

BOOK REVIEW

Mohanraj, Jayashree. (2018). *Life Sutras – Collective Wisdom for the Young*. Bangalore, Prism Books Pvt. Ltd. [ISBN 938650674-2] pp x + 158. Price Rs. 175/-

The book under review is a self-help book brought out as a sequel to the author's earlier book *Skill Sutras* published in 2015 by the same publisher.

In today's world when the youth are facing a variety of challenges in the form of unemployment, discrimination, and subjected to abuse of various types - suicides, killing or taking to crime has become more of a norm than an exception. It is essential to bring these youth back to the mainstream and channelize their energies by counselling them properly. As the popular adage goes, '*we should catch them young*'. In other words, the help should reach them early in life when they are still in schools and colleges. Such work, if it can be integrated into the curriculum, nothing more can be wished for.

Both the books by the author make a serious attempt to offer help without being didactic. This is the highlight of both the books.

India has a rich tradition of storytelling. *Panchatantra* and *Hitopadesha* have simply not remained names in our society, but have been widely popular and have been transmitted orally from generation to generation. This goes to prove the richness of the methodology adopted and the sustained values they have transmitted. Jayashree Mohanraj, in her books has taken recourse to similar technology and developed a storyline to drive home the point. *Skill Sutras* is a sustained conversation between a mature aunt Nandita and her young nephew Raju. Raju, who is schooled in a village, reaches the town to join his course in Engineering. Though well read and informed, he feels diffident in the presence of his English speaking confident urban classmates and becomes tongue-tied when a teacher asks him a question despite knowing the answers. He shares his woes with his friendly aunt who counsels him and makes him a confident boy. This is in brief the gist of *Skill Sutras*.

In *Life Sutras*, Raju is a successful student in the final semester of his Engineering course is confident and is ready to give back to the society what he has learnt. He is badly disturbed, when

one of his juniors unable to cope with his studies commits suicide. He discusses the matter with his aunt and plans out a strategy with his friends to publish a series of stories on the notice board according to a design given by Nandita. He and his friends Ashish, Amina, Swapna, Tejas, Hemanth and Anjanli (all names beginning with Raju when put together form an acronym RAASTHA – a way forward) meet every week to get clarification on conceptual details from Nandita. To illustrate the concepts they look for stories from all possible sources and share them with each other and discuss them. The stories are put up on a specially marked notice board (with the permission of the principal) for all the students in the college to read. This brings about a sea change in the college though it happens gradually. The goodness does not stop with one college, but spreads to other colleges like a good contagion. The students open up, discuss and take the initiative to add their own anecdotes to the published ones. That ushers in a sign of willingness to learn and change voluntarily.

With 112 stories drawn from various parts of the world, based on lives of great people, the book helps students fight stress, develop positive attitude, guard their self-esteem, manage their time, help others in need and what have you. The book with its 12 chapters is modular. One may pick up any chapter and read it independently of other chapters and yet stand to gain. To support the stories and anecdotes, the book carries a few but meaningful illustrations thoughtfully crafted by Anupam Arunachalam.

There are several books available in the market on self-help. This is not just one more addition to the existing lot. It is different and has made a successful and persistent effort to fill the void that existed for a long time. The book is worth being prescribed and used as a course book or just read as bed time reading and still stand to gain.

**Prof Julu Sen (Retd)
EFL University
Hyderabad**