

# DOWN THE MEMORY LANE

*With*

*Maj. Gen. (AVSM) Gaganjeet Singh (Retd)*

~ Mansi Rawat (VIII-A), Harpreet Kaur (IX-C) & Gurleen Kaur Baxi (IX-A) ~

**Reporters, Modern School Life Magazine**

**Mansi Rawat:** Good morning sir! On the opening of the Sports Meet of Modern Senior Secondary School we heard a few things about Sardar Mohan Singh Ji, the founder of Modern Senior Secondary School from you. We were delighted to know that you have met S. Mohan Singh ji in person and we would love to listen more about him. May we!

**Major General Gaganjeet Singh:** Of course yes! I joined school in 1951 and in those times there was no Upper or Lower KG. I did my X in 10 years only. As my father was a legal advisor in State Bank of Patiala, Sardar Mohan Singh Ji was attached to him. Sardar Mohan Singh ji had a dynamic and impressive personality and was always meticulously dressed up. In summer, he would come in his light colour suit with motia colour turban and in winter he would wear a dark colour suit, beard fully tied. We

use to compare his personality with due regards with that of Maharaja Yadvinder Singh ji. Maharaja ji was tall and slim. He was always properly dressed. Sardar Mohan Singh ji was in State Bank of Patiala in those days which was Maharaja ji's Bank and during that period Pepsu had just cropped up. Sardar Mohan Singh ji had a very broad vision about Patiala. He wanted to do something that could be long lasting and would have an impact on society. So he thought of starting a co-ed school because the schools at that time were either expensive or government schools whose results were not above twenty three percent to twenty five percent, but YPS was good in sports and other activities. Sardar Mohan Singh ji started the school to provide quality education and economically friendly atmosphere. More than sixty percent students were placed in the merit list every year. Their names were printed in the news paper with the heading 'Every Child Must Develop a Balanced Personality'. The school started in the old building, the one in the center. There was only one class room and Principal's office was in the front and Vice Principal's office was to its left. We had our play ground where Modern Nursery School is presently situated. The school was double storyed. Sardar Mohan Singh ji used to visit the school once in two months. He would select a particular class and talk to the students of that class. All of us would be spell bound by his personality and could not pay attention to what he spoke. He had white beard and was fairer than Britishers. Some times he would come with his wife, a graceful and charming lady, always dressed up in a saree and hair tied in a bun. Sardar Mohan Singh ji motivated the children to grow into good

human beings. His message was 'I want, I must convey and must achieve'. Our school has produced Generals, Vice Air Marshals, engineers, business tycoons and doctors. Like you have sports meet now, we used to have Annual Function in which there was dance, drama, debate, etc.

Sardar Mohan Singh ji used to come along with his wife and stayed all through the function and his wife would distribute the prizes. Then he would surprise by giving away three medals to the best, average and below average students on the basis of their contribution in extra co-curricular activities. When their names were announced it would surprise them, their class teacher and the Principal too. He would lift a student and tell the audience the cause of the medal he had received. This was his involvement in the school.

**Gurleen Kaur Baxi:** We have heard that Sardar Mohan Singh ji was very influential. We would like to know a little bit more about his personality.

**Major General Gaganjeet Singh:** As he was the general manager of State Bank of Patiala, and also the right-hand of Maharaja Yadvindra Singh Ji, he could get things done through him. He was a very respected man. He would celebrate Children's Day in old Moti Mahal and would invite twenty to thirty students from each and every school of Patiala. Few students were given a packet that contained a laddu, a balushahi, a matthi and three-four pieces of chhenamurgi. No Principal of any school was allowed to

accompany the students except Sardar Mohan Singh ji. Maharaja ji would himself ask the students whether they got the sweets or not. Maharaja ji was very much influenced by Sardar Mohan Singh ji's personality. After the distribution of the sweets, there used to be a group photograph of the modernites with Maharaja ji. Then he would seek permission from Sardar Mohan Singh ji. Sardar ji would accompany him to the gate. Sardar Mohan Singh ji had a dominating personality and was dedicated and wanted to do a lot for Patiala. The Bank Colony of Patiala is the gift of Sardar Mohan Singh to the people of Patiala. He bought the land and said that his bank officers must have their own house. He approved the loans and made this Bank Colony by taking assistance from Maharaja ji. It was his personality, which attracted everyone and that was his influence.

**Harpreet Kaur:** What was your experience when you met Sardar Mohan Singh ji for the first time?

**Major General Gaganjeet Singh:** When I met him for the first time, I kept looking at him, what he spoke I don't remember but everyone kept looking at him. And every one was so impressed that we wanted to know more about him. As my father was very close to him, whenever he called my father in the evening, my father used to take me along with him and I used to spend my evening with Mrs. Mohan

Singh. She would play with me and would give me sweets. She was very loving and had an attractive personality.

**Gurleen Kaur Baxi:** What was the influence of starting a co-ed school in society?

**Major General Gaganjeet Singh:** The society liked it. Anything that Sardar Mohan Singh started, the society welcomed it, supported him and people could see that he was a genuine person. He wanted to do good for Patiala and he wanted to promote its culture. Personality wise you cannot compare Sardar Mohan Singh ji with anyone.

**Mansi Rawat:** As an alumnus of this prestigious school please tell us about your journey.

**Major General Gaganjeet Singh:** I joined the school in 1951 and passed out in 1961. All the teachers were strict but affectionate. We used to have extra classes in 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> standard. When I joined Army, once my senior officer gave me a task and I accepted it. I took it as a challenge of treating ULFA men in my own way, though there was 90% risk in it. At the back of my mind, I had a thought about my family at home. I was awarded AVSM for guiding ULFA men for making their life better without weapons which they accepted happily. I gave them 5- star treatment and then they realized what they had missed in life. And let me tell you, never ever blame any terrorist or militant for what he had done because the circumstances had made him do that. Because I grabbed the opportunity, I became the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigadier in the

whole Indian army to get AVSM. Normally AVSM is given to Major Generals and the ranks above. The General of Army at that time told me, ‘Gaganjeet, people say that no one is indispensable, but you are’. In everybody’s life an opportunity comes and its up to him that he grabs it or not and if grabbed, one should work on it. And when you get successful, your parents, school and teachers will be proud of you and when you get recognition, the first thing you will be asked will be from which school or institution you have come from. If you get this thought in your mind then nothing is impossible.

**Jai Hind**