

Foreword

Meher Pestonji

In an age of instant gratification where internet offers immediate publication on poetry sites and poets are challenged to write a poem a day, Rositta Joseph has chosen to stand apart by publishing her first collection of poetry after thirty years, revealing a rare maturity.

It's worth the wait, for we see the trajectory of her growth from an idealistic adolescent

Racing against
That undefeated tyrant
Called time ('A Poet's Promise')

to the mature woman

Dancing gracefully
Without protest
With a smile
On the tightrope
Between
Love and Hate
Laughter and Tears

Selflessness and Selfishness

Hope and Despair ('A Fine Balance').

Yes, the journey to maturity is a long meander with triumphs and challenges.

I'm privileged to have observed Rositta's growth from her doctoral thesis on the role of literature in rewriting national history from the margins to her flowering into a passionate literature professor. Teaching is central to her life, enabling her to go

Riding on the crests of the tallest minds

Diving into the depths of the deepest souls

('For the Love of Literature').

Drawing on her literary explorations, she crafts poetry imbued with philosophical wisdom yet as contemporary as her students:

We found a soulmate in AI

And a philosopher in ChatGPT.

The Truth has died

Laughing at

The heights

We have reached ('Post Truth').

The young Rositta celebrates falling in love. For her, love is not a conventional giving over of body and soul to the loved one. She categorically states,

I had very clear ideas about space,

Until

You intruded into

My well-guarded queendom.

And ever so stealthily,

Made it your own ('Space').

Fiercely guarding independence, she describes her fiercely feminist relationship in an amazingly honest voice.

I am the one
You think you know
But you never really know.
Not appealing, but powerful
Not soothing, but meaningful.
I have swallowed
All your darkness
Borne all your pain.

Look at me, man,
I am your
Ego-crushing truth
Soul-searing solace
I have let you win,
You cannot bear loss
I have glorified my sorrow,
You can never bear
The pain you inflict ('Deep Brown Ocean').
This is tenderness camouflaged in soul strength.

Travelling, another passion, takes Rositta to many cities from Hyderabad to Ahmedabad as well as to jungles. From Tirumala, she hears about a tiger killing a five-year-old child with predictable reactions from villagers and officials while the bereaved parents sit with heads bowed. Discarding fake sympathy she views the situation with candid pragmatism:

No one sees
The gleaming truth
Of one tender tiger,
Divinely ordained
To end in
The swift and

Soft jungle way
A tiny life destined for
Endless misery
In the inhuman
Company of
Human beings ('Tiger At Tirumala').

Travel also takes her to pilgrimage places questioning physicality with childish rebellion. She enters the Tanjore temple asking,

Why should fort after fort,
Wall after wall,
Protect an old temple? ('The Temple At Tanjore').

Soon the spiritual ambience seeps into her being and she confesses,

Questions enter first,
Dragging me after.
Stunned by the enormity
Of what I almost missed,
Consciousness freezes
Into time travel and
A desperate
Struggle for words...
How do you paint paradise
Or communicate the cosmos?
(('The Temple At Tanjore').

Taking nothing for granted, Rositta remains open to questioning her own preconceptions. That's what makes her a great teacher and mentor. And her poems, gems of eternal value.