

**Lecture of Prime Ministers Lecture Series**

**Lal Bahadur Shastri: The Man Who Died Too Soon**

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**Pradhanmantri  
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# **Lal Bahadur Shastri: The Man Who Died Too Soon**

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Nripendra Misra-ji, Dr Surya Prakash, Mr Anil Shastri and other members of the Shastri family, and friends,

When a good friend of mine received the invitation to this lecture, he mailed to say that it was news to him that I was an expert on Shastri. I replied that of course I was not an expert. But I had been given the choice of speaking on Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi or Shastri, and given our contentious political climate I thought Shastri was the safest option!

The truth is that I have had no direct, personal experience of Shastri, since I never met him. I was in school in Calcutta when he was prime minister, and what I remember of that period is the excitement of the Indo-Pakistan war. Other than that, my memory is of Shastri's visit to the city, his cavalcade and Shastri himself riding in a large open limousine through the city's streets. The next morning the newspapers reported that, since the Prime Minister was so short, he had stood on a stool inside the car, so that people could better see him. I don't know if that was really the case; you know how reliable newspaper reports are!

So, I have had to base this lecture on entirely secondary sources: two-and-a-half biographies written on Shastri, and I say half because one person wrote two biographies, the first being only a half-baked job. I have also relied on the memoirs of civil servants and editors of the time, accounts of the war, and so on. These accounts don't always agree on the details, so I have used my judgement and chosen the version that seemed the most plausible. I hope I have made the right choices.

Now to turn to the man in focus this evening. I start with a broad assessment; then look at Shastri's early life; his entry into public life; how he came to be viewed as Nehru's most likely successor; the rivals and critics who stood in the way; his record as Prime Minister in the context of the India of the time; examples of his responses under pressure; Tashkent; the what if question, in case he had lived longer; and the conclusion.

### **Assessment of Shastri**

Most of us tend to under-estimate someone who is short and small-built, especially if he is also mild-mannered. And so, Lal Bahadur Shastri was easy to under-estimate. He was under-rated by Pakistan's President, Gen. Ayub Khan, a tall Pathan who thought that such a small weak man would fail the test of a war; under-rated also by his political peers, who thought he could be managed by a collective leadership. What wasn't obvious was that there was steel underneath the soft exterior. He was non-confrontational, but always his own man.

Shastri's other strength was that he was transparent in his dealings, which helped build trust. On top of that, he had the moral strength of his integrity. He was the only Prime Minister to die penniless; all that he left behind for his family was an unpaid car loan. Most importantly, and I must emphasise this, he was a man with remarkably good judgement. The country would have done well to have him live and serve longer. It was a tragedy that he died so soon.

### **His Early Life Story**

Those are my broad assessments. Now let us turn to his life story. Lal Bahadur was born and bred in poverty. His father died early, and his maternal grandfather who had taken charge of the family didn't live much longer. So young Lal Bahadur was moved to the homes of various uncles, some more kindly and some less. He neither pitied his condition, nor made political capital out of it later. When the inevitable myth-makers said he went to school every day by swimming across the Ganga, Shastri gently told a questioner that it happened only once, when he did not have the money to pay for the ferry.

One of his biographers records that Lal Bahadur's education was initiated at the age of four under the care of a maulvi, as apparently was the custom. The man chosen was from a neighbouring village who taught in a railway school at Mughal Sarai. He introduced Lal Bahadur to both Urdu and tahzeeb, or social etiquette. In due course a compendium of Mirza Ghalib's poetry would become Lal Bahadur's constant companion; his favourite poem by Ghalib spoke of a life of solitude.

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Before long the country was caught up in the ferment of the freedom movement. Lal Bahadur was just 16 when he responded to Gandhi's call at a meeting in Varanasi, asking students to leave their schools and colleges and join the non-cooperation movement. This was a few months short of his final school exams. He faced very natural pressure from his family to write the exams and get a job that would improve their straitened circumstances. But the teenager chose to become a Congress volunteer. Over the next 25 years, he was to be arrested seven times and spend a total of nine years behind bars.

But though he had left school, he did later join the Kashi Vidyapeeth when it was set up. On graduation after four years, Lal Bahadur earned the title of Shastri, is one who knows the Shaastras. This became the handle by which he would henceforth be known. Earlier, in school, young Lal Bahadur had given up his Kayastha caste name.

### **Shastri in Public Life**

His formal education completed, Shastri's next step was to meet Lala Lajpat Rai in Lahore and join the Servants of People Society, of which he later became a life member. His initial task was Harijan uplift in Muzaffarnagar. When Lajpat Rai was succeeded by Purushottam Das Tandon, who moved his base to Allahabad, Shastri was appointed his assistant and also elected a member of the city's municipal board. Allahabad's leading politician, other than Tandon, was of course Jawaharlal Nehru. As is well known, the two had very different worldviews and never got along. Yet Shastri earned the trust of both, and worked closely with both. Tandon read Shastri accurately when he described him as "a genius in striking balances...and achieving compromises". He also saw "behind his humility a rock of toughness".

The young assistant proved to be an efficient and hardworking political operative. So he rose step by step through district and state politics to the national stage. As the general secretary of the Congress, he took charge of the party's successful election campaign in 1952, and then again in 1957. Shastri was also one of the key players in choosing Congress candidates for the 1962 parliamentary elections.

As government minister Shastri undertook what came to me as a surprising number of initiatives when he was in charge at different times of the railways, commerce and industry, and finally home affairs. In that last post, he became a successful trouble-shooter, dousing linguistic-communal fires in Assam, tackling the agitation for a Punjabi Suba, and assuaging

concern about language policy in the south. Later, as minister without portfolio, he also tackled a crisis in Kashmir over the Prophet's missing hair, and then effected a much-needed change in the state's leadership.

### **Nehru's Potential Successor**

The result of this track record and his personality traits was that Shastri had the short odds when it came to succeeding Nehru. This is despite there being no shortage of stalwarts in the party. But Shastri had the advantage of coming from the political heartland. He was known to be a workaholic who applied himself seriously to any task. He had a good track record as a political operative, an active minister, and a successful problem-solver. He also had a pleasing, non-confrontational style of operation, and was easier to deal with than the stern Morarji Desai.

So, while he was not a visionary, or a man with original ideas who launched grand projects, Shastri had general acceptability. Nor was he an orator, but it helped that he spoke simply and from the heart. For all these reasons he enjoyed Nehru's confidence more than most others. It was said of him, somewhat fancifully I think, that he had no enemies. Perhaps there were no enemies so to speak, but he did have rivals who tried to arrest his rise. But those rival claimants to the top job fell short on one or other count.

As early as 1960, the well-known newspaper editor Frank Moraes had forecast in a book that Shastri could emerge as a compromise choice to succeed Nehru though, as Moraes noted, "he lacks an assertive personality". Moraes records that he liked him instinctively at their first meeting, because of his charm and modesty of manner, and a "homespun Indian quality" that the westernized Moraes found "compelling". His speech Moraes said "was, like him, precise and meticulous".

Another journalist, the American Welles Hangen, wrote in 1963 a book titled "After Nehru, who?" He listed eight possible successors, and concluded that Shastri was the person most likely to succeed Nehru. But he added presciently that Shastri's health might cut short his tenure. Hangen said of Shastri that he "is the most authentically Indian of the personalities described in this book. He is nearest the mind and soul of India."

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It was more than that. In a party that had its fair share of scandal, Shastri not only stayed clean himself but asked for action when it came to dealing with corruption or incompetence—against Krishna Menon, K.D. Malaviya and Punjab’s powerful Chief Minister Pratap Singh Kairon. Shastri himself had felt compelled to resign in the wake of a couple of major railway accidents that cost hundreds of lives, in 1956, when he had been the minister for railways. That principled and unasked for resignation helped build his image when the accidents had marred his record as minister. On these and other issues, he had a sure political instinct.

It is worth recalling Nehru’s comments in Parliament when he announced his acceptance of Shastri’s resignation: “...It has been...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 highest integrity, loyalty, devoted to ideals, a man of conscience and a man of hard work. We can expect no better.”

Nehru, towards the end of his life, came to rely on Shastri more than on anyone else, other than perhaps his daughter Indira. After the implementation of what I think was the hare-brained Kamaraj Plan, in which the senior most central ministers and most powerful state Chief Ministers had to leave office and work to strengthen the party, Shastri was the only one whom Nehru brought back into the government, as minister without portfolio, to help an aging and unwell lion in his winter.

### **Rivals, Critics and Cabals**

But there is no politics without rivalries. Press reports of the time spoke of active lobbying to induct Indira Gandhi into the Cabinet as foreign minister. Besides, as things turned out, Shastri’s formal brief as minister without portfolio was quite limited in scope, something that he was not happy about. And when Nehru wanted to make Shastri Leader of the House in the Lok Sabha, opposition from colleagues who considered themselves senior to Shastri forced the Prime Minister to drop the idea.

Later, it was a feature of Shastri’s Prime Ministership that, through the bulk of his 19 months in office, there was subdued but latent tension with Nehru’s family members. First, Nehru’s sister Krishna Huthee Singh and Indira Gandhi sought to pre-empt Shastri’s move into Teen Murti House by saying that it should be made into a Nehru Museum. As it happened, Shastri had never wanted a grand home as Prime Minister; in fact, he rejected both Hyderabad House

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and Jaipur House as options and chose to stay where he was, at 1 Motilal Nehru Place. The building next door, 10 Janpath, was tagged on as his office in order to handle visitors.

Indira Gandhi would complain that though she had helped Shastri become Prime Minister, he did not consult her much. Against this must be set the fact that she got the portfolio that she asked for, namely information and broadcasting. She was fourth in the Cabinet hierarchy, and named to all the important Cabinet committees. Her place in the hierarchy did not stop her from trying to upstage the prime minister by travelling to Madras in the middle of language riots to make policy pronouncements, and to the border to mingle with soldiers during the war with Pakistan. Quizzed by the journalist Inder Malhotra, who was one of her biographers, she said she was not merely minister for information and broadcasting but one of the country's leaders. And she asked Malhotra: "Do you think this government can survive if I resign today? Yes, I have jumped over the prime minister's head, and I would do it again."

Unhappy that she was not getting her due, she reportedly even thought of settling down with her sons in England. Later, she sought to belittle Shastri as an "orthodox Hindu" and therefore not someone with a modern mind who could take the country forward. It is also telling in its own way that, on Shastri's death, Mrs Gandhi suggested at one stage that the cremation be in Allahabad, not on the banks of the Yamuna in Delhi where her father's and the Mahatma's cremations had taken place.

On her part, Nehru's favourite sister Vijayalakshmi Pandit hit out hard in her maiden speech in Parliament. She echoed Atal Bihari Vajpayee's criticism that the government was indecisive, called her own party's government a prisoner of indecision, and asked: "Why is the government afraid?" But there was a footnote to that speech, in that she went immediately afterwards to see Shastri in his Parliament House office to say that she hoped she had not spoken out of turn! His dry reply, as recorded by an official close to him, was: "Aap ne jo theek samjha, woh kaha." This reminds me of Oscar Wilde, who once said that journalists are always apologizing to you in private for what they write about you in public. I didn't know that politicians did the same when it came to their speeches!

In any event, for all of his ordinariness and the lack of anything approaching Nehruvian charisma, it was Shastri who was the man of the moment. Mankekar records that a clutch of party bigwigs, later dubbed the Syndicate, had met at Tirupati in 1963 to discuss the post-

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Nehru Scenario. The cabal reportedly agreed on Shastri as the next party president, on the assumption that he would automatically become Prime Minister after Nehru.

The fallback option as party president was the Chief Minister of Madras state, K. Kamaraj, who was one of the confabulators at Tirupati. Mankekar says Shastri declined the offer of the post of president, and so Kamaraj became party president in October. At the ensuing Congress session at Bhubaneswar in January, where Nehru had a mild stroke, it was Shastri who moved the main political resolution.

Shastri could not have been unaware of the constant speculation about who would succeed Nehru. And we should not think that he was without ambition. Which politician is? Nor was he without guile, as his actions showed on Nehru's passing. But like others who worked closely with Nehru, Shastri suspected that Nehru's real wish was that his daughter would succeed him--not immediately for that would reek of dynasticism, but after an interregnum with someone like Shastri. So, when the time came to choose, it quickly became a question of Shastri or Morarji Desai, with Nehru's daughter a third possibility.

At this point (as recounted by C.P. Srivastava, an IAS officer who worked closely with Shastri in different capacities), Shastri took the unusual step of calling on Mrs Gandhi and asking her to lead the nation. She declined, saying she was in too much grief and pain. Kuldip Nayyar, Shastri's press officer in the home ministry and someone who enjoyed Shastri's confidence, recounts another unusual move: Shastri sent word through Nayyar to Morarji that Jayaprakash Narayan could be a consensus candidate, and failing that Indira Gandhi. Predictably, Desai rejected both names.

How does one interpret these moves even as Kamaraj as the party president was sussing out whether Shastri or Morarji had more support in the party? It could be Shastri's humility in looking for candidates other than himself. More likely, they were calculated moves to make sure there would be no surprise candidates entering the frame.

### **India in 1964**

How do we assess his record as Prime Minister? To do that, one must look at India in the context of the time, very different from its more confident position today. The country had nurtured its democracy and created the institutional bulwarks for rule-bound government. But militarily it had failed to defend its borders. Economically it was trying to lift itself up by its

boot-straps and create an industrial base, but it was short of food to feed its hungry millions, short of foreign exchange, and surviving on the charity of other countries. Nehru's grand projects and schemes had delivered industrial progress and faster economic growth, but not the basics for the people.

What is more, economic planning was about to run aground for want of resources. The country's socialist ambitions had produced bureaucracy-ridden controls and shortages. As for foreign policy, while Nehru had given voice to an emerging bloc of post-colonial countries, Shastri did not have the stature to play that role. What he could see, though, was that some of the western powers—especially but not only Britain—were willing to back Pakistan even when it was the aggressor.

So international confidence in the country's future was low. From across the border, Pakistan's President Ayub Khan thought India would cave in if, as he said, it was given one or two hard blows. And there was more than one prediction by western observers that the country would break up after Nehru, or slip into a military dictatorship.

This was the India that Shastri took charge of. His brief 19 months in office were in turn marked by successive crises: a drought that developed into a famine in Bihar and caused rampant food inflation; violent protests in what was then Madras state over the imposition of Hindi—a decision that had to be withdrawn; a still under-prepared military; corruption charges against ministers; and much else.

There was a military setback when Pakistan tested India in the Rann of Kutch. India lost some territory through arbitration, while Pakistan came to believe that it could aim for a bigger prize, Kashmir. The saving grace was that the humiliation of 1962 could be wiped out by a qualified victory over Pakistan in the war of September 1965. But both the manner in which food aid was made available and the substance of the Tashkent Declaration showed how India's hands could be twisted by the superpowers. It was not an easy time to be prime minister.

### **Record as Prime Minister**

For such a troubled period in India's history, the country had a Prime Minister who was certainly not born to greatness. Nor can one say that he achieved true greatness, given his all too brief tenure. But one thing can be said with confidence: Greatness was not thrust upon

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him. Lal Bahadur Shastri in 1964 had the experience and ability to lead the country. And the confidence to strike out in new directions as prime minister, even as the country was still mourning the death of a colossus. In his first remarks after being elected as leader of the Congress parliamentary party, just six days after Nehru's death, Shastri emphasized poverty and jobs as the primary issues that he would address.

At a time of food shortages, his focus was on agriculture and then small-scale industry. One of the most capable ministers, C. Subramaniam, had been minister for steel and mines in Nehru's Cabinet. Shastri put him in charge of agriculture. The resulting focus on agricultural research and new strains of wheat gave birth to the green revolution and eventually self-sufficiency in food.

In industry the new prime minister stressed the production of everyday goods used by ordinary people, rather than heavy industry—and said existing capital-intensive projects should be finished before starting new ones. At his first press conference as prime minister, he suggested that all government projects should mention the number of jobs they would create. That should be the yardstick on which to judge them.

During the debate on a no-confidence motion in Parliament, Shastri was quizzed about abandoning Nehruism. He said Nehru's economic policies had themselves been different from the Mahatma's, and it was natural to adapt policies to changed circumstances. The new Prime Minister was signalling that he was his own man. There can be little doubt that his economic policies would have had significant departures from Nehru's.

In many ways, Shastri had already been a good foil to Nehru. Where Nehru was the thinker and dreamer, Shastri was very much a grass-root organization man. Where Nehru didn't suffer fools gladly, Shastri knew how to bring factions together and construct compromise. Where Nehru was the visionary who launched ambitious projects and strode across the world stage, Shastri knew that the common man needed jobs and clothing and health care. And where Nehru's pursuit of a socialistic pattern of society was ideological, a contemporary observer noted that Shastri's socialism was more Gandhian. As the businessman G.D. Birla said of him at the time, "Not left, not right, but a good clean man."

Certainly, he knew how to exercise power and authority. He created the Prime Minister's office, with a powerful civil servant as secretary to the Prime Minister. When Morarji Desai insisted that he be made No. 2 in the new cabinet, Shastri didn't agree, and Morarji therefore

stayed out of the Cabinet. However meek and mild Shastri may have seemed, there can be little doubt that he would have progressively asserted himself.

### **Responses under pressure**

I'd like to cite three instances, to show that Shastri did not dither when it came to difficult decisions.

The first was after China carried out a nuclear test in 1964. Shastri, committed to using nuclear energy for only peaceful purposes, tried briefly to get India a nuclear umbrella from the western powers. When he failed, he changed tack in early 1965 and gave the green signal to Homi Bhabha, who was head of atomic energy. The clearance was qualified, "to begin theoretical work on explosions for peaceful purposes." Shastri added a rider in his note, that "No experimental work is to be done without my clearance".

A few months later, during the war with Pakistan, China had piled additional pressure on India by issuing some war-like threats. Shastri's response to a possible Sino-Pak axis, as recounted by Homi Sethna to Raj Chengappa, was to ask Bhabha to go ahead with all nuclear preparations short of an actual nuclear test. In his book, *Weapons of Peace*, Chengappa quotes then Cabinet Secretary Dharma Vira: "Initially Shastri only wanted atomic energy to be used for peaceful scientific purposes. But towards the end of his life he agreed that we have to be ready... We were not surrounded by friends, and we shouldn't be caught unawares." India's progress towards becoming a strategic nuclear power took a very important step forward under Shastri.

The war with Pakistan provided another display of the steel inside. India faced the risk that a Pakistani armoured thrust across the Cease-Fire Line at Chhamb would lead to the capture of a key choke point, namely the bridge across the Chenab at Akhnoor. Shastri readily gave the army the permission it sought, to cross the international border and take the battle into Pakistani Punjab. That helped India's forces to cross the Ichhogil canal and threaten Lahore. In turn it forced Pakistan to divert its forces away from the thrust towards Akhnoor. That killed Pakistan's key war objective of getting to what Ayub Khan had called the jugular, and cutting off Kashmir from the rest of India.

It is notable about that war that, unlike 1962, there was no political interference; the army was left free to carry out its mandate as it thought fit. Shastri's stature rose, and his catchy

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slogan, “Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan”, found resonance. Vijaylakshmi Pandit and Indira Gandhi spoke differently now about the prime minister; there was no more criticism about indecision.

The third example concerns the devaluation of the rupee, which for a variety of reasons had become inevitable by late 1965—not least because foreign aid was made conditional on a devaluation. Senior ministers like C. Subramaniam and Ashoka Mehta were in favour of the step. Shastri saw the need to take the controversial step, but the finance minister TT Krishnamachari was strongly opposed.

Coincidentally at that time, TTK came under attack from parliamentarians because of his family’s business interests. Shastri had in any case been having problems with TTK, and decided on a prima facie enquiry. TTK felt let down, and resigned. That Shastri had engineered the resignation became clear from what BK Nehru, India’s ambassador in Washington, records in his memoirs. For when Nehru met Shastri the following morning, which was New Year’s Day, the prime minister’s first remark was: “How did you like the New Year’s present I gave you?” Nehru went back to Washington with authorization to inform the IMF and World Bank that the government had decided to devalue. Shastri would have worked on the devaluation on his return from Tashkent. As things worked out, the devaluation was eventually announced by Indira Gandhi in June.

### **Tashkent**

Perhaps the one episode that can be weighed against these instances of responding to pressure with steely resolve, is Shastri’s decision in the Tashkent talks to give up territory captured in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir, most importantly the Haji Pir pass that connected Poonch in the south with Uri in the north. That salient was also a major point of infiltration from across the Cease-Fire Line into the Kashmir valley. Haji Pir had in fact been captured briefly by the Indian army in the 1948 war, but re-taken by Pakistan. So, its capture in 1965 had been a major triumph.

In Shastri’s defence, what can be said is that the Security Council resolution calling for a ceasefire, which India had accepted, asked both countries to withdraw to the pre-war position. Refusal to give up Haji Pir or any other piece of captured territory would have meant flouting that resolution, and failure in talks with Pakistan. It would also have created problems with the US which had already suspended all aid. Such blackmail reflected India’s vulnerabilities at the time.

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Mankekar and C.P. Srivastava, sympathetic biographers of Shastri, record that before he went to Tashkent the Prime Minister held extensive consultations with people in the government and in the opposition. The general consensus was that the country would not be able to hold on to Haji Pir, even if it tried. Shastri then took advance clearance from the Cabinet to withdraw from all captured territory if that was required. Still, there had been critical voices, including in the English language press. And the Jana Sangh stood out for opposing even going to Tashkent, fearing the outcome, and remained bitterly critical afterwards.

At Tashkent Shastri initially resisted pressure from his Soviet counterpart, Alexei Kosygin, saying that if Kosygin wanted India to give up Haji Pir he would have to talk to a different prime minister. Eventually, though, he did give it up as part of the over-all exchange of captured territory, in return for a Pak promise to not resort to war.

Kuldip Nayyar, by now the head of a news agency, the United News of India, was on the spot at Tashkent, and has recorded that when Shastri met the media contingent he was asked about Haji Pir. When Shastri said he had agreed to give it up, one of the reporters, forgetting that he was talking to the prime minister, blurted out that he was anti-national. Later, when Shastri called his home and asked how the news of the agreement had been received, Nayyar records that he got a negative response from his own family. It is possible that the stress caused by such reactions precipitated the heart attack that led to his death later that night.

Dharma Vira, cabinet secretary at the time, argues in his memoirs that under the circumstances the Tashkent agreement was inevitable, but that Shastri would have faced considerable opposition if he had returned to India alive. “The fact of his death in tragic circumstances blunted the opposition...”

### **What if**

What if Shastri had survived Tashkent? Shastri himself had told someone that if he lived for only another year or so, he would be succeeded by Indira Gandhi. And if he lived for three or four more years, his successor would be Y.B. Chavan, the defence minister.

Shastri’s survival and continuance would probably have resulted in keeping the Congress together. As a master of compromise, he might have found ways to deal with the Syndicate, thus avoiding an open power tussle and party split. That in turn would have voided the need for the sweeping nationalizations that Indira Gandhi effected in order to gain an upper hand

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politically. And a less contentious political climate would most likely have meant avoiding the trauma of Emergency rule as well.

It is equally possible, though, that a government under Shastri would have been forced by the difficult economic circumstances to take unpopular decisions. And that an impatient Indira Gandhi might have led a challenge from the Left, supported by younger elements in the Congress. If one considers how popular bank nationalization was when first announced, such a challenge might well have enjoyed popular support. As for the outcome of such a challenge, it is hard to say. They were difficult times for India, and economic and political forces could have combusted in unpredictable ways.

What of the other fault line in India's politics, between those who would follow Nehru's hard secular line, and the views of people like P.D. Tandon, Govind Ballabh Pant and others, who would have wanted India to reflect the reality that it was overwhelmingly Hindu? The answer to how Shastri would have seen it comes from one of his biographers who recounts how Shastri spoke at a public meeting in Delhi's Ram Lila grounds.

There he joined issue with a BBC report to the effect that since India's prime minister was a Hindu, he would be ready for war with Pakistan. Shastri said that while he was a Hindu, the gentleman presiding over the meeting was a Muslim, one of the speakers at the meeting was a Christian, and there were people of other faiths present. "The unique thing about our country is that we have... people of all... religions. We have temples and mosques, gurdwaras and churches. But we do not bring all this into politics. This is the difference between India and Pakistan... So far as politics is concerned, each of us is as much an Indian as the other."

### **In conclusion**

To conclude, Shastri must be remembered as a man of integrity who invited trust; a teenager who gave up his education, his job prospects and his family's financial welfare to join the freedom movement; a workaholic who successfully tackled knotty problems; a humble son of the soil, not a colonial Wog; an "orthodox Hindu" who also read Ghalib. Someone with whom the southern politicians felt comfortable, even though he expected everyone to eventually adopt Hindi; someone who could work simultaneously with such polar opposites as Purushottam Das Tandon and Jawaharlal Nehru; and be respected by businessmen even as he espoused a practical socialism that focused on people's everyday needs. His combination

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of qualities was unique, and his consensual approach would have had a good chance of keeping India on even keel. The country could have done without his untimely death.

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