

# Whatever the Odds: The Incredible Story behind DLF

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**K. P Singh, Ramesh Menon and Raman Swamy (2011). *Whatever the Odds: The incredible story behind DLF*. Harper Collins Publication, Price: Rs. 699, Pages 320, ISBN: 9789350291344.**

"Whatever the Odds - The incredible story behind DLF" is an autobiographical account of the rise of Delhi Land & Finance (DLF) told by its chairman, Dr. K. P. Singh.

In this autobiography, Dr. K.P. Singh shares his modest origin, a taste of English aristocracy, military life to turnaround of DLF. It describes how it transformed from near-bankruptcy into India's most valuable real estate company.

The book is divided into sixteen chapters and includes a few pages of pictures.

The first chapter aptly titled "The Mysteries of Fate" talks about how the fate intervened several times from his early life to steer him towards new horizons. He was not born in the "wealth" nor "married into it" but created it. It makes one believe in destiny that led a boy from semi-rural Bulandshar to hob-nob with English aristocracy and later lead a company that claims to "Build India". He shares his interest in horses and how a chance meeting with the viceroy allowed him a world-class training in Horse riding. He excelled in many sports as well. This proved to be a key that got him entry into various social circles and professions. Similarly, a well-meaning friend applied on his behalf which got him an opportunity, and subsequently changed his life in many unexpected ways - an acceptance to AST (Air Service Training) in a coventry in England.

In the subsequent chapters, K. P Singh talks about his romantic relationship with a beautiful aristocratic English girl and how it transformed him. It however could not end in "happily ever after" and K.P Singh returned to Indian shores to find new love in the Indian Army and Indira (a wise move in which he married her at the age of 23).

Life in Army (Cavalry) from 1951 to 1960 was what he considered one of the richest experiences in his life. He

was commissioned in Deccan horse, the legendary cavalry regiment. It had an ancient and inspiring tradition to follow. His stint in Army ended after eight years when his father in law persuaded him to join him in his family business. DLF had started way back in 1946 but came to a halt when the government had handed over all urban land development work to Delhi Development Authority (DDA). The real estate business was thus put on halt and he decided to diversify and opened a precision electric motors manufacturing unit "American Universal Electric India Limited". Thus began the transition of a soldier to a businessman. After the initial hiccups, he learnt the art of managing people and also found a mentor in George Warren Hoody. Along the way, came a birth of an idea - to revive DLF real estate and build a world-class city on the vast tracts of desolate land at the foot of the Aravalis in Haryana.

There is a detailed account of the process of land acquisition from the farmers. It is interesting especially in the wake of all the protests and difficulties in land acquisition faced even by the government. This led to a unique business model. The farmers not only sold the land to DLF but also became business partners by reinvesting that money in DLF. This could be possible because his rural background and defense connection, which inspired trust among the farmers. Also, DLF's clean image played its part.

The book gave an idea of how business is conducted in politically vibrating environment. Grappling with archaic laws, dealing with all levels of bureaucracy and policy makers with outmoded mindsets. How one minister's misled vendetta could lead a company to bankruptcy? K.P Singh almost sold all his shares in DLF for 26 Lakhs!

However, his perseverance paid, DLF received a windfall. In the late 1970s the Supreme Court awarded DLF a monetary compensation of 1.38 crore (Rs. 13.8 million).

He also struggled to retain absolute control by majority holding acquisition of Universal Electric's shareholdings. Since, the construction business has to seek compliance to a range of laws, he began to study and understand the system. His tendency to micro-manage and attention to detail reaped the benefits many times.

- An unexpected victory came in form of permission from ASI (Archeological Survey of India) to permit construction near Jantar -Mantar. On close inspection, it was revealed that buildings could be constructed in such a way that sunrays would not be blocked and the ancient monument would function like always.
- Another interesting anecdote is how his curiosity to figure out what 'admeasuring' meant before the word 'size' in reference to the plot lead the company to get a piece of 3.6 acres of land. This plot earned more revenue for DLF than what it has earned since its inception.

Dr. Singh's children joined him in the business and took it to newer heights. The grandchildren are being groomed to carry the legacy forward now.

In one of the last chapters, a new dimension of the person was captured. The most captivating part of the book is how both husband and wife coped with near-fatal helicopter crash. If that was not enough, his wife contracted lung cancer. The couple came out a winner and she recovered.

With its towering buildings and galloping economy, Gurgaon is often portrayed as a symbol of a rising "new" India, in this city that barely existed two decades ago; there are 26 shopping malls, seven golf courses and luxury shops selling Chanel and Louis Vuitton. Mercedes-Benzes and BMWs shimmer in automobile showrooms. It is the story that has caught the imagination of people. Not even its biggest detractors can overlook DLF's role in making this seemingly miraculous growth a reality.

The photographs divert the attention. This is not meant to be a pictorial book. One can also debate the place for a detailed family tree and a rather long thank you note.

Overall, who doesn't love rags to riches success story?

This book may prove invaluable for the entrepreneurs who can use it as a handbook and embrace the business strategies that created an empire. It shines a light on How Indian politics and business deal with each other. It provides an insight on how to deal with government authorities and how one can be heard.

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