The terminology has been tweaked, the canvas has been broadened, and what was once little more than a feel-good idea has come to be regarded as an imperative that defines the way business is conducted. Corporate sustainability — the latest incarnation of what was earlier called corporate social responsibility or corporate citizenship — has well and truly come of age in a world where ‘how’ a business is conducted has become as important as ‘what’ the business is about. At Tata, though, this change in nomenclature has not much altered a business philosophy that has always been concerned about a lot more than profits and shareholders.

Back in 2004, we had dedicated an issue of Tata Review to corporate social responsibility. Five years down the line, we felt it made sense to use that issue, also called Code of Honour, as base material for a book that would expand on the theme, the topics and the stories contained there. This attempt at, well, codification is what you are holding, and it gathers under its umbrella the social, the environmental and the entrepreneurial components and considerations that constitute modern-day business.

Sustainability was originally described as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. There is, of course, more to it than that. Ethical, financial and commercial behaviour, concern and respect for employees, caring for the wider community and concern for the environment — corporate sustainability has space within its all-embracing borders for all of these subjects, linking them and making one inseparable from the other.

In business, sustainability is sustenance for those who empathise with people and the good earth in as great a measure as they strive for the benefit of shareholders. The sad part is, not everyone is willing to swear by this doctrine. More talk and less action continues to be the norm, the cosmetic of appearance trumping the aesthetic of the actual. As the many stories in this book show, there is a better way. A sustainable way.