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Context to the nugget conversation

Pradeep speaks about how some of the kings assembled the right council of advisors around them to help them through complex situations. He refers to Malik Ambar, Ahilyabai, Serfoji and Aurangzeb in how they thought about getting advice from experts.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Moving to a different theme Pradeep, staying with Krishna Deva Raya for a couple of minutes, I was reading a book on him recently, the other thing that struck me was, lot of these successful kings and queens had a good sounding board around them. In the case of Krishna Deva Raya, there was Timmarusu, similarly, we know a lot of kings and, let us say, a wise minister or a council of ministers, so can you talk a little bit about what you have learnt about how successful kings assembled, for lack of a better term, a board of advisors around them?

Pradeep Chakravarthy (PC): Yes. I think the example that I would like to take up here is Malik Ambar. Malik Ambar was an Ethiopian slave who came from Ethiopia, all the way to Deccan which is Maharashtra region, Ahmednagar is where he ruled from, and that region, Deccan, is roughly Maharashtra, northern Karnataka and northern Andhra Pradesh as we know it today which is far more international in the 16th century than it is today. We had people from Turkey, we had people from Africa who came in there searching for a better life. And Malik Ambar came in as a slave, he got his freedom, and then, he worked his way through from being a remarkable strategist in a military commander to literally be the power behind the throne. And in fact he was so powerful that he was able to displace the Ahmednagar king and place another new king as a puppet king and ruled from the back. And Malik Ambar as we should know him today as the founder of Aurangabad. So Malik Ambar was somebody who was very careful about having a group of advisors and military commanders next to him, and in fact he was so grateful to them that when he planned this new city, many parts were actually named after them. So it is not a new thing that we have politicians naming places after them even today, it was there in the past as well. And one of the people that Malik Ambar supported was a person called Maloji who was a very powerful commander and we know Maloji today as an ancestor of Shivaji, the great. And it is even said that Shivaji's ability to do this bargir-giri as Mughals called it the guerrilla warfare tactics, which gave great grief to the Mughals, was something that he was inspired from the techniques of Malik Ambar, and Malik Ambar himself seems to have learnt this ability to do this bargir-giri from his days in Ethiopia when he was hunting animals. So you can see that across, and Ahilyabai Holkar has also done this, Serfoji II had this, all the kings you can see have had some set of council of ministers, they have had wise people who have advised them, and they have not been worried about whether they are Hindu or Muslim or anything. Aurangzeb, for example, some of his finest commanders were actually Hindu. So you will see that there is definitely merit plays a role, it is important, and kings have worked very well with the council

of ministers, and you see this in our mythology as well Deepak, everywhere you see that kings have never functioned alone or at least it is recommended that kings do not function alone, they always have an internal board of directors as it were to advice and counsel them.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This reminds me of my conversation with Vinay Sitapati (VS) who has written Narasimha Rao's biography – Half Lion. He speaks about how Narasimha Rao was deeply aware of his limitations and assembled a strong team around him.

VS: I think the first most important quality that NR brought to team building and team choosing was he personally not an insecure person, that's really important, now there's a law in India Arun Shourie told me it was called the Indersan law named after this IIT professor saying that in India first rate people hire first rate people, second rate people hire third rate people and so on because second rate people are also insecure about their abilities so they want to hire someone who is first rate and then in India you end up with 9th rate people so that's how institutional mediocracy takes place in India. NR was a first rate guy so when it came to for example foreign policy he knew it really well, he had academic friends in NY university who would send him the latest edition of top academic articles he knew the history of China he spoke Spanish he knew Persian he knew Urdu and he was the rank one in Persian and Urdu in Nizam state in Nizam's Hyderabad and he could talk to Pakistani President in Urdu and most Pakistani said that NR's Urdu was better so he was extremely confident so he was not insecure in selecting diplomats who were very good, he also was confident enough that when he didn't know something, he didn't pretend to know it, he knew nothing about economics, he had an instinct but he didn't know anything about economics so he had the confidence to first ask for the hiring of IG Patel former RBI governor who was at that time London School of Eco head, IG Patel says no arguably the most famous no in Indian history saying that look I have a mother in Baroda she is old I have to take care of her, so then he asked PC Alexander who should I select and he said look there is this guy called Manmohan Singh and he says fine get Manmohan Singh he seems to me the man who has the ideas which will get us out of this hole, he didn't knew anything about economics, Manmohan Singh did knew that and he was not insecure that MS knew more economics that he did he constantly consulted R Venkatraman who was the president at that time a former finance minister, saying that look help me out and he understood very clearly that look the ideas that Manmohan Singh, IG Patel are talking about are ideas that we need to implement in India but those ideas have been going around in India for decades my job is to get it politically off the ground he understood that very clearly so I think that, that core ability to not be insecure meant that he could hire first rate talent around him, he had no problem with people walking to his office and saying Mr. Rao I completely disagree with you because he was confident, not only he was a scholar if District Magistrate called him up and told him something he could tell a DM what to do because he knew Districts better than DM very often so he was not afraid of talent I think that is very important and in Indian context its very rare, it's very rare."

DJ: Back to what Pradeep says, it is really powerful when a leader is not insecure but gets people better than himself or herself around him. Thankyou for listening.

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Vinay Sitapati EP1 that is referenced: [Assembling an effective team](#).

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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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