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Asha Bage



Asha Arvind Bage [b.27 July 1939] lives in Nagpur. Her maiden story appeared in the Diwali issue of *Tarun Bharat* in 1972 and ever since she has made a glorious literary career as a short story writer and a novelist. Born in a middle class Brahmin family, she had her early training in literature from her mother and grandmother. She was brought up in an atmosphere rich in music and festivals. She studied Marathi literature and music for her post-graduation and took keen interest in extra-curricular activities like staging dramas and one-act plays and writing plays for the radio. Her early exposure to music and theatre was to profoundly influence her literary endeavours. Her understanding of a variety of rhythms enriched by her experience of music, dance and drama contributed substantially to the development of her unique narrative style. The titles of her short-story collections like *Marwa* or *Malhar* bear testimony to her deep interest in music.

Her works show an intense concern for the familial, social and economic tensions in the reality of contemporary times and its ever-changing contexts of modern life. Her stories capture the throbbing internal rhythms of these transformations. The older generation had inherited the rites and rituals of the past and accepted them rather unquestioningly. But the new generation accepts these traditional forms in intellectual terms, not without subtle

psychological tensions. When the new generation, for instance, renders the verses in the Bhakhti tradition in *Marwa* rather than in *Multani*, it cannot be taken as a mere superficial change of structure. In fact, it is an intellectual decision for Raghunath, a major shift from *sagun* to *nirgun* Bhakhti. The changes in cultural forms, like those in musical compositions, are subtle, internal, natural and resilient. Asha Bage's stories in *Marwa* and such other collections strike a fine balance between rational and aesthetic values. Her stories are informed by a new perception that music, as a medium, helps in building a cultural bridge.

Asha Bage's fiction can be described as woman-centred but not as feminist. She does not seem to commit herself to any 'ism' or ideology; nor does she imitate any established role models. She is not interested in developing a value-based, woman-centred cultural perspective either. She has no attractions for female stereotypes and she avoids the trap of creating an image of a modern woman taking a hidden political stand to subvert a male-centred power structure. The image of a woman who believes in her own honesty, is uninterested in intrigue of any kind, one who makes adjustments without naive self-surrender: an image founded in rational principles. The woman in her fiction grows in the company of the others, transforms them by her presence and association and establishes rapport with them by

her understanding and interaction carried out with natural ease. Though she is surrounded by the relentless *avatars* of age-old male ego and a socio-cultural atmosphere that suffocates her femaleself, she courageously faces reality in terms of her eternal female consciousness. Therefore her short stories do not have a tragic ending, though they powerfully depict pain and suffering. Interestingly enough, her stories have nothing to do with the heroic image of man as a sensualist, a benefactor, an advisor or a master. Her woman characters, however, do meet the *animus* in their unconscious. The culturally supported image of Krishna as a playmate enriching the feelings of companionship, peculiar to Indian mythology, attracts her women characters. Women in her short stories, therefore, never insult or humiliate men or submit themselves before their egotism. Asha Bage describes a relationship of mutuality which makes men change themselves

and women find psychological enhancement. Rukhmini and Anant in *Marwa* or Meenakshi and Mukund in *Chandan* are a few instances.

In her stories, she deals with the celebratory aspects of the cycle of birth and death, for she does not look at it from the orthodox view of the conflict of good and evil. She, therefore, sees a woman's death more as a social rather than as a natural event, avoiding stereotypical attitudes. She communicates her pained awareness of events like a suicide with great empathy. She subscribes neither to the attitude of a mere onlooker nor to that of unashamed commentary (Beiman, Avel), but treats events from a social, moral, spiritual or an amoral perspective. Her writings, therefore, articulate an openness that ascertains her commitment to freedom.

Her early stories show a flair for the psychoanalytical method. Most of the stories in *Chandan* deal with the sickness of the human psyche. They show a certain



With family members



Receiving Kothawale Award

scientific bias and resemble case-studies. But probably later, she discovered that the boundaries which separate the common men and women and the so-called psychic persons were really very thin and she began to handle the themes of her stories differently. The stresses and strains that disturb a child's mind (*Sankh Shimple, Koradi Bhumi*), the depression caused by social pressures (*Ek Pavasali Sandhyakal, Chandan*), the strange perversions generated by devotion to research and scholarship (*Samudra*), the total loss of awareness caused by the inability to forget childhood memories (*Setu*) are some of the themes she moulds into psychoanalytical narrative forms by taking due care that they would not become mere case-studies. Bage's art gives ample opportunities to her characters to conquer sickness by responding to human relationships and makes the human spirit come alive by evoking love, sympathy and compassion. Thus her stories go beyond science and become charged with human values. Her stories show the spirit of service and everlasting compassion in women's simple and controlled responsiveness sans pride.

Her four novels examine various phases of human relationships, both practical and emotional, on different levels. In *Tridal*, for instance, she depicts with a sure touch in all its colourful variety. The fulfilment of roles in the family, the chance relations generated by professional contacts and companionship beyond role fulfilment. In *Setu*, she presents human relationships on levels that are almost kaleidoscopic in their wide ranging treatment: the traditional shaped by the institution of marriage, the amoral born out of the rational-intellectual viewpoint, the friendly going beyond the common rut and blooming, owing to the artistic and cultural exposure, the attraction or otherwise between individuals, generated by the memories of the past and modern progressive attitudes and their tense desire for accord. A fluent style of dialogue that captures the harmony and discord of human togetherness, a vision of values that connects tradition and modernity and a mode of narration that creates new, pure humanitarian values are the qualities of Asha Bage's fiction that assure her a place of pride in the post-Sixties period of Marathi literature of the last century.



Receiving 'Katha award' by President

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Mouj Prakashan, Mumbai	
UTSAVA	Under Publication
Mouj Prakashan, Mumbai	



Receiving 'Katha award' by M.S. Subbulaxmi

A CHRONOLOGY

- 1939 Born 28th July, Nagpur, Maharashtra
- 1966 M.A. in Marathi
- 1971 M.A. in Music
- 1978 First Novel
- 1984 First short story collection
- 1985 Maharashtra State Award for *Marva*
D.B. Mokashi Award by Maharashtra Sahitya Parishad, Pune
- 1986 Maharashtra State Award
- 1987 Maharashtra State Award
- 1988 Vidarbha Sahitya Sangh Award
- 1989 Dr. A.V. Warty Award from Sarvajanic Wachanalaya, Nasik
- 1991 President, Vidarbha Lekhika Sammelan, Nagpur on the occasion of Centenary year of Marathi Katha
- 1992 & National level award for short stories *Toofan* and *Pankh* from
1996 Katha Organization, Delhi, presented by President of India, Dr. S.D. Sharma and M.S. Subbalaxmi respectively
Represented Marathi in the Anthologies brought out by *katha* for short stories in Indian languages
- 1994 Vidarbha Sahitya Sangh Award for Novel *Tridal*
- 1997 Shantaram Katha Award for Short story *Patra*
- 2000 S.L. Gadre Award for *Darpan* from Mulund Sevasangh
- 2000 Kothavale Award for *Darpan*
- 2000 Goni Dhadekar Award 'Mrinmayi' for novel *Setu*
- 2000 Apte Wachan Mandir, Ichalkaranji, Award for novel *Setu*
- 2001 Kamalabai Ogle Award by Mehta Publication House foundation, Pune, for literary contribution