

Short Stories Mirror The Fragmentary Experience of Life – Tejaswini Apte-Rahm

by [WritersM](#) - February 20, 2017



Who is Tejaswini Apte-Rahm?

I'm a full-time writer from Mumbai and have worked as an environmental researcher and writer for ten years. I have also worked as a journalist in Mumbai, writing on cinema, photography and environmental issues for Screen, The Times of India, Hindustan Times and The Asian Age. I've studied in Singapore and the United Kingdom. In recent years, I've lived in Serbia, Cambodia, Israel, Thailand, Myanmar, and Bangladesh, spending a year or two in each country.

Why do you write?

My favourite question in the world is *What If?* It's the big, magical question fiction writers must ask themselves, and it leads to a thousand different stories. I've always had an overactive imagination, and for as long as I can remember I've found it entertaining as well as satisfying to conjure up stories on a blank page. It never ceases to amaze me how marks on a piece of paper can create something out of nothing.

Why short stories?

I admire the short story form because of its precision and sparse use of words; the way it creates an entire world within a few pages. I love the genre because it has the potential to provide a differently

textured understanding of life, as compared to the novel. Life is not experienced like a novel which follows the conventional beginning, middle and end structure (though you can impose that kind of narrative on it with hindsight). Rather, I feel that we experience life as a series of fragments, often without neat endings – more often than not, episodes in our lives remain open-ended, loose ends don't get tied up, closure to an episode may come only years later. Short stories are uniquely placed to mirror that fragmentary experience of life.

About the book

These Circuses That Sweep Through the Landscape, a collection of short stories, was published in December 2016 by Aleph Book Company. The stories are about different forms of passion, violence, and love. Many of the stories are a bit dark and twisty. My characters are tussling with some kind of dilemma or facing a moment of truth, and often they make choices with the dark part of their minds. There's a beetle-collector whose jealous obsession with his wife manifests itself in a very twisted way; there's a girl who falls in love with a superstar from a bygone era, and she has a major problem on her hands because he has been dead for years; there's a shopaholic woman who is stuck in a mall for a year, unable to find the exit; there's a woman who begins to find inexplicable, creepy bits of cotton strewn around her house.

The common thread running through the collection is the idea that we are all just a step away from horror – and that 'normal' is an illusion which is easily broken. I think there is a very thin line between light and dark, or between sanity and madness. It takes just a small step to go from one side to the other side; and in between is a shadowy zone where the darker parts of the mind come into play. That's the zone I like to enter and explore.

Your inspiration for writing

I get a lot of inspiration from observing people. I am in my element when I overhear a loudmouth complaining on a plane, or when I catch a mischievous glance between friends. I'm always thinking about why people do what they do – and if I can get that right in my stories, that is what will make the stories believable. I also get inspiration from reading widely and whimsically – everything from literary fiction to a film magazine exposes you to wildly varying ways of seeing, living and writing. I think it's important to read beyond your own genre of writing – if you're writing a novel you should also read screenplays; if you're writing short stories you should also read poetry. It's also important to cultivate the habit of reading like a writer, i.e. to always be aware of the techniques used by an author to achieve a certain effect, whether it is in the choice of words, or choice of narrator, or the structure of a chapter.

Do you follow a particular writing schedule?

I usually set aside about 3 hours a day to write, whether or not I feel inspired to do so –because I've found that waiting for inspiration to strike is simply a way of procrastinating! Also, being a mom means that I don't have the luxury of sitting down to write whenever I feel like it – I have to fit in writing during a limited number of hours in the day (read: only during school-hours, and definitely not over weekends or school holidays!) My husband's job requires us to move countries every couple of years – we've lived in 7 countries over 14 years. Of course, this is a fascinating way to see

the world. But it also means that there are frequent, extended periods of moving and settling into a new country and culture. This does break the flow of writing and it takes a fairly long time for me to get into the groove again. Given my lifestyle, I've had to be very disciplined in order to make progress in my writing projects, whether as a fiction writer or, formerly, as an environmental researcher and writer. We're about to move countries again – this time to Azerbaijan – which coincides with working on my next book, a novel. A new country and a new book; both hold the promise of voyage, quest, and adventure!

Your literary heroes

My literary heroes are Roald Dahl (his short stories for adults) and Doris Lessing. I love the way Dahl dissects human nature with a certain ruthlessness. He lays bare a character's inner truth and their darkest sides, in a few concise words. That kind of precision and concise style is something that I have always aspired to. And of course, there is the allure of the classic Dahlesque twist in the tale. Doris Lessing also uses words with the precision of a knife-edge, and to that, she adds a beautiful compassion towards her characters.

You can connect with the author on [Website](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).

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