

Book Review

“Hot, Flat and Crowded”, Thomas Friedman

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Ferrar, Straus and Giroux, New York (2012)
Pages: 438, Price: \$27.95

Climate Change continues to occupy a rhetoric space in highest foras for the last couple of decades now. Infact, the Earth Summit in Rio de Junerio has triggered the issue of climate change to an extent that it is now bringing about transformational changes in the way we think, act and transact our daily routines. The coming up of UNFCCC (United Nations Convention of Climate Change) an organization responsible for forcing countries for strict compliance towards climate change issues. Several treaties like Kyoto Protocol in 1997 and Paris Agreement in 2015 is the appropriate response from the global community towards safeguarding the planet earth.

The population of the globe has reached a staggering level of over seven billion which is putting a fair amount of pressure on all ecosystems forcing enormous usage of energy deposits particularly fossil fuels. This has resulted in making the planet ‘hot’. Another dimension which is equally appropriate in the context is the flatness of development. North America, Western Europe, Japan and Austria are no more the only developed countries club. The fast-emerging economies in Asia, Latin America and Africa are keeping a pace with the advanced countries of the world. China and India in Asia, Brazil and Argentina in Latin America, South Africa, South East Asian countries have registered a marked developed and these have created a flat world of development. The Sky scrapers of New York, London and Paris are equally matched by the skyline structures of Shanghai, Bengaluru, Singapore and Taipie, Dalian and Doha. In a world which is flat in terms of economic development has posed new challenges under new realities.

In view of the dimensions described above, the book by Thomas L. Friedman titled “Hot, Flat and Crowded” captures the astonishing aspects of world (earth) we are living in. Thomas L. Friedman’s earlier book “The World is Flat: A Brief History of 21st Century” has been followed by this book in 2008. Although the book ‘Hot, flat and Crowded’ is more focused on climate change issues (hotness of the earth) and the American response to global warming, yet the flatness and the crowded world dimensions have been rightly added to prove the actuality of climate change.

The book is divided into five parts. Part one “Where we are?” introduces the concept of Energy Climate Era (ECE). Part two “How we got here?” actually sheds extensive light on how climate change started happening. The fast urbanization and the coming up of new cities with a skyline full of glass and steel have turned up as energy black holes. Doha and Dalian(a new city in North East China) have been cited as examples of quick development requiring bundles of energy, so there is a stress on climate. In fact, global warming has been the cause of too much of urbanization

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and highly mechanical lifestyle requiring energy in cities. The author further stresses on that American way of life has been replicated by other countries in the world over. Here the author has chided the American planners strongly for not coming up with a way of life that is energy prudent. American automobile industry like GM, Ford, Chrysler, Jeep etc. have created gas guzzlers instead of energy efficient cars. This was primarily because the gasoline prices were fairly low and Americans preferred to the extravagant way of living resulting in polluting the atmosphere. One of the chapters in this part 'Energy Poverty' throws extensive light on how the developing countries would feel the brunt of energy deficiency in coming years. Ironically, the poorest being the least responsible for global warming have to be the worst sufferers.

Part-III of the book "How we move forward" dispassionately puts across many inroads for tackling climate change. Starting from identifying easy ways to a very interesting discourse on "Energy Internet: Where IT meets ET". The author really touched the new realms of futuristic needs of energy and how electrons will be transacted through internet. How clean power, energy efficiency, and conservation will be dominant factors in the years to come. The new energy era will demand an intergovernmental integration of power grids. Next thing that people will differentiate will be the source of power-coal, oil, nuclear, hydro, wind, solar, or natural gas. Energy Climate Era (ECE) will be characterized with a plethora of energy suppliers and consumers who will have a choice to select the source based on cost and time. Energy will be costly in the peak hours like mornings and evenings but very cheap during night. People will charge their cars with electrons during the night and over-charged electrons can be sold in the garage the next morning when the person puts his/her car in the garage while being in the office. There will be trading of electrons. A smart electricity board will read costs of energy based on different source and the costs will keep on changing and all this shall be on the smart board.

The author lays appreciable stress on innovations towards new alternate energy sources. Prices and innovations have a strong correlation. The energy prices were deliberately kept low to discourage innovations in cleaner technology. Now as the climate change issues became colossal and threatening, there is serious thought on innovations. He asserts that the breakthroughs in alternate energies till now have been only incremental but we need to have exponential breakthroughs to meet the everincreasing energy demand. Part-IV of the book has only one chapter "China: Can Red China become green China? China has been polluting its atmosphere for a quite some time now. But, of late, there is an awakening. There are now questions about how to generate Green GDPism. It is true that China's voyage from Communism to Capitalism has not been as difficult as it has been from dirty capitalism to clean capitalism. China has adopted several world class policies in just last couple of years. Today the richest person in China is the one who deals in clean energy production.

The Part V of the Book, the last part, is dedicated to the chapter on "America". The Part hosts two chapters. Both the chapters focus on China. The author lucidly explains how easy it is for China to effect new regulations and how difficult it is for western economies particularly USA to pass new laws and get them implemented. The author has dedicated a chapter "China for a Day (But not for Two)" where the author discusses at length how it would consume years to get a regulation implemented with regard to climate change issues. Democracies have failed to put new laws and regulations across easily but for China it is quite smooth as they have a command and control regime in place. In America, it is important

that one does not talk about renewable energy otherwise he is sure to lose elections. There are election swing states and all of them have plenty of coal deposits for producing dirty but cheap energy. America has failed in forging a strict climate change that was expected of it.

The book is a complete manifestation of all contours of climate change and lays extensive stress and emphasis on the urgency of creating a clean world characterised with clean energies. Climate Change Era as postulated by author has already gained space in the think tank machineries all across the world. The book is an embodiment of authentic research data duly referenced at the end. Author's personal experiences has added to the value of the book. With its all merits the book acclaims itself as an important reference material. However, amidst, all its achievements, the book lacks a detailed description on International regulations on climate change fostered by UNFCCC and it lacks description about the efforts put in by European Union in particular for reduction of emissions through the compliance market mechanism initiated by EU from 2008-2012. Nonetheless, a masterpiece in the area, the book is a unique contribution to the body of knowledge fast emerging in the area of climate change.