

MILAP DUGAR : A MULTI-FACETED PERSONALITY

Born on November 9, 1944 at the remote desert town of Sardarshahr, Rajasthan, to a wealthy aristocratic family, traditionally renowned for its services to the communities at large, Shri Milap Dugar took his saintly father's legacy of altruism and adherence to truth, no matter what the cost, to a higher plateau.

After acquiring his Bachelor's degree in Humanities from BITS, Pilani, in 1964, he went on to Bombay for the master's course in Management at the Jamnalal Bajaj Institute of Management but could not complete it due to a crippling attack of cerebellum palsy. This vase occipital ailment rendered him unable to stand or walk. The top neurologists declared the disease incurable. Rather than accepting defeat, he got himself engrossed in Indian classical music, painting, creative writing and poetry which gave him the catharsis and strength to win over the consternation.

Having experienced a great personal trauma at an early age, he also learnt how to fight it out. In the inspiring company of his father, he amply absorbed the concern for others' trauma also. Instead of leading a life of luxury, which his family's affluence allowed, he immersed in Gandhian philosophy, and set out for himself a life-long mission to serve the downtrodden and destitute, ameliorate human sufferings and spread the light of education in the darkest alleys of Rajasthan's Thar desert.

His father (late) Shri Kanhaiyalal Dugar was a passionate follower of Mahatma Gandhi. After the brutal assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, he thought of dedicating his life for the tasks dear to the Mahatma. He founded Gandhi Vidya Mandir in 1950 on the advice of Shri Vonoba Bhave. Mr. Milap, ever since his childhood, was greatly influenced by his father and Gandhiji.

From a committee-member of Gandhi Vidya Mandir (GVM) he ascended, step by step, to assume the mantle of its highest office. In a span of about 25 years, he sheet sheet-anchored GVM's metamorphosis as India's premier educational and rural welfare institute. Located remotely in the country's worst desert, GVM was beset with innumerable problems and disadvantages. With hard work, innovative acumen and farsightedness, he has transformed GVM into an epitome of nation building and character building, a beacon amidst an ocean of backwardness. At its sprawling 1200 acre self-contained university-township is being imparted education from pre-primary to doctoral levels to over 10,000 students, mainly from the weakest sections of society.

His altruistic resolve got a greater fillip, later on, when he happened to encounter death from a very close quarter. He was traveling in the Howrah-Delhi Rajdhani Express which, on 9th September 2002, met with one of the worst mishaps in the history of Indian Railways. His name was circulated in the casualty-list. Though saved providentially, he volunteered to stay there for helping in the rescue operations, serving the people in distress and taking out hundreds of mangled and mutilated corpses. Sitting amidst a pall of gloom, he pledged to redeem his new lease of life and no more to fritter it away in selfish drudgeries. He, thus, traversed from mundane to meaningful.

After the train disaster, he shifted from Kolkotta to Sardarshahr. The move was aimed mainly to serve (GVM), an institution established by his father Shri KL Dugar, who donated his entire wealth and went on to become a 'sanyasi', Swami Shri Ramsharanji. Dr. Rajendra Prasad, India's first President, had laid the foundation-stone of its University building in 1955.

He has been driving force behind many a move: free Rural Outdoor Health Centres, medical and health camps, outdoor clinics, a 100 bedded hospital, mobile clinics and rural ambulance service. Drinking water supply along with sanitation and health education made available in about 2000 villages of Churu and two adjacent districts. Eighteen bore-wells supply water to Sardarshahr town and 150 surrounding villages; wells with motorized pumps are commissioned in 12 villages and rainwater harvesting system in 9 villages. An 'Adarsh Gram' was founded with more than fifty dwelling units for needy families, complete with roads, school, clinic, community centre etc.

Knowing no divides of caste, creed or class, Mr. Dugar has been a true friend of the masses. His activities get a different dimension at the times of famine and draught, which occur year after year. For the last ten years, and indeed his whole life, the benefits that he has brought to, and the social and economic changes that he has wrought in certain parts of Rajasthan have been stupendous. He is spearheading a movement of sorts to weed out the age-old social stigmas of illiteracy, untouchability, casteism, communalism, gambling, dowry, wasteful spendings on deaths and marriages, addictions, illiteracy and above all – the wide-spread and deep-rooted poverty. Mr. Dugar knows for sure – the key to all this is education; the education, which is in consonance with the needs and the aspirations of India's large rurality; the education, which acts as a catalyst to an all-out human development.

Mr. Dugar is greatly revered for having dedicated his life to serve the less fortunate ones. A quintessence of altruism and an amalgam of many rare qualities, he is a poet, singer and painter of substance and his communicative skill makes him a vanguard of rural masses among whom he has been assiduously working. He was awarded the coveted P.C. Sen Centennial National Award, in 1997 by the President of India Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma, for

his service in the fields of education and social empowerment. Recently, in 2008, he was also honoured with the Firoz Gandhi Saadgi Award by the hands of Dr. Devi Singh Shekhawat.

An essential element in Mr. Dugar's personal magnetism is his consummate sincerity and singleness of purpose which has earned him internal satisfaction and external success. He also has inveterate and indomitable respect for India's great culture and ethos, with no less discernment for the demands of the modern times – thus a meaningful and pragmatic matrix in the contemporary milieu. He has always held service to mankind to be his primary creed, no matter what other's position or religion.

GVM owes much to Mr. Dugar for spearheading its phenomenal growth. One of GVM's constituents is the Institute of Advanced Studies in Education, which, with Mr. Dugar's sustained efforts and leadership, has attained Deemed University status. He, as its architect and visionary, was the natural choice to become its founding Vice Chancellor, and continues to don the cap till the day.

Throughout his life and, by every thought and deed, Mr. Dugar has espoused the cause of deprived and needy. His every action has been a service to mankind. He has taken great strides to eradicate illiteracy. His whole life has been a paradigm of renouncing all comforts, evils and rewards. He has managed to imbibe the spirit of Gandhi, dedicating his whole being to the upliftment of his fellow beings. When others, in advancing years, would be curtailing their activities, Mr. Dugar has surged ahead, knowing well that much still remains to be accomplished. He will not rest whilst he can inspire others to do more than they thought possible, and until he can do all that he is able.

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