

To my Grandfather who taught me the power of the Word
To my Mother and my Brother who introduced me to poetry
To Kolyo who left his poems behind

NEW POETRY
IN HINDI

Nayi Kavita

An Anthology

edited, translated, and introduced by

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permanent black

*My poetry is the expression of a restless mind
looking for its path.¹*

Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh 1917–1964

IN THE SUMMER OF 1964, while Muktibodh lay in coma in a hospital bed, brought to the threshold of death by stroke and meningitis, his friends were preparing the publication of *Cād kā mūh terhā hai* (The moon's face is crooked), his first collection of poems. He did not live to see his book. The sixteen poems he contributed to Agyeya's *Tār sapṭak* and about thirty verses published in different magazines (*Vāṇī*, *Karmvīr*, *Artī*, *Vīṇā*, *Vicār*, *Hams*, *Lok yuddha*, *Dharmayug*, *Labar*, *Sārthī*, *Kavi*, etc.) were the only ones to appear in his lifetime. And yet, ever since his untimely death, his poetry has been in the limelight of Hindi literary discussion. As Ashok Vajpeyi points out, 'no responsible reader or contemporary critic can prove his authority without a link to Muktibodh' (Vajpeyi 1994, p.1). Superlatives pile against his name: he is compared with the giant of 20th-century Hindi verse, Nirala (Bandopadhyaya 1994, p.149); he is called 'the most original poet of *Tār sapṭak*' (Jain 1965, p.16); his *Cād kā mūh terhā hai* has been labelled 'the highest achievement in modern Hindi poetry' (Gaeffke 1978, p.88).

What turned this relatively unknown, small-town poet into 'an event in the world of Hindi poetry' (Jain 1965, p.9)? Muktibodh's final tragic battle with death caught the public's attention and focused it on all the earlier struggles of his life, on his tortured existence and on his obscure poetry.

Muktibodh lived 'in debt and insecurity, in dingy dwellings in small towns of Madhya Pradesh' (Bandopadhyaya 1994, p.150). Born in Sheopur (Madhya Pradesh) in the family of a police inspector, his nomadic existence started quite early, following his father's transfers. After completing his BA in 1938, Muktibodh continued this life of wandering, moving from one town to the next in search of employment: he became a teacher in Ujjain, and again in Shujalpur, an editor of *Hams* in Benares, a teacher and journalist in Jabalpur, a journalist for the radio and *Nayā*

khūn in Nagpur, unemployed in Allahabad and Calcutta, and finally managed to get a job as a lecturer at a degree college in Rajanandgaon in 1958 (after a belated MA in Hindi in 1953), a position which allowed him some relief from merciless poverty and frustration.

Throughout his adult life Muktibodh was financially responsible for his wife and children, brothers and ageing parents. His description of his ceaseless struggle for survival is bitterly laconic: 'I kept taking and giving up jobs. Teacher, journalist, teacher again, government service, non-government employment. Lower-middle class life, children, medical treatment, birth and death.' (Agyeya 1996a, p.19)

And yet, this struggle for daily bread never eroded Muktibodh's intellectual curiosity and engagement with ideas. He read with insatiable zest: Bergson, Gandhi and Marx; Jung and Adler; the romantic poems of Mahadevi Varma and Makhnālāl, the novels of Balzac, Flaubert, Dostoyevski and Gorki. He pronounced himself a Marxist in *Tār sapṭak* in 1943 (Agyeya 1996a, p.22) and remained a firm believer in this ideology to his last breath. Muktibodh laid the foundations of the Progressive Writers' Association of Central India, and organised an anti-Fascist Conference in Indore in 1944. All his life he was connected with the struggles of the poor; Khare recounts how aggrieved Muktibodh was to read that surplus potatoes had been thrown into the ocean in America while so many people in India were starving. (Khare 1993, p.5)

His contemporaries describe him as emotional, good-hearted, straightforward, innocent, generous, and obstinate. He worked with dedication, a sense of duty and perfectionism – sometimes he revised his poems twenty times and more before he was satisfied. Muktibodh was a mixture of rebel and traditionalist: he married for love against the wish of his parents and the expectations of society, and pronounced his commitment to the scientific, materialistic point of view (Agyeya 1996a, p.22), yet considered birth-control as a manifestation of capitalist evil (Bhatnagar 1976, p.20). He saw ugliness in beauty – he was the first poet in Hindi to characterise the face of the moon as 'crooked'; and beauty in ugliness – Shamsheer tells of the compassion with which Muktibodh described to him a wayside thistle as soft, transparent and

beautiful. (Jain 1964, p.19)

Muktibodh's poetry demands much from its readers; to borrow Ashok Vajpeyi's phrase, he is 'a difficult poet of a difficult time' (Vajpeyi 1994, p.1). His poems are typically very long and present a maze of dreams, fantasy and free associations. Muktibodh's canvases are vast: social life is intertwined with the individual's inner psyche. As Shamsheer eloquently puts it: 'Muktibodh searches for the face of this era, buried under the rubble of history, and yet still alive' (Jain 1965, p.23). His palette is dark, sombre, or fiery: the rugged terrain, dark caves, forests and the deep wells of his mother's native town Ishagarh (Madhya Pradesh) are recurrent symbols in his poetry. His verses are packed with images of terror and chaos, suggesting a cruel, hollow, alienating capitalist civilisation, but also with symbols of his unshakeable belief in a golden future for the poor. Muktibodh frequently uses narratives and myths in order to give structure to his long poems. He writes in free verse, and his language is often prosaic. His poetry mixes dialectical materialism and romanticism, realism and fantasy, prosiness and lyricism. Summarising the undercurrents of Muktibodh's poetry, Shamsheer asserts: 'Muktibodh crossed the romantic limitations of *Chāyāvād*, upheld Marxist philosophy, armed himself with the weapons of Experimentalism and advanced Nirala's pure humanism, as a free poet, above all parties and ideologies.' (ibid., p.26)

Apart from poetry Muktibodh wrote short stories, literary criticism, diaries and a novel. A second collection of his poems *Bhūri-bhūri khāk dhūl* (Grey dust and ashes) was published in 1980, followed by his complete works *Muktibodh racnāvalī* in six volumes. Though his *Kāmāyanī: ek punarmūlyānkan* (Kamayani: a revaluation) and his *Ek lekhak kī dāyri* (A writer's diary)² have established him as a very important voice in Hindi literary criticism, it is the spell of his poetry which has secured Muktibodh an honoured place in the Hindi literary pantheon.



The text of the poems is taken from Jain 1980 and Vajpeyi 1994. For a very informative introduction to Muktibodh's life, see Shamsheer's preface to Jain 1965. Singh 1997 and Chaturvedi 1990 provide insightful discussions of Muktibodh's poetry, par-

ticularly of 'Ādhere mē'. For further translations of his poetry, see Misra 1967, pp.63-4, Mehrotra 1974, Dharwadker 1996, pp.29-30, Vajpeyi 1998, pp.39-47, Satchidanandan, 2000, pp.67-75 and *Indian horizons*, vol. 42, pp.32-9. A translation of 'Ādhere mē' has recently been published in *Hindi: Language, discourse, writing*, vol. 2 (1), together with a few articles on the poem.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 Muktibodh, 'Statement' in Agyea 1996a, p.23.
- 2 Both of them are published in *Muktibodh racnāvalī*, Jain 1980, vol. 4.

Gajanan Muktibodh

अँधेरे में

जिंदगी के ...

कमरों में अँधेरे

लगाता है चक्कर

कोई एक लगातार;

आवाज़ पैरों की देती है सुनाई

बार-बार ... बार-बार,

वह नहीं दीखता ... नहीं ही दीखता,

किंतु, वह रहा घूम

तिलिस्मी खोह में गिरपतार कोई एक;

भीत-पार आती हुई पास से,

गहन रहस्यमय अधिकार-ध्वनि-सा

अस्तित्व जनाता

अनिवार कोई एक,

और, मेरे हृदय की धक-धक

पूछती है वह कौन

सुनाई जो देता, पर नहीं देता दिखाई !

इतने में अकस्मात् गिरते हैं भीत से

फूले हुए पलस्तर,

खिरती है चूनेभरी रेत

खिसकती है पपड़ियाँ इस तरह —

खुद-ब-खुद

कोई बड़ा चेहरा बन जाता है,

स्वयमपि

मुख बन जाता है दिवाल पर,

नुकीली नाक और

भव्य ललाट है,

दृढ़ हनु;

कोई अनजानी अन-पहचानी आकृति ।

कौन वह दिखाई जो देता, पर

नहीं जाना जाता है !!

कौन मनु ?

...

वह रहस्यमय व्यक्ति

अब तक न पाई गई मेरी अभिव्यक्ति है,

पूर्ण अवस्था वह

निज-संभावनाओं, निहित प्रभाओं, प्रतिभाओं की

मेरे परिपूर्ण का आविर्भाव,

हृदय में रिस रहे ज्ञान का तनाव वह,

आत्मा की प्रतिमा ।

...

सूनी है राह, अजीब है फैलाव,

सर्द अँधेरा ।

ढीली आँखों से देखते हैं विश्व

उदास तारे ।

हर बार सोच और हर बार अफ़सोस

हर बार फ़िक्र

के कारण बड़े हुए दर्द का मानो कि दूर वहाँ, दूर वहाँ

अँधियारा पीपल देता है पहरा ।

हवाओं की निःसंग लहरों में काँपती

कुत्तों की दूर-दूर अलग-अलग आवाज़,

टकराती रहती सियारों की ध्वनि से ।

काँपती हैं दूरियाँ, गुँजते हैं फ़ासले

(बाहर कोई नहीं, कोई नहीं बाहर)

इतने में अँधियारे सूने में कोई चीख गया है

रात का पक्षी

कहता है :

‘वह चला गया है,

वह नहीं आएगा, आएगा ही नहीं

अब तेरे द्वार पर ।

वह निकल गया है गाँव में शहर में !

उसका तू खोज अब

उसका तू शोध कर !
 वह तेरी पूर्णतम परम अभिव्यक्ति,
 उसका तू शिष्य है (यद्यपि पलातक ...)
 वह तेरी गुरु है
 गुरु है ...'
 ...

वह मेरे पास कभी बैठा ही नहीं था,
 वह मेरे पास कभी आया ही नहीं था,
 तिलिस्मी खोह में देखा था एक बार,
 आखिरी बार ही !
 पर, वह जगत् की गलियों में घूमता है प्रतिपल
 वह फटे-हाल रूप ।
 विद्युल्लहरिल वही गतिमयता,
 उद्विग्न ज्ञान-तनाव वह
 सकर्मक प्रेम की वह अतिशयता
 वही फटे-हाल रूप !!
 परम अभिव्यक्ति
 अविरत घूमती है जग में
 पता नहीं जाने कहाँ, जाने कहाँ
 वह है ।
 इसीलिए मैं हर गली में
 और हर सड़क पर
 झाँक-झाँक देखता हूँ हर एक चेहरा,
 प्रत्येक गतिविधि,
 प्रत्येक चरित्र,
 व हर एक आत्मा का इतिहास,
 हर एक देश व राजनीतिक स्थिति और परिवेश
 प्रत्येक मानवीय स्वानुभूत आदर्श
 विवेक-प्रक्रिया, क्रियागत परिणति !!
 खोजता हूँ पठार ... पहाड़ ... समुंदर
 जहाँ मिल सके मुझे
 मेरी वह खोई हुई

परम अभिव्यक्ति अनिवार
 आत्म-संभवा ।

In the dark'

In life's...

dark chambers

someone is pacing up and down
 ceaselessly;

I can hear the sound of his steps

again and again ... again and again

I cannot see him ... cannot see him

but he goes on wandering

Someone arrested in an enchanted cave;

Someone unstoppable

asserts his existence

like the echo of deep mysterious darkness,
 resounding nearby, behind the wall.

And the beating of my heart

asks – Who is he

that I can hear, but cannot see?

Then bulging plaster

suddenly falls from the wall

Sand full of lime cracks

Flakes slip

a big face emerges

of its own accord

A silhouette appears on the wall –

Pointed nose,

magnificent brow,

firm chin;

An unknown unfamiliar shape.

Who is he

that I can see, but

cannot know!

Manu?² ...

That mysterious man
is my expression which I haven't found yet
He is the ripeness
of my potential, latent brilliance, talents;
the realisation of my completeness
the tension of knowledge oozing in my heart
the image of my soul.

...

Empty road, strange expanse
cold darkness.

Sad stars observe the world
with indifferent eyes.

Pain grows

with every concern, every regret
every worry, as if guarded by

the dark pipal tree far far away.

Dogs' distant distinct barking

vibrates in the careless waves of the wind
constantly clashing with jackals' howling.

Distances tremble, interspaces echo

(Outside no one, no one outside)

Then somebody screams in the dark void –

A bird of the night

says:

'He's gone

he won't come back, won't come

to your door any more.

He's gone to villages and towns!

Search for him now,

examine him!

He's your absolute ultimate expression

you, his disciple (though fugitive...)

He's your teacher

teacher...'

...

He never sat next to me,
never even came to me,
once I saw him in an enchanted cave
it was the last time!
But he walks the lanes of this world ceaselessly
in tattered clothes
at the speed of lightning
He – anxious tension of knowledge,
abundance of vigorous love
in tattered clothes!
My ultimate expression
wanders in the world ceaselessly
I don't know where he is
Who does?
So I scrutinise every face
on every lane
and every street,
all actions,
all deeds,
the history of every soul,
every country, political situation and circumstance
every human self-perceived ideal,
the process of discrimination, the active transformation!
I search plateaus ... mountains ... oceans
wherever I might find
my lost
ultimate expression,
unstoppable,
self-born.

चाँद का मुँह टेढ़ा है

नगर के बीचोबीच

आधी रात – अँधेरे की काली स्याह

शिलाओं से बनी हुई दिवालों के घेरों पर,

अहातों के काँच-टुकड़े-जमे-हुए

ऊँचे-ऊँचे कंधों पर, सिरों पर
 चाँदनी की फैली हुई सँवलाई झालरें ।
 कारखाना-अहाते के उस पार
 कलमुँही चिमनियों के मीनार
 उदार-चिह्नाकार ।
 मीनारों के बीचोबीच चाँद का है टेढ़ा मुँह
 लटका,
 मेरे दिल में खटका—
 कहीं कोई चीख, कहीं बहुत बुरा हाल रे !!
 अजीब है !!
 गगन में करफ्यू ,
 धरती पर चुपचाप ज़हरीली छी: थू:,
 पीपल के सुनसान घोंसलों में पैटे हैं
 कारतूस-छर्चे
 जिससे कि हवेली में
 हवाओं के पल्लू भी सिहरे ।
 गजे-सिर चाँद की सँवलाई किरनों के जासूस
 साम-सूम नगर में धीरे-धीरे घूम-धाम
 नगर के कोनों के तिकोनों में छुपे छुपे
 करते हैं महसूस
 गलियों की हाय-हाय !!
 चाँद की कनखियों की किरनों ने
 नगर छान डाला है ।
 अँधेरे को आड़-तिरछे काटकर
 पीली-पीली पट्टियाँ बिछा दीं,
 समय काला-काला है ।
 समीप विशालाकार अँधियाले ताल पर
 सूनेपन की स्याही में डूबी हुई
 चाँदनी भी सँवलाई हुई है ।
 शहर के बड़े-बड़े पुलों के
 महाराबों-नीचे बहुत नीचे उन
 सिमटी हुई डरी हुई

बस्तियों के सुनसान उदास किनारों से लगकर
 बहुते-अटकते हुए
 झरते-अटकते हुए
 पथरीले नालों की काली-काली धार में
 धराशायी चाँदनी के होंठ काले पड़ गए ।
 हरिजन-बस्ती में, मंदिर के पास एक
 कबीठ के धड़ पर,
 मटमैले छप्परों पर,
 बरगद की ऐंठी हुई उभरी हुई जड़ पर
 कुहासे के भूतों के लटके
 चूनर के चिथरे
 अँगिया व घाघरे, फटी हुई चादरें
 अटक गईं जिनमें एक
 व्यभिचारी टकटकी
 गंजे सिर, टेढ़े-मुँह चाँद की ही कंजी आँख ।
 ...
 अजी, यह चाँदनी भी बड़ी मसखरी है
 तिमंजिले की एक
 खिड़की में बिल्ली के सफेद धब्बे-सी
 चमकती हुई वह
 समेटकर हाथ-पाँव, किसी की ताक में
 चुपचाप बैठी है ।
 धीरे-से उतरती है रास्तों पर
 चढ़ती है छतों पर
 गैलरी में घूम और खपरैलों पर चढ़कर
 पेड़ों की शाखों की सहायता से आँगन में उतरकर
 कमरों के हलके पाँव देखती है, खोजती है
 जाने क्या ?
 सड़कों के पेड़ों के गुंबदों पर चढ़कर
 महल उलौंघकर, मुहल्ले पारकर
 गलियों की गुहाओं में दबे-पाँव खुफिया सुराग में
 गुप्तचरी ताक में लगातार खोजती है

वह कौन
कंधों पर अँधेरे के चिपकाता कौन है
भड़कीले पोस्टर,
लंबे-चौड़े वर्ण और
बाँके-तिरछे घनघोर
लाल-नीले अक्षर !!

कोलतारी सड़क के बीचोबीच खड़ी हुई
गाँधी की मूर्ति पर बैठे हुए घुग्घू ने
एकाएक गला फाड़ गाना शुरू किया
हिचकी की ताल पर,
दुनिया की साँसों ने तब
मर जाना शुरू किया !!
टेलीफोन-खंभों थमे हुए तारों ने
सट्टे के ट्रंक-काल-सुर में
भरना और झनझनाना शुरू किया
काला स्याह कनटोप पहने हुए
आसमान बाबा ने
संकट पहचान
राम-राम-राम गुनगुनाना शुरू किया ।
सचाई के अधजले मुर्दा की सुनसान
चित्तियों की अधफूटी दहक में (अकरमात्)
थरथरा उठते हैं पेड़ों पर प्रकाश के चिथड़े
बिंब-क्षेप करते हैं
अफसोसभरे गहरे दुखड़े
जिन्हें देख, जिन्हें सुन
किन्हीं अति-संस्कृत भूतों के गोल-गोल
मटकों-से चेहरों ने
नम्रता के धिघियाते स्वर में
दुनिया को हाथ जोड़
कहना शुरू किया—
'बुद्ध के स्तूप में
मानव के सपने

गड़ गए, गाड़े गए !!
ईसा के पंख सब
झड़ गए झाड़े गए
सत्य की देवदासी-अँगिया
उतारी गई
उधारी गई
सपनों की आँतें सब
चोरी गई, फाड़ी गई
बाकी सब खोल है
ज़िंदगी में झोल है

The moon's face is crooked³

In the middle of town
midnight – on the walls of pitch black rock,
on the high shoulders of enclosures, topped with broken glass, on
the edges,
spread the inky fringes of moonlight
Across the factory enclosure
the minarets of black-faced chimneys –
Exclamation marks!
Between the minarets the moon's crooked face,
suspended,
in my heart, apprehension –
now a scream, now wretchedness!
It is strange!
Curfew in the sky
On the earth silent poisonous disgust
Desolate nests on the pipal tree
penetrated by pellets
so even the wind's borders shiver
in the mansions
Like spies the inky rays of the bald-headed moon
quietly wander about the black-skied city
Hidden in the triangles of the town's corners

they feel
 the distress of the lanes!
 The rays of the moon's side-glances
 search the town
 cut the darkness diagonally
 and spread pale strips
 Time is pitch black.
 On the monstrous dark tank nearby
 sunk in the blackness of the void
 the moon too becomes dark.
 Beneath the arches of town's great bridges,
 deep down
 touching the desolate sad banks
 of the jammed, scared settlements,
 the lips of the moon, resting on the ground, turn black
 in the drifting-stopping
 flowing-stopping
 pitch-black current of the gravelly gutters.
 In the settlement of the untouchables, near the temple,
 hanging on the trunk of a wood-apple tree
 on the dirty thatched roofs,
 on the swollen coiled roots of the banyan tree
 tatters of fog-ghosts' garments,
 bodices, skirts, torn sheets
 The light-coloured eye of the bald-headed, crooked-faced moon
 staring viciously at them.

...

Look, this moonlight is also a great buffoon
 shining
 on a third-floor window
 like a white spot on a cat
 It's sitting silently
 with paws folded, on the lookout for somebody.
 Softly it drops to the roads
 springs to the ceilings,

wanders the corridors, climbs the tiled roofs,
 slips down the tree branches into the courtyards
 light-footed, surveying the rooms, searching for
 who knows what?
 Climbing up the cupolas of the trees on the streets
 jumping over mansions, crossing neighbourhoods
 stealthily in a secret search through the dens of lanes
 it keeps seeking, spying, laying in wait.
 Who is that?
 Who is sticking onto the shoulders of darkness
 showy posters?
 Huge shapes
 fearsome, slanting
 red and blue letters!
 The owl sitting on the statue of Gandhi
 erect in the middle of a coal tar street
 suddenly started singing at the top of its voice
 at the beat of hiccups
 World's breath
 began to die away!
 The wires held by telephone poles
 began to croak and rattle
 in the voice of transactions trunk calls.
 Grandpa sky,
 wearing a pitch black cap,
 saw the crisis
 and started muttering God's name.
 In the flaring flames of the desolate pyres
 of truth's half-burnt corpses (suddenly)
 the tatters of light rose trembling above the trees,
 casting shadows
 like grievous tales of woe
 seeing which, hearing which
 the round, pot-like faces
 of some cultured ghosts

started saying
 in soft, whining voices
 with hands folded in supplication to the world –
 'The dreams of mankind
 got buried, entombed
 in the Buddhist stupas!
 The wings of Jesus
 were shed, torn away.
 The bodice of the temple prostitute of truth
 was removed, stripped off.
 The bowels of all dreams, were cut, split open
 The rest is hollow
 life's cavity.'

बेचैन चील

बेचैन चील !!
 उस-जैसा मैं पर्यटनशील
 प्यासा-प्यासा,
 देखता रहूँगा एक दमकती हुई झील
 या पानी का कोरा झोंसा
 जिसकी सफ़ेद चिलचिलाहटों में है अजीब
 इनकार एक सूना !!

Restless kite

Restless kite!
 Like it, I roaming,
 dying of thirst,
 will keep looking at the glittering lake
 or the mere mirage of water
 in whose white blazes
 there is a strange, blank rejection.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 'Ādhere mē' is Muktibodh's longest, most famous and arguably most obscure poem. It stretches over 30 pages in the edition I have used. The selection presented here includes the beginning and the end of the poem, and two extracts from parts 1 and 2. They all focus on the image of the 'ultimate expression', of man's lost identity, the search for which is the central theme of this work.

'Ādhere mē' covers a large canvas of India's history before and after Independence. If we try to unravel its intricate narrative thread it will guide us through the appearance of a face on a wall and in a dark pond, of a man, bathed in blood-light in a cave; the realisation that this man is the poetic protagonist's 'ultimate expression' (part 1); the protagonist responding to the call of this man and searching for him, guided by 'the bird of night' (part 2); a strange procession and a death sentence given to the protagonist (part 3); martial law to put the people's revolution down (part 4); the protagonist running for his life and looking at the 'diamonds' of his 'anguish, experience, understanding' in a 'deep dark cave' (part 5); the protagonist trying to escape again, seeing blood dripping from Tilak's statue and encountering Gandhi, who hands him the infant of the future; the protagonist's capture and torture; his release; his experience of the dangers of expression (part 6); the protagonist reading a pamphlet which shows him the way forward – the path of communism (part 7); the protagonist waking up in the morning and seeing from his balcony that the man – his 'ultimate expression' – is in the midst of the crowds', 'down there in the streets' (part 8).

This kind of 'decoding' of 'Ādhere mē' into a single narrative line does no justice to this complex poem, in which 'real' and allegorical are tightly knit. This intricate pattern intertwines: 'the "search and find motif" operating with enigmatic encounters...; the classical drama-line of failure, guilt, oracle, task, catharsis and realisation...; the time-journey evolving from a "real" night setting through several... zones of darkness... up to the eventual "real" light of the "morning"; the cleverly arranged geographical shifting between areas of outside and inside... of urban and natural settings, corresponding with mental areas of "dream" and "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 and literary characters 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.' (Lotz 2001, p.105)

- Once we start to follow this intricate pattern, to marvel at its colours and shapes, its complexity and richness, its images, we can understand why the prominent Hindi literary critic Namwar Singh has labelled this poem 'the grand finale of [Muktibodh's] poetic opus' and even 'the grand finale of the achievements of New Poetry'. (Singh 2001, p.118)
2. Manu is a mythological figure who partly corresponds to the biblical and Koranic Adam. He is the progenitor of the world and its inhabitants, seen as son of or personification of Brahma, the Creator. Manu is the principal character of one of the most important works of the *Chāyāvādī* period, Prasad's epic *Kāmāyanī*, which Muktibodh has analysed in his *Kāmāyanī: ek punarmūlyānkan* (Kamayani: a reevaluation), see Jain 1980, pp.211-387.
 3. 'Cād kā mūh ṭeṛhā hai' is another long poem (15 pages in the edition I have used), divided into two parts. The two extracts I have included are both from the first part: the beginning of the poem and the end of the first part (without the last stanza); they are connected by the image of the moon. The extracts give a sense of the general tenor of this work, in which curfew rules over sky and earth (slight variations on 'Curfew in the sky/ on the earth silent poisonous disgust' are repeated throughout the poem); the moon, with its 'crooked face' is a spy and no ordinary man is safe. The poem depicts compassionately the plight of the poor, who live under 'dirty thatched roofs' in 'jammed, scared settlements'. There is no hint of the usual romantic associations of the moon; instead the poet draws a powerful picture of contemporaneous reality as a realm of ugliness and terror.

Shamsher Bahadur Singh 1911-1993

MANY LITERARY CRITICS have tried to label Shamsher, to find the 'right' epithet for his poetry: Marxist, progressive, imagist, experimentalist, surrealist, romantic, mystic, hermetic. For Ashok Vajpeyi, Shamsher is a 'poets' poet' (Agrawal 1994, p.98),¹ for Sahi a 'poet of pure beauty' (ibid., p.99), for Muktibodh a 'poet of love' (ibid., p.8), for Malayaja a 'poet of moods' (Chaturvedi 1990, p.87). Shamsher is all these things and more; his poetry and his personality encompass variety, multiplicity and contradiction. Shamsher is a Marxist and an experimentalist, a poet and an artist, a writer in Hindi and Urdu, a man of childlike innocence, peasant roots and refined sensibility.

Shamsher's ambiguous attitude towards progressivism has been the focus of much critical discourse. 'As soon as one decides to write about Shamsher one faces the problem if he should place him next to the [Marxist] Muktibodh or to the [experimentalist] Agyeya', complains Vishvambhar 'Manav' ('Manav' 1978, p.245). After all, Shamsher has dedicated poems to both. Is Shamsher a Marxist? His statement in *Dūsrā sapṭak*, and the introductions to his collections and diaries testify to an aspiration to Marxist ideals, but simultaneously acknowledge his failure to reach them. The majority of his poems, among them his masterpieces, are not marked by Marxist ideology. As Sahi points out: 'Marxism remained limited to the margins of Shamsher's poetry' (Agrawal 1994, p.84).

It is not just the progressivist and the experimentalist fighting for dominance in Shamsher's works; another duality central to him is that of poet and artist. Muktibodh describes Shamsher's struggle to 'dismiss the artist enthroned in his heart and install the poet instead.' (ibid., part 2, p.57). But it is the painter who has crafted most of Shamsher's poems. He was interested in art from an early age, and attended the Ukil School of Art in Delhi; the painter's sensibility remains central to Shamsher throughout his life. He admits: 'I usually grasp things as a painting and try to transfer the first impression in words' (ibid., p.266), and 'the