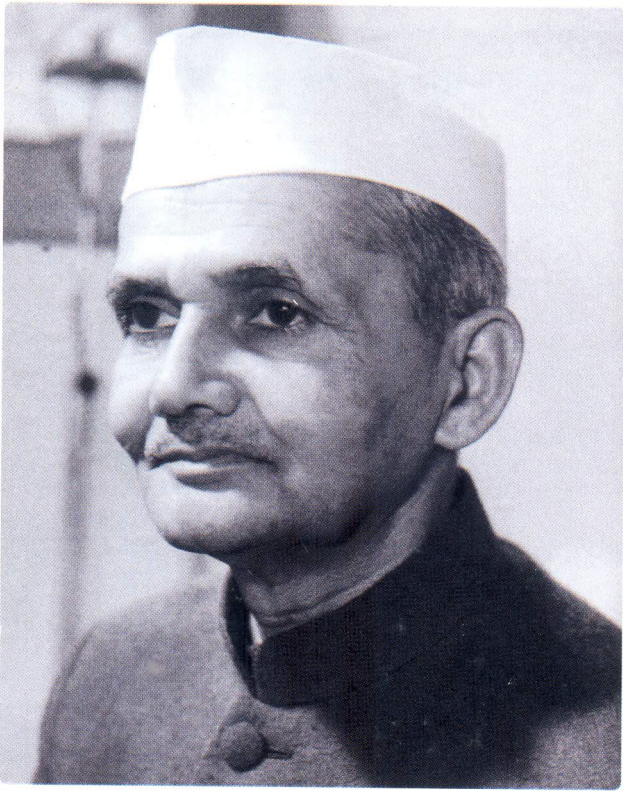




LAL BAHADUR SHASTRI



Lok Sabha Secretariat
New Delhi
2019

LAL BAHADUR SHASTRI

A peerless patriot, an eloquent parliamentarian, a skilful administrator, an acclaimed statesman, an astute negotiator, an embodiment of selflessness and honesty and a shining symbol of simplicity, integrity and affability, Lal Bahadur Shastri was an epitome of all that is best in Indian culture. He was a noble soul who lived in perfect purity of thought, work and deed. His life was truly a continuous *yajna*.

Born on 2 October 1904 at Mughalsarai in Uttar Pradesh to Sharda Prasad and Ramdulari Devi, Lal Bahadur Shastri joined the Harishchandra High School in Varanasi wherein his teacher, Shri Nishkameshwar Prasad Misra, played a major role in moulding his personality and inculcating in him the seeds of self-reliance and earnest endeavour. In 1921, Lal Bahadur responded to Mahatma Gandhi's call to strengthen the Non-Cooperation Movement and gave up his studies to join the freedom struggle. Later, he resumed his studies at the Kashi Vidyapeeth. On the completion of his studies in philosophy and humanities, Lal Bahadur was awarded the degree of 'Shastri'. Thereafter, he came to be affectionately addressed by the people at large as 'Shastriji'.

It was at Kashi Vidyapeeth that Shastriji got an opportunity to meet Acharya J.B. Kripalani, Dr. Bhagwan Das, Acharya Narendra Deva and Dr. Sampurnanand. After completing his education in 1926, Shastriji enrolled himself as a Life Member of the 'Servants of the People Society' and began working for the uplift of the weaker sections of society at Muzaffarnagar. In 1928, Shastriji was transferred to the headquarters of the Society in Allahabad to work under the then President of the Society, Shri Purushottamdas Tandon. As the years went by, this organization became a part and parcel of his life. In May 1928, Shastriji married Lalita Devi who belonged to Mirzapur.

The freedom struggle was getting intense day-by-day and Shastriji was getting deeply involved in it. He took a leading part in the Salt Satyagraha Movement in 1930 and devoted himself fully in convincing the people for non-payment of revenues and other taxes levied by the British Government. In the process, he was arrested and imprisoned for two and a half years.

Shastriji was appointed as Organizing Secretary of the U.P. Parliamentary Board in 1937. Pandit Gobind Ballabh

Pant was impressed with his sterling qualities of head and heart and his unflinching devotion and loyalty to party work and appointed him later as his Parliamentary Secretary.

In 1942, during the Quit India Movement, all the important Congress leaders were arrested on 9 August, but Shastriji somehow went underground and secretly instructed the Congress workers as to when and how to take further action. In the process, and while exhorting people in the Allahabad city to defy the law, he was arrested. He was released along with other Congress leaders on the eve of the arrival of the Cabinet Mission in India.

With the advent of Independence, Shastriji was appointed as the Minister of Home in U.P. and was assigned the Departments of Police and Transport. He carried out a number of reforms in both the fields. A significant effort on his part was the nationalization of the road transport and introduction of the U.P. Government Roadways Service. Yet another reform in this sector was the opening up of the post of bus conductor to women.

Shastriji came on the national political scene in 1951 when the country was preparing for the First General Elections on the basis of adult franchise under Independent India's Constitution. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had picked up Shastriji to be the Congress Party's election manager for the General Elections and appointed him as the General Secretary of the All India Congress Committee. Shastriji left no stone unturned to prove himself as an organizer *par excellence*.

Shastriji's stint as a Union Minister began just after his getting elected to the Rajya Sabha in 1952. Impressed by Shastriji's selfless service, particularly in the General Elections of 1952, Pandit Nehru inducted him into his Cabinet as the Minister of Railways and Transport. Shastriji worked hard to improve the efficiency and safety of the railway system and took several measures to set up various Railway Advisory Boards for the efficient assessment of the railway operations and management in diverse fields. His tenure as the Minister of Railways, however, came to an abrupt end in 1956, when a railway accident occurred near Ariyalur in Tamil Nadu in which many people lost their lives. Owning moral responsibility for the accident, he tendered his resignation. Shastriji's resignation was hailed by the Parliament as being in the highest traditions of parliamentary democracy. Expressing high appreciation of Shastriji's sterling qualities and impeccable character, Pandit Nehru observed in the Lok Sabha on 26 November 1956:

I would like to say that it has been, not only in the Government but for long, my good fortune and privilege

to have him as a comrade and colleague and no man can wish for a better comrade and better colleague in any undertaking—a man of the highest integrity, loyalty, devoted to ideals, a man of conscience and a man of hard work. We can expect no better. And it is because he is such a man of conscience that he has felt deeply whenever there is any failing in the work entrusted to his charge.

Within a year, Shastriji was back in the Union Cabinet and from 1957 to 1961, he held several important portfolios such as Transport and Communications, Commerce and Industry and also Home Affairs during Pandit Pant's illness. After the death of Pandit Pant, Shastriji took over the charge of the Minister of Home Affairs, addressing several problems which warranted action. He resolved the language controversy involving the State of Assam after extensive deliberations and came out with a formula which later came to be known as the 'Shastri Formula' that helped in assuaging the feelings of the Assamese people.

Similarly, in South India as well, there was a strong resentment against the Government for what was perceived as the imposition of Hindi on the people of the non-Hindi speaking States. Shastriji sympathized with the people of the South and their concern over the issue and assured that justice would be done to them. Keeping his word, he piloted the Official Language Bill in Parliament in April 1962, which provided that even after January 1965, English might be retained, in addition to Hindi, for all official purposes and for the transaction of business in Parliament. He made it clear that we should always keep the national interest uppermost in our minds.

Under the Kamraj Plan of 1963, he was the first person who took the initiative of resigning from the Union Cabinet to devote himself to organizational work of the Congress Party. But within a few months, he was re-inducted into the Union Cabinet as Minister without Portfolio to assist Pandit Nehru. In this role, he helped in resolving the 'relic episode' of the Kashmiris quite tactfully and very amicably ironed out the differences. Shastriji was also instrumental in the setting up of the Central Bureau of Investigation and in appointing the Santhanam Committee to recommend measures to stamp out corruption in the country's administrative and public life.

After Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's demise, the mantle of leadership fell on Shastriji's shoulders to steer the ship of the nation. He was unanimously elected leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party on 2 June 1964 and was sworn in as the Prime Minister of India on 9 June 1964. On assuming the office of the Prime Minister, he expressed his views on the political, social and economic problems

with utmost clarity. He was always conscious of the basic problems of poverty and unemployment that plagued the country. He laid equal stress on strengthening the defence forces and in honouring the man behind the plough. For him, self-sufficiency in food was as important as a strong defence system. It was because of this conviction that he coined the slogan *Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan*. The *Kisan* who tills the land, he believed, is as much of a soldier as the *Jawan*, who defends our borders.

Shastriji's role during the 1965 Indo-Pak war and in bringing about the Tashkent Declaration represented a remarkable milestone in modern Indian history. Though India emerged victorious in the war, Shastriji wanted to resolve the issues of contention between the two countries amicably. This, he felt, was necessary if both countries were to live in peace and as good neighbours, particularly when their priorities should be food, clothing and shelter for their people and not wars and conflicts.

Shastriji remained the Prime Minister of the country for eighteen months. He was the leader of world's largest democracy but he considered the Prime Minister 'as only first among equals, captain of the team, an initiator of policies and nothing more than that'. His modesty of expression and the manner in which he conducted himself in the high office concealed his intrinsic strength, extraordinary commonsense and profound wisdom. He very gently and deftly controlled the unprecedented events and very ably piloted the affairs of the nation with unflagging firmness and unequivocal direction that the entire nation pulsated with a sense of purpose. With his pragmatic approach to problems, he endeared himself not only to the people of his country but also those of other countries.

Shastriji was a true champion of peace and democracy. A staunch supporter of Gandhiji, he had adopted the Gandhian way of life. Like Gandhiji, he held truth higher than non-violence. He was also an ardent champion of peace and envisioned India to be a harbinger of peace in the world. He was, however, never ready to accept anything at the cost of his country's sovereignty and always held that it was our first and foremost duty to protect the country's interest, whatever be the cost. A firm believer of *Nishkam Karma*, Shastriji throughout his life worked tirelessly for the uplift of the people, especially the rural people. He also had great faith in the philosophy of *Samanvaya Vada*, a philosophical approach to life that takes up the middle course in the midst of conflicting points of view. A very well-read man, Shastriji had a genuine interest in literature. He had a passion for Urdu poetry also. He was so impressed by the biography of Madame Curie that he translated it into Hindi during his imprisonment.

On 11 January 1966, this great son of India suddenly passed away at Tashkent. The entire nation—the Parliament, the State Legislatures, the Press, leaders from all walks of life and dignitaries from abroad—mourned the sad demise of this outstanding leader who laid down his life at the altar of peace. Mourning the death of Shastriji, the then President of India, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, said:

“Lal Bahadur Shastriji’s case is an illustration of the strength of democracy in this country. From humble beginnings, without any advantages of birth, position or wealth, he rose to the highest position in the government of the country. It is due entirely to his force of character and integrity of life. These things enabled him to rise to the top.”

Paying glowing tributes to Shastriji, Smt. Indira Gandhi, who succeeded him as the Prime Minister, said:

“...He was very polite in his nature and was very peaceful but at the time of war he encouraged our morale strongly, provided his leadership to the nation which contributed to the unity and strength of the country.”

Appreciating his contributions to the nation, the then Speaker of Lok Sabha, Sardar Hukam Singh, said:

“Lal Bahadur Shastri proved that we are dedicated to peace not because of any weakness but because we consider peace essential for the country and the world.”

Deeply touched by the tragic news of Shastriji’s demise, the then American President Lyndon Johnson remarked that “The world is a smaller place without him, and our hearts go out to his family and to the people of India”. Expressing deep grief at the sudden passing away of Shastriji, the then United Nations Secretary-General, U. Thant, said: “Not India alone nor Asia alone, but the whole world will mourn Mr. Shastri’s passing... Prime Minister Shastri gave his great country guidance and leadership which helped it not only to approach with renewed vigour its immense tasks of social and economic improvement but also to exert with undiminished determination at the international level its influence for the good of all mankind”.

The life of Lal Bahadur Shastri continues to inspire India and the world.