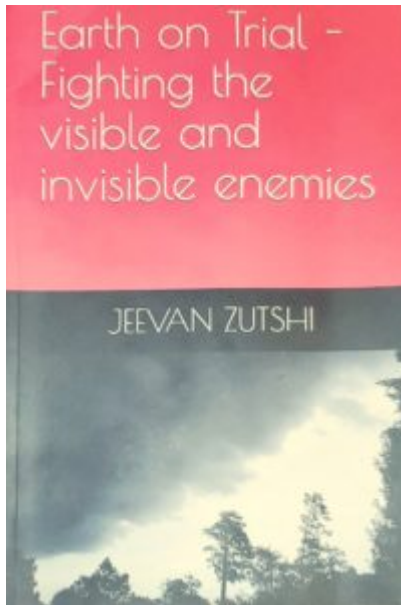


# Book Review : Earth on Trial - Fighting the Visible and Invisible Enemies By Jeevan Zutshi



Even as Covid -19 has squelched humanity's pride in itself to almost naught, but it has not numbed the titanic strength of its questioning mind. In the human evolution the birth of intellectualism, which I consider to have been its last mental creation, has been an awesome pillar of strength to it. Even when physically crippled, intellect can give man enormous rustication to bring him back to his feet. It is this power which is at work in the writing of this book.

The first thing that intrigues the reader of this book is its title: Earth on Trial - Fighting the Visible and Invisible Enemies. Which are the enemies of the earth, and furthermore, which are visible and which are invisible? The book having been written during the pandemic, one would think, going over its contents, that the chapters Covid - 19: Earth on Trial, Black Lives Matter, and The Broken System and the Dietary Supplements are the visible enemies. But which are the invisible enemies? Are the problems described in the chapters: My Ancestral Land, The Last Smile, and South Asia Comes to America visible or invisible? Only the books

author can illuminate us on that.

The most interesting thing about this book is that the author throws to wind the book's title when in Prologue he writes, "This book is a humble attempt to gather information, and write a chronology of my life during this pandemic, to tell our story, which is intertwined with world history." *Our story* means author and his family's story. That explains why the book has the chapters My Ancestral Land and South Asia Comes to America and bears pictures of him and his family.

Such a book as this is very difficult to write as you have to be able to connect the impersonal with the personal. The author has taken this awesome challenge and let us see if he has met it or not.

The book starts with Covi-19: Earth on Trial. The author has described in reasonably good detail the emergence of the pandemic and specifically how it has impacted U.S. He has described Trump's deliberate hands-off approach, and at times going against science, to the solution of the problem because of the higher priority he attached to get himself reelected. The author also dwells on how life in U.S. will follow after the pandemic. Overall, it is a good informative chapter on the catastrophe that has ravaged the world, whose impact will shadow it for decades, and make some significant medical, business, social, and human life-style changes in its wake.

The second chapter, Black Lives Matter, is the most successful chapter of the book. It gives concisely, though significantly, the history of the 400-year-old racism between the whites and the blacks in U.S. It introduces the significant black leaders that changed the degree of the racism over the long haul of time. One would have thought that the American Civil War (1861 - 65) would have ended it once for all. But it didn't, showing us that certain human group differences overwhelm quite a large number of us, in spite of our developed humanity and intellectualism.

The chapter on the multi-billion-dollar U.S. dietary supplements industry and the shocking lack of any governmental controls on it is well researched. It lays bare the damage the dietary supplements do every year to the millions of unsuspecting youths who are their biggest and the most ardent consumers. Most of the supplements' claims are not verified by its manufacturers and have most of the times not been experienced by its consumers. Sometimes they have even caused a lot of harm to them, including death. It is well worth reading.

Jeevan Zutshi is a passionate social activist who has embarked upon bringing together diverse immigrant communities and locals in California. He has the ability to convert his personal ambitions to social good of the people he lives with.

The book gives us an impetus to think about humanity and its delicate future at this time of a devastating pandemic. Also, as human civilization as we know it now is still a young phenomenon, about 70,000 years old, since Homo Sapiens gained the powers of cognition due to chemical changes in their brains.

Maharaj Kaul

Suffern, New York, Feb. 14, 2021

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# Book Review : Days of Destiny by S.S. Ambardar - Maharaj Kaul

This is an epic autobiography written in extraordinary detail, with a deep undercurrent of nostalgic pained emotion, in exquisite English. Starting from author's deep past, from the early childhood, to his near end, it contains a panoramic as well as a detailed sweep of his existence. The author's soul is present behind every word he has written.

After reading the 565-page book, one is choked by the inquiry, which has been incrementally rising during the reading, who is Mr. Shanti Swarup Ambardar. One is smitten by his intensity, depth of inquiry, and faith in human goodness. There is only once when he tried to depart from the accepted life of a Kashmiri Pandit, when he wanted to renounce the world and become a *sanyasi*. Otherwise, he stood ramrod-straight on the path of his life. His love for human beings, especially for his relatives, was intense. This included his Muslim friends. We can summarize his stellar qualities by saying that he was a man of deep faith, which was of higher value to him than even his strong intelligence.

Shanti Ambardar describes in excruciating detail the personalities and events from his mega-family. There was a lot of love present in families those days, which found an easy outlet during the celebration of religious and social events. There were uncles and aunts, and cousins and other relatives, besides your parents, who created a stratosphere around you of love and family bond, welded with family folklore and mythology. The economic poverty of Kashmiri Pandits often remained buried under these securities, not getting a chance to raise its head often. This architecture formed a permanent ornament and security over the author's life.

The book's title, Days of Destiny - A Memoir, is apt as it is essentially an autobiography. But it strongly connects with the prevailing Kashmiri Pandit culture and philosophy, and Kashmir Problem. The author was born in Kashmir in

a middle-class orthodox Pandit family and studied up to M.Sc. in chemistry. The timing of his birth was critical as it was just seventeen years before the birth of independent India in 1947, which led to the birth of Kashmir Problem the same year. So, from the impressionable age of seventeen through his demise in 2016, he lived in its severe clutches. The book clearly shows that if Kashmir Problem had not existed, the author and his wife would have lived a serene life in Kashmir till the end.

After his college finished in 1952, the author picked a job with Intelligence Bureau of Indian Government in 1953. Not being happy with it, he made a bold but consequential step in moving to teaching in 1956. Starting with St. Joseph's College in Baramulla, Kashmir, and ending up in Sri Partap College, in Srinagar, Kashmir, in 1986. The teaching profession gave him quite a good perch to be connected with the culture, politics, personalities, and places of Kashmir and the world. The book is a mosaic of the day-to-day life he lived with his family and friends, with the surrounding realities of living as a member of a minority community, Pandits, with the majority community of Muslims, evolving Kashmir Problem, and the emerging India after its independence.

There are no grand events or stark revelations in the book, but only the trajectory of three generations of a common family in Kashmir from 1930's through 1980's. But it is the way the narrative has been written that makes it so compelling to read. The author has woven his tale in one-day-at-a-time fashion, focusing on the circumstances and emotions present within the milieu and culture of the times. The language he has used is spartan and serene, in fine and elegant sentences. He is never excited, angry, or philosophical: just a cameraman and a commentator on the scene. So, the book is a cool narrative on the life of a sensitive, thoughtful, and good family; who, unfortunately, suffered a lot in its last phase due to the evil designs of Kashmir Problem.

Ambardars had a serene, secure, and a mentally rich life in Kashmir, which tragically was shattered by the politics of the place they lived in. Kashmir Problem was much larger than any single common family's life. Starting in 1947 as a

political situation about which newly formed dominion the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir should belong to, India or Pakistan, it mushroomed into an epic war between the original inhabitants of Kashmir Valley: the Kashmiri Pandits, who trace their roots in it to 5,200 years, and Kashmiri Muslims, who trace it to 550 years. At the exit of Britain from Indian subcontinent in 1947, the areas directly under their control, called Provinces, and the 565 areas indirectly under them called Princely States, had to be divided into two new dominions of India and Pakistan. There was no third choice. While the division of the provinces and the 562 princely states was cut and dry, the choices of the three princely states: Junagarh, Hyderabad, and Jammu and Kashmir, became problematic. The affiliation of the first two was resolved by 1948, but that of the third one, Jammu and Kashmir, continues to remain unresolved in the eyes of Kashmiri Muslims, even after seventy-three years. Pakistan claims Kashmir Valley because of the Muslim affiliation of the majority of its residents, while India claims it because its prince in 1947, Maharaja Hari Singh, opted freely to join India under the treaty called Instrument of Accession, which was the criterion used for all the 565 Princely States to join either country.

While Kashmir Valley, a part of Jammu and Kashmir State, is legally securely a part of India, it was the mercurialness of its legendary Muslim leader, Sheikh Abdullah, and the machinations of Pakistan to absorb it on the basis of its Islamic majority, that has kept Kashmir Problem alive so long. India and Pakistan have fought three wars over Kashmir Valley, but the one in 1989 was the most damaging and dramatic. One of the upshots of it was that Kashmiri Pandits were forced to leave the Valley. Out of their original population of 400,000 there, only 8,000 remain. Kashmir Valley has been more than a motherland for Pandits, it has been a part of their religion. It is this loss of sacredness of the place that has riven irreparable holes in Pandits' psyche and soul. There have been other people in history that have been forced to leave their motherlands, but driven by human instinct to survive they have moved on. But Kashmiri Pandits cannot accept the loss of their sacred land, the birthplace of their gods.

Ambardars' forced expulsion from their sacred land is the tragic undercurrent of the story of their lives narrated in this book. Without the presence of Kashmir

Problem, their lives would have ended serenely. So is the case with almost all other Pandits who were compelled to leave the Valley. This book is studded with a detailed, incisive, narrative on Kashmir Problem as it evolved from its inception in 1947. The account of Pakistan's attack on Kashmir in October, 1947, popularly called Qabailis attack, based on the author's conversations with the people who witnessed it, and other sources, is excellent. It describes the painful details of the attackers' inhumanity and the valor of Indian army to repel them back. Incidentally, the author's nephew, whom he raised as a son, fought in one of these wars. Only an intelligent and honest Kashmiri living in Kashmir could have produced such a comprehensive narrative of a demonically complex problem such as Kashmir Problem.

Kashmiri Pandits must read this book as it reflects on their or their relatives' lives before and after their tragic forced diaspora from Kashmir. It will make them re-absorb the veil of the rich cultural tapestry they lived under, their serene and nuanced existence in the land of their forefathers and gods. Others should read it to understand why Kashmiri Pandits are so pained to leave their motherland, when other people in history who were also forced to undergo that have borne it relatively calmly. The book's 565 pages may daunt some, but they should then think of it to be two books on Kashmiri Pandits' culture and ethos. The fateful tragedy of Kashmiri Pandits as narrated in this book moves you deeply.

Suffern, New York, March 7, 2020

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# **Book Review : The Circle of Memory - An Autobiography By Dr. Subhash Kak (Rev)**

How should one review this book whose author calls it an autobiography but which actually is a chronicle of his ideas on his innate spirituality seeking support of science?

Spiritualists are people who believe that human mind was created by God. They see two kinds of entities in the universe: human mind and physical matter. In fact, getting indirect help from Quantum Mechanics, even the physical matter is a creation of the former.

Marshaling a lot of help from modern physics and the ancient Indian sacred texts, Vedas, Dr.Subhash Kak puts a pitched defense of spirituality. But spirituality and science cannot share the same room. The author believes man and universe are one and the same thing. But his defense of that thesis is weak.



Dr. Kak's big moment with his spirituality came when in 1992 he discovered that in Rgvedic times some rituals and temple architectures used forms and designs based on the facts of astronomical knowledge. It meant for the author the union of man on earth with the Gods in the universe. From that moment onward he has been very relentlessly searching for similar connections in human history.

Human consciousness is a local enterprise inside human brain, though it suggests a cosmic self. That is all the spirituality man is born with. Beyond that it is up to the man possessing that to expand it into something material. There have been people who have developed their intrinsic spirituality into "cosmic" spirituality. But they are small in number.

What the author strongly misses is that consciousness is strongly dependent on ideas. If you compare the ideas of primitive man and modern man you find a huge gap. In almost every area the ideas have changed: child rearing, society, relaxation, sex, etc. Ideas are based on experience and their interpretation by the logical mind. The ideas about these subjects a hundred years ago were different than what they are now. Ideas about self have also changed. Modern man believes that a lot of his life is dependent on how he thinks about it, rather than on the concept of destiny that a man of earlier times thought.

To search for the roots of human consciousness in religious ideas and in ideas emanating from Quantum Mechanics is not a helpful thing to do, as human consciousness has been around some 70,000 years when homo sapiens experienced a significant growth in their cognition and it has developed on. When one is old enough to be meaningfully self-aware, one sees some vague connection to some unknown entity. This is consciousness in its basic manifestation. Many children do not even notice it. To this primitive self-consciousness, as the child grows, he may or may not relate his new significant experiences, depending on his emotional needs and the environment he lives in. Most of the human beings grow up to be religious, at varying levels. But they do not necessarily have a

cosmic consciousness the author is after. In fact, a very small number of people achieve that. So, it is the ideas of freedom, love of humanity, and creativeness, etc. that enrich human mind, which has been known from the ancient times. Inner security and happiness can be achieved by mastering the ideas associated with living. Search for the knowledge of consciousness beyond what we already know about it is unnecessary.

Dr. Kak is more well known for his exposition of Hinduism in the most favorable light than for his achievements in his profession of computer science, which I am sure are excellent. At the time of Vedas the scientific knowledge was on idea basis only. That is, there was no testing and there was no such thing as scientific methodology. In today's science a theory has to be rigorously tested, it can not contradict established theories, it has to make predictions that have to come out true, and finally it has to stand the test of time. He extols ancient Indian science and mathematics to such an extent that Indians in India feel guilty of neglecting to have done so themselves. It may be that it was for this reason that the Indian government made him a member of a high-level science panel. The author believes in the Vedic concept of *akasa*, an ether like entity, from which other elements are believed to have been created.

I am amazed why the author chose to be a scientist instead of being a Hinduism scholar. A couple of years ago I asked him why would a profound and intense spiritualist like him live in the bastion of world materialism, U.S.A. He said to the effect that the circumstances of his life had to be blamed for that.

The autobiography lacks the revelation of the process through which the author became a spiritualist. He never talks about his inspirations, dejections, loves, and failures. In that sense the book is incomplete. We very much learn the heavy armor of intellectuality he lives under. But the danger to an intellectual lies in the cocoon he may build around himself, thereby denying himself the natural flow of life. He says in the book that there has been no watershed experience in his life that turned his life around. Also, he says "...but for those who have traveled beyond unquestioned belief, the past is less than living history." Unfortunately,

that is how an intellectual may destroy the rich fabric of the experiences of his life.

The book delineates the prodigious intellectual labors the author has expended in support of his spirituality. The book could have had a smoother chronological flow than it has. Contextually dissimilar sections of the book have been grafted together at times which impede its overall flow of the narrative.

The book is a summing up of a life of purposefulness and achievements of a man of high scholarship and high intensity. This autobiography, though incomplete, is an excellent outline of it.

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# **Book Review -The Final Frontier : Dialogues Between Mother and Son by K.L. Chowdhury**

The Final Frontier-Book Review

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# **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.

Suffern, New York, May 4, 2017

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## **Book Review : The Last Queen of Kashmir (Rev.)**

Whether to review the book, The Last Queen of Kashmir, by Rakesh K. Kaul, or not, that is the question? Reviewing it would have been a natural exercise for me, but the difficulties the book presents in its substance, scope, and style are strong, though not insurmountable, that one wonders whether it is worth the effort it would entail.

The book is about Kotarani, a 14<sup>th</sup> century queen of Kashmir, who lived in turbulent times, when Hindu Kashmir turned to Islamic Kashmir. The history of that time is thin and shallow and to recreate comprehensively the life and times of

the queen is impossible. The book in question is not a history but a novel about the legendary queen. Therein lies one of the significant problems of the book.

Historical novel is a well-established genre of literature. When history is hard to find novelizing it is not that outlandish. But the writer has to be honest in presenting his story. Nowhere in this book is stated that it is a historical novel, although the notification on copyright page says:

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, ....

But author should have talked about the genre of the book in the book's foreword and the methodology he has used.

Only outlines of Kotarani's life and times are known to history. We do not know how she died: whether by suicide or murder by Shah Mir, the founder of the Muslim era in Kashmir, which has spanned 549 years and continues.

The central theme of the book is the presentation of Kotarani as a very brave, intelligent politician, and the compassionate and loving leader of her Kashmiri people, who valiantly fought for them time and again, risking her life, and finally sacrificed it to save them. She is shown as a crafty leader of courage, a risk-taker, wise, warm, and fervently religious. Now, such a clear picture of her personality and life is not afforded by history, but the book embellishes whatever is known into an epic. Kotarani's admitted weapon of using her sexuality to trap political opponents is not something to rejoice at, except that the author thinks it is part of the Shakti phenomenon of Shaivism. The author claims her to have been perhaps the greatest queen in the history of the world. But such an adulation of the Kotarani is crass addiction, a slap to reason and reality.



Kotarani did many mistakes. She did not have to marry the fleeing Tibetan prince, Rinchana, in order to stabilize Kashmir from a convulsion when the latter murdered her father, commander-in-chief and acting-king, Ramachandra. Rinchana knew that he would not be acceptable to Kashmiris, not only because he was an outsider but also because of his heinous crime. Rinchana by his own admission told Kotarani that without her help he would have returned to Tibet. But Kotarani was so keen to establish her own power quickly that she married in haste the murderer of her father. And this turned the history of Kashmir in such a turbulence that it is still not able to shake it off. History tells us that Rinchana wanted to convert to Hinduism from his Buddhism on account of his acute political sense that he must have a religion that he can share with his subjects, but the Hindu religious establishment would not let him do that. But the book softens the blow on the latter by suggesting that it was willing to convert him but without abridging the full initiation process, which Rinchana considered too slow for his personality and political needs. So, after being told that a fast version of conversion was not possible, he decided to change to the religion of the first man he would see the next day. And it happened that the first man he saw was none other than Bulbul Shah, a popular religious leader, who was a Muslim. It is incredulous. Whatever happened to Kotarani's commitment to her people? How could she have not prevailed on Deivaswami, kingdom's chief priest, to administer a fast version of conversion to Hinduism to Rinchana. But, perhaps, she did not care. If Rinchana had not converted to Islam the history of Kashmir would have been very different.

When Rinchana died in 1323, he willed Shah Mir to be the care-taker of his and Kotarani's son, Haider, which was another big step towards the Islamization of Kashmir. After marrying Udayandeva, she and the new emperor could have taken Haider back to his mother. Shah Mir did neither have the public support nor the military power to overcome their action. But Kotarani thought that it was good politics not to disturb Kashmir's Muslim community, even though it was meager. Kotarani became the empress of Kashmir for only a few months after the death of Udayandeva, but the book creates an illusion that she was an empress for some eighteen years, discounting the fact it were her two husbands who were the emperors.

Keeping Shah Mir as kingdom's military chief and foreign minister was another foolish move on part of Kotarani. Some people have suggested that she did not want to take away Shah Mir's power because it might have made him to mistreat Haider. That would imply that she wanted to keep Haider with Shah Mir for good.

Her marriage to Udyandeva was wrong as he was not an executive type, therefore, unfit to be the emperor of Kashmir, especially in the politically turbulent times of the Islamic penetration in Kashmir. But she must have married him because of the expediency of elevating herself to emperorship, while her husband would remain an emperor only in name. The continued existence of Shah Mir at high-echelons of power throughout Udyandeva's tenure of fifteen years of emperorship was indefensible from any angle.

There is so much glossing of Kotarani's achievements in the book that one feels turned off by it. She is supposed to have all qualities a human being can possibly have. The book indicates that not only did she design the trap for the Tartar invader Achala to stop his invasion of Kashmir, but she also physically killed him. The history does not corroborate it. Also, the book indicated that rendezvous with Achala was planned at the site of Khirbhwani. But we know that was created toward the end of nineteenth century when the two persons in Tulamulla area had the vision of the presence of serpent goddess there. But may be the author is referring to another Khirbhavani which existed in the fourteenth century.

The book is one long oration on Kashmiri Pandit ethos – its sublimity, infinitude, and eternity. Every few pages we are deluged by not only its volume but also grilled by its sharpness and repetition. If it would have been a book on Pandit religious foundations and practices, both philosophically and historically, it might have been fine. But these high-level philosophical discourses choke the story of Kotarani. The author's obsessive penchant and protracted pride for Kashmiri ethos is well known. He believes that Kashmir Pandits' knowledge, vision, and practices make them among the greatest people that ever lived in human history.

In fact, the greatest, which his modesty precludes him to state. First of all most of the modern Kashmiri Pandits do not live according to Kashmiri Shaivism, the preeminent Kashmiri Pandit religious philosophy. Most of them do not even know what that expression means. It is not taught in schools or discussed at homes or in fast-food restaurants.

The Virasa rasa style of writing the author touts of having used in the book, and that too uniquely, as it has been used only in two other books in India, has not helped it much – in fact, it has taken away some of its naturalness. I do not know Virasa rasa and the author states that it cannot be described in words. But one does not have to judge an actor's work by knowing what style of acting he is using to act a certain role, one simply judges the acting he is performing. The style has fluidity and impetuosity, suddenness and fervor. But that is only good in action items but not suitable in philosophical descriptions, where control and slow-paced-ness helps. Many a description in the book has been marred by the fleeting and looping sentences, which are factitious and mocking. As the author says that the style is such that the writer is so bonded with the subject he is writing on that a mere mention of it makes his emotion rise. And that is why such writer-author relationship snips at objectivity. We have many examples of non-objectively written sentences in the book.

The book does not have the delicacy and rapture of a novel. A novel is an unfolding of a past dream in future. It is created on the principles of aesthetics in art, where the canvass in front of the writer is a beautiful blankness, which has the potential of infinite possibilities. On it he only writes what he must write and nothing more – not even a word more. So, minimalism is the essence of novel writing. But the author in this book is the very opposite – the maximalist. Because of the heavy adrenaline of philosophy, the personality of the novel chokes quite often. It is truer in dialogs, which are high-flown lectures.

The novel has many descriptions on sex – an authentic and indispensable part of human life. But it is one thing to write on sex as a subject but another to describe it in observations and thoughts. Even vulgarity is included in the book.

Brahama's encounter with yogini and Kotarani's first nights with husbands one and two are vividly described. But what is a clincher is Achala's sexual orgy with a woman in Shah Mir and Udyandeva's party, called washerwoman, brought in to seduce him. (Pages 268-270). It could rival pornography available on internet. I believe the author included them because he believes sex is a life-enhancer and not something to be inhibited about. Also, he wants his book to sell well.

The author has given reasons for the unforced conversions of Pandits to Islam, but it is more in an episodic manner rather than historical. He has done a lot of research in different arenas of life in fourteenth century, but I wish it was done in an historical framework, rather than in a literary framework.

The outside characters are well drawn but the main ones are stuffed. The most ersatz character is that of Kotarani, who is portrayed as the world's most perfect human being. If the author had attempted to show her as a human being, he would have created a more adorable personality. And because of it the readers are more skeptical of her legend of perfect purity and absolute infallibility.

I know it has taken the author ten years to write this book, a prodigious effort by any standards. But if instead of writing a historical novel he had gone for history only he would have produced a greater achievement. I know the history on Kotarani and her times is thin, but by the dint of arduous research he could have produced a body of historical speculations. So, history together with historical speculations would have created a book that would have been invaluable to both scholars and laymen.

What lessons does the book teach us on the current predicament of Kashmiri Pandits. Nothing, because they are under the same stupor as they were in the fourteenth century. They could not see the dangers they faced in living in a mental stratosphere detached from the practical life then as they do not now. They saw no problems in letting foreigners come into Kashmir and ignored

economics then, as they did not cultivate relationships with New Delhi after 1947 to protect themselves. They did not engage in practical professions of farming, tailoring, plumbing, etc. then as they do not now.

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# **Book Review of Holy Wedlock or Unholy Deadlock By J.L.Dhar**

A book is a solemn effort by its author to present its subject in full gamut and arrive at the judicious and full conclusions on the problems presented by it, if any.

Though Mr.J.L.Dhar's solemnity is beyond reproach, his presentation of the problems created by his subject elegant, but we are not wholly impressed by his judiciousness in drawing conclusions on it.

At heart, Mr. Dhar, is for marriage. He would like this shimmering ornament of past cultures of humanity to survive. He leaves no stone unturned to sing its

praises. In fact, he takes it for granted its loftiness, its providing the infrastructural tracks for the journey of man, and its irreplaceability. That is what is the singular shortcoming of the book.

Marriage is no longer among the golden branches of life that it once was. It is because the industrial revolution rendered it a difficult institution to follow. Modern man has to live on his individual economic legs, which necessitates almost forty percent of his daily time to be devoted to earning. Which leaves him physically exhausted and emotionally drained, leading him to become more selfish in certain ways than his ancestors. This impacts his marriage, as that requires love and faith.

So, the institution of marriage as we know it is on its way out. But it will survive in some other form, as sexual relationship between genders is a mighty force of life, and the drive to have offspring is stupendous.

Mr. Dhar's book is incomplete, as it does not give respect to the reality that while sexual and offspring relationships between men and women will continue, marriage as a personal and social fabric binding them will undergo a sea-change in the coming millennia. In one of my projections, it will take the form of a friendship between men and women, where the engendered children are taken care of by a commercial institution. So, basically, men and women will be living alone. But their friendship can take them to spend time together if they please. Everything will be done on a voluntary basis, without any legally enforced cohabitation. They will have equal rights over their children. While the latter will be basically raised by a commercial organization, but their parents can have them for some periods. In fact, at times, they can all live together, if they want. But fundamentally, they will live alone. Parents will be legally responsible for taking care of their children.

It is not a matter of whether such an arrangement is best for a child's growth. It

will be an evolutionary step in man woman relationship. Evolutions, whether physical, social, economical, or political are resultants of various forces acting on certain important survival

aspects of human beings. The children, without the traditional rearing by their parents, I am certain, will survive. Whether they will come out emotionally warped has to be seen. But they will still be fully functional. It does not matter to evolution if some human traits are lost, for it caters to the survival of the fittest.

Mr. Dhar's thesis is that if husbands can cater to their wives' needs of repeated assurance of their love for them, expressed verbally, through gifts, providing help in household chores, and giving them their "sovereignty," then marriages would hardly fail. In fact, they would be proverbially blissful. But he is naïve. The marriages are failing in modern times because the stress of economic and emotional survival is so great that in order to cope with it, common man has become much more selfish than his predecessors. And since love requires sacrifice and selflessness, which quite a significant number of the modern men and women are incapable of giving to their spouses, marriages are coming apart.

Nevertheless, the book will help some people, as it is rich in its human nature insights and required laundry-list for conjugal survival. But in principle it cannot stop the onslaught of the incoming tornado of emotional and economic survival of man unleashed by the industrial age.

In the preface to the book Mr. Dhar states that he is not for a full philosophical treatment of subjects, for they may be misleading. But without philosophy, which is intellectual processing, no complex matter can be dealt with.

The book has a strange presentation. On one hand it is an essay on marriage, on the other it wants to be a self-help tool on withering marriages. For the latter it

invents a novel inside the book. So, it wants readers to learn from the marital drama in the novel, which has a running commentary by the author, together with his general thoughts on marriage. I do not know if any other author has used this technique before. But, unfortunately, it is a failure. A book is not a party where anything goes to make people happy. The form is very important in a book. When you break it, you shatter the presentation of the subject of the book.

This is unfortunate because Mr. Dhar has worked very hard on the book. He is good writer. His flowing language, studded with rich vocabulary and logical presentation embellished with literary effects, would have been great tools for any work. Also, Mr. Dhar uses many mythological and religious stories and connections to make the book a rich palette.

But because he has chosen to present his subject in such a convoluted form, the essence of the book falls. The novel part of the book is often corny, even though he has a special talent for writing it. He can be irresistible in his descriptions of people, scenes, and human nature. He will be a very successful novelist if he chooses to be one. But so far in his literary career he has been consumed by spiritual problems.

The book is studded with quotations, the use of which the author justifies in the preface. Quotations can add luster and dimension to a book but you cannot use them in novels, as the author has used them in this book. A novel is a presentation of a story, in which its author cannot give a commentary about it. The novel and its author are not allowed to converse. Also, the quotations are written in boldface font, which is not in good taste. Nothing in the book text should be in boldface font unless it is highly warranted. Many chapter titles end up with an exclamation mark. Another thing good writers do not do. The title of the book, *Holy Wedlock Or Unholy Deadlock*, is too commercial and sleazy, especially with a figure of an opened lock, with an image of a heart in it. It is all a matter of taste. It is puzzling to figure out how a serious man like Mr. Dhār allowed it.



It is a fine book, which its author has taken a lot of pains to create. I have no doubt it will be helpful to many people who are living on the fringes of matrimonial existence. Congratulations to the author.

Suffern, New York, July 31, 2016

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# Book Review of Madhu Wangu's Novel : Immigrant Wife - Her spiritual Journey

A novel is a slice of life past unfolding as a vivid dream.

In Madhu Wangu's novel *Immigrant Wife: Her Spiritual Journey* the past unfolding is that of Shanti Bamzai, who was born and raised in Kashmir, India.

The novel is replete with fine word-mosaics of observations and events. Wangu is quite skilled at that. She uses her painter's skills of raw observation and rounding up of it. The narrative has good flow. Her use of stream-of-consciousness technique is good. The book, overall, is a stream of impressionistic observations, bereft of philosophical inquiries into the nature of reality. Observation is the first step of intellectuality, so every set of observations has to lead to a thought or an idea. She looks at human life as something that happens. She shows little concern for cultural, social, political influences over the development of human personality. She is an existentialist. Her sense of novel's timeline is good. Her characterizations of Shanti's original family members are good, but when it comes to her own family she falters.

The novel's axis lies in the story of Shanti Bamzai. Shanti has a profound urge to draw and paint from her childhood. But because the pursuit of that could take her to socially sensitive situations at her time, her father puts his heavy foot against it. But Shanti defies him ruthlessly and moves forward to join an art school, at the cost of permanently damaging her relationship with him. The novel is set to depict how Shanti progresses in her life in art, or as it turns out later in her life, how she

struggles painfully without it.

Madhu Wangu has skillfully narrated Shanti's story but it is not always credible. It is incredible that how Shanti, who is driven by a demonic passion for drawing and painting, for all practical purposes, accepts with *fait accompli* her husband's fierce opposition to it. Shanti defies her father's opposition to it but cowers under her husband's evil scheme against it. This manipulation of Shanti's personality is the greatest flaw of the novel. Shanti picked up her future husband without checking out if he was going to support her immense passion for her art. That is Wangu's major blunder.

As Shanti progresses in her life, without the proper pursuit of her passion, she dwarfs to a mere housewife. From fine arts she goes to culinary arts. According to the author of the novel she is busy pursuing her spiritual journey. The finale of which is the forgiveness of her villainous husband, Satyavan. This tame ending of Shanti's passion for life is dismaying and disturbing. So, Shanti's epic passion for art morphs into pursuit of incipient spirituality. This is ersatz.

Shanti's husband, Satyavan's, character is the most flawed in the book. His talk, behavior, motivations, are artificial. His background of having been picked up from a trash can and latter abandoned by his adopted mother is highly contrived. He has been synthetically created. His nightmare when Shanti leaves him to go for an extended teaching-voyage is highly artificial.

The length of the book, 523 pages, dries out some of its quality. Wangu could have created the same quality of art in 350 pages, with greater comfort for the reader. Shanti's teaching-voyage covers too many pages. More like a travelogue than a spiritual journey that it is intended to be.

The title of the book is a misnomer. There is nothing of substance depicted in the

book that is connected to an immigrant's life. The subtitle *Her Spiritual Journey* is not accurate, as Shanti's spiritual yearnings are introduced late in the book, and not in a solid way.

Suffern, New York, May 22, 2016

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## **Foreword To Jeevan Zutshi's Book "The Last Smile"**

When a young human life perishes, no matter what the cause is, the whole glory of human life seems to crumble down precipitously and we die with it for sometime. The grandeur of human life is supported both by the marvel that nature makes of us as well as by the imagination that human mind imparts on it. Every human life is a scintillating possibility, a grand unwritten as yet promise. Amit Zutshi's life and death are the stuff of human drama, philosophy, and religion.

Jeevan Zutshi, the father of Amit, and author of *The Last smile*, has written the book in a cathartic experience, to lighten his and his family's infinite pain. This is the story of inspiration and perspiration of a family to build a better life for themselves. It is the story of their severe loss and their overcoming of it. Jeevan writes as a highly tormented parent wanting to know if he could have done things differently than they were to save Amit's life. He delineates the book with scientific objectivity to probe the causes of Amit's demise, but without anger on the culture and the institutions which might have contributed to it.

The book should possibly help other parents to avert the tragedy that fell Zutshis. The title of the book, *The Last Smile*, comes from the last smile Amit had on his face just moments after he dissolved into the eternity. It is that which sustains Jeevan now and he hopes it will last for his lifetime. It is that he wants to spread on to others now through this book and other works he has embarked on.

Jeevan came to United States in 1972 to realize a dream for his family and himself. Most of the human dreams are alike: to pursue one's ambitions, to love and be loved, to live peacefully, to be materially comfortable and be able to help the disadvantaged. America is the hottest crucible of human dreams. It has freedom to live how one wishes to and vast resources to support that. Immigrants often come loaded with a dream but they have to work harder than the natives and often at lesser wages. They work within glass ceilings and through layers of host countries prejudices. Also, there is a struggle of adjustment to the new culture. Immense effort to melt with America is in the end uplifting but not without excruciating heartbreaks.

Jeevan and his wife went through the full spectrum of immigrant's duel with destiny. Being an ambitious, hardworking, and an intelligent person, Jeevan created a good professional career, economic security, and raised two kids. Coming from the throes of his motherland Kashmir's tragedy, his realizing the American dream was the culmination of an arduous marathon run. The tragedy of

Amit's loss is the more devastating because it came not too long after all the sacrifices Zutshi's made to build a happy life for their family. Some times we wonder how God's mind works.

Amit passed away in 1908, at the age of 31. The cause of his death was given by the hospital he was in at that time to be cardiomyopathy, which in simple words is heart failure. It is surmised that his long use of health nutritional supplements robbed his heart muscle of the necessary amounts of sodium. His father twice intervened, when observing Amit's enfeebled physical state, getting him checked by a physician and a psychologist. Both professionals saw no sign of significant health problems, and in general they saw him on the right road. Further inquiries by Jeevan to the medical personnel were thwarted by them on the grounds of Amit's privacy. Frustrated and agonized he, his wife, and the second son waited in silent agony till the curtain unexpectedly fell on their beloved Amit.

Nutritional supplements are an unregulated health support industry. Their claims are unsubstantiated and their products' use is not much known by the medical doctors. Many people have lost their lives using these products. They appeal to people who have little confidence in the organized medical world by virtue of their ignorance or fantasies. Why does the U.S. Government allow them to run unregulated? Jeevan raises this very significant question facing Americans at this time in the book and tries to answer it?

Amit was a very thoughtful and down to earth person. He achieved scholastic goals very well and earned the trust and admiration of his schoolmates, friends, and relatives. He was clear-eyed, stable, highly ambitious, and confident. But he lived in the modern industrial culture which pushes us to loneliness. Caught in the vise of the centrifugal forces of loneliness, one weaves dreams of valor, victory, and perfection. The young people of today look for the perfection of mind and the perfection of body Narcissistic culture reigns supreme. Physical fitness has become an obsession with many a youth, a modern nirvana worth sacrificing conventional securities of life for. Nutritional supplements are heavily advertised as the elixirs for the perfect body. Amit fell prey to this fantasy even with his

balanced disposition. In spite of his father's and brother's reservations about his supplement intakes he firmly stood his ground. His very goal oriented approach to life and ambitious persistence, which brought him success in other endeavors of life, took him to his ultimate ruin. Here was a tragedy of mythic proportions. A gifted man designed for success failed tragically as he was seeking success in a good goal but with wrong means.

But let us not think Amit's life and death were in vain. In his short stay on earth he conducted himself with dignity and tenacity and gave his care, friendship, and love to most of the people he came in contact with. In a brief time he lit a flame that shone high, broad, and bright. One failure in his life, howsoever big it was, can not rob it of his brilliant spirit. He will remain alive in Zutshi clan, he will reverberate in his friends' hearts, he will remain an incandescent idea in the minds of the people who came to know him after his exit. From Amit's ashes Jeevan and his family resurrected a glow and a reverence for life mightier than his death, showing all of us, who know them, that here on earth God can make some things immortal.

Maharaj Kaul  
Suffern, New York  
7.16.09

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# **Foreword To Dheenadayalan Subramanian's Book Inner And Outer**

Inner and Outer

Dheena Subramanian has ambitiously endeavored to fuse the inner and the outer realities of mind in his poetry book, "Inner And Outer." The poet states, " This collection of poems is the outcome of an inner journey trying to explore mysteries of mind and secrets of cosmos." Philosophical in its approach the book find man's mind as mysterious and grand as the universe outside it. The poet finds beauties in those mysteries and that may be the salvation for man for all the pain life causes him. The book also has poems on other aspects of life: living, poetry, earth, and other. Most of the poems are easy to understand. They are generally short, which are interspersed with the longer ones. There seems to be no particular order which organizes the poems.

The poet right in the beginning says that words are divine. Very well said, as the words for a poet are like the colors for a painter, meaningful to him both intellectually and emotionally like in no other form of writing. In the poem, Well Said, the poet describes the voraciousness of human mind:

When stomach is full,  
It keeps mum.  
But the mind,  
More you feed,  
More it asks.

In the poem, Disappointment, he writes about how a person may fail to remember even his best friend, pushing him to even more loneliness than before. Human desperation and fragility is stated in this line from the poem, Distance: "I long for a hand-cup of water." Man's propensity to destroy is depicted in the following line from the poem, Fusion, Fissure Of Life And Death: But, man fissures and fuses atoms to annihilate one and all. Attempt at demystifying life is made in the poem, Prayer:



What, after all, I am?  
Effect of past and  
Cause of future!

Another unveiling of life in the poem, Rehearsal: You are a casual byproduct of the entire cosmic dynamics. The value of a song to a human being is very well stated in the poem, Singing Truth:

Sing I must,  
In song alone  
Truth appears made,  
Beautiful, simple and free!

Poetic state of mind is described in the poem, Strange:

I do not remember it,  
Its memory is faint, delicate and feeble,  
Like a shifting boundary line between dream and reality.  
Sometimes dreams appear to be real,  
Yet, other times, reality fades out for dream.  
Time's changeling!

The mystery of nature is uncovered in the poem ,The Deep:  
So many waves  
And so much noise  
Still, so big a sea in calm and cool!

The mystery of human life is described in the poem, Transcendence:  
Continuity, mystery and eternity

Weave web of times,  
Birth, life, and death!

Plumbing the mysterious universe of human unconsciousness in the poem,  
Unconscious:

It seems to be dark nothingness  
That forms the core from a single atom to grand universe  
From simple organism to complex man,  
Like the vacuous centre of a storm.

The poet has beautifully written about the birth of a poem in the poem, Poetry:  
It comes only  
When you are no more!  
Excepting your heart's beat  
And lungs breathe!

When your eyes see nothingness,  
And you mind hears silence,  
It comes,  
Of its own!

Reflecting on the effect of time on life and agonizing over the future of mankind in  
the poem, When?:  
What is the direction?  
Where is the promised land?  
Who'll be the messiah?  
When'll be the end of journey or me?

In the last poem, Light, the poet describes the mystery, beauty, and power of  
light: Quiet flows that Light in ever creative harmony!

Mr. Dheena Subramanian has assembled a variety of elegant poems, suffused with universal emotions, which touch the heart and make the mind think, and which has been appropriately titled, Inner and Outer. The gamut of intellectualization and poetic emotion has been generously used. The subject is difficult and it lends to reason that a clearer elucidation of the ideas could be made but poetry must have its music and emotion, which may interfere with that.

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