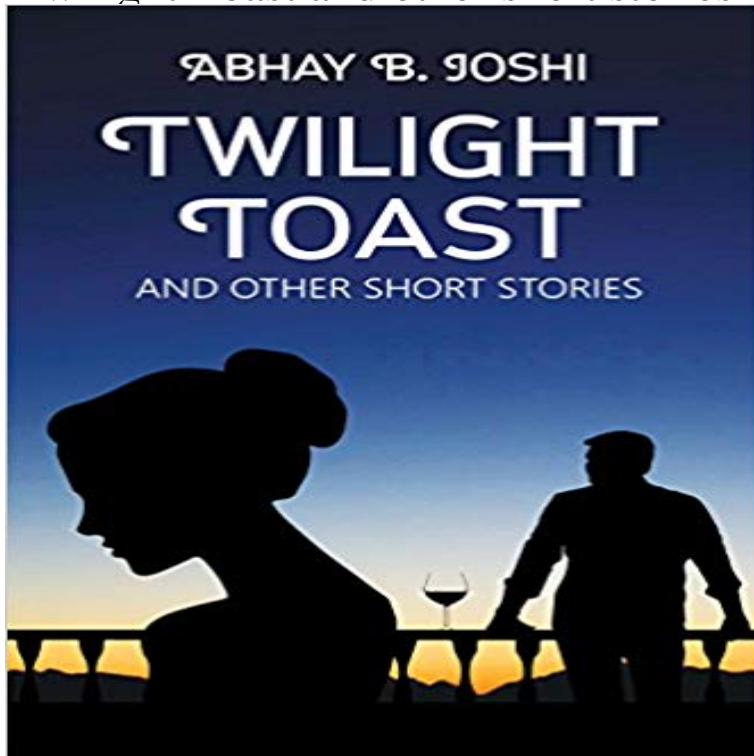


Twilight Toast and other short stories



These are stories of relationships, of emotional conflicts, of cultural dilemmas. Most of my characters are Indian Americans, a term that I use rather loosely: it includes Indians who live in America, Indians who lived there for a short while, and even Indians who never visit America but are affected by the western culture in some way. In fact, I feel the themes are probably applicable to any community that is affected by the western culture in some way. So, what are these stories about? And why should you read them? As I say above, the stories are about relationships, which I prefer to call connections. I think connections are the most fascinating and thrilling but also troublesome aspect of human life. They make us happy, they make us sorry, and they also make us philosophical. I have tried to capture some of the joys and sorrows of building connections. The stories are also about cross-cultural interactions and dilemmas. The Indian value system has the strength of hundreds, even thousands, of years of history and tradition. And yet, the influence and attraction of western values is undeniable. Indian Americans deal with the occasional clashes between these two systems as they live among Americans, or live among Indians in America, or return to live with Indians in India. How each person reacts to these interacting and powerful forces is fascinating to watch. Thus, you sometimes meet Indians in America who prefer to cling to their Indian heritage more strongly than the Indians living in India. The so-called westernized Indians, when they return to India, tend to underestimate the ruggedness of Indian traditions. And so, when they butt their westernized heads against the bulwark of the Indian system and dream like Americans, one possible outcome is humor, another is disappointment. I have tried to capture some of these fascinating, thought-provoking, and sometimes

humorous cultural interplays. As an Indian who moved to the US and lived there since the late 1980s, I have been deeply affected by the American value system, although I remained at the core a boy raised in rural India. My frequent visits to and sometimes extended stays in India further shaped my views of the two cultures. This collection is a tribute to my now dual identity the so-called Indian American. People sometimes ask me where I feel more comfortable India or the US. I tell them that I feel like a nowhere man. To assuage their disappointment I then say that I actually feel like a now-here man! I think that sums up, for me at least, the essence of being an Indian American.

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