



## VISION AND SOUND: POLYPHONY IN ORHAN PAMUK'S *MY NAME IS RED* AND VAIKOM MUHAMMED BASHEER'S *WALLS*

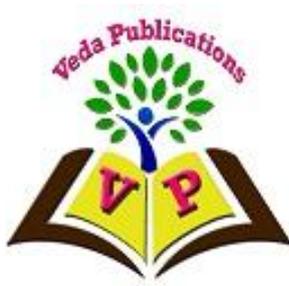
K.S.Radhika<sup>1\*</sup>, Dr. E. Celine<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1\*</sup>(Research Scholar, Dept. of English, St. Teresas College, Ernakulam.)

<sup>2</sup>(Research Guide, Dept. of English, St. Teresas College, Ernakulam.)

Email: [radhikanambodiri@yahoo.com](mailto:radhikanambodiri@yahoo.com)

### ABSTRACT



Mikhail Bakhtin's explains the multi-voiced nature of novels through the word polyphony. This paper is an attempt to find out the polyphony in Orhan Pamuk's *My Name is Red* and Vaikom Muhammed Basheer's *Walls*. In *My Name is Red* the plot is centered around paintings and they contain multiple voices whereas in *Walls*, it is Narayani's sound that gives multiple meanings to the text. This paper analyses how the theme of love is explained with polyphony of vision in *My Name is Red* and polyphony of sound in *Walls*.

**Keywords:** *Vision, Sound, Polyphony.*

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The term polyphony, meaning multiple voices, has its origin in Western music. Mikhail Bakhtin, the Russian thinker has adopted the term polyphony to explain the nature of Dostoevsky's novels. In his *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* Bakhtin says that Dostoevsky makes his characters free from his control and allows them to have their own voices. In the same work, Bakhtin later says that Dostoevsky is not the only novelist who has created multiple voices; other novelists are also capable of creating polyphonic novels. Polyphony is a situation in which all characters are free from authorial control and their voices are heard beyond the voice of the author. It is the creative genius that enables the author produce independent voices. Bakhtin says,

In every voice he could hear two contending voices, in every expression a crack, and the readiness to go over immediately to another contradictory expression; in every gesture he detected confidence and lack of confidence simultaneously; he perceived the profound ambiguity, even multiple ambiguity, of every phenomenon. (30 pdp )

Different novelists have adopted different methods for creating independent voices in their novels. Orhan Pamuk, the Turkish writer and Vaikom Muhammed Basheer, the Malayalam writer are two unique novelists who have made their novels polyphonic in different ways. This paper is an attempt to find out the multiple voices in of Pamuk's *My Name is Red* and Basheer's *Walls*. The two novels deal with the theme of love in two different ways and this study attempts to find out the role played by paintings in *My Name is Red* and *Voice in Walls* thus analyzing the multiple voices created by visual and auditory images.

Pamuk's *My Name is Red* is a novel in which multiple narrators narrate the story, thus becoming a polyphonic novel in itself. But this paper is an attempt to find out how the visual images, especially paintings, are able to create multiple voices. In *My Name is Red* the plot centres around a murder mystery in which paintings and illustrations play a significant role. Though the novel has been divided

into different chapters, narrated by different characters, the voices raised by the paintings are not less important.

Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the novel provides an ideal critical framework to explore the artistic and social functions of the multiple voices that open *My Name Is Red* as heteroglossia: the concept that every utterance involves multiple perspectives and layers, resulting in a polyphonic organization of language that does not surrender to the tyranny of monologic ideologies. (505 Barish Ali and Caroline Hagood)

*My Name is Red* which contains multiple layers of speeches which can be considered as an example of heteroglossia which results in polyphony. Different narrators speaking from different point of view contribute to the plot in their own way and they are free from authorial control.

In the context of the love affair between Black and Shekure, the paintings of Hüsrev and Shirin express a lot of ideas. For Shekure, her relationship with Black is connected with the paintings of Hüsrev and Shirin illustrating the story of a popular legend.

In the well-known tale of Hüsrev and Shirin, there's a moment that Black and I had discussed at length. Hüsrev's friend, Shapur, intends to make Hüsrev and Shirin fall in love. One day Shirin embarks on a countryside outing with her ladies of the court, when she sees a picture of Hüsrev that Shapur has secretly hung from the branch of one of the trees beneath which the outing party has stopped to rest. Beholding this picture of the handsome Hüsrev in that beautiful garden, Shirin is stricken by love. Many paintings depict this moment—or "scene" as the miniaturists would have it—consisting of Shirin's look of adoration and bewilderment as she



gazes upon the image of Hüsrev. While Black was working with my father, he'd seen this picture many times and had twice made exact copies by eyeing the original as he painted. After falling in love with me, he made a copy for himself. But this time in place of Hüsrev and Shirin, he portrayed himself and me, Black and Shekure. (61)

Though there are references to so many paintings in *My Name is Red*, the paintings of Hüsrev and Shirin gains much significance in the development of the plot. According to the legend, Hüsrev and Shirin fell in love with each other after watching a painting. When Black changes Hüsrev and Shirin to Black and Shekure, the two pairs become one and the same, rather the relationship between Black and Shekure is identical to that of Hüsrev and Shirin. Throughout the novel, Shekure reflects on the question whether the their relationship is as pure as that of Hüsrev and Shirin.

The voices raised by the paintings are no less important as far as *My Name is Red* is concerned. The paintings of Hüsrev and Shirin represent the immortal love between these two couples. Sometimes Hüsrev and Shirin replace Black and Shekure in terms of love. As the whole novel is centered on paintings and illustrations, these paintings represent the central theme of the novel that is art. Hüsrev and Shirin are the characters in the work written by Nizami. Thus it represents literature.

Shekure says how familiar she is with these paintings and how they influenced her life.

I looked at the picture I'd made years ago, which depicted Shirin stricken with love upon gazing at Hüsrev's image hanging from a branch. It didn't embarrass me as it would each time it came to mind in subsequent years, nor did it bring back my happy childhood memories. (82 *My Name is Red*)

The popular legend of Hüsrev and Shirin gets merged with the story of Black and Shekure. Polyphony is created as there are different layers of voices emerging from the same painting. Here the

characters depicted in the painting do not directly influence the development of the plot. But they too have their own voices which will be merged with the voices of the characters.

The conversations between the protagonist and Narayani in Basheer's *Walls* create polyphony. *Walls* is based on the protagonist's experience in jail during the time of India's freedom struggle. Living in the men's jail the protagonist listens to the voice of a lady which comes from the other part of the wall of jail, the women's jail.

"As we walked on, I was overcome by the most maddening scent in the world. The scent of a woman! female fragrance!

I was shaken. Every little atom of my being was aroused. My nostrils expanded. I inhaled and drew into myself....everything in this world.

Where was she? I looked around. Nobody! Nothing!

And as we continued, my ears heard the most beautiful sound in the world. A woman's laughter!"(47 *Walls*)

For the protagonist, the most beautiful sound in the world is a woman's laughter which stands for the woman's physical and mental beauty. It becomes beautiful as it is unattainable. It can also be considered as the laughter of freedom for which he is fighting. M.A. Rahman, is of the opinion that Narayani is a metaphor for freedom, the heaven dreamt by the freedom fighters of those times. (85-86) Thinking of achieving a united India, they endured all the troubles and sufferings which include arrest, lock up and jail. But the ultimate result is the partition of India followed by riots and sacrifices of so many lives. In this context the voice of Narayani stands for the freedom the protagonist wished to achieve but he could not.

Along with auditory images there are olfactory images which contribute to the multiplicity of the novel.

"I widened my nostrils and inhaled deeply. Had she heard the intake of my breath?

She asked. "Can you get the smell?"

"No."

"Nor can I. This damned wall!"

"Narayani, there used to be a hole in this wall. Have you seen it?"[67]



As they cannot see each other they try with other senses—they try to smell each other, but wall is in between them. They cannot touch as there is a wall. But voice can go beyond the wall and reach the lover. A subtle reading of this passage will show how he tries to convey his love to Narayani by trying to impart her with the sound his breath. The faculty of listening and speaking is used as a tool to attain the goal that is love. Along with the auditory image, olfactory image is also brought here. When he says he has got the smell of a woman, the statement becomes enigmatic as it is difficult to define the smell of a woman.

“I shivered. Ah Woman!

The conversation had to be quite loud. She, on one side of the wall. I, on the other.” (60)

When he felt the presence of a woman, he shivered because the presence of a woman ignites his passion though his eyes cannot perceive her. They do not speak softly as there is a wall. They have to raise their voice in order to be audible to the other. Here the protagonist stands on one side of the wall and Narayani on the other like two parallel lines that cannot meet.

*Walls* and *My Name is Red* express their multiple views in different ways. If *Walls* have auditory images, *My Name is Red* contains visual images. The title of *Walls* speaks about something that blocks our sight. But *My Name is Red* is about a colour which the eyes can perceive. Both these novels treat the subject of love with the help of different images. Though these two works deal with different sensory perceptions, the authors have successfully filled them with polyphonic meanings.

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