Through the process of interpretation, readers seek to discover in which ways this can be remedied. It means upholding an approximate completion of the unifying understanding of a text and also discovery of disjunctions of part and whole for their remedy. Whether the readers' suggestions of remedy through formulation of totality of meaning can overcome the problematics effected by the presence of contradictory ideological ingredients has been debated. Moreover, it is not easy to resolve the disagreement of the subjects over the validity of interpretations of texts. Likewise it is difficult to determine which meaning may be preferred over others. This obviously leads us to the comprehension of situatedness of the readers/interpreters in terms of ideology.

In spite of adverse arguments against ideological positioning of language, Bakhtin seems to be more correct when he talks both about language as ideological material and its user acting under its direct or indirect spell. If we follow Bakhtin's logic closely, we would understand that in a hegemonic era, language

cannot but be a medium of domination and social power which serves to legitimate relations of organized force. This means ruthless destruction of all possible spaces in which the process of addressivity crystallizes. Hence language has to be reorganized as the site for simultaneous aesthetic and ideological battle which is of course inclusive of socio-cultural and political battle as well. Social action is constituted only in ordinary language communication. That is why we can conceive language as a kind of meta-institution on which all social institutions are dependent. There cannot be any reality which is not mediated by ideology and not linguistically articulated. Conceptions of reality take shape and are also refashioned from time to time. All these happen precisely within language which also concomitantly testify that consciousness of objective reality is possible only if it is experienced in contrast. Polarity of positions and situations resulting into space/time distinctions in verbal discourses reveals as to how dialogism is inherent in the foundation of language itself. In other words, the blossoming of full-fledged aesthetic activity is enshrined in the process of linguistic communication.

The world of material experiences and cultural traditions is essentially pluralistic and hence often conflicting. Naturally the impact of ideologies is at variance. The firmament of language, therefore, can never be unipolar, univocal and monological. In the context of such overriding multiplicity, dialogue operates at many levels resulting into varying aesthetic constructs and conflicting interpretations which are all ideologically charged. Bakhtin makes us recognize these mediated realities and multiple functions of ideological materials in aesthetic constructs through the prism of dialogical understanding. Language is the core of our individual and social existence. While we interpret, we struggle between the legitimating and the contestation of domination to achieve an unimpaired free space for humanities. Bakhtin affirms that interpretations are socially critical or

uncritical according to the commitment they develop regarding symbolic and social struggles that occur at the level of language.

Language interiorizes both symbolic and social struggles as well as those factors which engineer them. Bakhtin unveils not only the process of understanding utterances and texts but also those projects through which language simultaneously constructs and deconstructs history. Being hypersensitive to ideological changes recorded by the society in transition, language helps us to map ideological relations. In *'The formal method in literary scholarship'*, Bakhtin/Medvedev made it clear in the very beginning of their discourse : 'literary scholarship is one branch of the study of ideologies. On the basis of the single principle it uses to understand its object and the single method it uses to study it, the study of ideologies embraces all areas of man's ideological creativity.' (1978 : 3). Creative and other aspects of language are integrally connected with the study of ideologies. It would suffice to say that like all forms of human knowledge, language is constituted ideologically. Since all subsequent study of human knowledge are the result of ideological understanding, the role and impact of language need to be assessed accordingly. In fact, the entire edifice of Bakhtinian conceptual world rests on this. Different stages of our thought process connect us with the processes of signification, aesthetic sensibilities, social exchanges and ideological formations. We live in an interrelated world and hence pursuit of meaning inevitably leads us to the polyphony of human existence. That is why an utterance is a site of social semiotics where dialogue continuously fashions meaning and brings about aesthetic consummation. Let us summarize in the light of Bakhtin/Voloshinov : 'Each word ... is a little area for the clash of and criss-crossing differently oriented social accents, as word in the mouth of particular individual is a product of the living interaction of social forces.' (1973 : 41)

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POETICS OF DIALOGUE

Since Dialogue is the masterkey offered by Bakhtin, it is the essential ingredient for analysis of ideological semiotic value of language. As socio-cultural entity enshrined in semiosis, language is alive and mutable dialogically. It has already been discussed how language is both the process and perspective of communication among people through continuous transformation of significations. This stems from the dynamic process of history and is always expressed through unfoldment of dialogics. According to Bakhtin/ Medvedev, 'It is not within us, but between us.' (1978 :8). Dialogue is the true navigator of the inner process of understanding, comprehension and perception which enforces imagination of ideological creation. That is why, we have noticed earlier, dialogue empowers language to be a site for the embodiment of ideologies and dynamics of aesthetics.

As each word is a cluster of signals that does not have sense in itself, likewise each text is impregnated with meaning under a definitive social convention. It is a social semiotic embodiment of ideologies being continuously sharpened through dialogue. Bakhtin explored the speech genres in general and the novelistic discourse in particular to emphasize that text is a dynamic process that exists dynamically in the socio-historical arena. His investigation of utterances in context as central concern with dialogue, with renewable struggle and especially with the cumulative force of history acts upon each speech-situation. There cannot be any neutral words and speech forms which can belong to no one. Hence a text is a living socio-ideological concrete entity that lies on the border-line between oneself and the other. The Novel expresses this basic truth most successfully and hence it

is regarded as the best embodiment of dialogics. Therefore, this genre can never be analysed outside social, historical and cultural human existence.

As an individual does not exist outside of dialogue, a true novelistic discourse can flourish only in dialogue. The existence of the self and the other is a simultaneous existence, that is, dialogical existence. The novel as creative genre uniquely exhibits as to how consciousness of self teems with the consciousness of others. Bakhtin talks about Dostoevsky as the emblem of dialogical imagination because the great author has been able to create free people and not voiceless slaves in his novels. They are not monological extensions of authorial self but capable of assuming independent position along with their creator. They enter into dialogue with him, meaning thereby that they are entitled to not to agree with him and even on certain occasions they are capable of rebelling against him. Thus dialogue presupposes polyphony and heteroglossia and proves itself to be essentially democratic and anti-hegemonic in spirit. It is now obvious that Bakhtin has thoroughly transformed our ordinary and usual perception of dialogue, that is, simple conversation between two persons; it is elevated to the status of philosophical essence of communication as basic condition of human existence. Dialogue has gone far beyond ordinary oral communication and means that it is impregnated with unique nuances which guarantee human existence. It has a mystique of its own because it does not only mean construction of a tangible relationship, it also reveals conflicts and protestations.

Dialogue is an encounter that embodies history, culture and politics. It is therefore multifaceted which leads to pluralistic social locations. Hence the dialogically authored novelistic texts become the sites of cultural and political struggle in which meanings collide and have to be negotiated. Precisely for this reason Bakhtin preferred Dostoevsky's novels as manifestations of polyphony and heteroglossia. Dostoevsky rejected monologic attitude to life and

forms of novelisation. His novels indeed explore dialogically diverse accents and multiple locations of life. In fact, heteroglossia bespeaks of the situation of a subject surrounded by the myriad responses he or she might make at any particular point of time. From amongst numerous responses, the addressee opts for one's specific addressivity. The process of novelisation rests on that act of choice as well as situatedness of the participant observers. Bakhtin uses the literary genre of the novel as an allegory for representing existence as the condition of authoring. The authorial self is dialogically connected with the text which, as it has already been noted, is replete with various modes of addressivity. In a dialogically fashioned novelistic text, it is a form of governance since, along with the protagonist, it is also implicated in the architectonics of responsibility.

Any intensive reading of Bakhtinian thought-world would reveal that his theoretical firmament is basically syncretic and inter-related. From 'The Architectonics of Answerability' he graduated to '*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*' through a very interesting intermittent stage comprising of the much-debated '*The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*', '*Marxism and the philosophy of language*' and '*Freudianism: A critical Sketch*'. Though their authorship has been debated for long, it has already been argued that Bakhtin's association with Pavel Medvedev and Valentine Voloshinov may be interpreted as practical demonstration of dialogism in scholastic pursuit. These texts strongly suggest that both in ontological and authorial enterprises, the role of co-beings may be vital. Bakhtin/Voloshinov or Bakhtin/Medvedev signals that separateness and simultaneity are basic conditions of intellectual existence as well. If Bakhtin insists on differences that cannot be overcome, he does so on the basis of his own intensely lived and intellectually realized experiences. Hence sharing of existence and network of inter-relatedness have been manifested in his conceptions of dialogical imagination and poetics of novel. He went on to extend his interwoven ideas further in the books entitled

'The Dialogic Imagination' (1981), *'Speech Genres and Other late Essays'* (1986) and *'Rabelais and His World'* (1984).

Novelistic texts being sites of struggle, cultural politics and aesthetics are at the cross roads. Bakhtin speaks later about the struggle between official and non-official ideologies in the texts. The hegemonic voices try to dominate over the marginalised others and according to their own immediate and future interests fashion the truth. They proclaim it as official and try to rush out all the non-official discourses emanating from the spaces occupied by the marginalised others as irrelevant and incongruous. The dialogic imagination of a true novelist encounters this cultural politics of silencing the others and registers the presence of simultaneity and difference in the unfoldment of socio-aesthetic existence. Bakhtin's close reading of Dostoevsky's novels helped him to formulate his innovative theories of novel and dialogic imagination.

In an essentially inter-related theoretical universe, Bakhtin makes us aware about the presence of many voices in a novel in the form of protagonists and other simultaneously present figures. The narratorial voice accords authenticity to those voices by not maintaining an isolated or hegemonic position but being participants in the vibrant dialogical perspective. Though authorial self is the actual arbiter of all these voices including that of the narrator, the narrator is basically an interlocutor in the generative process of an ideo-aesthetically constructed microcosm. Bakhtin/Voloshinov held, "Life begins only at the point where utterance crosses utterances *i.e.* where verbal interaction begins, be it not ever face to face verbal interaction, but the mediated literary variety." (1986 : 145).

In a novelistic discourse, interaction is always situated in socially significant relationships among various persons. Their utterances are not always dynamic and value-charged since extra-verbal context determines meaning irrespective of intention. Bakhtin/Voloshinov argued that intonation is the link between an utterance and its extra-verbal context and an intonation always

carries some active evaluative responsibility. Reading of a novel, therefore, presupposes a close understanding of the subtlety of communication. Voices situated temporally and spatially in a novel enter into dialogue with each other. Their polyphonic togetherness implies that multi-accentuality of the system of narrative signification has been created socially as well as aesthetically. No voice is ignorable since all uses of language are equally connotative and contextual. That is why all utterances are charged with existentially and aesthetically evaluative accent.

When the novelistic discourses are chiselled out from materials of lived and imagined experiences, dialogic existence of language is foregrounded. The dynamics of language in a novel posits a site in which dialogic relationships among different figures and their contexts are realized. It manifests itself in discourse brought about by utterances oriented towards each other. Because of multiplicity of social languages invested with ideology, the novelistic discourses cannot but be emblem of multiple interlocution. The omnipresent dialogue turns the process into a symphony of co-existence. Differences do not collide; on the contrary, these are mutually illuminating. Heteroglossia is therefore the novel's generic signature, as it were, which calls for our adaptability and responsiveness to the unrepeatable and unfinalizable situation of the narrativized cluster of utterances.

II

Bakhtin celebrated Dostoevsky as the inventor of polyphonic novel. His greatness was evident in his extraordinary ability to organize the novels in a profoundly different way. Unlike other novelists, Dostoevsky made the narratorial voice renounce the right to proclaim the last word and instead granted full and equal authority to the utterances of other figures. As a creative artist the great author believed that the human being could never be finally explained. He affirmed that the Other defies moral and existential

reducibility. With celebration of dialogue at every level, the surplus of artistic vision becomes prominent. There is no finalizing or explanatory comment. The narratorial voice engages in an unconcluded dialogue with the myriad voices of the depicted figures. There is no authoritarian presence in the process of novelisation. Bakhtin tells us that 'plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousness, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices.' (1984 : 6) is the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels. The novelist's imagination and organization of materials are dialogical which resist implicit authoritarian tendency in the text. There is no scope for the narrator to proclaim any final judgment about the portrayed figures and the represented events. In various ways the discourses of self and other interpenetrate and by virtue of representing such engagement, the dialogue of the polyphonic novel attains authenticity. In the light of the interesting example of Dostoyevsky, we may attempt new placements for the great novelists of world literature through close rereading of their dialogic novelisation. Though the familiar world has disintegrated many a times and numerous strange concepts have thoroughly transformed human understanding in the post-Dostoevsky literary firmament, Bakhtin's cardinal concepts like dialogism, polyphony, heteroglossia, addressivity and answerability, dichotomy between official and non-official discourses, separateness and simultaneity etc. remain as valid as ever. We are expected only to logically extend the theoretical strategy to new ingredients and ideo-aesthetic outcome of the multiple dialogics of time and space. Hegemonic attitude to life breeds monologism and hence novelistic texts which shun monologic tendencies actually participate in a process of socio-cultural and aesthetic-ideological struggle.

In this context, primacy of magic realism in the late twentieth century Latin American novels may be interpreted as a dialogical response to the overpowering and authoritarian European conception of realism. Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *'Hundred Years*

of *Solitude*' (1967:1970) is a unique textual exploration of polyphony and heteroglossia through celebration of all embracing dialogue. It is thus also an ideo-aesthetic representation of alterities in the context of decadent modernism. Marquez's '*The General in his Labyrinth*' (1989 : 1991) or '*Love in the time of Cholera*' (1985 : 1989) may not be of that magnitude but nevertheless these are also dialogically conceived and executed . In the two concluding decades of twentieth century, we have witnessed a special kind of dialogic exposition of novelisation in the polyphonic discourses of the great Portuguese writer, Jose Saramago, viz., '*Baltasar and Blimunda*' (1982 : 1988), '*The Gospel according to Jesus Christ*' (1991 : 1993), '*The Stone Raft*' (1986: 1994), '*Blindness*' (1995 : 1997), '*The year of the Death of Ricardo Reis*' (1984 : 1992), '*The Cave*' (2000 : 2002) etc.

The Latin American novels arrived with a boom in the world literary firmament during the 1960's. A remarkable departure from the European novelistic microcosm became pronounced. The international scholars and critics talked about a flourish of new consciousness, approaches and philosophy in these Latin American novels. The concept of magic realism was discussed, interpreted and re-examined for several decades. It seems that the new firmament may be described as the Bakhtinian dialogic other in the context of the continental literary as well as socio-political hegemony. In many a texts one can discover the deconstructive role of the carnivalesque. Of course, Gabriel Garcia Marquez's '*One hundred years of solitude*' is the automatic choice as its example. The typical situatedness of the prominent Latin American novelists induced them to take up privileged positions for registering claims of their own truth. This reminds us of the famous saying of Hans-Georg Gadamer, 'understanding is essentially a historically effected event' (*Truth and Method* : Crossroad: New York : 1990 : 300). These novelists had to first disown the historical discourses imposed on them and then they had to undertake the novelistic texts as projects for discovering new hermeneutical truths.

Marquez therefore attempted to describe the hitherto concealed and unexplored reality of his country through the prism of dialogic imagination and carnivalesque fantasy. Carlos Fuentes, another great Latin American author, argued that the historians of Latin America have distorted or ignored truth in such a way that it is the responsibility of the novelists to appraise the readers of the history of the Other and find truth in the imagined past.

Julio Cortazar and Carlos Fuentes led from the front to initiate the process of questioning the validity and efficacy of Western model of modernity, wholesale denial of tradition, conception of universal truth and hegemonic ideological exercise. Paul Ricoeur's emphasis on the capacity of an individual novelist to evoke dialogical truth may be re-contextualized through negotiating with the rediscovered and reformulated other. What a novelist like Cortazar or Fuentes does, according to Ricoeur, is as follows : 'He will create something new, something which is socially and politically valid, only if he is faithful to the power of analysis which flows from the authenticity of his sensitivity as well as from the maturity of the means of expression which he has inherited' (*History and Truth* : North Western University Press : Evanston : 1965 : 174). It is very difficult to select the representative novels of Latin America. However the following texts definitely deserve special mention for their unique treatment of the carnival elements, exploration of dialogic imagination and most importantly because of the engrossing presence of polyphony and heteroglossia: Juan Rulfo's '*Pedroparamo*' (1955), Salvador Qarmendia's '*The Little beings*' (1962), Carlos Fuentes's '*The death of Artemio Cruz*' (1962), Mario Vargas Llosa's '*The time of the hero*' (1963), Julio Cortazar's '*Hopscotch*' (1963) etc.

Close reading of the representative Latin American novelistic discourses convinces us of the basic dialogical exploration of the life-world. What these novelists seek in narrative is this response of the other. What constitutes their authorial selves as subject is their Interrogations of life. Throughout there is free play of

addressivity which continuously negotiate with unresolved tensions of the socialised individual space.

III

Some more examples may be cited from literatures of many other languages. From our own reading of Indian literature, we may also talk about the exposition of dialogism and polyphonic discourses in twentieth century. As Bakhtin preferred Dostoevsky over Tolstoy, contemporary readers of Bengali literature also prefer Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) over Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838-94). As forerunner of Bengal renaissance in nineteenth century, Bankim Chandra chiselled out the genre of novel from the floating mass of traditional narrative materials. In spite of his allegiance to enlightenment, he had too many self-imposed obstacles and paradoxes to overcome. That is why he was somewhat inclined towards religious ethics of Hinduism and could not properly respond to the budding modern sensibilities. Consequently his adaptation of the European novelistic mode did not usher in fundamental restructuring and reinterpretation of individual self. On the contrary, the authorial self was always authoritarian and the figures portrayed in the novelistic discourses succumbed to monologism of different kinds. Bankim Chandra's representative novels such as '*Bishabriksha*' (The Poison Tree : 1873), '*Krishnakanter Will*' (Krishnakanta's deed : 1878), '*Rajani*' (1877), '*Sitaram*' (1887), '*Chandrashekhar*' (1875) are invested with overriding monologism. Hence the important process of addressivity suffers a jolt in each discourse. The authorial self seems to be guided by a few predetermined prejudices and allows no space for any interrogative presence which might upset the whole set of dominant social, moral, sexual and cultural values. Only the great historical novel having epic features, viz., the '*Rajasinha*' (1893) is a departure from monological narrativization. In this novel Bankim Chandra has responded to dialogism and multivoicedness. This text, to a considerable extent, foregrounds internally persuasive words.

But, in the firmament of Bengali novels, Rabindranath Tagore, by far the greatest Bengali litterateur, was the archpriest of dialogue. When he came out of the lingering shade of Bankim Chandra in his famous novel '*Chokher bali*' (1902), the impact of internally persuasive words was evident. But the struggle between monologism and dialogism was not yet complete. That is why Rabindranath went two steps backward in his next novel, '*Naukadubi*' (1904). However, in the great novel with epic features viz., '*Gora*' (1910), dialogic imagination was in full play. In this polyphonic discourse, time-space continuum is the guiding force of novelisation. It is a unique example of polyphonic discourse where we come across artistic exposition of plurality of relations in the form of heteroglossia. '*Gora*' unfolds before us a symphony of multiple voices. Rabindranath has explored a cultural continent located in time and has also been able to extend the dialogics into future. Polyphony is deeply embedded in the intertextualities of manifold utterances. It reminds us of the Bakhtinian notion of 'internally persuasive word' operative in a dialogically impregnated text where such word awakens new and independent words, that organizes masses of our words from within and does not remain in an isolated and static condition. It is not so much interpreted by us as 'it is further, that is freely developed, applied to new material, new conditions, it enters into interanimating relationship with new contexts.' (1981 : 345-346).

In '*Chaturanga*' (1915), Rabindranath explores dialogics in a unique way. The dialogues that compose the novel are not shaped beforehand because it seems that the authorial self imposes nothing on the figures created by him. The entire discourse is one great dialogue where the creator and the created are integrally connected with each other in the mode of addressivity. As Bakhtin causes us to see through the surface structure of the text, it is a distinctive exposition of the genre of novel. Because '*Chaturanga*' does neither represent a hierarchy of devices, nor a complex of themes and forms nor a set of interpretive conventions. Rather it

is a specific form of thinking and a way of visualizing the world with renovated eyes of the genre. Thereafter Rabindranath wrote '*Gharebair*' (The home and the world : 1916) but inspite of a strong presence of form-shaping ideology and insightful comments on political monologue, the text could not attain the depth of earlier discourse. In his next novels viz, '*Yogayog*' (1929), '*Shesher Kabita*' (1929), '*Dui Bon*' (1933) and '*Char Adhyay*' (1934) the author dealt with the inherent possibilities of the genre in the context of changing social and political time, but nevertheless that form shaping ideology was not transcribed to its full capacity. Moreover, the essential polyphonic ingredients were also not explored to the expected extent. Bakhtin explicates that polyphony is not simply a context plus accompanying forms; rather it is an integrated way of seeing the world that generates both. It is important to note the ideological predisposition of polyphony to a dialogic conception of truth. A true novelist possesses seeing eyes with which he discovers an appropriate form to realise that conception.

The response of the later Bengali novelists to the dialogic orientation of the genre in general and form-shaping ideology in particular was varied. Some were concerned more with the novels' special sense of language while some others concentrated in exploring the senses of social space, historical time, role of character and human action. In an epoch of colonial subjugation, the impact of European modernism was a major force in the transcription of generic energy. Inspite of great potentials of the expanding novelistic consciousness, the beckoning of the residues of legacy and aspirations for future could not always be translated into form-shaping ideology. The dichotomy between pre-modern and modern sensibilities did not culminate into dialogic understanding of life. On the contrary there was monological allegiance to either ossified ideas of the past or denial of immediate realities under the impact of eccentric subservience to borrowed ideas. The generic frontiers of the

novel were sometimes challenged while serious interrogation of the given situatedness was not always undertaken. On the wake of Eurocentric modernist exposition of the novelistic genre, dialogic essence of temporal and spatial truth was not properly attended to. Polyphonic way of seeing the world around was explored significantly by Bibhuti Bhushan Bandyopadhyay (1894-1950) in his following novels: '*Pather Panchali*' (1929), '*Aparajita*' (1931), '*Ichamati*' (1949), '*Ashani Sanket*' (1959), etc. Likewise, Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay (1898-1971) also successfully explored his novels as the creative form that best embodies prosaic vision and wisdom. The following novelistic discourses may be cited as examples: '*Ganadevata*' (1942), '*Panchagram*' (1943), '*Hnasulibnaker Upakatha*' (1947) etc. Manik Bandyopadhyay (1908-1956) also upheld the novel as a form-shaping ideology in which dialogism and heteroglossia have been the chief textual ingredients. Along with Bibhuti Bhushan and Tarashankar, Manik also successfully explored chronotopic consciousness in his novels. His representative texts are as follows: '*Padmanadir Majhi*' (1936), '*Putulnacher Itikatha*' (1936), '*Chihna*' (1947) etc. In the post-Rabindranath era of Bengali prose literature, these three Bandyopadhyayas are fondly regarded as great trio who initiated altogether new trends in Bengali literature. Through their dialogically constituted texts, these authors in fact offered new insights for their prospective readers. However, in the earlier decades of twentieth century, Sharat Chandra Chattopadhyay (1876-1938) was by far the most popular novelist. But neither his magnum opus '*Shrikanta*' in four volumes (1917, 1918, 1927, 1933) nor the hotly debated modernist novels like '*Charitrahin*' (1917) and '*Grihadaha*' (1920) was structured on dialogical consciousness. That is why inspite of Sharat Chandra's phenomenal popularity and definite historical role, the artistic zeal of polyphony has not been registered in his novels. Dialogic sense of truth of life, is, therefore, conspicuous by its absence. Similarly, the novelistic microcosm of

Jagadish Gupta (1886-1957) as reflected in '*Asadhu Siddhartha*' (1929) or '*Laghuguru*' (1931) suffers from monological approaches to life. In the firmament of Bengali novels, divergent perspectives are available where in spite of temporary success among the readers, genuine dialogue is sometimes illusory. Naturally authenticity of creative consciousness is not always incommensurable. Satinath Bhaduri's (1906-1965) '*Jagari*' (1945) and '*Dhnodhai Charit Manas*' (1949, 1951) may be regarded as more dialogically inclined than Dhurjati Prasad Mukhopadhyay's (1894-1961) famous trilogy viz., '*Antahshila*' (1935), '*Abarta*' (1937) and '*Mohana*' (1943).

IV

With the passage of time, the generic essence and frontiers have been readjusted time and again by a host of Bengali novelists viz., Gopal Haldar (1902-1993), Annada Shankar Roy (1904-2002), Jyotirindra Nandy (1912-1982), Samarendra Basu (1924-1988), Kamal Kumar Mazumdar (1916-1982), Amiya Bhushan Mazumdar (1918-2000), Mahashweta Devi (1926—), Debesh Roy (1936—), Syed Waliullah (1923-1971), Akhtarujjaman Ilias (1943-1997) and others. Bengali novel has definitely become multi-linear but that does not necessarily mean that the discourses are polyphonic. Since chronotopic consciousness has not been equally manifested, the presence of form-shaping ideology is also not discernible everywhere.

However, with the resurgence of Mahashweta Devi as an author with political sensibilities in the late sixties and early seventies, a distinctive new era emerged in Bengali novel when dialogical consciousness was explored creatively by a new generation of authors. A radical change in the author's position came to the fore whose texts bespeak of polyphonic construction of ingredients deduced from the civil and political society. Capabilities to validate the unofficial discourses marked the beginning of an altogether

new phase in Bengali novels. These authors have been inspired by Mahashweta Devi's delineation of chronotopic consciousness and plurality of independent and unmerged voices. The authors like Abhijit Sen (1945-), Sadhan Chattopadhyay (1944—), Bhagirath Mishra (1947—), Amar Mitra (1951—), Nabarun Bhattacharjee (1948—) and others blend ideological positions and extreme heterogeneity of materials quite successfully. Though they differ from each other considerably with regards to narrative perspective, nevertheless they seem to be very keen in creating the objective preconditions for the 'Multi-leveledness and multi-voicedness of the polyphonic novel', professed by Bakhtin (1984: 20).

As dialogism is the universally accepted master-key appropriated from Bakhtin, its ideological connotation can never be denied. Yet it does not only refer to an inter-related system of concepts but is also reckoned as a guiding socio-cultural force towards concretisation of meaning. It is celebrated by both literary thinkers and philosophers as liberating consciousness. It proves to be the essence of the ever-renewing process of re-reading discourses as well as their constant re-contextualization and ultimately exploration of alternative hermeneutics. As it has been indicated earlier in this monograph, dialogism and its corollaries for example heteroglossia, polyphony, carnivalesque etc. have already ushered in a completely new era in re-conceptualization and execution of hitherto unexplored process of novelisation in the domain of contemporary Bengali literature. Before the eighties of the twentieth century, Bakhtinian notions were not quite familiar for the Bengali novelists and literary critics. Debesh Roy, a noted exponent of the narrative genre as well as literary critic, had first acknowledged the unique importance of Bakhtin for the novelists on the one hand and the readers of the genre on the other. He emphasised particularly on the task of both the exponents and readers of the novels in bringing about liberation from over-powering Euro-centricism and looking for a true alternative in the domain of

the legacies of pre-modern narrative modes and reformulating them in the process.

Debesh talks not about revival of discarded and worn-out narrative modes of the feudal epoch, but about regeneration and rediscovery of time-tested narrative strategies of the community. He argued that such modes or strategies are always already in ideology which signifies that authors deduce their authority only through operating inside ideological placement. Without any exception positionality determines the truth of textual presentation and its interpretation thereafter. Debesh sought to demonstrate the efficacy of his argument, as it were, by authoring a series of non-Eurocentric discourses e.g. '*Kharar Pratibedan*' (A Discourse on Drought), '*Shilpayaner Pratibedan*' (A Discourse on Industrialization), '*Dangar Pratibedan*' (A Discourse on Communal Riot) and '*Ekti Icchamrityur Pratibedan*' (A Discourse on self-desired Death). Each title contains the loaded word 'pratibedan' promising a discourse of obviously a different kind. It signifies a departure from the habituated total subservience to story as well as budding of a reconstruction of the polyphonic narrative mode. Debesh also signalled a renewal of Indian 'Katha' mode having simultaneous presence of several anecdotes. This may be regarded as conscious scion of Indian prose epic. '*Tistaparer Brittanta*' (A story about lives on the bank of Tista) is the typical example,

As we read and re-read above texts, Bakhtin's famous discourses in the *Dialogical Imagination* automatically come to the fore. Debesh also subscribes to one of the central notions of Bakhtin that the ingredients of life are novelised through overwhelming inter-textualities. The '*Tistaparer Brittanta*,' in particular, exhibits the never-ending inter-relatedness of material existence. The authôr has produced a huge text and hence he had to extend the generic boundaries as well as sharpen its elasticity to a considerable extent. Besides, in the true Bakhtinian spirit, Debesh has made excellent use of carnival as a means

for displaying otherness. It is not simply a literary strategem, rather much more than it. It is organically integrated with the architectonics of the text. The carnivalesque representation of the subaltern protagonist and his marginalised life-world proves undoubtedly as to how novelisation becomes synonymous with celebration of a carnival of not-too-familiar life.

It is not argued here that contemporary Bengali novels are inclined towards dialogism. With the ever-increasing onslaught of post-modernist tendencies along with all-embracing consumerism and dehumanisation, monological consciousness is overpowering creative pursuits. The generic features of the novel, therefore, cannot but be readjusted. But under the pretext of contemporaneity, the novelists, belonging to both the older and new generations, seem to be enticed by cacophony instead of the dialogically structured polyphony. Thus, a close reading of the novels written in Bengali, by far the most prominent language in Indian sub-continent, offers a unique opportunity to examine the efficacy of Bakhtin's cardinal concepts. Of course there are many other aspects to ponder over. But, on the whole, it is apparent that Bakhtin's theoretical microcosm can meaningfully illuminate the life-world and varied creative experiences of the people belonging to distant land as well. On the wake of virtual reality in the ongoing post-modern phase, all the vernacular literatures in the sub-continent are constrained to construct their responsiveness to the time and space in flux. Conceptual frameworks deduced from polyphonic national identities are being increasingly threatened by trans-national post-modernist assumptions. It is, therefore, an uphill task for the litterateurs to unmask the guiles of new monopolistic tendencies which are crippling the growth of the creative modes of addressivity and consequently the coveted poetics of dialogue. It is, therefore, imperative for us to interpret Bakhtinian concepts to understand the process of relentless struggle of human creativity against a messy world around.

We are required to differentiate between the contemporary official and unofficial streams of thought in the complicated world. In the complex scenario of presentday power-dynamics, the overriding centripetal forces tend to bluntly shun out the space of other and thereby possibilities of any opposition from the centrifugal forces. Imposition of order on an essentially heterogeneous human world signifies succumbing to semiotic totalitarianism. Hence in that process of production of discourses there cannot be any room for dialogical imagination. In order to create space for dialogics, the litterateurs in the presentday world have to concentrate in the process of constant re-discovering of the power-negating centrifugal forces emanating from the marginalized other. They are required to continually disrupt the so-called order imposed by the hegemonic officialdom. Undoubtedly the arbiters of centripetal forces are organized and systematic while the champions of otherness are disorganized and uncategorical. Yet, on some occasions, mutually opposed forces coalesce and interpenetrate as a result of which drawing a sharp line between them becomes impossible.

In the name of imposing order and system, the hegemonic official discourse arrogantly promotes monologism. On the other hand, unofficial discourses are essentially pluralistic and oppose monological closure by positing dialogic openness. These counterhegemonic discourses seek to discover the realities of heteroglossia and hence poetics of creativity is always a task to be performed. This process foregrounds responsiveness and continuous sharpening of the modes of addressivity. Indeed creativity is an ethical responsibility and therefore poetics of dialogue has to be properly understood through the prism of the ethics of answerability. This process is unfinalizable, the underlying truth of which is best perceived and executed by dialogical novels. In this context, one has to comprehend the meaning of the process of novelisation of life-world. Bakhtin emphasizes in the article entitled 'Art and

Responsibility' : 'Art and life are not one, but they must become united in me, in the unity of my responsibility' (p-6).

If we follow Bakhtin's arguments closely, we would find that the poetics of dialogue does not exhaust itself in narrativizing external reality and events. He described selfhood as essentially novelistic in term of inner dialogues and the processes that shape them over time into a personality. The novelistic self is an aesthetic and socio-philosophical construct whose essence may be properly understood through correct understanding of the import of inner speech. Assimilation and reaccentuation of various inner voices in the context of ever-expanding dialogue determine the projection of novelistic selves. Our reading experience thus testifies that dialogue is essential to selfhood and the novel is the most dialogical genre. Bakhtin develops an interesting theory of the image of person and the self in terms of social time and space. Bakhtin's emphasis on the philosophy of the deed adds a new dimension to the project of the novelistic self. It has been argued that the self is partially brought into being by the commitment of the deed itself. It is also pointed out that each act grows out of a self that is partially finalized and partially unfinalized. It may be debated that because of generic frontiers and obligations, atleast relative finalizability of the novelistic selves are to be achieved. Otherwise, the texts may not be aesthetically consummated. Here again close reading of the dialogical novels can claim that projected goals in a novel are not sufficient enough to secure a final narrative position. The response of the readers belonging to several generations may be varied and intriguing. The making and unmaking of the life-world continues and, therefore, the dialogically conceived and executed project of selfhood in novelistic texts remains unfinalizable. Hence the poetics of dialogue also remains an enticement and ever-renewable encounter.

CARNIVAL : THE OTHER STRIKES BACK

Bakhtin introduced his ideas about carnival in his famous books entitled *"Problems of Dostoyevsky's poetics"* and *"Rabelais and his world"*. Carnival, according to Bakhtin, is an element of popular history and the scion of the forgotten tradition of folk humour emanating from the very depth of sub-altern consciousness, which has been textualized. He makes use of a relatively conventional literary critical approach to explain this notion and then goes on to develop an absorbing theory having multiple dimensions. Polyphony, one of the celebrated cardinal concepts of Bakhtin, has been traced back to a distant carnivalesque past. Bakhtin's analysis of the origin of carnival bespeaks of both his scholarship and penetrating vision. Though carnivals originated in mythicized literary history, the cultural spectacles of the middle ages are invested with their many-sided presence. These historical carnivals persisted in transposed form in literary texts till the time of Rabelais in the sixteenth century. Thereafter, carnivals underwent metamorphic changes to continue even upto contemporary times in several popular festivities. Bakhtin looked through the surface structure of such carnivals and interpreted the essence which remains latent in deep structure. He concluded that the carnival played a much more prominent role in the life of the ordinary people in the middle ages. On the one hand people had to accept the guiles of power dynamics while on the other they registered protest and also stroke back against the hegemonic order. Thus the ordinary people inhabited a dual realm of existence of which one was imposingly official being characterized by the authority of the church, feudal system, the repressive state apparatus while another realm was non-conformist and unofficial being

characterised by reversal, rebellion against disciplining institutions, parody, song and laughter. Obviously such carnivals are the breeding grounds for polyphonic approaches to life.

The carnivalesque, being basically boundless world of humorous forms and manifestations spontaneously taking shape among the marginalized people, has strong political connotation. It cannot but be opposed to the hegemonic impositions and clever manipulations of the officialdom. Its presence may be traced in textual images, plot or language. Carnival is a spectacle without a stage in which the participant is both actor and spectator. It can be the subject or means of representation in a text or both. Julia Kristeva describes it as signifier but at the same time it is also signified.

Rabelais used the carnivalesque elements as strategies of reversal to travesty the very foundations of medieval thoughts as well as methods of establishing truth and conviction which are inseparable from fear, violence, morose and narrow-minded mock-seriousness and intolerance. Participants in the spectacles of carnival do not simply watch but live in it. Hierarchical structure and forms of reverence and etiquette are suspended during carnivalesque performance. Such spectacle sustained on free and familiar contact between people. Carnival evokes laughter by bringing down the exalted objects from their high pedestal to the level of the commonplace. This debasement of serious institutional ingredients is also interpreted as the process of renewal in a new life span through reversal. Carnival proves itself to be a unique strategem of cultural politics to disown and strike back at the arrogance of hegemony by forging unusual and unexpected combinations between the sacred and the profane, the lofty and the low, the great and the insignificant, the wise and the stupid.

Bakhtin also emphasizes on a concept of carnival time by which he implies moments of 'death and revival', of change and renewal which always led to a festive perception of the world. The feudal world is characterized by monologic authoritarianism which again

begets the omnipresence of carnival since it is the second life of the people. Repression and terror of the state apparatus and the political society are effectively countered by the unmediated festivities of carnival. One cannot afford to lose sight of the basic uninstitutional feature of this celebration of protest by the marginalized people. It may, in fact, be interpreted as the spontaneous endeavour of the unilluminated people to seek their own unofficial truth. The subversion of hierarchical habits of the society through uncensored folk humour automatically leads to polyphony in attitude and expression. There are grotesque aspects of the process as well which are related to bodily features and images. The gay abandon in carnival may sometimes be proved as counterfeited glee that transgresses permissible limits of decency and morality. This is, however, debatable. Nevertheless one of the important objectives of carnivalesque humour seems to be the eventual disintegration of a monological and unbending feudal order of an unaccommodating society.

II

'While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time, life is subject only to its laws ... the laws of its own time.' (1965 :7). This is how Bakhtin speaks about carnival that turned the hegemonic medieval world upside down. Our interpretation of the carnivalesque from a non-western perspective may emphasise on the wider phenomenon of transgression. In fact, even in the west, the feminists and post-colonialists are trying to deduce fresh nuances from the conceptual framework. Thus it is argued that carnival operates far beyond the strict confines of popular festivity and it is intrinsic to the dialectics of cultural politics. Yet some others have expressed doubts about the built-in view of the uses to which festive inversions are put. They do not quite agree with the perception that carnival offers a radical challenge to the status-quo.

Terry Eagleton, of course, spoke about carnival as 'a permissible rupture of hegemony' and that is where one can concentrate further. Carnival not only offers us a new methodology for investigating the social dynamics of popular culture, but invites us to comprehend its inherent political radicalism. Its great strength lies in wide participation and bounding freedom. Carnival is for all and never for an exclusive privileged few. Every participant makes and prolongs carnival and becomes inseparable ingredient of it. There is absolutely no frontier but only inexhaustible possibilities of extension. Bakhtin says: 'Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people.' In such a context, it does not remain confined to the idea of 'vision of the past'. Even its unmistakable association with festivity of medieval time calls for reinterpretation and re-contextualization.

In carnival everything that was normally revered and accorded prominence in medieval society was mocked and debased. In the contemporary hegemonic world, we may re-read such inversion as articulation of challenge to the established social order. Even though some analysts have talked about complex inter-relationships of festivity, transgression and counterhegemonic cultural politics, the immense potentialities of carnival as popular mode of fight-back can never be ignored. In spite of the tough requirement for undertaking the tremendous imaginative and chronological leap into the mystified past, the reward of representation of medieval marketplace festival in the context of today's sickly world infested with commodity-fetishism is indeed enormous. Because we are currently experiencing inversions of various kinds as a result of which the features of festivity have been completely subverted. Now fleshy grotesqueness is swallowing up every aspect of life and the official discourses are all about irresponsible and irrelevant existence. The total lack of responsiveness and addressivity is pronounced in the pretext of contemporaneity.

Where then can we find the transgressive unofficial discourse? We can find it in the perpetual silence of the marginalised other. In the Indian context the other is vast and expansive which includes multitudes of the so-called lower caste people, the wretched of the earth and, of course, the women belonging to all social categories. They have always been taken for granted and hence they were never allowed to speak for themselves. Throughout the ages, they remained as voiceless margins who could never have the authority to author themselves. There was hardly any interrogation about their static positions as literary and cultural constructs. Bakhtin's elaboration of the carnivalesque helps us to question the efficacy of institutionalised representation as public domain where there is no ambivalence. Carnival proposes to subvert the hitherto established categories of meaning and identities and the habit of confinement in stable definitions. There it resembles the project of deconstruction to a considerable extent. However, Bakhtin's unique interpretation of Rabelais and his world implores us to espouse an ideologically mystified, nostalgic and historically suspect conception of the lower classes as monolithically subversive force.

III

Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque function of the novel suggests the primacy of an inherently subversive force that effectively disrupts the official categories which confer and contain meaning. He emphatically observed : 'every age reaccentuates in its own way the works of its most immediate past'. By extending the essence of dialogic subversion through carnival, one may observe that nothing can control language and meaning permanently. However, subversion never accomplishes a clean break or an unambiguous negation and hence the process and effects of carnival should not be oversimplified. Bakhtinian concept of carnivalized subversion

connotes that it is directed against an official discourse that tends to deny the body, the cyclical nature of human life and triumph of the species over the death of the individual. He considers it to be an antidote not only to a particular dominant meaning but also to a particular mode of meaning. Carnival laughter is not an abstract negation; it undermines official discourse and challenges traditional concepts of logic and identity. Bakhtin says : 'negation in popular festival imagery has never an abstract logical character. It is always something obvious, tangible. That which stands behind negation is by no means nothingness by the other side of that which is denied, the carnivalesque upside down'. (1968:410). As it has been already noted, carnival is the rebellion of the hitherto marginalized other through reversal. Obviously carnival laughter is a strategical mask and no one can undermine it as a discursive expression of abstract negation. On the contrary, the silent spaces become eloquent while the cultivated eloquence of the upper strata is subjected to mockery and abrupt silence. Scholars detect ambivalence in carnival since it affirms and denies simultaneously and diminishes the individual but re-enables it through the strategem of collectivity. Its principal manifestation is the masquerade in which masks destabilize official identities in general. Carnival laughter humiliates and defies the pretences of the officialdom to personal power. Thereby it reasserts the power of the metaphorical body of the people and the life-cycle that transcends the individual.

Bakhtin's close reading of Rabelais' work made him conclude that simultaneous praise and abuse is part of ambivalence of grotesque realism. He comments. : 'it is based on the conception of the world as internally unfinished; at the same time, possessing as it were two bodies. The dual image combining praise and abuse seeks to grasp the very moment of this change, the transfer from the old to the new, from death to life. Such an image crowns and uncrowns at the same moment.'

(1984 : 165). This comment is replete with subtle nuances which can be profitably extended to the related spheres of human experience and creativity. Hegemony suffocates creativity by imposing arrogant closures while the silence of the marginalized other strikes back through mockery of the official ideology and encountering their pretences of finalization by professing unencumbered freedom and unfinalizable ambivalence.

Officialdom boasts of solemnity and maintenance of cultured aristocracy and hence it banishes laughter. It is founded on the principle of an immovable and unchanging hierarchy in which the higher and the lower never merged. As its binary opposite, unofficial culture is supposed to be meant for the internally degraded rustics whose collective existence is designated as the strictly polarized other. Yet the perpetually unspoken and unvoiced lowly and the unclean ones could strike back at the privileged aristocracy enjoying all the booties of life. Laughter was the weapon of the excluded other to which the extra-temporal stability of the medieval hierarchy had to succumb. The carnival brought about the disintegration of a seemingly invincible strict feudal order and made the fusion of the official and unofficial possible. The days of sterilized polarization were finally over. Carnavalesque humour did not remain confined to the lower strata as the prerogative of the rustics; on the contrary, it gradually ascended to the realm of literature and ideology, which were so long exclusive domains of the privileged strata, and fertilized them in unprecedented way. Carnival re-contextualized the theme and forms to such an extent that there was ultimately a basic transformation in the conceptualization of the life-world. An open-ended process of hermeneutics was born and concomitantly adherence to finality was considered unimportant. Freedom and dissent became the hallmark of creative genius.

There are many complicated ingredients of grotesque realism as well as the features of carnival which warrant

cautious interpretation. Bakhtin's presentations in *'Rabelais and his world'* require close scrutiny. Bakhtin revealed that Rabelais was often misunderstood and his grotesque images were misread as simple political allegories or as obscenity and cynicism. According to Bakhtin, correct placement of Rabelais in the legacy of popular humour can only help us to discover interesting different dimensions to his aesthetic notions. Reading of carnival in the proper perspective can offer us a way of recognizing the differences and eccentricities latent in the generic features of the novel. It is argued that carnival exists in certain novels at the level of both form and theme. Through understanding of carnival, one can substantially transform our reading strategies. Appreciation of different categories of grotesque realism and carnival may reveal that a historically situated text has several layers and that the essence of deep structure may differ considerably from apparent structure of meaning.

As European scholars have interpreted the nuances of carnival in several ways and explained the potentials of specific novels written in various European languages in a carnivalesque fashion, likewise Indian scholars may also speak of the impact of carnival on certain novels. The reading of Bengali novels in particular offers us an interesting opportunity to explore the un-institutional non-official discourses in the context of colonial and neo-colonial power dynamics. It is interesting to note that in the last decade of the nineteenth century, we came across a unique example of carnivalesque novelisation in *'Kankabati'* (1892), written by Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay (1842-1919). This text helps us to understand notion of carnival as the very process of replaceability. When a scholar talks of carnival as a relational and not a substantive phenomenon, it is expected that he would furnish an account of dialogic interaction of elements. Trailokyanath's *'Kankabati'* may profitably be explained in such a way. During the heyday of colonial modernism in Bengali literature, the novelists generally faithfully followed the pattern of official

discourse and hence, inspite of occasional search for an alternative mode of narrative, carnival was conspicuous by its absence.

It is significant that during the last two decades of twentieth century, the impact of post-modern fantasy brought back carnival elements in the Bengali novels. Nabarun Bhattacharjee's (1948-) '*Herbert*' (1993) and '*Kangal Malsat*' (2004) are two unique examples while traces of carnivalesque reversal and humour may be detected in Swapnamoy Chakraborty's (1952—) '*Chatushpathi*' (1995), Sadhan Chattopadhyay's (1944-) '*Paltipuran*' (2001) and such other texts. As it has been already noted, Bakhtin's emphasis on the concept of unfinalizability is integrally connected with the process of re-contextualization and re-valuation of the given situatedness. There is excess and hyperbole in order to evoke laughter as well as fantasies and dreams to transgress the habituated barriers of reality in such texts though they may differ from each other substantially in degree and outcome. Rabelais believed that laughter, as an aesthetic tool, frees human consciousness, thought and imagination for new potentialities. Bakhtin extended the original scheme of carnival laughter and transformed the orgy into a multi-dimensional regeneration of marginalised possibilities. Our close reading of the relevant texts reveals as to how, carnival liberates by freeing us from humdrum realities in daily life. Though the scholars speak about joyful destructions of all established truth, nevertheless it cannot be denied that a new mode of dialogue in the carnivalized novels ensues in the pretext of experimenting with new horizons of human thought.

The hegemonic aristocracy often imposes dogmatic and finalized trajectory of thoughts. Carnival tends to resist such dogmatism so that new and free creation can take place on the basis of full exploration of all potentials. The hegemony is always arrogant and unaccommodating; its discourses are violative and monological. Bakhtin tells us in his notes of 1970-71 : 'violence does not know laughter, analysis of a serious face (fear or

threat). Analysis of a laughing face ..., the sense of anonymous threat in the tone of an announcer while transmitting important communications. Seriousness burdens us with hopeless situations, but laughter lifts us above them and delivers us from them. Laughter does not encumber man, it liberates him. ... everything that is truly great must include an element of laughter. Otherwise it becomes threatening, terrible or pompous; in any case, it is limited. Laughter lifts the barrier and clears the path' (p. 134-135). Bakhtin's contentions are indeed very interesting and significant. Carnival not only provokes laughter, it also elevates its participants from both pompous artificiality and dreary habits. Laughter makes a mockery of arrogance and violence. But the most important observation is that greatness must be endowed with an element of laughter without which its solemnity may be degraded into uninspiring and sickening terribility, artificial grandeur and suffocating pompousness. On the contrary, carnival draws attention to alternative ontological and hermeneutical projects of the mankind which are always tentative, inconclusive and forever renewable. Carnival is therefore alternative fountainhead of fresh communicating modes, promises of liberation and arbiter of genuinely new insights.

IV

Bakhtin's understanding of carnival-induced laughter and its significance in the formulation of novelization is multilinear. The concepts of heteroglossia and chronotope have been shaped initially by the liberating potentials of laughter. With the passage of time, the processes of re-conceptualization and re-contextualization thoroughly transformed the ideas and their manifestations. Moreover there was continuous interference by the chroniclers of hegemonic history. Likewise the strategies of the marginalized had to be readjusted from time to time. It is

therefore important to study the changing manifestations of carnivalesque humour in the context of history in transition. Bakhtin also pointed out that the literary parody studied in contemporary times is an impoverished and reduced version. According to him, 'in modern times the functions of parody are narrow and unproductive. Parody has grown sickly, its place in modern literature is insignificant' (1981 : 71). In ancient times it was rich with complexity and strength but, in the name of simplification, contemporary parodies have denuded themselves and hence its multiple potentials are lost. Mono-dimensional interpretation of parody or laughter ignores its creative dialogics. Bakhtin regarded carnival humour as corrective of reality which signifies that laughter contains within itself the possibilities of elevation. It celebrates growth and transcendence while encountering the institutionalized hegemonic pretensions.

There are many aspects in the carnivalesque subversion. It is important to recontextualize carnival to suit the changing socio-aesthetic perspective. It has been argued that carnival strives to redistribute the available world, around the value system of human beings. The concept of chronotope can also be explored in terms of carnival. Besides, there are the questions of responsiveness and heteroglossia, polyphony and unfinalizability. When one speaks of the novel as becoming a sort of carnival body, the idea of pure loophole becomes pertinent. It is also held that the role played by carnival in real life of culture may be compared to that of the novel in literature. Laughter is regarded as the eternal loophole. When novels are interpreted in the terms of loopholes, laughter becomes absolutely essential ingredient for novelistic sensibility. It demolishes fear for hegemonic logic and institutions. In Bakhtinian thought, carnival is both a process and strategy to unveil a distinctive sense of the world. It is used to connote multiplicity of truth and their ambivalences simultaneously. As a technical term, it caters to many interconnected ideas. It has already been noted earlier that carnival promotes openness and

incompletion in which all important socio-aesthetic values are accommodated. Carnival dismantles all closed structures of beliefs and attitudes and proceeds to make mockery of serious given situations. It is altogether a subversive and resistant counter-idea that inverts top and bottom. It is both a material and symbolic gesture that brings down the sacred to the domain of the profane and then paves the way for renewal and refertilization.

We have already cited some instances of novelistic discourses of the Indian subcontinent which represent such process of reconceptualization and opening up for new direction as well as new beginnings. Whatever might be the outcome, it is proved beyond doubt that rediscovery of the spectacle of carnival in a new light is a historical necessity. Carnival does away with status quo and articulates fundamental challenge to its prospective re-emergence. Terry Eagleton observes: 'Carnival, after all, is a licensed affair in every sense, a permissible rupture of hegemony, a contained popular blow off as disturbing and relatively ineffectual as a revolutionary work of art.' (1981 :148). In order to perceive the inherent cultural politics and radicalism of carnival, we are expected to comprehend as to how particular elements of popular culture are situated in relation to the wider structure of society. Secondly, in the context of changing historical and cultural perspectives, the institutional and hegemonic formulations also tend to recover their lost ground by incorporating certain popular practices. Such counter-subversive reversals are also to be effectively negotiated by a fresh mode of carnival. Thus it is an effective social dynamics of popular culture which can always have a new lease of life by articulating protests and discovering aporias in the fortified discourses of the privileged.

Bakhtin was indeed the only theorist for whom popular culture is the privileged bearer of democratic and progressive values. Carnival is not simply a nomenclature; it is in fact the foundation of alternative system of thought that has the confidence to

withstand the guiles of hegemony. Carnival promotes and directs active discursive interventions conditioned by precise social and historical circumstances. Since every significance is essentially social, it has to be achieved through struggle. Carnival inspires us to respond to the yearnings of illumination even in the wake of arrogance and negativity. Popular culture strikes back because complete deconstruction of the given situatedness is the essential precondition for reconstruction. Different elements in carnival make it evident that the importance of dialogically interrelated set is inevitable in the illumination of truth. In the context of pluralistic cultural and political experiences of Indian sub-continent, we can describe the carnivalesque polyphony as the dialogic flux of collective desire. This desire crystallizes protest and rebellion against the tendency of overcentralization in the contemporary post-modern and neo-colonial phase of globalization. Bakhtin's carnival proves itself to be a source of regeneration of the marginalised and a possible resurrection of human world. Thus carnivalesque manifestation of collective desire displays a built-in affinity for the oppressed and the marginal. It is thereby proved that in every new historical epoch, humanity always critically evaluates, supplements, develops and enriches its inherited cultural values in the light of the new opportunities and new objectives confronting the society and in accordance with the requirements of the specific social forces.

Carnival is incompatible with monolithic orthodoxy and relentlessly counteracts it with the transfigurative power of collective life. When the institutionalized official discourses choke the popular voice under the weight of deadening intellectual orthodoxy and unbending arrogance of power, carnival mocks and ridicules the explicit hostility of the hegemonic strata. This is the response of the boundless world of humourous forms and manifestations which continuously oppose the official aristocratic culture. Carnival humour is directed against the hegemonic social relations which tend to

isolate and alienate the vast majority of the people. Earlier we spoke of resurrection of carnival in Bengali literature in the wake of colonial and neo-colonial phases of socio-historical experience.

V

While Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay's (1847-1919) 'Kankabati' (1892) was a unique manifestation of folk carnival humour, Nabarun Bhattacharjee's (1948-) '*Herbert*' (1993) is an interesting instance of urban carnival humour. The close reading of these two texts prove beyond doubt that resurrection of carnival in fact dismantles linearity in the composition of novels. It is definitely significant that just before the western model of the novel was adopted in Bengali literature, carnival spirit was conspicuously present in two pre-novelistic discourses viz., '*Alaler Gharer Dulal*' (1858) and '*Hutum Pnchar Naksha*' (1862). In the initial phase of urbanisation and modernization, the colonial society in Bengal was witnessing more penumbras than illuminated spheres. The emergent middle-class was caught between the Scylla and Charybdis of the degenerated feudal orthodoxy and the futuristic orientation of the colonial masters. Carnivalesque appeared as the response of an undecided and decentred society. With the arrival of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, indecision and decentredness were replaced by decisive situatedness and concentricity and hence carnival had no place there. It has already been noted that whenever there is a departure from the institutionalised hegemonic discourses, carnival spirit was temporarily resurrected. Besides Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay, carnival dynamics registered its presence in the discourses of Parashuram (1880-1960), Shibram Chakraborty (1905-1980) and Syed Mujtaba Ali (1904-1974). Such infrequent presence of carnival spirit continued till the concluding decades of twentieth century when neo-modern and post-modern sensibilities ushered in new phase of uncertainty, indecisiveness and decentredness.

Nabarun Bhattacharjee's (1948-) '*Herbert*' and '*Kangal Malshat*' are two unique examples of the current phase of carnivalisation in Bengali novels. Besides, the antinovels of Subimal Mishra (1943-) and Sandeepan Chattopadhyay (1933-2005) may be cited as typical instances of carnivalised discourses. In these discourses two highly interesting carnivalised celebrations of counteraesthetics has already been spoken of. There Nabarun Bhattacharjee, the author concerned, uncovered as it were the ideological range of the novel as a genre. Nabarun's exploration of the carnivalesque provides his novel with sets of specific strategies for relativising the discourses portrayed thereby. These strategies are evident in their incarnation in vividly embodied and concretely situated figures (both human and non-human) and the juxtapositions of discourses marked as high and low, inner and outer. The dialogic subversion has been extensively used by the author to disown all the hegemonic pretensions of the official discourse. Even the established projects of communication have been distorted with gay abandon. The carnivalesque in such novels projects crossing of boundaries, the breakdown of all categories of class, gender and genre that occurs in any carnival worthy of the name. The author and his representative narratorial self consciously promotes and cultivates multiaddressivity where all seeming contradictions are integrated. The status quo is challenged and thwarted with the help of the subversive mechanisms of carnival.

Of late Sadhan Chattopadhyay has been experimenting with the process of carnivalization in order to obviate the counter-ideological onslaught of the institutional hegemony. His '*Paltipuran*' (2001) and '*Satpurush dot.com*' (2003) are two unique examples of dialogic subversion where the non-official is strategically juxtaposed with the official. None of them has any affiliation to the post-modern discourses. On the contrary these texts carefully disrupt all habituated linearity and practise literary

transgression both as effective protest and yearning for a higher level of ideological consciousness. Yet it has to be conceded that both in the modernist and the late modernist phase of Bengali novel, the impact of decadence and consumerism as well as subservience to the allurements of national and transnational hegemonic literary practices is more pronounced. Hence the propagation of dialogic subversion of carnival is very few and far between. Isolated novelistic discourses like Swapnamoy Chakravorty's (1952—) '*Chatushpathi*' (1995) or Rabishankar Bal's (1962—) '*Timirer Harlem*' (2001) proves that Bengali novelists seldom interrogated the established processes of reconfirmation of hierarchy. Such experiences of reading the discourses of third world literature open up many a queries. But the basic truth is never-the-less affirmed that carnival is explored and profitably used by the litterateurs when they are perfectly aware of the discontinuity of institutional history or conception of history as crisis.

In contemporary times traditional binary opposites like the high and the low or the sacred and the profane are continuously waning along with their accompanying socio-cultural terrains and semiotics. Yet hegemonic pretensions associated with hierarchical officialdom still survive. Obviously carnival spirit also concomitantly discovers new strategies of mockery and inversion as the response of the suppressed. Thus, although the social force of carnival may appear to have been displaced and fragmented, it retains a symbolic importance which is central to post-colonial phase of history. It is now our task to correctly comprehend the historicized interpretations of the reminiscence of carnival. It seems that Bakhtin's notion of carnival has the thrill of a cultural and biological universal. In spite of the process of overpowering dehumanization, cultural politics remains an artillery of the marginalised against the arrogant impositions of the hegemonic aristocrats. Ridicule remains the most effective means of curing inelasticity: 'It explores the pompous, corrects

the well-meaning eccentric, cools the fanatical and prevents the incompetent from achieving success. Truth will prevail over it, falsehood will cower under it' (*Christopher Stone : Parody* : 1994 : 8) Carnavalesque ridicule, laughter, fun and festivity are thus essential ingredients of purification which tear asunder the fortified conservative institutions and usher in a new phase of collective freedom and mobility.

Various subtle nuances of carnival undoubtedly inspire us to re-read our literary and socio-cultural discourses. We feel emboldened to reaffirm that there is no sole possessor of truth. Rather it is born between people collectively searching for it in the process of their dialogic interaction. In the contemporary uncentred world of post-modernism, with increasing imposition of virtual reality and virtual space, this very truth is endangered. We are facing unprecedented onslaught of the illusory advertisement of consumer goods as cultivated exhibition of counterfeited signifiers. In the wake of such all-devouring monologism founded on the counter-ideology and counter-discourses of the wielders of power, only the spectacle of carnival can still inspire us to dream about the blossoming of a thousand flowers. Likewise it has also been evident that only the carnival spirit can be courageous enough to gun down the official centre of hegemony. It is a cultural war between the repressors and the repressed. Reading of history proves beyond doubt that Bakhtin's notion of carnival is basically a relentless struggle for achieving truth inspite of the guileful polemics of untruth. It cannot be dismissed on the plea of having 'a strong element of idealization, even Utopian visionariness.' Though every age has its own norms of official speech and propriety, its masks would always be torn apart by the collective protest against any claim to singleness of meaning. The downtrodden people would always mobilize themselves against the pseudo-seriousness of the dehumanized official culture. Carnival would always remain a site in which multiple cultural forms combine.

The marginalised people would emerge from pluralism of human existence as well as the essence of historical density to counteract hegemonic intensions as untenable. Ultimately the people as excluded other would prove to be the rebellious and regenerative force that would destroy the status quo in order to chisel out newer and finer worlds.

WHAT IS BAKHTIN FOR?

It is now imperative for us to define and explicate polyphonic truth in the context of our historically conditioned situatedness. In a fragmented world, Bakhtin brings solace for the dispossessed by emphasizing on the multiplicity of focuses and creation of new connectivities through creative cultivation of openness. It has been argued quite often that Bakhtinian ideas are labyrinths but it cannot be denied that by virtue of constant repositioning and revitalisation of potentialities, new schemes of linkages may be discovered in those labyrinths. One has to relocate the great thinker and reappropriate his ideas in accordance with one's own positional formulations. Though Bakhtin may have ignored gradual development of his thought processes and instead has been frankly repetitive yet it is the responsibility of his recipients to construct a viable system out of his works. It is definitely not an easy task because one has to guard against the tendency of monologisation. Because if one loses subtle nuances of his utterances and dampen their resonance, it amounts to fail to 'transpose a Symphonic theme onto the piano keyboard'.

Bakhtin fascinates and inspires us particularly by suggesting most authentically that nothing is finalisable in life. Moreover, meanings in life are never exhaustive; instead these are everrenewable projects where one has to act to be able to mean. A truly activated life does not develop mechanically; rather it unfolds itself, responsiveness is innate in the process and hence authenticity and insight are also implicit in the process of recontextualization of life-as-text. It connotes that Bakhtin's theoretical microcosm is not confined simply to the polemics and poetics of literary genres; on the contrary, it encompasses the prosaics of collective socio-cultural life.

Bakhtin is never confined to the boundaries of pre-determined frame-work; rather he is the true arbiter of conceptual globalisation in its most positive nuances. This enables us, the inhabitants of the perpetual marginal space in the Indian subcontinent, to participate creatively in the heteroglossia of existence.

Bakhtin provides us with vital clues about dialogical methods of conceptualization as well as processes of understanding the true import of eventfulness and the inter-relations of the social milieu, temporality, space, action and individual character. We learn to comprehend the far-reaching consequences of the dialogics between the figures and their grounds. We also learn to signify our own pluralistic experiences in the context of collective hermeneutics. This has opened before us more direction and possibilities of the life-world. Though there is a risk of miscomprehension and misapplication of Bakhtinian conceptual paradigms, nevertheless the challenge is worth exploring. Those who venture to speak from the margin in the Indian sub-continent, can definitely attempt a surveillance of Bakhtinian thought-world for their typical real-life non-literary situations as well. Obviously they have to be very cautious about the implicit and explicit logic of Bakhtinian categories. In the new scenario, the impact of global consumerism and the neo-colonial hegemonic onslaught of information technology on the marginal ethnic communities has been total. Consequently the menace of dehumanisation has become so stupefying that the most important process of generating and sustaining dialogue in the society seems to be threatened.

But here again Bakhtin rescues and reassures us. We are inspired once again to search for the locus of vitality as well as of social and individual creativity in the seemingly denigrated everyday realm. The communions and encounters through discourses in real life prove to be the constant epicentres of generating potentialities and significations. Though our daily experiences are outwardly slow and narrow, their inherent intensity and dynamism cannot be denied.

Bakhtin teaches us to look for the processes of addressivity in those seemingly common-place and casual everyday utterances. This is what makes the Bakhtinian concepts most relevant and truly noteworthy. So long worldly wisdom has sought to make us sceptical about discordance, difference and familiarity since familiarity breeds contempt and difference begets disharmony. But we have now come to know that difference and simultaneity may be the corner-stone of human existence. Likewise, familiarity is worked upon to achieve anew the theoretical paradigm of defamiliarisation which is regarded as one of the basic preconditions for creativity. Thus unity and unification may not be as desirable as they are supposed to be. Since dialogue is everywhere, the infinite is also in everything. In spite of the apparent slow and narrow space of the marginal beings on the wake of globalisation, correct exploration of the polyphonic life-world founded on dialogics firmly entrenches the faith in ever-changing, eternally great, unfathomable, infinite and pulsating life around.

II

Bakhtin teaches us to be always on guard against anything that darkens our judgement at any point of time. If necessary, we should be prepared to struggle with our own monologising tendencies in order to reaffirm the dialogics of life. Without entering into the debate of poetics versus prosaics in Bakhtin's thought, we may emphasise on the continuing projects of addressivity in individual and social life. This is obviously most needed in strife-ridden multipolar societies of the Indian sub-continent. Our obligation is basically towards our own responsibilities and responsiveness. Particularly in the widespread habitat of the Bengali-speaking community, it is an inescapable desideratum. A complicated process of interactivity between history and geography has turned collective situatedness into an epicentre of a plethora of eventfulness.

In spite of occasional crisis and catastrophe in the communal existence, life moves on. There is neither finality nor closure for the community; only the focuses and points of emphasis are being constantly readjusted. Undoubtedly Bakhtin inspires us with his unparalleled utterances viz., 'there is neither a first nor a last word in dialogue'. Bakhtin helps us to understand our own social perspective and cultural world in a better way. When he talks about the presence of centripetal official discourses and centrifugal unofficial discourses in the realm of society and culture, the level of our awareness is definitely elevated. We are then able to reinterpret the intertwinement of various contexts and texts in our strife-ridden epoch. We understand that the official discourse seeks to impose order on a messy, disarrayed and heterogeneous world which obviously reminds one of the repressive strategies of power centre. On the other hand, the unofficial discourse tends to disrupt that imposed order because it originates in the rebellious spirit of the voiceless marginalised and down-trodden people.

Here we would definitely disagree with those western critics who argue that the unofficial discourse continually disrupts the order of the centripetal force for no particular reason. Their intention is clear. For their historically conditioned positions as lieutenants of hegemony, they cannot accept that the unofficial discourse contains any semblance of organised or unified opposition to hegemony. These critics, for obvious reasons, disagree to draw a sharp line between the official and unofficial discourses. Whatever might be their opinion, our daily experiences even at the mundane level, unmistakably prove that responsiveness can never be institutionalised. In fact, heteroglossia, one of the basic concepts of Bakhtin, leads to constant evaluation of new meanings and tonalities manifested in daily life only because the arrogance of centripetal official thought-processes is effectively countered.

This calls for an alertness and preparedness to be able to change focus as well as modes of responses. The apparent disorderliness of the unofficial discourses cannot be simplistically equated with chaos. Life-world is neither given nor inheritance; it is a task or project which can only be renewed as it can never be completed. That is why the proposition of the creation of an integral individual self as well as collective existence of a community is basically the project of a lifetime. None can ever complete it; yet it has to be undertaken and celebrated because it is an ethical responsibility for a self as well as a community.

III

Thus Bakhtin provides the ideal healing balm for the fragmented world of ours. We are to share his considered opinion that each self is unique because each aggregate of the related and the unrelated is different. Likewise each community is unique on the strength of its unrepeatable ingredients of history, tradition and locationality. Each has its own distinctive embodiments of material and cultural significations. We may deduce this conclusion from Bakhtin that for each person and community there cannot be any fixed formula for integrity. Also there is no substitute for one's own project of selfhood as well as for the signature of a community. That is why ethnic identity is never mutually transferable nor can it be ever usurped or swept away by any sort of hegemonic conspiracy. Yes, there cannot be any escape for either an individual or a community from the ethical obligations of every situation at every moment. This is, in fact, one of the central premises of Bakhtin, viz., 'there is no alibi for being.'

Close reading of Bakhtin not only kindles our understanding about the novel as the best generic expression, it elevates our conceptions of self, society and language to an unprecedented extent. But this is not all; it enhances our sensibilities with regards to daily communion with the common men around and corrects

all digressions in various schemes of interrelatedness. Bakhtin's conceptual frameworks are never meant for the elites only. On the contrary, we learn to be more attentive to the nuances in the people's voice, tiny shifts in intonations and thrusts, loopholes and sudden withdrawals in everyday discourses. This is no over-sensitivity which jeopardises dialogue; rather it makes us more responsible and sociable to the simultaneous existence of our co-beings.

Bakhtin is thus no exclusive property of the scholars for augmenting their literary polemics; on the contrary, he is a thinker with a difference who, as a propagator of the protestant unofficial discourse, reaches out to the marginal space of the unvoiced commonplace existence. It is, therefore, the bounden duty of the readers to recontextualize and reinterpret Bakhtin's thoughts in a creative way. This re-reading is obviously replete with ideological connotations with distinctive insights and rhythms of their own.

Undoubtedly we are also unhesitatingly different as recipients. We understand that our own history and geography have endowed us with unfinalizable contexts. Nothing can change our basic conditions. This is not only non-western, it is emphatically Indian and more importantly it has ethnic specificity. Our given existence is neither trivial nor an aporias; our apparent backwardness or weakness is being transformed into points of strength and possibilities. In the global perspective, we may seem to be lingering at the periphery; but the vexing question is, in the frankly decentered post-modernist mayhem, why should we imagine a veiled hegemonic centre at all?

On the contrary, we may fall back upon Bakhtin for generous support to our projects of innovation, potentialities, creativity, freedom and genuine openness. As Bakhtin has used Dostoevsky's ideas profitably, we may also echo the words of the great thinker to reaffirm: 'nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the

world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future' (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* : 166).

Yes, the future indeed lasts long, even for the marginal linguistic communities in the stupefying epoch of globalisation. It appears that distinctive ethnic identities will be submerged under the avalanche of neo-colonial cultural imperialism. An infinite void is being cultivated relentlessly which, as the typical blackhole of contemporaneity, threatens to suck up memories of tradition and aspirations for a better human world. In such a grim scenario, Bakhtin's reassurance that all is not lost and the ultimate word about the world has not yet been expressed indeed dispels bitter despair and rejuvenates our mind. If there is no closure and conclusion anywhere, why should we lose confidence on the openness, freedom and sociability of existence? Rather we would have to undertake the task of renewing our projects of conception and action for a better humane tomorrow. Our life is enshrined in freedom of creativity and activity in a dialogical interrelatedness.

If we look more closely at the historicity of the collective experiences of Bengali community in particular, we find that creativity is always present and everywhere pro-active at different stages of time. Nevertheless, from nineteenth century onwards, collective creativity has been constantly sharpened by multilinear eventfulness and hence socio-cultural history always proclaimed its fundamental openness to the participant observers. The ingredients of history are also its makers. In no point of time, they can impose any closure or finality; instead they stick to the transformative tendencies of creativity. Many a times different sorts of levels have been attributed to the typical trends of a particular time. But these remain close categories and hence cannot accommodate the true spirit of creativity and pursuit of meaning through dialogical processes. Besides, the socio-cultural and intellectual experiences suggest constant search for alternative models. Hence the tentative position of

the social leaders and litterateurs of the community remains tentative and bi-polar.

IV

Partition of Bengal in 1947 is the watershed in the history of Bengali community when both structures and essences of the historicity of its ethnic existence have been denied with suicidal frenzy. There was forced diaspora and amnesia which resulted into massive displacement and endless struggle for rehabilitation. The natural habitat of the Bengali community was in complete disarray for different reasons. New complexities emerged with passage of time and the entire community became prisoners of history and captives of geography. The true polyphonic import of historicity was lost sight of. The intelligentsia in the post-partition era were by and large oblivious of their past legacy and present predicament. People, as individuals and social beings, were not quite aware of unfinalized discourses of history.

On the contrary, they became easy prey to a new hegemonic order which foregrounded the fundamentalist options and positions to be final and irreversible. There was hardly any interrogation of the imposed history revalidated by the new power-elites who were actually the scions of internalised colonialism. It was forgotten that history can no longer remain history unless particular experiences of the community are meaningful and actions are responsive. Here again Bakhtin illumines our understanding about history as open-ended and unfinalizable.

If historicity is a matter of multiple potentialities, one may undertake a new historiographical project and re-examine the imposed discourses. Because what has been represented to us may be only apparent and not real. If time is open and each moment has multiple possibilities, then both historical and

narrative discourses are expected to celebrate openness and inconclusiveness. Bakhtin has explained to us as to why only the novel among the speech-genres is most responsive to this 'open present' and actual historicity. Can we talk about a project of novelisation of history as well where textually represented reality is only one of several possible and explorable realities? Perhaps this is relevant for most of the disarrayed Bengali community in the post-humanist situation at the juncture of the millennium.

Novelisation of history connotes true understanding of the significances of eventfulness as well as their reconceptualization. This also reminds us of the famous formulation—'Time is not a mere parameter, but an operator. It fills events as much as events fill it.' Bakhtin's wonderful studies of Rabelais, Dostoevsky, Goethe and the chronotope provides us with interesting clues about exploration of the development of the concept of temporal incommensurability. This can be profitably used with regards to our own life-world in the context of varying networks of dialogic relationship. This signifies that, at any given point of time, a person is so integrated with his community and spatiality that he emerges along with the world and he reflects the historical emergence of the world itself. We thrive in the plurality of social time because every epoch of history is both silently and manifestly unfolding the orchestration of polyphonic unity. One only needs the Bakhtinian 'seeing eyes' to explore the nuances of multitemporality.

Each of us individually and collectively requires to be mediators in the on-going dialogues with the world around which includes other individuals and communities. This leads us to the notion of 'outsidedness' as the conditioner of one's experience which again is embedded in the famous Bakhtinian concept of 'surplus of vision.' This surplus is reciprocal and it is equally relevant to different forms of aesthetic, ethical, political and intellectual activities. Here we may refer to the following

observation of Bakhtin in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* : 'Dialogic relationships are a much broader phenomenon than mere rejoinders in a dialogue laid out compositionally in the text; they are an almost universal phenomenon, permeating all human speech and all relationships and manifestations of human life—in general, everything that has meaning and significance'. (p-40) In the earlier chapters such basic propositions of Bakhtin have already been explicated. It has also been noted that meaning is a communal possibility. Simultaneously we are also expected to be aware of an essential existential logic, viz, 'to be means to communicate'. That is why, in the context of contemporary loss of validity of the projects of communication, we would have to re-emphasise on the inevitability of dialogical communication inspite of occasional paradoxes and uncertainties. In fact, a truly living community can never deny the architectonics of responsiveness through continuous dialogical formulations. That is how a community can remain creative and pro-active inspite of its confrontation with heavy odds.

V

Any project of situating a great theorist anew yet has to confront this basic question: where do we begin! The idea of relocating Bakhtin in a disintegrating world is not merely an academic exercise. As we have already noted, many a cardinal concepts are automatically put to close scrutiny and we become increasingly aware of the sharpening of the decenteredness of perspectives and overwhelming sense of excess in the wake of globalization. The ethno-linguistic milieu of the Indian subcontinent has been historically commissioned as it were to respond through their literatures and cultures to the uncertain socio-political and intellectual climate of the late twentieth century. In the early years of the budding twenty-first century, the milieu perhaps feels a disturbing affinity with the intertwinement of the birth-pangs and the death-

knells of a disordered epoch. It signifies that we are witnesses to the ruins of hitherto existing orders of meaning on the one hand and tendencies of the emergence of enigmatically tentative hermeneutics on the other.

In this context, reception of Mikhail Bakhtin transcends mere problematization and explication of reality. On the contrary, the recipients belonging to the unexplored domain of the excluded others are inspired to initiate persistent interrogation of their own situatedness, the unknown and the unanswered. By and large, thorough examination of so-called inscrutable and indecipherable elements of the contemporary hegemonic epoch and its overpowering official discourses is gaining momentum among the litterateurs and cultural activists. For historical reasons, the Bengali milieu is the forerunner in the process of relocating Bakhtin; however, of late, the awareness is gradually spreading among others. A new critique is now possible incorporating and deciphering encounters with the repressed histories (socio-cultural and literary), languages and voices represented by the geographically isolated ethnic groups, women and the underprivileged. In fact, in the context of hegemonic 'mainstream' cultural politics of the geographically privileged Aryavarta (Northern India, abode of the Aryans), not only the sub-altern North-East, but also the entire Eastern region may be regarded as the disadvantageous.

That is why, inspite of having most noteworthy literary treasures among the Indian languages, Bengali is negotiating the challenges of complexities and uncertainties of time and space of various kinds. Being confronted with the lingering penumbras of colonial modernity and ill-prepared masks of assumed post-modernism, the literary and cultural activists are suffering from the crisis of tentative and inauthentic existence. In spite of having immense potentialities for dialogic experiences in various moods and situations, the overpowering interference of monologism seems to be unassailable. The new generation

of literary practitioners find themselves always at the crossroads, holding their discourses and critiques seemingly ill-at-ease with their language and process of contextualization. There are lots of gaps, limits and silences in formulation of genres and lack of coherence in textual presentation and problematisation of varying contexts. It is not a fact that the presence of dialogue is not comprehensible in contemporary life. But nevertheless the regulatory assumptions of centralization and monological tendencies cannot simply be wished away. In the epoch of ever-increasing dehumanisation unleashed by globalization, the concept of uniqueness of given existence and positionality is under perpetual threat of total erosion. The literary practitioners and cultural activists are therefore softened up, submerged and thwarted in an excess of disruptive and transgressive exercises. They are confused and perplexed with the recent break-ups of all communicative modes and the resultant loss of transparency.

The intervention of history in the life-world of the Bengali literary and cultural milieu has been total. Achieving independence from the colonial British power meant partition of not only the land of the Bengali people, but also their legacy and collective memory. Religious fanaticism of its worst kind had unleashed unprecedented horror in the civil society that inflicted bloodiest wound in the very soul of Bengali community. Thus it was the extreme reversal of one of the fundamental postulates of Bakhtin viz, every being is a co-being. Forced amnesia engulfed the sensibilities of the Bengali people who seemingly assumed irretrievable identity of Hindus and Muslims. As time rolled on, the great divide widened and consequently religious fundamentalism tended to be latent or manifest in the literary, social and cultural discourses. The impact of partition of India was manifold. Genocide, mass exodus and bitter struggle for rehabilitation provided absorbing materials for new dramatics of life. Nobody noticed that the natural habitat of the Bengali people

had been unceremoniously dismantled. West Bengal, as one of the many provinces of truncated India, tended to dismiss linguistic identity and all cultural signifiers associated with it as non-prominent intertextuality in the synthetic discourse of Indianness. In post-independence period, pan-Indian capital took absolute command over the political economy and the resultant cultural semiosis. New concepts dug in the Bengali psyche while the steady growth of cultural amnesia was inversely proportional. History was misread and misinterpreted that served the interest of the new hegemonic Indian polity. The lessons of partition, exodus and diaspora were never attended to. On the contrary, the religious identity of the partitioned East Bengal was blown out of proportion to deny the historicity of literary, cultural, social and intellectual legacies of the undivided Bengal.

VI

History did not wait too long to prove how grievously wrong was the partition of Bengal tainted with genocide and mass exodus. On 21 February 1952, the language martyrs in Dacca clearly indicated that the mischievous provocators of two-nation theory were the worst enemies of the people. Both in India and Pakistan, what mattered most was the blatant arithmetic of political and economic power. The compradores relegated the peoples' history as well as aspirations to the margin and sought to ensure only the complete sway of the national capital over all regions. India's partition was inevitable because the insatiable hunger for power grabbed the key players at the top while the unsuspecting common people remained mesmerised under the spell of their so-called images as 'hero'. A close reading of history unveils the fact that the capitalist forces representing two particular linguistic communities were not at all ready to share the market under any circumstances.

The great religious divide between the Hindus and Muslims was further complicated by some particular linguistic identities viz., the Hindi and Gujrati speaking traders on the one hand and the Urdu and Punjabi speaking nascent bourgeoisie on the other. Both the groups distorted the meaning and expression of nationalism to suit their own immediate and far-fetched interest. Indeed the religious overtones of their different brands of nationalism turned politics into mask and history into merry-ride. The common people remained transfixed into their habitual indifference while the hegemonists, for all practical purposes, thoroughly transformed the concept of country into market which however, had to be divided among the plunderers for their uninterrupted control over booty.

Communal tension and mutual hatred were therefore engineered by these dark forces through their political agents who were masquerading as nationalist leaders. They were nothing but convenient masks for the real game players underneath. Thus the cessation of colonial rule was little more than apparent. Hence the partition of India also paradoxically signified the beginning of a neo-colonial epoch. That in no-time made its ominous presence felt through rapid institutionalisation of exploitation and subservience of the civil society to the political society and state power.

However, history continued to unfold its paradoxes and celebrate aporias. It was evident when the Pakistanis made a gross miscalculation in East Bengal. They tried to drown linguistic identity under the avalanche of religious fanaticism. In the absence of capitalists among the Bengali, Punjabi and Urdu speaking hegemonists sought to dominate by using brutal force and imposing Urdu as the only state language on the non-obliging populace. They dismissed all protests contemptuously and took the people for granted. Hence they were first bewildered and then angry when the perverted logic of religious fundamentalism did not work at all. It was evident that the

people of East Bengal were not prepared to succumb to the forced cultural amnesia and, to the contrary, refused to accept Urdu as the compulsory state language for the Muslims. They fought bitterly first for the legitimate status of Bengali Language in the state and gradually the innate democratic content of the peoples' movement crystallized irretrievably into the all out struggle for creating Bangladesh.

In spite of several setbacks and aporias, Bengali sensibilities flourished to a great extent in literary, cultural and intellectual tradition. By and large, Bengali attained the coveted position of dignified signifier as Language of protest and regeneration. Yet paradoxically uncritical submission to colonial modernism continued as mainstream literary and cultural project. In the concluding decades of the twentieth century, however, interrogation of several modernist ideas and monopoly of cultural capital was earnestly undertaken. Concomitantly habituated conceptions about life and literary practices were no longer validated. In such a perplexing situation charged with uncertainties, ecstasies, tentativeness and inconclusiveness, it is not easy to locate and determine the alibi for creative understanding, 'in time, in space, in culture'. The task is more difficult particularly for the marginalised linguistic and ethnic communities who remain perpetual Other both socially and psychologically. Yet this is the ideal scenario for rediscovering and revalidating the multipolar relevance of dialogism and polyphony.

Therefore, we return inevitably to the central question for us : What is Bakhtin for? In the contemporary context of the worst as well as the most menacing dehumanisation, people in the margin are unceremoniously lost in wilderness. Hence an adequate response is much more than a desideratum.

VII

The marginalised neither have voice nor any presence in the hegemonic world-order. But Bakhtin reassures us that all is not

lost; we can yet again claim our own human world back. It is imperative for us to recognize that all seemingly neutral formalisms need to be replaced by socio-ideologically aware openness. Bakhtin tells us again and again that concepts are not products of different systems of abstract categories; rather these are to be regarded as ideologically saturated human constructs. Though we are now constantly threatened by progressive loss of centrality and meaning, new hermeneutics for our life and world has to be excavated. Yes, catastrophe has struck us but our great human family moves on through ever-renewable experimentations of heteroglossia. Undoubtedly there is neither a first nor a last word in the continuous unfoldment of existential drama.

Bakhtin, the archpriest of unfinalizability, implores us to renew our struggle for meaning constantly because, with the relentless shifting of boundaries in the world around, there cannot be any longer a single vantage point. Heteroglossia is not simply a philosophical category for us. Along with its implicit dialogical essence, it is our masterkey. Let us, therefore, reread Bakhtin more closely and intimately and find out in amazement as to how he not only talks to us but also talks from amongst us. Indeed he speaks better for the people in the margin.

Languages of heteroglossia, like mirrors that face each other, each reflecting in own way a piece, a tiny corner of the world, force us to guess about and grasp for a world behind their mutually reflecting aspects that is broader, more multileveled, containing more and varied horizons than would be available to a single language or a single mirror. Yes, Bakhtin is here and now for replenishing our impoverished human world through ever-renewable existential dialogue. He lives on...

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Time rolls on deconstructing everything around which includes value-system, worldview, beliefs and faiths, truth and illusion, facts and fictions, positions, preference and conclusions when both subjectivity and objectivity are in a flux, nothing is finalisable. Yet because of this unique openness, it also becomes an indispensable responsibility for all serious readers of literary and cultural paradigms to be relentless interrogators. Particularly on the wake of hegemonic globalization, blatant consumerism is obliterating all hitherto established nuances of human universe. Yet these very enigmatic uncertainties of contemporary time may be effectively countered with the armours provided by Mikhail Bakhtin.

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