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BAKHTINIAN POLYPHONY WITHIN *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*: A NOTE ON *EPIC AND NOVEL*, WITH RESPECT TO THE OPENING MAXIM OF THE NOVEL

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The declaration in the first line, which works in setting up the logic of the novel. This points to an important feature within the 19<sup>th</sup> Century English Novel, i.e., the creation of a tightly controlled world of its own. The Novel is a microcosmic entity, which runs on its own logic. Thus, the idea that a man in possession of considerable wealth and income must be compulsorily in search of a wife is what acts as a lynchpin for the novel.

Despite the binding declaration at the beginning of the novel, due to its essential polyphonic and heterotopic nature, there always exists multiple tensions within the space of the novel. For this, we must look at the Bakhtinian idea of the novel in his *Epic and the Novel* (an absolutely charming text). Mikhail Bakhtin, a Russian theorist, distinguishes an Epic from a novel, on several grounds.

Firstly, an epic is perhaps the most solidified form of literary genre, primarily due to its antiquity. As opposed to drama, which had its roots in popular satirical comedy, epic remains more deeply tied to primarily tragic tales. It has certain qualities, i.e., there must be an epic hero, it must be of a certain length, in a verse form, and that, very importantly, it is usually a mode of nation-building. There is usually a singular epic voice – despite there being multiple contentions regarding the possibility that Homer might not be a singular



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person, there always emerges a sense of a single voice that runs through the body of the epic.

Secondly, the epic is a completely solidified genre, which does not have any more potential for change and evolution. Even though, there might have been attempts at modern epics, it continues to adhere to certain requirements, like a prodigious length, verse form and a single voice. Similarly, most other forms, due to their antiquity, including drama and verse, shows relative solidification – although there is more scope for evolution in these literary genres, due to their antiquity, the reader knows more or less what to expect from these genres. As opposed to this, the novel, being only a nineteenth-century form, is continuously evolving. (Note that Bakhtin was writing this in the early twentieth century). Due to its open form, the novel bears the generic capacity of most accurately representing the present as it is evolving. One must understand what revolutionary capacity the novel bears then, in not only being capable of substantially accommodating of present socio-political-cultural, but also being essentially formally mutable! [Thus, the English novel, later, becomes the easiest to co-opt, transform content-wise and formally, within postcolonial movements, to channel anti-colonial thought itself].

Coming back to the point about epic voice, the novel fundamentally differs from the epic in its polyphonic nature. By polyphony, we mean that despite the presence of one authorial voice (for example, the narratorial voice of *Pride and Prejudice* announcing the maxim in its first line), due to its dialogic form, it is essentially polyphonic. By dialogic form, we mean a form that has dialogues within it. Thus, as opposed to the epic, where we hear only one voice (although the point is debatable, as everything is in literature), in the novel form,



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we compulsorily hear other voices delivering dialogues, and having dialogic interactions within the text. Some of these voices, more than often, challenge the authorial voice of the novel. This is a very important feature of the nineteenth century bourgeois novel, for which it becomes imperative to critically read against the grain within a novel, and explore the diverse strains and voices which are built into the very formal texture of the novel.

Thus, despite the authorial voice's declaration at the beginning of the novel, of its binding logic, we constantly notice opposing strains, and gaps in the narratorial fabric. Mary's voice, especially, becomes an important example of such an oppositional strain, constantly going against the dominant voice, which is Elizabeth's. Elizabeth's voice, is of course, aligned with the dominant narratorial voice. Most of the narratorial space of the novel, is dominated and occupied by the mind of Elizabeth. Although her sardonic, mocking, witty voice drowns out most other voices, we hear oppositional strains from characters like Mary and Lydia – their respective marketability in the marriage market plays an important role in deciding who gets to align herself with the authorial maxim, a topic which requires separate exploration, with respect to gender politics within the novel.