

An Evaluation of Mikhail Bakhtin: *Epic and Novel*

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Abstract : This paper explores Mikhail Bakhtin's Epic and Novel, focusing on how the novel breaks away from the rigidity of older literary forms like the epic. While the epic speaks from a fixed past with a single, authoritative voice, the novel is fluid, dialogic, and unfinished. It listens to many voices at once. Bakhtin's key concepts—heteroglossia (the presence of multiple voices or speech styles within a text), polyglossia (the coexistence of multiple actual languages within a cultural space), and the carnivalesque (a subversive mode that inverts social norms and allows the low to mock the high)—show how the novel mocks, questions, and reshapes tradition. The paper also considers how these ideas open space for feminist criticism, where Bakhtin's attention to language and marginality aligns with the feminist project of giving voice to the silenced. In a world where dominant discourses still shape who gets to speak and how, the novel becomes more than just a genre. It becomes a space of resistance and possibility. Through Bakhtin, the paper argues that novels are not just stories—they're sites of struggle, freedom, and transformation. They allow writers and readers to imagine differently, speak differently, and live differently.

Keywords: Tragedy; epic; heteroglot; polyglossia; carnivalesque.

Russian Formalism (1910s-1930s) mainly focuses on the linguistic and structural aspects of the text. It is a language-oriented school of literary criticism that methodologically studies the text. Bakhtin is one of the twentieth century's greatest theoreticians associated with Russian Formalism. The application of Bakhtin's *Dialogic Imagination* in the interpretation of any text is multi-faceted. The political ambience and the suppression of literary voices during the time and the days of Stalin in the Soviet Union gave rise to the different social and complementary theories of Mikhail Bakhtin. After looking at Russian linguist and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin and his linguistic approaches in the field of Literature, this paper will glance upon his 'Dialogical theory', the dichotomy between 'Epics and Novels' and 'Carnavalesque'. Further, it will deal with how 'Feminist Criticism' defines Bakhtin in their discourse.

This paper will discuss some of the prominent features of the novel as a modern genre in the discipline of Language and Literature. According to Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin's observation in his well-known essay "Epic and Novel", "a novel has fluidities; it has countless possibilities to ever develop and grow. It doesn't have any fixity and hard-core rules to follow. He contrasts the developing form of the novel to that of the developed form of the epic" (39). Further, he says how epic limits its possibilities and a new way of development. When it comes to differentiate between epic and novel, we can take various assumptions linguistically; the language of the epic is dead, monological, and mythic whereas the language of the novel is always alive, young, and dialogical. Logically, the novel is young in the sense that it comes long after the Writing and the Book. Somehow, the coming of the novel as a full-fledged genre in the Modern Age breaks the hegemony of epic and tragedy. Whether it is a matter of concern for other high-standard literary genres or not a novel with its unconventionality attends the highest position in the reading society even amongst intellectual people. It provides entertainment with its new and speculative ideas. Long gone is the age of epics and tragedy that was based on pre-ordained concepts and stipulated structure. The novel is dynamic in tendency; it can make fun of the highest form of literary genres.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries respectively, the novel was not at its finest height, it was just a part of the Collective Genres of Literature but the situation of contemporary times is slightly altered where we focus more on the novel than poetry, drama, and epic. The standard of the novel as the finest genre evolves according to time and its multi-dimensionality. Thus, the second thing which rises in the subsequent age is the novelization of the other genres. Later on, various forms of novels make their presence in the world of Literature: Baroque novels, Pastoral novels, Sentimental novels, etcetera. So, to say, the Baroque novel was slightly influenced by the epic which limits its popularity. The main motive behind these forms of the novel is to make fun which shows the art of Parodying and laughter at the same time.

Here, Bakhtin expands the characteristics of such writings including Heteroglot and Dialogised language and others. He argues how it makes the novelisation of works more open-ended and freer. It infects all other already developed and developing genres with its features of novelization, progress, and inconclusiveness. It liberates all other higher

or lower genres in their unique development and bridges the gap between the writer and the reader. Moreover, the subjectivity of authors is lost somewhere with the objective relativity of novels and their sub-genres (Ronald Barthes). Subsequently, in the novel character speaks for itself without the hindrance of the authorial position.

The novel reflects the tendencies of a New World as well as continues to anticipate the future development of the literature collectively. From Classical to Contemporary literary theories, all fail to explain the novel as a closet. It is almost impossible to classify a novel as a definite and clear-cut genre. It has various categorisations; it could be single or multi-layered. In the Machine Age, novels have mass production as a source of entertainment because of their flexibility and various forms i.e., Verse form, Prose form, etcetera. The re-emergence of new novel types in the eighteenth century begins with the novel Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* and its dynamic hero. Fielding, in the characterization of his novel, appended it with a Preface sequentially, where he gives pieces of advice about the structure of the novel. Later, Hegel formulated the theory of the novel and he suggested that the novel shouldn't be poetic; the hero of a novel shouldn't be heroic, the hero should have both positive as well as negative features as a developing and evolving persona.

Comparison: The novel has a positive factor; it is both critical and self-critical which is rare on the part of other developed genres. It brings rupture in the classics of Greek and Euro-centric dominant genres because of its peculiar and stylistic features. It has multiple voices in the writing as well as in the speaking. 'Polyglossia' adverts a revolutionary change in the reading of the novel where the narrator, as well as the character, have their own articulating space and position. Whereas epic was never a poem about the present, about its own time. It has since time immemorial a poem about the past, it validates the authorial position. Here, the locations of the author and the reader are always at one's past, which maintains an 'epic distance'. When it comes to epic, we don't know whether its history existed before or not. We never question its validity and so-called superiority. On the other side, the novel has the potential to re-think and re-evaluate which makes it experimental. The highness of epic comes with its 'epic distance' and its relativity with the past. It has become an object of recollective memories, unlike the novel as a tangible object. We cannot reduce the lacuna between the epic and the novel but we can mold novels according to our perception and choice. An epic

belief in the making of memory of the past and at the same time, it also retains the uniqueness of cultures, civilizations, and traditions. Epic doesn't preserve its contemporary profile whereas a novel does. A novel is transitory; it flows without a beginning or an end in a circle while an epic symbolizes authority, power, and hierarchy.

Tracing history, the novel has its roots in the folklore of the Ancient as well as in the Middle Ages. Laughter and novelistic language bring down the status of epic as a subject of the high genre. In Classical times, the Serio-Comical is the predecessor of the novel. It disobeys the rule and structure in Aristotle's *Poetics* for epic and tragedy. Sometimes, it lacks plot and composition and demolishes piety and fear (Katharsis). In epic, the story may begin and end at any moment. For example- The *Iliad* by Homer is an excerpt from the Trojan Cycle. It doesn't consider how the war ends. Who wins and who loses? This specific impulse to know the details is characteristic of the novel. In our daily lives, the novel plays the role of a surrogate mother or a substitute. Obsessive reading of a novel takes the reader into its world and even dreams come based on novelistic models. Nowadays, it is a common phenomenon, when the reader imitates the fictitious hero. The coming of letters, diaries, confessions, manifestos, etc develops the novel and its novelistic language. The world of the epic is monolithic and pre-formed, where gods and men are on the same plane, they have a common language, fate, and perception. For instance, when Vyasa was framing *Mahabharata*, he distanced his image as an absolute past. It has been rightly assured by Bakhtin, that an epic prophesies the past while a novel predicts the future.

Bakhtin explains carnivalesque in the discourse of Serio-Comical when the hero wears the mask of an altered character which produces an ambivalent ambience. In Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Dorian masquerades his dark image as a sophisticated man of the Victorian age. Carnival plays a vital role in the development of Gothic (*Dracula*) and Thriller novels (*The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde*, *Prometheus*). Masks have multiple and inexhaustible possibilities for the human face. It can adjust in any situation; its destiny is variable so it is independent of the formal plot structure. As epic and tragic heroes don't have masks for faces, gestures, and language; that's why they couldn't alter their real identity in any circumstance. In epic, the serious death of the hero is inevitable where masks perish; contrary to the mask never falling on the death of the comic hero follows his rebirth.

Satire is dialogic, multi-styled, and provides a realistic reflection of the Heteroglot world. While parodying the language of the author, the hero may enter into dialogic relations. The author as a narrator and hero as a character have their voices which are the aspects of Heteroglot language. The genre which has multiple speeches and voices is referred to as Dialogized language. Somehow, the novel has its creativity and plasticity, sometimes based on personal experience, in it born the future of all genres. In the ancient world, the novel couldn't develop all the potential that came to light in modern times. In the dialogical dimensions of the novel the clown, the fool, etcetera play a major role.

'Polyglossia' means a multiplicity of language, is the novelistic feature of the language, it has a multitude of languages, voices, and discourses. It frees the superiority complex of one language over the other and its tyranny on our consciousness. The creation of new meaning comes with the interaction between diversifying languages whereas 'Heteroglossia' conceptualizes the historical and social nature of language as a multiplicity of languages shaped by different social and ideological factors.

Bakhtin's concept of language is significant in Feminist Criticism because it is concerned with the disruption of patriarchal language and the exploration of marginal voices within the dominant discourse. Monologic language disrupts different voices in the discourse of Feminism which include issues of apartheid, violence against women environmental issues, and others. Based on the social and historical aspects of language, Feminist dialogics promote the disruption and critique of oppressive ideologies. It also attacks monolithic views of feminism that are stereotypical in contemporary culture. Feminist dialogics favours critical approaches based on the concept of designation. It considers specific contexts and conditions of women representing multi-voices.

The linguistic approach of Bakhtin applies to feminist criticism because the struggle between different voices is fundamental to his concept. Thus, Bakhtin provides the linguistic aspects that explore and identify women's multiple voices and positions. The voices of female writers have been controlled repeatedly in the publication house too. In most cases, they have to write either in the language of man or by adopting pseudonyms since the millennium. Therefore, in the closing stages, we can say that Feminist dialogics may prove useful in the reassessment of women writers.

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Work Cited

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