
BOOK REVIEWS

Only One Life to Give

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PUBLISHER

Frog Books, Leadstart Publishing Pvt. Ltd., Mumbai, India

YEAR: 2013

PAGES: 190, Rs 145, ISBN 978-93-82473-76-3

The book has a total of 15 stories that are presented in four distinct sections. The first section is 'Touching the Sky' and contains stories of self-sacrifice that emerge from the experiences of various individuals. The second is 'Within the Family' which explores dynamics within families, sacrifice for others and relationships between family members. 'Strangers in the Fold', the third section gives anecdotes of goodness and helpfulness shown by strangers for fellow human beings. 'Women - What It Takes' is the fourth section dedicated to women of fortitude that have displayed extraordinary strength and character.

A majority of the stories present the narrator's account of events in different situations and contexts. The emphasis is on describing characters, situations, and bringing to the fore virtues of selflessness, sacrifice, simplicity, kindness, determination, and an unflinching willingness to

lend a helping hand. The stories are largely set in an era that predates the computers, telecom revolution, and the concept of India as an economic powerhouse. Hence, the reader often encounters quaint settings and simple folk that believe in upholding traditions but also come across as cheerful but naïve.

The book begins with stories that offer an anecdotal perspective on experiences that one may encounter during a stint in the Indian Air Force (and other services). This selection is not entirely representative of life in the Armed Forces; however, it is diverse in itself. With a style of writing that is descriptive, and offers several details, the author succeeds in recreating the contexts in which he has witnessed virtues of dignity, selflessness, and humanism in people at different ranks in Indian Air Force. The characters in the stories have been etched out well. One of objectives of the book is

to highlight examples of virtuosity, often even in the face of difficult times. However, the stories stand out as strictly anecdotal, and the reader is sometimes left questioning the idealism of the characters or the narrative highlighting virtues. For instance, there is a lack of critical thinking in the narrative which is desirable to give a well-rounded perspective especially with respect to some of the actions of the protagonist in 'Man of Honour' and 'Burden of Goodness'. The path chosen by some of the characters instinctively raises questions and should be challenged for the sake of impressionable readers. In the two stories mentioned above, perceived selflessness may be interpreted as stubbornness, sensitivity or an excessively emotional response, which isn't necessarily the only response, or the correct response to a difficult situation.

Taking a step back in time from the author's experiences in the Air Force, the section 'Within the Family' present stories that give an insight into the values and experiences of his family members. The stories present the actions of his parents in an extremely reverential tone. There is sufficient justification for that with instances of his father making extra efforts, and devoting himself entirely to help the underprivileged and marginalised. However, the anecdotal account in the third person does not raise critical questions about his father's actions. This leaves the reader questioning some of the

messages put forth by the story. On the other hand, the story 'A Hole in the Heart' recounting the experience of his mother, a headmistress in school in small villages in the country, paints an admirable picture. Going beyond the call of duty, the actions of the headmistress can be described as heroic. The persistence and commitment to a cause is praiseworthy. Again the writing in this section is simple; some clichés repeat themselves, as does certain background information that could be avoided.

A few stories from the section 'Strangers in the Fold' stand out in the collection. Not only for the quality of writing, which is simple, but because of some meaningful messages that accompany the stories. This is evident in the story 'Bonding with the Bonded' where one can see the main character 'Kaka' use his position of respect in the community as an instrument for positive social change. The story is set in 1960 which has a few pleasant examples of innovative ideas for extending help to those in need of money or support. Similarly, in 'Only the Poor are Rich', the reader is presented with the example of a simple character 'Ramprasad' who derives meaning and happiness in his life by supporting people in their time of need and distress. The idealism, as it is presented in the story appears to be from a bygone era, and these stories serve a purpose by bringing them into sharp focus. On the other hand, the story 'The Retreat' which

attempts to present moral lessons through two narratives interwoven could benefit immensely from a more thoughtful implementation of the idea.

Overall, the writing in the book is easy to read and accessible. The author is successful in providing descriptions of surroundings and actions in the stories. However, from the perspective of English language teaching/learning there are times when the language used is colloquial. There are also occasions when the author uses phrases and/or words from the lexicon of the Armed Forces, or recycles clichés. This is noticeable; however, it is not a major distraction while reading the stories.

By virtue of offering a window into the world of those committed

to serving their fellow humans, and doing more than fulfilling their responsibility the book triumphs virtues that are eroding in modern society. Hence, as reading material, it can certainly make a contribution in shaping the moral compass of young learners. However, one limitation of the book is that it does not lend itself to highlighting these values in contexts where the reader should be exposed to equally important issues such as environmental concerns, inclusion, gender issues, health and nutrition etc. The collection is an attempt to encourage people to share goodwill and extend care for those who need it and help build a tight knit society.

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Becoming a Reflective Educator: How to Build a Culture of Inquiry in the Schools

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PUBLISHER

Corwin Press, INC.

YEAR: 1994

PAGES: XIV+144

There is a host of literature in the recent past that laid emphasis on the importance of reflective abilities and disposition in teachers. 'Reflection' is increasingly regarded as one of the core aims of pre-service teacher

education programmes and is marked as being an essential quality in in-service teachers.

This book is a remarkable account of why and how educators become 'reflective' practitioners. The use of