

ISSN:0976-8165

# THE CRITERION

An International Journal in English

*The Criterion*



Vol. 9, Issue-III June 2018

9 YEARS OF OPEN ACCESS

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ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

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## **Post Colonial Paradox of Subaltern and Sublime: The Soulful Choir of a Presidential Memoir**

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**Article History:** Submitted-21/05/2018, Revised-21/07/2018, Accepted-23/07/2018, Published-25/07/2018.

### **Abstract:**

The Seventh President of India, Giani Zail Singh through his posthumous presidential memoir traces the history of free India from his native domain of Punjab. The saga from subaltern and sub-human setting to the regal Presidential palace has been wrapped with struggle, strife, spiritual undertones, deceit, generosity, conspiracy, humiliation and above all deep loyalty to the nation and the people. The paradox at every inch of his life, work and writing is manifest in the post-colonial period bearing the strains of colonialism. Having come from backward sections of the society and stoic Sikh community, Zail Singh faced the wrath of political hypocrisy and divided loyalties between the position and the personality in tune with the soulful choir of a life. This is evidently brought out in the study of his memoir.

**Keywords: Presidential memoir – paradox – subaltern – sublime – position and personality.**

Giani Zail Singh was the seventh President of India. Hailed by Mr. Kushwant Singh not only as a 'good President' but also as a 'great President', Zail Singh was the first man from the backward sections and the first Sikh to occupy India's highest office. He was a courageous leader who fought for the freedom and welfare of the people. Zail Singh was born in a mud house in a poor artisan family of the erstwhile princely state of Faridkot, now in Punjab. He learnt stitching clothes, crushing stones, ploughing in fields, laying roads, digging wells and making swords. This hard experience taught him about the plight of commoners and downtrodden sections of the society. Zail Singh had his basic education in the reading of scriptures like the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Quran*, *Ramayana* and *Guru Granth*. In fact, his father did not want Zail Singh to take up any other career than the service of God. He was popular for his sweet recitals of holy hymns at religious and social congregations during his childhood. Giani Zail Singh was deeply

religious and humane in his word and act. He was known for his straightforwardness, hard work, honesty, simplicity and spirit of sacrifice.

The modern Punjab owes a lot to Zail Singh's sagacity and spirit of service as its Chief Minister. Before becoming the President, he served as the country's Home Minister in the Government of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Thus Zail Singh played an instrumental role in shaping the destiny of Punjab as well as that of India. *National Herald* welcomed the President in its editorial in this fashion: "Rashtrapati Bhavan has had six illustrious incumbents who have brought honour and dignity to the high office they held in their different ways. Giani Zail Singh is the seventh President of the country. He is also more truly than most others, a son of the soil. A man who can ply the most plebeian of trades, he represents the toiling masses more fully than others do. Like most Indians, he had had no time or opportunity for formal schooling, and like them, he is trained in the school of life, learning and growing with each passing day. His native wisdom and sense of good and bad have enabled him to hold high public office with distinction despite all the handicaps of a man who has been in the thick of the nation's struggle from childhood. If there is anyone who can qualify as the poor man's President, it is he."(Bhattacharya 197)

Giani Zail Singh's writings are limited. He authored one book, *Memoirs of Giani Zail Singh* (1997). An interesting comment is made on Giani Zail Singh in one of his biographies, *President Zail Singh – A Profile of Dedication*: "Giani Zail Singh belongs to a new class of politicians of whom the earliest example was K. Kamraj, who knew only 'telegraphic English' and who have no pretensions to learning but possesses abundant commonsense and earthly shrewdness. Their learning is not of the genre which Macaulay advocated, namely, the "substitution of Western culture for the Indian.....(for).....the creation of a class of Indians who would be Indian in blood and colour but English in tastes, in opinion, in morals and in intellect." The two classes of politicians are presently coexisting mark a transitional stage in India on politics. The Western educated intellectual elite must give place one day to the domestically trained leaders educated entirely through the medium of Indian languages and inspired by Indian literature, art and culture. Giani's tastes, and one would add his instincts, are Indian. His non-academic background is what would distinguish him from the previous six occupants of Rashtrapati Bhavan. Zail Singh did not qualify for any of the professions considered 'learned' according to Western educational standards. But he earned the title '*Giani*' which means, the

“learned one” when he trained himself to become a *granthi*, professional reader of the holy *Granth* (holy book of the Sikh religion). This is the symbol of the transition from Macaulay to total Indianness.”(Bhattacharya 147)

### ***Memoirs of Giani Zail Singh***

The book, *Memoirs of Giani Zail Singh*, is a narrative account of Zail Singh’s life which was ‘faithfully’ recorded by his O.S.D., Manohar Singh Batra. Posthumously published in the year 1997, it describes the events of Zail Singh’s life from childhood to the end of his Presidency i.e. 1916 to 1988. It took about four years for Zail Singh to narrate his memoirs and get them recorded. He depended completely on his memory and ‘slowly and haltingly’ he recollected the events of his life and described them to Mr. Batra. He explains that this process necessitated some revisions, deletions and additions before the final approval came from the President. Mr. Batra observes that Gianiji purposefully did not discuss some of the significant events which took place in his life in detail and he exercised great caution and displayed a knack in deciding what is to be recorded and what is to be left out. Mr. Batra says, “Gianiji personally read the penultimate and final drafts and approved them entirely. But when he started giving hints to his friends and certain visitors that his memoirs were ready for publication and some publishers actually started approaching him he changed his mind and felt that these should be printed when he is no more.”(6)

The book, *Memoirs of Giani Zail Singh*, divided into fifty chapters, depicts the life of Zail Singh. It starts with the description of his birth and childhood in the village, Sandhwan and narrates his upbringing in the tenets of Sikh and other religious texts. It chronicles his rebellion against the ruler of the Faridkot Princely State and the resultant incarceration, his participation in freedom struggle and the post independence battle with the Faridkot ruler. Then his stand on the division of Indian states on linguistic lines and the consequent division of Punjab into Punjab and Haryana is explained. His rise in Punjab Congress, his fight against *Akalis*, ascendancy as Chief Minister and the welfare measures he had initiated for the prosperity of the modern Punjab find detailed mention in the subsequent pages. In the second half of the book, he describes his elevation at the national level, his close association with Mrs. Indira Gandhi, his Home Ministership and finally his election as President of India. His Presidency was rated as one of the tumultuous periods of post independence India that witnessed the rise of Sikh communalism

and militancy and the demand for a separate Sikh nation. Mrs. Indira Gandhi's military action, her assassination and the massacre of thousands of Sikh citizens were the painful chapters of his life. His deeply strained relations with Rajiv Gandhi whom he appointed as Prime Minister forms the pathetic part of the memoirs.

### **Childhood and early Youth: Religion and patriotism**

Spiritual outlook and familial affection scented the early childhood of Giani Zail Sing. He lost his mother when he was nine months old. He was brought up in the care and love of Daya Kaur, his mother's elder sister. His father was a spiritual minded man who made Hindu and Sikh religious books as his guiding souls. As the youngest of the family, Zail Singh received the maximum attention from the family members. When he was seriously ill, at the age of twelve, Zail Singh recalled fervently how his father had taken him to the room where the *Guru Granth* (the holy book of Sikhs) was placed and prayed for the recovery of the child, how he vowed to offer him to the service of God and the subsequent miraculous recovery.

After this incident, his father decided that Zail Singh should completely devote his life to the service of the Lord and His creation and made him study several Hindu and Sikh religious texts like *Suraj Prakash*, *Vichara Sagara*, *Bhavarasamrita*, *Vichara Mala*, *Hanuman Natak*, and *Saruktavali* under the guidance of a saint named Paramahansa. This man taught several aspects of the religious texts to Zail Singh and never allowed him to drop out of this rigorous study. Zail Singh says, "He developed such an involvement in teaching that if I missed going to him for lessons, he would himself come and coax me to accompany him to his class..." (12). His father too took special interest in tutoring the recitation of the Sikh Holy Scripture, *Guru Granth Sahib*. As a result, by the age of seven, Zail Singh could recite the holy book with commanding ease, exactness and sweet voice. He was a popular invitee at many religious, marriage and community congregations at homes and *gurdwaras* (Sikh places of worship). However his family members and friends did not like the idea of Zail Singh moving into religious arena and even some friends tried to dissuade his father from his decision.

In attending several events as a good singer of religious hymns, Zail Singh came into close contact with some revolutionaries engaged in the freedom struggle who were followers of Sardar Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Raj guru. They gave him two books, one in Punjabi entitled

*Ghadar Dian Goonjan* (Echoes of Revolution) and the other in Urdu *Khoon-e-Shahidan* (Blood of the Martyrs) to study. He says, “The earlier discussions on devotional themes gave way to enthusiasm for wresting freedom from foreign rulers. The news at that juncture of the executions of Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Raj guru in the Lahore Central jail fired our hearts further with patriotic fervour.”(Singh -17). Even though his parents were averse to his participation in the freedom struggle, Zail Singh felt drawn towards it with intense patriotism. His resolve was strengthened even more with his frequent attendance at several Akali religious and political congregations. He was particularly impressed by a patriotic poem composed by the eminent poet, Vidhata Singh. The spirit and influence of the poem explains the transformation which took place in Zail Singh’s young mind: “O, the lion-hearted handsome hero of the nation, what is the use of your scintillating youth? If you do not sacrifice yourself like a moth on the burning flame, what is the purpose of your lighting candles in temples? Your country has been plundered by the foreigners. What is the use of your complacent living? If in your heart there is no enthusiasm, no zeal, what use is it, if your chest is made of steel?”(19-20)

### **The rebellion and the incarceration**

The Raja of Faridkot was an autocratic ruler who never liked or allowed meetings organized by Zail Singh and other nationalists. The patriotic fire of Zail Singh burst into a flame when he was arrested by the British for leading a march demanding democratic rights. In collusion with the Akalis and in tandem with the British government, the Raja implicated Zail Singh in a false case of misappropriation of funds and other crimes against the State. The legal machinery was so manipulated by the Raja to his advantage that the trial went on for months together. In 1939 Zail Singh was sentenced to five years of rigorous imprisonment along with a fine of Rs. 250 in three cases. His appeals for reconsideration of the judgement in the false political cases were ignored. Pressure was mounted on Zail Singh to tender apology to the Raja so that the sentence could be toned down. Indirectly a message was passed through his mother who met her son in the jail. Zail Singh comments, “..my mother confided that she had not come to ask me to apologize. Though she had not been in favour of my joining the crusade for freedom, yet, since I had launched myself on this unchartered course, there was no going back, and if I ever thought of tendering an apology, it would sadden her heart, besmirch my name and damage the prestige of the family. The abject act of apologizing would not only cause a stigma,

to my person, it would also embarrass her mortally, for which she would never be able to forgive me. Whatever the difficulties and whatever the suffering, I should never capitulate. I should not surrender my honour under any threat or temptation.” (34-35). Zail Singh was determined to face the solitary imprisonment imposed upon him. He spent about six years in the jail and this made him very weak with serious digestive disorder but strong at the subconscious level.

### **Last Ditch Battle and the victory**

Many advised Zail Singh to shift to the national arena as the Raja of Faridkot was still bent on nailing him down and at the same time, he could gain breathing time to mobilize his energies against the ruler and as India’s independence was imminent. He said, “I reconciled myself to this voluntary exile from my home State to wait for the clarion call to rid the States of the oppressive rule and to usher in an era of democracy. My campaign against the feudal rule continued. I went on expressing my views on public platforms with the only difference that I was at a little distance from the State.”(47-48). In this fight, he was ably supported by Jawaharlal Nehru and other national leaders. Nehru advised Zail Singh to have patience, prudence and foresight in fighting political battles. He further added that it was essential to notify the demands, give some time, negotiate and then, basing on the need, take a firm stand.

Zail Singh played a key role in deciding the status of Faridkot. A decision was taken at the highest level to form the Patiala and East Punjab States Union (PEPSU) consisting of States of Patiala, Nabha, Jind, Kapurthala, Malerkotla, Faridkot, Nalagarh and Kasia and install a popular government with the Patiala Maharaja as its constitutional head.

### **Land Reforms**

After the formation of PEPSU, once he became the President of the state Congress Committee, he made great attempts to solve the problems of the peasantry such as proprietary rights to tenants of the lands. His conviction can be measured in his own words: “The most important task facing the peasantry, which formed a vast majority of the population, was the land reforms. The yawning gap in prosperity between the rich landlords and toiling tenants was too spectacular to be ignored. As the State Congress President, therefore, I addressed myself to the problems of the common man. Inspired by the *Bhoodan* (land donation) movement launched by the devout Gandhian, Acharya Vinobha Bhave, we pressed the opulent landlords to donate one-

sixth of their estates towards this movement. The gentry not possessing land should donate one-twelfth of their income towards *sampattidan* (assets donation).”(88)

### **The malignity and benignity**

When Punjab was born as a new state, Mrs. Indira Gandhi asked Zail Singh whether he had any ambition to be the Chief Minister of the nascent state to which he replied in the negative. Ever a suitable candidate for the Chief Ministership, he faced stiff opposition from the leaders of former PEPSU as well as the newly formed Punjab. He was satisfied with the party work that he carried out with devotion. In the State Assembly elections held in March 1972, the Congress came to power and Zail Singh was elected as Chief Minister.

Zail Singh was very quick to the task and he never exercised any misconceptions about the longevity of his ministry. Given the political situation in Punjab, he candidly admits: “I had never overestimated my abilities to carry on the onerous duties of the Chief Minister. Predictions and prognostications started making the rounds about the maximum life of the Ministry, which was put at six months to the maximum. My non-Jat status was cited as another factor for the possible ephemerality of my office. With quite a bit of trepidation, I set out on the arduous course and decided never to look back.” (116) He made alleviation of the abject poverty of the rural folk as his first task. He formulated a twelve-point programme and pledged to implement it in the fastest possible speed. The programme consisted of objectives like upliftment of the members of Scheduled Castes, employment opportunities to poor people, road linkage to all villages, reforms in land tenancy laws, simplification of tax structure, streamlining the cooperative and *Panchayat Raj* (village level local government) movement and other welfare measures. The programme achieved tremendous success with the achievement of targets well in advance. He contentedly says that his twelve-point programme in Punjab provided the base for the 20-point socio economic programme initiated by Mrs. Indira Gandhi.

Zail Singh displayed a rare courage in curbing the problems created by his own party men and solving problems of the state. When accusations of land grab were levelled against some of the ministers of his government, he immediately ordered an enquiry and took prompt action against them. He frankly says, “I had to resist powerful attempts at absolving the guilty of the taint of land-grab, and in the process earned the displeasure of some senior leaders like



Swaran Singh.”(118) He charted a code of conduct for ministers, which prevented them from accepting invitations to functions arranged in their honour. Besides material development of the state, Zail Singh concentrated on providing encouragement to intellectuals and litterateurs. He rightly says, “Environment had to be created for human values to proliferate.”(120)

### **President of India**

In 1982, when Presidential elections were due, there was much speculation about the possible candidate. Zail Singh’s name was in the air. He states, “It goes to the credit of some of my friends in the Congress party that they tried for my nomination. What influenced me to some extent not to oppose this move was the realization that I was over-burdened with work in the Home Ministry. I persuaded myself to let things take their own course. If the choice ultimately fell on me, I should not decline it. Without much surprise I found my old political opponents busy working overtime for getting the move in my favour scotched.”(159)After many confabulations within the Congress party, he was nominated as party’s choice for the position and he was sworn in as President of India on 25<sup>th</sup> July 1982.

In the beginning, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister, made it a point to meet Zail Singh and discuss major events of the nation. She used to call on him before embarking on foreign tours and brief him after the visits. Later Zail Singh realized that she had developed some hesitation to discuss the Punjab problem which by that time had acquired alarming proportions with the Akali demand for a separate Sikh state.

### **Akali agitation for separate Sikh nation**

Zail Singh opined that vacillating tactics of the Punjab government resulted in Akali agitation getting out of control. He looks at the Anandpur Sahib Resolution as a document having elements of separatism because it envisaged a special status for the Sikhs in the region. He felt alarmed about the Alkalis’ opposition to the Indian Constitution and their open defiance of its tenets. He termed the stand taken by the Akalis over article 25 of the Constitution as highly untenable and condemned their act of tearing the Constitution. He expresses agony: “Had the Akalis shown a measure of maturity they could have highlighted their viewpoint in Parliament. Instead of using such an effective forum, they chose the sanctity of the *gurudwaras* to burn a portion of the Constitution.”(167)

During the agitation, hundreds of agitators were arrested and put in jails. Darbara Singh government adopted a stern and inhuman attitude towards the agitators, which made the situation worse. Zail Singh opposed the Centre's move to impose President's rule on the plea that this would embroil the Central government in the imbroglio. Nevertheless, Mrs. Indira Gandhi seemed to have made up her mind already on the issue and asked him to endorse it. As the situation worsened the Central government had sent two ordinances for the Presidential sanction without any prior consultation. One of the Ordinances was aimed at sanction of unlimited powers to the Governor to declare any area as disturbed area and deploy the military forces. In retrospect, he lamented that the Ordinance as a blunder on the part of the Government. At this point also, he offered some positive suggestions to end the deadlock but Mrs. Gandhi really was in no mood to receive any sort of advice. He said, "I told her that this ordinance would be construed as a measure of repression and would cause deeper cynicism. And this is what actually happened. The attitude of the Akalis hardened and they called for greater sacrifices from their followers proclaiming that the struggle would be a long-drawn affair. The Akali leaders led their trusting adherents downhill towards lower levels of pessimism and to uncertainty of a solution and prompting them for greater sufferings in the name of religion."(172-73) He precisely analysed the machinery of communalism in India: "The agitators and militants had adopted the strategy of publicity offensive among this class of people and had been substantially successful in inciting communal passion, feeding them on exaggerated accounts of atrocities on and discrimination against the Sikhs. But the government had not taken sufficient notice of this propaganda blitzkrieg. The Akalis were stirring communal sentiments of the Sikhs settled in foreign countries, because they were well-to-do and could be liberal with their money in the name of religion."(176)

### **Operation Blue Star and after**

During 1984, the Akali agitation reached a flash point with militant Akalis using the Golden temple complex as their shelter and stock point for arms. Mrs. Indira Gandhi pondered over the option of flush out of militants by police action. Zail Singh advised her against this disastrous move. She appeared to have heeded the advice. After a week she ordered military action code named Operation Blue Star in the Golden temple complex without informing Zail Singh about it. There were thousands of devotees inside the complex to attend the anniversary of

martyrdom of Guru Arjun Dev, the fifth guru of Sikhs. Hundreds were killed and many temples of the complex were destroyed and damaged. Zail Singh got the information through other sources which were tragically confirmed by the government. The fact of not informing him beforehand coupled with military attack against his religious symbol pained him a lot. However, he was in a helpless situation. In anguish, he asked Mrs. Indira Gandhi what the intelligence agencies were doing when arms build-up was going on. He fumes, "Mrs. Gandhi had obviously no plausible answer. With a distant look in her eyes, she replied feebly that it was the duty of the Punjab Government to take care of these aspects." (179) In his presence, she slipped into a reflective mood and felt remorseful.

Later Zail Singh personally visited the Golden temple complex and could feel the stench of human flesh in the air and corridors. He felt that no amount of cleansing could have wiped out the strong smell of so many decomposed bodies in that scorching summer heat. He wondered at the fanaticism and destructive instinct of the militants, who had caused their most important religious spot to be brought to this state and at the lack of wisdom and discretion on the part of the Government, who took such ill-advised, drastic action without proper assessment of its ramifications. He was informed by the head priest that a bullet had struck the Holy Book. Rage and pain equally enveloped the President.

In the wake of the military action, Zail Singh was under tremendous pressure to tender his resignation. He gave his mature reasons composedly in this manner: "Had the Sikh community as a whole raised its voice against the sinister moves of a few short-sighted and misguided persons, all this humiliation and suffering could well have been avoided. Of course, the Government too could not be exonerated of the damage caused by its policy of drift, indifference to reality and the ultimate debacle, but I did not think, my resignation would restore the lost glory to the Sikhs. It was quite likely that in the event of my resigning from the Presidency, I would earn the community's approbation and be lionised by some people, but had they given thought to the damage it might cause to the country as a whole, including the Sikhs. In the first instance, I had taken the oath as the President of all Indians and I was not the President of the Sikhs alone. Moreover, my resignation might bring more harm to the Sikhs than gain. Since I was the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, my resignation might generate a sense of guilt among the serving Sikh members of the forces, giving rise to a feeling of

persecution and a desire to square up things with the authority. As President, it was my duty to defend and not to endanger the integrity of the nation. I had to look after the interests of the whole country. I could not be sentimental while taking a momentous decision to resign or to stay in office to perform my duty.”(184-85)

In the aftermath of Operation Blue Star, Zail Singh had to face the wrath of the Head Priests of Golden Temple. Zail Singh was held responsible for the bloodshed in the holy temple for ordering military action as Supreme Commander of the forces. He was also found guilty for his alleged wearing of shoes and use of umbrella on his visit to the temple. After a careful perusal of *Tankhahaya* (guilt in religious parlance) issued on his name, Zail Singh brought the facts of the matter to light. The footage that was shown on television was not related to his visit to the Golden temple but that of Gobindgarh fort. The high priests misunderstood the thing and issued the edict. As per the position of the Supreme Commander, he said that it was in name only. He assured the high priests that he had highest regard for the holiest of religious institutions. There upon the edict was repealed.

### **The assassination and the holocaust**

When Zail Singh was on an official visit to the Yemen Arab Republic, the sad news of Mrs. Indira Gandhi’s assassination reached. He immediately cut short his visit and while on return, gave a thought to the selection of the new Prime Minister and decided to appoint Rajiv Gandhi, elder son of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, as Prime Minister. He wanted to appoint someone who would be acceptable to the majority party in the Lok Sabha but he did not conceal his affection towards the Nehru –Gandhi family. Throughout India, there was widespread arson and massacre of innocent Sikh people as a vengeance against the killing of Mrs. Indira Gandhi by two Sikh bodyguards. Zail Singh felt anguished at his helplessness in the face of deaths of thousands of Sikh citizens by hooligans and arsonists. He was dismayed at the mayhem created, apathy of the government and the complicity of the police in the dastardly act. He termed the whole episode as a taint on the psyche of India.

### **The differences and the indifference**

The relations between Zail Singh and Rajiv Gandhi can best be described as most acrimonious and tragic of all relationships of the Presidents and Prime Ministers of India. Right

from the beginning, Rajiv Gandhi demonstrated his aversion to maintain the custom of meeting the President regularly to seek his counsel or to brief him on important matters. Rajiv Gandhi simply dispensed with the practice. Zail Singh says, “After three or four days, it was a Sunday when I sent for Rajiv Gandhi, but my Secretary was informed by the Prime Minister’s Secretary that Rajiv Gandhi would call on me in a couple of days time and that he wanted me to take rest on a Sunday. I was surprised at this suggestion. But he never came, and in the following days and weeks I realized that he had started avoiding me.”(217) He told Rajiv Gandhi in one of the official functions that there should not be communication gap between the Prime Minister and the President. Zail Singh was hurt at Rajiv Gandhi’s casual treatment of the senior Ministers and opined that the young Prime Minister was in need of mature and experienced counsel.

Zail Singh sensed an undercurrent of hostility replacing the formal demonstrative courtesy. Even worse, he came to know that there were moves a foot to impeach him and ease him out of the Presidency. There was denial of regular and formal information to the President. His foreign visits were also not approved. He exasperatedly asked Rajiv Gandhi whether the government had lost trust in the President and he offered to walk out of the Rashtrapati Bhavan if his stay was not to the liking of the Prime Minister. Rajiv Gandhi never expressed his real feelings to the President, spoke sweetly and gave false promises. He observed that, “Rajiv Gandhi did not translate these promises into practice. When a news man asked him at press conference as to why he had not been observing the convention of meeting the President, he replied that he had broken hundreds of conventions.”(227) He wondered at the psychology of Rajiv Gandhi to get piqued readily and his over defensive reactions to the normal and elderly advice tendered by him. He discovered sharp divergence between Rajiv Gandhi’s words and practice.

In his *Memoirs*, Zail Singh takes strong objection to the way the office of the President was sidelined and denigrated. There ran detailed exchanges between him and Rajiv Gandhi government about the constitutional provisions and conventions regarding the relationship of President and Prime Minister. During the height of the Bofors scandal, he got memoranda from several quarters to grant sanction to prosecute Rajiv Gandhi for his misdeeds and corruption. Though he was satisfied with the constitutional position of the President to sanction prosecution, he made it clear that he had no such intentions to upset the government. However, Rajiv Gandhi

was worried about his motives. In the last stages of his Presidency he clearly assured Rajiv Gandhi, that he had no intention of running for the second term.

### **The voyage of subaltern to sublime**

Zail Singh vividly narrated the memories to Mr. Batra. The pain and the suffering that he went throughout his life are visible in these words. The numerous vicissitudes that Zail Singh had experienced and the undaunted spirit with which he faced them can be reckoned as remarkable qualities of a stoic politician intent on doing some good to the people. The wisdom ingrained in his deep study of the religious texts appears to have made him conscious of the ultimate reality. The truth that service of people and fight for their cause are equal to the service of God for which his father longed to dedicate his son, is reflected in the writing of the former President.

Rooted in practicality, Zail Singh never lost sight of his vision and mission. He accepted the physical humiliation of his imprisonment in the Faridkot jail and the emotional isolation - alienation from his own people, his mentor, Indira Gandhi and his Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi - of his Presidential years in the Rashtrapati Bhavan with rare equanimity of mind. His first hand perception of the people he came across and the objective analysis of the problems he encountered offer a rare insight into the circumstances of the times. Zail Singh's narrative of the machinations and intrigue at the highest office attempts to separate the personalities from their public image. His incisive comments on Presidential relations with the Prime Minister demand serious understanding and deeper study. His concern for the people's welfare is pervasive in the text. His visionary programmes for the development of his state and the observations he made when he recollected them in his book of memoirs can still guide the governments of the day. The earthy wisdom and realized knowledge of *Memoirs of Giani Zail Singh* shall be an invaluable part of literature.

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