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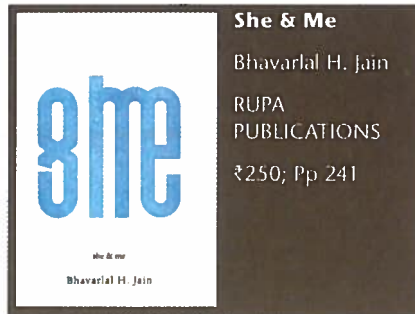
TECH MAHINDRA

Joining the Big League

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From lemon to lemonade

An account of a man, not a business magnate, about life with his soul mate, not just wife



There is a saying that one cannot judge a book by its cover. But, in this case, it is just the opposite. Readers who are familiar with the author's earlier book (*The Enlightened Entrepreneur*) would agree. This book, by Bhavarlal H. Jain (founder, Jain Irrigation Ltd), is a journey of togetherness – the saga of the author's days spent with his now deceased wife Kantabai. But it is not simply a love story. Rather, it elevates itself to give a higher disposition on the importance of joint families and thoughtful and considerate life partners. In the process, the book keeps meandering between 'then' and 'now'. It is hardly surprising that, in its original Marathi avatar, it was a bestseller!

The book is a searching account of Jain's passion and compassion for Kantabai. A wife, daughter-in-law and mother, Kantabai lived a tough life, balancing the needs of a large family with the ambition of a husband who rose from a small-time kerosene oil trader to be the head of one of India's largest business conglomerates. Kantabai's contribution is felt everywhere. Jain's portrayal of her as an ideal partner, a soul mate and not just wife, is not forcefully presented before the readers. It radiates through his outspoken views, which take potshots at issues like dowry, involving his own family.

Typical of Jain, the book casts several 'pearls' of wisdom, which hopefully will not fade away with changing

times. For example, his views on the sanctity of a joint family vis-à-vis the hypocrisy of a nuclear family, have a lot of substance even today. In a joint family, he says, all tangible and intangible resources are shared equitably. Even the emotional and economic issues of a family are shared, giving less stress to one individual. He narrates how his mother, who lived mostly in hardship, selflessly passed on a gift of ₹100 (which she received in the early 1960s from her uncle) to her son to buy a new fan for her daughter-in-law and infant grandson. Similarly, when Kantabai was expecting her first baby, Jain and his brother often chose to cook at home. In a nuclear family, in the pursuit of economic and individual advancement, such adjustments do not take place and an individual member often is left fragmented.

Kantabai had felt that education transformed housewives into homemakers, equipped as they were with better insight and training. Another enlightening view expressed by her was that, 'looking after the elders in the family is gratitude, not servitude'. Such sagacity in today's context might be viewed with scepticism or sheer denouncement, but the fact

that the book, in its original Marathi version, was a bestseller clearly implies that the values expressed therein had found a significant number of buyers. Herein rests the hope that good taste and *sanskaar* still prevail in our community. Certain traits are inherent in a culture like ours, such as the word '*sanskaar*', which does not have an English equivalent.

It is difficult to write a book which engagingly talks of one's values and culture without being preachy. That it is anecdotal helps but there is something more in it too, which prompts the words of wisdom to effortlessly float across to its readers. Jain had said in his earlier book: 'how to count is as important as what is counted'. Here, he gives fresh food for thought on that evergreen concept of relationship: Any great relationship, including marriage, is about two main things: first, to discover the similarities; and second, to respect the differences. In that sense, a married life is a journey of thoughts, ideas and adjustments, as much as it is a journey in time. How come we never thought of relationship in this manner? It is as if we have heard it all before, but never listened to it till now. It is as if such a world exists but, in the superficial atmosphere we inhabit, we obviously never fathom its depth or dimensions.

There are very few books that truly stand the test of time. This is one among them. ♦

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Kantabai was Jain's soul mate not just wife