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Book Review: Making Anew My Home

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Book Review

Mathew Zachariah (2013) *Making Anew My Home: A memoir*. Victoria, BC: Friesen Press. 226 pp. (ISBN: 978-1-4602-1259-2PM)

Reviewed by Deo H. Poonwassie, Professor Emeritus, University of Manitoba

This book is about identity and belonging. During one's lifetime the question of "worth" is often raised forcing us to examine our lives using criteria that have value for us. We highlight the activities and thoughts that have created critical paths on our journey towards expiration. Zachariah chronicles critical incidents that have shaped his life through episodes from Borneo through India and USA to Canada.

There are nine chapters: a prologue, an index, and with a touch of the scholarly, includes footnotes; the book also has a liberal scattering of poems, photographs and quotations. After some 235 pages, the author leaves us with many themes to ponder and evaluate. Some such themes are inequality, the influence of religion, good citizenship, the importance of family life, discipline in education and schooling, and the influence of one's environment as a determinant of life paths.

Zachariah was fortunate from the start being blessed with caring parents and family. He was not in need of any essentials to success. He had privileged schooling, spoke English, which distinguished him from others in a primarily Indian community and did not have to seek sustenance. He took full advantage of his status by concentrating on being a devoted student and creating the groundwork for a successful life.

This book reminds us that living in the USA or Canada can be very gratifying provided that one has the strength of character and confidence to confront the many challenges that present themselves in immigrant societies. Zachariah was a scholar and proved that he could surmount difficulties and be successful in academe. His amorous sojourn in the USA, which saw him begin a new family taught him several valuable lessons (through marriage and divorce) which would later consolidate a rewarding relationship in a new almost perfect marriage in Canada, his new home.

One of Zachariah's major themes is "My Christian Faith" (Ch. 4). Here he speaks of the Syrian Christian faith and emphasizes particularly the tendency to see others as equals. This he contrast with other faiths, which believe and practise a caste system often demonizing those at the lower levels. In this chapter, the author states: "I have committed many wrongs in my life" (p.72). This statement underlines his Christian conviction almost to the point of a confessional. Zachariah emphasises the role of religion in his success as a human being.

After SUNY and University of Colorado, University of Calgary provided Zachariah with further academic growth, sustenance and a fertile future. At the University of Calgary (as he puts it), "my work as a University professor defined for the most part my life..." (p. 148). Life as a teacher and scholar was measured by "...justice, fairness, equality and peace." (p. 148). While at the University of Calgary, Zachariah received some fifteen awards of notable prestige. He clearly devoted himself to teaching, research and service (to his students and community).

Zachariah was a champion of Development Education, which through political crassness and benign neglect died in the 1980s. It was not for lack of effort or scholarship that such an international academic effort was destroyed but because of political ideology at the highest

levels. Zachariah had demonstrated that this area of study was essential for understanding the international dependency created by the North-South divide. His interaction with such notables as Paulo Freire and Mikhail Gorbachev and references to Andre Gunder Frank must have placed Zachariah a bit left of centre on the political spectrum.

This book might well be instructive for those who aspire to pursue work and study in Comparative and International Education. Zachariah has crossed many boundaries and created a place for himself, grounded but not bound; and this is in no small part to the guiding force and love of his wife Saro to whom he has dedicated this book. Zachariah's search for identity was fruitful due to his critical examination and acceptance of context, religion, family and a strong commitment to research and community service.