



HARI PRASAD SHASTRI

Founder of Shanti Sadan and author or translator of most of its books, Hari Prasad Shastri (1882-1956) was born into a Brahmin family at Bareilly in the United Provinces of India. He received a traditional Indian education, distinguishing himself as a Sanskrit scholar and Pundit, and finishing his studies as a personal pupil of the world-renowned Professor of Sanskrit at Varanasi (Benares) University, Pundit Rama Mishra Shastri. He later became well-versed in English literature, history and philosophy and also studied Persian, Chinese and Japanese literature.



As a young man he was well-known as a lecturer on spiritual matters in Northern India, and, in his mid-twenties, had the honorary title Mahopadeshaka (great teacher) conferred on him by His Highness Maharaja Lakshmishvara Singh, President of the Bharata Dharma Mahamandala, one of the highest honours which could then be given to a classical Sanskrit scholar in India.

Even at this time his main interest in life was the pursuit of the spiritual Yoga and its ideal of enlightenment. He learnt the traditional methods of Yoga practice and enquiry from his own Teacher, the Mahatma Shri Dada of Aligarh, and also visited many of the Yogis and Mahatmas who were living in the region of the Himalayas at that time. As a result, as well as being a scholar of exceptionally wide experience and a remarkable linguist, Dr Shastri also became an Acharya (Teacher) in the direct line of one of the oldest teaching schools of the classical Yoga, the Yoga of Self-Knowledge (Adhyatma Yoga).

In 1916 Dr Shastri went to Japan where he lectured at the Imperial University and Waseda University in Tokyo and established a centre of Adhyatma Yoga under the name of Ichi-no-do (the Cave of Non-duality). Some personal impressions of his two-year stay in the country have been published by Shanti Sadan in the little book Echoes of Japan.

As a result of a chance encounter with Dr Sun Yat Sen, the founder and first President of the Republic of China, he was invited to go to that country. He went in 1918, remaining there for 11 years. Dr Sun Yat Sen became a personal friend of Dr Shastri and studied Yoga under him until his untimely death in 1925. While in China Dr Shastri became Dean of the Foreign Department of Haroon University at Shanghai and was also appointed Professor of Philosophy at Nankwang College. He founded and edited the Asiatic Review to promote a better understanding between East and West. He brought out the Haroon edition of the Buddhist classics, the Tripitaka, which became the standard text used in all Chinese Universities. He supervised a translation of the Koran into Chinese and later (after coming to England) himself translated the Analects of Confucius into Hindi. This was published in India in a series sponsored by the Maharaja Gaekwar of Baroda.

Dr Shastri came to London in 1929 at the wish of his teacher, and founded the Centre which he called Shanti Sadan (Temple of Inner Peace). He gave hundreds of lectures in London and elsewhere and published many original works and translations, notably The Ramayana of Valmiki, which has become the standard translation of the Sanskrit epic. He died early in 1956.

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