



GRIPPING REALITY

(A Collection of Poems)

Rosa Juju Abraham

GRIPPING REALITY

with compliments
guy

About the Author

Born in Thrissur, Kerala, daughter of Dr. C.T. Ouseph and Leela, Rosa Juju Abraham alias Dr. Rosa Juju Joseph is a poet whose first collection of poems is titled *Arabesque*. Her doctoral thesis is on Post-Independence Indian English Women Poets. Her poems have been published in *The Indian P.E.N.*, *Kavya Bharathi*, *Ijas* and other literary magazines. Some of her poems have appeared in anthologies too. She has also to her credit publications in various magazines comprising of poems, short stories, and articles. Her article "The Pauline Epistles: A Precursor to Derrida's Deconstruction," appeared in *Littcrit: An Indian Response to Literature*, Journal, December 2019 Issue. Has written lyrics for theme songs for several occasions which include two for National events and one for Lions International Convention 2017 held in Chicago. She lives in Cherthala, Alappuzha, with her Chartered Accountant husband, Mr. E.A. Abraham Panjikaran.

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Dedication



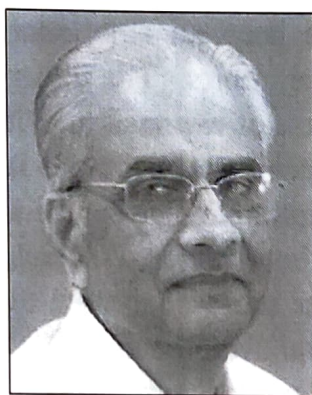
Leela Rosa Ouseph

*She was lovely
She was sweet
Her love was fierce
And her actions sincere.
Nimble were her fingers
Independent were her ways
Frugal seemed her manner
But bountiful was her nature
Truly blessed are we to have her
As our beloved mother
For her love was unselfish
An everlasting surrender . . .*

– Rosa Juju

FOREWORD: Poetry that Celebrates Regeneration

by
K. Jayakumar*



Good poetry is always the creative struggle to discover pattern in chaos, order in disorder and meaning in absurdity. This collection of poems befittingly titled *Gripping Reality* contains some fifty poems that provide a translucent view of the ongoing inner struggle of a sensitive yet suave mind to come to grips with reality. Rosa Juju Abraham is by temperament a poet as evidenced by how she relates herself with experiences. It may not be always necessary to go through earth-shattering external situations or undergo torture in a concentration camp for poetry to spring forth within a molten heart. What matters is the intensity with which a poet relates with life. That doesn't mean that Rosa's poetry is a simple and bland recollection and summation of the events in her life. Personal anecdotes there could be. That is not a factor on which the appreciation of poetry should hinge. She is evidently selective and translucent in depicting her experiences. In fact, it is this translucence that

weaves a veil of mystery on her poems, making them more endearing and inviting. I have no personal knowledge about her life, yet I have no difficulty in relishing these poems. At the same time, even after reading them a few times, I still find dark areas in them which do not intrigue me but on the other hand, continue to invite and enchant. This unwillingness to bare it all even as it communicates is something unique to these poems.

Two qualities of the poet contribute to this enchanting mystery. One is her ability to keep an emotional distance even while dealing with intimate topics. The other is her rich diction coupled with a boldness of expression. With these tools the poet is able to invest a special charm on the familiar and make the not-so-familiar quite intimate. She can be shockingly candid, but equally enigmatic. The emotional detachment, without being indifferent, makes her more composed and prevents her from lapsing into sentimental overdose and self-pity. In fact, self-pity is anathema to this poet who has the fortitude to weather the upheavals of life. That is how regeneration becomes a recurring motif. The poem "Eye of the Storm" demands careful reading. The first sixteen lines describe the storm:

gathering, gaining, swirling,
belting vehemently, flashing electrically,
scattering dust and debris,
spawning chasms
of hellish hollows:
Monochromatic annihilation . . .

This soon leads her to the realization that it is "nature's way of periodic destruction" leading to "polychromatic restoration." The restored state may neither be perfect, nor lasting. But the cycle goes on. This attitude towards the 'storms' in life has to make the poet detached.

Like Walt Whitman who declared famously that "I am not one but a multitude," this poet is acutely aware of the presence of 'the other' in her. It can be glimpsed in the poem "Elegy on the

death of myself," where she identifies "that's me lying in the coffin" and goes on to wonder whether they will bury her, "I am so claustrophobic / let them burn me" (19-20). The detachment goes to the extent of saying:

And let me
just rest here
for a while
Until they dispose me off
Living my death
As beautifully as I can.

This theme is further elaborated in another poem aptly titled "Doppelgänger":

I surreally searched
For the real me,
For I know not who I really am,
But I often slide out of myself
To wobble the world incognito
Leaving me safely behind . . .

This multiple personae further metamorphose into the desire for self-negation. When one's attachment with one identity is dislodged and multiple personas are accepted at face value, it is only logical that the poet should proceed to a stage where self-abnegation is a distinct consequence. In the poem "In Retrospect" we read these highly suggestive lines:

I am melody, a fluid symphony
I am attar, distilled to a drop
Of spicy tangy sensations
And I taste in me a pining for
What is not . . .

She longs for the quality of suppleness of the mind so that the social self doesn't matter but the true self could be offered "to churn the primordial wheel / to shape into a pitcher fragile . . ." ("Wellbeing").

Creativity is also a process of awakening and regeneration. Unsurprisingly, there are a few poems in this collection with

poetic creation as its theme. And writing is not only concerned with words and paper or ideas and keyboard. The whole nature is involved in the process. In fact, these poems get written by sunrays and moonbeams. Thus, what she writes becomes 'a tome of infinite finites,' that indeed is an inadvertent but potent expression. The urge of the finite for the Infinite is an underlying theme of all great poetry. In her moments of heightened creativity, this poet too experiences the inner stirrings to go beyond. Going beyond the finite is perhaps the deep and unrecognized aspiration of true poetry. To go beyond the seen, beyond the obvious, beyond the present, beyond the finite. Rosa's urge to go beyond pulsates in several poems in the collection.

The poem titled "Verse" opening with the line: "Verses are like starlings" goes on to elaborate the rejuvenating power of poetry:

The significant seven
 Carrying the music of the cosmos
 These clueless tiny motifs
 To preordained destinations
 In gentle glissandos glide
 Yes, truly do I believe
 In the wholesome power of language
 That like hot knife on butter
 Swiftly slices through!

Dynamic Nature is a living presence in these poems. This poet has a penchant to capture the dynamic aspect of nature as is evident from oft-recurring words and phrases like: duplicating, multiplying, mitosis, meiosis, reduction, division, purifying, moulting, moulding, emerging etc.

When it comes to the self-expression of her identity as a woman, Rosa doesn't mince words. Her adoration of the celebrated writer Kamala Das defines with brevity and intensity her perspective and position. She listens with empathy to "the song of a woman/perched on the ledge of loneliness" (3-4). In poems

like “Deflowered,” “Le(e)cher,” “Love, Sex & Internet,” the poet asserts her woman-self in pithy expressions and evocative images.

An exhaustive study of the thematic cohesion and exuberance of these poems is beyond the scope of this brief Foreword. However, I cannot resist the temptation of quoting a passage or two that would represent the flourish and poise of her poetic idiom:

Oh! Why is it that the more I look, the less I see?
 Hush . . . a moment please,
 I think I faintly hear the gentle rustle of hope
 Flowing in from beyond . . .
 Yes, I see a flush of pink appearing like dawn, . . .
 Lingeringly vivid, exclusively translucent, infinitely transparent.
 (“The Canvas”)

The poem “Antique,” portrays vividly a decrepit ‘Homestay’:

There she lay curled
 Like a millipede
 The brown skinned, blue veined matriarch
 Reeking of urine . . .
 Memories meandering
 Generations wilting
 Old worlds shrinking
 Silence thickening
 Gaps widening . . .

She can feel the rapture of the sizzling earth that cracks open for the ‘timid greens peeping through.’ Each moment is an awakening, like new sprouts:

Each moment
 I think of you
 I shed
 My loneliness
 Like a tree shedding its leaves . . .
 (“A New Awakening”)

Only to feel the delight of the sprouting new leaves “unleashing within a new awakening.”

Rosa Juju Abraham writes with zest and honesty. These poems are intense yet restrained. They crystallize in sparkling metaphors and exquisite poetic phrases a deeper awareness of the inevitable changes and unfailing continuity of life. Her poetry itself resembles a freshly efflorescent tree that looks towards the sky with stoic optimism.

* K. Jayakumar is a senior Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer from Kerala who retired as the Chief Secretary, Government of Kerala. Jayakumar is also a popular Malayali poet, lyricist, translator and scriptwriter. Presently he is serving as Director, Institute of Management in Government, Kerala & President, The Poetry Society of India.

Preface

Writing was always a passion I nursed in my soul right from a very young age. It was fuelled and fed and fertilized and luxuriantly nurtured by my mother who fed me on a constant supply of books, both fiction and non-fiction, which I gorged with insatiable appetite. But somewhere along the journey I partially parted ways with the prosaic and started travelling on the less trodden path embraced by few - I moved from realism to fantasy and then to poetry. And there I snuggled in and made a comfortable home, each brick laid with utmost care and caution, for I knew that I was creating a world where I chose to stay forever. Inspired have I been by many writers and poets, their works searing into my soul. In this collection of poems too, I sing my songs of joy and sorrow and passion and emotion, each song a cry that swelled from a perturbed, shaken, perplexed, ecstatic me. The songs that rose from my core, caught, and bound in a book I give to you under the title *Gripping Reality*.

My profound gratitude goes to Sri. K Jayakumar IAS, Poet, Lyricist, Former Chief Secretary of Kerala; for having found time, despite his busy schedule, to go through my collection of poems in *Gripping Reality* and write a Foreword for the same. I am deeply honoured that I could, for a moment, catch the attention of the great poet in him. I am also grateful for his encouragement and blessings.

I am greatly indebted to two individuals for believing in me – my mother Leela, and my husband Abraham who is affectionately known as Raju to all near and dear. But for their strong support and encouragement I do not think I would have been able to dream up a world where words coalesce to become images that could captivate a few, make them pause for a second, and reflect

upon the thoughts culled and collected to be dispersed again to an interested discerning few. I dedicate this book to my mother Leela.

But for God's abundant grace this book would not have been possible.

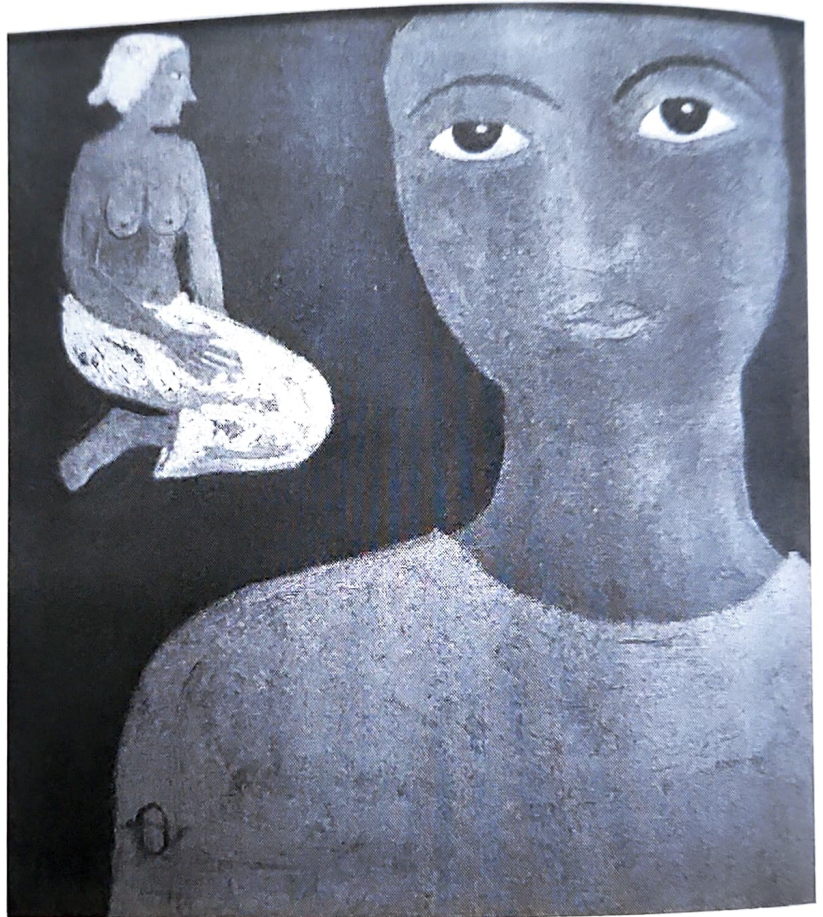
Rosa Juju Abraham

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Painting by Kamala Das (from Author's Personal Collection)

1. Metamorphosis

They struck me
and I writhed in pain
as venom coursed through my placid veins;

They struck me
again and again
until rattled I hissed, and my hood arose;

Now in indifference I discern
that I've sprouted fangs
and become as deadly as the other clan.



2. R.E.M.

Bone chilled
I woke up at night
to see the spectre of my grandfather,
a translucent blue silhouette
poised near my bed . . .

With his bony thin finger
He beckoned me out,
out into the woods
like Hamlet's father . . .
I felt no fear as I followed him
and halting near a flower laden tree,
He shook its branches
showering tender white petals on me.

As the fiery morn trickled in
He diminished, faded, vanished:
I startled awake
to the diffused scent of delicate flowers
and basking in a conceived blessing
I gently swept away a petal or two from my tress.



3. From Finite to Infinite . . .

My scribbling is scrawled
all over my breathing spaces,
in the garden
where tendrils twine in cursive loops
that alphabets in my feelings.
The font that runs in an unending gurgle
is Ariel,
airy thin but magically entangled, bold,
smuggling within, mournful, soulful delights:
And somewhere within
I delve myself in,
a tome in the making . . .
Feelings, petal muffled and crushed
releasing a scent of delicate experiences
wedge themselves smugly into nooks and crannies:
And as I write the days away,
they get written
with sunlight rays and moonlight beams,
tunnelling into time;
time and time again,
until, somewhere along the way
the ink runs out,
leaving a manuscript
that is fingered but unsoiled
scribbled and scrawled
A tome of infinite finites . . .



4. Identity

Snowflakes
dancing down from the skies
in myriad shapes
huddling into sheets
of sleek cold ice-
Identities lost
mounting in desperation
waiting for the sun
to melt it back,
into droplets of individuality.

Skin-flakes
dead skin flaking,
I scrub myself clean:
peeled, I emerge from the pool
cleansed in body;
and the soul,
mesmerized by the daily ritual
stands, shivering like an urchin
unpeeled, uncleansed
waiting for the Son
to baptise it back
into its clannish identity.



5. What Do I Know of Lockdown . . .

(Lockdown Phase I-2020)

Sitting in the confines of a home
 within a compound wall and
 the luxuriant green
 the windows opening out to the singing birds
 and sunlight streaming in, to tickle one awake,
 sipping steaming coffee
 sitting in a patio
 with a sighing dog
 languidly lying at my feet,
 and the day
 stretching out into a long yearn of wistful nostalgia
 for the bygones, piping ditties . . .
 What do I know . . . what do I know?

What do i know of the new verse
 written
 lying flat on one's back scared to even breathe
 gulping air, writing
 from the hell of fear that
 constricts one's chest with an excruciating pain,
 cautiously consuming food, which consumes itself
 phones and religious books clutched close,
 a survival tactic
 humming familiar songs to keep at bay the unfamiliar
 silence hanging in the air punctuated by bone chilling wails,
 Hiding behind masks, unmasking the all-consuming horror . . .

What do i know of the new verse
 melted in the hot crucible of terror and
 poured on to a white paper singeing it
 into a heap of ashes . . .
 What do I know . . . what do I know?





Gripping Reality is Rosa Juju Abraham's second collection of poems. Her first collection is *Arabesque*. Her poems feel authentic and intense both when recited as well as when read off the page. Her diction is rich, and her imagery both concentrated and resonant. She subtly internalizes the agony and mirth of being a woman with a suaveness that is both alluring and elusive.

"Rosa Juju Abraham writes with zest and honesty. These poems are intense yet restrained. They crystallize in sparkling metaphors and exquisite poetic phrases a deeper awareness of the inevitable changes and unfailing continuity of life. Her poetry itself resembles a freshly efflorescent tree that looks towards the sky with stoic optimism."

Sri. K. Jayakumar IAS

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From the Foreword

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