

Failure is only the opportunity to begin again, only this time more wisely.

– Henry Ford (1863-1947)
Industrialist and Isolationist

I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work.

– Thomas Edison (1847-1931)
*American inventor, entrepreneur,
and industrialist*

All my successes have been built on my failures.

– Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881)
British Prime Minister and Novelist

Success is the ability to go from failure to failure without losing your enthusiasm.

– Sir Winston Churchill (1874-1965)
British soldier, politician, and Prime Minister

CHAPTER 11

Failure is a Postponement of Success

Shinde decided to follow his natural instincts and trust his own judgment. He knew that if he worked hard with a sense of genuine commitment, he would be rewarded. He decided to take the plunge into political life and participate actively in all aspects of political life in order to be closer to the common people.

He was first enrolled as a grassroots Congress worker. Pawar and Gadgil then took him to Yaswantrao Balwantrao Chavan. Shinde's interaction with the veteran was brief. He went to meet Chavan at his bungalow, with the two strongmen of Maharashtra political scene – Pawar and Gadgil. Chavan sized him up with one piercing look and then asked him: “Are you serious about entering politics?” Shinde mumbled a hoarse reply – '*haan... haan sahib*' to indicate his willingness. He could hardly bring himself to say anything more.

His name was placed before the Maharashtra Pradesh Election Committee and they strongly recommended his case to Vasantdada Patil and urged him to put Shinde up as a candidate from the Solapur constituency. Their efforts to persuade Patil were beginning to yield some results. At the same time, Sharad Pawar also took it up with Yaswantrao Balwantrao Chavan and pushed hard for Shinde. He briefed the national leader who was synonymous with Maharashtra politics about Shinde's background and described him as a young man with great promise and potential.

He was then recommended to the High Command as a potential candidate. His name found acceptance, thanks to the untiring efforts of Sharad Pawar and Vithal Rao Gadgil, with the Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee, and the State

Election Committee, which comprised 21 high-ranking leaders from all over the state. Both of them lobbied hard for Shinde. For the proposal to get as far as the State Election Committee, was in itself, an achievement, but owing to the perseverance of the two heavyweights behind his candidature, it was sent up to Delhi for clearance by the High Command.

But then, other twists lay in store. As it turned out, Babu Jagjivan Ram had been lobbying intensely for a candidate of his choice – Sonawane – and as a result, Shinde's chances got thinner by the day. This was a rather unexpected development. Jagjivan Ram was a Dalit leader of national standing, a Cabinet Minister from Pandit Nehru's times and a political heavyweight. He was undoubtedly the tallest Dalit leader in the country and great weight was attached to his opinion. Sharad Pawar was simply no match to him, as Pawar admitted to Shinde. Yet, Pawar did not give up altogether and pleaded with Y.B. Chavan, who was himself a powerful national figure. Besides, there was no love lost between Chavan and Jagjivan Ram and when Chavan plunged into the fray, by taking up Shinde's case, the plot thickened.



Eventually, as a result of Chavan and Pawar's sustained opposition to Sonawane's candidature, N.S. Kamble of the Republican Party of India swept the polls. Shinde had missed the bus by a whisker, but he had learnt yet another valuable lesson. Nothing was certain in the world of politics. Everything was always in a state of flux.

In April 1972, another opportunity presented itself.

Assembly elections were announced in Maharashtra and the entire political scene came alive with frenetic lobbying and political jostling. Sharad Pawar threw his weight behind Shinde once again, and this time around, they were more optimistic of the outcome. Pawar seemed to be brimming with confidence. He told Shinde to brace himself for a shy at the hustings. The time had indeed come for him to test the political waters, Pawar said. Shinde was quite naturally, a bit apprehensive. This time he was a bit more unsure than he was on the previous occasion. Initially, he did not react to Pawar's suggestion with much enthusiasm. He was not quite sure whether politics was indeed his cup of tea. He began to wonder whether he should not abandon the idea of becoming a politician altogether.

Shinde's dilemma was not without basis – after all, he came from a very humble background, and a permanent government job with prospects of growth, meant a lot to him. He had taken risk of resigning the clerk's post to study law but now, being married, he could not afford to take risks. While Ujwala did leave it to him, he knew that he had to be pragmatic. Uncertainty was something he was not very comfortable with, as a state of mind or a condition of existence. His friends and acquaintances also cautioned him against taking the Congress party offer seriously – they cited several instances of politicians being promised the moon by the party, only to end up by the wayside. Politics was a graveyard of talent and ambition, they warned him. Shinde knew that there was an element of truth in what they said. There were any number of aspiring politicians at any given time and only the odd candidate made it, out of hundreds of aspirants.

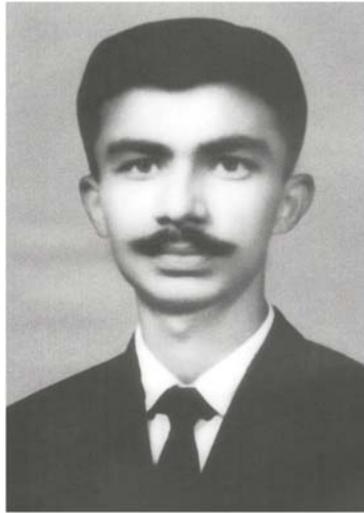
Pawar sensed that his protégé had some reservations and, being a seasoned politician who could well understand the psyche of a newcomer, decided to allay Shinde's fears. He used all his powers of persuasion and then took Shinde, along with a

few others, to Y.B.Chavan, aware of the fact that Shinde had great admiration for the grand old man of Maharashtra politics. When Vithal Rao Gadgil and Sharad Pawar started narrating how he had narrowly missed the bus in his bid for a parliamentary seat, Chavan replied that he knew the entire story. Chavan was aware of the background that led up to Sushil's narrow miss and of Jagjivan Ram's active role in the entire episode. Without revealing much about the behind-the-scenes manipulation and machinations, Chavan attributed the party high command's rejection of Shinde's candidature to the fact that he had not resigned from service. The party high command had assumed that Shinde was not serious about his political aspirations. This was a small fig-leaf for Chavan's own inability to get the better of Jagjivan Ram in this particular case. Although Shinde knew that Chavan's version was not entirely correct, he realised that there was a grain of truth in his explanation, as well. Before Shinde could say something, Chavan quizzed him – "Have you given your letter of resignation?" .

Shinde's moment of reckoning had come – "Yes, Saheb", he replied, quite unthinkingly. Actually, he had not, but that was beside the point, as far as Sushil was concerned. The main thing was to clinch the candidature.

"You will be our candidate then," said Chavan. Although it was not going to be easy to launch Sushilkumar Shinde, his name was now being considered seriously. When Shinde told Chavan that he was prepared to give up his government job, and a permanent one at that, he was exhibiting a trait that he had demonstrated all too often – the capacity to take risks.

He thought he would be launched from the Badarpur 'reserved' constituency and took the bold decision to resign and risk an election, just as he decided to risk studying in Pune, when he came to know that Solapur did not have a law college.



Shinde submitted his resignation to his immediate boss, Suryakant Jogi, who was fond of his young Inspector. Jogi cautioned him against resigning from a permanent job, which had ample potential, simply going by the promises of politicians, no matter how important they were. What if he were to be denied a ticket, in spite of the promises of these heavy weights of Maharashtra politics? Shinde said that he was left with no choice since one could not seek a 'guarantee'

from a political party. He had to take a calculated risk. To his credit, Jogi kept Shinde's resignation in abeyance till his name appeared in the list of official candidates. Shinde was moved by this gesture on the part of his considerate boss. While it reflected Jogi's concern and kind nature, it also demonstrated the affection and trust that Shinde had earned by the sheer dint of hard work. Jogi had grown very fond of Shinde and relied on him for intelligence gathering activities. He had developed a great trust in the authenticity of Shinde's reports. In fact, he admitted to Shinde that the very nature of his job was such that he could not trust anyone implicitly, and yet Shinde was someone in whom he had developed tremendous faith. Unfortunately, Jogi could not help Shinde.

Destiny, it appeared, had more surprises in store for him. Babu Jagjivan Ram, once again pushed hard for Sonawane and although his candidature had been approved by the Central Selection Committee of the Congress party, Shinde found himself at the receiving end. Pawar and Chavan were simply



First Political Speech in Solapur

outwitted by the grand old battle-scarred warrior, who threw his weight behind Sonawane for the Karmala assembly constituency. Sonawane and Jagjivan Ram won the day and Shinde had to face disappointment yet again.

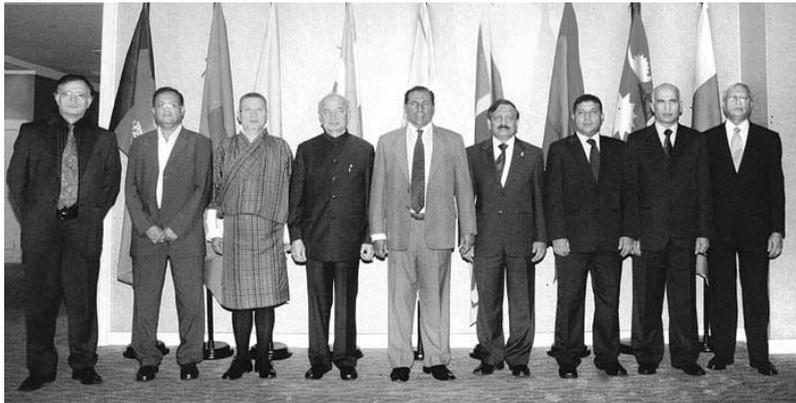
He had been cautioned by his friends, officers and acquaintances against trusting politicians in absolute terms, and yet he had taken the plunge, only to face disillusionment and frustration. Where did he go wrong? Had he been driven more by impulse than by reason? Had his trust been entirely misplaced? Did he have a future in politics, at all? In his mind, he was tormented by countless doubts and demons all the time.

Added to the disappointment of having missed the bus, he lost his secure government job and would have to vacate his government quarters soon. He had no money to support himself and was forlorn. He had lost his job with an assured income and all his savings, as well. Pawar and Chavan had created for him an ideal opportunity, which he failed to capitalise on. His foray into Congress was full of unexpected

twists and turns reflecting the uncertainty associated with a career in politics, especially the Congress party. He found himself standing once again at the crossroads unsure of which direction to move towards. For some time he found it difficult to make up his mind. One opportunity that was clearly open to him was to leave the party and start practising law. The other possibility was to resign from the Congress party and join another party. He weighed all his options and finally came to the conclusion in the prevailing situation that instead of considering any strategic moves, it would be more apt to listen to the counsel of his inner voice. His relatives and friends did offer solace and tried to console him, but Shinde knew that he had to find inner strength to get over this crisis.

His confidence had not deserted him and he knew that he would, one day, rise phoenix-like from the ashes. He rushed to his home to read the book where a quote had changed his outlook on life. This time the quote was different but suited his mindset a lot. It read: "Failure doesn't mean that you can't achieve, it means certainly you will, but belatedly".

He was moved by a surge of chemicals in his body which silently told him that '*winning is his birthright*'. He rushed to



At the Third SAARC Energy Ministers' Meeting in Colombo

refresh himself and while splashing the water on the face, he murmured: *The pain is disappearing. I am a winner in due course. Sushil, don't get disheartened. Move forward.* In a few minutes, the auto suggestion changed the chemistry of the body and mind. Shinde took a bold decision to take active part in Sonawane's electioneering. It was not aimed at gaining any sympathy. More than anything else, he saw it as an opportunity to redeem himself at a rather difficult time. After thinking about all the pros and cons, Shinde announced his decision to canvass for Sonawane, taking his friends and associates by surprise. Shinde also wanted to familiarise himself with the process of electioneering and wherever he went, he was well received and evoked tremendous response. Like a dedicated supporter of Sonawane, he travelled extensively and worked tirelessly, canvassing for his (Sonawane's) success.

On more than one occasion, Sonawane was moved to see Shinde travelling, standing in a jeep along with the party workers and working hard to ensure his victory. Shinde left no stone unturned and when Sonawane won the election, Shinde was the second person to greet the winner, after his mentor Jagjivan Ram. Shinde's hard work earned recognition from the Congress party and he continued to remain a loyal worker of the party, which rewarded him befittingly throughout his career.

Shinde's wholehearted support for Sonawane's victory for the Karmala constituency, was guided by his absolute faith in the principle that whatever happens is for one's good. He came in contact with voters, became familiar with the entire election process in terms of rules, procedures and code of conduct, among other things. He also earned Sonawane's abiding gratitude – Sonawane was touched by Shinde's magnanimity and his level of involvement, and over a period of time, they became very good friends. Shinde's exposure to the entire process of an election, including the hectic canvassing and

electioneering that had to be planned thoroughly and undertaken arduously, was to prove useful and serve him well.

Once again Shinde looked only at the positive face of the situation – the entire episode taught him yet another valuable lesson and he was someone always willing to learn. Today, he says that his decision to participate actively in Sonawane's campaign had been worthwhile, not merely in political terms, but in shaping his own personality, as well. His heart was free of any bitterness, which gave him psychological strength and he saw the consequences of positive thought and action, as also active involvement.

In later years, he was to contest many more elections and the experience proved to be an educative and rewarding one. He then consulted Ujwala on his next move – he had to make a living and support his family. She suggested he try his hand at practising law, which in a sense, coincided with his own plans. As an anonymous proverb says: "Yesterday's failures are today's seeds that must be diligently planted to be able to abundantly harvest tomorrow's success", Shinde decided to practise as a lawyer, without giving room for depression or desolation for being denied election ticket. It may be recalled that the time Shinde spent in the court at Solapur had created in him an admiration for lawyers, which remained undiminished over the years. The idea of donning a lawyer's robes was something of a long cherished dream. It now seemed as though this dream was taking the shape of reality.

If you were not a born winner then you were not loser too. You are what you make yourself to be.

– Anonymous

You were born to win, but to be a winner, you must plan to win, prepare to win, and expect to win.

*– Zig Ziglar (1926)
American author, salesperson,
and motivational speaker*

Defeat doesn't finish a man – quitting does. A man is not finished when he's defeated. He is finished when he quits.

*– Richard M. Nixon (1913-1994)
Forty Seventh President of
the United States of America*

CHAPTER 12

Winner Never Quits and Quitter Never Wins

Shinde did not feel defeated. He felt let down by circumstances, but he was someone who took things in their stride. He knew that the Congress party was where his future lay and he only had to bide his time. The party was a mother organisation, a giant beehive, where every single bee had its place. In the interim, he was inundated with questions from his friends and relatives on his future course of action. Was he going to try to get back into police service? Was he considering getting into business? Almost everybody had an opinion on his life and a piece of advice accompanying it. There were those who told him that he could try and get his job back if he worked his way through government offices. They reminded him of the saying in officialdom that “nothing is impossible in government.” He shouldn't give up, they would tell him. With some 'persuasion', they were sure he could have his job back. Others told him that business was a lucrative option worth exploring. Shinde, true to his nature, listened to everyone patiently. He had mapped out his own plans and shared them with Ujwala and some of his close friends. He went to the office of the Bar Council in 1972 to enroll himself as a practicing lawyer.

Once the formalities had been completed, he stepped out, looked skywards and thanked Almighty God for opening new windows of opportunity when one (political) door was closed. In a way he thought that his dream of becoming a lawyer had taken a shape and he reassured the inner Shinde that things are happening for better. He felt overwhelmed by the fact that he was now a registered lawyer, like some of the eminent lawyers who left a lasting impression on his mind. A long chain of events flashed on his mind's screen – the suffering,



impoverished young Dagadu, struggling to come to terms with life, the years he spent in Sonubai's house, the musty, dungeon-like record-room of the courthouse, lawyers strutting about, all too conscious of their importance, his time as an Inspector, his initiation into politics and now the realisation of his dream. Life held great promise for the inveterate optimist in him and he was determined to make the most of the opportunity that now came his way. His friend, Patate, an Income Tax practitioner, and a lawyer-friend, Daniel, were his partners in his new enterprise. They stood by him and helped him get familiar with the day-to-day aspects of law, especially from the standpoint of a lawyer. The former, in fact, became his full-time associate once Shinde's practice took off.

Shinde got busy acquainting himself with the practical aspects of legal counselling. He spent his time brushing up his knowledge of the law. He needed to be thorough in his understanding of some of the practical features of law, in order to be of some help to his clients who were referred to him by his friends, former colleagues from the police force and



acquaintances. All of them were very sympathetic of him and tried to stand by him.

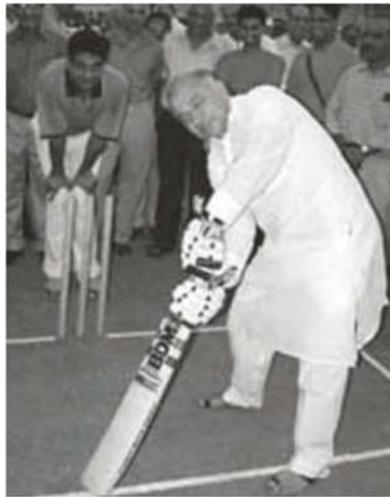
Strangely enough, most of the clients referred to him by his friends in the Police Department were petty criminals and bootleggers, who were in dire need of bail. At times, Shinde found it strange that he, as a lawyer, was defending the very class that he had been busy trying to prosecute as a police officer. He realised however, that a lawyer had a different role to perform and that all citizens had the right to seek a lawyer's help. Eventually, it was up to the courts to decide on a person's guilt or innocence. He built up a flourishing practice and achieved remarkable success as a lawyer in a very short span of time. He worked very hard during this period, driven by a sense of insecurity and uncertainty in the initial weeks. He firmly believed that the sense of insecurity is the key tool that made many work hard and enjoyed every moment of struggle as he knows that the fruit of labour will be sweet. He had to build a reputation for himself apart from earning a comfortable livelihood. However, he got into his stride as a lawyer relatively fast, though.

He earned a great number of friends and well wishers during his service as Sub Inspector in the police department. Sushil's natural kindness, inclination to help others and patience were attributes which were responsible for this. Though many of his colleagues advised him against jumping into politics at the cost of a bright career in the police department, Shinde trusted his intuition and jumped into the fray pitting himself against Sonawane in the race for a party

ticket. Many of his erstwhile co-workers in the department empathised with him and more than half a dozen inspectors came forward voluntarily to refer cases to him when he soon became a practising lawyer.

Shinde became a popular lawyer in Bombay, thanks to his former colleagues whom he obliged readily. The fact that they were helping him at a time when he needed them, strengthened his belief that God closes a door or window, only to open many more. Sushil's popularity grew faster among the poor and working classes as a lawyer who championed their cause. He had a team of assistants, and managed to buy a used Fiat car, a flat and some expensive jewellery for his wife and couldn't have asked for more. He was on a roll, and felt he was a lot better off, as a lawyer, than he was as a policeman. He lived in interesting times, as they say.

Around this time, Shinde's friend, Gonge, who had settled in Mumbai, lost his purse containing Rs. 2,000, when he was travelling from Dadar to Andheri, on a local train. He called up his friend Shinde and asked for some money to be able to return to his native place. A shocked Shinde advised him to lodge a police complaint and as it happened, he was speaking in the presence of a few clients, whose bail applications were to be filed by Shinde the next morning. Overhearing Shinde's conversation with his friend, one of the clients volunteered to help him in retrieving the lost money. After Shinde enquired and narrated the sequence of events as to where his friend's pocket was picked, his client went outside, saying that he would return in two hours. To the astonishment of Shinde and his friend, in about half an hour's time, Gonge's purse containing Rs. 2,000 was retrieved and returned to Shinde. His client reprimanded the pickpocket: "*Kasala manush thula advocate sahib ka dosthle pocket marle*" – "what kind of a person are you to pick the pocket of our advocate saheb's friend?!"



For the next two years, Shinde continued to enjoy fame and success as a lawyer. Money was no longer a problem. Looking back on the times and circumstances, he feels that it was his faith in himself which saw him through crisis after crisis in his life and also turned him into a successful lawyer. He was a police officer with a bright future, but decided to take a giant leap – a risk that he was cautioned against, but one that paid off in ways that his khaki uniform would not have.

His interest in the affairs of the Congress party remained as strong as ever, and he continued to be a party activist. On a quiet evening in the middle of 1973, Shinde was busy speaking to a client, when, at nine, he got a message which was nothing short of a bolt from the blue. That message changed the roadmap of Shinde's journey. Shinde, who lost to Sonawane and fought for his success, settled down as a lawyer. But destiny stored something else for him. "Sonawane, MLA, died" was the message that was to bring many more twists to his career. A bye-election seemed inevitable and Shinde appeared to be the Congress party's most likely candidate. At first, Shinde was very unenthusiastic about the whole thing. His friends and relatives warned him about the consequences of succumbing to the lure of politics, riddled as it indeed was, with a host of uncertainties and pitfalls. Besides, electioneering entailed a lot of expenditure, which would mean that he would have to sell his property and possessions, which he had acquired with his hard-earned money. Ujwala was also scared

of such a prospect and Shinde once again found himself in a Hamletian dilemma – "to be or not to be"! Should he risk everything against all odds and chance his luck or should he continue to lead the sedate life that he had got used to, over the last couple of years. Would a plunge into politics take him downhill? Was he being selfish and inconsiderate in being driven by his own ambitions and aspirations? Such questions troubled him all the time and they defied easy answers. Opinions differed, advice varied and his own mind seemed undecided.

When all the heavyweights of Maharashtra politics, Vasant Naik, Y.B.Chavan and Sharad Pawar unanimously backed his candidature, Shinde decided to test his political fortunes. Vasant Naik, the Chief Minister, campaigned for him, against the normal practice of the Chief Ministers keeping away from bye-elections. The Congress party's fortunes were on the wane in Northern Maharashtra, and needed to be shored up. Being the veteran politician he was, Naik even dropped a hint that Shinde would not simply remain an MLA, implying that he would get a ministerial berth. Shinde's experience as a speaker at elocution competitions, his long stint as a theatre artiste, election campaigner for Sonawane and his legal practice had honed his oratorical skills, which he used successfully and skilfully, seemed to be paying off. The Chief Minister and others highlighted Shinde's humble origins and his rise from poverty and obscurity. April 23, 1974 marked a red letter day in Shinde's life. The Karmala by-election returned Shinde with a huge margin. It is interesting to note that while Sonawane had polled 22,454 votes, Shinde secured 26,364 votes demonstrating his (the first timer's) popularity visibly. He stepped on to the first rung of the political ladder. The by-election also brought out Shinde's integrity and sincerity as far as financial matters were concerned. It may be relevant to quote Sharad Pawar's words (Mr. Pawar organised



a fund for Shinde's election campaign): "We organised a fund of Rs. 15,000 and handed it over to a veteran Congress leader, Namdevrao Jagtap for the by-election expenses." Surprisingly, after the elections were over, Namdevrao returned Rs. 4,500 to MPCC with the details of expenditure.

For Shinde, the journey was a long and arduous one. He had never imagined in his wildest fantasies that Dagadu, from Dhor Galli in Solapur, who, he sometimes believed, was condemned to a life of poverty, deprivation and backwardness – would ever become a successful politician. He thought there was some hidden hand that led him along, a fairy godmother of sorts, who appeared magically when he was in distress to rescue him and this happened time after time. It was almost as though one of the many roles he had played in his time as a stage actor, turned real. Shinde knew that his new position meant greater accountability. People not only looked up to him to help them in different ways, but expected him to be more understanding of their needs and aspirations. After all, he was one of them – someone they could easily relate to, unlike most other politicians they had come across. Shinde's stock rose gradually in the Congress party as well, and in 1974 he became a Minister of State and was given the portfolios of Youth Services and Sports by Vasanttrao Naik. In fact, his induction into the Maharashtra Cabinet for the first time is a story in itself.

Shinde got home late at night to be informed by his mother that Vasanttrao Naik, the Chief Minister, and Sharad Pawar



had been calling repeatedly and enquiring about him. Shinde knew that something was evidently afoot. Meanwhile, one of his friends in the media, met him late at night and told him that he had been included in the state cabinet as the Minister of State. Shinde met Sharad Pawar in the wee hours of the morning at the house of the well-known social worker and leader, Prabhakar Kunte. Shinde, at first, expressed his reluctance to join the ministry. His contention was that he had an excellent legal practice going for him and he wasn't quite sure how far this new political elevation would take him. However, both Kunte and Pawar told him that it was only the first rung of the political ladder, at a higher level, and marked a good beginning. When Shinde met Naik the next morning to seek his blessings, the Chief Minister told him that he had included him in his cabinet and wished him good luck.

Shinde very righteously remembered the quote that just anchored him again in the path of positive thinking.

Failure doesn't mean that God has deserted you; it means that he has reserved an alternative – a better future for you.

Yes! God has not only reserved an alternative path but a better one. He was not only offered to become an MLA but this first timer was also given a ministerial berth proving his faith that 'whatever happens is for only good'.

It was a great moment for a Dalit boy from the backwaters of Solapur to find a place in the state cabinet. Dhor Galli was overjoyed. His old neighbours, friends and other residents of the area celebrated his success and ascribed it to his humility. He had always been accessible to them. His success, he had always told them, was representative of their victory. In Karmala, the followers of Namdevrao Jagtap, a senior Congress leader, took out a victory procession. They knew that he was not someone who would forget where he came from. Shinde was his usual modest self and accepted his success and new responsibility, with his head bowed.

Over the next three decades, he was to be a member of many state cabinets, holding diverse portfolios. He was to have the singular distinction of presenting nine budgets as Finance Minister, apart from being a Cabinet Minister for 12 times.

Shinde feels very strongly about self-belief, perseverance and above all, a positive approach as the key elements to one's success. He says that this formula can be replicated under any circumstances and conditions in order to achieve success. Without faith in oneself it would be impossible to take a decisive step forward. Without persistence and courage, one cannot travel very far and without positive thinking one's mind and vision get clouded. Success rests on faith in one's own strengths, persistence and a strong, positive frame of mind as his own life proves. Let us see how Shinde meditatively used these traits and achieved his targets.

We live in a wonderful world that is full of beauty, charm and adventure. There is no end to the adventures that we can have if only we seek them with our eyes open.

– Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964)

When you blame others, you give up your power to change.

– Douglas Noel Adams (1952-2001)

English author, dramatist and musician

We always overestimate the change that will occur in the next two years and underestimate the change that will occur in the next ten. Don't let yourself be lulled into inaction.

– Bill Gates (1955)

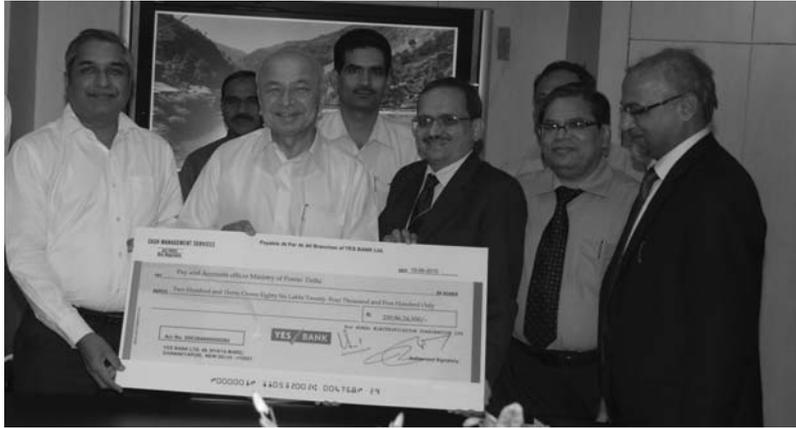
*Chairman, Microsoft
American business magnate,
philanthropist and author*

CHAPTER 13

Change is the Law of Nature

For most politicians, power is an end in itself. Not so for Sushilkumar Shinde. He always saw it as a means to an end. To start with, he was a reluctant entrant into politics and later, into Vasant Rao Naik's cabinet, thinking that he would be better off as a lawyer. Besides, becoming a successful lawyer would mark the fulfilment of a dream. In a sense, he was drawn into politics, in a state of uncertainty. But once he was in the thick of the rough and tumble of politics, his tact, temperament, simplicity and vision saw him through many a difficult situations and earned him hordes of friends and associates.

On 7th November 1974, Shinde, for the first time, became the Minister of State for Sports & Cultural Affairs, a rare recognition. He began understanding in right earnest, the challenges and issues that were related to his new responsibility and since 'Youth Affairs' was one of his subjects, he interacted with officials to comprehend the problems connected to the subject, and solutions that needed to be devised. Similarly, 'Cultural Affairs' was a subject close to his heart and his appointment was widely welcomed by artistes, performers, entertainers and writers. As they saw it, he was one of the man-artiste who had acted in several plays and one who understood the pangs of both hunger and creativity. He understood their travails since he was a stage artiste himself and identified himself with them. It is said that a cancer patient understands the disease better than a doctor at a certain psychological and experiential level. Similarly, Shinde's exposure to theatre early in life not only freed him of stage fear and instilled self-confidence but also gave him an insight into the subject.



Over the next few years, as a Minister under Mr. Naik and later under Mr. Chavan, Shinde interacted closely with a galaxy of writers, poets, performers and artistes, including the great music director of Hindi films C. Ramchandra, the famous Marathi litterateur, P.L.Deshpande, the veteran performer, Prabhakar Panashikar, the celebrated playwright, Vidyadhar Gokhale, among several others. He, with a human touch, extended support such as pension and medical benefits to the aging theatre artistes. In the coming chapters one would find Shinde's life experience in every reform and legislation that he introduced during his tenure as a minister. They also mirrored his empathy towards the people who were suffering in one form or the other because he himself was a victim during his childhood. It is not Shinde alone whose political thoughts will be intertwined with his personal experiences, for that matter any politician worth his salt will empathise with the suffering people and try to redeem them.

Following Naik's death on February 20, 1975, Shankarrao Chavan became the Chief Minister of Maharashtra on February 21, 1975. Under Shankarrao Chavan, Shinde was allocated the same portfolio. Shinde launched a host of ground breaking schemes under various portfolios. To cite a few examples, he made sure that many cultural bodies, which were doing good



work, were funded by the state government, and sanctioned pensions and honorariums to artistes, musicians, writers and eminent personalities from the realm of culture. This decision was triggered by the impoverished state in which he saw some veteran stage artistes whom he had known and seen in their heydays. When he met them in their later years, some of them were past their acting days and could barely make both ends meet.

Shinde not only remained righteous in thought but also developed empathy, a noble deed. He could see the pain of an age-old artiste and hear the clamour of a hungry stomach though it was in the form of appeals. He saw life in files while many saw files in life. Among them were many old and in some cases, forgotten writers, musicians and performers, like the poet, Kunjvihari of Solapur. Shinde announced a monthly pension to the bereaved family of the distinguished writer, Chintamani Tryambak Khanolkar, an act for which he earned the accolades from the world of culture. Similarly, he took personal interest in finding out the state of affairs of the celebrated lyricist of yesteryears, P.D. Khadilkar. Once, when he learnt of the illness of the great poet, V. R. Kant, while he was in a meeting, he rushed to the hospital and enquired about him



and made sure he got the very best of treatment. Another incident that caught the public attention was Shinde's hand in bailing out a young Harijan artiste, Muridhar Mang, in Karmala taluk. Mang pledged his harmonium and veena with a private money lender and was unable to retrieve them. When Shinde learnt this, he rushed to the young man's rescue and not only restored the instrument but also cleared his debt. A journalist, G.V. Behare, developed a serious heart condition, which necessitated surgery abroad. When Shinde came to know of this, he was so moved that he not only announced financial help to him, on behalf of the Maharashtra Government, but also went to the airport late at night to see him off. All these acts show that behind a man who wields power and authority, is a simple soul who bonds with fellow-human beings – a fellow-artiste, who knows what it is to be a performer.

He also toured the whole of Maharashtra during this period to propagate the message of Mrs. Gandhi's twenty-point programme. One of the many issues that troubled him was that of the widespread prevalence of beggary and though he knew that it was very difficult to eradicate it altogether in our country, he brought in far-reaching measures to rehabilitate beggars. Because of his own background, he understood the

fact that beggary was not simply an eyesore that could be dismissed. It was rooted in deeper socio-economic conditions that needed comprehensive planning and concerted action in order to be eradicated.

Shankarrao Chavan lasted two years as the Chief Minister up until May 1977 and Vasantdada Patil became the next Chief Minister of Maharashtra on May 17, 1977. However, he did not last very long – he was Chief Minister for just over a year. He inducted Shinde into his Cabinet as a Minister of State entrusting him with the prestigious portfolio of Finance, apart from Cultural Affairs, Sports, Health and Family Planning. Shinde burnt the midnight oil learning 'on the job'. He had never wanted to be a commonplace power-seeking politician, out to make a fast buck. Shinde gave, it must be mentioned, incentives to doctors, in order to encourage them to work in rural areas. He had studied human nature closely enough in the University of Life. One of the landmark decisions he took with an eye on future needs, was to increase the intake in medical colleges to 1675 from 925. He knew that the doctor-patient ratio had to be improved in Maharashtra in particular, and in a country like ours, with a growing population, in general. As a poor Dalit in Solapur, he had first-hand experience of the difficulties that the needy faced in finding access to healthcare.

Shinde could never forget the extent to which Dr. Vishnu Vaishampayan had helped him in his childhood. When he saw the medical college in Solapur, found by Dr. Vaishampayan's National Education Society, floundering and struggling to survive, he drew up an action plan, converted it into a Government college, increased the number of beds in the hospital, as also the staff, added an extra floor to the college building and ensured that many major developmental changes were carried out to the outpatient wing of the hospital. To this day, the college attracts meritorious students from all over the country.

It was during his stint as a Minister in Vasantdada Patil's cabinet that Shinde is remembered for the outstanding rescue operations; he personally supervised, when the flooded river Bhima inundated Chandrabhaga and the surrounding areas of the holy town of Pandharpur, famous for its Vithoba (Lord Vishnu) shrine. Shinde rushed to the area and taking over the salvage operations went around in a crude ferryboat to rescue people, who were stranded. When some officials tried to dissuade him telling him that he was risking his own life, (True, the boat was on the verge of capsizing and somebody came to its rescue. This event hogged the headlines of the Newspapers the next day) Shinde remained undaunted. He told them that he had absolute faith in God and he would not mind jeopardising his own life to rescue innocent people who were stranded there.

Just before the elections, Shinde encountered a personal tragedy. His step-mother, Krishnabai, had passed away on January 5, 1978 and both Shinde and Ujwala were shattered. Perhaps, the 95 year-old lady had a premonition of her impending death, because she asked her son to move her to their ancestral house in Dhor Galli of Shukravarpeth in Solapur, where she breathed her last.

The imposition of emergency divided Congress but Shinde remained in Congress. In the elections to the state assembly held in March 1978, Shinde contested on a Congress-I ticket from the North Solapur (Reserved) constituency and in an election in which many a giant bit the dust, he romped home by a margin of 11,000 votes. Shinde handled the same portfolios in a coalition government headed by Vasantdada Patil. The Congress-I (Indira), much to its discomfort, was forced into a power-sharing arrangement with the Congress-S (Swaran Singh). Shinde remained with the Vasantdada Patil government until Sharad Pawar formed the Progressive Democratic Front (PDF).

These were turbulent times in Maharashtra politics with a lot of cannibalisation taking place with each party eating into the other and poaching at the strength of the opposition. However, Shinde was anything but ecstatic, either about his victory or his induction into Patil's ministry.

On the political front, every single day brought about something new to Shinde. The Congress-I and the Congress-S were uneasy partners or strange bedfellows, as they observed. When the Congress-I saw that this power-sharing arrangement was at the cost of progress and development, it decided to snap the ties.

In July 1978, Sharad Pawar, who headed the Progressive Democratic Front (PDF), following the elections to the sixth Maharashtra Assembly, replaced Patil as the Chief Minister. Pawar was widely seen, quite correctly as Shinde's mentor. Sharad Pawar made Shinde a cabinet minister and assigned to him the Labour portfolio, as also that of Finance. To be the Finance Minister of Maharashtra was a big responsibility, Shinde thought. He was no longer a minister of state. He was determined to be a successful Finance Minister. His stint as a Labour minister was a unique success story in itself. He handled complex labour issues with patience and maturity and

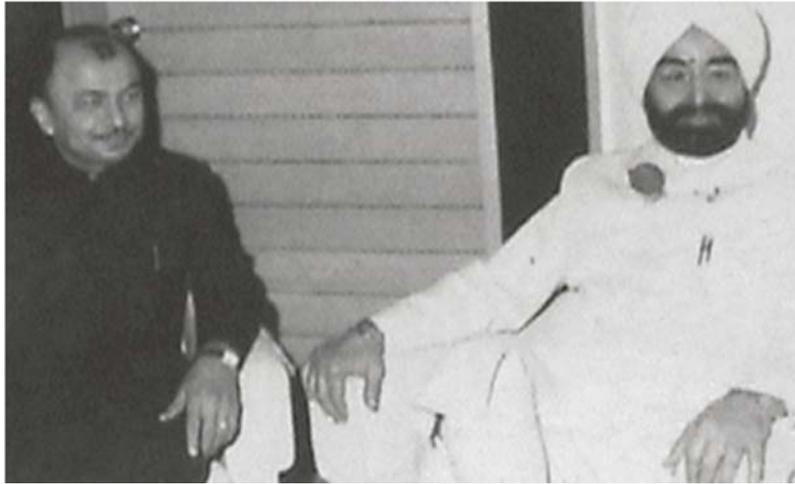


brought many a knotty dispute to a happy ending with tact and understanding. The reconciliation Shinde brought about between the management of Ciba-Geigy and the workers' union, which is discussed in the next chapter, is considered a major landmark in the history of labour disputes and settlements, not only in Maharashtra, but in the entire country.

As someone who came from a very deprived and impoverished background, Shinde empathised with many of the genuine problems of workers and worked on managements for redressal of authentic grievances. They too saw in him a kindred spirit. At the same time, he pointed out to the workers, their unreasonableness in instances where unions indulged in muscle-flexing and obduracy. This was a time when the attrition rate in industry in Maharashtra had assumed dangerously high proportions.

Shinde gradually changed the entire situation and made a strong case for the workers in the unorganised sector, recognising their rights. His decision was motivated by his own background and his experience as an errand-boy, hawker, vendor and servant. It was by no means a small accomplishment, and was hailed as a major step forward. It gave workers in the unorganised sector a face and a voice, as time was to tell. He also announced incentives to workers and ensured that the state provided gainful employment to labourers. He was concerned about the plight of beedi workers and guaranteed that the government enhanced their minimum wages. Shinde's style of working and attitude towards common public earned him a rare recognition as a "model young leader" in the Congress party when a Marathi weekly conducted a readership survey and concluded that his popularity was taking a vertical surge.

Expectedly, Shinde's rising popularity earned him some powerful enemies within the party, who viewed him as an upstart in politics. In tune with the ways of politics and local



politicians they lost no opportunity to snap at his heels. While he took their criticism in his stride, Shinde never saw the need to retaliate and get drawn into needless controversies. Precisely, when his star in the party and in Maharashtra politics was on the ascendancy, his adversaries devised a devious method of attacking him. A story was planted in a popular newspaper under the caption '*bakwas*' stating that the Chief Minister, Sharad Pawar had criticised Shinde's style of functioning in unparliamentary language. Friends and followers mounted pressure on Shinde to respond to this vilification campaign, but he chose to remain patient and counselled them to wait for Pawar's rebuttal – he knew that the story was fallacious and needed to be nailed. He sent word to Pawar that a strong rejoinder alone would check the machinations of his political rivals and foes. After all, Pawar was quoted extensively in the report in question. He was in a strange predicament. He did not wish to precipitate matters. Besides, Shinde owed his political career to Sharad Pawar who had all along been his mentor.

It was almost next to impossible to conceive of a course of action that Pawar would disapprove of, although it hurt



Shinde's pride immensely. But when Pawar failed to refute the veracity of the report, Shinde decided that the moment had come for him to put in his papers. He made his point and very effectively at that. No position, not even a cabinet portfolio, was too steep a price to pay for self-respect. He felt he was a misfit in politics and ought to go back to his legal practice. He was certainly better off as a lawyer. His self-respect remained intact and he did not have to kowtow to anyone. Politics seemed to demand a price that he was simply not ready to pay – it would mean transforming himself into a person that he was not. This was not evolution, but regression, he thought, and it was better to revert to his old, established way of life rather than pursue a career in politics at the cost of his principles.

Shinde called a press conference at which he announced his decision to resign from the cabinet. The message went home and Pawar met Shinde to assuage his hurt feelings. He also issued a denial and a stern, unambiguously worded statement of condemnation of the entire episode. Pawar requested Shinde to withdraw his resignation.

Though Shinde, embedded as he was to the principles of whatever happens is for the good and good alone happens, did not keep quiet over the '*bakwas*' episode as he stubbornly

believed that one had to perform one's duty when one was under attack. By this incident two things became very evident - Shinde emerged stronger than before, thanks to this episode, issue and the fact that the principles on which he grew never let him down.

Though many friends branded Shinde as a very mild mannered person, yet he acted stubbornly when Sudhakar Rao Naik divested him of the Law and Judiciary portfolio. Shinde's removal snowballed into a political crisis and the then Prime Minister, Narasimha Rao, rushed Janardhan Poojari to resolve the crisis and Naik had to restore the portfolio back to Shinde. Shinde says: "I don't keep quiet when injustice is done. Every happening is for good. But this does not mean that we work compromising with our self respect."

Shinde's adversaries realised that beneath the gentle exterior was a man committed to his ideals and principles. It was an important lesson for Shinde, as well. He saw in stark terms, the flip side of fame, the murkier face of the media and the Stygian depths politicians can stoop to, if only to score the odd brownie point. He also saw the triumph of truth against falsehood, slander and innuendo, and that in itself was a valuable lesson. He decided to continue his political journey without any rancour and earn the trust of friends and foes in politics, as well, just as he endeared himself to his friends, acquaintances, co-workers and others he came into contact with in his years in the Solapur Court or the police force.

Shinde believes that at every stage of his life and career, he has learnt an important lesson by taking in the positives. Integrity and moral courage stem from self-confidence and a belief that truth will triumph, instead of harping on negative aspects and using manipulative methods which would only harm one's personality.

All major religious traditions carry basically the same message, that is love, compassion and forgiveness ... the important thing is they should be part of our daily lives.

*– Dalai Lama (1935)
Head of the Dge-lugs-pa order
of Tibetan Buddhists,
Winner of Nobel Peace Prize 1989*

If there exists no possibility of failure, then victory is meaningless.

*– Robert H. Schuller (1926)
American Protestant minister
and television evangelist*

CHAPTER 14

Failure is a Message

Shinde never learnt to don masks to please people. His candidness had been his strength and it had done him a lot of good and elevated his personality. He knows that dual personality will be at the cost of health both physically and morally. Many a time he had to invite the wrath of friends but he never gave up. It would be a befitting event to record how Shinde remained unperturbed before the party chief, when asked about Sharad Pawar who was not pulling on well with Indira Gandhi. He could have manipulated his personality for smaller or bigger gains but remained a loyal friend to Pawar.

Shinde developed an excellent rapport with Mrs. Gandhi and met her on a regular basis to update her on regional politics, relating to Maharashtra. In later years, he also got to interact with Rajiv Gandhi, who showed his liking for Shinde. Both Indira Gandhi and Rajiv found in him a simple, sincere, unassuming congressman, bound to the ideals of the party. There were times when Mrs. Gandhi would speak to him in a very casual, informal manner and on one such occasion, she asked him why a number of Maharashtra legislators complained about Pawar behind his back, but sang panegyrics about him in Maharashtra. This ambivalence seemed strange to her. She then asked Shinde the reason for his own loyalty to Sharad Pawar. Shinde told her that he was quite unambiguously a 'Pawar loyalist'. It was Pawar who had introduced him to politics and had fought on Shinde's behalf, to get him his due share at the time of elections. He tirelessly persuaded local and central leaders for Shinde's ticket because he had resigned from his Inspector's job. "Pawar also knows that I have just one tongue, madam," Shinde added. Mrs. Gandhi looked at him and gave him a benign smile. She



seemed to appreciate his candour.

Mrs. Gandhi, who had seen any number of politicians of all hues, hardly needed to be told that people believed that a forked tongue was a pre-requisite for survival in the rough and tumble of Indian politics. Then she queried whether he believed in loyalty to individuals or institutions. Without mincing words, Shinde responded: 'institutions'. Mrs. Gandhi seemed to like his straightforwardness and candour – she treated him with exceptional kindness and gentleness. She was a mother-figure, who respected other individuals. At the same time, she had an uncanny ability to assess them. She sized up even the most seasoned politicians with amazing accuracy and she rarely ever seemed to go wrong in her reading of men and matters.

She liked Shinde, the young upcoming politician from Maharashtra, who did not hesitate to speak with candour and objectivity. Over a period of time, Shinde developed an excellent rapport with her and recalls his close association with the late Prime Minister fondly. The imposition of the state of Emergency brought about a revolution in the history of national politics of the time and Maharashtra too was affected.

Shinde opposed the imposition of the emergency and this created rift in the party. Though he had tremendous personal regard for Mrs. Gandhi and continued to remain loyal to her, he left the party for a short spell on a matter of principle. Shinde, however, emphasises the close rapport between him and Indira Gandhi, also mentions how he remained her man Friday and continued to remain her trusted lieutenant when it came to Maharashtra affairs even after leaving the party for a brief period.

He nailed his colours to the mast at times. Though he had great admiration for Indira Gandhi, he opposed the imposition of emergency but without making personal attack. Though his action invited Pawar's wrath, Shinde readily rather consciously raised his voice when Indira Gandhi was arrested, because he believed that it was an act of political vendetta and in principle, he was opposed to such political tactics. His spontaneous reactions against her arrest need a mention. Though he displeased Sharad Pawar, he might know the secret about his loyalty to Nehru's family, and he was clear in saying and doing that. It was the Congress party that has made him what he is today though many individuals, friends contributed their share.

Shinde left the Congress party only to return soon. Though welcomed by the party high command at the Central level wholeheartedly, the local leaders, who were at logger heads with him, lost no opportunity in showing their resentment. Shinde had no rancour against them even when they denied him a ministerial post in the Congress ministry. During the tenures of the chief ministers Abdul Rehman Antulay and Babasaheb Bhosale, Shinde was not given a ministerial berth. Undisturbed Shinde, who is well anchored in his philosophy that only good things happen and whatever happens is for good alone, got an opportunity to do something differently. One of his very close friends sold some of his surplus

agricultural land to Shinde. Shinde saw it as a heaven-sent message and prospect to keep him occupied and began working on it in right earnest, after formally acquiring it which later turned into a centre of leisure for all top politicians including Rajiv Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi.

Had Shinde been appointed as a minister, he wouldn't have got an opportunity to acquire the property. In other words, this event reaffirms his faith that not becoming a minister is a blessing in disguise. The situation could be interpreted as a part of life style to utilise one's idle time and convert it into a productive event. When he was a domestic help, he made use of his idle time to study in a night school while as a peon he turned free time into college study. This has become an integral part of his character. No wonder, when he was a sub-inspector of police he utilised holidays (Saturdays, Sundays and other holidays) to complete his law course at Pune and when he was denied an MLA ticket he did not whine over it but started practising law. When he was the Governor of Andhra Pradesh, rarely did Shinde find time to relax, though he could have chosen to turn this into a gubernatorial post of leisure. Shinde is the only Governor who toured all the districts in his State within six months of his tenure. He says it was a God gifted opportunity to serve the people and wasting valuable time unproductively is a crime.

It was Shinde's value system or his core set of principles that made him oppose the Emergency. He thought that it was a draconian measure that went against the grain of Nehruvian democracy, of which he was an ardent admirer. In spite of not being the member of the Congress party, he took out a protest demonstration in Solapur against Indira Gandhi's arrest, during the Janata Party regime on sheer issue of ideology. In fact, the rally turned out to be an eventful one, with thousands of people participating in the peaceful demonstration.

Nanaji Deshmukh, a veteran Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader, alleged that Shinde's supporters had indulged in vandalism and had destroyed public property worth crores. Shinde countered Deshmukh's charges head on and offered to quit public life, if it was proved that any vandalism took place at all. He also challenged Deshmukh to pick up the gauntlet and quit politics if he could not prove his allegations. Sensing Shinde's indignation, Pawar requested him not to press the issue any further. He intervened to set the controversy at rest, but Shinde was determined to make the veteran leader eat his own words.

As always, he preferred to remain stoical and unperturbed about such things. When asked, he would always say that people would reap the harvest of their deeds and that it was not up to him to retaliate. Janata Party cadres started creating chaos during Shinde's political meetings. Although cases were filed against those responsible for such disruptions of public meetings, he never bothered to pursue those cases (He could have done so if he had wanted when he became the minister later) maintaining that these animosities and hostilities were forgotten the moment the election got over. He put all rancour





behind him once the election hour got over. Also, he believed as he continues to, even today that one must counter negative thoughts and deeds with a positive frame of mind. Else, it could affect one's own way of thinking and functioning.

Among the pictures from childhood that stayed in his mind was that of his mother telling him stories from classical Hindu mythology, the puranas – stories that she had heard from her own mother, who had picked them up from hers. Many of the stories centred on unswerving faith and loyalty – be it Hanuman's loyalty to Lord Ram or Prahlad's faith in Vishnu. His mother dinned into him as a child that he needed to be true to himself, do what is right and be loyal to a cause. He had imbibed this principle and tried to be sincere and loyal to people he had befriended. He always wanted to be known and seen as a person of unflinching loyalty. His friends, Subhash, Purohit and Sagelkar have always believed that if there was one attribute that he could be defined by, it was his loyalty.

Shinde considered himself a pupil under the tutelage of Indira Gandhi and his natural instinct drove him to be loyal to her. One had to be loyal to one's guru, no matter what came by. This belief cemented the bond they shared and was reflected in

the manner of his interaction with her. Responding to her rousing call asking all congressmen to return to the party's fold, Shinde came back in February 1980, with many of his followers and supporters. As it happened, Shinde got the opportunity to interact closely with Indira Gandhi during this time. He frequently briefed her on the goings-on in Maharashtra politics and was assigned important party responsibilities. Such was his equation with Indira Gandhi that he continued to be her trusted lieutenant even during his brief spell away from the Congress. It was a rapport built on trust and loyalty.

Sharad Pawar continued as the Chief Minister of Maharashtra until February 1980. Shinde was his Cabinet Minister for Labour and Tourism, which was certainly not on par with his stature in the Party, but which he accepted as something that came his way and was assigned to him by the Chief Minister, whose discretion it was not his business to question. As usual, Shinde demonstrated his acumen wherever he was given responsibility. If one looks at the career graph of Shinde, none will dispute the author's claim that he left a landmark throughout his political life.

One of the interesting incidents during his stint as Labour Minister of Maharashtra centred on a labour problem in the pharmaceutical giant, CIBA-Geigy. The 6 month-old union problem in the company that led to a lock-out defied a solution, it appeared.

One afternoon, Shinde was informed – before he started his habitual late lunch – that the Prime Minister, Morarji Desai, was on the line. Apparently, the Chairman of CIBA Geigy had spoken to the P.M. and had requested him to intervene (Ravindra Varma was the Labour Minister at the Centre at that time) and get the labour dispute in the company resolved.

The P.M., in turn, spoke to Shinde, who immediately called a meeting – which turned out to be a 7-hour long marathon one – with the officials, including the Labour Commissioner, union leaders and representatives of the company management. Finally, the two sides came to a compromise, which was a major breakthrough. Shinde conveyed the news to the C.M., Pawar, at 9:30 p.m. Pawar was understandably very pleased with Shinde's efforts and he in turn, apprised the P.M. of the good news and the next evening Shinde was pleasantly surprised to hear from the P.M. again. This time, Morarji Desai congratulated him in Marathi for a sensational breakthrough to the longstanding dispute, which had plagued the pharmaceutical giant. To his surprise, Shinde also heard from the Union Minister for Labour, Ravindra Varma, who told him that he would be the leader of the Indian delegation to the ILO Conference in Geneva. He was accompanied by Ujwala and was pleased to see eminent industrialists like Naval Tata included in the delegation.

Shinde patted himself for accepting the Labour Portfolio without grumbling. Accepting things as they came brought him international exposure and Shinde once again immersed into the philosophy of “good alone happens”.

During the flight to Geneva, Shinde recalled how his long standing desire of addressing an International forum in English language is going to be a memorable reality and he once again recollected the reverberating quote from the Vedas:

*You are what your deep driving desire is
As the desire, so is the will
As the will, so is the thought
As the thought, so is the deed
As the deed, so is the destiny*

When he stepped into the auditorium which had a capacity to seat 3500 people, he was awe-struck. He had never seen

anything on this scale before. Shinde's participation in the Conference at Geneva was eventful and his ideas and suggestions on topics like Child Labour, among several other issues were very well received. Interestingly, Shinde was the first Dalit leader after Babu Jagjivan Ram in over three decades to have headed this delegation and this in itself was considered a singular honour.

When Antulay did not include Shinde in his cabinet, he thought that he was destined to perform some other roles. True to his natural instinct, Shinde utilised his abilities, time and energy on some issues of basic importance. Shinde decided to concentrate on strengthening the party at the grassroots level. He set up an office in Solapur and launched a membership drive of the party. He toured Solapur district extensively enrolling new members, and trying to energise the existing cadre. In January 1982, Antulay had to resign following his indictment by the Mumbai High Court.

Babasaheb Bhosale, Antulay's successor, who became the Chief Minister in 1982, also kept Shinde out of the ministry.





Shinde was aware of the machinations and manoeuvres of his rivals desperately seeking to marginalise him. Some were wary of the growing political stature of a Dalit politician who would sooner or later become a 'threat', in political terms. While he was clueless about their motives – all he could see was that they had their knives out for him.

Shinde's friends and followers wanted him to take on his political foes, but he preferred to wait. Not only was it unwise and imprudent to get drawn into a needless controversy, but would appear as though he was addicted to power. He was quite certain that he would get his due sooner or later, in terms of political recognition. He continued to work silently out of his Solapur party office and in a short period of time, succeeded in galvanising the party network in Solapur.

At this point of time, Shinde's supporters became increasingly resentful and the restlessness of his key followers made him reflect on the headiness of power. But, he was determined not to succumb to the temptation of the trappings of power. Early on, when he was first made a minister, Shinde told himself that under no circumstances would he get

addicted to power. He had scribbled Lord Acton's dictum in his notebook – “power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely,” and recalled it constantly during his days as a law student and it was a thought he was never to forget and an ideal he now wanted to live by.

The land he purchased followed by his close exposure to agriculture gave him a deeper insight into agriculture related issues. (When Shinde became the Chief Minister of Maharashtra, he introduced many legislations to empower farmers, a first of its kind in India). He saw for himself how ignorant some of the small farmers and farm labourers were, when it came to many of the basic advancements of agriculture. They had no idea about some of the recent farming techniques, as also agricultural equipment used in relatively more prosperous states like Punjab, for instance. He also focused on his constituency and sought to find lasting solutions to some of the long-standing problems that the people of his constituency faced. One of the age-old problems that the people of Solapur had been plagued with, was the problem of drinking water. The laying of the 110 km pipeline to transport water from Ujani dam to Solapur seemed to take forever and Shinde now had the time to focus on it. To his credit, he ensured that the work was speeded up and that the citizens of Solapur had a steady supply of drinking water. To this day, the citizens of Solapur thank Shinde for the 100 crore Ujani water pipeline from Bheema river that resolved their long-standing problem.

Shinde is one such politician who always observes the unseen message in every event, be it political or apolitical. In an incident he deeply understood how words are so powerful like weapons that can make or mar one's career. Unkind words or words layered with hatred often change the chemistry of the body. Imagine a postman knocks at someone's door and says a word 'telegram' and observe the reaction of the listener. Blood



pressure rises, and a thousand negative thoughts rush through the mind. When one hears that it is no more than a pleasant message of a reward, the chemistry of the body changes. (*Turn to page 314 to know how word power, when used positively, performs miracle*)

A political storm was to build up soon, changing Shinde's fortunes yet again. The Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Babasaheb Bhosale, was known to be a quick-tempered politician, who often ridiculed his colleagues and associates in colloquial and not infrequently, colourful language, to put it euphemistically. Quite often, his outbursts and his humorous descriptions crossed the limits of propriety. It so happened that when some of his party members criticised Bhosale, he was irked. In an informal get-together, true to his nature, Bhosale characterised MLAs as *shand* (eunuch), *pund* (dadas), *gund* (gundas). He did not foresee the repercussions of his seemingly innocuous remark. To make matters worse, his crude description found its way into the newspapers the very next day. Bhosale hoped against hope that the legislators would forget his unsavoury remarks and that the entire

episode would pass in the manner of a bad dream. But to his misfortune, MLAs of all the political parties closed ranks and mounted a concerted attack on the Chief Minister. Bhosale's fate seemed to be sealed and he found himself in the thick of a soup. He had hoped that internal rivalry and groups would save the day for him, but that was not to be.

It was obvious that Bhosale had to go. Shinde gave the party high command the relevant feedback, because it was sought from someone like him who had no personal bias.

Shinde moved a 'no-confidence' against the Chief Minister – it was evident to Bhosale that when an influential sitting MLA of the Congress moved the motion, the high command had accorded its blessings to him. The motion was barely put to vote when Bhosale submitted his resignation paving the way for the eleventh Chief Minister of the state, the sugar baron, Vasantdada Patil, in 1983. Meanwhile, some of his opponents worked overtime to ensure that Shinde was not inducted into the Patil cabinet. Assuming that all odds were stacked against him, Shinde decided to bide his time and left Bombay. While most of the other legislators were busy trying to drum up support for themselves to get into the cabinet, Shinde spent his time at a friend's place. In his heart of hearts, he was prepared for all eventualities – he believed that a positive turn of events awaited him either way. He remained his usual composed self. To his surprise he received a call from Vasantdada Patil.

What makes life worth living is knowing that one day you'll wake up and find the person that makes you happier than anything in the whole world. So don't ever lose hope and give up, everything turns out okay and the good guy always wins.

– George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950)
*Irish literary critic, playwright and essayist.
Awarded Nobel Prize for Literature (1925)*

Being part of the natural world reminds me that innocence isn't ever lost completely; we just need to maintain our goodness to regain it.

– Jewel (1974)
*American singer-songwriter,
guitarist, actress, and poet*

CHAPTER 15

Lose only to Gain

Vasantdada Patil had been desperately trying to establish contact with Shinde, who remained incommunicado for a few days while others were busy leaving no stone unturned to find a seat for themselves in the cabinet. While Shinde's behaviour seemed strange to them seen against the desperation of other politicians, he was personally pleased with the way he handled the situation. He, who is tuned to the philosophy that everything is all right and that whatever happens is only for the good, also knows that he would get what he deserves. He never wanted to run around the power centres.

Moreover, he was disappointed with the manner in which some of his peers in the party had tried to paint him as a 'rebel', in the Babasaheb Bhosale episode. Although some politicians did stoop to unexpected levels for power and pelf, Shinde thought that some of his adversaries had crossed all limits of political rivalry, greed and envy, in trying to run him down. He felt slighted and decided to leave it to 'destiny' to unmask the truth. There was simply no point in trying to present his version to Vasantdada Patil under whom he served during 1978 and had good rapport with, as a state minister of finance. On many occasions, Vasantdada Patil complimented Shinde's art of budgeting and felt that the finance department was in safer hands. He would leave that to time. You can not keep a lid on truth forever, one of his old neighbours in Shukravarpeth would always say. There was wisdom in that saying, he thought and therefore, Shinde decided to bide his time. Ujwala and some of his old friends and associates were very supportive of his actions and told him that he correctly valued self-respect over everything else. Let the world discover the truth for itself, he said. This was precisely why he remained



incommunicado, till, finally, one of Patil's confidants managed to get through to him.

Patil told Shinde straightaway that he wanted him in his cabinet. For Shinde, this came as a big surprise. Here he was expecting to be sidelined and relegated to the limbo of political oblivion, as his political rivals had wanted and instead, he was back on centre stage. He had actually been expecting to take a sabbatical from active politics and take up farming. He thought he would thus be able to understand the problems of farmers better. Besides, it was something he had always wanted to do. He felt very grateful to Patil for showing a great deal of trust and confidence in him. Patil's unexpected magnanimity took Shinde totally by surprise and he was overcome with gratitude.

In tune with his practice of discussing portfolios with the members of his team, Vasantdada Patil asked Shinde whether he had any preferences. Patil told him that he personally believed that a leader should try to accommodate the preferences of his colleagues and associates. Shinde replied that he was quite certain of what was in store for him and when

Patil quizzed him further, told him that since he was a Dalit, he was likely to be given Social Welfare or Tribal Welfare. Patil smiled and told a bemused Shinde that he was wrong – he wanted him to be his Finance Minister as he recalled his association with him as state finance minister during the late 70s. Patil was adamant and insisted on assigning the finance portfolio to him. Shinde was overcome with gratitude. Further, Patil told him that he always had a soft corner for him because although Shinde was loyal to Pawar, he had never opposed Indira Gandhi and for Patil, this was of paramount importance. As Patil saw it, Shinde was a loyal Congressman with a mass base. He was also a man of integrity and could be entrusted with greater responsibilities. Patil told him as much and said that Shinde should ready himself to take on a more important role in State politics and in the Maharashtra cabinet. “Let us work together and make Maharashtra a happening State”, Patil told Shinde. Additionally, Patil said, he would also handle the subjects of Economic Planning, Cultural Affairs and Sports. On his part, Shinde told Vasantdada Patil that he wanted a non-Dalit person to handle the portfolio of BC/SC/ST welfare mainly because Shinde wanted people from other communities also to familiarise themselves with the problems of the socially deprived. It would give them an insight into many of the economic and social evils plaguing our society, particularly rural India and would dispel many of the misgivings and false notions that prevailed in society at large. Patil liked Shinde's idea and felt that it would be a novel approach in terms of allocation of portfolios.

While the new assignment did entail onerous responsibilities, it also meant a major elevation in Shinde's career. He had to prove it to himself that he deserved what he had got before he needed to do so for anyone else. It was not going to be easy – though he had already a reasonable exposure to the finance department.

Shinde's swearing-in as the Finance Minister of Maharashtra marked yet another step in his long journey in the rough and tumble of Maharashtra and Indian politics. He had arrived in the world of national politics and had emerged as a force to reckon with in his home state. He felt overwhelmed – he was grateful to Vasantdada Patil for his elevation and started visualising that he was living up to the expectations of the people of Maharashtra with political wherewithal, so to speak, to justify the confidence Patil had reposed in him.

The moment he started thinking that he was marching towards setting new landmarks in finance administration, things began getting clearer. He knew that a sceptical attitude would blur the thinking process. He optimistically thought that every opportunity is a new journey and determined to reach some fresh milestones as he was doing wherever he worked. 'Yes, I can', pushed him forward and drew a sketch with the ink of a holistic approach to avoid regional imbalances. That was the only positive line of approach to take. He had to lean on experienced and trustworthy officials and at the same time, had to monitor the progress of a host of initiatives and action plans. There were terms and tools that he came across for the first time. He stored every little scrap of information that came his way and which he found useful, to understand the subject better. It was said that he was the second most powerful individual in the cabinet. Yet, Shinde always reminded himself that political power was a mere tool meant to be utilised for the service of the needy masses. Besides, he said, one must never forget the eternal truth that it (power) is ephemeral. He had never thought of himself as someone indispensable. Nor did he ever indulge in manipulations and manoeuvring. Shinde knew that he would always get his due – and almost invariably this had happened.

What sort of finance minister he would make, time alone would tell, but he had to give it his best shot. He had a difficult

job on hand, at a time when Maharashtra was reeling under famine. Inflation was spiraling out of control with an RBI overdraft of Rs. 120 crore to boot, and trade unionism was grounding industrial progress to a halt. He had to stretch every sinew to make a mark. As it turned out, he proved to be a very successful Finance Minister under Patil.

The state budget that he presented for the fiscal year, 1983-84, was considered a landmark. It was considered a common man's budget, factoring the needs of the farmer, offering several broad based concessions and most significantly, proposing to repay the RBI overdraft of Rs. 120 crore in 4 months. His keenness to learn more about the rather complex subject of managing the state's treasury stood him in good stead. His interaction with officials centred on understanding the problem or the job on hand first, and then coming up with solutions and ways of resolving it. There was no point in trying to launch political initiatives with great fanfare, when they could not take off on the ground.

During his stint as Finance Minister – incidentally, he held the same portfolios, apart from that of 'Judiciary', in the next term, presenting the 1985-86 budget – Shinde relied on the expertise of specialists in the field who were extremely well versed in the nuances of the subject. He would listen to them patiently, seek the advice of senior bureaucrats when needed, and act accordingly. Sometimes, the meetings stretched late into evening, upsetting his other engagements or previous commitments, but Shinde would see it – the task on hand, through. He was grateful to the officials of his ministry for helping him. They, in turn, respected him for the trust and confidence he reposed in them.

Shinde seemed to understand the constraints of the officials and the problems they faced. Once, while discussing the financial outlay of a major project, he turned to a senior official for advice, who tried to explain to him that his (Shinde's) would

be the last word on the subject. Shinde smiled and replied – “I know that. I’m asking you for your advice because I don’t want to impose my views on a matter I don’t know much about, and because you know better.” The Minister’s unassuming answer floored the official, who told him that he was unlike most finance ministers and “very different from the common run of Indian politicians”. The official added that most ministers either took very little interest in the functioning of the ministry or had pre-conceived set notions or stock ideas on how to run it. They rarely ever relied on the expertise of the officials in the way he did. Shinde told him that he did not consider it *infra dig* to learn from officials and experts in various aspects of finance. After all, they were trained to plan and perform at a higher level of efficiency than most others.

Shinde, who is open to new ideas, as this being one of his basic traits, introduced the concept of zero-based budgeting on the advice of experts and specialists. He had heard about it earlier and learnt all about the manner of its working from the officials in his ministry. To him, it appeared to be a novel idea worth trying. Unfortunately, the rigid nature of bureaucracy did not allow anything new, no matter how useful the concept was, to take wing. Similarly, it was not easy to push through the concept of zero-based budgeting. The resistance from officialdom was, once again, very stiff. Moreover, the concept of zero-based budgeting, Shinde discovered, had its limitations. In one particular instance, when Vidarbha required more finances in the year 1977-78, Shinde was told that the region could not be allocated more funds because the concept of zero-based budgeting gave no room for such a provision. He scrapped the idea (of zero-based budgeting) with immediate effect and reverted to the previous system of conventional allotment of budgets, saying that any idea had to lend itself to developmental activities and if it impeded development, it did not deserve to be supported or implemented. Considering the fact that the bureaucracy as a

whole was rigid and inflexible when it came to accepting change, it became even more difficult when a new concept could not be adapted or tailored to developmental activities.

Fellow-ministers very often sent requisitions for finances, which went beyond what was allocated to them by way of departmental budgets. They were expected to abide by the norm of budgetary allocations and yet, almost always, they overshot their budget or to put it in terms, spent beyond their means. Shinde had discussed this subject with the Chief Minister once, and the two of them came to a tacit understanding. Shinde would forward such requisitions to the Chief Minister and he would turn them down, and in instances where Shinde felt a certain ministry's request was authentic, he would intervene and get it approved.

This system worked because of the excellent rapport he enjoyed with Vasantdada Patil. Fellow-ministers would feel slighted if they were told that the finance ministry had turned down their proposal and would have yet another grouse



against Shinde. If they learnt that the Chief Minister had rejected the proposal, they could live it down and swallow the slight. That they had overshot their budget would rarely ever occur to them. Shinde managed the tight rope walk quite adroitly thanks to the Chief Minister's encouragement and support.

His handling of the complex subject of finance remains one of the enduring success stories of Maharashtra politics. He presented the state budget as Finance Minister a record-breaking number of nine times – under various Chief Ministers, Vasantdada Patil, Shivajirao Nilangekar Patil, Shankarrao Chavan and Sharad Pawar. Fortunately for Shinde, each time he presented the budget his team of officials rose to the occasion and came up with projects that were designed to alleviate the suffering and backwardness of the deprived. They worked with him for long hours on each occasion. There was always a new scheme, innovative in its approach and designed to percolate to the weakest of the weaker sections of society. Behind each idea there was an official or a set of officials, but there was also Shinde's own background, which served as something of a whip at the back of his mind. He heard the crack of this whip all the time and during the weeks that budgets were prepared, he reminded himself and his team of officials about the need to factor the poor and the marginalised into their planning. He once told an official about it at length – that Shinde himself came from a very deprived stratum of society and that his poverty stayed in his mind in the form of the whip whose crack he heard whenever he tried to put it out of his mind. The official was moved to tears when Shinde told him about his long battle with grinding poverty and adverse circumstances, and that he empathised with the poor and the marginalised because of where he came from. He told Shinde that he could understand that the minister's concern for the poor was not based on empty populism.

Each time he learnt something new, he tried to incorporate it in the budget after consulting the officials and the experts. Shinde considered himself to be a student in the art of preparing a budget and sat down with specialists, learning about the job. It was always through a long-drawn process of co-ordination and interaction with officials from different ministries, assessing their requirements and incorporating them in his budget that the task was accomplished. In the end, his objective remained steadfast – bringing in reforms and development with a human face. His beliefs that social justice should be the paramount consideration in planning and spending yielded fruitful results and made the officials conceive of schemes which had far-reaching impact. Shinde told them about his one-point agenda – progress should percolate to the poorest and the most marginalised sections of society.

A budget that did not truly reflect the most deprived strata of our layered social fabric was a budget not worth spending time on. “We will be judged by our actions, not by what we say,” Shinde would constantly tell the officials he worked with. He believed in this principle and wanted them to bear it in mind, as well.

Having been a minister for six consecutive terms under different Chief Ministers, three years' gap gave him enough courage, experience and material to attend to his ministerial responsibilities. He had to act fast because he is powered to perform. Shinde thought every day was his last day to serve the poor and did the things as if tomorrow was destined for something else. Though he knew that his positive attitude would pave the way to do things the next day, he felt that the thought 'do it today and do it now' philosophy was the best way to perform.

It is worth pointing out that behind every single contribution to his hometown, is a childhood experience which



remained engraved in his memory forever. The difficulties he faced as a child in finding access to school education, created in him a yearning to help other children in similar circumstances. Similarly, the day to day struggle of the citizens of Solapur that he saw in the Dhor Galli of Shukravarpeth for drinking water was an unforgettable experience which was responsible for his untiring efforts to get the Ujani Drinking Water Project sanctioned.

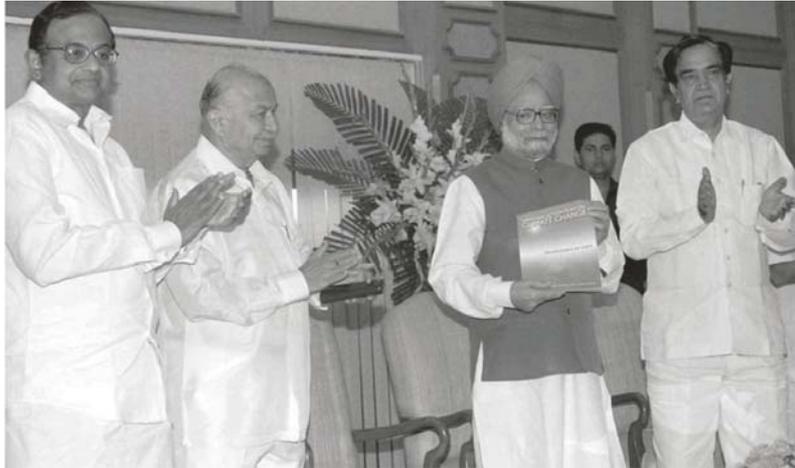
The modernisation of the Solapur Civil Hospital was a major mission that he undertook successfully, not forgetting his own experience in Dr. Vishnu Vaishampayan's Hospital, where he saw patients suffering for lack of medical care, although the doctors stretched every sinew to give them the very best of available health care. These are but some examples of how his experience encouraged his actions and influenced him as a politician in later life.

Cultural affairs was a subject close to his heart and to cite just one significant example, Shinde allocated 75 acres of non-agricultural land of Morewadi, to a proposed film city. The decision marked the fulfilment of a long-standing demand by many stalwarts of Marathi and Hindi cinema and theatre, including the colossus, V. Shantaram.

Shinde's indelible memory brought back to mind the Dagadu days of struggle to get education. He empathised with those who longed for quality education and one of his many dreams has always been the spread of school education, making it accessible to all. It was his conviction that no Dagadu should go unlettered. Shinde lent his whole-hearted support to the setting up of a school that offered free education to the children of mill workers. The school situated in Solapur, was named after his father Sambhajirao Shinde. Later a string of schools, colleges and a university were also started over a period of time.

As a Minister, Shinde paid equal attention to the development of all the regions of Maharashtra. In particular, he remained especially indebted to Solapur and over a period of time got an engineering college, a medical college, a university, a Doordarshan Kendra, an All India Radio Station, an airport, an ESI hospital and an industrial estate, among many other significant contributions. He also ensured that Solapur was well connected to the rest of the country by different means of transport – road and air. One instance of how Solapur's Airport was used for relief work was during the earthquake that shook Latur and Usmanabad Districts on September 30, 1993, creating unprecedented havoc, claiming more than twelve thousand lives and flattening houses and buildings for miles.

What he is remembered for and for which posterity will remain grateful to him is the hundred crore Ujani Drinking Water Project which supplies water to Solapur from the river Bheema and is located about 110 kilometers away from Solapur. (Can he forget how he toiled to get a pot of water to his house when he was a child?) The citizens of his state remember him very fondly when it comes to the regular supply of day to day water, which is considered a big boon. Shinde, of course, says as always, that the credit should never go to a single individual, but to the people and the State.



Maharashtra was going through a period of great political uncertainty in those years, and the Congress was plagued with factionalism and groupism of the worst kind. Vasantdada Patil resigned as the Chief Minister of Maharashtra on the first of June, 1985. After Vasanttrao Naik's long tenure, Maharashtra had experimented with eight Chief Ministers in ten years! Once again, the question of who was to be the next Chief Minister came to be debated. Sushilkumar Shinde, Sudhakar Naik and Shivajirao Nilangekar Patil were among the hot contenders.

Shivajirao Nilangekar Patil was tipped for the post and was sworn in as the Chief Minister. Shinde was once again assigned the all-important portfolio of Finance, apart from Economic Planning and Environment.

Meanwhile, a personal tragedy of enormous magnitude was to shatter Shinde. Sakhubai Sambhajirao Shinde, his mother, passed away in Solapur. As in the case of Shinde's step-mother, Krishnabai, she too seemed to have had a premonition of her impending death and wanted to spend her last days in their ancestral house in Shukravarpeth in Dhor Galli, Solapur.

Despite the best efforts of doctors at the Civil Hospital in Solapur, she breathed her last on July 11, 1985. Shinde and Ujwala were understandably devastated. He observed, during the course of her funeral, that the cremation ground at Solapur was in a deplorable state and got the Solapur Municipal Corporation to beautify it, and asked the Corporation to put in a requisition for the necessary infrastructure to meet its growing needs. He told the local Corporation officials that these were among some of the basic necessities that had to be provided to the citizens, without their having to ask for them.

Shivajirao Nilangekar's government lasted only 9 months and he had to quit under ignominious circumstances. The Chief Ministership of Maharashtra had become a game of musical chairs for about a decade. This time around the names of Sushilkumar Shinde, Narendra Tidke, Sudhakar Rao Naik and Shankarrao Chavan did the rounds and were sent to the party high command. The then Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, had the final say and lent his approval to Shankarrao Chavan's candidature and on 12th March 1986, Shankarrao Chavan, who hailed from Marathwada, became the 14th Chief Minister of Maharashtra. Thus, Shinde missed the bus narrowly once again – the third time that his name had featured for Chief Ministership. Yet, he took it in his stride because of his natural inclination of looking at the positive aspects of a situation.

Shinde knew that expectation, if it fails to turn into reality, leads to frustration. He also knew that it would be a difficult task to eliminate expectation, a fuel to growth. But he simultaneously developed an antidote to drive away frustration under the philosophy of 'accept a thing as it comes' and the results never haunted him as he was always anchored under the faith of 'whatever happens is for the good'.