

# When Karan Singh suggested that Indira Gandhi should quit!

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Veteran Congress leader Karan Singh has come out with a book on his meetings with "remarkable women", which has several tidbits like his suggestion to Indira Gandhi to quit after the Emergency and Morarji Desai offering to nominate Rukmini Devi Arundale for the post of President.

"Meetings with Remarkable Women" offers a glimpse into the lives of extraordinary women including late Prime Minister Gandhi, Congress chief Sonia Gandhi, Edwina Mountbatten, Vijay Lakshmi Pandit, M S Subbulakshmi, Helen Keller and Gayatri Devi.

Mentioning about the Emergency in his chapter on Gandhi, Singh says after the Allahabad High Court judgement of June 12, 1975 holding the then prime minister guilty of two corrupt practices and declaring her election to the Lok Sabha void, there was a furore.

"The Opposition saw this as a golden opportunity to attack and unseat her, and the whole national was in turmoil," he writes in the book, published by Palimpsest.

"One evening, I sat at my desk and wrote a personal handwritten letter, which as I mentioned, was not in my capacity as a Cabinet Minister, but in my personal capacity.

I suggested that she should offer to resign, send in her resignation to the President who need not accept it on the grounds that the final decision was to be taken by the Supreme Court on her appeal," Singh recalls.

"This, I felt, would not only be the correct thing to do but may also have obviated the endless criticism that followed. I happened to have kept a photocopy of the letter which has been published in my correspondence with her. She did not reply nor was the matter mentioned hereafter," he writes.

In his chapter on Arundale, he mentions how after the Janata government assumed office, Desai suggested that the danseuse would be a good candidate for the presidency. Arundale, however, refused the offer saying she was devoted to art.

Singh says the book is the result of an advice by his daughter Jyotsna.

"Taking off from the 19th century Greek-Armenian mystic G I Gurdjieff's 'Meetings with Remarkable Men', however, my daughter Jyotsna had for long been urging me to write about my meetings with remarkable women. At last I decided to accept her advice; hence this book," he says.

"All these women that I have met over a long period of time, have left an impression upon my mind, obviously some more than others. Even a brief meeting has turned out to be a long

remembered event, as for example, the one with Helen Keller which did not last more than a few minutes.

"I have attempted just to sketch a brief outline of each of the personalities, a short description of my interaction, and wherever possible, a photograph. Many of these women were well known around the world, many of them not in the public eye, but they all shared a certain intangible quality which has led me to include them in this book of reminiscences."

The opening chapter is about Singh's mother Maharani Tara Devi, whom he describes as the most influential woman in his life next only to his wife Asha.

He mentions that by a "strange quirk of history, when in 1950 it had become impossible for my father and Sheikh Abdullah to work together, the Sheikh insisted that the government of India ask both my parents to leave the state".

"He is believed to have said that the Maharani was more dangerous than the Maharaja, because while the latter spent most of his time in the palace surrounded by courtiers, the Maharani would go out to meet the people, particularly in the numerous refugee camps that had come up after the disastrous Partition of 1947. She, therefore, left along with my father, although both went in opposite directions, he to Mumbai and she to Himachal Pradesh."

He recalls how he learnt a great deal from his mother, whom he was extremely attached to but missed her because he was studying at a boarding school.

"Apart from devotional stories of our epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, and from the Kalyan magazine (brought out by Geeta Press, Gorakhpur), which she read regularly, I learnt to love the Dogra Pahari songs and bhajans that Maaji and her maids would sing on festive occasions. She would teach me to be courteous and considerate to all persons regardless of their rank, and this included the staff and servants," Singh writes.