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Context to the nugget conversation

Pradeep speaks about Serfoji and how he could have chosen a comfortable life but he decided to go ahead and commit his time and energy to various causes that led to the thriving of Thanjavur in those times.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Let us get back to Serfoji, Pradeep, you spoke about him earlier. He was adopted as an 11-year-old boy by Thuljaji, then ruler of Thanjavur, and you say that a big part of the kingdom was taken away from him and he was given a small area of 30 square kilometres and he got an annual grant, of course, it was 3.5 lakh rupees in those days, which is non-trivial, but you go on to say that he could have very well wasted his life, but he chose within his limited sphere of influence to be a role model leader for today till his death in 1832, can you say more about his life and some of the choices he made under these circumstances?

Pradeep Chakravarthy (PC): Sure Deepak. So whether it is Serfoji or Jahanara or Ahilyabai Holkar, we have to also look at it in the contrast of what they could have done. I think that is an important question. The choices that they had to live an easier life and how they have lived a life of more value to the people around them. So if you look at Serfoji, yeah, like I said, he had a very generous pension, he was the ruler of Thanjavur Fort which is not even 30-40 square kilometres, that is about it. But here was a man who was so scholarly, he got books from abroad, he built a library and the library has a phenomenal diversity of collections. You have art, philosophy, history, you have literature, you have water divining, you have medicine, food, the range is enormous. And not only did he do that, he was also passionate about building a navy, he built a lighthouse, he was passionate about education, if girls were not enrolling in schools, he found out that was because there were not women teachers, so he went and enrolled women teachers at that point of time, if kids were not interested in geography, then he created plays based on earlier genres of Tamil poetry of bringing geography to life through a play, through a music dance drama, and he started a printing press because there were not enough books available, if he had to fix the medical problem, he went and learnt how to do surgeries himself, he was a qualified eye surgeon himself, kept meticulous documentation of how the eyes looked before the surgery and after the surgery. So clearly, a man who could have wasted his life away doing nothing and sitting in the palace and enjoying life. Said, no, in what little I have, let me do what I can. And I think that is a good lesson for us to live in the lockdowns, right. That, yeah, we are cut off from many things that we would normally like to do, but we have that gift of time, what can we do differently in that.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Subsequent to this conversation with Pradeep, I researched around Serfoji a little bit and this is what I found. I will read a short paragraph which makes the point quite eloquently:

“In the history of pre-Victorian India, Serfoji’s name often shows up as somebody who was a great savant and humanist, a man who was far ahead of his times. During his time, Thanjavur was one of the most developed princely states in the Indian subcontinent. While many rajahs were engrossed in fighting and civil wars, Serfoji ushered in an era of peace, prosperity and scientific development and pioneered new administrative and educational reforms. His vision helped Thanjavur forge ahead of other princely states and advance into a new age and emerge as a fitting competitor to European nations.”

Like Pradeep says, what strikes me here is that each one of us has a choice. We can be engrossed in fighting battles (literally or metaphorically speaking) or we can usher in an era of peace, prosperity and development – whatever that term means to us. In knowing that there is a choice, lies the opportunity.

End of nugget transcription

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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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