

BOOK REVIEW

A DEVOTIONAL OFFERING TO SAINT—COMPOSER TYAGARAJA

Sadguru Sri Tyagabrahma Pushpanjali: Smt. Pushpa Srivatsan, published in 1994 by Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams, All rights reserved by the author.

The author of this book Smt. Pushpa Srivatsan has poured out her heart in total devotion to her preceptor, Saint Tyagaraja, just as the great saint himself did, when it came to singing the glory of his Ishta Devata - Sri Rama. This is as though an illustration of the concept of Sri Sankarabhagavat-pada who in his Satasloki refers to the efficacy of the grace of one's preceptor and says that it would render the disciple the like of the preceptor himself.

This work, born out of inspiration and self-experience of the author, is refreshingly new, in many ways. The text has been amplified through translations into English and Tamil by the author herself; as in the case of short explanations given by authors of books on Sastras, called "Vrtti-s". In addition, the preface by the author and the verses set to Gayatri metre, at the start of each portion of the text, give a brief account of the contents that follow.

Dr. N. Veezhinathan

A close reading of the text will show that Tyagaraja is the Guru, the Supreme Reality—the Brahman. Thus, these outpourings of this lonely seeker of the ultimate reality would not confine the relevance of this text to the devotees of the saint-composer alone. All seekers of Brahman will find this text to their taste, as neither a single path of worship nor a single God for devotion, form the content of the book.

The verse in the preface employs only one word "Bhava" and alludes to Tyagabrahma and his pervading all creation and this is also indicated in the portrait of the saint and the verse printed below it, again composed by the author.

The book is divided into six parts (a) Ashtotarasatanama, (b) Trisati, (c) Panchasati, (d) Sahasranama, (e) Saranagatigadyam, and (f) Mangalashtakam. In fact, the Trisati, Panchasati and Sahasranama have groups of 108 names, i.e., Trisati is not 300 but 324, Panchasati is not 500 but 540 and the Sahasranama is not 1000 but 1080. Each 108th name is printed in bold characters to remind the reader that he is at the

end of one Ashtottarasati in the Stotra, something like the "Uchvasa-s", in long sentences, found in Sanskrit compositions.

Each section is preceded by a suitable verse in Gayatri metre. The first 108 names speak of Guru-Sishya Bhava. In the Trisati, Rama-nama is used, employing the Bahuvrihi compound in a beautiful way, easy to recite and full of imagery and esoteric import.

The names "Rama nama gana priyaya namah", "Rama priyaya namah", etc., recall to one's mind that the saint is the incarnation of Valmiki—vide "Kujantam Rama Rameti, madhura madhuraksharam". The 104th name in the Trisati "Svayamkaritastutipushpa prakaraya namah" is the self-experience of the author.

The names 12 to 26 in the first part of the Trisati elaborate on the "manasa puja". The second portion of the Trisati is Sri Rama param, the third part of the Trisati is mostly Sri Krishna param. In the Panchasati, the first 108 names speak of the Guru. The second part of Panchasati is in alphabetical order and speaks about the sage as Brahman, his teachings, songs, etc. The 364th name in this portion reveals the humility of the author.

In the Sahasranama, the first 14 names again deal with Manasa

Puja and later, there is a "Padadi kesa Varnana". Then there is a cascade of Rama nama till the third hundred of the names. The names from 325 to 1068 are again in an alphabetical order. The name at 887 reminds one of Valmiki, whose composition was a result of his sorrow! "slokatvam apadyata yasya sokah". The name at 1045 is an epitome of the life of the saint. The colophon to this stotra proves the deep and abiding attachment of the author to the lotus feet of the sage, recalling the "Guru Ashtaka" of Sri Sankara; "manaschenna lagnam guroran-ghripadme, tatah kim? tatah kim? tatah kim? tatah kim?"

The next is the "Saranga-gatigadyam", dedicated to the saint composer. The opening Gayatri verse aptly refers to "Subhacharanaya". The reference to sishya is only to the author. The style in the gadyam is lilting and arresting and produces a flashback of the great Vedanta Desikacharya.

The Mangalashtakam is a fitting finale to the illuminating work and the seven notes in the Carnatic music system form the beginning of verses 2 to 8.

The entire work abounds in peculiar compounds, innovative use of grammar, figures of speech like alliteration, double entendre, etc.

The note by the author as also the translations in English and Tamil give an insight into the usages and layers of meaning of the texts.

The get-up of the book is excellent and the printing easily readable. It is also flawless.

This volume will be a welcome addition to the shelf of any seeker of knowledge about Reality, irrespective of the path one may choose to follow. Though a priceless work, it is priced to be accessible to the reading public.

