

# 'My pen will pain nobody'

In a reflective interview on his life and times, President Shankar Dayal Sharma discusses politics and philosophy with Alok Mehta.

**P**RESIDENT Shankar Dayal Sharma has been in the forefront of the post-independent India's political activity. Known to be reticent, he has never "spilled the beans" about the occasional political vortices that the undivided and divided Congress has found itself sucked into since the fifties. "I will never make public my memories about the tumultuous times as I have worked with those who have bestowed on me their trust and affection," he said during a relaxed conversation with this correspondent last week.

Having been intimately associated with Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, he has been constantly prodded on by many to pen his reminiscences. But he says, "Nothing is greater than self-satisfaction. As a follower of Mahatma Gandhi, I've always believed in the welfare of

issues concerning democracy," Dr Sharma recalled.

Austere in conduct and disciplinarian by nature, Dr Sharma has been known to have maintained his sang-froid all through his life. His education at the Cambridge and Harvard only reinforced his conviction in the country's traditions and high moral standards. "In the absence of ethical values, instability and disorder grip a society. The so-called modern society is experiencing a crisis of values. Every section of our country will have to understand the seriousness of this situation. A civilised and developed society cannot be imagined if it does not have these very values," he says. His constant emphasis on values instantly provokes two questions. When ethical values are inherent in *Dharma* then why this raging debate on promotion or dilution of religion's role? Second-

doors and windows of our value- edifice sweep us off our feet? Won't the multinational companies obstruct the way to socialism and shake our concept of a welfare state?

"Our ideal has been to keep both the bullock and aeroplane going. We are responsive to the external pulls and pressures. The key to success in a democracy is development. Top priority should be given to economic progress in a free and democratic country. Multinational companies have invested their capital much more in China than in India. But that country has not given up its traditions and basic principles. However, full attention will have to be paid to encourage cottage industry in rural areas. Political democracy will have to be extended to the free economic regime. Only then will we be able to eliminate class discrimination. That is what Jawaharlal Nehru, too, had thought. India cannot be a political force in the context of modern world as long as it is not economically stable and strong," he clarified.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, the world has become unipolar. The hiatus between the developed and developing countries is getting wider. What can India do in such a situation?

Dr Sharma said, "India's role has now become more important. She will have to lead the developing countries. Most countries in the world are now free. Apartheid has gone. Peace and disarmament are universally accepted principles. India will have to play a big role in the economic development, as it is the biggest developing country. Inter-dependence envisages self-reliance of all."

Commenting on the fall in political values, the President said, "to stem the rot, we'll have to re-establish the right values and ideals. Man cannot be immortalised simply by idolising him. That is why I always refer to ideas and principles of Dr Rajendra Prasad and Jawaharlal Nehru in my public

## INTERVIEW

