



Sharachchandra Muktibodh

Ashok Joshi

Sharachchandra Madhav Muktibodh was one of the most notable poets, novelists and critics in Marathi. By temperament he was very modest person, a perfect gentleman who never cultivated aggressiveness, exhibitionism or a tendency for wider publicity.

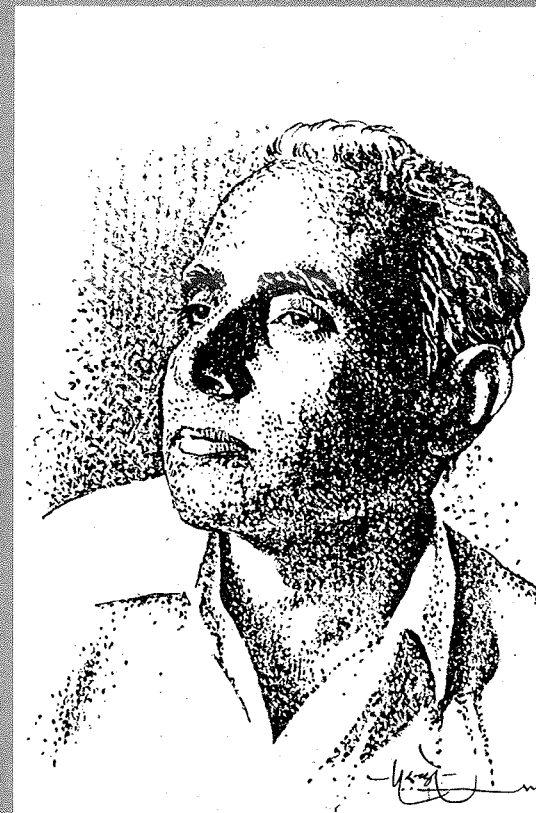
Though marxism made a genuine appeal to his intellect and sentiment, he never felt like following the 'Correct' Marxist line of Scientific Socialism as was done by several of his contemporaries. Accepting Marxism in order to help shape his perspective, he took keen interest in observing the actual life as it is lived by people. This made him a liberal, openminded, Marxist thinker and critic having deep roots in the Indian tradition and history a great achievement for any progressive writer. His stance against nihilism and the philosophy despair and his positive, social approach towards human problems were very special qualities not possessed by many contemporary Marathi writers of sixties.

Muktibodh is known more as a poet. His fame as a poet of revolution, a progressive poet has curiously clouded the evident fact that he wrote lyrical poems, love-poems, nature-poems and metaphysical poems, which easily outnumber his social, revolutionery and progressive poems.

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Sharachchandra Muktibodh (English), Rs. 15
ISBN 81-7201-950-5

Makers of
Indian
Literature



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The sculpture reproduced on the endpaper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodhana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha.

Below them, is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From : Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A. D.
Courtesy : National Museum, New Delhi.



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Rabindra Bhavan, 35, Ferozeshah Road, New Delhi 110 001
Sales Department : 'Swati', Mandir Marg, New Delhi 110 001

172, M.M.G.S. Marg, Dadar (East), Bombay 400 014
Jeevan Tara, 23A/44X, Diamond Harbour Road, Calcutta 700 053
Guna, 304-305, Anna Salai, Teynampet, Madras 600 018
ADA Rangamandira, 109, J. C. Road, Bangalore 560 002

© Sahitya Akademi
First Published 1996

Rs. 15

ISBN 81-7201 - 950 - 5

Published by the Sahitya Akademi
and Printed at DYNAMIC,
849, Sadashiv Peth, Pune 411 030

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I

MUKTIBODH : LIFE AND WORKS

Sharachchandra Madhav Muktibodh, one of the most notable poets, novelists and critics in Marathi, was born at Indore on 21st January, 1921, in a Maharashtrian family. Being born in a lower middle - class but well-educated and good-natured Maharashtrian family settled in a Hindi-speaking State had both its advantages and disadvantages. The social milieu in which he spent his childhood was very traditional, the family atmosphere too was very religious, puritan and there was great concern about individual morality in the family. The Muktibodh brothers - Sharachchandra and his illustrious elder brother Gajanan, one of the great modernist poets in Hindi, - had hardly any contacts with educated, sophisticated and modernist sections of society, except in the educational institutions attended by them.

The early influence on Sharachchandra was naturally that of his simple, innocent, god-fearing virtuous parents. A job in the police force had not turned his father Madhav Muktibodh into a domineering person nor did he become a corrupt person; his simplicity and virtuosity often evoked misunderstanding, pity or ridicule among his close relations. Sharachchandra and Gajanan, however, knew how good their father was. An avid and sensitive reader of literature, Muktibodh's mother created a lasting love for literature in the minds of her sons. Sharachchandra states that he may have acquired a man-centred moral perspective from his father, and a sense of curiosity and imaginative sensibility from his mother.

The elder brother Gajanan had been a third important source of inspiration for Sharachchandra. He not only provided Sharachchandra with select literary works from all languages,

but carefully helped shape his literary sensibility. Being an extremely sensitive and introspective person, Gajanan had developed an intense perception of social reality and had turned to Marxism in his youth to guide him in his thoughts and actions. His idealism was naturally infectious and Sharachchandra too became progressive in his outlook and an idealist in his perception of the future.

Added to these personalities from his own family, Sharachchandra's reading of theoretical works had helped him develop a social, objective and universal view of life. Well-equipped with all this, Sharachchandra was ready to explore the inner and external reality both as a writer and a thinker.

Sharachchandra's school days were spent at Ujjain, not a very modern township in Madhya Pradesh, and hence, his exposure to the modernist forces in literature was rather limited. He, however, got an opportunity to stay at Indore for five years for his studies. This was a fruitful period of his life because Shri Bhalachandra Lowalekar, a government servant with very distinctive, artistic bend of mind helped him shape his taste during those impressionable years. A famous Hindi poet, Shri Virendrakumar Jain, too, was staying at Indore during these years, and he too, encouraged Sharachchandra to read more and more of significant literature.

By then he had developed a keen interest in English and French romantic poetry and in the works of great Indian writers like Rabindranath Tagore and Sharachchandra Chatterjee. An intimate acquaintance with young Marxist intellectuals and workers made him take keen interest in the deterministic, historical Marxist philosophy, but he was not unaware of the humanistic content of Marxist philosophy even at that stage of his life.

His first published work had been a short story in Hindi- a literary form he was not to pursue further in his entire literary career. Around this time he published a few of his Hindi poems. The discerning editor of a Marathi literary journal, **Abhiruchi** - Shri P. A. Chitre- encouraged him to write in Marathi and regularly published his poems in **Abhiruchi**. Sharachchandra thus turned to Marathi for his artistic expression and by 1944 the

direction of his artistic development was quite clear - to be an important writer in Marathi.

Writing, however, was never considered by him an easy task. In one of his letters he states that writing, for him, was a laborious job; unless he felt deeply, he never wrote anything and he revised the drafts several times. He never considered the act of writing as a matter of joy, it was always a hard and demanding mission for him. Knowledge, he held, was gained by a writer by reading philosophical and scientific works and by one's close acquaintance with various arts. A writer then perceives life clearly, develops an attitude to life and has a genuine concern for it. The conflicts in life and the dynamics of life are then only clearly understood by a writer. A writer, who thus gets equipped, changes and develops daily as he continues gaining a proper view of the ever-expanding horizons of life. He thus puts his intelligence and imagination to work to fathom truths in life. This is a writer's commitment to values in life.

Sharachchandra Muktibodh was of the view that a poet as a man has to be integrally united with the totality of life. Man-nature, man-totality relationship was never an assumption, but a given fact for Muktibodh.

Muktibodh's development as a progressive and modernist poet had a specific context too. The second World-War had created a feeling of despair and helplessness among sensitive people; the future of mankind was also being considered uncertain and bleak; urbanization and industrialization too had displayed its other - the not-so-welcome-side. Violence, war, poverty, inequality, injustice were traumatic facts for most common people. The society, in general, was in need of artists who could grasp these problems and express them through their art. Further, a world-view had then emerged, claiming to give a satisfactory explanation of all the conflicts and contradictions in society and Muktibodh was attracted towards this Marxist world-view.

As one turns to the literary scene of the day, one finds that in Marathi poetry, romanticism had no longer any appeal for sensitive and intelligent readers. Muktibodh's humanistic, social

approach and B.S. Mardhekar's modernist - existentialist perspective were perhaps the apt responses to the expectations of Marathi readership of the post-second World War period. Muktibodh continued the legacy of progressive optimistic modernism of Keshavsut - the first modernist and rebellious poet of the early twentieth century - in an altogether changed context of the post-war period and Mardhekar - who was deeply rooted in Indian spiritual tradition and had a close acquaintance with the European post-war sensibility as well - set in a new way of writing experimental poetry on contemporary themes in contemporary language. Mardhekar's belief in pure poetry, his abiding interest in poetic form, his views on the alienation of an individual from the social contexts, his near-existentialist view of life distinguish him clearly from the progressive, socially oriented modernist poet like Muktibodh.

Muktibodh's social and human concerns may also be attributed to his childhood ethos - he was brought up in the Indian heartland where life was still dominated by strong family and religious traditions. Atomisation of an individual - which was so characteristic of the post-war metropolitan sensibility of a modernist like Mardhekar - had not even been remotely felt in Ujjain and Indore. It was natural for him to think in terms of problems of the social man and be optimistic about the efficacy of collective action and the good of social man. The feelings of despair and alienation would only be experienced by him at an intellectual and philosophical level. All this was quite different from the metropolitan contexts of B. S. Mardhekar.

As another equally significant modernist poet, Muktibodh had his own assessment of Mardhekar's poetic achievement. He appreciated Mardhekar's concern for mankind and genuine humanistic perspective, but was quite critical of the themes of loneliness, despair, alienation, pessimism and meaninglessness of life in his poetry. He was more critical of poets who followed Mardhekar and wrote formalistic, experimental and purely aesthetic poetry by avoiding any depiction of social and external reality in their poetry. Regretting the dominance of form-centred, imagist, abstract and experimental poetry in the post -

Mardhekar Marathi poetry, Muktibodh compared the situation to the nineteenth century French ethos in which the symbolist poetry of Rimbaud and Baudelaire had found a fertile soil.

Making an appeal to the intelligent and sensitive modernist poets in Marathi, Muktibodh wanted them to see the social context around them more intently and sympathetically. They would then, he hoped, understand the plight of the majority of depraved people, would make an attempt to awaken and guide them and would also realize their dreams. A poet's duty was thus to be sensitive to the social, moral, philosophical and eternal aspects of human life and since Marxism paid attention to these aspects, interest in Marxist world-view would be a welcome-feature in any poet's make-up. The actually lived life - not any artistic tradition - was for Muktibodh the greatest source of strength and sustenance for any poet.

His two volumes of poems - *Navi Malwat* (1949) and *Yatrik* (1957) amply illustrate his social and human concerns. Rightly focussing on the conflict between the rising aspirations of the post-war individual and the increasingly complex, competitive and coercive social reality in a forceful language, he communicates to his readers his confident grasp of the contemporary reality in a famous poem titled *Navi Kavita* (A New Poem):

A Colossos, new and angry Sun is on fire in each heart.

His unbearable light suffocates my heart.

Black mountains fall onto the sea of light.

The dome of sky contains the universe-piercing thunderous sound.

The sound and its echo do not allow me to hold back the song of light.

A new poem is born in my heart.

Today the New Sun is blazing in my heart.

(Navi Malwat, p. 4)

The force and confidence with which Muktibodh wrote his poems indicates what a significant poet he was. Interested in presenting the hard truths of contemporary life in his poetry -

such as the decline of moral values, the loss of sense of values, erosion of idealism in the post-independence Indian life, problems related to poverty, inequality and injustice - Muktibodh was constantly in search of a poetic idiom all his life.

Muktibodh had an unfailing belief in the dynamic nature of reality and hence his writing on harsh realities of contemporary life was always accompanied by a feeling that these difficulties will be over if human beings strive hard and there was no room whatsoever for pessimism.

His philosophical understanding of life was based on the concept of **Manushata** (humanism), which for him was a universal principle obtainable at all times, places and among all people. This principle, he held, was an absolute principle ingrained in man's being and one's efforts through one's becoming or existence were made to reach this absolute principle of being. As the principle of humanism (Manushata) or attainment of full human status was not a practical but a moral and a spiritual principle, the entire struggle of becoming is to be directed towards the attainment of full status as a human being.

Literature expresses this dream of humanity to have human beings of full and complete stature. Great writers show an awareness of this great human dream, but the pessimistic and practical writers miss it for two different reasons. A pessimistic writer lacks the vision and cannot have good dreams of the future, a practical-pragmatic, realistic writer does not understand the gravity of hardships and conflicts in the life of majority. This was Muktibodh's assessment of contemporary as well as the eternal human situation and his literature expressed it convincingly throughout his career as a writer. Muktibodh's development as a writer was integrally linked with his development as man.



II

MUKTIBODH AS A POET

As one comes to study Muktibodh's poetry, one finds that his convictions and principles as a responsible and concerned human being are reflected in it. In addition, one finds that his poems and novels have a strong meditative aspect. The meditative, philosophical, spiritual element in his poetry can largely be attributed to his upbringing in a highly religious family in which recitation of Marathi devotional poetry and the Sanskrit prayers was a part of one's daily routine. The content and diction of his poetry have been thus shaped at least partially by these early experiences.

To facilitate a systematic comment on his poetry, one can conveniently divide his poetry from two collections **Navi Malwat** and **Yatrik** and from a selection edited by Shri Yashwant Manohar into the following types - personal and social poems, short and long poems. Further, one can have three sub-categories of his personal poems - love poems, poems of despair and poems of loneliness. In addition to these, he also wrote some nature-poems.

In his social and revolutionary poems, Muktibodh valorizes the workers, their perception, their organizational capabilities and their penchant for a revolutionary world. Dr. R. B. Patankar, an important critic of Muktibodh, has raised a point whether Muktibodh had an intimate knowledge of the working class. Muktibodh did have a first-hand knowledge of the lower-middle class life is a point accepted by Patankar, but his argument centres on the fact that Muktibodh's knowledge of the working classes and their genuine problems like utter poverty, exploitation, injustice remained at an abstract and philosophical level only. He also refers to the conventional, exaggerated use of

words and imagery in Muktibodh's poetry, in support of this argument.

Critics like Yashwant Manohar, on the other hand, hold that there is a gradual shift in Muktibodh's presentation of revolutionary themes from the early optimistic poetry in **Navi Malwat** to an utter pessimistic phase of his later years.

It is possible that Muktibodh like many middle class Indians was optimistic in the first two decades of the post-independence era and as the dreamy phase came to an end, he became more realistic and pessimistic in his view of life. One must, however, note that the humanitarian and social concerns were unmistakably present in his view of life till the end.

At this juncture one needs to point at another significant aspect of Muktibodh's perception. For him, totality was constituted by three elements - Nature, society and individuals. On realizing that Nature and the aesthetic principle in Nature has, as if, pushed him out of that world, he wrote a poem titled 'The dream of a suspended man' (*Trishankuche Swapna*). When the poet observes the beauty of Nature, he rather curiously develops a sense of alienation from it and then starts wondering about this feeling. Identifying himself with Trishanku, a mythological being suspended from the heavens and not allowed to land on earth, he addresses Nature saying that his state of being is imperfect in comparison to the perfection of Nature; it makes him feel inferior and alienated. He is more pained by being alienated from the vast sea of humanity on the earth and wants to be an insignificant droplet in it. Willing to be a tree on earth, he would not only absorb the sap of life, but will also have a capacity to produce myriad songs along with flowers to spread over the surface of the earth. But this is only a dream, for he is a suspended being, a Trishanku (**Navi Malwat**, pp. 54-60).

The poem thus expresses a genuine love for Nature and the earth principle and contemplates on the state of man in general who, in the poet's view, is suspended between the heaven-principle and the earth-principle. When he is overawed by the heaven-principle, his natural attraction is for the earth-principle.

Muktibodh was not interested in describing the different

phases of Nature; his was basically a contemplative response based on which he went on to write a special kind of personal poetry, i. e. love poetry with a distinct, generalized, meditative universal colour.

'*Nako Manala Halhal Asli*' (Let me not feel rueful) is a poem in the romantic tradition of B. R. Tambe in which the poet, who is an eternal traveller, wants to spend as much time as possible with his beloved. He says that he would not enjoy the thought of repenting later for not being caring and loving to his beloved at the proper time.

In another poem in **Navi Malwat** titled '*Ant Aahe Tasaa Aarambh Aahe*' (If there is an end, there is also the beginning) (**Navi Malwat** pp. 85-93), one finds a marked change in Muktibodh's style: his imagery undergoes drastic change, it becomes more contemporary like that of Mardhekar, the traces of romantic imagery almost totally disappear. The poem develops in two phases. In the first phase, the poet is considerably depressed on account of his perception of poverty, loneliness, unhappiness, monotony, immorality, frustration of human dreams, the realm of death, dehumanization; but then comes the second phase in which he communicates with his beloved and sings to her a song of the new bright age, a new love, a new relationship and a new style. The poem ends on a note of hope.

Yet another poem in **Yatrik** titled '*Aaj Battees Shishir Rutu Lotale*' (Today thirty two winters are over) takes an overview of his thirty - two years. He is sad at the state of the world, at his achievement, but again at the end of the poem, develops a strong hope for the future which is, he is sure, joyous as it is the future shaped by the red revolution, by the red sun, by the spring to come which will put an end to thirty-two winters.

Muktibodh's personal poetry does not remain at the personal level only, it is inextricably linked with important social themes. Personal feelings of despair, frustration, thus do not remain long with him and he turns towards the brighter, happy future, both for the individual and the society. The generalized, universalized, optimistic and meditative aspects are thus of

greater consequence to him than the purely personal and temporal ones.

This observation is largely true about his writings till 1966. After 1966, however, his optimism regarding the end of poverty, injustice and exploitation, his faith in the socialist revolution received a serious set-back as he started examining the socialist regimes more closely and carefully. Further, the deeply ingrained faith in his mind regarding the possibility of a socialist revolution in India too received a set-back. Inevitably, he became lonely and started expressing a sense of defeat and despair through his works. A comparison with *Trishanku*, the suspended mythical figure thus was natural. Then followed a proclamation that he will not seek distant horizons. Was this pessimistic turn based on his actual experiences or on his sensitive perception of external reality is a question worth attempting an answer to. Muktibodh, in addition to being a committed writer, was a man of great dreams - he had high hopes from poetry and the poets. When he looked around at his peers, he did not find many who cherished his high ideals. As a result, he became more and more isolated from them and from his readers, which gave him a sense of detached despair and loneliness. This problem, normally faced by an honest and an authentic man, may have led him to find some solace in returning to his childhood spiritualistic ideals. The time-tested values in Hindu and Buddhist ways of life and philosophies may have then provided him with solace, consolation and hope. A return to the high ideals of Hinduism and Buddhism could as well be seen as an important phase in his maturation as a writer and man.

One understands the reasons for the dismay expressed by some Marxists on the 'reversal' in Muktibodh's final phase of spiritualistic leaning, but when one understands the crises, trauma and vacillations faced by an individual called Sharachchandra Muktibodh, one can sympathetically perceive and evaluate the 'reversal' in Muktibodh's career.

That a Marxist like Muktibodh turned to Hindu spiritualism is a fact. One way to explain this 'turn' is to locate him as a lower

middle class but high-caste Marathi-speaking intellectual of the fifties who had not extricated himself from the religious background of his childhood days. Secondly, one must also give some importance to the fact that like most intellectuals in India, Muktibodh too was brought up on Western liberal humanistic tradition which always treats an individual as a unit in itself and wants society to look after the interests of an individual. Religiosity and individualism were two important forces in the make-up of the Marxist Muktibodh whose subjectivity / personality was constructed on them both intellectually and emotionally. His own understanding of the economic and social reality, his intellectual grasp of Marxism had made him accept the Marxist ideology. The historical frame in which he was situated, however, was largely religious, humanitarian, individualistic and traditional. One can thus imagine him being pulled at these opposing ends. It is, therefore, understandable that in his last phase he returned to the religious, humanitarian, spiritualistic pole. Western liberal education and the Hindu religious spiritual tradition were integral parts of his personality. A complex personality like Muktibodh can be properly understood by taking into account these two significant nodes of his personality.

It is interesting to refer to a rather special feature of his poetry - his fifteen long poems. Modernist poets, in general, do not favour writing long poems, as long poems are always in danger of getting reduced to narratives and a poet who attempts to write them finds it difficult to sustain his 'modernist', experimental style over a unit of a larger size. Muktibodh, however, has accepted this challenge and has written long poems not as a deviation, but almost as a natural mode of poetic expression. One marvels at the confidence Muktibodh had in his ability as a poet, and his stature as a poet gets considerably enhanced on account of his determination. Choice of much broader canvas to write one's poetry is thus itself an act of courage that merits serious attention.

Muktibodh's own position on his long poems has been that they express different phases of his experience and are in the

form of dialogues with his own self and, further, they are also expressive of his view of life. To illustrate his perception of his long poems, we may refer to his poem '*Trishankuche Swapna*' (The dream of Trishanku), a poem having three phases of its development. In its first phase, the poet says he is an exile in the beautiful and pleasant world of Nature. In its second phase, the exalted poet realizes that he is a part of the large human multitude and has a desire to rush towards it to be one with it. The last phase of the poem expresses the unison of individual, society and Nature. He holds that totality is like a huge tree full of life. The poem starts with the poet-narrator Trishanku's alienation from the world of Nature, but ends by expressing his oneness with life and Nature. The use of free verse form seems to be the apt choice for the expression of its content.

A long poem, unlike shorter personal poems dealing with some intense mood of the poet, has a much broader canvas to paint a large-size slice of life and is expressive of the poet's convincing and total grasp of its theme. Muktibodh achieves this expressiveness in this poem while presenting the theme of frustration of our dreams and ideals in the post-independence India and yet it is noteworthy that he does not give any message of despair. Not losing hope and maintaining a positive vision, he presents the story about the sad lot of contemporary, exploited man. But he also finds a way out of it. Poets like Wordsworth were concerned with the depiction of man-Nature relationship. Muktibodh's social perspective made him add the social dimension to it. Thus, for Muktibodh man, Nature and society together constitute totality. To present various aspects of this totality, he chose to write long poems. It allowed him to express his varied, complex and subtle experience.

The choice of long poems then was a very well-conceived strategy to express vast, varied, subtle and complex experiences of the poet regarding man-Nature-society relationship, which the shorter personal poem would have found difficult to express.

The style of his poetry is like that of most modernist poets : direct, simple and expressive. Muktibodh's childhood in the Malwa region of Madhya Pradesh had its impact on his style and

occasionally he seems to make use of dated Marathi expressions. Further, his early acquaintance with Sanskrit language and literature also made him use Sanskrit words rather liberally in his poetry.

Being a contemplative, developing poet, his style went on progressively maturing from its early reliance on the romantic mode to a more direct, mature, simple and classical mode. Whenever need arose, he could also write in a sarcastic and aggressive manner. The seventeenth century Marathi saint poet Ramdas was an ideal for him, both in style and content. A rare sensitivity and an admirable penchant for imagery are two other noteworthy features of his style.

Muktibodh was aware of the fact that he was writing poetry in a totally new way and that his was a new and difficult path. He had an ambitious project of depicting social reality from a socialistic revolutionary perspective in a novel way. If the newspaper stories of famine in Bengal and the sufferings of the millions moved him to write poems, a much wider perception of man-Nature unity also made him write a poem. If the reality around him made him feel like expressing despair, he did not express it because his social vision did not allow him to do it. He thus continued writing poems in an optimistic vein.

As time passed, Muktibodh developed into a mature poet of considerable strength having command over his themes, techniques and words. Central to his concern, however, were the same concerns for human life and the same social, historical, progressive perspective.

To illustrate some aspects of his development as a poet, it would be fruitful to turn to his poems that illustrate four major themes in his writing - love, concern for man-Nature unity, revolutionary humanistic perspective and the occasional feeling of despair - especially in the last phase of his life - and his return to spiritualism.

Though Muktibodh's reputation rests on being a progressive Marxist poet, he wrote a number of love poems expressing different phases of love. On various occasions, his love poems do express the conflict between the demand of love and the

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demands made on him by his progressive ideology.

In some of his early love poems, for example, '*Nako Manala Halhal Asli*' (Let me not feel rueful), the influence of a great Marathi romantic poet B. R. Tambe is unmistakably felt. Caught between the innocent and genuine love of his beloved and the social forces that make him take radical steps, the poet beautifully expresses the vacillations of his mind.

In an extremely tender poem titled '*Sanj Ye Haluhalu*' (The evening steps in slowly) against the backdrop of slowly advancing evening, the poet expresses his tender feelings towards his beloved. In an otherwise descriptive poem about the evening, he succeeds in putting a large measure of warmth and life.

'*Mala Olakhavayala*' (In order to understand me) is a poem that unfolds the poet's expectations from his beloved : he wants her to dream his dreams, feel his sky, have his soul, have his sense of stoicism, know his pain and then only the distance between them will disappear.

These are only a few examples from a large body of his love poetry; what is common to all of his love poems is that they are highly intense and personal poems and are in contrast with his strong social awareness and well-defined Marxist perspective. One may, however, note that even in some of his love poems, he does not overlook the broader social concerns. He tends to see even personal love in a broader social and human frame of reference in a few poems.

Muktibodh wrote Nature poems also. Like the Romantic poets of the West, he discovers his identity in the company of Nature. In a poem '*Kiti Madhur Jadu Hi*' (How sweet is the magic), the Himalayan Nature is shown to have cast a magic spell on the poet and he realizes his loneliness, self and happiness there.

In a poem titled '*Phiruni Ale*' (They come back again), the poet sitting on the banks of the river Kshipra recalls his childhood memories; the return of those memories makes him one with Nature and he has the experience of empathy on the river bank in the company of Nature. In the same way, he

experiences the advance of monsoon and has a feeling of oneness with Nature in the poem '*Varshagam*' (The coming of Rainy season.)

On seeing the flight of a bird in the vast blue sky, the poet wonders whether he should capture the wonders and beauty of Nature in his art and asks himself in a poem '*Vismay*' (The Wonder), why he cannot write a simple song on his ever-smiling beloved. The poem is a beautiful lyric in the tradition of B. R. Tamble.

Though the theme of man-Nature unity is a recurrent theme in Muktibodh's poetry, occasionally doubts do creep into his mind. In '*Trishankuche Swapna*' (The dream of a suspended being) the poet expresses a feeling of distancing and alienation from Nature. He feels he is suspended between the sky-principle and the earth-principle, the sight of beauty of Nature makes his mind unsteady and he hopes to strike roots in the earth and flower in the form of poems.

The genuine desire to be one with Nature is not yet diminished in his mind. '*Mazy Peedela Artha Yeyil*' (My sufferings will acquire meaning) expresses his strong feeling to be one with Nature as it holds that his sufferings will acquire meaning when his being becomes one with the dust of the earth, from which, he hopes, millions of song-flowers will blossom.

The nature-poems of Muktibodh thus express several aspects of man-Nature relations, besides being descriptive, picturesque statements on Nature. He starts with a mere sense of wonder on noticing the marvels, the beauty and the simplicity of Nature, but he then gradually advances towards a meditative mood and contemplates on notions like individuality, loneliness and isolation from Nature. For him, the feeling of alienation from Nature is momentary and man is finally to be located in the broader frame of Nature. Muktibodh's aim of weaving a complex, rich web of man-Nature relationship is largely attained in his several Nature-poems.

The third kind of poetry written by Muktibodh is the poetry of revolutionary humanism. Muktibodh's reputation as a poet depends largely on his being a revolutionary humanist poet and

yet one rarely finds any extravagant expression of the revolutionary elements in his poems. Muktibodh's gentle and sophisticated personality, his genuine humanistic concerns, his childhood experiences as a high caste, lower middle class family - member have shaped his revolutionary humanistic poetry in no small measure.

Aiming at a direct expression of the real-life experiences of an Indian, he was aware that in the characteristic Indian context the class of industrial workers was not the only exploited class; it included farm-workers, petty-artisans, semi-employed poor people from cities and villages. This large segment of deprived people was in an utter need of social and economic justice. Socialism, he was convinced, was the only remedy for the exploited multitude and when the masses prepare themselves for a revolution, nobody would stop them. The new Sun was rising on the horizon bringing hope to the suffering masses.

Several poems both in *Navi Malwat* and *Yatrik* express his anger against the prevalent social structure and underline his trust in the newly emerging progressive forces. Themes like human sufferings, social and economic inequality, injustice, poverty, consumerism and individualism occupy an important place in his poetry. For many of the prevalent evils he does not hold any individuals responsible, the social structure is the real culprit for him.

It disturbs him most to see some intellectuals and artists being insensitive towards the contemporary reality. There is, however, a strong streak of optimism in his poetry and therefore he holds that when a single ray of the sun comes, it heralds the defeat of darkness and in the 'womb of pain', indomitable confidence is born, ready to give new direction to the course of human history (*'Marathichiye Nagari'*, *Yatrik*, p. 57).

Muktibodh's poems about social revolution are thus full of optimism and they do indicate his full faith in the Marxist perspective.

Commenting on his poetry of social revolution, Dr. R. B. Patankar has observed that since Muktibodh's acquaintance with the lower middle-class life was intimate, he could describe it in

concrete and convincing terms in his poetry, but he did not have any close knowledge of the life of industrial workers and farmers. Hence, his writing on themes related to their life takes on a rather abstract and conventional turn and at times it tends to be somewhat lifeless. It happens this way because he was not in daily contact with farmers and the factory workers (Patankar, pp. 156-161).

Though Muktibodh's belief in socialist revolution was unshaken, he was not always optimistic about events which would take place in the near future. We, therefore, confront some poems of despair by Muktibodh: the wait for revolution was too long for him, there were no immediate solutions for problems like poverty, inequality and injustice. A sensitive person like Muktibodh was bound to be impatient and therefore, occasionally pessimistic. All this made him turn to the religious, moral and spiritualistic influences of his early childhood. In his late years, Indian spiritualism did draw his attention to a great measure.

Comparing himself to the mythic figure Trishanku, he felt that he was far away from revolution and at the same time could not be content with things as they were. In poems like '*Ajoon*' (still to come) and '*Trishanku*' he expresses his mixed sentiments towards his ideal of socialist revolution.

R. B. Patankar has offered an explanation for the feeling of despair in Muktibodh's mind and his dwindling faith in socialist revolution. Patankar holds that Muktibodh had virtually no close links with other Marathi literateurs at the end of his career. Being a dedicated, authentic, idealist and 'free' writer-thinker, he felt more and more disillusioned about the possibility of socialist revolution and felt like turning more towards spiritualism and the attainment of internal peace. Patankar argues that Muktibodh is more significant as a nature-poet, a love-poet and a meditative poet than a poet of revolution (Patankar, p. 176).

Patankar also attributes the abundance of Sanskrit words in Muktibodh's poetry to his childhood acquaintance with Sanskrit prayers and religious texts.

For Muktibodh, the first rebellious modern Marathi poet

Keshavsut was a role-model. He wanted a good poem to be like a thunderbolt in the sky and a poet to be truthful, sympathetic and philosophical by temperament. A revolutionary poet, he held, must shed both despair and defeatism and write songs of revolution giving hope to the suffering masses. So apart from the occasional feeling of despair expressed in his early poetry, and a decisive turn towards despair and spiritualism in the last part of his life, Muktibodh remained an optimistic poet with unshaken faith in the Marxist world-view. A genuine and deep concern for the suffering humanity and a search for an integrated view of life had led him to the acceptance of the Marxist view of life. An abiding interest in the historical understanding of life, an undistorted perception of life and a meditative temperament were the integral parts of Muktibodh's poetic personality. □

III

MUKTIBODH AS A NOVELIST

1. Plot and structure of Muktibodh's Novels

The events in Sharachchandra Muktibodh's novel-sequence of three novels - **Kshipra, Sarhadda, Jan He Wolatu Jethe** - or of the 'Bishu Trilogy,' span over a long period of time as it covers the events from around the year 1926 to 1942, the most significant years in the history of Indian Freedom Struggle. The plot of these novels mainly centres on the initiation and growth of a boy called Vishwas or Bishu who finally becomes a mature and experienced man ready to take a decision on his own to become a teacher in a distant village. Apart from narrating the events in the life of Vishwas and his unfortunate family, the three novels mainly elaborate the traumatic experiences of this sensitive son of an upright clerk.

Bishu is undoubtedly the central character of 'trilogy' and the traumatic events in his life do constitute the main theme of these novels. Bishu is not only a protagonist of the trilogy, he does represent the author at least partially. In his interview with Shri Digambar Padhye, Muktibodh has maintained that he wanted to present his perception of the external world through his novels and that he did not turn to novel-writing either for an aesthetic experimentation or for any other external purpose. He took fifteen long years (1954-1969) to write these novels because he wanted to present a more mature perception of dynamic, ever-changing external social reality against which both the becoming and the being of his protagonist Bishu take shape. Further, he points out that he wanted to depict the life of four sections of contemporary society - (1) The value-conscious, sophisticated section of the feudal milieu; (2) The competitive and the practical section; (3) The unfortunate, defeated and distressed

segment and (4) The dynamic, humane and freedom-loving, socially conscious section. The delicate web of inter-relationships between people belonging to these four different segments constitutes the major thematic statement of these novels. The trilogy thus tries to capture the dynamic reality in a dramatic manner and wants to present the psychological upheavals in the life of his characters in a realistic and artistic manner (*Tatparya*, July, 1980, pp. 13-14).

Though the trilogy develops almost as an initiation story of Bishu culminating in his final, free choice of joining a village-school, it is equally a revealing statement on contemporary social reality against which the divergent characters interact with one another. The geographical and political backdrop of the trilogy has a specific identity in these novels and it is this backdrop which defines the choices and actions of the characters in the novels. The novel-sequence does not only depict the maturation of a whole generation represented by Bishu, it makes a telling statement on several generations of people struggling to make it possible for them to live. The Indian reality has been captured most dramatically and realistically in these novels.

The choice of third person, omniscient authorial narration has helped the author substantially in commenting on the situations and the people. From the events in the last novel of the trilogy, *Jan He Wolatu Jethe*, it appears that it was around 1942 that the protagonist, Bishu, chose a more or less stable occupation of becoming a school-teacher. He would be then around twenty-five. The trilogy thus narrates events from his birth to the age of twenty-five. These years of Bishu's life were the most eventful years in the life of the struggling nation. If the events in the trilogy are spread over a period of more than two decades, the action too shifts between two cities - Ujjain and Indore. The former represents the old-fashioned pilgrim centre and the latter a more or less modern style of life.

The trilogy, though written over a period of fifteen years, displays a remarkable sense of continuity and unity. Several factors contribute to the sense of continuity and unity of the three novels. One can point at four major factors : (1) The life-

story woven round one major character, Bishu; (2) A convincing depiction of the political life of India prior to the Quit India Movement of 1942; (3) Description of a characteristic lower middle-class family facing economic hardship and yet trying to maintain cultural, religious and moral traditions alive; (4) A simple and direct way of narration.

As one turns to the places where the action of the novels takes place, one notices that several happenings in the novels occur at protected spaces like home, school or the home of some relation and we are rarely shown characters facing the outdoor situations. When we find Bishu, his father Bapu or his brother Madhu face to face with a difficult outdoor situation, we find them getting distraught, disturbed and uncomfortable. As a matter of fact, many problems faced by the members of Bapu's household are to be attributed to their inadequate exposure to unprotected spaces outside the home-situation. Bapu and his two sons go through traumatic experiences as they face people and places other than the ones in which they were brought up. Bapu and his elder son Madhu prove to be failures; Bishu, however, manages to face the unprotected spaces bravely and on his own terms. In the absence of any guidance from their innocent father, Bapu, about the ways of the world, Bishu and Madhu struggle hard as they face strange and unfamiliar men and situations. The knowledge they receive is valuable, but they had to pay a heavy price for the attainment of this knowledge. This knowledge was hardly useful for Bapu and his elder son Madhu, but Bishu does find that knowledge quite useful and he manages to make a hard, but well thought out choice for himself.

It needs to be noted that the problems faced by the family members of Bapu's household are neither uncommon nor uncharacteristic. Poverty, deception, exploitation, neglect of the poor are problems of a representative character and it is in this sense that the story of Madhu is a representative story. What is special is the way each member of the family faces these problems and in facing the problem defines himself or herself in the novels.

The happenings in the story occur progressively in the

family, school, friends' places, relations and acquaintances' places, work places and in the open, such as on the train and at the railway stations. The home and the ever-flowing river Kshipra work as backdrop against which the life of Bapu, his two sons and some of his relations and acquaintances unfolds itself.

It is possible to identify the theme of ouster as one of the most dominant themes of the novel-sequence. Bapu loses his job, Madhu leaves home and joins the Navy and thus imposes an 'ouster' on himself. Bishu, the central character, is first 'ousted' from Ujjain and he then goes to Indore. After his return to Ujjain, he is second time 'ousted' when he voluntarily decides to work in a distant village, leaving behind the warmth of his hearth and the love of his ailing mother. For Bishu, ouster from secured, protected places and acquisition of identity are simultaneous processes. The structure of the novel - sequence depends largely on these themes.

It is evident that Muktibodh has meticulously and patiently planned his novel-sequence, which is written over a long period of fifteen years from 1954 to 1969. The events in the novel-sequence end around the year 1942, which means that Muktibodh took twelve long years to start writing on the events witnessed by him during the years of freedom struggle. It is thus a mature person's perception that one discovers in this novel-sequence.

The first novel of the trilogy **Kshipra** is spread over twenty-nine chapters and has one hundred and sixty five pages. Beginning with Bishu's birth - his first cry, which, for his father, is symptomatic of the baby's dislike of the habitation - the early chapters of **Kshipra** narrate Bishu's experiences at the school. The next few chapters graphically bring out before us the love and the innocence of a poor home, especially the tenderness of Suma, Bishu's younger sister. Bishu's elder brother Madhu's character is then vividly brought before us. Bishu's sensitive, poetic temperament is then sketched by narrating different events in his childhood including his encounters with his friends such as Bhawe. A pen-portrait of his sensitive and caring parents,

Bapu and Ramabai, is naturally spread over almost every chapter that describes the childhood of the central character Bishu. Chapters in which his younger sister Suma's feelings are expressed have turned out to be the most delicate and sensitive and beautiful chapters of the novel. A small event - misappropriation of some money by a subordinate clerk in Bapu's office - creates a serious crisis in the family. The upright, innocent Bapu is shaken to his roots. Wamanrao, an old friend, helps him, but Bapu never recovers from the shock. His elder son Madhu, without informing anybody in the family, joins the Navy. Bapu dies. The entire locality attends the funeral of this simple and honest man. As there is nobody to support his education, Bishu is sent to Indore to the place of his rich Mavashi (Aunt) to complete his education. It is a more sophisticated and wealthy place where he is given shelter for sometime. The first novel of the trilogy thus describes the childhood of Bishu and as the protection and support given to him by his parents, family, the township of Ujjain and the river Kshipra is no longer continued, he has to leave for Indore to complete his education, to grow, to get initiated and be mature.

The second novel of the trilogy, **Sarhadda**, was published in 1962. It is divided into five parts indicating five 'movements' of the plot. The action of the novel takes place at one place - Indore - only and it deals with the adolescent years of Bishu during which he first gets initiated into a way of life other than the one at home and gradually matures to a stage where he can understand situations and people on his own and could give mature and well thought-out responses to them. Secondly, the novel places before Bishu the choice regarding the place of his activity and the consequences of choosing either his home or the wider open environment are realized by him well. Thirdly, the novel also underlines Bishu's two genuine concerns - his concern for the poor and the unfortunate and for the freedom of the country. Finally, the novel also describes the adolescent's attraction for a sensitive, intelligent, beautiful and innocent girl, Kamal, at Mavashi's place.

The novel successfully conveys to us that Muktibodh has

matured as a novelist and has a much better command over his narration. Unlike the first novel, he has divided this novel into five phases indicating clear division of its themes. In part one, we are shown Bishu's entry into a more modern city of Indore and a much more affluent and a happier family of Mavashi. He discovers a different ethos in which people spend time in songs, dances, good eating and in a good life-style in general. This is registered very sensitively by his alert mind.

In the second part, the reader is narrated the sad tale of Mavashi's life through her reverie. Nirmala Mavashi was the third wife of her husband and had suffered a lot in her youth. She has a complex attitude towards Bishu because his parents had not given her adequate support and sympathy in her hard times.

In the third part of the novel, the scene shifts to a different and contrasting locale in Indore - the house of Geetabai, Raja's mother. The writer brings before us the scene of utter poverty, sickness and death in the extremely impoverished home of Geetabai. A very graphic description of the five characters in that home - Nana, his two sons Raja and Bandya, daughter Akka and Geetabai - is made to fully bring them to life. We also get to know how poverty has embittered young Raja; how it has turned the sensitive artist - type Nana into an addict and a stoic; how Geetabai has become a defiant woman and how Akka, the ailing daughter, has preserved tenderness of heart to its limits.

Part four continues the narration of events of Nana's place and presents a contrasting study of two brothers - Raja and Bandya. Anna, an elderly well-wisher of Mavashi, on learning that Bishu has started giving tuitions and has thus started earning some money, gets happy and encourages him by telling the story of his own early struggles in life. Bishu - thoughtful, reticent and soft, in his external behaviour - is hardened enough to face life and has developed the critical faculty in good measure. In this part we are also told that in every part of India the freedom movement had gathered momentum and Indore was no exception to it. Bishu was naturally drawn towards the freedom movement but his Mavashi's acquaintances were opposed to it.

Nana, the poor old man, was however, an exception and had a genuinely intense desire for the attainment of freedom of his country.

The fifth and the last part of the novel further brings out the contrasting attitudes of the haves and the have-nots towards the freedom movement. While Bishu joins the freedom struggle in his own way by carrying secret documents and by joining the protest-marches, the more fortunate ones around him were totally away from any such adventure. In a lathi-charge on the protesters, Nana dies. The entire atmosphere had become so charged that it was time for Bishu to leave Indore and return home. Kamal feels sad because of his departure, but it is an inevitable step for Bishu as he had gained adequate initiation at Indore and the mature Bishu had to set off for Ujjain.

The last novel of the trilogy, **Jan He Wolatu Jethe**, was published in 1969. It has 19 chapters and 215 pages. In structure, it differs from the second novel and is closer to the first one. The third novel starts with Bishu's journey or movement towards Ujjain and ends by showing another journey of Bishu towards an unnamed village - school far from Ujjain. Between the two start-offs in the journey, we are shown life at Ujjain faced by the now - initiated Bishu. In fact, one can hold that the third novel describes the process of acquisition of knowledge by Bishu who is enabled by that knowledge to make a firm individual choice of leaving for a Rashtriya Village School to become a teacher.

Unlike the earlier two novels, this novel has several characters from a rather unfamiliar environment, i. e. characters who are neither relations nor acquaintances of Bishu and his family members.

As the novel opens, we find Bishu on a crowded train in the company of fellow-travellers who are unknown to him. The train compartment contains all sorts of people and it is, in this sense, a microcosm of Indian life. On the train, he meets a rather curious man with a dog. The man is named Sadashivrao alias Garibdas and his actions do ironically reflect on his name. This man was to enter the life of Bishu too often later on and was to display contrasting character-traits.

As Bishu reaches Ujjain, he is face to face with stark reality at home. In an utter contrast to Mavashi's home in Indore, his is a poverty-stricken household facing the elemental problem of hunger. On realizing the gravity of situation, Bishu immediately sets off in search of a job. His stoic friend Bhave makes him aware of reality. Bhave also makes it known to him that his elder brother Madhu was not doing well in the Navy and was not in a position to send any money regularly to his mother. Bishu also knows how hollow some of the well-known personalities of the town are. His visit to the place of a writer Vishweshwar is an eye-opener for him.

Bishu attends an interview for a school-job and when he finds the Sethji coming very late to take the interview, he does not mind criticising him. Invoking the image of spider and web, Bishu visualises his entire past and present, including the whole range of his relations.

A political activist, Nishikant, whom Bishu had known on his train journey from Indore to Ujjain, had come for shelter to Bishu's house. Bishu wants him to leave the house, for he does not want his family members to be in more trouble on account of Nishikant, and secondly, he had a feeling that his sister was attracted towards him which, ultimately, might bring pain and misery to her. He meets Sadashivrao for the second time. He has been already informed that Sadashivrao was a police-informant. However, in this encounter, Bishu comes to know the depth of Sadashivrao's understanding and his philosophy of life. Then the novel depicts the return of his elder brother Madhu who had seen the outside world, had his big dreams shattered, had experienced insults and punishment in the Navy and had come round to the point of Bhave that finally one has to adjust to the situation. The novel then depicts the travails of Bhave who had been a gifted artist, a voracious reader of serious works, an honest, truthful, omniscient and selfless advisor to Madhu and Bishu. But he too has finally experienced emptiness and defeat inspite of his tendency for self-denial and the acceptance of philosophy of adjustment. His moment of introspection brings him fear.

Bhave admits to Bishu that throughout his life he insulted

and ignored himself. He wants to destroy all the sculptures created by him and thus wants to deny himself the claims of an artist. Bhave then dies a sad death. Madhu, his childhood friend, is saddened by the news and feels empty. Madhukar then meets Sadashivrao and Jagdish. Jagdish is disappointed that the wayward and poet-type Madhu will not be of any use to him for the cause of freedom struggle. Not feeling at home in Ujjain, Madhu leaves for Mumbai. Wamanrao extends his helping hand again to the family by bringing a marriage proposal from one Watave for Suma. The understanding Suma accepts the proposal inspite of resistance from her mother Ramabai and brother Bishu.

Bishu, in the meantime had hit Sadashivrao, the police informant, on the head to help a freedom-fighter escape. The large-heartedness of Sadashivrao saves him and he gets only four months jail - term. In the jail, he meets Bhagwat, a Marxist who also has great faith in Indian spiritualism and Vedanta philosophy. Vishwas' education and maturation thus gets almost completed because of his friendship with Bhagwat. On his release from the jail, several options and choices come his way. Finally, Vishwas makes up his mind to be a teacher in a Rashtriya School in a distant village. The novel-sequence ends on Bishu's firm choice of leaving Ujjain and educate village children in a school located in the hinterland. This is his way of helping the suffering masses.

2. Characterization

As one shifts one's attention from the plot and the structure of Muktibodh's trilogy, one notices that apart from the five characters from the protagonist Bishu's family, a host of other characters representing lower middle-class milieu from two townships in Madhya Pradesh of the forties inhabit the world of these novels. Muktibodh's first-hand acquaintance with that life has given them a veritable life-likeness.

Underlining the life-likeness of characters in these novels does not lead to a conclusion that they lack the element of fictionality. As a matter of fact, they can equally be seen as

imaginative creations made for a definite novelistic purpose by Muktibodh. Their life-likeness grants them a strong realistic status. We have thus the dual task of judging them as realistic portraits and fictional creations with autonomous creative status.

Bishu is undoubtedly the central character of the novels and almost all the events in these novels centre round his life and his perception. In fact, the first novel begins with his cry as a newborn baby and the last novel ends with his decision to leave for the village school. He thus begins his life on a clean slate in the first novel; the events and the people in the novel initiate him in the school of life and we find him finally gathering enough strength to make an independent, meaningful decision on his own. The novel- sequence thus can truly be called the initiation story of Bishu.

His elder brother Madhu is a foil to his character. If Bishu could learn a lot from life, could take an independent decision and could assert his personality, his brother Madhu could not do so. Madhu's life is a sad tale of an intelligent, sensitive but wilful boy who did not get properly initiated into the school of life. Madhukar's impatience and importunity are in sharp contrast with Bishu's patience and receptivity.

Compared to Bishu, Madhukar faces greater hardships and suffers more, but he does not seem to draw proper lessons from them and adamantly refuses to change himself. Compared to him, Bishu is a much greater learner of lessons given by life. Madhu does not grow and live to a plan, philosophy and model, he is like a rudderless ship that drifts on the sea of life. Defeat and despair thus stare him in his face and at the end of the last novel, like the uncountable nameless multitude, he drifts towards Mumbai.

The god-fearing, sensitive, loving and caring parents of these two boys - Ramabai and Bapu - had shaped the moral and emotional life of these children. Their sister Suma is a symbol of quiet suffering, tolerance and tender love. She never grudges about her poor lot, does not take any reckless decision and when the time comes to take a realistic and firm step, she responds to a marriage proposal brought to her by a well-wisher of their

family. She represents the quiet, suffering and understanding Indian womanhood.

So is the case with her mother Ramabai who, for the sake of Bapu, gave up all the luxuries she had enjoyed in her childhood as a daughter in a rich family. She respected her husband, his uprightness, his moral stance and even after his death remembers and extols his great moral qualities. The caring mother of three children, she suffers hardships and poverty without even grudging about it. Her husband Bapu is a god-fearing moral person, but he is duped by his own colleague and is shocked on discovering meanness in mankind. He never recovers from the shock.

Bhave, a close friend of Bishu and Madhu, is an epitome of patience and accepts the hardships in life in a stoical way. But he, too, comes to grief and meets a sad end due to consumption. His sister Nima, too, is a sensitive, suffering girl from a poor, but culturally enlightened family.

In the second novel, we meet another poor family - the family of Geetabai and Nana - which is a foil to the family of Ramabai and Bapu. Geetabai is a foil to Ramabai in this that she abuses her husband profusely. Nana is different from Bapu in this that he has taken to drugs to forget his sufferings. Thus, they - Geetabai and Nana - differ in their expression of feelings from Ramabai and Bapu, but when it comes to their essential nature, we discover that they are equally good.

Their three children are a foil to the three children of Bapu and Ramabai. Deprived of any intellectual, moral and cultural direction, they drift their own way. Geetabai's sensitive and understanding daughter suffers from T. B. and finally dies after prolonged suffering. Bandy, the elder son, becomes a police informant and informs police about the activities of the freedom-fighters in Indore. Raja's poetic temperament, protest and rebelliousness are all fruitless and he does not in any way build a meaningful personality. Raja is a foil to Bishu, Bandy to Madhu and Akka to Suma. The family of Nana and Geetabai can be considered a lost family compared to the family of Bapu and Ramabai. Bishu, the protagonist, gains knowledge about

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situations and people, he could thus take proper decisions. Such a thing had not happened in the case of any of the three children of Nana and Geetabai.

From among the other characters in the novels, each one has a point of view to maintain and has his or her share of unhappiness. Wamanrao's practical steps, though not justifiable on moral grounds, are defensible under the given situation. Mavashi's tale also can be listened to sympathetically. Anna's practical nature can be sympathetically seen in a certain context. Sadashivrao, the police informant, has his own moment of greatness, nobility and sacrifice when he defends Bishu in a court of law.

The characters together constitute the social milieu of these novels and are representative of the people of the forties. They invest the novel with a rare authenticity and are round and individual characters in their own right. The ideological development and maturation of the principal character does not take place in a mechanical manner. On the contrary, one gets a feeling that the character of Bishu emerges naturally and attains maturation in a natural manner. His undeclared, undefined ideology asserts itself in the midst of contending ideologies represented by other characters.

While paying close attention to the main aspects of his characters, the author has not ignored the details regarding the other features of the context in which they live and grow. Thus the description of places, people, households has attained a rare authenticity. The portrait gallery of the novelist has offered an extremely rich fare to his readers.

3. Narration

As seen earlier, the novel-sequence was written over a period of fifteen years and yet Muktibodh has managed to maintain a sustained mode of narration and the style too has marks of continuity. The choice of third person authorial narration has proved to be an apt choice as it facilitates movement of characters from one place to another and further it renders easy flashbacks by different characters. In spite of the

choice of the third person narration, the author-narrator rarely intrudes and stops the flow of narration. Working almost as an eye of the camera, the author-narrator focusses on events and characters and keeps on shifting the focus from event to event or person to person or from a slice of time to another slice of time. A masterly use of the cinematic technique in narration is one of the significant achievements of Muktibodh's novels.

Scrupulously avoiding any authorial comment and judgement on the events or characters, Muktibodh makes apt use of different narrative techniques by giving them unstinted authenticity. In addition to an effective narration, the inclusion of authentic and homely dialogues has given Muktibodh a very valuable tool. Profuse use of dialogues has given rare credibility to his characters. In fact, as he progressed in his novel-writing, the narrative part gets gradually reduced and more and more space gets occupied by dialogues.

Even in dialogues containing debatable points and intellectual discussions - for example, some dialogues between Madhu and Bhavé, Bishu and Bhavé, Bishu and Sadashivrao, Bishu and his intellectual friends are in the form of serious intellectual discussions - a fair degree of simplicity and homeliness has been achieved by Muktibodh.

He also does not miss any opportunity of presenting vivid descriptions of situations, places and persons. The narratives likewise contain a strong measure of lyricality. The choice of the third person narration has enabled him to acquire a good degree of intimacy, sincerity, expressiveness and homeliness in his writing. Added to it, the occasional interspersing of the Indore Marathi has given his style a pleasant local colour. Use of short, racy and direct sentences gives his narration the most desired quality in any narration - speed. The exclusion of ornamentation and flowery language has given it directness of rare quality. To illustrate, one can turn to a narration made in a state of delirium by Bishu's ailing father Bapu (*Kshipra*, pp. 150-159).

With the change of locale of the novel - for example, from Ujjain to Indore in *Sarhadda* or from Indore to Ujjain in *Jan He Wolatu Jethe* - the style of narration also undergoes subtle

changes underlining the author's mastery over his craft. Or when a new character or a group of characters is introduced, the narrative technique also undergoes a significant change. It indicates how alert and adaptable the author has been in introducing different movements in his novels. For example, the scene at Mavashi's place in Indore or the scene at Gangabai's place is introduced with a corresponding change in the narrative technique. When Nana narrates his past to Bishu (*Sarhadda*, pp. 31-37), or when Mavashi narrates her past (*Sarhadda*, pp. 46-82), one notices quite subtle and apt changes in the narrative techniques. The dynamism used by Muktibodh in his narrativistic techniques and style adds to his strength as a novelist. The occasional use of stream of consciousness technique also throws light on Muktibodh's mastery over contemporary novelistic techniques.

4. Realism and Muktibodh

Muktibodh's work is surely not of the category of fantasy or romance. It is a realistic work of a writer with a definite progressive vision and perspective. It is also true that Muktibodh had a Marxist world-view and had genuine sympathy for the working, suffering, exploited sections of the human race. But all this does not necessarily lead to a conclusion that the novel-sequence of Muktibodh bears any distinct stamp of being a work of a Marxist writer. True, socialism, the philosophy of socialism and the socialist movement have been mentioned in the second (*Sarhadda*) and the third novel (*Jan He Wolatu Jethe*) of the novel-sequence and socialism has been described as an ideal economic system. Similarly, the protagonist Bishu finally takes a decision which is consistent with socialist ideology. But all this does not make Muktibodh's novels either socialist novels or socialist realist novels. One cannot hold that the novels develop according to any socialist model. To be fair to the art of Muktibodh, one needs to admit that they are realistic, autobiographical works having considerable amount of imaginative, creative and fictional element. True to his vocation as an artist, Muktibodh in his depiction of men, places and

nature had been a realist closely acquainted with the lower middle class and middle class life in Malwa.

One can possibly hold that to the extent Muktibodh shows his protagonist as a boy from a poor family gaining knowledge of the world, of the available political philosophies and succeeds in taking a radical and bold decision at the most crucial moment of choice, his novels do have a socialistic perspective. Undoubtedly, Muktibodh had a socialist utopia before him unlike many of his contemporaries who had a dystopian perspective and were content with creating pessimistic fictional works in the sixties. His optimism and positive world-view had made him visualize the end of poverty, exploitation, conflicts and contradictions in life. But all this is not directly expressed in his novels, his novels do not convey any direct socialistic message to his readers. They are concrete, artistic statements on the development of a young boy and the characteristic environment in which he grows.

5. Aesthetic Distance and Muktibodh

It is expected of a mature writer that he maintains objectivity or aesthetic distance from the protagonist or the hero of his novel. Muktibodh's novel-sequence unfolds the initiation and development of the protagonist Bishu. The novels also seem to have some autobiographical element in them; one can at least say that the author has great sympathy for Bishu. Yet a good degree of objectivity and distance has been maintained by Muktibodh which is symptomatic of his achievements as a mature writer.

That Muktibodh is sympathetic towards Bishu and his family is clear on every page of the novels. But he does not seem to impose his authorial view-point on Bishu or any other character in the novels. He allows events to happen their way and accords great freedom to his characters, to have their say, opinions and to act their own ways. His characters thus, do not appear like puppets created by Muktibodh; they talk and act like living beings throughout these novels. This has become possible because Muktibodh has managed to maintain aesthetic distance

from the events and characters in these novels. Bishu undoubtedly is the protagonist of these novels, but one hardly gathers a feeling that he has been at any point in these novels put in a more advantageous position than the other characters. A mature writer alone can do this. In spite of his firm convictions, positive ideology and lasting faith in Marxism, Muktibodh has been able to grant objectivity to his narration on this count.

Throughout the novels, one confronts his sincere, authentic authorial tone that is devoid of any satirical or ironical undertone. The utter sincerity of purpose is never allowed to interfere with the objectivity of narration.

6. Setting, Atmosphere and Local colour

The unfortunate incidents of misappropriation of six hundred rupees by a subordinate of Bapu and Bapu's death (due to the shock received by him on realizing the immorality of his subordinate) are the 'immediate causes that set off a chain of unsettling events for Bishu and Madhu. But the two most significant events against which the actions, decisions and choices take shape - in fact the fate of everybody in Bapu's family and all other families of the time was decided by these events - are the second World War and the freedom movement. Everybody's life was affected by these two events, but the very course of life of the young generation represented by Madhu, Bishu, Bhave, Raja, Bandya, Akka, Suma and Nima was directly shaped by these two events. These youngsters found that their economic and psychological life was being shaped by these two major events. The young and the dynamic generation found itself in the throes of events never witnessed earlier by any generation. Muktibodh has shown an extraordinary alertness in making war and freedom as the two major events of the setting of his novels and has very convincingly filled in the details regarding this setting.

The charged atmosphere all over the country then must have naturally been experienced by every alert individual. What, however, goes to the credit of Muktibodh is his ability to capture this in his novels and to show how directly or indirectly war and

the freedom movement were having their impact on everybody. The actions, choices and fortunes and, therefore, personalities of people were inevitably influenced by war and the freedom-struggle. We are shown how the family of Bapu is affected by war (his son Madhu joins the Navy) and the freedom-struggle (his younger son Bishu takes keen interest in freedom struggle and has a genuine concern for economic equality). In Indore, Nana's family is hit badly by the freedom-struggle - Nana dies as a result of the beating received in the lathi-charge; Bandya becomes a police-informant and Raja becomes a drifter. But this is not all. Women suffer much more though passively and silently. The four young girls - Suma, Kamal, Akka and Bhave's young sister Nima - are directly affected by these events. The old also suffered. Nobody could be a passive and unconcerned witness to the eventful forties. Muktibodh has captured these eventful years in his novels with such a mastery that we could bring before us the entire scene of the forties vividly.

Muktibodh has added a powerful local colour to his novels by virtually painting in, words, the cities of Ujjain and Indore and the banks of river Kshipra in all their details. The School and temples of Ujjain, the Akhada and Bhartruhari's dark cave, the poverty and undeveloped character of the town Ujjain and above all the beauty and love of river Kshipra all add to the authenticity of his description of Ujjain. Similarly, when he describes the more affluent town Indore, he manages to give all details about the people and the place. We can almost clearly visualize the atmosphere of gaiety at Mavashi's place and the crying poverty at Gangabai's home. The market of Ujjain is brought to life by Muktibodh's pen. He shows the static state of Ujjain and the dynamism of Indore and as he lovingly describes the river Kshipra, one becomes aware of the ever-flowing character of life represented by the river giving us an assurance that even Ujjain will change and will prosper in times to come. As one comes to the end of the trilogy, one feels that one could find such characters and events at these places only.

7. Critics on Muktibodh's Novels

When one comes to Muktibodh's critics, the first critic one feels referring to is R. B. Patankar. Patankar holds that though Muktibodh is known as a poet and a critic, his most important contribution lies in the field of novel-writing, but for some unknown reasons his contribution to Marathi novels was ignored by his critics and readers. The first reason for this was the dominance of two other literary forms in the fifties and the sixties in Marathi. Poetry and short story were the two most important literary forms in Marathi literature of these two decades and serious novel was rarely appreciated and criticised during those days. Patankar also feels that critics had not developed adequate skill to criticise mature novels then. One can agree with Patankar on this point.

Secondly, Patankar maintains that the trilogy makes a genuine attempt to depict the total life of Bishu and it also deals with the problem of the development of his consciousness.

Thirdly, Patankar is of the view that Muktibodh in his novels emerges as a romantic writer of a special kind who wanted to study individual-society, individual-environment relationship minutely.

Patankar's point about the idealism and romanticism in Muktibodh's novels is understandable in a specific context only and it cannot be considered as a general point of criticism. Though Muktibodh was an idealist and a Marxist thinker, there was a strong streak of realism in him; he was never a dreamy idealist. His awareness about the contemporary reality was so acute that he felt disillusioned with his own dreams and became something of a pessimist and spiritualist. This could be called romantic dreaminess and romantic escapism. But when one takes a broader overview of the Marxist movement in India, one realises that Muktibodh gave up dreaminess and stopped romanticising about the future much earlier than most Marxists who took longer time to grasp the reality around them. Patankar has also referred to Muktibodh's unsure grasp of working class reality and the point is well made. One, however, feels that as

each one of us belongs to some or the other stratum of society, our understanding of other strata of society is bound to be uncertain, unsure and inadequate. The question of understanding a certain segment of society cannot be referred to the quantum of exposure one has to that segment, but to one's approach towards it. Muktibodh had much greater sympathy for the working classes and his inadequate knowledge of the working class has not come in the way of his 'understanding' and perception of that class.

D. K. Bedekar, a veteran Marxist thinker and critic in Maharashtra has made a very apt observation on the colourful vividness of human relations observable in Muktibodh's novels. He finds an interesting display of the vividness of life in them. He observes that Muktibodh has shown human beings in all their colours. Sharachchandra's portrait-gallery has innocent, loving, understanding and caring characters who are made to stand shoulder to shoulder with angry, cruel, insane, deceitful and ununderstanding characters. Muktibodh, Bedekar observes, has found man to be a complex and many-sided being. Bedekar's comments on Muktibodh's novels are perceptive and valuable.

Though the poetic and critical works of Muktibodh received good response from his readers and critics, his novels did not receive the attention they deserved. Their merit was neither aptly realized, nor properly focussed on. A large part of the criticism of his novels remained at the level of reviews and articles in which either a summary of the novels was presented or something amounting to an introduction to his novels was attempted by the critics. The only notable exceptions are the articles by D. K. Bedekar and Patankar's comprehensive book on Muktibodh.

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IV

MUKTIBODH AS A CRITIC

Muktibodh never claimed to be an academic literary critic. Yet he had held a definite position as a literary critic. He was of the view that the creative tendencies were not necessarily opposed to critical tendencies. Being well aware of the history of criticism, Muktibodh maintained that if creative artists negotiate with the past, at times fight it, and in any case respond to it, the critics also necessarily have to do the same exercise.

Referring to his own development, he informs that his creative and critical faculties started developing around the same time, i. e. around 1944 and he wrote his first critical article on the poet Govindagraj in a journal *Abhiruchi*. He published three books on criticism, namely, *Kahi Nibandh* (Some Essays, 1963), *Jeevan Ani Sahitya* (Life and Literature, 1972) and the Sahitya Akademi Award winning book *Srushti, Saundarya Ani Sahityamulya* (Nature, Beauty and Literary Value). In addition to these three books, he also wrote about thirty critical articles which were published in different journals from 1941 to 1984. The volume of his critical works explains how keenly he had developed interest in criticism.

It goes to the credit of Muktibodh that while he consistently maintained a Marxist position in his literary criticism, he never fell a prey to orthodox Marxism. On the various aspects of art and also on different topics of his interest, he could maintain an independent position. Though he accepted the central Marxist concept that art expresses class reality, yet when he came to apply the Marxist perspective to art in general and more particularly to specific works of art, he exercised considerable freedom in making his own formulations.

When he started thinking of devotional poetry in Marathi

and the poems of scholar - poets like Moropant and Raghunath Pandit, he realized that the class-centred Marxist approach to literature needed some modifications. In the context of that poetry, he held that it is possible to think of oneself as belonging to a much larger class than the one to which one belongs. One can thus turn the subjective experiences into objective experiences; especially the artists can become free of the class-awareness they possess as members of a particular class. When Muktibodh talks in terms of transcending the class-alignments and transforming the subjective experience into an objective experience, he is quite close to the position held by the Sanskrit critics regarding the nature of art-experience. The Sanskrit critics like Bhatta Nayaka and Abhinavagupta regard art experience as a generalized (Sadharanikrut) experience.

While thinking about the main principle of organization that accords unity to a literary work, Muktibodh argues that the meaning or the content of a literary work is the main principle of organization of a literary work. An artist makes an attempt to transmit the meaning experienced by him/her to his/her readers. But in maintaining this position, he goes to an extreme when he holds : "A literary work bears a meaning. An artist first realizes this meaning and an appreciator realizes the same meaning while appreciating the work of art. It is this meaning which decides the functions of different constituents of a work of art." (*Srushti Saundarya Ani Sahityamulya*, p.107)

That a literary work bears only one meaning and this meaning is realized first by the producing artist is no longer a tenable position. From the early formalist critics like William Empson to the contemporary post-structuralist critics, it is being repeatedly and convincingly argued that a literary work possesses many meanings and the producing artist is not necessarily the privileged knower of the meaning of his artwork.

In the same way, Muktibodh argues about the uniqueness of a work of art. The theory of uniqueness of a work of art was maintained by the idealist or the autonomist critics. Over the years, however, this position is criticised severely by several

critics and does not have much currency among literary critics.

While thinking about the nature of literature, Muktibodh maintains a more acceptable position that literature corresponds to external reality and words express reality in their own world of illusion. Thus on the one hand, he gives importance to depiction of reality in literature and to the experiential basis of literature, but on the other hand he also maintains that a literary work has internal coherence and that it is autonomous in nature. This is his way of upholding an inclusive perspective in which the aesthetic values and values related to representation of life in art are sought to be given equal weightage. This makes it clear that while being a Marxist critic, he is equally eager to admit the claims of an art work as a formal organization.

As he comes to consider the problem of function of art, he takes a rather comprehensive view and states that the world of art performs four major functions - (1) It aims at pleasing the appreciators; (2) It is pursued in order to satisfy one's urge for creation; (3) It unfolds a writer's view and understanding of life for the appreciators and (4) It contributes to essential human values and to the essence of the social man.

One can easily see that the first two functions mentioned by Muktibodh are related to the formal and the aesthetic aspects of life, whereas the latter two functions deal with the content of art works and underline his realistic, humanistic and Marxist view of art and life.

It is necessary here to discuss the notion of '**Manushata**' (or the essence of man) advanced by Muktibodh. Muktibodh upholds that '**Manushata**' is a universal principle that expresses the being of social man. He regards it as the central, organizing concept of literature. In his opinion, art and literature are basically social expressions and therefore, the world of art has much to do with the essence of man and hence, works of art have to perform an important function in the context of '**Manushata**'. It needs to be stressed that the notion of '**Manushata**' is not to be equated to humanism or the humanistic perspective. Muktibodh repeatedly holds that the concept of '**Manushata**' is concerned with the concept of essence or being of

the social man, it is concerned with the very being of man. Art and literature perform important functions in the context of the being of social man.

One appreciates the significance of the notion of '**Manushata**' and the role assigned to art by Muktibodh in the context of this concept of '**Manushata**', but it needs to be noted here that in spite of its desirability, the concept of '**Manushata**' remains a hazy and abstract concept like the concepts of freedom, equality, truth, justice and so forth. It is natural for such broader value concepts to be hazy and abstract; one, however, expects of a critic like Muktibodh to illustrate this concept with ample examples. It is, nevertheless, possible to defend Muktibodh by saying that since the notion of '**Manushata**' is concerned with the very being of man, not giving adequate examples to explain it may not be considered as an act that deserves much criticism.

When, however, Muktibodh insists on value-oriented 'meaning' of a work of art, one feels like raising an objection to his position. A work of art can have many meanings and most of them, and at times each one of them, may contribute to human values, to the essence or the being of social man, to **Manushata**. No single meaning can claim to be 'the meaning' of a given work of art.

As one comes to Muktibodh's views on the evaluation of a work of art, one notices that he makes use of aesthetic, social and Marxist criteria at one and the same time. He uses the aesthetic category of depth of human experience to judge the content of literature, then he employs the social and Marxist criterion of the correspondence of a work of art with life and further he uses a very special criterion of **Manushata** to consider the function of art. It is noteworthy that all the three criteria aim at judging the content of a work of art and none of them makes even a faint attempt to consider the formal, aesthetic aspect of a work of art.

In his study of Muktibodh's literary criticism, R. B. Patankar points out that Muktibodh's belief in eternal human values and his cherished notion of **Manushata** would go against the Marxist perspective which insists on locating values in the dynamic,

ever-changing class-reality. Patankar also holds that Muktibodh's insistence on man-Nature unity, his belief in the eternal values of life and his advocacy of Manushata point to the fact that Muktibodh was not a 'complete' Marxist and he was closer to the radical humanist position of M. N. Roy. Patankar also observes that Muktibodh's historical perspective was not flawless, his observations on feudalism are open to debate; and yet he considers Muktibodh to be a very significant Marxist critic who was ready to deviate from the trodden orthodox Marxist path. If Muktibodh did not put forward a complete and satisfactory Marxist theory of art, the entire blame cannot be ascribed to him and his equipment. Patankar maintains that Marxism itself is an elastic, open and essentially contested concept having many meanings and hence one cannot pinpoint the characteristics of Marxism or of Marxist aesthetics accurately. Muktibodh probably had sensed it intuitively and had mustered courage to advance his formulations on art. Patankar has also warned that Marxist perspective does not necessarily give satisfactory solutions to social and cultural problems of every age.

Muktibodh understandably upholds the claims of those perceptions of art in which meaning and content are accorded primacy. For him, art activity has significance in the larger contexts of life. Like other Marxists, he holds that literature has all along expressed the desires, the dreams and the consciousness of the dominant classes. He is not surprised by the fact that those who take progressive postures in relation to problems in the social field, at times, do not take any progressive measures in the cultural field. He is of the view that the dominance of class-consciousness influences through mass-media the minds of such people and helps shape their aesthetic and cultural taste.

His characteristic perspective leads him to criticise the formalist view of B. S. Mardhekar, including his theory of three laws of rhythm. Appreciating Mardhekar's attempt to focus the attention of critics on the formal aspects of art, he maintains that Mardhekar should not have over-emphasized the formal element at the cost of meaning and content in a work of art. Language,

Muktibodh holds, is in many ways a different medium from the other art media and hence the laws of rhythm applicable in other arts may not be applicable in the case of language-based art like literature.

Further, Muktibodh shows commendable awareness regarding the need to study allied disciplines like history, sociology, philosophy and psychology. A critic, he is of the view, needs to master the broader contexts of social life and in doing this he would get considerable help from a study of allied disciplines. Not many critics show such a welcome awareness of the need to acquire a much larger apparatus of knowledge.

One of the important critical problems addressed by all major critics is the problem of literary greatness and Muktibodh also has considered the problem by stating that a great work of art seizes and communicates the totality of life. A great artist aims at representing the being and the becoming of people and he can do it by acquiring much wider and deeper knowledge, not necessarily at the academic and the abstract level, but certainly at the level of actual living. A writer's sincerity and analytical faculty will enable him to acquire the necessary perspective to present a total picture of life. He should also be able to capture the dynamic, ever-changing reality around him. His intelligence, imagination and genuine interest in man should help him in his search for truth in life. In doing this he also changes himself, develops both as a man and an artist and establishes himself as a great artist, who is necessarily different from a mere good artist, having command over his art and its aesthetics.

The criteria used by Muktibodh here are not very different from the criteria used by other important critics, particularly the classical critics, in their formulations on great art and great artists. One cannot identify any specific Marxist element in the criteria adopted by Muktibodh excepting the notion of totality which can be discovered in the Marxist perspective of George Lukacs and the non-Marxist perspective of the classical critics alike.

It was natural for Muktibodh to have thought of progressive literature. In Marathi literature, progressive literary movement

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was at no specific time a very strong movement. Muktibodh's interest in Hindi literature had made him take a serious note of progressive literature and the progressive literary movement in Indian literatures. Defining progressive literature as value based, man-centred realistic perspective of life, Muktibodh cited Premchand's **Godan** (a novel) and 'Kafan' (a short story) as the appropriate examples of progressive literature. Progressive literature, he maintained, takes into account not only the material development of man, but also the human, ethical and therefore, spiritual development of man. Muktibodh is rightly concerned with the ethical and spiritual aspects of human development and interestingly he discovered them in the Marxist view of life. For him, Marxism was not a mere socio-economic statement, but also a very comprehensive statement on the being (which includes the ethical and spiritual aspects as well) and becoming of the social man. Muktibodh was not very happy with the existing forms of realism in literature, nor was he totally happy with socialist realism and progressivism in literature. Upholding the notion of human freedom, he argued that literature must make readers aware of reality by keeping in focus the human values and the human good. He, therefore, preferred the term 'life-centred literature' to the term 'progressive literature'. To create such literature, he opined, one need not accept the progressive thought at the abstract, philosophical level.

This was a radically different and, therefore, a welcome interpretation of 'progressive' literature and it amply exposes the populist and spacious arguments about the progressive movement in literature.

Dalit literature has undeniably made significant contribution to Marathi literature since the late sixties and this has been accepted by major critics in Marathi. Muktibodh is no exception to this. He wanted Dalit writers to acquire the Marxist perspective in order to more effectively express the Dalit consciousness. It is noteworthy that he had sympathetically and also unmistakably realized the distinctness and the authenticity of Dalit consciousness and yet he was advocating that the Dalit writers ought to acquire the Marxist world-view to give proper

direction to their consciousness and expression.

While suggesting that the Dalit writers can make good use of the Marxist world-view, Muktibodh was aware of the differences between the Marxist and the Dalit perspectives. He argued that unlike the Marxist view, which gives utmost importance to economic and political factors, the Dalit consciousness is mainly concerned with the socio-cultural factors and is in the form of a revolt against the dominating social castes. He, however, gives a word of caution that there is a rush among the conscious, educated Dalits to become a part of the middle-class milieu. Acceptance of middle-class consciousness, he observes, might lead to a serious loss of sharpness and intensity in Dalit consciousness. Dalit literature then might end up as a mere style of literature, it might lose its intensity.

This apprehension does not make him belittle the achievement of Dalit writers. Muktibodh refers to three major achievements of Dalit writing: (1) It reinforced thinking on Indian art, culture and life in an unprecedented manner; (2) In Marathi literature, it created a new awareness regarding the social contexts of life and art, which virtually transformed and enlivened the literary scene in Marathi; (3) It gave rise to a number of good poets, novelists, short-story writers and autobiography writers in Marathi.

Muktibodh warned the Dalit writers against the danger of complacency and contentedness and appealed to them to cultivate a much broader consciousness that would grasp the dynamism, contradictions and ever-changing nature of reality and would also be aware of permanent human values. He notes that the Dalit writing brought back to Marathi the life and warmth of dialects used by the masses and it enriched the literary language. Further, referring to the strong measure of personal agony and its expression in Dalit literature, Muktibodh underlines its distinctive, inimitable character thus distinguishing it from literature written about the village-life.

Muktibodh's study of Dalit literature had its base in his far wider sympathy for man in general and in his Marxist perspective; it is a study on art and life made by a very

concerned and original thinker.

As a critic dealing with the applied and theoretical aspects of literary criticism, Muktibodh had an inclusive and wider perspective on life and was much concerned with human experience in all its dimensions. He cherished a humanistic attitude to life and had a close and sympathetic understanding of the actual, the 'lived' life of the masses. His Marxist awareness had a far wider reach and could not be contained within the orthodox boundaries of available frames of Marxism. As a connoisseur of art, and an appreciator brought up on the rich Indian literary heritage and the weighty tradition of world-literature, Muktibodh had a rare creative and critical sensibility and his acceptance of the essential aspects of Marxist philosophy had given it a distinct and welcome social direction.

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CONCLUSION

Muktibodh was by temperament a very modest person, a perfect gentleman who never cultivated aggressiveness, exhibitionism or a tendency for wider publicity. Being true to his desire to be honest to his self, his being, his true personality, he consciously made efforts to keep himself away from the public eye.

We saw that his family background, his childhood experiences, parental influences, rich cultural and religious background, his acquisition of traditional learning, his mastery of the best in Marathi, Hindi and Sanskrit literature and his keen interest in contemporary literature were all responsible in the making of his sophisticated, cultivated, liberal and inclusive personality. Added to it, his stay in places like Indore, Ujjain and Nagpur too may have had a fair share in the making of his character.

Though Marxism made a genuine appeal to his intellect and sentiment, he never felt like following the 'correct' Marxist line of scientific socialism as was done by several of his contemporaries. Accepting Marxism in order to help shape his perspective, he took keen interest in observing the actual life as it is lived by people. He could, therefore, immediately grasp the significance of Dalit literature, which was not done by several Marxists who looked at the whole phenomenon from the 'trained' Marxist eye only. His sympathy for the Dalits, the underprivileged, the exploited people did not emanate from a mere philosophical and political understanding, but it had its roots in his emotional oneness with the concrete, actual 'lived' life of these unfortunate segments of Indian society.

All this made him a liberal, open-minded, Marxist thinker

and critic having deep roots in the Indian tradition and history, a great achievement for any progressive writer. His stance against nihilism and the philosophy of despair and his positive, social approach towards human problems were very special qualities not possessed by many contemporary Marathi writers of the sixties.

The significance of his novels was not immediately grasped by the reading public and it took quite some time for the academic critics to realize the greatness of his novel-sequence. Recognition thus came rather late to him, but it was a lasting recognition for which any novelist could take pride upon himself. His convincing depiction of the slice of life seen by him and the rare sensibility with which he saw it are to be considered as his great achievements as a novelist.

Muktibodh is known more as a poet. On several occasions he is compared to his illustrious contemporary B. S. Mardhekar. He himself has expressed his studied opinion of Mardhekar's poetry by judiciously referring to its merits and demerits. Like Mardhekar, he, too, handled many new techniques in poetry including free verse. His fame as a poet of revolution and a progressive poet has curiously clouded the evident fact that he wrote lyrical poems, love-poems, nature-poems and metaphysical poems, which easily outnumber his social, revolutionary and progressive poems.

In literary criticism, too he, made a remarkable contribution by grappling with almost all important critical issues in his books and articles and therefore he is widely known as a Marathi critic of considerable repute. In his works, we discover an unmistakable evidence of a rare combination of creative and critical faculties. It would be a mistake to call him only a good writer, rather, one would call him a writer who was very close to being an all-time great writer in Marathi.

There is a mistaken notion among readers and critics alike that Muktibodh did not receive adequate critical attention. When one looks at the number of articles written on him, the critics who wrote them and the journals which published them, one understands immediately that he was never ignored by Marathi

critics. From 1948 to 1985, more than 32 articles appeared in reputed journals like **Abhiruchi, Satyakatha, Alochana, Yugwani, Maharashtra Sahitya Patrika, Navbharat, Pratishthan, Chhand, Tatparya, Aksharvaidarbhi, Asmitadarsh, Lokvangmaya, Samajprabodhan, Samuchit, Sangrahalaya**. This long list, it needs to be stressed, does not include dailies, weeklies, popular magazines and the Sunday editions of newspapers which published several articles on his life and works. Some of the best Marathi critics like G. K. Bhat, R. S. Jog, D. K. Bedekar, W. L. Kulkarni, N. G. Joshi, A. N. Deshpande, Ashok Kelkar, M. D. Hatkanangalekar and R. B. Patankar have unequivocally praised his creative and critical talent.

But praise from critics does not lead to popularity and serious writers rarely become popular with the common reader. Muktibodh himself scrupulously avoided publicity, self-projection and 'popularity'. He was happy with the judicious critical acclaim he had received from the discerning readers and critics of his works. He will be remembered as a poet-novelist who brought in an important change in our aesthetic taste and judgement on poetry and novel.



APPENDIX

A. A brief Life-sketch of Sharachchandra Madhav Muktibodh :

- Date and place of Birth : 21st January, 1921, Indore.
- Education : M. A., LL. B.
- Worked as teacher, pleader, co-editor, Deputy Director. Retired as Professor and Head of the Dept. of Marathi, Govt. College (Morris College), Nagpur.
- Won Sahitya Akademy Award (1979), R. S. Jog Award (1979) for the critical work **Srushti, Saundarya ani Saundaryamulya**. The two collections of his poems **Navi Malwat** and **Yatrik** received awards from the Govt. of Maharashtra.
- Died on 2nd November, 1984 at Nagpur.

B. Books :

- **Navi Malwat**, Nagpur : Veena Prakashan, 1949. The 2nd edition was published in 1964 by Mauj Prakashan, Bombay. The two editions contain long and important critical statements in the form of prefaces.
- **Yatrik**, Bombay ; Mauj Prakashan, 1957.
- A selection of his published and unpublished poems was made by Shri. Yashwant Manohar with a 38 page introduction. It was published by Sahitya Akademi in 1993, under the title **Muktibodhanchi Nivadak Kavita**.

C. Novel - Sequence :

- **Kshipra** : Solapur : Suras Granthmala, 1954.
- **Sarhadda**, Bombay : Mauj Prakashan, 1961.
- **Jan He Wolatu Jethe**, Bombay : Mauj Prakashan, 1969.

D. Criticism :

- **Kaahi Nibandh**, Nagpur : Nagpur Prakashan, 1963.
- **Jeevan ani Sahitya**, Bombay : Abhinav Prakashan, 1972.
- **Srushti, Saundarya ani Sahityamulya**, Bombay : Lokvangamayagraha, 1978.
- Muktibodh published more than thirty articles in reputed literary Journals.

E. Almost all well-known literary journals in Marathi published more than 32 articles on Muktibodh's writing. Further, many dailies, weeklies and magazines published several articles on him.

A full-length study of his works was made by R. B. Patankar under the title **Muktibodhanchi Sahitya** (Bombay : Mauj Prakashan, 1986).

F. Muktibodh started his career as a writer by writing poems and short-stories in Hindi. Some of them were published in magazines. But later he turned to Marathi only.

G. The better known interviews of Muktibodh were taken by Shri. Digambar Padhye and G. M. Kulkarni. Muktibodh was interviewed on various aspects of his writing by Shri. Digambar padhye in **Tatparya**, July 1980, pp. 9-22.

He was also interviewed by Shri. G. M. Kulkarni for his views on Dalit consciousness and Dalit literature. This interview was posthumously published in **Samuchit** (April-May, 1985, pp. 103-111)¹