

The Void

-Gajanan Madhav_Muktibodh

*The void inside us
has jaws ,
those jaws have carnivorous teeth;
those teeth will chew you up,
those teeth will chew up everyone else.
The dearth inside
is our nature,
habitually angry,
in the dark hollow inside the jaws
there is a pond of blood.
This void is utterly black,
is barbaric, is naked,
disowned, debased,
completely self absorbed.
I scatter it,
give it away,
with fiery words and deeds.
Those who cross my path
find this void
in the wounds
I inflict on them.
They let it grow,
spread it around,
scatter it and give it away
to others,
raising the children of emptiness.
The void is very durable,
it is fertile.
Everywhere it breeds
saws, daggers, sickles,
breeds carnivorous teeth.
That is why,
wherever you look,*

*there is dancing, jubilation,
death is now giving birth
to brand new children.
Everywhere
there are oversights
with the teeth of saws,
there are heavily armed mistakes:
the world looks at them
and walks on,
rubbing its hands.*

Translated from the Hindi by **Vinay Dharwadker**.

Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh was one of the most prominent Hindi poets, essayist, literary and political critic, and fiction writers of the 20th century.

Muktibodh's poetry is experimental and deeply speculative. There is a complex interplay of reality and fantasy in his poems through the use of surrealistic images that juxtapose several levels of existence.

शून्य / "The Void" is a surrealistic poem which powerfully evokes the horror, destruction and violence that result from extreme self-absorption and a sense of the meaninglessness of life.

The Void by G.M. Muktibodh is one of the popular poems of Hindi literature. Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh is famous for his works in the Hindi language. His poems are vibrant in wordplay and pictorial in the use of [imagery](#). His immense popularity as an author had led to the translation of many of his works into English. The current poem *'The Void'* is the translated version of his poem 'Shunya' by Vinay Dharwadker. Shunya literally means zero in English but in the poem, it depicts the negative side of our mind. The negativity which enslaves us and devours humanity from within.

In the poem *'The Void'*, Muktibodh depicts the void which we possess in our mind. It is generally a part of the subconscious mind in which our dark desires flourish. We can't neglect this dark side and this gloomy part of our mind makes us slaves. We serve this void by practicing anger, hatred, and demeaning someone. The more we do works that affect others, the more this dark side develops. It breeds its species into others. According to Muktibodh, it is like a communicable disease that is a threat to humanity.

Structure of *The Void*

'*The Void*' is a poem of 43 lines. The lines are short and precise having no regular line length. It is a [modernist](#) of Hindi Literature. The pace of the poem is fast and the long lines have an average of 4 words in them. Most of the lines are composed of iambic meter and the rhythm goes like "daa-dum, daa-dum". The compact lines make the sound of military footsteps. The choice of words and the sound generating out of the words is heard like a drum used while marching or parade. The sound and the rhyme scheme are somehow significant while analyzing the poem as a whole. So the structure of the poem, 'The Void' is important while analyzing the [theme of the poem](#).

Literary Devices in *The Void*

'*The Void*' by Muktibodh contains literary devices like [personification](#), personal [metaphor](#), metaphor, paradox, [irony](#), [alliteration](#), and [synecdoche](#). Let us have a look at some of these literary devices used in this ironic poem.

In the first few lines, "void" is personified by using personal metaphors like "jaws", "carnivorous teeth" and "chewing up". In this way, this abstract idea is invested with the idea of chewing up the positive side of our minds. At the same time, we can consider this "void" as a use of synecdoche. The "void" depicts a person who is void from inside. This stands for "abstract for the concrete", a variety of synecdoche. "Death" is also personified in the poem. It is seen "giving birth to brand new children."

"The dearth inside/ is our nature", this line sounds somehow paradoxical but it is true that we possess this "dearth" in our hearts. We can't admit it in front of others but still, we have it in our minds chewing up our goodness. If we look at the lines, "This void is utterly black... completely self absorbed" it can be considered as a use of irony. Muktibodh doesn't want to say here that this void is self-absorbed. He says we the people are absorbed in our selfish thoughts.

In the poem, "fiery words and deeds", "pond of blood" and "carnivorous teeth" are uses of metaphor. There is a use of alliteration in the phrase "those teeth". Here the 't' sound is [repeated](#) in the [juxtaposed](#) words. Another significant rhetorical device used in the poem is [enjambment](#). To understand the meaning of a line in the poem, a reader has to go through the lines following it.

Analysis of *The Void*

Lines. 1–14

The void inside us

(...)

completely self absorbed.

In the first five lines of *'The Void'*, G.M. Muktibodh depicts the void which is inside our heart as a beast having sharp teeth. According to the poet, the void has “carnivorous teeth”. Carnivorous means an animal that feeds on other animals. The void is also like that. It finds nourishment by feeding on the goodness of other human beings. In the next five lines the poet remarks that the scarcity is inside us where the void lies. This “dearth” leads to our anger. Then the poet uses the image of “pond of blood” to portray the fierce and ruthless side of our human nature. Thereafter in the next four lines, Muktibodh describes the characteristics of the void. It is “black” or gloomy in complexion. It is barbaric, naked, disowned, and debased. At last, he says that this void is self-centered. Here the poet tries to give the void a physical structure. So he embodies the demonic spirit inside the image of the void and presents it to the readers as a beast-like human figure. It has no relationships and belongs to the lower section of humanity. In this way, Muktibodh describes the internal “shunya” in the first few lines of *'The Void'*.

Lines. 15–28

I scatter it,
(...)
it is fertile.

In lines 15–21, the poet writes in the [first-person](#) narrative scheme. It brings out the [lyrical](#) quality of the poem. Though the poem depicts an abstract quality, it becomes a lyric for the direct presence of the poetic [persona](#) in these lines. Muktibodh confirms that he has the void in himself like others. Then he goes on to project how he nurtures this negative side of his heart. His “fiery words and deeds” inflict mental pain on people. In this way, he eventuates the chain reaction. The offenders respond to the poet’s action and in this way the dark desires in their hearts get nourishment. They spread this negativity among others and the process goes on. The void creates its offsprings in others and mankind gets affected. Here the negative deeds we do to others is compared to the sowing of seeds. At last, Muktibodh says that the void is long-lasting and its ground is very fertile. It means that the void is always in an excited state, susceptible to further chain reactions. Here we can find another use of metaphor as the void is compared to land.

Lines. 29–43

Everywhere it breeds,
(...)
rubbing its hands.

In the last 15 lines of *'The Void'* by Muktibodh, the poet discusses further how this void gets spread and affects people. The poet refers to “saws”, “daggers” and “sickles” in a symbolic way. They [symbolize](#) negative qualities like cruelty and ruthlessness. Muktibodh compares the teeth

of those instruments to the “carnivorous teeth”. This void has infected a lot of people. The ignorant mankind is in the [mood](#) of merrymaking instead of focusing on themselves. The void is eating the good qualities in their hearts but they aren’t in the condition of thinking about it. The “heavily armed mistakes” or the wars have snatched away thousands of lives. Still, we are drinking the cup of Lethe (river of forgetfulness) and overlooking the effects. According to the poet, “the world looks at them/ and walks on,/ rubbing its hands.” I In this way Muktibodh shows that the void inside us keeps us in a state of eternal forgetfulness and passivity.