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Context to the conversation

Neeraj speaks about his early years in a town called Asandh in Haryana where he had to commute 2 hours each way to access an English Medium School. He speaks about his journey from there to DPS RK Puram to IIT Delhi to IIM Ahmedabad.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Neeraj, thank you so much for making the time on the Play to Potential podcast. I know. It's been a long time coming. I don't know if you remember way back around our 23rd Union in Goa, we tried to do it. think then...

Neeraj Aggarwal (NA): My pleasure, buddy. Yeah, you're right. We've been trying it for a bit. But what you've done with this is remarkable and I've really, really enjoyed listening to them over the years. Thank And you've taken the game every year to an even better level. Thank you. I've told you this many times. you. I feel out of place, to be honest.

DJ: Now it's at a high enough level to reach out to you. Actually, sincerely saying this, I think I'm also sort of moving the conversation more towards exploring potential in a holistic sense and sort of talking to people who have a little more of a holistic perspective on life and Given the conversations we've had and my observations of you, Neeraj, I really, apart from the heights you've climbed on the corporate front, I genuinely admire sort of the, if I may say, the multifaceted-ness of your life and really would love to explore how you do it and sort of get a peek into the, you know, behind the curtains view of Neeraj.

NA: Kind of you to say that but I think what you put out on the FLAVOUR aspect in your book really really resonates. Right. And I love the VO part of it.

DJ: Yes. So I think, I feel we are all shaped by the early years right Neeraj, I think it will be useful for us to know just the first 15 years, tell us a little bit about where you grew up, maybe the family context, parenting context, know, the three, four, if I may say parts of your operating system that got shaped in the first 10-15 years, it will be good for us to know.

NA: Yeah, think probably what I'll draw out is year 6 to year 15. You know, I used to live in the state of Haryana. My dad was in the Haryana State Electricity Board. And this was the time when

Greenfield thermal plants were being set up. So he used to be part of the team which used to set up these Greenfield thermal plants. Power was a new thing. This is, I'm talking about late 70s to 80s time period. My father came from a, you know, his father was a Sarpanch in a village. So, for him, education was his ticket to, he went to Thapar Engineering College and education was his ticket to wherever he got to. And I was only child, father and mother. My mother also, she grew up in, her father was also an engineer. Her father was an engineer, she, his job, he was in CPWD. So his job took him to various parts of the country. She was born in Rajasthan, but my mother in Pushkar, but lived most of her life in Himachal. But I lived most of her, my life in this non-descript place called Asandh, which was between Panipat and Jind, because these greenfield power plants were set up in places where nobody really lived. Government could buy large tracts of land and they were set up there.

DJ: Like a comp township okay with the school inside

NA: It like a township. No, there was no school. There were 50 kind of white-collar workers and maybe about... you know, a thousand blue collar workers kind of stuff. So it was a very small township, that small that the other social infrastructure was very limited in the early 10 years because we went there when they were not even, when they were like the first 10-20 people were there. So we were like literally zero to one stage. So I used to go to school about in the early years about half an hour away and later years about two hours away.

DJ: Wow and this was English medium or?

NA: Yeah, so that's part of the story. The half an hour away school was English medium only till grade 7. So once I reached grade 8, I think the choice was to move to Hindi medium or to go to a school which is two hours away, going and two hours coming. But that's what we did then and I moved to that school from grade 8 to 10 and that also ran out in 10 and then I went to a...

DJ: in grade 8 to 10, you were commuting four hours a day. Wow. And by state bus.

NA: four hours a day. Yes, buy a colony bus for half an hour and buy a Haryana state bus, Haryana roadways bus, for an hour and a half.

DJ: So, that was 8 to 10.

NA: That was 8 to 10. And 11th 12th, I moved to Delhi in DPS RK Puram, the hostel. And that exposed me to the big bad of the big good world.

DJ: And was that an obvious choice? Again, I'm curious. I was lucky given my father's decisions to be based in the metro for my 8th to 12th. So in a way, the school I went to was like the DPS equivalent in Chennai, you could say. But was DPS an obvious choice given where you were, the 8th to 10th? Was that the sort of seen as a ticket to better institutions?

NA: So I evaluated at that time, the choice was you had to find a school for the boarding. Because my parents lived not in Delhi. And I could go to Chandigarh or Delhi. And I think Delhi was, my father felt, had a better ecosystem. And we looked at Mother's International, DPS Mathura Road and DPS

RK Puram and Modern School. Those are the only ones which are hostels. And I think DPS Archipelago was, I think, just seen as more at scale, guess. Whatever. My father felt that it was more at scale.

DJ: Got it. Got it. And then IIT computer science.

NA: Yes, IIT Delhi, computer science, think, and then to US for a masters and working between US and India. And then IIMA.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: It is really inspiring to hear about Neeraj's journey from A to B. From Assandh to BCG. It is just fascinating to see what the power of education can be in transforming lives. Neeraj's story is a shining example of how at every stage, his parents chose to invest and send him to the best possible institution they could and how that has played a role in his growth.

Do look up the Curated Playlist on Formative years for how many other leaders have been shaped by their early years.

End of transcription

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Neeraj Aggarwal - Nuggets

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About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock the human potential of senior executive's / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

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