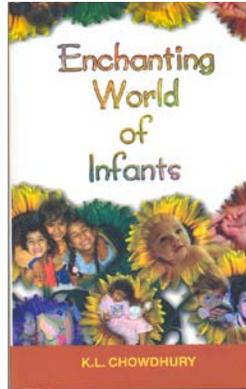


Dr. K.L.Chowdhury's 'Enchanting World of Infants'



'Enchanting World of Infants' is the third book authored by Dr. K.L. Chowdhury and perhaps the first of its kind on infants by any author, that too in poetry. Dr. Chowdhury's poetic skills and his passion to write on the varying but closer to his heart themes, have already been proved by his two books 'Of Gods, Men and Militants' and 'A Thousand-Petalled Garland and Other Poems'. Be it his love for the land he was born in, or the fire burning in his heart against those who took to militancy to gun down noble and innocents, and the meek and mild KPs; or his anguish on seeing his community forced to flee out of its place of birth and disgraced and humiliated by the powers that be; or a father's longing, wanting to have his overseas-child beside him at the time of his death, the author has proved his credentials as a matured poet, beyond doubt. His simple language and use of idioms are so blended that a reader is instantly mesmerised to find himself/herself in place of an eye-witness to the event narrated. Though the present book can have an international readership because of its universal topic, the subjects and themes which the author has picked up in all of his three books, are very familiar to all of us.

'Enchanting World of Infants' has an attractive multicolour cover depicting the kids blossoming out of lovely flowers with an innocent smile on their tiny faces, to invite the attention of the reader. It has 219 pages, divided into eight sections of 'Invocation', 'Conception', 'Creation', 'The One Year Milestone', 'The Two Year Milestone',

'Third Year and After', 'Bird Songs for Infants' and 'Grandchildren Visit Grandparents in India'.

The book not only portrays the stages of an infant from his birth to his third year and after, but also portrays the psychology and restlessness of parents and grandparents to hear that 'good news', much before he is actually conceived in mother's womb. The poet expresses his innate impulse when he says:

*And patiently we waited,
hearts fluttering, breaths bated;
gazing at the endless heavens
for a cosmic occurrence;
scanning the galaxies and the milky way,
for that miracle to happen one day –
a new star in the firmament,
our life's wish-fulfilment.*

And how does a mother express her feelings when the child is still in her womb?

*Then I saw you first time,
on the ultrasonic screen,
face to face,
embedded within myself,
lying deep within me
in quiet repose.*

Imagine the moments of glory of a mother, when the newcomer is born and she lays her eyes on the infant with the inborn delight:

*I never set my eyes on anything
as beautiful as you, my darling
stirring so many visions –
of the subtle fragrance*

The author has truthfully given the deep-rooted dimensions to parents love, especially that of a mother, for their child. Mother pours out her heart when she takes the child in her lap and says:

You are the embodiment divine,

the god incarnate, all mine

and the child knows that she is the whole world for him and she ought to be always with him:

*He smiles an angelic smile,
now looking at her
in unblinking admiration,
now lightly closing his eyes,
now forcing them open
to make sure
she is by his side*

The poet has blended his words excellently with the infant psychology, life and love. He turns the glimpses and movements of various organs of the infant into language. Imagine an infant raising his arms and rubbing mother's cheeks with his soft tiny hands, looking direct into her eyes, as if to say:

*Mother,
there is a timelessness
between you and me
that goes beyond my birth,
beyond the point you conceived me,
beyond singularity,
beyond the infinity of time.*

And when he does not want to leave company of his mother and father even for a while, he just looks at both of them with compassion:

*I mean no offence
to the day-care centre,
I have no complaints
against the care giver;
but frankly,
it is only the two of you,
dear mother, dear father,
that makes all sense,*

*that is the Shangri-La
and the essence.*

The poet expresses in a fascinating way, the emotions of grandparents when they converse with their grandchildren in a far away country and show their urge to meet the little ones in person:

*Your poser makes me ponder,
my lovely little grand daughter,
how long do I wait for destiny
to make us meet in person again*

The poor old people know that they are at the fag end of their life and that they may not get much time to play with the tiny tots and shower their love upon them. The grandfather in the poet awakes and laments, giving new dimensions to his longing:

*For, as surely as you are drawn
from the sublime
to the vortex of humanity,
time is running out for me,
as I age and fade, imperceptibly,
into eternity.*

Aditya, the child brought up in the West, has all his fingers rightly pointing to the confusion and filth and pollution in our country. He is aghast to see people honking their cars, cows loitering and kids playing in the streets, and has lot many questions to be answered. But he also has a question, which we need not answer. The answer lies in the question itself, for, it clearly illustrates our legacy in the true style of Kashmiriyat, which we have carried along with us even when we left everything behind:

*Why is everyone eager to hug you here
even when being a total stranger?*

The poet has narrated in a superb way our joyful period with our grandchildren, when we play with them, feed them, scold them and love them. We are generally so excited to be in their company that

we almost forget the date of their leaving back. Abruptly, one day we find them packing their baggage and on seeing our eyes wet, assuring us of their next visit very soon. Weeks and weeks after their departure, their images and memories continue to haunt us, till we come to grips with the reality. The poet has painfully but beautifully revealed human emotions, when the children are no more present to play and dance, make a mess and shout and roll on the carpet:

*Pray do not play the tape recorder,
I can not bear to hear his voice
without him being near,
and I miss those divine expressions,
their intensity, the urgency there....
Pray do not show me the photo album,
and the rerun of the camcorder,
of our evening climb to the hill ...*

The Section 'Bird Songs for Infants' is entirely a new experience. The sweet, simple narrative holds the attention of the reader, young and old. Like King Solomon, the poet talks to the birds of Kashmir and sings songs of their emotions, wishes and joy. All the songs are lovely. The poem 'Crow Poornima' is an extended version of the famous Kashmiri rhyme 'काव बटु कावो, खेचरे कावो ...' and it is beautifully composed to fascinate children. How I wish, the poet had also taken up famous Kashmiri rhyme 'हु कुस बस कुस, तेलि वन चस कुस ...' and the one, which will always remind us of our past and also give our children and grandchildren a taste of our days 'अख गव खदा, जु तु जिन्य ग्यडुरा, त्रे कलश डूना, चोर कूज आलम, पांछ गॅयि पांडव, शे तु शे रेशी, सथ ज़ालु सतम, आँठ हुर्य आँठम, दँह दशिहार, काह गाडु गाह, वागुर्य बाह, हेरचु त्रुवाह'. I hope the author includes these rhymes in the second edition of this beautiful book, which I am sure he will release very soon.

Last Section of the book 'Grandchildren Visit Grandparents in India', deals with the strong instinctive feelings of children, parents and grandparents when they are together and when separated. It is true for everyone of us that long before we expect our children coming from a distant place, we start thinking about them, their food, their likes and dislikes, their habits and tendencies and what

not. Sample these lines, wherein the author translates innocent feelings of a grandmother:

*But there is a grandmother here
pleading with the oranges
to tarry a while,
to stay put on the mother tree
She desires her grandchildren
to pick them virgin from the tree,
to hold them in their little hands*

I (MK) remember, a family in our neighbourhood used to arrange well in advance, a handful of 'Guchhis' from wherever possible and at whatever cost, for their visiting son because he was so fond of the dish.

The poem 'After You Left' represents the sad moments of a household when their young ones have already left. The pain and agony of the separation can not be expressed in words but the author is able to give an idea of that in the following lines:

*You gave us just two weeks
for a separation of as many years,
and what a melting away it was -
of time, of us
we forgot who and what we were
in our total surrender
to your being near.*

There is a plethora of literary rich and much prized verses in the book, but four of them, dedicated to a mother are really heart-warming:

*Motherhood is divine at the core,
infinite like the cosmos.
Motherhood is
the mother of all relationships.*

'Enchanting world of Infants' is a real piece of literature, combining the child's psychology with the parents' and grandparents'

emotions, ethos of Kashmir and nature. Poet has a good command over English. The flora-fauna of the place where kids live, have been depicted through the relation of the infants with nature. The poet is a physician too and he has put in his whole worth to mix body-language to the poetry and create an enchanting world.

The Book is a new addition to the Indian English literature. It is error-free and will be welcomed by the English world. The imagery, the symbolic expression and brevity of words is praiseworthy. It also has a flavour of Kashmir's geography, seasons and picturesque beauty. The drawings of Shri Gokul Dembi are appropriate and charming. The publishers of the book rightly say that the book is a uniquely diversified poetic narrative, whose anthology takes the reader along an adventurous journey into the enchanting world of infants.
