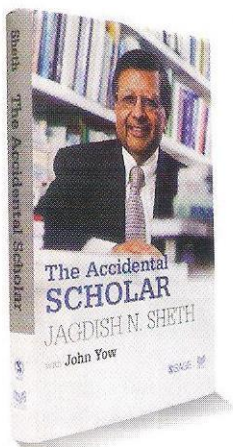


Such a Long Journey

Sheth's book is a candid account of his life from a studious Marwari child to an authority on consumer behaviour and marketing



The Accidental Scholar

By Jagdish N. Sheth
with John Yow

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In my view, autobiographies are generally boring. So I try not to read them unless they are of personalities like Mahatma Gandhi or Nelson Mandela or some such awesome person. But Jagdish is an old friend. So out of curiosity I decided to read *The Accidental Scholar*. The book traces the journey of Jagdish Sheth, one of the world's leading authorities on consumer behaviour and marketing.

It records incidents from his childhood in Chennai in a rather large Marwari family. Through a series of decisions that were made for him, he was able to complete his schooling, pursue his college education and move to the US for his Masters and Ph.D. The rest, as they say, is history. That should put the book's title in the right perspective.

Many things work in favour of the book. For starters, the prose is very tight. The narrative is lucid, clear and hearty so that you don't get bored with reading the chronology of events as they unfold. Secondly, Jagdish has recorded the personal milestones alongside the professional ones. Some of these personal anecdotes are quite hilarious and admittedly make for lighter reading in the middle of serious academic content, thereby retaining the reader's interest.

The third plus in Jagdish's favour is the 'lessons learnt' portion at the end of each chapter, which succinctly captures the essence of each chapter and creates a practical 'take-away' for the reader. The fourth point that I especially enjoyed is the candidness with which the book has been written. Jagdish has not only showered praise and admiration on many but also recorded with unbridled dislike, the things and people that bothered him.

The book chronicles very effectively not just the life of Jagdish Sheth, but also the environment that he was part

of. The reader gets glimpses of pre-Independence Chennai, USA of the 60s and 70s, the socialist movement in Kolkata in the late 60s, the student uprisings in the US against the Vietnam war, the research and development-oriented academic atmosphere in the US, the cultural upheavals in both countries and the impact of the Internet.

Jagdish has given the reader a picture of the shift in the life and living habits of people from the late 60s to the present in India and in the US. In fact, as a person who also lived the American dream (I did pretty much the same things that he did although I planned to be a scholar and my area was accounting), the book resonates with 'me' since I am able to also understand and appreciate the years of hard work and the euphoric sense of achievement. The US is by no means an easy place, but it is a place where hard work is rewarded, skill and talent appreciated and opportunities commensurate with merit do literally knock on your door. Success is directly proportional to effort and there are no hidden variables in that equation. That is perhaps the lure of the land even today. This aspect has been beautifully captured by Jagdish in his book.

In conclusion, the book is a decent read. It does not bore you with technical details that one would normally associate with an autobiography. It summarises the extraordinary journey of an ordinary man who may have perhaps been manufacturing and selling jewel boxes in Chennai's Sowcarpet, had fate (and his brother) not intervened! ♦

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