Chapter 10
A Bakhtinian View of the Development of the Novelistic Genre in India

Jyoti S. Rane

In his book *The Novel and our Time* (1948), Alex Comfort, claims that the 'novel' was a product of an 'asocial society.'[1] According to him, historically the novel is not only the art form of social barbarism but the art form of scientific method.[2] He points out that, "The novel has grown to its present position (i.e. its position in 1948 in Europe) through the nineteenth century from roots which existed before the industrial revolution and the advent of technical-asocial society"[3] in which the technical development in printing made the novel accessible to a vast majority of people for 'a novel cannot be memorized, it must be printed'. Also in the age of thorough individualism, 'it is radically individual in its approach, since it addresses itself to one reader at a time, and it can make no assumption about his beliefs or activities comparable with those which the early nineteenth century novel, addressed to a section of society could make…' Comfort further comments on the subjugation of the drama, primarily to the novel and secondarily to lyrical poetry, and the elimination of communal forms of poetic and dramatic expression, except in closed groups.

Novels have a very special relationship with conversational language and with life and everyday genres. The novel is the youngest and the sole genre that continues to develop—a final definition of the word novel has not been reached. It contains within itself several genres and sparks the renovation of other genres. It presupposes epistemology as the dominant discipline and performs a thorough contemporization of language and thoughts. According to Bakhtin, "Literary language is not represented in the novel as a unitary, completely finished off and

---

[1]Comfort (1948).
[2]Ibid., p. 14.
[3]Ibid., p. 13.

J.S. Rane (✉)
Pratap College, Amalner, India
e-mail: jsramal@yahoo.com

indisputable language—it is represented precisely as a living mix of varied and opposing voices, developing and renewing itself."[4] Thus, according to Bakhtin, it is language, and its use as both a means and an object of representation, that makes the novel a unique genre. The author loses his authoritative position. He is himself a participant despite his omnipresence in the novel with almost no direct language of his own. Since his job is to represent, to present images of characters as they exist or could exist in real life, the language of the novel cannot be a single unitary language. In Bakhtin's words, "It is impossible to lay out the languages of the novel on a single plane, to stretch them out along a single line. It is a system of inter-secting planes."[5] Bakhtin was of the opinion that the novel is grounded in 'con-temporary reality' and is essentially a genre in the making and is inseparably related to the contemporary reality as it unfolds.

In his comments on Bakhtin's 'Discourse in the Novel', Richard L.W.C. Clarke points out that "From Plato onwards, art has frequently been defined as a 'mirror held up to nature'. As Ian Watt points out in 'The Rise of the Novel' it is not for nothing that there was the so-called rise of the novel during the early modern period of Cartesian Rationalism and Lockeian empiricism. The result of this is that the novel form has come to function as the classic paradigm of literary realism. The novel is thought to verbally represent 'life' as apprehended through physical senses of the novelist."[6] Bakhtin maintains that the novel acquired its present form fol-lowing the appearance of other forms (those considered low, e.g., parody and travesty), reflecting the real and lighter side of life. He contrasts the use of novelistic language with the language used in a poetic and straightforward genre such as the epic. The novel as a genre makes specific demands upon language and opens up specific possibilities for it. In their introduction to Mikhail Bakhtin, David Lodge and Nigel Wood state that "in 1929, Bakhtin published under his own name, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art,* arguing that Dostoevsky inaugurated a new 'poly-phonic' kind of fiction in which the variety of discourses expressing different ideological positions are set in play without being ultimately placed and judged by a totalizing authorial discourse. Later on he thought that this was not unique to Dostoevsky's style but an inherent characteristic of the novel as a literary form—one that he traced back to its origins in the 'parodic travestying' genres of classical and medieval cultures—the satyr plays."[7] In his article 'From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse', Bakhtin tries to establish the role of 'laughter' and 'poly-glossia' in the development of novel as a literary form. One must remember that Bakhtin acknowledges the existence of novel as, e.g., 'Greek Romance' in ancient time; for him, however, it was a narrow form, or monological, as the title suggests. For Bakhtin, the novel is essentially formed out of many styles and many images which can be depicted when there is impiety which can develop only through

---

[4]Bakhtin (2008a).

[5]Ibid., p. 129.

[6]L.W.C. Clarke, Notes 078. R on Bakhtin's Discourse in the Novel, LITS, p. 3.

[7]Lodge and Wood (2008).

laughter. According to Bakhtin, "parodic travestying forms… liberated the object from the power of language in which it became entangled as if in a net; they destroyed the homogenizing power of myth over language, they freed consciousness from the power of the direct word…"[8]

In another article, 'Discourse in the Novel', Bakhtin states "At the time when major divisions of the poetic genres were developing under the influence of the unifying, centralizing, centripetal forces of verbal, ideological life, the novel—and those artistic prose genres that gravitate toward it—was being historically shaped by the current of decentralizing, centrifugal forces. At the time when poetry was accomplishing the task of cultural, national, political centralization of the verbal ideological world in the higher official ideological levels, on the stage of local fairs and at the buffoon spectacles, the heteroglossia of the clown sounded forth, ridiculing all… where no language could claim to be the authentic incontestable face."[9]

Throughout this article, Bakhtin uses his idea of discourse as a 'social phenomenon'. The social tone of language, according to him, has been ignored in the analysis of genres, resulting in the privileging of individual and period-bound overtones of style. Bakhtin discusses the ever-present state of heteroglossia in a society, emphasizing the fact that the language of each individual is a combination of various voices and is therefore 'unique'. It should be noted that a closed society, one not open to a situation of polyglossia, will itself be limited and 'unique'. A society monologized by the influence of myth will be imprisoned in—and by— its heteroglossia. In his analysis Bakhtin emphasizes the importance of parody. There will be no escape from the power of myth unless looked at from outside (i.e., in a polyglot situation) and travesty, which would enable thinking about every situation in its multiple possibilities. It is clear that a conscious selection of the serious word and rejection of any possible comic reflection as profanation would seriously limit any literary development in the direction of 'novel' writing.

For Bakhtin, the processes involved in creating direct word and novelistic discourse are different. The writer of epic, tragic or lyric uses the direct word and deals only with the subject whose praises he sings, or represents or expresses, i.e., he does not take other languages into consideration. He perceives his language as the sole and adequate tool for realizing the word's 'direct objectivized meaning'. The person who creates such a form ascribes meaning to it in a language which cannot escape the hold of the national myth and the national tradition.

When a myth serves the purpose of giving identity to a community it becomes restricted in the proportion of the identity of the community for the community cannot allow it to grow beyond itself. So the community 'myth' and the community grow mutually restrictive and reading the myth also becomes repeating or retelling it. Actually, myth is in fact a celebration of disorder, of that which cannot be controlled. But this is what gives the mythmaker the power to distort. Myths, because of their illogic, are more manipulable by the hegemonic since they involve

---

[8]Ibid., p. 136.
[9]Bakhtin (1981).

no accountability or answerability. It has been observed that myth and history are opposed to each other—where myth signifies the sacred constant. This explains the return to the myth. If the logic of community text is followed the 'archetype' or social consciousness is created by allowing only a certain kind of thinking. Community text raises no questions, but only offers solutions. So while myths permit centrifugalization to a certain extent community texts translate mythos into logos, thereby ensuring centripetalization. V. Turner points out that without a deliberate disruption being brought about by risk takers, the given hierarchy will tend to inertia, rigidifying, injustice and inequality….[10] A myth is essentially open in the sense that one can interpret and reinterpret it. It is also always in the making. However, when the myth assumes a certain shape in the epic, it enters an utterly finished state. It is impossible to change, rethink, or reevaluate anything within it. It is possible that heteroglossia is responsible for an arrest of the distance between the imagination projected through the epic and the existing social imaginary. The epic, which captures and restricts collective consciousness of any society can be challenged by active polyglossia which inter-illuminates languages. As pointed out by Bakhtin in his article, 'Epic and Novel', the time of the epic is sacred and 'high' in comparison to the narrative time of the novel which is of a lower order.[11] The contemporary and low, Bakhtin suggests, was 'subject of representation' only in the low genres.[12] He points out that the authentic folkloric roots of the novel are to be sought in laughter. It is in parody and laughter that the high world of gods and legends is to be 'contemporized' and brought low.

For Bakhtin, the language of the novel is categorically different from the language of straightforward genres such as the epic poem, the lyric and the drama. The novel has the potential to bring out the dialogical aspect of language. Heteroglossia creates the potential for the development of novel in every society, but a condition of polyglossia is essential to animate language, i.e., to look at language from 'outside' and to ridicule it. The social reality of a society cannot be expressed through literary forms which privilege the word of the author alone. Bakhtin believes that novel has resulted from the comic forms which preceded the appearance of the novel. Due to these comic forms in a novel "Language is transformed from the absolute dogma it had been within the narrow framework of a sealed off and impermeable monoglossia into a working hypothesis for comprehending and expressing reality."[13] He traces the origin of the novel form in a multilingual Europe where a polyglot situation enabled the writer to create images of various languages and worldviews.

In his various articles, Bakhtin's concern is with the neglect of the study of the most important aspect of novelistic discourse: the style. According to him, the social tone of the language cannot be ignored. Novelistic discourse originates in the

---

[10]V. Turner, p. 152.

[11]Bakhtin M.M., "Epic and Novel", p. 19.

[12]Ibid., p. 20.

[13]Bakhtin (2008b).

open spaces of public squares, streets, cities and villages, social groups, generations and epochs. So it is not a product of 'private craftsmanship'. What finds representation in the novelistic genre is 'heteroglossia', i.e., an image of the unique language of people from different sections of the society.

Bakhtin emphasizes that the importance of dialogue in the society for conditions of possible dialogue enables the prose writer to present an elevated form of an otherwise singular, one-sided i.e., a monological heteroglossia. It would be interesting to study this contention of Bakhtin in the Indian context where dialogue between communities and peoples was hampered for various reasons, including caste, gender and linguistic differences. Not just poets but common people in India had to live and operate within these socio-linguistic bounds so language became authoritarian, dogmatic and conservative. About such conditions Bakhtin would observe, "such ideas as a special 'poetic language' a 'language of Gods' a 'priestly language of poetry' could flourish on poetic soil."[14]

The Novel in India

India, as we all know, has a long literary tradition. The writings in Sanskrit by Banabhatta and others indicate that prose narrations of considerable length were created in India from the earliest times. These may be described as 'novels' owing to their length, yet they do not seem to have emerged from the existing social reality of their epoch. Banabhatta's contribution in this field has been taken cognizance of, for the name of his heroine 'Kadambari' is now the name ascribed to the 'novel' in at least two Indian languages—namely, Marathi and Kannada.

Dr. Ganeshan, in his "Study of the Hindi Novelistic Literature," laments the fact that even today one fails to find the variety of experimentation in style and matter in the Hindi novel which can be seen in its Western counterparts. He also states that the Hindi novelistic form was an adaptation of the English novel, which reached Hindi writers through the translation of Bangla novels. One more reason why the novel did not evolve indigenously in India is the particular brand of multiculturalism which has existed in India from time immemorial. The impenetrable walls which communities erected around themselves enabled a peaceful and perennial existence through a process of compartmentalization. There was neither conflict nor dialogue. Such compartmentalization continues to this date and even a slight inkling of interference in what is considered an 'internal matter' of a community can cause a flare up in communal sentiments. English enabled the Indian writer, "to look at language from the outside, with another's eyes, from the point of view of a potentially different language and style." About the content of the Hindi novel, Ganeshan points out that "the tendency of Hindi novel writers was not to look upon life as life but as a problem… our novelistic literature has been mostly concerned

---

[14]Bakhtin (2008b).

with morality, to improve the society. The admonishing, moralizing voice of the novelist can be heard clearly".[15] Tracing the history of novel writing in Marathi, the noted novelist and critic Bhalchandra Nemade points out that the first novel written in India was *Yamunaparyatan* by Baba Padmanjee in 1857 in Marathi. Nemade comments that a novel is a linguistic creation by the novelist who consciously selects the content and assumes a certain moral position on the problems arising out of the relation between people and society. This preoccupation with morality throws light on the inability of the Indian novelist to allow the novelistic discourse to have a life of its own. Nemade also comments on the long tradition of poetic writing which existed in India prior to the introduction of the novelistic form in the nineteenth century. Very significantly, Nemade does not fail to point that the Marathi novelist, for a very long time, did not have the courage to choose his content from the existing reality of the society. The ideology which the novelist dealt with, and which was at the center of the novels, was borrowed from Europe. As a result, the novel failed to develop as an independent literary genre in India.

Yamunaparyatan, the first novel in India to emerge out of the coming together of the European and Indian cultures of the time when the English ruled India takes a particular moral stand and looks at the existing society around from a particular angle. This novel may be a reflection of how the Marathi society of that time desired to emerge as a modern society. Thus, prose writing emerged out of this combination of the restless and striving English and restful and deliberative Indian culture. Nemade observes that while the novel as a genre has proved to be a powerful vehicle for social deliberation and constructive creativity it has not worked as such in Marathi. For this, Nemade argues that the other novelists who found it difficult to project reality promptly turned to creating the 'strange' and 'unnatural'. But that is precisely the problem which may have its solution in Bakhtin's theory. In the case of, e.g., Sane Guruji (whose name Namade cites), this writer was so entrenched in the Hindu culture (as is reflected in his novel 'Shyamchi Aai') that he could never have presented a realistic picture of the society. Sane glorifies the shortcomings of both his father and mother and is not critical about them. As a result, the novel turns out to be a melodramatic narrative rather than a thought-provoking creative work.

The period of the realist novel in Marathi began soon after 1870. This reflects perhaps the influence of English writers on Marathi writers. Another noted Marathi critic, Rajwade, maintains that the origin of the realist novel is in Europe and most of this kind of writing in India is of a low kind. According to him, the reason for this is that the Marathi realist novelist did not know whom to imitate and how.[16]

Such attempts at using the originally European genre into Marathi seem to produce a picture of English society with Indian, or more precisely Marathi, characters. Rajwade discusses great English and French novelists and compares their writings. He states how English novelistic writing has limited itself to a large

---

[15]Ganeshan (1962).
[16]Rajwade (2008).

extent while the French writers have not hesitated to criticize the entire society. To create great literature a nation needs to feel deeply unhappy and literature needs to show a way out.

Rajwade analyses the origin and development of European novel taking into consideration the historical reality and condition of the society which produced the novelistic literature. He relates the development of certain kind of novelistic literature in France and its lack in English by relating this to the historical reality of France and England during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The national will in periods of challenges encourage the writer to write in a particular way. He talks about how 'Ramayan' was rewritten by Ramdas and Mudgal during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

This brings us back to our question of why the European writer could think of different ways (reflected through their novels) of addressing their social problems while the Marathi writer could not move beyond 'Ramayan'. He takes up the case of the novels written by Hari Narayan Apte which, according to him, cannot be rated, highly because they are an imitation of European novels and not realistic in the Indian sense. He observes that it has taken very long for the Marathi novel to move the small steps from translation of novel to writing a realistic novel.

It is only after 1960 that Marathi novelists have come to grips with the existing reality of the society—the inequality, the caste system, the issues of women, poverty and problems inseparably linked with it are the subject matter of their writings. Nemade, not unlike Dr. Ganeshan, is not satisfied with the existing condition of this genre. He feels that it would be too early to prophesy a bright future for the Marathi novel. When one looks at the lack of significant development in this genre through the Bakhtinian lens we find that the average Indian (who is unaffected by the metropolitan culture) still remains under the influence of a monological culture. About the long prevailing caste and community system in the country Nemade himself remarks: "I am not against caste system but I am against casteism. In India caste system will remain. The system of innumerable groups in India will not sustain otherwise. In this vast ocean of mankind small mating groups have been maintaining their autonomy and identities through exchange of food and daughter on the basis of religion, dynasty and language. There is among them a basic principle of respecting each other. This horizontal system which has developed out of such arrangement is according to me the caste system."[17]

In an article titled 'Gandhi Centre Stage', Perry Anderson points out how Gandhi looked at the Indian civilization. It was, according to him, astonishing "that any culture or civilization should have this continuity for five to six thousand years or more; and not in a static or unchanging sense, for India was changing and progressing all the time…".[18] There was 'something unique' about the antiquity of the subcontinent and 'its tremendous impress of oneness' making its inhabitants "throughout these ages distinctly Indian, with the same national heritage and the

---

[17]Nemade (1990).
[18]Anderson (2012).

same set of moral and mental qualities". However, Anderson does not overlook the fact that "the elite or English speaking gentry were united in a very abstract way while they were in unity with their own communities/castes etc. in a very concrete way". So, the community and the caste system remained untouched by the colonial impact.

This phenomenon has had a very significant impact on the functioning of the society as a whole. While the elite-dominated public sphere of the nation tried hard to establish western values in politics and society the public sphere of the communities strived hard to retain the old set of values which held the community together. This divide in the society as a whole continues to this date. We can see that many nationalist leaders—most prominently Gandhi—were against any change in the rigid communal set-up in India. Anderson remarks how "Revolution was a greater danger than the Raj: Behind his of any prospect of it (e.g., violence) lay religious belief and social calculation. On one hand, Hinduism bound all who adhered to it into a single interwoven community, in which each was allotted their appointed station. To break its unity by setting one part against another was contrary to divine order…".[19] Very significantly, Gandhi's idea of ideal sociopolitical set up was one which was based on the set up imagined in the community text 'Ramayana' which deals with the myth of Rama. This throws light on the role of myth and deification of mythological characters in India.

In the lead essay in a volume of essays on Ramayana, edited by Paula Richman, A.K. Ramanujan takes up the challenge of commenting on the thousands of telling of the stories of Ram in India and its neighboring countries. He looks at five different Ramayanas: Valmiki's Sanskrit poem *Kampan Iramavataram*, a Tamil literary account that incorporates characteristically south Indian material; Jain which provides a non-Hindu perspective on familiar events; a Kannada folk tale which reflects preoccupation with sexuality and child bearing and the Ramakein, produced for a Thai rather than an Indian audience.[20] It is important to note that in spite of its innumerable retellings (which reflects the preoccupation with the epic and its monological content) one never comes across any reversal of tradition and Rama never really loses his seat of honour.

This needs to be contrasted with the observation made by Bakhtin in his essay, 'The Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse'. Here he talks about the problem of the so-called 'fourth drama' in the verbal culture of ancient times. "It is our conviction that there was never a single strictly straightforward genre, no single type of direct discourse—artistic, rhetorical, philosophical, religious, ordinary, everyday that did not have its own parodying and travestying double, its own *contre-partie*."[21] According to him, what is important is that these parodic doubles and laughing reflections of the direct word were, in some cases, just as sanctioned by tradition and just as canonized as their elevated models.

---

[19]Ibid.

[20]Ramanujan (1992).

[21]Bakhtin (2008c).

Not only is such sanction relatively absent in the Indian ethos, but any attempt or undermining of the myth was treated as blasphemy and more often than not resulted in severe punishment by the custodians of religious laws. Coming to the issue of the language of the epic we find that this language alone receives social sanction. Very significantly, Paula Richman points out, "The Ramayana in India is not just a story with a variety of retellings; it is a language with which a host of statements may be made. Women in Andhra Pradesh have long used this language to say what they wish to say as women."[22] That women have to fall back upon language of a misogynistic text like Ramayana to express themselves in itself throws light on how people have been imprisoned in the net of straight forward language. Richman does not fail to point out that "it is strictly forbidden to laugh at any aspect of the text. The element of laughter is restricted to the attempts of the writer. While these aspects (chosen by the writer) may be stretched further for creation of mirth any attempt at creating laughter at the expense of serious language or character can have disastrous consequences."[23] In the Indian ethos, a counter-discourse in the form of travesty was frowned upon. This treatment of the Indian myth and epic must be studied alongside Bakhtin's observations regarding the "fourth drama" of the ancient Greek theatre. According to him, "In most instances this drama which follows the tragic trilogy, developed the same narrative and mythological motifs as had the trilogy that preceded it. It was therefore a peculiar type of parodic travestying *contre-partie* to the myth that had just received a tragic treatment on the stage, it showed the myth in a different aspect."[24] In very simple terms, one can say that the highly placed characters were freed from the burden of absolute past and were 'brought low' to the level of contemporary life. This introduced to the audience the binary tone of the word and the various ways in which the otherwise straight forward word could be represented.

The absence of such a balancing mechanism in India has been pointed out by the noted critic G.N. Devy. Here the ability of literary creation was itself considered divine, resulting in the deification of both text and author, and raising him above the level of ordinary day-to-day life. "A unique feature of literary traditions in India, a feature entirely unknown in the literatures of the world, is that in India literary texts, mostly poetic but occasionally prose biographies as in case of the Mahanubhav sect is treated as divinely ordained… Thus, literature and worship become overlapping: all forms of literature are worshipped and all forms of worship are literary…."[25] This elevated the literary texts and put them beyond the scope for parody and travesty. The straightforward language of the texts, i.e., the language of reverence percolated in the day-to-day life of people, for all religious texts, whether in the form of poetry or prose, used a monological language and preached reverence and piety toward all religious texts in the many different languages in the country.

---

[22]Richman (1992).

[23]Ibid., p. 114.

[24]Bakhtin (2008c).

[25]Devy (1998).

Piety and reverence is an inseparable part of Indian culture. It gets manifested in the everyday language of the people. The abundant use of honorific pronouns and the compulsion involved in their use, the element of non-symmetry and non-reciprocity indicates a system in which hierarchies are protected by every possible means, prime among these being language. Attempted carnivalesque in the form of festivals like the Holi provide restricted freedom for mirth in the form of irreverent verbal exchanges. However any possibility of taking liberty with another person is controlled by strict community rules. In the introduction to his book on comparative literature E.V. Ramakrishnan rightly quotes Nemade and points out, in India, individualism cannot be the dominant credo as each individual is not a single person but is constituted by a network of multiple relationships. Nemade says, "just as a single chimpanzee is no chimpanzee, a single Indianis no Indian".[26] This network of relationships is kept in place by a set of rigid unbending rules and a rigid hierarchical structure. Hierarchies are everywhere. About access to knowledge Ramakrishna states, "Even when such traditions of shared knowledge exist, as in India, it may not be free from the hegemonic attitude based on caste, religion or gender. Replicating an orientalist or Bhadralok/Brahminic view of 'Indian literature' uncritically will reproduce the hierarchies of the feudal/colonial period."[27]

It is clear that the free participation of people in the creation of literature was blocked in various ways. The only way of expression open to people was the Bhakti way, or the path of reverence. So, the basic requirement for novel as a genre to originate and develop was lacking. According to Bakhtin, the novel rose out of a complex of parodically reflected words and voices. The parodic travestying genres unified in order to provide a corrective of laughter and criticism to all existing straightforward forms. Bakhtin very specifically draws the attention of readers to the essential 'impiety of the novelistic form' He states, "These parodic travestying forms prepared the ground for the novel in one very important, in fact, decisive respect. They liberated the object from the power of language, in which it had become entangled as if in a net; they destroyed all homogenizing power of myth over language; they freed consciousness from power of the direct word, destroyed the thick walls that had imprisoned consciousness within its own discourse, within its own language…"[28]. Such freedom could not be experienced in India for a very long time. The thorough monoglossia which has permeated the Indian ethos was both responsible for and itself a result of a lack of 'a corrective of laughter.' Since criticism of the existing straightforward forms was not possible no contradictory reality was experienced. The word continued to be used in a straightforward monological way as there was never any liberation from its power. It suffered from the homogenizing power of myth over language and the consciousness of the people remained imprisoned within its own discourse. Language never got

---

[26]E. Ramakhrishnan (2013).

[27]Ibid., p. 7.

[28]Bakhtin (2008d).

transformed from the absolute dogma it had been. Social distinctions and hierarchies were protected through strictly imposed linguistic practices such as the use of honorifics. A narrow and closed-off monological consciousness of people led to creation of internal dialectics privileging already privileged people through suppression of others. The reason why caste and gender differences in India could become so rigid and oppressive lies in the failure of any language powerful enough to make a counter discourse possible. In fact, there is in many instances no scope for discourse in self-defence. Gayatri Spivak's article 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' clearly points out the rigid boundaries of language that people use in order to be 'heard', since the upper-class vanguardism appropriated subaltern speech and a dialectic within a monological system was created and worked out. Spivak's exposition regarding 'sati' shows how the egalitarian yet monological language of the Vedas got twisted and was made to work against women.[29]

Bakhtin emphasizes the importance of polyglossia in the development of novel as a genre. The model of 'other-languagedness', for example, "played a fateful role in national, straight forward forms of artistic discourse in Rome. It overwhelmed all of the tender shoots of national epic and lyric, born in an environment their epic and lyric word—born of a muffled monoglossia, it turned the direct word of the barbarian peoples—into a discourse that was somewhat conventional, somewhat stylized."[30] This, according to Bakhtin, 'greatly facilitated the development of all forms of parodic travestying discourse'. He also mentions the polyglot condition in the Orient where several cultures and languages directly cohabited and specifically mentions places such as Mesopotamia, Persia, and India.

The development of the novelistic genre in India should be compared to its development in Greece as described by Bakhtin in 'The Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse'. Talking about the development of Parody and Travesty in Greece, he points out how the 'fourth drama' consisting of figures such as the 'comic' Odysseus' and the 'comic Hercules' was "an indispensable conclusion to the tragic trilogy." Such a fourth drama was written by the same writer who had composed the earlier 'serious' trilogy. Though in India Drama was a much-developed genre right from… the time of Kalidasa dating back to second century BCE but we do not find any comic double of any play being written by the same writer. So even when something like a novel come into existence in India even before it did in Europe it remained in the shape of a "'romance' which was the form in which the Greek novel originally made its appearance. This eponymous work which is written in poetic prose has led to two Indian languages 'Kannada' and 'Marathi' giving 'Kadambari'—a woman's name to mean novel, romance, fiction or tale written in the first half of the seventh century. It is self-consciously artificial prose. In other words, it had not the "matter of factness essential for the novel." But it could not have had such a language for the novel was in Sanskrit, (which was the language of select elite) and like Latin rigid and rule based. The 'intentional dialogized hybrid'

---

[29]Gayatri (1994).
[30]Bakhtin (2008e).

which developed in multilingual situations in Europe failed to develop in India despite its multilingualism because of the inbuilt piety in the language. With its honorifics and specific genres which preach love for one's own language, with language treated as a prized possession of groups of people who were taught not to tolerate its violation at any cost the mutual illumination of each other was blocked to a great extent. Social distinction and hierarchies were protected through such strictly imposed linguistic practices.

In other words, there was no ground for the novel where the object would be free from the power of language; language was itself entangled as if in a net forced to operate under the homogenizing power of myth over language. The thick walls of the direct word imprisoned consciousness within its own language and would not allow authentically realistic forms of discourse. The binary tone of the word which becomes available only through laughter remained absent to a very great extent. In India, the ability of literary creation was itself considered divine, resulting in the deification of both text and author, raising them above ordinary day-to-day life. It is not difficult to imagine how such a situation led to the straight-jacketing of the writer himself who, working under the burden of divinity, could never give way to his mundane and ordinary self in his writings. The straightforward language of the texts percolated into the day-to-day life of people, for all religious texts, whether in the form of poetry or prose, used a monological language and preached reverence and piety toward all living creatures. This was aggravated due to the dependence of the teeming illiterate masses on the oral transmission of literature. The passage of the text from rhetorical to logical, which is generally accompanied by a move from the collective to the individual, has only been partial. The several literacy drives undertaken by various governments have resulted in the emergence of people from different communities who can express themselves in the written form. However, their play with their language was restricted by the homogeneous culture of which Nehru and others talk.[31]

It became possible for Indian writers to enter into a dialogic with their vernaculars when they came into contact with the English language. It was a language about which and with which one could be as irreverent as one liked. An opportunity for 'other languagedness' arose. External multilanguagedness played a role in the author's ability to question the authority of custom (itself beyond contradiction) and traditions which restricted freedom to experiment. Bakhtin has emphasized the importance of polyglossia in freeing language from its dogmas. Though there was a polyglot situation in India, we can see how a singular myth has bound most of the vernaculars with its homogenizing power. English as the language of the outsider was free from this power of the direct word. Very significantly most of the noted novel writers were and are well versed in English. English enabled them to look at their language 'from the outside' and to experience reality in other than prescribed ways. It became possible for them to think outside monoglossia and the extreme semantic narrowing of the singular language was countered. Baba Padmanji—the

---

[31]Nehru (2004).

writer of the first Indian novel, was the son of a government servant (in the British Raj) and knew English well.

The writer of the chapter wants to imagine what happens when a society refuses to rise above its monologic and blocks other languages and myths and makes systems impenetrable through hegemonic assertions. The Brahmin community in India were successful in doing this and acquired unquestionable hold over the language of the entire society. In a cloistered society caste and gender differences were worked and reworked as a kind of negative dialectics in a situation which was rigid and unmoving. Since assimilation was unthinkable separation and further division became the rule. Hegemony moved towards absolute domination. Gayatri Spivak's article 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' clearly points out the rigid boundaries set around languages.

Historical Differences: The Novel in Europe and India

The origin of the particular kind of novel which has been discussed by Bakhtin has been repeatedly traced in Europe. Timothy Brennan points out how "The rise of European nationalism coincides especially with one form of literature—the novel."[32] Timothy Brennan, for it objectified the 'one yet many' of national life, mimicked the structure of the nation which was clearly bordered jumble of languages and styles. Bakhtin has also pointed out how "the naïve and stubborn co–existence of 'languages' within a given national language also comes to an end, and there is no more peaceful coexistence between territorial dialects and jargons, literary languages, generic languages within literary languages, epochs in language and so on" when the world becomes polyglot. In Europe, the rise of the novel implied the victory of European vernaculars over Latin and a dusk of religious modes of thought. The invention of printing brought a kind of uniformity in peoples' thoughts. This also coincides with the rise of middle class and a new concept of 'reality' coming into existence. Bakhtin associates the rise of the novel with lower sections of the society, their modes of entertainment such as the carnivalesque. The rise of the middle class made it possible for these modes to find a place in the literary expressions of 'realistic' literature of the time in Europe i.e., the novel. Brennan compares the implant of this form in 'third world countries'. He points out, "…under conditions of illiteracy and shortages, and given simply the leisure time necessary for reading one, the novel has been an elitist and minority form in developing countries when compared to poem, song, television, film."[33]

Though this apparent paradox intrigues Brennan one must look critically at the difference between the rise of nationalism in Europe and developments in the developing world, especially India. Here nationalism was more or less an idea borrowed from the West and imposed on the Indian masses from the top.

---

[32]Brennan (2008).
[33]Ibid., p. 56.

So was the 'realistic novel'. For a very long time, it remained a genre controlled and used by the elite. Serious questions continue to be raised regarding the mode and language chosen by Indian English writers for such writing does not seem to serve any purpose in the Indian setting. The masses continue to connect with the epics which are religious texts and therefore unquestionable as far as content is concerned. A purely intellectual critical treatment of the text or any attempt at parody or travesty of the characters or content of these epics can lead to serious social disturbances and riots. In India, we are yet to see the disintegration of the national myth, not to talk of its death and must wait for a long time to see the birth of 'novelistic matter-of-factness' in case of practitioners of this genre in languages other than English.

References

Anderson, Perry. 2012. Gandhi Center Stage. *London Review* 34 (13): 3–11.

Bakhtin, M.M. 1981. Epic and Novel. In *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin,* ed. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson, 272, 273. Austin Texas: University of Texas Press.

Bakhtin, M.M. 2008a. From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse. In *Modern Criticism and Theory*, ed. David Lodge and Nigel Wood, 129. Delhi: Dorling Kindersley.

Bakhtin, M.M. 2008b. From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse. In *Modern Criticism and Theory*, ed. David Lodge and Nigel Wood, 138. Delhi: Dorling Kindersley.

Bakhtin, M.M. 2008c. From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse. In *Modern Criticism and Theory*, ed. David Lodge and Nigel Wood, 132. Delhi: Dorling Kindersley.

Bakhtin, M.M. 2008d. From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse. In *Modern Criticism and Theory*, ed. David Lodge and Nigel Wood, 137. Delhi: Dorling Kindersley.

Bakhtin, M.M. 2008e. From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse. In *Modern Criticism and Theory*, ed. David Lodge and Nigel Wood, 139. Delhi: Dorling Kindersley.

Brennan, T. 2008. The National Longing for Form. In *Nation and Narration,* ed. Homi Bhabha, 49. India: Indian Reprint Routledge.

Comfort, Alex. 1948. *History of Novel Writing: The Novel of Our Time*, 13. London: Phoenix House Ltd.

Devy, G. 1998. *Of Many Heroes: An Indian Essay in Literary History*, 54. Hyderabad: Orient Longman.

Ganeshan. 1962. *Hindi Upanyasa Sahitya ka Adhyayan: Pashyatya Upanyasa Se Tulana Sahit, 192.* Delhi: Rajpal and Sons.

Gayatri, S. 1994. Can the Subaltern Speak? In *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. William Patric and Laura Christman. Hertfordshire: Wheatsheaf.

Lodge, D., and Nigel Wood. 2008. *Modern Criticism and Theory*, 122. Delhi: Dorling Kindersley.

Nehru, J. 2004. *The Discovery of India*. New Delhi: Penguin Books.

Nemade, B. 1990. *Tikaswayamvar*, 387. Aurangabad: Saket Prakashan.

Rajwade, S.K. Kadambari. 2008. In *Nivadak Marathi Samiksha*, ed. Pawar G.M. and Hthkaraglekar M.P., 26. Mumbai: Sahitya Academy.

Ramanujan, A.K. 1992. On Versions of Ramayana. *Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South*, ed. Paula Richman, 7. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Richman, P. 1992. *Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South*, 114. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Ramakhrishnan, E. 2013. Comparative Literature: Changing Paradigms. In *Interdisciplinary Alternatives in Comparative Literature*, ed. Ramkrishnan E.V., Harish Trivedi, Chandra Mohan, 12, New Delhi: Sage Publications.