

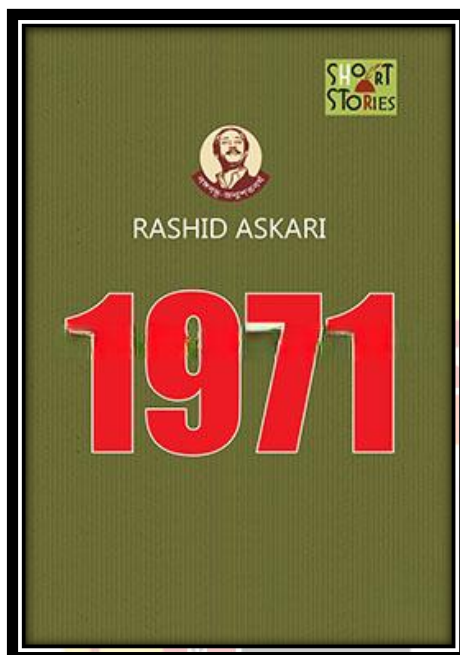
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WAR, WOUNDS, AND WORDS: EXPLORING RASHID ASKARI'S 1971

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About Book:



Title:

1971

Author:

Rashid Askari

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Full Book Review

Rashid Askari's *1971* is a profound collection that delves into the social and political landscape of Bangladesh, weaving tales that reflect the lasting impact of the 1971 Liberation War. Each of the twelve stories in this book provides a poignant and vivid portrayal of human struggles—against exploitation, societal norms, and internal conflicts—set against the backdrop of war and post-war Bangladesh. This masterful work resonates not only with the historical trauma of the nation's violent past but also with the universal themes of human suffering, resilience, and the fight for justice.

The opening story, *The Human Cow*, serves as a powerful critique of the exploitative systems at play in rural Bangladesh, illustrating the devastating consequences of economic disparity and patriarchy. Through the character of Kasem, who loses his cow to a heartless moneylender, Askari poignantly explores the harsh realities of rural poverty, symbolizing how people are often dehumanized in the pursuit of survival. As one critic highlights, Askari's portrayal of the character's suffering is reminiscent of Premchand's *Godaan*, reflecting Askari's deep-rooted anti-imperialist perspective and his sympathy for the plight of the peasantry.



In *Crossfire*, the story of Tapan—a leader of an outlawed group mistakenly declared dead—Askari deftly captures the euphoria of survival and rebirth, using the ordinary backdrop of a rural field to elevate the mundane into something sublime. The exuberance Tapan feels after narrowly escaping death is symbolic of personal renewal and the hope for societal rejuvenation, a theme central to Askari's storytelling.

While Askari's stories largely dwell in the realm of suffering and the harsh realities of life, they are also imbued with moments of dark humor and irony. In *The Longest Jam*, the narrative shifts between the seemingly trivial matter of traffic congestion and the serious socio-political commentary on the stasis in Bangladesh's justice system. Through the fictional banter of a schoolboy, Askari critiques the prolonged delay in the trial of war criminals, comparing it to a traffic jam that's perpetually stalled. The tone of irony, present throughout the collection, provides sharp commentary on the failures of political leadership and the disillusionment with state promises.

One of the standout stories is *Jihad*, which critiques religious extremism and the dangerous allure of radical ideologies. Askari's use of humor to expose the incongruity between religious fervor and the corrupt motives of leaders is striking. The story's protagonist, Mujahid, becomes a tragic figure, misled by a charismatic leader, embodying the risks of fanaticism in a nation struggling with its identity.

Another remarkable aspect of Askari's writing is his vivid portrayal of women and their inner worlds. In *Co-wife*, Askari crafts a tense domestic drama in which Bilqis, the infertile wife, takes a drastic step to ensure her place in her husband's life. The story, with its sensual undertones and exploration of gender dynamics, reflects the societal pressures placed on women to fulfill traditional roles. Askari's ability to render such complex emotional landscapes makes this a standout story in the collection.

Lottery brings the collection into the realm of contemporary life, exploring modern greed and the fragility of hope. The protagonist, Mamun, falls victim to a digital lottery scam, and yet the story ends on a redemptive note, with Mamun purchasing handmade jewelry for his wife—a symbolic gesture of love and the resilience to overcome material failures.

In *the Story Virus*, the dangers of military control and non-secular ideologies are starkly portrayed, showing their potential to bring destruction. In *The Proud Possessor*, the narrative explores the severe consequences of poverty, revealing how desperate situations can force individuals to disregard societal norms.

Askari's mastery of short fiction is evident in his skillful use of literary influences, including classical writers like Maupassant, Chekhov, and Joyce. His style is marked by a deep empathy for his characters, complex narratives that often take unexpected turns, and a keen understanding of the socio-political realities that shape the lives of ordinary people. His stories—ranging from the exploitation of the rural poor to the complex moral dilemmas in urban spaces—address universal themes of love, betrayal, survival, and the search for meaning in a fractured world.

Ultimately, *1971: Short Stories* is a compelling collection that speaks to both the historical trauma of Bangladesh and the universal human condition. Through Askari's deft storytelling, the reader is transported into the lives of ordinary people grappling with the harshness of life and the



weight of history. Askari's short stories are not just reflections of Bangladesh's socio-political realities; they are timeless narratives of struggle, resilience, and the quest for justice.



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