

Book Review : The Last Smile - A Father's Love Story by Jeevan Zutshi

The drama of human life falls into a few types, but every life is a special case. The book we are dealing with is the story of Jeevan Zutshi, who immigrated to U.S. in 1972 and went through the usual struggles of a new immigrant and ended up a success story. Then what is captivating and interesting about his story? It is the epic tragedy he met in 2008 in the form of the loss of his eldest child, Amit.

Amit Zutshi died at the age of thirty not by an illness, an accident, or a crime, but by the dietary supplements, the ubiquitous health enhancement drugs on the American self-initiated health enhancement revolution scene. That is the drama of the book, that is the soul of the book. A crime was committed on author's son, who bore scintillating promise, and who was the apple of his eyes. This is a Hamletian drama, where the author wants to scream:

The time is out of joint—O cursèd spite,
That ever I was born to set it right!

If the book had just contained a father's sorrow over the loss of his beloved child, depending on how it was written, it would have had an immense human appeal. But it rises higher than that. It depicts his sorrow's transformation into a searing crusade to harness and guide the dietary supplement industry's blind lust for money. That is the special dimension of the book.

Dietary supplement industry in U.S. has remained unregulated, even though it kills and hurts thousands of people annually, especially the younger ones. On one hand Federal Drug Agency is most likely the world's most stringent and thorough

body screening new prescription drugs and their continuing record, but it does nothing about the multi-billion dollar dietary supplement industry. The latter remains an unexamined industry, free to create and sell drugs, which are consumed by millions of Americans. But it is going to change now, to a good extent due to this book and its author's persistent efforts at the U.S. Congress and elsewhere. Just about a year ago U.S. sued over a hundred dietary supplement manufacturers and marketers for spurious labeling and other indiscretions of their products. The cat is out the box now, one day dietary supplements will be subjected to the same scrutiny as the prescription drugs. A movie based on the book, bearing the same name, was released a few months ago, which will further drill the message: do not let people be killed by the wanton lust of businessmen. Chapter 17 of the book, A System Overdue for Reform, will haunt the dietary supplement industry for a long time.

The book starts with a folksy and chatty narration of author's roots in Kashmir, a forlornly tragic place which has remained crushed in the vise of Islamic jihadism for seventy years, without any signs of abatement of its insanity and inhumanity. While Jeevan Zutshi dreamt of freeing himself and his family from this epic fire by emigrating to America, little did he know that he would be skewered alive there with the loss of his son on the grates blazed by the corporate greed. So, he could not escape tragedy in his life. In fact tragedy is the shadow of life human beings cannot totally escape from. It strikes us in one or the other form.

The book is strewn with descriptions of author's relatives. I wish author had included a family-tree for the readers' comfort. Zutshi's life is primarily geared to nurturing his family, from where he gets his solace and substance of life. Without his family he might as well have been dead. But it is his greatness that he has expanded his human radius to community service. He has been the founder of many community organizations and member of governmental boards. He is a larger-than-life personality.

The book is an honest and honorable narrative of the author's love for his family, especially the son who is no more. A tribute to a life extinguished in its primacy, a

noble effort to bereave him.

The title of the book, *The Last Smile*, comes from the last smile that Amit had on his face before he lapsed into unconsciousness, when he was taken by an ambulance from his home to the hospital, never to wake up again. Ever since this smile has been etched in Jeevan Zutshi's consciousness, not in a sorrowful way, but as a symbol of hope, defiance, and eternity that stimulate human life. In the ultimate analysis every man's life is a mystery. Mystery in the sense that what drives a man's soul.

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