

## Reshma Ruia's

### 'A Dinner Party in The Home Counties'

Reviewed by Mona Dash

Reshma Ruia's debut poetry volume is a collection of forty-two poems, neatly divided into three sections: Beginnings, The Space Between and Endings. Whether by design or not, the number of poems in each section increases as they go on, and fittingly Endings has the maximum number. An unostentatious white cover belies the vast canvas of themes in this collection.

Several of the poems in Beginnings are about, identity, belonging, and connected with the diaspora. The title poem says it well, I have earned my right to claim this slice of sky as my own, a defiant voice in the face of being peripheral, and not being able to offer opinions on climate change.

Ruia portrays this peripheral identity, this acceptance of a forced name, like in the poem In Which Mrs XU Becomes a Sally, with humour, a wry acceptance, and a quiet anger. Mrs Basu, even while leaving town, and being deported, remembers to shout, I have a name. Ruia lays bare the duality subtly and without judgement. We as readers can't look away anymore and are drawn into the microsm she is describing. The fragility of humans, of all our lives is brought out well. In Biography, one of my favourites: We are bottles of blood walking down the street. One gentle push. We spill. This section ends with a poignant poem for an unborn child, a promise of a beginning, you won't fell me down, my unborn child with your love or your blows.

The Space in Between continues with the widening canvas; lives of unfinished accountants, Brexit blues, a new role of a mother. Being a woman can be fun at times, starts the poem Pomology, another of my favourites and then goes to show a harsh truth in a very matter of fact tone. How the beauty of a woman is often seen on the exterior and is linked inextricably with

youth, and how like rotting fruit, one day its over: You still have your fruit. But its no longer the season.

There are several gentle touches, for example in the elegantly titled El Kapitano, Ruia urges, Don't speak of falling in love, speak instead of climbing into love, and in This could only be Lennon's Doing, Imagine a day like no other. The sky- a blue-skinned Krishna's belly.

But it is the last section, Endings, where the voice changes to an

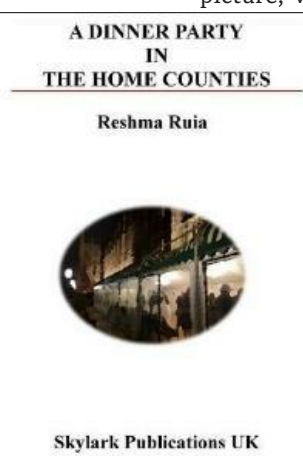
speak soon. Finally, the answer: the trick she tells me, is to balance while falling. To stand still while burning quick.

Being Old is a full-time job, the grandmother winks in Tell Me About Age. And as we read more, we see loneliness, emptiness, and a starkness laid bare. Where is our redemption? In Portrait of a family, we see the father, his face a foreign map. My mother is different. Her worries stalk our sleep. In this picture, we see our own parents,

our own selves, all of us entwined in a slow descent of mortality. The final poem, Chesapeake Bay was so reminiscent of my own father's passing and immersion, and I could resonate with I learnt something new today. Ash is not ash. It is pulverized bones ground to dust. It is in the lines of this poem, there is a final send-off. This is it, here in this world with all the

beautiful places we can travel to, whether Chesapeake Bay or the temple strewn Hardwar, here in this life with the small pleasures of food and drink, here in a lifetime all the emotions we face whether love, anticipation grief, death or motherhood; we leave the book realising its all here, and then we turn right to the start and start reading again.

An interesting collection from Skylark Publications!



unbearable poignancy. With a rare empathy into the world of the ageing, Ruia slowly lays bare the loneliness, the vulnerability and the strength of the human spirit as it descends into the later stages of life. A nostalgic, If only she could run, back to her ten-year old self chasing butterflies on the village green, In A Mrs Dalloway Kind of Day. And in An Empty Milk Bottle, the unnamed protagonists' wonders how and why a life crammed so full of living and loving became so stripped. Being a writer of fiction, Ruia brings in the efficient precision of observation of prose, while not losing the rhythm of poetry. Without undue sentimentality, the poetic voice remains true and due to this minimality of expression, the effect is of sheer heartache as we read on, there are loves, and lives circling out of reach.....One day its over. One of my favourites in this section is A Conversation with Sylvia Plath. The poet waits at the grave of Sylvia Plath, waiting for her to



Mona Dash is the author of *Untamed Heart* (Tara India Research Press, 2016), two collections of poetry *Dawn-Drops* (Writer's Workshop, 2001) A certain way, and very recently, her memoir *A Roll of the Dice: a story of loss, love and genetics* (Linen Press, UK). She has a Masters in Creative Writing (with distinction) from the London Metropolitan University. Mona was awarded a 'Poet of excellence' award in the House of Lords in 2016. [www.monadash.net](http://www.monadash.net)