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Entrepreneurship Is Social Entrepreneurship

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Tarun Khanna, Professor at Harvard Business School, speaks about the incredible change in aspirations among young people in India. Whereas in the past young people aspired to become government officials, today they aspire to become entrepreneurs and lift themselves out of poverty by their own actions. Khanna reflects that this change in attitudes is inspiring and very good for the country.



Transcript

What's really heartening to me is that in the last 10 years ... There is a simple experiment that some social scientists in New Delhi have been doing. They have been wandering around asking young kids in India, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" A simple question like that and I think the response indicates a sea change in attitudes has happened in the last 10 years. 10 years ago, 15 years ago if you asked someone what do you want to be, the typical response would have been something like a government official. In India they would say an IAS officer. It stands for Indian Administrative Services, basically the civil service, bureaucracy, government. Why? Implicitly two reasons: stable job, you never get fired, and you can be as corrupt as you want and become fabulously wealthy. Great things. If you are a boy you get a great wife you know because you got a stable job and you get rich and wonderful, that's what people wanted. Today if you ask the same thing and people are running these surveys nobody says that, nobody.

I don't even think 1 out of 10 say that anymore. They all say we want to be a software entrepreneur. They have no idea what software is, they don't necessarily know what entrepreneur means, but they know that people work their way out of a hole and begin to go up and to me this is so fundamental, when people on the street, including uneducated people, are aspiring to something that has limited corruption or no corruption in it and are aspiring to basically lift themselves up by the bootstrap. And when poor mothers primarily are basically forgoing daily meals to educate their kids and send them to a training institute down the street so they can learn to write a few lines of code, that's a great sign. That's an awesome sign for the country. It is something I celebrate and acknowledge and speak about wherever I go.