

**LOVE IN FASCINATING POEMS**  
**Fr. Varghese Paul, SJ**

[ON THE WINGS OF LOVE – Verses From The Heart, Author: Fr. Shekhar Manickam, S.J., Publisher, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, Anand 2008, PP XII+106, Multi-colour cover, Price Rs.80.00 & US \$ 10.00]

As a writer I get any number of poetry books from known and not so known poets and authors. But in recent months I have not found a poetry book as fascinating as the one I have just read. I am captivated by the subject matter of the book, that is, the all-embracing universal love. The author is a Jesuit priest, Fr. Shekhar Manickam. His poetry book entitled “On the Wings of Love” opens to us his heart in lucid verses. The result is that he lets us fly on the wings of love over the entire creation, the universe of the creator and of the creatures.

As the contents indicates the book is divided into 5 parts: 1) Drenched in Love, 2) Strayed from Love, 3) Rejoicing in Love, 4) Transcending Love and 5) Unified in Love.

For the author everything is love. Everything is centred around love. Everything is expression of love. In the first poem the author says:

“Harmonious union or vicious departure,  
No gate has love in its grove.  
Once in love, it is love ever.  
Think not, but just be love.”  
(page 3)

We usually think of harmonious union as an expression of love. But for the poet even the vicious departure is an act of love or lack of it.

What impresses us most in Part I is that the author remains close to the reality. And still he is able to express the depth of thought in simple, lucid words. Here is a small poem:

“Love is built  
Love is broken  
Love is rejected  
And yet  
Love remains unruffled”.  
(page 7)

It takes a poet to say love remains unruffled even after love is broken and love is rejected!

In the Part II “Strayed From Love” the author has a poem of “Murder in the Sanctum Sanctorum.” The two Latin words in the title are most significant and I feel, irreplaceable. The first stanza tells you what is happening in the “Sanctum Sanctorum” which means “the most holy place.” Can you tell what is the most holy place for the author? Any guess? Please read. The poet

mentions the sanctum sanctorum at the end of the poem. But you can guess it reading the first stanza:

“I watched them chop that defenceless innocent being  
In God’s hand. They were experts, thus, it’s easy hacking.  
That crushed and cracked, squashed and squished foetus  
Was throbbing for life in their smeared, ruthless hands.”  
(page 29)

In Part III the poem, which impresses me most for it’s depth and its reality, is entitled “The Silence Within.” Here it is. Please read.

“Hearing the humming of silence deep within  
I explored my inner space – landed there!  
I stirred the silence and stilled it for tilling  
The life that seemed a wasteland  
Facing the greenery across me.”  
(page 54)

The poem “A Tribute to Sheetal of Kalamkuyi” in the forth Part the author shares with and leads the reader to “transcending love” Taking the example of a girl the author give the reader an incling of the transcending love. Just read the last 6 lines of the poem.

“The world has christened you abnormal.  
A cruel tag! Blessed are you for knowing not this, Sheetal.  
You too are on a noble mission  
Because He formed you in His own design.  
  
You too are His daughter, moulded, loved and redeemed  
To shine forth His love to a world so doomed.”  
(page 65)

The Part V “Unified in Love” proclaims the poet’s openness to all religions and faiths. Here I quote a small poem “In You Ever” as the source and destiny of all which is the “Master of my Now.”

“For all that was,  
Thank you.  
Whatever will be,  
Bless it.  
This is.  
Grant me the grace  
To live this moment;  
This present,  
Oh, Master of my Now.”  
(page 81)

Shekhar Manickam's poems wonder and explore the North and South, the East and West, the present and the transcendent universe. Everything converges in the "Master of my Now".

The 'Now' with capital 'N' has special significance here. Philosopher and mystic Eckhart Tolle's interpretation of "Now" is relevant here. He says, "When you step into the Now, you step out of the content of your mind. The incessant stream of thinking slows down. Thoughts don't absorb all your attention anymore, doesn't draw you in totally. Gaps arise in between thoughts – speciousness, stillness. You begin to realize how much vaster and deeper you are than your thoughts."

Then, like a crown to a head or a dome to a church, Prof. Suguna Ramanathan's enlightening foreword adds beauty and attractiveness to the poetry book.

The publisher of the book, Fr. K. T. Mathew, S.J. of Gujarat Sahitya Prakash has done a wonderful job in beautifully illustrating each poem with appropriate art works, symbols and photographs.

Finally I agree what the author says in his acknowledgement, "In truth, it is not I who have written these verses; they are the fruit of all the aforementioned (i.e. God and the cosmic family) influences in my life; I have merely picked up – like drawing water from the well - what they have given me freely. These are thus Verses from the Heart, from the heart of the universe." (page VII)

You can enjoy and relish Fr. Shekhar's poems in an atmosphere of prayer and silence. (contact the author: [ciss@satyam.net.in](mailto:ciss@satyam.net.in))