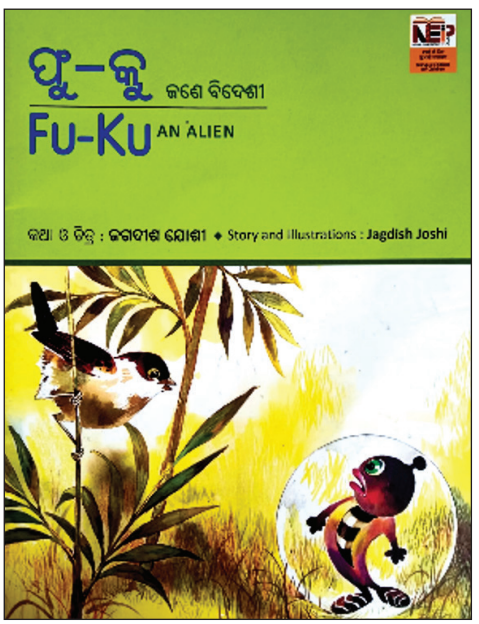
Book Review

Fu-Ku
An Alien

Geyin Boli*



Author and Illustrator : Jagdish Joshi
Translator (English) : Kaveri Joshi
(Odia) : Shanti Mahapatra (Bal)
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About the Book

The story F*u-Ku*: *An Alien* is written and illustrated by Jagdish Joshi in Hindi, and later translated into English by Kaveri Joshi. It was later translated from English to Odia by Shanti Mahapatra (Bal). The first bilingual edition (Odia-English) was published in 2021 by the National Book Trust, India for children of 6 to 8 years of age. It is the story of an alien named Fu-Ku. It is a written and illustrated storybook of 24 pages folded in two. Through an imaginary creature—an alien—the story shows the impact of wars and fighting, and the moral value of peace.

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Story Plot

Fu-Ku, comes down to Earth from a spaceship to see the beauty of Earth. What he sees on Earth is like a perfect scene—colourful flowers, green foliage, trees, a blue sky, and gleaming water, unaware of the war-like situation that exists in many places on Earth. Fu-Ku is very happy being on Earth, jumping here and there. His excitement indicates that Fu-Ku has not seen the beauty of Nature on his planet or anywhere else.

Suddenly, a crow pounces upon Fu-Ku, but he manages to escape, though with great difficulty. Seeing this, a little bird becomes curious about Fu-Ku. Perching on a branch near him, he politely asks him his name and about his home. Fu-Ku likes the bird, and they soon become friends. Fu-Ku tells the bird his name, and where he comes from—a faraway planet in the galaxy. He then asks the bird about the crow who attacked him. So the bird tells him about the crow, its cruelty, and how it eats small birds and insects. Hearing this, Fu-Ku shares with the bird an idea to teach a lesson to the crow by spreading the fine thread that he has brought with him, all over the bush. Interestingly, after a while, when the crow attacked Fu-Ku again, and the moment it touched the thread, there was a big bang, the sound that caused the crow to fall to the ground and become unconscious. Fu-Ku, then asked the bird to cut the thread so that the crow would fly freely again.

When Fu-Ku and the bird were talking, there was a loud noise, along with terrifying sounds. The bird explained to him that it was the sound of the people fighting with firearms and bombs, destroying Nature, animals and birds, trees, and houses. As these things are unknown to Fu-Ku, he begins to think that humans are very strange. He returns to his spaceship in deep sadness and shock, because the reality of human life on Earth is far from his imagination.

Interpretation of the Story

The central aim of the story is to deliver a message that 'fighting destroys'. Human beings are not only destroying themselves through fighting, but events like wars or battles have a devastating effect on the Earth's environment. Wars pollute air and water, and destroy the co-existing ecosystem and biodiversity. The most vital lesson is that peace is crucial for sustainable development. The author attempts to elucidate through the story that humans should avoid fighting and coexist peacefully and happily with one another. Fu-Ku came down happily to Earth seeing the beauty of nature on this planet, but went back to the space in utter disappointment and shock at the sight of human beings fighting among themselves. He sadly observes how wars destroy this wonderful place.

Since time immemorial, wars have been a part of human existence and even history has been unable to cover the entire record. The consequences

of wars are evident in the history of the past. There has never been a win-win situation after a war. Will there ever be? Who wins the war? Nobody. We shall never erase the memory of the outcome of the Kalinga War 261 BCE fought between the Mauryan Empire, led by Emperor Ashok, and the independent kingdom of Kalinga, in the present-day Odisha and parts of Andhra Pradesh. What was the outcome of the war that changed Ashoka completely from within? Didn't he win the Kalinga war in literal sense? So why was he so unsettled even after a victory? Why did he experience feelings of guilt within him? Witnessing the brutality of war—the killings, pain, and immense suffering—deeply affected Ashoka, so much so that he later shifted towards pacifism and accepted the path of Buddhism. War breeds war, and revenge begets revenge. There was a war within Ashoka even after the literal war was over. He saw that in the end, war brought no good, and that peace and harmony are the ultimate requirements to sustain Nature and living beings anywhere on Earth.

Relevance to the Child

Some experts believe that exposing children to topics like war or fighting is inappropriate, but such realities of life should be told to children of all ages, and their cost and consequences should be explained in an age-appropriate manner. From an early age, children should be made aware of both good and bad things in the society, if they are to be trained and prepared for the future. The mention of war in the story is indicative of the fights that children may go through in everyday life, since violence is not restricted only to a full-fledged war. They should be taught to select the right path in life from the very beginning. Besides, through the story, moral values like compassion, empathy, peace, etc. could also be inculcated among the young ones.

By promoting peace, we can protect and ensure a healthy, thriving environment for the future generations to inherit. This little story communicates much about the human existence and the reality of life in a child-friendly way. Children are not the only beneficiaries; indeed, the story gives life's great lessons to adults as well. It is important to promote peace and raise a more compassionate and informed generation, one that would value harmony and co-existence. Above all, the story reminds us of the beauty of our Earth, Nature, and our surroundings that could have been preserved in a much better way for sustainable development.

Theme

The story adopts the character of an alien who comes from a different planet to bring us to the realisation that Earth is a beautiful place, and to remind us our moral responsibility to safeguard Earth. Thereby, the central theme of

the story is teaching us to say No to fighting and wars, support peace, and protect Nature and the beauty of the Earth. It talks of creating a world that is beautiful because it is not spoilt by wars and battles. The story urges us to select the right path in life and to adopt the principle of living in peace. Narrated through the character of an alien—a creature that is believed to exist on an another planet—the story explains how life may seem beautiful from the outside, but is full of troubles, difficulties, and problems. Each of us needs to make a genuine effort to avoid violence and contribute towards making Earth our peaceful home, irrespective of the country we belong to.

Language Used

The story was first written in Hindi, titled—*फू-कू: दूसरे ग्रह का यात्री* and translated into English. It was again translated from English to Odia. It is also available in a bilingual (Odia-English) version, first published in 2021. This book review is based on the English version of the book. The words used in the English version are mostly simple, but the translator has made use of some words that may be new to children aged 6–8 years. It focusses on providing opportunities for children to learn new words like 'galaxy', 'spaceship', 'conscious', 'unconscious', 'creature', 'foliage', etc. The explanation in the story is quite straightforward and easy for a child to understand. It also makes use of onomatopoeia, for example, 'boom' and 'bam' to express sound effects. The word Fu-Ku in the Japanese language means happiness, fortune, clothing, or an act of blowing. The author may have deliberately adopted a Japanese name for the alien, thus creating a platform for encouraging the idea of multilingualism.

Illustration

The illustrations on each page complement the story plot very well. The first two pages depict a spaceship that looks like a colourful gem above Earth with a galaxy of stars, and the next two pages represent the beauty of Earth. An alien, the imaginary creature in the story, is shown inside a bubble-like structure, and his features look like those of a tiny little insect, the size of a little bird, and much smaller than a crow. The art work uses attractive and vibrant colours appropriate for each scene. The illustrations depict a dark galaxy of stars above Earth, beautiful Nature with colourful flowers, and a blue river. An entire page is dedicated to the expression of the loud sounds 'boom' and 'bam' in dark red and yellowish colours, which is expressive of danger and destruction. Interestingly, the deep-black crow in the illustration is depicted losing its feathers, expressing the outcome of the struggle to break free from the thread.