Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar holds a unique position in the annals of Indian Science. He was a man of many dimensions – an outstanding scientist, an able science manager, a visionary creator of institutions and a patriot who had an abiding faith in the scientific and technological prowess of India. Bhatnagar met his destiny in the year 1940, at the age of forty six, when he was called by the Government of India to become the Director of Board of Scientific and Industrial Research which was to become later the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research. This signaled the transition of Bhatnagar from a mere scientist to a science manager and a creator of institutions. By the time he died in 1955, Bhatnagar, had created one of the finest science and technology edifice of independent India, a chain of twelve discipline based laboratories ranging from physics and chemistry to leather and electrochemicals. He recognized the potential of science and technology to create wealth through business and established the National Research and Development Corporation of India, an organization dedicated to translate science and technology into business. As early as 1941, Bhatnagar persuaded the Government to set up an Industrial Research Utilization Committee (IRUC) for translating science and technology into applications. His singular devotion to the cause of building a scientific infrastructure in India, his pioneering ventures into making science useful to society and industry and his courage to shake the Indian scientific establishments out of the ivory towers it had ensconced itself make him, along with Homi Bhabha and Vikram Sarabhai, one of the most influential and visionary members of the scientific establishment in post independent India.

Bhatnagar was born on 21 February 1894, at Bhera, in the
district of Shahpur in Punjab. He was the second of three children. His father, Parameshwari Sahai Bhatnagar gained distinction as a teacher of history and English. His father was a puritan and joined the Brahmosamaj. Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar was only eight months old when his father died leaving the family in dire poverty. Shanti Swarup was brought up by his maternal grandfather who was an engineer by profession and one of the first graduates of the Roorkee College. Shanti Swarup developed his interest in applied sciences growing up with his grand father. Shanti Swarup studied till 1907 at the A V High School, Sikandarabad. He was later persuaded by a family friend to move to Lahore to attend the Dayal Singh High School. In school he excelled in both science and Urdu grammar and poetry. In 1911, at the age of 17, he published his first paper in Leader of Allahabad on a method of making substitute carbon electrodes for a battery by heating molasses and carbonaceous matter under pressure.

Shanti Swarup joined the Forman Christian College, Lahore in 1913 for his BSc degree, which he completed in 1916 with honors in physics. He completed his MSc degree in chemistry in 1919. Presumably the system of education in those days provided the flexibility for a physics graduate to do MSc in chemistry, a feat that would not be easy today! Shanti Swarup wrote a thesis on ‘effect of adsorbed gases on the surface tension of water’. Armed with a scholarship from Dayal Singh College Trust, Shanti Swarup left for America via England in 1919. However, the breaking of the First World War prevented him from going to America. So he decided to stay back in England. He joined the University College, London, under the mentorship of F G Donnan, a distinguished physical chemist known for his contributions to the area of surface and interface science. He was awarded a DSc degree in 1921 for his thesis ‘solubility of bi- and trivalent salt of higher fatty acids in oils and their effects on the surface tension of oils’. While at London, his contemporaries were, J C Ghosh, later Sir J C Ghosh, member, planning commission, J N Mukherjee, later Director, Indian Agricultural