

THE IMPORTANCE OF ENTREPRENEUR TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF SRI LANKA: A CASE STUDY OF MERRILL J FERNANDO

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1. INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship has become more important in today's world as it is the main factor which creates new products and creates new organization. The development of a country relies on the success of the organizations and industries which creates employment, utilize resources, introduce new technology, brings foreign income etc. Therefore, entrepreneurship is an important topic which we need to focus on. As the importance of an entrepreneur was identified, an empirical research was conducted to justify the role of an entrepreneur to the development of Sri Lanka. The study was piloted by researching an outstanding entrepreneur in Sri Lanka "Merrill J Fernando" the founder of "Dilmah" Tea, one of the leading and renowned brand in the world. Merrill J Fernando is an extraordinary entrepreneur considered as the person who produces single origin tea in the whole world. He is the only CEO who produces and exports tea, under his own brand. He alone has changed the conventional system in the tea industry. Thus, it is considered him as one of the remarkable entrepreneurs in Sri Lanka. Therefore, a detailed exploration of Merrill J Fernando would help to identify the behavior, aspirations, features and the specialties which serve or help to achieve social, environmental and economic development in Sri Lanka. Contribution to the development in a country cannot be attained by an ordinary person. And this broad concept needs to be achieved in terms of social, environmental and economic wise. Simply the study needs to find out why an entrepreneur is important to achieve social, environment and economic development and how an entrepreneur contributes to the development in Sri Lanka. The empirical study of this research will provide the answer on taking Merrill J Fernando as an example. Therefore, the research problem in this study is "*how Merrill J Fernando, as an entrepreneur becomes important to the development of Economy, Society and Environment of a country?*"

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Modernity of entrepreneurship focus on main five features in entrepreneurship according to Krisciunas (2007). They are Social Responsibility, Competiveness and Progressiveness, Knowledge Generation and Usage, Dynamism and Responsible Entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship has been recognized as a strong factor in economic development. The concept of entrepreneurship is decorated by various attributes like innovation, organization building ability, gap-filling function, input completing etc. the persons of these qualities are required to initiative and sustain the process of industrialization. The fact that entrepreneurial ability is a cultivable asset, the supply of which can be generated and enhanced through education, training and opportune climate has focused the attention of policy makers and planners towards entrepreneurship as the desirable and manageable route to economic development. It is widely acknowledged that entrepreneurship is critical to the development of knowledge based economy. Mohammad and Nimalathasan (2010).

In Sri Lanka context, the empirical research conducted in terms of a case study by Fonseka (2008) proves that Merrill Fernando is a great example for a successful entrepreneur and a visionary leader who contributed to the entire society. His research article describes most of the modern entrepreneur concepts and traits though it has not specifically mentioned. This shows the importance of conducting a research on a great personality as Merrill J Fernando, the founder of Dilmah Tea who will be a great example or a perfect fit for the issue stated above.

3. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The major objective of this study is to identify the importance of Merrill J Fernando as an entrepreneur, to the development of Sri Lanka. In addition to that the research paper also identifies the contribution of Merrill J Fernando to the economic, environment and social development of Sri Lanka and identifying the form of entrepreneurship to describe Merrill J Fernando.

4. METHODS

Both primary and secondary data was collected using the following methods. The study is mainly based on the interview conducted with Merrill J Fernando and his son Dilhan Fernando. Initially Merrill J Fernando's secretary was contacted through a direct telephone call to "Dilmah" head office. Following her instructions, a mail was sent to Merrill J Fernando, requesting for an appointment to conduct an interview. The most suitable method of the

interview was a structured interview. Therefore, before the interview was conducted a questionnaire was designed to scrutinize data in order to address the research questions. The questionnaire was designed under ten main topics and 50 sub-questions. Mainly the story behind his success, the challenges he faced, the opportunities and threats, growth of MJF group, impact to the society and environment, impact to the economy, leadership style and trait and finally a message to the youth. Sub questions were open ended. The interview was recorded with the permission of Merrill J Fernando. The structured interview with Merrill J Fernando was held for one hour. After the main discussion with him, an informal interview was conducted with his son Dilhan Fernando to identify the future prospects, diversification and innovations of the company under the guidance of Merrill J Fernando.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As discussed throughout the analysis it gives an understanding about the contribution to Sri Lanka in terms of economic, social and environmental development in detail. The CSR projects he has conducted by the MJF Foundation has changed the lives of millions of people in Sri Lanka uplifting their standard of living. The huge number of projects conducted by the MJF Conservation, under the aspect of sustainability in terms of, sustainability, bio diversity heritage and knowledge sharing shows his obligation towards the environment and society. The employment creation and generating foreign earning to the country which increases the GDP of the country gives the understanding of the contribution of Merrill Fernando to the economy of Sri Lanka. Dilmah today produces the highest quality tea in the world. His principles of producing tea will never change due to innovations or growth of the country. Being a globally recognized brand itself has bring pride to the country which were relied on conventional bulk tea exporting. The value of such an entrepreneur cannot be under estimated. As a part of innovation Merrill J Fernando has pioneered the first international Tea school. Dilmah Tea School is a great contribution by Merrill J Fernando to the entire world. It is the first international tea school specially focusing the international top chefs to get trained about the modern techniques and the educating the tea drinkers on tea. Dilmah commenced the first school of Tea at a celebration a celebration of the 21st Anniversary of Dilmah and Merrill J Fernando's 60th year in Tea. The initiative of the school led to a partnership with the most prestigious culinary institutions in the world. Merrill J Fernando is an entrepreneur with great pride. He is honored as the first person to initiate the world's first consumer and hospitality training school which is totally different from the rest of the tea training facilities. The desire to educate professionals on preparing and presenting tea with great understanding of the

attributes of tea shows the responsibility he has taken to transfer the knowledge to future generations. And today it has achieved great success with the great demand from the foreigners. The great success of all his companies and the great work he has done up to day proves without any doubt the importance of the entrepreneurs to a country.

6. CONCLUSION

To conclude the analysis of the detailed study on Merrill J Fernando in order to identify the importance of an entrepreneur to the development of Sri Lanka by using the conceptual framework is as follows. All the twelve determinants, which were captured from the literature review, were able to identify in the study which proves the importance of an entrepreneur in terms of social, economic and environment development of Sri Lanka. Economic thinking has led Merrill J Fernando to fight with the multinationals, attack the colonial conventional patterns and break the solid barriers to enter in to the global markets. Today he has brought justice to the Ceylon tea by producing tea with integrity and value addition which retain the profits inside the country. The main attribute in the research is about the efficiency of resource utilization. Merrill Fernando has taken the maximum benefit of the natural resource of the country which is tea, by utilizing it in an efficient and effective. The liveliness, quality and variability of the products at Dilmah and the efficiency of the MJF group and his service on transferring the knowledge by the initiation of school of tea proves the dynamism. More over the competitiveness, economic risk in the organisation justifies the dynamism The CSR projects conducted by the MJF foundation proves the obligation to the society by Merrill J Fernando. Employments creation at Dilmah for 1069 people and 25000 people in his plantations, projects and the entire MJF group proves that he has created employment opportunities which indirectly reduce the unemployment rate in Sri Lanka and by enhancing the purchasing power of people. The Tea Gastronomy and the innovative packaging, Tea school are some of the innovations done by Dilmah. The availability of the research and development Centre which does continuous experiments on white tea, silver tips so on justifies that Merrill J Fernando is committed to do continuous innovation. The fact that Merrill J Fernando has created a globally renowned brand, his engagement in international business, the fact that his competitors are international, the high quality and uniqueness of the product and the generation of international employment proves that Merrill J Fernando can be honored as an “International Entrepreneur”. His great service to Sri Lanka proves that an entrepreneur plays a vital role to the development of Sri Lanka. And his conscience as an entrepreneur is a great example to the

entire universe. He had won number of awards in his journey as an entrepreneur. However, the greatest award he has won today is the hearts of people around the whole world.

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