

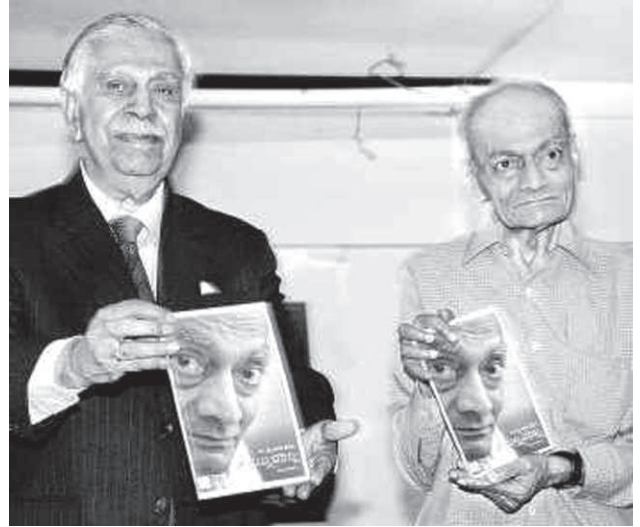
# Sharada Prasad – An Institution

DR.SHARADA PRASAD, WHO PASSED AWAY EARLY in September 2008, was an institution, more than an erudite journalist or scholar, which he was. In my Bombay days -- in the 1940s—he was with the *Indian Express*, which Ramnath Goenka had set up with headquarters in Colaba. Between 1945 and 1951, when I had been trying to find my feet in journalism in Joachim Alva's *Forum*, Sadanand's and Socialist Party's *Janata*, there was no occasion for our paths to cross. But I had heard of him. In my eagerness to gain experience of working in a daily newspaper, I sought an opening in the *Sunday Standard* with S. Kapadia as news editor. Except for producing the Sunday morning edition, the rest of the work was desultory, ten a.m. to five p.m., clipping stories from British tabloids like the *Daily Mirror* and *News of the World*, both of which lived up to the character of tabloids, and tailoring them for Indian readers. Kapadia was a hard taskmaster who kept Pingley, a senior sub-editor, and me engaged. Pingley wrote a column of sorts, which kept him away from the office for two, three days in the week.

Goenka acquired the *Morning Standard* from its Anglo-Indian owner and renamed it the *National Standard*, which provoked Lata Punjabi's gag in her (Lata Punjabi's) column to say what does it matter when the same standard remains!

**The Mysore University held a special convocation in New Delhi to confer doctorate on Sharada Prasad.**

My first encounter with Sharada Prasad was when he was media adviser to Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi. As a correspondent of *Agence France Presse*, the French news agency, I attended his briefing a few times. He had also acceded to my request for exclusive briefing, when he impressed me with his lucid and matter-of-fact statement of Government position. During the Janata Government days, I had a personal favour to seek from him. In the last days of the 1975



'emergency', Kartar Singh Duggal came to me in the *Hindustan Times* to ask me to do a biography of Morarji Desai - a quickie – in three months! I thought I could manage it since the editor, Hiranmay Karlekar, would not anyhow trust me with editorial assignments. But Karlekar had other ideas. He asked me to cover the pre-election scene in Andhra Pradesh and Orissa in the following four weeks.

In short, I had hardly finished the writing – almost a cut-and-paste affair – when Morarji Desai became prime minister. The publisher decided to bring out a hard cover edition as well. Before then Morarji asked Sharada Prasad to vet my copy. I requested Sharada Prasad to let my text remain as it was and only look to the writing and syntax, which he generously did. Within the next year, Advani as Information & Broadcasting Minister opted to address the UNESCO general assembly in Paris and I was chosen to accompany him to help him in the task. Sharada Prasad, as usual, drafted the speech but, most embarrassingly for me, Advani asked me to re-write it. I apologised profusely to Sharada Prasad, who most generously said it was okay!

G.S. Bhargava