

Finders Keepers?

Robert Arnett Smita Turakhia

Atman Press (Oct 15, 2003)

Unknown \$16.95 (34pp)

978-0-9652900-2-9

Finders Keepers? is an elevating morality story inspired by the author's surprising encounter with a village child during one of his trips to India. The American narrator in the story unknowingly drops his wallet at a marketplace and a small boy returns it to him. When the narrator attempts to give the boy money as a reward for his honesty, the boy refuses to accept it. The American enlists the aid of a translator, who explains, "This boy does not understand why you should give him any money for returning to you what is yours. The idea of accepting a reward for doing a good deed makes no sense to him."

Apparently, for American children (and their Enron-shocked parents), such selfless honesty requires further explanation, which Arnett, a lecturer and author of the acclaimed armchair travel book *India Unveiled*, immediately provides. Writing of the boy, Arnett notes: "It would have taken him many years to earn the money in the wallet, yet he was not tempted to keep it. He listened to his conscience." In case the latter concept is also unfamiliar to American children, Arnett provides a definition and uses it to introduce the Buddhist concept of dharma, one of several words included in a brief glossary at the end of the book.

This volume is as much a cultural journey as a morality tale. On the way to the village where the encounter takes place, the narrator boards a crowded bus and stops en route at a roadside marketplace for a lunch of boiled buffalo milk and various Indian savory snacks. He meets a monk at a Hindu ashram and sees monks and nuns of the Jain religion sweeping the ground ahead of them as they walk to avoid accidentally stepping on insects or seeds. Only pleasant aspects of Indian culture are encountered; Arnett doesn't trouble his young audience with poverty or ethnic conflict.

Arnett found an ideal illustrator in Turakhia, a native of India who now resides in Texas and whose portfolio includes illustrations for a CD-ROM about the Bhagavad Gita. Turakhia's paintings vividly depict the cornucopia for the senses that is India. With such beautiful illustrations and story, *Finders Keepers?* is an excellent picture book for parents and educators seeking to introduce children to lands beyond their borders.

(January / February 2004)

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