

# Role Models for New Generation

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THE OTHER DAY I WAS BROWSING through some old issues of *The Sikh Review* and I came across a number of articles on scores of devoted Keshadhari turbaned Sikhs who have served their country and religion by their outstanding achievements. I have been wondering that if all such articles could be assembled and published in an affordable book form, every Sikh family across the world can have a copy to show it to their children. Some of the so-called "Modern" Sikhs with a myopic vision about the future of the Khalsa might even draw much inspiration. Such a volume could, in my humble opinion, give a lot of impetus to our youth to walk in the footsteps of the great Sikhs of yesteryear who have, in the tumultuous twentieth century, proved that KESH with TURBAN - far from being a handicap to their worldly achievements - actually enhanced their *persona* and reputation. Here are a few names which come to my mind. All these people have three things in common:

**(a) Their achievements, (b) Their Sikh swaroop, and (c) Their being apolitical.**

In my humble opinion, I think that dwelling on the distant past and taking out processions won't carry much weight with the youth today; they always say that they were different times, which is true to an extent. So it will be best to restrict ourselves to the twentieth century that is still fresh in our memory.

A run through *The Sikh Review* index of all the articles published so far (I believe you have a computer now) will give you a lot of material. There are, besides, a lot of names which could have occurred before our magazine started publication in 1953.

For starters, there were people like S. Tarlok Singh, ICS who was the first Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission and could be safely named as the architect of the present Planning Commission, which, again, has the distinguished economist, Dr. Montek Singh Ahluwalia as the head.

Then, there was Sr. Karnail Singh, the legendary chairman of the Railway Board who dared to build about 450 km of railways, with about 18 stations thrown in, an incredible nine months, connecting Siliguri to Guwahati in the tough NE Indian terrain. There is a marble tablet at Siliguri station acknowledging Sr. Karnail Singh's great feat. It is another matter that the original connection between these stations has fallen in the present Bangla Desh.

When we won independence in 1947, there was the incredible aviator, Group Captain Mehar Singh (@ Mehar Baba) of the Indian Air Force who surprised and shocked the Pakistani raiders and created a sensation in the military history when he ferried Tanks, with the help of World War II Dakotas, to the Kashmir front even as the Pakistani hordes attacked the valley and almost closed in on the airfield in Srinagar.

Then there were a couple of Sikh Pilots who laid down their lives to destroy the most modern Radar installations at Sargodha, deep in Pakistan territory in the 1965 war.

Let me also recall the Sikh General Lt. Gen. Harbakhsh Singh who had, in 1965 announced that the Pakistani forces won't be allowed to touch Amritsar, and who kept his word by advancing to Ichhogil Canal within earshot of Lahore! We could read more about it in the recent book, published in Pakistan, "*Crisis of Leadership*" by Maj Gen. Mukish Khan.

There was also, in first half of 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the great Writer-scientist, Prof. Puran Singh, Director of the Forest Research Institute at Dehradun, who did pioneering work in the research related to silviculture and set up standards which have not been surpassed so far.

Mountaineering is currently dubbed as a 'circus'. But in the heyday of the Everest Saga, it was the Naval Captain Manmohan Singh Kohli who, as leader of the Indian expedition, a few decades ago, put nine men atop the Mount Everest – an unprecedented example of courage, endurance and meticulous planning.

Then there is the administrator, Manohar Singh Gill, Ex-Chief Election Commissioner; and Scientist Dr. Narinder Singh Kapani in U.S.A. Who has done some path-breaking work in Fibre-Optics and eye treatment.

We will have to include the super sportsman Sr. Fauja Singh who - at 80 plus - continues to run Marathons all over the world. I also recall this Sikh gentleman from Kenya who served as a Tennis referee in Wimbledon for many years, and of course, our respected Justice Mota Singh of British Judiciary who occasionally writes for ***The Sikh Review***. How can one forget another Sikh Judge, Justice Choor Singh of Singapore who, I believe was offered the Presidentship of the Island Republic. In cinema there is the funster Jaspal Singh Bhatti who is still in his Sikh form and has been an actor, director and producer.

There are the celebrated classic singers: Singh Bandhu who are respected all over India for their mastery over classical music.

There is a book "Rise of Sikhs Abroad" by Gurmukh Singh (UK) which gives quite a few instances of our Sikhs breaking the glass barriers. Likewise, ex Justice Kuldip Singh of India's Supreme Court cannot be forgotten for his path breaking 'environmental' judgements.

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