Book Reviews

Bhaskaranand Jha Bhaskar. *Soothing Serenades: Straight from the Heart*. New Delhi: Authors press, 2018. pp.113. Rs. 250/ US$ 12. PB. ISBN: 978-93-87281-59-2.

Reviewed by
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The book entitled *Soothing Serenades: Straight from the Heart* is a collection of love poems written by Bhaskaranand Jha Bhaskar. This poetic oeuvre is the maiden collection of sixty-two love poems deploying various moods and attitudes about love. The poet seems to an ardent lover of love poetry. He uses Facebook as a platform for experiment and experience. The selection of theme of this anthology is quite substantial in the present context because the world in which we are living is full of chaos, cruelty and contempt. People have lost faith in humanity, love and peace. The poet has used fine poetic sensibility to delineate the platonic urges of love. The poetic urges remind us the words of Mathew Arnold who prophesized that poetry may replace religion.

The poet starts the anthology with appeal to Goddess of Love with the hope of healing the humanity from the global wound. The poet is a man of heart with excellent poetic sensibilities who is determined to enlighten the world through his poetic verbosity and love longings.

Love is still an enigmatic and mysterious word for it comprises manifold measurements. It is as dizzy as a cathedral. It is the interminable world where 'even angels fear to tread'. The poetic soul of the poet however tries its level best to accomplish herculean task to define love and its wondrous tale. Love is neither the romantic escapade of Casanova nor the orgiastic profligacy of Don Juan, but 'life, philosophy, art and religion' all rolled into one, an ennobling and elevating experience which can transform life by filling it with peace, bliss and divinity. Love meets and ignites two sweet hearts and binds up body, mind and soul.

Soothing Serenades: Straight from the Heart is a colorful assortment of love poetry. The poetic volume chirrups the song of love in diversity including platonic, eccentric, mythical as well as realistic. The poet seems to gulp a love through the many stages of love to its eventual end. He has bared his soul and spoken to readers about the common and the exceptional elements of love. Some of the poems conjure

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charms from their simplicity of thought and some others might appeal more to someone with a more cursory knowledge of poetry who was looking for an artistic expression to mirror their own feelings about love. This eccentric and zig-zag mode is the true tune of love. After all love is not a temporary feeling or emotion. Emotions and feelings change, sometimes daily. But true unconditional love is everlasting. This collection actually reaches a broad expanse of feeling and depth while providing a peep into the writer's soul.

Love is a manifold phenomenon and the poet has tried to touch hook and nook of this aspect of love. Love is many splendid things. Love lifts us up where we belong. Love is perhaps the highest ideal, and relationships give our lives meaning and purpose. They enliven and motivate us. The poet, who himself considers 'a man of heart' full with poetic sensibilities, takes life as a beautiful art because life is blessed with love. He thanks God for bestowing him with eternal love. He asserts: 'Love leads me unto Him above'. The poet is a messenger of love. He believes that there is true love in the world. It may be rare, but it does exist. He addresses:

Oh, Eternal Love!
Let me be lost
In your ethereal being
Merged ("Oh, Eternal Love!" 1-4)

Love is something eternal; the aspect may change, but not the essence. Eternal love is sweet as sugar. It is metaphysical and perennial source of peace, which soothes poet's soul. The present world is bereft of true love. Life has become monotonous and full of turbulence. The poet finds the solution of this problem in having eternal kind of love.

According to the poet, love is a fantasy: a pleasant feeling which brings resounding life with the music of soothing happiness. For youth, it is a willing drug which intoxicates their minds and hearts making them ever lost in the world of imagination of their sweet future and ecstasy. Love has amazing binding power which joins two beautiful hearts irrespective of thousands of differences. It is enriched with vividness and profundity that is beyond the level of understanding. Eternal love is actually abundant that resides in our heart. Each one of us has been blessed with the ability to love deeply.

All literature across the world praises the beauty of a woman. Love poetry has well-known conventions for depicting women and their bodies. The poet in some of his poems explores the physical beauty of his beloved. Beauty ensnares hearts, captures minds, and stirs up emotional wildfires. This is a prevailed customary but leaves a question mark in the very existence of eternal, platonic or spiritual love. The poet lingers over every aspect of his face, pausing to describe every feature with great detail. Here is an example from his poem:

Her beaming face
Belittling the moonlight
In the night of gorgeous romance… ("Voyeur" 7-9)

The way in which Bhaskar depicts physical beauty and romance that reminds us of the Shakespearean sonnet "Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day". In the poem "Pattern of Beauty", the poet writes:

O, You Sweet Swarthy Brunette!
Your palms henna-smeared
Beautify your glow
Not slow but fast
Like the rays
Playing on
All,
Emanating From the Sun
Sitting in the heart
Of the azure, cloudless sky
Radiated with the flooding lights;
I dip my soul in your joyous beauty! (1-13)

But the poet suddenly moves to describe eternal love. The poet, here, seems to be critical of Romantic love. The poem "Definition of Love" recalls 'Casanovian frame of mind', and 'a clumsy Don Juan life'. Romantic love is a blind self-delusion-it only exists in the realm of fantasy; an imaginary world that we've cultivated with the help of the romantic tradition. It distorts our perception and leads us to make decisions we later regret for. The romantic tradition fools us into believing that perfect relationships exist. As the poet says in the poem "A Romantic Eve":

Hot crusts of the earthy bosom lie soothed
So do the hearts of love birds fluttering together
Some cuddled down, and some up in bower
Lost in themselves....exchanging wooing words
Inherent meanings in silence they alone know... (6-10)

Romantic love is addictive. Everything seems perfect to the romantic love addict. The promises of fairy tales have come true. At last, life is as it's supposed to be. Yet, once the initial high fades, everything changes. Life becomes mundane, ordinary, boring once again. To escape from the trap of romantic love is quite difficult. It abhors actually getting the pure essence of agape love. The thinking level of the poet is as high as his model lover in him does not go for wanting love with an exceedingly gorgeous external appearance: charming faces, rosy lips, dimple cheeks and darken eyes. The lover in him actually looks for salacious beauty in the following distinctive ways:

Restless I am for you
for your rest,
for your peace,
for your happiness
for its play on your face. ("Restless I am for You" 1-5)

The search for rest, peace and happiness is ultimately rest upon in the Platonic urges of the poet. He is overwhelmed to have true feelings for her. He writes,

Your brows
So cute and beauteous
My eyes reflect
A celestial glimpse
Of yours
As a replica of Aphrodite -
Goddess of Love. ("Ocean of Love" 18-24)

The poet believes that with love, one can change the world. Love helps one transcend the realm of superficiality, and achieve a spiritual awakening. Bhasker's love poetry thus, is neither a celebration of women nor an enduring tribute to the women who have touched his life. In the poem "Feeling Closer", he writes:

I am accessible to you
Through time,
Space,
Reason and thoughts,
But you are not;
I know it.
Much closer to you (1-7)
……..
Love, peace, and bliss
That beautify
The sunny sky of life - (22-24)

Eternal love has many blessings in disguise: peace, bliss healing power and many more. But true love is not easy to find out. Love is beauty and beauty is untrustworthy also. In philosophical way he writes:

A rose is beautiful
Till it is beheld
From afar;
If held closely, It pricks the fingers
Lo! Throes ajar..! ("Thorny Rose" 1-5)

But he advises the lover to be trustworthy and give space and freedom in their life. In the poem "Trust If You Want to be Trusted" the poet says,

One has to trust
to be another's trustworthy! (29-30)

Moreover, love can't be earmarked a particular day in a few moments of emotional warmth in the name of Valentine. It can't be restricted in any boundary.

The poet gives very mature explanation of married life in his poem "Happy Moments of Togetherness". It is a beautiful poem which talks about the path of conjugal life.

Wedding bells tolled long back,
Their sweet sounds still echo
Our fervent, earnest love
With moments of togetherness,
Boundless joy and happiness
In our felicitous, beauteous life.... (1-6)

In married life, familial bliss and peace is the result of understanding, commitment, persistent loyalty, mutual love and respect.

This remarkable collection is primarily a fusion of the platonic and physical love. The poet celebrates both and feels that one can't be set aside to the understanding of the other. It can be remember for the variety of loves and desires, romantic and platonic, celebrated and lamented in the poems, as well as for the diversity of their forms and settings. It offers some of literature's most unyielding philosophical and aesthetic vision of love and life.

The book is set off by a variety of excellent pieces of rhetoric devices in the poems. The style is beautiful, simple, and elegant. The love crusader has used free verse written mostly in lines of short visual shape to heighten dramatic in his poetry. The poems are lyrical and well worded with some amazing imagery. The poet's use of imagery is exquisite. They serve various purposes: sensuous beauty, realistic realm, frantic realm and many others; all rolled in one. Figurative languages such as simile, metaphor, personification, alliteration, paradox, apostrophe, metonymy, allusion etc. are frequent and rampant throughout the poetic collection. A few poems are inspired from mythology. The mystical theme of the poem is uplifting.

Altogether, the book is an encouraging and galvanizing attempt of the young poet. He has magnificently created a love collection that is sure to stay with the reader long after the last page is turned. He seems to have a unique talent for expressing emotions through words and that is why he candidly reflects on his emotions and visions in this uplifting collection. Each poem of this collection evokes diverse emotions about love. The collection transports readers through a wonderful acuity of the senses and a huge emotional tide with his poetry and makes them experience the different shades of love.

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