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Why I Write

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Why I Write

Abstract

I do not know, to date, what led me to write. All I realize is that, as a lonely, introverted child, there was this enormous need to create and express myself because I dreaded to communicate through speech. I needed to express my thoughts, feelings and emotions in an indirect way rather than talk face to face. Long before I began to write, however, I was living in a fantasy world of my own creation, where I created people and situations the way I wanted them to be. I spent many happy hours creating live characters out of inanimate dolls, giving each a name and personality. I made them walk and talk and live through experiences which entertained and amused my younger sister and brother. Next I turned to play-acting with real live people, namely my cousins. We used to don costumes and put out plays for an appreciative audience, our parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles.

—PUNYAKANTE WIJENAIKE—



Punyakante Wijenaike is Sri Lanka's most distinguished novelist writing in English. She has published four novels and four collections of short stories and one of her novels, *Giraya*, has recently been made into a very successful television series. Though she was born, bred and educated in the city of Colombo the roots of her writing very often go deeper into the rural areas. In 1985 she was awarded the Woman of Achievement Award and in 1988 the Rank of Kala Suri Class 1 was conferred on her by the President of Sri Lanka. She also served on the panel of judges for the Eurasian region of the Commonwealth Writers Prize and was chairperson of the panel of judges for the Michael Ondaatje Prize. In connection with the State Printing Cooperation of Sri Lanka Dangaroo Press is going to publish her most recent novel, *Amulet*, in 1994.

PUNYAKANTE WIJENAIKE

Why I Write

I do not know, to date, what led me to write. All I realize is that, as a lonely, introverted child, there was this enormous need to create and express myself because I dreaded to communicate through speech. I needed to express my thoughts, feelings and emotions in an indirect way rather than talk face to face. Long before I began to write, however, I was living in a fantasy world of my own creation, where I created people and situations the way I wanted them to be. I spent many happy hours creating live characters out of inanimate dolls, giving each a name and personality. I made them walk and talk and live through experiences which entertained and amused my younger sister and brother. Next I turned to play-acting with real live people, namely my cousins. We used to don costumes and put out plays for an appreciative audience, our parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles.

As a child I was happiest in a world I created around me. A tree was not just a tree. My imagination turned it into a ship or a trapeze where I experienced adventure. A pathway turned into a stream where I paddled a canoe.

Then I learned to read. A whole new world opened its doors to me. I began to devour books by the dozen, often to the dismay of my grandmother who saw nothing worthwhile in my lying about and reading. I would read while eating, while lying down or even in the toilet. My first love was Enid Blyton's 'The Magic Faraway Tree'.

Slowly I began to write. I kept diaries of my thoughts, feelings, impressions, fears and happy moments. I found, when writing, that I was uninhibited, unselfconscious, not ill at ease, like when I attempted to speak to anyone. If I wanted to communicate with my parents on a matter that was serious to me, I would note it down on paper and present it to them. Once my father was amused. 'Why don't you turn to creating stories?' he asked me.

Yet it was only after I was married that I began writing stories. At first it was just a break from the routine of housework and child-rearing. Once more I had found a way to break the dreariness of day to day reality. As I progressed as a writer I found I was developing as a person as well. I met new people, learnt to observe, listen, understand. I came out of a narrow house-bound world. I also came out of fantasy into reality or rather made a blend of both. I could cope with reality as it formed a base

for my writing. I wrote of everyday lives, of people living in the village as well as in the city. I would take a character or a situation and create my own interpretation of the person or situation.

My approach to creative writing is simple. I don't write to change people or society. I don't attempt to separate black from white. Each human is equipped with good as well as bad. I know when I am writing well. I am happy and absorbed and the type-writer or pen cannot keep pace with the flow of thought. On the other hand, there are days when I tend to pause, day-dream and do not get enough satisfaction out of what I am writing. I know then there is something wrong, something missing in that piece of creative work.

In the beginning I wrote for the mere pleasure of writing. But now, with demands for more stories for television and books, it has taken a positive role in my life. It has got deep into my blood and has become 'a way of life'. It has become part of me.

To date I have seven published books, a hundred stories in newspapers, journals, anthologies here and abroad. The B.B.C. broadcast four of my stories and the local Radio has broadcast many. I have won an honour from the Sri Lankan government, a title called 'Kala Suri' which means 'class one' in the field of creative arts.

The financial rewards are small and limited. The real reward comes with the acceptance of my work and the personal enrichment I derive from writing about people and situations I feel deeply about.