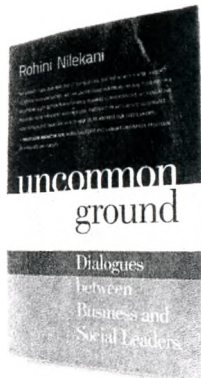


Bookmark



Negotiating Social Harmony

by sangeeth varghese

**UNCOMMON GROUND DIALOGUES
WITH BUSINESS AND SOCIAL LEADERS**
BY ROHINI NILEKANI;
PENGUIN BOOKS INDIA;
PAGES: 288; PRICE: Rs 499

Nilekani's collection brings together industry titans and civil society leaders to explore eight themes that define social inclusion and are probably the pillars of our future development. Based on Nilekani's 2008 show on *NDTV*, the conversations explore the middle ground between the ideological divisions that often polarise the business and voluntary sectors.

Nilekani brings together the best in the fields — for each topic that is being discussed. Best not only in terms of thought leadership, but also in terms of practice. So, we have a taste of telecom mogul Sunil Bharti Mittal discussing with Magsaysay Award winner social activist Aruna Roy about livelihoods and job creation, while ITC chairman Y.C. Deveshwar discusses business and environmental sustainability with environmentalist Sunita Narain. My favourite is the discussion between RIL chief Mukesh Ambani and R.K. Pachauri on energy.

The author, uniquely placed to moderate these discussions, demonstrates that the relationship between business, society and state need not be necessarily confrontational. In all areas — especially food, energy and the environment, jobs and livelihood, transportation and mobility, poverty and financial inclusion, natural resources and economic sustainability, land use and displacement — non-governmental organisations and businesses can play an enabling role together with the government. Which is the crux of the book.

The most exciting element about the book is the fact that the theme revolves around tapping into diverse views and different fields to find solutions for the most challenging problems of our times. I have always been an admirer of Frans Johansson's theory of The Medici Effect — which says it is in the intersection of diverse fields and realms that extraordinary breakthrough ideas would happen. That when ideas

NO servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." From Biblical times, this has been the conventional wisdom. But humbly correcting the dictum is philanthropist, journalist and activist, Rohini Nilekani, who is famous for being one of the backstage players of Infosys, in *UNCOMMON GROUND*. In the new world, where the distance between business and social spheres are blurring increasingly, wealth does not hinder one from pursuing social good.

The book tries to address a seemingly simple question, which in fact is an enormously complex one: why has economic prosperity with social inclusion remained a distant goal in India despite years of liberalisation? In fact, if we remember, liberalisation was proclaimed to be the panacea for social inclusion. We believed wholeheartedly that when the government encourages businesses with tax breaks and other facilities, it would ultimately benefit poorer members of society while improving the economy as a whole. Yes, liberalisation has liberated us from the so-called "Hindu rate of growth" and has led to sustained GDP growth and dramatic improvement in the quality of life of many. Yet, unfortunately, millions remain untouched, and are being pushed back further. That is because of their shrinking access to natural resources which they depend on and because access to alternative opportunities are denied to them.

BROWSING



Suman Reddy
Managing Director
Pegasystems India

Currently reading:
The Next Convergence
by MICHAEL SPENCE
Recent reads: *The World Is Flat* by Thomas L. Friedman
I recommend: *The Winning*
by Jack Welch with Suzy Welch, *Built To Last* by Jim Collins and *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen Covey
In my shelf: Biographies, works on leadership and authors such as Robin Sharma and Dan Brown



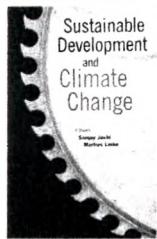
ROHINI NILEKANI is the co-founder and chairperson of Pratham Books. She also heads the non-profit organisation, Arghyam, which works on water and sanitation issues. She has worked with and contributed to publications such as *Bombay Magazine*, *India Today*, *Sunday*, *The Times of India* and *Mint*. Her debut novel, *Stillborn*, was published in 1998.

are accumulated from multiple fields, great challenges crack down. This is exactly what Nilekani tries to demonstrate through this book. I am sure that these doyens who converse in this book actively practice this theory. For example, I remember having a conversation with ICICI Bank's head Chanda Kochhar, where she was reminiscing about the time when the bank was grappling with the scalability challenge of providing banking services to the mass — how do you issue a million credit cards in a day, or service a few million accounts in a day. Instead of going through tried-and-tested banking methodologies, she went out and researched how the courier companies or the manufacturing companies are serving millions. Captain Gopinath, again, did the same thing while he tried to democratise air travel.

I am sure that at some point of time, the author might decide to take the idea to the next level by bringing together not just business and social activists, but also artists, politicians, sports persons to challenge more critical problems of our times. That would be an even greater uncommon ground.

Varghese is the author of *Open Source Leader*

SELECTION



Blowing Hot And Cold

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE EDITED BY SUNJOY JOSHI & MARLIES LINKE;
ACADEMIC FOUNDATION;
PAGES: 284; PRICE: Rs 795

IT IS THAT TIME OF THE YEAR. YOU WILL SEE HEADS of states get together at some cool locations and lament about one of the hottest topics of the day — climate change. This time, the conference of the parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is set in Durban and by now you would have read all those curtain raisers. In fact, there is a plethora of information out there on climate change, so how is one book more any different. **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE**, edited by Sunjoy Joshi and Marlies Linke is different as it puts India's problems and prospects with climate change centre-stage in a global context. It makes the oft-heard arguments of calculating emissions on a per-capita basis as being the most equitable. The book pulls together perspectives on climate change from

Brazil and the European Union, but not to the same extent from the US, Japan and China.

The editors make a case for global justice as the cornerstone of climate negotiations. Reiterating that developed countries have hogged the atmospheric carbon space, the book calls for allowing developing countries — notably India — space for development even at the cost of increasing per-capita emissions. The same chapter points out that developed countries have in effect exported their emissions to China by outsourcing manufacturing.

Later, the book looks at the relationship between climate change and trade policies, a largely ignored part of climate change negotiations. It analyses the international trade regime — as overseen by the World Trade Organization — and international climate change talks to conclude there are several opportunities for clashes between the two. The need for deeper emission cuts in developed countries had raised concerns about the competitiveness of energy-intensive industries and concerns about emissions leakages from countries with lax climate policies. These, in turn, could prompt the US and EU to put in place unilateral trade measures that would hurt developing countries. Essentially, the argument that developing countries have a right to increase emissions could turn into a trade stick to beat them with. Just how far this will hold in a world economic order not dominated by Europe and the US remains to be seen.

There are two chapters on financing climate change mitigation and adaptation. One says the UN-sponsored Clean Development Mechanism overlooks the huge potential of reducing emissions by cutting deforestation. It outlines new policies to checking deforestation. A chapter on the REDD (reduced emissions from deforestation and degradation) programme describes its limitations in detail. And there is a lot more.

The Indian perspective on climate covers energy for the most part. It takes a brief look at the impact on the Himalayan glaciers, and moves onto effects of climate change on the poor. What is missing here is a discussion on the impact of change on the water cycle, especially the monsoons and groundwater, given the increasing water needs of agriculture, industry and people. An analysis of where we are, and where we are headed in the near term, on water and climate change would have added tremendous value to this section.

— Nitya Jacob

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THE END OF THE GODS by A.S. Byatt. Plus, **1888 DIAL INDIA** by Anuvab Pal and **CONDITIONS APPLY** by Nishant Kaushik

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