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Ten Ideas to Galvanize India's Green Finance Sector

By Ashish Saini, IRAS officer currently working with Northern Railways*

India has a climate-smart investment potential of \$3.1 trillion from 2018 to 2030 according to the International Finance Corporation (IFC). This is a large sum of money and India can't afford to lose the opportunity to realize this potential.

Below are ten reformative steps that India should take to capitalize on this opportunity:

1. **Taxonomy:** India needs to standardize what it considers green and establish a set of criteria for green finance. Several countries like Russia, Mongolia, Malaysia, China and the EU have already put in place their taxonomies. India should also come up with its taxonomy

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with appropriate screening criteria that reflect its domestic realities and aligns with the national norms.

2. Use of Technology: India is a leader in Information Technology and should use this benefit to solve issues like availability of quality data, capturing relevant climate data, monitoring projects and enabling financial impact analysis.

- To illustrate, TCS has developed the **Climanomics** platform that allows organizations to quantify and disclose the financial impact of climate change by analyzing climate risk exposure on assets.
- Similarly, the **Originator Engine** is a digital platform connecting customers, investors, and ecosystem partners to help navigate the process of securing financial investment for new businesses in the solar energy sector.
- The Swiss firm Carbon Delta has developed a machine learning-based **Climate Value-at-Risk** assessment method to quantify climate change risks across investment portfolios.

3. Startup ecosystem: India should also explore its booming startup ecosystem to contribute to the sustainable finance sector. Many startup firms across the globe are already contributing to this goal in various ways. For example, the personal finance company **Aspiration** has launched the '**Plant Your Change**' initiative that allows customers to eliminate their carbon footprint by planting trees while they shop. Similarly, **Trine** is a Swedish fintech firm which aims to make it easy for people to invest in solar energy by connecting solar businesses in emerging markets with capital through



Ashish Saini, IRAS officer,
Northern Railways

crowdfunding. The Indian government should facilitate this startup ecosystem through initiatives like the Green Fintech Network launched by the Swiss government.

- 4 Innovation:** The Indian markets should develop innovative products to advance the green products market. For example, products like Green Infrastructure Investment Trusts can help facilitate deeper green bond markets. India can also explore a formal carbon pricing framework. A **carbon price** would help nudge investors and consumers to consider these costs in their decision-making process. Nasdaq has taken the lead and has recently collaborated with a Finnish firm Fortum to create an exclusive trading platform for carbon removal credits.
- 5. Data is the key:** There is a need to focus on data-collection and use modern techniques like data analytics and machine learning to improve sectoral understanding and forecasting future trends. For example, while making decisions on investment in the renewable energy sector, an essential consideration in determining the project viability is the future price that the company

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will earn from the sale of electricity. Data-based price forecasting can help investors make better decisions and finance sustainable projects.

6. Rating Agencies for Rating based on ESG: There is a need for a reliable rating framework to adjudge the different companies/projects based on their ESG scores. Crisil had launched such a rating last year. There are other agencies in this space as well. However, the problem is the high inconsistency between the ratings provided by these agencies. SEBI had published a consultation paper on its website with a proposed framework to regulate ESG Rating Providers for securities markets and has sought suggestions over its propositions. It should fast-track the process and release official guidelines as soon as possible.

7. High borrowing cost: The green financial instruments usually cost more than other instruments available in the market. A significant reason for this is information asymmetry. Therefore, a solid Information Management System in India is the need of the hour.

8. Incentivize Green Bonds: Considering the potential that green bonds hold, government should promote these by providing different incentives like tax exemption on interest or tax deductions.

9. Cooperation and collaboration between investors: Moving towards a sustainable developmental model comes with several associated risks. The different players in the finance sector need to establish institutional mechanisms to collaborate and coordinate amongst themselves to tackle these risks. For example, during the initial process of underwriting, the primary

and secondary finance providers could collaborate, and the secondary provider could provide a suitable refinancing option to the primary provider set out in indicative terms for a few years down the line. This would help build confidence in the residual price of the asset and lower the associated risk.

10.A relook at Human Resources: For the finance sector to become a pioneer in the drive towards sustainability, it needs to be staffed and led by people who are well trained and aware of the importance of Environmental, Social and Governance aspects of businesses while assessing any business. Hence, the different stakeholders in the finance sector need to ensure that they hire employees with these skill sets, train them on these skills and incorporate ESG parameters in their performance reviews.

A fresh look at some of the major stakeholders in the finance sector can help:

Stock Exchanges

The stock exchanges form a central component in the financial system connecting investors to borrowers. They can play a pivotal role in ensuring sustainability in several ways. Firstly, the stock exchanges should promote Green products and services, give them high visibility, and create awareness among investors on the different green terminologies and how they could differentiate between products.

Secondly, stock exchanges should proactively involve themselves in educating the market and creating standards and benchmarks for Sustainable product offerings.

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Thirdly, the stock exchanges should promote and ensure environmental disclosures by companies by drafting different disclosure rules and training the various stakeholders on the importance and need of those rules and the incremental benefits for the economy and the companies.

Fourthly, the stock exchanges can play an active role in promoting a culture of green disclosure. They can encourage dialogue between investors and borrowers on the green and sustainable aspects of the investments and formulate policies and standards to aid green investments.

Understanding the importance of stock exchanges, UNCTAD, UN Global Compact, the UNEP Finance Initiative, and Principles for Responsible Investments organized the Sustainable Stock Exchanges Initiative. This is a peer-to-peer learning platform that explores how exchanges, in collaboration with investors, regulators, and companies, can encourage sustainable investment. The BSE and NSE are also a member of this initiative.

The Bombay Stock Exchange has already taken many initiatives to promote sustainability. For example, it has made ESG (Environment, Social and Governance) reporting and submission of business responsibility reports mandatory for top listed companies, offers ESG-related training, and has several sustainability-related indices like S&P BSE CARBONEX, S&P BSE 100 ESG, and S&P BSE GREENEX.

Investors

Investors are another major stakeholder who can help steer the financial system towards sustainability. They can do so by primarily integrating ESG parameters in their investment analysis and decisions. This exercise will



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help drive borrowers towards incorporating sustainability in their plans.

Today, investors around the globe are making impact investments to unravel the power of capital for good. Impact investing is a general investment strategy that seeks to generate financial returns while creating a positive social or environmental impact.

Investors should engage in discussions on ESG issues with companies and convince them to incorporate good ESG practices in their work. Investors can also use proxy voting to nudge borrowers towards sustainable practices. Proxy voting is a mechanism to formally express approval/disapproval of a company's practices through voting.

Several Responsible Investment Initiatives are already in place that bring together investors to use their agency and foster sustainable changes. The UN Convened Net Zero Asset

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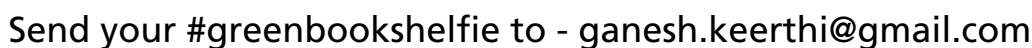
Banks

The banks should also work closely with all stakeholders and consult, engage and partner with them to achieve the set targets. They should try to incorporate ESG practices as a core part of their culture and governance systems.

Way Ahead

Sustainability has always been a core component of Indian culture. India should incorporate this sustainability in the finance sector as well and set an example for the world to follow.

**Views expressed in this article are personal*





Save our Soil: Why We Need a Soil Protection Act Now

By Benedict Paramanand

While most countries have clean air and clean water acts, it hasn't occurred to anyone the urgent need for an act to restore quality of soil through farmer-friendly laws

It's also surprising that none of the 17 **UN Sustainable Development Goals**, or the Agenda 2030 of the United Nations, mention the word 'soil' when it has become stark that degradation of soil quality is directly and indirectly contributing to most of the global unrest and climate crisis. Although UN said somewhere else that at current rates of soil degradation, 90% of the earth could turn into desert by 2050 – less than three decades from now.

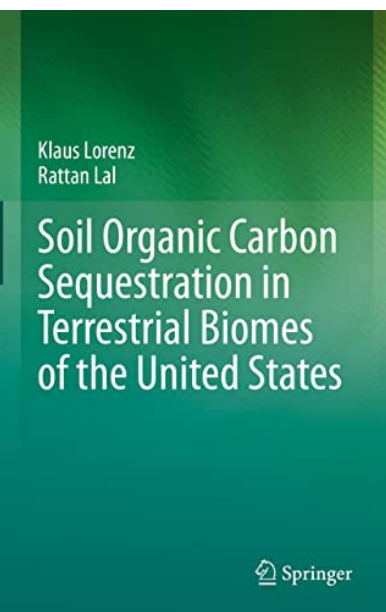
environmental activist Sadguru Jaggi Vasudev's just-concluded global campaign 'Save Soil' to restore the quality of soil. During his whirlwind tour on a motorbike, Sadguru met several heads of states to impress upon them the need to take the soil crisis seriously. He also offered policy support to some, including India. The primary objective of the 'Save Soil Movement' was to urge nations to mandate a minimum of 3-6% organic content in agricultural soil through urgent policy reforms.

Even for environmental conscious folks, conversations around the idea of 'soil as a living entity' and 'soil has rights just as any other animal, tree or human being' are new. It's new because no one has been speaking about it, until now.

Hard data drives the message even clearer. According to Isha Foundation, the average organic content in agricultural soil in India is estimated to be 0.68% placing the country at high risk of desertification and soil extinction. An ideal figure is between 6% and 8%. Nearly

Dr. Rattan Lal, a Distinguished University Professor of Soil Science at the Ohio State University, and World Food Prize Awardee 2020, is waging a huge battle around the world with his 'Living Soil' campaign to help small farmers improve the conditions of their soil.

Dr. Lal was a part of spiritual guru and



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30% of fertile soil in the country have already become barren and are incapable of yield.

The biggest achievement of the save soil movement is that it made it people-centric with the hope that change can begin sooner. Through innovative global reach strategies, Isha Foundation says it has been able to garner support of over 3.5 billion people (more than 60% of the world's voting population) around the world.

To Dr. Lal, there are 7 million live parts on earth, and most are part of the soil. "We must protect, restore, and enhance life on soil. Destroying soil is a crime against nature. There is a very strong links between soil degradation and climate change."



Carbon Farming

The immediate thing to do, he and Sadguru suggest, is for governments to resort to massive afforestation by planting diverse plants and trees in degraded lands and on the banks of river basins. Also encourage farmers to plant trees and shrubs around their farms so that leaves and animal droppings can enrich soil.

Dr. Lal is promoting an ambitious project called 'carbon farming'. He is persuading the American government to offer incentives to farmers by paying them \$35 an acre for

purely enriching soil so that they become rich in organic nutrients. Perhaps they can trade as many companies struggle to set off their carbon footprint through carbon credits.

Since soil connects every element of life, Dr. Lal insists the subject Soil Science is taught right from the primary school level. He told a news channel, "Farmers must also be paid the real price for the food they produce. Keeping prices low is okay but it must not hurt farmers. The real cost of soil degradation must be reflected in the price that consumer pays." He added, "The focus should be on nutrition-sensitive agriculture, so that good diet is also a good medicine."

One of the ways to reduce pressure on soil is to develop non-soil food production systems so that soil can be preserved for other uses. Thus, hydroponics and aeroponics can be encouraged. Urban agriculture (sky farming, glass building specifically designed to grow vegetables and aquaculture) are other options.

River Basin Afforestation

Isha believes that if India takes up afforestation of 13 river basins which cover 67% of the land area, India can see positive results in just over a decade. "We all have been working individually, if we come together, in 12 to 20 years, we can make a difference in a big way," Sadguru said. His confidence stems from the success of Isha's 'Cauvery Calling' movement that seeks to plant millions of trees on the banks of river Cauvery in the next few years.

"This is a generational responsibility. If we don't fulfil, we will regret this very seriously," he warned.

Watch Conversation between Dr. Rattan Lal and Sadguru - <https://youtu.be/rznm-FUUTUk>



Self-publishing Environmental Literature

Traditional publishers are inaccessible to most new authors

Many writers are choosing to self-publish green books instead of going with known and established publishing houses

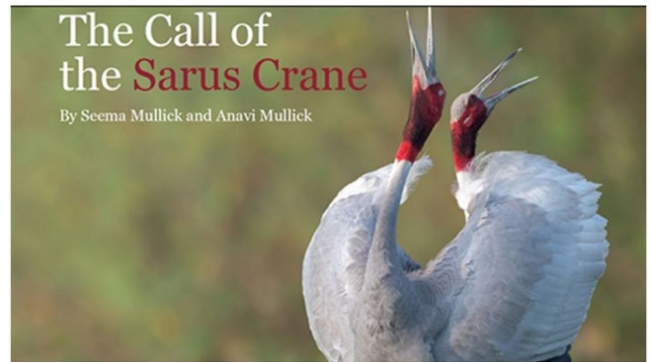
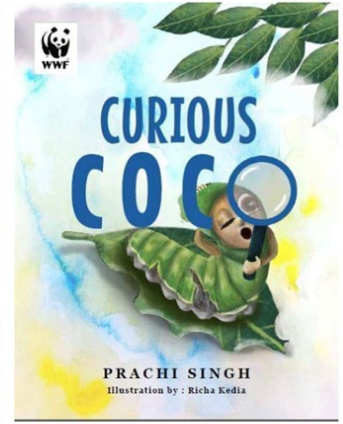
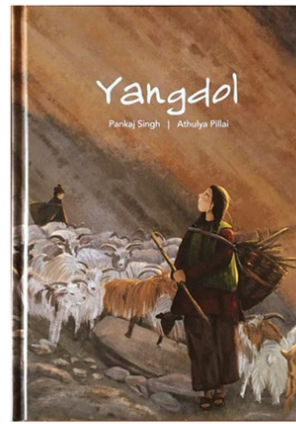
By Rati Girish

Often considered 'niche', books on the environment have been gradually gaining ground as concerns over climate change find greater traction worldwide. Many publishers acknowledge that this is potentially a huge market that needs to be developed. But information on readers of such books, particularly titles that are either beyond the conventional non-fiction narratives or have not been written by known names, remains vague and few seem to have made an active effort to identify them.

Yet, environmental issues are widely recognised as some of the most pressing issues facing humanity. They frequently make news headlines and there is no dearth of influential organisations and people invested in the field. For many passionate nature writers, this has been enough inspiration to strike out on their own instead of waiting for an established publisher to take on their manuscript.

Creative control

When Pankaj Singh approached traditional publishing houses with his 2000-word, richly



illustrated story about a young girl living in a remote Himalayan village, who dreams of coming face-to-face with the elusive snow leopard, he realised his manuscript didn't meet the standard submission guidelines. He was told to edit his story down to 800 words. But editing it down to this length would mean losing the essence of his story. Determined to make his dream a reality, he decided to self-publish his book. In July, 2021, **Yangdol** came to life as a self-published picture book.

Similarly, for their passion project – **The Call of the Sarus Cranes** – Anavi Mullick and her mother, Seema wanted to ensure the best print quality. The book was all about the beauty and the majesty of the Sarus cranes shown through spectacular images taken by Anavi's grandfather and they were unwilling to compromise on the printing process. "As these pictures were the main element, we wanted to do justice to them through the print. In all honesty, we did not look very hard

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for someone to publish the book for us. The few people we did reach out to either did not have time to publish our book, or could not satisfy our requirements.”

Overcoming challenges

While self-publishing is a way out, it comes with a slew of challenges that are not always easy to surmount. When Prachi Singh, a Limca-record-holding Lepidopterist and butterfly conservationist, set out to self-publish **Curious Coco** – her book on butterflies – she quickly realised that she would be wearing many hats, that of an author, book designer, marketer, and social media expert. “I barely knew anything about publishing. Neither did my friends, colleagues or relatives have any experience. So finding my way through was definitely challenging.”

Sangeeta Bhansali, founder and chief curator of books at Kahani Tree, an independent children’s bookstore in Mumbai points out, “My concern for self-published books is that the content would have to be vetted since we place great emphasis on curation. With books backed by publishers, we can assume that quality checks and balances would be in place.” Given this concern, it’s important for self-published authors to make an extra effort on their content.

A vital consideration, while doing this, is the expense. Apart from payments for editing and designing, the initial printing costs are a heavy expense, especially when one isn’t sure if the stocks would sell. As such estimating the number of copies to print can prove to be tricky. Most self-published authors tend to go with small print-runs. But the fall out of this is that the book price often becomes uneconomical for average buyers. For instance, Pankaj Singh printed only 350 copies of Yangdol and had to price them at Rs 800 per book.

Most self-published authors agree that the biggest challenges facing them are discoverability and sales. “Marketing has been a slow and tedious process. It has involved talking and meeting with various people. We are yet to see the outcome of this and are still learning the intricacies of the market,” says Anavi.

Yet within all these challenges, lies an opportunity to discover and build readership within the massive community of nature lovers and enthusiasts. For many, a good place to begin is social media. Both Prachi and Pankaj used social media handles to publicise their books. There are countless social media pages that cater specifically to those interested in environmental issues. From organisations such as WWF, publications like Mongabay, volunteer-led initiatives like the Indian Youth Climate Network and the Earth Book Club, and literature festivals like the newly-minted Greenlitfest – one needs to spend some time going over various pages, finding the best fit and actively engaging online.

However, this needs to be substantiated with meaningful on-the-ground partnerships. Pankaj found that tying up with the independent bookstore, Champaca in Bengaluru helped him reach out to the right target audience and boost sales. Located in heart of Bengaluru – one of the largest markets for English books in India – Champaca actively promotes diverse books on specially curated subjects including nature writing and has a dedicated audience. When Pankaj reached out to them, he found them surprisingly forthcoming. They even reduced their margin to accommodate the price of his book. In addition to this, he sent out a review copy to Sanctuary Asia to ensure the book got seen by the right audience.

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Meanwhile, Prachi found much-needed support from WWF-India. She had a team of field experts, researchers, and naturalists, who looked at her book as a means of creating a buzz around butterfly conservation and were ready to invest time and effort in developing and promoting it.

A growing market

Over the years, many environmental organisations like Kalpavriksh, Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) and World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) have started publication divisions dedicated to literature on the natural environment that few others are publishing. This has opened up avenues for nature writers looking to find publishing support for their green books.

Meanwhile, as some self-publishing companies confirm, the number of green books coming out of their stables is only going to increase. Hitesh Jain, Co-Founder and COO at StoryMirror Infotech Pvt Ltd corroborates, "There is a huge interest in creating environmental literature, especially among students. Educational institutes have been giving a lot of importance to eco-consciousness and many young writers are deeply influenced by this. However, traditional publishing options are limited, and come with their own challenges. This is why many youngsters are opting for self-publishing. The pandemic has also sensitised more people about the need to protect the environment. These factors only add to the growth in this segment."

(with inputs from Meghaa Gupta)

Leo Burnett's Whisper Campaign Wins Grand Prix



Leo Burnett India won the **Grand Prix** award in the **Sustainable Development Goals** category for **Procter & Gamble's** c a m p a i g n

called **'The Missing Chapter'** for its sanitary napkin brand **Whisper** at the just concluded 2022 Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity.

The campaign was meant to spread education on period so that girls did not drop out of school. About 23 million girls fall off the

education system because they lack period education. Whisper's purpose was to impact society and also build its brand.

The campaign explains the simple biology behind periods and petitioned the Government to include it in school textbooks. The team worked with local artists to adapt the chapter in 28 native art styles and diverse languages and put it out on school and village walls across the country, so no girl could miss it. The red paper became a powerful symbol of period revolution in India, appearing everywhere in the media.

In a historic decision, the Government of India committed to include the 'Missing Chapter' on periods in public school books.



India's Cement Companies are at the Forefront of Climate Action

Neeraj Akhoury, CEO Holcim India & Managing Director and CEO of Ambuja Cements

India ranks among nations that are most vulnerable to climate change. Which is why innovating towards sustainability is imperative. It can leverage on technology and R&D to develop “green” solutions. Thankfully, the industry is taking note and actively pursuing a host of measures to reduce its carbon footprint. Take, for instance, cement manufacturers.

Solutions comprise improving energy efficiency of cement units, substitution of clinker with fly ash or deploying fuels with lower emissions. Others include deploying waste heat recovery systems, diverting waste like used plastic from landfills as either raw input or fuel. Plants are being retro-fitted to be able to utilise cleaner fuels, thereby reducing emissions. These are under implementation in various stages at cement plants in India. **Companies also claim to have developed clinker-free cement, which reduces emissions by up to 80-90%.**

Other developments that cement industry is watching include the carbon capturing and sequestration technology, where emissions

from cement kilns could be captured and stored in various forms—be it in a cylinder or even concrete blocks! Carbon dioxide when added to cement blocks at the manufacturing stage can improve their strength and durability. Savings that can be accrued through this technology is phenomenal, not to mention the reduced demand for natural resources.

Look around, and you will see that every industry is making similar efforts. The automobile industry recently made a tectonic shift to BS-VI emissions standards. Battery-powered cars, bikes and auto-rickshaws are yet to dominate the Indian market, but we're already looking forward to newer technologies like hydrogen fuel cell. And that's a mind-boggling change for a country that was using leaded petrol and diesel whose noxious fumes clouded our skylines barely a couple of decades ago! The war against plastic has acquired a new dimension with retailers offering either cloth bags or those that appear like plastic but are biodegradable in nature.

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After all, it's also in the industry's best interests if it adopts the circular economy of functioning—where emphasis is laid on recycling or repurposing every single product.

Bold Targets

As India sets itself the target of achieving net zero by 2070, Prime Minister Narendra Modi outlined a five-pronged approach named “Panchamrit” at last year's COP-26 Glasgow summit. Accordingly, India will take its non-fossil energy capacity to 500 GW by 2030; meet nearly 50% of its energy requirements from renewable sources by 2030; reduce the total projected carbon emissions by one billion tonnes from now till 2030; and slash the carbon intensity of its economy by more than 45%. **We can arrive there faster if the industry acts in concert with the government's objectives.**

India's problem is unique in that it must not only generate millions of skilled and semi-skilled jobs year after year that would lift masses out of abject poverty but also do so in a clean and sustainable manner. This was a question that the world's developed economies didn't have to face in their route to prosperity—their industrial revolutions involved burning coal and other dirtier fuels without having to bother about limits or a timeline. Their transition to cleaner technologies of the future is easier amid higher incomes and an improved quality of life.

What It Entails

The shift towards newer technologies will come at a cost. Existing plants will have to be repurposed or built all over to meet the needs and regulations of the future. This will involve pouring in hundreds of thousands of crores into the technologies that will have to gain acceptance by the industry and then the end consumer. Chances are, the products thus

produced would be priced at a premium, and unit economics may take time to kick in. Yet, industries must persist collectively.

There are other challenges like ensuring that the entire ecosystem, too, adopts best practices. From the downstream supplier, to stockist or dealer, every link in the chain must be apprised of the new product and possible changes in their handling. They must be educated or retooled with newer technologies.

Is this difficult? Perhaps. But there can be no doubt on its necessity. After all we owe it to our future generations to leave a greener planet.

About the author

Mr. Neeraj Akhoury brings with him over 28 years of rich experience in the steel and cement industries. He has worked in leadership roles in India and other emerging markets. He began his career with Tata Steel in 1993 and joined the Holcim Group in 1999.

Mr. Akhoury was appointed as **Managing Director & CEO of ACC Limited** in February 2017. In February 2020, he took over as CEO India, Holcim, Managing Director & CEO, Ambuja Cements Limited and Non-Executive Director, ACC Limited.

He is on the board of Governors at National Council for Cement and Building Materials (NCCBM) constituted by the Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Government of India. He also serves as Vice President of Cement Manufacturers Association of India.

Mr. Akhoury has a degree in Economics and MBA from the University of Liverpool; General Management from XLRI, Jamshedpur; and an alumnus of Harvard Business School.



BOOK REVIEW

Climate Crisis Needs Action

By Hariharan Chandra

Cases and exercises in this book will help students to think about solutions

Another book on Climate Change, environment and how it impacts, easily tends to get dismissed. So what can one say that will make the change. Well, we seem to only get tons of bad news, and the rare, occasional inspiring story that only sharpens the reminder on all that is terribly wrong with the planet, or our life on it. Says **Nandakumar**, CEO of the International Centre for Clean Water, "Action orientation is needed for handling anything, and it's especially so with climate change. There is too much talk and many of us are uncomfortable when called for action.

In our school days, action was not needed to score high grades or even to pass. It is assumed that one can read and remember well enough, but that was enough to get things done by others later on in life. Who are these others? People like you and me again? So what's the good of that? My own view is that practical exams in schools are a farce. Maybe a strong word, but that's the way I remember it, and I'm sure teachers are also aware of what I mean. You are never really challenged in a practical exam, whether it's physics, chemistry or whatever exams you give. Because failure here means failure of the teacher also. So as teachers we generally ensure that everybody passes. And that's the way it is treated. It's almost as if it's a crime to make someone fail in Practicals."

There is a justification for such thinking or acceptance, however lame: the student does



not know his future career path, so why learn a skill that he may never put to use; so let Practicals be just that little bit of 'touch and feel'. Says Nandakumar, "But when it comes to actions related to climate change, I think that is not true. Every career, every step in every career today, must be linked to actions related to climate change. Talk is not enough, so everybody, irrespective of whether he's

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a lift man or a CEO, has to have something to talk about and do, more than talk about. We cannot afford to have anyone not to act, to mitigate all the damage that is done. We cannot continue to live in a theoretical world. We have mistaken talking for action.”

This book is all about action in one’s life that can transform any reader who practises the numbers of case exercises. It just might help the next generation to pull back from the brink if they are weaned on such stuff as this book offers. Broken into a dozen chapters, starting from environmental management, what is unique about the book is that it lists very specific case exercises that teachers and students can make integral to the classroom experience.

Dr Vasudevan Rajaram, who is the lead author, says, “I’ve been coming to India every so often. I check textbooks of kids in school. It is a lot of theory and not so much about what they are learning on how they are going to apply it in life. I draw blank stares from the richer kids when I ask them simple questions of the lives of the poorer kids in the slums, or of the crisis on water or forests. This book is action oriented. The idea is to let the reader, young or old, to think. We put activities and exercises at the end of each chapter. All of those centre around observing nature, observing things in the community and writing reports, drawing up action plans that they can suggest in the classroom to other students and to the teachers.”

Having authored 7 books in the past on subjects centred around solid waste management and waste water management at mega city levels, Raj Rajaram brings a refreshing approach. “The case exercises came in thanks to the large contribution that the two co-authors



One sapling to be planted for each enrolment in govt schools, India TV

made,” says Raj. **Keith Olson** and **Lynn Tiede** [pronounced ‘Teedy’] are both teachers for children in Chicago and New York City. Both walk the talk on green, with work they do with communities. Says Keith, “It was fun, and a lot a hard work, detailing the case exercises. What is important to me is that no person can avoid environmental impact. Even heating water for a cup of tea takes energy which, unless from green energy, will produce some greenhouse gases, thereby contributing to climate change.”

Think and Act

Lynn’s strength comes from the fact that she has taught Math, Science, and Engineering at High School levels in New York City. As her school’s sustainability coordinator she works on every day to foster habits of sustainability in her students and colleagues. “It was a labour of love, putting together the numbers of case exercise, field observations, and project exercises.” Raj’s lucid writing style keeps the reading racy, and simple.

One exercise for students that the book suggests among a hundred such, relates to the

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CO₂ a vehicle produces. 'What is the weight of the CO₂ exhaust from a Maruti 800 that weighs 650 kg? Will it be one-tenth of the weight of the vehicle?' Then the chapter goes on to explain, "Assume the vehicle goes 20 km on a petrol-litre, and it is driven 6000 km a year. That would use 300 litres, which weighs about 210 kg. Using that much fuel would produce three times that weight of CO₂, or 630 kg. How does that compare to the weight of the vehicle? For the Maruti 800, it's about the same. Most people's guess is much lower than the actual output." **The book is replete with such examples that are practical, engaging the mind and attention of the reader, and reminding you time and again that learning on sustainability can only be by the doing beyond the classroom.**

This is not just another book that you put away for the occasional reference-read. It is a book you use for the treasure-trove of ideas that will trigger the imagination of the working

professional, or of the student with a bit of help from a coach or mentor. There's plenty of material out here for you to read, absorb, and share with students, peers and professionals. And if you're looking for suggestions from a trustworthy source on how to combat climate change with personal actions then look no further.



The author is a Trustee at BCIL AltTech Foundation and is a pioneer in green buildings and sustainability solutions





Charming Elephant Verse

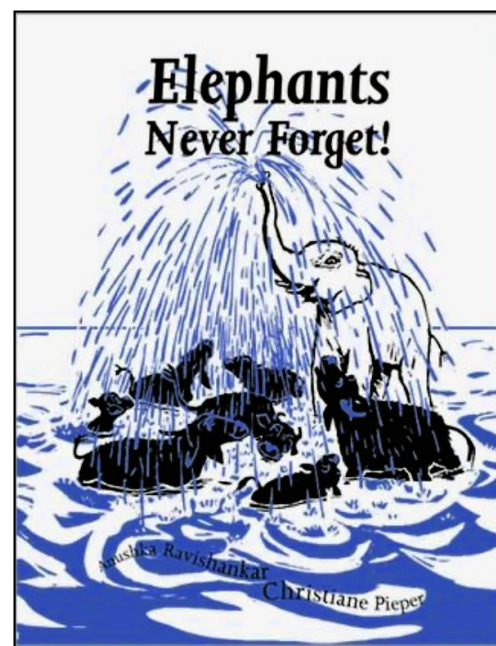
By Meghaa Gupta

Offers an opening to discussions on powerful life lessons using nature's tender lens and the personal values that drive conservation

*His ears were too large
His nose was too long
His shape was quite odd
And his colour all wrong
He only could trumpet, he could not bellow
Yet, the elephant liked being a buffalo.*

Written in delightful verse by **Anushka Ravishankar**, often called India's Dr Suess, *Elephants Never Forget* by Tara books, is a charming tale of a baby elephant who finds himself all alone in the jungle after a sudden storm, till he befriends a baby buffalo and becomes one of them. But what happens when he encounters a group of elephants like himself? Does he leave the buffaloes and join them?

Not an 'environment' book in the traditional sense, *Elephants Never Forget* uses animal characters to tell a joyous tale of loss, adoption and integration laced with increasingly urgent ideas on identity, belongingness, kindness and staying true to one's beliefs instead of conforming to norms. Yet, aren't these values omnipresent in the natural world where all living beings survive by making room for each other, irrespective of differences.



Why did the elephant befriend the buffaloes who were so different from him? What made the buffaloes come to the rescue of the baby elephant despite the imminent danger posed by the tiger? Why did the elephant stay on with the buffaloes even after he grew big and strong? Was it all because the buffaloes had made room for him when he was most vulnerable or did it run deeper than that? After all, didn't the big and strong elephant end up repaying their kindness in equal measure. When we speak of environmental literature, we tend to restrict ourselves to books that espouse conservation. But we rarely question the personal values that drive conservation. What makes people care for the environment? Is it only a measure of altruism or is there more to it? Stories like *Elephants Never Forget* offer an opening to discussions on powerful life lessons using nature's tender lens.



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Of Grief, Resilience and The Environment

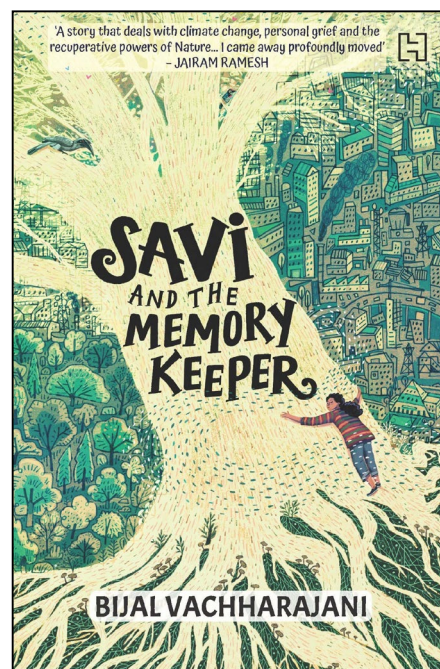
By Naina A

An intimate tale of of the human-nature relationship that is often lost in larger conversations around the exploitation of the Earth's resources.

Straddling the dichotomy of Progress versus Nature is the fictitious city of Shajarpur, marked by a sense of joy, peace and calm that's borne out a healthy ecosystem of flora, fauna and humanity. But it seems Progress, represented by powerful Uncles and (two) Aunties, is gaining ground. An insidious attempt is being made to uproot the Wood Wide Web – an underground ecosystem of roots, fungi and bacteria that form a network amongst the trees of the area. When it seems like Shajarpur will fall victim to climate change and the demands of industrial development, in walks Savitri, a.k.a Savi, an initially unwilling and cynical hero.

Bijal Vachharajani's *Savi and the Memory Keeper* tells the story of a young girl in middle school who is dealing with the sudden loss of her beloved father. Her suffering is made worse, when she has to move from dreary, smog-filled Delhi to Shajarpur – her father's green, bright, unbearably happy hometown.

In an attempt to forget her loss, Savi's mother distracts herself by obsessively cleaning, to the point that she almost transcends reality. Her Insta-obsessed older sister, Meher, seems to have everything in control, with her beauty, charm and social media followers. Meanwhile, Savi feels alone, stuck with caring for her father's potted plants and petrified of classmates at her elite new school.



Savi's life is moving on, without her permission. She finds herself snapping at people without meaning to and is unable to comprehend, let alone express, what she's going through. This is a situation, I'm all too familiar with. A few years ago, I too lost my father. Like Savi, I am the younger sibling and haven't figured out what to do with grief. The book captures just how unknowable, overwhelming and frustrating grief is. How it takes over our will and lords over our lives. Dealing with grief requires wresting back control.

In the midst of this chaos, Savi finds the tree on the school grounds and the plants at home speaking to her and showing her memories – of Shajarpur and her father. This becomes an unlikely source of comfort and Savi ends up developing a deep relationship with nature around her. So, as the happy ecosystem of Shajarpur turns darker and the effects of climate change materialise, she steps in for a fight to protect it against the perils of Progress.

Vachharajani takes on a personal perspective when it comes to the environment discourse.

Continued on next page



Through the storylines of the protagonist, fellow classmates, teachers and her late father, the author reveals the intimacy of the human-nature relationship that is often lost in larger conversations around the exploitation of the Earth's resources. One finds tenderness, care and companionship in engagements with plants and animals, big and small. The destructive forces of economic development crush such relationships. The scent of freshly minted money, the prospects of material life (consumerism/capitalism) and what Marx calls the 'false consciousness' make people forget this love of the green universe. Our world today distances humanity from nature, making the latter a thing that must be dominated. But what we don't realise is that we aren't winning. The few who do feel like they are winning may have an abundance of cultural and material power, but this blinds them to destruction that may prove to be fatal to all life on earth.

Indigenous people's loss of land, class differences, bullying, celebrity culture, superficiality... the book often branches off into a multiplicity of directions. Coupled with several jumps in the timeline, this sometimes makes the narrative difficult to locate, even though the entire story is told from Savi's perspective. Major plot points are packed into the last few chapters, leaving one to ponder over questions such as 'Why did an uncle and aunty suddenly join the environmentalists?'

We are left to presume that there must be some good in the bad, some conscience among the unconscionable. References to Beyonce's hit from over a decade ago, Ryan Gosling and Mondrian paintings, make the protagonist sound much older than an average twelve-thirteen-year-old. In fact, there is an uncharacteristic maturity to the characters in this book, who appear closer to millennials than tweens yet to enter high school.

Vachharajani's strength is her ability to tell a story of human emotions. It is easy to relate to Savi's dilemmas, her journey to finding inner courage and her fear of forgetting her father. This made me wonder if the book would have worked better as a diary. The format might have addressed some of the concerns arising out of the first-person narrative.

Climate fiction is an emerging genre in India and Vachharajani is undoubtedly one of its strongest proponents. Where **Savi and the Memory Keeper** succeeds is in its ability to introduce drama into what is otherwise seen as essential non-fiction for children growing up in a world beset by climate change. This makes the **story come alive almost in the fashion of a film and is sure to find several readers looking for books that address vital dimensions of life enveloped in an ethereal web of nature.**

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Design

H.S. Ganesh Keerthi

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