Lecture – 13
Dialogism (II)

Hello and welcome back to another lecture on Literary Theory. Today, we are going to continue with some of the other theoretical concepts that were introduced by Mikhail Bakhtin and more specifically, we are going to focus on three topics.

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- Heteroglossia

- Carnivalesque

- Chronotope

The first being Heteroglossia, the second being Carnivalesque and the third being Chronotope. But, before we start discussing these new concepts, I would like to briefly look back on the discussion of our previous lecture.

And I would like to try and situate Bakhtin and his work within the broader context of this course on Literary Theory. So, in my previous lecture, I had insisted on Bakhtins uniqueness as a theorist, but here I would like to suggest that in spite of this uniqueness, Bakhtins work can be placed and in fact, should be placed to borrow one of his own terms biologically vis a vis some of the established schools of Literary Theory of the 20 th century; there for instance, Bakhtins focus on discourse and the way discourses are constructed and structured places his work squarely within the tradition of 20 th century

western literary theory that I have referred to as a linguistic turn, theories which follow the linguistic turn.

Now, we have already seen this Bakthinian preoccupation with language in our previous discussion on polyphony and we will notice it even more strongly when we take up for discussion the concept of Heteroglossia today. But, connected with this linguistic turn is another characteristic aspect which is the relegation of the author to the margins of literary criticism. And in this aspect too, we see Bakhtins work sharing certain similarities with the new criticism, with Russian formalism and also with the later theoretical schools like structuralism; for instance or post structuralism.

Thus, in Bakhtins a theory of polyphony for instance, we have already seen how he prioritizes the multiplicity of utterances, the multiplicity of voices. And, there the authorial voice exists but only as one among the various other independent and unmerged voices and consciousness which together constitute the tension filled dialogic space of concrete language use.

However, even while taking note of these connections and these overlaps, we will need to be aware, we will sort of need to remember that Bakhtins theory does have it is own peculiarities and singularities which do not allow us to very easily categorize Bakhtinian work as either part of Russian formalism or as part of the later post structuralist movement and this I have already told you in my previous lecture, but this we need to remember. And as we deal with more office theoretical concepts today this uniqueness of Bakhtin should become even more apparent to us.

So, the first theoretical concept that we would focus on is Heteroglossia and the texture that we would use to understand this concept is two of Bakhtins long essays that were later compiled in the English edition, title The Dialogic Imagination.

The Dialogic Imagination

• "Discourse in the novel"

• "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse"

So, the names of these essays are Discourse in the Novel which is an essay that I have already briefly touched upon in my previous lecture and the other one is titled From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse. Now, as you remember Bakthin through his concept of polyphony was already working on a theory of multiplicity or plurality of discourses.

But in his Dostoevsky book which was our primary focus in our previous lecture, this exploration was framed as well as limited by his readings of Dostoevsky novels; nevertheless even then, a careful reader of Bakhtins study on Dostoevsky would be able to perceive, would be able to notice that this polyphonic plurality is not merely a feature of the novel of a particular novel or novels of a particular author.

But, rather it is a more widespread phenomenon that is inherent to how language is used, concrete language uses and Heteroglossia is in a way a study of this plurality that we had already encountered in the idea of polyphony, but it is a study of this plurality that is taken up at the level of language use in general and not just at the level of stylistic features observable in a particular set of novels.

However, before we make this transition from polyphony to Heteroglossia, we need to deal with another term which Bakhtin introduces in his essays compiled in the dialogic imagination and the term is Polyglossia. The word Polyglossia might sound completely unfamiliar especially to those who are not yet acquainted with Bakhtins theories, but a

related form of the same term is quite extensively used in Mundane English conversation and I am quite sure you have heard of that term and the term is polyglot.

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The dictionary meaning of **polyglot** is a person who can read, write, or understand several different languages.

So, the dictionary meaning of polyglot is person who can read write or understand communicate several different languages. For instance, most of the Indians who are educated beyond their school and college levels are usually polyglots who are comfortable communicating in at least two or three languages if not more. The term polyglot as you might now be able to guess refers to this many languagedness. But then, what does it mean? What does this many languagedness mean in Bakhtins theory?

According to Bakhtin the consciousness of polyglossia shatters the myth of the isolation of national languages and the literature produced in those languages.

Well, according to Bakhtin, the consciousness of polyglot shatters the myth of the isolation of national languages and the literature produced in those languages. So, in order to understand this, we will first need to understand what a national language might mean. Now, within the multilingual context of India relating nation with one language might sound like a rather alien idea.

But the sense of nationalism as it started spreading in Europe from after the French revolution was mainly pivoted on the concept of linguistics similarity. So, the nationalist argument is that France is the country of the French speakers, Germany is the country of German speakers, Spain is a country of speakers of Spanish, Italy is a country of Italian speakers and so on and so forth.

Now, you will also have to remember here that the boundaries of these European nations as individual nation state only got fixed after the First World War. So, the idea of nation state as a pervasive phenomenon is really something that is very recent in world history but nonetheless the point is in Europe, there is till date a very strong correlation between nation and language.

So, for instance the national language of France would be French, the national language of Germany would be German and so on and so forth. In contrast, if you look at the Indian context, you will see that we do not have a single national language. So, unlike what many of us might think Hindi is not the national language of India and in fact, there

is even a Gujarat high court judgment on this matter, but of course, Bakhtin was writing within the European context and within that context speaking about national languages and national literatures produced in those languages made perfect sense.

Now, since any form of nationalism stresses on exclusivity, there is often a myth of uniqueness surrounding national languages too. So, to sustain the exclusivity that is preferred by nationalism, national languages are more often than not looked in isolation and considered as existing in a state of uncontaminated purity. But according to Bakthin, the consciousness of poly Glossia shatters this myth of the isolation of national languages and it does so by pointing out it is dialogic relationship with other foreign languages.

Of course in certain societies, the consciousness of the presence of other foreign languages might be limited and here Bakhtins example is the society of classical Greek antiquity where the myth of an isolated Greek language and Greek literature sustained a sense of Greek nationalism in spite of the fact that Greece was administratively divided among various city states on police and actually, we have already talked about this proto nationalism in terms of a shared Greek culture sphere in our lectures on Plato and Aristotle.

But in most cases, these myths of isolated national languages cannot be sustained because of the presence of other foreign languages and these other foreign languages their presence has to be accommodated. In other words, it becomes imperative in certain situations to develop a consciousness of Polyglossia.

Here Bakhtins example is that of imperial room whose language Latin do it maintain the links between the entire sprawling empire could not nevertheless exist within the cocoon of linguistic isolation because the imprint of the preceding Greek culture was so heavy on the Roman Empire that it is language Latin was always informed by the spectral presence of Greek of the Greek language and was always situated in a dialogic relationship with that preceding language.

For us, this kind of poly Glossia is even more easily understandable within our Indian context. Thus, take for instance any of the vernacular Indian languages that we might speak, we will soon realize that we do not use that language in isolation rather our language use is constantly informed by the presence of other languages, be it the English

language which is our colonial inheritance or the other Indian languages that we might know or we might hear regularly spoken around us.

This sets up precisely the kind of dialogic relationship that we had discussed in our previous lecture on polyphony. Our utterances in any one language enters a tension filled space where it interacts with and where it rebounds from other alien utterances in other foreign languages. Thus for instance the English that I am speaking to you now is constantly being inter illuminated in my mind with other languages like Bangla for instance or Hindi, Urdu and the same thing happens when I speak let us say in Bangla.

The spectral presence of English and of Hindi is unmistakably present even then. So, conceptually what does all of this boil down to? I think this is what it boils down to at the most fundamental level. Bakhtin through his ideas like polyphony or poly Glossia was attacking and undermining certain very persistent and pervasive myths of unity and of homogeneity.

In the first case, it was a myth of a single homogeneous authorial voice and authorial consciousness that he was attacking through the idea of polyphony and in the second case that we have just now discussed, it was the myth of an isolated and homogeneous linguistic nationalism that was being attacked by Bakhtin through his concept of Poly Glossia. It is precisely in the place of this unity, this homogeneity, this singleness that Bakhtin was offering his idea of dialogism of a dialogic relationship where a plurality of elements be their different voices or different languages, all of them interpenetrate and inter illuminate each other.

So, if we are clear about this understanding of dialogism then the idea of Heteroglossia which we are going to take up right now will be quite easy to understand. Indeed one of the best ways to understand the term Heteroglossia is through Poly Glossia, so for instance, what poly Glossia does to a language externally, Heteroglossia does to that language internally.

> What polyglossia does to a language externally, heteroglossia does to that language internally. In other words, **heteroglossia** signifies how a language is dialogized from within.

In other words, Heteroglossia signifies how a language is dialyzed from within. Now, again like much of the things that we have encountered and will encounter in this course on literary theory; these cryptic sentences sound more complicated than they actually are.

So, what does it mean to say that Heteroglossia dialyzes a language from within? To simplify matters, let us try and think about our language uses in day to day context. You will see that even when you are speaking the same language, let us say you speak Bangla, you are speaking it differently depending upon the context but, also depending upon the audience and also depending upon whether you are connected to your listener over the phone or over a device where you can see his or her face while communicating and there are many such other factors which control our language use and which diversify and differentiate our language use.

So, I am sure if we think about it, it will not take any of us much time to figure out that we use language differently when we are talking say for instance to our mother than from when we are talking to our boss or our best friend or like now when I am talking in front of a camera. This means that even when we are talking in one particular language we took the instance of Bangla, but you can think of any other language that you are familiar with.

Even if we are talking in that one language, our language use is thoroughly stratified is thoroughly pluralized from within. In fact, Bakhtin in his essay discourse in the novel

provides a much more comprehensive list of such internal stratification which goes beyond the examples that I have just cited.

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Bakhtin talks about:

"social dialects, characteristic group behaviour, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour (each day has its own slogan, its own vocabulary, its own emphases)."

("Discourse in the Novel")

Thus, Bakhtin talks about social dialects, language that is characteristic of group behaviors. So, as I said we talk differently when we are amongst our group of friends than when we are not professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups your grandmother I am sure you have noticed talks differently uses a language differently than you do, tendentious languages; languages of the authorities of various circles and of passing fashions; languages that serve the specific socio political purposes of the day every day we come across some slogan or the other and language that serves the specific purposes not even of the day, but even of the hour because each day Bakhtin says has it is own slogan it is own vocabulary it is own emphasis..

So, this internal stratification is what Bakhtin refers to as Heteroglossia. And since each of these stratified components interact with and inter illuminate each other like different languages do in the case of Polyglossia, we again come across the notion of a dialogic relationship, thus whereas poly Glossia dialyzes a language from without by bringing it in contact with other foreign languages, Heteroglossia dialyzes a language from within by establishing an interplay between the various stratifications of that languages use which typically preaches different characters from different social strata against each other in different conditions and different contexts would obviously, be a literary form

where the use of dialogism of language would be the most markedly observable. And therefore, it is no wonder that Bakhtin starts with the novels of Dostoevsky to gradually build first his theory of polyphony and then, to build the more sophisticated concepts of poly Glossia and Heteroglossia in his later essays.

But even then, we have to remember that the dialogism that is triggered by poly Glossia or Heteroglossia is not any special feature of a particular literary genre or the other rather they inform any and all concrete uses of language thus even if an author shows monologic tendencies, it is still possible to locate in his work traces of dialyzed poly Glossia and dialyzed Heteroglossia. You need as we will see later reading a text against it is green and locating the traces of plurality of voices beyond the authorial consciousness is one of the characteristic features of a literary theory like post colonialism but for now, let us move forward and take up for our discussion another typical Bakhtinian concept which is the Carnivalesque.

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The word **carnivalesque** is derived from the familiar root word carnival which signifies an occasion of festivity and celebration.

The word Carnivalesque is derived from the more familiar root word which is Carnival and Carnival signifies generally an occasion of festivity and occasion of celebration. And the most iconic image that comes up in our mind when we discuss carnival is the image of some kind of a spectacle involving parades of rights crowds of unusually bright color and dresses and generally off scenes of wild revelry and abandon.

Bakhtin points out that such carnivals were an integral part of the medieval European social life, riotous spectacles which even today from the principal image of a carnival could be regularly seen in the market squares of all medieval European towns and cities. Now, Bakhtin observes that these body celebrations which characterized the spirit of carnival, they were deeply subversive in nature. So, the spectacles usually revolved around the willful suspension of the social rules and hierarchies that were otherwise very strictly imposed.

For instance, in a carnival one could see a buffoon playing the role of a king or for instance ecclesiastical figures very respected figures otherwise it could be seen being parodied and being ridiculed in street acts during a carnival. So, in general carnival involved and in fact, it still involves to a certain extent a limited extent the turning upside down of the social norms as they were otherwise known like the placing of the foolish over the wise for instance, the pour over the rich and so on.

Bakhtin notes the underlying spirit of these carnivals was to challenge and even degrade the hierarchical regulations that guided the medieval societies and constructed the formal and official truth about it and this is what Bakhtin writes in his book Rubley. And, his world which is the source text from which we can derive Bakhtins idea of the Carnivalesque, I quote from the book.

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"[C]arnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions."

(Rabelais and His World)

Carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions. Now, such turning upside down of the social hierarchies and norms through laughter dismantled howsoever temporarily. The official and formal discourses and truths of social existence and situated these official versions official discourses, official truths within a field of multiple other possibilities and this again brings us back to the notion of dialogism.

Because this tension filled space of contradictory subversive and alternate social possibilities bring us back to that familiar concept of things being within a dialogic relationship inter illuminating each other; however, whereas, we have. So, far encountered the idea of dialogism only in relation to language and it is literary expressions, Bakhtins writings on the spirit of carnival shows that the site of dialogism is as much social as linguistic but then, how does this conception of the carnivalesque spirit inform our understanding of Bakhtins literary theory.

Well, according to Bakhtin, with the advent of the renaissance in Europe, Carnivals were squeezed out of the public life by the state authority of course, to control their subversive possibilities. However, Bakhtin argues that as the spirit of the Carnivalesque was denied expression in the form of street spectacles, it was gradually observed from that time onwards by literature and literary genres like parody for instance or satire started performing the same kind of subversion and degradation of the official roots and of the social hierarchies that were earlier done through carnival performances.

François Rabelais
(c. 1483 – 1553)

•*The Life of Gargantua and of Pantagruel.*

Source: WorldCat Identities

And as an example of this absorption of the Carnivalesque in literature, Bakhtin mentions the 16 th century French writer Francois Rabelais and he mentions his famous satirical proofs piece named the life of Gargantua and of Pantagruel. But, what is important for us to note here is that according to Bakhtin, it is not this one work that is imbued with the spirit of the Carnivalist though his book Rubley and his world is primarily focused on this particular work and this particular author.

What we need to note here is that the whole genre of the novel can be read as a literary form that is open to the tendencies of the Carnivalesque. This is because unlike an epic for instance which is a product of the hierarchical world of the pre modern age and is therefore in complete sync with the official truths and the formal discourses of that world. A novel is still comparatively new it is still an emerging genre which can not only accommodate the official discourses of the social hierarchy, but which can also accommodate at the same time periodic discourses ridiculing and challenging the official versions, the official truths, official uses of language and this dialogic placing together of different discourses as we have already seen is one of the hallmarks of a major novelist like Dostoevsky.

So, we have come almost to an end of our discussion, but before we end I would just like to briefly touch on the concept of Chronotope which is again a very typical Bakhtinian concept.

The term **chrontope** actually builds upon two separate Greek terms, the "chronos" which means time and the "topos" which means space.

The term Chronotope actually builds upon two separate Greek words; the first being Chronos which means time and the other part is topos which in Greek means space. So, the theory of Chronotope is basically something that explodes the dialogic relationship between space and time and it explores how these space time relations inform different kinds of literature.

So, let me clarify this with an example. Think of all the romances of kings and queens and princes and princesses that you might have read as a child. Now, try and think about the wait time unfold in these romances. Can you remember for instance romance in which the hero during the course of his adventures grew old or became feeble or changed his personality, I think not yet such change is precisely what characterizes the everyday passage of time in our life.

So, in the romances unlike in our lives as these nights and even seasons and years would pass while nothing would apparently change. No one in these romances seemed to grow old or to age or even to change his or her attitude towards life or towards the fellow human beings. In other words, the time of the romance is what might be referred to as empty time and Bakhtin refers to this time as adventure time.

So, empty adventure time is a time of the romances. Now, think again about the species or the location against which the adventures of the romances were enacted. These spaces even if referred to in any details were actually mentioned in a generic form and did not
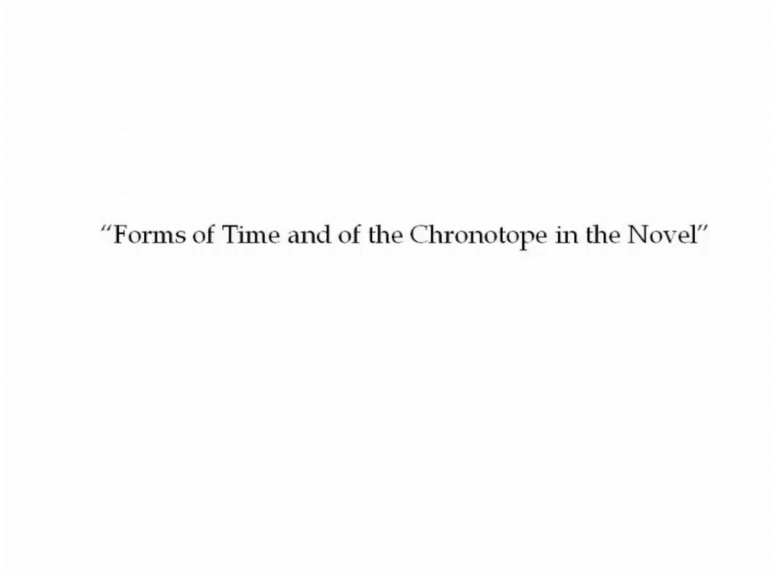
have any real impact on the story. So, for instance think of some of the Bollywood romances where neither the hero nor the heroine is usually seen growing old and in these romances, the locals in which their romantic tale unfolds is so irrelevant that the director is not even apologetic about shooting a sequence in distant Croatia, for instance or Hungary or New Zealand for a film that is otherwise shot almost entirely in India..

So, the empty adventure time in a romance is usually coupled with an empty space in which the adventure is enacted and this coupling creates a unique Chronotope that is unique to romances, but we need to remember that this Chronotope or this space time relationship that I have just elaborated is not universal.

So, for instance if you were to compare this kind of time space relationship with the kind of time space relationship that is encountered in let us say a bildungsroman, you will see that the Chronotope that is used there is completely different and it is completely different primarily because unlike in a romance in a bildungsroman, the entire story hinges on the idea that the protagonist actually grows and the protagonist changes over a period of time.

So, the Chronotope used in a romance cannot sustain the narrative of a Bildungsroman but unfortunately because of time constraint I am unable to explore in further details the various different kinds of a Chronotope that Bakhtin writes about. But, I would definitely encourage you to study them in his essay titled Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel.

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"Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel"

That essay is also part of the compilation the dialogic imagination and so, with this we end our discussion on Bakhtin and his theories of dialogism. In our next lecture, we will again take up a new topic.

Thank you.