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**Straight From The Heart: A Review of C.L. Khatri's *Two Minute's Silence*.
New Delhi: Authors Press, 2014. 81 Pp. Rs 195/- Isbn 978-81-7273-920-1**

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With the publication of the third volume of poetry, *Two Minutes Silence* (2014), C.L. Khatri's poetry seems to have come off age with a sign of emphatic and straight forward appeal to the readers to rise to the occasion of a clarion call that would serve the cause of Indian writing English well. A poetry fetishist, Khatri has come a long way since his debut volume *Kargil* in 2000. While the Poetry of C. L. Khatri has become the catchall concept for representing Indian cultural values at length, -- for a bulk of Indian poetry in English beginning from A.k. Ramanujan, Nisim Ezekiel, Jayanta Mahapatra, O. P. Bhatnagar, Parthosarathy, Daruwalla have incorporated materials related to indigenous roots in their poetry. Human thrust and emphasis on place and landscape have become Khatri's niche area where he pours his heart and mind out for representing the cause of India in a suave way.

Besides thirty four engrossing and thought provoking poems, the volume also incorporates some interesting and rudimentary haikus into its corpus to come out with some probing issues of intellectual and creative inquiry. The poems with tight- knit structure and candid appeal show the promise of a well-wrought commentary on both cultural and contemporary issues that hold key to any post colonial writing on course of a glittering global perspective. The volume seems to argue in a persuasive but precise way that it is high time our value-based adages got adequate representation in both their complex and crucial avatars. The poetic discourse that Khatri seems to initiate has an aim to bring out the empiricist quality foregrounded in the otherwise mystique element that one easily associates with Indian English poetry. His poetry has done enough groundwork to withstand the warnings and fraught results of the spurious present to represent our much sought after roots. Exploration of various roots in the context of the crisis-ridden present is very much in Khatri's scheme of things.

Foremost is Khatri's ability to blend tradition with modernity in the shadow of stalwart poetic and powerful lines, an avid interest is expected from the readers to go for our much cherished ideals which is nearly impossible to accomplish in the present context. The poetic persona would definitely agree with Edward Said's idea which he explicates in course of an interview to Imre Salunsinszky that "The sense of being between cultures has been very, very strong for me". That is, the sense of insecurity borne out of the impending danger of globalization seems to be driving force which guides the poet to argue in favor of this volume. There is always an urge to represent the national consciousness which is constantly opposed by

the lingering shadow of the dominant imperial culture that has cast its sway over the indigenous issues and ideas troubling the poets, writers and intellectual thinkers to develop and nurture an abiding accountability towards anything and everything about India. Indeed, the volume is imbued with ideas and issues that are ineluctably indigenous. The poet's quest for a crucial and cogent identity in the global context seems to be glaring as dispossession, displacement and distancing from our own culture and history has led to an exilic experience that we encounter in our own back yard. Our task is cut out and one is reminded of the views of Theodor Adorno, who in his *Dialectic of Enlightenment* asserts that "The task to be accomplished is not the conservation of the past, but the redemption of the hopes of the past". The idea that revival of the past values and ideals should be the major concern of the post colonial writers and thinkers also seems to be governing principle of Khatri's poetry.

The poem "Peaceful Ways" sets out the poet's search for quintessential self in the fierce competition marked by a cut throat world. However, the poetic persona attempts to strike out a middle course between an angry man "pricked by the spikes of porcupine" and a man of self aggrandizement who proclaims emphatically "I am a blissful soul" with an apathetic but assertive "Om Shanti Om". The poem "River" performs some symbolic purpose of getting rid of the naïve and dull ways of life that ends with a spiritual quest as the only way of salvation at the end of a human life characterized by the ever dominating Hindu chanting when someone dies with a final warning that only the name of ideal lord Rama is final truth of life. But the powerful image of the lazy elegance of a "rhinoceros" has the last laugh as the persona of the poet declares "I crossed so many ends/ but the ends turned into weary ways". The use of animal imagery has given the poet alternative ways to argue through powerful imagery. The emphatic use of Indian idiom has proved khatri's poetic prowess as an Indian English poet.

Familial roots serve as the pillar post for all Indian English poets and Khatri is of no exception. In a soul-searching poem entitled "Homage to Maa", the poet has described the personal loss which seems to perturb the poet time and again:

She was standing like mother Mary
 feeding me her breast
 alas! I could not be her Christ
 she bore the Cross all through her life
 I slept in piece, bloomed in spring.

The loss is irreparable and the poet can never be able to repay it. The ambit of the poetic scene is filled with the amalgamation of the East and West myths so that local themes are accentuated with western themes of Mary and Christ. The post colonial thrust on local imagery is prominently employed by Khatri and the profuse use of Indian idiom points to providing stuff to this truth. Nostalgia becomes the mainstay when the poet says that his mother "...lives in me,

breathes through me”. To prove his point, the poet draws upon the myth of Lord Ganesh who has circled around his parents when asked to travel around the world.

Yet another aspect of postcolonial perspective of emphasis on place and landscape is evidenced in the poem “Paeon to Pataliputra” where the poet has taken recourse to history to place the value based roots in the right standpoint to deal with the crisis-ridden present. Self identification is the pivot here when the poet quests for:

A Charak in PMCH,
 a Chanakya in the university,
 a Chandragupta in Vidhan Sabha,
 a Bhagirathi in the Ganga.

The historical roots come to the aid of the poet to realize the importance of our long preserved cultural constructs “to preserve in my poetry/ the mysterious symmetry/ of dance, death and desire”. Perhaps the poet is not happy with the present preoccupations. Hence he reverts back to the nostalgic past which seems to be a safe recluse for the poet. Khatri is also a poet whose heart is equally at pains when matters of contemporary concern perturb him very much. In “Flower of Opium” he records his grief over the mad rush of the nations to score a victory or two over one another. He says: “Nations in race of weapons / harvesting atom fruits / hand grenade roots” with an end result “Of multi storeys graveyard / with a handful of ashes”. The poem “Ahilya’s Astra” deals with the feministic concerns of the poet, the sorry state of women in the contemporary society emerges out as a burning issue in the poem where a widow is being flanked by her own kith and kin. The poet feels strongly for the marginal woman where even the radical feminists like Swalter has no answer. With poignancy the poet writes: “But how would a Swalter define / The story of struggle, strife, submission / subversion within the walls?”. The devastating Tsunami for which the man has scant regard catches the attention of the poet and his concern for nature and ecology which is doing rounds and which has become a global concern now. The poem “I Am a Bird” describes the poet’s intentions to be free from earthly responsibility. It points out the inadequacies of living in a country like India but the patriotic fervor of the poet is at full swing when he feels not to desert his native land: “refuse to migrate from the land I love”. It proves time and again that the poet in Khatri is thoroughly nationalistic in his new and innovative bent of mind. For a change, the poet offers his views on sex candidly and advocates for mutual sex which would solve a lot of problems like frequent gang rapes that embrace the front pages of daily news papers. In place of the brutal sex mutual sex is a bliss. In a poem like “National Consciousness” the poet is ready to castigate the pen and paper equality and seems to advocate the course for a freedom or equality on real terms. Whatever situation he is in, the poet wants to derive the best out of the minimum resources at hand to exploit. In “I Am a Bird”, the poet sticks his allegiance to the motherland in a way all the postcolonial writers write to hail everything native. He boldly proclaims his self assertion, “refuse to migrate/ from the land I love”. The title poem “Two- Minute Silence” sums up the apathy of the poet’s people to the long cherished value system as well as lack of accountability in the public place, by our leaders and the bureaucrats. The poignant moment in the poem comes when the poet laments the loss of everything that is native and indigenous: “Let’s observe two-minute silence / on the death of *dhoti* and *pugadi* / oxen and coolies replaced by wheels / chopped up hands and lame legs”. The

poems in this collection takes one in a nostalgic ride to reviving our cultural, historical and familial roots which would stand the depleted and off-track Indians in good steads in future.

In short, pithy and aphoristic haikus which are in vogue in the literary scene, Khatri proves his prowess as a poet of promise and assurance to his learned audience. The poet draws our attention to both contemporary and cultural problems that lurk at our face. Irony is the poet's forte in the Haiku: "Sonia's Dandi March // Gandhi makes salt out of tears / VAT comes out of her beg."

The present fascination for Fiction is lamented in the next haiku number five when the poet is disappointed at not being considered for the mainstream recognition at the behest of fiction. He writes: In a churchyard Gray / writes anonymous poems / fiction blows from the candle." Similarly the poet's knack of arguing for the cause of women empowerment attracts the attention of the reader. He seems to uphold the view that women are not always at the receiving end and they can be treated as permanent companions to men: "Preserve your wife / for old days or odd days / sun and shower." How innocence becomes the victim forms the subject matter of yet another haiku: "Vultures on the top / crows pecking the left over / doves gasping for breath."

On the whole, the volume is a power-packed one to both enlighten and entertain the reader and it is a must for every connoisseur of poetry. The beautiful binding and getup only add up to our contention that Khatri's poetry has come here to stay against the ordeals of time and space.