

## BOOK REVIEW

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**Prasad, Anirudh and Kumar, Sudeep. (2016). *Beyond business: Mapping the CSR and sustainable development initiatives of Tata Steel*. Ranchi: Xavier Institute of Social Service [ISBN-81-904112-8-4 (HB)], pp. xix + 260. Price INR 650/-**

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Of late there is much talk about the social responsibilities of the corporate sector. Tata Steel, which is the flagship company of the Tata Group, has been discharging its responsibilities in this regard for a long time. Understanding the need for an unbiased and neutral study of corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes in the operational zone of Tata Steel; and to ascertain whether JRD Tata's vision of sustainable development and inclusive growth has been truly realized or not, Tata Steel constituted a JRD Tata Chair at Xavier Institute of Social Service (XISS), Ranchi in April 2010. The lead author of the book under review, Dr. Anirudh Prasad, was made JRD Tata Chair Professor, while the second author, Dr. Sudeep Kumar, was Assistant Professor, JRD Tata Chair. Therefore, the commissioned and researched book meets a long-term need to systematically document the performance of Tata Steel on this score.

The book begins with an introductory discussion about the philosophical foundations of sustainable development and corporate social responsibility. It traces the origin of the term 'sustainable development', and gives examples of some business houses that have taken an interest in rural development. These examples include corporate bodies like Central Coalfields! Quoting J. C. Kumarappa (1945), the authors submit that "sustainability in development requires, apart from others, smallest possible amount of damage; development options for successive generations; shifts the focus from "sustainable development" to "sustainability" and increase the revenues to meet its rising commitments. If these requirements are not fulfilled then it is called an unsustainable model of development" (p. 4). Similarly, the authors conclude that "[p]ractically all discourses on corporate social responsibility (CSR) have limited application of sustainable development as they speak mainly of giving back something to the society in lieu of whatever has been taken away from it in the process of development" (p. 11). Thereafter, the authors come to the theme of the book. They devote chapter 2 to the theory and praxis of the contributions of Tata Steel towards CSR and sustainable

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development. With the Tata ethos as its guiding principles, the company has utilized about 2.5 per cent of its net profits for the welfare of the citizens. It created community development and social welfare departments, whose programmes included attempts to transform the life of people living near to the steel works through adult literacy, primary education, family planning, small savings, cultural programmes and sports. In this context, Tata Steel Rural Development Society (TSRDS) has played a pivotal role.

Since its inception in 1979, TSRDS has passed through four phases. The first phase was preparatory and continued to 1984. The three principal heads under which the work was done were (i) agriculture and crop extension; (ii) establishing training centres of allied vocations such as dairy farming, poultry farming, piggery and goat breeding; and (iii) setting up village industries and imparting training in income generation enterprises for sustainable development. The second phase, till 1991, was that of which the authors call boundless enthusiasm. TSRDS launched activities hitherto not undertaken or undertaken only marginally. Many self-help groups were established. Activities like changing wastelands into cultivable lands were undertaken. Single cropped areas were turned into double cropped and triple cropped areas. In the third phase (which continued up to 1998) four areas of intervention were identified, i.e., women's empowerment, income generation, infrastructural development, and health and hygiene. The fourth phase has witnessed curtailment of activities. The authors say that this was done for "various reasons" (p. 31), although they fail to spell them out. At the same time, the authors point out that TSRDS has made strides in procuring products and services from unorganized vendors and service providers from rural and tribal areas. There is an obvious contradiction because on the one hand they talk about the curtailment of activities while on the other they give illustrations of new/expanded activities.

In chapter 3 the authors describe their methodology and sample profile. There are five zones in Jharkhand and projects were selected by TSRDS in each zone. Data collection by the authors was done by way of observations, interviews, focus-group discussions and case studies. The authors are honest enough to mention that there could be a large margin of error in the replies of the respondents. Hence, they attempted to crosscheck the information from various alternative sources. They have found that the problems of development are multi-dimensional and related to structural, technological and human issues.

The Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and sustainable development initiatives of the company have been described for each of

the five zones. Many of the tables presented are given for their own sake. Obtaining the names of individual beneficiaries and other sundry details in a questionnaire is perfectly normal, but giving them in a tabular form in the book has little meaning. Comments made by the authors at the end of the tables suffice the purposes of the reader. It is worth noting that the authors are objective and neutral in their comments. They have shown appreciation of the work done where necessary but have not hesitated to be critical of TSRDS when called upon to do so. For instance, on p. 126, they mention that in Jonragora village, the Tatas have not given any permanent compensation for land acquisition to the villagers who lost their land. On p. 134 they point out that the medical and educational services by TSRDS in West Bokaro are not up to the mark; though are better than CCL and government welfare services. Again, on p. 139, they mention that although the production of coal is more in Tata Steel as compared with Central Coalfields Limited (CCL), Tata pays its labourers lower wages.

The book ends with conclusions that include twenty-four recommendations. The authors' overall finding is as follows: "Tata Steel through TSRDS has been playing a constructive role in adding to our national output by producing essential consumer goods; creating wage employment through skill development; and generating the additional income through SHGs" (pp. 234-35). To this may be added that it has contributed towards a transformation of sorts in the day-to-day life of the common people. Overall, the book covers an important but neglected subject and is thus commendable. It will serve as a useful base for conducting more studies along these lines.