

# The Incredible Arjan Singh : A Story of Faith & Courage

“ਚਤੁਰ ਦਿਸਾ ਕੀਨੋ ਬਲੁ ਅਪਨਾ ਸਿਰ ਉਪਰਿ ਕਰੁ ਧਾਰਿਓ ॥” - SGGS: 681

*We are beholden to Sr. Roopinder Singh (son of the distinguished scholar couple, Gyani Gurdit Singh and Dr. Inderjit Kaur) as also the publisher Rupa & Co., New Delhi for permission to use excerpts from their book “Arjan Singh, DFC, Marshal of the Indian Air Force” (2002).*

SERENITY AND A QUIET CONFIDENCE seem to be the defining qualities of Air Chief Marshal (retd.) Arjan Singh, DFC. We celebrate his life and times as a manifestation of the divine grace.

It is not often that we have the opportunity to recognize a living legend in the annals of India’s defence forces who retired as Air Chief Marshal in 1969, at the incredibly young age of 50, trailing shining clouds of glory.

An ace pilot who is also a teetotaler is bound to be endowed with equipoise and a cool temperament. When these traits are directly traceable to a long family tradition rooted in the Sikh faith, it is cause enough to celebrate. More so because the country (and the world at large) needs to be reminded that certain measures of greatness remain constant irrespective of the fast changing life styles and standards of behaviour.

It is a measure of Arjan Singh’s reluctance to project himself that we have few chronicles of his colourful career as an ace aviator who participated in World War II. His exploits, and the daring sorties of a handful of other pioneers, like S. Mukherjee, Mehar (Baba) Singh, Air Marshal Shivdev Singh and ACM Dilbagh Singh not only saved Jammu and Kashmir for India in 1947 but also catapulted the fledgling India’s Air wing into a full blown Indian Air Force.

While a detailed account of the IAF saga awaits more perceptive professional historians, we are grateful to Roopinder Singh and his Publisher, Rupa & Co. for the neat little handbook that was published in 2002 following the conferment of the ultimate honour on Arjan Singh of the one and only Five Star Marshal of the Air Force.

Some of the biographical details of the Marshal, (reprinted with permission of Rupa & Co. in this issue) offer delightful vignettes of Arjan Singh blossoming into an ace pilot, and rising to the top by dint of sheer grit and determination.

A man of patience as well as precision, his biography sketches him as a man of courtesy and compassion. We have likewise taken the liberty of reprinting an Editorial from *The Economic Times* which reflects his thoughtful generosity and the public spirit we call *praukwr* [

Overall, Arjan Singh’s life has been like a journey towards excellence, more like a pilgrimage, traveling into a deeper faith, making light of the infinite complexities of modern day society. We are aware that to Arjan Singh it matters little whether we do (or do not) dedicate a special issue of this journal to him. The decision is entirely ours, because we wish to recognize the triumph of moral values, and the quest for

excellence which he embodies and represents. Also because, at 86 years of age, he continues to be a guidepost.

His sense of purpose and his steadfast love for the country and humanity are worth recounting and worthy of emulation. His flights in the Indian Air Force remind one of Dante's "ascent into the Stars". His lifestyle symbolizes faith, dignity and good taste.

To know of him is to know what the Sikh moral and spiritual values symbolize. In this age of material progress and moral decay, unbridled consumerism and arrogance of power, Arjan Singh shines like the Polestar.

