President Dayal Sharma Brings Spiritual Outlook To Indian Politics
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# President Dayal Sharma Brings Spiritual Outlook To Indian Politics

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After about 20 years India is once again witness to an inspiring scene - it is being presided over by a person who is close to its spiritual stirring. He has a profound knowledge of India's culture and history. He is well versed, too, in its ancient language - Sanskrit. When he speaks in private or public, the holy verses from the Gita and the Upanishads effortlessly flow from his lips. He is Dr. Shanker Dayal Sharma, the ninth president of India.

Dr. Sharma was installed in the President's House on July 25th after he was elected by an overwhelming majority of the members of Parliament and State legislatures. He will function as Head of State for five years. Earlier, he was vice-president of India. Though there was a fierce contest for this office, even his main opponent in the contest and those who voted against him publicity spoke very highly of him.

When the results of Dr. Sharma's election were announced on July 16th, many people found their minds rushing back twenty years, recalling the days when the incumbent of the high office was Dr. Sarvpalli Radhakrishnan, a world - renowned Hindu scholar and philosopher. He had brought honor and dignity not only to his position but also to the country; he conducted himself in the style of an Upanishadic saint, guiding the destiny of Bharatvarsha (the ancient name of this land).

Those who know Dr. Sharma claim that he will bring to bear on this office the immense experience he has acquired both as a scholar and a statesman. He began to build up this experience when he joined polities as the instance of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, and became a minister while still

very young.

A close confidant of Dr. Sharma told HINDUISM TODAY: "The life of the new President of India, now 74, has run along two parallel lines since his childhood days in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh. The first line took him into the realm of knowledge and scholarship and the second into polities. He excelled saw Dr. Sharma taking a Master's degree in English literature, a doctorate from Cambridge and a law degree from Lincoln's Inn in London.

While collecting these degrees, he attained proficiency in Sanskrit, French and Persian. Almost all opposition parties who have recently benefited from the raging caste and religious conflicts in the country demanded that only a member of the one of these castes should be elected President. This they did to embarrass the ruling Congress party. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narasimha Rao found that in private most of the leaders he met spoke highly of Dr. Sharma, even though he is a Brahmin. The some members of the ruling party, in order to score over the opposition, cleverly leaked to the press that Dr. Sharma was acceptable to most political parties as the candidate for presidentship, but they themselves were demanding the elevation of the member of a low caste for marking political gains.

Sensing the mood of support in the country for Dr. Sharma, Prime Minister Rao announced Dr. Sharma would be his party's nominee. Then followed a strange spectacle. The Bharatiya Janata Dal and the National Front put a Christian coming from a backward tribe, Professor G.S. Swell, as their candidate. But the Congress received full support from several regional parties which brought an easy victory for Dr. Sharma. Almost everyone - including Dr. Swell - rushed to congratulate Dr. Sharma and say they felt the nation would be safe in his hands.

Dr. Sharma has critics too, and they say he tries to be everything to everyone. But they admit that Dr. Sharma is a politician also and has sought a career for himself in polities. He was therefore to carry everybody along with him. However, it certainly does not mean that he has no commitment to honor. Even in polities, he has maintained integrity in whatever he does.

The giant daily newspaper, the Indian Express, said of Dr. Sharma: "In the Congress and Opposition alike, his admires are legion. And most of them agree on

one point - that he is a rare amalgam of humility and talent. His unassuming face, furrowed with the years, will instantly frame a rather boyish smile when he hears a witty remark. And he can match every earthy joke with one which is earthier. But on serious issues, his utterances have the gravitas of statesman - controlled, precise and illuminating."

Statesman

QUOTES COLLECTED FROM RECENT SPEECHES.

FAITH

Is the faith of the people in the birthplace of Lord Rama at Ayodhya, where a mosque stands today, superior to the constitution of the country?

President Sharma: This kind of concept is alien to our culture. Which faith tells you to differentiate? Have we forgotten what the Rig Veda said? It said: Ekasmat, vipra bahuda vadanti, [Wise people interpret one truth in different ways.] One of the important kings of India, Ashoka, said in one of his inscriptions: "Give full respect to the people of other religion." He also said that a person who extols his own religion to deprive other religions does harm to his own. In Islam it is Rab-ul-Alamee of the entire world), not Rab-ul-Muslimeen (God of the Muslims alone).

CASTE

Are you affected by the caste controversy?

PS: I am not affected by it because my training is not to distinguish between one person and another on the basis of caste. My learning of Vedas, of Islam, Buddhism and Jainism has taught to do the right thing.

RELIGION

How will you conduct national affairs?

PS with faith in God. And in the country. I am a God-fearing man. I go to temples and mazars (tombs of Muslim saints.) And I find the same happiness.

PRESIDENTIAL ROLE

With a minority government in the country, the President's positions becomes important under the constitution. Are you going to be an active president?

PS: It all depends on the circumstances. You can't decide beforehand. You have to see the constitutional propriety and what the president's limitations are. He has powers too. He has to advise the council of ministers. I can do a great deal also because I have known most of the leaders for so long. I would try to reconcile differences. By nature I am not assertive, but at the same time I do stick to what is correct.

PERSONAL MENTORS

Who was your greatest influence?

PS: Politically, it was Pandit Nehru. He took me under his wing when I was just 18. What I have learned, what I am today in polities, is because of him.

VALUES

Your generation often complains about the degeneration of public life? Do you feel the same?

PS: The degeneration has come about for various reasons. One is power. The generation that guided us was a class by itself. Pandit Nehru, Rajendra Prasad, Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai. Today, there is deterioration in moral values. Intellectually, though, our young boys and girls are better than in any other part of the world.

VISION

What is your vision?

PS: Very simple. An India where everybody has got the basic necessities, where everybody is able to hold his head high. And where, ultimately, there is harmony, and people pressing together.

Devotee

Dr. Shanker Dayal Sharma is such a deeply religious person, he is convinced that his elevation to the highest office of the land is nothing but a gift to him from the Gods.

He is regular visitor to all the well known Hindu shrines and temples in the country, especially the famous temple of Lord Balaji at Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh. He is also a devotee of Satya Sai Baba. Soon after he was sworn in, he went with his family to Tirupati. There, he performed a strenuous ceremony called angapradhakshina (offering of one's body to God). His doctors advised against doing so. He had his head and moustache shaved and then bare-chested in a wet dhoti rolled himself twice over a 700-metre circular path near the sanctum sanctorum. From Tirupati, he went to see Satya Sai Baba. He touched the guru's feet and thanked him for ensuring his success in the election. Baba blessed him.

He has equal reverence for the deities of other religious and regularly visits the tombs of Muslim saints to pay homage. He meets Buddhist and Jain saints, and Christian priests have found in him a person always keen to know more about their religious beliefs and practices.

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