

# 'SPIRITUALISM AND OTHER ISMS ARE NOT HOLDING BACK INDIA'



**SIR C P SRIVASTAVA** has dedicated his life to public service. Arguably, India's most distinguished government officer, he has had a meteoric rise in India and overseas. Hand picked by former Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri, he moved on to head Shipping Corporation of India. And later as Secretary General of the International Maritime Organization, UN for an unprecedented 16 years. He was awarded the "Padma Bhushan" by the Indian President and Knighted by the Queen of the UK in 1990.

Last year, President Kalam, in the presence of PM Manmohan Singh and Congress supremo Sonia Gandhi, awarded him the Lal Bahadur Shastri award. Sir Srivastava is married to Shri Mataji, the founder of Sahaja Yoga. They have two daughters.

Sir CP and Shri Mataji are currently in Australia and will attend a public program at the Sydney Town Hall on Feb 6 to mark 25 years of Sahaja Yoga in this country. In his first interview to **IndusAge** about politics, spirituality and what is right with India

**□ You have had the honour of working closely with one of India's strongest leaders – Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri. What was so special about him compared to so much corruption in government we see all over the world these days?**

Sir CP Srivastava (left) with former Australian PM Gough Whitlam in Sydney. Photograph by Matthew Cooper

Shastriji was a unique person. He had a mightily difficult task succeeding Pandit Nehru. Nehru was a world personality and a hero to the people. And Shastriji acknowledged that. However, he became the Prime Minister and a leader in his own right because he had certain qualities. Firstly, he was a man of total integrity. Secondly, he was not a self opinionated person. He always heard everyone for good elements on the subject, but always made up his own mind. He was a very determined person. He knew what was right, and always followed it to the end.

**□ Your life has been deeply influenced by your wife Shri Mataji. How much have you influenced each other?**

Her influence is obvious. She has evolved a new philosophy for her own. She has practised and promoted it single-handedly for 35 years. I was doing my job and she was doing hers. Whichever way I could support her, I did, but frankly there was much more to do. A husband and wife always influence each other. I believe she is doing the best thing that could happen to humanity by promoting the unity of all religions and equality of all people, regardless of colour and race. And she means it from the heart. She says that the almighty has created you with the power to do good. Raise the power and become under

the control of the almighty power. As far as I am concerned I have always been a bureaucrat. Some people don't like the word. But I have always tried to follow the best principles — be honest in everything and implement policies that benefit the people.

**□ In a globalised world the UN has become more relevant, but yet some feel that parts of UN are losing credibility. What are your thoughts on that ?**

The UN is not a world government. It is still an association of independent, sovereign states. In any organization of that kind, what helps most is the ability to persuade people to follow a certain view. It is not possible for UN to use force everywhere. The main issue is how to make UN a better place. I looked after International Maritime Organization for 4 terms — 16 years — and faced the same questions. I realised it is my main job to persuade people to implement treaties as it was in everyone's interest. Initially, developing countries said IMO was a rich man's club which wanted to keep them out. I travelled to all these countries and persuaded them it was in the commercial interests of rich and poor countries to follow the international rules. If developing countries did not have technical expertise, we would help them. A university was setup to help developing countries. Gradually, everyone joined IMO.

**□ What according to you is the root cause of corruption in our societies?**

Corruption has always existed throughout the ages. Lord Acton had said power tends to corrupt and absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely. Note he did not say that power corrupts, because we need power to run a state, but he said 'power tends to corrupt'. If we know that 'power tends to corrupt' we can do something about it. And therein lies the solution as well. I don't believe that poverty and corruption go hand in hand. Is there no corruption in rich countries? Some people earning millions defraud to earn more. Poverty is not the cause of corruption, power is. In the richer countries they have realized that the tendency to corruption has to be fought. A code of conduct for the ministers to the lowliest person. It not enough to just have codes, it is essential to enforce them. Corruption has nothing to do with poverty or riches. A rich man wants to become richer. A code of conduct will prevent him from doing this illegally. Absolute power corrupts, there is no doubt about that.

**□ There is a school of thought that believes that spiritualism and extreme religious beliefs have hindered India's growth. Do you think that is true ?**

The majority of Indians want to go on leading life in a normal way. Spiritualism or other isms are not holding them back. What is holding back India is a mass which is still not properly educated and so don't have a chance of gainful employment. Once that is done, and it is being done, India will run to greater glories. In my view compulsory education till High School would go a long way in making more rapid progress.



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