

PROLIFERATION OF POSTMODERN MEANINGLESSNESS IN G. M. MUKTIBODH'S "THE VOID"

Hillela. P Ph.D. Research Scholar,

Department of English, Bishop Heber College, Trichy-17,

Email: prayhillela@gmail.com

Dr. A. Sheeba Princess, Research Supervisor,

Assistant Professor of English, Bishop Heber College, Trichy-17

Abstract

G. M. Muktibodh (1917-64), an Indian writer of the twentieth century, is a versatile genius, writing across many genres of literature. He also functioned as editor of prestigious journals. *Chand ka Munh Tedha Hai* is one of his masterpieces. He is known for his powerful imageries and for experimentalist writing. Existentialist philosophy has a strong hold on his works, including "The Void." This poem has been analyzed in terms of economic and colonial perspectives, by Chandra Shekhar Dubey. This paper attempts to establish that according to Muktibodh's "The Void," meaninglessness in postmodern society is capable of proliferation at an interpersonal level as well as in a collective or mass level.

Key Words: *essentialist philosophy, experimentalist, postmodern.*

G. M. Muktibodh (1917-64), an Indian writer of the twentieth century, is a versatile genius, writing across many genres of literature. He also functioned as editor of prestigious journals. *Chand ka Munh Tedha Hai* is one of his masterpieces. He is known for his powerful imageries and for experimentalist writing. Existentialist philosophy has a strong hold on his works, including "The Void." This poem has been analyzed in terms of economic and colonial perspectives, by Chandra Shekhar Dubey. This paper attempts to establish that according to Muktibodh's "The Void," meaninglessness in postmodern society is capable of proliferation at an interpersonal level as well as in a collective or mass level.

The existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre declared "man is born into a kind of void" (Cuddon, 295). Important features of the mid-twentieth century throughout the world include "lack of positive optimism,... contradictory nature of an affluent society which is discontented with itself" (Albert, 563) and meaninglessness. The poem, "The Void" by Muktibodh discusses the theme of emptiness that exists within every soul. To be plain, 'the void' stands for the sense of meaningless or lack of peace and contentment, despite all the achievements and greatness that

one has. While most people would ascribe their lack of peace to their material or social problems, at some moments they realize that the fulfillment of their dreams or the solution to their material problems does not suffice to give them satisfaction or meaning to life. Existentialism deals much with this and the quest for finding the reason for one's existence. All through this poem, the poet converses about the crude nature of this emptiness.

The poet begins the poem by giving a pictorial presentation of the hollowness within. He says that it has maws, which have "carnivorous teeth." The use of the adjective 'carnivorous' suggests the wild nature of the emptiness and the poet explains why he calls it carnivorous in the next line. He says that the teeth in those jaws will chew up or eat up everybody. In other words, it will grind or squash people to pieces. This reflects the intense pain one undergoes, because of the empty space within. After saying that the "teeth will chew you up," he declares it will "chew up everyone else." This suggests that the emptiness is not only individual but also collective.

The scarcity or the lack inside us is a part and parcel of our being. The poet continues with the pictorial image when he says that in the hollow space within the jaws of the void, there is a pool of blood. Blood often stands for life. Thus, the pool of blood can symbolize the void sucking the blood out of people. Then, he lists the characteristics of the void. It is "utterly black." One of the meanings indicated in the Concise Oxford Dictionary (Eleventh Edition) for the term 'black,' as an adjective, is of the very darkest color due to the complete absence of light. Here it can refer to the absolute absence of everything good or joyful. The void is then explained to be violent, cruel and blatant.

The void is disowned by most people. But, it is nevertheless present. In other words, though the void is plain or obvious, it is disowned or it is claimed to be absent by some people. Disownment also suggest that the void is not liked or it is not something that can be enjoyed, by anybody. The use of words like 'us' and 'everyone else' suggests that nobody is free of this emptiness. It is a debased. In other words, it is often not given much attention to. The void is totally self-absorbed i.e. it is full of itself, which again suggests its callous nature, The qualities that have been attributed to the void i.e. barbaric, naked, disowned, debased and completely self-absorbed, are similar to the qualities of the ones who have the void inside themselves. The people who are being tormented by the void turn into cruel beings. They become naked or too vulnerable to all pain and evil. In other words, they become too sensitive. The void also makes them feel disowned and debased. Such people also become narcissistic and full of themselves, which implies that they turn into individuals, who least bother about other people's feelings and emotions.

The ones who have the void within them scatter it or spread it among the people who belong to their social network, with their furious words and quick-tempered deeds. The people who happen to meet them also recognize the void in the wounds imposed on themselves by the

ones with the void. They (the ones who have been hurt), in turn, let it develop or widen its influence by doing the same and thus rearing the children or the seeds of the void. This is a reference to the fact that the individuals who are hurting inside hurt others and consecutively, the ones who are hurt others treat others in the same way and thus pass on the gloominess or the seeds of emptiness. When they are first sown, they appear trivial or petty like children, but they are raised with fuel fire. Here, the spread of the void is done on a one-to-one level or at an individual level.

The void is sturdy and lasting. This denotes its robust nature and that it cannot be easily done away with. It is a fertile soil to breed saws, daggers, and sickles. According to the Cambridge Learner's Dictionary (Second Edition), 'saw' is "a tool with a sharp edge that is used to cut wood or other hard material," 'dagger' is a "short knife, used as a weapon" and 'sickle' refers to "a tool with a round blade used to cut long grass or grain crops" Saw, dagger, and sickle are objects used to chop hard materials like wood, sickle is used to cut malleable substances like grass and dagger is mostly employed to hack people. This conjures up another important characteristic of the void, i.e. the void strikes people of all caliber from people as strong as wood to those as frail like grass and it is as strong a weapon, as a dagger. Now, the poet again reminds the reader of the image of the void as having 'carnivorous teeth'

The poet then, to express the mass response to the void within, makes a paradoxical statement. He says that it is because of this kind of destructive nature (of the void), that there are dancing and jubilation on every side. In fact, this is true because people often try to disguise their grief within and project a great feeling of happiness and success to falsely convince themselves and others that they are enjoying their lives. Thus, the void, in a way, becomes the cause of the celebration. This is the reaction that some people give, in response to the void inside. Here, the postmodernist's celebration of meaninglessness comes in. Baldrick mentions that "the postmodernist greets the absurd or meaningless confusion of contemporary existence" (288). Celebrating, while hiding the void within, together becomes a trend and many others follow.

Death or the void is now giving rise to brand new kinds of people. This can be a reference to the stimulation of weird behavior in individuals, as a result of the void. Everywhere there are people who bounce into failure, despite having tried to avoid it and on the other hand, there are folks who deliberately commit deadly blunders. People behave in the above-mentioned ways because they have been sawn by the teeth of the void.

The world or the society, despite the powerful presence of the void and the suffering induced by it, choose to ignore it with indifference. In other words, though many or rather all individuals undergo affliction due to the void, the world, as a whole pays the least attention to it and the poet condemns such an attitude. While Christian existentialism put forth by Soren Kierkegaard believes that the void is God's niche in the human soul. Atheistic and secular

existentialism proposes the role of the individual himself to fill one's life with meaning, living such a life. Muktibodh's view thus appears to cater to the latter kind of existentialist thought.

Reading the poem closely, one can find that it progresses from dealing with the spread of the void at an individual level to a collective level. While the former refers to the individual propagation of the void, the latter denotes the many that respond to it and also disperse it. The characteristics of the void, as described throughout the poem suggest its individual and collective nature. While the initial half details the void inside each individual, the latter is mostly concerned with the void afflicting a throng of people in a collective manner.

In this poem, Muktibodh scrutinizes the characteristics of the void and its increase or growth. The proliferation of the void, existing in an individual manner in addition to a mass or in a large magnitude is thus, detailed vividly by the poet. Alongside his blatant description of the void as a vital issue in people's lives, he reprimands the neglect of the presence of the void and the duty to annihilate it.

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