

Book Review

“She Is” An Anthology
Compiled by ElsaMarie D’silva

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SHE IS

This book review is of the book titled "She Is". It is an anthology compiled by ElsaMarie D'Silva and has illustrations by Supreet K Singh. It was published by Notion Press Media Pvt. Ltd in 2021 and is priced at 399 rupees.

This book is a compilation of stories of women advancing the sustainable development goals in India. 'Sustainable Development' is a habitual term for a student of geography. Also, as a student of gender geography, I am always in a search of learning more about the stories of empowering women. In my opinion, this book is at the exact crossroads of it.

This book has 33 stories of 33 women, each one comes from a different family culture, educational background and personal interests. What all of them have in common is this one thing: that they are passionately DRIVEN. Some had already chosen their purpose while some just found it along the way. They worked relentlessly on what they believed in, even when people around them did not. They made sure that they made themselves academically stronger, learning the know-hows of the world. They were thoroughly aware of the challenges that they had at their doorsteps. Keeping the big picture in mind, they came up with sustainable solutions.

When Sumaira Abulali noticed sand extraction at the beach near her house, she blocked the trucks carrying sand from there. She was attacked but did not give up. She became the first one to present the issue of sand mining at United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity. In 2020, the Government of India published Guidelines for sustainable sand mining. She says that no issue is big or small, we need to act on it.

When I read about her, I started looking if there is any illegal sand extraction taking place in my vicinity?

I salute Kamla Devi, a child-bride who defied all the rural customs and stereotypes and became the first and only woman solar engineer in her village. She didn't stop at that, she trained herself as a night schoolteacher as well. Today, she is training other men and women from her region.

We all try to help the poor when we see them. But one incidence in the life of Dr. Neelam Gupta triggered her to be a social entrepreneur. Simanteeni Khot and Richa Pant not only talked about the economic gap between the resource-rich and resource-poor but also became a big part of Corporate Social Responsibility themselves. They used their position as means to achieve substantial changes in the lives of the poor and gave meaning to the work done under Corporate Social Responsibility.

When I read the story of Bishakha Datta, author of "And who will make the chapatis?" who became the voice of women across India, taking down patriarchy, one brick at a time time.

I loved the story of Runa Ray who did not just study fashion and designs but came up with sustainable fashion styles from discarded surplus fabrics. Like origami, she experimented with zero-stitched techniques. She introduced ancient craft techniques in her collections to reduce carbon footprint of dyeing processes. She even came up with an incredible collection from her stroll on a beach!

We all travel and sometimes we come across the incidences of human-animal conflicts. Most of us turn a blind eye towards the issue. But Nayantara Jain, Lathika

Nath, Pujā Mithra and Dr. Vidya Athreya worked persistently on creating awareness through their actions on the subject of wildlife conservation.

This decade for Sustainable Development Goals is the 'Decade of Action'. Every story in this book talks about action. There are 17 goals, each one laden with multifaceted obstacles. Though the goal is similar, there are diverse ways of approaching it. Some of these women picked up a particular goal like Eliminating Poverty or Hunger, or Having Clean water and Sanitation, or Renewable Energy, or saving Life under Water, Life on land and while some worked on multiple SDGs. What all these women have knowingly or unknowingly attained as their life choice is SDG 5: Gender Equality. They changed the views of their family members, colleagues and society on gender stereotyping. They questioned the customary status quos and dared to break them.

The stories are written by these women in their own words. They are short anecdotes that give an essence of their passion, struggle, successes and failures and most importantly a life message at the end. This, I feel is the beauty of this book. These stories are small doses of inspiration. One can just open any page and start reading and one can feel the positivity. These women give us hope, they give us strength, and a new perspective.

The illustrator of the book has added the introductory image of the storytelling woman and associated her endeavor with a relevant word. As we read the story, the image and the word builds itself around it, slowly building the picture out of puzzles. It is like mentally printing the entire journey of those women on paper. It was a novel idea!

It is not just a book with stories of 33 women. Every story is a life lived through difficulties. Every story is an approach, a methodology in itself. The compiler at the end has also compiled the strategies followed by these women to be advocate of Gender Equality and representative of Sustainability. It is done in the form of gripping quotes stated by these 33 women.

“At home: Encourage Equal Parenting – share in household work, childcare and earning an income; bring up sons and daughters equally – give them equal opportunities and equal responsibilities.

At Work: Pay and Demand equal salary for equal work.” – Smita Mankad.

“Question the status quo” – Sohini Chakravarthy.

“Think minimalistic. Before buying or ordering, reflect if you really want it. Think again.” – Shilpi Singh.

“No matter what your financial status is, the moment you resolve to take every measure possible to minimize your waste (be it energy, water, resources, material consumption), you would be living a sustainable life.” – Anu Choudhary.

In conclusion, this book is extremely lucid. The initial part covers all the 33 fascinating stories. The flow of the content and the arrangement of the stories make it unique. In the latter part of the book, there are the 17 photos of sustainable development goals.

Under the section of Strategies to Advance Gender Equality, there are quotes by the women themselves, some of which are mentioned above. Finally, there is a list of non-Profit organisations where one can start volunteer work for the cause of their choice. The colours of The Goals of Sustainable Development reflect on the cover page of the book. However, except the cover page, the entire book is in black and white, including the images, possibly hinting at a metaphor used by the compiler to celebrate sustainability.

This book is for anyone and everyone who is empathetic towards the weaker sections of society and who emphasize sustainability in their lives.