

Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee

A Patriot and Visionary Leader

Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee, born on 6th July 1901 in Calcutta, was a multifaceted personality – patriot, educationist, parliamentarian, statesman, and humanitarian. He inherited a legacy of erudition and nationalism from his father, Sir Ashutosh Mookerjee, an esteemed Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University and Judge of the Calcutta High Court. This upbringing instilled in him a deep respect for India's cultural heritage and a keen interest in modern scientific thought. Dr. Mookerjee's academic brilliance was evident from an early age. After excelling at the Presidency College, he earned degrees in law and literature, including a D.Litt. and LL.D.

While in England, Dr. Syama Prasad represented Calcutta University at the Conference of the Universities of the British Empire, establishing himself as a prominent Indian educationist. Elected to the University Senate and Syndicate in 1924, he initially joined the Bengal Legislative Council as a Congress candidate. However, when Congress boycotted the legislatures in 1930, he resigned but soon re-entered as an independent to protect the University's interests.

His tenure as the youngest Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University (1934) allowed him to implement his progressive vision for education. He played a pivotal role in promoting Indian languages and fostering intellectual growth, inviting luminaries like Rabindranath Tagore to inspire students. He later joined the Hindu Mahasabha and, in 1937, united non-Congress forces to form a Progressive Coalition government under the leadership of Fazal-ul-Haq, with himself as the Finance Minister. In 1940, he became the acting President of the Hindu Mahasabha and declared complete independence for India as its political goal. Syama Prasad resigned from the Bengal Cabinet in November 1942, protesting against the Governor's interference in administration and criticizing provincial autonomy as ineffective. His humanitarian efforts during the Bengal famine of 1943, including relief initiatives, highlighted his commitment to serving society.

Post-Independence, Dr. Mookerjee joined the interim government under Jawaharlal Nehru as Minister for Industry and Supply, where he laid the foundation for India's industrial growth by establishing iconic institutions like the Chittaranjan Locomotive Factory, Sindri Fertilizer Corporation and the Hindustan. However, ideological differences led to his resignation, after which he founded the All-India Bharatiya Jan Sangh (1951) to champion nationalist ideals.

As a parliamentarian, Dr. Mookerjee was a formidable orator and a respected opposition leader, earning the title "The Lion of Parliament" for his incisive debates on issues like Kashmir issue, migration between Pakistan and India, foreign policy of India, preventive detention, electoral reforms, etc. His unwavering commitment to Indian unity was exemplified by his fight for the integration of Jammu and Kashmir. His declaration, "I will get you the Indian Constitution or lay down my life for it," epitomized his dedication. Tragically, he died in 1953 while under detention in Kashmir, a loss mourned across

political lines. Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee remains an enduring symbol of patriotism and selfless service to India, remembered for his visionary leadership and unwavering dedication to national unity

Excerpts of Speeches made by Syama Prasad Mukherjee in Constituent Assembly

On Framing Constitution

"I believe in the course of the chequered history of our country, we have often passed motions and resolutions from different political parties and platforms embodying our demands for an Independent Sovereign State for our motherland. But so far as today's Resolutions is concerned, it has a deep and special significance. It is for the first time in the history of our country, since we came under British rule, that we have met to frame our own constitution. It is a great responsibility-in fact, as the Hon'ble the Mover of the Resolution reminded us, it is a solemn and sacred trust which we Indians have agreed to perform and we propose to do so to the best of our ability."

On Hindi as the National Language

"If it is claimed by anyone that by passing an article in the Constitution of India, one language is going to be accepted by all, by a process of coercion, I say, that that will not be possible to achieve."

"Why do we accept Hindi? Not that it is necessarily the best of Indian languages. It is for the main reason that is the one language which is understood by the largest single majority in this country today."

"You have got some time fifteen years, within which English will have to be replaced. How is it to be replaced? It will have to be replaced progressively. We will have to decide realistically whether for certain special purposes English should still be continued to be used in India."

On Foreign Policy

"We want peace. We want to avoid war. We would like to follow the policy of negotiations. We would like to be patient, though not, as the Prime Minister said, too patient always. At the same time we must guard ourselves against not following a policy of drift. We must be able to arrive at decisions-we hope correct decision&-at the right time."

"We stand for freedom of expression, for freedom of thought, for freedom of association and religion and our Constitution has been based on the sound principles of democracy. India will not, therefore, and cannot accept any principles attached to totalitarianism or dictatorship."

"What is needed is firmness. What is needed is a decisive policy. What is needed is a clear enunciation of the interest of our own Motherland. And bearing all these in mind, if we proceed to act, I am sure it will be possible for us to do much more than what we have hitherto achieved."

On Linguistic States

"Although we may draw upon the lessons of history, we have to consider the grave situation that has arisen in different parts of the country and settle once for all whether India is going to be divided mainly on a linguistic basis. Speaking for myself, I have always maintained that linguistic consideration cannot be the only consideration on which India can be divided. You must take into consideration other factors also, like administrative efficiency, security, economic prosperity, and the unity of the country. These are vital factors which no one in his senses can possibly ignore."

On Voluntary Donation

"We get, now Rs. 40 per day. I do not know what the allowance of the members of the House of the People will be hereafter. Let us agree to a voluntary cut of Rs. 10 per day and let us set apart this sum for the purpose of opening homes where these women and children (of famine-affected areas) may be housed and fed."