



REVIEW

TWILIGHT RAGA and Other Stories by Amita Ray **Kolkata: Haoajan Publishers, 2025**

In his autobiography *Summing Up* (1938) the masterly stylist of the English short story Somerset Maugham had observed, “A good style should show no signs of effort. What is written should seem a happy accident.” It is this effortless style in her narrative that distinguishes Amita Ray’s second book of short stories *Twilight Raga*. Her first book of short stories *Trail of Love and Longings* published sometime ago, was very well received.

The seventeen stories in *Twilight Raga* are deeply sensitive representations of the lives of men and women, more specifically women, in their explorations of discovering the world around them, their personal role-playing, their moments of surprise, shock, discovery and occasions of reminiscences and heart-wrenching nostalgia. Ray covers a wide cross-section of society in her stories with varied themes, ranging from educated and cultured middle-class conservative families to the disadvantaged people, who remain in the periphery, attracting middle-class curiosity and compassion, but rarely generate any semblance of empathy.

From the quantitative frame of reference, the word count of a short story sets it apart as a literary genre, different from both the novella and the novel. Yet quite noticeably a short story carries within its many layers of perspectives, the seeds of a full-fledged novel. The impact created by a short story can be like tossing off a tequila shot in a pub, or alternatively, the imprint can be like a languorous savouring of a cocktail in a moonlit terrace garden.

Also, as a literary genre, the short story may seem to create an impression of a premature novel or an aspirant novel, yet since its evolution in the 19th century, the short story has established an exclusive identity of its own. By winning the Nobel Prize for her short stories in 2013, the Canadian writer Alice Munroe has proved that the short story can have fewer words than a novel, but it is not short-lived and cannot be short-changed. Its well-crafted concision, is essentially, the USP of short stories. Edgar Allan Poe had referred to the “unity of effect” as the defining feature of the short story. Despite its literary plasticity, the unification of affect and effect characterises the engineering of a short story. It is needless to state that concision is the soul of the short story, as expansiveness is the soul of the novel.

Among the intriguing stories included in Amita Ray’s *Twilight Raga*, there are several which are tenderly romantic, almost like screenplays for popular web series, that traverse in their content, spatial-temporal dynamics, gender inequality and generational drift towards a more liberated ecosystem. These features are underscored in the title story ‘Twilight Raga’ as well as stories such as ‘Namesake’, ‘A Revelation’ and ‘The Maroon Pullover’ among others.

The story ‘English Medium’ is a disturbing narrative of the abortive aspirations of the underprivileged to break free from their incarceration within an environment of humiliating poverty through quality education. Ray’s narratorial skill takes a surprise turn in the story ‘Raaka Falls’ as the bonding between grandmother and granddaughter is etched through images and metaphors, emphasizing that tri-generational kinship is truly visceral. In ‘Parcel of Atonement’ the casteist grandmother realizes that human care and empathy are far more important than mindlessly following tradition and customs that foster hatred for other members of the human race.

In her stories Ray traverses a wide gamut of incidents and emotions. Also, quite noticeably, in the story, ‘A Farewell’ Ray brilliantly spans the human and the non-human world with empathy. Ray’s narrative gives a voice to the puppy Bhulu and his mother. The canine duo become fast friends of the young children who were growing up in the refugee colony that housed the people who were forced to flee as the Bangladesh Liberation war had displaced them without any possibility of ever returning to



the land of their birth. This story is truly extraordinary in its theme and its manifestation of emotional intelligence and empathy.

There are some sequences in the stories where we perceive the subtle use of wit, humour, irony, but none so hilarious and suspenseful than in the story, 'Solo Sojourn', for thankfully, all ended well, despite near catastrophic possibilities. The story 'Namesake' is a typical twentieth century love story between two schoolfriends, opposed by parents and grandparents, all staying in the same house. Letters were confiscated, land phones owned by families were rare and out of bounds. Long-distance relationships were more about memory and telepathy.

Unlike the 21st century prioritizing moving on, the lovers in the twentieth, made promises and abided by them till their last breath. This intense love story between Sreemati and Saurabh, their burgeoning romance opposed vehemently by Sreemati's authoritarian grandfather, may remind readers of the romantic Indian films of the nineteen sixties, where heroines pined away for their lost lovers, often they did not marry and lead a reclusive life. As the narrative unfolds, we learn that Saurabh, Sreemati's lost estranged lover, was married and was expecting his first child, when he suddenly met with a fatal accident. Saurabh's wife narrates to Sreemati when they meet quite unexpectedly, that when Saurabh lay dying, 'the last word he had on his lips was the name Sreemati'.

There are a few innocuous stories about a snake in the house, which the maid regarded as a mascot of the Lord Shiva, a friend who had glorious long hair, lost her braid when it was chopped off while travelling in a congested local train in Mumbai. The story *Dhanteras*, underscores the deep love between a young couple, who made up for their lack of affluence in their readiness to sacrifice a treasured and revered personal possession. This story will remind readers of O. Henry's timeless short story, 'The Gift of the Magi', though Ray's story ends in tears shed in gratitude and admiration by the loved wife. The qualms of conscience experienced by the narrator in the story, 'Winter Mist', carries the message of regret and guilt in an acute confessional mode.

Each story by Amita Ray touches a chord in the mind of the reader. In '121, Bhupen Dey Road', the relationship between the mother and daughter, the tug of the umbilical cord as a metaphor becomes apparent with the stirring of the roots, the strong magnetism of the ancestral home and an ageing, loveable mother, makes Trishna's daughter Rinku, give up her covetable job offer in the USA and return to the house where she grew up. In a similar vein 'The Maroon Pullover' becomes a precious family heritage as the daughter realizes the frayed pullover's priceless, timeless quality, though it was no longer usable.

Sanjukta Dasgupta
October 14, 2025

Dr. Sanjukta Dasgupta

President, Executive Committee, Intercultural Poetry and Performance Library, Kolkata
ScoTs Research Affiliate Edinburgh
Visiting Professor, Jagiellonian University, Krakow, Poland (2018)
Honorary Visiting Professor, Dept. of English, Sister Nivedita University
Professor, Dept of English (Retd)
Former Dean, Faculty of Arts
Calcutta University
Kolkata 700073

<https://lucywritersplatform.com/2022/05/12/sanjukta-dasgupta-in-conversation-with-basudhara-roy/>



<https://countercurrents.org/2022/07/book-review-it-begins-at-home-and-other-short-stories/mposure> of
Amita Ray's seventeen stories in the 'Twilight Raga' will delight readers as they are both reader-friendly and
deeply meaningful. The publisher however needs to pay meticulous attention to copy-editing.