**Forward for The Language of Love**

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Marcie Bower is a native of Boston, Massachusetts, USA. As a college undergraduate, she studied in Madurai, Tamil Nadu, on a cultural exchange program. She studied Tamil and researched spirit possession and its manifestation at some local temples. After completing her degree in Religious Studies in the USA, she returned to Madurai to work for an American study abroad/cultural exchange program, and resumed her Tamil studies with Dr. C. Rajeswari. After her time in Madurai, Marcie moved back to the USA and enrolled in graduate school to become an acupuncturist and Traditional Chinese Medicine practitioner. She currently resides in the Boston area and owns an acupuncture and integrative health clinic. She lives with her husband and their two young children, who she dreams of taking to India one day.

Muththamizh Virumbi’s *The Language of Love* is a compelling collection of love poems that poignantly capture the angst and heartache of true love. His work explores themes of loneliness and connection, silence and voice, and the relationship between the physical and metaphorical distance between two people.

When I first read *The Language of Love*, what really struck me was the pain and frustration on the pages – not of heartbreak or love lost, but of trying to truly know, communicate, and connect with another human being. "The Language of Love" that he refers to is, of course, silence itself. This is both beautiful (in that no words are needed to feel that passion) and sad (in that we can never truly know our partner). He plays with this juxtaposition of emotion from the very beginning of the collection – in the second poem, 'A Demoness', he asks

*‘Is she*

*A demoness?’*

*“No never,*

*A savior”*

Another theme that Mr. Virumbi weaves through his poems is that of missing and yearning for his love – at times when she is physically apart from him, but more often when she is emotionally distant or holding back. Sometimes we as the reader don’t know which of these is the case – and does it really matter? In 'Sea Shore', he writes

*“When will you repent*

*And come back?*

*I wait for you*

*In the sea shore*

*Of the life*

*Where the waves roll on.”*

As a reader, I felt that the poet was on a journey, trying to fully understand and connect with his beloved, and always yearning for a deeper, more meaningful connection than what he was experiencing. Sometimes yearning was because his love was physically apart from him, sometimes because she was emotionally distant, sometimes because she was not communicating in ways he could understand. But other times it was that he wanted a stronger, more vital connection. The poem 'Ambrosial Kiss', my favorite in the collection, illustrates the poet’s desire to make a life with his love, not a desire merely for a fleeting kiss or passing connection:

*“Don’t want*

*An ambrosial Kiss*

*Gift me*

*An ambrosial life.”*

This passage perfectly illustrates the poet’s desire for something real, powerful, and lasting – beyond the passion or the words spoken. And much of this collection is words on paper that represent how daunting and painful searching for that kind of connection can be.

*The Language of Love* referenced throughout this text is silence. Mr. Virumbi explores the great power and deep sadness of silence in a myriad of ways in this collection. In 'Permanent is Frozen', he writes,

*“Not meeting you;*

*No reply to you;*

*Not speaking with you;*

*Is the only apt*

*Environment*

*For my subconscious mind*

*To speak with you;”*

Silence is both a form of self-preservation, of protecting oneself from further hurt or misunderstanding. Yet it also affords a time and space for truer connection, for conversation at a deeper, subconscious level. It can be positive and negative, a source of strength and a punishment.

And in the poem 'Silence – The Primitive Language', he further explores the weight that silence can carry, concluding

*“Silence*

*Is not being dumb;*

*It is a reply.”*

It is a reply. It is a form of communication in and of itself, and a valid one. Yet as we see throughout the collection, it is a form of communication that highlights the loneliness we all embody even in the midst of a romantic relationship, even as we yearn for ever more.

This collection’s powerful exploration of love and loneliness takes place against the backdrop of Tamil life, culture, and country. The lovers exist amidst Nerunji flowers, the Alagar Hills outside of Madurai, and references to Sangam love poems. Excerpted from 'Silence –The Primitive Language':

*“In the front yard*

*The little ants moving;*

*At the kolam design,*

*Decorated*

*With the pumpkin flower.”*

Through imagery like this, one is immediately transported to the everyday life of Tamil Nadu. This is all the more important for this English translation of poetry – to bring the reader back to South India, or transport them there for the very first time.

*The Language of Love* has been expertly translated by Dr. C. Rajeswari to retain the meaning and feel of the original Tamil poems. Every word has been painstakingly analyzed to bring not just the beauty of the written words but the ache behind them to the English reader. Through her translation, a much wider audience can have the benefit of reading this collection of poems that are at once uniquely Tamil and also universal.

After all, it is a uniquely human ability to relate to the simultaneous anguish and beauty of love.

As Mr. Virumbi asks in 'The Taste of the Raw Ones',

*“Is this a normal life*

*Or a sweet blessing?”*

May it be both.