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The Cold War Poetics of Muktibodh: a Study of Hindi Internationalism, 1943-1964

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The Cold War Poetics of Muktibodh: a Study of Hindi Internationalism, 1943-1964

by

Gregory Young Goulding

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in

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Abstract

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Gregory Young Goulding

Doctor of Philosophy in South and Southeast Asian Studies

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University of California, Berkeley

Professor Vasudha Dalmia, Chair

My dissertation deals with the poetry, short fiction, and critical writing of Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh (1917-1964). In my dissertation I argue that Muktibodh's work—in spite of or even because of its conscious affiliation to a Marxist idea of international revolution and progress—presents a critique of postcolonial modernity rooted in the experience of the post-Independence middle class. Through an account of the ways in which his writings were able to bring into poetic life a range of issues—not least the imagination of an alternative globality in the wake of Indian independence—a picture emerges of the hopes and anxieties of an emerging lower middle class beginning to speak on a global stage. My work relies on a methodology of close readings of Muktibodh's work with an attention to the formal qualities of language, situated in a theoretical understanding based upon Critical and Postcolonial Theory.

In my first chapter, I discuss the life and reception of Muktibodh, who has been a central figure in Hindi literary criticism since his early death in 1964. In the first part of this chapter I examine Muktibodh's life and career, with special attention to the influence of Central India and its distinct literary culture. I then examine Muktibodh's reception, focusing on two main stages. In the first, roughly within the decade after his death, Muktibodh's works are seen as a referendum on debates over aesthetics and politics that dominated Hindi criticism in the 1950s. In the second, which takes place in the late 1970s, Muktibodh is seen as a uniquely prophetic figure, even as he is reinterpreted to fit contemporary concerns. The second chapter of my dissertation examines Muktibodh's interest in science and technology. This interest, typically overlooked in criticism of Muktibodh, brings into light Muktibodh's engagement with the discourse of science and technology in the context of the Cold War. In this chapter, through the examination of his poetry and fiction, I show how Muktibodh used the language and thematics of science and technology to raise questions about India's new relationship to the international.

The third and fourth chapters of this dissertation analyze in detail the formal evolution of Muktibodh's poetry towards the "Long Poem" for which he is most known. By tracing the sources of the Long Poem both to the influence of the *Chāyāvād* [Romantic] poet Jayshankar Prasad, as well as the influence of modernist Marathi poetry on the bilingual Muktibodh, I show how Muktibodh's long poem emerges as a unique form in Hindi modernism, one rooted in the literary culture of Central India in which he worked. This chapter therefore demonstrates the complex networks through which Hindi poetry developed. In my fourth chapter, I compare "Aṁdhere meṁ," which is Muktibodh's most well-known long poem, with the more obscure "Bhaviṣyadhārā." This chapter shows how "Aṁdhere meṁ," even as it depicts a nightmarish version of contemporary reality, takes as its subject the role of the autonomous imagination in engaging with the world. These chapters, in analyzing Muktibodh's long poem, point towards the possibilities of a formal analysis of modernist Hindi poetry, and its importance for understanding larger trends in intellectual, cultural, and literary history.

The final two chapters take up Muktibodh's views towards realism and genre, issues that are present in the discussion of the long poem, but emphasized here in an investigation of his short fiction and criticism. In the fifth chapter, I use an analysis of several of Muktibodh's short stories in order to examine his ideas about genre, and the problem of a post-Independence reality in which social relations seemed to resist a straightforward, realist depiction. Rather than view Muktibodh's short fiction as unfinished or stagnant, I examine the moments in these stories in which fables, frame stories, and metanarrative devices interrogate ideas of realism. The final sixth chapter of my dissertation analyzes Muktibodh's criticism, showing how he used a critique of Realism to develop an aesthetics centered on the critical imagination. Through an examination of Muktibodh's criticism across his career, I show how a contradiction between narrative and the poetic image eventually develops into an critique of realism, based on readings in Marxist and romantic aesthetic theory.

My research not only contributes to an emerging scholarship of post-Independence Hindi, but also develops an understanding of the contribution of Hindi and other South Asian languages to postcolonial literature. I argue that taking account of Muktibodh's writings is crucial towards forming a model of World Literature that accounts for the experience of India following independence, and the unique perspectives on the international developed by South Asian literatures. My dissertation therefore acts as a corrective to studies of global modernism that privilege literatures written in European languages and view non-European literatures as fundamentally local in scope. In addition, by analyzing the unique way in which Muktibodh combined Marxism with a global Hindi internationalism, my dissertation reveals new ways of understanding the literary and intellectual history of the Cold War. Research that situates writers such as Muktibodh in an international context can thus help to illuminate networks of alternative, postcolonial modernisms in the twentieth century.

to Emma, wherever we are

Contents

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A Note on Transliteration and Translation

Quotations in South Asian languages are written using diacritical marks, unless words or names are cited which have a standard spelling in English. I have attempted a method of transliteration that will be legible both to those who read Hindi and other South Asian languages, as well as to those who wish to get some sense of the feeling for the original. I have thus followed, for the most part, the system used by R.S. McGregor in *The Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary,* with some variation to improve readability. All translations, unless noted otherwise, are my own.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Muktibodh at the Center

In the middle of the twentieth century, in the decades following India's Independence in 1947, modernist Hindi literature existed in a contentious position between an international status as the purported language of the nation, and the uneven terrain of post-Independence Indian modernity. During the preceding Nationalist period, writers in Hindi and its political proponents argued for a language that would be a vehicle for a new nation; indeed, much of the appeal of Hindi for these writers was its newness as a literary language vis-à-vis Urdu or Braj. Hindi was a language that could be shaped into a new literature, without any of the associations and traditions that would otherwise weigh it down. As India became an independent nation, these writers shifted their view towards an engagement with the question of the international in the context of the Cold War, but they did so from the perspective of Hindi, and its own unique relation to the national and language. Hindi modernism, then, was in a position to reimagine both the local and the world.

This dissertation examines this process of reimagination in the work of Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh, who lived from 1917 to 1964 primarily in what are now the Indian states of Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, and Maharashtra. He wrote continuously from his teenage years, publishing his first works in 1935, and gaining some prominence as a member of the *Tār saptak* [A heptad of strings] group of poets, whose eponymous anthology, upon its publication in 1943, marked a watershed moment in Hindi modernist poetry. Muktibodh himself began to come into prominence from 1957, following successful readings at a literary conference in Allahabad. By the time of his death in 1964 following a stroke, many of his most well-known poems had been published in leading literary journals, and his first collection of poetry, *Cānd kā muṃh ṭeḍhā Hai*, [The moon's crooked face] was edited and published with the help of his close associates in the midst of his final illness. His reputation grew steadily, even exponentially; in the fifty years after his death, a large body of work has been collected and posthumously released. Although he is best known as a poet, his collected works, currently filling six volumes, include substantive and important literary criticism, political reportage, and short fiction, in addition to his two volumes of poetry.

I will argue that Muktibodh should be seen as a central node in the development of Hindi liter-

ature after Independence. Muktibodh has frequently been analyzed in terms of whether he can be considered to be politically progressive according to standards of literature strongly influenced by the dictates of Soviet Realism. Even critiques of this position that argue that Muktibodh's writings must be considered as more complex, and point out Muktibodh's own critiques of Communist Proscriptivism, often consider Muktibodh only in terms of his departure from ideology. I contend, however, that Muktibodh articulated an idea of Hindi modernist internationalism, influenced both by his own theories of art as well as by the internationalism of the era in which he wrote. Muktibodh, therefore, can be properly understood as an international modernist of Hindi literature.

The placing of Muktibodh at the center of Hindi literature requires some qualification. For one thing, Muktibodh is rarely seen to be at the center of Hindi literature; much of his reception, in fact, is predicated on portraying him as an isolated, underground figure, geographically far from the mainstream of North Indian literature in the hinterlands of Madhya Pradesh, and as stepping away from the literary mainstream in his poetry, which seems unclassifiable according to the criteria of his times. The crafter of nightmare tours through unnamed, modern cities, chased by fascist marching bands armed with howitzers and supported by corrupt newspaper editors, could hardly be seen to be representative of any stream other than that of his own imagination.

My dissertation will contend, however, that Muktibodh stands at the center not in the sense that that his life or works formed a central point of reference for literature at the time, but in the sense that, in placing his own experience of post-Independence modernity at the center of his literature, while simultaneously insisting on the relevance of that experience within a range of universal frameworks, Muktibodh expressed the hopes, anxieties, and dreams of the Indian lower middle class. In doing so, he created a model for a Left-Romantic poetics that continues to influence Hindi literature, as well as an imagination of history, the world, and the future, the understanding of which is essential in order to understand the world of post-Independence India.

Much of this work will depend on my understanding of two points: Hindi literature, which was the medium of Muktibodh's expression, and the universal, which was that to which he addressed his works. This is because a large part of the value of Muktibodh's work is rooted in the historical circumstances which shaped the particular idea of the universal which he formed. This universal is itself unique, a flawed but utopian model of the world that was limited by, and engaged in transcending, the framework of the Cold War that dominated the mid-twentieth century. In short: although his mother tongue was Marathi, Muktibodh chose to write in Hindi, a language whose purported international voice was dependent on its claim to speak as a national language. To the extent that that claim could not be fulfilled, any idea of Hindi Internationalism itself becomes suspect. But because this was the language in which Muktibodh claimed his universality, it becomes the unique medium through which he was able to imagine his own, *as-if* universalism.

In addition, the relation between the medium of Muktibodh's expression and the universality to which he addressed his works raises the question of form. The *lambī kavitā*, or "long poem," which Muktibodh created over the course of his career, developed out of a long internal struggle, rooted not least in Muktibodh's ethical orientation towards Marxism and the Left generally, between a literature of social engagement and a literature of the personal image. This struggle,

which dates back to the earliest documents of Muktibodh's career and was expressed in multiple forms, was hardly unique to Muktibodh; arguably, it was the common challenge of lyric poets on the Left, especially in historical situations in which a mechanical model of literature dominated.[1] To put the question simply: how can one write lyric poetry, the most personal and subjective of literary forms, when one is committed to political emancipation, an inherently social project? The eleventh thesis on Feurbach, Marx's famous statement that the point of philosophy was to change the world, therefore loomed over Muktibodh as well.[2] Responses to this question are varied, but the long silence of the American poet George Oppen, who ceased writing poetry for twenty years in order to function as an underground communist, should underline both the seriousness of the question and the extreme answers possible. Oppen, choosing commitment to political action over the creation of art, ceased writing poetry from the 1930s to the early 1960s.[3] Muktibodh's response, however, was to expand the framework of lyric expression until it grew so capacious as to (claim to) encompass the entire universe as he knew it, from the smallest atomic particles to distant galaxies, while retaining, at its core, a radical lyric subjectivity. The imagination of Muktibodh, and especially his imagination of the world of science and technology, might strike a modern reader (and did strike contemporary readers), as obscure and even unnecessary, but I contend that it stands as proof of his willingness to incorporate the entire range of human knowledge in his poetry, and especially conceptual knowledge as he understood it. Muktibodh's insistense on reconceiving poetics through the language of conceptuality was a precondition, furthermore, for a poem such as *Am̐dhere meṁ* [In the dark], universally regarded as Muktibodh's highest achievement, which I will argue succeeds precisely because it balances this capacious treatment of experience with a deep attention to the contemporary.

My analysis of Muktibodh's works, then, will focus on the ways in which the lyric holds a special place in his work, and acknowledge the long poem as his greatest achievement. But it will also emphasize the ways in which the long poem developed alongside the other genres in which Muktibodh worked. Muktibodh's criticism was a crucial contribution to Left aesthetics in Hindi in that it formed a model for literature that was ethically engaged while rejecting the proscriptive attitudes towards literature that were prominent in the Left. Muktibodh rejected both models of literature that emphasized solely the individual experience of the world, as well as ones in which the individual was subordinated to a category such as class or a particular ideology, in favor of a Romantic critical theory of art, in which the artist developed a unique image through the interaction between his reactions to the world, and his imaginative reinterpretations of those reactions. Muktibodh developed these aesthetic theories both through a series of essays, as well as through criticism of Jayshankar Prasad's 1935 *Chāyāvād* [Shadowist] poem *Kāmāyanī*.

[1]See Robert Kaufman, "Lyric Commodity Critique, Benjamin Adorno Marx, Baudelaire Baudelaire Baudelaire," *PMLA* 123, no. 1 (2008): 207–215; and Robert Kaufman, "Lyric's Expression: Musicality, Conceptuality, Critical Agency," *Cultural Critique*, no. 60 (2005): 197–216 for a discussion of the question of lyric's place in relation to the political.

[2]See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), pp. 143-148.

[3]See John Wilkinson, "The Glass Enclosure: Transparency and Glitter in the Poetry of George Oppen," *Critical Inquiry* 36, no. 2 (2010): 218–238 for a discussion of this problem in particular.

Muktibodh's criticism is therefore a link between Left criticism, Romantic theories of art, and Hindi literary history.

Muktibodh's short fiction, although it was often disparaged by Muktibodh himself and was not seriously examined until after his death, is essential for understanding both the rest of his work, as well as his place in Hindi literature. Muktibodh's short stories are often seen as incomplete, or as presenting a largely negative perspective on the social world of the lower middle class, in comparison with the utopian, imaginative worlds of his poetry. As I will show, however, Muktibodh's short stories represent a separate series of experiments with genre, and with questions of narrative and realism, that are extremely pertinent to the formation of the long poem. If the long poem, as I will discuss in chapter four, came be seen as novelistic in its ability to represent the totality of post-Independence life, then the short story, for Muktibodh, was an examination of the capabilities and limits of representing that totality through a variety of narrative options.

I place Muktibodh within a history of modernist literature in Hindi during the mid-twentieth century. In doing so I hope to open up a space to explore the complexities and interrelations of South Asian literatures during this time period, and their interactions with larger international, global frameworks of cultural and literary discourse. A study of Muktibodh can be a contribution towards an intellectual and literary history of post-Independence Indian literature, and an understanding of that literature as engaged in a unique internationalism in the context of decolonization and the Cold War.

Towards a Study of Hindi Modernism

Modernism, in its strictest form, refers to the literature produced in Europe around the turn of the twentieth century. Often the term can be more capacious, and can expand in time, especially when understood in conjunction with discussions of modernity itself, itself an unstable term that can refer to any of the broad changes that occurred in Europe in the previous five hundred years; recently, some have argued for a definition of modernism that would move beyond this by including any moment of rapid change and social disruption. By the more narrow definition, however, modernist literature is characterized by stylistic experimentation, an emphasis on fragmented time, and a concern with the instability of both the self and modern society; modernism is often therefore contrasted with realism, a form of literature which preceded it in the nineteenth century, was its rival in the twentieth century especially in literatures produced by the Left, and followed it through the advent of a range of neo-realisms.[4] Modernism is often defined in terms of a canonical set of writers, including the poets T.S. Eliot (1888–1965) and Ezra Pound

[4]The primary sources for a theory of realism remain the works of György Lukács, especially György Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah Mitchell and Stanley Mitchell (U of Nebraska Press, 1983). Lukács's theory of realism, as the title suggests, is rooted in his analysis of the novel as the primary form of the 19th century bourgeoisie, and he analyzes this form according to a Marxist historical model in which, as the Bourgeoisie declines and ceases to be a revolutionary class, the realism of the novel devolves into naturalism. Another major touchstone, a comparative overview in which realism becomes part of a historical account of Western literature as a whole, is Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: the Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard Trask (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003 [1957]).

(1885–1972), the novelist James Joyce (1882–1941), and the novelist and playwright Samuel Beckett (1906–1889). Often modernist writers, such as Eliot, expressed a concern with history and the loss of tradition in their time, and accordingly developed a poetry of fragmented reference. This literature was preceded and influenced by literary movements such as French Symbolism, which looked forward to modernism in its exploration of the literary symbol, or figures such as Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867), who wrote a darkly ironic poetry of confrontation with modern, urban life. It is in turn often considered to end sometime after the 1930s, and is contrasted with postmodernism. Postmodernism contrasts with modernism in no small part in its rejection of the formal complexity of modernism and its failure to expand its perspective beyond certain elite groups; postmodernism is also defined by the response to changes in culture and society that followed the second world war and the breakup of colonial empires.[5]

As a historical period of literature modernism is, indeed, predicated on a relation between the peripheral and the metropolitan that characterized the specific time in which modernism came into shape. The influences of non-European art, coded as primitive, are well enough known; modernist literatures are equally influenced by their setting in the new, massive cities that defined the early twentieth century.[6] Modernism can be defined in part by a range of exclusions both temporal and geographical, which were quickly challenged as modernism began to be defined as a field and canon of literature in the 1960s.[7] Some of these exclusions, such as the Harlem Renaissance, were separate not by time but by the geographical and cultural locus of their genesis and their creation by minority groups. Others, however, were defined by the different time in which they took shape.[8]

Modernist literature in South Asia was effected by British colonialism in that South Asian literatures were directly influenced by European literatures in the uneven cultural landscape of colonialism. Under this model, writers in British India adopted European models of literature, which in the colonial period would be considered more advanced than Indian literary models. In reality, although writers in South Asia did adopt European models of literature, they did so to varying degrees, and for a variety of reasons; while influence was widespread and ultimately

[5]For an overview of modernism, see Peter Childs, *Modernism*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 1-26. See also Pericles Lewis, *The Cambridge Companion to European Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) for an overview of European modernisms. The modernisms of Eastern Europe and the Austro-Hungarian empire are especially relevant to any study of South Asian modernism. In contrast to the situation in Western Europe, these modernist literatures were defined by the emergence of new national languages and their relation to the metropolitan-imperial language of German. Recent scholarship has begun to formulate arguments for a range of models of international and global modernisms; see Susan Stanford Friedman, *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity Across Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); see also Laura. Doyle and Laura A. Winkiel, *Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

[6]See Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists* (London [England]: Verso, 1989).

[7]See Childs, *Modernism*, pp. 14-15.4

[8]See Simon Gikandi, *Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Literature* (Cornell University Press, 1992) for an analysis of modernism in the context of Caribbean literature; see Nicholas Brown, *Utopian Generations: the Political Horizon of Twentieth-Century Literature* (Princeton University Press, 2005) for an analysis of the relations between African literatures and modernism. For a history and analysis of the Harlem Renaissance and African-American modernism, see Houston A. Baker, *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

universal in South Asia, it was often indirect, and was utilized by South Asian writers to serve diverse needs. Furthermore, modern South Asian literature took shape in a wide variety of South Asian languages, which were to varying degrees in contact with each other as well as with the metropolitan English. Thus, for instance, Hindi literature was strongly influenced by Bengali literature, influenced to a lesser degree by contact with Marathi literature, and almost not at all through contact with Tamil. Understanding these networks of interlinguistic exchange, then, are an essential precondition for understanding the emergence of modern South Asian literatures.[9]

Nevertheless, the literatures of South Asia can be typified by a literary history in which, broadly, modernism became an important genre of literature around the 1940s. The reasons for this include both the manner in which South Asian languages were influenced by European literatures, as well as social changes that made modernist strategies towards literature make sense. Prior to this period, literature in South Asian languages was, for the most part, concerned with reforming and developing a new literary language in the context of nationalism. Thus during the period from 1900 to 1940, during which modernist literature in Europe was at its peak, in British India writers were typically more concerned with adapting classical forms of literature in order to speak for a new audience, and to develop a new national or subnational language.[10] This process did include intense engagement with European, and especially English, literature, but more frequently involved processes of translation and adaptation. For instance, the poet Keshavsut (1865–1905), writing in Marathi, became most well known for his poems "Tutārī" [Trumpet] and "Nava Śipāī [New soldier]," which addressed the theme of a new era, but did so through the either of Marathi meters or an adapted sonnet.[11] These writers were often influenced by the English romantic poets, whose approach to poetic form and language appealed to writers who were trying to form a new, national literature.

By the late 1930s, however, writers in different South Asian languages began to see literary experimentation based on an open exploration of experience, rather than the development of a new national form, as the goal of literature. These tendencies were accelerated by several events. Towards the ends of the 1930s, as Independence ceased to be a goal and became an impending and negotiable reality, an increasing number of political alternatives, especially on the Left, began to challenge the prior dominance of the National Congress Party. This led, at first, to a proliferation of works with broadly progressive themes, spurred on in part by the formation in 1936 of the All-India Progressive Writers' Association. The experience of the Second World War and the Partition which divided British India into two nations made violent disruption a part of the daily

[9]For an overview and theory of modernism in South Asian poetry, see E. V. Ramakrishnan, *Making it New: Modernism in Malayalam, Marathi, and Hindi Poetry* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, 1995). For a chronological history of Indian literature in the twentieth century, see Sisir Kumar Das, *A History of Indian Literature, 1911-1956: Struggle for Freedom: Triumph and Tragedy* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1995).

[10]For the key articulation of the theory that literature, and print culture more generally, plays an essential role in the formation of national identities, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 1991). Of the many works that engage with and critique Anderson, the most important here is Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?*, Third World books (London, U.K: Zed Books for the United Nations University, 1986), pp. 19-22.

[11]See Philip C. Engblom, "Keshavsut and Early Modernist Strategies for Indigenizing the Sonnet in Marathi: A Western Form in Indian Garb," *Journal of South Asian Literature* 23, no. 1 (1988): 42–66.

news, if not everyday life, and prompted a literature which could confront such drastic removals of moral certainty.[12] Thus, a writer such as Sa'adat Hasan Manto (1912–1955) wrote searing short stories in Urdu detailing not only the violence but also the absurdities of Partition.[13] Simultaneously, writers began to be directly influenced by modernist writers in English and in translation into English. Some of these writers, such as Mulk Raj Anand (1905–2004), wrote in English themselves, and some of them, such as the Marathi poet Bal Sitaram Mardhekar (1909–1956), lived in England.[14] Following Independence, writers in South Asian languages lived in a new nation-state which offered new opportunities, including positions within cultural institutions such as the All India Radio, which became Akashvani in 1956. They also had unprecedented opportunities to travel abroad, aided by the increasing influence of the Soviet Union and the United States during the Cold War, as well as the rise of international organizations such as the United Nations. This was the case for, among others, the Urdu poet N. M. Rashid (1910–1975), and the Hindi writers Nirmal Varma (1929–2005), and Girijakumar Mathur (1919–1994), all of whom lived abroad for extended periods under the auspices of international organizations.[15] At the same time, greater and greater numbers of writers began to live and work in rapidly growing urban centers, and their writing thus began to reflect the experience of living in these new environments. Thus the transitional period before and following Independence brought with it unprecedented social change, increasing opportunities for international exchange, and an impetus to reassess literary forms and create new ones, rather than only critique and reform already existing forms.

The development of modernism in Hindi poetry was influenced by all of these trends. Although the word "modernism," (translatable into Hindi as *ādhuniktāvād*) is itself rarely used, a range of terms are used instead that have a direct genealogical relationship to formal modernism. The beginning of Hindi modernist poetry is usually marked by the publication, in 1943, of the anthology *Tār saptak* [A heptad of strings]. This anthology included seven poets, one of them Muktibodh himself, all of whom were young and advocated a new, experimental poetry. The anthology's preface was written by the poet Sachchidananda Vatsyayan 'Agyeya' (1911–1987), who became probably the most representative and well-known modernist poet in Hindi, and his preface, which framed experiment or *prayog* as the goal of the poets in the anthology, lead to the coinage of the term *prayogvād*, or experimentalism, as the first major designation of modernist literature in Hindi. In the 1950s, however, another term, *Naī kavitā* [New poetry], began to gain prominence; both terms are often used interchangeably, unless the historical difference is being stressed between the poets of the 1950s and 60s and an earlier generation of poets. Both terms denote a poetry of free verse and an attention towards the artist's experience of the world, and

[12]The most important text in Hindi which develops this argument is Vijayadev Narayaṇ Sāhī, "Laghu mānav ke bahāne hindī kavitā par ek bahas," in *Chaṭhvāṁ daśak* (Allahabad: Hindustani Ekedemi, 1987), 259–321; Sāhī's work is discussed in greater detail in chapter 6 of my dissertation.

[13]For an overview of Manto's work, see Aamir Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: the Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture* (Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 177-210.

[14]For a personal account by Anand of his time in Bloomsbury, see Mulk Raj Anand, *Conversations in Bloomsbury* (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1981).

[15]Although a full account of the internationalism of this period has yet to be written, for an analysis of Rashid's time in Iran and the relation between the Persian language and his Urdu poetry, see A. Sean Pue, *I Too Have Some Dreams: N.M. Rashed and Modernism in Urdu Poetry* (University of California Press, 2014).

a poetics contrasted with either a mystical retreat from the world, which these poets associated with the earlier, *Chāyāvād* era of poetry that dated to the 1920s, or a Left poetics of realism and the advocacy of progressive causes, which during this period was referred to by the term *pragativād*, or progressivism.[16] The strong emphasis of *Naī kavitā* on the individual's experience indicates one of the major historical conditions of Hindi modernism in general: in contrast to European modernism, which took shape before and after World War I, modernist literature in Hindi coincided with the independence of India and the beginning of the Cold War. As mentioned above, writers from South Asia traveled frequently to these new centers of power in Europe and the United States, and by the 1950s, criticism began to be dominated by an increasingly sectarian division between the Left and the Center. The development of this literature was marked, then, by an antipathy fueled by the cultural competition between the United States and the Soviet Union. The emphasis on the individual experience can be analyzed as rooted, at least in part, in this division.

At first glance, Muktibodh would seem to be an obvious representative of Hindi modernism: not only was he included in the seminal *Tār saptak*, but he was also published in important journals associated with *Naī kavitā*, not the least of which was the journal titled *Naī kavitā* itself. Muktibodh's poetry is almost entirely written in free verse, and his poems frequently featured meditations on the experience of the speaker. He also strongly critiqued proscriptivism in progressive poetry. But Muktibodh was also a Marxist for much of his life, and frequently criticized *Naī kavitā* for its exclusive emphasis on the individual moment of experience. And his insistence on the allegorical potential of his works, and their relevance to a utopian Marxism, directly contradicts the apoliticism that that came to characterize *Naī kavitā*. Accordingly, much of the reception of Muktibodh has centered on the question of how to categorize him according to the literary history of Hindi. Because Hindi modernism is strongly split between the two camps, analysis of Muktibodh's work often falls primarily on the single question of his allegiance.

But a consideration of Muktibodh's place within Hindi modernism, if widened beyond the question of his political belonging, becomes a means by which Hindi modernism itself can be historicized. Muktibodh's career is exemplary of Hindi modernism precisely in the ways in which it develops out of *Chāyāvād* and embraces free verse and experimentalism, even as it insists on using that formal experimentation as the basis for a renewed allegory, refusing to sacrifice either the insights of lyricism or the ethical core of progressive literature. Criticism of Muktibodh, for good reason, has focused on his long poems as a way in which Muktibodh allegorically fused together the individual identity with history. But in examining how Muktibodh developed the long poem, we can better understood how his work took place not in a vacuum, but in the specific context of Hindi modernism. Furthermore, Muktibodh's life-long engagement with Marathi poetry shows the ways in which Hindi modernism developed through sustained engagement with other South Asian modernist literatures.

The question of Muktibodh's politics itself can be an avenue to a better understanding of his

[16]The standard source on *Chāyāvād* in English is Karine Schomer, *Mahadevi Varma and the Chhayavad Age of Modern Hindi Poetry* (1983). In Hindi, see Namwar Singh, *Chāyāvād* (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 1979 [1955]). Singh's work argues for the critical potential of *Chāyāvād* poetics.

place in the intellectual history of the Hindi world. Muktibodh was, politically, an unequivocal member of the Left; he was a member of the Communist Party of India throughout the 1940s and, even during the 1950s when he wasn't an official member, his activities were well-known enough to effect his professional career. But in his writing he developed an aesthetics that insisted on the autonomy of the individual imagination, and its crucial role in any political philosophy. In this way his aesthetics come close to the theories of art developed by the German playwright and poet Bertolt Brecht (1869–1939), along with Walter Benjamin (1892–1940), Theodor Adorno (1903–1969), and other thinkers associated with the Frankfurt School. These theorists, on the whole, critiqued Left-oriented theories of Realism, most prominently associated with György Lukács (1885–1971); the debates among these figures testify to the vitality of a Left discourse on modernist forms of literature in Europe in the 1930s, and also to the crucial role that an engagement with a radical Romanticism can play in a Left modernist aesthetics. Although Muktibodh read Brecht, and was almost certainly influenced by Brecht's contrast of a "realist style" with a "realist point of view," he developed his own aesthetic theories, based on his readings of Marx, English Romantic poetry and classic German aesthetic theory, and South Asian aesthetic theories both classical and modern; his ideas must therefore be considered as parallel to those associated with the Frankfurt School.[17] An examination of Muktibodh's aesthetics and literary writings would be a step towards an intellectual history of modernism that, rather than treating South Asian modernisms as subsidiary and reactive to European modernisms, included a framework for understanding the complex interrelations of ideas during this period, one formed through a complex web of translation and interpretation that engaged with, at the very least, texts in English, German, Sanskrit, and Hindi.

In this way, one could argue that Muktibodh represents one of the unique qualities of South Asian modernism. In contradiction to European modernism, which took shape in a context of the imperial metropole, South Asian modernism was fundamentally shaped by the internationalism of decolonization. What this means is that internationalism of South Asian modernism took not in a context of destruction but one of optimism and re-imagination, albeit tempered by the chaos and instability epitomized by such events as partition and the assassination of Gandhi. This was a moment during which writers in South Asian languages imagined themselves, for the first time, to be speaking on an international stage. As Muktibodh's writing shows us, this imagination includes moments both utopian and nightmarish. But examining the ways in which Muktibodh, from his location in Central India, reimagined the world, enables us to rethink the contours of modernism and begin to take into account the particular regional identities of the modernisms of South Asian languages.

[17]Muktibodh's aesthetics are discussed at greater length in chapter six. For the intellectual history of the Frankfurt School, see Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: a History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996 [1973]); for the key selection of the debates between realism and expressionism during the 1930s, see Ernst Bloch et al., *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso, 2007). See also Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: the Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), especially pp. 81-128 and 241-276.

Muktibodh and his Times

Muktibodh's writings, more complete now than at any point since his death, stretch from his earliest works, published in a college newsletter in 1937, to works left incomplete at the time of his death in 1964. They thus encompass several periods. The first of these periods spans the years prior to Independence, in which the moral clarity of the Independence movement symbolized by Gandhi was giving way to a series of critiques of the Congress party. In poetry, the Romantic, aesthetically complex poetry known in Hindi as *Chāyāvād* was beginning to wane as the priority for literature in Hindi shifted from the explicit construction of a new literary idiom towards the question of what this new literary language could do. The responses to this question include the wide array of literatures grouped under the term progressive, or *pragatiśīl*, later referred to more pejoratively as *pragativād*, progressivism, which drew much of its energy from the array of Left, sometimes Communist-sponsored literary associations which formed in the 1930s, most notably the All-India Progressive Writer's Association.[18] While fiction writers, such as Premchand (1880–1936) and Yashpal (1903–1976), are most closely associated with this period, and a Left-Oriented Realism became a crucial term in literature at this time, progressivism had an important effect on poetry as well.[19] At the same time, poets began to experiment with literary form, prompted in part by the influence of Anglo-American modernism. They also wrote in response to the idea that poetry should try to engage in the forms of the world, rather than shape the forms of the world to the feeling of the poet, a move necessitated by the instability of the time leading up to Independence. This was the poetry that eventually came to be identified with the term *prayogvād*, "experimentalism."

While the above movements dominated during the 1930s, the following decades saw a range of shifts in the literary scene. What had previously been referred to as *prayogvād* was instead referred to primarily as *naī kavitā* [new poetry], leading to a rebellious group of young poets producing a school named, naturally enough, *akavitā* [non-poetry].[20] Besides a shift in names, poetry had shifted further and further away from the aestheticism of *Chāyāvād* towards a poetry of speech, culminating in a poet such as Raghuvir Sahay (1929–1990), who exemplified the times in writing a poetry that mimicked the rhythms of speech and reportage. Sahay was also typical of the period in that he worked as a reporter in the capital of Delhi, which was in the years following Independence rapidly becoming the center of Hindi publishing and literary culture.[21] The

[18]For a history of All-India Progressive Writers Union, see Priyamvada Gopal, *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation and the Transition to Independence* (New York: Routledge, 2005); see also Sudhi Pradhan, *Marxist Cultural Movements in India*, 3 vols. (Calcultta: Santi Pradhan, 1979), vol. 1.

[19]For a tendentious account of this period and its relation to the development of *prayogvād*, see Ramvilās Śarmā, *Nayī kavitā aur astitvavād* (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 1978), pp. 11-29. Sharma views the eventual *Naī kavitā*, on the whole, as a "perversion" of experimentalism, and while he acknowledges the shortcomings of *pragatiśīl*, he maintains the hope for a progressive experimental poetry, which is for him represented primarily by the poets Kedarnath Agrawal (1911–2000) and Nagarjun (1911–1998).

[20]For a brief history of the term *Naī kavitā*, see Dhīrendra Varmā, *Hindī sāhitya koś*, 2 vols. (Benares: Gyan mandal, 1985–1986), vol. 2, pp. 311-314. There is some disagreement about the coining of the term, but it was probably current from the mid-1950s onwards. For an exhaustive and somewhat sarcastic list of all the possible schools of poetry, circa 1958, see Rādhikācaraṇ Tivārī, p.21 in *Vasudhā*, August September 1958.

[21]See Rashmi Sadana, *English Heart, Hindi Heartland: the Political Life of Literature in India* (Berkeley: University

urbanization of the middle class also led to the rise of the short story, and in particular the school known as *naī kahānī* [New story], as the emblematic literary depiction of post-Independence middle class life. These stories presented a new perspective which emphasized the changing social relations of the time, the changing nature of the family and domesticity, and new forms of urban life.[22]

Muktibodh's death in 1964 coincided with the death of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964), and thus with the end of one of the most crucial periods in twentieth-century Indian history. The long prime-ministership of Nehru post-Independence, as well as his leadership of the Congress party prior to *de jure* Independence, oversaw a series of changes crucial to this study. First is the simple fact of Independence itself in 1947. The Independence of India for British rule was marked by the cataclysmic partition of India and Pakistan, with the accompanying mass movement of peoples across new borders into refugee camps in both nations, as well as the first war between India and Pakistan. This in turn led to the immediate imbrication of India in the Cold War, as it sought to navigate a path between the two great post-war powers of the United States and the Soviet Union.[23] Nehru, as Prime Minister from Independence in 1947 until his death in 1964, attempted to find a path for India that would not be bound to either of these powers. This led to the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement, which presented India as the leader of the rapidly expanding, decolonizing world. This attempt was tested, and arguably broken, by the Indo-Chinese War of 1962, which forced India to abandon a foreign policy of cooperation, and led to closer and closer ties with the Soviet Union.

For the Indian Left, the years following Independence led to the fragmentation of the Communist Party. The Communist Party of India, which had been founded in 1925, had struggled throughout its history with the question of whether to support the Congress-led Independence movement, and thus participate in the political process, or to attempt to work directly for revolution, regardless of the question of nationalism.[24] This issue, which was tied up with the larger policy of the Soviet Union, was partially responsible for the strange history of the Communist Party of India during the Second World War, in which the party, following the stance of the Soviet Union, shifted rapidly from opposition to the British to a sudden endorsement of "The People's War."[25] Following Independence, the Communist Party at first supported an anti-government military insurgency in Telangana, but during the 1950s was pressured by the Soviet Union, which was by then pursuing foreign policy ties with India, to avoid direct confrontation. Resulting pressures, especially following the Sino-Indian war, led to the split of the party: debates over whether Communists should support a war against a fellow Communist state ended in the formation of

of California Press, 2012), for a history of this shift in terms of publishing.

[22]See Gordon C. Roadarmel, *A Death in Delhi: Modern Hindi Short Stories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972); see also Preetha Mani, "Gender and Genre: Hindi and Tamil Short Story Writing and the Framing of the Postcolonial Indian Nation, 1950-1970" (Dissertation, 2011).

[23]See Bipan Chandra, Aditya Mukherjee, and Mridula Mukherjee, *India Since Independence* (Penguin Books India, January 1, 2008), pp. 189-218.

[24]See Sanjay Seth, *Marxist Theory and Nationalist Politics: the Case of Colonial India* (New Delhi : Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1995) for a history of the Communist Party during the Nationalist movement.

[25]See Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India, 1885-1947* (Delhi: Macmillan, 1983), pp. 411-413; see also D.N. Gupta, *Communism and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1939-45* (Los Angeles, Calif.: Sage, 2008).

the Communist Party of India (Marxist).[26]

A study of Muktibodh is of unique interest to understanding the history of this period. Muktibodh was a lifelong supporter and sometime member of the Communist Party, but his criticism often sparred with the Party's support of Socialist Realism in literature. However, his aesthetic criticism and his poetics in terms of the long poem, are impossible to understand without grasping his engagement with Left Marxian thought. Furthermore, Muktibodh's attempt to write a poetry that would grasp and express the universal through his own experience means that he was a Hindi writer uniquely engaged with the question of the international, especially as it related to the question of science and technology. These interests are especially relevant to our understanding of the Nehruvian era of state-led development and international non-alignment. And finally, Muktibodh's criticism of genre, and his development of the long poem, are bound up in the question of genre in Indian literary history. Muktibodh wished throughout his life to have written a novel, but his long poems, in many ways, were written out of a desire to make lyric subjectivity imagine, and imagine speaking to, a totality of social experience that would otherwise be restricted to the form of the novel. In this way, Muktibodh's long poems are a unique contribution to the literary history of Hindi.

Muktibodh, ultimately, is a foundational figure in Hindi literature because he expressed, more than anyone of his generation, the ways in which the lower-middle-class confronted the social world of post-Independence India. Despite his strong political commitments to Marxism, his writing remained experimental and centered on his own experiences as a member of that class. An examination of Muktibodh's works, then, is a crucial step in understanding the unique qualities and contributions of Hindi modernist literature during this period. Muktibodh's engagement with the internationalism of the Cold War, far from a simplistic enthusiasm for progress, was rooted in his own interpretation of his contemporary society. The bravery of his attempt was to use that experience as the basis for interpreting and thinking through the global.

Muktibodh and his Reception

Despite being acknowledged as one of the major figures of post-Independence Hindi literature, Muktibodh has frequently been depicted as an outsider. Reactions to his death, for instance, stressed Muktibodh's position as a rebel outside of the mainstream. Shamsher Bahadur Singh, Writing the preface to *Cāṁd kā muṁh ṭeḍhā hai*, underlined the contrast between Muktibodh's popularity with the "new generation" of writers and his contrasting obscurity to the general reading public. The cause for this, according to Singh, was the "cowardice" [*bhīrutā*] of editors, critics, and literary institutions—"whether they are on the Right, Left, somewhere in between, or are simply businessmen,"—towards a writer "who was never a cheap flatterer, and who refused to accept anyone else's selfish interests."[27] Attacking the publishing industry, Singh was further supporting

[26]For an account of this split, see Mohit Sen, *A Traveller and the Road: the Journey of an Indian Communist* (New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2003). Sen (1929–2003) was a member of the Communist Party of India until the 1970s, and his autobiography details the tensions in the party that built up in the 1950s and 1960s.

[27]Śamśer Bahādur Singh, "Ek vilakṣaṇ pratibhā," in *Cānd kā muṃh ṭeḍhā hai*, by Gajānan Mādhav Muktibodh (Bhāratīya Jñānapīṭh Prakāśan, 1964), p. 20.

the image a rebellious uncompromising figure, which since then has persisted and become the dominant perception of Muktibodh. In a recent analysis, the poet Chandrakant Devtale describes Muktibodh's life as "nearly mythic" in its story of struggle, poverty, and the psychological pain of modernity.[28] In this way, despite his incorporation into the canon of Hindi literature, Muktibodh is treated as fundamentally separate and distinct from contemporary *Naī kavitā* poets.

In Singh's original formulation, Muktibodh's outsider status stems from both his geographic and economic position. The areas in which he lived, far from Benares, Allahabad and Delhi, are in the periphery of the Hindi literary world, and in fact form a linguistic borderland with other South Asian languages, most notably Marathi. Indeed, Muktibodh grew up speaking the latter language, in which his younger brother, Śaraccandra Muktibodh, became a major poet, and his early reception made much of the fact that he had decided to write in the national language-to-be rather than the tongue of his home.[29] This geographic marginality combines with an economic marginality; Muktibodh struggled to find a permanent, decently-paying position as a journalist or teacher. Even the relative comfort of his final years, in which he was employed at a college in Rajnandgaon, a small city outside of Raipur in Chattisgarh, were marred by the politically motivated banning of a history textbook which he had written, by all accounts, in the hope that it would secure a decent income.[30]

Despite the above-mentioned economic and geographic factors, Muktibodh's outsider status is more often explained by recourse to the difficulty and strangeness of his poetry. Muktibodh's poems were famously thought of as long, a factor that Muktibodh himself often complained of, claiming that it made them more and more difficult to have published.[31] While the length of the poetry has proven of interest to most critics of Muktibodh, and indeed his long poems form the most important basis for his evaluation as a great poet, they are also invariably characterized as confusing and meandering. Similarly, the style of Muktibodh's writing has often been described as crude and alienating, a feature remarked upon from at least the time the preface, written by Shamsher Bahadur Singh (1911–1993), to *Cānd kā Muṃh Ṭeḍhā Hai* in 1964.[32] The perceived crudeness of his writing, attributed variously to his originality, the rugged landscape in which he lived, or his Marathi background, was noted by the majority of commentators on Muktibodh regardless of their other positions vis-à-vis his work.[33] That his writing was described as crude was almost always presented in positive terms; nevertheless, it served to differentiate Muktibodh from other writers who were more aesthetically integrated within Hindi literary history.

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[28]Devtāle Candrakānt, *Muktibodh: kavitā aur jīvan-vivek* (New Delhi: Radhakrishna, 2003), pp. 13.

[29]For a representative example, see the articles and letters collected in a memorial issue to Muktibodh of the journal *Rāṣṭravāṇī* 18, no. 7-8 (January 1965), which was published from Pune by the Mahārāṣṭra Rāṣṭrabhāṣā Sabhā [Maharashtra Congress for the National language] in Pune. See also Singh, "Ek vilakṣaṇ pratibhā," p. 12, which lists regional and linguistic differences as reasons for Muktibodh's relative obscurity prior to his death.

[30]This textbook is published in full, along with materials related to the court cases associated with it, separately from Muktibodh's collected works, as Gajānan Mādhav Muktibodh, *Bhārat : Itihās aur sanskṛti* (Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 2009).

[31]See Gajānan Mādhav Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 2nd edition, ed. Nemichandra Jain, 6 vols. (2007), 5:271.

[32]See Singh, "Ek vilakṣaṇ pratibhā."

[33]See *Kaṁk*, December 1980, p. 28. See also Kedārnāth Singh, "Kālbaddh aur parārthmay," *Pūrvagraha*, nos. 39-40 (June-October 1980): 29–35; and Singh, "Ek vilakṣaṇ pratibhā."

Perhaps the most important reason for Muktibodh's perceived, if not actual, marginality is that, uniquely among post-Independence Hindi writers, his writing was not claimed fully by either the Right or the Left within Hindi criticism. The schism relates to two camps, usually if not quite accurately referred to as *Pragativād* and *Prayogvād*, which dominated literary culture during the mid-twentieth century. This schism, of course, was strongly inflected by the Cold War, and the direct support of cultural politics by various international players such as the CIA.[34] Within this dynamic, Muktibodh presented a distinct problem: on the one hand, it was impossible to ignore the explicitly Marxist themes of his poetry, his intermittent membership in the Communist Party and involvement in Leftist politics more generally, and his explicit statements of ideological alignment. On the other hand, the rigid, proscriptive literary politics of *pragativād* at that time could hardly accommodate the fantastic, allegorical poetry that made up the vast majority of Muktibodh's work. The result has been that, in the fifty years following Muktibodh's death, criticism has largely focused on the question of his position within *pragativād* and *prayogvād*, rather than engaging directly with his literary work.

Because Muktibodh is largely perceived through the prism of his possible affiliation, his position as an outsider may come not from any of his essential qualities, but rather from the way in which he is always seen and depicted as outside of something—outside of the center of Hindi literature, outside of the mainstream of the language, and crucially outside of the most important political distinction of his time. While all of these distinctions between the broadly liberal and the Left are valid, and will be discussed at length in this dissertation, I will also argue that this perception of Muktibodh as an outsider often does harm to our ability to understand the ways in which he is central to the literature of his time, from his formal contribution to Hindi poetry, to his development of a Romantic Left aesthetics and, crucial to my argument, to the ways in which he was very much a figure of his time, a Hindi writer who thought of himself as writing on a world stage in a way that was unprecedented in his language, and which within a few years of his death would come to seem equally impossible.

This legacy of Muktibodh as a writer of the international and the universal is difficult to see precisely because his work is so often viewed in terms of its relation to progress, i.e., towards the construction of a politically and socially progressive point of view. This issue maintained its pertinence with regards to the study of Muktibodh even as the political and cultural priorities changed in the late 1960s and early 1970s. These changes, which took place across Hindi speaking regions as well as across South Asia at large, are often viewed through the lens of the Naxalbari movement. The Naxalbari movement, in which a peasant insurgency in West Bengal which drew in Kolkata-based Marxist intellectuals and student leaders, and led to a violent reaction by the

[34]This support, on behalf of the United States, is typified by the history of the Congress for Cultural Freedom and the journal Encounter, which claimed a Paris Masthead and a perspective as a "British" until it was exposed as funded by the CIA in 1967. For a history of the Congress for Cultural Freedom worldwide, see Giles Scott-Smith, *The Politics of Apolitical Culture: the Congress for Cultural Freedom, the CIA, and Post-war American Hegemony* (London: Routledge, 2002); as well as Peter Coleman, *The Liberal Conspiracy: the Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Struggle for the Mind of Postwar Europe* (New York: Free Press, 1989). For a history of Congress' adventures in India, and particularly its surreptitious sponsorship of the journal *Quest*, see Margery Sabin, "The Politics of Cultural Freedom: India in the Nineteen Fifties," *Raritan* 14, no. 4 (Spring 1995): 45–66.

West Bengal government, at the time ruled by a coalition led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist), exposed divisions among Indian Marxism with wide repercussions, and led in part to the development of Maoist political parties and militant groups.[35] This development disrupted debates in India over the question of progressivism, which had focused primarily on the correct attitude towards issues of national development. The Indian Left had already been divided, both by the question of whether to support the Congress Party and national development as well as by the tensions caused by the Sino-Soviet split and the 1962 Indo-Chinese war, which had culminated in the fracture of the Communist Party in 1964. The development of Naxalism in turn led to a sudden shift by a new generation of the Indian Left. Consider, for instance, the Leftist literary journal *Kaṅk*, which began publication in 1971. The journal was published from the small town of Ratlam, a stop on the Bombay–Delhi railway line in Madhya Pradesh. This journal quickly became devoted, not to the former use of the term *pragati*, or progress, but instead to the issue of janvād, "people-ism", to which it devoted a special issue in 1980. *Janvād* was contrasted with *pragativād* in its attention to a broader, less orthodox spectrum of oppressed and revolutionary classes, and in particular on the rural poor, as well as its more practical departure from what was seen as the Soviet-oriented conservatism that characterized *pragativād*. But for the writers who contributed to *Kaṅk*, Muktibodh was still a difficult issue; a special issue devoted to him in 1980 brought up a series of debates on his place within a new paradigm of the Left. These debates often centered on the question of whether Muktibodh, with his personal voice, obscure vocabulary, and explicit position within the educated middle class, could be accomodated within a literary ideal that emphasized connection with the rural peasantry and simple, transparent language. This debate engaged directly with Muktibodh's language, even if this engagement was often solely intended to explain away its obscurity. But even if the frame of debating Muktibodh had changed, the essential parameters of that debate had not. Muktibodh was still judged primarily in terms of his political perspective and relation to a dominant postition on the Left.

My dissertation views Muktibodh's work with the matrix of an intellectual history extending from his own contemporary criticism to the reevaluations of his work in the two decades that followed his death. I also ask how Muktibodh was able to think beyond the constraints of his time and place, in order to assess the originality of his contributions to Hindi literature. Rather than considering this originality soely in terms of its relation to the schism between *prayogvād* and *pragativād*, I take up key features of Muktibodh's work to consider their development in the context of a larger literary history of Hindi. This literary history takes into account the unique circumstances of post-Independence India and situates those circumstances within the earlier *Chāyāvād* period. It also takes into account Muktibodh's own engagement with this literary history as well as his ability to create new forms capable of expressing the tensions of his own time.

[35]For a consideration of the intellectual impacts of the Naxalbari movement and Indian Maoism on intellectual history, and in particular the development of the Subaltern Studies group, see Sanjay Seth, "From Maoism to post-colonialism? The Indian 'Sixties', and beyond," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 7, no. 4 (2006): 589–605.

Plan for the Dissertation

As the above discussion might indicate, there exists a substantial literature on Muktibodh in Hindi; indeed, Muktibodh is one of the more debated figures within post-Independence Hindi literature. Most contemporary literature has tended to view Muktibodh within the framework of ideological debate, and the majority of Muktibodh criticism is concerned with establishing his progressive Marxist identity in the face of his unorthodox aesthetic positions. Criticism on Muktibodh has, for this reason, tended to focus more on analyzing the content of Muktibodh's work in order to establish a perceived correct reading.[36] Besides Muktibodh's reception within Hindi criticism, there has been relatively little work done on Muktibodh to date. Although some of Muktibodh's poetry, including his poem *Aṁdhere Meṁ*, has been translated into English, and he has been discussed in Lucy Rosenstein's anthology of Hindi poetry, his work has only been the subject of two dissertations, one in English, and one in German.[37]

Muktibodh's writings are often interpreted solely in terms of the contents of its imagery, and its relation to a political interpretation of his works. My methodological approach, however, takes seriously Muktibodh's claim to universality, and examine it through historicized close readings

[36]Some of the more prominent and thoroughly researched critical works on Muktibodh, besides those which will be discussed directly, are: Nandakiśor Naval, *Muktibodh, jñān aur saṃvedanā* (Naī Dillī: Rājakamala Prakāśana, 1993), which presents a well-researched overview of Muktibodh's works. The closest thing yet available in Hindi to a biography of Muktibodh is Viṣṇucandra Śarmā, *Muktibodh kī ātmakathā* (New Delhi: Radhakrishna, 1984), which presents a fictionalized autobiography of the author. More valuable for research purposes is *Lakṣit muktibodh*, in collab. with Moti Ram Varmā (Delhi: Vidyarthi Prakashan, 1972), an invaluable oral history of Muktibodh's family and associates, upon which much of the biographical material is based. A useful anthology, which contains Śaraccandra Muktibodh's scathing essay "Mere baḍe bhāī" [My big brother], is *Muktibodh: vyakti, anubhav aur abhivyakti* (New Delhi: Naya Sahitya Kendra, 2001). More recent work includes Candrakānt Devtāle, *Muktibodh: kavitā aur jīvan vivek* (Rajkamal Prakashan Pvt Ltd, January 1, 2003) which is a more personal and idiosyncratic work by a well-known poet, and contains many original insights into Muktibodh's life and poetry; and Dūdhnāth Singh, *Muktibodh: sāhitya meṁ naī pravṛttiyāṁ* (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 2013). Besides these full length works, there are equally innumerable essays dealing with Muktibodh; some of these are especially valuable in that they are brief assessments by fellow writers rather than critics, and thus are slightly looser in their interpretations. See Aśok Vājpeyī, "Bhayānak xabar kī kavitā," in *Filhāl* (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 1970); as well as Rājeś Jośī, *Ek kavi kī noṭbuk* (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 2004), pp. 11-19.

[37]Brief translations of Muktibodh's work by Arvind Krishna Mehtrotra of "Bhūl-galtī" [The error] and "Śūnya" [The zero] are available in the *Journal of South Asian Literature* vol. 10, issue 1 (1974): 39-41. Muktibodh's opus, *Aṁdhere meṁ*, has been translated into English by the Hindi novelist Krishna Baldev Vaid as Gajānan Mādhav Muktibodh, *In the Dark*, trans. Krishna Baldev Vaid (Noida: Rainbow Publishers, in collaboration with Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya Hindi Vishwavidyalaya, 2001). There are, of course, a wide variety of translations of Muktibodh's work into other South Asian and European languages. For dissertations, see Sanjay Kumar. Gautam, "Conflict of Callings: Literature, Politics, and the Birth of Pain in the Poetry of Muktibodh (1917-1964)" (University of Chicago, 2005); and Barbara Lotz, "Poesie, Poetik, Politik: Engagement und Experiment im Werk des Hindiautors Gajānan Mādhav Muktibodh (1917 - 1964)" (Universität Heidelberg, 2000). Some of Lotz's scholarship on Muktibodh has been translated into English as Barbara Lotz, "Romantic Allegory and Progressive Criticism," in *Narrative Strategies: Essays on South Asian Literature and Film*, ed. Vasudha Dalmia and Theo Dansteegt (New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 1998); and Barbara Lotz, "Long poem or unending poem? On the emergence of Muktibodh's Andhere mein'," *Hindi: Language, discourse, writing* 2, no. 1 (2001): 91–108. See also Ludmila L. Rosenstein, *New Poetry in Hindi* (Permanent Black, 2003); this anthology includes translations from Muktibodh as well as other poets associated with *Naī kavitā*, along with a critical introduction.

of his works. What this means is that, rather than read Muktibodh's work solely in terms of its ultimately political commitments, or, for that matter, read it solely as symptomatic of the political and social circumstances in which he wrote, I evaluate his work on the basis both of the evolution of his poetic form, as well as his sustained interests in questions of universality. This approach requires that Muktibodh's Marxism be understood as part of his utopian project—a crucial part, without which he would be unable to imagine the world that he did, but a necessary part of a larger project.[38] In this way I depart both from those who, even as they accommodate Muktibodh's fantasies, do so from the position that they are ultimately aligned solely towards overcoming his own alienation and discovering a radical identity.[39] Muktibodh's poetics are concerned not only with realizing an actually existing alienation, but also with bringing into being an autonomous space, through his own lyric subjectivity, within which his own experiences could become the basis for reimagining the world.

I also embed my formalist interpretation of Muktibodh's poetry and prose in the historical context of his time in Hindi literary history. My research is based, however, not only on readings of Muktibodh's works, but also on a detailed understanding of the literary culture in which he wrote. Muktibodh emerges in this dissertation as a crucial figure in literary history in two major ways. First, as a member of the *Tār saptak* group, Muktibodh was a crucial element in the transition between *Chāyāvād* to modernist Hindi poetry. Second, Muktibodh's career in Central India, and his background as a speaker of Marathi, exemplifies a unique regional literary culture on a frontier zone. To examine Muktibodh's contributions to this trend, my dissertation features a detailed examination of the Hindi literary sphere at this time. It includes readerings drawn both from daily newspapers as well as literary journals, including both widely-read journals such as *Naī kavitā* and *Kalpanā*, as well as more local journals such as *Vasudhā*. I also read from literary journals of the 1970s and 1980s in order to understand how Muktibodh's reception changed during this time.

A historicized reading of Muktibodh allows for new interpretations, especially when we take into account the importance of science, technology, and the international in the first decades of India's Independence. Muktibodh's interest in science and technology is not simply a sign of his eccentricity, but part of the means through which Muktibodh attempted to engage with a range of materials, from the nature of education and learning to the question of relations to the planetary itself.[40] My dissertation therefore contributes to the understanding of Muktibodh's work in argu-

[38]In positing that Muktibodh's Marxism should be folded within a utopian project, I risk tautology in order to historicize Muktibodh's own understanding of and conception of Marxism. As I argue in chapter 1, a close reading of Muktibodh's *vaktavya*, or personal statement, that precedes his poems in *Tār saptak*, shows that Muktibodh's turn to Marxism came about in the context of what were ultimately questions of *genre* and language, having to do with the choice between lyric poetry in Hindi and the novel in Marathi. Marxism was that "scientific viewpoint" that enabled Muktibodh to begin to imagine a poetic image that could encompass more than a single moment. In this way, Muktibodh's work insists on including a Marxist point of view on the world as part of its subjective, non-determined imagination.

[39]See Namwar Singh, *Kavitā ke naye pratimān* (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 1968), pp. 245-246.

[40]In invoking the term planetary, I adopt the term used by Gayatri Spivak. The crucial insight of this term, beyond the trenchant critique which accompanies it of the history of Area Studies and Comparative Literature as disciplines, is the positing of the planetary as the non-existent but imaginable possibility of subjectivity in the world, as against

ing for the central importance of his imagination of science. It also argues for the importance of Muktibodh's work as a lens through which we can understand the period immediately following Independence. This period was strongly affected by a Cold War politics of atomic anxiety and the development of new models of imagining the world as internationalized spheres of influence, and accompanied by rapid technological change.

My dissertation also draws attention to the form which Muktibodh used to shape his ideas, and which he placed at the center of aesthetics: the *kavita*, or lyric. In translating the term *kavitā* as lyric, I am both collapsing the history of the lyric itself, as well as that of the *kavitā*. Hindi poetry took shape out of a contentious history during the colonial period that was marked by the emergence of the *Khaḍī bolī* Hindi register as a literary language, and it was not until the twentieth century that that language was accepted as a vehicle for poetry, rather than simply prose. The four major *Chāyāvād* [Mystical] poets of the 1920s—primarily Sumitranandan Pant (1900–1977), Suryakant Tripathi 'Nirala' (1896–1961), Jayshankar Prasad (1890–1937), and Mahadevi Varma (1907–1987)—were the first to write a poetry that was considered both essential and unique to *Khaḍī bolī* Hindi, as well as successful as literature; earlier poetry written in *Khaḍī bolī*, associated with the Reformist school of Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi (1864–1938) was widely criticized as awkward and overly indebted to Sanskrit poetics.[41] Prior to that time, written poetry was composed primarily in either Braj—a literary language with a long history, connected both to courtly culture in North India as well as religious devotional poetry—or Urdu, which had developed originally as a contact language between the dialects spoken around Delhi and Persian.[42] The literary past of Hindi, for this reason, was very much still an active project, rendering the relations between the subjective, lyric poem, as Mutkibodh understood himself to be writing it, and its predecessors, such as the short poetry of Braj, and the epic *kāvya* form to which language was thought to aspire, all quite complex. But at the same time, Muktibodh fixed a lineage for himself that included not only *Chāyāvād*, but also the English modernist poets and the Romantics, especially Shelley. In this way, Muktibodh forged his own relationship to, and definition of, the lyric.

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the existing global. Under this formulation, the global is the contemporary world, fully globalized, in which we live, but which cannot begin to change politically until we can imagine another, alternate way of existing. Muktibodh reimagined the world based on a confrontation with a Cold War International, but in many ways, his imagination was prescient enough to fully imagine the globalized future, as he did in his short story "Claude Eatherly," which I will discuss in chapter 3. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a discipline* (Columbia University Press, 2003), pp. 72-80.

[41]The poetics of modern Hindi are discussed in the third chapter of this dissertation. For the history of Dwivedi's journal *Saraswati*, see Sujata Mody, "Literature, language, and nation formation: The story of a modern Hindi journal 1900–1920," Ph.D. (University of California, Berkeley, 2008).

[42]For the emergence of Hindi as a literary language of poetry, see Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere, 1920-1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 125-174; and Schomer, *Mahadevi Varma*, especially pp. 19-92. For the early history of Urdu as a literary language, see Shamsurraḥmān Fārūqī, *Early Urdu Literary Culture and History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001). For the history of the development of modern Hindi as a literary language and the emergence of a Hindi public sphere in and around Benares, see Vasudha Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bhāratendu Hariśchandra and Nineteenth-Century Banaras* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), esp. pp. 146-221. See also Christopher Rolland King, *One Language, Two Scripts: the Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India* (Oxford University Press, December 9, 1999); and Alok Rai, *Hindi Nationalism* (Orient Blackswan, 2001).

The lyric is rarely depicted as a constitutive genre of a postcolonial, national literature. As a wide range of criticism has argued, the novel is traditionally seen as the privileged literary form of national formation, because it can lay claim to a social totality, and also because of its historical emergence as the unique and essential genre of European modernity.[43] Recent scholarship has begun to explore the fact that, in the case of post-Independence India, it was the short story that was the preeminent genre of literature, as exemplified by the importance of *Naī kahānī* in Hindi. As I argue in the fourth chapter of this dissertation, Muktibodh saw the short story as both a desired goal, as well as a literary form to be interrogated. [44] The lyric poem, however, perhaps because it is so often thought of as the expression of individual subjectivity, is frequently considered to be the province of tradition and the local. In addition, the lyric, insofar as it makes a claim to express subjectivity, is often thought be trapped in the asocial box of its own expression; the lyric has often therefore been criticized in Hindi as a form limited solely to the individual moment of experience.[45] Debates over the proper of poetry always centered on the question of the lyric expression of the moment, or *kṣaṇvād*, [momentism] as the term was sometimes used pejoratively in Hindi; the implication of this focus on subjectivity was that the poet was afraid of engagement with the people, and thought of them instead as a terrifying, faceless "bhīḍ" [crowd].[46] An analysis of Muktibodh's development of the lyric in Hindi poetry therefore has the potential to reshape both the literary history of genre in Hindi, as well as contribute towards a rethinking of the function of the lyric more generally. By showing how Muktibodh's development of the long poem was based off of his own understanding of the antinomies of his experience, my dissertation argues that Muktibodh's work made a unique argument for the crucial role of lyric expression, one that has continued to resonate since his death. Essentially, my dissertation argues that Muktibodh's long poem, at its most concentrated moments, gave a voice to a reimagination of the reality of post-Independence, lower-middle class life that was unavailable in any other form. This accounts in part for the novelistic quality of Muktibodh's long poems: they expressed a seeming totality of social life, embedded within history and articulating a new imagination of the world.

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[43]For a history in English of the emergence of the novel in India, see Meenakshi Mukherjee, *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985).

[44]For an overview of the theorization of the short story viz-à-vis the novel, see Mani, "Gender and Genre: Hindi and Tamil Short Story Writing and the Framing of the Postcolonial Indian Nation, 1950-1970," pp. 10-12.

[45]See my discussion of Rajendra Yadav's introduction to *Ek duniyā: samānantar* in Chapter 4. Notable recent exceptions to the neglect of the lyric in South Asian Studies, and the study of Postcolonial or World Literature more broadly, include Pue, *I Too Have Some Dreams*; and Jahan Ramazani, *A Transnational Poetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). Notably, although Ramazani argues for a transnational poetics of postcolonial hybridity, he does so in regards to poetry written entirely in English. The possibility of a transnational or transregional poetry written in a non-metropolitan language, or in a language such as Hindi or Indonesian, which makes a claim to a national status, remains unexplored.

[46]For a representative expression of this trope in Hindi criticism, see Śarmā, *Nayī kavitā aur astitvavād*, p. 121, in which Sharma writes of the "existentialist" poets: "These poets sometimes have pity and think about the country. They think and they become utterly disappointed. In a despairing voice, they ask, 'What will I do with this country?' The greatest calamity for them is that they were born here, in India. The politicians are, of course, dishonest, and the people are morons for following them. The amount of hatred among the poets of *naī kavitā* towards the crowd cannot be found anywhere else."

My dissertation, in examining a modernist Hindi poet during a time of Cold War internationalism, is also more generally a contribution to our understanding of post-Independence Hindi and its role in the world. Through examining the work of Muktibodh, who was bilingual and engaged in both Hindi and Marathi literature, and who made a unique contribution to modernist Hindi poetry from his position in the literary culture of Central India, my dissertation intervenes in our understanding of post-Independence Hindi literary history. My research shows this to be a particularly dynamic time in that literary history, one distinct both from the development of Hindi literature during the Nationalist period, as well as from the period which followed Nehru's death in 1964. Through analyzing the unique way in which Muktibodh combined Marxism with a global Hindi internationalism, my dissertation argues that for a new understanding the literary and intellectual history of Hindi during the Cold War.

Structure of the Dissertation

My dissertation is intended to, on one level, make a series of discrete arguments about Muktibodh's work, but on another level, to be read as a coherent whole. For this reason, the first two chapters of this work are intended to introduce the career and reception of Muktibodh, as well as provide a sense of the historical context to which he responded. With this knowledge in place, the subsequent three chapters analyze questions of genre and form in Muktibodh's writing, before the final chapter looks at his own aesthetic theories. Muktibodh made important contributions to several literary genres, as well as to Hindi criticism, and so to a certain extent the dissertation is structured according to each of these genres. However, the dissertation as a whole argues that Muktibodh's work has to be understood holistically, in that his short fiction, poetry and criticism are interact with and reflect upon each other. To this end, each chapter, to a significant extent, comments on the others.

Chapter 1 focuses on the life and career of Muktibodh, as well as his reception within Hindi criticism. An account of Muktibodh's career is crucial for reasons besides the basic necessities of a biographical account. First, Muktibodh's background, as a Marathi speaker from Central India, and as a journalist and schoolteacher living for the most part outside of the mainstream of the Hindi literary scene, became an extremely important part of how he was received as a romantic, rebellious poet of the lower middle class. But understanding Muktibodh's life is also a lens for understanding the importance of geography and location in Hindi literary history. In many ways, Muktibodh's position questions narratives of Hindi literary history that emphasize the mainstream literary centers, and the relationship between those centers and the regional periphery. Muktibodh lived and wrote in Central India, an area composed of a wide variety of urban settings set within a linguistic frontier zone in which multiple literary cultures, particularly in Hindi and Marathi, but also in Urdu, interacted and coexisted. The first part of this chapter therefore presents Muktibodh's life and career in part as a reflection on the role of Central India in the literary history of Hindi.

The second part of this chapter examines Muktibodh's reception after his death across three moments. First, I show how Muktibodh's illness and untimely death led to a great deal of coverage in the Hindi media that structured the ways in which he was initially received. The com-

bination of his death, memorials that depicted him as a romantic, tragic figure, and the release of his first book of poetry combined to cement a popular image of Muktibodh as a poet of struggle. Second, I analyze how criticism of Muktibodh functioned metonymously as a referendum on post-Independence Hindi poetry. Two major critics at the time, Namwar Singh and Ram Vilas Sharma, debated over whether Muktibodh should be considered as the prophetic voice of post-Independence Hindi and its search for identity, or as an escape into mystical fantasy. For these critics, Muktibodh was a synecdoche for the poetry of the 1950s as a whole. Third, I focus on the reevaluation of Muktibodh in the late 1970s and early 1980s. For later critics, the reception of Muktibodh changed in response to the development of Maoist Naxalism, and the political event of Indira Gandhi's suspension of constitutional guarantees by declaring a state of Emergency which lasted from 1975 to 1977. While Muktibodh's nightmarish fantasy of political oppression began to feel more relevant than ever, a shift on the Left towards identification with the rural poor, and a more general growth in interest in regional and local specificity, meant that Muktibodh's legacy had to be reinterpreted to fit contemporary concerns. This chapter concludes that Muktibodh's posthumous reception has shifted as it reflects changes in Hindi literature, and that it often obscures crucial aspects of its works in favor of debates over his ideological commitments.

In Chapter 2, I examine Muktibodh's use of the themes of science and technology. Because so much critical attention has focused on the allegorical meaning of Muktibodh's fantastic imagery, relatively little attention has been paid to the content of that imagery itself. But science and technology in Muktibodh's work are not important simply because they have been neglected in literary evaluations of his work; they provide one of the key means through which he imagined the universal in the context of the 1950s. This chapter therefore situates Muktibodh's use of science and technology in the context both of Nehru's interest in science and state-led development, as well as the growing engagement of Hindi writers with the international. For Muktibodh, however, these themes were activated in his writings into a critical engagement with the concept of knowledge and historical development. In the poems "Dūr Tārā" [Distant star] and "Mujhe nahīṁ mālūm" [I do not know] I examine how Mutkibodh's use of the vocabulary of science brings up issues of the ways in which technical vocabulary in Hindi was formed. The poem "Brahmarākṣas,"[Brahman Demon] features the ghost of a Brahman living at the bottom of a well who interrogates a wide range of knowledge systems, and is ultimately revealed to possess a crucial, transcendental truth. By depicting the ghost as combining traditions and modern knowledge systems, Muktibodh is able to create an image that interrogates the history of science in relation to pre-modern knowledge and education. Finally, in examining Muktibodh's short story "Claude Eatherly," I show how he was able to depict international relations, and in particular the developing connections between the post-colonial world, the Soviet Union, and the United States.

In Chapter 3, I analyze the formal evolution of Muktibodh's long poem, the form for which he is best known. Although Muktibodh's long poem, and its analysis, is the foundation of Muktibodh criticism, the formal roots of this long poem remain relatively unexamined. In this chapter I argue that the long poem developed out of two major sources: the *Chāyāvād* poetry that Muktibodh read in his youth and engaged with throughout his career, as well as the influence of the Marathi language and its literature. While it is frequently remarked upon that Muktibodh spoke Marathi throughout his life, and that it had some effect on his work, I show that the influence of Marathi

poetics, including Marathi treatment of meter, are of tremendous importance in the formation of Muktibodh's poetry. Marathi meter, especially the *abhaṅga* devotional poems, functions in a manner distinct from a Sanskrit metrical model, weighting each syllable equally and forming a line by a number of syllables, rather than assigning a metrical weight to different vowels. This metrical model became the basis for Marathi free verse, and as I show through examining Muktibodh's poems collected in the 1943 *Tār saptak*, this syllabic free verse influenced Muktibodh's own development of free verse in Hindi. Furthermore, I argue that the Marathi modernist poet Mardhekar influenced Muktibodh's poetics, both in his use of syllabic meters, as well as his imagery of urban despair. These influences combine in Muktibodh's work with the grand, Romantic language of *Chāyāvād*, especially that of Jayshankar Prasad's 1935 *Kāmāyanī*, to provide a base for Muktibodh's long poem, which I here demonstrate through an analysis of "O virāṭ svapno" [O expansive dreams], a poem written between 1944 and 1948 and unpublished in Muktibodh's life time.

In Chapter 4, I turn to a comparison of two of Muktibodh's later long poems, "Bhaviṣyadhārā" and "Aṁdhere meṁ," his most famous poem. These two poems, both written across the late 1950s and early 1960s, show the range and capabilities of the long poem, but they also display the capaciousness of imagery which sometimes led to his poems being labeled obscure. "Bhaviṣyadhārā," unpublished during Muktibodh's lifetime and perhaps unfinished, is a long poem depicting a prophetic scientist, whose formula has been stolen. In a narrative framework that vaguely resembles a *tilismīya* [fantastic] or *jāsūsī* [spy] novel, the narrator of the poem is depicted as guiltily alternating between wondering if he is responsible for attacking the scientist and seeking out the prophetic figure. Through this loose framework the poem is able to encompass a vast range of imagery drawn from a wide range of scientific fields. "Aṁdhere meṁ," although it was written during the same late period of Muktibodh's career, differs sharply from "Bhaviṣyadhārā": it insists both on making its subject the act of imaginative creation of the narrator himself, as well as on grounding its fantastic sequences within realist depictions of the everyday life of the narrator. Its fantasies, furthermore, constantly return to a terror-filled vision of the contemporary city, drawn largely from Muktibodh's experiences of living in Nagpur. In this way, I argue, "Aṁdhere meṁ" is a crucial poem in part because it insists on linking together the poetic imagination with the imagination of the political.

In Chapter 5, I take up Muktibodh's short stories, which are frequently seen as inferior to, and at best preparatory of, Muktibodh's poetry. I contend, however, that Muktibodh's stories show a series of experiments with narrative and genre, and that they attempt to show the ways in which the reality of post-Independence, middle class life, and especially that life as it revolved around bureaucratic structures, was unable to be depicted in a straightforward narrative and therefore required the experimental stories discussed in this chapter. The stories I examine interject various prose forms into the framework of the short story, from the animal fable that appears in "Pakṣī aur dīmak" [The bird and the weevil] to a Kafkaesque tale of a man forced to become a circus lion in "Samjhautā" [Compromise] to a narrator's conversation with his own character in "Bhūt kā upcār" [The attendance of a ghost]. Each of these fables comments in some way on the conflict set up in the plot, but is presented in such a way that it is able to provide a resolution that the realist plot in which it is framed is not. In this way, I show that Muktibodh's short stories, far

from the failures that Muktibodh himself sometimes present them as, are in fact detailed and subtle commentaries on the narrative form of the short story itself.

In Chapter 6, finally, I examine Muktibodh's aesthetic theory and criticism. Muktibodh is most well known for his theory of the *fantasy*, for which he uses the English term. He developed this theory most prominently in his essay "Tīsrā kṣaṇ" [The third moment], in which an author transforms his experience of reality and then transforms it once again into a work of art. In this chapter, I tease apart the genealogy of this concept, locating it first in Muktibodh's earliest critical statements, in which he presents his idea of the poetic image as able to combine a variety of experiences in a new, transformed shape, and trace its evolution through his criticism. I also show how this concept developed through Muktibodh's engagement both with English Romanticism and Left Aesthetics. Finally, I show how these ideas are the basis for a critique of realism that insists on the ways in which the autonomous imagination is able to comment indirectly on the real. In his book-length criticism of Jayshankar Prasad's long *Chāyāvād* poem Kāmāyaṇī (1935), Muktibodh insists that Prasad's poem, even as it claims historical and mythological significance, is crucially influenced by in the contemporary social conditions that affected its author. Prasad's depiction of myth therefore forms a fantasy of the social conditions experienced by the author. In this way, Muktibodh both critiques Prasad, while at the same time adopting his poetry as a model for his own poetics.

In conclusion, this dissertation shows the profound interrelation between the different genres in which Muktibodh wrote. As I show, although Muktibodh is known primarily for his poetry, he was also an important thinker on modern Hindi aesthetics, and his concept of the fantasy is frequently cited in Hindi criticism. And although his short fiction, as noted above, is often viewed as secondary to his poetry, it is in many ways is a vital complement to that work, and can be seen to comment on many of the same issues of genre that Muktibodh address in his poetry and criticism. In this way, although it does make a particular claim for the importance of the lyric and the long poem in Muktibodh's work, this dissertation situates that importance within a wider literary, historical, and culture framework. The relevance of the long poem itself can be seen best when it is understand in the context of the rest of Muktibodh's work and the historical period during the Cold War in which he accomplished that work.

Chapter 2

Muktibodh's Life and Reception

Śamśer Bahādūr Singh, *Gajānan Muktibodh*

zamāne bhar kā koī is qadar apnā na ho jāye
ki apnī zindagī xud āpko begānā ho jāye.

sahar hogī ye śab bītegī aur aisī sahar hogī
ki behośī hamāre hoś kā paimānā ho jāye.

kiraṇ phūṭī hai zaxmoṁ ke lahū se: yah nayā din hai:
diloṁ kī rośnī ke phūl haiṁ—nazarānā ho jāye.

garībuddahar the ham; uṭh gaye duniyā se; acchā hai...
hamāre nām se rośan agar vīrānā ho jāye.

bahut khīñce tere mastoṁ ne faqe phir bhī kam khīñce
riyāzat xatm hotī hai agar afsānā ho jāye.

caman khiltā thā vah khiltā thā, aur vah khiltā kaisā thā
ki jaise har kali se dard kā yārānā ho jāye.

vah gahre āsmānī raṅg kī cādar meṁ liṗṭā hai
kafan sau zaxm phūloṁ meṁ vahī pardā na ho jāye.

idhar maiṁ hūṁ udhar maiṁ hūṁ, ajal, tū bīc meṁ kyoṁ hai?
fakt ik nām hai, yah nām bhī dhokā na ho jāye.

X X X

vo sarmastoṁ kī mahfil meṁ Gajānan Muktibodh āyā
siyāsat zāhidoṁ kī khande-dīvānā ho jāye.

Gajānan Muktibodh

Let your value to the entire age not be this
That your own life became something strange to you

The dawn will come, the night will pass and such a dawn will come
When our sleep will be the measure of our waking

The light bursts out from the blood of the wounds: this is a new day:
It is the flower of the light of all these hearts—let it be a gift

We are the fated wanderers; we drifted away from the world, it is better…
If the light of our name lights up the wasteland

Your intoxications drew us in, but starvation, in the end drew us in less
The practice ends when it becomes a story

The garden bloomed, it bloomed, and how did it bloom
It was as if every bud fell in love with pain

He is wrapped in a sheet of deep sky blue
Let the shroud, in a hundred wounded flowers, not become a cover

I am here and I am there; death, why are you in the middle?
If all that is left is a name, let that name, at least, not be a fraud

X X X

Gajanan Muktibodh sat in the assembly of drunkards
Let the zealots of politics go mad with laughter[1]

Shamsher Bahadur Singh published this poem to memorialize Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh's death in 1964. It was far from the only memorial to his death: the same journal, the popular weekly newsmagazine *Dharmyūg*, featured several other memorial poems, and later featured a two page photo feature depicting the funeral of the artist, whose illness and death had become a major event. Rarely published and living close to obscurity during his life, Muktibodh's death was described in almost every major literary and cultural journal in the Hindi-speaking world.[2]

Shamsher's poem, however, departs from the more conventional memorials to Muktibodh's death to address the question, already forming, of Muktibodh's legacy and contribution, and the way in which the grandiose event of his death might obscure the substance of his life's work. In its references to a funeral shroud and the name of the poet, the poem does not shy away from the already-developing mythology of a rebellious, struggling artist that would come to envelop his life, but instead integrates it into the complex of motions and images that make up a series of possible receptions. If Muktibodh's work points to the day in which "our sleep will be the measure of our waking," meaning that the content of the fantasy will have political import for a social and political reality, it also expresses the fear that the shroud that covers Muktibodh's body will also come to be a concealing cover.

Shamsher is able to do this in part through his use of the *ghazal*: because no one couplet in a *ghazal* is necessarily related to another, Shamsher is able to create a series of sometimes startling juxtapositions. Each line of the *ghazal* ends with the words *ho jāe*, literally "let it become." But, in

[1]Śamśer Bahādur Singh, *Ṭūṭī huī bikhrī huī*, ed. Aśok Vājpeyī (New Delhi: Radhakrishna, 1990), p. 42.

[2]For a useful summary of reactions to Muktibodh's death, see Śarmā, *Muktibodha kī ātmakathā*, pp. 491-500.

Hindi, this subjunctive verb can become a negative with the addition of *na*, becoming "let it not become." Because of the repeated use of the same verb, each verse is able to evoke a particular hope or fear and address a completely different subject, while still ending by evoking the same mood. Consider, for instance:

> *bahut khīñce tere mastoṁ ne fāqe phir bhī kam khīñce*
> *riyāzat xatm hotī hai agar afsānā ho jāye*
>
> your intoxications drew us in, but starvation, in the end drew us in less
> the practice ends when it becomes a story fable.

The first line opposes attraction and starvation; the attractions, the intoxications, that Muktibodh brought are opposed to the synecdotal starvation that played such a large role in his life. The second line, though, comments on the way in which that life is read: the practice of poetry that is responsible for the intoxications that drew the crowd in the first place, cannot survive if it becomes a mute, pre-determined story. The ambiguity of the first line—who is it that is being drawn in by the attractions, the poet or the audience?—pulls the reader towards the question of how art and experience interact with each other, on the one hand, and how the life and death of a poet can influence the way in which he is read. The *riyāzat* of Muktibodh, his poetic practice and the works that resulted from it, can be overshadowed by the way in which he is turned into a fable of modern poetry, an *afsānā*, something apparent even at the beginning of this process of his reception.

Muktibodh occupied, and continues to occupy, a central place in Hindi literary history because of the confluence of his poetry and the perception of his life. His fantastic, nightmarish long poems seemed to tap into the building frustration and disappointment that defined the 1960s and prophesied Naxalism, the Left response to peasant poverty and exploitation, the Emergency, and the authoritarian clamping down of the state on the freedom of expression. However, he also seemed to embody the intellectual, social, and cultural trends and struggles of the lower middle class, along with the complex of questions, dealing with a search for identity after the breakdown of certainties after Independence, or the question of political commitment, that came to assume greater and greater degrees of importance as time went on. The story of Muktibodh and the way in which it is directly reflected in his poems seem to be inextricably connected. It is impossible, therefore, to consider Muktibodh's reception and his place in history without understanding the interconnection between Muktibodh's life and the way in which he was understood to embody a particular class in his poetry.

This chapter, then, examines the biography and career of Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh (1917–1964). It then presents and analyzes Muktibodh's posthumous reception from 1964 to 1980, which, as we may expect, differs from the reception of his work during his lifetime. This posthumous reception is particularly important because the vast majority of Muktibodh's literary production was published after his death; *Cāṁd kā muṁh ṭeḍhā hai* (1964) had some input from its author in the selection of poems, but was ultimately edited and compiled by the younger poets Shrikant

Varma and Ashok Vajpayee.[3] In this way, the most important moment of Muktibodh's career, the collection which in many ways established the parameters of his poetry and his place in the history of Hindi literature, took place as part of a collaborative process. Since that time in 1964, that process of collaboration has continued among literary writers in Hindi, editors, and Muktibodh's own family, in particular his son Ramesh Gajanan Muktibodh.

In addition to the process through which his literature was collected, compiled, and published, in the nearly fifty years since his death, Muktibodh has been interpreted from a variety of perspectives at quite distinct points in the literary history of Hindi. I will engage with his reception from his death until roughly the 1980s. The reception of Muktibodh immediately upon his death in November of 1964 was adulatory and to no small extent emotional, and it was followed by a period in which his legacy was contested by the major critics of his time, primarily in terms of establishing his links both to the loosely-defined *Naī kavitā* school of poetry and the *Chāyāvād* poetry which preceded it, as well as cementing the difference between poetic movements in the midst of the Cold War. In the 1970s, however, the debate in Hindi changed as new figures and institutions became prominent, and Hindi literature and criticism began to grapple with new models of poetry and new ideological standpoints, such as *akavitā* [non-poetry] and *janavādī kavitā* [popular poetry]. This reinterpretation of Muktibodh culminated in 1979 with the publication of his second major book of poems *Bhūrī bhūrī xāk dhūl*, and a film by Mani Kaul, *Satah se uṭhta ādmī*, which joined together scenes from Muktibodh's poetry, prose, and criticism to create a kind of anthology film of Muktibodh's work. This, in turn, became the occasion for a series of retrospective special issues in major journals, and two conferences. I will look at two of these journals, *Pūrvagraha* (1979) and *Kaṇk* (1980), which were both based in Madhya Pradesh; both journals published special issues dedicated to Muktibodh accompanied by conferences. To some extent, the changes of the 1990s, including the collapse of the Soviet Union, the economic liberalization of India, and the growth of *Hindutva* as a social, cultural, and political phenomenon, altered the paradigm of Hindi criticism. Nonetheless, major players in Muktibodh's reinterpretation, such as Ashok Vajpayee, continue to exert enough influence in the 21st century to assure the continued dominance of their readings of Muktibodh.

By prefacing the reception of his life and work with an understanding of Muktibodh's career while he was alive, I hope to show how these interpretations both engaged with that earlier career but also substantially departed from it in their construction of Muktibodh as a part of a literary canon. Muktibodh, to the extent that he could, took part in literary life; he began publishing in his college journal at the age of eighteen, and continued to publish regularly throughout his life. His career was marked by engagement with the time and place in which he lived, and many of the decisions he made and forms that he created were informed by those specificities. Just as naturally, later interpretations of Muktibodh emphasized some of these aspects and de-emphasized others, depending on their own perspectives and goals. A juxtaposition of social and biographical context allows for a more complete picture of Mutkibodh to emerge, and reveals specific problems which he attempted to resolve in his work. It is thus to Muktibodh's career and life that I

[3]See Shrikant Varma's preface to Gajānan Mādhav Muktibodh, *Cāṁd kā muṁh ṭeṛhā hai* (Calcutta: Bhartiy Gyanpith, 1964), pp. 9-10.

now turn.

Muktibodh's Early Life and Career

Muktibodh was born in 1917 in the village of Shyopur, in what was then the princely state of Gwalior. Muktibodh's father was a police subinspector, or *koṭvāl*, and the family moved frequently according to the father's post. In the early 1930s, the family settled in the city of Ujjain, where Muktibodh would for the most part live until moving to Indore for his B.A., which he received in 1938. The first twenty years of his life thus took place in a series of small towns and cities. The most important of these, Ujjain, is a city with a rich history—it is frequently claimed to have been the home of the 5th century Sanskrit poet Kalidasa, and is mentioned in his poem, *Meghadūta*—and an important pilgrimage center.

The best account of Muktibodh's younger life comes from the collection of interviews with his brothers and close friends, conducted by Motiram Varmā and published under the name *Lakṣit Muktibodh* in 1972. Because Gajanan Muktibodh was the eldest child, he was often described as pampered and happy. His father, however, was strict and religious, and generally conservative; The poet Prabhakar Machwe (1917–1991), who himself went through a very similar upbringing in Gwalior state, considered Muktibodh's position as the eldest son in an authoritarian household to be essentially alienating, attributing to it the string of terrifying figures of authority throughout Muktibodh's poetry.[4] Certainly, a poem such as "Ek arūp śūnya ke prati," [To a formless void], which features an authoritarian image of God as a violent village policeman, would support such an idea.[5] Machwe, however, also pointed to another childhood source for Muktibodh's alienation: his status as a member of the Marathi-speaking minority in a Hindi-speaking area. Gwalior, along with many of the important princely states of Central India, was founded as one of the successor states of the Maratha confederacy, and immigrant Maharashtrian families had been an important part of the social fabric of the region for several hundred years. Muktibodh's great grandfather had moved there from the town of Jalgarh, today in northern Maharashtra.[6] Muktibodh's entire education was in Hindi, and almost none of his writing or letters in Marathi have been discovered, but it was the language he used at home throughout his life. In contrast his younger brother, Śaraccandra Muktibodh (1921–1984), grew up largely in Indore, was educated in Marathi, and went on to become a prominent literary figure in that language. Furthermore, Gajanan Muktibodh indicated at a few points in his letters, written in English and Hindi, that he felt more comfortable in Marathi than Hindi.[7]

The influence of Muktibodh's Maharashtrian background on his writing, both linguistically and socially, has remained an open question. When the matter of linguistic influence on Muktibodh's works is discussed, it is usually mentioned in passing, as part of the explanation for the

[4] *Lakṣit muktibodh*, pp. 95-96. Machwe's English-language autobiography also contains details of this period. See Prabhakar Machwe, *From Self to Self: Reminiscences of a Writer* (New Delhi: Vikas Pub. House, 1977).

[5] Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 2:187-191.

[6] For a history of Gwalior state, see Amar Farooqui, *Sindias and the Raj: princely Gwalior c. 1800-1850* (Delhi: Primus Books, 2011).

[7] See Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 6:228.

"strangeness" of his language. References to Maharashtra appear infrequently in Muktibodh's work: in his first preface to *Tār saptak*, the 1943 anthology that first established his reputation, he discusses the tension between his interest in the Romantic poetry of *Chāyāvād* and the more humanist novels of Marathi, and his influential essay on Bhakti literature, prominently discusses the Marathi *Sant* poet Tukaram.[8] Additionally, elements of Muktibodh's poetic imagery evoke locations in the bilingual city of Nagpur, such as the frequent presence of the statues of Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856–1920), the editor, author and anti-colonialist politician who has become central to the modern idea of Maharashtra. But, as I will argue, in discussing the evolution of Muktibodh's poetry, the influence of Marathi poetics, both in terms of meter and in the direct influence of the Marathi modernist poet Bāḷ Sītārām Marḍhekar (1909-1956), are essential in understanding the way in which Muktibodh formed the long poems for which he is best known. Only a single, short unpublished document in English, titled "Marathi Literature," and probably intended to form part of an application for a position as college lecturer, explicitly attests to his broader affiliation with Marathi literature. There, Muktibodh claims a continued familiarity with contemporary Marathi literature, as well as experience in translation, but he also asserts that he rejected the "cynicism" of Mardhekar, who was known for his shocking and bleak depictions of modern life. Muktibodh also notes here that he chose to write in Hindi because of its "full scope… for self-expression."[9]

This last statement points towards a possible connection for Muktibodh between Hindi and Marathi: Marathi was the language of the home, and Hindi the language of the world. But Muktibodh rarely drew out this connection—only one poem,"Ghar kī tulsī," unambiguously depicts the idea of an intimate Maharashtrian domestic world.[10] And in the social setting of Madhya Pradesh, the presence of Marathi was not a sign of rural provenance, but rather the language of an urbanized minority group, possessors of a privilege rooted in a historical connection to the state.[11] Furthermore, Marathi was itself the language of a thriving literary culture, especially in the cities of Indore and Nagpur, where Muktibodh would live later in his life from 1948–1958. While Muktibodh's education in Hindi probably played a large part in his decision to write in that language, he did so apparently in the knowledge that he was divorcing himself from another important source of his literary development. At the same time, this decision also freed Muktibodh to reinterpret the tradition of Hindi poetry in which he worked.

For Machwe, this influence played out not only in the language of his poetry, but also in his

[8]See Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 5:288-297. See also Sanjiv Kumar's discussion of the genealogy of Muktibodh's ideas about Bhakti in Sañjīv Kumār, "Hindī kā mārksvād: jātyābhimānī parcam ke tale," in *Hindī-ādhūniktā: ek punarvicār*, ed. Abhay Kumār Dube, vol. 2 (New Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 2014), 343–394.

[9]See Gajānan Mādhav Muktibodh, *Marathi Literature*, Unpublished Document, Date Unknown. The document is in possession of Muktibodh's son, Ramesh Gajanan Muktibodh.

[10]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 2:51-55.

[11]This privilege, it should be added, was tenuous, and increasingly unstable after Independence, as the princely states were transformed into what eventually became parts of Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Chattisgarh. Muktibodh's father, in fact, lost his position in the dissolution of the Gwalior state, and it is perhaps telling that one of the few novels written in Malwa, the regional language spoken in the area, depicts social tension between local and Maharashtrian Brahmans Candraśekhar Dube and Satīś Jośī, *'Deśasth': mālavī meṃ upanyās* (Indore: Saṅgītā Dvivedī dvārā 'Audumbara Udghosha' ke lie, 1997).

feeling of alienation—both from his social environment, as well as from the traditional occupations of his caste. Because the Muktibodh family were Kulkarni Brahmans, and worked primarily in administrative positions related to the Gwalior state, Machwe argued that Muktibodh was divorced from his Brahmanical occupational ideals. There is little direct evidence to support this claim. But as I discuss elsewhere, questions related to these issues, in particular the question of education and the validity of traditional knowledge systems, appear repeatedly in Muktibodh's poetry. There is thus reason to consider that the question of caste and ethnic identity are in operation below the surface of Muktibodh's works. Certainly, the image of a traditional priestly role that has been usurped and rendered irrelevant in the modern world could be rooted in this childhood. In an unpublished short piece in Muktibodh's collected works, written between 1948 and 1954, he describes his experience working in Ākāśvānī or All India Radio:

> So, as I am preparing a draft of a radio broadcast for some minister with my head bowed, suddenly sitting before me is a smiling girl. I know perfectly well why she is smiling. She is laughing at me, only me. She is fair, she is smiling so wide I could fit an egg in, she looks well read, she has this job just for fun (really, just for fun?) and she's laughing at me. She doesn't know who I am. I am the *brahmarākṣas*. I am that *brahmarākṣas* who, since time immemorial, has always tried to remain true and has always failed, somehow or other.[12]

The *Brahmarākṣas* appears prominently in at least two other points in Muktibodh's work, most prominently in the well-known poem by the same name, but also in a 1957 short story, "Brahmarākṣas kā śiṣya," in which a young boy is tutored in Sanskrit in an old, abandoned mansion by a teacher who eventually reveals himself to be the ghost of a Brahman who had failed to pass on his teachings.[13] Here, the *Brahmarākṣas* not only represents Muktibodh himself, but is explicitly connected to Muktibodh's feelings of humiliation in the bureaucratic world. Occupational, intellectual, and sexual humiliation are fused together in an image that evokes the shame and frustration that Muktibodh associates with his position in the lower middle class, but also a deeper sense of shame that connects, at least obliquely, to the question of caste and occupation. The *brahmarākṣas*, who will later appear as a raving demon at the bottom of the well, is here the stereotypically nebbish, "head bowed" civil servant, laughed at by a well-educated, upper-class girl, a symbol perhaps of a social order rendered chaotic and incomprehensible in modern times.

The frustration and humiliation bound up in this sequence would later become an essential component in Muktibodh's reception. A series of articles published after Muktibodh's death would describe his uncompromising, romantic nature. The image of a lower middle class poet, engaged in a struggle against a world that ignored his talents, arguably dominate the popular image of Muktibodh today. But it is important to acknowledge, firstly, that this image was constructed in part by Muktibodh's own depiction of his life, and secondly, that the crafting of his own persona played a crucial role in his poetics. Here, the image of the *brahmarākṣas* evokes the position of the speaker, a member of the lower middle class in a subordinate position within

[12]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, vol. 4, p. 177.

[13]Ibid., 3:115-120.

a large office bureaucracy. At the same time it brings up a range of mythological associations, which in turn allowed for the possibility of engaging with questions of caste. As will be made clear by analysis of Muktibodh's works later in this dissertation, his treatment of the materials of his life, even if they indicate the very real poverty and frustration contained within, did not stop simply at expressing that material, but made use of them in order to construct his poetry.

Muktibodh's Entry into the Hindi World

The publication of *Tār saptak* [A heptad of strings] in 1943 was a major event in Hindi criticism: the anthology of young, modern, experimental poetry became a watershed moment in Hindi literary history not necessarily because it departed from the Romantic *Chāyāvād* that preceded it, but because it implied an active group of poets working together to change literature, and united them under a clear editorial that, later, would be read as a manifesto in favor of literary experimentation, or *Prayog*. The influence of *Tār saptak* is difficult to overstate; Kamlesh, a poet who rose to prominence in the 1970s, described his discovery of *Tār saptak* in the small Uttar Pradesh village in which he grew up as the decisive moment that pushed him towards poetry.[14] That the anthology was followed by two further collections, *Dūsrā saptak* [The second heptad, 1951] and *Tīsrā saptak* [A third heptad, 1961], both of which were also quite influential in presenting major new voices of Hindi poetry, increases the importance of the first *Tār Saptak* volume.

A full account, therefore, of the genesis, content, and impact of *Tār saptak* is outside the scope of this work. What I will focus on here is the intellectual environment surrounding this period, and the impact that it has on our understanding of Muktibodh's works. The intellectual milieu in which *Tār saptak* took shape is notable for several reasons. First, the writers of *Tār saptak* were not, for the most part, living in the same city; the anthology was not the result of a single, active group. Indeed, many of the writers, such as Muktibodh, were living in small, fairly isolated towns. Second, the time in which *Tār saptak* took its shape and was published, in the midst of the Second World War and just prior to Independence, was one of great transition, both in terms of politics, intellectual culture, and Hindi literature.

Muktibodh began teaching in 1941 at a new private school in a small town named Shujalpur, located roughly halfway between Ujjain and Bhopal. The school, named "Śārdā śikṣā sadan," and run by a Gandhian educator named Narayan Vishnu Joshi, was notable for making available a socially progressive education in the hinterlands of Gwalior state. At this time, six years before Independence, the Indian Princely States existed in a complex state between dependence and autonomy. While their foreign policy was explicitly subordinated to British India, they were largely independent in many domestic policies, particularly education.[15] However, the state of

[14]See Udayan Vājpeyī, "Samay aur sāhitya: Kamleś se bātcīt," *Samās*, no. 5 (2012): 7–77.

[15]For an analysis of education in the princely states, see Barbara N. Ramusack, *The Indian Princes and Their States*, The New Cambridge history of India III. 6 (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004). For an overview of the history of the princely states as a whole, see Manu Belur Bhagavan, *Sovereign spheres: Princes, Education and Empire in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003). For a history of Indore and Gwalior state in relation to the Nationalist movement, see Śiva Śarmā and Śrīrāma Tivārī, *Jaṅga-e-āzādī meṃ Indaur-Gvāliyar* (Bhopāl: Madhyapradesh Hindi Granth Akademi).

Gwalior was noted for being fairly conservative, in opposition to more liberal Princely States such as Baroda. For this reason a socially progressive school, that conducted its class accordingly to explicitly Gandhian methods, was particularly noteworthy.[16]

It was in Shujalpur that Muktibodh met Nemichandra Jain (1919–2005), who would become one of his closest friends and literary associates.[17] Nemichandra Jain had recently completed an MA from Agra University, and along with his more extensive education—and library—he brought to Shujalpur an extensive literary network. It was Nemichandra's association with Agyeya and other poets that enabled the formation of the *Tār saptak* group.[In addition to Muktibodh and Nemichandra Jain, this group comprised Bhāratbhūṣaṇ Agarwal, Prabhakar Machwe, Girijākuār Māthur, Rāmvilās Śarmā, and 'Agyeya', who also functioned as editor. Much of the controversy surrounding the publication of *Tār saptak* concerns the extent of 'Agyeya's involvement. Members of the group, especially Nemichandra Jain, claim that 'Agyeya' was brought on later, in part due to his wide network of contacts as the more established author, while others contend that he had a more widespread impact on the selection and editing of the work.[18]

The importance of Muktibodh's meeting with Nemichandra Jain appears crucial in the development of his thought, and illustrative of the social networks in which Hindi literature took shape. Muktibodh had grown up in a series of small towns in a region that, by and large, was isolated from the mainstream of Hindi literature in larger cities such as Allahabad, Benares, and Calcutta.[19] His education, furthermore, had been uneven and frequently interrupted. Nemichandra, on the other hand, was educated, to the point of attaining an MA at the young age of twenty-two, in the larger city of Agra, with access to a wider network of authors and intellectuals. Besides this larger human network, Nemichandra simply had a large library; accounts of Muktibodh's time in Shujalpur describe the much wider reading available to him thanks to the library both of Nemichandra and the headmaster, Narayan Vishnu Joshi. Until this point, Muktibodh had read widely in Hindi and Marathi, as well as the English Romantic and Victorian literature that was available in colonial India.[20] Now, to a greater degree, Muktibodh read widely from European literature in translation: Bergson and Jung, Balzac and Flaubert.

Nemichandra also introduced Muktibodh to Marxism, at least in the most rigorous form he had encountered in his life thus far. In the personal statement that preceded his poems in *Tār saptak*, Muktibodh would write: "I obtained a a point of view which was more scientific, more con-

[16]For an account of this school by the principal himself, see Nārāyaṇ Viṣṇu Jośī, "Dṛṣṭi-vikās kā saṅgharṣ," in *Muktibodh: vyakti, anubhav aur abhivyakti*, ed. Lakṣmaṇdatt Gautam (New Delhi: Naya Sahitya Kendra, 2001), 39–47.

[17]Muktibodh and Nemichandra Jain's letters are collected in Gajānan Mādhav Muktibodh and Nemicandra Jain, *Pāyā patra tumhārā: Gajānana Mādhava Muktibodha aura Nemicandra Jaina ke bīca patra-vyavahāra, 1942-1964* (Rājakamala, 1984).

[18]See Barbara Lotz, "Rāhoṁ ke anveṣī: the editor of the saptak-anthologies and his poets," in *Hindi Modernism*, ed. Vasudha Dalmia (Berkeley: Center for South Asia Studies, Univesity of California, Berkeley, 2012), 125–146.

[19]For an overview of the geography of Hindi literary culture, see Schomer, *Mahadevi Varma*, pp. 1-5. See also Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere, 1920-1940* , pp. 124-150, for a history of Allahabad's role in Hindi literary culture.

[20]See Priya Joshi, *In Another Country: Colonialism, Culture, and the English Novel in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), for a discussion of the availability of English literature in India during the colonial period.

crete, and more energetic."[21] Nemichandra would, when interviewed later, describe Muktibodh's conversion to "intellectual Marxism," and although Muktibodh was probably not an official member of the Communist Party of India after 1947, he would identify as a Marxist for the rest of his life, and a consideration of Marxian thought—and, crucially, an interrogation of the implications of Marxian thought for historical analysis, aesthetics, and political commitment—would structure his work as a whole.[22]

Interest in Marxism was growing in the Hindi-speaking world in the late 1930s and early 1940s for several reasons. Internationally, Soviet Russia, in the 1930s, was already becoming a model for great parts of the world, and especially for the colonial world, through its rapid development and its five-year plans. Within India also, the growth of Communism had begun to accelerate in the 1930s, with the increase of criticism of the leadership of the Congress Party, and the formation of several political and culture groups that advocated Left causes generally. Foremost among these was the well-known All India Progressive Writer's Association, which was formed by Urdu and English writers in London but quickly became a prominent force in Hindi literature. Muktibodh had himself hosted a conference in Ujjain in 1938 associated with the Progressive Writer's Association, and so was already predisposed towards Left causes.

But it is important to situate Muktibodh's embrace of Marxism within his overall intellectual development. In the same statement, or *vaktavya*, the turn towards Marxism is presented as part of a larger personal development that took place during this time, one that Muktibodh characterizes in terms of both aesthetics and his philosophy towards life. In aesthetics, Muktibodh describes a split between, on the one hand, the "humanist problem novels of Tolstoy," which he also associates with the "great humanity-filled novelistic world of Marathi literature" and the Hindi *Chāyāvād* poet Mahadevi Varma (1907–1987), who represents the "new aesthetic poetry [saundarya-kāvya] of Hindi."[23] For Muktibodh, the importance of this difference lies in the ability of the novel, through narrative, to engage to a greater degree with the social, and for the poetic, through its ability to create new symbolic images within language, to indicate a more complex relation to reality, and connect it to the imaginative reaction of the poet.[24]

This difference, which, to generalize, I will refer to as that between the lyric and the novelistic, is inseparable from the ethical impulse. In his *vaktavya* he writes: "The first hunger of my young mind was for beauty, and the second was for the happiness and sorrow of all of humanity—the struggle between these two was the first complication of my literary life." He attributes the transformation of his poetry to a desire to "join the borders of poetry to those of life," and characterizes the five years prior to moving to Shujalpur as ones of "mental struggle and Bergsonian individualism" in which his "individualism functioned as a shield" against reality. The influence of the French proto-Existentialist philosopher Bergson, and in particular of the idea of the *élan vital*, or the expressive force of nature, was described by Muktibodh as leading him towards a literature in which, he wrote "my poetry and stories, even as they attained new forms, wandered around

[21]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 5:266.

[22]*Lakṣit muktibodh*, p. 135.

[23]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 5: 265.

[24]For a history of modern Marathi literature in English, see Kusumāvatī Deśapāṇḍe and Maṅgeśa Viṭṭhala Rājādhyaksha, *A History of Marathi Literature* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1988).

themselves, without any outward or external directionality/tendency [*un kī gati ūrdhvamukhī na ho*]." In this way Muktibodh's aesthetic problem of the connection between the personal imagination and its expressive connection with the social, was deeply bound up in the question of ethical and political commitments.

It was in this context that his turn towards Marxism should be understood. In the same paragraph in which he describes the appeal of Marxism as a more scientific, concrete and energetic philosophy, he states that he has gained self-confidence in the elements of narrative, or *kathā-tattva*, and that "I turned towards the obscurity [*aspaṣṭatā*] in my poetry, and thirdly began a search for a new path of development." In this way Marxism was directly linked to the aesthetic problems that structure the *vaktavya* and, as I will argue later in this dissertation, his work as a whole. Muktibodh's interest in Marxism was rooted in a question that at first appears as an anxiety regarding genre, becomes a question of the relation between the self and the world, and ultimately develops into a series of interrogations of the role of the artistic imagination. In this way, Marxism was for Muktibodh a tool through which he could develop his poetics.

Nagpur and Rajnandgaon

After a period of financial and professional turmoil which included a brief stint at an army ordinance factory in Bangalore and a year on the editorial board of the prominent Progressive literary journal *Hans* in Allahabad, in 1948 Muktibodh moved to Nagpur.[25] He first worked in the Department of Information, later with *Ākāśvānī* the national radio service, and eventually as editor of the weekly *Nayā xūn* [New blood].

Nagpur, in the 1950s, was an unusually contested city. One of the largest cities in Central India, at the time, it was the capital of the formerly British-administered Central Provinces and Berar, and was from 1950 to 1957 the capital of the newly-formed state of Madhya Pradesh. The States Reorganization Act (passed in 1956, and executed in 1957) made Bhopal the capital of a reshaped Madhya Pradesh, and Nagpur moved to an enlarged Maharashtra. The city was also bilingual, roughly split between Hindi and Marathi, due to migration in the nineteenth century. Political competition between Hindi- and Marathi-speakers played an important part in the city, and was at least one factor in the formation of the Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in Nagpur in 1925, today the world's largest volunteer organization and a massive force in right-wing, nationalist politics in India.[26] In a letter to Nemichandra Jain in 1952, Muktibodh wrote that the city, in addition to being "very dear, very dirty, very hot," had "three Hindi, two Marathi and two English dailies and some fifty other papers, is a hotbed of political blackguards, blackmailing journalists, fiery agitators, opportunist trade unionists and other species of political crooks and

[25]The letters between Muktibodh and Nemichandra from this period shed light on some of his financial difficulties; the correspondence between the two during this period, written primarily in English, describes a series of jobs, and details Muktibodh's general frustration with domestic life. See Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 6:212.

[26]For a political history of the region, focusing on electoral politics and Hindi–Marathi competition in the late colonial period, see D. E. U. Baker, *Changing Political Leadership in an Indian Province: the Central Provinces and Berar, 1919-1939* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1979).

maneuverers."[27] Thus, Nagpur was arguably a center for a host of issues that would come to define the decades following Independence: tensions in language politics, the growth of non-Congress political groups, both on the Right and the Left, and rapid urban growth and industrialization.

It was in Nagpur that Muktibodh began to consolidate his reputation. Over time he formed a circle of younger poets, including Jivanlal Varma 'Vidrohi', Pramod Varma, and Shrikant Varma (1931–1986). According to 'Vidrohi', he began to be referred to by this group as "Mahaguru [Great teacher]."[28] His poetry began to be widely recognized as original and distinct. One local literary figure known only as "Madariya jī," who later memorialized Muktibodh in the journal *Vīnā*, recalled a poetry gathering in 1952, in which Muktibodh appeared at first "absolutely ordinary, a darkish man who looked to be some kind of clerk or schoolmaster," but whose poem was praised in a newspaper the next day as "a unique poem for world literature, let alone Hindi."[29] Muktibodh also began to publish more widely in literary publications, including journals such as *Kalpanā* and *Kṛti* that had wider circulation throughout the Hindi-speaking world. This came about in part because many of the poets with whom he had been associated since the 1940s were now editors of major magazines; Shrikant Varma, for instance, was a founding editor of the journal *Kṛti*. In 1957, Muktibodh attended a major literary conference in Allahabad, where he was extremely well received. This was one of the first points at which he became recognized as a major literary figure in the Hindi world.[30]

This was also the period in which Muktibodh was most active as a journalist. Often writing under a pseudonym, Muktibodh published a series of articles for local magazines, most prominently *Sārathī*, but later also under his editorship of *Nayā Xūn*.[31] These articles, to a large extent, concerned international politics, especially anti-colonial movements and the Soviet Union. But they also dealt with a range of topics, from the question of how Hindi would develop its vocabulary, to the question of the formation of Greater Maharashtra, to the science of rockets.[32] These articles, in addition to the many literary essays that he wrote during this time, would become widely known for the most part only after his death. But they show that during this time, more than any other in his life, Muktibodh was engaged in the world, and in forming a circle of associates in a large, thriving city.

A cursory reading of his poetry will show that, although he completed most of his longer poetry after leaving Nagpur, the city's impact on his writing was deep and profound. His experience of covering the political intrigues and events of the city appear repeatedly transformed in his poetry, most famously in "Aṁdhere meṁ".[33] But images of the city, such as that of the long, well-kept streets lined with old stone buildings, with alleyways built behind them, appear throughout

[27]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 6:314.

[28]Ibid., 6:153.

[29]Mādariyajī, "Sīḍhī aur sāmp kā khel," *Vīnā*, November 1964, 32–34.

[30]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 5:190-192.

[31]ibid., 6:1-200; see also Gajānan Mādhav Muktibodh, *J̌ab praśnacinha baukhlā uṭhe* (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 2009) which contains pseudonymously-written columns discovered after the publication of Muktibodh's collected works.

[32]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 6:39-43; Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 6:164-170; Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 6:190-196.

[33]Lotz, "Long poem or unending poem?"

his work. Discussions of Muktibodh's imagery often draw on the image of the *bīhaḍ*, or wasteland, of the Malwa region in which he grew up, but the imagery of Nagpur, the quintessential city of Muktibodh's work, is equally present and important.

In 1956, rather than transfer with his position at Akāśvānī from Nagpur to Bhopal, the new capital of Madhya Pradesh, Muktibodh left that position and began to work as the editor of the news weekly *Nāyā xūn*. After two years with that paper, however, he quit again. This time, he received a position in Digvijay College in Rajnandgaon, in what is now the state of Chattisgarh. Muktibodh had completed an M.A. in Nagpur University in 1953, with the result that he was able to teach B.A. students. Rajnandgaon is a small town about two hours away from Raipur by train; halfway between those two cities is Bhilai, home of a major Soviet-sponsored steelworks in which several of Muktibodh's children would spend their careers. Muktibodh was eventually housed in a large, crumbling mansion called "Triveni Bhavan", which looked out onto a lake surrounded by jungle.

By all accounts Muktibodh's years in Rajnandgaon were some of the happiest and most productive of his life. He completed many works which he had begun while living in Nagpur, and he began to prepare more and more works for publication. He also began to write a history textbook which was to be used at the high school level, titled *Bhārat: Itihās aur sanskṛti* [India: History and Culture]. But in 1962, its publication led to a disaster that overshadowed the final years of his life. The textbook, which on the whole was straightforward and unobjectionable, was targeted by right-wing political elements who raised an objection to the book in the courts and succeeded in having a ban imposed.[34] The incident, which was accompanied by personal slander and demonstrations orchestrated throughout Madhya Pradesh, had a devastating impact on Muktibodh; his brother claimed that after this, he "broke inside."[35] The textbook banning, and the political machinations that resulted in it, seemed to embody all of Muktibodh's darkest paranoia.

In the 1960s, Muktibodh's health began to decline, leading to a stroke in the spring of 1964. His friends in the literary world, many of whom were now quite established, arranged for his medical care, first in Bhopal and then, when his condition proved more serious, in the All-India Medical Institute in Delhi. By the time he arrived in New Delhi, he was already in a coma. The drama of his medical condition, and of the intervention of major literary figures with political connections such as Harivansh Rai Baccan (1907–2003), led to a wave of media interest even as his health declined. His closest literary associates had begun to compile his first book of poetry, which eventually gained the title *Chāṁd kā Munh Teḍhā Hai* and was published in November 1964, a couple months after his death on September 11.

Muktibodh's Reception after his Death

The publication of *Chāṁd kā muṁh ṭeḍhā hai*, the prominent funeral in New Delhi, and the wave of articles and special issues published upon Muktibodh's death in 1964 combined to form a singular moment in his reception. This moment cemented a certain image of Muktibodh in the

[34] The book has recently been published in full under its original name, along with the court documents associated with the case, as Muktibodh, *Bharat*.

[35] *Lakṣit muktibodh*, p. 79.

public imagination as a Romantic, doomed figure, and it also narrowed the immediate reception of his work to the long poems, such as "Aṁdhere meṁ", which most closely fit this image. That Muktibodh's death nearly coincided with that of the Nehru's on May 27 of that year only seemed to reinforce the idea that Muktibodh's work expressed the feeling of disappointment that was building in the early sixties, more than a decade after Independence.

Much of the early reception of Muktibodh thus emphasized his personality and the perceived tragedy of his life and death. Besides prominent coverage in popular newsweeklies such as *Dharmyug*, literary journals released a series of commemorative issues that featured both personal reminiscences from his associates in Madhya Pradesh, as well as more public commemorations from politicians both local and national.[36] These journals featured a range of opinions, some of which—such as the idea that Muktibodh was a proof of the universality of Hindi in India—have been mostly forgotten. Others, however, have remained vital, such as the widespread sentiment that it was only because Muktibodh lived and worked in Madhya Pradesh, far from the center of power, that he remained obscure until his death. As I will discuss below, the question of Muktibodh's regional identity can take many permutations, and in many ways the region of Madhya Pradesh challenges notions of the regional that tend to emphasize an authenticity rooted in folk language and practices, contrasted with an artificial language emanating from select urban centers. This understanding came to be associated in the 1950s with the word *āncalik*, literally, 'border', but coined largely in reference to the works of Phanishwarnath Renu (1921–1977), in particular his 1954 novel *Mailā āṁcal* [The Soiled Border].[37] Muktibodh, however, could be described as "regional" not on the level of belonging to a particular folk culture, but through a series of geographical moves between country and city. Furthermore, Muktibodh's distance from Hindi was based not in speaking a rural dialect, such as Bhojpuri, that had a subordinate relationship to standard Hindi, but rather in speaking Marathi, which supported a distinct literary culture. Muktibodh was therefore a figure certainly outside of the mainstream of Hindi, but his outsider status was based upon belonging to a linguistic, social, and cultural borderland that did not map easily to an *āṁcalik* understanding.

Immediately overshadowing the question of Muktibodh's position vis-à-vis region, however, was the debate over Muktibodh's ideological position, and how he might relate to ideas of politically committed literature. At stake in these debates was not only Muktibodh's legacy, but also the literary history of Hindi poetry after Independence. Muktibodh had always maintained an uneasy relationship to the question of literary progressivism generally, and his critical writing critiqued a wide range of positions. Furthermore, the burst of attention that accompanied the publication of *Cāṁd kā muṁh ṭeḍhā hai*, and Muktibodh's popularity with younger literary

[36]See Manoharśyām Jośī, "Pukār kho gayī kahīṃ!," *Dharmyug*, September 26, 1964, 9–10 in which Rammanohar Lohia credited Muktibodh for proving "that Hindi, in addition to being the language of the center, is also the language of the people of Maharashtra, Bengal, and Tamil Nadu". See also Mādariyajī, "Sīḍhī aur sāmp kā khel"; , *Rāṣṭravāṇī* 18, nos. 7-8 (1965)

[37]Phaṇīśvarnāth Reṇu, *Mailā āṁcal: ek āṁcalik upanyās* (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 1966). Translated into English as Phaṇīśvarnāth Reṇu, *The Soiled Border*, trans. Indira Junghare (Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1991). See also Ian Woolford, "Renu Village: an Ethnography of North Indian Fiction" (Dissertation, University of Texas Austin, 2012) for an analysis of the performative traditions that influenced *MailĀ āṁcal*.

figures, amplified his positions on literature. Because Muktibodh's writing seemed to challenge assumptions associated both with the *pragativād* and *prayogvād* camps, the question of its evaluation went to the heart of current debates in Hindi literature.

It is telling, then, that two of the most important texts in the criticism of Muktibodh, in their titles, address not the individual figure, but Hindi poetry as a whole, and *Naī kavitā* in particular. The critic Nāmwar Singh's (born 1927) 1968 *Kavitā ke naye pratimān* [The new criteria of poetry] saw *Naī kavitā*, with Muktibodh as its ultimate expression, as a redefinition of Hindi poetry in general. Ram Vilas Sharma's *Nayī kavitā aur astitvavād* [New poetry and existentialism] framed its critique of Muktibodh as part of an assessment of *Naī kavitā* in general, and characterized Muktibodh as the epitome of what could be called an individualistic existentialism in literature. For both authors, Muktibodh epitomizes something about Hindi poetry in the 1950s. Far from being considered as obscure, or regional, as was the case in the immediate memorial, Muktibodh, and in particular the Muktibodh represented by *Cāṁd kā muṁh ṭeḍhā hai*, now stood out as uniquely emblematic of the Indian experience post-Independence. His long, fantastic poems, with their reimagination of the political contemporary, and their vision of growing violence and corruption, were already seen as the defining works of the time.

For Ramvilas Sharma (1912–2000), however, Muktibodh's fantastic imagery and poetry, and its focus on the self, represented not a depiction of the split self as a sign of class struggle, but an escape from the problems of class struggle itself. In Sharma's interpretation, the inner struggle of Muktibodh lies between romantic or mystical escapism and a realist depiction of social conditions. Comparing Muktibodh to the poetry of Shamsher Bahadur Singh, he writes:

> Muktibodh was far away from that happy world, and so mysticism created a great complication. He believed that the mind could be joined with the sun in such a way that the mysteries of both the universe and of human society would be simultaneously revealed, and that he could retrieve from the cave of inner consciousness such gems that the poverty of the filthy slum would at once disappear. And then he broke apart these dreams and cursed his dreaming mind.[38]

Sharma saw Muktibodh's fantastic poetry as essentially escapist: rather than reveal any new truth, Muktibodh's work cycled back and forth between a dream of transcendent truth and, upon the shattering of that dream, despair. As a result, Muktibodh's poetry, even if it is identified with social concerns, was too too removed from reality, containing too much mystical imagery and psychological fantasy; Muktibodh "itched for a knowledge which was always developing" but needed "complete knowledge; and such knowledge can only be given by mysticism."[39]

In referring to "complete knowledge" and "gems" that could be retrieved from the "cave of inner consciousness," Sharma based his critique, at least partially, on the imagery from "Aṁdhere Meṁ." In that poem, the speaker finds himself passing back and forth between a reality of lower middle class poverty—crumbling walls, debt, sick children—and a series of fantastic dreamworlds. Some of these are terrifying re-imaginings of political violence and repression, and some of them

[38]Śarmā, *Nayī kavitā aur astitvavād*, p. 88.
[39]Ibid., p. 88.

are moments in which the speaker is presented with a vision of a mythical figure, variously referred to as the *guru*, or as *Manu*, a reference to the hero of *Kāmāyanī*. Finally, there are some sequences in which the speaker finds himself in a cave, which is either associated with the imprisonment of *Manu*, or with the replenishing power of the imagination. As I will argue in a later chapter, the poem, rather than present fantastic imagery as a solution and of itself to the problems depicted in the poem, places the imagination, and specifically the poetic imagination as central. The poetic imagination in "Aṁdhere meṁ" is the precondition for further political consciousness, rather than a direct depiction of political action. The guru of the poem, who appears at first as a kind of imprisoned superman, is transformed by the end of "Aṁdhere meṁ" into the expressive power of the speaker.

For Sharma, however, what he saw as the mysticism of Muktibodh's poetry was an unacceptable deviation from political commitment. Although Sharma, an astute critic, analyzed a wide range of possible interpretations of Muktibodh's imagery, he ultimately took exception not only to the content of Muktibodh's poetry, but to the entire tradition of *Naī kavitā* which it represented. In this criticism, Sharma responded directly to the argument made by Namwar Singh and Vijaydev Narayan Sahi, which held that the poets of *Naī kavitā* were responding to the breakdown of the ideals of the nationalist movement.[40] In Sharma's literary history of post-Independence literature, *Naī kavitā* was, first off, an essentially reactionary creation of the 1950s, in which poets rejected the emotionalism of *Chāyāvād* without understanding the ways in which their own poetry was conventional in its rejection of society.[41]

For Namwar Singh, however, Muktibodh represented the possibility of a critical, imaginative Left poetry that would engage with the political concerns of the lower middle class, while rejecting the proscriptive tenets of Realism that were becoming associated with Progressivism. In an essay written and appended to *Kavitā ke naye pratimān* in 1974, Singh argues that Muktibodh poems played out the search for identity and meaning that defined post-Independence literature. In this way, poems like "Aṁdhere meṁ" succeeded in allegorizing contemporary life, and most importantly, in allegorizing the alienation of the modern man from himself. Citing Marx's *Economic and Political Manuscripts* but possibly also responding to the recent 1971 translation into English of Georg Lukács *History and Class Consciousness*, Singh argues that Muktibodh's poetry exemplifies a search for identity [*asmitā kī khoj*] which is, ultimately, the precondition for identification with the class-consciousness of the working class. For Singh, the alienation which Muktibodh describes in his poetry should not be understood as existentialist or individualist, because Muktibodh's ultimate identification is with the working class.[42] In this way, Singh echoes Lukács' conception of the metasubjectivity of the proletariat, in which the proletariat's awareness of its own alienation from labor is the fundamental precondition for the proletariat to, in Lukács words, become the "subject-object of history" and thus capable of praxis, or the unity of

[40]Śarmā, *Nayī kavitā aur astitvavād*, p. 54.

[41]Ibid., p. 107. Sharma faults in particular the poets Sarveśvardayāl Saksenā, GirijākumĀr Māthur, Rājkamal Chaudharī, Jagḍīś Caturvedī, Lakṣmīkānt Varmā, Vijaydev Nārāyaṇ Sāhī, and Aśok Vājpayī. These poets, in fact, are active beyond the period of *nayī kavitā per se*, and in many ways Sharma's critique seems better aimed at the explicitly harsh and despairing *akavitā* [non-poetry] which became prominent in the mid to late 1960s.

[42]See Singh, *Kavitā ke naye pratimāna.*, 245-6.

thought and action.[43]

Thus, the debate between Ram Vilas Sharma and Namwar Singh is rooted in a debate over Marxian aesthetics and politics, one in which the middle-class perspective of Muktibodh is especially problematic. Muktibodh's poetry brings up questions on the relations between art, conceptual thought, and political action that are central to Marxist criticism in the twentieth century, and especially crucial in the context of the emergence of Western Marxism. However, this debate must also be understood in the context of Communist politics in India in the 1960s. Tensions within the party had been growing throughout the 1950s. The question, which dated back to the nationalist period, of whether the Communist movement should support the Indian state became more pressing as India came into a closer alliance with the Soviet Union. These tensions then came to a head over the war between India and China in 1962, and eventually led to a split in 1964 between the Communist Party of India, which favored cooperation with the Congress Party and Loyalty to the Soviet Union, and the Communist Party of India (Marxist). Thus, debates over orthodoxy in aesthetics cannot be separated from political debates over the future of Communism in India.

The history of Communism in India, in fact, is arguably responsible for one of the most important changes in Muktibodh's reception following his death. For while Namwar Singh and Ram Vilas Sharma largely viewed Muktibodh through the lens of debates that took shape in the late 1950s and early 1960s, two crucial events would lead to a complete reassessment of Muktibodh's work, along with a change in the stream of Hindi literature more generally. The impact of the Naxalite movement, which began in 1967, and the declaration of Emergency in 1975, cannot be overstated. The Emergency, in addition to its political effects, was a cultural event: the arrest of politicians and journalists, and the widespread abuse of power by the government, made permanent the disillusionment that had been growing since the early 1960s, and was typified in the writings of the post-60s, or *sāṭhottarīya* generation. However, the advent of the Naxalites, first in West Bengal, and then throughout rural North India through the 1970s, led to a surge of interest in Maoist thought in the Hindi left. A range of journals, such as *Pahal* in Bihar, *Puruṣ* in Muzaffarpur, *Uttarārdha* in Agra, and *Kaṇk* in the small town of Ratlam, MP, were created in the 1970s, all broadly sympathetic to Naxalism. This eventually gave rise to a trend called janvādī, "popular" as opposed to pragativādī, which was specifically put forward as descended from, but distinct of the pragatiśīl literature associated with the PWA.[44] These journals contributed towards a change in focus towards a concern with the rural.

The journal *Kaṇk*, which eventually played a major part in the reassessment of Muktibodh, is illustrative of the changes in literary culture during this time. *Kaṅk* was begun in 1971 in the small town of Ratlam, located on the railway line between Bhopal and Bombay. At first, the journal emphasized its support of young, local writers, and to that end often featured angry, *akavitā* poets;

[43]See György Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness : Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971) p. 197. See also Jay, *Marxism and Totality: the Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas*, pp. 6-8, for a discussion of the problem of praxis and its relation to Western Marxism more generally, and pp. 81-128 for an overview of Lukács work and contribution to Western Marxism generally.

[44]See , *Kaṅk*, nos. 56-58 (1975) for a representative issue of *Kaṅk*. See also Nirmal Śarmā, "Samkālīn janvādī kavitā: paramparā aur itihās-dṛṣṭi!," *Kaṅk*, nos. 56-58 (1981): 5–21 for an overview of janvādī poetry.

the second issue, in fact, included a detachable card drawing of the poet and novelist Rajkamal Chaudhari, who had become established as a leading figure since his death in 1967 at the age of 37. The first issue featured an attack on the poet and critic Ashok Vajpayee, (born 1941), who would later figure prominently in Hindi literary criticism, and would often be criticized by the Left for his close involvement with Congress-led governments in Madhya Pradesh and the Center. At the time, however, the review targeted an essay critical of young poets in his first book of criticism, *Filhāl*.[45] By 1975, however, the journal was firmly affiliated with Maoism, and featured increasing numbers of articles on *Janvādī* literature.[46]

In December of 1979 *Kaṅk* held a symposium on Muktibodh, which was followed by a special issue in 1980. The time was apt: interest in Muktibodh had been growing steadily through the 1970s, aided by a series of posthumous releases. By the time the conference was held, in addition to *Cāṁd kā muṁh ṭeḍhā hai*, *Kāmāyaṇī: ek punarvicār* [Kāmāyaṇī: a reconsideration], *Ek sāhityak kī ḍāyarī* [A writer's diary], and *Nayī kavitā kā ātmasaṅgharṣ tathā anya nibandh* [The internal struggle of *Nai kavita* and other essays], all of which were published while Muktibodh was still alive, a second collection of short stories, *Kāṭh kā sapnā* [A wooden dream], and a collection of essays, *Naye sāhitya kā saundarya-śāstra* [The aesthetics of new literature], were published in 1967 and 1971 respectively. 1979 would see the release of a second collection of poetry, *Bhūrī-bhūrī xāk dhūl* [The brown and dusty earth].[47] His collected works, or *Racnāvalī*, would be published in 1980, under the editorship of his old friend Nemichandra Jain, and film based on his works, *Satah se uṭhtā ādmī*, directed by Mani Kaul, would also be released in 1980.

The essays collected in *Kaṁk* reflect this shift. From the Left perspective of *Kaṁk*, Muktibodh is presented as a figure who merits reconsideration under new intellectual and aesthetic frameworks. Both perspectives want to fit Muktibodh within a series of affiliations that, given his poetry, do not always fit. Many of the articles are concerned with establishing Muktibodh's progressive credentials. This was often difficult for several reasons. Muktibodh directly criticised what he saw as a rigid proscriptivism among Left writers; one of his final acts, in fact, was to write an anonymous letter in English to the head to the Communist Party.[48] In this letter, written in English to then Chairman S.A. Dange, Muktibodh had explicitly denounced the rejection by major Marxist critics of experimental poetry, and called for a series of moves by the CPI to support experimental writing, new developments in literary theory taking place outside of the Soviet Union, and to directly address criticism of Marxism in the Hindi world on an intellectual level. Muktibodh felt the need to write this letter, in part, because of his continued involvement with several literary figures, such as Agyeya, who had since become anathema to the left. Agyeya, especially in the preface to the 1951 anthology *Dūsrā saptak*, had explicitly denounced any ideological basis for literature, claiming that no true art was possible based on ideology.[49] A substantial amount of the writing in this issue of *Kaṁk* therefore consisted of denunciations of Agyeya, with the aim

[45], *Kaṅk* 1 (1971): 67–72.

[46]See *Kaṅk*, October 1976.

[47]New collections of Muktibodh's works continue to be released; see Gajānan Mādhav Muktibodh, *Śesh-aśesh : Muktibodh kī asaṅkalit racanāeṁ* (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 2009).

[48]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 6:397-402.

[49]See Sachchidanand Hiranand Vatsyayan, *Dūsrā saptak* (Calcutta: Bhartiy Gyanpith, 1970 [1951]), pp. 5-14.

of differentiating him from Muktibodh.[50]

But far more important issues for the contributors in *Kaṁk* were all of the things that made Muktibodh a unique poetic voice: his long, allegorical poetry and his fierce, subjective reimagination of the experiences of the lower middle class. There seemed to be little in Muktibodh's work that explicitly connected with the rural poor, or even with the working class. Furthermore, the strong influence of *Chāyāvād*, which in many ways would not have been incompatible with a progressive writer twenty years previously, placed Muktibodh even further from the tendency in *janvādī* towards simpler speech. Ironically, although Muktibodh's writing was seen to incorporate everyday language in a manner that presaged this trend, his writing was by this point seen as too closely tied to the complex rhetoric of *Chāyāvād* and the *Prayogvād* modernism which followed it.[51] It was therefore difficult to imagine that Muktibodh was writing for anything but an educated audience. One solution was presented by Bharat Singh, who in an article "Vibhinn kāvyāndolan aur Muktibodh kī kavitā" [Various movements in poetry and the poetry of Muktibodh] focused on Muktibodh's difficult and "unformed" language as proof of fidelity to a progressive message. He writes: "Muktibodh formed his style according to what he had to say. There was a morality to his crude and tradition-less style. Poetry was not natural for him."[52] Singh, in discussing what was universally described as Muktibodh's difficult style, interpreted it to mean that Muktibodh was in fact eschewing form in favor of content. If Muktibodh's difficulty could be taken, not as a sign of complexity, but as one of rough authenticity, then his complexity would not be as much of an issue.

Although this move would seem to be a severely reductive reading of Muktibodh's poetry, it fits within the trend at the time to favor authenticity and simplicity in writing, and it found echoes in other pieces of Muktibodh criticism. In fact, although at many points *Kaṁk* explicitly ranged itself against the critical perspective of *Pūrvagraha*, in many ways its analyses pointed to the same qualities in Muktibodh's work.[53] Ashok Vajpeyi's *Pūrvagraha*, like *Kaṁk*, was associated with a series of special issues and events related to Muktibodh in 1980. The most important of these was a conference, held in Bhopal in November 1980, titled "Muktibodh prasaṅg" [Concerning Muktibodh]. The conference featured a premiere of the film, along with an exhibition of paintings by well known artist Akbar Padamsee inspired by Muktibodh's works. [54] "Muktibodh prasaṅg" was held in December 1980 under the auspices of the literary journal *Pūrvagraha. Pūrvagraha*, published from Bhopal, was published under the auspices of the Madhya Pradeś Kalā Pariṣad [Madhya Pradesh Foundation for the Arts], and was originally edited by Ashok Vajpeyi. Vajpeyi (born 1941) is a poet and cultural critic who had earlier been instrumental in the publi-

[50]See *Kaṅk*, December 1980, p. 28.

[51]See Vājpeyī, "Bhayānak xabar kī kavitā," p. 124 for a discussion of the "roughness" of Muktibodh's language and the influence of it on the next generation of poets.

[52]*Ibid.*, p. 36.

[53]That the animosity of the contributors of *Kaṁk* to *Pūrvagraha* came about through close contact is indicated by the final pages of the special issue on Muktibodh, which describes a series of altercations that took place at Ashok Vajpeyi's home in Bhopal over the political import of Mani Kaul's film. See *Kank*, December 1980, p. 280-281.

[54]For an extensive description of the event, see Dhanañjay Varmā, "Ek ādhūnik klāsik kā sākṣātkār," *Pūrvagraha*, no. 42 (1981): 23–28.

cation of *Cāṁd kā muṁh ṭeḍhā hai*, and would later, in his capacity as a member of the Indian Administrative Service, be responsible for the foundation of Bharat Bhavan, an institute of the arts in Bhopal that now houses many of Muktibodh's original manuscripts.[55] *Pūrvagraha* was one of the first cultural journals in Hindi that focused simultaneously on literature, music, and the fine arts. Its connection to the Madhya Pradesh state government and its support of the arts led to *Pūrvagraha* being a nucleus of a wide of range of artists from this area, and providing a distinct cultural identity for the modern art of the region.[56] This conference in honor of Muktibodh was therefore heavily supported by the state government, which also financially sponsored the making of the film *Satah se uṭhtā ādmī*. *Pūrvagraha*'s support of Muktibodh should be understood, then, in the context of a larger state support for the arts, efforts to establish a regional identity for modern art in Madhya Pradesh, and the broader reevaluation of Muktibodh. Muktibodh was in the midst of another transformation into a regionalized figure of a lower-middle-class modernity rooted in the small towns of Central India.

Pūrvagraha featured a series of articles on Muktibodh across three issues in 1980 and 1981. One of these featured reviews of the recently released second anthology of Muktibodh's poems, *Bhūrī-bhūrī xāk dhūl*. *Bhūrī-bhūrī xāk dhūl* featured mostly shorter poems than those found in *Cāṁd kā muṁh ṭeḍhā hai*, and many of those featured a greater identification with landscape or the countryside. The review of *Bhūrī-bhūrī xāk dhūl* focused on the "roughness" of Muktibodh's poetry; for these critics, the roughness of Muktibodh's work marked his belonging both to a poetics of independent authenticiy, as well as to a local aesthetic that depicted the rugged landscapes of Madhya Pradesh.[57] The poet Kedarnath Singh saw in these poems an attempt to "take up the challenge of transforming the living history of their time into verse."[58] Pointing to what he saw as the untranslatability of Muktibodh's work, Kedarnath Singh also argued for a roughness to Muktibodh's work, but whereas Bharat Singh saw in that a sign of Muktibodh's authenticity, or even simplicity, for Kedarnath Singh it was a sign of Muktibodh's poetic project: to reform the history and contemporary world in which he lived, through his poetic imagination, into art.

Other articles analyzed aspects of Muktibodh's works that had been previously neglected, such as his criticism and short stories. The short story writer and novelist Nirmal Varma's (1929–2005) "Muktibodh kī gadya-kathā," which will be further discussed in chapter four, argued for an understanding of Muktibodh's short stories as depicting a "frozen social reality" that would come to life in the imaginative world of his poetry.[59] The novelist and critic Ramesh Chandra Shah (born 1937) took up the question of why Muktibodh seemed to portray the totality of Indian life not in the expected form of the novel, but in his long poems. Shah's argument both reveals an anxiety

[55]See Sadana, *English Heart, Hindi Heartland*, pp. 86-91 for a brief biography of Ashok Vajpeyi, detailing his career in the service of Hindi letters.

[56]See, for instance, *Pūrvagraha* issue 16, September 1976, which focuses on the musician Kumar Gandharva (1924–1992), and issue 35-36, November 1979, which focuses on the painter S. H. Raza (born 1922). Both S. H. Raza and Kumar Gandharva maintained connections with the region, and *Pūrvagraha* frequently featured other local figures, such as the writer Vinod Kumar Shukla (born 1937), who wrote some of his early works under the support of the state's Muktibodh fellowship in 1976.

[57]See, for instance, Paramānanda Śrīvāstava, "Bīhaḍ jaghoṁ meṁ kavitā," *Pūrvagraha*, nos. 39-40 (1980): 42–45.

[58]Singh, "Kālbaddh aur parārthmay."

[59]See Nirmal Varma, "Muktibodh kī gadya-kathā," *Pūrvagraha* 7, no. 3 (Jan-Feb 1981): 3–9.

over a perceived failure of Muktibodh, and by extension of Hindi literature, to produce a great novel, and in the process shifts the interpretation of the great poem. Whereas, for earlier critics such as Shamsher Bahadur Singh, Namwar Singh, and Ram Vilas Sharma, Muktibodh's long poem was the apex of his work and compared to a vast mural, for Shah, and also for Varma, the long poem was symptomatic of the postcolonial modernity that shaped Muktibodh's writings.[60]

In this way, the essays and appreciations of Muktibodh, which were often accompanied by prints of Padamsee's haunting portraits of Muktibodh, were crucial in forming the image of Muktibodh as a tragic figure, emblematic of a larger idea of post-Independence India as a time of disappointment, and the search for meaning and tradition in a society shattered by the experience of colonialism. The Muktibodh presented in *Pūrvagraha*, in sharp contrast with his reevaluation in *Kaṁk*, was not assimilable to a turn towards the popular in Marxism, but he was also did not fit within a classical mold of *Naī kavitā*, which would privilege the artist's own interpretation of experience. Rather, the Muktibodh of *Pūrvagraha* was rooted in the fractured societies of the small towns of Central India, and his work articulated the unique modernity of the Indian lower middle class.

Conclusion

The criticism of Muktibodh shifted in response to changes in the political circumstances of India, and the trends in Hindi literature at the time. For Ram Vilas Sharma and Namwar Singh, the criticism of Muktibodh was a referendum of sorts on the meaning of post-Independence Hindi poetry. Namwar Singh claimed a privileged position for Muktibodh as articulating what he calls the "search for identity" of post-Independence class consciousness, whereas Ram Vilas Sharma saw in these same qualities a retreat from ideals of progressive poetry in favor of escapist individualism. For both critics, Muktibodh was seen to be a summation of *Naī kavitā* and the poetry of the 1950s. Long poems such as "Aṁdhere meṁ", which could be read either as presenting the nightmares of post-Independence life in an original new way, or as escaping from those realities into a romantic fantasy of self-expression, were the primary objects of criticism.

For the critics who confronted Muktibodh's legacy after Naxalism and the Emergency, Muktibodh took the form of a strange prophet, whose work could not be entirely accommodated within the new frameworks, but who nevertheless demanded that a place be made for him. For critics on the Left, Muktibodh's strong identification with the lower middle class presented a challenge to a new generation of writers who emphasized connections with the rural peasantry. And his continued association with poets, such as Agyeya, who were viewed as politically suspect, demanded an explanation. Ten years previously, that Muktibodh would be considered both a Marxist poet and a representative of experimentalism and *Naī kavitā* would be unremarkable, but in the more rigidly polarized and politicized atmosphere of the late 1970s, this was seen as unacceptable.

But for all of these critics, Muktibodh's reception could not be separated from the poetic persona that he had, in part, crafted through the presentation of his work. The criticism of "roughness" in his work that characterized later criticism is an uneasy fit, certainly, for the writer who

[60]See Rameścandra Śāh, "Upanyās aur Muktibodh," *Pūrvagraha*, nos. 46-47 (1981): 14–22.

chose to write in Hindi originally because of the vast beauty of its poetry. But it also echoes his own claim that his was a poetry born out of painful sensation. Likewise, the image of Muktibodh as an individualist, Romantic artist often creates problems for interpretations that aim to portray him as a disciplined Marxist and poet of the masses. But interpretations that fail to acknowledge the depth of his commitment, and the importance that Marxism had in helping to build his poetics, would be unable to understand the role that a Romantic imagination is able to play within such a system.

Ideally, a reading of these debates over Muktibodh's legacy can point us towards a new engagement with his poetic and prose corpus, regarding them as one, as well as a reevaluation of our received understandings of modern Hindi criticism and Muktibodh's place in Hindi literary history. The logical next step in this process is to engage directly with Muktibodh's poetry and criticism at every level, building from the work's form and the phenomenology of how readers experience it, to then possible characterizations of its formal and substantial character, its aesthetics, poetics, politics, and apparant meanings, in order to understand how Muktibodh himself appeared to see these questions, and to understand how they developed over the range of his career. My dissertation represents an attempt to separate Muktibodh's achievements from the ways in which he has been presented in literary history, and thus present, to the extent possible, a politically unbiased account. This makes it possible to read Muktibodh through his own works, taking seriously both his intellectual and poetic achievements, as well as the historical context in which they occurred.

Chapter 3

A Graph of Errors: The Language of Science in Muktibodh's Writings

This chapter engages with the question of science and technology as a signifier of Indian modernity, as experienced and expressed by a Hindi writer following Independence. Science, and particularly scientific inquiry with an eye towards technological progress, remains the indispensable mark of modernity in postcolonial India. This holds true both in the context of the developmentalism that typified the period immediately following Independence, as well as in contemporary discourse. In the former, this discourse was dominated by the idea of technocratic and largely state-directed industrial development and its importance in fulfilling the promise of a new nation, an idea often epitomized by its support by the first prime minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru. Contemporary discourse, however, is dominated by the question of whether scientific progress can be attributed to figures in the ancient, often mythological past.[1] Recent comments by Narendra Modi, the current prime minister, exemplify this trend.[2] The attribution of examples of modern technology to a pre-modern, idealized past seems, at first glance, to be far removed from the discourse on science found immediately after Independence.

Consideration of Modi's comments and Nehru's well-known advocacy of state-directed development, however, reveal a shared concern. The Indian state has always claimed a monopoly on scientific progress, and both sides of this issue have portrayed the controlled culmination of scientific development as a crucial sign of the state's justification for existing. Muktibodh's engagement with the question of science and technology directly interrogates this question. By importing the charged discourse of science into his poetry, he enables it to function as if it is open to interpretation in a way that would be otherwise impossible.

[1] See Shoaib Daniyal, "At Delhi University's Vedic Chronology seminar, discussions on flying chariots, Mahabharat-era TV," Scroll.in, October 1, 2015, accessed October 14, 2015, http://scroll.in/article/759001/at-delhi-universitys-vedic-chronology-seminar-discussions-on-flying-chariots-mahabharat-era-tv.

[2] "PM Modi takes leaf from Batra book: Mahabharat genetics, Lord Ganesha surgery," The Indian Express, accessed October 14, 2015, http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/pm-takes-leaf-from-batra-book-mahabharat-genetics-lord-ganesha-surgery/.

To take one of many examples from Muktibodh's work, the image of the imaginary number *i*, divorced from its functioning within a system of mathematics, is able to function as a symbol in a poetic system which contains the possibility of alternate relations to modernity, the past, and education. *i*, the square root of -1, is the quintessential imaginary complex number, and a foundation for modern mathematics. As such, in Muktibodh's writing, it is able to function as the crucial element of the imagination as the element of the conceptual that can be imagined, if only in the space of the artistic subject, as freely open and undetermined. When placed into Muktibodh's imagination of systems of science, it is able to engage with the question of science's role in reimagining postcolonial reality.

In incorporating science within his poetics, Muktibodh was not only attempting to create a space for a critique of modernity, he was also taking up a distinct issue that existed within the language in which he wrote. By writing in Hindi, Muktibodh was choosing to write within a language that he described as having a "universal scope," and was therefore devoid of the specifically regional and local linguistic overtones and resonances of his home language, Marathi.[3] In this way, writing in Hindi was, for Muktibodh, a cosmopolitan choice. But writing in Hindi also set Muktibodh on a collision course with the limits of language, and particularly the problematic status of Hindi as a technical language. Hindi existed in a critical space between the idea of Hindi as the projected national language—and implicitly, the language of upper-caste male Hindus—and its status as an international language, and thus the hegemonic means to transfer India onto a global stage. That this position is inherently contradictory can be demonstrated by the fact that, even as the state was officially presenting Hindi as a language uniquely suited for technical vocabulary through its reliance on Sanskrit, the Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru explicitly denied Indian languages that privilege due to their lack of technical vocabulary. That Hindi was primary among these languages can be surmised by the fact that the letter in question was written to the poet and member of the Rajya Sabha Ramdhari Singh Dinkar (1908–1974).[4] Hindi was thus in a constant state of incomplete translation, a language created by suturing together the abstract, idealized future and the classicized, idealized past. While in this way it differed only in degree, and not kind, from the position of other modern South Asian languages, Hindi's claim to be the voice of the nation rendered it uniquely vulnerable to this problem. And this suturing was visible nowhere more clearly than in the conceptual language of science itself.

It is for this reason that Muktibodh's poetry, when it brings in the language of science, seems to dwell so thoroughly on the vocabulary of science itself, and so frequently plays on the multiple resonances of this vocabulary. That the language of astrology coincides with that of astronomy—as it does in the 1956 poem "Mujhe Nahīṁ Mālūm," [I don't know] which I will discuss in this chapter—would pertain to any language in which the study of space proceeds from a series of

[3]Muktibodh, *Marathi Literature*, The letter is in possession of Ramesh Gajanan Muktibodh.

[4]"In India it is not possible for anyone to acquire adequate scientific or technical knowledge through any of our Indian languages. He may learn some elementary science or technology through the Indian languages and through textbooks translated or written for the purpose. But he will have to stop at a very elementary stage unless he knows some other language." Letter to Ramdhari Singh Dinkar by Jawaharlal Nehru, September 9, 1955. From Jawaharlal Nehru and Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund., *Selected works of Jawaharlal Nehru. Second series.* (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund :Distributed by Oxford University Press, 1984–).

conclusions based on the night sky. But when Muktibodh describes the movements of the planets in terms simultaneously referencing magnetic force and the astrological influences of the planets, he brings into play the radically uncertain existence of these concepts within language itself.

This chapter will argue that this uncertainty, and the possibilities for poetic and radical play that it engendered in Muktibodh's writing, were particularly pertinent during the period during which Muktibodh wrote his mature work. The years during which Jawaharlal Nehru was prime minister, from 1947 to 1964, coincided with a period of worldwide technical development. The combination of unlimited progress and the promise of the mastery of nature, and its simultaneous existence with the threat of total destruction through atomic warfare, was a planetary phenomenon. But Muktibodh's position among the lower-middle-class of a series of small cities and towns and central India, and the isolation produced by the combinations of his politics, family life, and aesthetic commitments, played no small part in his ability to grasp the reality of an uneven modernity, and in particular its consequences for the possibility of a critical engagement with the conceptual, in a way unique among his contemporaries.

By making use of the language of science in Hindi, Muktibodh used that language to make visible through the space of language the incomplete way in which that language was able to take part in the claimed universality and rationality of modernity. In that way we can move closer to understanding the ambiguity at the heart of so much of Muktibodh's writing. Because they made visible in language the insufficiency, incompleteness, and instability of the language in which he wrote, Muktibodh's writings contain within themselves a critique of universality, despite and because of the degree to which they gesture towards and create a linguistic space that plays at universality itself.

This chapter will discuss three major themes: the language of science and technology in Muktibodh's poetry, focusing on their evolution from the early poem "Dūr Tārā" [Distant Star] to the late poem "Mujhe Nahīṃ Mālūm" [I Don't Know]; education and learning in the poem "Brahmarākṣas" [The Brahman Demon]; and questions of the global, the international, and surveillance in the short story "Claude Eatherly." Beginning with the sheer presence in his work of scientific objects and images of science such as telescopes, revolving planets, and imaginary numbers, I look at the way in which they interact with religious mythology and Muktibodh's own attempts to evolve a critical Left Romantic aesthetics. From there I move on to discuss the terrifying invention of the Brahman demon in "Brahmarākṣas" in order to analyze how the poem brings up questions of education and knowledge production. Finally, I will look at "Claude Eatherly," which uses the concept of an encounter with a spy to bring issues of science and international politics into an imagination of the contemporary Indian city. This chapter acts both as a tour of some prominent thematics of Muktibodh's work, but also tries to move from the more superficial aspects of this language of technology towards the ways in which this thinking is essential to understanding the cultural life of post-Independence India.

My analysis draws from Anindita Banerjee's work on Russian science fiction and futurism. As she shows in her book *We Modern People* (2013), writing about science, both through science fiction as well as the more high-modernist poetry of the Russian Futurists, became a way of imagining technology and science from a distance, for a growing popular audience without direct

access to western models of modernity.[5] Banerjee argues that Science Fiction is inherently "heterochronotopic" in that it allows for engagement with a modernity that is outside of the dominant model of a given event. Models of energy, and the exploration of outer space, for example, can be imagined in the writings of Konstantin Tsiolkovsky (1857–1935) as having mystical transformative properties on the human soul in a model of cosmic evolution.[6] And the invention of the radio can be imagined in the writings of Velimir Khlebnikov (1885-1928) as having the capacity to dismantle the boundaries and contradictions between nations, just as the train, in his poem "The Tree," can travel not only across Siberia, but can even cross North America, thus building from a poetic exploration of Russian history and imperialism to an imagined global reach of technological change.[7]

Muktibodh's imagination of science and technology similarly interrogates modernity. In his deployment of the newly-coined technical language of Hindi, Muktibodh's poetry reveals new possibilities for imagining the world through the conceptual language of science. Through understanding that perspective, an analysis of his writings on science and vocabulary can shed light on a unique period in the history of post-Independence India, one in which science and technology functioned both as a sign of the development of the new state, as well as a symbol of the complicated history of the idea of science and development. This history, in turn, is rooted in the colonial discourse of science and technical superiority in India and the nationalist response to it.

Science and Colonialism

Studies of the development of nationalist thought and its relation to colonialism, and the different ways in which ideas of a national historical past are constructed in the wake of the imperial project, are often rooted in questions of knowledge production. For instance, the foundational work of Partha Chatterjee on Bankim Chattopadhyay (1838–1894) shows how, in the late 19th century, the Bengali writer tried to form a non-colonial past that could be a source for rational, but independent, thinking.[8] Building on this and other works, recent scholars of South Asian history have shown the ways in which the nationalist project rested upon constructions of ideas of national space and a national past that were based in no small part on the intellectual experience of colonialism and the reordering of intellectual life entailed by it.[9]

[5]Anindita Banerjee, *We Modern People: Science Fiction and the Making of Russian Modernity* (Wesleyan University Press, January 3, 2013), pp. 158-159.

[6]Ibid., p. 135.

[7]ibid., pp. 35-37. See also Velimir Khlebnikov, "The tree," in *Collected works of Velimir Khlebnikov*, ed. Charlotte Douglas, trans. Paul Schmidt (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 3:110–112.

[8]Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World.*

[9]See Manu Goswami, *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space*, Chicago studies in practices of meaning (Chicago ;London: University of Chicago Press, 2004) for an analysis of the role of geography in creating the idea of India as a national space; see Prathama Banerjee, *Politics of Time: "Primitives" and History-Writing in a Colonial Society* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006) for a useful history of the relations between colonial administration, local Bengali colonists, and Santhal tribal groups in the context of differing ideas of temporality and history.

Gyan Prakash's 1999 work *Another Reason* addresses directly the question of science and colonialism, describing the ways in which the problem of science, and its role in the British technology of the colonial state, impinged on nationalist thought. Prakash argues that India's identity was acquired by the violent, epistemological break caused by colonialism, and that that the culture that preceded this break was "reconfigured" as a "prehistory of the modern self."[10] The epistemological break then becomes not only a gap, beyond which the post-colonial culture cannot have access, but becomes in fact constitutive of the post-colonial itself. The colonial process, which reorganizes and transforms the physical world through technology, requires the re-imagination or "re-inscription" of an ancient unity upon this transformed technological space, which Independence can then claim as its own right.[11] The struggle for Independence, in this formulation, is inextricably bound up in a struggle for the control of technical space; stories like Kipling's "The Bridge Builders," (1893) which describes a struggle to build a modern, metal bridge across the Ganges river, becomes the story of the colonial reconfiguration and rationalization of space.[12]

Prakash's analysis foregrounds a tradition of science within colonialism that, of course, existed in various permutations across the colonial world. As Michael Adas shows in his 1989 study *Machines as the Measure of Men*, ideas of technological superiority and, just as importantly, the inherent rationalism of the Western mind were an important part of colonial thought almost from the age of exploration in the 15th century. In the case of India, these ideas, which were most firmly consolidated in James Mill's 1817 *The History of British India*, took the form of a critique of religious elites, and the idea that a glorious ancient past, the source for ancient Indian philosophy and one of the primary languages of the Indo-European language family, that devolved into a squalid, inefficient present, due primarily to the selfishness and myopia of intellectual elites.[13]

The result, in Prakash's account, were two different, but related, attempts to engage with science and technology that had profound consequences after Independence. The first was an embrace of technological and scientific knowledge and education, and a privileging of this kind of knowledge as the key to progress and eventually national self-determination. In the 19th century, a diverse range of reformist groups formed which would later be understood to be a precursor to the Independence movement, but themselves supported a variety of geographical bases, ideological positions, and modes of action. But despite these differences most of these groups understood the question of science to be essential to their given interpretation of advancement, be it religious and social reform in the case of the Arya Samaj, or linguistic reform in the case of the Hindi-advocacy organization Nagari Pracarini Sabha; in the latter case this took the form of translation and dissemination in Hindi of scientific knowledge.[14] The second was the develop-

[10]Gyan Prakash, *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 14.

[11]Ibid., p. 161.

[12]Ibid., p. 167.

[13]Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 149. For an analysis of Liberal thought and its relation to empire, see Uday Singh. Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: a Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), especially pp. 77-114.

[14]Prakash, *Another Reason*, p. 62.

ment of theories of the ancient past that privileged ideas of a glorious ancient Indian culture. In Prakash's formulation, the response was rooted in a need to, on the one hand, embrace and usurp the technological space, as well as to imagine a return to an imagined wholeness of an undivided India, of which the nation-state would be the restoration and fulfilment.

Nehru and his ideas about technology were tremendously influential in the first decade of Independence. Primarily in his speeches, Nehru developed an idea of progress that, as Ronald Inden shows, tied directly into the idea of development as a modern procession or pilgrimage into a better world—a Utopia accessible through massive works of technological development.[15] Inden argues that these ideas of Progress were themselves sublimations of medieval concepts of Progress shared by both Europeans and South Asians: the medieval progress is overtaken by the colonial imperial visits of, for instance, the Prince of Wales in 1877.[16] This is in turn overtaken by the idea, following the breakdown of the colonial order and the simultaneous beginning of Cold War following the second world war, of a modern, developed world, one defined for both the United States and the USSR by a global managerial administrative order, in which progress was permanent, and which the backwards, "underdeveloped" post-colonial world could join through the development of a "dynamic" economy.[17] As Inden shows, Nehru's emphasis on dams and heavy industry relates to the metaphors of movement and "lift-off," in which an Independent India would transcend earthly reality and join the order of developed nations.[18] The tragedy of this was that Nehru's idea of development and progress did not engage with existing ideas of progress for those who were not already included, through wealth and education, in a global order.[19] At the same time, as several intellectual problems converged in the idea of progress, development, and a rational, scientific world order, rapid technological change also took place in the post-war 1950s Cold War period, change that was even more amplified in India with the coming of Independence. Newspapers in both English and Hindi resounded with discussion of new technologies that were simultaneously domestic and foreign. The growth of Indian newspapers and magazines coincided with a new consumer culture, with the sudden availability of a wide range of appliances and an expansion of material culture. What many of these technologies had in common was their importation from outside India, and this fact raised questions of how to enter into a developing global economic system.[20] Discussion of technology also served to prefigure the coming progress of the nation, progress often explicitly tied to connections made through science between India and the world. A telling example was the description in Nagpur newspaper *Hitawada* of an exhibition by the U.S. Information Service of the "Atoms for Peace" in 1956—a time, coincidentally, during which Muktibodh was still living in the city.[21] The article, which enthusiastically describes

[15]Ronald B. Inden, *Text and Practice: Essays on South Asian History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 291-292.

[16]Ibid., p. 252.

[17]Ibid., pp. 274-5.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Ibid., pp. 291-292. Note also that the procession, which makes up the bulk of Inden's discussion of the idea of progress, figures prominently in Muktibodh's work, most famously as a structuring narrative of his most famous poem "Andhere Mein".

[20]Chunilal Bakshi, "Letter," *Hitavada*, December 10, 1949,

[21]"'Atoms for Peace' Exhibition Opens Today," *Hitavada*, December 9, 1956, 5–8.

a traveling exhibition visiting Nagpur that included a variety of visual displays, concentrated in particular on the model of a "swimming pool" nuclear reactor, a kind of reactor, the article points out, that had recently been designed by Homi Bhabha in Bombay.

The intervening years also saw a dramatic change in the ways in which Indian writers were able to engage with the outside world. Prior to Independence the majority of printed material was subject to the varying strictures of British censorship, and a connection to England was in many ways the primary conduit for Indians to engage with the international. The international travel of Rahul Sankṛtyayan (1893–1963), who lived for many years in the Soviet Union, was so noteworthy in the world of Hindi writing in part because he traveled and lived in places outside of the orbit of British imperialism, namely Tibet and Soviet Central Asia. By 1956, however, a great many writers in Hindi had been able to travel abroad under the auspices of various organizations associated with the United States, the Soviet Union, or other international organizations. Among the seven writers of the "*Tār saptak*" group, at least three of them would travel abroad by 1970: Girijakumar Mathur lived for two years in New York for the United Nations; Prabhakar Machwe lived for several years across the United States as a teacher; and Agyeya would travel widely, and notably taught at Berkeley for several years in the 1960s. Other important writers of the 1950s would travel under the auspices of the Soviet Union; for instance short story writer and novelist Nirmal Varma lived in then-Czechoslovakia, which became the backdrop for many of his short stories and his first novel, *Ve Din* [Those days, 1964] Varma and other writers in similar positions began to write frequent columns for Hindi journals such as *Kalpanā*, *Laharī* and *Kakhaga* describing their experiences as well as the artistic and intellectual scene in Europe and America. Thus, it is fair to say that the networks of Hindi writers changed dramatically in the 1950s, and in geographic terms the world became much more present in the Hindi literary world.[22]

Corresponding to this change in the personal travel of Hindi writers, science, technology, and international politics took up an increasing role in Hindi print culture. Hindi journals such as *Āgāmīkal* [The coming tomorrow], published from the railway junction city of Khandwa in what would become Madhya Pradesh, and the more widely prominent *Viśāl bhārat* [Expansive India], tracked the change in priorities from the late 30s and 40s into the 50s. For instance, an article in *Āgāmīkal* called "Vijñān aur saṇkaṭ grast sabhyatā" [Science and a Civilization in Crisis] described the problem of science in terms of its perversion under "capitalism" and Nazi Germany, and its democratization (with accordingly quoted expenditures) under the Soviet Union.[23] The article portrayed science as an essential part of the coming changes in the country, which were to be modelled under the imagination of science in the Soviet Union, in which science would become a part of daily life and society: "In the future," the article dryly begins, "we won't pass our time raising birds." This reference to the traditionally genteel and cultured pastime of raising znd training pigeons seems to indicate a decisive break between older cultural models and the coming, scientific future. After Independence, questions about science changed along with the changes in Indian culture following the main trends of the Cold War, Nehru's promotion of technological development, and the overarching question of how India would engage with its idea of global,

[22]The most widely available and condensed source for most of these biographies is Varmā, *Hindī sāhitya koś*.

[23]Anonymous, "Vijñān aur saṃkaṭ grast sabhyatā," *āgāmīkal*, January 1941, 454–456.

Western, modernity. It should not surprise, then, that discourse often centered around the issue of atomic weaponry. Magazines such as *Sārthī* and *Karmvīr* were discussing the dangers of nuclear weapon proliferation as early as 1954, following the testing of bombs on the Bikini atoll—the infamous testing that inspired the anti-proliferation movement, the classic film *Godzilla*, and a now-ubiquitous article of clothing. The weapon testing, as the article noted, affected a nearby Japanese fishing vessel, and spread radioactive material as far as Japan and Australia, leading the article, like the rest of the world, to describe the testing in terms of its effect on international sovereignty and fears of science run amok.[24] At the same time, however, information about atomic war was often mixed with other news about "technological advances": in 1954, for instance, news about damage to the human eyes from the flash of an atomic explosion was paired with news about advancements in organ transplants and the invention of the answering machine.[25] And even articles about nuclear bombs were often subsumed in the language of scientific advance; an article from *Sārthī* in 1954 on the new Cobalt bomb, for instance, even as it was titled "Dānavī Astra" [demonic weapon], spent at least half of the article describing the technological developments inherent in the bomb and innovation of using cobalt in the place of iron in the core of the device.[26] Furthermore, articles detailing scientific progress were often featured in the same section of the newspaper or magazine devoted to current affairs around the world, including science along with foreign lifestyles and entertainment. For example, an article describing the innovation of artificial earth satellites appears below a picture of the Prince of Wales going to school for the first time.[27]

There was such a thing as science fiction in Hindi, but most studies on the subject foreground the relative paucity of the literature, compared even to other Indian languages like Marathi.[28] The same study, in fact, speculates that this paucity might be explained by the "delusional" [*mohmukt*] attitude of Hindi writers towards society and culture.[29] The first stories in Hindi that could be called "science fiction" were in fact published in the first decade of the 20th century, but they are regarded primarily as adaptations of Western stories.[30] The first story that explicitly referred to itself as "science fiction" was therefore, in the view of a study on the author, Yamunadatt Vaishnav 'Ashok''s *Cakṣudān* [The gift of eyes].[31] The short novel, which dealt with the question of eye transplants at a military hospital during WW2 in Iraq, was serialized by *Vishal Bharat*, under the editorship of Agyeya, in 1949.[32] 'Ashok' published two more novels and several collections of short stories, but his reputation remained fairly obscure.[33]

[24]"Haiḍrojan Bam," *Sārthī*, April 6, 1954,

[25]"Vijñān Vārtā," *Sārthī*, May 30, 1954, 16.

[26]"Dānavī Astra," *Sārthī*, April 16, 1954, 5.

[27]"Untitled," *Hitavada*, March 10, 1957,

[28]Rājakumārī Upādhyay and Yamunādatta Vaishṇava, *Vaijñānik kathākār Yamunādatt Vaishṇav "Aśoka": jīvan aur sāhitya*, Saṃskaraṇa 1. (Alīgaṛha: Granthāyana, 1983), p. 9.

[29]Ibid.

[30]Ibid., p. 413.

[31]Yamunādatt Vaiṣṇav, *Cakṣudān* (Aligarh: Taramandal, 1991 [1949]).

[32]Upādhyay and Vaishṇava, *Vaijñānika kathākāra Yamunādatta Vaishṇava "Aśoka"*, p. 409.

[33]His work is not discussed in Gopal Ray's *Hindī Upanyās kā Itihās*, the primary history on the subject, and apart from the critical work cited in this paragraph, I have been unable to find any mention of 'Ashok' in Hindi literary history.

But any discussion of science in literature, at least prose literature, should bear in mind the often dominating presence of science in technology in what are commonly referred to in Hindi as *Jāsūsī*, [espionage] novels. These novels, which describe the adventures of various preternaturally talented investigators, often featured the technological skills of said investigators. This tradition, natural in some sense to the genre of the detective story, in fact has roots going back to the qissa/dastan tradition in 19th century Hindi-Urdu literature, which often revolved around the exploits of *'ayyār*s, magicians who used various magical devices to accomplish feats on behalf of their feudal lords. As Francesca Orsini notes in her study of the subject, Devkinand Khatri, in his massively popular novel *Candrakāntā*,intervened in several ways into the dastan tradition; one of these interventions was to introduce a kind of scientific explanation for what otherwise would be presented as the magical acts of his *'ayyar*s.[34] Khatri's son, Durgaprasad Khatri (1895–1973), who wrote more than 100 novels, took this one step farther, labeling many of his stories not as "jāsūsi" or "sāmājik" (dealing with social issues) but as *vaijñānik*, or scientific, novels. The plots of these novels revolved largely around the technological abilities of the protagonists, and their abilities to use technology to accomplish feats that would otherwise seem magical.[35]

The 1950s, then, brought together both a popular reading culture which emphasized the importance of technology in popular literature, as well as an unprecedented expansion of a discourse of science and technology, as well as unprecedented access of Hindi writers to international travel. A reader during this period would be reading about scientific advances on a daily basis while being exposed to the idea that technological progress was inevitable, and something to be aspired to. Muktibodh's incorporation of the imagery of science and technology, then, should be considered in the context of this period, and its unique engagement with questions of progress and internationalism. Muktibodh's use of the language of science and poetry in his poetry, however, exposes the ways in which that language was incorporated into Hindi, and makes visible the complex, historical processes through which Hindi was developed as a national language.

The Language of Science in Muktibodh's Poetry

As discussed above, the critical reception of Muktibodh frequently references the difficulty of Muktibodh's poetry. Critics located the sources of this difficulty in anything from the gradually expanding length of his poetry, to the "estrangement of language" traceable to his Marathi-speaking background, to his focus on the "existential" concerns of the middle class rather than the more immediate and revolutionary concerns of the peasants or proletariat. But these issues, and the many sympathetic attempts to understand Muktibodh in terms of them, can exclude some of the more direct reasons that his poetry was treated as obscure by its first readers. In 1964, in one of the last poems of Muktibodh published before his death, the editors of the journal *Kalpanā* made the decision, without consulting the incapacitated Muktibodh, to substitute Hindi translations for the words "Manganese," "Phosphor," "Nitrate," and "Quartz," with the argument that the Hindi translations would be more comprehensible and effective because of their "Indian

[34]Francesca Orsini, *Print and Pleasure: Popular Literature and Entertaining Fictions in Colonial North India* (Permanent Black, 2009), p. 219.

[35]Jagannāth Caudharī, *Vaijñānik upanyās aur upanyāsakār* (Kānapura: Sāhityaloka, 1986), pp. 50-51.

resonance" [*bhāratīya dhvani*].[36] So, on the level of words themselves, the presence of science, technology, and the relation of Hindi to English was here deemed inappropriate. Even a journal such as *Kalpanā*, which, in its more than ten years of publication, had built up a reputation as sympathetic to experimental poetry, found the use of these technical, English-derived mineral names as obscure and unnecessary, even as they replaced them with equally obscure Sanskritized neologisms.

A study of scientific terminology in Muktibodh's work, then, can begin by looking at what was particular and different about this language, before considering its evolution in his work. I'll begin then by looking at an early poem, "Dūr tārā." [Distant star] This poem, a short lyric focusing on the relationship between a star's eternal distance from the movements of its observers and comparing that to, more or less, the human soul, was written as part of the *Tār saptak* anthology and published in 1943. On the one hand, it was written in the midst of the Second World War and during the lead-up to Independence from England; on the other hand, it was written at a time in Muktibodh's life when he was living and working at a Gandhian school in Shujalpur and undergoing a period of great intellectual development. Relevant, perhaps, is his discussion of this period as that of his conversion to Marxism, which he described at this point as a "more scientific, more concrete, more energetic philosophy.".[37]

The poem begins ambiguously, unclear as to whether it is addressing the star, making explicit the identification that will end the poem, or attempting to see it objectively:

tīvra-gati
ati dūr tārā,
vah hamārā
śūnya ke vistār nīle meṁ calā hai.

Fast and
distant star,
gone
into our expansive
blue emptiness.[38]

The opening of this poem points towards the poem's conclusion, in which the speaker affirms his faith in every "son of Manu" due to man's own internal "fearless child of orbit." The absence, "śūnya" brings up images of the entire philosophical critique of emptiness and absence, and the word *vistār*, popularized by Chhayavad poetry, gives a kind of high, dignified ring to the opening lines, offsetting the looseness of the free verse in the opening. But, the first two lines of address are ambiguous; if the poem is addressing the star directly, then it more easily identifies with the sentiment that the poem expresses in the end, but as the next lines show, the star is also being presented here as present in its real, objective distance from the speaker.

[36]"Yah Aṅk," *Kalpanā*, August 1964,
[37]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 5:232.
[38]Ibid., 1:110.

The next lines, however, describe the star in radically different ways that mark the poem as distinct from the poetic models which Muktibodh made use of in the beginning of his career. The perspective shifts from the star, far off and cosmic, to the earth:

aur nīce log
us ko dekhte haiṁ, nāpte haiṁ gati, udaya au' asta kā
itihās.
kintu itnī dīrgh dūrī,
śūnya ke us kuch-na-hone se banā jo nīl kā ākāś,
vah ek uttar
dūrbīnoṃ kī satat ālocnāoṃ ko,
nayan-āvart ke sīmit nidarśan yā ki darśan-yatna ko.

The people below
watch and map its course, the
history
of its rising and falling.
But such a vast distance,
that dark sky made of so much nothing,
is a rebuttal
to the eternal critiques of telescopes,
to the limits of turning eyes, or to devices of vision.

The poem here brings up two things: the language of science and the language of critique. The last two lines introduce three terms for attempts to look at the star: telescopes, turning eyes, and devices of vision. In a way, each term is more abstract from the last, from the more practical and widespread "durbīn" [telescope] to the awkward, technical "darśan-yatna" [device of vision]. At the same time, the distance between these technical human devices and the star is described as a response to the criticism of the telescopes. In this way the poem here moves from the expansive to the mundane. These lines enact the shift, as Namwar Singh argues in his seminal analysis of Muktibodh and the poetry of the 1950s, *Kavitā ke naye pratimān* [The new criteria of poetry], in which the focus of the poem shifts from a discovery of form or object through a supposed emotion, to, in *Naī kavitā*, a discovery of emotion through analysis of the form or object, the *rūp*.[39] The poem shifts from evoking the emotion of vastness and distance, to focus our attention on the way that we try to look at things. And the way that it does this, by talking about mechanical devices, helps us to see the interconnection between this formal change in Hindi poetry and thinking about science.

In the third and fourth stanzas, however, the poem shifts back to the star's movement through space, and connects it to the internal, the soul:

aur jāne kyoṁ,
mujhe lagtā ki aisā hī akelā nīl tārā,

[39]See Singh, *Kavitā ke naye pratimāna.*, p. 25.

tīvra-gati,
jo śūnya meṁ nissaṅg,
jis kā path virāṭ—
vah chipā pratyek ur meṁ,
prati hṛday ke kalmaṣoṁ ke bād
jaise bādaloṁ ke bād bhī hai śūnya nīlākāś.

And somehow,
it seems to me that a single blue star,
with all its velocity
alone in the deep,
with its vast orbit—
is hidden in every heart,
beyond the filth of every heart,
like the clear blue sky beyond the clouds.

In these lines the image of the star moves from one that would be quite at home in the still-nascent poetry of the 1940s and 50s—poems that took as their natural object questions of perception, movement, the best expression of the moment—to a very old image of the soul which is obscured by the marks, or *kalmaṣ*, of misdeeds, like a lamp obscured by soot or, in this case, a sky obscured by clouds. The orbit of the star, with its velocity [*gati*], now evokes not only a kind of space-age impossibility of light-speed, quantum physics, and discovery, but also a much older resonance of *gati*, in which it refers to both speed and also the divine frequency of the *bhakti* object of devotion.[40] After a description of the "fearless vast child" that is "the support of its own progress," the final stanza, in a single line, concludes: "and so I try to believe in each child of Manu." Manu is the character from the myth of a flooded world, similar to Noah, and also the primary character of Jayshankar Prasad's 1935 *Kāmāyanī*, a long poem that would be immensely influential for Muktibodh and would eventually become the subject of a book-length critique.[41] In that poem Manu, the primordial man but also the primordial moral actor and even, for Muktibodh, the symbolically primordial symbol of modernity, agonized over the loss of a former, privileged world. Muktibodh wouldn't write formally about *Kāmāyanī* for another ten years, but here we can see a reaction to the redemption of that character in the closing statements of the poem.

"Dūr tārā," written in the midst of both dramatic intellectual and political developments for its author, reflects a transition and search for a new poetics, and engagement with a terminology of technological perception, that still recalls many of the thematics of early *Chhāyāvad* and *Pragativād* poetic traditions and a sense of a Romantic and mythological cosmic that owes more than a little to Prasad and *Kāmāyanī*. The presence of scientific terminology in his later work,

[40]See Philip Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text: Performing the Rāmcaritmānas of Tulsidas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). *Bhakti* is the moniker for a huge history of religious practices across time, space, and language in South Asia during the second millennium; what all of them share is a personalized relationship with the divine, and, in this instance, the possibility of personal salvation through that devotion.

[41]That critique is discussed in Chapter 6.

particularly his 1956–1960 "Mujhe nahīṁ mālūm," inverts the logic of the earlier poem; here the cosmic and mythological fade away into a meditation on doubt, scientific error, and the status of knowledge produced through aesthetic engagement.[42] Indeed, this poem not only incorporates the language of science, it foregrounds the problem of determination and error inherent in that vocabulary, and uses it to push the poem into new territory.

The poem opens with a comparison between the speaker and the planets, in that they submit their massive gravitational power to the forces that place them on predetermined paths. The speaker then considers his own power, through the internal atomic physics of his own self, and then decides against that, considering the massive likelihood of failure in any endeavor. Then, in the conclusion to the poem, the speaker imagines a transcendent experience rising up out of his mistakes, culminating in an experience of bodiless potentiality in a Garden of Eden. The basic elements of the poem then, as in "Dūr tārā," connect problems of science, and the vocabulary of science, to questions of philosophy. But unlike in "Dūr tārā", in which the transition was fairly abrupt and rooted in the kind of lyric that Muktibodh was writing at the time, here the conclusion of the poem is far less obvious; rather than the firm declaration in "Dūr tārā" that "and for this reason I believe in the son of Manu," here there is a transformation into a very real paradise, but one that is coupled with the dissolution of the speaker. And the movement of the poem, from the planets, to the speaker in monologue with himself, to an imagined ecstatic experience, is far more complex.

The poem begins in this kind of questioning manner with the first stanza, with lines that orientate the rest of the poem towards problems of truth and perception:

> *mujhe nahīṁ mālūm*
> *sahī hūṁ yā galat hūṁ yā aur kuch,*
> *satya hūṁ ki mātra maiṁ nivedan-saundarya*
>
> I don't know
> if I'm right or wrong or something else,
> am I truth or just the impulse of beauty[43]

These first lines of the poems (which are echoed in several other poems by Muktibodh, and here are the stable point of several iterations of the same poems in Muktibodh's own archives) orient the rest of the poem around the question of truth and the aesthetic. The phrase "saundarya-nivedana" can be "impulse of beauty," but it can also be translated as "designation of beauty" or "aesthetic conclusion" or "aesthetic knowledge." *Satya*, for that matter, can be translated as "truth," but also as "good," "moral," "just." The question, then, poses the speaker's own idea of "aesthetic truth" against some other, pre-determined, fixed idea of truth.

The next stanza, which focuses on the movements of planets, would seem to leave this simple question of truth far behind. But they serve to underscore the fundamental connection for Muktibodh between questions of science and those of his poetics, between the fixed, already-assigned truths of planetary physics and the knowledge of the aesthetic itself:

[42]"Mujhe nahīṁ mālūm," Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 2:155-158.

[43]Ibid., 2:154.

dharitri va nakṣatra
tārāgaṇ
rakhte haiṁ nij-nij vyaktitva
rakhte haiṁ cumbakīya śakti, par
svayaṃ ke anusār
gurutva-ākarṣaṇ śakti kā upyog
karne meṁ asamarth.
yah nahīṁ hotā hai unse ki zarā ghūm-ghām āe
nabhas apār meṁ
yantrabaddh gatiyoṁ kā grah-path tyāgkar
brahmāṇḍ akhil kī sarhadeṁ māp le.
are, ye jyoti-piṇḍ
hṛday meṁ mahāśakti rakhne ke bāvjūd
andhe haiṁ netrahīn
asaṅg ghūmte haiṁ ahetuk
asīm nabhas meṁ
caṭṭānī ḍher hai gatimān anathak,
apne na bas meṁ.

the earth and the heavens
the assembly of stars
each its own identity
each its own magnetism, but
of their own accord
are incapable
of using their own gravitational power.
they'll never wander
and
graze
in the boundless sky,
map the borders of the unbroken universe.
these fragments of light
even as they hold a great power in their hearts
are blind, eyeless
wander aimlessly alone
in the endless sky
a collection of rock set to tireless movement
out of their own control.[44]

Here, as in "Dūr tārā" the poem discusses the movements of heavenly bodies. The language, in fact, is strikingly similar in its ability to evoke both contemporary science, in the sense of the

[44]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 2:155.

planets and their "magnetic power" [*cumbakīya śakti*] as well as another language of astrology, in references like "assembly of stars" [*tārāgaṇ*] and "fragments of light" [*jyoti-piṇḍ*]. It differs, however, in the sentiment evoked. Whereas in "Dūr tārā" the star was essentially an optimistic, positive symbol, here the planets are helpless and subject to outside forces. This kind of language, on the one hand, makes sense in the general pessimism and darkness of Muktibodh's later work, in which the moon, that classical symbol of beauty, is explicitly evoked as twisted and ugly.

This helplessness is reflected in the internal physics of the narrator, who considers that within him "spin electrons":

bahut xuś hotā hūṁ nij se ki
yadyapi sāṁce meṁ ḍhalī huī mūrti maiṁ mazbūt
phir bhī hūṁ devdūt
'ilekṭron'—raśmiyoṁ meṁ bandhe hue aṇuoṁ kā
puñjībhūt
ek mahābhūt mēṁ.
ṛṇ-ek rāśi kā vargmūl
sākṣāt
ṛṇ-dhan taḍit kī cingiyoṁ kā ātmajāt
prakāś hūṁ nij-śūl.

I'm very happy with myself, for
although I'm a statue formed in a mold, I'm strong
a messenger of the gods
an "electron"—atoms bound in light-rays
accumulated
I'm the five elements.
the square root of negative one
empowered,
I am my own trident,
negative-positive come alive in bolts of lightning.[45]

The helplessness of the planets is supposedly offset by the ambivalent internal power, rendered here in mythological, Shaivist vocabulary—"I am my own trident". These lines are in fact echoed in an earlier, unpublished poem, "Cāhie mujhe mere asaṅg babūlpan" [My foolishness is necessary], in which the narrator reenacts the myth of Shiva's throat turning blue through drinking a poison which had been churned up in the ocean; here, the narrator's throat is tainted blue with printer's ink. Thus, the science in this poem is bound to the cosmic, but explicitly through the mythological.

This is made explicit in the ending of the first half of the poem, and the transition into the second. For, the first part ends with the narrator considering his own helplessness and fear of error:

[45]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 2:155-156.

isīlie, satya hamāre haiṁ satahī
pahle se banī huī rāhoṁ par ghūmte haiṁ
yantra-baddh gati se.
par unkā sahīpan
bahut baḍā vyaṅgya hai
aur satyoṁ kī cumbakīy śakti
vah maigneṭ.....
hāṁ, vah anaṅg hai
apne meṁ kāmātur,
aṅg se kintu hīn!!

and so, our truths are superficial
we revolve on pre-made orbits
by mechanized movements.
but this surface
holds a great suggestion
and the magnetic power of truth
that magnet
yes, it is bodiless
self-animate,
but without limbs!![46]

The final lines, in which magnetic power is described as bodiless and invisible, but still powerful, is a reference possibly to Kāmadeva, the Indian god of love, who was incinerated by Shiva when he attempted to convince him to marry and was thenceforth known as the invisible, unseen, limbless god—an event most famously memorialized in Kalidasa's Sanskrit poem *Kumārasambhava*.[47] The power of magnetism, the power of gravity, like the power of love, is invisible and acts as a weak force. And in the poem, this force is implicitly compared to the weak force raised as a question in the beginning of the poem: the "truth" of aesthetics. This then resolves into the explicitly religious and ecstatic final portion of the portion, in which the author describes his mistakes forming into a golden, shining, utopia, but that which ends, ambiguously, with the author stating, "I am nowhere."

If we look at a trajectory from "Dūr tārā" to "Mujhe nahīṁ mālūm", we can see that questions of the scientific method and the terminology of science itself transform from being a thematic in his poems, as they are in "Dūr tārā", to being in some sense a structuring, overarching problem of his poetry itself, and becomes tightly embedded in the way that Muktibodh thinks about poetry. That is why "Mujhe nahīṁ mālūm", which begins with the speaker considering the efficacy of his own aesthetic truth, can deal so thoroughly and entirely with questions of science and knowledge.

[46]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 2:157.

[47]*Kumārasambhava* has been translated into English as Kālidāsa, *The Origin of the Young God: Kālidāsa's Kumārasaṃbhava*, trans. Hank Heifetz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); a newer translation is Kālidāsa, *The Birth of Kumāra*, 1st ed., trans. David Smith, The Clay Sanskrit library (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

As I tried to show in foregrounding the problems of this chapter, part of that process has to do with the growing presence of the language of science in daily life and in concerns of international politics in the form of atomic anxieties. But in "Mujhe nahīṁ mālūm" the question of the scientific method, of the opposition of different methods of calculating the world and discerning truth, the problem of the empirically determined fact become the structuring issue of the poem, and the anxiety and doubt of the speaker's voice, in interaction with that language of calculation, becomes a means of transcendence.

The *Brahmarākṣas* and the Question of Learning

While "Dūr tārā" and "Mujhe nahīṁ mālūm", in their dissection of the language of technology and its relation to artistic truth, represent one side of Muktibodh's thinking about science, a wide range of his poems represent another: that of tutelage, learning, the relationship between a guru and his student. The idea of a perfect teacher appears often in discussions of the revolutionary learning that is such an important part of Muktibodh's work. A wide range of poems throughout his career reference this kind of sense of conversion, gratitude and a friendship that is often like the relationship between a student and a teacher: in his poem "Ātma ke Mitra mere" [My friend of the soul], he describes a friend holding him on his shoulders so that he can screw in the fuse bulb of history.

Perhaps the most well-known of Muktibodh's poem on this theme is "Brahmarākṣas," (1956–1962), which describes the demonic ghost of a Brahman living at the bottom of a well.[48] The figure of the *brahmarākṣas* appears sporadically in Muktibodh's throughout Muktibodh's work. In an unpublished diary entry in 1954 that describes his feelings of humiliation while working in a bureaucracy, Muktibodh writes that "I am the *brahmarākṣas* who, since time immemorial, has always tried to remain true and has always failed, somehow or other."[49] In 1957, around the same time that he was probably composing the poem "Brahmarākṣas," Muktibodh published a short story titled "Brahmarākṣas kā śiṣya" [The student of the Brahmarākṣas, 1957]. "Brahmarākṣas kā śiṣya" is told in the manner of a fable in which a young man learns Sanskrit in the traditional twelve years from a Brahman teacher in an abandoned mansion, only to discover at the end of these twelve years that the Brahman is a ghost who had failed to pass on his teaching.[50] In the diary entry, we can see a different sense of the *brahmarākṣas*: in a moment of humiliation as a clerk in a government office, Muktibodh imagines himself to be the *brahmarākṣas*, "who always wanted to do good and always failed."[51] The *brahmarākṣas* then, serves as a symbol both of a traditional idea of learning that is broken or not functioning in some way, as well as Muktibodh's own sense of himself as a broken, non-functioning intellectual.

[48]See the reference to the *brahmarākṣas* in *Encyclopedia Indica*, in which the *brahmarākṣas* is referenced to the *Mahabharata* and other scattered sources in the Sanskrit corpus as the ghost of a Brahman who has failed to pass on his teachings.

[49]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 4:177.

[50]Ibid., 3: 115-120.

[51]Ibid., 4:300.

The poem "Brahmarākṣas" stands out for the strength of its allegory, developed over the length of the poem, and is frequently cited as one of Muktibodh's most powerful and important poems.[52] The poem revolves around the ghost of a Brahman, the *brahmarākṣas*, doomed to live at the bottom of an old, abandoned well:

śahar ke us or khaṇḍahar kī taraf
parityakt sūnī bāvaḍī
ke bhītarī
ṭhaṇḍe aṁdhere meṁ
basī gahrāiyāṁ jal kī...
sīḍhiyāṁ ḍūbīṁ anekoṁ
us purāne ghire pānī meṁ...
samajh meṁ ā na saktā ho
ki jaise bāt kā ādhār
lekin bāt gahrī ho.

Towards the ruins outside the city
inside
an abandoned, empty well
in the cold dark
settled depths of water...
surrounded by sunken steps
you don't get it
won't get to the bottom of it
but you know it's deep.[53]

The Hindi word used for the well, *bāvaḍī*, connotes a particular kind of large step-well common to Western India, which in their most elaborate form could resemble a kind of underground palace. When abandoned they are common sites for ghosts and stories about them.[54] Here we have a well as ruin, with the focus on the lines of the impossibly deep and old water. The well is surrounded by owl's nests, another inauspicious sign, and a smell like "the glory of a hundred good deeds" that "becomes the feeling/ of some unknown past greatness/ rattling in your heart." But the well is surrounded too by flowers: by the "white star blossoms" of the Valerian tree, and the red flowers of the Kanher, dear somehow to the speaker and, we know as readers, common to Malwa. There is a danger to this well, a foreboding of dark, haunted places, but also an attraction, and a familiarity.

The *brahmarākṣas* lives at the bottom of this well, "scrubbing away/ the filth/ to banish the mark of sin." The reader is not given any explanation: the *brahmarākṣas*, we know only, is "the

[52]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, p. 315-320.

[53]Ibid., 2:315.

[54]See, for instance, the reinterpretations of Rajasthani folk tales by Vijay Dan Detha, collected in Vijayadānna Dethā, *Chouboli and Other Stories*, trans. Christi A. Merrill and Kailāśa Kabīra (Bronx, N.Y.: Fordham University Press, 2011).

great reckoner," a calculator, but one somehow broken. He tries to clean himself: he "scrapes himself," but he remains unclean. He speaks in curses, "an odd hymn, an enraged chanting/ or rather a flood of pure Sanskrit swearing; brows knotted together, / a shining star of criticism‼" The lines balance traditional markers of dignity and asceticism—the Sanskrit *stotra*, the "shining star of criticism"— with those of depravity and collapse, culminating in the ironic image of the *brahmarākṣas* imagining the sun and the moon as his students, even as "the flying particles / of crooked sun-rays / fall and reach the bottom."

The poem, clearly, is open to a range of interpretations; in particular, the idea that the *brahmarākṣas* represents the crisis of the contemporary Indian intellectual has taken hold as the standard interpretation. Ashok Chakradhar, for instance, in an early 1975 assessment of Muktibodh's work, described the *brahmarākṣas* as a "middle-class intellectual" who yearns for knowledge, or *jñāna*, but is unable to transform that knowledge into action.[55] Through reference to Marx's "Theses on Feurbach," with its description of the disconnect between philosophy from practice, Chakradhar considers the *brahmarākṣas* as unable to move beyond his middle-class mindset into identification with the working classes. The passage describing the *brahmarākṣasa*'s delusions of intellectual grandeur, for Chakradhar, prove the self-absorbed disconnect of the Indian intellectual:

aur, tab dugune bhayānak oj se
pahcānvālā man
sumerī-baibilonī jan-kathāoṁ se
madhur vaidik ṛcāoṁ tak
va tab se āj tak ke sūtra
chandas, mantra, thiyoram,
sab prameyoṁ tak
ki mārks, engels, rasel, ṭoenbī
ki hīḍeggar va spenglar, sārtra, gāṁdhī bhī
sabhī ke siddha-antoṁ kā
nayā vyākhyān kartā vah
nahātā brahmarākṣas, śyām
prāktan bāvaḍī kī
un ghanī gahrāiyoṁ meṁ śūnya.

And then with a brilliance now doubly terrifying
this discerning mind
from the Sumerian-Babylonian folktales
to the sweet Vedic hymns
and all the sutras from then to now
verses, mantras, theorems
up to all the propositions

[55]Aśok Cakradhar, *Muktibodh kī kāvyaprakriyā: Muktibodh ke cintan ke sandarbh meṃ unke kāvya kī racanāprakriyā aur arthaprakriyā kā adhyayan* (Dillī: Macmillan company of India, 1975), p. 146.

of Marx, Engels, Russell, Toynbee,
of Heidegger and Spengler, Sartre, even Gandhi—
from all their principles
he makes a new analysis
the *brahmarākṣas* bathes in the dark
in the emptiness of those thick depths
of the stepwell.[56]

This passage, with its triumphant list of prestigious intellectuals from the West, combined with the popularly imagined ancient roots of civilization and Gandhi, the core ethical figure of the Congress Party, is taken by Chakradhar as an example of the useless arrogance of the *brahmarākṣas*, whose words, in the next lines, "rise up from the depths; so/ in the new turn of words / each word collides with its own response." The conclusion of the poem, in which the speaker wishes to become the "tear-stained student" of the *brahmarākṣas*, is meant to be a resolution of the speaker towards this "tragic" failure and an allegorical desire to correct the lack of class-consciousness of the intellectual.

However, in its eagerness to support a Marxist allegorical reading of the poem, Chakradhar's interpretation neglects not only the formal aspects of the poem, but much of the thematic content as well. For instance, in the imagined achievements of the *brahmarākṣas*, the figures combined are, on the surface, rather contradictory. Marx and Engels are, of course, the progenitors of Communism itself, Gandhi the leader of the movement for Indian independence, and Toynbee and Spengler the authors of broad surveys of global civilization. But these thinkers are in turn tied to a large-scale civilizational model of history that privileges first the foundational civilizations of Mesopotamia. The "new analysis" develops through Vedic Indian civilization, sutras and mantras. This in turn reminds of the "pure Sanskrit chanting," and of the insistent markers of the Brahman-ness of the *brahmarākṣas*, not least in its name.

Who is the *brahmarākṣas*? The *brahmarākṣas* is steeped in markers of Brahman-ness and of classical Indian civilization, which stand out even in their collapse. But that Brahman's analysis, with its theorems and propositions, points to his identification as the "great reckoner:" one who uses calculation and conceptual knowledge to understand the world. And in fact, at every moment of the poem, the reader is asked not to imagine the *brahmarākṣas* simply as a symbol of a certain idea of the intellectual, but rather to balance in his mind a variety of symbols, a variety of indications, a variety of signs.

The *brahmarākṣas* is at once a marker of ancient ruins and also of a failed system of knowledge production. It is telling that the Brahman imagines the sun and the moon to be bowing in greeting or offering the respect of an obedient student to his guru, but at the same time as a symbol of detached, modern, scientific thought. As the narrator, looking down the abandoned well at the ghost, relates the history of the *brahmarākṣas*'s transformation, the ghost transforms from a monstrosity to a tragic figure, a delicate genius, animated by a desire for experimentation, knowledge, and wisdom. The history of this *brahmarākṣas* is laid out in broad strokes of aims

[56]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 2:317.

and goals—the *brahmarākṣas* works for "geometric calculation and balance," a "war between good and better"; as he ties a bandage on his head from some unstated wound, "the stars spread on the shores of the sky/ from uncountable decimals / decimal points spread out all across/ the tangled field of math." These terms create a context in which what the *brahmarākṣas* searches is not necessarily wisdom *per se*, but a kind of rationalized, scientifically transformed universe, in which "decimal points spread out" against the sky:

> *ve bhāv-saṅgat tark-saṅgat*
> *kārya sāmañjasya-yojit*
> *samīkaraṇoṁ ke gaṇit kī sīḍhiyāṁ*
> *ham choḍ deṁ uske lie.*
> *Us bhāv-tark va kārya-sāmañjasya-yojan-*
> *shodh meṁ*
> *sab paṇḍitoṁ, sab cintakoṁ ke pās*
> *vah guru prāpt karne ke lie*
> *bhaṭkā!!*
>
> Balanced in feeling, balanced in logic
> the elegant, coordinated action
> the steps of the standardization of mathematics
> let us leave all of that for him.
> that sense-logic and the union of work and coordination…
> from all the professors, all the thinkers
> in research
> he wandered away
> for an audience with that guru!![57]

The guru of the *brahmarākṣas* was science. What are we to make of this? How does this affect how we consider the knowledge that the Brahman has failed to pass onwards? The words "elegant, coordinated action" and the "steps of the standardization about mathematics," and the "sense-logic and the union of work and coordination" are, in fact, awkward and technical-sounding in the original Hindi, and don't seem to particularly match with the image of a delusional, arrogant demon given in the beginning of the poem. They bring to mind, rather, the careful, optimistic scientist, fostering a kind of clear-eyed rationality. This is, in fact, the opposite of the image proffered by Chakradhar, who treats this second half of the poem as a "new fantasy," disconnected from the first half of the poem, and describes it as a moment of excessive elaborate imagery.[58] But the *brahmarākṣas* is also "the great reckoner," and even in description we can see that the sun-rays are also "flying particles," and we can reconsider the "insane symbols/ inscribed on the well." And his death, presented only as the corpse of "a researcher" found "sprawled on the floor," is presented without cause.

[57]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 2:319.
[58]Cakradhar, *Muktibodha kī kāvyaprakriyā*.

"Brahmarākṣas" shows us the ways in which questions of knowledge are tied deeply not only to questions of class, as described by the criticism of the poem, but also to deep symbolic systems of knowledge production. In "Brahmarākṣas," too, the question of this knowledge production is related to the intimate question of the speaker confronted with his own sense of a historical past, and trying to find some kind of solution through the aesthetic form of the poem to the unresolvable questions of value and learning represented by the *brahmarākṣas*.

The Global within the City and within Conversation

"Claude Eatherly" builds on the question of the expert or manager who is a mediator for questions of technology, science, and politics. In "Brahmarākṣas" the demon in the well acts as a kind of guru, a symbol of a conflict of different modes of producing knowledge. Here, a spy seems to break down the barriers between private and public life as well as between the local and the international. And in both instances the narrative is driven by a kind of conversation and even a hidden threat of conversation; as we shall see, the purpose of the spy in "Claude Eatherly" is to act as a kind of conduit for the narrator's own anxieties and suspicions about the world around him.

"Claude Eatherly" was written sometime after 1959 and unpublished during Muktibodh's lifetime; the abrupt ending of the plot indicates that it might not have been completed.[59] Although questions similar to those raised by "Claude Eatherly" appear throughout his work, I focus on this possibly incomplete story because it features one of the most sustained meditations in Muktibodh's work on the connections between international politics, science and technology, and the new circumstances of the Indian intellectual after Independence. The story is cited in Muktibodh criticism primarily as an anti-war and anti-imperialist polemic, one of many in the first decades of the Cold War.[60] But, as I will show, the way in which these positions are presented and elaborated displays a significant ambivalence towards these questions, treating them as an opportunity to interrogate an entire culture. So through discussing "Claude Eatherly" I hope to show how Muktibodh's work is able to connect questions of the global and international to his concerns of science and pedagogical relationships in ways particularly vital to his time and context.

The plot of "Claude Eatherly" consists primarily of a conversation between two men as they wander through an unnamed, but mid-sized, Indian, city, which in most readers' minds would probably look something like Nagpur. The narrator is a poor, indebted writer, who at the opening of the story has looked through a transom window into a warehouse and seen a man tied to a chair in an otherwise empty space. He meets the second man after guiltily passing from a side alley into the main street of the city. This second man claims to be a member of the Central Investigative Division, or CID, India's federal investigative agency (and heir to the British colonial surveillance system). The man attempts to recruit the narrator, pointing out the usefulness of writers and journalists as informants, and informs the narrator that the prisoner was in fact the American Claude Eatherly, portrayed in the story as the pilot of the *Enola Gay*, and ridden with guilt for his

[59]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 3:161.

[60]See Varshā Agravāl, *Muktibodh kā racnā-saṃsār: saṅgharsh aura srjan ke āyām* (Allahabad: Sahitya Bhandar, 2011), p. 226.

participation in the destruction of Hiroshima.[61] Upon questioning, the spy at first avers that, in the new post-Independence era, "there is an American neighborhood in every Indian city," and it thus makes sense for an American prisoner to be tied up in an Indian warehouse, but he eventually tells the narrator that he invented the identity of the prisoner as a form of interrogation prior to recruitment, at which point the story abruptly ends with the cryptic statement by the spy that "I am only talking about things relating to you, so far as possible."[62]

This plotline, with its narrative of unreliable storytelling, paranoia, and guilt, is appropriately situated in an atmosphere of dread and implaceability. The details of the surroundings create a geography that is both precise in its particulars but vague in general. The first moments of the story feature those aspects of the modern Indian city that are explicitly foreign: eucalyptus trees, that appear frequently in Muktibodh's work as symbols of wealthy, modern neighborhoods, and foreign flowers, that "are beautiful but have no scent."[63] After seeing the prisoner, the narrator quickly ducks out of the side streets and onto the main, in the process delineating the new geometry of a town divided into warehouse spaces and thoroughfares. And as the two converse, one of their first stops is in a chai stall that is described in terms of its physical precariousness, held together largely by newspaper strips. In this way, the story echoes the development of the city in Muktibodh's work, visible most famously in poems like "Cānd kā muṁh ṭeḍhā hai" [The crooked face of the moon], in which the motif of the moon as a device of surveillance serves as a guide to the political and social structure of the modern city, or "Andhere meṃ" [In the dark] which models itself in many ways as a procession through a nightmare of the urbanized landscape.[64]

At the same time, "Claude Eatherly" emphasizes the historical moment of the city in which it is set, and makes explicit the connection between these changes to the Indian city and the political and economic changes in the country following Independence. When the spy explains that the prisoner is American, he does so with the logic of a modern, technocratic sensibility, underlining the ways in which the dominant intellectual class at the moment has aligned itself with the United States:

> As if scoffing at my ignorance, he said, "There's an America inside of every big Indian city. Haven't you seen the woman with their sparkling red lips and golden pale skin, haven't you seen their expensive clothes? Haven't you seen all those well-educated people driving around in their wonderful cars. Haven't you seen the exquisite new variety of prostitution? Haven't you seen *Seminar*? Once we went to London and called ourselves "England-returned." And now we go to Washington. If we had our way, and we could really be that rich, and have that many atom and hydrogen bombs and rockets then who knows! Don't you read newspapers?[65]

[61]Claude Eatherly was in fact not the pilot of the *Enola Gay* but a weatherman who flew in the following plane, but who was in fact driven mad with guilt, leading to a string of harmless crimes intended to imprison himself and subsequent celebrity within the burgeoning anti-nuclear movement. The actual pilot of the *Enola Gay* felt no apparent guilt whatsoever, going so far as to request a birthday cake in the shape of a mushroom cloud.

[62]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 3:161.

[63]Ibid., 3:152.

[64]Ibid., 2:274-275.

[65]Ibid., 3:157-158.

In a short speech, the spy completely reorients old ideas of what the Indian cosmopolitan ways, and strips bare the thirst for power of the new, confident nation. The city he describes would fit in with a host of references in the de-colonizing world, perhaps most evocatively the deracinated, rationalized cityscapes of Ousmane Sembene's Dakar in his first film *Borom sarret* [The wagoner, 1963], in which a horse-driven cab passes into a rarefied and exclusive city within a city.[66] The final line is echoed years later in Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land*, in which the protagonist, enraged at the intransigence of his Egyptian hosts, declares the atomic might of 1980s India, and in the process serves similarly to illustrate the fraying and reordering of the ancient bonds of the Indian Ocean he describes in that book.[67] Here, the spy presents the reordered, changed cultural universe of the Indian city in language also of the humiliation of the lower-middle-class intellectual he speaks to, reminding the reader of the Chevrolet owned by the narrator's corrupt principal in another story, "Pakṣī aur dīmak" [The bird and the weevil], the wheels under which he will lie in the poem "Meṁ tum logoṁ se dūr hū" [I am far away from all of you].[68] The Chevrolet in those two instances is a symbol of wealth and power. Here, though, the presence of America in Indian ideas of the global is tied to humiliation and a thirst for destructive power in a way that would probably not be possible without depictions of globalized urbanity in such poets as Girijākumār Māthur (1919–1994), and his meditations on Times Square and Manhattan as center of a new globalizing and imperialist order, but that seriously complicate attempts to understand this story as simply opposed to global imperialism and nuclear war. The key point here, maybe, is that here the description of the city, the eucalyptus trees of the modern section, and the description quoted above lead us to consider that the global exists here insofar as it is internalized within the city.

That leads us to a key element of the story: the spying. That the interlocutor of "Claude Eatherly" was a spy has a fine pedigree, both in Hindi in general, with its long history of popular "jāsūsī" novels, as well as in Muktibodh's work. Particularly at this time, Muktibodh was conscious of the existence of spies and indeed as an underground Marxist he felt frequently that he was the subject of surveillance for his political beliefs. At one point in the story, a point that probably reflects his life, he notes that in various small *hotels* (small cheap restaurants) and tea rooms, among the people having conversations would be "dark eyes that could look into the black depths."[69] Elsewhere in his work, the actions in his stories would mimic the language and plots of early twentieth century *jāsūsī* novels. "Bhaviśyadhārā" [The River of Future Time] for instances, opens with a scientist knocked unconscious with sleeping powder, a staple of *jāsūsī* novels finding its origins in the *dastān* narratives of the 19th century; the story further unfolds utilizing the melodramatic language of a mysterious crime.[70]

Here, the presence of the spy deepens, hinted at by the description of the city throughout the story. If the changing city that the narrator moves through has hints of an internalized but shifting and changing idea of the global, then the spy presents himself as a kind of intermediary between

[66] *Borom sarret*, dir. Ousmane Sembene (1963).

[67] Amitav. Ghosh, *In an Antique Land* (New Delhi: Ravi Dayal Publisher, 1992), p. 235.

[68] The short story "Pakṣī aur dīmak" is discussed in Chapter four.

[69] Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 3:156.

[70] Ibid., 2:104.

these different planes of existence. The spy reveals the identity of the prisoner as the American Claude Eatherly and the spy who underlines the presence of America within this Indian city. This, in fact, may explain what is otherwise an anomalous element in the story: the narrator's frequently stated discomfort with what he calls this "womanish character," bolstered by the spy's stated personal history: he claims to have been the illegitimate child of a wealthy merchant and one of his servants, and to have been supported financially throughout his life and career by this merchant even as he was raised by his mother, who continued to work in the merchant's house.[71] The narrator is frequently disturbed by the spy's gender ambiguity, by his womanly youthful body, in a manner that might otherwise seem out of place. But it may serve to emphasize the nature of the spy in the story as someone who exists uncomfortable in the interstices of society, between the public and the private, and has the capacity to make visible not only the seams between various orders and spheres of society but also the different connections between the local and the global. The spy pretends to be something he is not, and pretends at intimacy, in the service of a larger, often abstract, purpose. In this way the spy always makes the political local.

Ultimately, the elements of the story that might at first glance seem the most internationally and globally engaged reveal themselves as internal anxieties: the spy makes it clear that the narrator, with his guilty conscience and inability to effect political change, is no different in his guilty conscience than Claude Eatherly, who has been driven mad by his sense of helpless responsibility. The moments of the story in which the narrator imagines an international, global perspective are in many ways the moments in which he is most terrified by the situation at hand. As I mentioned above, this can be seen in the spy's description of the "ultramodern neighborhoods" of an Indian city, which each contain a small America within them. This occurs throughout the story to the narrator, as a kind of central, impossible point that prompts an unfolding series of disturbing imaginaries. Ultimately, through considering the possibility that the prisoner in the asylum is Claude Eatherly, the narrator imagines the international itself:

> Who is this person who talks to me like this? I felt, truly, like I had left the world, and arrived some two hundred miles above it, where the sky, the moon and the stars, the sun, were all at once visible. Rockets were flying. They came and went, and the earth appeared like a big blue ball, where we weren't from any one country, but from all of them. My mind filled with a terrifying, disconcerting feeling of weightless restlessness. All this lasted maybe for a single instant. But that single instant was terrifying. Terrifying and full of doubt![72]

This passage inverts the imagined logic of science fiction familiar to contemporary American pop culture, especially in late-60s variants such as *Star Trek* and *2001*, in which an internationalized world, in which boundaries between nations have disappeared, is presented as a positive utopia; here, the literal weightlessness of space is transformed into the mental weightlessness of collapsing boundaries. In contrast, too, to the frequent appearance of interplanetary travel in the musings of Muktibodh's characters (as, for instance, in which one character in a short story

[71]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 3:155.

[72]Ibid., 3:157.

which? imagines himself travelling to Saturn), here the moment of departing the earth, and most importantly its socio-political structures, is an occasion not of freedom but of dislocation and terror.[73]

It is in this sense—as an internalized, mediated sense of a globalizing capitalism, represented by America—that the question of atomic war, and the guilt of Claude Eatherly, is presented. Claude Eatherly is described by the spy as a "war hero", using the English phrase, and is, in journalistic fashion, rendered deeply specific. The places in Texas where he commits his guilty crimes are all named, along with the time he spent in mental institutions, and even an accomplice in one of his robberies is given the particularly American-sounding name of "Roy L. Mantooth."[74] But this overwhelming guilt is framed in terms of the mental contradiction that the spy claims to have discerned in the narrator himself: "The point is," he says, "that the ones who feel this massive injustice but don't stand up to it feel, inside, like they're some kind of sinners, and they should keep on feeling this way. Between Eatherly and these people this is the fundamental unity and similarity."[75] The guilt of Claude Eatherly is given emotional weight in the story by the repeatedly established guilt of the narrator, who feels unable to engage in the social or in politics, and even the supposedly villainous—and distant—imperialist politics of America is framed as entirely internalized by the Indian intellectual class. When the spy compares every city to America, he asks, "Are we inspired by the literature of Indonesia or China or Africa, or the poetry of Lumumba? *Chi-chi!* That's the literature of animals, of beasts!" The guilt of Claude Eatherly and the question of the international, here, is only possible in a framework of contempt for any kind of solidarity in the post-colonial world.

The presence of an American pilot tied to a chair in an Indian warehouse is the most disturbing and unique element of this short story. The impossibility of this act, and the strange, guilt-torn past of Claude Eatherly himself, make inevitable a reading of this story as simply anti-war. But "Claude Eatherly" uses the fantastic event of Claude Eatherly's imprisonment to interrogate not only the international politics of total war against civilians and atomic weaponry represented by Eatherly, but also the rapidly developing internationalism of India in the Cold War. The narrator's vision of an international space station, and his horror at it, inverts the question of scientific progress in order to focus the reader's attention on the exclusions inherent in an international framework. In the process, "Claude Eatherly" forces us to consider the implications of India's position in the Cold War and the expression of these implications in everyday life.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have traced the progression of science and technology from Muktibodh's earliest poems to his final, mature works. This progression features science and technology, and more importantly, the language of such conceptuality, as a privileged means through which Muktibodh constructs his allegory of modernity. By this I refer to the signification of a language of science on multiple levels. First, and most directly, in terms of the incorporation of science directly into

[73]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 3:368.

[74]Ibid., 3:159.

[75]Ibid., 3:160.

the plot or thematics of his work. Secondly, however, Muktibodh was able to incorporate the language of science symbolically so that it could be used to create complex allegorical images, as it does in "Mujhe Nahīṁ mālūm." Finally, Muktibodh was able to bring into critical imaginative space the language of science itself, the language composed of neologisms and Latin calques crafted in Sanskrit and brought into Hindi as a part of a modern, historic process, and which therefore carried within itself the fractured, unstable history of that adoption.

In part because Muktibodh does not appear to be intentionally engaging with the language of science in terms of its symbolic potential, his use of technical vocabulary illustrates the beginnings of this process. The language of "Dūr tārā," laden with astronomical terminology, brings into play its own artificiality: the poem opens up a space in which—even as it is being asked to convey a message that, in its depiction of the moment of observation, can be seen to symbolize the transition between Chayavad and Nai Kavita—the language of the poem can become critically active. This means that a phrase such as "nayan-āvart ke sīmit nidarśan yā ki darśan-yatna ko" [the limited direction of the eyes or a device of vision] is able to accomplish multiple tasks. First, the assonance of "nayan" [eye] and "nidarśan" [direction, supervision, indication] brings up the etymological connecting sinew of eye and *darśan*, vision, the root-word of *nidarśan*. Second, the repetition of that same word, *darsan*, which without any prefix means simply "vision," within a compound word of *darśan-yatna*, literally "vision-device," draws our attention to the way in which this line describing vision is itself a construction of language, a language built up in history.

This critique, which is buried within language in a poem such as "Dūr tārā," becomes explicit in later work such as "Mujhe nahīṁ mālūm," and its elaboration through his later work creates, eventually, a symbolic language of science and a direct critique of history. "Brahmarākṣas," Muktibodh's great poem of language, science, and education, creates the indelible image of a demon at the bottom of a well, consumed by his own rage and wasted talents, that continues to resonate with themes of education and the impact of colonialism on South Asian knowledge systems. But the image of the "Brahmarākṣas" relies upon a symbolic language of science and technology, deeply rooted in Muktibodh's poetics, that engages the deep connections between science, education, and the imposition of the idea of development on conceptions of the past. The result is a poem in which the "Brahman-demon," even as he seems to claim for himself its entire mantle, problematizes that very idea of universal progress. The ending of the poem, in which the narrator professes his desire to become the "sajal-ur śiṣya" [the intimate student] of the *brahmarākṣas*, opens up the possibility of an engagement with the critique of progress inherent in the fractured depictions of knowledge systems depicted in the poem.

This critique, brought to such explosive life in Muktibodh's poetry, is ultimately what makes "Claude Eatherly" such a unique and startling document. While I have contended in this chapter that the critique of science and technology is central to Muktibodh's work—and, indeed, is an essential component of the cultural context of the Nehruvian era—only in "Claude Eatherly" does this critique emerge into a full-blown satire of contemporary Indian life. The moment in which the nameless spy angrily describes the Washington D.C. which is present in every Indian city is remarkable not only in its illumination of the antinomies of post-Independence political and intellectual culture—down to the precise details of the most popular journals—but also in fram-

ing those antinomies in a larger contradiction of the reigning idea of the international itself. The narrator's terror at the nationless space station is a terror at the imposition of a unilinear, teleological progress. That progress, in "Claude Eatherly," mimics the process of development already at play in the Indian city, and connects it to the very idea of the universal which is represented by the space station.

Ultimately, for Muktibodh, science and technology functioned, in a natural enough manner, as part of a symbolic of progress. But where Muktibodh departed from this idea was in using that symbolic to place into poetic question the idea of progress, and the idea of the universal, the *viśvātmak*, embedded within the concept of scientific development. That he did so in post-Independence Hindi meant that he was able to seize one of the central problems of modern Indian intellectual history, the question of the relation between the historical and the present, and the idea that a future can be a fulfilment of a lost past. The complexity of the poetic symbolic system which he was thus able to produce does not in any way obscure the ultimate poetic capacity of his imagination of the technological universal.

Chapter 4

Muktibodh's Long Poem between Hindi and Marathi

Tār Saptak, the 1943 anthology that launched Muktibodh's career, was reissued in 1963. As part of this reissuing, members of the original heptad were invited to add a new poem, along with another personal statement. The original statements are crucial documents for Hindi criticism; Agyeya's statement in particular, along with the preface he wrote as editor to the collection, marked the beginnings of experimentalist poetry in Hindi.[1] The reception of *Tār saptak* in the roughly twenty years since publication meant that some contributors, such as Nemicandra Jain, took the opportunity to underline their disagreements, and in particular to dispute Agyeya's own role in editing the volume.[2] Agyeya, for his part, used the occasion to address the range of controversies that had taken place in the momentous years since the collection's original publication in 1943.[3] The republication of *Tār saptak*, then, was an opportunity to reflect on the poetics and legacy of post-Independence Hindi modernism.

Muktibodh wrote two new prefaces; only one, the shorter, was published.[4] In both prefaces, he traced the evolution of his poetry from the poems of *Tār saptak* to the present day of 1963. Seeing a continuity with the poems, he writes that "My poems in *Tār saptak* still charm me, although they have a fundamental rawness and misshapenness. I find in them a voice of struggle, of a challenge, of intimacy, and at times of question and curiosity. The topics of my *Tār saptak* poems are still new to me." The "rawness and misshapenness" of the poems, doubtless attributed to youth, are contrasted by Muktibodh to the great change that happened to his poetry over the "years of struggle" in the decade of 1943–1953 following *Tār saptak*'s publication. He writes:

> Although in the years that followed, the black tone of my poetry slowly began to melt away, my imagery continued to grow and increase. The subject of my poetry

[1] Varmā, *Hindī sāhitya koś*, 2:410-411.

[2] Lotz, "Rāhoṁ ke anveṣī: the editor of the saptak-anthologies and his poets," pp. 128-129.

[3] See Agyeya's preface to the second edition in Agyeya, ed., *Tār Saptak*, Ninth edition, Lokodaya granthamālā, granthāṅka 226 (New Delhi: Bhartiy Gyanpith, 2005 [1943]), pp. v-vii.

[4] Both prefaces are collected in Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 5:267-271.

> gradually became more various and expansive. It would even be appropriate to say that my poems after 1952–53 expanded their own forms. Although the earlier poems were not particularly short, my poems now are, in fact, massive.
>
> Why did all this happen? Why did the imagery begin to increase? Why did the subject become so expansive? Why did the poems become so long? Answering these questions are beyond me. Truthfully, I have been asking myself these questions as well.[5]

While Muktibodh often refers to the practical problems of his poems' increasing length, such as the difficulty of publication, here he gestures towards the actual content of his shift. The move of his poems towards the "expansive" [*vistṛt*] was accompanied not only by an increase in imagery but by an expansion in form. Commenting on the problem of his poetry, he write, "For me, the main question is not of the paucity of form and the abundance of style, but rather of the abundance of form and the insufficiency of style. Therefore, for me the main problem is how to encompass the diversity of content, in what way to express it formally."[6] The use of the English term "content" points towards the idea that the experimental poetry with which *Tār saptak* had been associated was elevating formal experimentation at the expense of a "content" that, variously, could address the social or the political. At the center of Muktibodh's shift was a new approach towards encompassing "content" in gradually expanding form and imagery.

This chapter traces the formal trajectory of the long poem in Muktibodh's poetry. It takes as its starting point Muktibodh's earliest poetry, and its animating question is how this poetry moved in the direction of the unique, allegorical form of the long poem. The direction is indicated, in part, by Muktibodh's own theorization of his work: the long poem was expansive, in part, because it was attempting to make the intensity of the poem dwell in the massiveness of the social, in a way that could draw together, formally, the wide range of possible reactions and images of that social. The imagery of the long poem increased in variety and intensity not, in Muktibodh's theorization, in order simply to test the possibilities of style, but rather in order to find ways to bring into the poem greater and greater amounts of social experience. However, I depart from Muktibodh's own self-criticism by arguing that analyzing the history of this form will require an understanding the poetic influences with which Muktibodh worked in the 1940s and 1950s. The long poem did not arise from a vacuum or, as Muktibodh puts it in this essay, entirely through an engagement with the struggles of lower-middle-class life. There were important formal influences that led to the possibility of the long poem, and understanding those influences makes it possible to understand both the actual originality of Muktibodh's contribution, and the context of literary history in which it was made.

Among these influences was one which was, although not unique to Muktibodh, among his poetic contemporaries, particularly influential: his engagement with Marathi poetics. Although Muktibodh's education was in Hindi, and he wrote in Hindi throughout his life, he spoke Marathi at home, and, as mentioned above, his brother, Sharaccandra Muktibodh (1921–1984), was himself

[5]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī.*

[6]Ibid., 5:270.

a major poet, novelist, and critic in Marathi. Muktibodh never wrote in Marathi, and with few exceptions, never mentioned it as a major influence on his poetics. But the form that his long poem took was deeply influenced by Marathi metrics, and as I will show, the shape of the long form, with its short lines, long stanzas, and ability to create new rhythms and slant lines from syllable combinations, owes a great deal to Marathi meter. An exploration of the influence of Marathi poetry on Muktibodh's long poem therefore shows an important hidden link between Marathi and the development of free verse and modernism in Hindi. It also makes visible the process through which Muktibodh engaged with the lyric to develop, first, his own unique form of free verse in Hindi, and second, to use that form to build the potentiality of the long form.

Before examining the influence of Marathi meter, however, we must first understand the poetic background in which Muktibodh began his work, and the ways in which he encountered Hindi poetry itself. The formal problems of *Chāyāvād* poetry influenced Muktibodh's work in that they were the primary model in which he began writing poetry, and also in that they were able to present a wide, sweeping canvas that he continued to work into his modernist poetry throughout his career. Understanding the formal problems that directly preceded free verse in Hindi is therefore essential to understanding Muktibodh's point of departure.

Poetic Form in Hindi and Marathi

In an introduction to his poetry collection *Parimal*, in 1929, the *Chāyāvād* poet Suryakant Tripathi 'Nirala' wrote: "the rows of *Khaḍī Bolī* poetry, which were only recently planted in the garden of Hindi by the hard work of foresighted gardeners, have today begun slowly to sprout buds." Nirala, one of the most controversial of the *Chāyāvād* poets, was referring both to the relatively young age of poetry written in the *Khaḍī bolī* form of Hindi, which had begun to be used for poetry only in the late nineteenth century, as well as the claim that *Chāyāvād* poetry was the only literature that could be considered completely unique to this form of Hindi. Sumitranandan Pant, writing in 1926, expressed a similar sentiment:

> We are unacquainted with *Khaḍī Bolī*, we have yet to fill it with the music of our lives; its words, still unsweetened with the honey of our hearts, are only names; we need to fill them with shape, with flavor, with scent. Their souls have yet to meet with ours, their heartbeats have yet to match with ours, they've yet to lasso the galloping graspings of our minds—and so the touch of these words doesn't thrill us; they seem to us stale, flavorless.[7]

If for Nirala, *Khaḍī bolī* poetry was a plant that had only begun to sprout into life above the earth, for Pant, *Khaḍī bolī* was an empty vessel, one that seemed stale and flavorless only because it had not been enriched with a sustained poetic tradition. For both Pant and Nirala in the 1920s, to write in Khaḍī Bolī, which is now simply referred to as Modern Standard Hindi, was to write in a language shorn of any and all predefined associations with literary culture. Accordingly, much

[7]Sumitrānandan Pant, *Pallav* (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 1963 [1926]), p. 51.

of Pant's preface to *Pallav* was a defence of *Khaḍī bolī*'s potential for poetry.[8]

For both Pant and Nirala in the 1920s, to write in Khaḍī Bolī, which is now simply referred to as Modern Standard Hindi, was to write in a language shorn of any and all predefined associations with literary culture. Khadi Boli had developed in the late 19th century as a modern language of the nation, explicitly juxtaposed not only to Urdu, which was a legal rival for the language of administration throughout North India in the 19th and earliest 20th centuries, but juxtaposed to two other important languages of literary culture: Braj and Sanskrit.[9] But the political movement for Hindi, which developed in the nineteenth century, also articulated a new discourse of language in a context which, prior to this, considered as standard the use of a wide of variety of related languages for different purposes. Prior to the establishment of Hindi as a purportive national language, it existed alongside a range of languages used for different purposes.[10] Although, by the twentieth century, Hindi was an important language for a wide variety of purposes, its use as a language of poetry was still in some ways a novelty. The most important poets prior to the 1920s, Ayodhyāsingh Upādhyāy 'Harioudh' (1865–1947) and Maithiliśaran Gupta (1886–1964) are considered pioneers of poetry written in *Khaḍī bolī*. Their major works, Harioudh's *Priyapravās* (1914) and Gupta's *Bhārat-bhārtī* (1912), are criticized, however, as being overly didactic and awkward.[11] Both Pant and Nirala are therefore submitting their own work as a culmination of *Khaḍī bolī* itself as a mature poetic idiom.

In the context of Modernism, it is axiomatic that the crafting of a modern poetic idiom would innovate and separate sharply from literature of the past. For Anglo-American and European modernism, this meant a variety of new approaches to literary tradition, from the mourning for a lost and broken world typified by Eliot to the very different attitude towards the modern found in Russian and Italian futurism.[12] Often overlooked, however, is the fact that in colonial contexts, modernist literatures frequently followed, within a few decades, the establishment of the new literary language in which they were written. For instance, modern Chinese literature is characterized by the abandonment of classical Chinese in favor of the adoption of the modern

[8]See Schomer, *Mahadevi Varma*, pp. 108-109 for a brief discussion of the preface to *Pallav*.

[9]For the political history of the development of modern Hindi and its propagation in the colonial period, see King, *One Language, Two Scripts*.

[10]For an overview of the development of Hindi prior to its adoption as the sole languages of the Hindus, see Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions*, pp. 152-161. crucially for our purposes, Dalmia notes that what is now Hindi, although it existed prior to its study and promulgation during the colonial period, was only somewhat differentiated from Urdu, with which it shares a common history; there was, however, a trend towards developing a predominantly rural speech, then known as *Hindavī*, through the usage of words from Sanskrit, as opposed to the Perso-Arabic vocabulary that obtained in Urdu. This language was used for a variety of popular purposes; the most important languages for poetry, however, remained Urdu and Braj.

[11]See Schomer, *Mahadevi Varma*, pp. 1-18 for a history of this period of Hindi poetry. *Priyapravās* Describes an episode from the life of Krishna. *Bhārat-bhārtī*, modelled on Altāf Hussain Hālī's (1837–1914) 1869 Urdu poem *Musaddas*, and portrays a contrast between a glorious ancient past and a colonial present. For a discussion of the poem and its impact, see Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere, 1920-1940*, pp. 192-207

[12]For an overview of issues related to the categorization of modernism in a Euro-American context, see Childs, *Modernism*.

language as a literary idiom.[13] The key difference in Hindi is that the creation of a "new" language meant not only a redefined relation to a perceived classical tradition, set up as Sanskrit, but also a redefined relationship to contemporary, living literary traditions, most importantly Braj and Urdu, with which Hindi was immediately viewed as in competition.

Much of the "newness" of Hindi, in contradistinction to the quotes above, was framed in terms of its interest to the growing nation. In the first quarter of the 20th century, literature began to be viewed in terms of its interest to the nation; in this formulation, a given piece was no longer intended to relate to standards of beauty, as was the case in Braj Bhasha poetry, but instead was ideally meant to increase the storehouse of Hindi.[14] Particularly important were reformers and editors like Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi (1864–1938), who argued that literature should be "useful knowledge, and it's aim… not only, or not primarily, to entertain but to inform and educate."[15] As part of this effort towards a nationally useful literature, contemporary English utilitarian treatises on useful literature were translated into Hindi, but often with a distinct emphasis on the classical Sanskrit and its connection to these theories of literature.[16] In line with the colonial model of Sanskrit as the pure, pre-decadent literature of India, as discussed in the previous chapter, Sanskrit was seen as the ultimate model for a beneficial Hindi literature.

Chhayavad poets such as Nirala and Pant were criticized for writing poetry that was "useless" in terms of this model, but as the two quotes above show, the poets themselves frequently formulated their innovations in variations on the idea of enriching and developing the new, national language. If Chhayavad poets emphasized an idea of Romantic, individual genius and freedom, and argued for a literature that was free to develop new verse forms, they still did so ultimately within the same rubric of usefulness and form under which they were critiqued. As Orsini shows, Pant, in his critique of Braj Bhasha, is opposed to the world of Braj Bhasha, in which poets "could not go beyond that three-foot long world that went from her tip to her toe," a Khadi Boli that was like a planned modern city, lacking temples but built with avenues, markets, and parks with new flowers.[17] Pant's Hindi, for all its freedom and openness, was still formulated as ultimately determined by nationalism, just as much as Dwivedi's scientifically useful literature. The difference was that Pant used the idea of a useful, developed language to argue for a poetry with room for formal experimentation and the central experience of the poet.

What this meant for literary form was that Chhayavad poets developed most of the metrical forms that were in use up until Independence. Before considering the consequences of this, it is necessary to understand a bit about traditional Sanskrit meter, which was the basis not only for Braj Bhasha meter, but also, ultimately, for many of the meters developed by Chhayavad poets. Up until this point, poetry in Khadi Boli was often either written in converted forms

[13]For an overview of modern Chinese, see Ping Chen, *Modern Chinese: History and Sociolinguistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), especially pp. 5-22 and pp. 65-90. For an overview of modern Chinese poetry, see Michelle Yeh, "Modern Poetry," in *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature*, ed. Victor H. Mair (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 453–465.

[14]Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere, 1920-1940*, pp. 144-148.

[15]Ibid., p. 145.

[16]Ibid., pp. 147-148.

[17]Pant, *Pallav*, 1926; cited in ibid., pp. 151-152.

familiar from Braj Bhasha, or in adaptations of Sanskrit meters. All of these meters relied upon an understanding of meter based upon a Sanskrit model of vowel duration. This model recognized long syllables, called *guru*, as well as short syllables, called *laghu*. The determination of *laghu* and *guru* was often made upon the traditional length of the vowel, but was often moderated by the following consonants; a vowel followed by two consonants, or ending in a nasalized vowel, would be considered *guru*.[18]

For example, the first lines of Jayshankar Prasad's *Kamāyani* are:

Hima giri ke uttuṅga śikhara para

On the bare exposed peak of the snowy range[19]

In these lines, the second word *giri* would contain two *laghu* syllables. The third word, *ke*, would be long because *e* is considered a naturally long vowel. The fourth word, *uttuṅga*, would contain two long syllables and one short; the first, *utt*, is long because of the geminated *t*, the second because of the nasal consonant *ṅ* before *g*, and the third syllable is a short *a*. The short *a* at the end of the word, although unpronounced in modern Hindi, was still often pronounced in poetry because of the influence of this form of meter. The short *a* was also crucial for being part of the prevailing syllabic meters, which rely upon a given sum of long and short syllables in a line. The above line, for instance, is the first half of a line of 31 morae, or *mātrā*:

Hima giri ke uttuṅga śikhara para
Baiṭha śilā kī śītala chāṁha,

On the high open crown of the snowy range
Sat the cold, stilled shadow of the stone.

The count of long and short *mātrā* in the first half of the line add up to 16 and the second adds up to 15. In this kind of meter there is no particular restriction on the placement of long and short vowels; in other meters, popular in Sanskrit but quickly discarded in Hindi, long and short syllables were arranged distinctively in a manner similar to the metrical feet of Greek prosody. Karine Schomer has shown that in using this line Prasad was in fact departing from Braj prosody, which largely favored the *dohā* and *caupaī* meters, in favor of a meter taken from the *khadī bolī* folk epic *Alhā Khaṇḍ*.[20]

[18]For a succinct introduction to Sanskrit metrics in the context of Braj, see Rupert. Snell, *The Hindi classical tradition: a Braj Bhāṣā reader* (London: School of Oriental and African studies, 1991).

[19]Jai Shankar Prasad, *Kāmāyanī*, 11th edition (Allahabad: Bharati-bhandar, 1961), p. 11. Here and in the quotations which follow, I am breaking standard conventions of transliteration. Normally, spoken Hindi does not pronounce a short *a* sound which is technically a part of the syllabic script, and therefore in Roman script these sounds are not usually transliterated. In Sanskrit and Braj, however, these sounds are pronounced, and therefore they are pronounced in *Khaḍī bolī* poetry that is following Sanskrit-derived rules of prosody. There are, of course, a wide range of exceptions, and metrically innovative poets such as Nirala frequently bended the rules in ways that defy straightforward scansion. However, in poems that at least relied upon the *expectation* of these sounds being pronounced, I have chosen to render them in transliteration as well. To make clear the distinction, I have also capitalized the first lines of these poems in both Hindi and English.

[20]Schomer, *Mahadevi Varma*, p. 32.

Chayavad poets made use of these and other meters unfamiliar to Braj in an attempt to create a new poetic idiom. While the *Alhā* meter was still based upon a quantitative meter, Nirala popularized both the *Ghaṇākṣarī* meter as well as several "free verse" meters closely related to it, in which the length of syllables was ignored and what mattered instead were the number of syllables, in a manner similar to French versification.[21] Consider Niralás poem "jāgo phir ek bār" [Wake once more].[22] This nationalist poem, supposedly written at the specific request of an editor for an inspiring poem, is written in a free verse that evokes the *Ghaṇākṣarī*:

Jāgo phira eka bāra!
Pyāra jagāte hue
Hāre saba tāre tumheṁ
Aruṇa-paṅkha taruṇa-kiraṇa
Khaḍī kholatī hai dvāra—
Jāgo phira eka bāra!

Wake, again, once more!
Oh, my love, in waking you
All the stars are lost
Young rays of light on wings of dawn
Have come to open the door—
Wake, again, once more![23]

Here, in contrast to the meter in *Kāmāyanī*, the weight of the individual syllable is irrelevant; rather, the first line of eight syllables and the second of seven are repeated to various extents through the poem. For the most part, the final, normally-unpronounced syllables are counted in the meter, are sometimes ignored, as in the fourth line of "aruṇa-paṅkha taruṇa-kiraṇa," which would not scan otherwise.

For *Chāyāvād* poets, meter remained a crucial aspect of their poetry, but subject to extensive experimentation. As free verse began to develop in Hindi in the 1920s, it was based upon two different models, a quantitative, *mātrik*, model, and a syllabic, or *varṇik* model. While proponents of these models cited precedents in everything from modern English blank verse, Bengali adaptations of blank verse based on their own, syllabic meter traditions. They also drew on traditions of meters accessible within the Braj tradition: both *mātrik* and *varṇik* meters were used in Braj poetry, although *mātrik* meters, such as the *dohā*, were always more popular.[24] The idea that a free verse would be based upon one of these two forms of metrics meant that, even as it followed

[21]For a discussion in Hindi of the principles of Bangla prosody, especially as they relate to modern Hindi poetry, see Puttūlāl Śukla, *Ādhunik Hindī-kāvya mēṃ chand-yōjanā.* (Lucknow: Lucknow University, 1958), pp. 115-131.

[22]For an extended discussion of this poem, see Heidi Pauwels, "Diptych in Verse: Gender Hybridity, Language Consciousness, and National Identity in Nirālā's "Jāgo Phir Ek Bār"," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 121, no. 3 (2001): 449–481.

[23]Sūryakānt 'Nirālā' Tripāṭhī, *Parimal* (Lucknow: Ganga Pustakmala, 1966).

[24]The Doha is a couplet form, widely used in Braj poetry but with roots dating further back, consisted of two lines of twenty-four *mātrās*, divided in turn into portions of thirteen and eleven *mātrās.* See Śukla, *Ādhunika Hindī-kāvya mēṃ chanda-yōjanā.*, p. 414.

no rules of line, foot, or rhyme, it could still be analyzed against one or the other system. A mixed form, in which the line was composed of either syllable-based units or a quantitative line that was proportionate with them, was also possible.[25] The combination of new variations of meters still based upon syllable weight, as well as Nirala's in particular, meant that free verse in Hindi was able to draw on two quite different prosodic models; indeed, Hindi criticism has noted that early free verse in Hindi can be analyzed as being based on one of these two models.[26] This is important because, as Namwar Singh argues in *Kavitā ke Naye Pratimān*, the long poem is the culmination of *Naī kavitā* in its push towards the use of common speech in poetry, and the ultimate liberation of poetry not only from the form of *Chāyāvād*, but from its ideas of versification as well.

But in order to discuss Muktibodh's development of this form, it is important to consider that his poetic sensibilities developed through engagement not only with Hindi, but with Marathi literature as well. A document, probably written for the purpose of employment, briefly describes Muktibodh's connection with the Marathi literary world, but it is enough to indicate an extensive influence.[27] Muktibodh not only evinces a familiarity with Marathi literature, but also claims to have begun writing first in the Marathi language, and to have been continuously translating Marathi while working with Akashvani the national radio station. With one exception that I am aware of, none of these materials have survived. They still, however, indicate a considerable familiarity with the Marathi world that extended beyond the language of his childhood.

Marathi verse differed from Hindi in its greater emphasis on syllabic meters; although it shared the heritage of Sanskrit prosody with Hindi, and many popular verse forms made use of quantitative meters, it also featured an important syllabic metrical tradition.[28] The most important of these forms were the *abhaṅga* and *ovī* meters, which are the basis of the Marathi *santa*, or *varkarī*, tradition of devotional poetry. The *abhaṅga* and the *ovī* are two closely related meters, in which the *abhaṅga* is typically used for devotional songs, whereas the *ovī* is used for narrative poems, most importantly the *Jñāneśvarī* of Dnyaneshwar (1275–1296). Both use verses of three lines with one number of syllables, followed by a fourth shorter line, with a rhyme between the second and third line. Whereas scholars of Hindi defined the Hindi classical tradition on poets who used primarily quantitative meters, in Marathi, the most important *varkarī* poets, such as Dnyaneshwar, Tukaram, and Namdev, all made use of syllabic *ovī* and *abhaṅga* meters.[29] In comparison with the stricter and more complex *mātrik* meters described above, *abhaṅgas* are deceptively simple in construction; much of their power comes from a formal compression that

[25]For a discussion of these extremely complex meters in the context of Nirala's *Parimal*, see Śukla, *Ādhunika Hindī-kāvya mēṃ chanda-yōjanā*., pp. 429-437.

[26]Sachchidanand Hiranand Vatsyāyan, ed., *Samkālīn kavitā meṃ chand* (New Delhi: National Publishing House, 1987), pp. 9-22.

[27]This document, which is held by Muktibodh's son Ramesh, was probably composed in the mid 1950s for the purposes of finding employment in a school. It details Muktibodh's history with the Marathi language, with special mention of the influence of Mardhekar. It also, intriguingly, claims a great number of translations written anonymously between Marathi and Hindi. The discovery of any such translations would be tremendously valuable for this study.

[28]The most important overview of Marathi verse, and one that makes a crucial argument for the role of syllabic meters, is the criminally out of print Mādhavrāo Paṭvardhan, *Marāṭhī Chandoracnā* (1937).

[29]Deśapāṇḍe and Rājādhyaksha, *A History of Marathi Literature*, pp. 15-16.

is reminiscent of the *haiku*, in which a great deal is expressed within a minimal amount of words. For instance, Tukaram's *abhaṅgas* are typically composed of lines of six and four syllables, respectively:

Āmhāṁ gharī dhana
Śabdāṁcīca ratneṁ
Śabdāṁcīca śastreṁ
Yatna karūṁ

The wealth of my home
These jewels of words
With words in my hands
I struggle.[30]

Here, the first three lines have six syllables, and the final line has four. The meaning here hinges on a play of repetition and difference, with *śabda*, word, changing its reference from *ratneṁ*, jewels, to *śāstreṁ*, arms, tools, or weapons. The poem strips the Marathi language of as much information as possible, using the shortest possible means of indicating syntactic relationships and avoiding any verbs until the final *yatna karūṁ*.

Because these forms were always strongly associated with the religious *varkari* tradition, they were not at first directly used for modern literature; Bāl Sitaram Mardhekar (1909–1956) caused a sensation—that later led to an obscenity charge—by using these forms to describe modern life in his second collection, *Kāhī kavitā* [Some poems, 1947].[31] For instance, in his volume *Kāhī kavitā*, the first lines of his untitled *ovī* #16 are striking not only for underling the sexual origins of the *śivalinga*, but for comparing it to the speaker's own sexual drive:

Śivaliṅga mājheṁ liṅga; heṁca aśāntīceṁ biṁga,
J̌yāñcyā jhujeṁ sañjñāriṅga; vyāpileṁ gā.

Shiva's lingam and mine,
Right here is the crack of unrest;
As they wrestle
In the ring of the mind,
It spreads open and wide.[32]

[30]Although this translation is my own, a selection of Tukaram's verses are translated by the Marathi poet Dilip Chitre in Tukārām, *Says Tuka: Selected Poetry of Tukaram*, trans. Dilip Chitre (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1991).

[31]Deśapāṇḍe and Rājādhyaksha, *A History of Marathi Literature*, p. 143. Some of Mardhekar's poems are also translated in Dilip Chitre, ed. and trans., *An Anthology of Marathi poetry, 1945-65.* (Bombay: Nirmala Sadanand, 1967). The obscenity charge is described briefly in Gaṅgādhara Devarāv Khānolkar, *Marāṭhī vāṅmayakoś* (Mumbai: Maharashtra rajya sahitya sakriti mandal, 1977), p. 562. The most important work of criticism on Mardhekar in Marathi is Vijayā Maṅgeś Rājādhyakṣa, *Marḍhekarāñcī kavitā: svarūp āṇi sandarbh*, 2 vols. (Mumbai: Mauj Prakashan Grha, 1991).

[32]Bal Sitaram Mardhekar, *Marḍhekarāñcī kavitā.*, 6th edition (Mumbai: Mauj Prakashan Grha, 1994), p. 36.

Here, the *ovī* is divided into two lines, split into four feet or sections. The first three sections are composed of eight syllables, and the final four. These lines still have the power to shock in their comparison of the speaker's body with the divine form of Shiva; are also striking because, while perfectly fulfilling all the technical requirements of the *ovī*, they use the traditional form to describe a psychoanalytic struggle of the mind. Furthermore, they bring into this form the english word "ring," using it to form a rhyme with *biṁga*, "flaw, defect." Mardhekar would frequently use English in a striking and ironic way:

> *Mājhā abhaṅga majhī ovī; natadraṣta gāthā govī,*
> *Iñjināvīn gāḍī jeṁvī; gharaṅgaḷe.*
>
> My *abhaṅga* and my *ovī*:
> A cheap and jumbled song,
> A train without an engine;
> Sliding along.[33]

Mardhekar's use of traditional meters in this way provided an important basis for non-quantitative meters, and they were therefore influential in the beginnings of Marathi free verse. In a manner parallel to that of Nirala, Mardhekaŕs poems brought a flexibility and expressiveness to Marathi verse, along with an extremely popular and influential body of work, that would influence later Marathi modernist poetry even after it was largely written in free verse.

The most important early model for free verse in Marathi, however, was most likely the *muktachanda* of Atmaram Ravaji Deshpande (1901–1982). Anil, who grew up in the Central Indian Vidarbha region of Maharashtra and lived and worked as a judge in Nagpur, developed the system of *muktachanda* in the 1930s.[34] Literally, *muktachanda* means "free verse," but Anil's *muktachanda* was not precisely free so much as it was modular, composed of sets of feet that can be combined to make a line of multiple lengths. These feet were themselves composed of syllable counts of either five or six that were neither long nor short, and distinguished by a light stress at the beginning of the line. Although accent continues to be a subject of research in the study of South Asian languages, it has no role in traditional prosody. The addition of it in Anil's conception of the *muktachanda* is therefore for its poetic effects. For instance:

> *Bhagnamūrti—! āṇi / bhagnamandira*
> *Samoraca āhe / ticeṁ paḍakeṁ*
> *Avaghe cāraca/ pāṣāṇastambha*
>
> The broken statue—! and a broken temple
> Its ruins lying all around
> Pieces of rubble in all directions[35]

[33]Mardhekar, *Marḍhekarāñcī kavitā.*, p. 23.

[34]See the essays included in Ātmarām Rāvjī 'Anil' Deśpāṇḍe, *Bhagnamūrti*, 3rd (Pune: Venus Publishers, 1995 [1940]), pp. 87-156.

[35]Ibid., p. 25. I have added a solidus in the Marathi to show the division between feet in the line.

Here, the first line contains two feet, one of six syllables and one of five. The first foot, "*bhagnamūrti—! āṇi*" [Broken statue—! and] contains the beginning of a second phrase, creating a tension between the flow of the line and the syntax of the poem, one emphasized by the stress placed on the first syllable of the foot. In this case, that stress falls twice on the prefix *bhagna*, "broken", to draw out both the breathiness of the opening *bha* and the sharpness of the consonant cluster *gna* that makes up the following syllable. By contrast, the final three syllables of the foot flow smoothly, broken only by a nasal consonant, *ṇ*. A foot cannot break across a word, but it can break anywhere else. Because the lines are so short, the *muktachanda* creates a range of possibilities for enjambment and unusual stress, just as with the *ovī* and *abhaṅga*. This is by design: as Anil describes in the afterward to the poem, the *muktachanda* is explicitly modelled on these forms, emphasizing their connection to natural speech in Marathi as well as their concision and brevity.[36]

Bhagnamūrti articulates many formal antecedents of the long poem, not only in its metrical innovations but also in its larger structure and theme. *Bhagnamūrti*, similarly to Gupta's *Bhāratbhārtī,* addresses the contrast between a glorious ancient past and a ruined present. But rather than use the ancient past as a site for articulating identity, the poem is a free ranging, personal experience of history focused on describing the past in terms of evolutionary theories of history, including a discussion of the extinction of dinosaurs and other extinct animals:

> *Yethe jagatānta nāndūna gele*
> *Parvatāsārakhe pracaṇḍa prāṇī*
> *Daināsura, bhrāntāsura, plījāsura,*
> *Asthyāsura āṇi dviplavodaka*
>
> On this world passed away
> A life as great as nature itself
> The dinosaur, brontosaurus, pleosaurus,
> The ichthyosaurus and the diplodocus.[37]

Anil's long poem thus carries many of the unique marker's of Muktibodh's later long poems. Its formal solution to the long poem, of using an unlimited number of feet of limited syllables, points to the formally loose quality of Muktibodh's later long poems. And thematically, the quote above shows a similar fascination with incorporating the technical language of science. Anil's work shares another, more personal and direct connection to Muktibodh's long poem: Anil, as a poet living in Nagpur, was almost certainly in some direct contact with Muktibodh. There is a wealth of concrete evidence indicating his collaboration with Muktibodh's brother, Sharaccandra Muktibodh, as well as with Muktibodh's close associate and fellow contributor to *Tār saptak*, Prabhakar Machwe (1917–1991). Machwe, with the assistance of Sharaccandra, made

[36]Deśpāṇḍe, *Bhagnamūrti*, pp. 87-94.

[37]Ibid., p. 40. In a note on pp. 152-153, Anil describes that he created his own, non-standard translations of dinosaur names for poetic purposes.

a translation of *Bhagnamūrti* which was published in 1958..[38]

Although Sharaccandra Madhav Muktibodh was younger than his brother by four years, his first collection of poetry, *Navī Maḷvaṭ*, [A new path] was published in 1949. A second collection, *Yātrik* [Pilgrim], was published in 1957. Almost all of the poems in these collections use Anil's *Bhagnamūrti* meter. For instance, consider the opening lines of "Navī kavitā" [A new poem]:

> *Navī kavitā*
> *Āja hṛdayīṁ/ dhagadhaga karī/ navā savitā*
> *Ǯaḷāyā lāge/ prāṇapiṇḍācā/ sakhola gābhā*
> *Kasā rokhūṁ mī/ yātanāñcī hī/ pradīpta ābhā?*
>
> A new poem
> Awakens today in my heart a new dawn
> Has begun to burn away the whole content of the body
> How can I stop the dazzling light of this suffering?[39]

Just as in Anil's *Bhagnamurti* the meter is broken up into feet of either five or six syllables. The loose meter allows for a line that both approximates speech—something especially important in Marathi, a language in which a weighted, quantitative meter sounds particularly artificial because several long/short vowel distinctions are not preserved in speech—and also evokes a venerable meter. In a long afterward to *Navī maḷvaṭ* written in 1964, Sharaccandra credits the creation of this meter to Anil..[40] He also praises Anil's *muktachanda* as part of a move towards what he calls "realism" in Marathi, as opposed both to the "mannerism" of the *ravikiraṇ maṇḍal* [The sun beam club] group of poets popular in the 1920s and 30s, as well as what he categorizes as the overly cynical modernism of Mardhekar.[41] Sharaccandra also emphasizes the connection between *muktachanda*-based free verse and the *ovi*/*abhaṅga* tradition of Marathi poetry, noting, "It's absolutely not excessive to believe that someday *muktachanda* will receive the same respect and acceptance as *ovi* and *abhanga*."[42]

In the original, 1949 preface to *Nai maḷvaṭ*, S.M. Muktibodh describes his poetic influences. He relates his own work to that of Mardhekar, in who he sees echoes of the French symbolists; Muktibodh supports the formal and thematic innovations of Mardhekar, which he relates to the symbolists, and his preface is an attempt at a model that could embrace these innovations while rejecting Mardhekar's cynicism.[43] He mentions his brother only briefly, describing his as a "ma-

[38]Ātmarām Rāvjī 'Anil' Deśpāṇḍe, *Bhagnamūrti*, 2nd ed., trans. Prabhakar Machwe (Naī Dillī: Sāhitya Akādemī, 1970).

[39]Śaraccandra Muktibodh, *Navī Malvāṭ*, 3rd ed. (Mumbai: Mauj Prakashan Grha, 1987).

[40]Ibid.

[41]For an overview of the *ravikiraṇ maṇḍal* group, see Deśapāṇḍe and Rājādhyaksha, *A History of Marathi Literature*, pp. 135-138. This group of eight poets, the most prominent of which was Mādhavrāo Paṭvardhan 'Mādhav Julian', were known for their light poetry, as well as their adoptation of formal verse forms such as the sonnet and the ghazal. Mādhav 'Julian' (1894–1939) was also the author of *Chandoracnā*, the study of meter discussed above, and was a professor of Persian at Ferguson College, Pune.

[42]Muktibodh, *Navī Malvāṭ*, p. 106.

[43]Ibid., p. xlvii.

jor practitioner" of free verse, and of Hindi in general as more accepting of free verse.[44] But if *Navī maḷvaṭ* was published in 1949, then the poems written in it were, if not contemporary with Muktibodh's free verse poems for *Tār saptak*, then certainly created soon afterwards. Much of this early poetry had thematic connections, as well, with Muktibodh's works. Consider "Śiśirāntīl paurṇimā" ["Winter's full moon"]:

Śiśirāntalyā paurṇimentalī pāṇḍharīpheka sampūrṇa nagnā nirlajjā niśā
Vyāpī tī diśā, ṭekūn āpaleṁ campaka aṅga
Karī ughaḍā dīnahīna hā sansāra bhagna!

The white of the winter's full moon, entirely naked and shameless,
Fills the night, and resting its blossom limbs
Exposes this broken, pitiless world![45]

This poem reveals several important elements that would characterize Muktibodh's poetry. First, although it is written in a *muktachanda* meter, the lines are very long; the first line, for instance, contains five feet of five syllables each. These lines thus stretch out the possibilities of *muktachanda*, while still making use of the meter's readability and rhythm. Gajanan Muktibodh's long poems, similarly, would frequently vary line length and make use of enjambment for poetic effect. The mingling of the classical image of the full moon as a beautiful female form with its description as "entirely naked and shameless," and exposing a cruel, modern world, is reminiscent of Gajanan Muktibodh's long poem "Cāṁd kā muṁh ṭeḍhā hai" (1953–1962), in which the moon is depicted as a searchlight in a repressive, jail-like city:

Cāṁd kī kanakhiyoṁ kī kiranoṁ ne
nagar chān ḍālā hai.
aṁdhere ko āḍē-tirche kāṭkar
pīlī-pīlī paṭṭiyāṁ bichā dī,
samay kālā-kālā hai.

The rays of the moon's sidelong glances
Search through the city.
They angrily cut through the dark
And spread out their yellowish cloth
The times are pitch black.[46]

Here, as in Sharaccandra Muktibodh's poem, the moon is evoked first in terms of its traditional, romantic image, through the word *kanakhī*, "sidelong glance." But in the next lines its light, usually rendered as pure, white, and beautiful, becomes a kind of yellowed sheet spread out over the city, removing the security of darkness. In both instances the moon is neither deployed

[44]Muktibodh, *Navī Malvāṭ*, p. l.
[45]Ibid., p. 75.
[46]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, p. 2:274.

as a vehicle for its expected tenor, nor is it used to express the emotion of the speaker; rather, the moon retains its associations, but ironically, in contrast to the depiction of the world as cruel or ugly.

The connections between the poetry of Sharaccandra Madhav Muktibodh and that of Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh extend beyond the formal qualities of their poems. Both, as poets on the Left, and as poets concerned with developing a Left modernist poetics in their own chosen languages, took up similar themes. For instance, included in *Yātrik* is a 1951 poem, "Hiryāsam lakhākhte ḍoḷe" [Eyes sparkling like diamonds], which depicts World War II and the battle of Stalingrad. Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh worked on a poem, never published, named "zamāne kā cehrā" (1950–1957) which depicts the same basic events, and which features extended descriptions of the technology of war.[47] While for both poets, their interest in Stalingrad was inspired, not less, from their connections to the Communist Party and its depiction of World War II as a "people's war," their shared poetic language points towards a deep connection between the brothers, and in turn towards the influence of Marathi on Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh.

The possibility of this influence is important not only because of its traces in Muktibodh's work, and especially in his later work, but also because it points to important interregional and interlinguistic connections and their continuing role in the development of modern Hindi literature. These connections are most frequently discussed, in Hindi literary history, in terms of an anxiety of influence from languages, such as Urdu, Bengali, or English, with which Hindi has an antagonistic relationship.[48] As I have shown above, poetic form in both Hindi and Marathi is a useful lens of understanding the ways in which writers navigated a wide variety of literary priorities. In both Hindi and Marathi, numerous models for free verse emerged from an engagement with the metrical traditions that dominated the language. In Hindi, this process was further complicated by the transition to the use of *Khaḍī bolī*, and poets and critics defined their new approaches towards meter against a perceived blank slate of a new modern language. In Marathi, however, the transition towards blank verse was more accommodating of popular verse forms; Mardhekar expressed his shockingly new perspective within verse forms that were an integral part of Marathi poetic traditions.

For Muktibodh, the decision to write in Hindi gave him access, in the form of *Chāyāvād*, to what he viewed as a more aesthetically vital tradition in poetry. But, as he began to develop his own, unique model towards a free verse poetics, the influence of Marathi on his form continued to be important. In Hindi, he came of age at a moment when free verse, having been born out of two different ways of measuring syllables, had not yet transformed into a form of versification based primarily on conversation. In Marathi, free verse had evolved into a powerful and supple model for long, rambling poems, providing an important formal precedent for Muktibodh's own long form, especially in the collage-like capabilities of poetry like Anil's. As I will now show,

[47]See Singh, *Muktibodh: sāhitya meṁ naī pravṛttiyāṁ*, pp. 50-65 for an analysis of this poem.

[48]The most well known historical instance of this was the criticism of *Chāyāvād*; see Schomer, *Mahadevi Varma*, pp. 93-123. *Chāyāvād*, in particular was accused of being an import from English Romanticism, via Bengali, and in particular the influence of Rabindranath Tagore. In response, criticism has often tried to show the indigenously Hindi character of the poetic movement, often without taking into account the ways in which influence and interlinguistic exchange actually operated.

this background would effect how Muktibodh constructed his long poem. The resulting form would bear influences from all these different approaches. Thus, the long poem can be seen as an attempt to join together a series of contradictory impulses and approaches to poetics, and to gain a certain kind of flexibility towards subject matter from this approach.

The Evolution of the Long Poem

Muktibodh's first poems in free verse, and his first movement therefore towards the eventual mature style of the long poem, are included in the anthology *Tār saptak*.[49] Sixteen poems were included in the 1943 edition—one, along with a second preface statement, was added in the 1963 revision—out of which eight can be classified as free verse, with the other eight adhering to some verse pattern.[50] Of the poems in free verse, very few are particularly long; the longest, "ātmā ke mitra mere" runs to three pages. So there is little reason for these poems to be described as a "long poem" in the manner of Muktibodh's later work. Nevertheless, these short lyric poems demonstrate many of the formal attributes that would later form part of Muktibodh's long poems, and their analysis can tell us much about the transition in Muktibodh's work from his earliest, Chayavad-influenced poems to his adult work.

"Ātmā ke mitra mere" [To the friend of my deepest self], initiates a theme which runs throughout Muktibodh's poetry: the address to a friend who has widened the speaker's intellectual horizons, in a relationship that is more reminiscent of that between a teacher and a student.[51] The friendship is described as passing beyond the conventional forms of love for one's parents and one's ones wife, into an ideal, platonic realm, thus forming a friendship of the *ātmā*, the deepest self or soul. This idea will appear repeatedly throughout Muktibodh's poems, in more and more complicated forms. Eventually, it fuses with the idea of the ideal teacher, culminating in the complex image of the Guru in poems such as "Brahmarākṣas" [The Brahman demon] and "Aṁdhere meṁ" [In the dark].

Here, however, although the poem elucidates many of the themes of Muktibodh's later poetry, in form it belongs firmly to the period of his early, late-*Chāyāvād* influence. Consider the first lines:

> *Vaha mitra kā mukha*
> *Jyoṁ atala ātmā hamārī bana gayī sākṣāt nija sukha.*
> *Vaha madhuratama hāsa*
> *Jaise ātma-paricaya sāmane hī ā rahā hai mūrta ho kara.*
> *Jo sadā hī mama hṛdaya-antargata chipe the*
> *Ve sabhī āloka khulate jisa sumukha para!*
> *Vaha hamārā mitra hai,*

[49] Agyeya, *Tār saptak*, pp. 24-44.

[50] See, for instance, "Vihar", ibid., pp. 34-35.

[51] See "Mere sahcar mitra" [To the friend by my side, 1951–1962], Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 2:246-255, for a very different poem on the same theme.

Ātmīyatā ke kendra para ekatra saurabha! Vaha banā
Mere hṛdaya kā citra hai!

The face of the friend
At the moment it became the private happiness of my Boundless soul.
That most sweet laughter
Like the realization of self approaches, become manifest.
Upon whose visage all that which is hidden in my heart
Bursts into light!
They are my friends,
The gathered glory of the center of self! They become
The image of my heart![52]

The first, and most strikingly *Chāyāvād*-like aspect of this poem, is the language. The line "Vaha madhuratama hāsa," [That most sweet laughter] would be a very familiar use of the Sanskrit-derived, or *tatsam*, "madhura," joined with the superlative suffix "*-tama*" to form "most sweet." The line, furthermore, the line follows the *Chāyāvād* of preference for "soft" dental sounds.[53] The language quoted above continues throughout the poem; the suffix *-tama*, for instance, appears eight times. Metrically, too, the poem seems to fit within the mold of its time. While it might be described as free verse, one could argue far more easily that it operates within the mode of an unrhymed, quantitative verse of a style similar to Nirala. Compare it with the first line of Agyeya's first poem for the collection, "Janāhvān" [The cry of the people]:

Ṭhahara, ṭhahara, ātatāyī! zarā suna le
Mere kruddha vīrya kī pukāra āja suna jā
Rāgātīta, darpasphīta, atala, atulanīya,
Merī avahelanā kī ṭakkara sahāra le—
kṣaṇa-bhara sthira khaḍā raha le—
mere dṛḍha pauruṣa kī eka coṭa saha le!

Wait, wait, oh tyrant! Just listen
Listen today to the cry of my angry heroism
Mad with passion, swollen with pride, boundless and incomparable,
Bear the blows of my disrespect—

[52]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 1:107-109.

[53]Hindi, as with most South Asian languages, contains two series of contrasting stops. The dental series is formed by pressing the tongue against the teeth, as in the Spanish *t*. These sounds contrast with the Retroflex series in which the tongue is curled backwards towards the palate. Because these sounds either do not occur or are an allophones in most other languages, they often appear as sounds distinct to South Asian languages. They are popularly considered harsh and rustic, and thus looked down upon in poetry. For a discussion of Sanskrit vocabulary, its conventionally poetic and culturally resonant effects, and its wide and innovative adoption in *Chāyāvād* poetry, see Schomer, *Mahadevi Varma*, pp. 72-73. Curiously, Marathi, because it contains a proportionally greater number of retroflex sounds while maintaining a great deal of mutual comprehensibility with Hindi, is often perceived as a generally harsh language.

Stand still right there for just one moment—
Withstand just one blow from my firm power![54]

Agyeya's poem marks a clear departure from the soft sounds of "Ātmā ke mitra mere"; although it retains the high, Sanskritized diction, it retroflex sounds—which are coded in Hindi poetry as harsh—along with consonant clusters to create a feeling of bursting, riotous energy. But although it departs from it at times, "Janāhvan" returns repeatedly to a line a fifteen syllables, often but not always broken into two units. Although "Janāhvān" and "Ātmā ke mitra mere" are very different poems with very different end, they are operating within the same poetic universe.

Many of Muktibodh's sixteen *Tār saptak* poems are similar addresses in the Chāyāvād, or Pragatiśīl style, written in a language quite different from that of later work, and frequently written as direct addresses to political themes, as in "Pūṁjīvādī samāj ke prati." Many of them do point to some themes that would continue to be developed over twenty years; as Ram Vilas Sharma points out, the relationship to the friend in "ātmā ke mitra mere" forms a direct lineage to the guru of "Aṁdhere Meṁ."[55] As I discuss in the previous chapter, "Dūr Tārā," [Distant Star] while it is thematically similar to "ātmā ke mitra mere," begins to develop the idea of scientific knowledge and perception that would continue to evolve throughout his work. It also reads quite differently than "ātmā ke mitra mere," and its free verse comes much closer to the *muktachanda* of Anil:

tīvra-gati
ati-dūr tārā,
vaha hamārā
śūnya ke vistār nīle meṁ calā hai.

aur nīce log
us ko dekhate haiṁ, nāpate haiṁ gati, udaya au' asta kā
itihāsa.

Fast-paced excessively-far star,
gone off
into the expansive blue of our emptiness

and below
they look, they measure speed, a history
of rising and setting.[56]

There are a few salient differences from "Ātmā ke mitra mere." First, while the diction is similarly Sanskritic, the syntax is far more prosaic, avoiding the long, syntactically complex constructions of the former poem. Despite the prosaic syntax, the pacing is more deliberate: note

[54]Agyeya, *Tār saptak.*
[55]Śarmā, *Nayī kavitā aur astitvavād*, p. 210.
[56]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 1:110.

how long and short sounds in the first two lines interact with each other—"*tīvra gati, ati-dūr tārā.*" And metrically, there is no indication that the poem is influenced by a *mātrik* mixed-meter line. Rather, the lines quite neatly break into short sections of syllables, as in the longest line, "*usa ko dekhate haiṁ,—nāpate haiṁ gati,—udaya au' asta kā*" which breaks into three groups of six syllables each.

Thus, the poems Muktibodh published in *Tār saptak*, while they point towards many of his later themes, are not formally in line with the long poems written later in his career. They are still roughly classifiable within the lyric traditions in which he was working, although many of their themes will reappear later. In the years after the 1943 release of the *Tār saptak* poems, Muktibodh seemed to focus on writing either straightforward political poems or topical poems, including a series of odes to major literary figures.[57] These poems were often written in a *pragativād* mode, such as "lāl salām" [Red salute], written in 1944 for the first Indo-Soviet Congress.[58]

The first movement towards the long poem occurs later, after the poems written for *Tār saptak*. An unpublished poem "O virāṭ svapnoṁ" [O, expansive dreams], worked on from 1944 to 1948, describes a solitary, anguished figure, looking down from a mountain peak onto a modern city.[59] Like several of the poems which I mentioned before, the poem is set up as an address. The refrain "O, virāṭ swapnoṁ" at several points in the poem, describing the different ways in which the poet's romantic, revolutionary dreams can transform a dessicated, destroyed and oppressed world. The second stanza of the poem, in its description of a figure looking down from a mountain peak, is a direct reference to *Kāmāyanī*:

baiṭhā maiṁ saritā ke ūṁce caṭṭānī kagār par ātur;
nīce, nīce,
saghan timir meṁ līn dhār kī dhīmī marmar
uṭh-uṭhkar ūpar ātī hai;
vah lagatī utanī hī kātar
rone meṁ jyoṁ lagī hickiyāṁ
jo uṭh-uṭhkar rukīṁ gale meṁ
chātī meṁ se sun paḍtī hoṁ.
Phailī haiṁ giri kī caṭṭāneṁ—
vindhācal ke chinn-bhinn jyom viśāl kandhe,
hāth, hṛday hoṁ
sir par rāt śīt tārā-gati;
dūr nagar ke ekākī tam-ḍūbe añcal
meṁ udās
dīpoṁ kī uljhī bujhī-bujhī dhuṁdhlī-dhuṁdhlī dyuti.

I sit, restless, on a precipice high above the river
below, below

[57]See "Rabindranāth," in Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 1:135-138; and "Ṭī. Es. Īliyaṭ ke prati" [To T.S. Eliot] in ibid., 1:197-199.

[58]Ibid., 1:130-131.

[59]Ibid., 1:167-178.

immersed in the thick darkness, the soft rustle of the river
rises up above;
they feel just as dejected
as the sounds of crying
that rise up and are caught in the throat
and that you might hear caught in the chest.
The peaks of the mountains spread out—
like the broken broad shoulders of the *Vindhyacal,*
are like the hand, the heart
above my head, the movement of the stars cold in the night
in the lonely dark-drowned edge of a city
sad
the lights of candles, faint, burning out.[60]

Compare this with the first lines of Prasad's *Kāmāyanī*:

himagiri ke uttuṁga śikhara para, baiṭha śilā kī śītala chāṁh
eka puruṣa, bhīge nayanoṁ se, dekha rahā thā pralaya pravāha.

nīce jala thā ūpara hima thā, eka tarala thā eka saghana,
eka tattva kī hī pradhānatā, kaho use jaḍa yā cetana.

dūra dūra taka vistṛta thā hima, stabdha usī ke hṛdaya samāna,
nīravatā-sī śilā-caraṇa se, ṭakarātā phiratā pavamāna.

taruṇa tapasvī-sā vaha baiṭhā, sādhana karatā sura-śmaśāna,
nīce pralaya sindhu laharoṁ kā, hotā thā sakaruṇa avasāna.

On the high open crown of the snowy range sat a cold, stilled shadow of stone
A man, eyes wet with tears, looked out on the mammoth flood.

Water below, ice above, one flowing and one solid,
A predominance of a single element, be it sentient or insensate.

Far, far away stretched the sheet of ice, and it felt as still as his heart,
The winds danced and spun, only to collide against the silent rock.

He sat like a youthful ascetic, performing the austerities of the cremation grounds,
The waves below of the flooded world, a pause filled with sympathy.[61]

In both the verses, a figure sits alone, distressed, on a mountain peak, high above a body of water. In *Kāmāyanī*, this figure is Manu, the mythological man who survives the flooding of the world, and who looks down on a destroyed world out of balance—"*eka tattva kī hī pradhānatā, kaho use jaḍa yā cetana.*" In "O Virāṭ Svapnoṁ" the character stands on a precipice listening to

[60]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 1:167.
[61]Prasad, *Kāmāyanī*, p. 11.

the sound of a river, shrouded in darkness. In both versions, the character is distressed, listening with sympathy to the sound of a ruined world.

The first difference, then, is the location of the speaker, both in terms of the grammar of the poem as well as his purported location. First, the figure on the precipice is not a mythical Manu, but rather is the first-person speaker of the poem, a lyric "I." What might this signify? I mentioned a moment ago that this poem emerges out of a period of frequently writing lyric odes or addresses to various figures or subjects. The lyric I, of course, was an important part of *Chāyāvād*. But *Kāmāyanī*, the poem on which Muktibodh is modeling his poem here, is explicitly not a poem of a first-person subject, but rather of a mythological figure; in fact, Prasad, in his preface to the poem, describes Manu as a model for history. So in some sense by changing the subjectivity of the poem, Muktibodh is changing the focus as well. Manu is presented as a model, and is portrayed entirely in the third person; for Muktibodh, the use of the first-person leads eventually to the portrayal of subjectivity itself as the model figure.

Secondly, and relatedly, the temporality is completely different. Rather than a mythical setting, this poem is set in a geographically specific place and, at least in some sense, in the present. The present tense, for one thing—"baitha huṁ" [I am seated]—but also the location on the *Vindhyāñcal*, the mountain range of central India, rather than the mythic Himalayas. And the city is in the distance. In this early stanza, the city is indistinct, a "lonely, dark-drowned edge." But just this slight image changes the focus of the poem, from the nostalgic, historically distant and mythological allegory of *Kamayani* to the present-day Romanticized experience of the speaker in "O Virāṭ Svapnoṁ."

But the poem takes another step, in a temporal and spatial shift that makes this one of the first "long poems:"

kintu śyām gahre ajasra
do paṅkh nirākul
lauh śakti se maḍhe hṛday ke
kinhīṁ abūjh mand samvedan
se sahsā phaḍphaḍā uṭhe.
Phaile,
phir dhīre-dhīre gire,
aur muṁd gaye
ki māno ek kahānī samāpt hotī.

But, the thick dark endless
two calm wings
a heart covered in the strength of steel
suddenly flapped into motion
with how many unquenched, slow sensitivities.
Spread out,
then slowly, slowly, falling,
and stopped

as if a story has finished.[62]

This passage acts as a pivot between the moment of the speaker, the "I" of the poem, and a shift to the city in the distance. The flapping of the birds wings is a sudden intrusion into the stillness and reverie of the second stanza quoted above: out of "*soft, slow*" comes the sudden, explosive verb *phaḍphaḍā uṭhe*. This is hard to get across in English, but a basic aspect of verbs in Hindi includes a coloring auxiliary verb that effects the meaning of the verb it is attached to, while losing its own meaning. This process is roughly analagous to the English "to take a look," in which the verb means look, and the "take" doesn't mean anything, but changes slightly the meaning of the imperative look. Here, that verb is *uṭhnā*, which literally means "to rise," but when attached as a coloring verb gives a sense of suddenness or abruptness. The total effect is one of snapping to attention in the middle of the stanza, from the sibililants, labials and dentals of "*abūjh mand samvedan*" [an unquenched, soft sensibility], to *phaḍphaḍā uṭhe*, which, with its onomatopoetic repetition of the unvoiced labial aspirate *ph* and the voiced retroflex flap *ḍ*, is precisely the opposite from the previous line, phonotactically speaking, and creates a sense of a sharp turn from the soft, hypnotizing feeling, and the gauzy post-Romanticism, of the previous lines.

The next stanza transitions into the city, playing out the great dialectic of city and country in Hindi literature; perhaps not coincidentally, the next consecutive poem, "Bābūl" references *Horī* and *Dhaniyā* of Premchand's 1936 novel *Godān*.[63] The stanza focuses on the ways in which the solitude of the mountain is permeated by the sense of the city:

dūr nagar ke dhuṁdhle dīpoṁ
kī udās khoyī-sī jhilmil;
pās ṭekḍī ke ḍhalān par gāḍh-śyām,
prācīn ucc pīpal kī
bacī huī ativiral pattiyoṁ kī sarsar;
is kagār nīce se
uṭhtī bahut dūr nīce se
gahrī saghan līn dhīmī marmar
saritā kī—
māno ye antar-
antarāl meṁ paṭhī gahrī
ek udās zindagī kī
ati kaṭhin kahānī ke pravāh kī lahreṁ.
Dūr nagar ke dhuṁdhle dīpak
mujhāye gīle kapol kī
phīkī ābhā se haiṁ pīle
mlān sarit kī līn śyām dhīmī marmar

[62]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 1:168.

[63]*Godān* is translated into English as Premchand, *The Gift of a Cow: a Translation of the Classic Hindi Novel Godaan*, in collab. with Vasudha Dalmia, trans. Gordon C Roadarmel (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002).

nīce se uṭh, tam meṁ khoyā
ūṁcā kagār kar pār
ki maidānoṁ ke sūne andhakār meṁ maṁḍrātī—
jyoṁ dhvast bhāg meṁ kisī nagar ke nirjan,
ek purāne ādhe-gire hue ghar ke
śyāmal sūne kone meṁ
vivaś ek asahāy rulāī
kātar nārī kī ūṁce kamzor svaroṁ meṁ
jīrṇ bhagna prācīn koṭ ko lāṁgh-lāṁghkar
sūnī pagḍaṇḍī par ātī
bhagna jīrṇ avaśeṣ nagar ke lāṁgh-lāṁghkar
nirjan path par ghūm-ghūm
maṁḍrātī hai
vah gopnīy ghāvoṁ sī ughrī
nihsahāytā kī pukār-sī ūṁcī vyākul karuṇ tīvra,
vaisī udās ākul śyāmal marmar
hai us pathrīlī saritā kī.

The sad lost flickering
of the dim lights of the far city;
the molded dark on the slope of the hill,
the leaves left behind, a loose net,
murmuring in the high ancient *peepal*;
down below this precipice
rises up from far below
a deep, thick, engrossed soft rustling
of the creek—
as if these distances
are pierced
by a sad life
and its flowing waves of a hard story.
The dim lights of the far city
withered, damp cheek's
more yellow than a faded glory
the soft murmur of the slow creek, lost in the darkness
rises up from below, lost in the dark
crossing the high precipice
weaves trough the silent dark of the fields—
just as in the destroyed sector of some abandoned city,
in the dark, silent corner
of some old half-fallen house
a helpless, compelled cry

in the high helpless tones of a dejected woman
leaping over the broken down old mansion
coming on a silent footpath
leaping over the broken down, empty city
wandering on an empty path
weaving through
those secret wounds open up
the high, desperation of a helpless cry,
just like that is the desperate dark murmur
of that rocky creek.[64]

I include this long quote in order to demonstrate the ways in which Muktibodh uses quick shifts of perspective and repetition to a) disorient the reader, and b) juxtapose a poetics of landscape with that of the city, and with a shift from a poetics of nostalgia, which Muktibodh would later explicitly reject in his critique of *Kamayani*, to a poetics of sympathy, a sympathy which, furthermore, is itself removed from any specific social circumstance but connected only to the half-fallen house. I'm not that concerned with the content of this sympathy—there isn't really much depth here to the "high helpless tones of a dejected woman"—but what matters is the ways in which the poem manages to whip us from scene to scene, here using an extended metaphor with the relative particle *jyoṁ*. This is something else that is particular about Hindi (and shared with other Indo-Aryan languages), that the language requires a separate pronoun to introduce a relative clause, in this case *jyoṁ*. *Jyoṁ* can indicate a shift of time—*jyoṁ hī*["as soon as"], or it can indicate a comparison ["just as"], as it does here when it introduces an extended metaphor of sorts that is only closed by the *vaise*["just like that"] at the end of the stanza. But that's not the only way this stanza creates startling shifts. Consider the way that the perspective flashes back and forth between the ruined house and the foot path, by repeating the phrase *lāṁghkar* ["having leapt"], or how the stanza overall is punctuated by a distinction between verbs of leaping, cracking, sudden movement, and verbs of circular wandering, soft, hypnotic verbs like *ghūm-ghūm* [revolving]. These words for wandering, opposed to these words of piercing or sudden—*paiṭhī, lānghnā, ghūmnā, maṁḍrānā*—will stay with Muktibodh for the rest of his poetry, and will be an important way in which the long poem takes shape, the way in which it creates what will eventually be called a collage. Movement, wandering, stillness, sharp piercing interruption, all of these things can be found in this poem, but the themes are still clearly connected to the poetry that he grew up with and was writing earlier.

The language of "O virāṭ svapnoṁ" also moves closer to Muktibodh's long poem in its use of a loose, free verse line that is quite similar to the *muktachanda* Marathi meters with which he would have been familiar. Although, unlike the Marathi meter, Muktibodh's line here does not map precisely onto numbered feet, the lines rely on small units of four to six syllables, and produce a similarly jolting and jagged rhythm of heavily emjambed lines. For instance, in the passage quoted above, "*dūr nagar ke dhuṁdhle dīpoṁ*" [The dim lights of the distant city] can be read

[64]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 1:168-169.

as composed of two feet, split between *ke* and *dhuṁdhle*, and shorter lines, such as"*saritā kī* [of the river]—can still be scanned as four syllables. In this way, the poem echoes the *muktachanda* of Anil and Sharaccandra Muktibodh, and is able to produce a similar effect in Hindi. Just as important as the echoes of the syllabic meter of Marathi *muktachanda* are the possibilities of tone made possible by this adoptation. Here, Muktibodh combines a poetic diction that borrows greatly from *Chāyāvād* with an emjambed, varying free verse line that, like the *muktachanda* long poems of Anil, is able to vary significantly across the poem while still maintaining a formal consistency.

"O virāṭ svapnoṁ," then, represents a snapshot of the development of the long poem. While it can be considered a response to Jayshankar Prasad's *Kāmāyaṇī,* and in many ways echoes the language of the *Chāyāvād* poem, Muktibodh's use of a Marathi *muktachanda*-inflected free verse, as well as the differences of tone, poetic diction, and theme, serve as a departure. The harsh and jagged shifts of the enjambed lines, and the sudden verbal jumps and leaps of perspective, mark "O virāṭ svapnoṁ" as one of the first of what would later become Muktibodh's defining long poems.

Conclusion

This chapter deals with the evolution of Muktibodh's verse, arguing that what we now recognize as hallmarks of the long poem were in development from his earliest verse, and that understanding this can tell us much both about the ways in which Hindi poetry developed free verse, as well as how Muktibodh evolved his own unique voice. The hallmarks discussed could be grouped under the rubric of poetics, and the meter, diction, and poetic thematics that influenced Muktibodh as he developed his form.

I have discussed to a great extent meter in both Marathi and Hindi, because meter is a very visible form of Muktibodh's influences as he developed his poetics. Distinctly from other Hindi poets, Muktibodh was greatly influenced by Marathi—and curiously, this influence became even more pronounced in his later blank verse. I argue that the reason for this is that, although his earliest poems are marked by the influence of late Chayavad poetry, blank verse was more theoretically developed in Marathi, especially in terms of the influence of quantitatively weighted *mātrik* meters. Another important reason is that, as Muktibodh was looking for a model for his poetics, he was at the same time deeply influenced—perhaps more than he was willing to admit—by the poetry of Bal Sitaram Mardhekar. Mardhekar's dark, modernist poetry did not abandon traditional Marathi meters; rather, it twisted them into statements that often struck contemporary Marathi readers as perverse. Poems like "Pipāt mele olyā undira" were so striking perhaps because they were couched within familiar meters.[65] This was a lesson that Muktibodh learned well. While the influence of Mardhekar is most visible in a poem such as "Vihār," the Marathi poet's tone of despair with modern life, and willingness to invoke the tone of religious poetry, would resonate throughout Muktibodh's poetry. Besides helping to understand some of the sources of Muktibodh's dark, despairing imagery of modern urban life, acknowledging the influence on

[65]Mardhekar, *Marḍhekarāñcī kavitā.*, p. 41.

Muktibodh's work contributes to our understanding of the connections between South Asian language modernist literatures. And the Marathi influence, in this case, matters because it adds a separate, nightmarish perspective on modernity, and on modernist poetry, that would not be available otherwise.

But the most important development in Muktibodh's poetry, the one that enabled the development of the long poem itself in the 1950s, was the way in which he integrated his own understanding of free verse with the theatricality of late-*Chāyāvād* poetry, especially that of *Kāmāyani*. Muktibodh's poetry took these two major influences and developed them over the forties, through a series of poems that depicted the speaker in mixes of modern cities and wild wildernesses. But these poems were a point on the evolution towards the long poems of his later career. In these poems, Muktibodh has synthesized completely his poetic models. But more than this, he has succeeded in creating an entirely new perspective on Hindi modernity, and in expressing the anxieties of his time. He has succeeded, finally, in combining scope with an innovative use of free verse, and applying both the cynical forms of Mardhekar's modernism with the grand morals that he attributed to his Marxism, but which probably had as much to do with his education in the diction of *Chāyāvād*. Ultimately, Muktibodh's long poems were an accomplishment not only in that they brought all of Indian modernity onto his canvas, but furthermore in that they drove the formal evolution of Hindi poetry.

Chapter 5

The Possibilities of the Long Poem: "Bhaviṣyadhārā" and "Aṁdhere Meṁ"

In the previous chapter, I defined Muktibodh's long poem as a distinct poetic form, and analyzed its development in his work. I argued that the long poem emerged through a process of interaction unique to the literary culture of Central India, and in particular to the influence of Marathi poetics on Muktibodh's work. This interaction between Marathi free verse and the diction of *Chāyāvād*, visible in Muktibodh's early poetry, gave rise to the unique formal qualities of the long poem in his later work. In this chapter, I will examine two representative poems of Muktibodh's later period: one of these, "Bhaviṣyadhārā," was not published until sixteen years after Muktibodh's death, and remains obscure; the other, "Aṁdhere meṁ," is Muktibodh's most well-known long poem, and was proclaimed as his most important work even before his death in 1964. In comparing these two works I will further demonstrate the formal unity of the long poem and its consistent approach to issues of allegory and theme, despite the significant and apparent differences between these two poems. I will also try to show how these long poems illustrate this form's ambition to fuse together a poetics of sensation, experience and imagination with an allegorical representation of the contemporary world.

Two of the most important critics of Muktibodh, themselves both poets, recognized the importance of Muktibodh's long poem as accomplishing, most of all, a transformative, mythic vision of contemporary, post-Independence South Asia. The nature of Muktibodh's allegory, the precise relation between the social and the personal, and the nature of political commitment might have been points of debate, but both Śamśer Bahādūr Singh (1911–1993; hereafter referred to as "Shamsher"), writing in the early 1960s, and Kedārnāth Singh (1934–), writing in the early 1980s, agreed that Muktibodh's long poems were an important contribution to Hindi poetry because they managed to join a personal experience of post-Independence life in urbanized India with a larger historical and social canvas. However, for both Shamsher and Singh, if the long poems themselves were crucial for Hindi poetry, their form, in its exuberance of theme, rhetorically deployed dissonance, and narrative circuitousness, presented a problem that neither poet seemed able to explain.

I'll begin by looking at the definition of the long poem given by Shamsher. Shamsher was

an established poet by the 1950s, and was already known for his mastery of a kind of poetry that was quite different from that of Muktibodh, marked by the influence of Urdu lyric poetics, his love of painting, and the French symbolists, many of whom he introduced to Hindi through criticism in the 1940s in the short-lived journal *Pratīk*.[1] In these ways, and in particular in his crystalline, almost imagistic poetry, Shamsher is quite a different poet from Muktibodh, and yet his statements and writings take up Muktibodh's poetry with great specificity. Shamsher's most well-known writing on Muktibodh is his preface to Muktibodh's first, famous book of poetry, *Cānd kā muṁh ṭeḍhā hai*. But even before Muktibodh's death, he described his poetry in a 1960 article for the journal *Kṛti* [The Work].[2] In this piece, Shamsher describes Muktibodh's imagery as "stable and concrete, caught up in some very tragic net." Shamsher then compares Muktibodh's long poem to the Mexican muralists, writing that "Muktibodh is a marvelous Marxist poet of ironic images [*vyaṅgyarūpkār*]… in his poems he is a painter and a sculptor—and his style is powerful, reminiscent of the realist Mexican muralists." Like these muralists, Muktibodh "crafts every image with great care and effort, and then freezes it in amber," creating a feeling that his poems "are a grim, terrifying museum of still images." In this assessment of Muktibodh, his ability to create images of great resonance is joined to the nightmare-like terror of these images, a terror rooted in the experience of the lower middle class: "The oppressed individual of the lower middle class is impaled on a fantastic spear; he remains alive to journey into hell, and to suffer that hell along with his family." Shamsher here emphasizes their grimness and desperation; in a play on Muktibodh's name, the only salvation possible is a "consciousness of freedom," literally *mukti kā bodh*.

In his preface to *Cānd kā muṁh ṭeḍhā hai*, Shamsher presents a similar view of Muktibodh's work, but here he attempts to place Muktibodh into a framework of Hindi literary history, and to establish the specific contribution of his long poems. He admits that Muktibodh's poetry is almost the opposite of his own, writing that "the reason I find Muktibodh so appealing is that he is so different than me—not abstract, but dense, concrete [*ṭhos*]![3] Shamsher refers to Muktibodh's powerful, dark imagery, which he compares to his own exaggeratedly ethereal style, and his language that "flows with emotion." Muktibodh's images, even if they are "grotesque," are still rooted in reality.[4] But this concreteness of image is, in Shamsher's account, tied to a long, free-flowing style of the poems themselves. Muktibodh's free verse is, in Shamsher's interpretation, a successor to the natural and humanistic simplicity of the verse of Suryakand Tripathi Nirala (1986–1961).[5] And yet this comparison, which is one of the first moves towards a lineage between

[1]See Alok Rai, "Reading *Pratīk* through Agyeya: Reading Agyeya through *Pratīk*," in *Hindi Modernism* (Berkeley: Center for South Asia Studies, 2012), 17–28.

[2]Śamśer Bahādur Singh, "Mere Priya Hindī Lekhak Ityādī," *Kṛti* 2, no. 3 (1960): 46–50.

[3]Singh, "Ek vilakṣaṇ pratibhā," p. 24.

[4]Ibid., p. 25.

[5]Nirala was one of the four primary Chāyāvād poets, and the one whose radical experimentation was most amenable to a later generation of poets. The most important analysis of Nirala in Hindi is Rāmavilās Śarmā, *Nirālā kī sāhitya sādhanā* (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 1969). Some of Nirala's poems are translated in David Rubin, *Of love and war: a Chayavad anthology* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005); and David Rubin, *The return of Sarasvati: translations of the poetry of Prasad, Nirala, Pant, and Mahadevi* (Philadelphia: Dept. of South Asia Regional Studies, University of Pennsylvania, 1993).

Muktibodh and Nirala, is offset by the statement that ends the paragraph that, at times, Muktibodh is swept away "perhaps more than is necessary" by his own mythic creation.[6] This is the first contradiction of Muktibodh's poetry: its imagery is both fantastic and real, possessed of "density"; and his free verse is both simple and humanistic, and yet the poems are capable of being carried beyond the complexity of reality.

It is at the end of his preface that Shamsher gives the fullest definition of the long poem. He ends his preface to *Caṁd kā muṁh ṭeḍhā hai* by writing that "certain of Muktibodh's long poems," especially the already well-known "Aṁdhere meṁ," would be a special contribution to Hindi poetry.[7] It is possible that, when he wrote his original appreciation of Muktibodh's poetry, he was not fully acquainted with "Aṁdhere meṁ."[8] But here, he views it as the pinnacle of Muktibodh's long poem: this poem, more than anything else, brings together the life of the individual and the collective life of a people that, in this account, creates history. He writes:

> This poem is a burning, iron document of the modern history of the people, both before and after Independence. In it the people and the individual are fused together in a strange and startling form. It pulses in every vein with the land, sky and air of the country, its true sense of freedom and its ambitions… and this sense exists on many hidden levels of feeling. Doctor Prabhakar Machwe claims that this it is a *Guernica in verse*: many of its portions have the same impact as Picasso's world-famous painting. "Aṁdhere meṁ" is the poem of Muktibodh which fuses together many of the elements of its poetic power to create a single great work which, even as it maintains its romanticism, is utterly Realist and distinctly modern.[9]

"Aṁdhere meṁ" claims a special importance for Singh because, in contrast to Muktibodh's other long poems, it succeeds in making a coherent whole, rather than present a series of distinct, separated images. More than perhaps any of Muktibodh's long poems, "Aṁdhere meṁ" is arranged in a narrative and organized in such a way that, more than just a consciousness of freedom, there is an active attempt to craft a kind of spirit of revolution in the form of the "puruṣ" [man] that floats throughout the poem.

Fifteen years later, the poet Kedarnath Singh refers to many of these same qualities. His essay, "Kālbaddh aur padārthmay," [Time-bound and material] was written in 1980 as a review of *Bhūrī bhūrī xāk dhūl*, [The brown, brown, ashen dust] a newly-released second collection of Muktibodh's poems.[10] For Singh, as for Shamsher, Mutkibodh's long poems are comparable to Picasso's *Guernica* in their ability to combine disparate elements in a single canvas. In Singh's words, Muktibodh's poems "move space into time, and are thus in a spectacular way spatial, or defined by space."[11] Thus singh also compares the long poem to a mural, in which various

[6]Singh, "Ek vilakṣaṇ pratibhā," p. 25.

[7]Ibid.

[8]See Nandiśor Naval's discussion of the possible timeline of "Aṁdhere meṁ" in Naval, *Muktibodha, jñāna aura saṃvedanā*, pp. 442-446.

[9]Singh, "Ek vilakṣaṇ pratibhā," p. 27.

[10]Singh, "Kālbaddh aur parārthmay."

[11]Ibid., p. 30.

arrangements of the historical are made spatial. For Singh, this quality is important to distinguish Muktibodh's long poems from the "fantasy" of Prasad's *Kāmāyanī*; they are "a fistfight with the imagination of the present." The moments of Muktibodh's poems that seem almost dulling, the "soporific repetition" is, according to Singh, an attempt to create a "framework" that would support this kind of arrangement.

Based on the work of these two critics, we can establish a basic framework for understanding Muktibodh's long poem, both in terms of style and function. The "long poem" is stylistically diverse—it seems to be both written in a "simple, humanistic" free verse, while at the same time it tends at times towards rhetorical excess, repetition, and syntactic confusion. But for both of these critics, the long poem attempts to join together the individual and his experience with a larger history, in Shamsher Bahadur Singh's formulation "the history of the people" and for Kedarnath Singh "a fistfight with the imagination of the present," or an attempt to "move space into time." In all these formulations there is a sense that, in Muktibodh's arrangement or juxtapositions of imagery into a long narrative framework, his poems create a connection between individual experience and some kind of collective, social experience.

But considering these two critical interpretations and definitions of the long poem, there are some sticking points. Namely, if both Kedarnath Singh and Shamsher Bahadur Singh define Muktibodh's long poems through analogy to a mural, specifically in their ability to juxtapose a series of images against each other to create new illumination, they differ on the nature of that illumination. For Shamsher, the most important thing is "the history of the people," that is, an interpretative relation that has some possibility of explanation, of showing the connections between the fractured, confusing, violent present, and some larger, understandable framework. For Kedarnath Singh, however, the juxtaposition is an attempt to "make history from the present," and to transform what Singh's refers to as the "material" of his contemporary time.[12] And whereas Shamsher considers the problems in Muktibodh's poetry as being overwhelmed by his own mythic world, for Kedarnath Singh the awkwardness is a result of the work done to create a structure for his poetry, or due to the difficulty of juxtaposition inherent in his world. For Kedarnath Singh, for instance, Muktibodh's poems in a rural setting, such as "Isī bailgāḍī ko" [To this very bullock-cart] display a "tension-filled connection between these un-modern materials and modern surroundings." In fact, Kedarnath Singh goes on to refer to Muktibodh's untranslatability as a sign of his "fundamental localness." One can contrast this with Shamsher's description of "Aṁdhere meṁ" as a signal contribution to Hindi literature, and his analogy of Muktibodh's "Aṁdhere meṁ" to the poetry of Walt Whitman and Vladimir Mayakovsky—two pillars of Left-oriented, long poetry. Whereas for Shamsher, Muktibodh's poetry is expansive in scope and, in its Marxist perspective, connected to a global history, Singh emphasizes the local particularity of Muktibodh's work; in fact, for Singh, Muktibodh's poetry is particularly "untranslatable" because it is so rooted in the local.

An important part of the reason for this difference, of course, is precisely the space in time between the two writers. Shamsher's preface was included as part of *Cāṁd kā muṁh ṭeḍhā hai* in 1964. Singh, however, was writing his essay in 1980. By then, in Singh's words, "Indian society,

[12]Singh, "Kālbaddh aur parārthmay," p. 30.

having passed through a variety of political changes, youth movements, droughts, famines, wars, and price increases, has thoroughly left behind the intoxicating memories of the time of Nehru."[13] Singh was writing in the context of the disillusionment that followed the optimism produced by the first years of Independence; for Singh, Muktibodh's long poems access not a utopian impulse but rather the materials of post-Independence life, which are irreconcilable to and fundamentally other from Muktibodh's idea of modernity. In this analysis, he reflects the broader turn in the 1970s towards local particularity, both in terms of *janvādī* [popular] affiliations, as well as in terms of a growing analysis of a distinct, post-colonial modernity.

This distinction between a poetry of totalizing, historical purpose, and a poetry that joins the particular to the historical, leads to a difference in how Shamsher and Singh evaluate the length and complexity of the long poem. If for Shamsher, the long poem is a collage of great power that nonetheless is at times "overwhelming," or at times appears to be obscure and incomprehensible, or at times seems too caught up in its own rhetoric, for Kedarnath Singh these qualities are evidence of a great struggle, of a suturing that Muktibodh attempted between what Singh views as the unwieldy materials of Indian modernity, and between the local and the universal—or, one might say, the personal and the historical. For Singh, writing in the 1980s, Muktibodh is attempting to repair a deep wound in language that seems to cut it off from some living thing; this act of repairing is the source of Muktibodh's awkwardness. For Shamsher, Muktibodh's work is aligned with the still-present optimism of the 1950s and 60s, in which the highest praise of the long poem was that it created a collage of the totality of the people's aspirations on a historical stage.

Both of these writers, though, are concerned with what, following Benjamin, is the allegorization of modernity, the attempt to portray, through the poem, a kind of experience particular to that time and place. Post-Independence India in Muktibodh's work becomes the moment of rupture, the moment in which, as with Baudelaire, *experience* in the sense of a historicized, collective event is replaced by fragmented bits of information.[14] In his "Theses on History," Benjamin emphasizes that in his conception of historical materialism, history is composed not of a teleology of progress, but of the joining of various materials all within the present—not a sympathetic view of the past, but one in which the past is able to make a kind of claim upon the present.[15] For Benjamin, history is "the 'time of the now' which is shot through with chips of Messianic time"; Benjamin perceives the present as a violent ruptured time pierced with shrapnel, just as Muktibodh will dwell repeatedly on a space warped by quantum mechanics., and on the "invisible forces" tying together time and space. And Muktibodh's poetry performs just such a suturing of disconnected, fragmented experience, perhaps with the hope of creating again a lost whole.

However, both Shamsher and Kedarnath Singh stop their analysis of Muktibodh's allegorical process at the very moment at which it comes alive: form. The "overwhelming" or "awkward"

[13]Singh, "Kālbaddh aur parārthmay," p. 29.

[14]This is taken, first from Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 155–200; crucial aspects of Benjamin's idea of allegory, and in particular the relationship between modernity and the past, are found in Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Rolf Tiedemann (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 805.

[15]Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), p. 263.

aspects of the long poem are viewed as an unavoidable, if perhaps unpleasant, side effect of Muktibodh's attempt to create an allegory of modernity, rather than a key means through which the long poem upsets notions of identity, space, and history in order to open a new ground of aesthetic experience. What this chapter will contend is that the form of the long poem is not a side effect, but is, in fact, historically integral to the long poem's evolution. As I discussed in the previous chapter, Muktibodh's long poem emerged from a long process of interaction between, at the minumum, Marathi poetics, and especially emergent methods of forming free verse, and the *Chāyāvād* poetry that influenced Muktibodh at the beginning of his career. I argued that the long poem should be understood not only in terms of its thematic content, but also in terms of a set of formal qualities. I outlined some of these qualities in the previous chapter, such as the long poems variable, free-verse line, which I argued drew much from Marathi free verse, and its early debt to the language of Jayshankar Prasad's *Kāmāyanī*, already acknowledged as a powerful influence on Muktibodh's work.

In this chapter, having established the formal antecedents of the long poem and traced its evolution in Muktibodh's earlier work, I will examine two of Muktibodh's mature long poems, written in the final decade of his life from 1955 to 1964. The first of these, "Bhaviṣyadhārā," is relatively unknown, unpublished during Muktibodh's lifetime and included only posthumously in his collected works. The second of these, "Aṁdhere meṁ," is easily Muktibodh's most well-known work and his only work widely available in translation. As we saw above, its reputation was established at the earliest point of his reception, and its analysis was the basis of most early criticism of Muktibodh's work. As Shamsher argued, "Aṁdhere meṁ" stands in Hindi criticism as the most complete of the long poems, and the one that comes closest to seamlessly merging a poetics of the individual with a vision of history, all within a nightmarish vision of post-Independence India. "Bhaviṣyadhārā," on the other hand, is more explicitly fantastic, dealing to a great extent with a poetic exploration of the imagery of different scientific subjects, but especially biology and astronomy. Its narrative has little connection to any real discernable image of contemporary life, organizing itself instead around a plot of an incapacitated scientist and the theft of a mysterious equation that would be more in place in a pulp novel.

By looking at these poems together, I hope to show, first, how they are both recognizably long poems, emerging from similar goals and using similar poetic techniques. Both of these poems make use of a similar diction and poetic line, and both of them depict a similar narrative of a speaker in search of a guru-like, guiding figure, culminating in a revolutionary experience of the people. But I also hope to show how they depart from each other, and how these differences can show both the capaciousness of Muktibodh's long poems, as well as point towards the distinction of "Aṁdhere meṁ" as the long poem which most clearly depicts contemporary, post-Independence Indian life, and thus to a greater degree than Muktibodh's other long poems, creates a model for modernist Hindi poetry.

"Bhaviṣyadhārā" and the Emergence of the Long Poem

The posthumously published poem "Bhaviśyadhārā," written sometime after 1957, displays important changes that distinguish it from the poems discussed up to this point. While it retains

the loose, *abhaṅga*-based free verse meter and irregular line length of Muktibodh's earlier work, its increase in length and narrative complexity, and its corresponding introduction of a new thematics of science and the story of a narrator's quest across a fantastic, imagined landscape, marks a change from poems such as "O Virāṭ Svapna." In the prior poem, the speaker imagines himself leaping from the lonely crag of the mountain into the crumbling, modern city; now, the speaker is able to maintain the image of the city, but expand it to include a range of new locations and images.

"Bhaviṣyadhārā", a long, digressive poem, wraps themes of science, math, progress, and the self in a detective story of a scientist who has been rendered unconscious and possibly murdered, and the looted laboratory in which the narrator finds him. The narrative constantly flips between this story, in which the narrator plays an uncertain role as victim, perpetrator, and investigator, and a narrative of his internal reflection and dreams, largely centered on the question of scientific, determinative thought—most frequently appearing in the poem as the "formula of equality"—and its relation to human liberation.

"Bhaviṣyadhārā" is the culmination of a trajectory of Muktibodh's poetry during the 1950s. It seems relatively clear that, through the early 1950s, his poems were attempting to integrate a poetic voice, developed out of late *Chāyāvād* and Marathi poetic influences, with a greater and greater diversity of themes. So in this sense we see a poem like "Zamāne kā cehrā" [The face of the age] in which the poem is organized around a long description of the Second World War, primarily from the perspective of the Soviet Union.[16] "Bhaviṣyadhārā" can be seen to some extent in this light: the poem takes as its subject, loosely, the relation of science to knowledge and the role an avant-garde intellectual, explored through a range of prophetic, guiding voices. These are themes that can be seen throughout Muktibodh's work, but particualarly in the poems written in the middle of the 1950s. During this period, when Muktibodh was living in Nagpur, his work began to depart from the model of poetry depicted in the previous chapter, and began to experiment with longer and longer poems, with more abstract narrative structures. Poems such as "Mere sahcar mitra", which was worked on between 1951 and 1962, but was published in the journal *Nikaṣ* in 1957, reworks the theme of friendship that dates back at least to the *Tār saptak* poem "Ātmā ke mitra mere."[17] The latter poem, however, quickly transitions into an allegorical narrative of a quest, rich in obscure symbolism.

The element of the "autobiographical" that is thought to tie together and inform Muktibodh's fantastic poems, and which Muktibodh himself often put forward as an organizing impulse, is also present. But "Bhaviṣyadhārā", to an unprecedented degree, synthesizes these formal elements in a dizzying array of themes, in an attempt to portray the universal in the most literal terms. In "Bhaviṣyadhārā," the autobiographical, romantic lyric, late *Chāyāvād* sentimentality, Soviet poems of war and infrastructure from the 1930s and 1940s, and a sense of the grotesque reminiscent of the modernist Marathi poet Mardhekar, are all yoked together in a grand, if inherently unstable, synthesis.[18]

[16]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 2:104-124.

[17]Ibid., 2:246-255.

[18]The possible influence of B.S. Mardhekar (1909–1956) on Muktibodh's work is discussed in greater detail in

The Byzantine symbolism includes possible use of Goethian primary colors, a scientific references dealing with astrology and biology that range from nebulas to bacteria, and a series of cryptic encounters with characters such as an abortion doctor who resides on a bridge. While annotating and explaining all of the references in a poem such as "Bhaviṣyadhārā" is beyond the scope of this chapter, the poem's ungainliness and expansiveness can reveal elements of the structure of the long poem in ways that later, more polished poems might not. Furthermore, "Bhaviṣyadhārā" is exemplary of a tendency of Muktibodh's long poems towards incorporating abstract allegories of modern life and fragmented narrative forms that can easily be missed in an analysis that only focuses on poems, such as "Aṁdhere meṁ," that make a sustained effort to connect an allegorical narrative to a depiction of contemporary life.

"Bhaviṣyadhārā" begins:

Kyoṁ vaijñānik so gayā
satat prajvalit gais-sṭov pās
svayaṃ kī prayogśālā meṁ?
Kyoṁ acet ho gayā?
Ki kamre meṁ ghūmne lagīṁ adṛśya lahreṁ
vah mahak ajībogarīb dravyoṁ kī
(atyant ugra) sir ko cakrā denevālī.
Haiṁ ḍhulī paḍī śīśiyāṁ, parīkṣaṇ-nalikāeṁ
kyoṁ huī bhayānak ghaṭnā yah?
Kyā yahāṁ kisī ne behośī kī davā pilā
corī kar lī nav-gaṇit-paṅktiyoṁ kī adbhut
ve nav-aviśkṛt samīkaraṇ ke sūtra
kho gaye kahāṁ!!

Why is the scientist asleep
by the ever-flickering flame of the gas burner
in his own laboratory?
Why is he unconscious?
Invisible waves float through the room
the scents of exotic chemicals
(very sharp) that would make the head spin.
The glasses and test-tubes are covered in dust
What horrifying accident happened here?
Did someone introduce a sleeping agent
so that they could steal the lines of new mathematics
those newly-discovered equations
where are they lost!![19]

Chapter 3.

[19]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 2:104.

The opening of the poem displays a dramatic tone. In the previous chapter, I discussed the ways in which Muktibodh's language of science drew from the growing body of writing on technological change, and even tapped into the overt development of a technical language in Hindi. Here, we see that in the combination of the English gas-stove with the multitude of Sanskrit calques for scientific and mathematical terminology, for instance *parīkṣaṇ-nalikāeṁ* for test tube. But the "invisible waves" of chemical vapors leads to another, telling reference. The scientist has been rendered unconscious by some kind of "sleeping medicine" so that his mathematical references can be stolen. The sleeping agent is as clear a reference as possible to the Hindi tradition of fantastic fiction, in which first magicians, and later scientists, face off against each other using a range of stratagems, but most prominently sleeping powder. Furthermore, the poem opens not only with the scientist knocked unconscious, but with a theft of the "formulas of equality."[20]

An examination of the opening lines also reveals that "Bhaviśyadhārā" bears the formal hallmarks of Muktibodh's long form, in a way that is fairly consistent across his later work. There seems to be little, if any, metrical remnants of the quantitative meters that were visible in the *Tār saptak* poems; instead, the opening lines play upon the syllabic rhythms of free verse. They still, however, maintain a connection to the Marathi *Muktachanda* in that they rely on variable-length lines, rarely shorter than four syllables, and long, syntactically fractured sentences. Enjambment continues to be used to great effect, creating tension within these long sentences by, for instance, splitting the opening sentence of the poem into three lines.

In the first stanza, the poem brings up an entire world of a fantastic story. This fantastic story is woven throughout the poem, and the story frequently circles back to the "formulas of equality" that have been lost. At multiple points in the poem, the narrator suddenly remembers himself in the laboratory, and at times feels as if he will be convicted for this crime, even as the poem, in sympathy with the scientist, moves along from his perspective. The story of the poem even seems at times to be returning to the story of a laboratory theft: halfway through the narrative, for instance, the narrator describes searching through the room, through every "table, drawer, wardrobe" for the mathematical formula, and wonders if there will be a "police case."[21] In this way the poem always returns to the plot of the mystery of the scientist and his missing formula, and it is the crucial way in which the narrative of the poem is composed.

But if this narrative always returns, it is just as frequently overwhelmed by a digression into the kind of dream narrative, which is an allegorical exploration of knowledge and symbol. The second stanza:

Anavasthā ke bhram-dhūm-lok meṁ jāg uṭhī ātmā.
anbujhe ṛṇ-ek rāśi ke vargmūl
kī pāṁteṁ caltī rahīṁ, bhayānak gatiyoṁ meṁ,
atyant vicitra anantoṁ tak.
gaṇitik lalāṭ kī gahrī cintit rageṁ uṭhī haiṁ phūl va

[20]See Francesca Orsini's definition of Ayyars in Orsini, *Print and Pleasure*, pp. 238-9. See also her discussion of *Chandrakānta* as a whole in ibid., pp. 198-225; *Chandrakānta* is translated in English as Devkīnandan Khatrī and Manju Gupta, *In the Mysterious Ruins: a Novel* (New Delhi: Star Publications, 2004).

[21]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 2:107.

bloṭiṅg-pepar par bimbit akṣar-varṇoṁ se
ve aṅk dāgvāle uljhe
har bhāv hṛday meṁ phail dāg ban gayā.
Khoye hī ko khojtī huī santrast sūjh
abhinav kalpit rāśiyoṁ-rāśiyoṁ dvārā jab
jātī hai karne bhūl sudhār ki kar ātī
hai ek dūsrī bhūl
ki jiske lie kostī rahtī hai
ātmā nij ko,
phaṭkār, ciḍhciḍhāhaṭ, phir gahrā udbodhan
bhīṣaṇ ekāntoṁ meṁ apnā saṃśodhan
nij par hī vah nij kā prayog.

The soul bolts awake in a world of uncertainty, smoky and confused.
The lines of the square root of negative one, unextinguished
march on, with terrifying speed
into the weird endlesses.
The mathematician's forehead bulges with veins of concentration &
the dark, tangled figures
letters and lines on blotting paper
all of their meanings a spreading stain on the heart.
When the disturbed perception, searching for something lost
attempts to correct an error
through more and more new and imagined accumulations, it makes
another error
and for this the self
curses itself,
beats itself, and then out of this irritation enlightenment
its research, in terrifying solitude
the experimentation of the self upon the self.[22]

The second stanza moves from the unconsciousness of the scientist to an awakening—but whose awakening? Perhaps it is the scientist's, but there is no direct indication of that. Instead, the verse focuses on the way in which the formula was acquired, by a kind of combination of mathematics and pure scientific method. The allegory of scientific discovery then transforms into a ladder extending into the sky, a ladder which itself is composed of the perfect geometry of two straight lines. This ladder then breaks, plunging the poem again into chaos.

How is this poem held together, if it fluctuates between loose, dreamlike presentation of images and a melodramatic story of a scientist in his laboratory? What are the threads that keep this poem from completely falling apart? It must be said that, at the end of the day, nothing completely accomplishes this, because the poem does not completely hold together. But the framework of

[22]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 2:104-105.

the detective story is crucial because it allows for the long poem to move away from a poem organized entirely in terms of the statement of the emotional lyric subject, as can be seen in a poem such as "O virāṭ svapnoṁ." There, the poem revolves around the emotional arc of that subject; here, the poem can range widely between these two archetypal figures. The dyad of the lyric subject and the scientist remains throughout the poem, but the relationship and the nature of each element of the pair can shift radically. If at the beginning of the poem, the speaker is a witness to a kind of crime, and the victim a laboratory scientist, the speaker later can become a kind of suspect, or an editor of the cosmic message of the scientist—and the scientist can transform from a technician to a prophet, eventually speaking in the voice of pure mathematics which is then transformed by the speaker into something "of language":

> *Dhvani se chan kiraṇ-taraṅgoṁ meṁ*
> *pariṇat ho gaṇitik aṅkoṁ meṁ!!*
> *Us vaijñānik ke svar bhāṣā meṁ anuvādit*
> *maiṁ mātra ek sampādak hūṁ.*
> *Yah nirvaiyaktik kārya.*
>
> Shattered by echoes and filtered into particle waves
> transformed into mathematical figures!!
> I am merely an editor
> of the voice of the scientist
> translated into language.
> This is an impersonal labor.[23]

In a metaphor for the creative process, the narrator takes up the position as an editor or compiler of the cosmic vibrations of the scientest. These kinds of shifts, often isolated in short stanzas like this one, upset any stable sense of a speaker, but maintain the binary relationship between the two given protagonists, here between a writer and editor. So, if this long poem maintains an aspect of collage or constellation, it also repeatedly returns to the mystery plot that begins the poem and continues to structure it, long after the content has completely departed from any kind of mystery plot.

The poem transitions eventually from the voice of the speaker, imagining the cosmic world of the scientist, to the voice of the scientist-as-prophet, describing not mathematics and physics now but relations between the self and reality. The poem shifts into the use of a series of biological and even vegetal images, focusing at length on depicting the conscience as a kind of "thorny blue plant.":

> *Merī bhaviṣyavāṇiyāṁ suno!!*
> *Ug rahā tumhāre antar meṁ sir uṭhā,*
> *ek kaṇṭak paudhā*
> *jo ṭhāṭhdār*

[23]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 2:110.

maulik sunīl—
vah maiṁ hī hūṁ!!

vah ūṁcī ek nīl kompal
jiske pradīrgh pattoṁ meṁ baḍe-baḍe kāṁṭe
au' patra-kagāroṃ par ūṁce khurdure śūl
ki pattoṁ ke pichle hissoṁ par
sūkśma bahut bārīk
kaṇṭakāvaliyāṁ
ve sone tumheṁ nahīṁ deṁgī
calte meṁ phirte meṁ
uṭhte va baiṭhte meṁ
sote meṁ khāte meṁ
ve cubhtī jāyeṁgī.
ki dhāraṇkar antar meṁ kaṇṭak-taru
cehre par dhūl-dhūl au' maru-prasār
camkegā!!
caṭṭānī cilcilāhaṭeṁ hoṁgī āṁkhoṁ meṁ!!
hāth-pair ye dhūl-sane ban jāyeṁge.

Listen to my prophecies!!
Raise up your heads to that swelling within you
a thorny shrub
with bony branches
completely blue—
it is me!!

that high blue bud
great thorns in broad leaves
high uneven spikes on the eaves
and on the back of the leaves
tender and delicate
tiny little thorns
won't let you sleep
pricking at you
as you move around
as you get up and sit down
as you sleep or as you eat.
when you hold this thorn tree inside of you
your face will sparkle
with the dust of the desert!!
A stony sparkle in the eyes!!

Your hands and feet covered in dust.[24]

The blue plant acts as a transition to the final exhortations that make up the last quarter of the poem, in which the speaker urges a transformative series of actions upon a vaguely defined, "people" who are probably meant to be an educated, middle-class audience. That is to say, the dyad between the speaker, who is an editor or assistant to the scientist, is now between the voice of the prophet and a collective personification of a lower-middle class intellectual that is often the subject of Muktibodh's poems. By the end of the poem, this prophet is urging these people to engage with the most visceral forms of reality:

bīc saḍak meṁ baḍā khulā hai ek aṁdherā ched,
ek aṁdherā gol-gol
vah niclā-niclā bhed,
jiske gahre-gahre tal meṁ
gahrā gandā kīc.
Usmeṁ phaṁse manuṣya...
ghuso aṁdhere jal meṁ

A hole is open in the middle of the street,
dark and round,
and deep down at the bottom
is dark, thick mud
Man is caught in it...
Go into the dark water
—this road of dark water.[25]

The poem's ending with an equation of the popular and the folk with an explicit image of the sewer bears further analysis. The "dark, thick mud" below the ground, with its deep resonance with issues of caste and physical disgust, is a startling departure from the abstract, scientific imagery that dominates the poem until these moments. Is that something that the poem is asking us to consider? A similar image appears in a short poem, "Maiṁ tum logoṁ se dūr hūṁ", written between 1960 and 1961, in which the speaker introduces the action of sweeping as an image for social transformation:

nij se aprasann hūṁ
islie ki jo hai usse behtar cahie
pūrī duniyā sāf karne ke lie mehtar cāhie
vah mehtar maiṁ ho nahīṁ pātā
par, roz koī bhītar cillātā hai
ki koī kām burā nahīṁ

[24]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 2:116-117.
[25]Ibid., 2:123.

baśarte ki ādmī kharā ho
phir bhī maiṁ us or apne ko ḍho nahīṁ pātā.

I'm dissatisfied
because what there is should be better
this whole world should needs a sweeper
I'll never be that sweeper
but, every day something inside shouts out
that no work is wrong
so long as it's done by an upright man
but I can't manage to pull myself in that direction.[26]

The word used in the Hindi, *mehtar*, refers to a dalit caste group that traditionally performed the work of sweeping and waste disposal. In invoking this group, Muktibodh here obliquely raises the question of caste by stating that, as much as he can sense that this is what the world needs, he is unable to perform such a task himself. "Bhaviṣyadhārā" lacks the introspective turn found in "Maiṁ tum logoṁ se dūr hūṁ," but invokes the same connection between social change and labor, raising similar questions in turn on labor and caste.

But the contrast between a larger framework and a local image of Indian urban modernity is also characteristic of Muktibodh's long poems: "Zamāne kā cehrā," written between 1950 and 1957 and describing the battle of Volgograd, similarly intercuts the description of World War II with with the point of view of the speaker, a teacher in a small town in Madhya Pradesh.[27] If the goal of the long poem is to tie together imagination, reality, and local perspective, the transition in this poem from the cosmic to the sewer manhole would be an example of just such a potentiality. The fact that this is a "man hole" that we are discussing, too, is a distinct mark of modern, urban, oppression; the English word, in fact, is used, and a manhole would be a mark of oppression but one removed from traditional depictions of oppression and darkness.

Ultimately, if "Bhaviṣyadhārā" is a sprawling, problematic version of the long poem, its value is that it shows us what Muktibodh envisioned the poem able to do at its most ambitious and unrestrained. "Aṁdhere meṁ," however, emphasizes movement through an imagined, but modern, Indian city, and its images of the surface and the underground are blended not with the plot of a mystery novel, but with a vision of violent repression and revolution. But the strategy is the same as what we see in "Bhaviṣyadhārā," in its use of a loose, allegorical narrative to juxtapose a range of images. "Aṁdhere meṁ" differs from "Bhaviṣyadhārā" not in its strategy but in its location of the poem in the contemporary Indian city, rather than in the abstract spaces that typify "Bhaviṣyadhārā." "Aṁdhere meṁ" is also a story of a quest, and the narrator similarly wanders through a strange landscape. But in "Aṁdhere meṁ," that landscape is a nightmare of the contemporary, and the allegorical narrative is explicitly the desire for expression of the narrator himself.

[26]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 2:219.
[27]See ibid., 2:65-66.

"Aṁdhere meṁ" and the Question of the Individual

"Aṁdhere meṁ" has long been viewed as the culmination of Muktibodh's long poem, and as typifying the contribution of Muktibodh to Hindi poetry.[28] Namwar Singh, in an analysis of the poem included in his work of criticism on Muktibodh, referred to it as "the highest achievement of *Naī kavitā*."[29] For Singh, "Aṁdhere meṁ" dramatized the political radicalization of the lower middle class; the long poem delved into the identity of that class in order to find, in a Marxist theoretical sense, the kernel for a larger identity with the proletariate.[30] Other critics, even if they departed from the Marxist interpretation of Singh, saw in "Aṁdhere meṁ" an evocative depiction of the increasing sense of disappointment that followed Independence, and a pinnacle among Muktibodh's long poems.[31] This evaluation, furthermore, was shared by Muktibodh himself, who insisted only that the poem should be included in his first collection. "Aṁdhere meṃ" thus can exemplify both the directions in which his late poetry was heading, as well as Muktibodh's ultimate success in creating a poetry that could fuse together the contemporary and the mythic imagination.

"Aṁdhere meṁ," indeed, contains elements common to most of Muktibodh's long poems, not least the previously discussed "Bhaviṣyadhārā." Like his other long poems,"Aṁdhere meṁ" features a loosely autobiographical speaker who experiences a series of dreamlike fantasies that relate allegorically to the real. Both "Aṁdhere meṁ" and "Bhaviṣyadhārā" feature the motif of a guru: in "Bhaviṣyadhārā," the scientist whose incapacitation begins the poem eventually becomes a prophetic voice, explaining a series of connections between contemporary life and the universe. In "Aṁdhere meṁ," likewise, the quest that forms the narrative of the poem is initiated by the apparition of a guru, and the poem ends with the speaker's resolution to find that guru. The narrative in between these two moments consists of a series of episodes experienced by the speaker as he moves across a landscape that seems, at times, to be a dream, and at time to be a realistic depiction of a small, modern Indian city.

"Aṁdhere meṁ" can be distinguished from "Bhaviṣyadhārā," most importantly, by the intensity with which it melds together the fantastic/imaginative dreamworlds of Muktibodh's poetry with a searing image of contemporary India. It does this by making its setting not only the contemporary world, but the interplay between the imagination and the world. "Aṁdhere meṁ," more than perhaps any of Muktibodh's long poems, takes up the question of how the fantasies of the speaker interact with the world around him, and how they form the necessary background for political involvement. Rather than set its imagery within a complex journey across a cosmic landscape, as is the case in Bhaviṣyadhārā," "Aṁdhere meṁ" insists on repeatedly puncturing its action to remind the reader that the speaker exists in a mundane, contemporary world. This

[28]My discussion of 'Aṁdhere meṁ' follows the most recent edition of Muktibodh's collected works, Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 2:320-356. The poem is translated into English in Muktibodh, *In the Dark*; the original poem was also published as Gajānan Mādhav Muktibodh, "Kalpanā ke Dvīp Andhere meṁ," *Kalpanā*, November 1964, For a description of the publication and manuscript history of the poem in English, see Lotz, "Long poem or unending poem?"

[29]Singh, *Kavitā ke naye pratimāna.*, p. 230.

[30]I discuss Namwar Singh's analysis of Muktibodh in Chapter 1.

[31]See for instance Vājpeyī, "Bhayānak xabar kī kavitā"; in which Vajpeyi argues that Muktibodh's poetry is the "fragmented Ramayana" of the modern Indian.

makes the moments when the dream takes over all the more compelling.

Structurally, "Aṁdhere meṁ" has several sources. Although its basic plot is held in common with many of Muktibodh's long poems, it also references several other works. Most crucial of these may be Prasad's *Kāmāyanī*. Muktibodh is always in dialogue with Prasad's great work, and here the guru is given the name, explicitly, of Manu, the main protagonist of *Kāmāyanī*.[32] *Kāmāyanī* tells the story of Manu's wandering across an allegorical, mythologized landscape; in "Aṁdhere meṁ," Manu is himself the goal of the speaker's quest, and the pretext for the speaker's journey. *Kāmāyanī* ends with Manu's vision of universal unity; although Muktibodh explicitly rejected any religious interpretation of Prasad's work, his poem concludes with a vision of utopian revolutionary potential. Throughout the text, the poem evokes the *Kāmāyanī*, in particular its description of a Himalayan terrain of mountains and craggy peaks. In "Aṁdhere meṁ," however, these crags are depicted ironically; the speaker is not gazing soulfully across a ruined world, but rather presented by Manu with a terrifying journey for which he feels unequipped:

> *vah biṭhā detā hai tuṅg śikhar ke*
> *xatarnāk, khurdare kagār-taṭ par;*
> *śocanīya sthiti meṁ hī choḍ detā mujhko.*
> *kahtā hai—'pār karo parvat-sandhi ke gahvar,*
> *rassī ke pul par calkar*
> *dūr us śikhar-kagār par svayaṁ hī pahuṁco.'*
> *are bhāī, mujhe nahīṁ cāhie śikharoṁ kī yātrā,*
> *mujhe ḍar lagtā hai uṁcaiyoṁ se;*
> *bajne do sāṁkal!!*
>
> He sits me down right on the shore of
> this sea of mountain , rough and perilous;
> he leaves me here, trapped in this pathetic state.
> He says—'Cross the abyss between the mountains,
> go across a rope bridge
> and reach those far-off mountain peaks.'
> Listen, man, I've got nothing to do with mountain treks,
> I'm afraid of heights;
> let him knock at the door! [33]

Here, Manu is simultaneously knocking on the door of the speaker's room and, in a fantastic vision, commanding him to cross the mountain peaks; in an ironic inversion, and perhaps a comment on the generational distance between post-Independence India and the confident, idealist Nationalists that preceded it, the speaker, terrified, refuses. But *Kāmāyanī*, with its promise of allegoricizing the modern Indian world, remains a crucial model for the quest of "Aṁdhere meṁ" and a constant point of reference.

[32]Muktibodh's interpretation of Prasad and *Kāmāyanī* is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six.

[33]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 2:324. All translations from "Aṁdhere meṁ" are my own.

The second major structural source must be considered Shelley's "The Mask of Anarchy." Shelley's 1819 poem was written in response to the Peterloo Massacre which took place in Manchester that year. It describes the march of a series of personified characteristics of repressive politics, directly connected to contemporary political figures, before describing a nonviolent resistance. The poem's place in the genesis of the Left in Europe, and Shelley's own important position within that movement as one of the most radical of the English Romantic poets, has lead to the poem's enduring importance to progressive poetry.[34] "Aṁdhere meṁ" features a procession that includes not only a marching band and military figures, but also the notable intellectuals and politicians of the city, as well as noted thugs. As Barbara Lotz has detailed, some of the inspiration for "Aṁdhere meṁ" must have come from his time as a journalist in Nagpur, especially his witnessing of violent police action against striking mill workers, further strengthening Muktibodh's connection to Shelley's verse: just as Shelley's poem was inspired by the violent action taken against non-violent protest in Manchester in the Peterloo Massacre of 1819, "Aṁdhere meṁ" was at least influenced in its imagery by a similar incident in Nagpur.[35]

"Aṁdhere meṁ," begins, like Shelley's "Mask of Anarchy," with an explicit invocation of a dreamlike state. The poem opens with a vision of mundane existence that is suddenly interrupted:

zindagī ke...
kamroṁ meṁ aṁdhere
lagātā hai cakkar
koī ek lagātār;
āvāz pairoṁ kī detī hai sunāyī
bār-bār...bār-bār,
vah nahīṁ dīkhtā... nahī hī dīkhtā,
kintu, vah rahā ghūm
tilasmī khoh meṁ giraftār koī ek,
bhīt-pār ātī huī pās se,
gahan rahasyamay andhakār dhvani-sā
astitva janātā
anivār koī ek,
aur, mere hṛday kī dhak-dhak
pūchtī hai—vah kaun
sunāyī jo detā, par nahī detā dikhāyī!
itne meṁ akasmāt girte haiṁ bhītar se
phūle hue palistar,
khirtī hai cūne-bharī ret
khisaktī haiṁ papaḍiyāṁ is tarah—
xud-ba-xud

[34]For an overview of the radical critique of Shelley, see Paul Foot, *Red Shelley* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson in association with Michael Dempsey, 1980). For a formal reading of "The Mask of Anarchy," see Susan J. Wolfson, *Formal Charges: the Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 195-204.

[35]See Lotz, "Long poem or unending poem?"

koī baḍā cehrā ban jātā hai,
svayamapi
mukh ban jātā hai divāl par,
nukīlī nāk aur
bhavya lalāṭ hai,
dṛḍh hanu,
koī anjānī an-pahcānī ākṛti.
Kaun vah dikhāī jo detā, par
nahī jānā jātā hai!
kaun manu?

Life's…
dark chambers:
someone,
endless
walking in circles;
his feet sound out
again and again… again and again,
don't see… can't see
but still he wanders
a prisoner in the enchanted cave
from across the walls it comes to me
an echo, from across the black mysterious depths
someone
announces himself
unstoppable
and, the beat of my heart
asks—who is he
I hear, but cannot see!
And then, suddenly, falling away from within
the plaster cracking and bursting open
sandy lime falling out
skins sloughing off so that
on its own
a massive face appears
a self-generated
face on the wall,
with a pointed nose
and a splendid forehead,
a straight jaw
of some strange and unrecognized figure.
who is he who appears, but

is not known!
What Manu?[36]

The first lines of "Aṁdhere meṁ," stylistically, set the stage for the rest of the poem. The variable-length line that characterizes all of Muktibodh's long poems is present, as is the frequent use of rhyme and enjambment. The syllabic count, as in "Bhaviṣyadhārā," echoes the older syllabic meters of Marathi free verse that influenced Muktibodh earlier in his career. The staggered four lines that open the poem have syllable counts, if the final, unpronounced *a* is ignored, of 4–6–6–6, grounding the poem in the rhythms of *muktachanda* [free verse]. The following line, "āvāz pairoṁ kī detī hai sunāyī," which translates literally as "voice-feet-of is heard" can easily be read as composed of two units of five and six syllables, with a stress placed on the syntactically separate *detī*. Most importantly, the formal qualities of the long poem create an incantatory consistency that allows for a narrative flexibility, and for heightened poetic effects when necessary.

The split of the first two lines between *zindagī* [life] and *kamroṁ meṁ aṁdhere* [in the rooms dark] places the emphasis on the ellipsis: the three dots not only create a pause in the reading, but also an unspoken verbal movement from the world of reality—of "life"—to the world of the fantastic, "inside the dark chambers." The ellipsis serves to indicate the incommensurability between the real and the imagined; "Bhaviṣyadhārā" too features jarring transitions, but unlike that poem's setting in the plot of a *jāsūsī* or spy novel, "Aṁdhere meṁ" opens with an emphasis on the mundane: the speaker simply listens from a room, across walls made of plaster, lime, and sand. This makes the intrusion of the fantastic all the more jarring when a face suddenly appears from the crumbling wall. The use of *itne meṁ* and *akasmāt*, although both essentially translate as "suddenly," serve a similar function as the ellipsis. Just as the ellipsis passes silently over a transformational space, these two words serve to break the action from the real to the unreal without any other explanation.

Equally crucial to the imaginative space of the poem is the richly allusive language. The poem's reference to a "prisoner in a magical cave," appears several times in Muktibodh's poetry, as well as in an extended sequence in his long short story, "Vipātra" [Anti-hero].[37] Its use in "Vipātra" in which the narrator imagines the transformation of a company party into a garden, makes explicit the connection to the extremely popular 19th century novel *Candrakānta*,which I have discussed above in the context of "Bhaviṣyadhārā"; the novel features a series of adventures with *ayyārīs*, or court magicians, including one who imprisons his rivals in a specially built enchanted cave.[38] Here, the enchanted cave serves a similar function to the usage of the narrative framework of a *jasūsī* novel in "Bhaviṣyadhārā" by reframing the fantastic element of the poem in the language of a familiar work. But an even more crucial element in the creation of an imaginative space is hinted at by the final word quoted here: the description of the mysterious figure as Manu confirms the connection between "Aṁdhere meṁ" and Prasad's long poem *Kāmāyanī*. Manu, of course, is not simply the hero of Prasad's poem, but also a mythological figure of rejuvenation, change, survival, and survival. But here, in "Aṁdhere meṁ," the description of the character

[36]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 2:320-321.

[37]See ibid., pp. 202-252.

[38]See ibid., 2:228, for the moment in "Vipātra."

as Manu helps to announce Muktibodh's ambition to recreate *Kāmāyanī*, with its language and symbolic richness, to serve his own purposes. Deepening the association is the poem's diction, by now a completely confident and transformed language, reminiscent of Prasad in its use of Sanskrit synonyms, but able to blend seamlessly the high language of the fantastic with both the mundane and the grotesque imagery we have seen throughout his poetry. The descriptive language of the figure, resonant not only in Prasad but in the epic descriptions of the Sanskrit classics, with his *bhavya lalāṭ*, "noble forehead," and *dṛh hanu*, "firm jaw," reinforces the sudden intrusion of the mythic, the enchanted, into the world of the plaster and lime walls.

"Aṁdhere meṁ" shares with "Bhaviṣyadhārā" a self-conscious, jarring interplay between the fantastic and mundane; in the former poem, the scene rapidly and abruptly switches between the mystery plot of a scientist knocked unconscious, and the wide-ranging, prophetic proclamation of the scientist himself. "Aṁdhere meṁ," however, roots its fantastic story in a very real, very contemporary framework. The narrator shifts from a disorienting vision given to him by Manu to a scene that emphasizes the banal:

samajh na pāyā ki cal rahā svapna yā
jāgṛti śurū hai.
diyā jal rahā hai,
pītālok-prasār meṁ kāl gal rahā hai,
ās-pās phailī-huī jag-ākṛtiyāṁ
lagtī haiṁ chapī huī jaḍ citra-kṛtiyoṁ-sī
alag va dūr-dūr
nirjīv!!
yah sivil lāins hai. maiṁ apne kamre meṁ
yahāṁ paḍā huā hūṁ.
āṁkheṁ khulī huī haiṁ,
pīṭe gaye bālak-sā mār khāyā cehrā
udās ikharā,
saleṭ-paṭṭī par khīṁcī gayī tasvīr
bhūt-jaisī ākṛti—
kyā vah maiṁ hūṁ
maiṁ hūṁ?

rāt ke do haiṁ,
dūr-dūr jaṅgal meṁ siyāroṁ kā ho-ho,
pās-pās ātī huī ghahrātī gūṁjtī
kisī relgāḍī ke pahiyoṁ kī āvāz!!
kisī anapekṣit
asambhav ghaṭnā kā bhayānak sandeh,
acetan pratīkṣā,
kahīṁ koī rel-eksīḍeṇṭ na ho jāy.
cintā ke gaṇit aṅk
āsmānī-saleṭ-paṭṭī par camakte

khiḍkī se dīkhte.

I can't tell if I'm still dreaming
or if I've begun to wake up.
The lamp is burning,
time softens in the glow of yellow light,
scattered around me the figures of objects
like printed outlines
separate and distant
lifeless‼
This is Civil Lines. I'm lying here
in my room
eyes open
my face like that of a beaten child
lean and depressed
a picture drawn on a chalk board
a shape like a ghost—
is that me
is it me?

Two in the morning,
the distant howls of jackals far away,
and closer, the ringing, returning sound
of the wheels of a train‼
Terrified, I suspect
some unexpected, impossible event,
an unsensed presence,
I hope it's not the train crashing.
From the window I can see
sparkling against the chalkboard of the sky
the calculations of my worries.[39]

The details of everyday life build up: the specific time, the modern neighborhood, the sound of an approaching train. The change of scenery serves to create a silent, pregnant pause in the action after the swelling overture of the previous lines, a sense reinforced by the flat, declarative statements: "This is Civil Lines"; "It's two in the morning." The pause grounds our reading of the poem as well in the persona of the narrator; rather than continue the magical dream up to this point, the reader here is presented with a quiet, desolate waking in a specific location. Here the speaker uses the familiar elements of the dramatically disaffected middle-class narrator to link the grandiosity of the fantastic elements of the poem to a plain contemporaneity.

The fantasy of the poem appears through transforming elements of the city. Throughout the poem, the speaker ventures out onto the night-time streets only to find them erupt in a strange

[39]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 3:326-327.

spectacle of violence and chaos. In one of the most well-known passages of the poem, the speaker is confronted with a procession of figures:

proseśan?
nistabdh nagar ke madhya-rātri aṁdhere meṁ sunsān
kisī dūr baiṇḍ kī dabī huī kramāgat tān-dhun,
mand-tār ucc-nimn svar-svapna,
udās-udās dhvani-taraṅgeṁ hai gambhīr,
dīrgh lahariyāṁ!!
gailarī meṁ jātā hūṁ, dekhtā hū rāstā
vah koltār-path athvā
marī huī khiṁcī huī koī kālī jihvā
bijlī ke dyutimān diye yā
mare hue dāṁtoṁ kā camakdār namūnā!!

kintu dūr saḍak ke us chor
śīt-bhare tharrāte tāroṁ ke aṁdhiyāle tal meṁ
nīl tej-udbhās
pās-pās pās-pās
ā rahā is or!
dabī huī gambhīr svar-svapna-taraṅgeṁ,
udās tān-dhun śat-dhvani-saṅgam-saṅgīt
samīp ā rahā!!

aur, ab
gaislāiṭ pāṁtoṁ kī bindūeṁ chiṭkīṁ,
bīcoṁ-bīc unke
sāṁvale julūs-sā kyā-kuch dīkhtā!!

aur ab
gaislāiṭ nilāī meṁ raṁge hue apārthiv cehre,
baiṇḍ-dal,
unke pīche kāle-kāle balvān ghoḍoṁ kā jatthā
dīkhtā,
ghanā va ḍarāvnā avcetan hī
julūs meṁ caltā.
kyā śhobhā-yātrā
kisī mṛtyu dal kī?

ajīb!!
donoṁ or, nīlī-gais-lāiṭ-pāṁt
cal rahī, cal rahī.
nīnd mem khoye hue śahar kī gahan avcetnā meṁ
halcal (pātālī tal meṁ
camakdār sāṁpoṁ kī uḍtī huī lagātār

lakīroṁ kī vārdāt!!
sab soye hue haiṁ.
lekin, maiṁ jāg rahā, dekh rahā
romāñckārī vah jāduī karāmāt!!)

Procession?
Silently, in the still midnight dark of the city
the muffled beat of a band, off somewhere
sounds from a dream rising and falling on soft strings
rolling echoes, waves of sadness
rolling waves!!
I walk out onto the balcony and watch the street,
a path of coal
some black dead tongue stretched outlines
shining electric lights
glittering like the teeth of the dead!!

at the base of the stars shivering with cold
a dark shining
coming, coming closer
closer!!
those muffled dream sounds
the music of a thousand echoes crashing together
coming closer!!

and now
the points of the gas lights burst into view
and between them appears
something, something like a dark procession!!

and now
endless faces light up in the blue gas light
a marching band
behind them march massive black horses
even in dark and terrifying unconsciousness
is this the parade
of a death squad?

Bizarre!!
the lines of the blue gas light
marching on either side.
In the thick oblivion of the city lost in sleep
(in the underworld
rise up these writhing endless snakes
the tangled lines of calamity!!

All are sleeping.
But I am awake, yes, watching
the bloodcurdling magical feat!!)[40]

My translation of *ramāñckārī vah jāduī karāmāt* into the florid language of "bloodcurdling magical feat" is intentional: besides an attempt at a slant line with "calamity" to match the Hindi *vārdāt*, the phrase brings up vaudevillian associations that are entirely appropriate here. A marching band, on the surface, is not at all a nefarious presence in a modern Indian city: the bands are commonly hired to accompany the traditional processions of the bridegroom's party, known as a *barāt*, and are often accompanied by an array of portable lights. These lines take the innocuous scene and twist it into a nightmare by emphasizing the uncanniness, in isolation, of the elements of the modern city. By placing the procession in the space of a dream the poem defamiliarizes the everyday of the modern city. The electric lights and blacktopped road, while probably in existence for at least thirty years, would still be unevenly distributed in Central India.[41] Each source of light—the street lamps, the stars, and the gas lamps—are frozen in the darkness. But the poem, in a move familiar from "Bhaviṣyadhārā," uses the language of a fantastic story to further evoke the "dream-sounds" of the band. The frequent exclamation points of the lines and the language of the fantastic story serve to heighten the symbolic language of the poem, and remove and disorder the elements of the speaker's everyday life.

The movement through the nighttime streets mixes together the fantastic and surreal appearance of a fascist marching band with the transformation of real, everyday objects. Statues of Independence leaders are nearly ubiquitous in India today; a statue of Gandhi, in particular, is found in almost every city, and in Maharashtra statues of Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856–1920), a Marathi newspaper editor and early nationalist leader, are nearly as omnipresent. In "Aṁdhere meṁ" a statue of Tilak appears, but is immediately transformed in the space of the poem:

sapāṭ sūne meṁ ūṁcī-sī khaḍī jo
Tilak kī pāṣāṇ-mūrtī hai ni:saṅg
stabha jaḍībhūt..
dekhtā hūṁ usko parantu, jyoṁ hī maiṁ pās pahuṁctā
pāṣāṇ-pīṭhikā hiltī-sī lagtī
are, are, yah kyā!!
kaṇ-kaṇ kaṁp rahe jinmeṁ se jharte
nīle ilekṭron
sab or gir rahī haiṁ cingiyāṁ nīlī
mūrtī ke tan se jharte haiṁ aṅgār.
muskān pattharī hoṭhoṁ par kaṁpī,
aṁkhoṁ meṁ bijlī ke phūl sulagte.
itne meṁ yah kyā!!

[40]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 2:327-328.

[41]For a description of the growth of the motorable road in the Central Provinces, see Baker, *Changing Political Leadership in an Indian Province*, p. 49.

bhavya lalāṭ kī nāsikā meṁ se
bah rahā xūn na jāne kab se
lāl-lāl garmīlā rakt ṭapaktā
(xūn ke dhabboṁ se bharā aṁgarkhā)
māno ki atiśay cintā ke kāraṇ
mastak-koṣ hī phūṭ paḍe sahsā
mastak-rakt hī bah uṭhā nāsikā meṁ se.
hāy, hāy, pita: pita: o,
cintā meṁ itne na uljho
ham abhī zindā haiṁ zindā,
cintā kyā hai!!
maiṁ us pāṣāṇ-mūrti ke ṭhaṇḍe
pairoṁ ko chātī se barbas cipkā
ruaṁsa-sā hotā
deh meṁ tan gaye karuṇā ke kaṁṭe
chātī par, sir par, baṁhoṁ par mere
girtī haiṁ nīlī
bijlī kī cingiyāṁ
rakt ṭapaktā hai hṛday meṁ mere
ātmā meṁ bahtā-sā lagtā
xūn kā tālāb.

standing high on the level ground
this lonely, lonely statue of Tilak
still, insensate…
but at the moment I approach
the base of the statue begins to tremble and move
what, what is this!!
Every grain trembles and showers
blue electrons
the blue sparks falling in every direction
burning sparks flying out from the body of the statue.
A smile trembles on lips of stone,
electricity blooms into smoldering life in the eyes.
And then, what is this!!
from the nostrils of that noble face
how long has blood been flowing
warm, red blood, drip by drip
(the overcoat slowly covered with bloodstains)
as if from worry, from stress
the skull has suddenly burst open
and the blood of the brain is pouring out of the nostrils.

Pater, *pater*, oh *pater*,
try not to worry so much
we're still alive, aren't we,
why worry!!
helplessly, I grab hold
and pull my chest to those cold legs
of a stone statue
almost crying
my whole body trembles with compassion
on my chest, on my head, on my arms
fall blue
electric sparks
the blood drips into my heart
it is as if it floods into my soul
a pool of blood.[42]

The image of a statue of Tilak coming to life in a shower of blue sparks is, at first, reminiscent of a host of images, most obvious of which is the creation of Frankenstein's monster, but it also brings to mind the statue of Peter the Great which chases the hero of Pushkin's 1837 poem "The Bronze Horseman," in which the statue comes to life after a flood of St. Petersburg.[43] Here, however, Tilak appears to suffer a kind of aneurysm at the moment in which he gains sentience and movement. As in Pushkin's poem, the image revolves around the uneasy, ambiguous relationship the speaker has with the historical leaders that preceded him. Tilak, who seems at first like a figure of guidance, is unable to survive the shock of post-Independence India. The speaker addresses the statue with the Sanskrit *pita:*, "father," and sobbingly grasps onto it, crying for the dream of the country that has transformed into an imperfect reality.

The appearance of Tilak and other figures from recent history serve as ways for "Aṁdhere meṁ" to initiate a reckoning with the history of the Independence movement amid the reality of a newly independent India. After the encounter with Tilak, the speaker is confronted with Gandhi, who turns over to the speaker a wailing child, which in turn transforms first into a bundle of flowers and then into a rifle. The nation, bequeathed to the present by these unapproachable figures, has a range of potentialities, but they can only be confronted through imaginative, metaphorical transformation. The speaker wavers in and out of engagement with these visions; if at one moment he is running through the streets of the city, in another moment the reader is reminded that this is a vision, either through a parenthetical aside, or through the complete disruption of the dream.

[42]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 2:338-339.

[43]See Aleksandr Sergeevich Pushkin, *Mednyĭ vsadnik / The bronze horseman / A.S. Pushkin; edited with introduction, notes, bibliography & vocabulary by Michael Basker.*, trans. Michael. Basker, Russian texts series (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2000); see also Alexander M. Schenker, *The Bronze Horseman: Falconet's Monument to Peter the Great* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003) for a cultural history of the statue itself.

That the imagination of the speaker, and the transformative effect of that imagination, is the subject of the poem, is indicated not only by the language of the poem and the frequent references to dreams in the midst of its plot, but also by the frequent discussion of magical caves and their connection to the mind of the speaker. The guru is a prisoner within one, but at key moments in the poem the speaker also descends into a cave:

bhūmi kī satahoṁ ke bahut-bahut nīce
aṁdhiyārī, ekānt
prākṛt guhā ek.
Vistṛt khoh ke sāṁvle tal meṁ
timir ko bhedkar camakteiṁ haiṁ patthar
tejaskriy reḍiyo-aikṭiv ratna bhī bikhre,
jhartā hai jin par prabal prapāt ek.
Prākṛt jal vah āvegabharā hai,
dyutimat maṇiyoṁ kī agniyoṁ par se
phisal-phisalkar bahtī haiṁ lahreṁ,
lahroṁ ke tal meṁ se phūṭtī haiṁ kiraneṁ
ratnoṁ kī raṅgīn rūpoṁ kī ābhā
phūṭ nikaltiī
khoh kī beḍaul bhīteṁ haiṁ jhilmil!

pātā hūṁ nij ko khoh ke bhītar,
vilubdh netroṁ se dekhtā hūṁ dyutiyāṁ,
maṇi tejaskriy hāthoṁ meṁ lekar
vibhor āṁkhoṁ se dekhtā hūṁ unko—
pātā hūṁ akasmāt
dīpti meṁ valayit ratna ve nahīṁ haiṁ
anubhav, vednā, vivek-niṣkarṣ,
mere hī apne yahāṁ paḍe hue haiṁ
vicāroṁ kī raktim agni ke maṇi ve
prāṇ-jal-prapāt meṁ ghulte haiṁ pratipal
akele meṁ kiraṇoṁ kī gīlī hai halcal
gīlī hai jhilmil!!

hāy, hāy! Maiṁne unheṁ guhā-vās de diyā
lok-hit kṣetr se kar diyā vañcit
janopayog se varjit kiyā, aur
niṣiddh kar diyā
khoh meṁ ḍāl diyā!!
ve xatarnāk the,
(bacce bhīkh māṁgte) xair...
yah na samay hai,
jūjhnā hī tay hai.

Deep below the surface of the earth
a dark solitude
a natural cave.
At the dark base of the massive chamber
rocks sparkle and break through the darkness
and scattered about are phosphorescent radio active gems,
covered in a powerful waterfall.
It is a natural water full of energy,
the waves flow splashing over the glowing gems,
the rays of light burst at the base of the waves
the colorful forms of the gems
burst out into light
and glimmer against the rough walls of the cave‼

I find myself within the cave,
my eyes captured by the lights,
I take the phosphorescent stones in my hands
and look at them with inspired eyes—
suddenly I find
these are not stones filled with waving light
they are my own experience, sensation, discernment,
fallen down here
these are stones formed in the bloody fire of thought
dissolving each moment in a waterfall of life
a dissolution of light-rays in isolation
a dissolved confusion‼

Why, why! I placed them in the cave
hid them away from the realm of the social
forbid them from the use of the people, and
banned them
threw them into the cave‼
they are dangerous
(the children are begging) and well…
now's not the time,
I'll simply have to bear it.[44]

Here, the cave is explicitly the cave of the self, and everything found in that cave is related to the thoughts of the self. At first glance, this would seem to be an extension of the nightmare of the poem into the strange, half-visible things that make up the dark recesses of the mind, a kind of psychological gothic. But the cave here is not at all the realm of the subconscious, or of isolation from the world. Instead, the model of the cave is that of the active mind; the stones, "formed from

[44]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 2:335-336.

the bloody fire of thought," are composed of experience, sensation, and discernment. The mind of the speaker is transmuted into actual radioactive power, the magic of glowing stones transmuted into (weird) science. The speaker, then, has been shifted from a dream-like reality into a cave of his own psyche.

The placement of this moment is crucial. The speaker finds himself in the chamber of his mind roughly in the mid-point of the poem. He has just fled from the demonic possession described above and, after listening to the song of a wandering madman below a banyan tree, has fled again, blindly, through the city. After this moment in the cave, he will again wander through the city, in a series of adventures that will culminate in a violent cataclysm. Here, then, at the center of the poem, the action pauses in order to emphasize not only the dream-like quality of the narrative, but the artifice of the poem itself. "Aṁdhere meṁ" has a way of reminding its readers of its own construction, with the frequent asides to the dream, the use of metaphors drawn from typography itself, and the emphasis on repeated, fairy-tale like phrases. This sequence makes this connection explicit, before the next section of the poem promptly begins with "sīn badaltā hai" [the scene changes].

The finale of the poem, after the dissolution of the final dream, returns to the idea of the guru that began the poem. After a series of encounters in the city, the speaker finds himself in the midst of violent revolution, in a vision of almost apocalyptic disruption, punctuated by the repeated line "kahīṁ āg lag gayī, kahīṁ golī cal gayī." [A fire started here, bullets flying there][45] This vision suddenly breaks at morning, and the speaker finds himself once again in his room. The nightmare seems to be at an end. But it is at this moment, in the concluding stanza of the poem, that the speaker remembers once again the guru that had originally sent him on his journey:

vah mere pās kabhī baiṭhā hī nahīṁ thā,
vah mere pās kabhī āyā hī nahīṁ thā,
tilismī khoh meṁ dekhā thā ek bār,
āxirī bār hī.
par, vah jagat kī galiyoṁ meṁ ghūmtā hai pratipal
vah phaṭe-hāl rūp.
vidyullaharil vahī gatimayatā,
udvigna gyān-tanāv vah
sakarmak prem kī vah atiśayatā
vahī phaṭe-hāl rūp!!
param abhivyakti
avirat ghūmtī hai jag meṁ
patā nahīṁ jāne kahāṁ, jāne kahāṁ
vah hai.
isīlie maiṁ har galī meṁ
aur har saḍak par
jhāṁk-jhāṁk dekhtā hūṁ har ek cehrā,

[45]See Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 2:351-353.

pratyek gatividhi,
pratyek caritra,
va har ek ātmā kā itihās,
har ek deś va rājnītik sthiti aur pariveś
pratyek mānavīya svānubhūt ādarś
vivek-prakriyā, kriyāgat pariṇati!!
khojtā hūṁ paṭhār... pahād... samundar
jahāṁ mil sake mujhe
merī vah khoyī huī
param abhivyakti anivār
ātma-sambhavā.

He never sat with me,
he never came to me,
I saw him in that magical cave,
once and for the last time.
But at every moment he moves through the alleyways
in his ragged form.
Bursting with lightning
a tensed up knot of knowledge
exploding with a love that calls to action
that ragged form!!
The supreme expression
ceaselessly he wanders the earth
who knows where he'll be
where he'll be next.
So I look into every alley,
every lane and street,
I look at every face,
every event
every character,
the story of every soul,
every country and political situation and circumstance
every ideal born out of humanity
process of discernment, action-bound consequence!!
I search the plateaus, the mountains, the seas,
where I will find
that which I lost
my inevitable, supreme expression
born out of the self.[46]

[46]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 2:355-356.

As I mentioned above, the guru appears rarely in the poem, primarily at the beginning of the poem and at the end. The poem begins with his appearance in the room of the speaker, but for the rest of the poem the speaker is wandering through a nightmarish world of the city, interspersed with moments in the cave of the imagination. Now, the speaker resolves to seek out the guru, but in such a way as to indicate that ultimately the guru is not a person per se, nor even the direct relationship with the people that is implied by the lines "I peer at every face/ on every street." Rather, the guru here is the imaginative and conceptual faculty of the speaker himself. In this way, my reading departs from interpretations in which "Aṁdhere meṁ" depicts a search for political identity with a larger metasubjectivity.[47] The final lines, which complete a poem that has featured multiple instances of the speaker enacting the revolutionary capability of the imagination, depict the guru not as someone hidden away, but as an expression created out of interaction between the mind of the speaker and his engagement with the world.

Conclusion

This chapter began with a consideration of the importance that Hindi critics gave the long poem within literary history. Although the ways in which critics interpreted the long poem's importance varied, I showed that they did agree on certain points: the long poem was a revolutionary form because it was able to join the concerns and experiences of the individual, and by extension of the new, politically uncommitted middle class, with the history of the country. They also agreed that the potential of this form was its ability to draw together a wide range of materials, with the result that, at times, it appeared ungainly and awkward. Ultimately, the importance of the long poem, for these critics, is allegorical. And indeed, every evidence of Muktibodh's own thoughts on the subject points to the importance of allegory. As I will discuss in the following chapter, Muktibodh privileged the long poem because it could reorganize reality, and present it in terms of an allegory, rather than bind it to the rules of realism. In his discussion of problems of narrative, he often contrasted the long poem with the short story, to the detriment of the later. Although I will argue that Muktibodh was able to use the short story to analyze problems of narrative in a way that makes great use of the genre, the fact remains that, for him, the long poem was a privileged form precisely in its capability to do away with the rules of realism, and bring into narrative form the potentials of the lyric image.

Both "Bhaviṣyadhārā" and "Aṁdhere meṁ" present long, dreamlike journeys through magical landscapes. Both poems present a series of images that form a concentration of the mythic and the real. Both poems, stylistically, have much in common, and are basically written with the same form and poetic diction. The difference between the two is that whereas "Bhaviṣyadhārā" presents itself in the form of a story of a magical, prophetic scientist, and switches eventually into the voice of that scientist himself, Aṁdhere meṁ keeps its focus resolutely on the narrator of the story, and sets his journey firmly within lower-middle-class life in an Indian city. At crucial points in the poem, "Aṁdhere meṁ" emphasizes the connection between the imagination of

[47]See, for instance, Namwar Singh's argument that Muktibodh's poems depict a quest for an identification between Muktibodh's own lower middle class position, and the ultimately revolutionary class, in Singh, *Kavitā ke naye pratimāna.*, pp. 245-246.

the poet and the fantastic sequences that take place. It thus succeeds in binding its fantasies to an allegory of modern post-Independence life, expressing a unique reality. For Muktibodh this was only possible in the long poem, but it was not the theme of all of his long poems. A poem such as "Bhaviṣyadhārā," for all of its similarities to "Aṁdhere meṁ," was ultimately concerned with creating a larger allegorical system for modern life, which would include scientific, conceptual thought in its vision of the world. It is the unflinching attention of "Aṁdhere meṁ" to the contemporary world that makes it such a powerful and unique document in post-Independence Hindi literature.

Chapter 6

Muktibodh's Prose Fiction and the Question of the Real

In the previous chapter, I described how the long poems of Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh (1917–1964) evolved out of lyric and long poem traditions in Hindi and Marathi, and how ultimately they were a means of creating a lyric narrative in which the central persona was able to shift and diffract according to different thematic needs, and the poem as a whole was able to create effects of disruption and transcendence across a wide range of literary and historical contexts. These long poems, through their ability to adopt a range of narrative models, from the depiction of World War II in "Zamāne kā cehrā" [The face of the age] to the spy novel in "Bhaviśyadhārā," aim at creating a system of allegory that is flexible enough to accommodate contemporary reality. These works are also able to incorporate a vast range of global imagery because they fit that imagery within plots of personal discovery, of uncovering the secrets hidden beneath reality, and in so doing can claim to allegorize the connections between Muktibodh's own life and the larger world.

In this chapter, I will focus on the short story. The short story was one of the most prominent genres of literature in Hindi in the twentieth century, and recent scholarship has begun to acknowledge the way in which the short story, far from being considered a "minor" literature in opposition to the novel, was in fact a foundational genre for the development of modern South Asian literatures. The short story, and in particular the movement known as *Naī kahānī* [New story], was particularly important to Hindi literature after Independence; *Naī kahānī* authors such as Rajendra Yadav (1929–2013), Mannu Bhandari (1931–), Mohan Rakesh (1925–1972) and Kamleshvar (1932–2007) used the short story to address the changing social circumstances of middle-class, urbanized life in post-Independence India, and theorized the short story as the most important and crucial form of expressing these changes. Although Muktibodh's short stories were contemporary with this movement, he has largely been considered as a poet, separately from *Naī kahānī*. His prose fiction, therefore, constitutes a unique body of work within the history of the short story in Hindi, in that they have not been incorporated into the broader literature

on the short story of this period.[1]

The interpretation of the role of this genre within Muktibodh's larger corpus of work is made difficult by Muktibodh's own negative assessment of it. Indeed the short story is depicted by Muktibodh himself as a kind of burden, a practical effort necessary to succeed in a literary world of journals and weekly magazines. In an essay from his Sāhityak kī Ḍāyarī, "Ek Lambī Kavitā kā Ant" [The End of a Long Poem], he describes the need to write fiction almost entirely in terms of economics: stories can be published more easily in weekly or monthly journals and magazines, editors send letters asking him to write book reviews, when his wife sees him writing and asks "What are you doing? Oh, a poem? And how much will you get for that?".[2] Muktibodh ties these concerns to the general corruption he sees in post-Independence society, in which the youth have seen their elders, who they saw as responsible for the nationalist movement, fall prey to corruption and venality. The need to write in prose, for Muktibodh, is inseparable from the way in which as a financially-vulnerable poet he is embedded in the corrupt socioeconomics of post-Independence India.

Muktibodh's objection to the short story is based on his understanding of the form as one in which a strict sense of plot and narrative dominates, at the expense of an ability to reveal deeper truths. As he describes the long poem in the above essay, "This allegory proceeds sequentially in prose; but in a poem the order breaks, just as a dream comes within a dream—disconcertingly. I have tried in my poem to complete that disorder."[3] For Muktibodh, poetry, in contrast to the linear narrative of prose, allows for a subjective interpretation of narrative; it can only provide "a glimmer of story, a mirage of the dramatic." The poem allows Muktibodh to sidestep the requirement, as he puts it, to "present reality in a concrete way."[4] The essay ends with Muktibodh repeating his resolution to focus on prose, but solely for its economic benefits, while reiterating that he prefers the non-sequential logic of the poem.

As this chapter shows, however, Muktibodh's short stories were far from a forced, awkward adaptation of his poetry. His mature short stories, written in the last decade of his life, can be read as interrogations of narrative form in general, taking the short story's emphasis on character interaction and narrative, which was portrayed by theorists of the short story as its crucial difference from the solipsism of modern poetry, and interrogating it through a deployment of

[1]For a discussion of the short story as a minor form, see Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony*. Mufti argues that the Urdu short story expresses the position of Muslims as a minority within the Indian nation. In this way, he echoes the concept of a minor literature as found in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). See Mani, "Gender and Genre: Hindi and Tamil Short Story Writing and the Framing of the Postcolonial Indian Nation, 1950-1970" for a critique of this argument in the context of theorizations of the Hindi and Tamil short story after Independence, as well as a study of the short story and its theorization in these languages. The period of *Naī kahānī* can broadly be considered to stretch from Independence in 1947 to the mid-1960s; writers during this time often contrasted their work with, on the one hand, the influence of Premchand (1880–1936) and Yashpal (1903–1976), and, on the other, with the more critical literature that came to be prominent in the late 1960s and 1970s. For an overview of *Naī kahānī*, see Gordon C. Roadarmel, "The Theme of Alienation in the Modern Hindi Short Atory" (1969).

[2]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 4:151-152.

[3]Ibid., 4:158.

[4]Ibid.

contrasting narrative forms. In the stories which I will examine, the main narrative of the short story is interrupted by another narrative form, allowing the story to comment on itself, as well as the limits of the short story to depict certain aspects of the Real. In particular, these short stories addressed an emerging social reality of massive, hierarchical bureaucracies. Through analyzing these stories, I demonstrate how Muktibodh successfully confronted this new world in a way that plays upon the narrative form of the short story itself.

The Reception of Muktibodh's Short Stories

Criticism of Muktibodh's prose has, to some extent, followed his distinction between the imaginative, allegorical capability of the poem and the strict adherence to a realist depiction of plot in the short story, while echoing his valorization of his poetry over his short stories, which have received relatively little critical attention.[5] One exception to this dearth of critical writing on the subject is found in the work of story writer and novelist Nirmal Varma. Varma's essay on Muktibodh's prose, "Muktibodh kī gadya-kathā" [Muktibodh's prose narrative], published originally in *Pūrvagraha* in 1981, evaluates Muktibodh's prose on the basis of its relation to his poetry, arguing that his prose depicts a frozen social reality, and that it is complementary to his long, allegorical poetry.[6] It was published as part of the same special issue of *Purvagraha* that included a range of discussions of Muktibodh, but all from a similar perspective of reevaluating Muktibodh's place in Hindi literature and, frequently, questioning what had come to be viewed as rigid Marxist assumptions about his literature and its significance. Within that paradigm, Varma argues that for Muktibodh, as opposed to his contemporaries, particularly Shamsher Bahadur Singh, the appeal of Marxism was not that it provided a "protection from the crisis of modernity" but that it "makes visible in his artistic creation an objective and scientific elegance in which social experience attains the truth of a work of art."[7]

In Varma's interpretation, Muktibodh's Marxism was crucial as a method of scientific interpretation, and his literature an attempt to fuse together social experience and the self, or "*ātmā*."[8] Varma relates this sense of atma with the idea of landscape:

> The *atma* has its own landscape. And a landscape is not simply a fragment of the earth, but rather it is a scene viewed by the eye, which transforms the impersonal land into an intimate landscape. When Muktibodh despairs of the individual and society and turns to his poetry—then the seeing eye, which brings with it the darkness of its experiences—itself begins to glitter into view in the landscape of his poem, a sun in

[5]For a useful overview and selection of Muktibodh's prose works, see Gajānan Mādhav Muktibodh, *Ḍabre par sūraj kā bimb: Muktibodh kī gadya racanāeṃ*, ed. Candrakānt Deotale (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 2002), One of the most important analyses of Muktibodh's work, Rameshchandra Shah's 1981 essay "Upanyās aur Muktibodh," [The novel and Muktibodh] discusses Muktibodh's work almost entirely in terms of the dialectic between the lyric and the novel, examining why Muktibodh felt the need to express his ideas in poetry, when his major models all seemed to be novelists. See *Pūrvagraha*, 46-47, pp. 14-22.

[6]Varma, "Muktibodh kī gadya-kathā."

[7]Ibid., p. 3.

[8]Ātmā can be translated as either "soul," "self," or, when part of a word, as "auto-," depending on context.

> the shadow of which hide Muktibodh's doubts. We cannot see our own eyes—we can only see the world outside, but in the world we see in the poem, is that not a self-seeing eye, that transforms the land of experience into the landscape of the *atma*? It does not change at once—in the middle is a long road—and that movement from experience to *atma* is fixed by none other than the stories of Muktibodh.[9]

Muktibodh's poetry creates a "self-seeing eye" of the self, and thereby transforms that self into a visible, articulate presence. For Kedarnath Singh and Shamsher Bahadur Singh, Muktibodh's long poems were a way of fusing together the disparate experiences of the post-Independence middle class with a larger history; for Varma, Muktibodh's poetic vision transforms a static space into the personally invested and poetic landscape. In this formulation, Muktibodh's short stories are a mid-point between the depiction of social reality, and the autonomous, recreated space of Muktibodh's poetic imagination. If Muktibodh's poetry is defined by a sense of movement and sudden transformation, a self-seeing eye beginning to "glitter into view," then the short stories are rooted in a social that is absolutely frozen into space.

Muktibodh's short stories pointedly lack the hallmark of the modern short story: the revelation of inner forces, ethics or values, through the actions of characters and their reactions to events. Instead, they present a social reality that is as paralyzed as it is all-encompassing; Varma compares them with the short stories of *Naī kahānī*, noting that they take up the same subject matter of the changes of post-Independence, urbanized middle-class life. Muktibodh's stories, however, freeze the action of narrative to focus on pain or suffering, which Varma refers to as "vedanā." *Vedanā*, which literally refers to a sensation of pain, or suffering, is here present in Muktibodh's stories almost as a tangible substance, through which the characters in his stories pass, and in which all that occurs is a conversation that takes place in the "tireless and endless wheel" of middle class life.[10] Varma argues that Muktibodh's short stories contain an endless sense of anticipation, as if "the *time bomb* of the poetry was buried somewhere in his stories."[11] The stillness of the stories, the paralyzed social world which Muktibodh's characters attempt to understand, and the hidden, expectant presence of images that would come to life in Muktibodh's poetry—all this, in Varma's view, adds up to a conception of Muktibodh's short stories that are at once entirely essential, but simultaneously incomplete. They are "a web, in which Muktibodh's poetry comes into trembling life."All that seems frozen like ice in Muktibodh's stories flows with something like an electric current in the poems, and illuminates Muktibodh's entire inward journey."

In his image of a lifeless collection of images that is thrown into life with a jolt of electricity, Varma seems to be referring also to one of the most important myths of European Romanticism: Muktibodh's short stories are the gathered organs and limbs that Frankenstein animates into shuddering life. Varma even refers to Muktibodh's desire to "freeze" the action so that "he could examine each of these objects in the laboratory of his mind." The "shuddering life" of Muktibodh's poems, as we have seen in the prior chapter, is indeed alive with the question of science, creation,

[9]Varma, "Muktibodh kī gadya-kathā," p. 7.

[10]Ibid., p. 7.

[11]Ibid., p. 9.

and transformation, and all of these elements figure into Muktibodh's transformation of Romantic and Left thought in his own criticism. But it is perhaps only in Varma's treatment of his work that Muktibodh's stories are presented as the lifeless, inert social material that will be transformed in his poetry.

Nirmal Varma defines Muktibodh's short stories as a kind of corollary to the poems: because the stories are locked into depicting the social, and because the stories experience this social as paralyzed, therefore the stories themselves are paralyzed, a paralysis that can only be resolved through the allegorical, fantastic possibilities of Muktibodh's poetry. In this approach to narrative—resistance to closure, avoidance of the "moment of electricity"—that, for Varma, defines the fantasy of the poems; the importance of the stories lies both in their resistance to expected form as well their postulated state of "waiting" for the release of the poem. In this, they offer up both a classic depiction of post-colonial life as the "waiting room" of life, and so doing, take on a paradoxical importance vis-a-vis Muktibodh's poetry.

If Muktibodh's poetry is bombastic, jolted into life, Varma seems almost to be implying that, like Frankenstein's monster, this shuddering life is also somewhat unnatural; indeed, its explosive energy seems to rely on the impossible desire on Muktibodh's part for the union of personal experience with social reality. Varma differs crucially from Muktibodh's own evaluation of his prose works; for Muktibodh, the short story's formal requirements of narrative realism stifled the imaginative and allegorical possibilities of his writing and thus are only undertaken for economic gain. Varma, however, argues that these short stories are able to represent the basic reality of the world in which he lived in ways impossible for works of *Nai kahānī*, a reality from which his poetry escapes. Varma writes:

> Truth is always available through experience, but not every experience leads to truth—aesthetic truth can never be judged on the basis of experience if we have no standard of measuring the truth of our own experience. And where is this standard? In objects, because the context of objects is the world, which cuts apart experiences, scrapes away the false external layers and extracts the firm truth within. Muktibodh has no response to the question of what is valuable in our experiences, what is worthless—is that discerning knowledge not contained within experience? When he is pressed on this question, he takes recourse to a vague and shrouded thing, the writer's "universal perspective."[12]

While I support this analysis to some extent, I am interested here not only in the ways that Muktibodh's short stories might complement and even precede the work of the poetry, but also how they might succeed as putting into contrast different formal possibilities for prose outside of the possibilities of Muktibodh's poetry. My material for these questions are three particular stories, each of which both depicts and then departs from the paradigm of a frozen, post-colonial modernity. The narrative in these stories juxtaposes two plots, each of which seems at once to comment on and intertwine with the other, but also invalidate and disprove the other. Characters

[12]Varma, "Muktibodh kī gadya-kathā," p. 5.

in these stories, at critical moments, attempt to bring in new stories in order to resolve the impasse of their world. In so doing, they both show the limits of the form of story, as Muktibodh practiced it, but also bring into play the form of story itself, in a manner completely autonomous from the poetry. These stories, I hope to show, lead us to question Nirmal Varma's neat division of Muktibodh's prose literature and his poetry. Rather than dwell solely on a frozen, paralyzed social reality, they depict the ways in which characters in a fictional world attempt to imagine something else, to deploy narrative in order to explain their social world, or create an image of an otherwise incomprehensible bureaucratic hierarchy. In so doing, they bring up issues of allegory and narrative, precisely those issues which, in Varma's analysis, are missing from his prose fiction.

If these stories, with their combination of irresolvable social antinomies with strange parables and the fantastic enchantment of invented personas, do not fit into Varma's model of a desolate, post-Independence social landscape, they also depart from the idealized model of the post-Independence short story. The novelist, short story writer, and editor Rajendra Yadav (1929–2013), in the preface to his anthology *Ek Duniyā, Samānantar*, [One World, Parallel] discusses both the contours of *Nai kahānī*, of which he was a major proponent, expressed particularly in terms of how it related to, and was different, from *Naī kavitā*. For Yadav, poetry, especially the modernist poetry of *Naī kavitā* , was concerned entirely with the poet's individual expression, or *abhivyakti*, of an individual moment, image, or symbol. Yadav historicizes this problem as following a retreat into individual experience following the paroxysms of the 1940s—what Yadav refers to as the "triple crisis" of the Second World War, national Independence in 1947, and the violence associated with the partition that accompanied that Independence.[13] In such a circumstance, in which social reality no longer corresponded to any of the possible ideals available to an earlier generation of writers in the 1930s, the writer is unable to interpret his or her actual experience, or *anubhav*, in a meaningful way. At the same time, the poet celebrates the newly found independence of youth, a movement symbolized for Yadav in the poetry of Agyeya.[14] For Yadav, therefore, the ideal short story was neither what he called "vertical," which he associated with *Naī kavitā*'s retreat into the moment and the individual, nor "horizontal": "the story is neither the personal story of the 'I', nor is it the impersonal reporting of circumstances."[15] Yadav traced a course in between these two extremes, "the intensified joining of the individual and circumstances," and therefore focus on the changes in domestic life. For Yadav, the family, and especially the changing role of women in society, was the ideal subject for *Naī kahānī*, because it was most able to express the changes of the contemporary: "The bridge between the individual and society, or the unity of social relations among individuals, is the family."[16] Yadav therefore argued for a realism in the short story that, through the evocation of experience through plot, focused on the changing domestic lives of the middle-class, rather than either individual expression or a more explicit connection to social concerns.

Muktibodh's prose fiction, therefore, was asked to navigate a complicated terrain in which the

[13]Rājendra Yādav, *Ek duniyā: samānāntar* (Delhi: Akshar Prakashan, 1966), p. 30.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Ibid., p. 29.

[16]Ibid.

relation between the individual and the narration of his circumstances was fraught with tension over how best to represent reality. For Yadav, the short story could best depict the real through its emphasis on plot, and its insistence on the presence of an individual protagonist within a larger social world. For Varma, Muktibodh's prose fiction seemed, in its lack of plot or narrative development, to come closer to the reality of middle class life, at least in terms of its paralysis and changelessness. But, as I will attempt to show, Muktibodh's fiction in these stories was in fact concerned with the issues of plot and narrative in the short story, but it was concerned in ways that, rather than relying directly on a realist depiction of social life, depicted instead the stakes and intentions of characters within that social world to express their reality. These stories are in this way trying to show the limits of realism in depicting social life, and put into play instead a series of narrative possibilities.

Pakśī aur Dīmak—The Fable and the World

All of the three stories I will discuss in this chapter were written in the last few years of Muktibodh's life; "Pakṣī aur Dīmak" [The bird and the weevil] was published in *Kalpanā* in 1963, "Samjhautā" [The compromise] was written in 1959 and published posthumously in *Naī kahānī* in 1967, and "Bhūt kā upcār" [The presence of a ghost] was written in 1957 and published posthumously in *Kalpanā* in 1968. Like the two other stories I will discuss, "Pakṣī aur Dimak" takes the form of a short story, but joins it with another, different form of short narrative.

"Pakṣī aur Dimak" presents a story that begins and ends with a consideration of the efflorescence of nature, and proceeds through a slice of domestic life in which the narrator and his wife, Shyamla, go on a walk in the heat of summer from their home to the small college campus where the narrator works. The story presents a fairly familiar tableau of a frustrated lower-middle-class intellectual; Shyamla, the narrator's wife, follows his career and, throughout the story, presses him to be more socially adept. At the campus, they encounter a series of authority figures, most importantly the head of the college; the narrator is intimidated by the head, and especially by his shining, expensive Chevrolet car, and the terrified reverie which overcomes the narrator at the moment of staring into the chrome is one of the major events of the story. The narrator then attempts to express his situation to his wife, who insists on his participation in the bureaucracy of the college, through a parable of a bird which starves after trading away all of its feathers for weevils. The parable is distantly related to elements introduced throughout the story, such as the birds, whose eggs are eaten by the snake outside of the narrator's window, and the birds that appear at the end of the story flying between the trees. But Shyamla does not respond in any appreciable way to the parable, and the story ends with the narrator recommitting himself to his social situation and status in life.

On the whole, the plot of "Pakṣī aur Dimak" seems to support Varma's description of Muktibodh's stories as a frozen world, dealing with some of the same themes as *Naī kahānī*—here, for instance, domestic life, the question of just how a companionate marriage, as opposed to the domestic relations of a joint family, ought to work—but presenting them as paralyzed social relations, inured to any possibility of change. The imagery of the story, too, supports this idea: the story returns to the same place of growing vegetation, the endless cycle of predation symbolized

by a python that preys on birds, the blazing, stupefying heat of the outside world which can be contrasted with the cool interior of home. The narrator loathes to leave this cool as well because outside is where impossible, humiliating social interactions are played out.

But embedded within this story is another story, the fable which gives the short story its title. This fable, in its framing within the story as explicitly motivated by a desire of the narrator to explain himself, contrasts with Varma's analysis in that, rather than focus solely on a frozen social reality, it shows a protagonist actively attempting to understand and reimagine that reality. This fable is told by the narrator to his wife Shyamla, in the context of his own feeling of powerlessness in the face of social relations: in particular the relation between himself and the head of the college, to whom he is professionally bound:

> I would remain faithful to him, because I was his man. He might be bad, he might be corrupt, but he alone was the means by which I drew my salary! Personal devotion still mattered, and it was the only reason that I could be considered dependable. Indeed, it was the reason I found myself a member of several important committees.[17]

This tension affects the narrator's relationship with Shyamla, who recognizes his frustration, but pushes him to engage with the university, to build the kind of social relationships that would ensure success. The narrator, at this point, decides to tell a story, noting that, if he transforms his own reaction into some kind of expression, its value would be transformed:

> The essential truth of my life was like a kind of hidden wealth. It contained its own hidden struggle, its own hidden drama. It was not formed through expression. But still, perhaps in expressing it, its value might be increased, it might have some remaining use.[18]

The narrator here discusses the basic material of allegory: expressing something hidden through some alternate means. It is telling, in fact, that here the "essential truth" is a hidden struggle or drama: both forms imply, on the one hand, narrative tension and release, and on the other, explicit expression. The narrator has, up to this point, been drawing the action of the story almost entirely into his own, inner space; his reverie in consideration of nature, or his feelings of suffocation in his interactions with his boss. But here he turns explicitly towards both the narrative—the telling out of some story—and the expressive. And the story that follows, explicitly designed to comment on his life, can be read as an attempt to join the inner contemplative world with the outer one.

The story that the narrator tells would easily fit within the generic constraints of the *Pancatantra* animal parables. The narrator tells the story in the manner of a fable, with repetition and with the beginning phrase "ek thā pakṣī", [there was a bird] as opposed to the syntacically standard "ek pakṣī thā."[19] And the plot of the story in some fits neatly within the neat moral

[17]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 3:148.

[18]Ibid.

[19]The effect is equivalent to that produced in English by the phrase "Once upon a time…".

reasoning of a parable: a protagonist makes a series of bad decisions that reveal his moral character, and lead eventually to some unpleasant outcome. But the story is punctured several times by parenthetical asides in which the narrator tracks his wife Shyamla's reaction to what he is saying; while these asides might mimic the oral aspect of the parable, they also serve to recenter us in the original story, with its dynamic of the marriage.

This is the story: a young bird comes across a man with a cart selling weevils out of a sack. The price: two weevils for one feather. For the birds, who usually live from what they find in the trees, ground-dwelling weevils are a delicacy, and the bird happily trades its one feather for weevils. Gradually, the bird becomes addicted to weevils: other food begins to taste bland, and he gradually, against the advice of his family, trades away most of his feathers. By then, the bird can no longer fly and must hop along the ground. When, one day, the cart disappears, the bird begins to collect weevils on his own, until he has amassed a large collection. When the cart returns, the bird attempts to trade his surplus of weevils for the feathers which he had earlier traded away. But the trader scoffs at the bird: "I trade feathers for weevils!" he says, "not weevils for feathers!" The now-flightless bird is eventually picked up by a black cat, "his drip-dripping blood making a line of spots along the ground."[20]

How is the moral of the parable connected to the social antinomies presented in the story that surrounds it? The bird, rather than take part in a kind of natural economy in the trees, relies instead on a fixed value of exchange to trade his own feathers for weevils. The problem with this is two-fold: first, for every feather the bird sells, he is less able to fly. Secondly, as he later finds out, the exchange value between feathers and weevils is fixed by the trader and non-negotiable. This basic aspect of exchange, and of trading away a part of yourself, is meant to resonate throughout the story. The narrator's life bound to the machinations of the educational bureaucracy of which he is a part, and his helplessness in the face of the pressures of society, are all meant to be symbolized by the story.

The narrator explicitly deploys the story as a way to reveal his hidden truth. As he tells the parable, Shyamla's reactions and engagement with the story are conveyed in parenthetical asides. And as he finishes the story, he exclaims:

> No, there's something left in me, much remains! I won't die like that bird. I can still climb out of all this. The disease is not incurable. This cycle of ills that come from being bound to a fashionable life [*ṭhaṭh se rahne ke cakkar se burāī ke cakkar*]. I still have an energy for life [*prāṇśakti*]![21]

The narrator is telling this story to reveal a truth about himself, but he also attempting, rhetorically, to convince others of this truth. The reaction of the characters around him, however, does not support such an attempt: his wife, Shyamla, immediately asks him where he read the story, completely failing to give the narrator the reaction that he was hoping for, before moving on. The plot then loops back to the question of predatory animals; a local farmer comes carrying a dead snake which, he reveals, is a poisonous krait. The story thus closes with the return of the

[20]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 3:150.

[21]Ibid., 3:150.

narrator to the position at the beginning of the story of a contrast between a predatory nature and an enervating social reality. In what way, then, did the parable serve to illuminate this reality?

The parable and the short story are operating in a kind of binary of the realistic and the fantastic. Rather, what the short story does is deploy the parable as a kind of strategy within the real: the parable is embedded within the perspective of the narrator, and is used within the short story as an attempt to explain his own social reality. The question of whether or not the parable fully *succeeds* in portraying that social reality is besides the point; the narrator needs this parable, with all of its generic formality, its strict rules about content, chronotope, and language, in order to express something that, within the framework of the story, is otherwise inexpressible: his feeling of helpless frustration within the society of the college. The events of the larger story are materials for this parable, as is made clear by the narrator himself when he directly ties himself to the bird, but they also exist in a relation of excess vis-a-vis the content of the parable. The parable makes clear to us, as readers, the position of the narrator, but it does nothing to convince anyone in the story.

Consider a moment from earlier in the story in which the narrator comes into contact with the Chevrolet owned by his boss. The narrator's experience of the car is a moment in which the real seems to exceed the realism of the story, or of the ability of the story to appropriately represent what is happening. But unlike the parable, this moment is not contained within a generic form, but instead presents a kind of narrative crisis, the moment at which the narrator stops the action of the story and instead becomes lost inside of his own reaction:

> Next to the steps, standing on the shining road of red earth mixed with mica, stood a beautiful "Chevrolet."
>
> It was the "Chevrolet" of that man in the homespun saffron kurta; I stood behind him, and looked at—and just so—the car's number—when it's black, smooth surface, which was shining like a mirror, began to display my face to me.
>
> The face was terrifying! All the proportions were ruined. My nose was half a yard long and just as wide. My face became long and pinched. My eyes, pockmarked. My ears practically disappeared. Fascinated and perplexed, I stared at my face, unable to look away.
>
> And then I stepped back two steps; and I found that in that black shining mirror of the motor, my cheek, chin, nose, and ear became wide, absolutely wide. The length practically disappeared. I couldn't look away, I kept on looking until in some corner of my heart some dark gutter broke open. It was the gutter of self-perception, sorrow and hate.
>
> Suddenly a cry broke out of my mouth. When will I be free of this man in the saffron kurta, when!

> And it suddenly seemed to me that I was trapped in a net, since some unknown time I had been trapped in this terrible machine with all its gears. My legs were broken, my ribs ground to powder, I couldn't scream, my voice was caught in my throat.[22]

The narrator experiences the surface of the car, a perfectly technological material that seems to have no real natural, or even pre-modern, anologue, as a hideously distorting and imprisoning force. Just as the social world in which the narrator lives seems to twist and distort his sense of self, the one physical mirror in the story distorts his features. Throughout the story, other characters in the story have been described first in terms of their physical features. Shyamla is introduced in terms of her physical beauty, is introduced in fact as nārī-mūrti [statue of womanhood], but other characters, such as the narrator's boss who owns the car, are described as grotesque:

> At that moment, in the sparkling openness of the sky in the field, suddenly appeared—handspun kurta, like a waistcoat, draped over a dark, squat frame, big, flat face, a big wart on the right cheek, and out of the wart sprouted thin, fine hairs.[23]

The "handspun kurta" of the boss is shorthand for the politician who wears the handloom clothing popularized by Gandhi during the Independence movement, and the character is immediately revealed to be a corrupt, grasping bureaucrat, busy speaking English to impress others and bribing clerks to speed government grants through the ministry of finance. So, for the narrator, the boss's Chevrolet has the ability to transform his own view of himself in the same way that the narrator is able to control the way in which the boss is presented in the story. The boss is the ultimate figure in the social world of the story, one who usurps the role of the narrator himself in his ability to control representation.

The reflection coming from chrome also connects the story to a series of critiques of modernity: the loss of the self; the subjugation of the human within a rationalized consumerist order; the brutal interruption of everyday life by the mechanical object. The narrator's feeling that he is "trapped in a machine" reminds the reader of these critiques, because the writer's own self-perception is trapped in the distortion of the car's surface. The car functions in the story as a piece of technology that creates a series of effects upon the narrator through its unnatural, mirror-like surface. The narrator experiences these effects as out of his control because the car is a machine outside of his control. But in the context of the story, the description of the narrator's experience of the chrome is also insufficient, because it describes his subjugation without explaining the way in which his imagination can interact with that subjugation.

This is the context in which we can understand the introduction of the parable: the narrator goes through a series of experiences, which forces him to interact with the world in a different way. The parable is then built out of these experiences: out of the narrator's own experiences but also out of the natural world that he observes, and his memories of corruption that occur to him during his walk. He builds the parable from these elements: the birds that he sees, and their

[22]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, p. 3:145-146.

[23]Ibid., 3:144.

vulnerability to the snake; the contrast between the natural cycle of hunting that he sees in the snake, and the corrupt economics he sees in the college; and his own imagined position within this economy. The experience of subjugation, the natural world, and the memories combine together to produce the material for the parable. But in terms of the story itself, and the purpose for which the narrator spoke the parable, it is insufficient; Shyamla ignores the substance of the parable. It is within the larger framework of the reader engaging with the story that the parable is able to have its ideal function.

The drama of the creation of the parable is the key to understanding this story and its work in Muktibodh's fiction. The narrator of the story crafts the parable out of the elements of his life, and in so doing shows an awareness of the power of the imagination. Rather than isolate the imagination from the short story, then, here the short story takes up imagination itself as its theme, and in depicting the creation of the parable tests the possibilities of a certain type of allegory. But this allegory, because it seems generic and fits within a familiar, *Pancatantra* format, can be ignored by the social world in which the narrator lives. When Shyamla asks the narrator where he heard the story, she restricts the parable, and its direct connection to the social world in which it takes place. By shifting the attention of the story back to its social setting, this action also reveals the limits of the parable: it can only explain a specific way in which the narrator feels trapped.

"Pakṣī aur dīmak" appears, on the surface, to confirm Varma's depiction of Muktibodh's stories as a frozen social world. In fact, the story ends explicitly in almost the same point at which it begins, and the narration of the parable has no effect at all within the story itself. But the parable and its role in the story reveal Muktibodh's intention to interrogate form and narrative. By placing this parable within the story it shows both the possibilities and limits of allegory, as well as their special role in particular social circumstances.

Samjhautā – Work, Bureaucracy, Hierarchical Interaction

"Samjhautā", [The compromise] like "Pakṣī aur dīmak," was written sometime after 1959, and was published after Muktibodh's death. Like "Pakṣī aur Dīmak", "Samjhautā" is structured as a short story in which another tale is deployed within the narrative in order to comment on what is happening in the story at large. Similarly to "Pakṣī aur dīmak", here the story serves to illuminate aspects of modern life that would otherwise be in excess of representation: the impossible geography of the new bureaucratic spaces of late-colonial and Independent India; the equally convoluted tactics and power struggles that characterize such spaces on the social plane; the hidden histories of caste- and class-based poverty and struggle, painted over by necessity with layers of imposed, false identity. But whereas in "Pakṣī aur dīmak", the parable was presented by the narrator as a means of personalizing and accommodating reality, and the success or failure of the tale was bound up in the degree to which it successfully actualized itself in the world of the story, in "Samjhautā" the tale is used as part of the story, as part of a discussion between the narrator and a work superior, and the conversation between the two, and the stakes of that conversation, determine the ways in which the story is deployed. The story in "Samjhautā" is here given as a kind of gift to the narrator, rather than be produced by the narrator in an attempt

to communicate with someone else.

"Samjhautā" takes up the modern, bureaucratic space by depicting it not, first and foremost, in terms of the social movements within it, but in terms of its spatial infrastructure: a massive office:

> Filled with darkness, hazy, narrow, an endless *corridor* and stone walls. High up in a cornice a pigeon's nest, and from to time a soft cooing that makes the silence of six o'clock deeper still. The empty corridors, after some twists and turns, arrive at a staircase. The staircase climbs upwards, stops and turns before ending at another long *corridor*.
>
> All the doors are closed. Locks hang on the hinges. A strange, sad, lonely silence spreads across this second floor. I walk quickly. My sandals are silent. Outside, someone is busy making sackcloth.
>
> In the distance, only one door is open. A hint of light reaches the corridor from within. Not light, really, because a green sheet hangs over the doorway. When I arrive at the room, in the hazy darkness outside, I can make out the figure of a seated man. I pay him no heed and enter the doorway.[24]

By opening the story with this description of an office hallway, empty after the end of the work day, "Samjhautā" foregrounds the centrality and power of space. The dark, abandoned office, with its strange geometry, locked rooms, and guarded entrances, hints at the ways in which the bureaucratic world is composed of a series of hierarchies, but also bounded spaces, and ways of understanding often exclusive to a given member of the system. Opacity is the defining feature of this space.

Within this space, the narrator meets a man, a supervisor. The precise relationship of this man to his supervisor is unclear, but the narrator appears to be meeting him for some kind of disciplinary action. The disciplinary action, too, is left unstated, but both the narrator and the supervisor agree that the narrator is being made to be a "scapegoat" for the unnamed infraction. The supervisor is kind, sympathetic; he even, by referring to the narrator as "Comrade," hints at his own Leftist political affiliations. But the supervisor is also a contradictory figure, who has wrenched himself up the bureaucratic ladder: he wears fine clothing, such as a black wool coat, but like the boss of "Pakṣī aur Dimak" he is short, squat, and dark, and known to be a canny operator of the signifiers of caste and class in order to get ahead. By dispensing with hierarchical formality, and presenting himself to the narrator as an understanding interlocutor, the supervisor aims to step outside of the complex, hierarchical system of the bureaucracy in which the story takes place.[25]

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[24]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 3:130.

[25]For an analysis of the hierarchical form of the bureaucracy, and the way in which it can be explored through narrative, see Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton , New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015).

The story the supervisor tells is part of this effort: when the narrator is distraught by his situation at the office, the supervisor tells him a story that, he hints strongly, belonged to his own youth. A young man from a poor family is educated, but finds himself unable to either fit into the patronage system of his own caste, or to ascend the ranks and break into the upper caste world of educated jobs. One day, while contemplating suicide, the man comes across a circus and, enchanted by the cosmopolitan composition of the circus workers and the freedom of the traveling life, begs to join. He is rejected several times, but after enduring the abuse of the strong-man guards of the circus, he is accepted by the manager, whom he never sees.

To the young man's surprise, when he is accepted to the circus, he is immediately taken and locked in a small room. After several days of confused isolation, he is moved to a new room with the thick smell of a bear; this is where his training begins. After days of constant whipping, beating, and starvation, he is given a diet of raw meat, which in his hunger he learns to eat without retching. After weeks of further isolation and torture, the young man's transformation from human to animal is nearly complete. He is then led into a ring and confronted with a lion. The ferocious lion attacks at once, and the young man, despite his transformation, is immediately pinned down. But at the moment at which he expects his throat to be bitten into, he hears a voice in his ear: the lion, like the young man, is also a man in an animal skin. He tells the young man that there's no need to die, and the two of them can help each other: "Come, let's be friends," the lion says. "If we have to live the life of animals, let's live properly at least, and make an agreement with each other."[26]

The supervisor tells the young man this story, he explains, to underline the importance of compromise. When the young man, probing the comradeship of this supervisor, asks if he is now to sign the paper, the supervisor tells him: "No doubt, I'm giving you the warning, and you're receiving it: I'm the lion, and you're the bear."[27] When the young man protests, arguing that he will be accepting a "warning" for something he didn't do, and that he furthermore sees no point in writing an endless series of "explanations," the supervisor underlines the logic of the system that he has tried to explain:

> If you don't know how to write explanations, then what are you doing in service? I've written three hundred and eight explanations. I've never received a single warning, though, because I know how to write them, and maybe too because I'm a lion, not a bear. I've been an animal long before you. So then I've got *seniority* on my side. Maybe someday you'll be a lion too.[28]

The manager speaks in the byzantine jargon of byzantine life; it is never explained, for instance, what is contained in an "explanation," or why the manager would have had to write one hundred and eight of them. There is no explanation for why the narrator is expecting a warning, or even what the relationship is between the narrator and the supervisor that is prompting the meeting in the first place. The world of bureaucracy has an isolating feeling, that produces

[26]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 3:139.
[27]Ibid., 3:140.
[28]Ibid., 3:140.

instances of servitude and humiliation even as it promises a measure of financial stability: when advising the narrator, the supervisor tells him: "There are a thousand hats in the world, but only if your head is on your shoulders!"[29]

The tale of the man who, as part of a circus, transforms into a bear brings strongly to mind Kafka's short story "A Report to the Academy."[30] In that story, a man reports to a scientific academy the story of how he transformed from an ape to a European man. After being captured by a ship off of the African coast, the Ape learns, slowly and painfully, to imitate human behaviors, such as speaking, and drinking. Eventually, as the ape reports, it becomes as difficult for him to imagine becoming an ape again as for a human to reverse its evolution; describing the space between himself and his past being as a hole through which wind comes through, he says "the opening in the distance, through which it comes and through which I once came myself, has grown so small that, even if my strength and my will power sufficed to get me back to it, I should have to scrape the very skin from my body to crawl through."[31] The Kafka story is the obverse of the tale within "Samjhautā": a transformation between animal and man, bringing up themes of atavism, acculturation, and subjugation. But whereas in "A Report to the Academy," the focus is on the palpable anger and frustration of the ape, which brings up again and again the question of finding "a way out" of the cage in which he is placed, and the different value of freedom implied by such an imperative, in "Samjhautā" the focus is on the shared imperative of the lion and the bear to live together, to find an arrangement to mitigate and survive their mutual obligation. Rather than end the focus on the fractured, impossible internality of the ape as living in modernity, barely suppressing a sense of outrage and desire for freedom, "Samjhautā" presents the fable of two prisoners very much still within the prison and finding a way to live within it.

The story of the man who transforms into a bear has to be considered in the context of the larger story, in terms of who is telling it and why. As the story makes absolutely clear, the tale is told by a supervisor to his subordinate, the narrator. He tells it, claiming for himself the role of the former subordinate, in order to explain to the narrator how to survive in a bureaucratic world, claiming for himself the present position of lion. The transformations, then, are multiple: from supervisor to helpless, unemployed young man, from human to bear, and from bear to lion. This latter transformation has taken place offstage, over the course of time—a time delineated also in obscure, bureaucratic terms, as "three hundred and eight explanations." This final transformation, too, is one that occurs within the system: first the supervisor, in telling the story, transforms himself into the position of the subordinate, then, he describes the transformation from outside to inside. The transformation from bear to lion is described as being the ultimate success, but only within the closed, hierarchical world of the bureaucracy.

"Samjhautā", then, uses the story of the young man and the circus on several levels: as a way of explaining one's own personal history of accommodation to a larger system, as an allegory for that system and its capacity to transform and debase its members, and finally, as a kind of gift, an attempt by the supervisor to help the narrator by convincing him to find a way to survive

[29]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 3:149.

[30]Franz Kafka, *Complete Stories*, Centennial ed., ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), pp. 250-259.

[31]Ibid., p. 250.

within this larger system. Tellingly, the manager refuses to answer the question of who the unseen "manager" is who controlled the circus within his story, saying instead, "Why don't you ask instead who that manager is who's turned me and you, and everybody else, into a bear or a lion, or an elephant or a cheetah?"[32] The manager, asked for this detail, instead interprets the story and points out the final level at which it signifies something outside of itself: the point of consideration of the larger "manager" or managerial force, which subjugates everyone involved in it into a position within a hierarchy of either predator or prey.

In "Samjhautā," as in "Pakṣī aur Dimak," a smaller story is embedded within a larger one, and in each case, a character in the story uses the sub-story as a means of explaining an aspect of the real that feels excessive and incomprehensible: in "Pakṣī aur Dimak", the narrator of the story tries to employ an animal parable to explain how he feels like he has given up an essential autonomy in order to take part in an inherently unfair and pre-determined economy; in "Samjhautā", the supervisor tells a Kafka-esque story in order to explain the hierarchy of the bureaucracy, and the relations possible between two members at different points of that hierarchy. In both cases, the sub-story both reveals a crucial truth about the social world of the story, while also coming up against the limits of the sub-story to explain or effect the world of the story. In "Pakṣī aur dīmak," the parable fails to interest the narrator's wife, perhaps not least because it flattens out the complex social world through which she is trying to guide the narrator. In "Samjhautā", the tale comes up against a ragged edge in the form of the unseen, unknowable "manager": the allegory can only extend to the bureaucratic system itself, and not to the overarching power that prompts the creation of that system in the first place. In both cases, the sub-story can explain something essential, but only at the cost of excluding larger, but still crucial factors.

If "Pakṣī aur Dimak" engages with the potential of the parable to explain modern life, and ultimately suggests its insufficiency, then "Samjhautā" hints at the possibilities of a fable based not on the characteristics of nature, but rather on the new world of the office. Again, "Samjhautā" displays an awareness not only of the social reality of the newly emerging hierarchical world of the post-Independence bureaucratic universe, but of the capacity of the story, and the different narrative capabilities inherent within it to depict that new social reality. In so doing, the story succeeds in confronting the new hierarchies of work with an aspect of social life that would elude the story if it only depicted a frozen, changeless social reality.

Character and Destiny

The final story I will discuss, "Bhūt kā Upcār" [The Ghost in Attendance], differs from the previous two in that it does not consist of a story deployed within a larger story. Instead, "Bhut ka Upcar" features a narrator in conversation with one of his own characters. But the larger themes of this chapter, of the tension between describing the real and the hope of finding some alternate means of explaining it through narrative forms, and the role of the critical imagination within narrative forms such as the short story, are also present here. However, whereas "Pakṣī aur dīmak" and "Samjhautā" work with the question of how to represent the real, and deploy stories as part of the

[32]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 3:140.

larger narrative of their interactions within their given society, "Bhut ka upcār" works with the process of writing, the crafting of a persona, the difference between poetry and prose, all issues which have concerned Muktibodh whenever he considered the distinction between his poetry and his short story.

"Bhūt ka upcār", like the other stories, was written at some point in the late 1950s or early 1960s, and like "Samjhautā", was published after Muktibodh's death in 1968. Unlike the other two stories, however, "Bhūt ka upcār" functions entirely within the discourse of the narrator; indeed, with its concern for literary craft and aesthetics, it could easily fit within the collection of essays in *Ek lekhak kī ḍāyarī* [A Writer's Diary]. The crucial difference here is that, unlike in the essays of *Ek lekhak kī ḍāyarī*, which mostly consist of a long conversation between the narrator and an interlocutor, the conversation in "Bhūt ka upcār" is between the narrator and his own character. That the main character is strikingly similar, in his status and concerns, to the narrator, and therefore to the autobiographical persona that is consistent throughout Muktibodh's work, raises questions about the ways in which Muktibodh constructs his own fictional persona. The story opens with the narrator failing to write a story, falling instead into what he feels are a series of awkward, clichéd descriptions, such as "a man in shorts, so thin he looked like a skeleton that had learned to speak English."[33] To avoid the difficulties of this story, the narrator instead writes a poem. This poem, the narrator tells us, was based solely on *udveg*, or passion, rather than on any kind of unifying emotion or plot, or character. Reflecting on this poem, the narrator has an image in his mind of a single character:

> A person who was cast into doubt, divided. One corner of this division was that he wished to grab on to his root nature, which spread within and without him, and take control of it somehow. He wished to be so external, alert and conscious, wished to be so clever and worldly, even as he failed at every moment, he was becoming inward, excessively introspective, and so, far from defeating this rooted nature, he could even manage to support his own selfishness, which was his wish. In his own internal, self-conscious and sensitive soul, a weak, tender but worthwhile, most praiseworthy defeat was hidden. He regretted this defeat, because he was possessed of the delusion that it would have been so much better had he won. In other words—his intention—the complaint of the bulbul that it was not born an owl![34]

This character, then, is meant to express solely the contradiction felt by the narrator. The narrator creates a character who is typically a dissatisfied member of the lower middle class: working in an office, constantly on the edge of poverty, given to consoling himself with an advaita philosophy that posits the unity of the self with the universe. Furthermore, this character was given not to material vices such as drinking or gambling, but rather to intellectual vices, particularly an interest in mathematics, and with a habit of drinking tea, still at the time a vaguely disreputable habit. The writer's interest in mathematics is, in the narrator's mind, his means of escaping the antinomies of his existence: the endless small debts, the needs of his family, and so

[33]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 3:122.

[34]Ibid., 3:123-124.

on. Underlining the impracticality of this interest, the narrator points that "he had wanted an MA in mathematics, not even an MSc!"[35]

He is surprised to find, however, that the character, who was clearly built out of his own reaction to his own writing process, speaking back to him and disagreeing with the way in which the narrator has imagined the character. First, the character insists that, rather than passively accept his dissatisfied position within the office, he is rapidly gaining political power by conspiring with his coworkers and, as much as possible, flattering and insinuating himself with "the director." He goes on to characterize himself as a "political man" and to describe a series of other activities in the office, such as having his horoscope read by a nearby clerk, and conspiring with the director to avoid being reprimanded for harassing a female fellow worker, all of which disgust the narrator. But for the character, as he will point out, all of this is a means for which he can take charge of his own fate; as the narrator admits at the beginning of the piece, the character was created out of a "pure reaction," without plot, in the midst of a failed story.

But the most startling departure for the narrator, in his interactions with his character, comes about through a discussion of mathematics. The character's fascination with mathematics is meant to be a sign of his weak mind, unable to overcome the conditions in which he works and lives. His retort to the character's office machinations is to remind him that "life is not the same thing as mathematics." But the character responds to this quote not by agreeing to the narrator's characterization of him, but by disproving the narrator's own ideas of mathematics. One night, as the two are lying on cots beneath the stars, the characters asks the narrator to give the sum of one plus one. When the narrator responds with the obvious two, the character goes on to tell him that if two rivers join together into one, then one plus one has equalled one. The character then goes on to describe a series of paradoxical situations that complicate basic ideas of math, such as the ability of a line to behave in a variety of ways, culminating in an exposition of Einsteinian theories of relativity and their impact upon the idea of space itself.

When the narrator objects to this line of questioning, the character argues that the narrator has no real sense of the beauty of mathematics—that he essentially gave this quality to his own character without considering the truth implications of it:

Softly and kindly, my character said to me—I'm sorry, you are my creator. I only asked you two questions, which you were unable to answer. Human nature, too, has its fixed mathematics, which you know well. But you have no *objective imagination.* And so you think that base mathematics is universal and eternal. When I asked you to give me a straightforward definition of a line then the same thing happened. If you extended a line long enough, then it will make a circle around the earth and arrive back at the point from which it started. If you join a straight line to the sun, then it will begin to rotate along with the earth. Sometimes it will be longer, and sometimes shorter, and sometimes it will hang slack. Do you understand? There's no scientific value whatsoever to any fantasies of stability!

The character accuses the narrator of lacking in "objective imagination," and considering instead that mathematics consists of a series of eternal rules. The character, however, insists upon his own capacity to creatively imagine his own world, and views his interest in mathematics as

[35]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 3:125.

a part of that. Pushed by the narrator, who continues to view his character's deviations from his imagination as irritating, the character goes on:

> The character responded sweetly—what do you know about my inner life! You're wrong to think that the inner life is filled with smoke or fog! You want to paint me as if I'm sorrowful, unbalanced, full of pain, a worm in the gutter—lower middle class, in short. No sir, my great creator, I'm not so modern as that. My self is half classical, half Romantic. Id, ego, and superego are believed to be the components of the self. All that is *technological*, but if rather than *technological*, they have been become rather scientific for me, what should I do?
>
> For God's sake, don't portray me incorrectly. I may live in narrow lanes, my children may not have clothes, I may be in rags myself. But please don't try and pity me.
>
> Now I got up from my cot and sat staring at the innocent face of my character. He looked back at me, and said—I'm sorry, but it's true that you people go along considering a single aspect of the mind to be endlessly important—especially the parts that are dissatisfied, and in pain from external influences. I am not a supporter in any way of that dissatisfaction or pain; I'm a firm opponent of it. This pain should be removed, of course. But in order to remove that pain, the mind needs a certain dignity—whether that dignity is associated with removing pain, or with seeking out new expressions of mathematical imagination. But if that dignity is removed altogether, what is left?
>
> So, exalted sir, I oppose the idea that you can call me oppressed simply because I belong to the lower middle class, and force people to pity me because my clothes are in rags. To hell with all of them![36]

This long passage is worth examining part by part. First, the character objects to the narrator's characterization of his own inner life as essentially unknowable, or as dominated by simple reactions to external life. The position of "lower middle class" in the narrator's story is equivalent to that of a "worm in the gutter," that is to say, defenseless, covered in filth, and surviving by scavenging through refuse. Instead, the character insists, he believes himself to be "half classical, half romantic," using the English terms for both. By this, he is pointing, on the one hand, to his love for rationally ordered systems such as mathematics or music, and on the other, to his belief in his own imagination, and its ability to reshape the world. The narrator, of course, having created this character solely to fit an emotional position, can imagine no such agency for his creation. But the character objects to what he calls any "technological" understanding of his own position. By technological, I take his meaning to be closer to the "mechanically determined:" that is, fixed, always-already determined by outside forces. Ultimately, the character insists on what he call "dignity:" some kind of critical agency that can hope to reshape the world—something that the

[36]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 3:129.

character insists is possible either through critical action, or "removing pain," or through "seeking out new expressions of mathematical imagination." The character refuses to respond to the imperative to join thought and action, insisting instead on the necessity of the autonomy of the imagination in both processes.

Conclusion

All three of these stories deal with questions of truth and narrative in some manner. A character, frustrated with his inability to control not only his own interactions in the world, but even his own representation within it, turns to a parable drawn out of the elements of his everyday life. Another character sits as his supervisor allegorizes the hierarchical system in which they both find themselves. And a third, imagining his own character to be an autonomous being, finds that character intervening not only in the world in which his creator has placed him, but with the creator's sense of justice and understanding of the imagination. In all three of these stories what is at stake is not something created by the plot, but the possibility of plot itself.

These stories prompt a reconsideration of Nirmal Varma's theory of Muktibodh's prose work, as discussed in the beginning of this chapter. Varma considered Muktibodh's prose works as both uniquely true to Indian modernity and radically incomplete. They were true in that they presented the real social paralysis that afflicted the middle class following Independence; they were incomplete in that, without the license of imagination in Muktibodh's poetry, they were unable to break free of that stultifying real. As he put it, they were an assemblage of parts that Muktibodh's poetry would bring to life with a bolt of electricity. Varma's analysis rested not only on Muktibodh's prose works; it relied as well both on a critique of the contemporary *Naī kahānī* short story, as well as on his understanding of Muktibodh's poetry. Varma considered Muktibodh's short prose to be a contrast to *Naī kahānī* because, although it dealt with some of the same themes as *Naī kahānī*, it did so not through a reliance on artificial ideas of plot and narrative tension, but instead through attention to the atmosphere of lower-middle-class life in a small city, and with an attention to the impossibility of agency in a time of social change. But compared to his poetry, Varma almost preferred the prose because it did not rely upon a kind of *deus ex machina* of "universal perspective," but rather presented the elements of modernity as they were.

However, these three stories indicate that Muktibodh was extremely concerned with issues of narrative and plot, and that, narratively speaking, the stories are extremely lively. In each of the stories, Muktibodh does something that would not be possible outside of the form of the short story, and does so in a way that, while it comments on some of the same themes and elements that are found in his poetry, does so in a totally different way. Furthermore, Muktibodh's stories here seem to go against his own conception of his short fiction: they are far more than poems that are forced into the mold of prose fiction. Despite his insistence discussed at the beginning of this chapter, in "Ek lambī kavitā kā ant," that his short stories were simply poems forced into prose, these stories show an attention to the form of the short story, and a playful consciousness of form and character, that rarely, if ever, appears in his poetry, which seem rooted in an understanding of the possibilities of the short story as a genre.

Varma, in his essay on Muktibodh, refers to this as the "space of experience that was attacked with such clamoring by '*Naī kahānī*'—poverty, employment, the shrinking of the joint family, suicide."[37] Varma, however, argues that Muktibodh is more attentive to lived reality in depicting the elements precisely without plot, that which for Yadav is the essential imperative of the short story, and the reason that it needs to be contrasted to the momentist *Naī kavitā*. But for Varma, this quality relies upon a short story written in anticipation of the release, the ecstatic, narrativized, universalizing-through-imagination of Muktibodh's poetry:

> What are they waiting for? We won't find the answer in the content [*kathya*], but rather in the location of that content [*kathya-sthal*]. Muktibodh was fundamentally a poet, but his prose—whether it was his stories or the *Diary*—are very different from that what we might call poetic or lyrical prose. Rather, it has such hardness and stoniness that no one could imagine that they are reading the prose of one whose fundamental sensitivity is expressed in poetry. But neither is it the prose of a story writer, in which the ethics of characters are revealed through events. Nothing is revealed in Muktibodh's stories: from the first sentence to the last, everything seems flat, defined, pre-decided—just like the life of the middle class—in which nothing changes, in which that which is, was, and always will be, a wheel turning in an endless, tireless circle. But if everything is predetermined, why is there a wait, or hope? What is the event that these stories seem to be anticipating?[38]

Varma indicates that the importance of these stories is not the substance but the location, or background, of that substance. By this, he refers to the atmosphere that he has described, and which I have shown in my discussion of these stories: the still and frozen small cities, the paralyzed social situations of the characters, the meandering conversations that dissect these situations like, as Varma puts it, "peels back layer after layer" of "the frozen situation of life."

For Varma, ultimately, the dichotomy between Muktibodh's short stories and his poetry may be that Muktibodh had no "faith" in his own imagination. Varma writes: "The greatest self-contradiction of Muktibodh is that he at once had faith in the ability to create and imagination, and was unable to believe in the artistic truth of such imaginings, seeing them instead as only personal."[39] Muktibodh would therefore only be able to give rein to that imagination in his poetry, in which he felt no obligation to engage in the social, that space where his imagination would have to wither and die. For Varma, Muktibodh was able to depict the experience of post-Independence middle-class life, but was only able to imagine a solution to that reality, through the use of his own critical imagination, in the space of poetry, the space reserved for personal expression.

But this distinction, I hope I have shown, relies upon both too easy a split between the spaces of poetry and prose, as well as upon an understanding of Muktibodh's fiction that does not admit his own ability to interrogate his own imaginative spaces. By experimenting both with a wide variety of narrative forms and possibilities, as well as enacting the way in which these narrative

[37]Varma, "Muktibodh kī gadya-kathā," p. 8.
[38]Ibid., p. 9.
[39]Ibid., p. 4.

forms are used within the space of a realist short story, these three stories succeed, firstly, in not only showing that Muktibodh's short fiction was capable of a great deal of critical imagination, but that it was able to do so by interrogating the terms under which fiction itself was understood. By inserting these narrative forms, such as the parable, into a short story, Muktibodh was able to show both the paralysis of social reality, as well as the ways in which participants in that reality attempted to imagine critical responses to it. And ultimately, Muktibodh's interest in different allegorical forms such as the fable, or even the Kafka-esque fantastic, shows in a clearer way how he would manipulate those forms in his poetry.

Muktibodh's writings on the question of prose and poetry, inflected as they are with real concerns over the economics of writing, often themselves rely upon too strict a definition between the two forms, a difference belied by his own work. But, in his concern for this difference, Muktibodh's writings reflect a larger concern in Hindi literature of the time, and especially with literature on the Left, with the role of narrative, individual experience and response, and critical imagination in Hindi literature. That this question was not at all settled throughout the 20th century is certainly indicated by Muktibodh's own work and the vigorous reception prompted by it, and in particular the question of how to categorize his long poems, as was discussed in the previous chapter. The reception of his prose can be seen in some ways as concomitant to that question when it relies upon a distinction between his prose and poetry that relegates the role of the imagination to poetry alone. But, as we have seen, an examination of Muktibodh's prose work and the response to it brings to the fore the stakes in these conversations of the role of the individual imagination, which is in fact an abiding concern in Muktibodh's own criticism, and a key question in positioning his work in a larger framework of 20th century Left aesthetic thought. It is to that body of critical work, therefore, that I turn in the next and final chapter.

Chapter 7

“Even if They are Imaginary”: Muktibodh’s Aesthetic Thought and the Obligation of the Real

Even if They are Imaginary: Muktibodh’s Aesthetic Thought and the Obligation of the Real

ek phoḍā dukhā…
lahar ek dard kī dauḍ gayī
lahar ne buddhi kī kiraṇ ko diyā janm
kiranoṁ ne xūbsūrat susaṅgat
rucir namūnedār phūldār jālā banāyā ek
raśmiyoṁ ke gunthan ke ḍhāṁce ne
ek vākya paidā kiyā
vākyoṁ ke gunthan ne siddhānt banāyā
phoḍā vah siddhānt ke andar baiṭhā huā
ek kām siddhānt kā yah thā ki
parvariś kare vah phoḍe kī
jam gayā papḍī kā ḍhakkan to
zabardastī khol de!!
dūsrā kām siddhānt kā yah thā ki
pratipādit kare vah aucitya
ghoḍe ko tamg̱e kā rūp dekar ghūmne kā
aucitya!!

A boil of pain…
a wave of suffering breaking out
the wave gave birth to the ray of wisdom
the rays created a net
beautiful, elegant
fascinating and resplendent, adorned in blossoms

this frame made of knotted light
formed a sentence
the knot of sentences made a doctrine
a blister buried within the doctrine
the doctrine was good for one thing
it was a shelter to the boil
tear open that cover
    the gathered scab!!
the doctrine was good for something else
it expounded propriety
the propriety
of wandering around with that boil
in the form of a medal!![1]

The 1957 poem "Ek phoḍā dukhā" [A boil of pain] describes a boil giving rise to the intellect and the conceptual; this conceptual language, recursively, carries within it another boil. The first verse ends with *siddhānt* [concept], an idea hardened into concept, wearing the boil as a precious medal or medallion; pain is transformed by doctrine into a symbol of value and virtue. The elegant language of the conceptual—depicted here as rays of light and doctrines—juxtaposes with the heaviness of the Hindi word for *phoḍā*, a word derived from and containing within it the verb *phoḍnā*, "to burst or erupt": conceptual language is fused with the grotesque. The poem goes on to describe the growth of more and more boils, "even if they are imaginary/ and an army of these boils/ imaginary and real/ might create meditations, ideas, opinions." The reciprocal relation of boils to conceptual thought creates a tautology in the poem in which the boil is transformed, again and again, only to reconstruct and expose the original sore:

usne kī nirmāṇ
mahattvākāṅkṣā
aur uske cāroṁ or
laghu-laghu kāṅkṣā ke rakh diye mohre
kāṅkṣā ne pahan liye
ādmī ke kapḍe
kapḍoṁ ne karā lī thī istrī
istrī ne dhobī ke mahattva ko banāyā
dhobī guru ho gayā
guru ne hṛday dhoyā
buddhi ko svacch kiyā
dhule-puṁche hṛday aur buddhi ne
    nyāyocit bāt kī
    acchī salāh dī
    acchā vicār kiyā

[1]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 2:19.

sabke pīche kintu vah
bhūt thā phoḍe kā
aur us bhūt kā
vikrāl pratibimb
paḍtā thā hṛday aur buddhi
    ke abhyantar!!
dīkh jātā sabko
sab pahcān jāte!!

It formed
grand ambitions
and in every direction
placed little clay dolls of desire
those desires dressed themselves
in the clothes of man
the clothes got themselves ironed
in that case, they should be washed
the washerman became the guru
the guru washed off the heart
made pure the intellect
the heart and the mind, clean and scrubbed
    spoke words just and proper
    gave wise council
    had good ideas.

But behind their back, all
were haunted by the boil
and that ghost
burst out
within the heart and the mind
    disgusting images!!
exposed to all
and recognized by all!!

"Disgusting images" burst out from within the mind and the intellect and, again and again, form the basis for conceptual language, labor—including the *istrī-wala* [ironer] and *dhobī* [washerman], so ubiquitous in a modern Indian city—and finally judgment, ethics, and thought. But all of this is haunted by the boil buried at the source. The boils, rooted not only in pain but in the imaginary itself, *kalpanā*, are created again and again. "Ek phoḍā dukhā" enacts in poetic language the feedback loop of suffering, conceptual language, and the play of the imagination that is at the heart of Muktibodh's aesthetics.

This chapter takes as its focus Muktibodh's criticism. This body of work was cut short by the author's premature death at the age of 47, and thus, like the rest of his work, may be considered

incomplete. Nevertheless, what exists can be seen as moving in two distinct directions. As a negative critique, Muktibodh wrote in contention against both the constraints of Progressivism in Hindi, as well as against the morally dissipated individualism of *Naī kavitā* [New poetry]. As a positive critique, however, Muktibodh attempted to synthesize both of these positions, and make room for his own poetry through expanding theories of Romanticism and Allegory, and connecting them to his own ideas of realism.

As Raymond Williams notes in *Keywords*, his still-essential etymological dictionary, realism has always contained within itself both a sense of the depiction of the world as it is, the source for the Real in *Realpolitik*, for instance, as well as a depiction of the underlying forms which structure the phenomenal world.[2] The word operates in both of these senses in criticism, often in contradictory ways: in Left criticism, most frequently associated with the work of George Lukács, realism is developed as a theory of the novel with reference to the literature of the 19th and early 20th century. This concept is further elaborated in a series of debates between Lukács and other literary figures of the 1930s Left Germanophone world, in which realism, it was argued, was a superior method for politically engaged literature than Expressionism, or other literary modes that privileged subjective experience and techniques broadly associated with Modernism. Buried beneath this debate, and articulated by many of the writers and critics who argued with Lukács on the matter, was the question: to what extent was the work of art to be seen as pre-determined, and to what extent should its development be imagined to be autonomous? This question was of particular importance in the case of realism because of its special claim to represent the totality of reality itself. If realism, and by extension the realist novel, could depict both the entirety of social life as well as the underlying, determining structure of that social life, then arguments against it would have to contend with the underlying un-essentialness, and even the social reactionary-ness, of the subjective, the non-determined, the lyric.

Central to my analysis in this chapter is the response to this question formulated by Theodor Adorno, perhaps most concisely in his 1957 radio talk turned essay "On Lyric Poetry and Society."[3] For Adorno, echoing Kant's idea of the lyric as the most crucial place for the articulation of the imagination within language, as well as the tradition of thinking through the radical potential of the lyric within Marxian thought more generally, lyric poetry is the place where, above all else, the imagination is able to articulate itself through language, the vehicle of pre-determined, conceptual thought. Although the lyric is the vehicle of the most concentrated individualism in art, its most important contribution is social, because it takes part in language, which is inherently social. Because the lyric poem is written in language, and is therefore addressed to an audience outside of itself which can read that language, it always and inevitably reaches out towards the universal. But this interaction is never a foregone conclusion, and the language of the lyric poem takes part in a greater and greater struggle to express itself in conceptual language to the degree that that the world becomes more and more disenchanted and inimical to the subjectivity of the poem itself. Adorno writes:

[2]Raymond Williams, *Keywords: a Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 257-262.

[3]Theodor W. Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, *Notes to Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 1:37-54.

> …language is itself something double. Through its configurations it assimilates itself completely into subjective impulses; one would almost think it had produced them. But at the same time language remains the medium of concepts, remains that which establishes an inescapable relation to the universal and society. Hence the highest lyric works are those in which the subject, with no remaining trace of mere matter, sounds forth in language until language itself acquires a voice.[4]

What Muktibodh termed the "fantasy," using the English word, was the intermediary through which he was able to imagine his transformed subjectivity taking part in language. His aesthetic theory comes so close to that of Adorno not because of a direct influence but due to a confluence of concerns: Muktibodh insisted on adopting all of the resources of language, and especially the language both of concept and of the mythological, in order to create his own subjective worlds that would reflect and engage with his own reality. At stake, for Muktibodh, was the redemption of his social world, along with the massive inequalities that he perceived in the wake of colonialism and the transformations that followed its end.

As we shall see, although Muktibodh, in defending the work of Jayśaṅkar Prasād, articulated his ideas in terms of realism, at stake in his critique was the possibility of an art that would be based not upon the pre-determined structure of reality as it was thought to be, but upon the organic imagination of the artist. Muktibodh would make his argument through a synthesis of a variety of artistic models available to him, including those of Marxism, but also those derived from his reading in Idealist philosophy as well as English romanticism, and Hindi criticism's reworking of Sanskrit *Rasa* aesthetics. This framework, as he would go on to further articulate it in his important essay, "Tīsrā kṣaṇ" [The third moment], thereby forms the bedrock of his own understanding of the genesis and construction of his own poetry. Muktibodh's connection with the theorists of the Frankfurt school, the Left artists of the 1930s, and Western Marxism more generally is that of analogy. Like them, Muktibodh was engaged in a series of theoretical responses both to traumas of modernity, as well as to a Left framework, one bolstered by the official adoption and promulgation by the Soviet Union of a realism that would verge on propaganda.

This chapter will consider Muktibodh's aesthetic theory primarily through the examination of two major texts. The first is Muktibodh work of criticism on Prasād's long poem *Kāmāyanī*. In this work, *Kāmāyanī: ek punarvicār* [Kāmāyanī: A reconsideration, hereafter the *Punarvicār*] , Muktibodh produced an extended criticism of Prasād's work based upon the concept of the *fantasy*, Muktibodh's term for a long allegorical work which represented in an abstract way the contemporary social world. As a part of this critique, Muktibodh also defended the *fantasy* against charges that, in deviating from realism, it was an essentially individualist work, with no relation to any Leftist objectives. The second work which I will examine, "Tīsrā kṣaṇ" [The third moment], is part of a longer work titled *Ek lekhak kī ḍāyarī* [A Writer's Diary]. As the title implies, this was a collection of aesthetic criticism organized around discussions between the author and various companions.[5] "Tīsrā kṣaṇ" presents and develops Muktibodh's idea of "three moments" of artistic creation, an idea developed in no small part from his readings of the English Romantics.

[4]Adorno and Tiedemann, *Notes to Literature*, 1:43.

[5]The collection is probably modelled, in its mixture of criticism, short story, and journalism, on Dosteoevsky's

It represents the most extended effort on Muktibodh's part to develop an aesthetic system, and remains influential in Hindi criticism to this day.

I situate my readings of these texts in the context both of Muktibodh's development as a critic, as well as the larger history of Hindi poetry from the 1940s to the 1960s. In so doing, I will develop my argument that Muktibodh's aesthetic critique of realism is deeply rooted in the history of the 1950s, and therefore serves as a contribution to Hindi criticism of realism and literary history. This implies taking into account the considerable literature dealing with the question of realism in the development of South Asian literature, as well as the history of debates between progressives and experimentalists which has informed this dissertation as a whole. In considering the history of Muktibodh's criticism, moreover, one must account for his earlier influences and intellectual development, as well as the extensive body of his criticism as a whole.

Style and Perspective

In a move that I will return to later in the chapter, Muktibodh, in seeking a contrast for the model of poetry he is analyzing in the *Punarvicār*, chooses to define realism as containing both a *yathārthvādī śailī*, or a realist style, as well as a *yathārthvādī dṛṣṭikoṇ*, a realist point of view. A realist style would be one that, in Muktibodh's formulation, adopted both a method of description and perspective as well as a framework that represents images of the real, created in an arranged order, according to the internal rules of Real itself. As opposed to this is what Muktibodh calls a "romantic, emotionalist style," [*bhāvavādī, romaiṇṭik śilp*] in which "the imagination has more freedom, and for that reason presents the particulars of experience through compounded [*samaṣṭi*] and symbolic [*pratīkātmak*] images." A realist point of view is pointedly undefined; instead, Muktibodh argues that there is no reason why a *bhāvātmak* [emotional] style cannot maintain a realist point of view. Realism in this way becomes the signifier of engagement: by separating realism into both the claim of reference to the social, as well as a style of forming narrative, it becomes possible to make an argument for the symbolic or allegorical relation of the "Romantic, emotionalist style" to the real itself.[6]

I begin by quoting these definitions because they bring up the most important elements of Muktibodh's critique: the importance of the imagination, and its creation of complex images, as

A writer's Diary. See Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *A Writer's Diary*, ed. Gary Saul Morson, trans. Kenneth Lantz (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1993). The individual articles were irregularly published in the Jabalpur-based journal *Vasudhā*, edited by writer and humorist Hariśaṅkar Parsāī (1924–1995), and eventually collected in a single volume.

[6]Muktibodh's formulation uncannily echoes Bertolt Brecht's argument in his 1938 essay "Weite und Vielfalt" [Breadth and Variety of the Realist Mode of Writing], in Bertolt Brecht, Tom. Kuhn, and Steve. Giles, *Brecht on art and politics* (London: Methuen, 2003), pp. 220-228. Brecht uses almost identical terminology to that of Muktibodh, making the same distinction between a realist style and a realist perspective. However, because Brecht's essay was not published in German until 1954 and not available in English translation until 2003, it is unclear whether Muktibodh was directly influenced by Brecht's writing on this issue. Brecht's other writings on Realism, which use similar language, were not published until 1967. See Bloch et al., *Aesthetics and Politics*, pp. 60-67. The question of the influence of Brecht on Muktibodh, and of German-language aesthetic thought generally, is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but of the utmost importance in tracing the intellectual history of the Indian Left.

opposed to a set of "internal rules" and an "arranged order." They also outline for us some of the conceptual problems with which we will be contending. For if I intend to analyze a critique of realism, I must first answer the question: what is realism? Is Muktibodh's critique based upon an analysis of the novel, especially the Gandhian and progressive novels of the 1920s and 30s associated most of all with Munshi Premchand (1880–1936). This would lead us to consider the history of narrative form in Hindi, and the way in which questions of community, identity and representation take shape in the growth of the *Naī kavitā* [new story] in the 1950s and, from the 1990s onwards, the critique of ideas of progressivism most prominently in the work of Premchand himself, by the development of a criticism of Dalit *cetnā* [Dalit consciousness].[7] Such an analysis would therefore take up the question of mimesis, the extent to which reality can be represented in the context of South Asian prose, taking into account the history of the development of the novel during the colonial era, and the problems that accompany that process of representing a social reality of uneven development.[8]

However, such an analysis, while it would be essential in order to understand the larger context of Muktibodh's ambitions insofar as they pertain to the claim of the novel to depict the totality of social existence, would pull us away from seeing the importance of the *bhāvātmak śailī*. The concept of an "emotionalist style" serves as the core of Muktibodh's ambitions to create an organic, Romantic aesthetics, an aesthetics that is engaged not only, or not necessarily, with fracturing realism's claim to narrative totality but also with insisting on the radical potential of expanding the non-determinative core of the lyric poem to engage with the social. Understanding Muktibodh's concept of realism and his critique is therefore crucial in order to grasp the ways in which he insists on the potentiality of the Left while at the same time departing from Left criticism.

That body of criticism itself must be schematized and understood in the context of Indian independence, the political state of the Hindi language, and the effects of the Cold War; that is to say, the 1950s. These three factors helped to create the conditions under which Muktibodh's critique of realism and his articulation of an organic ethics of poetic form, become necessary. All three of these factors are political, including the state of the Hindi language: Hindi was and is a political project within India, one in which the possibilities of literature are seen as tied to the political possibilities of the language's hegemony within India.[9] Simultaneously, in the

[7]See Toral Jatin Gajarawala, *Untouchable Fictions: Literary Realism and the Crisis of Caste* (The Bronx: Fordham University Press, December 12, 2012), pp. 63-92 for a complete description in English of this controversy. See also Śaraṇakumāra. Limbāḷe, *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature: History, Controversies, and Considerations*, 1st ed., trans. Alok Mukherjee (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2004). This text, originally written in Marathi as *Dalit sāhityāce saundaryaśāstra*, presents many of the most important formulations of Dalit literature.

[8]In Hindi criticism, Premchand's 1935 novel *Godān* is most frequently taken as the paradigmatic example of this problem. The novel famously was praised for its success in creating a fine-grained depiction of rural life, and the central character of *Hori* was treated as revelatory in his completeness as a flawed human being. But the sections of the novel set among the upper middle classes in Lucknow were critiqued for their flatness, and the characters in these sections were claimed to be largely unrealistic and melodramatic. See Mukherjee, *Realism and Reality*, pp. 145-151.

[9]It is often noted that poetry was seen as outside of the scope of modern Hindi until the success of Chhayavad verse. But the fact that this was an issue in the first place indicates the political stakes of Hindi poetry, and the perception of the language as signifier of irreducable modernity; poetry in Khari Boli was perceived in the 1920s as

cultural politics of post-Independence India, in which a sense of unity driven by the nationalist movement, however uneven, was fractured under the forces of newly emerging forms of political disagreement among the Left driven by the Cold War. A further cause was the beginning of the influence of the Cold War: both the Soviet Union and the United States directly sponsored various forms of cultural activity, sometimes overtly and sometimes covertly. The end result was, on the whole, a culture of polarized debate. The current common perception that this debate was solely a split between progressives and experimentalists obscures a wide range of positions.

Muktibodh always fit uneasily within the confines of the Left: his own brother pointed out that his Marxism was largely "emotional," and while he remained absolutely loyal in his political views, he also thought of himself as a poet of *Naī kavitā*, and much of his criticism collected in the volume *Naī kavitā kā ātmasaṁgharṣ* [The internal struggle of new poetry] was directed towards the aesthetic problems of *Naī kavitā.* As he himself makes clear, his criticism of realism is in no small part an effort to critique the tendency among Left criticism to reject literary experimentalism altogether in favor of literature that would support a specific social cause.[10] But at the same time, it would be a mistake to view his critique of realism as solely based on a desire to argue against proscriptivism. As we shall see when discussing the *Punarvicār*, Muktibodh's critique of realism implies a larger articulation of a poetics that insists on something larger than a mere rejection of a restrictive paradigm of literature, and instead moves towards maintaining important aspects of realism within a lyric organic form.

Muktibodh's eventual critique of realism is rooted in the history of his development as a writer. In the beginning of his career Muktibodh transitioned from an early influence of *Chāyāvād* towards the modernist poetry that is associated with the *Tār saptak* collection. At this early moment he was equally concerned with issues of genre, mimesis, and literary form, as he would be his more mature criticism. But rather than portray the conflicts between these differing models of literature as rooted solely in the question of literature, in this writing Muktibodh discusses them in terms of the literary models that influenced him. Because this chapter aims to discuss the evolution of his aesthetic thought, it is to these early critical statements that I now turn.

"The Humanist Problem Novels of Tolstoy—or Mahadevi Varma?" The Contradictions of the Lyric in *Tār Saptak*

Muktibodh emerged as a poet and a critic during the tumultuous period that directly preceded Independence. In contrast to the poet and critic Agyeya to whom he is often compared, who had

divorced from the existing traditions of poetry in other languages, especially Khari Boli, and in large part the literary historians of the late 1920s and 30s, in particular Ram Chandra Shukla (1884–1941), worked towards creating a new canon for the language, one that could make up for the fracturing of a historical continuity inherent in the new literature.

[10]See Śarmā, *Nayī kavitā aur astitvavād*, p. 54. Śarmā viewed literary experimentalism as successful insofar as it "lessened the differences between Hindi and Urdu"; the purpose of such experimentalism was to create a common, flexible language, and creativity was inevitable for such a purpose. But, as the title of the book indicates, he viewed most *Naī kavitā*, not least the poetry of Muktibodh himself, as a result of existentialism, which in this text implies a complete rejection of values without a corresponding ethical system.

already published a book of poetry and spent time in jail by 1940, Muktibodh didn't begin serious publication until 1942, and it is his inclusion in the seminal anthology *Tār saptak* [A septad of strings] edited by Agyeya at that time that marks his first emergence as a writer. *Tār saptak*'s publication in 1943 was widely seen to herald a new era in Hindi poetry, becoming a source for the term *prayogvād* used to describe experimentalism in Hindi, and featuring poetry in blank verse that powerfully marked an end of the stylistics of the prior Chāyāvād era. But the poets of *Tār saptak*, including Muktibodh, maintained strong connections to late-*Chāyāvād* that were visible in their poetic diction, choice of theme, and, in the statements that preceded each poet's selection, their aesthetic philosophy. If that were the final act of Muktibodh's career, then he would probably be remembered as a post-*Chāyāvād* poet, whose recent adoption of Marxism had relatively little effect on his concerns for the question of civilization and aesthetic standards.

At this early stage, Muktibodh experienced a contradiction in his poetry between aesthetics and a committed literature as he understood it:

> I place a great deal of emphasis on the "migration instinct" of the artist. If we want to really see today's diverse, entangled and exotic life, then we must, at least once, look at it from a distance. If we don't do that, then the boundaries of the ocean of life, the geography of its shores, will remain covered before our eyes. The center of art is the individual, but the need today is for a broadening of that center. The idea will have be disproven by reality that a time of decline produces only actors, not artists.
>
> The reason for the constant change of location in my poetry is just such inherent curiosity. But for all this curiosity in my behavior, I still cannot find a real, "objective" form. I feel that it can only be achieved through a novel. As for poetry, a poem that shows an image of life—or of a scientific 'type'—of its emergence, or a piercing idea, or a pure word-image—all of this is possible in a poem. That's what I want to try to do. They aren't completely free of the old tradition, but it is my own lineage, and I can't help but display it.
>
> In order to see the diverse sources of progress, there must be a place in poetry for various poetic forms [*kāvya-rūpoṁ*], and even aspects of the dramatic. I hope that my experiments are in this direction.[11]

The passage is full of contradictions: Life cannot be seen without abandoning scientific rationality, but Muktibodh searches for an "objective" form that can only be found in a novel. Art must be broadened beyond the central individual, but a scientific type can emerge within a poem. The passage, on the whole, seems torn between an idea of art that is focused on a single, developed image, and an art that is able to grasp a larger, novelistic world beyond the individual.

Muktibodh writes that the five years between 1938 and 1942 were "years of Bergson" in which "my individualism acted as a kind of armor." He goes to describe, however, how in 1942 he uprooted this philosophy in favor of Marxism, a "most scientific, most concrete and most brilliant

[11]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 5:266.

perspective." Perhaps the contradiction between these two perspectives, then, arises from the transition Muktibodh was undergoing in the years prior to writing this statement. Such a transition was rooted in the years he spent teaching at a small, Gandhian progressive school in a small town of Shujalpur where, through his friendship with the poet and fellow contributor to *Tār saptak* Nemichandra Jain, Muktibodh was first thoroughly introduced to Marxism. This was also a time during which, by most accounts, he read more widely than he had been able to before.[12] The combination of an exposure to the isolated, conversation-rich environment of Shujalpur with continuing financial difficulties may have made it natural to feel a contradiction between a poetry of crystallized experience and the "objective," worldly form of the novel.

Beyond the personal circumstances in which he was writing, however, this statement points to a concern that would last throughout Muktibodh's career: the contradiction between the novel and the poem. Elsewhere in the statement Muktibodh describes this comparison as one between the "world of beauty" of Hindi poetry and "tender but harsh influence of the more humanistic realm of the novel in Marathi." In this statement, Muktibodh portrays the choice between the two as a choice between beauty and social responsibility, one that he furthermore relates to his own social transition towards Marxism. But let us turn our attention to the fractured, hesitant description of the capability of the poem. The poem may be of a "piercing image," a "scientific 'type'," a "pure word image", or a "poem of emergence": all of this is contrasted with a *vāstav* or objective form. These various ideas of the image have in common the idea of the image's concentration. When shifting from a discussion of the choice between the novel and the poem to a description of poetic method, the focus moves from social engagement ("greater humanism") to what Muktibodh calls "objective form," and the ethical capacity of beauty shifts towards a poetry in which a single image is generated and presented in the poem.

Muktibodh's reference to a "concentrated image" relates to a modernist literature of the symbol and the image. The importance of the word-image, and its elaboration in a lyric poem, had been outlined in Hindi poetry as a model for modernism in the 1940s, most prominently by Shamsher Bahadur Singh who, among other works, published in 1946 a long discussion of French symbolist poetics, and on the other, to a dominating trend in Hindi poetry as articulated by the editor of *Tār saptak* himself. Agyeya emphasized in the preface to *Tār saptak* the idea of literary experimentation, but with an aim towards increasing the sensory capability of language. In his own prefatory statement to his poems, Agyeya discussed his goal as that of "the eternal responsibility to transform the individually true [*vyakti-satya*] into the comprehensively true [*vyāpak-satya*]. For Agyeya, however, *vyāpaktā*, which typically refers to meanings of broadness, grandiosity, and spatial greatness, does not seem to relate to the social content of language, despite the fact that Agyeya connects it to the question of communication, which he describes as the greatest task of a poet. This question of communication, however, is related by Agyeya to the question of filling language with meaning; the poet wants to:

> slough off the gradually tightening skin of language and fill it with new definitions, more expansive, more pregnant with meaning—and not out of egotism, but because

[12]See Śarmā, *Nayī kavitā aur astitvavād*, p. 18 for a description of this period, and the general Left critique of Gandhianism that typifies the time.

> he feels something deep within himself—because he stills feels the eternal responsibility to transform the 'individual-truth' into the 'comprehensive-truth', but he sees that the old methods of communication have become blocked from the hardened lava that flows out of the volcano of life, and are no longer capable of acting as passages for that life.[13]

Agyeya thus advocated for an experimental poetics that would fill language with new meaning to cope with the dislocations of modernity. But for all that, this move was indebted to Anglo-American modernism (and in fact Agyeya made a prominent translation of T.S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent") was deeply connected as well to the prefaces of the preceding *Chāyāvād* era of Hindi poetry, in which poets such as Pant and Nirala justified their own departures from poetic tradition as part of the need to define new meanings for the explicitly new poetic idiom of modern standard Hindi.[14] But whereas those poets connected their experimentation to the historical problem of Hindi's rise as a new literary standard in the late 19th century, and the political question of that language's role in a still-imagined independent India, Agyeya defined the need for literary experimentation in terms of the "narrowing" of language and the corresponding need to imbue it with new meanings.

Agyeya's emphasis on literary experimentation and his definition of it as imbuing language with new meaning has frequently underlain the reception of *Tār saptak* as a whole. In the preface to the volume, Agyeya described the work of the poets as that of "discoverers of the path," who agreed on nothing but the possibility of this discovery through poetry. Of the diverse contributors to the anthology, he wrote, "There is no consensus—they each have a different opinion on every important topic—on life, on society, religion and politics, poetic content and style, meter and rhyme, the poet's responsibility—they disagree on every subject."[15] The authors may disagree, but the subjects of their disagreement could serve easily for a delineation of the problematic of Hindi poetry in this period. This was the context in which Agyeya described "the subject of poetry to be experiment [*prayog*]—they have not found the truth of poetry, they think of themselves only as explorers."[16] But despite the openness of this statement, Agyeya's emphasis on language as a field of experimentation led to this collection being received as the primary document of what came to be called *prayogvād*, or Experimentalism. *Prayog*, although it can easily be translated as "experiment," can also mean "usage," as in the proper use of a word, and thus gravitates more easily towards a kind of formalism which at the same time lends itself to the criticism of *prayogvād* as disaffected, self-involved experimentation. However, it also indicates the desire for precision and objectivity towards language. *Prayogvād* is often ranged against what

[13]Agyeya, *Tār saptak*, p. 222.

[14]The most useful source for understanding the history of *Tār saptak* in English, and especially the later debate that developed over the role of Agyeya in editing the volume, is Lotz, "Rāhoṁ ke anveṣī: the editor of the saptak-anthologies and his poets." For my own analysis of Agyeya's interpretation of Eliot, see Gregory Goulding, "Two Models of Modernist Aesthetics in Hindi Criticism," in *Hindi Modernism: Rethinking Agyeya and His Times: Proceedings of the Berkeley Symposium February 11-13, 2011*, ed. Vasudha Dalmia (Berkeley, Calif.: Center for South Asia Studies, Univesity of California, Berkeley, 2012), 147–159.

[15]Agyeya, *Tār saptak*, p. x.

[16]Ibid., p. xi.

is called *pragativād*—itself a word of uncertain derivation, most likely coined as a critical slur on the earlier word *pragatiśīl*, formed by changing *pragatiśīl*, which would imply an adjectival relationship between progress and literature, into an -ism, or *vād*, with all the restriction and narrow-mindedness implied by doctrine. This distinction, in fact, was supported by a range of writers and critics in Hindi, not least the poets who contributed to *Tār saptak* itself. But here, at the approximate moment in which the concept of *prayog* came into being, it points both towards a later hardening of positions but also, if we compare it with Muktibodh's concerns, towards a desire for a reinvigoration of language that had a genealogy both in Anglo-American modernism as well as the recent tradition of modern Hindi poetry.

Muktibodh's departure from Agyeya is thus not that of the distinction between *prayogvād* and *pragativād*; rather, Muktibodh was torn over the question whether the poetic image, which he viewed as a kind of constellative form, could perform a kind of allegorical function similar to the "humanist" potential of the novel. In his statement, Muktibodh wrote of the possibilities of a typology, an individual or emergent image that was possible in poetry, and its contrast with an "objective form" that was only possible in the novel. This would develop in his later criticism into an aesthetics that would try to resolve this contradiction—an aesthetics, perhaps, of an emergent form. As the first step in tracing this process, Muktibodh confronted one of the most important ideas that developed in the following years, as the term *prayogvād* was superceded by *Naī kavitā* in the 1950s, and the concept of the *laghu mānav* [minor man], began to become the prominent model for modernist Hindi poetry.

The *Laghu Mānav* and the Social

Prayogvād is often considered to be interchangeable with the term *Naī kavitā*, and as schools of Hindi poetry they are usually differentiated by time and by the poets involved, rather than by the general thrust of the poetics.[17] But where the statements surrounding *Prayogvād* in the 1940s were defined by a sense of openness and experimentation, by *Tār Saptak's* "Discoverers of the paths," *Naī kavitā*, which took form in the mid- to late-1950s, was much stronger in its positions. Critics such as Jagdīś Gupt (1924–2001) and Rāmsvarūp Catūrvedī (1931–2003) edited journals such as *Naī kavitā*, published from 1954 to 1961, that included a range of critical articles that established the views that are associated with *Naī kavitā*.[18] In particular, the poetry of this period emphasized the importance of the perspective of the modern individual, and of the representation in poetry of the moment of experience. In this way, *Naī kavitā* could be considered as opposed to the idea that poetry should address a given social concern; but in its insistence on attention to

[17]See the entry on *Naī kavitā* in Varmā, *Hindī sāhitya koś*, pp. 311-314: historically, *Naī kavitā* is often thought to commence *after* the publication of the Agyey-edited anthology *dūsrā saptak*, although the editors and poets Jagdish Gupta and Ramswarup Caturvedi, who edited the journal *Naī kavitā* and became established as primary mouthpieces for the movement as such, published two collections, *Nae patte* [New leaves] in 1953 and *Naī kavitā* [The new poem] in 1954, that could also be seen as beginning dates. The poets and poetry of *Naī kavitā* are often differentiated from Agyey, Shamsher Bahadur Singh, and other poets associated with *prayogvād* in that they went farther had more established viewpoints.

[18]The representative journals of this period include *Naī kavitā*, *Kalpanā*, and *Kṛti*, all associated to some degree with *Naī kavitā*.

the often-cruel reality of modern life, *Naī kavitā* departed as well from the idealism of *Chāyāvād*.

The term "*laghu mānav*," or minor man, was coined by Lakṣmikānt Varmā in his 1957 book of criticism *Naī kavitā ke pratimān*. Varmā argued that *Naī kavitā* was "directed towards that man, certainly not great, who is awake to himself even in his state of being minor." *Laghu* is not necessarily small in a physical sense, or even in a sense of being powerless, but eschews the grandiose. In this state "that newness, in which all things are developing into new forms, establishes the prestige of this minor man and his environment."[19] Along with a faith in this minor man, Varmā emphasized the importance of the individual moment, professing "a faith in that smallest moment which only now, after being considered utterly without importance, is considered in some small way by human history."[20] Varmā's *Naī kavitā* was thus committed to a short lyric form and a penetrating examination of the isolated individual's experience. This was seen to be the most important aspect of life in the rapidly changing social world of post-Independence India, something emphasized by Varma when he connected the environment of the minor man to a newness "in which all things are developing into new forms."

Vijaydev Nārāyaṇ Sāhī (1924–1982), Hindi critic, poet, and early member of the *Samājvādī* [Socialist] Party, in his essay "Laghu mānav ke bahāne hindī kavitā par ek bahas" [A critique of Hindi poetry on the pretext of the minor man], argues that *Naī kavitā*, which he defines as a poetry of the experience of the minor man, has its roots in the literary history of Hindi from the Chāyāvād period to the arrival of Independence. In Sahi's account, *Naī kavitā* places experience at the center of poetry, but it does so as a result of what he defines as the splintering and disappointment of the 1930s, what he calls the transformation from an "undefeatable resolve" [*aparājey saṅkalp*] into an "uncontrollable compulsion" [*aparājey vivaśtā*]; this change is typified by Harivansh Rai Bachchan's (1907-2003) extremely popular 1935 volume of poems, *Madhuśālā*, which was devoted to the description of a tavern. *Naī kavitā* departed from this poetry by resolving upon the exploration of the experience of the individual, or the "minor man" who is bereft of the grand, comforting philosophies that animated both the *Chāyāvād* poets as well as the nationalist movement in the 1920s. Sahi contrasts the *laghu mānav* of *Naī kavitā* with the *sahaj* [organic, natural] man of the *Chāyāvād* period, for whom change was only possible insofar as it was a transition towards freedom and the ideal; for the *laghu mānav*, the search for a new source of experience took place in the wake of a fracturing of such idealism.[21]

By the late 1950s and early 1960s, Muktibodh felt himself to be both a *Naī kavitā* poet, both in that he published his poems in the major organs of *Naī kavitā*, such as *Kalpanā* and *Naī kavitā*, but also in that he felt his poetics to be broadly connected to the emphasis in *Naī kavitā* on the

[19]Lakṣmīkānt Varmā, *Nayī kavitā ke pratimān: paripreksḥya, naye dharātal, Mānavavād* (Ilāhābāda: Bhāratī Presa, 1957), p. 4.

[20]Ibid.

[21]Sāhī would be an excellent subject for an intellectual history of this period: this piece, and its essential historicization of the shift from *Chāyāvād* to *Naī kavitā*, was foundational enough that it formed the basis for Namwar Singh's more well-known criticism of the period in *Naī kavitā ke pratimān*—to the extent that when Ram Vilas Sharma wrote against Singh in his *Naī kavitā aur astitvavād*, it was largely on the basis of Singh channeling Sahi's ideas. Sahi, furthermore, was intimately involved with the foundation of the Indian Socialist Party, which was composed in part of the Left-wing caucus of the Congress Party before forming an independent party in 1948. See Satyaprakāś Miśra and Vinod Tivārī, *Vijayadev Nārāyaṇ Sāhī* (New Delhi: Sāhitya Akādemī, 2011).

importance of individual experience, as opposed to an explicit rejection of such poetics in favor of the proscriptions of progressive poetry at the time. But in several essays from this period, he critiqued the concept of *laghu mānav*, taking up its restriction of the concept of experience to the individual. For Muktibodh, this field of critique was an extension of the same concerns outlined in his *Tār saptak* statement: the seeming contradiction between the limitations in poetry of the single image, and the possibilities of expansive, "humanist" form that he saw in the novel, but still reserved hope for producing within poetry.

In a 1960 essay "Kāvya: ek sānskṛtik prakriyā" [Poetry: a cultural process], Muktibodh critiques directly the concept of *laghu mānav*. In his argument, poetry written according to this concept "abandons the great, calamitous feelings of a poisoned, declining civilization in favor of the so-called modern sense of feeling." Why does he juxtapose this poetry of experience to a "poisoned, declining civilization"? Within the poem, the contrast is with a poetry that, in privileging the moment of experience of the "minor man," restricts the proper realm of poetry to that of a seemingly modern, alienated individual, by extension educated, male, and belonging to the upper middle class. He writes:

> 'We write what we ourselves experience.' From a distance, this theory seems correct. But our selves contain a multitude of experiences. Can they not all be admitted into literature? The response is that there are only a few moments of *deep experience*, moments of *aesthetic experience*. When some kind of 'aesthetic emotion' rises up inside us, then we write poetry. Not all experiences of the self are 'aesthetic', so they are not all expressed in poetic form. Writers: just stick to your own 'aesthetic emotion'; don't mess around with anyone else's. And if you do, then you've lost it![22]

The concept of *laghu mānav*, then, far from its humble connotations—and historical connection to the concept of the "minor man" in Soviet realism—in fact privileges only a certain kind of experience. And this privileging, it is worth noting, takes place on the basis of "aesthetic experience," which is in fact the same terminology that Muktibodh uses when describing his poetics in *Tār saptak*. In the intervening fifteen years, however, his poetry had developed quite far from the influences of *Chāyāvād* that he displayed in his earliest works. Now, the concept of "aesthetic experience" is deployed ironically, in order to display the elitism inherent to *Naī kavitā*.

Muktibodh argues instead that artistic experience should take part in a wide range of experiences. This is the sense in which poetry is a "cultural process"; he writes:

> Until *Naī kavitā* recognizes the reality of a declining, half-fallen civilization, and connects itself to the basic questions of that civilization, until it is able to organize itself for the struggle to construct humanity, and reflects the suffering and oppressed faces within it and shows the shining light in their hearts, until then our work is truly incomplete. I can accept that we can't finish this job in a day. But with a discerning sensitivity, the pain of experience, and tireless labor, we can move forward in that direction.[23]

[22]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 5:198.

[23]Ibid.

Muktibodh's critique of *Naī kavitā* is linked here to a larger frame, that is, the element of a declining civilization which seems absent in Lakṣmikānt Varmā's "new environment." Instead, he joins a "discerning sensitivity" to "the pain of experience." This pain contrasts with the idealized, restrictive "aesthetic experience" that Muktibodh attributes to *Naī kavitā*. Muktibodh links this broader sense of experience to personal expression: "today's poet cannot perfect his own consciousness [*apnī cetnā kā samskār nahīṁ*], cannot truly maintain a consciousness of self [*ātmacetas*], until he is not conscious of the universal [*viśva-cetas*]."[24] Muktibodh sees this tension between self and universal in the critical debates of his day; elsewhere he further develops this connection into his own theory of the poetic process.

Muktibodh contrasts the restriction to experience of *Naī kavitā* with, overall, a sense of pain: the pain of oppression, the painful sensations of everyday life, the pain of a "declining, half-fallen civilization." At first glance, this resonates with the description of "personal struggle" in his *Tār saptak* statement, or the presence throughout his poetry of emotionalized, personal suffering. And it resonates, as well, with his Marxist rejection of the narrow-mindedness of *Naī kavitā* and insists instead on its evocation of wider ranges of experience and its ability to "organize itself for the struggle to construct humanity." And indeed, by placing an essential sympathy at the heart of his aesthetics, Muktibodh aligns himself with progressive poets of his generation, such as Nagarjun (1911–1998), who crafted a fierce poetics of identification with suffering and struggle.[25] But by evoking, in one sentence, both a sense of civilization as well as its reality, Muktibodh turns here towards the animating concern that I have traced so far through this chapter: the possibility of a *bhāvvādī*, emotionalist, Romantic poetics that is able to embrace a "realist point of view," that is, a radically expansive grasp of reality, constellated together into a single, compounded image.

However, this tension forms the basis for Muktibodh's most important criticism, and in the essay which I will now discuss, he succeeds not only in fully articulating the problems with the individualist poetics of *Naī kavitā*, but also in producing a new aesthetics: one based in part on his understanding of Romantic aesthetics, most particularly through Coleridge's idea of the imagination, but rebuilt from the ground up through an engagement with Muktibodh's own social environment, with the result of an aesthetics that could be true both to the importance of literary experimentation as well as its reciprocal and engaged relationship with the social, both through the individual's reaction to the world around her, as well as through the dynamic attempt to transform the imaginative into language.

"Tīsrā kṡaṅ": The Three Moments of Art

Considering Muktibodh's criticism up to this point, a tension emerges between the radical capability inherent in poetry, especially the lyric poem's ability to create new images that contain and transform the social, and the perceived limitations of that same lyric poetry in comparison with other, narrative forms. As Muktibodh's own poetry grew more and more complex, and as it began to engage in a more radical transmutation of social reality into long lyric poems, these

[24]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 5:200.

[25]See Rāmvilās Śarmā, *Pragatiśīl kāvyadhārā aur Kedāranāth Agravāl* (Allahabad: Parimal Prakashan, 1986).

questions become more intense. How could the lyric poem, with all of its ability to reimagine language and generate new forms, or even new typologies of imagery and relations to reality, be reconciled to the imperative to engage with the social? These concerns eventually led Muktibodh towards an interpretation of Romantic and idealist aesthetic theory: in a move analogous of classic Left adaptations of aesthetic theory, Muktibodh found in theories of organic form and the semblance-experience of art a means through his aporia between the lyric and the social.

In this move Muktibodh was unique among Left poets in Hindi. And it should be reiterated at this time that there is, in fact, no reason to believe that Muktibodh was exposed to any of the Left-aesthetic theory that would make this move now so familiar. Without exposure to the works of Lukács, let alone the theorists of the Frankfurt school, Muktibodh's interpretations of aesthetic theory were not acts of translations, but parallel movements in aesthetic thought. The context and history that prompted such a movement was correspondingly different. In his 1958 essay, "Tīsrā kṣaṇ" [The third moment], Muktibodh formulates a complex Romantic aesthetics based on the concept of an organic emergence of poetic form through the incorporation, through the imagination, of external experience.

He does so, however, through a dialogue between two friends, asserting the centrality of his own specific class circumstances, his own environment, in the creation of his theory. "Tīsrā kṣaṇ" is presented, as are the rest of the pieces collected as *Ek lekhak kī ḍāyarī* [A writer's diary], in the mode of a long reminiscence or anecdote, purportedly presented by Muktibodh himself.[26] In this sequence, the second character, Keshav, is presented as an old school friend, a friendship somewhat forced by connections between the two boys' families. Muktibodh finds Keshav severe and dull, and Keshav misses few opportunities to dampen Muktibodh's romantic enthusiasm. Nevertheless, Muktibodh has memories of wandering through the forests and barren lands near their home, and of long discussions of philosophy and politics, which in the context of their youth in the 1920s and 1930s includes the waxing of the Gandhian era and the first movements of criticism towards it, the news of five-year plans and economic advancements in the Soviet Union, and the rising popularity of yoga and other mystical exercises—of which Keshav in particular is quite fond—and the popularity of philosophies of *advaitā vedāntā.* or non-dualism, which posits the essential if unrealized unity of the individual with the divine.[27]

The discussion of aesthetics itself takes place over a series of conversations both in their youth and later in life, when Keshav, conspicuously healthier than Muktibodh though unchanged in temperament, comes to visit, and later continues the discussion in a letter. Their discussion thus takes place over a long span of time, in various settings and across various personal circumstances. And the aesthetics of the "three moments" that give the essay its title form evolves gradually, with each voice in the essay contributing a part, though Keshav and Muktibodh find themselves frequently in disagreement, with Muktibodh taking the side, usually, of the importance of emotion and sensation, and Keshav that of impartial criticism and the development of an idea. In this way, the concept of three moments which describes the creation of a work of art

[26]See especially "Kalākār kī vyaktigat īmāndārī," in Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 4:102-122.

[27]For a discussion of the influence of *advaita-vedanta* on the *Chāyāvād* poet Nirala, see Pauwels, "Diptych in Verse."

in its genesis, development and expression, grows more and more complex as the two argue over its individual points.

Why, at the moment in his career when he articulates to the greatest extent a Romantic theory of organic form, does he choose to do so by means of a long dialogue that, in many ways, would fit comfortably within his short fiction? Why is this conversation then embedded within a series of descriptions of aesthetic experiences, of varying degrees of intensity, and then in turn within a depiction of (a fictional persona of) Muktibodh's particular social circumstance, including his difficult family life and financial situation?

The first reason is that Muktibodh, by portraying an aesthetic process that takes place over the course of a conversation, is enacting the way in which that process is bound both to time and social space. Muktibodh is reformulating an organic theory of form in order both to account not only for the importance of the autonomous function of the imagination and of the autonomous space that develops around the fantasy, but also for the continuous interaction between, and enrichment by, the social world of language. Rather than depict the moment of the formation of art as rooted in a moment of singular experience, Muktibodh depicts art as taking shape over a wide range of experience, stretching from childhood to adulthood. Muktibodh argues both for a Left commitment to literature within the space of experimental poetry as well as the importance of an autonomous space of poetic experimentation and place to a Left-committed art. By setting his argument within a dialogue set in a contemporary space, Muktibodh renders visible the sinews connecting the aesthetic experiences enacted in the piece along with their indirect but crucial relations to the reality in which they are sparked to life.

The second reason is that, by contrasting his own character so thoroughly with that of Keshav, he is able to play out and develop a wide range of possible responses and criticisms of his theory. When, at several points in the essay, Muktibodh puts forth a theory of art that is based upon the organic development of a fantasy, Keshav interrupts to insist upon the interrelation between that development and the original source. In Muktibodh's original idea of the three moments, sensation first gives rise to a *fantasy*, which is then transformed through the imagination, which is finally transformed again by becoming bound in words. With this move Muktibodh stages the romantic departure from set criteria of beauty in favor of a romantic model of poetic form. Keshav, however, insists that each of these moments must be imagined as in constant interaction with one another and, ultimately, with the social: the sensation, with its roots in external reality, continually affects the shape of the fantasy, and the fantasy, in turn, is continually transformed by language even as it transforms language itself. In this way the dialogue between Keshav and Muktibodh enacts the transition from a theory of organic form based solely on the individual to one that, at each moment, is fully engaged with the imagination of the social.

The essay opens with a description of the friendship between Keshav and Muktibodh: their wandering through the forest, Keshav's interest in yoga and, along with it, the *cakras* or pressure points that contribute to a traditional mystical practice of the body, and their discussions of the politics of the time. Muktibodh repeatedly describes Keshav's severe demeanor and "yellow, aged face." In an abrupt departure from Keshav, he writes:

> I feel like inside the womb of the earth is an ancient lake. Around its shores are fright-

> ening steps, terrifying statues of the gods, mysterious old dark-chambered temples. History has suppressed and buried all of this; covered by depths upon depths of soil, layers upon layers, mountains upon mountains, the whole scene is buried under the earth, invisible. There are bungalows, and beautiful girls wander around wearing sparkling clothes. In one of those bungalows lives my friend Keshav who, maybe in his previous birth, or maybe a birth even before that, must have drunk the water of that lake in the womb of the earth, must have walked along its shores.[28]

This image of Keshav as belonging to an ancient, underground world connects to a host of images in Muktibodh's poetry of an underground, at the bottom of which dwell both the self, and the tortured relationship of the self to history. The description of Keshav here serves in part to underline his strange, mysterious personality as a counterpoint to Muktibodh. But it also serves a second function: to emphasize that the aesthetic, and the imaginative relation to it, exists in relation to sensation and language, but that both of those things themselves exist in relation to history and to a body of imagery that is transformed by the imagination but absolutely essential for understanding the real.

The two begin to discuss beauty—where it comes from, how it is experienced. They begin by noticing a *pīpal*, banyan tree, the tree associated with the enlightenment of the Buddha. The narrator suddenly feels a strong sensation of beauty:

> I told him in a weird and excited voice, "Evening, colorful evening, has gathered together inside me, settled there. It has a strange, colorful power. I'm scared of that tender, burning, magical power—as if I'm scared of myself." And I was really trembling.[29]

Keshav explains to the narrator that "now you're experiencing beauty all on your own." The narrator imagines that the tree is taking on the form of a *stūpa*, the traditional domed form of Buddhist temples that exist as ruins through Central India, and that the moonlight plays on the branches like a white dhoti, the men's clothing that hangs to dry in long white sheets. Seized by the feeling of some indescribable force, the narrator exclaims: "What I myself was has become something else. I am 'expanded' within myself, startled, non-self!"

We have been primed to read this description of the narrator's aesthetic experience by the description earlier in the piece of the wild, forested landscape close to the city, and the small, local college, with its canteen and the large pipal trees. The moment itself brings to mind some elements of the expansive, romantic Chhayavad poetry, with an overwhelming emotional experience of nature in the sunset. But it also shows a very specific world through the image of the domes of the small, provincial college, and the moonlight that looks like clothing hung out to dry. The image is both grandiose and intimate.

But Keshav responds to the narrator's experience of an indescribable force by explaining, in "Pandit-like speech" [*pāṇḍitāū bhāṣā*] that "whenever a person unites with any object, perception,

[28]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 4:75.

[29]Ibid., 4:77.

or feeling, he becomes conscious of beauty. Subject and object, a thing and its perception—when a subject erases the difference between two distinct facts and achieves identity with an object, then the result is a feeling of beauty!" This pattern, of the narrator putting forth an emotionalized example of an aesthetic experience, and Keshav responding with a definition, proceeds through the piece. The narrator is always irritated by what he views as the cold and analytical definition of art offered by Keshav, which he often dismisses as that of someone who cannot produce or appreciate art, noting here that "anyone who defines beauty is untouched by it." The dialogue activates several animating tensions of Muktibodh's thinking: that between a language of the final result of poetry and that of process; between an emotional experience of art and its relation to conceptual language; and between the creator of poetry and the demands of the reader. The theory of three moments that unfolds in this piece cannot be separated from the dialogue between these two friends and the social context in which they converse. It's not possible to say that the author Muktibodh agrees fully with either of the positions represented by these two people; both characters are exaggerated stereotypes, but they both touch on some aspect of the truth as the author sees it.

The two characters are separated and meet again in adulthood. Keshav brings up the narrator's poetry, and the narrator presents his theory of art, beginning with the first moment. The first moment begins with an experience, the core of which disassociates from its "painful origin" and thus "rises beyond the merely individual."[30] The narrator privileges the moment of experience, giving it its own autonomy as it "throws itself out from the base of the mind." But Keshav complicates this definition of the first moment by introducing the idea of a spectator [*darśakatva*], who observes the experience, simultaneously with the one who undergoes the experience [*bhoktṛtva*].[31] Both of these qualities should be present in the first moment of experience; the spectator's independence from the experience should exist in conflict with the subject's sensation of that same experience.[32] If these two aspects of experience can remain in productive opposition, without becoming "unbalanced and united," then within the individual the sensibility of the participant can join with the perspective of the spectator and "arrive at a new climax."

This new climax becomes the second moment. Like the first moment, it is presented by the narrator as created solely by the original experience, even as it is independent of it. It becomes the "fantasy" which is "the daughter of experience, and that daughter has its own independent, developing personality."[33] The artist uses his imagination to guide the experience towards what the narrator calls "new importance and meaning [*arth-mahattva*]." Repeatedly, the narrator stresses the ability of the fantasy to independently attract new combinations of thought; the compound word of *arth-mahattva*, used for "importance and meaning," strongly implies a field of intellectual engagement. It creates a distinction from *bhāvanā*, or feeling, which coexists along with it in an obscure relationship; the narrator claims that "the convictions of beauty are convictions of importance, emotionalized experiences of meaning."[34] Above all the narrator stresses the intel-

[30]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 4:85.
[31]Ibid., 4:87.
[32]Ibid., 4:88.
[33]Ibid., 4:85.
[34]Ibid., 4:87.

lectual aspect of the imagination in working with a fantastic image, evolving an almost heroic picture of the creative process.

Keshav, as he did with the first moment, shifts the narrator's conception of the second moment away from a heroic encounter between the imagination and an experience-born fantasy and towards a dialectical relationship between what he calls viewpoints [*dṛṣṭi*] and sensitivities [*saṃvednā*]. These two, out of their opposition, take on certain aspects of the other: "sensitivity, which is bound to circumstance, makes its own boundedness predominant in the liberated viewpoint, and takes for itself the viewpoint's liberation from circumstance."[35] The perspectives created by the "spectator-ness" described in the first moment become bound into a single, unified fantasy, at the same time as the sensations that result from the "undergoing-ness" are emancipated from the original experience. The fantasy produced by the coordination between what Keshav calls "a knowledge possessed of sensitivity" [*saṃvedātmak jñān*] and a "sensitivity possessed of knowledge" [*jñānātmak saṃvednā*] continue to interact to form a "universal meaning."[36] What is a knowledge possessed of sensitivity and a sensitivity possessed of knowledge? The first may be knowledge, the conceptual knowledge possessed by the spectator, which in becoming part of the fantasy takes on the personal emotions or sensitivities associated with the original experience. Sensitivity possessed of knowledge, then, is the result of sensations which are transformed away from experience into knowledge.

The development described in the second moment, and its eventual culmination in a "universal meaning" presupposes the eventual attempt to render the fantasy into some form of art. The essay, and Muktibodh's work generally, privileges the poem over other literary genres, and describes the third moment as the capturing through language of the gathered-together combination of sense and knowledge. Again, the narrator presents this chiefly as an interaction between the fantasy, now fantastically depicted as a "fundamental core" which, in the process of being "bound in word… begins to gather together various facts and experiences, each meaningful, secure and self-sustaining." The "core" here is an autonomous object, like a nuclear chain reaction or an organism; the narrator claims that "as long as the core maintains luster and strength, it will continue to attract new conceptual material."[37] The attraction of this core produces a "series of well-ordered images."[38] This last attribute brings to mind a statement Muktibodh prepared for a second edition of *Tār saptak*, in which he claimed that his poems were simply a series of images linked together in verse.[39]

Once again, however, Keshav complicates this picture by emphasizing the connection between language, the social world, and the fantasy of the poem. For Keshav the fantasy is not a reactive core but rather a world. That world enriches itself through an encounter with words possessed of a complementary vibration or attunement [*spandan*], which are themselves connected to "universal social experiences."[40] This enrichment sets in motion a process in which the poem,

[35]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 4:88.
[36]Ibid., 4:89.
[37]Ibid., 4:90.
[38]Ibid., 4:89.
[39]Ibid., 5:270.
[40]Ibid., 4:93.

as it gathers together language, transforms it: "Language changes the fantasy, and… during this process the fantasy also enriches and fertilizes language."[41] Whereas the narrator saw the third moment as that in which a reactive core attracts meaning until finally losing energy, Keshav sees a continual and mutual process, in which the highest goal of the poet is not to create a massive source of magnetism, but rather to construct language.[42] Keshav's depiction of the third moment, like his other interventions, insists on the presence of the social. From introducing the distinction between the quality of being a spectator and that of undergoing an experience, to a dialectical relationship between knowledge and sensation, to what he finally calls "the supreme dialectic" between the fantasy and language, Keshav stubbornly shifts the conversation from the solitary struggle between the artist and experience to a complicated set of negotiations between the artist and the social. The narrator again and again draws attention to the struggle of the artist and the intensity of the artist's experience. But each time Keshav shifts this proposition towards a more dynamic model.

What are we to make of this? For one thing, the piece demonstrates the difference between Muktibodh and his auctorial persona. Many of Muktibodh's essays, especially the ones written late in his life, create a very specific persona of an artist unwilling to compromise, tortured by the knowledge that he is unable to support his family, but unable to stop writing long, emotional and fantastic poems. But here the narrative voice, which we are certainly led to believe is Muktibodh himself, is satirically overblown and self-absorbed; throughout the piece this voice belittles Keshav's opinion as dull and artless, and one point refers to him as being "a lock hanging from the door that has no key," and in the early part of the piece is continuously dismayed at meeting him.[43] But Keshav ultimately deepens and expands the idea of three moments, and allows it to become something more than a simple exposition of art as expression of the artist. And in fact Keshav's idea of the three moments of art comes closes to that given in the later essay "Nayī Kavitā aur uskā Ātma-saṅgharṣ."[44] Keshav, with his interest in yoga and a scientific language for aesthetics, also seems to express Muktibodh's reference to esoteric religious systems and efforts, such as those in "Tīsrā kṣaṇ", to develop a comprehensive language of aesthetics. And Keshav himself, with his connection to some kind of cold, analytic stillness and an ancient past, seems to allow for the presence of a symbolic world that would not otherwise be allowed in to this discussion of aesthetics, but seems central for understanding the argument.

"Tīsrā kṣaṇ" represents Muktibodh's most sophisticated attempt to create a Left Romantic poetics of form in Hindi. Integral to this attempt is a penetrating analysis of the three moments, and their presentation as a model for the creation of a work of art. By presenting his aesthetics in the form of a dialogue, and embedded within a narrative of the social life with which those aesthetics are imagined to interact, Muktibodh is able to integrate the role of the imagination, and its ability to create autonomous worlds of semblance-experience, and in turn describe the ways in which the fantasy interacts with the social, both through a reciprocal relationship with sensation, as well as through the larger world of language. In later criticism, this model would

[41]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 4:92.

[42]Ibid., 4:93.

[43]Ibid., 4: 87.

[44]See ibid., 5:327-334.

become the basis for Muktibodh's most important work of practical criticism: in his critique of Jayśaṅkar Prasād's 1936 *Kāmāyanī*, he would reframe his aesthetic theory as a means both of reinterpreting what is arguably the most important long mythological poem in Hindi, as well as reframing his own aesthetics as a model for interpreting his own poetry.

"A Realist Point of View": Muktibodh's Practical Criticism

Muktibodh's most sustained criticism of a single work focuses on Jayshaṅkar Prasād's 1936 *Kāmāyanī*. The poem was composed of several mythological stories, but primarily that of Manu, the survivor of a great primordial flood; this story was then presented as an allegory for modern life, as interpreted through Prasād's monist philosophy. The poem, written in a quantitative, 31-measure meter, begins with Manu looking out over a flooded, destroyed world, before describing his relationship with two women, Śraddhā and Iḍā. Śraddhā, whose name means faith, is presented as an ideal of womanhood, whereas Iḍā represents rationalism and the idea of progress. Eventually, after a series of events with both women, the poem ends with Manu's realization of the unity of all creation at Mount Kailasha, through a vision of the dance of Shiva.[45]

Since its publication, this long, epic poem had been acclaimed as one of the most monumental Hindi poems, and the one that came closest to a Sanskrit ideal of a *kāvya* [epic poem]; in the years that followed its publication, debate over the text centered on the nature of its fulfilment of this literary ideal, and in particular on the proper assessment of its characters. *Kāvya* was a particularly loaded term in modern Hindi with a range of criteria defining it; in Sanskrit, it refers to an epic poem, the first and greatest of which is the *Rāmāyaṇa* itself. It was considered the most important and prestigious form of literature. For Hindi literature to possess a *kāvya* was a way for the new language to claim the classical status of Sanskrit, but also to claim the ability of this classical form to incorporate modern life. In critiquing *Kāmāyanī*, Muktibodh was not only working with a text that had influenced him greatly, but one that was also claimed by Hindi criticism as the most important long poem of the modern era.[46]

Kāmāyanī: ek punarvicār ["Kāmāyanī: A Reconsideration," hereafter the *Punarvicār*] was published in 1961. The work was from an earlier work of criticism on *Kāmāyanī*, written in 1950 and printed at a Nagpur publisher, but never published. The text published in 1961 was substantially changed and expanded, most significantly in the sections that form the beginning and the end of the text. While the first text focuses primarily on the critique of the characters of the epic poem, the later edition contextualizes those concerns within Muktibodh's theory of literature, developed in texts such as "Tīsrā kṣaṇ". In the *Punarvicār*, Muktibodh establishes the

[45]The text has been translated several times into English; the most recent available is Jai Shankar Prasad, *Kamayani*, trans. Pratibha Vinod Kumar (Singapore: Pratham Manjari Books Pte. Ltd., May 30, 2013). See also discussions of the work in David John Dell, "Jai Shankar Prasad's "Kamayani": A Modern Hindi Epic and Its Place in Hindu Tradition" (Ph.D., Columbia University, 1978); and Guriqbal S. Sahota, "A Literature of the Sublime in Late Colonial India: Romanticism and the Epic Form in Modern Hindi and Urdu" (Ph.D., The University of Chicago, 2006), especially pp. 289-306.

[46]The most important overview of the debates over *Kāmāyanī*, as well as of Muktibodh's work on the poem, is Lotz, "Romantic Allegory and Progressive Criticism," Lotz discusses the publication history of Muktibodh's work, as well as the ways in which it engaged with ideas of progressive criticism at the time.

connection between his own aesthetic model and that of *Kāmāyanī*: by arguing that *Kāmāyanī* is a fantasy and transformation of its authors contemporary social world, Muktibodh historicizes his own work and makes an argument to consider it in an epic framework, albeit one with important distinctions from that of *Kāmāyanī*.

In the *Punarvicār*, as in "Tīsrā kṣaṇ", Muktibodh presents Prasād's work according to his essentially Romantic theory of individual-centered artistic production. Here, rather than describe it temporally in three stages, he describes it as "triangular," with each side of the triangle representing respectively the individual, the social, and the reaction of the individual to the social world. The emphasis here is shifted from the temporal—the process of writing—to the synchronous; rather than focus on the way in which the creator undergoes a series of reactions that lead to the final creation of art, here the focus is on stable, necessary system that reflects a present, self reinforcing reality.

This shift points towards a broader, and primary, intention of this work: to explain the importance of the "fantasy" not in terms of how it produces a work of art, but rather how that production relates to the idea of realism. Here, the "fantasy" contrasts with realism through its presentation of aesthetic modes, an idea drawn from the theory of *Rasa*. Realism presents the causes of emotion, or *vibhāv*, directly, what Muktibodh refers to as the "images of the real, bound according to the rules of Reality's nature and pace."[47] In what he calls the Fantasy or the "Romantic, emotionalist [*bhāvvādī*] style," the objective recedes into the background in favor of the direct presentation of the individual reaction and emotions. This basic difference, for Muktibodh, means that the Fantasy is at once able to be complementary to realism as well as consistent with a tradition of artistic production:

> The work of art recreates through an imagination of the experiences of his life. Embedded within the Realist style, the work of art presents images of the Real, created in an arranged order, according to the internal rules of the Real itself. However, within the Romantic, emotionalist style, the imagination has more freedom, and for that reason presents the particulars of experience through compound images, through symbolic images. Within the fantasy, the imagination of the poet, while presenting the essential particularities of life, presents a kind of image poem which causes the objective life, which has made explicit the particularities which have been experienced, to become greatly implicit, subsidiary, behind the stage. In essence, in the fantasy the aspect of emotion is predominant, and the causes of the emotion becomes implicit and subsidiary, while at the same time that emotional element, exciting the imagination, creating more and more images, presents such an embodied form, which is true only to its own form. In this tangible form the causes of emotion are only indicated, only echoed. However, without that backstage foundation, that underground—deep within the earth—without the cause of emotions, that tangible form cannot articulate its relevance to life.[48]

[47]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 4:195.

[48]Ibid.

Here Muktibodh presents an essentially Romantic theory of artistic production, with two important distinctions. First, he uses the vocabulary of *Rasa*: *Rasa* theory originated in the theorization of the Sanskrit theater and eventually became the basis for the body of classical aesthetic theory which is most influential in modern South Asian Literature.[49] Perhaps it is noteworthy that, despite framing these ideas in the conceptual language of *Rasa*, Muktibodh does not use the word *Rasa* itself. In *Rasa* theory, an abstract aesthetic experience is articulated through an interaction between an emotion which is provoked, the *bhāva*, through an objective cause of emotion, the *vibhāva*, to produce a generalized aesthetic emotion, the *Rasa*. But Muktibodh is separating the theory of poetic effects from a discussion of the causes of effects, and is interested here in the distinction between *bhava* and *vibhava*. Under this distinction, the difference between realism and what Muktibodh calls "emotionalism" is that in the latter, the *bhava*, or primary feeling, is predominant and on the surface, and the objective causes of that emotion are in the background, literally *nepathyavāsī*, behind the stage. By using the language of *rasa*, therefore, Muktibodh is able, finally, to bring onto one plane the distinctions between realism and lyric emergence, between narrative and image, and between experience and expression. If we compare this passage with the other moments of Muktibodh's criticism, in each of them he was struggling to find a language for his concept of allegorical poetry—instead, his language was caught between a theory of literature in which lyric expression was always looked at with suspicion and one in which the "compound-image" was seen as dishonest, and not rooted in personal experience. Here, Muktibodh succeeds in articulating a poetics which not only establishes the allegorical potential of Prasād's work an expression of Prasād's own social conditions, but also, in a manner that is a culmination of his earliest concerns, justifies his own poetics.

In Muktibodh's description of an "emotionalist style," likewise, the focus is not so much on the manner of expression, or even on the connection between that expression and the emotions and experiences of the artist (as it was/is in, for instance, "Tīsrā kṣaṇ"), but rather on the nature of the artistic image. He writes that in the emotionalist style "the imagination has more freedom, and so presents the particulars of experience through compound and symbolic images."[50] This then creates an "image poem" in which objective life recedes into the background.

Muktibodh saw *Kāmāyanī's* poetic language and use of an allegory framework to be essential for his critique. But despite this, Muktibodh spends the vast majority of the *Punarvicār* not analyzing this poetic language and its importance for his poetics, but rather dissecting, piece by, any possible claims that the poem might make for its connections to myth in history, and any claims for the ideal nature of the characters within the poem. The characterization of Manu, in particular, as ideal, is grating to Muktibodh; Manu is shown throughout the review to be anything but an ideal character.

Yet Muktibodh's reading of the text is not meant to be purely critical. Rather, the *Punarvicār* establishes *Kāmāyanī* as a fantasy, a work that, in Muktibodh's own aesthetic model, transforms the experiences of its author, through the imagination, into a unique artifact, one that is composed

[49]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 4:195. For *Rasa* in relation to the theater, see Edwin Gerow, *Indian Poetics*, vol. v. 5, fasc. 3, History of Indian literature (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1977).

[50]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 4:195.

of the language and, perhaps most importantly, intellectual content of its time. This is in spite of the fact that Prasād, in his own preface to *Kāmāyanī*, claimed a universality and philosophical validity to its contents that aligned with a historical and cultural nationalism:

> Prasād had no scientific perspective on history. But he remained always concerned with questions related to human civilization. Society and caste, or rather the modern world, emphasized for Prasād a perspective which was inspired by the cultural rejuvenation associated with nationalism. In presenting a proud image of the past, Prasād joined with this rising. But he also took into his perspective nationalism's economic and social basis, that is, the formation of a capitalist society. Prasād had no scientific analysis of the history of civilization. He began to oppose this nationalism and its capitalist foundation in exactly the same manner as the idealist philosophers of the West. The influence of these philosophers arrived in India via Bengal.[51]

For Muktibodh, Prasād's position, and his critique of modern life, is unacceptable. But the *fantasy* of his poem is crucial; to this end, the *Punarvicār* separates the fantasy from the ideological content of the poem. The necessity, therefore, of focusing on the claims to ancient pedigree becomes clearer. The claims to ancient pedigree would serve to validate the cultural nationalism of *Kāmāyanī*, which grounds its critique of modernity not in any analysis of contemporary society, but rather in contrast to an ideal past. This in particular is something Muktibodh found intolerable, not least because it would be the basis for the traumatic banning of his history textbook due to a court case brought by the Hindu Mahasabha in 1962.[52] Muktibodh's insistence on the invalidity of Prasād's version of the past is therefore connected to his Marxist critique of Prasād's class position.

Muktibodh's positive critique of the work, however, means defending its allegorical and fantastic framework. As described above, Muktibodh argues that a text can maintain a fundamentally "realist point of view" even if the style is "emotionalist". *Kāmāyanī* is therefore the example of an emotionalist work, and despite many problems with the poem, Muktibodh views it as a crucial model. The reason for this is that it succeeds in representing at a deeper level the social position of its author through a symbolic frame, rather than a realist depiction. This is then a secondary reason to critique so thoroughly the work's claims to the representation of history.

Kāmāyanī was often viewed in critical literature as a mythological epic: Muktibodh, however, saw *Kāmāyanī* as an allegorical poem not of modern life as understood through history, but rather as a depiction of the emotions and reactions of the author himself. Its importance lay in its success in using a wide range of materials to depict the imagined fantasy of Prasād, based upon his own reality, and in its success in creating a poetic language and form that was successful in evoking these realities. By arguing that *Kāmāyanī* possesses a "realist point of view" through the indirect relation between feeling, or *bhāv*, and the objective, or *vibhāv*, Muktibodh reframes his theory of organic form as one in which the sensation which is the first moment becomes the *vibhāv*, and

[51]Muktibodh, *Racnāvalī*, 4:201.

[52]See my discussion of this in chapter 1. The textbook, along with the records relating to the court case against it, is published as Muktibodh, *Bharat*.

the fantasy is depicted as the *bhāv*. *Kāmāyanī*, in presenting an image that "is true only to its own form," is an example of precisely the kind of poem that is possible under Muktibodh's own aesthetic theory, and it thus becomes a poetic model.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have traced a history of Muktibodh's criticism with an eye towards understanding the evolution of his critique of realism. By this, I do not necessarily mean his direct engagement with and elaboration of a realist aesthetics. While realism was very frequently a term around which Muktibodh organized his critique, he was not necessarily interested in redefining or otherwise critiquing the concept of realism *per se*. Instead, throughout his career Muktibodh formed an aesthetics around the contrast between the poetic image and narrative form; realism, in this sense, represented not simply a literary mode but an ethical stance towards literature itself.

This idea developed over the twenty or so years that Muktibodh was active as a writer. In the first years of his activity, most visible in the personal statement attached to *Tār saptak*, this difference was largely portrayed in terms of the idea of an ethical difference between humanism and aestheticism, but there were some indications, namely in the ways which Muktibodh defined the novel and the poem, of how he would later change these ideas. Muktibodh seemed to struggle at this time with the idea that the poem was capable of producing a single image that contained within it a range of poetic potentialities; a novel, on the other hand, held out the promises of accessing what he termed the "objective."

In his criticism of *Naī kavitā* and of the idea of the individual experience as the criterion (singular) of a poem, Muktibodh argued for the necessity of sympathy and of social engagement, and of their importance to the lyric. In the context of this criticism, Muktibodh was engaging in debates with the poetry of the 1950s in which the most important aspect of poetry was considered to be the moment of individual experience. Against this concept, Muktibodh developed ideas of an image that could constellate and fuse together a variety of aspects of reality, personal and social.

This idea was further solidified in two major works: *Kāmāyanī: ek Punarvicār* and the essay "Tīsrā kṣaṇ". In particular, the potential of the organically formed poem, and its relation to image—are the basis for the aesthetics formed in "Tīsrā kṣaṇ". Although "Tīsrā kṣaṇ" seems at first (and is in many ways) profoundly indebted to Romantic critical aesthetics in the ways that it approaches the organicism of the imagination, it develops its aesthetics in the context of Muktibodh's commitment to a Left poetics of social commitment, and to the importance of the image as dynamically fusing together aspects of modern life in ways that would otherwise be incommensurable. In this way, "Tīsrā kṣaṇ" presents a model of poetry that is crucial precisely because it brings together and makes compatible Left aesthetics and romanticism, in a specifically post-colonial context which makes great demands on the ability of art to reconcile uneven social and cultural terrain.

In the *Punarvicār*, Muktibodh developed a practical criticism of Prasād's long poem *Kāmāyanī* based upon his Romantic aesthetics as developed in "Tīsrā kṣaṇ". This criticism had several aims, not least of which were to consider *Kāmāyanī* not as an epic poem that was accurately depicting

the past in any way, nor even as a philosophical poem that presented any useful point of view on religions (both of these had otherwise been presented as important aspects of the poem). Instead, Muktibodh thought of and argued for *Kāmāyanī* as a great symbolic and allegorical poem. This argument, on the one hand, was a way of incorporating important aspects of *Kāmāyanī*'s aesthetics while separating them from the poem's claims to "epic-ness" (so to speak). On the other hand, it provided a way for Muktibodh to articulate a theory of the poem that was based on the poem's allegorical abilities, and to finally (compared to when this idea originally appears in his criticism) develop a concept of the poetic image that could be compared to realism without automatically losing ground in comparing the "individualist" poem to the more social and humanist novel.

Muktibodh's aesthetic thought provided a model for the long, allegorical poetry that he himself wrote, and became an influence on later poets who wanted to understand it, such as Candrakānt Devtale and Vinod Kumār Śukla. Furthermore, it reconciled a range of poetic theories under debate in Hindi at the time, in order to provide a coherent whole, while resolving a contradiction Muktibodh felt between poetry and prose. This contradiction was rooted not necessarily in the formal qualities of either mode, but rather in what Muktibodh perceived to be the social value of the novel, and his own desire to express his own subjective experience through the transformed space of imagination of his poetry. This contradiction was made further complex by the deep split in Hindi literary criticism at this time between a poetics of the individual and a proscriptive Left realism. Muktibodh's long poems, uniquely in Hindi poetry, brought together lyric imagination and the allegorical representation of reality. His most famous poem, "Aṁdhere meṁ," depicted the interplay between the imagination and the subjective experience of contemporary life. Through analyzing how Muktibodh formed his aesthetic theory, we can better understand the ways in which Muktibodh's response to this contradiction both enabled, and was in turn informed by, his poetry.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

Uday Prakash's 2006 short novel *Mohandās* tells the story of a lower-caste man, Mohan Das (the author insists that all names are strictly coincidental, including the shared name of the title character and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi), who has struggled against caste prejudice to find a job despite his education. Finally, he sees an opening at a nearby mine; he takes an exam and fills out an application that includes his full identification. Then, instead of finding himself with a job, he finds that his name and identity have been stolen, so that an upper-caste man can use this identity to qualify for a reservation quota job. In desperation, Mohan Das tries and fails to regain his identity, and watches his life fall apart as a false Mohan Das takes up his job, along with an allotted apartment and other benefits. The only member of the administrative elite that helps him is an old judge named Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh.[1]

It would be tempting to read Muktibodh's presence in poet and novelist Uday Prakash's 2006 short novel *Mohandas* as indicating an Andy Kaufman-esque performance of death and resurrection: the poet did not die, and he is living secretly as a judge, even if he is transferred constantly from one small regional center to another. In a final irony, might the persona that seemed to inhabit this world so thoroughly, and so far ahead of his contemporaries, have somehow lived secretly to intervene when he could, forty years after his own death? The return of Muktibodh as the lone voice of a conscience within the system, a system that has otherwise been completely perverted and removed from any connection to the human, makes sense, because Muktibodh always seemed to be looking forward to the contemporary, past the initial disappointments that followed Independence to the twisted satire that composes so much of the world of Uday Prakash's work. Muktibodh here represents an essential and particular voice that continues to be relevant in part because it speaks so clearly from a location in small-town, Hindi speaking India.

In this interpretation, Muktibodh is able to see behind the hidden reality that underlies an inherently unequal and excessive world, and, in the case of Mohandas, perceiving the injustice that underlays it. Muktibodh's fantasies are so often the basis for discussions of realism in modern Hindi literature because they seem, to his contemporaries and to his critics today, to represent the hidden structure of a newly forming, emergent reality. In this context, Muktibodh's reap-

[1]Uday Prakāś, *Mohan Dās* (New Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 2006); the novel is translated in Uday Prakash, *The Walls of Delhi*, trans. Jason. Grunebaum (Crawley, W.A.: UWA Publishing, 2012).

pearance, deep within a broken system of justice, is another invocation of the promise of his imaginative recreation of the world. That imagination has the ability to inhabit and critique the buried pain of post-Independence modernity, and therefore to explain the inequality, dread, and dissatisfaction that continue to structure the imagination of the lower-middle-class. At the same time, *Mohandas* shows how a continued engagement with the idea of Muktibodh can incorporate a new understanding of caste, and the new ways in which inequality is expressed in contemporary India.

This dissertation has argued for a historically specific Muktibodh. By emphasizing the particularities of his linguistic and family background, and of his career in Madhya Pradesh, and situating his interests firmly in the context of the world of pre- and post-Independence India, an image of Muktibodh has emerged that is impossible to imagine outside of the context of the long 1950s in which he developed his work. The most particular example of this is Muktibodh's interest in science, which draws so much from the tenor of its time, even as it pulls the material of that time into a space of radical critique, where the present is forced to account for itself in the well of the Brahman's ghost. The intellectual contradictions faced in "Brahmarākṣas" were both utterly particular to Muktibodh's own anxieties about caste and education, while simultaneously rooted in the intellectual history of his own time.

By understanding the particular historical circumstances in which Muktibodh worked, my dissertation makes clear both Muktibodh's own contribution to the literary history of Hindi, as well as his place in its intellectual history. Muktibodh is typical of the first generation of Hindi modernists in that he was strongly influenced by the poetry of the 1920s and 30s; indeed, he would grapple with the legacy of *Chāyāvād*, and especially the interpretation of Jayshankar Prasad's long poem *Kāmāyanī*, for most of his career. He is also deeply embedded in the time and place in which he worked, from the turn to the Left among Hindi writers in the late 1930s and early 1940s to his interest in questions of Internationalism in the 1950s. Muktibodh's career is also deeply affected, however, by his particular background as a Marathi speaker, and the area in Central India in which he worked. An examination of Muktibodh's career reveals the importance of a location such as Nagpur, one of the largest cities of Central India, and the unique Hindi-Marathi bilingual literary culture which it supported. Muktibodh is both a typical figure in modern Hindi literature, as well as a representative of changes in regional literary cultures and the literary expression of the lower middle class.

As my first chapter showed, Muktibodh's reception arguably hinged on the question of his background, and its relation to his ideology. The reception of Muktibodh in the first years following his death was characterized by debates over his political position, vis-à-vis the Indian Left; but this debate was predicated on questions of literary form, and in particular the interpretation of his long poems. Muktibodh's long poems were so particularly important because they seemed to challenge both the *Naī kavitā* [New poetry] idea that poetry should depict only the individual moment of experience, as well as critiques of that idea that insisted that the depiction of social problems from a Left progressive point of view was the primary method of committed poetry. The long poem, in its ability to depict a series of disparate sensations of post-Independence life through a series of images, contradicted both of these ideas of literature. Criticism of Muktibodh, most notably in the case of the works of Namwar Singh and Ram Vilas Sharma in the late 1960s

and early 1970s, thus argued over the legacy of Muktibodh's poetics insofar as they related to the questions of the depiction of experience and realism. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, the influence of Naxalism, a Maoist politics of the rural, along with a growing sense of frustration and cynicism that culminated in the 1975-77 political Emergency, led to a reassessment of both of Muktibodh's work and his position as a member of the lower middle class. The journals *Pūrvagraha* and *Kaṅk*, both of which began publication in Madhya Pradesh in the early 1970s, approached Muktibodh as a member of a regional literary culture of Madhya Pradesh. Further aiding this reassessment was the greater availability of his works; Muktibodh's collected works, totaling six volumes, were released in 1980. Many writers, particularly in *Pūrvagraha*, created a richer account of Muktibdodh's short stories and their depiction of the social life of small cities. Muktibodh thus was transformed from a pinnacle figure of Hindi modernism to a representative of the middle class. In this way Muktibodh's reception was a site where questions of regional identity, literary form, and political commitment could be negotiated.

My dissertation has argued, however, that these negotiations have resulted in an image of Muktibodh that obscures his accomplishments. First, because Muktibodh has been understood primarily in terms of his position in the lower middle class, and because his work has been debated primarily in terms of its possible political readings, his own accomplishments are often less deeply analyzed, especially in terms of his innovations, and his theorization of, literary form. Second, the emphasis on Muktibodh's position in the lower-middle-class, and the debate over the implications of that position for his political allegiances, obscure his deep and consistent engagement with thinking through the framework of the international.

In my second chapter, I therefore examined how Muktibodh worked through questions of knowledge, science, and the international. Part of the project of historicizing Muktibodh's work is understanding the unique circumstances in which that work took shape. The period between Independence in 1947 and 1964 is often referred to as the Nehruvian era, and a great deal of criticism of Muktibodh has underlined the importance of this particular period to his work. The excitement of Independence itself, coupled with the enthusiasm of India's prime minister for rapid development and an international realignment are often depicted in stark contrast with the disillusionment of the following decades. Muktibodh's work, in turn, is thought to embody both the optimism of this period, as well as the deep anxieties that underlay it. Criticism has therefore brought out the ways in which Muktibodh used the fantastic to depict, in an allegorical fashion, a reality that otherwise resisted representation. This reality, naturally enough, is most frequently examined in terms of the social and political history of post-Independence India. In this chapter, however, I examined those aspects of Muktibodh's fantasy which, at first glance, seem to exceed that reality, and to engage instead in a universalist fantasy that is frequently attributed to a utopian impulse. I focused on the moments in Muktibodh's work, both in poetry and fiction, in which he directly engages with questions of science and technology. Under the prime ministership of Jawaharlal Nehru, foreign policy in the midst of the Cold War and India's place in the world more generally were of great importance. At the same time, the prospect of universal destruction in atomic war prompted a concept of the entire planet existing beyond any framework of individual nations. The question of India's belonging in the world was therefore frequently articulated in the language of scientific and technological development. My second

chapter, after examining the genealogy of these concepts in the colonial history of India, showed how the problematic of science and technology was a crucial way in which Muktibodh interrogated the conceptual. By analyzing previously unexamined texts that deal directly with questions of progress and learning, I showed how Muktibodh's texts were able to bring up questions of science, education, and the international, in ways that brought them into a field of critique on the level of history, language, and literary form, in both his poetry as well as his fiction. In so doing, I hope to have expanded the field of a historicist critique of Hindi literature to include the rich conception of science and the planetary that evolved during this period.

Having established the historical context in which I read Muktibodh's works, in my third and fourth chapters I dealt directly with the question of the "long poem," As I discussed in my first chapter, the long poem was perhaps the most important element in the reception of Muktibodh's work. Muktibodh's reputation was cemented by his 1957 reading of "Aṁdhere meṁ" at the Allahabad Writer's Conference, and this poem in particular formed the basis of most appreciation of his work since then. However, much of this criticism focused on "Aṁdhere meṁ" and other long poems which allegoricized the reality of post-Independence life, and in the process paid little attention either to the formal evolution of this form. Rather, a range of critics depicted Muktibodh's poetry as rough, obscure, or repetitive, treating these qualities as indicative of the intensity and idiosyncrasy of his project. I argued, however, that Muktibodh's long poem has a distinct formal character, and that the formal analysis of Muktibodh's long poem can shed light on both the evolution of Muktibodh's work, as well as its place in the history of modern Hindi poetry.

In my third chapter, therefore, I examined the evolution of the long poem, beginning with its antecedents in Muktibodh's earlier poetry in the 1950s, and ending with a poem written in the early 1950s, before he wrote the poems for which he would become most well-known. I analyzed these works through the categories of meter, diction, and theme; these categories each indicate a historical relationship that gave rise to the long poem. An analysis of meter, in particular, revealed the strong influence of Marathi poetry on Muktibodh's works. A tradition of free verse, based on units of syllabic counts, rose to prominence in Marathi poetry around the time when Muktibodh began to write, and as I showed, is clearly discernible in his work. This influence not only is crucial to understanding the development of the long poem, it also demonstrates the contribution of the multilinguistic literary culture of Central India to Muktibodh's work, and thus to the literary history of Hindi.

My fourth chapter treated in detail two long poems: the famous "Aṁdhere meṁ" and the less well-known "Bhaviṣyadhārā," both of which were written roughly during the same period in the late 1950s and early 1960s. As I showed, both of these poems share formal qualities that are consistent with the long poem as I established it in the previous chapter. Where they depart from each other, however, is in their attitude towards questions of utopia and their relationship to the present. "Bhaviṣyadhārā" is a long, sprawling poem which begins as a pastiche of a detective story and proceeds through a tour of a host of scientific disciplines. "Aṁdhere meṁ," on the other hand, focuses on the experiences of its narrator in a recognizably contemporary Indian city, and directly engages with questions of the artistic imagination and the representation of reality in a way that "Bhaviṣyadhārā" does not. Critics have argued that Muktibodh's long poem, through its

use of allegorical fantasy, is able to access the totality of that post-Independence modernity in a manner impossible in the realist novel. My interpretation, while broadly supporting this reading of his long poems, underlined the way in which "Aṁdhere meṁ" focused on the drama of the individual, and the role of the autonomous imagination itself in engaging with the world.

The importance in my reading of "Aṁdhere meṁ" of the subjective imagination concerns both my formal reading of Muktibodh's poetry—in that it prompts us to consider how the form of his work is a crucial aspect of its content—but also leads to the subject of my final two chapters. The critique of realism, and the theorization of the role of the subjective imagination in committed art, is the major subject of Muktibodh's criticism. But a concern with genre is also a key feature of his short fiction. As I have noted in my analysis, his short stories are often seen as incomplete and narratively undynamic, their value lying in the depiction of a frozen, paralyzed social reality. I have argued, however, that Muktibodh's short stories are in fact a vital part of his work, and in many ways his formal experimentation serves as a crucial complement to the work he does in his long poem. Muktibodh's long poems are an object of study, in part, because of the ways that they seem to depict a totality of society, culture, and history, which is usually the province of the novel. Muktibodh's concern with the question of genre, which is alluded to frequently in his work, come to drive his experimentation with narrative in his short stories. By examining a series of nested fables and other narrative forms in his short stories, I have demonstrated how Muktibodh was able to use the form to interrogate and comment upon genre and narrative itself.

The concern with genre which, I argued, is expressed in certain of Muktibodh's short stories, also structures his aesthetic criticism. Muktibodh's theorization of the *fantasy* and his distinction between a realist point of view and a realist style are frequently cited as a departure from the proscriptivism of the literary Left. This chapter has showed, however, that while Muktibodh certainly theorized a critique of realism, he did so out of a broader critique of genre that has roots in his earliest work. By examining his statements for the *Tār saptak* anthology, his essays, and his criticism of Jahshankar Prasad *Kāmāyanī*, this chapter has argued that Muktibodh's critique evolved from a concern with a contrast between image and narrative. The image, in its ability to bring together a wide range of symbolic associations and feelings, could create a new representation of reality—but narrative, and particularly the novel, could lay claim to the most complete depiction of social totality. This perceived contradiction led eventually to Muktibodh's examination of an aesthetics of the autonomous imagination. Drawing in large part from his own understandings of romanticism and Left idealism, in his *Kāmāyanī: ek punarvicār*, Muktibodh made a case for the importance of the imaginative representation of the real. Furthermore, he was able to develop a theory of art that was predicated upon critical subjectivity.

If my dissertation has argued that Muktibodh needs to be understood as operating within his own time, however, this begs the question: what can Muktibodh tell us now? What is the relevance of his work to our attempts to understand contemporary India? How can this figure, who seems to be so prophetic to readers of Hindi literature in his time, speak to us today? The time of which he was a part seems to be more and more distant and irrelevant. Nehru cast a long shadow over the post-Independence period and defined many of reigning themes of state-led development and an independent foreign policy. Today, he has often come to be seen as an irrelevance. Recently, there have been attempts to remodel the Nehru Memorial Museum and

Library, founded after his death in 1964. One possibility, stated only in indefinite terms, would be to redesign the museum so that it focuses instead on contemporary Indian governance. The idea of Nehru in this way is to be effaced. In contrast, Muktibodh's nightmarish vision begins to seem more and more prophetic. The banning of the history textbook, and the court cases and processions which accompanied it, seemed to bring to life the nightmares of "Aṁdhere meṁ"; today, capricious bannings under organized public pressure have become ordinary, and acts of violence against intellectuals more generally, have become commonplace.[2]

In this way, Muktibodh's fantasies continue to remain relevant and alive. He continues to analyzed in part because his works remain a vital model for Hindi literature. But Muktibodh is also important because he is a key figure in mid-twentieth century literary and cultural history. This period, extending from just before Independence to the disillusionment with that Independence that set in in the 1960s, saw the development of crucial paradigms that remain vital today. The conversations and debates which Muktibodh took part in, and the literary models that he developed, have formed defining moments in Hindi modernism. This in turn means that as this period begins to become an object of historical inquiry, rather than contemporary criticism, the understanding of Muktibodh in Hindi will begin to change as well.[3] This criticism builds on the shift I described, which took place in the late 1970s and early 1980s, towards viewing Muktibodh as representative of a particular, lower-middle-class modernity. This new appreciation of Muktibodh, also historicizes Muktibodh's contributions to literature and criticism, looking at Muktibodh as a participant in intellectual history. I hope that this work will be a contribution towards this trend.

My dissertation, on one level, is an attempt to historicize Muktibodh's contributions to Hindi literature, so that they can be seen as developing out of the particular times, locations, and interests with which he worked. In that way, it is a contribution to the study of modern Hindi literature, and in particular to the study of Hindi literature after Independence. But I also hope to have demonstrated the intense vitality of this period, and the ways in which Muktibodh's work can be seen as a unique record of Hindi's engagement with a global stage. From his location in Central India, and without ever leaving the country or even spending significant time in a major Hindi-speaking city, Muktibodh insisted on his work's ability to reimagine the world. In this way it work reflected the time in which he lived, an unprecedented period for Hindi literature. For the first time, Hindi could claim to speak on an international stage as the hegemonic language of the nation. That this period of imagined hegemony was so short-lived—by the mid-1960s it would be not the single national language but only part of a three-language compromise—and riven with so many contradictions while it existed, makes it all the more important to understand its effects on literary culture at its apogee. Muktibodh is key to those effects, in part because his interna-

[2] In the Fall of 2015, several prominent literary figures returned awards given to them by the Sahitya Akademi. See "Sahitya Akademi May Frame Policy on Returning Awards," http://www.hindustantimes.com/, November 25, 2015, accessed November 25, 2015, `http://www.hindustantimes.com/india/sahitya-akademi-may-frame-policy-on-returning-awards/story-Ha6TntQ2LTKs58mS135NRN.html`.

[3] See, for instance, Apūrvānand, "Rāmvilās śarmā kā vijetā mārksvād aur muktibodh-kṣaṇ," in *Hindī-ādhūniktā: ek punarvicār*, ed. Abhay Kumār Dube, vol. 2 (New Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 2014), 395–421; and Kumār, "Hindī kā mārksvād: jātyābhimānī parcam ke tale." Both of these examinations of Marxist thought in Hindi draw in large part from analyses of Muktibodh's thought.

tionalism was so particularly locally rooted. Rather than participate directly in the international through travel or movement, Muktibodh reimagined the framework in which the international took place. He did so through creating a literature, and its theorization, that emphasized the interconnections between the imagination and the outside world, thus unifying the most important aporias of literature as he understood them. The result was a body of work that provided the most important modernist model for a Hindi literature that could, through its imaginative landscapes, confront simultaneously the world of the Cold War and post-Independence India, and remains today a crucial model in Hindi for imagining the interplay between the self and world.

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