

A Role Model par Excellent

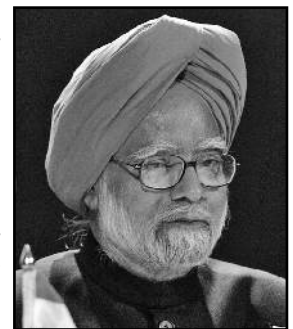
A born-great or prodigy, doing great things may be appreciated and applauded, but that does not translate into the likes of a role model capable of inspiring millions. However, doing of a great thing by a person born and brought up in the midst of life challenges, obviously inspires every one, particularly the young.

Dr. Manmohan Singh, present Prime Minister of India, is one such role model. In fact he is a tribute to Indian democracy. He was no where in the galaxy of Indian politics until former Prime Minister Narasimha Rao inducted him as Finance Minister in 1991. That was a time when the Indian treasury was rather empty with India's gold reserves pawned at the Central Bank in London. Balance of payment situation and foreign exchange reserves of India were precarious and gave nightmares to Indian administrators. Dr. Manmohan Singh's plan to open up the Indian economy to play with uneven global competitors at an uneven level, gave the much needed pitch and push for the Indian economy to move forward from its negative perceptions to a positive outlook or in layman terms: hope for the future. That in fact was a financial surgery. The rest is history.

Including him in our Role Model column for the benefit of our young readers, gives us great pleasure. It adds value to this column. For the benefit of those who would not have gone through the Govt. of India website on him, here is a factual narration of his early life.

A.V. Balakrishnan*

"Manmohan Singh was born to Gurmukh Singh and Amrit Kaur on 26 September 1932, in Gah, Punjab (now in Chakwal District, Pakistan), of British India, into a Sikh family. He lost his mother when he was very young, and he was raised by his paternal grandmother, to whom he was very close. He was a hard working student who studied by candle light, as his village did not have electricity. After the Partition of India, his family migrated to Amritsar, India. He attended Punjab University, Chandigarh studying Economics and attaining his bachelor's and master's degrees in 1952 and 1954 respectively, standing first throughout his academic career. He went on to read for the Economics Tripos at Cambridge as a member of St John's College. (In the Oxbridge tradition, holders of a BA degree with honours are entitled in due course to an MA degree.) He won the Wright's Prize for distinguished performance in 1955 and 1957. He was also one of the few recipients of the Wrenbury scholarship. In 1962, Singh completed his DPhil from the University of Oxford where he was a member of Nuffield College. The title of his doctoral thesis was "India's export performance, 1951-1960, export prospects and policy implications", From this thesis he published the book "India's Export Trends and Prospects for Self-Sustained Growth".



In 1997, the University of Alberta presented him with an Honorary Doctor of Laws. The University of Oxford awarded him an honorary Doctor of Civil Law degree in June 2006, and in October 2006, the University of Cambridge followed with the same honour. St. John's College further honoured him by naming a PhD Scholarship after him, "the Dr Manmohan Singh Scholarship".

This unassuming scholar always says “I am what I am because of my education”. And he did not get that education as comfortable as present day Indian students, even of rural India. There was no school in his village or nearby. He walked for miles every day to school and studied at night in the dim light of a kerosene lamp.

Through hard work and positive thinking he finished his schooling and went to college in Amritsar. A scholarship beckoned this meritorious student to go to Cambridge University in England, to do his Master’s in Economics. With the help of another scholarship he completed his PhD. His outstanding academic record brought him the prestigious Adam Smith Prize in Economics. Dr. Manmohan Singh returned to India and joined his college in Amritsar as a lecturer.

When he was teaching at this college (you can imagine the salary of college lecturers in those days), he was introduced to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru by the great Indian writer Mulk Raj Anand. Panditji asked Manmohan to join Government of India service. He said NO to the offer because he had a commitment to teach at the college at that time and, therefore, could not accept that offer - a pinnacle of ethics that we seldom find around us.

Later he went to the United Nations where he worked under the famous economist Raul Prebisch. During this period he got an offer to join Delhi School of Economics as a lecturer. He accepted that invitation and returned to

India. It was a prestigious and lucrative job at UN that he gave away to return to his motherland as a teacher.

Later Dr. Manmohan Singh joined Government Services. He has held very important and sensitive posts in the field of economic policy making in India, including the Governor of Reserve Bank of India and Deputy Chairman of Planning Commission. He later became the Finance Minister of India. With deep rooted faith in India’s resilient power, he chalked out plans and programmes to liberate Indian economy from the clutches of what was known as “Licence Raj” or overzealous Govt. control on any thing and every thing.

Like in all other fields, in politics too Dr. Manmohan Singh has proved his mettle and has displayed rare courage and qualities of leadership. His soft spoken and balanced reaction to complex and conflicting situations and the polite yet bold responses to the coalition partners in the Govt., have been appreciated by one and all.

By being humble, polite, calm, serene and absolutely detached, he has displayed outstanding qualities of leadership, which gave India political stability and appreciable economic growth in the last six years.

He is admired as the modern Janaka Maharaja, who was half ruler and half sage. His impeccable humility, simplicity, agility, prowess and farsightedness combined with undeterred calm and coolness in handling day to day political challenges, have literally made him a ‘Raja Rishi.’