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# Research Innovator

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Editor-In-Chief  
Prof. K.N. Shelke

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A detailed illustration of a quill pen resting on a scroll of parchment. The quill is positioned diagonally across the frame. The scroll is tied with a red ribbon and has a red wax seal. In the background, a lit candle in a brass holder provides a warm glow. In the foreground, there is a glass inkwell with a quill inside, and a red wax seal with a wooden handle. The entire scene is set on a wooden surface.

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**Volume III Issue I: February – 2016**

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**Poetry of Possession: A Study of C.L. Khatri's Poetry**

Dr. Gagan Bihari Purohit

**Abstract**

Khatri's poetry, like his peers, is trying to solve the riddle of the contradictory claim of representing indigenous insights against western hegemony by using English language as his main tool. The spirit of the East is vindicated against the western notion of representation. Khatri has done well to preserve and sustain the spirit of unity and its essential ingredients in its quintessential form. The paper argues that Khatri's poetry of possession helps him preserve the essentialism of India against the backdrop of western bias. In doing so, it also foregrounds the inherent contradictions present within our own indigenous ideology, and Khatri has tried hard to reconcile such contradictions through analysis and criticism of the mistakes committed by his countrymen by failing to live up to an accountability of sorts.

**Key Words:** Poetry of possession, indigenous tropes, national identity, cultural nationalism, colonial disposition

All poets dovetail between personal experiences and turbulent past history to come to terms with their individual as well as national identity. It is Saidean "discourse of dispossession" (Singh 99) that directs the course of a postcolonial poet's double plight of fighting with and explaining in defense of the colonial hegemony. That is, they have to fight against the out of proportion distortion of their glorious historical and cultural past at the hands of the colonizers, the tool of their fight, however, being the English language, for everything they write to represent their personal as well as national identity is in English to write off the consciousness of exile in their own courtyard. Poetry of C.L. Khatri, the most accomplished contemporary poet from Bihar, is pitied against this sense of "dispossession" to assert his sense of firm possession over the cultural and historical

heritage of India to voyage his war against contemporary nepotism, political chauvinism and jingoism. The paper undertakes the argument that Khatri's poetry permeates a patriotic ambience in his maiden collection *Kargil* (2000) where he seems to form a paradigm of nationalistic opinion on our soldiers achievement in adverse situations which is found wanting in civilians. In contrast to colonial dispossession of indigenous cultural identities, Khatri has been bedeviled by problems of accommodation and acquisition in an ambience not befitting to the mass. I argue through this essay how a uniformly evolving pattern characterizes the poetry of Khatri, the other two volumes *Ripples in the Lake* (2006) and *Two Minutes Silence* (2014) are also included in the purview so as to come out with the similarities and contrasting strand



points of possession that I predominantly presuppose in the course of the essay.

Before we take on to the business of textual citations in support of our argument, I plan to have a sound theoretical base, taking the Indian and westerns epistemological offerings in support of our stand point. The Indian English Poetry is based on a sound platform, laid down by phenomenal poets like Jayanta Mahapatra, Nissim Ezekiel, and A.K. Ramanujan, Parthasarathy, Daruwalla, and Kamala Das, among others. All these poets tried to use the English language to their advantage from the vintage point of indigenous idiom and panacea for subscribing to native tradition and culture in total retaliation to the colonial hegemony. No wonder, Mahapatra tried to write about the theme of “sleep and action” in exploring the “theme song of my life” in his masterpiece *Relationship* (1980). A sense of urgency is noticed to rearrange the world in disarray which culminates in some sort of skeptical, compromising, ironic, ambivalent and inward vision based on indigenous idiom and experiences. Ezekiel, Ramanujan, Jayanta Mahapatra, Kamala Das, Bhatnagar, Shiv K. Kumar and Parthasarathy have recognized this urge for Indianness that would stand them in good steads for their very survival as poets, and they have become successful in creating a critical acclaim both in and outside the country. They pursued every possible avenue to explore the indigenous elements for a global representation. Parthasarathy is hard at it when he says in *Rough Passage* :

How long can foreign poets

provide the staple of your lines ?

Turn inward, scrape the bottom of your past. ( “Homecoming 2” )

Mahapatra recognizes the “myth of sleep and action” in him. Ramanujan’s probing mind harps on the origin and scope of his Hindu heritage, Ezekiel handles the theme of superstition and folk belief in “Night Of The Scorpion“ deftly, and Bhatnagar’s firm belief that the Indian intellectuals, who prefer to stay abroad, deserting their mother land are worse than the migratory birds who return back to their native land at the end of the cold season, has lot more to do with the theme of possession. Derek Walcott’s validation of African ancestral authenticity over the acquired American status in his poem “A Far Cry from Africa” which gives an optimistic conclusion, “How can I turn from Africa and Live?”, is an idea about assertive nationalism further reinforced in his much acclaimed novel *Omeros*, “either I’m nobody or I’m Nation”; lays bare the notion of nationality very much in keeping with the possessive identity of the nation. Sri Aurobindo also gives vent to such an opinion in *The Future of Poetry* which augurs well for our purpose: “The work of the poet depends not only on himself and his age but on the mentality of the nation to which he belongs and the spiritual, intellectual and aesthetic tradition and environment which it creates for him” (38). This dual representation of a poet is also looked forward to by Eliot’s foresight when he talks about “the empirical personality” (personality of the poet) and an “implied personality” ( the poetic persona) where the normal man and a visionary’s insight go together to define

his poetic soul. Eliot's exercise of "a particular medium" in his essay "Traditional and Individual Talent" in confirmation with Heidegger's philosophical claim that "language writes the man" also finds echoes of resemblance in Aurobindo:

A poet or artist may be a medium for creative force which uses him as channel and is concerned only with expression in art and not with the man's personality or his inner or outer life. He is a medium for the creative force which acts through him; it uses or picks up anything stored up in his mind from his inner life or his memories and impressions of outer life and things, anything it can and cares to make use of and this is molded and turns to its purpose (328).

Ramanujan has also given some theoretical input where he tries to maintain the delicate balance between the English language and the imperial hegemony. Ramanujan's view on the status of English in shaping up our sensibility gives a balanced view amidst the claims and counter claims of colonial hegemony. It posits case for a native context in an internationally acclaimed language even though it happens to be the language of the colonizers:

It might be good that English is so widespread as second language. English has distorted our traditions but it has also made us look at our traditions. It's not enough to say that it is all colonialism and has done

nothing but distort. This whole question of colonial distortion has been formulated in English. It requires a dialogue with English. English has been the other through which we have returned to ourselves. English has become a part of us. To say we want to return to a state of pre-English is chimerical. The anti-colonial discourse is all done in English. Nobody is writing this in Kannada. In India, there is a wonderfully group of new historians called the Subalterns, who are looking at all the distortions of the colonial intellectual practices. But all their work is done in English. Isn't the English in which they are writing distorting what they are writing about? English has made us self-critical and made us critical of English itself (Daniels—Ramanujan and Keith Harrison 79).

Ramanujan explores the prevalent trend of storytelling that becomes the forte of the Indian English poet by resorting to the glorious epic Indian tradition of *the Mahabharata* and *the Ramayana*. Continuity rather than discreteness, as advocated by colonial regime, is seen as the strongest point of the Indian culture and tradition. He describes the tradition of continuity as follows:

*The Ramayana* and *the Mahabharata* open with episodes that tell you why and under what circumstances they were composed. Every such story is encased in a meta-story. And within the text, one tale is the context for another within it; not only does the

outer frame- story motivate the inner sub –story; the inner story illuminates the outer as well. It often acts as a microcosmic replica for the whole text. In the forest when the Pandava brothers are in exile, the eldest, Yudhistira, is in the very slough of despondency: he has gambled away a kingdom, and is in exile. In the depth of his despair, a sage visits him and tells him the story of Nala. As the story unfolds, we see Nala too gamble away a kingdom, lose his wife, wander in the forest, and finally, win his wager, defeat his brother, reunite with his wife and return to his kingdom. Yudhistira, following the full curve of Nala’s adventures, sees that he is only halfway through of his own, and sees his present in perspective, himself as a story yet to be finished. Very often the Nala story is excerpted and read by itself, but its poignancy is partly in its frame, its meaning for the hearer within the fiction and for the listener of the whole epic. The tale within is context-sensitive—getting its meaning from the tale without, and giving it further meanings (Dharwadkar 42).

In his seminal book, *After Amnesia*, G.N. Devy goes on to elaborate the nature of Amnesia of Indian literary tradition and blames the western literary canon for the inertia of the Indian literary criticism: “The worst part of the colonial impact was that it snatched away India’s living cultural heritage and replaced it with a fantasy of

the past. This amnesia, which has affected our awareness of native traditions which are still alive, perhaps is the central factor of the crisis in Indian criticism” (*After Amnesia* 55).

The claims made by Devy sounds pompous at times because the people who are averse to English as language of colonizers paradoxically use the different “Englishes” (which are translated into English) so that our regional or “Bhasa literature”(G N Devy’s term) gets critical attention abroad.

Ramachandra Guha’s award winning book *India After Gandhi* (won the Sahitya Akademi Award for the year 2011) argues in favour of the relevance of the English language in our day to day lives and, as a sort of mythical implication of indigenous acclimatization of the English language as follows:

In British times the intelligentsia and professional classes communicated with one another in English. So did the nationalist elite, Patel, Bose, Nehru, Gandhi and Ambedkar- all spoke and wrote in their native tongue, and also in English...

After Independence, among the most articulate advocates for English was C. Rajgopalchari. The colonial rulers, he wrote, ‘for certain accidental reasons, causes and purposes...left behind [in India] a vast body of English language.’ But now it had come there was no need for it to go away. For English ‘is ours .We need not send it back to Britain along with the English men.’ He humorously added that, according to the Indian tradition it was



a Hindu Goddess Saraswati, who had given birth to all the languages of the world. Thus English belonged to us by origin, the originator being Swaraswati, and also by acquisition' (762).

As a postcolonial critic, Ramanujan advocates a rewriting of an indigenous alternative history to cope with the challenges posed by the colonizers. Like Jawaharlal Nehru, Ramanujan also speaks in support of English as a second language. But he does not stop at that, he makes his point of view clear when he stands up boldly for the national culture and myth to cross swords with colonial hegemony. Ramanujan adheres to the principle of alternative history, in a way current cultural critic Satya P. Mohanty stresses upon unearthing our glorious cultural and historical significance to match with western canon. Edward Said's "Orientalism", Bhabha's "hybridity", Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak's "catachreism" have successfully kept the colonialism at bay. Ramanujan's alternative history, a new-historicist approach of tracing the text in the contextual roots, will go a long way in combating the colonial threat to indigenous culture. What Bipin Pal Singh cites Theodor Adorno's dictum, "The task to be accomplished is not the conservation of the past, but the redemption of the hopes of the past" (99) to describe Said's plight of "dispossession" seems to be covertly true in case of Khatri's poetry.

One of the chief motifs of Khatri's poetry is possession of indigenous culture and history, duly disturbed and distorted by the colonial intervention. The establishment of

East India Company has robbed India not only of its material wealth but also of the cultural, spiritual and historical values which has not gone well with the patriotic poets like Khatri. The physical seizure of imperial power is concomitant with the intellectual eviction which becomes the central aspect of Khatri's poetry. Khatri is also critical of the spurious sense of possession of the Indians forgetful of values; they show false allegiance to our longstanding value system by shedding crocodile tears on significant issues like showing respect to elders.

No wonder "Poet's Commitment" begins with his overburdened responsibility to arouse the country men to cater to the needs of their motherland. He evokes sense of urgency in the mind of the readers by taking an image from indigenous mythology. How else do we consider lines like:

My nails of Narsimha  
will tear the veils  
until they know their real shelves  
but my soul will wait until they are  
purged of all dross  
and emerge like phoenix (1)

Sure he does not want to give in to the increasing pressure all around him rather he makes it a point to purge the society and motherland out of all evils. The strenuous and arduous task of changing the course of "the destiny of their destiny – makers" (1) makes the task of the poet all the more difficult. Khatri's maiden volume, it seems, is replete with the existential crisis of his countrymen where the poetic personae is busy finding out a

long term solution to the problem at hand. The pain and agony, the callousness and irresponsibility of the law makers and its adherent attendants informs the poetry of Khatri. "Walking Alone"(2) is a case in point where the poet musters courage to "walking alone on a hard and pinching road" (2) in the company of natural elements where human beings have drawn flak. He puts a brave front amid the loss of face on all fronts. "Gun-Fire" keeps us on our toes to come to terms with the loss of our culture and tradition with the advent of modernity and westernization. The yearning for "Indianness" is always there but what is more significant here is the explicitness and the ever increasing urgency: "We have lost our *chopal, kirtan mandali* / age-old family bond, birds like freedom / hermit like peace and sound sleep" (4). The quest for roots is nothing new in Indian poetry which fits well into the postcolonial scheme of things, but what is special about Khatri is the working of the underlying theme of soul searching at physical, metaphysical, spiritual and philosophical levels. The accessible not the esoteric is the target of the poet. Wit, humour and satire play their part in informing the poetry of Khatri: so are freshness, agility, courage and vigour, and a willing ear to stay positive to criticism. The underlying sarcasm of Khatri's "pain" at the increasingly eroding value base of our culture is interesting here. Khatri does not mind to explain in detail the emptiness in the present mode of operation:

I feel no pain even in pyre;  
my eyes shade no tears, sprout no fire  
at the killings, rapings, flaming.

New modalities replacing  
the old moralities entire. (6)

Social commentary of such magnitude is more effective and penetrating in Khatri than the high seriousness of a Ramanujan or Mahapatra. Social criticism is at its peak in "Waiting for the Sun-Rise", "Dark descends on Bihar / prospects of light to mar" (11), a bitter commentary on the Jungle raj of Bihar is picked out with savage humour. In "Garden of Gods" Khatri makes a vain attempt to explain away the depleted moral plain of the civic amenities. Moral depravity, if misplaced savagery of his locality and in contemporary India is described with pain and agony: "I am searching for the song of silence / a solitary sight / to sow seeds of strength / soulful self esteem" (13). To get rid of "boasting bullets" and "boys wearing bangles"(13) being his motto, the poet gives his best efforts to change the prevalent unruly scenes. The youth has taken a wrong direction and it his duty to duly authenticate such a misplacement or dispossession with either a bang or a humble attempt, of which the poet prefers the latter. He even does not care taking a life risk for bringing the misunderstood youth back into the right track: " I'll graduate them in grammar of God / with love and care of a gardener / watch them grow into garden of gods / before I am buried into its breast" (13). Such a moral lesson is the need of the time and Khatri loses no time in reminding the youth about their disturbing draw backs. But Khatri's claim seems to be an exercise in futility where the blunt denial from the mass to the clarion call of the poet seems to be the only

answer. That is, the poet's purpose fails to bring in any practical import. In "I am Burning"(15) a clarion call is depicted, providing the reader with mystic aura when the narrator is willing to take up the challenge "to spread the light of Christ" (15) in total dispensation of his individual self. Perhaps the poet is convinced that through agony and sacrifice the road of ecstasy is paved. The subtle imagery that pervades the atmosphere of the poem makes the tone even graver. The deep scars, memories and cultural past combine together to culminate in personal sacrifice. Khatri's evocative lines reveal his intensions clearly: "I am digging my grave/ in the bottom of the candle/ I fear neither your bell nor hell / I will burnout to light again" (15). His personal agony mixes up with a universal anguish haunts the poet time and again. Khatri does not hesitate to mobilize his narrators take risks if the pride and respect of the country is at stake. The patriotic intent of the poet goes hand in hand with the title of the collection.

With the poet the shift from physical to spiritual plane seems to be safe passage. His philosophical bent of mind is best exhibited in "Peace" where he harps on the theme of death-rebirth cycle. For Khatri, the completion of one cycle is not an end but a means to entry into another world. He makes no qualms while dealing with the most solemn fact of life, death. For him, or for any poet hailing from India, death is not discrete but continuity into another life: "For ultimate peace we turn to death / but it is haunted by the cycle of rebirth" (16). The poet wants to be possessive about the Indian notion of peace which believes in

perfect communion with heart and mind; it is not a commodity to be sold out in the market. The poet is critical of and answering to cheap hype of peace in the modern world. What is significant here is he never shies away from pointing out the pitfalls prevalent in our present day society. He is annoyed to learn that cheap items are in place to replace our long standing value system.

The poem "Kargil-1" gives the valour and courage of our soldiers against an all-out onslaught of the enemy camp. The contrasting style of employing images weakens the enemy soldiers as if they are searching after a needle in a haystack. On the other hand our soldiers have come out successful reducing "enemy's pride to nil" (19). Implicit though his claims, Khatri gives our national heroes an epic welcome by employing natural images to enhance their firmness of mind and strength of character. The kind of immediacy and close-knit structure the poet employs heightens the intensity of the purpose:

Neither the freezing wind nor the  
defiant sea  
neither the Himalayas odds nor foe's  
fraud  
can come in your march forward to  
victory,  
can touch the apron of your mother  
proud. (19)

The resolution of the poem comes with snail-eagle analogy, when the enemy soldiers strain their every nerve to score victory over the opponents. "Kargil-2" adds another important facet to Khatri's poetry, the story element, which, without

being politically biased, gives a balanced account of the Kargil war and its background. The nascent design or foul play by the enemy troops put the political correct Indian state of affairs in jeopardy. But our soldiers fight tooth and nail and “thrashed out the betrayers / who were forced to eat the humble pie” (21). All his life the great man is animated for a passion of truth and justice, but failed miserably in convincing his political rival next door. The opponents have a narrow squeak, both the poet and his country men are convinced of the strength and vigour with which our national army stood ground. What is alarming here is even our victory in the battle field leads to failure in putting up a strong fight against the internal “Kargils” that posed a many sided challenge to our country’s security and progress. He has no knit answer to the probing problem of rising up to expectations, because the public accountability in the country comes next to nothing. In a desperate bid, the poet cannot but pleads the hypocritical people to live for our country’s pride: “Let’s be Jawans of Kargil / Arise, Awake, Ascend / and fight to the end” (22). Poems like “Unfortunate Country”, “Politics and Temples”, “Hiroshima Fog”, “Sorry Mother” and “Elephant Tusk” attempt a similar exhibition of contemporary squalor that has plagued our nation. Here Khatri’s tryst with destiny seems to be a failure because they are related to, either explicitly or implicitly, the present follies of the public to come true to the national needs.

Poems like “A Tribal Girl” provides criticism of the so-called elite, who, despite their strong financial back up,

make a mess of the long standing values of love and affection that is a characteristic feature of indigenous family framework. Against the natural backdrop of the tribal girls who are destined to serve as maid servants, the so-called civic society fails to treat its daughters with equality and respect. Humour and sarcasm saves the day for the poet who is engrossed with an otherwise pessimistic thought. However, mythical Draupadi in the poem of same title come to the poet’s aid when he invokes Her to rescue the world out of danger. She has never bowed to necessities, rather her symbolic victory and glorious history provides the poet with the much needed thrust to fight with gripping problems at hand. Khatri tries hard to strike out a balance between the glorious past and the nebulous present by invoking cosmic power of the mythical character from the celebrated epic, *the Mahabharata*:

Come down from heaven *Draupadi*  
regain your dignity, awake the Pandavs  
reenact your historical swear  
redeem the dignity of your sisters(24).

The myth and culture of our country assumes an indigenous overtone in poems like “Generation Gap”, the poet is best assured of security from both internal and external threat, “tri-colour” gives firmness and strength to nationalism in the face of warring elements. The principal weapon of the mankind, according to *the Gita*, “the Sudarshan of Krishna” (25) is also there as the chief custodian of the possessive values of our culture and tradition. These cultural mores are India’s pride and envy of every other western nation, which could never



have avoided the closely guarded attention of Khatri. To this category belongs poems like “Old Home” where positive values like, “benevolence, kindness, nationalism, and humanity” (29) are fast disappearing, the world has turned out to be “a contempt Square” where negative values like “hate, malevolence, cruelty, communalism, carnality and their pals” (29) have taken control. “Hiroshima Fog” has the same theme to explore where the “Mother of Liberty” (32) is in trouble of celebrating the fleeting “winning spree of Aswamedha” (32) on account of the lingering shadow of “Hiroshima fog” which compels the people “to live with rolling fire” (32). On the whole, the sense of the possession of the poet is threatened by the external factors which are elusive, and out of reach of the poet. The poem “Devaki” draws on a mythical background to point at the ills of a contemporary society. The mother-son relationship in India is something sacred which is cherished by our culture. In “Tandav”, the poet seeks explanation from the almighty so as to stop atrocities being unleashed upon the society. His inquisitive mind is restless making frequent queries to the God: “Tell me, For God’s sake tell me/ when will the earth’s stupor end? (41)

The volume as a whole marks a departure from the accepted norms of poetry writing in India as it has taken the indigenous undercurrent as its main thrust. That is when Khatri’s possessive poetry comes into limelight. The reader’s attention is not distracted even for a moment from the indigenous cultural mores, through out there is series of queries to the reader as

well as the public to be sensitive to the issues happening around them.

Khatri’s second volume also continues with the theme of possession in a calm and composed way. Unlike the aggressive stand he adopts in the first volume, *Kargil*, the second one seems to be more mature and mild in its criticism of and thrust on the indigenous strands. In a poignant poem, “Pitirir” (The Debt of Father on Son), he takes on the so-called elite who do not hesitate to desert their own parents which speaks of terrible loss to our long standing family values. The people start surreptitiously eroding the longstanding family values of the Indian soil following the western model. The history and culture of the land is distorted by the colonial hegemony and in their place the western model of nucleus family system is put in place where we forget our primary duty to our elderly ailing father, denying him the basic needs of comfort. Khatri writes:

He who would not offer  
a glass of water to the old rag  
now pours the redeeming dose of  
*Ganga-jal* .  
He who has never fed  
his ailing, paling pa with his hand  
gives *mukhagni* to the dead. (*Ripples in  
the Lake* 3)

In the vein of Ramanujan, who is sarcastic about the traditional Tamil eulogy of the river Baikei to point out its pitfalls in “A River” and Ezekiel’s “Night of the Scorpion” which castigates the traditional superstitious bent of mind of the village folk, Khatri also directs bitter invective against the so-called cultured people who



do not pay heed to their longstanding value system where elderly people deserve their due, without doubt, owing to western influence. This is one possible means of attempting to annihilate our cultural mores thereby dispossessing us from our own history, memory, language and culture. The stand out quality of Khatri's poetry here is what Promod Kumar Nayar calls "the tongue-in-cheek humour" (99). He is at pains to bring the essence of India into his poems. Like his illustrious predecessors, Khatri also tries to assimilate an "Indianness" possessively into his poetry.

Khatri weaves a stranger-in-own-land idea that makes him a sorry spectacle of things happening around him and tries his best to make the malicious man mind his own business, saving what G.N. Devy would call, the cultural amnesia. National issues like crisis in food in flood affected areas do perturb the poet which surfaces as the main theme of the poem "Water". Since India has got independence, though the real independence is a few and far between options, the leaders are themselves to blame for an answer to the gripping contemporary issues that stare them at face. Poems in similar vein are "Brahm-Bhoja", "Brindawan", "Professor Sahib" where contemporary evil, sordidness and squalor come to the fore. Deception and hypocrisy steal the show, leaving the poet stranded on the way. The real purpose of each of the assignments and accountabilities thereof has been amiss. Bound by necessities, the professor is "lost into whirlpool of thought"(15) to ask probing questions to his inquisitive mind:

"Who am I? a Conniver or a professor? /Who is my audience? Vacant hall and dust coated / benches? (15). No wonder, the poet is worried about the eroding values of the teacher- student relationship in the modern times. He judges the distinction between the present educational set up and our ancient ideal *guru-sishya* custom to a nicety. The insipid insouciance of the students has put the future of education in a deadlock. The poem "Metaphor of Honesty" (17) takes seemingly elite culture down a peg when the innocent tribal men refuse the city culture in a blunt denial. It is high time, feels the poet, we took a peep at "... what we plunder / under the carpet of development" (17). Nicety of criticism, humour and veiled sarcasm give vent to the poet's intense efforts to bring the human being into his senses.

Khatri's role is cut out in poems like "Poetry" and "Quest", where he is prepared to take on the insurmountable problems that surround his indigenous insightfulness. He is bent on giving a good send off to his motherland as her worthy and accountable son:

I fathom the deep bed  
of my of conscience in it,  
to discover nature's treasure  
to fill the void at inner level  
to redefine my role  
on the stage of the world (26).

The poet is even more persuasive in the poem "Quest", he does not want to desert his mother land against a sea of odds, something of Jayanta Mahapatra comes into play here (he is not overtaken by the idea of living abroad deserting his native

place, Cuttack in Odisha). Living on the world of necessities, he wants to keep his value system in-tact. Thus the sonorous style of questions follow: “Does education means taking away / the child from his mother’s lap? Why can’t I fly high and still / be in mother’s lap like a bird? (27). Bereft of all possibilities to rise up to the wakeup call of the country, Khatri invokes the spirit of Bapu in an imploring tone, in the poem of same name. That he tries to hold on to the rare and scare indigenous value system, without grinding his ideological axes to a point of no return, subscribes to Khatri’s commitment and sensitivity to national cause: “Bapu come, come once again, / for my sake, for my country’s sake / it’s more difficult to fight against own people (30). The disparate value system has taken its toll on Khatri’s mind. He feels the urgency of preserving the value based culture exhibited brilliantly by Gandhiji, which is out and out a delicate issue to be just lamented and soon to be forgotten again.

The volume is replete with scores of such instances where Khatri tries hard to regain the lost ground to cultural erosion. Redrawing the borders of the squeezed indigenous culture being his niche area, the poet does not mind leaving out the minds of those so-called elite who continue in the vein of colonial hangover. An enlightened poet that Khatri is, he is firm in his mind, not keeping his disapproval of the faulty system a secret, he opens up new avenues in the indigenous cultural paradigms to develop a fascination for strong moral back-up and hatred of the contemporary evils simultaneously. To my mind, this rift

between loss of value system and the contemporary mismatching explains away Khatri’s overt insistence on an indigenous catch-all concept to fight with western hegemony on the face of it.

Khatri commits himself to certain indigenous conscience in his third poetry volume *Two-Minute Silence* (2014). He has shared valuable opinion of many of his illustrious predecessors in his deft handling of humour and satire. These two devices feather Khatri’s poetic nest with sharp parables and cultural allusions. The cosy collection is a brilliant feat of muse which supports the cause of Khatri’s zest for indigenous tropes, sometimes his witty and pithy remarks do add to this indigenous flavor helping in turn to take it to a different plane altogether. He is not a man to count the conspiracies before they are hatched which is exhibited in the very first poem “Peaceful Soul”. What stands here is his down-to-earth approach. What keeps him at the cutting edge of creativity is knack of finding solutions to difficult issues out of nowhere. The good –for-nothing modern man finds him at the receiving end with no obvious positive outings. Mark the witty statement from the poem under discussion: “Situations impotent / potent the man / in realization / I am a peaceful soul / I am a blissful soul” (14). Khatri’s poetic persona is in search of a longstanding solution to the present crisis and the synthesis comes with the caption “Om shanti om”. Khatri’s assertions are in keeping with Levi Strauss’s long established finding that myths pave the way for our easy access to cultural paradigms. The myth of “Shanti” would go

a long way to provide a readymade solution to the warring elements that contributes to the burden of our stress account. The fecund company of indigenous spiritual strength, the poet believes, would be an ideal staple of postcolonial answer to clinging on to our moral strength. This mystic sense of indigenous cultural praxis is a potent weapon for us to fight western hegemony away from our soil and it would be a *faux pas* if we do not realize this potentiality, or ignore it, adhering to a western bias. The discourse of *shanti* has deep rooted appeal to our cultural nuances which strikes a degree of coherence in this discrete and diverse field of interest. The poem "River" serves the very purpose of the poetic self in search of a peaceful solution to an otherwise stressful mind: "Heaven lies ahead / infinite peace, infinite bliss/ sound sleep, selfless work/ and salvation at the end" (15). Use of local phrases like "*Ram nam satya hai*" (16) is painted in the universal colour, it captures the agile imagination of the readers to reach at the final truth of their life. Similar in intension and insight are the poems "Hell on the Hill", drawing upon the myth of Lord Shiva and his outrageous outings, it foregrounds acute lack of accountability among the Indians.

Khatri's possessive intent becomes explicit in the poem "Homage to Maa" (20). He is at odds with capricious sons who can easily dispense with their responsibility towards their motherland, cherishing a spurious ideology; they very often waylay their own cultural parameters: "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 peace, bloomed in spring" (20). The use local imagery like the traditional earthen stove for preparation of food and the use of cow dung to savour it; the dishes like noodles, pickles etcetera and above all, the alluring "...aroma of frying grains in the sand" (21) speaks about Khatri's fondness for indigenous tropes surging ahead with full swing. The celebrations of festivals at will and drawing from the myth of Ganesh, who has considered circling round his parents would be more than travelling the whole world, attaches immense importance to the vital role of a mother in shaping up both our character and career. The flight of Khatri's imagination is taken to a new high when he is all set to pick out the holes in our out of place cultural paradigms. Nostalgia becomes the mainstay when the poetic personae considers his mother as a living soul whose blessings and advices would prove more than handy in her absence. In the same token poems like "The Falgu Myth", "Mother", "Poetic Justice" and "New Year 2014" are representations of Khatri's riposte for consideration of indigenous idealism. The rip-off of the indigenous culture has not gone well with Khatri. Poems like "Bull's Reaction", "Baffolo Ride" and "Reversal Syndrome" project Khatri's down-to-earth work ethic, displaying his equality agenda which blurs the age-old distinction between the rich and poor. Elsewhere a pithy statement is infused with subtle wit, "land, sand and empty hand" (46) and takes a peg down the reader's mind about

the Bihari fortitude against a sea of odds. The Bull-cow parable also undermines the weak and strong hierarchy, the final resolution bringing much needed respite to both the parties; “the earth equally belonged to us”(48) being the conclusion. A poem like “I Am a Bird” speaks out the mind of the poet when the poet persists with “the land I love”(49) despite the inadequacies being felt acutely. The local merges with universal in poems like “Holi” and “Jogiji” giving a global perspective to Khatri’s poetic trajectory. Love turns out to be the universal healer transcending the local and global issues into perfect harmony. Sometimes natural agents like the crane become the poet’s spokes person for exploring the world of contemporary paucity. He pursues a poetic truth of sticking to his roots but lack of opportunities hurts the poet very much. There is not a single moment in the poem when the indigenous impulse is being either reduced or lost. Add to this, the indigenous intoxication *bhang* enhances the fervor and gaiety of this ancient myth which takes the country men in its stride, irrespective their caste, creed and religion. The Hindi accent is prominent though, the poem invites the readers live participation in the festival of colour carrying out clarity and crispness of our cultural high point. The title poem, “Two Minutes Silence” depicts contemporary squalor and sordidness and the behavior of our so-called representatives in the parliament and the state Assemblies. It also focuses on the impotence of the modern men in the face of technology, and the loss of value system has been given attention to. The sensitive

eye of the poet observes the loss of life and value based culture keenly, but humour of the poet remains the stand out quality in the conclusion: “Someone whispered in my ear / can’t we do with one minute” (68). Poems like “National Consciousness”, “Chastity” and “Fire” also follow the suit of the title poem in their attempt to put the disarray things in order. While the poems “I and They” and “New Invention” point to the perverse moral standards, the Haikus, on the other hand, find the poet in humorous and witty mood. Humour is the poet’s forte in the haiku on Sonia Gandhi’s Dandi March contributing to the introduction of value added tax in sharp contrast to Gandhiji’s march which was an agitation in favour of release from tax. On revelation of the true colour of a human being at death bed, the haiku takes us into a philosophical sojourn: “Smile on the face / death reveals more than his life / man and his mask” (72). And the one on scorching heat as the eastern woe, deserves particular mention: “Wide cracks in the field / peeping for water inside / sky conceals the hope” (73). On the whole, fifty five haikus on different subjects, both current and ancient themes, point to rich repertory of Khatri’s oeuvre.

Khatri excels in two things: possession and patriotism or nationalism. His reliance on cultural, national and cultural myths only serve the postcolonial thrust on indigenous tropes as an efficient write-up for the long-due out-of-possession native representation. It is this dispossession that has been a niche talking point in Edward Said’s *Orientalism*. Khatri’s elite education does not write off the ineluctably colonial

influence on his mind that has led to a sort of what would GN Devy call, “cultural amnesia”. Khatri’s plight, Like that of Said’s who wavers between the Arab consciousness and one that imposed on him, the western consciousness of elite representation, led to an obvious spilt in his sense of identity. Although Khatri adheres to a strict indigenous regimen, the fact that he writes and is educated in English leads to an oblique reference to his fascination with and hate for the colonialist hegemony. One is reminded of Said’s statement in course of an interview to Imre Salunsky in this context: “...The sense of being between cultures has been very, very strong for me. I would say that the single

strongest strand running through my life: The fact that I’m always in and out of things and never really of anything for long (Said, *Power, Politics and Culture* 70).

Khatri’s laudable efforts to form a single cogent and bias free identity of possession serve the cause of cultural nationalism well. The complexity and difficulty to form a uniform opinion on diverse India is all the more difficult. His critical consciousness, and sharp wit and humour only support his will, representing the nationalist ethos. There lies the greatness of Khatri, searching for an alternative modernity to represent indigenous insights that Satya P. Mohanty has ardently advocated.

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