

Book Discussion: Anchoring Change
75 years of grassroots interventions that made a
difference

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Hon'ble Dr Karan Singh

Visionary Statesman and Cultural Ambassador

Vijay Mahajan

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Renana Jhabwala

Social worker

Moderator(s)

Vikram Singh Mehta

Chairman & Distinguished Fellow

Know More Details: <https://csep.org/dRsK3Bp>

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Vikram Singh Mehta:

Shri Karan Singhji, Mr Vijay Mahajan, Ms Naina Lal Kidwai, Ladies and gentlemen, in the audience here and those listening virtually, it is my privilege to welcome you all to CSEP and to this book launch. This book has been in the book stores for a few months. But as this is the first formal occasion for a discussion on its content I refer to this event as a launch.

Dr Karan Singh:

Actually I have seen you on television 45 minutes this afternoon. That was a launch.

Vikram Singh Mehta:

That was a virtual launch sir. We at CSEP are honoured and privileged to have sir here today amidst all of us. As you all know the book is titled 'Anchoring change -75 years of grassroots interventions that made a difference'. I do not think there is a person in India today who has been as extensively and intensively involved with change over the past 75 years as our honoured guest today Dr Karan Singhji. From the day we achieved our independence on August 15th 1947 Dr Karan Singhji has been at the helm of policy and the crossroads of political, economic, social and cultural change in the country. He was Prince Regent of Jammu and Kashmir in 1949 Sadar I Riyasat from 1952 to 1965. The first governor of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Amongst the most senior most cabinet member in successive congress-led governments and our ambassador to the US. He has been at the forefront of philosophic cultural and religious dialogue through his books lectures and teachings. There is scarcely an issue that Dr Karan Singhji has not been involved with directly and or indirectly. It would be no exaggeration to say that there is no one alive today who has this breadth or depth of knowledge experience and sensitivity of what our country has passed through over the seven decades. To have him here in CSEP, in the CSEP offices to launch a book that focuses on 75 years of change is a single honour for me personally as the co-editor of the book and professionally as chairman of CSEP. We are hugely grateful to you sir. Thank you so much for being with us.

Dr Karan Singh:

Thank you for inviting me.

Vikram Singh Mehta:

I am also extremely grateful to Mr Vijay Mahajan and Mrs Naina Lal Kidwai for agreeing to join us today as the panellist. Vijay is the doyen of civic interventions. He is amongst the handful of leaders that have inspired volunteerism and impactful grassroots interventions in our country. Currently Vijay is the CEO of the Rajiv Gandhi foundation and the director of the Rajiv Gandhi institute of contemporary studies. Vijay founded Pradan or professional assistance for development action an NGO that by inducting professionals to work with other NGOs, raise the quality and impact of grassroots interventions. Vijay also conceptualised the micro finance group 'Basix'. Basix's objective was to attract mainstream financial resources into the promotion of the livelihood for the poor and women on a sustainable basis. This initiative spawned innovative financing models for development. I am proud to say that Vijay is one of the authors of this book. Naina Lal Kidwai is nationally and internationally known

for her leadership in business and finance. She was the chairman of the HSBC group in India. And the president of FICCI. The Federation of chamber of commerce and industry. She has been repeatedly ranked in the Fortune magazine as amongst the most influential business women in the world. But the reason I am grateful to Naina for accepting our invitation has less to do with these distinctions than by the fact that this gives us an opportunity to tap into her experiences in the civic space. Naina founded the India Sanitation Coalition and is author of the book 'Survive or Sink'. An action agenda for sanitation, water, pollution and green finance. Through this book Naina has issued a Clarion call to citizens, industry, civil society, media and the government to collaborate, to address the challenge of poor sanitation, water and pollution in our country. Naina's contribution in this space has shifted the needle. She has made a big difference. Thank you Vijay, Thank you Naina. We at CSEP and I personally owe you both a debt of gratitude. Let me now share a few thoughts about the book. The idea of this book came to me as I circled the closed corridors of the high rise building in which I stay in Mumbai during the height of the covid lockdown. I have always been troubled by the thought that we the educated liberals, for lack of a better phrase, spend a disproportionate amount of our time critiquing the state of the nation. The focus of our conversations are predominantly on India's failure as a socio-economic polity, the erosion of its institutions of governance, the poor quality of leadership, corruption and bureaucratic status and in general the failure of our country to realise its potential. We seldom dwell on what has gone right. On the many examples of interventions by governments, business, civil society organisations and individuals that have made a positive difference to society. In short we seldom dwell on what has succeeded. Now to be clear I am not suggesting that these critiques are without substance. India has indeed failed to deliver on the promises made by its founding fathers to build a just, egalitarian and sustainable society. India is still home to largest number of poor people in the world. And it remains divided by class, caste, religion, language and race. So said, this critique is I believe imbalanced. It ignores the achievements that over the past 75 years have in some small way shifted the needle of social progress in a positive direction. Anyway, my thought as I circumambulated this corridor in my high rise building, was that this balance should be corrected. That an effort should be made to shift the narrative from what has not been done to what has been achieved. And through this shift input the positive learnings from these achievements into our future development models. I would admit to a personal influence. I come from Udaipur, a city that has been at the forefront of volunteerism and civic service. They are probably more civic social organisations or NGOs in this city than other comparably sized cities in north India. Many members of my family have been engaged in civic and grassroots activity. I have not been directly engaged. My career was along a very different track. But their involvement did give me an insight into the positive impact that grassroots interventions have made on society. It is this insight and the conviction that there were many individuals and organisations across the length and breadth of our country that have contributed comparably and that their story should be told. I wrote up a proposal for a book for Harper Collins. My proposal encapsulated four objectives. One to get the progenitors of successful grassroots interventions over the past 75 years to narrate their stories. Two, to ensure that through this narration the readers derive an understanding of how and why these organisations achieved success. Three, to distil the common principles and learnings if indeed a unifying connect could be established from these stories for possible inclusion into future developmental models. And finally to shift the tenor of the public narrative from the negativism of failure to the positivism of success. Harper Collins accepted my proposal. But urged that the project be brought to completion by the start

of our 75th year of independence. As I have no hands on experience of grassroots activity I invited two experts, Neelima Khetan and Jayapadma R V to help me with the project. The book – ‘Anchoring change – 75 years of grassroots intervention that made a difference’ edited by the three of us contains 24 different stories of grassroots interventions and one synthesis chapter that pulls together the connecting themes and common learnings. The selection of these 24 stories was not easy for our research. For our research had identified close to a 100 interventions that made a difference. 24 barely touches the richness of these variegated efforts. We managed by deciding that the coverage should be expansive in time that is across several decades, pan India, multi topical, it should cover all subjects such as women’s empowerment, water, education, poverty alleviation, and so forth and it should be inclusive of less well-known entities. Some well-known and much written about organisations were deliberately excluded. We sought the advice of a group of external experts like Vijay. Now a read through the 24 chapters throws up one message unsurprisingly. There is no silver bullet response to the complexity of India’s social challenge. There is no one size fits all solution to the myriad of problems that needs to be addressed. Each issue has to be tackled through tailored localised responses. There is a unifying thread that binds these varied interventions across geography and time. This thread has several strands. All authors are driven by the conviction that they are addressing what one referred to as the salient problems of our times. They all recognise that success hinges on giving the poor a voice and an equal stake in the process and outcome of social change. The poor are not passive agents. And interventions have to be designed around them. The authors do not differentiate between means and ends. The two are inseparable. For them the ‘how’ of an intervention is as important as the ‘what’ of the outcome. The challenge has been to prevent a wedge being driven between the two. Leadership is another unifying theme. In this context what is striking is the preponderance of women in influential positions and behind successful social transformations. Partnerships and the support of the government are also cross cutting factors of importance. Few civil organisations succeed without forging strategic alliances. And not surprisingly unsupportive bureaucrats and politicians or an unfavourable policy environment does present an existential challenge. Funds are of course a necessity but civil organisations must be cautious about the quality of the funds. These organisations should look for money from donors that empower and encourage and not from those that place conditions and create distortions. The strength of conviction to say no must be in every civil organisation’s quiver. Looking into the future the stories hold out several lessons for development. The poor, the disadvantaged, the differently abled, whatever term you wish to use, can change their destiny if they are empowered to own the process of change and if they are supported by skill, technology and resources. Civil organisations should see themselves as conduits and facilitators to create cultures of consultation and collaboration to develop and deliver holistic solutions for sustainable livelihood programs. Women are more effective than men in striking the right balance between the imperatives of change and the compulsions of traditions. A developmental model that does not give women a central place would be sub-optimal. Individuals matter. And not just those vested with formal authority. Behind each successful intervention that we have talked about have been exceptional men and women who have through sheer dint of intellectual vitality, physical effort and urgent patience move the social needle. Such people need to be found, encouraged and made integral to the process of development. This book does not refute the evidence that India has a long way to go to keep its tryst with destiny. But it shows that every segment of our society has at some time or other and in some small way across the length and breadth of the country successfully addressed the

issues of social inequality. It lays out the markers by which the citizens of India can bring political democracy into alignment with social democracy. In conclusion and before I request the honourable Dr Karan Singhji to make his remarks I want to thank Swati Chopra who is here, who is the editor of Harper Collins. I thank her for her constant support, editorial advice and friendship. Every author Swati as you must know needs a supportive publisher. And CSEP and we the co-editors of this book are fortunate in having had you steer us along. So thank you very much. So may I request you sir to deliver your remarks.

Dr Karan Singh:

Thank you Vikram for a useful encapsulation of the messages behind this book. Your speech itself I think contains a lot of wisdom and it would be good if more and more people who hold power in public life are to listen to your speech carefully and try and absorb the basic points that you have made. Particularly the one about the importance of women in the developmental process and the importance of a dialogue and dignity with the people to whom we are trying to help. Not as a sort of a biksha, but as part of our social duty. Vijay Mahajan, Nainaji and friends in this nice little neat auditorium. I didn't know you had one here. What a joy it is to see a book for a change that talks about our successes and not our failures. There is too much doomerism, I don't know whether you have come across the phrase or not. I brought you an article by a woman called Hannah Ritchie. 'An end to doomerism'. Something you might be interested to read. Doomerism means that all the time talking about death, things ending, this happened or that happened, it was destroyed or look what is happening. Doomerism these negative feelings often become self-fulfilling. When you keep saying that you failed, you failed, you failed, then, all the zest goes out of the whole process. Young people particularly feel extremely frustrated. If you are all going to fail then what is the use of their trying so hard. It is really very nice to see this book. I haven't read it. I must tell you. But I have glanced through it. And it shows clearly what a difference NGOs and individuals can make in the developmental process. We used to have at one stage I remember very early on in our independence there was this theory of working together and all, but they didn't and it collapsed after a while. It became again polarised the whole developmental process. As he said this one idea in his mind morphed into a book and the book by the way I have seen you on television. You can't say this is a launch. I have seen you launch and I have listened to you for 45 minutes this afternoon. How can this be a launch unless I have some psychic powers that can see things that don't exist? Some three people and editors were there. Somebody sent me the link. He said you are speaking this evening, why don't you see this? I have seen it. Anyhow, I know what you are going to say.

Vikram Singh Mehta:

It was virtual. I was waiting for you for the launch.

Dr Karan Singh:

Even it was virtual.

Vikram Singh Mehta:

I was waiting for you for the launch.

Dr Karan Singh:

Anyhow let me say as Vikram has said I have indeed witnessed the whole drama of Indian independence from day one. I have met all the dramatist people. Even Gandhiji. I must be one of the few persons alive who have actually met Gandhiji. Because he came to Srinagar in 1947 and he called on my father and my mother and I insisted. I was on a wheel chair by the way. But I insisted on being there. So my wheel chair was wheeled up and I didn't understand a word he said. He spoke with a soft Gujarati accent. Accidentally I couldn't follow. But anyhow the fact that I saw him is itself a big thing. Then of course all the Prime Ministers from Jawaharlal Nehru to Narendra Modi and all the presidents from Dr Rajendra Prasad to Shrimati Draupadi Murmu. So I have seen it all because I am older than the... I am 92 by the way. So I am older than the Republic. I have seen the whole thing. As you said there has been tremendous changes in these 75 years. It is impossible to encapsulate them. But very briefly let me start with politics. We have had a functioning democracy for 75 years which not very many countries have. With smooth transfers of power at the state. We take this for granted. But there are many countries around the world who do not have this privilege. An independent judiciary and free media, although there have been doubts about that from time to time, but nonetheless by and large we have had a functioning democracy. With one man one vote, one woman one vote. So that is I think one of the biggest achievements, the very fact that we continued our democracy. Without going into other aspects of it I think this is something which we can be proud. On the economic front I can broadly touch upon three revolutions which I have seen in my own life time which really changed the picture of India. The first was the green revolution. With my good friend M S Swaminathan. I mean that green revolution, we literally, I don't know you were much too younger to remember, we lived from ship to mouth. In other words the grain was coming in, if the grain came in we ate, if it didn't we starved. A million starved. That was our position Vikram. Today we are actually exporting grain which I think is a shame because there are so many people starving. But that is a different point. The fact of the matter is that green revolution changed everything. It transformed India's internal position and India's image in the world. We didn't have to go around with a begging bowl every time. That is one very important revolution. The second is the white revolution and Kurien. I think Amul... You talk of start-ups and NGOs. Amul is a miracle. What that one man did and achieved. The way he was able to set up this extraordinary cooperative of rural women and milk today we are the greatest largest milk producers in the world as you know. So that is another big revolution. People have forgotten it. You see young people now take these revolutions for granted. But I remember when we did not have the revolution we did not have the food, we did not have the milk. So I think they also need to be reminded there has been a major change. And the third is what I could perhaps call the technological revolution. All the IITs, the space program was set up a long time ago. Homi Baba a good friend of mine, Vikram Sarabhai, I mean these are two people, Satish Dawan I think, these are the people, the pioneers in the field of space travel and our program there. So these three revolutions, the green revolution, the white revolution and the technological revolution. Where of course now in technology we have moved from... what did we have when I went to college or school? We had no computers. I mean young people won't believe today that we could have got a perfectly good education without computers. But we did. Assisted in the mental faculties also. Nowadays you ask a young man to do a simple sum, immediately they run for their machines. They can't do anything in their heads. We did our BA, MA and my PhD all without any computers. Without any television. There was a time when there was no television. I am sure none of you can believe that. How can you live without television? We did live without television. We did reasonably well I think. The point I am

making is that a lot of the things that we now take for granted were not there. And all of them required the sort of interventions that you mentioned here. But of course with government help. Not so much NGOs. But nonetheless even with, the name I was looking was community living or something like community development or something that Jawaharlalji had set up. The idea was that it was not only government who would do it, the communities would get involved. Who are neighbours that is a different matter. But that was the point. So this is an important point that I want to make when you talk about change in political and economic and social revolution. Crores of people who were outside the pail and who were nowhere. They were not there, they were non-people. The Adivasi, the Dalits, the backwards, they were brought into the mainstream. Why? Because of the one man one vote. These people are now are being sort of lobbied by every political party. So the reservations for scheduled tribes and scheduled castes, I know some people are against that. But those reservations have changed the face of India. Because crores of people literally, they were not there. They were not in any account. Constitution giving every man a vote, equal citizens they are. And now they are being wooed by all the political parties. We need to do this for the Dalits, we have do that for the tribal... because they need the vote. The only way to get a politician to move is to if he get a vote. Let me tell you that from personal experience I have had. I was 40 years in parliament you know. Four times in Lok Sabha and four times in Rajya Sabha. So I have seen it all from the treasury benches and from the opposition. Both houses. It is a fascinating thing but that can come later. So what I want to point out on this social revolution, the revolution of bringing outsiders into the mainstream, I think that is something which was very important. So the political revolution, the economic revolution and the social revolution, these are all incomplete mind you. I can go and have a long talk about how... I have a talk called India's unfinished revolutions where I mention these and what needs to be done. But I don't want to go into that today because I have been given only 15 minutes. So if I spend all my time on looking into those things I won't be able to say anything else. Now, I must say that this – the critical role of civil society is very important. Or civic society as you seem to call it. I don't know. I have never heard that before. I always call it civil society. But I read somewhere in your book civic society. I am not sure which the correct use is. We used to call it civil society. Civic society must be your Bombayite innovation. Whatever it is, the role of civil society in the anchoring is quite extraordinary. It is fascinating even for a layman like me. You know I am not really in any way technologically inclined. Nonetheless to read how some of these things have happened and many of these things are in areas in which we have ourselves been involved. For example, handicapped people. I myself have a locomotive handicap. I have lived with a nail in my hip for 75 years. But I have done fine. I played tennis doubles, badminton, I did golf. I have a disability. There are very serious disabilities, there are audio, visual. Now the world of disabilities is something which is totally neglected. It is estimated that 5% of Indians at least if not 10% have some kind of disability. What happens to them? Who looks after them? Some of these things are about people with disabilities I noticed. My late wife whom you know she started this school for special children in Delhi. Which has been looking after children who are mentally handicapped. Now my daughter in law runs it. Another thing that we are doing is my daughter for example is trying to re-establish 'Basohli paintings'. You see even the arts are not necessarily elitist. I mean the artists are starving most of them. They are languishing. Particularly in covid. So they also have to be involved in some ways in our cultural life, we have to involve the artists. As I said these successes are very good and I must congratulate all of those who have made a contribution in this. That having said I must point out that we are a nation of great

contradictions. I don't know whether any of you saw a wonderful article by Vikram Patel, in which he says, 'it is not rocket science, what Indians need basics like clean toilet, decent housing, drinking water and nutritious food. Too bad our idea of modern day does not include them'. And I can't read it all. I will read some of it. 'We are a country that can simultaneously boast to being home to medical facilities which are so sophisticated that people from other countries stoop to them. While most of our primary care clinics don't have enough doctors. And we have amongst the worst health indicators in the world. We are a country which can be proud of producing more vaccines than any other and yet be home to the largest number of unvaccinated children. We are a country which can boast of having so much food stored in our granaries as some of it is feasted upon by vermin while tens of millions of our children go hungry and stunted'. There is lots more. 'We are the country where we are pioneering the use of technology in every aspect of our daily life even though most of our children do not have the digital devices or access to the internet which they needed during the school closures in the pandemic leading to a historic learning loss. We are a country that builds ultra-modern infrastructure on the banks of our holiest rivers even while the water themselves are slowly dying from most toxic pollutions in the planet'. It is a very interesting article. You should look at it. What he was saying is with these contradictions, we are like this only. This is the only answer that he is able to give. We are like this only. The point is there are so many contradictions in this country still. Even today crores of people shiver in the winter, drenched in the monsoon. Sweat in the summer. Because they don't have any accommodation to live in. There are crores of children who go to bed hungry. What tragedy it is. When we waste so much food on our weddings. If you go to a wedding I don't know about Bombay, but Delhi weddings are gross. I mean it is terrible to see the amount of food that is wasted when children are literally starving. And malnutrition, I have been health minister among other things and malnutrition is the worst possible thing. Because it stunts not only your body but it stunts your mind. It is a terrible deprivation. Our granaries are filled. Ask the ministers. What is the use of our fully filled granaries if you can't feed your children? I have never been able to understand why we have not been able to get that food to the children. And somebody has to tell me this. I have been 75 years in public life, I never got an answer to this. Perhaps you could think of something and let me know. Not that I have anything to do with it now. But it will be good to know that there is a solution. Because why should this be. Nainaji please tell me. Children are dying of starvation, they are not getting two square meals and our granaries are full. Rats are eating it. There are such fat rats in our country which you can't see anywhere else. Such good fat rats we have. But the children are suffering. What is this? It is very bad for India. I am sorry. I mean with all our great achievements we are going beyond the moon and we are going to mars. These are wonderful things. I agree. But why are our children undernourished. Nobody has been able to answer that question yet. So Vikram I don't want to take too much time. But the fact is that you have in your article synthesis of towards the framework for grassroots interventions, you have summed up the challenges very well. And particularly your framework for future development, public private collaboration is very important. You have to bring the government into the picture. It is no use saying that they are corrupt. They may be. But without government support at some stage you cannot really solve the problems that we have. So good or bad or indifferent, we hope they get better not get worse, the governments at the state level more particularly because that is where the grassroots come in. The state level, the district level, the panchayat level, the block level, that is where government interventions are so important. That is something which we have to do. I must congratulate you for this very good publication

I must say. I am not saying because he talked about Udaipur. I have known his grandfather, Mohan Singh Mehta, he was the one who started a lot of these institutions in Udaipur which are still functioning so well. So I have known him for many years. I am not saying just because you are a friend but because I really think that you have done a good job in this. I am sure the panellists will shed a lot of light on it. Maybe you will come out with more books like this. May the force be with you.

Vikram Singh Mehta:

Thank you very much for gracing this occasion and honouring us. I am going to go over to Vijay. We have made a lot of ... we have taken so much advice from you. We owe much to you and the support that you have given us. But you are obviously not going to be held responsible for the contents. You might have some comments to make about the contents. Especially some of the conclusions that we have drawn. So may I just ask you to perhaps give us your thoughts?

Vijay Mahajan:

Thank you Vikram. And thank you Dr Karan Singh for such a grand overview. It is really when one thinks about it to be sitting next to someone who is you know born before the independence, who met Gandhiji and who is done all the things that you mentioned, that itself is quite a privilege. First of all congratulations Vikram for doing the opposite of doomerism. It is a national disease I think. I think we have two national diseases. One is we are all deaf and we don't like to listen to others. And the other is we are suffering from doomerism. This is despite the fact that so much progress. Dr Karan Singh alluded to three revolutions and many half-finished ones. By the way the half-finished ones are not something to laugh at. For example though I am painfully aware of the health statistics including the NFHS 5 data which has come out recently since I am also a policy wonk. But in 1947 our life expectancy was 32. National average was 32. Now it is 68. Just think about it. 36 additional years of life for every human being who is alive today and that is 1.4 billion and it is by the time they are completely gone, the life expectancy maybe 75 or more. So it is probably 40 billion additional life years contributed. What would be the valuation of an enterprise which would add that? I asked this question to my sort of financial sector friends. 40 billion life years additional. So there is a lots to celebrate, to be grateful for and I think if there is a third thing that which you have avoided which I again want to applaud is finger pointing. NGO saying government is not doing. Government saying NGOs are not doing. Both saying the business and market are the culprit. The three sort of important components of the society, institutions of the state, institutions of the market and institutions of civil society are constantly sort of finger pointing at each other rather than collaborating for the national task and in some ways when you allude to public private partnership in your future solutions you move to towards that. But before I come to that let me just sort of since it is a formal book launch and I was involved as you said and thank you for acknowledging that with some of the ideas here and some of the selections. I first thought, I was not aware of the name till the book came. The first thought that occurred to me and I want to ask the editor maybe later, as to why you choose this paradox. Because change and anchoring is quite the opposite of each other. And obviously it is not a slip.

Vikram Singh Mehta:

I can answer that.

Vijay Mahajan:

So I thought about it and in some ways while it is in an apparent paradox I guess a change which is fleeting, which doesn't take root, we see that all the time. It actually drowns more sort of hopes and scotches more expectations than it arouses. So you do need change which is stable and sustainable and hopefully scalable. That can happen only if it is rooted or anchored. So in that sense...

Vikram Singh Mehta:

Thank you for answering the question.

Vijay Mahajan:

So I did try to think about it. Neither Vikram Mehta nor Harper Collins would sort of let a paradox pass so quickly. By the way I do know Vikram's philosopher brother and his civil society brother. So I kind of know the family. Of course I have also briefly met Mohan Singhji your father. The choices of ... I have to take credit for the fact that I did push Neelima and I think she then convinced Vikram that we need to have at least few case studies of government programs which according to me are absolutely world class. Which pass all the tests of good social engineering, sustainable and they are far more scalable at a much larger scale than even the biggest NGOs. I am so glad that you included cases here like 'Kutumb shri' on Andhra Pradesh. SERP society for eradication of rural poverty. The Chhattisgarh 'Mitanin' program and so forth. And of course the Tamil Nadu Midday meal program. So that is one good thing. However I had another suggestion which I think even Neelima didn't quite agree with. So it probably never made it to you which was that I think that the change that has happened in India is also happened significantly because of people who are often seen as uncivil. Or at least they are seen as the protestors, the activists, in some cases extremists. Let me give you three examples that I completely deeply admire. One is Shankar Guha Niyogi who used to work in the Dalli Rajhara's mines which feed the Bhilai steel plant. This is in Chhattisgarh. Shankar Guha Niyogi moved there in the late 60s and he basically established a trade union of the tribal workers who were contract labourers. They were digging up iron ore and loading it in wagons. Most of the work that time was manual. Over a period of time he managed to achieve a lot of benefits for them, but also in the process alienated a lot of the contractors and eventually he was shot and he died. There was a case lodged against a local industrialist who was eventually acquitted, so one doesn't really know what the truth is. But the fact is that a person who did so much for so many was taken away. But thanks to Shankar Guha Niyogi's work the rights of contract labourers in that generation at least significantly moved a whole step. Unfortunately we are now seeing the reverse of it. There has been serious informalisation and casualization of Indian labour in the last two decades. We don't have a Shankar Guha Niyogi amongst us. The trade union movement in India has almost died. It is as a result causing a lot of the opposite of welfare to millions of people. The extreme example of which we saw when so many of them had to walk back home in the midst of covid. That was partly because all those workers were basically from the unorganised sector. The second such person I can mention is Medha Patkar. Very well known for Narmada Bachao andolan. While we can argue both ways about the desirability of a dam on the Narmada, because I also worked in places like Saurashtra and I know what that water has done for those places both in terms of drinking water as well as irrigation. But at the same time I also know what it has done to the tribal in Omkareshwar and other places. Medha's question was the current situation where all the costs were to be borne

by the tribal and all the benefits shall flow to people who get water downstream is not fair. Of course this sort of congealed into an opposition of the dam. But eventually what happened was that the RNR, the relief and rehabilitation packages that eventually started getting more widely accepted and then went beyond dams to any kind of projects and it was ultimately codified in the land acquisition act of 2013 were significantly a step towards social justice. The half-finished revolution that Dr Karan Singh talked about which was envisaged only in the preamble of the constitution and the rest of the constitution though a great document is seriously short of instruments to achieve any of those four goals. Justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. Fraternity is completely missing. There is not a word in the constitution after the preamble to build anything about fraternity and that is why we are where we are. At least for liberty we have the fundamental rights and the courts, for equality there are again article 14, 15 etc. and for justice of course there is the full judicial system. But as an engineer even though every time I read the preamble of the constitution there is a catch in my throat. But as an engineer I say, hey partner, sorry. After such ideals where are the instruments to actually implement them. The constitution sadly after the preamble breaks down into being the memorandum of association of the Indian state. After using 'We the people' as the first three words of the preamble the people are basically been reduced to the subjects of the state. In your preface you talk about citizenship and democracy. The idea of India was based on citizens building the new India. The constitution of India almost every clause begins with 'the state shall', 'the state shall', 'the state shall'. Read the directive principles. Every one of them, from article 39 onwards right up to the 51 that was introduced by Indiraji. All begin with the phrase 'the state shall' as if there is nothing in India other than the state. (Dr Karan Singh saying a sentence away from the mike). In some ways we the civil society... and by the way though the common phrase usage is civil society. But I prefer your usage. Because unfortunately in the last ten years that phrase civil society is being misused as civil societies. You know, that is society registered under the society's registration act which is a trivial category of the original abstract noun. The word civil society. In any case I think civic represents citizenship in the active sense rather than civil which is a kind of an inherited adjective. So I prefer that usage and I thought it... in fact I would do it advisedly in future. So the summary of these 24 or 24 less the ones which are government efforts is that they were efforts by citizens, individuals, some acting alone initially and some acting in groups to come together and work towards the idea of India which was envisaged by our founders. But which was the state was either not willing or able to do it. The institutions of the market in any case did not see it as their business till fairly recently. I am not referring to the CSR business. I am talking about the whole business thinking about its role in society. So first and foremost these are stories of citizen action to address the ills and deficits of our times. And to do it in an organised way and the seed of it is always an idea. If you read the chapter on the Tamil Nadu midday meals because it started as far back as 1920 in Madras corporation. But when Kamaraj made it a state-wide program in 1956 he inaugurated it in the village of Subramanya Bharati the poet. The article says that one of the reasons was that Subramanya Bharati had written, I only know the English translation, where there is this one line saying 'if even one man goes hungry at night let this world be destroyed'. When it is said in Tamil it is really powerful. That idea really became you might say the moral legitimacy for building the Tamil Nadu midday meal program. Which by the way was an attempt to address malnutrition and things that you mentioned. Unfortunately unlike the Mitani article the Tamil Nadu article does not use much data or statistics to show actually what is an absolute world class, long term successful program. So if it is ever revised I would advise them to put some

data because it is really something we can be proud of. But from the seed of the idea whether it is a poet's line or whether it is some idea in a manifesto of a political party, you still need a place where that idea is tried out in practice. So that real people can see how it plays out in practice. And the role of civil society organisations is they are those nursery beds of innovation which make ideal sprout and take root. You can see that – oh, this plant will give or yield this kind of fruit. If I have many such plants I will have a whole garden full of them. But to then expect that NGO, that civil society organisation to then go and cover the whole earth with that is unfair because they neither have the resources nor the legitimacy, nor the sort of role in the eyes of the society to do that everywhere. That is where the role of the state and in some case market institutions comes in. As society is transiting from being able to figure out how to meet essential human needs in ways that are sustainable, that is where there is no charity involved and no subsidy involved, but it is a user pay services. One simple example of which is say healthcare. At one time it was supposed to be completely a service, free service, right? But slowly an increasing proportion of the population started affording, even now we are at a situation where a significant part of the population cannot afford it, but through innovations like health insurance, even in the last 10 years for example you have seen a dramatic rise in the number of people without means being able to afford advanced medical or surgical care well beyond their means. Because of pooling effect. So as society is able to come up with these innovations to address human needs it is quite valid to transfer these out of the world of civil society to institutions of the market. I therefore do not think that there is anything wrong with for-profit health as long as it is regulated and it is made available to a larger number of citizens. For that there are other techniques as Naina being from the financial sector should be able to agree with me that health insurance is a great enabler to spread the possibilities of health. Whether it is a US style model or a single payer model, those are further matters of detail that we can... this is not the appropriate place to discuss. I want to therefore say that this triple finger pointing that has been happening in society needs to stop. And we need to get together on the same table and say – hey, these are critical problems of our time. Whether it is rampant malnutrition that Dr Karan Singh referred to or a number of other things that we lament in our drawing rooms every evening. We need to recognise them as national problems that everybody has to get together to solve. We need to then put together institutions of the state, institutions of the market and civil society institutions to work on them together. To this triad Vikram I want to add two more which don't actually fall in this triple category and these two are knowledge institutions which are though universities can be government or private but they are not really institutions of the market or institutions of the state. Knowledge institutions in my mind include the media because they are basically using information to sort of disseminate it more widely. So universities and the media. But the fifth is financial institutions. That is because though financial institutions can be both either state-owned or market players, they are a class in themselves because they deal with a particular type of capital which has become so important both as a problem and as a solution. That unless we bring that in our toolbox for change we are denying ourselves one of the most important instruments that the 20th century discovered to bring about large scale change. So technology coming largely from knowledge institutions, institutional practice from that triad of institutions that I talked about and capital. These three have to be deployed to resolve or address our problems over time. Therefore what I would have liked to see in this book other than these few of these activist's stories, by the way the third one I forgot to mention is of course Aruna Roy and her work. Those are my three favourite examples of activism that has made a huge change to society. I think the deployment of

knowledge, technology being an instrument of knowledge, institutions because individual action is trivial, and capital together and doing this without finger pointing, doing this with the spirit of – lets crack these problems. I think that is the way to go. I think this book fills us with hope because in small ways it has been done. ‘Basix’ when I started it little commercial here, the first year we did two crores worth of lending. This is 1996. And we were at that time the only commercial microfinance institution and therefore obviously the country __ two crores. That was 1996. In 2022, 31st March, year ending, total microfinance in the country was 2 lakh 76 thousand crores. And in a smaller version of Dr Karan Singh’s life, I have seen every bit of that happen in front of my eyes. From people telling me are you mad. You are lending to a poor person taking from the bank. Will he repay you so you have to repay to bank? Are you joking? To where today it is considered one of the best asset classes for any bank and all banks are vying with each other to be in micro financing. The whole ecosystem for it was built including **whats** and all. But it has got built and it’s happened in front of my eyes. And it’s been done by real people who I know. So I am very hopeful the opposite of doomerism, like that we can crack a hundred problems. What Dr Karan Singh mentioned, Dr Kuriens white revolution, Dr Swaminathan’s green revolution and the technological revolution which is many, many people, subset of which is the digital revolution which we have seen being an IIT engineer myself I sort of from the time fabricating a diode in 1975 for a B Tech project, I can’t believe that in my pocket right now I was carrying a pen drive which is 128 gigabytes. If it had to be installed in the IIT Delhi today using the same type of computer that was there we would have to have a campus bigger than IIT Delhi for 128 gigabytes. All this has happened. What I am saying is this has happened by real people, by the same set of institutions whom we malign every day and under the same semi-functional imperfect democracy and imperfect set of institutions. So can we please shut up and start focusing on solving these problems rather than focusing on doomerism. Thank you so much.

Vikram Singh Mehta:

Well that is profound and thank you so much to talk about. I could ask so many questions. But I do really think that Naina, your comments on, not necessarily the book, but this idea of change that we talked about the toolbox that he has talked about, the challenges that Dr Karan Singh has talked about. She brought them together given your own effort to solve one set of problem in the sanitation. I just wonder if you could...

Vijay Mahajan:

I can’t resist one foot note. I am very fond of acronyms. Since you mentioned the toolbox, it is actually tool kit, K for capital, I for institution and T for technology. My friend Arjun would tell you this. I can’t but except in acronyms.

Naina Lal Kidwai:

Thank you Vikram. So lots of thought for reflection here and I must thank you Vikram for having me here because in every such forum it gives one a chance to reflect and think and actually feel good about where we are as well. Dr Karan Singhji, just hearing you as ever and to point out as you have so aptly the article on doomerism. I love the term, to actually look me on that is actually what this book does. So big congratulations to you Vikram, to CSEP for taking forward what I think we do very little of, which is to celebrate our successes, to celebrate the individuals who have made a difference. I love the title. ‘Anchoring change’, it is about

change and how that perpetual change is so important for us to see. So I would just like to reflect on the thoughts that have been going through my mind hearing all the great speeches we have just heard. On what then anchors change and Vikram reflects on it in his opening introduction as well. And one of them has to be how we deal with failure. This is a sector when you work as NGOs there is just so many challenges coming at you all the time. You don't always succeed. Vijay himself was reminding me about the journey in microfinance and I have known him and worked with him when I was at HSBC as we were trying to institutionalize micro finance in the bank, barely understanding it, with bosses who were like – you guys are mad. How on earth do you think you are going to be funding micro finance institutions in India? But we got our way. People like Vijay showed us the way and Vijay was reminding me about the crisis which was actually a political crisis in Andhra. So that is a clear case where there is a failure of institutions that brings on issues where that same impoverished typically groups of women, the self-help groups which anchored microfinance were willing and able to pay and those disciplines are what carried the microfinance movement forward were destroyed by one fell swoop of political activism which came in to say – please don't pay back. For all those loans that were going fine and there was this huge growth of this sector, it collapsed. Just one movement starting in Andhra and then spread to three southern states where microfinance was booming. So you get these huge setbacks and how do you deal with this failure. How does a 'Basix' come back into being a major microfinance institution? How do you not lose heart is also very, very critical. So I think dealing with failure when you work in any business frankly I talk about this to my business colleagues and some of the leadership lessons that I take back to people but in this sector it has to count for everything. I think that refrain you will see through some of the stories that are shared. I think very, very importantly so. A second area is collaboration. Much has been said rightly of the collaboration and role of government and government and the not for profit the NGO sector. But I would also like to add a third dimension there and that is the corporate. I am really happy to see the E-choupal experience here Vikram. It hasn't been mentioned. But the ITC E-choupal is a great example. It is in the book for you to read. What they achieved in terms of community activity, some of it self-serving and I think that needs to be there. It is self-serving in that they work with farmer communities who they also dependent on for tobacco. But they have gone way beyond that. The example I would like to take is in the field of sanitation which is where I work. My late husband and I started the India Sanitation coalition. ITC right now working in that space has really shown what working in communities in sanitation is about. We have a very interesting project going on now which highlights the role of the corporate. I think it is such a big tick mark in the country that the same ministry who I have worked with very closely over the last six years since we started the India Sanitation Coalition, which by the way predates the Swachh bharat mission. We just lucked out that it suddenly became such a big program. So government was a partner, had to be a partner, I was dreading that part of my work only to find that that partnership was very rich and very engaging and the least of the challenges that we faced. In fact we were having to push back government in that we weren't always able to do what they wanted us to do. Welcome change. And also shows how sometimes when change is driven from the top it can really help down the line. But coming back to the corporate in the sector in the last three months we have had the ministry of rural development and the ministry of drinking water and sanitation reach out to us to create lighthouse projects and 75 because it is 75 years but anyway that aside, that the reason for it is – hey we have given a lot of money down to the states to implement in sanitation. It's come through the finance commission, it is

not just there in the budgets of the ministry. It is right down at the state level. But the money is not being deployed fast enough. We need not the money of the corporate but the partnership of the corporate to ensure that the money is spent and spent well. Imagine government is reaching out saying we want to make sure that this money is used in a way that the partnership between the corporate, the state government institutions which can be the Panchayat, it's the mission directors, I mean they go under various categories at the grass roots and of course the third is civil society because we do have a lot of NGOs that work in this space. I don't think we would get anywhere without them. That, that partnership is established. So the role of the corporate now is in the program typically around the factories where they work. So as a corporate it is self-serving. Good. It's self-serving because and therefore I come back to the E-Choupal example. It is self-serving because around your factory you want to make sure the communities are healthy and well. Because you draw from those communities. If the guy or the woman who is coming to work in your factory is sick or her family is sick, her attendance is going to be an issue for you. So you want that community to be healthy. You want to make sure that community has water because if they don't have enough water they would believe you are drawing the water and there is going to be conflict. So you want to make sure that they have the right sanitation, right nutrition and the right levels of water, education, because it benefits you. So you go into that activity as a corporate to provide for the programs that government provides, you make sure they know what programs government should be providing so you help them access it. By the way digital is really helping in that space. The knowledge of what programs are there and for the individual to draw from it. But also to make sure that the implementation is good and where there are gaps you step in to finance it as a corporate. So the best partnerships and the projects that I believe have succeeded best are those where this collaboration has worked. The collaboration of the government, the NGO and the corporate. I will say corporate but it is corporate and donor. I mean sometimes it is UN body, sometimes it is donors. It is often less about the finance and much more about the implementation of programs and access to programs which I think are very important. So as we go forward in looking at some of these examples I think I would really like to see examples of where each vertical is not just narrow in the space it is. If you see some of these examples work in communities across different platforms. They aren't just there saying we are educating children. They will work as, you see ones like **ANT**, and they work in various streams to ensure welfare of the communities where they work. It is very lateral, it is horizontal and it spreads across the community instead of in narrow brackets. Others focus on a bracket and that is fine. But when you focus on that you also want to see the lateral engagement and what I mean by that and Dr Karan Singhji, you talked about nutrition. Sanitation and nutrition go hand in hand. We have the highest number, declining fortunately, of stunted children anywhere in the world. A stunted kid is a kid that doesn't grow to his or her full capacity, mental as well. It impacts the development of the brain, it impacts the development of the body and what you end up is, forget demographic dividend, if you have half developed human beings this is not going to be a demographic dividend. It is a liability. If you have diarrhea which comes from poor water and poor sanitation, you can feed as much good food to that individual but it is literally going down the drain. So the combination has to be about nutrition, development, sanitation, water... water which is such a key aspect... clean water, drinking water. There is no end to the challenges at every level of society. But bringing it together to solve for nutrition isn't just about getting good food to the person. It is about ensuring that everything from health which Vijay mentioned through to nutrition, sanitation, water etc. gets solved. And education is key

to it all that unless you know what it means, why you are washing your hands, why is it important. Covid was such a help. Fortunately swachh bharat had started this whole practice of washing hands, kids had been part of wash programs, education on cleanliness, hygiene thanks to swachh Bharat that by the time covid came that institution of washing was already embedded. Now never mind that we still have issues on how do you give water and soap and whatever to the individual but it is solving for all these that become key. I think the best examples you will see in this book are those that have managed to work across lateral spaces. E-Choupal is an example of that. It starts with farmers and E-choupal which was really about helping them access information to do with farming and today one of the biggest programs in this lighthouse project that I just explained to you where we have corporates now who have adopted districts and are working down at the rural areas in sanitation and water, one of the biggest partner is ITC who were already doing 60% of the work. There was another 40 that they needed to just dot the 'I's and 'T's to bring the whole thing together in a meaningful way. I think we will see more examples of this. Now finance is very, very critical. There are microfinance institutions mentioned here. So that is one aspect. We need far more institutional finance. Microfinance is only one. It is green bonds when it comes to environment. There is very interesting project right now coming from a corporate in the area of 'carbon credits'. It is interesting because we all live in our great Delhi and its polluted airs of November. This corporate which is a UPL has a fungicide, it is in India's biggest agri-business company and it is one of the biggest in the world. It has a fungicide which in three weeks can destroy the stubble which the farmers burn. So rather than burning you apply this fungicide. By the way it is already been implemented in a number of districts in the north. I think in the next three years the good news is we have this solution. It is distributed free to the farmers because it is funded by carbon credits. It is implemented but not widely enough. It has been on Television also for last two years. The good news is all the politicians are taking credit for it. Aap is calling it their program, BJP is calling it theirs and that is all great. Because it should be everyone's program. What this implementation is about is farmer resist change as you well know. So the first few that have gone ahead have gone with their hearts in their mouth. But when they see that it works, it produces great fertilizer the answers are there. But my point here is 'carbon credit' which is a relatively new finance concept is enabling the delivery of this fungicide for free to farmers. So innovations in finance are going to be very important to bring some of these solutions into our market place. They are for-profit solutions. The company makes money from distributing fungicide. The farmer makes money by having excellent, cheap fertilizer which is what he creates by applying fungicide to a stubble instead of burning it and his next crops are proven to be richer and better as a result. So it is a win-win across the board and I think these are the collaborations we need as we go forward and the most successful examples I think demonstrate that. So dealing with failure, collaborations and how that works across the different players, the most successful ones being the ones that work together and working across verticals so one isn't narrow. I say I work in sanitation but can I ignore water, can I ignore nutrition, can I ignore education and the way it is taught in a school? No. You have to work through the different threads so that when you apply sanitation and water it is a horizontal, it cuts across verticals. Whether if you are working with women, you need to have toilets so that they can have ready access to it because it is a matter of their dignity and their safety. If you work in education you cannot ignore teaching sanitation and water. So on and so forth. So the verticals that you think you are looking at have to also have these horizontal applications and vice versa. We have to always think about when we solve for one problem to make sure it

doesn't create another. Does an electric vehicle solve for the environment if the electricity you are using is coming from coal. We have to solve across and make sure that we aren't looking at just – yes it will solve for pollution, but does it solve for everything else. How do we have holistic solutions and work in parallel and it is great to see that you do have one of the great players actually in the solar area as well in the book here. I will just end by saying that we need more such documentation of examples that work. I am delighted to see how these have endured, that these are not organizations that lost courage, lost faith and then moved away. They have been around for a long time and may they live for many, many more time. They will reinvent themselves, they will go up and down, but they are there now, they are past that I would like to believe. The whole area of scaling up remains a big challenge. If there is one challenge in the not-for-profit sector it is scale. And I think that it is distressing actually to see how little sharing happens in the sector. They tend to be very individual oriented around an individual. The inability of that individual to build teams and scale is something I see wearing my corporate hat. It is a challenge. You want the passion of that individual but you also want them to be able to create that passion in a million others who work with them. But also enable replication. At our India sanitation coalition we keep tabling examples of what is working so they can be replicated and you would be amazed how difficult it is. It is like extracting teeth sometimes to get people to share what is working for them so that others can replicate it. We don't have to reinvent the wheel each time. Yes, local examples change. But replication and books like this help because they will inspire others, they will show others the way and for those that want to share what they do go back and do that. I will just end by saying I am really sorry that Renana Behn couldn't be with us. I have worked very closely, my husband even more so, my late husband with Sewa and the work that they do. Particularly given Ela Behn's passing. It would have been wonderful to have had her here with us today. It is a remarkable example of what can be achieved on scale and how women have led this organization Sewa, the whole creation whether through microfinance, livelihood creation and I can tell you that at the behest of Ela Behn my husband actually worked on setting up grassroots trading network for them. Which was a Sewa organization which was about working with corporates. Sewa learnt how to do organic farming because ITC taught them. Sewa learnt how to work with the Ammas who go selling product in the local villages because of Levers and how to actually make products which sell in the market through Fab India. These corporate engagements took a business and they were businesses for Sewa which were under a crore to tens of crores. I think again it needed someone like Ela Behn. Always NGOs suspicious of corporates to get her organization into a mindset where they saw partnerships rather than suspicion and looking at everyone out there as an enemy rather than a friend. I think the more we see of those examples the more we will see scale and success as we go forward. On that note back to you Vikram.

Vikram Singh Mehta:

Thank you Naina. I am sorry. Renana was unwell. So she couldn't join us. We have about a minute or so and I would like to actually pass the request to Dr Karan Singhji to have the last substantive word. I might say a few thank yous after that. But...

Dr Karan Singh:

All I can see is that as the appendix says it is a great __ (audio feeble) and gives a very clear direction like how you should proceed with __ (audio feeble). All the points that you made, the collaborations, the horizontal linkages and the building of teams rather than individuals are all

tremendously important. I am grateful to Vijay Mahajan and to Nainaji for giving us these insights which are very valuable and in a way they all come back to your book. And each one of them have been very complimentary about the book rightly so. Because we can learn a lot from this. You can learn how these individuals and NGOs have made a difference. We can also think as to how they can expand. Ultimately as you say scale is important. Scale cannot just be by pushing money in. It has to be on a collaborative basis. I was in fact astounded to learn that this midday meal program began as an NGO program in Tamil Nadu. I didn't know that.

Vijay Mahajan:

It started with the Municipal Corporation of Chennai.

Dr Karan Singh:

Yeah. Kind of semi... it wasn't sort of a ministry program. And how this can grow is an example of how a good idea if it takes off can really make a difference. So I think this has been a very valuable discussion Vikram. I hope that you and your editors find it of interest so when your next book comes out you will be able to carry on this dialogue to the next level. Thank you.

Vikram Singh Mehta:

Let me just say once again thank you very much sir for being here. It is an honor. It's been a privilege. Thank you Vijay, thank you Naina. As Dr Karan Singhji said the conversations, the insights that you have all brought to the table enrich the book. Enriched whatever it is that we tried to do, the three editors along with the authors. They certainly gave us possibly an opportunity to think about a follow up project. But that is for the future. It would be a remiss for me not to thank the 24 authors formally. Only Vijay is present here today. The others are not. But clearly a book... these compliments that we have received are compliments that are directed towards the authors. Wherever they are I hope are listening in virtually. But I would like them to know that I am most grateful for them. They met all the deadlines that allowed the three editors to meet the deadline that Swathi and her team had imposed on us. The book did get published a week before India celebrated its 75th anniversary of independence. So my grateful thanks to the authors. We did get support from corporate India, Axis bank and Bajaj supported us. And I am really grateful to them too. Then finally of course my gratitude to my colleagues. Shishir is here the CEO, our president Rakesh Mohan, has a commitment in Bombay so he couldn't be here. But there are many of you in this room who have helped me and my two co-editors. So thank you all very much. This is what CSEP is all about. We are in a way endeavoring through our research which is independent totally non-partisan, based on empirical data and seeking to impact the direction of change in this policy. So books like this or papers that all of you contribute to, that is the purpose of CSEP, the center for social and economic progress. And I really am grateful to all of you for being my colleagues. So sir, thank you again very much and thank you all.