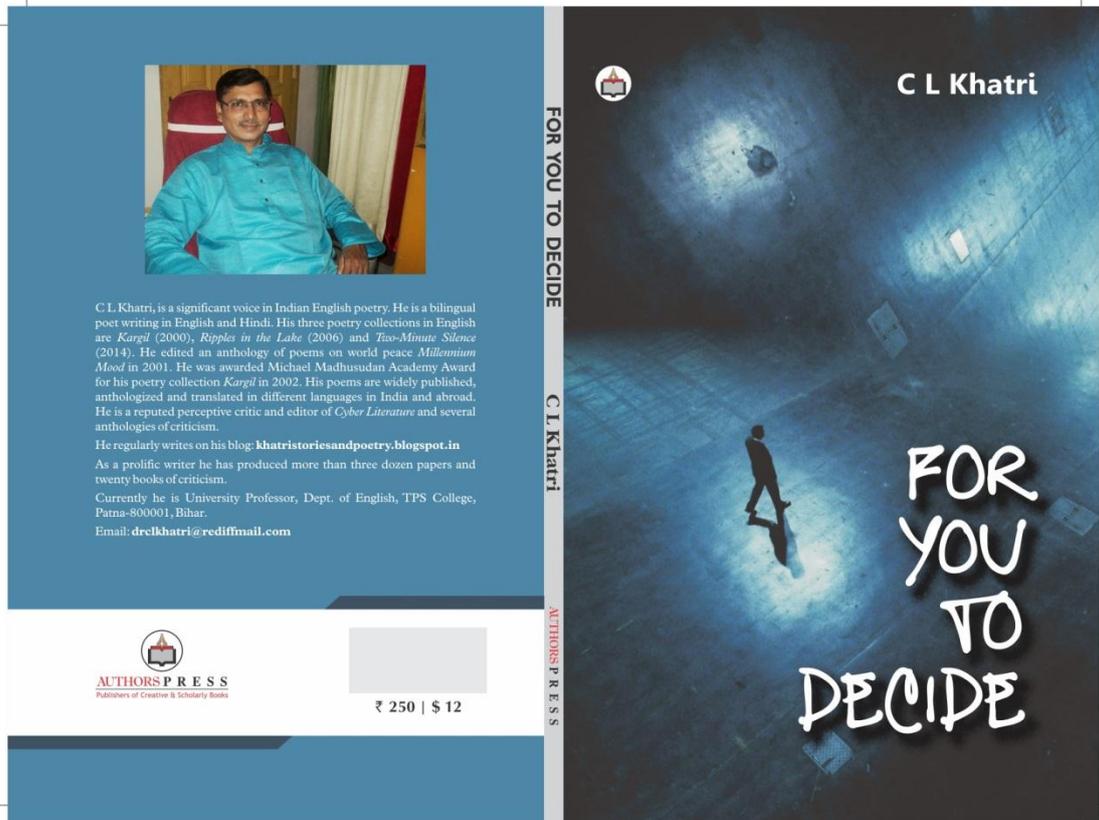


BOOK REVIEW

***For You To Decide* by C. L. Khatri, Authorspress, New Delhi, 2016, Pp 82**

By Amrita Sharma



After *Kargil* (2000), *Ripples in the Lake* (2006) and *Two-Minute Silence* (2014), C.L. Khatri's fourth poetry collection is titled *For You To Decide*. It is a collection of forty nine poems along with eight "Three Liners" and twenty six Haikus. An exemplary work of contemporary Indian English poetry, the collection brings together the varying shades of conflicting realities that characterise the rapidly modernising society.

All the compositions compiled in this collection, in one way or the other, bring forward images of the contemporary society painted not in blacks and whites but rather in hues of grey. The thematic canvas varies along, ranging from poet's deep concern for the "deluge of development" to his complete amalgamation with the modern ways while "writing a new Ramayana". However, there also lies a very strong element of the search for the traditions

that seem to be rapidly eroding from the contemporary scene, and the poet's numerous references to his heritage substantiate his lamentation.

Another recurring theme throughout the collection is the poet's search for an identity for himself that would justify his nostalgia for the past, acceptance of the present, as well as his vision for the future. From the very first poem "Mask", he asserts his determination to cast off all pretence as the concluding lines of the poem convey: "Now no layers of mask / can hide you from me. / Everything looks transparent from this land." Many other poems in the collection like "I Have God" appear as an attempt to reaffirm this identity as the poet expresses his strong conviction in the almighty as he writes: "I will go wherever He takes / or bank on my dwarf to carve / a path through hillocks of life." Another poem titled "Suck My Sap" is also an expression of the poet's desires regarding his own identity expressed metaphorically as: "I dream to bloom in the air / like a lotus in the cesspool / my legs firm on the native soil like Angad."

Apart from this, many of the poems are rather poetic narrations of the stories that the poet wishes to tell his readers. One such example may be the poem titled "Genesis" wherein the poet narrates the mythical story of the birth of the mortals as the poet writes: "Come on children; listen to the song of genesis / it's not the Bible; it's what our Purkha told us." Another such example may be the poem "Love" which narrates a story of self-sacrifice. The versification of the various stories that convey a moral lesson or an ancient teaching also stand out in the collection.

The poem "For You To Decide" that lends the title to the collection, also stands out as one of the best compositions in this verse collection. Foregrounding the various wonderings of the poet, the poem becomes an expression of the growing need to assess our lives and the direction in which it is being led. In the concluding two lines of this poem, the poet asserts: "This is for you to decide. / For me it's time to retire." Provoking his readers to make their own judgement, the poet thus retires in peace. Many other poems in the collection also reverberate a similar theme where the poet's fanciful musings often lead to serious contemplations regarding the contemporary ways of life.

The poet's selection of his poetic diction is another striking feature of this collection. The lexicon varies greatly from the use of ordinary speech to the inclusion of scientific vocabulary, even including poet's innovative use of abbreviations like SQK which is explained as "Sustainable Quest for Knowledge". Many words are also borrowed from the religious and mythological sources, enriching the diversity of the poetic diction. The language, though mostly simple and straightforward, often goes into the realm of the unconventional, which may prove a drawback for a reader looking for something less complex. In addition, an understanding of the poetic nuances at several instances may also prove a bit difficult for a reader who is not much acquainted with the literary lexicon and its stylistic variations.

The binary oppositions like hope and despair, tradition and modernity, optimism and pessimism and the real and the virtual, explored and expressed by the poet in different verses of this collection, serve to create a sense of discomfort, coaxing the reader to rediscover the contemporary realities along with the traditional values. Also, the verses frequently contain words borrowed from the Hindu mythology, with the poet making references to numerous mythic characters like Angad, Sita, Ram, Vamana, among others, that reflect his deep attachment to his religious roots. However, contrasted with this are the poems like "Mission Mars" and "E God" that present the rapidly growing nexus between technology and human survival, highlighting the poet's concern for the future.

The entire collection may be seen as a rich storehouse of images drawn out of diverse sources ranging from traditional myths to cyber resources. Many of the poems in the collection invoke natural imagery while others sketch out the horrors of modernisation, the effect of which seems heightened by the poet's imagination and the flight of his fancy. For instance, the poem "Unresolved Sensations" evokes images like "Cloudburst rived apart" and "mystic music of / birds, beasts, conical trees" ; while on the other hand the poem titled "Eleventh Incarnation" presents the image of the " god of a cyber age". However, as the title of the collection suggests, the poet leaves it upon the reader "to decide" as to what these images signify and in what ways they appeal to the reader's individual outlook.

All in all, the collection provides a range of reading experiences from a deep sense of loss to the spirit of triumph; from alienation to amalgamation; and from rejection to a complete understanding of the modern day society. It is an almost perfect recipe for feeding your poetic appetite as well as a recommended addition to your modern Indian English poetry collections.

Bio

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