

Re-contextualizing Mikhail Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* through Classroom Teaching: Re-presentation of Monological/Dialogical Conflicts in Student-Teacher Communication

Sayan Dey

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Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975)

Courtesy: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikhail_Bakhtin

Abstract

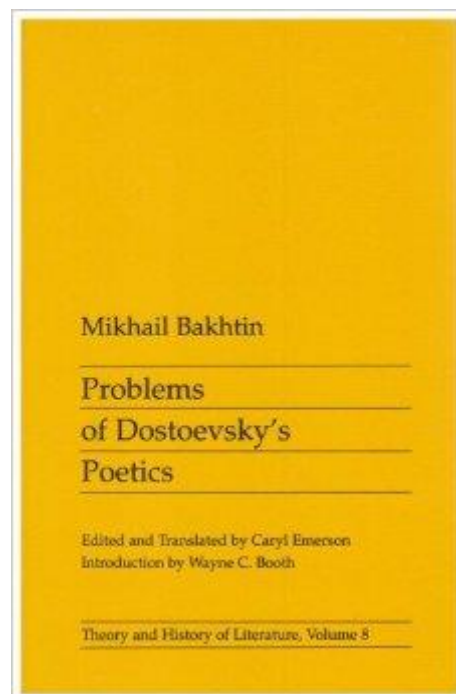
The evolution of theory is a result of different forms of individual and collective experiences of regular human existence. Its function is not limited within the written pages of intellectual monologues. The changing universal situations and circumstances influence theory to undergo modulations and modifications from time to time. Mikhail Bakhtin in his work *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* invites multiple criticisms of Fyodor Dostoevsky's novels through the concepts of monology and dialogy. Dostoevsky's creations blossomed when the dangers of Capitalism infiltrated Russia causing severe socio-political effects. The entire society

was monologized by all-pervasive capitalist institutional norms, colonizing individual free-will and intellect. The field of literature was also capitalized and found thorough elaboration in the works of novelists like James Joyce and Marcel Proust. Dostoevsky deconstructed the capitalist ideology through the dialogical development of his works, where the characters observe and interpret the world in a unique and individual manner.

This paper enlarges Bakhtin's theory of monology and dialogy by re-contextualizing it in the classroom scenario through student-teacher interaction. The traditional unilateral interactive procedures colonized the students and Bakhtin's concepts seem to break this monological situation. The entire educational procedure experiences revolution when the teacher is decentered through dialogical communication, thus, bringing an equilibrium in student-teacher participation.

Key words: Monological, dialogical, Dostoevsky, Bakhtin, poetics, decentering teacher

Theory as Defining Life



Keeping aside all forms of ideological complexities, theory can be defined as a systematic and conscious way of defining life. Theories erupted out of the situations, actions and

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incidents taking place at the individual and collective level. The sudden outburst of theories in the latter half of the 19th century throws light on the various contemporary issues of the approaching modernity. The continuous process of theoretical evolution has doubtlessly expanded the matrix of discussions and debates. But it has led to tremendous over-theorizing, imperializing the psyche of the individuals. Theory has complicated the entire thought process to such an extent that people have forgotten the simple ways of regular communication and thinking.

Whenever a discussion is initiated people ignore the basic modes of speech and strictly bind to the textual versions of discourse. The procedure of theory learning happens individually or in a class room environment. But does anybody question or analyzes the theoretical aspects that performs within the classroom? The class room environment is created through student-teacher interaction.

Unidirectional Ancient Indian Educational System

The ancient Indian educational system shows that the process of imparting knowledge was unidirectional in nature. The teacher was the sole speaker and the students appeared to be as mere recipients. The teachers' discourse was worshipped as the *Brahma-Satya* or absolute truth.

In Europe, during 13th and 14th centuries, Church dominated the entire educational system. They preached their baseless, irrational philosophies, infecting the individual psyches with god-fearing believes and practices. The church's analysis power was strictly confined within the realms of the bible. They learnt, preached and taught nothing outside it. Bible enjoyed the monopoly over all fields of education. Anyone ignoring the church was subjected to severe punishment. These similar instances are also available with other religious and regional faiths around the world prior to Theo-centrism.

Modernization and Changes in Discussion Strategies

With the advent of modernization people started questioning and breaking the early illogicalities of human faith. The gradual loss of ethics and moralities or the violation of laws

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and order created a ruckus amongst the individuals forcing them rethink the rightful existence of the divine. The intrusion of new thought processes influenced and transformed the Theo-centric world to a homo-centric world. Man's loss of divine faith received further impetus with Nietzsche's debatable conclusion, "God is dead." (*Thus Spake Zarathustra*).

Similar other revolutionary ideologies teased the people encouraging them to judge the world from completely unique perspectives. These new forms of ideas influenced and encouraged the individuals in various ways. But the educational system seemed to be paralyzed and faced further disintegration under the curse of institutionalization. It embarked and flourished on the grounds of disguised capitalism. Equality and freedom of knowledge are withheld as the two basic policies of education. But, behind these policies the educational institutes imperialize the entire system through unilateral impositions.

The moment a syllabus is formulated, the process of impositions begins. The freedom of knowledge immediately gets snapped and the students are made to function as identical objects forcing them to function within a definite thought process. The class room interaction involves multiple forms of internal and external politics like the nature of the syllabus, individual-teacher relation etc. In order to make the process of education a superfluous one, it is important to transform the education as a bilateral medium of expression. In this paper, I wish to theorize the process of class room interaction itself, through Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of *Monology* and *Dialogy*.

Mikhail Bakhtin's Description of Dostoevsky

Mikhail Bakhtin through his work *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* critically analyses the works of Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky from the multiple viewpoints of the various critics. Bakhtin describes Dostoevsky in the following words:

A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels. What unfolds in his works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a

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plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event.

(Bakhtin 22)

Context of Dostoevsky

Dostoevsky rose during the 19th century when capitalism was reigning all over the world. Though Russia always portrayed Marxism as their political ideology, it proved to be a massive failure. In the name of Marxism the governing body introduced autocracy especially during the Stalin era. The financial strategies that were undertaken by the government then proved to be a massacre. But these strategies proved to be highly influential over several other nations. With the passage of time Stalinism proved to be a demonic failure. Imperializing democracy was pointed out as the core reason. The violation of democracy was not only limited to politics but it also affected individual creativity as well. Dostoevsky utilized his intellect as the medium and novels as his modes for laying his revolutionary ideas. Novels can be defined as an important medium of uniting the masses and Dostoevsky used his creative magic to deconstruct the prevailing structure of novel writing.

A Definite System of Plot and Characterization

Prior to Dostoevsky novels followed a definite system of plot and characterization. The plot always appeared to be linear in nature having a definite form of introduction, denouement and conclusion. The characters seemed to be dominated by authors' private emotions or they appeared to be very traditional in nature. As a result the plot and the characters has been very much stereotype in nature. The characters appeared to be very much polyphonic in nature representing the voices of their respective authors. They never possessed any forms of uniqueness which made them lifeless and non-realistic in nature.

Dostoevsky – A Harsh Critic and Originator of Polyphonic Novel Writing

Bakhtin identified Dostoevsky as a harsh critic of this polyphonic form of creation. His novels deliberately violated the existent norms of writing which made his creative art as very realistic in nature. His novels were characterized with multiple voices and the characters were

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privileged with certain uniqueness that distinguished them from each other. Dostoevsky strictly believed that the author is no longer the hero. Doubtlessly, the author creates the characters from the depth of his conscious or unconscious, but still it possesses another's consciousness at the same time. They no longer breathe the ideological burden of the author. Dostoevsky is believed to be the creator of polyphonic novel writing.

Monology and Dialogy of Characters

In respect to the characters, Bakhtin established his concepts of monology and dialogy. Monology means unilateral form of communication or one-way discourse whereas dialogy means bilateral or multilateral basis of communication. The process of interaction amongst the different characters in the earlier novels seemed to be different voices of the author and as a result it was unidirectional in nature. But Dostoevsky's characters overcome these narrow imperialistic margins and represented a democratic voice.

Application of Bakhtin's Analysis of Dostoevsky in Classroom

This paper attempts to re-contextualize Bakhtin's analysis of Dostoevsky and its functionability in the classroom. The process of educating the students in India involves various forms of styles and techniques. But mostly it is found that students are burdened with the discourse of the teachers. The students hesitate to question the teachings of the teachers or often their freedom of expression is violated by forcing the students to mug up the class room notes provided by the teachers. It is a common phenomenon, that children complaining to their parents that despite writing the correct answer, they have been deprived of satisfying marks. Mostly the parents ignore these aspects as they are themselves burdened with the traditional student-teacher concepts. The tradition believes that questioning the words of the teachers is a highly immoral act. But reality should be judged outside these dark traditional structures.

Education as Interaction

It is time now to revolutionize the educational structure in the various educational institutions from primary to the university level. Education doesn't involve turning few pages of the book or taking down simple classroom notes in the copy. A proper form of education

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involves both verbal and theoretical forms of interaction. It is a dialectical process which involves the clash of the opposite views evolving new directions of thoughts and ideas. As a result it is important to deconstruct the metanarrative discourse into small fragments of micro-narratives creating an equal platform for both the students and the teachers.

Knowledge is ambiguous in nature. It searches for its permanence in ambiguity. Its absolutism lies in the continuous process of evolution and evasion. This process of thesis-antithesis and synthesis keeps the process of gaining knowledge a superfluous one. Dialogic interaction not only enhances the knowledge of the students but at the same time it makes the process of student-teacher interaction very innovative and interesting. The discussion amongst the teachers and students takes the shape of a debate sparking multifarious ideas in the process. This also influences the students helping them to overcome their daily monotonous routine affairs.

To Construct New Ideologies

To conclude, we find that the function of Bakhtin and Dostoevsky is not only limited to the process of reading and understanding novels. The most fascinating aspect about the concepts of polyphony, monology and dialogy is that it deconstructs the existing theoretical limitations to reconstruct new ideologies. It shatters the limitations of class room teaching both in terms of its procedure and contents by functioning within it, developing new critical insights in theoretical study of 21st century.

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