

LONG POEM OR UNENDING POEM? On the emergence of Muktibodh's 'Andhere Mein'

Barbara Lotz

Within the poetics of New Poetry (Nayi Kavita) in Hindi, Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh's unconventional treatment of traditional literary forms, contents and lingual patterns appears as a most significant contribution. Especially, the exceptional length of his poems represented an experimentalist transgressing of lyrical boundaries. Besides 'Andhere Mein', his longest poem, most of his better known poems impress with a large number of pages, distinguishing him as the father of long poems in modern Hindi poetry. Although before him poets like Suryakant Tripathi Nirala and Jaishankar Prasad had come up with similarly long poems in Hindi, these works still remained to a large extent embedded in traditional contexts of epic narration or elegiac song patterns, both forms not only allowing but also demanding a certain development of length. And whereas both these great forerunners had chosen the form of a long poem for the adequate treatment of a certain topic, Muktibodh's creation of long poems was not one of choice, but, as this article tries to show, one of necessity, if not obsession. He was only too well aware that the length in his poetic writings created an increasing obstacle in finding an audience or readership, as even publishing in magazines became a problem. Furthermore, the unwieldy length in combination with dream-like, surrealistic settings, and a dense and sometimes obscure diction combined with doubting, fragmented protagonists made his poems somewhat difficult to comply with a core demand of the progressivist school that Muktibodh felt committed to: a direct, lucid communication with 'the people'. Feeling increasingly restricted within the confines of both experimentalist and progressive demands, he therefore pleaded for a widening of the artistic freedom within progressivist outlines.

Many Originals: Manuscript Muddle

Muktibodh did not live to see a published poetry collection of his own. When, finally, plans for his poetry collection *Chand Ka Moonh Terha Hai*

materialised, he was already fatally ill. Therefore he was never able to edit a printed version of the poem 'Andhere Mein'. Eventually, after his death in September 1964, this poem appeared twice: in August/September 1964 in the aforesaid collection edited by Shrikant Verma and a few months later in the November issue of the magazine *Kalpana*, but with a longer title: 'Ashanka Ke Dweep Andhere Mein'. Shrikant Verma mentions in his introduction that Muktibodh wished to include 'Andhere Mein' in this collection, and that he, according to the author's wish, deleted the first part of the heading. That means, both texts still carried the earlier longer title when being handed in, but as we will see, it is rather impossible that it was the *same* manuscript because of the great amount of differences in the printed versions. Another version eventually appeared in 1980 in Muktibodh's collected works *Muktibodh Rachnavali*¹, carrying, as in *Chand Ka Moonh Terha Hai*, the shortened title 'Andhere Mein'. In his foreword, editor Nemichandra Jain mentions that the version of the *Rachnavali* would not follow the one in *Chand Ka Moonh Terha Hai*, because in the meanwhile manuscripts corrected by the author himself were available. The version in *Rachnavali* would follow, 'with some changes'², the one published in *Kalpana*. Under the heading of the poem itself we find the editorial note: 'Here we have the text of the poem, that differs from the version published in *Chand Ka Moonh Terha Hai* and *Kalpana*. It follows the manuscript that is based on the corrections the poet himself carried out in these two versions.' After a close comparison of the texts, however, it seems that both the *Rachnavali*-version (RAC) and the *Chand Ka Moonh Terha Hai*-version (CKM) have too many changes peculiar to each of them, and furthermore neither version corresponds with the *Kalpana*-version (KAL), the CKM-version being the one with the most deviations. The manuscript situation therefore is quite unclear.

Ashok Vajpeyi, who was actively involved in both the CKM-collection and the completion of the *Rachnavali*, quotes a letter of Muktibodh of February 1964³, when the latter already was confined to bed. In this letter, Muktibodh agreed to send a manuscript of two poems, one of them 'Andhere Mein', to Vajpeyi and Kamlesh for publication in their planned new magazine *Punarvasu*. Since later on these plans had to be abandoned, Vajpeyi recalls having discussed with Muktibodh in the hospital at Bhopal, where he was admitted in March 1964, that Vajpeyi should send the manuscript to the magazine *Kalpana* instead. At around the same time it was decided between Vajpeyi and Muktibodh to shorten the title, and to convey this change to Shrikant Verma preparing the CKM-collection.

So one manuscript, originally meant for *Punarvasu*, was sent to *Kalpana*, with the original long title by Vajpeyi. It is unclear which manuscript Shrikant Verma had in hand when collecting poems for CKM. The idea that the same manuscript as that being sent to *Kalpana* had been used for this publication seems rather doubtful, as both these versions differ to a great extent. Equally interesting seems the question, what manuscript Nemichandra Jain used when collecting material for the *Muktibodh Rachmavali* (RAC) in 1980, if it really had corrections by the author of both the other versions as he claims. If the manuscript meant for *Punarvasu* was sent by Muktibodh to Vajpeyi from bed when he was already very ill, and later forwarded by Vajpeyi to *Kalpana*, Muktibodh could hardly have corrected the same afterwards for publication in CKM. If this had been the case, it would have been mentioned most probably in Shrikant Verma's foreword. So it seems possible that at least two, if not three, manuscripts existed separately and simultaneously, possibly all of them in full length and fully worked out, and all of them to develop a life of their own.

These circumstances became evident and posed serious problems when the text had to be translated. Therefore, in the course of my research a word-by-word comparison of these texts seemed appropriate and promising: the translation had to mention all the deviations existing in the originals. Another aspect was to gain insight into a possible order in the changes from one version to the other, allowing conclusions in regard to their sequence of creation. The character of the changes itself could render useful hints as to where it was that the hand of the author was to be presumed and where that of the different editors. This could help to determine whether an original manuscript was tampered with in the course of time by editors, or the author himself had indeed left behind varying manuscripts (each of them in turn being subject to editorial changes or printing mistakes). Most importantly, however, this method could render valuable insights into the creative process and the work method of the author Muktibodh. One could analyse words or passages which were repeatedly taken up for correction, and find out what exactly was sought to be expressed in a more precise way and to what extent, and with what aim. I marked the changes that occurred in one version only with three different colours, and three other colours were used where a deviation coincided with one of the other versions. I discovered that quite often different versions appeared in all the three texts.

The coloured text⁴ soon revealed certain passages as virtual battlegrounds of cor-

rection, and, as a by-product, other long passages stood out, that had remained obviously untouched or 'finished' in all the three versions alike. The changes were then categorised in terms of their relevance for the original and for the translation, as (a) changes on the textual surface (grammatical corrections, possible misreading of the handwriting, changes in the punctuation marks), (b) stylistic changes without significant semantic differences (change of the word order, replacement of words or word groups by synonyms, replacement of Hindi/Urdu words by English equivalents), and (c) significant changes of content and structure (deletion, addition or 'resurfacing' of omitted lines/line fragments, change in the content and the meaning of lines, different chapter breaks, change of title). Whereas in the first division the changes are very numerous and the differences in meaning sometimes quite important as far as the translation is concerned, it is not easy to determine as to who made the changes: it could have been the editor, the printsetter or the author himself when copying the manuscript. The second category, however, is more prone to proving the author's hand: no editor would possibly recreate a certain poetic expression in an even more refined way or would painstakingly search for more sanscritised or even English word replacements. For the translated texts, however, these differences are of less importance, as mostly synonymous meanings are conveyed. The third category of changes again must have been made by the author; if these changes had been carried out by an editor, he would have mentioned it. These changes are relevant for both the text and the translation.

When analysing the changes concerning misreadings or corrections, it became quite clear, as mentioned above, that nearly always one of the RAC and CKM-versions coincided with the KAL-version, which means the KAL-version can be considered as the oldest one. Most of the corrections, carried out probably by the editor, concerning gender, grammar, spelling or a meaningful, contextualised interpretation in case of doubt, etc., can definitely be found in the RAC-version, whereas to nearly the same extent a series of editorial blunders can be traced in the CKM-version. Not to be underrated is the use of punctuation marks in the manuscripts, i.e. where words are put in quotation marks, lines end with exclamation marks, or, one of Muktibodh's specialities, lines were put in brackets, marking a different communicative level of speech within the poem. Here again a certain carelessness can be seen in the CKM-version, especially concerning the mixing up of hyphens and dashes, resulting in a number of translatory dilemmas regarding the syntax. Concerning a possible sequence of the manuscripts, how-

ever, the changes in the form of word replacements and additions or deletions of lines were of greater importance. I found a large number of word replacements of a lyrical nature⁵—in both the versions other than the KAL-version—the CKM-version once again differing in most of the details from the other two versions: more often than not we find here the most sanscritised or refined formula.

A particularity of the synonymous replacements concerns the changing of Hindi/Urdu words into their English equivalents, written in Devanagari script. At the first glance itself it becomes clear that the KAL-version is the only version in which most of the Hindi/Urdu words, which have been replaced in the other two versions, remain unchanged. Since this process of 'Anglicisation' gives clear hints of a sequence in creation, a counting of the words replaced in each version seemed of special importance. Ten words (interestingly mostly from military vocabulary) have been changed in RAC and CKM into their English equivalents. But CKM has four additional words from English, which are still in Hindi/Urdu in RAC. Furthermore, we discovered that there were a number of English words already in KAL, which have been retained in the other versions. Of these, some have been integrated into the Devanagari script as in the other texts (17); some others, however, appear in quotation marks (10). (This practice is followed in RAC, too, where two English words have been put within quotation marks. However, in CKM there are no English words within quotation marks). This means there was no 'pure' Hindi/Urdu version in the beginning which might have been gradually changed, but that the process of replacing Hindi/Urdu words with those from English had already been initiated in KAL and was continued in the other versions, ending with CKM. Interestingly, at three places in all the three versions the word 'बुलूँ' (at other places replaced by 'प्रोसेटन') has been retained, which could hint at a certain carelessness in replacing a word at all the places where it occurs. In view of the large number of words already in English in KAL and the increase in their number, sequentially, in RAC and CKM, we can assume a temporal sequence of the manuscripts in precisely the same order.⁶

This cumbersome procedure—rather than tracing one 'authentic' manuscript—in the end leads to a detailed impression of what the author was talking about when he referred to the constant reworking of his poems. It was not merely his last illness that kept him from a final editing of his printed texts, so that he left behind a sackful of scattered, unfinished or fragmented manuscripts: throughout his lifetime and particularly towards the end of his life he seemed to have been unable

to complete and finalise his poems, again and again taking them up for correction, refining and restructuring them, splitting them up or adding to their length, transferring motives from other poems and even short stories, in what appears to be a collage-like technique of juggling with his most cherished topics, characters and vistas. But this juggling cannot be taken lightly; rather than plain juggling, it is a struggle that characterises Muktibodh's method of working with its unremitting search for truth, solutions and new forms of expression. Nevertheless, after a look at the changes in the manuscripts one can state that even the most reworked passages in 'Andhere Mein' did not aim at a fundamental change of form or contents. The corpus of the poem remained more or less intact, the deviation in the sixth and seventh chapter breaks being the only structural intervention. We can clearly state that in the case of 'Andhere Mein' Muktibodh's often proclaimed dissatisfaction with his own writing hardly concerned a basic questioning of his creative output, resulting in a confused reshaping and rewriting of the whole text. It rather referred to a careful and systematic striving to refine even further and bring greater precision into what had already been expressed; to making a metaphoric context more stringent and translating important 'messages' into an adequate lyrical shape.

In this sense the underlying topic of the poem, 'the search for the ultimate expression', may very basically reflect Muktibodh's working style. The most critical passages obviously were those where the essence of 'images' and 'messages' presented in sequences before was to be once more presented, reorganised in a lyrical, complex and concise expression. These are passages where the voice of the poet is heard in a seemingly effortlessly evolving plot with a density of vistas, dramaturgically allowing several characters to 'speak'; or they are programmatic passages where we hear a political jargon in all its impersonality. In these intensely worked-upon passages the condensed lyrical penetration and the fusion of the seen and the thought is at stake: a polishing of rhyme and rhythm, of diction, new metaphors and images. Narrative and 'fantastic' passages on the contrary appear to have been more immune to corrections: the stream of visual images on the mental screen of the poet obviously was so clear that they needed to be written down only once.

On the Way to 'Andhere Mein'

It is probably not a coincidence that 'Andhere Mein', which is often considered to be one of Muktibodh's last poems, is also the longest one: here we may see the

attempt to crown a lifetime of creative writing with a poem that is representative of all that has been attempted elsewhere; a poem that is representative of its time and of its changing tendencies, and at the same time representative enough to outlast that contemporariness by eternal and universal qualities. In view of the literary complexity displayed in 'Andhere Mein' we may even say that it displays the attempt to create a poem that was representative of the full scope of contemporary poetic possibilities, combining lyrical imagery, song references, dramatic encounters, cinema techniques, narrative logic and a highly ethical perspective.

When scanning the list of contents in volumes one and two of the *Rachnavali*, containing Muktibodh's poetry, a significantly shorter time span for the production of about the same amount of text in the second volume becomes apparent. Whereas the first volume was divided by editor Nemichandra Jain into three periods of creative writing (1935-39, 1940-48, 1949-56) adding up to 22 years, the second volume covers only one period of eight years (1957-64). Jain explains that mode of division by the sudden rise in text production, especially the long poems, from the year 1957 onwards.⁷ Out of these long poems, 'Andhere Mein' sticks out even here as being by far the longest not only of that last period but also of all his poems. Interestingly, in his earlier periods too we see a peculiar work rhythm: always a poem stands out with a significantly larger number of pages as compared with its siblings.⁸ An analysis of the first three long poems seemed worthwhile to find out whether Muktibodh had earlier on shown the urge to sum up certain important strands of his writing in one poem of 'grand[er] style', by using different writing techniques, contents and forms to increasingly enlarge the prescribed limits of lyrical contexts. The titles of these poems themselves hint at a certain dimension of generalisation and grandeur: 'Jivan Yatra' (Life-Journey), 'O Virat Sapnón' (O Magnificent Dreams) and 'Zindagi Ka Rasta' (The Path of Life).

We will not go too much into details, and will present only those aspects here which relate to the focus on the gradual enlargement of Muktibodh's poems and especially to the final composition of 'Andhere Mein'. The first poem in question, published in 1938 in the magazine *Arti* when he was twenty years old, belongs to that group of poems which were short, all of them dated and neatly noted down in notebooks; all of them were published in magazines, and followed distinct rhyme and rhythm patterns, some of them in their content and style reflecting

the exalted attitude of Makhanlal Chaturvedi's poetry⁹ and the post-Chhayavad tendencies. A certain morbid obsession with the topic of 'death', imagined in Chhayavadi-fashion in a personified way, can be observed in his early poems¹⁰, which is gradually replaced by a strong domination of 'life'-related titles. Among them 'Jivan Yatra' is the first poem that has been divided into numbered chapters, which are uneven in length and structure. A certain rhyme pattern is visible in the first stanza; in the following stanzas, however, more and more 'orphan lines' are slipped into the existing rhyme pattern. Another important feature that recurs in a lot of Muktibodh's later poems shows up in this poem: the tendency to repeat refrain lines, a stylistic device common to lyrical *geet*-traditions and narrative ballad-structures alike. This is later visible in the four refrain groups of 'Andhere Mein' too. In 'Jivan Yatra', the stanzas are initially neatly framed with two refrain lines at the beginning and end, but in the sixth stanza this pattern is suddenly abandoned.

The seven stanzas differ in length, and another feature becomes apparent: in the same way as this poem is much longer than the poems written in the same period, the length of *one* (the fifth) stanza is much longer than the other ones,¹¹ something that relates directly to the structure of 'Andhere Mein'. What happens in this long fifth stanza that makes it break so explicitly free from the stanzas that surround it? Three powerful prolonging elements can already be seen here: an independent, allegorical story is being inserted, a romantic dream phantasy takes over with its own dynamics, and an elaborate future vision is developed. The story in this stanza, illustrating the general topic of this poem (the dynamically growing forces of life), starts out with lyrically chiselled lines in a fairytale-like setting depicting a dream island to be reached by a group of young boatmen. The group is soon caught in a dramatic fight for survival in rough waters, making the rhyme pattern to gallop away in a hammering staccato. The eventual landing in quieter waters is reflected with a return to the initial soft and 'watery' lingual patterns.

Nothing less than the demanding topic of 'life' itself is taken up in this poem with all its dynamic force, uncontrollable developments and unfathomable dimensions, allowing the poem to 'outgrow' itself, the allegorical journey-set-up providing a narrative frame. The numbered structure of the stanzas, pointing to a beginning, development and end—trying in this way to come to a solution of an initially-posed problematic complex—is already moving away from lyrical pre-

scriptions of the static, contemplative, condensed kind; the still photographic quality of the lyric is replaced by the dynamics of storytelling and film-like visual qualities.

The second poem 'O Virat Sapnon' is vaguely dated as having been written in 1944-1948; it was never published. The outer shape shows no apparent regular organisation on eight-and-a-half pages, neither by stanzas nor by numbers or chapters. Lines of different length and pattern follow one another, the text being roughly divided into eight blocks. A reminiscence of the refrain structure can be found in the line 'O virat sapnon' ('O magnificent dreams'), repeated six times with slight alterations, and sometimes complemented by the line 'only because of you', but both these lines are strewn rather arbitrarily over the text. The theme motif is presented in eleven compact and to some extent rhyme-wise crafted lines at the beginning, addressing the dreams personally as in an invocation. The description of a landscape that follows (with typical Malwa-motifs to be found in many of his other poems too) turns it more and more into a landscape of the mind through a flood of associations. The 'magnificent dreams' are appealed to again and again as the power that overcomes darkness, as a source of encouragement for the liberation of manhood, providing hope and belief for better times in future. On the one hand dreams serve as an individual agent to deal with unsolved, depressing experiences, on the other hand they have the capacity to overcome this individual restriction by expanding to a social dimension, expressing the collective unconscious longing and imaginary power as in the Jungian model. Dreams turn into powerful visions that, like a religious belief, are able to support mankind on the way to salvation: 'only because of you/the salvation of mankind/is not far, is very close already. One shore is belief/the other liberation'.

Another motif, that of the dream containing a message which has to be identified and conveyed by the poet, is often presented in the shape of a bird or a river 'speaking', resulting again in loosely associated episodes and insertions. (The occurrence of a bird, like the oracle-like night-bird of 'Andhere Mein', is very often connected to the setting of dream and imagination). No narrative logic is required within the device of a dream-story: episodes and images without beginning and end are loosely connected; they may repeat themselves as dream images do; any number of characters can surface, 'speak' and disappear, and the narrative space can basically expand in an unlimited way.

The third poem in question, 'Zindagi Ka Rasta', was written 1950 at Nagpur, but

got published only in 1980 in the collection *Bhoori Bhoori Khaak Dhool*. This poem of seventeen pages is organised in five numbered chapters, of which one again (the last one) is the longest, taking up nine pages. The tendency of an expanding chapter-size towards the end is visible here too, as in 'Andhere Mein'. Rhymes, alliterations and other embellishment are scarce; the poem is constructed of short and dense sentence fragments, which are parts of scattered syntactical contexts sometimes stretching over eighteen lines or more. Punctuation marks at the end of the lines or elsewhere are few; only a deliberate usage of brackets can be found, marking a certain 'interior mind level' of the hero, Ramu. His way home from work at the textile mill is symbolically transformed into the 'way of life' in general, and further on into the 'way out' of oppression and terror. Ramu's thoughts are articulated in interior monologues or free associations,¹² mostly self-critically pondering on his inability to contribute more to 'the cause', which is possible for him only at night and on Sundays.¹³ The vocabulary is rather colloquial, straight and down to earth, using few heavy poetically condensed images; a certain political jargon with distinct Marxist terminology is pursued instead. A 'song' of seven lines is repeated three times, inciting a rebellious power ('songs' of that kind are also a feature of 'Andhere Mein'): 'In the midst of the pain of the fiftieth step of the twentieth century/in the midst of the dense loud darkness of oppression/in the midst of the skies/the wailing of the poor rises/someone has gifted Ramu's sleeping heart/his faltering life/with the power of truth and the way of courage/within the huge terror of the capitalist lie.'

The thematic expansion, that leads Ramu from his 'real' way home (a dusty path) onto a symbolic 'way of life', corresponds to a similar development in the widening of the time frame: in the same way as Ramu in the end does not reach his home but idealistic goals of the future, similarly the initial 'real' evening atmosphere ends in larger images of 'political night' and 'darkness'. The 'real' time frame of *one* specific evening and night gets gradually extended to historic dimensions of 'civilisations', 'centuries', 'epochs' and a 'new age' towards the end: 'the noble-minded civilisations of exploiters/with one match/ lighted by historic hands/they start burning like paper/... Ramu's heart and senses/ wish to jump/into these epoch-making waves out of whose/sky-splitting wild roaring/the inaugural song of a new age evolves/'. Similarly, the single individual Ramu is eventually enlarged into the image of the New Man of the coming times.

After a brief look at these early long poems certain constant features can be

named, that potentially lead towards a prolongation and extension in Muktibodh's poems. Whereas topics such as love, longing and death dominated his very first poems—which were short, traditionally crafted and static in nature, circulating concentrically around a chosen theme—the topic of 'life' with its inherent notion of growth and development asked for an adequate treatment in an anti-cyclic, dynamically onward moving narrative. The outer form in due course breaks free from metre, rhyme and organised stanzas; the tendency to numerate and chapterise, as well as the keeping up of refrains, is appropriate for the exposition of a theme that is not reflectively returning to its origin, but strives towards a result. An array of elements of suspense or fictitious dialogues allow dramatic as well as narrative devices to intrude into the lyrical set-up.

The treatment of 'time' in Muktibodh's long poems is committed to a time *span*, which is opposed to the traditional time-less *moments* of lyrics. The scope of a poem comprising past, present and future tends to create a document that is representing a distinct historical stretch in time; accordingly structural devices of contemplation, review and future visions are required.

Dreams, imagination and visions provide virtual loopholes within the lyrical context enabling the poet to freely assemble stories, images and episodes of arbitrary length in an associative manner. This surrealistic layer can completely overgrow the 'real' situation that triggered the dream or vision in the poem. Dreams are not only a pretext for setting out on a narrative excursion, they also have the additional function of conceiving and conveying a *message*. The individual, subjective and private status of the dream is transformed into a collective 'realistic' utopia, thereby legitimating the 'romantic' stylistic device of dream imagery within the context of committed writing.

Individual suffering is put into a wide historic and internationalised context, to counter subjectively experienced helplessness with a responsible and positive perspective. Such a poem cannot ponder on a problem in a reflective or rhetorical way, treating it as a question of fate and destiny and leave it at that. It has to work out the origins of the problem and *all* the various side-aspects related to it, leading to a comprehensive solution. Then only can life in all its complexity be captured. The poem is incomplete before this goal is achieved. Further on, the transformation of this intellectually acquired solution into a poetically appealing and convincing message has to be constantly reworked to comply with the responsibility of the poet towards the people. Light-hearted, tentative endings with

unclear perspectives are not acceptable within this framework.

The steady recurrence of certain motifs such as dream/utopia, self-liberation/release, individual life-plan/social perspective, etc., in these three poems affirms the assumption that these topics, taken up and reworked again and again in ever widening contexts, were to be given a last and final treatment in 'Andhere Mein'. The unwillingness to divide a vast and complex issue into separate, manageable aspects, and to deal with them in a lyrically concentrated form, thus resulted in the urge to achieve an *epic* solution for the eternal questions of life in each of Muktibodh's long poems, requiring a reactivation of the complete stock of poetic repertoire all over again.

Nightmare Nagpur: Outer Repression, Inner Explosion

Though from 1958 onwards most of Muktibodh's long poems were 'finished' (and dated accordingly as 1960-62), after his moving to Rajnandgaon, where he could lead a comparatively calmer and more settled life, we have to assume that many of them, including 'Andhere Mein', actually had been conceived and composed during his time at Nagpur where he lived from 1948 to 1958. A biographical study of that time therefore is of interest to find out what specific outer circumstances might have led to that sudden rise in the length of his poems.

After years of restlessly moving from place to place, looking for employment and projects he could work in,¹⁴ Muktibodh came to Nagpur, then state capital, in December 1948, to join the Department of Information and Publication at the Civil Secretariat as a journalist. Like his former jobs this one, too, was not paid for very well, and could not do much to relieve him from his financial difficulties.¹⁵ With credits from money lenders, shops and friends¹⁶ and all kinds of 'hack work', he just managed to sail through, but was initially not even able to take his family from Jabalpur, where they remained caught in the claws of money lenders.¹⁷ The publication of the manuscript of a novel had failed to materialise as the manuscript was lost under unclear circumstances,¹⁸ and so he hoped for the publication of a collection of poems to bring him some money.¹⁹ In 1953, he appeared for the M.A. exam to enhance his job prospects in the university sector. In September 1954, he gave up his job at the Secretariat, feeling harassed by the secret service which eyed him as a communist, although he had not renewed his party-membership since Jabalpur. On the mediation of Prabhakar Machve, he could join All India Radio, Nagpur, as a journalist in October 1954. In the course

of the reorganisation of states, however, his workplace was supposed to be shifted in 1956 to Bhopal, the new state capital of Madhya Pradesh. Because he was not assured of a steady job there, he had to refuse the transfer. In October 1956, he joined the progressive newsmagazine *Naya Khoon* as an editor, but was again paid very poorly: Rs. 225/- a month. His health was already deteriorating, and though he was devoted to his work, he felt exhausted by the long working hours often stretching into the early morning hours, sitting in his tiny, low-roofed office.²⁰ During that time, he also contributed his regular column 'Ek Sahityik Ki Dayri' to Harishankar Parsai's magazine *Vasudha* in Jabalpur. In the beginning of 1958 he had started work on a textbook, later to be translated into Marathi, that should earn him some money. In August 1958, he joined Digvijay College in Rajnandgaon as a teacher, because he hoped for some regular working hours and sufficient payment, allowing him to concentrate more on his own writing. His time in Nagpur he described as a 'loss, total loss', a 'nightmare',²¹ and he turned down an option to go to Delhi because he was afraid to go through the same agonies of uncertainty again.

The worries concerning his working career were doubled by the constant fight for money, which gradually also affected his family life. Whereas in his early letters he shows a kind of grim humour, confident of eventually coping with this disaster,²² he realised during his time at Nagpur that he was unable to fulfil his duty as a bread-winner for the family. Continuous and often serious illnesses of himself, his children, his wife and his father forced him into ever-increasing expenditures. Although in many of his letters a great love for his family is visible, the relationship with his wife, whom he had married against the will of his family, was marred by constant tensions.²³

Against this background, his enormous literary output of poems, essays and letters during that period seems amazing, and reflects a feverish urge to work, using every possible opportunity to release his bottled up creative energy. His creative writing seemed to have been his way of coming to terms with the controversial aspects of reality, a life-saving valve for his high-pressure personality. He constantly craved for time and had to justify his writing, especially his 'useless' poetic writing, before his wife and family, up to a point where he seriously considered giving up poetry and writing only prose, even *rewriting* his poetry into prose for better financial prospects. Already in 1958 he had harboured the idea of reworking his poems a last time for publication and then stopping to write poetry alto-

gether, a bitter decision as he himself considered his poems 'my only achievements in life', as he wrote to Shrikant Verma in 1958.²⁴ Finally in 1963 he gave voice to his feeling of defeat: 'Whenever I see what I have in my hands, it is nothing but my poems. I don't know how many months and years I have been wasting on them. And I received nothing in return, no *dharma*, no *artha*, no *kama*, no *moksha*... People go crazy in many ways, and I feel worthy to be put into this category, too. But no, I will make the effort to become reasonable again and write prose. I started already with it, but what shall I say, there is a thing called melody, there is a thing called fire. These words are not 'modern', but they still have their value. They draw me towards poetry. But I promise to write no poetry anymore, only prose. My income will increase, and my fame, too.'²⁵

The actual time of the first drafts of 'Andhere Mein' can only be assumed. Shamsheer Bahadur Singh had heard a version of the poem in 1961, as he writes in his introduction to *Chand Ka Moonh Terha Hai*. Earlier in 1959, Ashok Vajpeyi had invited Muktibodh from Rajnandgaon to a reading of the 'Creative Forum', Sagar, and there he read out the poem in what must have been one of the first 'final' versions, which had been worked out in Rajnandgaon but actually been written at Nagpur. That seems plausible, since not only the locality of the 'real' level of 'Andhere Mein' refers to several places and persons in Nagpur; it is also the atmosphere of agony and terror, of being persecuted in an illegal 'underground' existence and the dominance of night scenery which refers directly to that time of turmoil and deprivations. The fear of fascist forces coming to the fore was not an invented feature, either. One actual triggering event for the poem is said to be an uprising of the workers of the Empress Textile Mills at Nagpur, which was brutally put down when police opened fire on the strikers, and which was witnessed by Muktibodh when he was a reporter for *Naya Khoon*. This could allow the assumption that first attempts of the poem were started around 1956. Later on, after publishing political pieces, partly under pseudonyms, and on being observed and shadowed by secret agents, he himself saw his worst forebodings confirmed when on September 19, 1962 a textbook on history (*Bharat: Itihas Aur Sanskriti*), written by him, was banned by a court order after an organised hate-campaign, which included the burning of this book and mobbing of the author, initiated by RSS-forces and resentful publishers. By that time 35000 copies had already been printed after an initial permission by the Ministry of Education. The degree of Muktibodh's depression following that event can only be imagined: apart from the implied terrifying political perspectives, the book most certainly

would have earned him enough money to solve his financial crisis for good. We do not know, however, to what extent this experience led to further amendments in the manuscript of 'Andhere Mein', since the text as such seems to have been more or less ready by 1959. However, it is possible that these developments had given him a bitter satisfaction that his worst apprehensions, pervading the poem, had been justified by the turn of the events. In fact, the long and painful judicial procedure that followed the burning of the book killed every spark of optimism in this 'rock of a man', as Parsai described him once.

These few observations are meant to present some aspects of the development of 'Andhere Mein', a text extraordinary in length, history of emergence and literary character. The version as we have in hand today clearly can be considered a meticulously composed piece, the product of a true perfectionist. That is clear not only from the analysis of the many changes that were obviously made to refine and condense the poetic expression. The intricate narrative framework of the poem itself, something hardly existent to this extent in his other poems,²⁶ proves on another level that this poem can be situated in several respects at the conclusion of a long ripening process. The construction and interaction of the 'real' and the allegoric levels are exemplary in their logical development towards the end: the suspense of the 'search and find' motif operating with enigmatic encounters and cryptic messages to be deciphered; the classical drama-line of failure, guilt, oracle, task, catharsis and realisation (even the choir being represented by the refrain-lines); the time-journey evolving from a 'real' night setting through several, in their evaluation sharply differentiated, zones of darkness, all of them illuminated by their specific light bodies, up to the eventual 'real' light of the 'morning' in the poem; the cleverly arranged geographical shifting between areas of outside and inside, of 'up' and 'down', of urban and natural settings, corresponding with mental areas of 'dream' or 'wakefulness' and set against the protagonist's 'real' movement from his dark, closed, claustrophobic room to the sun-lit veranda overlooking a busy street; the arrangement of historic or literary characters (even his own *brahmtrakshas*) to enact the intellectual self-questioning in search of a guiding 'Guru', up to a point where the protagonist seems to represent nothing less than India ten years after independence. The very scope of displayed literary techniques makes this poem an unending and rewarding ground for analysis and exploration. The poetic vehemence we find in his tense, brutally clear nocturnal urban settings, taking turns with lines of metaphorically entangled, carefully crafted images created out of water, sky, earth, cosmos, caves,

trees, birds and flowers, shows another vast scope of lyrical potential struggling for expression. Considering the wide dimension of artistic, ideological and intellectual options that were activated and processed here to 'recreate reality in literature', as Muktibodh himself put it once, truly nothing less than a 'vast canvas' (Shamsher Bahadur Singh) was required.

NOTES

- 1 *Muktibodh Rachnavali*, edited by Nemichandra Jain, 6 Vols., Rajkamal Paperbacks, Dilli, 1985. [First edition: (Hardcover), Rajkamal Prakashan, Dilli, 1980.] The paperback version of 1985 contains 350 pages more than the hardcover version of 1980. All references in this article refer to the paperback version of 1985 (RAC).
- 2 RAC 2: 20.
- 3 Ashok Vajpeyi: 'Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh ko yad karte', in *इंडिया टुडे साहित्य वार्षिकी* 1997: 33.
- 4 The text published in *Chand Ka Moonh Terha Hai* (Bhartiya Gyanpeeth, 9th edition, 1988), was used for this purpose, as also for the translation. Line numbers mentioned and quotations in this article refer to that version.
- 5 Only very few examples: In line 5.50 'हलचल' (CKM) against 'दिलमिल' (RAC and KAL); in 6.272 'नीरव' (CKM and RAC) against 'चुपचाप' (KAL); in 6.304 'रक्तिम' (CKM and RAC) against 'लाल-लाल' (KAL); in 6.356 'ज्वरन' (CKM) against 'बलात्' (RAC and KAL); in 7.76 'ध्वस्त दीवालें के' (CKM) against 'टूटी हुई भीतों के' (RAC and KAL); in 8.103 'अग्नि के शत-दल-कोष में' (CKM) against 'अग्नि-कमल के केंद्र में' (RAC and KAL); in 8.141 'अन्तरिक्ष-वायु' (CKM and KAL) against 'गगन की वायु' (RAC); in 8.165 'तडित्जरीय' (CKM) against 'विद्युत्लहरिल' (RAC and KAL); in 8.170 'लग्नातार' (CKM and KAL) against 'अविरत' (RAC); in 8.179 'राजनैतिक परिस्थिति' (CKM and KAL) against 'राजनीतिक स्थिति और परिवेश' (GA), etc. Sometimes there are different versions in all three texts: in 8.88 'ज्वलन्त-प्रकाशित' (CKM) against 'प्राञ्चल' (RAC) and 'ज्वलन्त' (KAL); or in 7.4 'छायाकृतियां' (CKM) against 'छायाकार' (KAL) and 'श्यामाकार' (RAC), etc.
- 6 Another interesting observation resulted from comparing the missing, added or resurfacing, lines: Lines only in RAC and KAL, not in CKM: 13.5. Lines only in CKM and RAC, not in KAL: none. Lines only in CKM and KAL, not in RAC: 3. Lines only in CKM: 3.5. Lines only in RAC: 4. Lines only in KAL: none. (The counting included line fragments, too). Again it showed the maximum number of deviations in CKM against the other two; both CKM and RAC have lines exclusively appearing in them, whereas in KAL there is no line that would not appear in the other two versions.
- 7 In fact, Muktibodh states in his afterword in *Tar Saptak* (1963) that his poems had started to become really long after 1952/1953, the reason for that being 'a miracle' to him. But much earlier he already says: 'After Shanta's [his wife's] departure for Ujjain I was also straining my pen and wrote four crude, unchiselled poems of some length. No one would dare publish them. So modernist they are.' (Letter dated 29.1.1947, Jabalpur. RAC 6: 252).
- 8 From 1935-39 fifty titles. Of these only seven are longer than one page, six go up to two pages, and one, 'Jivan Yatra' has three and a half pages structured into seven stanzas. From 1940-48 sixty-eight titles. Of these twenty are between two and four pages long; three

cover five pages, and one is again the longest, with eight and a half pages: 'O Virat Sapnon'. From 1949-1956 sixty-four titles. Of these ten are of three to nine pages, four of 10-13 pages and the longest one, 'Zindagi Ka Rasta', of 17 pages.

From 1957-1964 sixty-eight titles. Of these twenty-five are three to nine pages long, six 10-13 of pages, three of 14-20 pages, three of 21-26 pages, and one, 'Andhere Mein', of 36 pages.

⁹ Many of his early poems were, in fact, published in Makhanlal Chaturvedi's magazine *Karmvir*.

¹⁰ Titles, for example, were: 'मरण-रमणी' (1936; by the way, we find in this poem for the first time a 'prose extension' in the form of an explanatory paragraph in brackets below the title), 'मरण का संसार', 'समाधि', 'सुझको मरण मिला', 'मृत्यु और कवि', etc. (All titles in RAC 1.)

¹¹ Seven, 12, 15, 18, 27, 13, 15 lines respectively.

¹² The technique of interior monologue or fictitious dialogue to discuss larger contexts is visible from some very early poems, essays and short stories. See, for example, 'एक मित्र के प्रति', 'ओ मेरे जीवन के साथी', 'आत्मा के मित्र मेरे'); directly addressing 'friends' as 'मेरे मित्र, सहचर', 'ओ कलाकार', 'किसी से', 'अपने कवि से'; addressing real or virtual poets: 'रबिन्द्रनाथ', 'टी. एस. इलियट के प्रति', etc. (All titles in RAC 1.) The dialogue is also an essential structure of many essays, as in 'तीसरा क्षण' (RAC 4: 74ff) or 'एक मित्र की पत्नी का प्रश्नचिन्ह' (RAC 4: 69).

¹³ Although the search for 'autobiographical' details in a poet's writings is always a problematic endeavour, in this poem, that refers rather directly to many aspects of Muktibodh's life at Nagpur, the importance of night is very aptly displayed: this was the only space his otherwise tight existence had to offer. Many recurring motifs of his repertoire such as half-sleep, dreams, fever, darkness, emptiness, the unsteady light of the lantern, moon and stars, distorted sounds and perceptions, etc., can be considered as very real 'requisites' of his creative atmosphere. Apart from that, night as a cover for all kinds of illegal, underground activities refers to a 'real-life' experience of Muktibodh, too.

¹⁴ Shujalpur 1940-1942, Ujjain 1942-45, Bangalore 1945, Calcutta, Varanasi 1945-October 1946, Allahabad and Jabalpur November 1946-November 1948.

¹⁵ 'My monthly income is rupees hundred and eighty-two. That is all. Nagpur is very expensive, very dirty, very hot. Epidemics are general. Sun and air do not greet the walls of our house. It is a regular den, with no water-tap or well. The only advantage that Nagpur seems to afford is the approachability of its politicians, leaders, editors and other public men; boasts of three Hindi, two Marathi and two English dailies, and some 50 other papers; is a hotbed of political blackguards, blackmailing journalists, fiery agitators, opportunist trade unionists and other species of political crooks and manoeuvrers. The Marathi literary team is better than the Hindi one.' (8.2.1952, Nagpur. RAC 6: 310ff.)

¹⁶ Refer especially to the innumerable letters asking for financial support to Nemichandra Jain, who was a close family friend ever since a common posting to Shujalpur in 1942. The quotations that follow are from letters written originally in English; only the letter quoted in footnote 20 is translated from Hindi by me.

¹⁷ 'I have given up passing through those streets where the blessed physician, the grocer, the tea-shopwallah watch the debtors for a good hunt. We passed the last three months in this condition, changed doctors for want of money, used all tricks and tactics to keep them away.' (Letter to Nemichandra Jain, 6.8.1949, Nagpur. RAC 6: 292 ff.)

¹⁸ Around 1948/9 Muktibodh had sent a manuscript of 250 pages to a publisher in Allahabad, but unfortunately a large part of the manuscript got lost there. A part of that novel

was found later by chance, and published 1975/76 in *Pakshdhar*. (See RAC 1:21.)

19 'In February, I shall finish my book of poems. That would bring me money in March or April. That too when I don't take any hack work. Hack work is needed for immediate needs, and does not give me more than 10 or 15 chips...' (Letter December 1948/January 1949, Nagpur. RAC 6: 286.)

20 'My working hours at *Naya Khoon* go up to two o'clock at night, no strength is left in my body. There will be no change in that as long as I cannot leave this post. My health is destroyed, and overwhelming worries have seized me.' (Letter to Shrikant Verma, 1.2.1958, Nagpur. RAC 6: 354.)

21 'My first two years of Nagpur life were almost a nightmare... It was at that time that indulgence in fantastic dreams of help from you increased. It was an utter folly, no doubt, to claim first to be an intellectual and then to be so unrealistic about things. Most un-Marxist that way.' (Letter to Nemichandra Jain, 6.2.1952, Nagpur. RAC 6: 311.)

22 'I want to do and can do a lot. First, I want to be a well placed man so that I may be truly self-dependent and quite assured of myself. I think I can earn Rs. 500 a year by books. I don't want to be in rags and broken *chappals* and looked down upon by the people. Don't want to be a tragic figure.' (Letter to Nemichandra Jain, 8.10.1945, Benares. RAC 6: 281.)

23 'After all, I can't write, sell books in this condition. I am prepared to pay say Rs. 30 per month on debt, but not the whole sum. My wife is at daggers drawn with me and has the slightest respect for me now. She says it openly and, as a last measure, had managed to write to you which I checked in time. Quite true, I have not given her any happiness. But I too am extremely unhappy. If I smoke *bidis* and take three cups of tea outside, I can't help. I get away from my home at 9 a.m., on foot to cross 4 miles in an hour to the Secretariat, and come back on foot again and reach home at 6.30 to be only sent here and there for purposes with crazy crossness. She remains alone, at home, in privations, along with her two whimpering children. What can I do? I can't help. I have no peace of mind, I can't write, I can't earn, I can't beg from my brother. That would be the greatest punishment to me and this repeated reference to my tea-*bidi* indulgence makes me awfully brutal.' (Letter to Nemichandra Jain, 6.8.1949, Nagpur. RAC 6: 292 ff.)

24 RAC 6: 359.

25 'एक लम्बी कविता का अंत', 1963. RAC 4: 153.

26 See for comparison the fate of another 'very long poem' ('*Ek Pradiragh Kavita*'), which Muktibodh split up into several smaller poems, gave them different headings and published them independently. This long poem lacks a binding narrative frame, making the fragments hardly noticeable as parts of one larger text. Nemichandra Jain's account of the retrieval of the original full-length manuscript, which was published for the first time in RAC, and the meticulously documented history of the fragments is worth reading. (RAC 2:10, RAC 2:292ff).

Barbara Lotz is presently associated as a research scholar at the South Asia Institute, Heidelberg, Germany, with a project on 'Language Movements in Orissa: Aspects of Language Policy for Regional and Marginal Languages'. Her publications include *Poesie, Poetik, Politik: Engagement und Experiment im Werk des Hindiautors Gajana Madhava Muktibodh* (Heidelberg, 1999), and *Living Literature: A Trilingual Documentation of Indo-German Literary Exchange* (edited with Vishnu Khare, New Delhi, 1998).