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Why I Write

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Why I Write

Abstract

I was born at Tamilnadu in India, gained my Master's degree at Madras University and my Ph.D. at Flinders University of South Australia. I married a Nigerian and now teach English at the University of Jos in Nigeria.



Kanchana Ugbabe was born and raised in India, is Nigerian by marriage and has a daughter and two sons. She has written widely on cross-cultural and women's issues. She is a graduate B.A. and M.A. (First Class), of Madras University and was awarded a gold medal for being the best female student of the University in her year. Her dissertation on *The Theme of Infancy and Childhood in Literature and Thought 1640-1750* gained her the degree of Ph.D. at Flinders University of South Australia in Adelaide. Dr Ugbabe has taught at Madras, Queensland, and Flinders Universities, and is now a Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Jos, Nigeria. In 1993 she was awarded a USIA grant to participate in the International Writing programme at the University of Iowa, U.S.A. Several of her stories have been broadcast by the BBC on its Overseas Service.

KANCHANA UGBABE

Why I Write

I was born at Tamilnadu in India, gained my Master's degree at Madras University and my Ph.D. at Flinders University of South Australia. I married a Nigerian and now teach English at the University of Jos in Nigeria.

It is this cross-cultural perspective that gives me the impetus to write short stories. I feel I have a unique angle of vision: Indian from the outside and Nigerian from the inside. Each of my stories is born of some little incident or observation that sparks a range of associated ideas which have been brewing in my mind, and the story takes shape and form. Four elements contribute to this process: the impulse, the subject matter, the attitude, and the language.

Among the subjects which particularly interest me are the entire chaos of city life, the way people cohabit with the bizarre and the mundane in their everyday lives, and above all the responses of women to these and other situations in a society in transition. I write women's stories because I believe women have a voice and a vision that is peculiarly their own. I feel an urge about writing as a woman, a need to catch up and put across women's stories.

Living in an African country has made me strongly aware of the need to understand different cultures. My academic work is concerned with the concepts of childhood and the family in African as well as western literatures. In African literature, as in African society, the family is far from being a neatly defined and illustrated unit. It is, on the contrary, made up of a loose and amorphous group of people with a matriarch or patriarch at the centre, branching out into ever-widening circles of kinships and relations. It is a complex network of support-systems and value-building mechanisms.

Marriage in African society is not the union of two individuals but of two groups, two families, and African women writers in particular have gone to great lengths to explore the issues raised by such social structures. In my own way as a wife and mother in Nigeria, who is also familiar with Indian and Western attitudes to women, children, and marriage, I try similarly to explore these issues in my academic work as well as in my own stories.

Moreover, my years as postgraduate student and as teacher in Australia, and my recent extended visit to the United States of America have also in important ways contributed to my personal vision as a writer and to the craft of writing.