**Lal Bahadur Shastri**

***Introduction***

Lal Bahadur Shastri (2nd October 1904 to 11th January 1966) was an Indian Statesman (Neta) who served as the second prime minister of India. He promoted the white revolution (Increase in milk production) and created the National Dairy Development Board and green revolution (Increase in the growth of plants) which led to the increase in food grain production.

He studied in East Central Railway Inter college and Harish Chandra High School, which he left to join the non-cooperation movement. He worked for the betterment of the Harijans at Muzaffarpur and dropped his caste-derived surname of "Srivastava".

Following the independence in 1947, he joined the Government of India and became one of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru’s key cabinet colleagues. He took up on important roles like Railways Minister and Home Minister.

He led the country during the India-Pakistan War and his slogan “Jai Jawan, jai Kisan” became very popular during the war. This war finally ended with Tashkent Agreement on 10 January 1966 and he died the following day in Tashkent, with the cause of his death not known. He was posthumously awarded the Bharat Ratna.

***Early Years (1904 – 1917)***

Lal Bahadur Shastri was born on 2nd October 1904 sharing his birthday with Mahatma Gandhi in the house of his maternal grandparents in Mughalsarai in a Kayastha Hindu family. Shastri's paternal ancestors had been in the service of the zamindar of Ramnagar, Varanasi and Shastri lived there for the first year of his life. Shastri's father, Sharada Prasad Srivastava, was a school teacher who later became a clerk in the revenue office at Allahabad, while his mother, Ramdulari Devi, was the daughter of Munshi Hazari Lal, the headmaster and English teacher at a railway school in Mughalsarai. Shastri was the second child and eldest son of his parents; he had an elder sister, Kailashi Devi.

In April 1906, When Shastri was hardly a year and 6 months old, his father, who had only recently been promoted to the post of deputy tahsildar, died in an epidemic of bubonic plague. Srimati Ramdulari Devi, then only 23 and pregnant with her third child, took her two children and moved from Ramnagar to her father's house in Mughalsarai and settled there for good. She gave birth to a daughter, Sundari Devi, in July 1906. Thus, Shastri and his sisters grew up in the household of his maternal grandfather, Hazari Lalji. However, Hazari Lalji himself died from a stroke in mid-1908, after which the family was looked after by his brother (Shastri's great-uncle) Darbari Lal, who was the head clerk in the opium regulation department at Ghazipur, and later by his son (Ramdulari Devi's cousin) Bindeshwari Prasad, a school teacher in Mughalsarai.

In Shastri's family, as with many Kayastha families, it was the custom in that era for children to receive an education in the Urdu language and culture. This is because Urdu/Persian had been the language of government for centuries, before being replaced by English, and old traditions persisted into the 20th century. Therefore, Shastri began his education at the age of four under the tutelage of a maulvi (a Muslim cleric), Budhan Mian, at the East Central Railway Inter college in Mughalsarai. He studied there until the sixth standard. In 1917, Bindeshwari Prasad (who was now head of the household) was transferred to Varanasi, and the entire family moved there, including Ramdulari Devi and her three children. In Varanasi, Shastri joining the seventh standard at Harish Chandra High School. At this time, he decided to drop his caste-derived surname of "Srivastava".

***Gandhi’s Disciple (1921 – 1945)***

While his family had no links to the independence movement then taking shape, among his teachers at Harish Chandra High School was an intensely patriotic and highly respected teacher named Nishkameshwar Prasad Mishra who inspired Shastri by his patriotism to take deep interest in freedom struggle. He began to study its history and the works of several noted personalities like Swami Vivekananda, Gandhiji and Annie Besant.

In January 1921, when Shastri was in the 10th standard and three months from sitting the final examinations, he attended a public meeting in Benares hosted by Gandhi and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya. Inspired by the Mahatma's call for students to withdraw from government schools and join the non-cooperation movement, Shastri withdrew from Harish Chandra High School the next day and joined the local branch of the Congress Party as a volunteer, actively participating in picketing and anti-government demonstrations. He was soon arrested and jailed, but was then let off as he was still a minor.

Shastri's immediate supervisor was a former Benares Hindu University lecturer named J.B. Kripalani, who recognized the need for younger volunteers to continue their education. So, Kriplani and his, V.N Sharma founded a school around “nationalist education” to educate the young activists in their nation's heritage and with the support of a wealthy philanthropist and ardent Congress nationalist, Shiv Prasad Gupta, the Kashi Vidyapith, the school was inaugurated by Gandhi in Benares as a national institution of higher education on 10 February 1921. Among the first students of the new institution, Shastri graduated with a first-class degree in philosophy and ethics from the Vidyapith in 1925. He was given the title Shastri ("scholar"). The title was a bachelor's degree awarded by the institution but it stuck as part of his name.

Shastri enrolled himself as a life member of the Servants of the People Society (Lok Sevak Mandal), founded by Lala Lajpat Rai, and began to work for the betterment of the Harijans under Gandhi's direction at Muzaffarpur.[21] Later he became the President of the Society.

*Independence Activism of Lal Bahadur Shastri*

In 1928 Shastri became an active and mature member of the Indian National Congress at the call of Mahatma Gandhi. He was imprisoned for two and a half years.[24] Later, he worked as the Organizing Secretary of the Parliamentary Board of U.P. in 1937.[25] In 1940, he was sent to prison for one year, for offering individual Satyagraha support to the independence movement.[26]

On 8 August 1942, Mahatma Gandhi issued the Quit India speech at Gowalia Tank in Bombay, demanding that the British leave India. Shastri, who had just then come out after a year in prison, travelled to Allahabad. For a week, he sent instructions to the independence activists from Jawaharlal Nehru's home, Anand Bhavan. He served as an elected representative for United Provinces in 1937 and 1946.

***His Political Career (1947 – 1964)***

*State Minister*

After India’s independence, Lal Bahadur Shastri was appointed Parliamentary Secretary in his home state, Uttar Pradesh. He became the Minister of Police and Transport under Govind Ballabh Pant's Chief Ministership on 15 August 1947 following Rafi Ahmed Kidwai's departure to become a minister at the centre. As the Transport Minister, he was the first to appoint women conductors. As the minister in charge of the Police Department, he ordered that police use water jets, instead of lathis (batons) to disperse unruly crowds. His tenure as police minister (As Home Minister was called prior to 1950) saw successful curbing of communal riots in 1947, mass migration and resettlement of refugees.

*Cabinet Minister*

In 1951, Shastri was made the General Secretary of the All-India Congress Committee with Jawaharlal Nehru as the Prime Minister. He was directly responsible for the selection of candidates and the direction of publicity and electioneering activities. His cabinet consisted of the finest business men of India including Ratilal Premchand Mehta. He played an important role in the landslide successes of the Congress Party in the Indian General Elections of 1952, 1957 and 1962. In 1952, he successfully contested UP Vidhansabha from Soraon North cum Phulpur West seat and won by getting over 69% of vote. He was believed to be retained as home minister of UP, but surprisingly, he was called to Centre as minister by Nehru. Shastri was made Minister of Railways and Transport in First Cabinet of Republic of India on 13 May 1952. He served as the Minister of Commerce and Industry in 1959 and Minister of Home Affairs in 1961. Shastri laid the foundation of Mangalore Port in 1964 as a minister without a portfolio.

***Prime Minister (1964 – 1966)***

Jawaharlal Nehru died in office on 27 May 1964. Then Congress Party President K. Kamaraj was instrumental in making Shastri Prime Minister on 9 June.

*Domestic Policies*

Shastri retained many members of Nehru's Council of Ministers. T. T. Krishnamachari was retained as the Finance Minister of India, as was Defence Minister Yashwantrao Chavan. He appointed Swaran Singh to succeed him as External Affairs Minister. He also appointed Indira Gandhi, daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru and former Congress President, as the Minister of Information and Broadcasting. Gulzarilal Nanda continued as the Minister of Home Affairs.

Lal Bahadur Shastri's tenure witnessed the Madras anti-Hindi agitation of 1965. The government of India had for a long time made an effort to establish Hindi as the sole national language of India. This was resisted by the non-Hindi speaking states particularly Madras State. To calm the situation, Shastri gave assurances that English would continue to be used as the official language as long the non-Hindi speaking states wanted. The riots subsided after Shastri's assurance, as did the student agitation.

*Economic Policies*

Shastri continued Nehru's socialist economic policies with central planning. He promoted the White Revolution – a national campaign to increase the production and supply of milk – by supporting the Amul milk co-operative of Anand, Gujarat and creating the National Dairy Development Board. He visited Anand on 31 October 1964 for inauguration of the Cattle Feed Factory of Amul at Kanjari. As he was keenly interested in knowing the success of this co-operative, he stayed overnight with farmers in a village, and even had dinner with a farmer's family. He discussed his wish with Verghese Kurien, then the General Manager of Kaira District Co-operative Milk Producers' Union Ltd (Amul) to replicate this model to other parts of the country for improving the socio-economic conditions of farmers. As a result of this visit, the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) was established at Anand in 1965.

While speaking on the chronic food shortages across the country, Shastri urged people to voluntarily give up one meal so that the food saved could be distributed to the affected populace. However, he ensured that he first implemented the system in his own family before appealing to the country. He went on air to appeal to his countrymen to skip a meal a week. The response to his appeal was overwhelming. Even restaurants and eateries downed the shutters on Monday evenings. Many parts of the country observed the "Shastri Vrat". He motivated the country to maximize the cultivation of food grains by ploughing the lawn himself, at his official residence in New Delhi. Underlining the need to boost India's food production, Shastri also promoted the Green Revolution in India in 1965. This led to an increase in food grain production, especially in Punjab, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh. Major milestones in this undertaking were the development of high-yielding varieties of wheat, and rust resistant strains of wheat.

*Foreign Policies*

Shastri continued Nehru's policy of non-alignment but also built closer relations with the Soviet Union. In the aftermath of the Sino-Indian War of 1962 and the formation of military ties between China and Pakistan, Shastri's government decided to expand the country's defense budget.

In 1964, Shastri signed an accord with Sri Lankan Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike regarding the status of Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka, then called Ceylon. This agreement is also known as the Sirima-Shastri Pact or the Bandaranaike-Shastri Pact.

Under the terms of this agreement, 600,000 Indian Tamils were to be repatriated, while 375,000 were to be granted Sri Lankan citizenship. This settlement was to be done by 31 October 1981. However, after Shastri's death, by 1981, India had taken only 300,000 Tamils as repatriates, while Sri Lanka had granted citizenship to only 185,000 citizens (plus another 62,000 born after 1964). Later, India declined to consider any further applications for citizenship, stating that the 1964 agreement had lapsed.

India's relationship with Burma had been strained after the 1962 military coup followed by the repatriation of many Indian families in 1964 by Burma. While the central government in New Delhi monitored the overall process of repatriation and arranged for identification and transportation of the Indian returnees from Burma, it fell under the responsibilities of local governments to provide adequate facilities to shelter the repatriates upon disembarkation on Indian soil. Particularly in the

Madras State the Chief Minister during that time, Minjur K. Bhaktavatsalam, showed care in rehabilitation of the returnees. In December 1965, Shastri made an official visit with his family to Rangoon, Burma and re-established cordial relations with the country's military government of General Ne Win.

***War with Pakistan***

Shastri's greatest moment came when he led India in the 1965 Indo-Pak War.[1] Laying claim to half the Kutch peninsula, the Pakistani army skirmished with Indian forces in August 1965.

On 1 August 1965, major incursions of militants and Pakistani soldiers began, hoping not only to break down the government but incite a sympathetic revolt. The revolt did not happen, and India sent its forces across the Ceasefire Line (now Line of Control) and threatened Pakistan by crossing the International Border near Lahore as war broke out on a general scale. Massive tank battles occurred in the Punjab, and while the Pakistani forces made gains in the northern part of subcontinent, Indian forces captured the key post at Haji Pir, in Kashmir, and brought the Pakistani city of Lahore under artillery and mortar fire.

The Indo-Pak war ended on 23 September 1965 with a United Nations-mandated ceasefire.

On 19 October 1965, Shastri gave the seminal 'Jai Jawan Jai Kishan' ("Hail the soldier, Hail the farmer") slogan at Urwa in Allahabad that became a national slogan.

During his tenure as Prime Minister, Shastri visited many countries including Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, England, Canada, Nepal, Egypt and Burma. Incidentally while returning from the Non Alliance Conference in Cairo on the invitation of then President of the Pakistan, Mohammed Ayub Khan to have lunch with him, Shastri made a stop over at Karachi Airport for few hours and breaking from the protocol Ayub Khan personally received him at the Airport and had an informal meeting during October 1964. After the declaration of ceasefire with Pakistan in 1965, Shastri and Ayub Khan attended a summit in Tashkent (former USSR, now in modern Uzbekistan), organized by Alexei Kosygin. On 10 January 1966, Shastri and Ayub Khan signed the Tashkent Declaration.

***Death***

Shastri died in Tashkent, Uzbekistan (then Soviet Union) on 11 January 1966, one day after signing a peace treaty to end the 1965 Indo-Pakistan War.[54] Many among Shastri's supporters and close relatives, refused at the time, and have refused since, to believe the circumstances of his death and allege foul play.[55][56] Conspiracy theories appeared within hours of his death and have thereafter persisted. He was eulogized as a national hero and the Vijay Ghat memorial established in his memory. Upon his death, Gulzarilal Nanda once again assumed the role of Acting Prime Minister until the Congress Parliamentary Party elected Indira Gandhi over Morarji Desai to officially succeed Shastri.

After Shastri's death, his wife Lalita Shastri alleged he was poisoned. An epic poetry book in Hindi titled Lalita Ke Aansoo written by Krant M. L. Verma was published in 1978. In this book, the tragic story about the death of Shastri has been narrated by his wife Lalita.

The Indian Government released no information about his death and the media then was kept silent. The possible existence of a conspiracy was covered in India by the 'Outlook' magazine.[61] A query was later posed by Anuj Dhar, author of CIA's Eye on South Asia, under the Right to Information Act to declassify a document supposedly related to Shastri's death, but the Prime Minister's Office refused to oblige, reportedly citing that this could lead to harming of foreign relations, cause disruption in the country and cause breach of parliamentary privileges.[62] Another RTI plea by Kuldip Nayar was also declined, as PMO cited exemption from disclosure on the plea. The home ministry is yet to respond to queries whether India conducted a post-mortem on Shastri, and if the government had investigated allegations of foul play. The Delhi Police in their reply to an RTI application said they do not have any record pertaining to Shastri's death. The Ministry of External Affairs has already said no post-mortem was conducted in the USSR. The Central Public Information Officer of Delhi Police in his reply dated 29 July 2009[63] said, "No such record related to the death of the former Prime Minister of India Lal Bahadur Shastri is available in this district. Hence the requisite information pertaining to New Delhi district may please be treated as nil."[64] This has created more doubts.[65] The death of Lal Bahadur Shastri is considered to be one of the biggest unsolved mysteries of Indian politics.

The PMO answered only two questions of the RTI application, saying it has only one classified document pertaining to the death of Shastri, which is exempted from disclosure under the RTI Act. It sent the rest of the questions to the Ministry of External Affairs and Home Ministry to answer. The MEA said the only document from the erstwhile Soviet Government is "the report of the Joint Medical Investigation conducted by a team comprising R. N. Chugh, Doctor in-Attendance to the PM and some Russian doctors" and added no post-mortem was conducted in the USSR. The Home Ministry referred the matter to Delhi Police and National Archives for the response pertaining to any post-mortem conducted on the body of Shastri in India

Later, Gregory Douglas, a journalist who interviewed former CIA operative Robert Crowley over a period of 4 years, recorded their telephone conversations and published a transcription in a book titled Conversations with the Crow. In the book, Crowley claimed that the CIA was responsible for eliminating Homi Bhabha, an Indian nuclear scientist whose plane crashed in the Alps, when he was going to attend a conference in Vienna; and Lal Bahadur Shastri. Crowley said that the USA was wary of India's rigid stand on nuclear policy and of then prime minister Lal Bahadur Shastri, who wanted to go ahead with nuclear tests. He also said that the agency was worried about collective domination by India and Russia over the region, for which a strong deterrent was required.

***Memorials***

Shastri was known for his honesty and humility throughout his life. He was posthumously awarded the Bharat Ratna, and a memorial "Vijay Ghat" was built for him in Delhi. Several educational institutes including Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (Mussoorie, Uttarakhand) bear his name. The Lal Bahadur Shastri Institute of Management was established in Delhi by the Lal Bahadur Shastri Educational Trust in 1995. The Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute was named after Shastri due to his role in promoting scholarly activity between India and Canada. Lal Bahadur Shastri Memorial run by the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Memorial Trust, is situated next to 10 Janpath his residence when he was Prime Minister,[87] at 1, Motilal Nehru Place, New Delhi. One of the halls of residence of IIT Kharagpur is named after him as Lal Bahadur Shastri Hall of Residence. In 2011, on Shastri's 45th death anniversary, the Uttar Pradesh Government announced the renovation of Shastri's ancestral house at Ramnagar in Varanasi and declared plans to convert it into a biographical museum.[90][91] Varanasi International Airport is named after him. The Lal Bahadur Shastri Centre for Indian Culture with a monument and a street named after him are in the city of Tashkent, Uzbekistan.