

herworld feature
KAUSHAL DUGAR, 25
The Walking Political Encyclopedia


To say that Kaushal Dugar is “politically-minded” would be an understatement. The 25-year-old’s grasp of the local political system here is so good that his friends, mostly locals from his university days, sometimes tap him for this knowledge.

“Friends who want to start their own businesses come to me for advice as I

know which government agencies they need to go to, as well as the policies the Government has to help SMEs (small and medium enterprises). I probably know more about policies here than most of them!”

His interest in the system was deepened when he joined the Meet-the-People Sessions as a volunteer as he wanted to learn more about the struggles faced by the average Singaporean. For six to seven hours weekly, he listened to residents from Queenstown and Commonwealth air their concerns. The Indian national, who works in financial services, shares: “I’ve met people struggling with the cost of living and family issues. I learnt how the assigned MP handled their problems.” Though heavy work commitments put a halt to this, Kaushal still follows *The Straits Times’* local and political coverage religiously, attends talks given by ministers whenever possible and volunteers in ad-hoc activities with OnePeople.sg, to promote racial and religious harmony.

When he first arrived here in 2002 to study at the Singapore Management University (SMU), he was sceptical of the way Singapore was run. For starters, he was critical of the lack of freedom of speech here. “I felt that people were not open in speaking their minds. I felt stifled,” he says. His reaction stemmed from the environment he grew up in. “I come from Siliguri, a small town situated at the foothills of Himalayas in Northern India. It’s a communist state. When people are not happy about something, they call for a strike so there was a lot of freedom of expression,” he explains.

Kaushal decided to learn more about this country, instead of merely passing judgment. He read books on Singapore’s history voraciously, particularly the memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew. He explains: “It made me more aware of how Singapore developed. I learnt how he grew a country from scratch.”

This deeper awareness not only helped him understand the context of Singapore’s speech policy but also let him see “the rationale behind such policies, systems and regulations, and why they have been effective”. Opportunities to interact with ministers through university activities further enlightened him. “Dr Vivian Balakrishnan said having a democracy doesn’t mean we can do whatever we want. There are responsibilities. That struck a chord within me,” he recalls. “I come from a country where people say and do anything they want but nothing productive gets done.”

Currently single, Kaushal has laid a few roots here.



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He shares a condominium in Bishan with two friends, is the founder of the entrepreneurship society in SMU and the current membership director of the SMU Alumni Association. But he hopes his understanding of Singapore’s development will help him contribute to India. “This country made me realise that nothing can be taken for granted. There is a striking contrast between

my upbringing... seeing people kill each other in the name of religion, to seeing how Singapore has carefully managed its racial relations and efforts to build a more tolerant society,” he says. “I’m seeing first-hand how things can be done and the benefits the people reap. Hopefully one day I’ll return to India and give back what I’ve learnt about promoting racial harmony and education.” **HW**

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