



THE ELEMENTS OF HORROR, DESTRUCTION AND VIOLENCE IN GAJANAN MADHAV MUKTIBODH'S SURREALIST POEM THE VOID

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ABSTRACT

As we all know Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh is one of the most influential poets in Hindi Literature and many of his works have been translated into English due to their popularity across the country. The Void is one such work that talks about the horror, destruction and violence which result from extreme self-absorption and a sense of meaninglessness in life. The void is not emptiness; it is stuffed with corruption and violence. It is frighteningly aggressive and is always demanding its domain of blood and violence. Man is a monster and therefore there is no escape from this horrifying situation where each one of us has been debased and dehumanized, except through more violence. Let us try to understand in detail.

Key words: Surrealistic, Horror, Hindi, Violence, Destruction, Society.

INTRODUCTION

A poet who broke new ground in Hindi poetry by adopting the cause of the lower working classes and existing corruption at every level, Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh was born in Shivpuri, near Gwalior Madhya Pradesh. He had his preliminary education in Ujjain and Indore. After graduation in 1938, Muktibodh taught in various schools and was greatly influenced by the Marxist ideology. Founder of the Madhya Pradesh Pragatisheel Lekhak Sangh (The Central India Progressive Writers Association), he ran study circles for teachers, writers and women workers. He also organised a conference of writers opposed to Fascism in Indore in 1943.

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All his life, Muktibodh remained in dire financial straits. He worked briefly in the Madhya Pradesh, Department of Information and Publication and in the regional news services division of All-India Radio. Then he edited *Naya Khoon* (New Blood), for which he wrote on literary, political and economic affairs. Subsequently, he became a college lecturer after obtaining his Master of Arts degree in 1953. His book, *Bharat: Itihas aur Sanskriti* (India: History and Culture), prescribed 15 a textbook for Higher Secondary Schools in Madhya Pradesh, was banned in 1962 for its Marxist view of history and its criticism of some aspects of Hinduism and Jainism. Muktibodh called it indicative of the rise of Fascism in life. This is manifested in his long poem, *Andhere Mein* (In the Dark). He died after a protracted illness in 1964.

Although the prominent influence on Muktibodh's life and works was that of Marxism, he was also inspired in his writings by Premchand (his mother's favourite). Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, Freud, Jung, Russian master's like Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Gorky, T.S. Eliot and the surrealists. His poetry is experimental and deeply speculative. There is a complex interplay of reality and fantasy in his poems through the use of surrealist images that juxtapose several levels of existence. These images powerfully evoke a mysterious strangeness and a sense of horror to dramatise the psychological turbulence of the protagonist. Chanchal Chauhan in his perceptive essay *Ideological Content of Muktibodh's Poetry* writes,

Like all great philosophers and creative writers he explores and reveals reality with his own social vision. This vision is his worldview, which was formed by his pursuit for the scientific and rational outlook. With his thought study of various trends in world philosophy he adopted the Marxist worldview for analysing and understanding the national and international reality of human world. (Kapse ed, 2016, p73)

The Void is a surrealistic poem that powerful evokes the horror, destruction and violence which result from the extreme self-absorption and a sense of meaningless in life. It plays upon the philosophical concept of the void as the emptiness which is also its fullness- the nothing which is the ultimate reality. Because it is nothing in particular, the void has the possibility of being everything, and its realization is a means of attaining salvation. In his poem, *Ek Aroop Shoonya Ke Prati* (To a Formless Void), Muktibodh mocks the veneration of the void: "This light-destroying journey in limitless cipher is also great."

Muktibodh uses the concept of the void as negativism, which penetrates the violence and the destruction. Void is a metaphor of the violence, cruelty and corruption which have overtaken the common man. The poet uses the genre of fantasy to indict the corrupt and violent forces raising their heads in the modern society.

The void inside us has terrible jaws. It is cannibalistic, chewing us all up. It connotes the bankruptcy of the human values like love, compassion and sympathy. This monster has been nourished on corruption and violence; it is ever-growing, ever-spreading its fiery, shark-like teeth and jaws. It is never satiated. Its hunger grows more and more intense, and its ferocity destroys all life around it. A cannibal, it survives on the blood of its victims. It is neither inert nor passive, for it continues to spout the lava which smothers and songs all forms of life.

The void is not emptiness; it is stubbed with the corruption and the violence. It is frighteningly aggressive and is always demanding its domain of blood and violence. The hunger inside our nature has turned man into a beast, naked and barbaric, disowned and debased; it has trampled over all human values. Man is another Frankenstein monster, a veritable Dracula, devouring and chewing up everything in sight. We have all been sucked up into the enormous valley of the void. Man has become another Moloch thriving on sacrificial rituals. Horror upon horror piles up. The infected ones infect others and the void expands; it goes on extending the frontiers of evil, breeding more evil and destroying all that is good in its path. Paradoxically, it is not the void which lies within us, it is we who are within the void. The situation portends the birth of a new breed with life dying out and death triumphing. The agony and anguish of the poor and the destitute, the have-nots, hardly, moves the conscience of the privileged, the haves in society. There is no escape from this horrifying situation where each one of us has been debased and dehumanized, except through more violence, because,

*“Everywhere it breeds
 saws, daggers, sickles,
 breeds carnivorous teeth.” (Muktibodh, 12)*

Muktibodh says in *The Void*, but this habitual anger is impotent and ineffectual. It may have turned man into a monster feeding on the flesh of his fellow beings in modern society, but the poet is unable to do anything about it. He concedes it in *So Very Far*:

*I covered myself with failure’s trash
 Finding heaps on the spiral staircase
 path Of corruption and cash.
 And though I’ve gone straight
 I’m still bitter in what I do, hate
 The poison (Muktibodh, 18)*

The tragic irony inherent in the prevailing situation is described in *The Void* thus:

*death is now giving birth
 to brand new children.*

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*Everywhere there are oversights
with the teeth of saws,
there are heavily armed mistakes
the world looks at them
and walks on,
rubbing its hands. (Muktibodh, 16)*

One may recall Yeats's poem, *The Second Coming*, in this context:

*"Mere anarchy is loosed upon this world
the blood-dimmed tide is loosed and everywhere
the ceremony of innocence is drowned." (Yeats, 4)*

But the poet stands mute and helpless as he watches and experiences, like everyone else, the cruelties and inequalities of life. The void is not emptiness; it is stubbed with corruption and violence. The void is frighteningly aggressive and is always demanding its domain of blood and violence. Man is a monster and therefore there is no escape from this horrifying situation where each one of us has been debased and dehumanized, except through more violence.

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