

If the facts don't fit the theory, change the facts.

– Albert Einstein (1879-1955)

Everything changes, nothing remains without change.

– Buddha (563 BC-483 BC)

You can't change the past, but you can ruin the present by worrying about the future.

– Aldous Huxley (1894-1963)
British novelist and critic

CHAPTER 16

Change is always for Betterment

The reticent, mild-mannered S.B. Chavan, succeeded Shivajirao Nilangekar Patil. Chavan allocated the portfolios of Finance, Planning, Industry, Law, Judiciary and Social Justice to Shinde. These were the subjects close to his heart and which he knew he could handle successfully to put many of his ideas into positive action. To his credit, some of the legislations conceived by him and enacted by the Assembly made a huge impact on governance.

It was a momentous period for Shinde, an eventful time in which he tried to serve the people of his constituency and the state in ways that he had only dreamed of. If one were to go by the opinion of the citizens of Solapur and the people of Maharashtra, his accomplishments during this phase were indeed quite remarkable. But ask him, and true to his style, Shinde says that he could have done a lot more. One of his endearing traits is humility and over the years, it is a quality that stood him in good stead and was recognised by Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, P.V. Narasimha Rao and Sonia Gandhi, to name a few important leaders of this phase.

It was during this term that Solapur's All India Radio (AIR) station was inaugurated, fulfilling a cherished dream of the citizens of Solapur. Vithalrao Gadgil, who was the Union Minister for Information and Broadcasting, inaugurated the radio station, while Shinde was the chief guest. For Shinde, the event was a special occasion. As a child, he had grown up listening mainly to AIR. In fact, for the citizens of his generation, AIR had been something of a staple diet, be it news, music or entertainment. The fact that he was responsible, in some measure for the setting up of a radio



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station in his hometown, was an event that thrilled him beyond expression. He found it hard to believe that he was responsible for the setting up of a radio station in Solapur.

More responsibility came Shinde's way when one of the ministers of state, Bhai Sawant, resigned, and his portfolios of Excise and Prohibition were assigned to Shinde. However, S.B. Chavan's style of functioning did not earn him many friends and the high command was certainly not pleased with him. It was quite obvious that a change was both imminent and inevitable.

On 26th June 1988, Sharad Pawar replaced Chavan after a series of dramatic developments – hectic lobbying was the norm. Sushilkumar Shinde was one of the contenders again, but Maharashtra's sugar lobby prevailed in the end. Shinde, who was introduced to politics by Sharad Pawar, became the new Chief Minister's minister for Finance, Planning, Cultural Affairs and Sports. It was during his stint as a Finance Minister in this phase that Shinde presented his last of the record-breaking nine budgets that he presented, once again proving that it was his birthright to create landmarks.

It is true that Shinde achieved the rarest of the rare achievements to be an Indian state's only Finance Minister to present nine budgets during his tenure.

One reason to hold the finance portfolio for as long was because of his long exposure to this field that he had developed over the years. Added to this was his whole-hearted involvement in budget making process. Unlike others, he would not allocate higher budgetary provision to his pet zones at the cost of other regions. He made an unequivocal allocation to all the regions of Maharashtra, which satisfied every section of politicians including the opposition. Another visible factor supporting his continuation was the high frequency of change of guard, forcing every Chief Minister to spend more time in protecting his chair than finding qualitative time to concentrate on the subject of finance. This unusual political uncertainty facilitated Shinde to avail greater freedom to look after finance department and went on presenting budget after budget for nine times.

Elections to the state's assembly were held in 1990 and Shinde emerged victorious once again in difficult circumstances and against heavy odds, winning by a margin of over 39,000 votes. Shinde joined Pawar's cabinet and was allocated Urban Development, Law and Justice. Many, including Shinde, thought that he would continue to be the Finance Minister, contrary to everybody's expectation, Pawar made him the Minister for Urban Development. Shinde looked at the things differently. He thought that this being a new exposure would enrich him – an additional experience as he had reached many progressive milestones during his tenure as the Finance Minister. 'Change is perennial' and 'Change is the law of Nature'. According to him every change is always for the better. This is how Shinde took things in his stride and grew while persons stifled by inertia bound to remain like were still water and turn into stagnancy leading to decay.



Another type of person who wants to avoid or bypass changes will term it as *fait accompli* and remain unchanged because his mindset is tuned to remain unchanged. Rarely does a mind accept change and we generally go by its dictation and avoid changing things. Change is happening in every living being and it happens voluntarily. We know that millions of cells are born and die every second in our body giving a twist to the metamorphosis of the body. It means change is a must and all the changes are only for good. Change will not take place in non-living things. In other words resistance to change is nothing but decaying oneself. Shinde's philosophy is very simple. He says: Put efforts and accept change as it comes, flow with the change and be like the running water as in a river. Since Shinde's mental attitude is in rhythm with the law of nature, he was blessed with regular changes in his socio-political assignment.

This was a period of great political upheaval in national politics. V.P. Singh's 'Mandal bomb' left the Indian polity badly bruised and divided. It tore into the very heart of the political system. Caste lines were more deeply drawn than ever before and almost inevitably, the Congress party was

getting increasingly sucked into the quagmire of caste politics. There was very little that could be done to prevent this. New alignments were rapidly taking place and opportunistic political formations seemed to change the arithmetic of elections in the way that they were conventionally fought. It was a time of great flux and rapid change. Whether the political scenario was to change for all time was something no one could predict, but that it had changed irrevocably was a fact everyone was beginning to accept. To prevent further polarisation, to consolidate the traditional Congress vote-bank of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, and to shore up the confidence of the weaker sections of the society, Rajiv Gandhi took a major decision.

Rajiv Gandhi incidentally became the President of the Indian National Congress (1985), after Indira Gandhi's assassination. He had entrusted Shinde with an important responsibility because he knew that Shinde could deliver the job he had on hand. The High Command felt that it was imperative to find a Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) President who would galvanise the party and strengthen it at the grass-root level. Rajiv Gandhi decided to let the mantle fall on Shinde and thought that he would be the right person to become the MPCC Chief. This is how Shinde, the Urban Development Minister in Sharad Pawar's Ministry, became the next MPCC President in 1990. Rajiv was impressed with Shinde's insight into local politics, equations, affiliations, factional pulls and counter pulls, caste formations and other factors. Rajiv also liked the fact that Shinde was a simple, modest politician who did not try to extract any political mileage out of his Dalit status.

In truth, Shinde enjoyed an excellent rapport with Rajiv Gandhi, who would seek his opinion, and sometimes, advice on Maharashtra Congress affairs. The move sent a clear message to all the politicians in Maharashtra – Sushilkumar



Shinde was no lightweight or pushover. In a sense his elevation, earlier as the Finance Minister of Maharashtra and then as the MPCC President, marked the coming of age of the small-town politician. It was also a clear measure of the close relationship he shared with Rajiv Gandhi.

Shinde's ascendancy was construed as a just reward for his loyalty to the Congress party by his friends, while he always maintained that he was merely a true soldier of a mammoth organisation. It did not matter where he stood in the party hierarchy because an individual, regardless of his stature, was a mere drop in the ocean. He had never overrated his importance. He was aware of the fact that every individual in the party machinery had a role to play. His rise only meant greater responsibility and he had to live up to the confidence and trust of the party high command. He wanted to do his bit to consolidate the political fortunes of the Congress party and roped in party men from all regions and groups. In fact, early in his career some politician friends advised him to join the RPI offering the argument that it was the party meant for SCs and the oppressed sections of society, Shinde responded by saying that he always believed the Congress party was where he

belonged. He owed his allegiance to Congress and to the leadership of Indira Gandhi and later Rajiv Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi. This was a time when the party needed the support of all sections of society. The Congress was going through a rather difficult phase in its long and eventful history. Shinde as party president of the state had a tremendous responsibility on his shoulders. Rajiv Gandhi had high expectations from him and would always turn to Shinde for his opinion or at times, his problem-solving skills in difficult situations relating to the party affairs in Maharashtra. Shinde was determined not to let the party down and decided to do his utmost to strengthen it. He knew that his own reputation was as much at stake as the electoral fortunes of the party, as also the leadership's image and public face. An organisation of the stature and standing of the Congress party could afford to lose an individual like him if it performed badly at the hustings, but that his own political future would nosedive if he were to let this opportunity slip by. Besides, he had to keep the larger picture in mind. He had to battle it out and was determined to prove his detractors wrong. A long and bitter campaign lay ahead. He was to become MPCC President again in 1996.





In June 1990, when Shinde had taken over as the President of the MPCC for the first time, he had lost no time in getting down to business and strengthening the party at the ground level. He, like he did in any other jobs, decided to create something new, a distinct trait of his. Look at his whole career! One would find that he never remained a run-of-the-mill politician and made himself visible in whatever he undertook and this character is seen even today. He toured every single district in Maharashtra to meet party workers, understand their problems, discuss local affairs and come up with viable solutions in order to invigorate the party at the ground level. He asked the District Congress Committee (DCC) Presidents to register the names of the party members anew. Shinde held dozens of meetings all over Maharashtra in a short span of six months and it gladdened him when many party men told him that he was the first President they had come across who brought about such a spirit of unity, togetherness and galvanised the Party at the local level with such enthusiasm. Such a meticulous party manager, committed a blunder that cost his MPCC and how it happened will be seen in the coming chapter. Rise and fall, one of the laws of nature, did not spare Shinde!

Towards the end of June 1991, Sudhakar Rao Naik became the Chief Minister of Maharashtra and Shinde was once again entrusted with the same portfolios that he held earlier in Pawar's tenure, Urban Development, Law and Justice. Even though Shinde deliberately did not interact with the national leaders of the Congress Party, his exposure began to increase day by day. To his good fortune, all of them developed a liking for him and found someone who was simple and forthright in his views. True to his philosophy – “grow or perish”, Shinde became a member of the Rajya Sabha in 1992, a nomination which catapulted him into the mainstream of national politics. P.V. Narasimha Rao, the then Prime Minister, gave Shinde a free hand in running the party affairs of the 13 states whose general secretary he was.

Many observers thought that P.V. Narasimha Rao filled in a much required void of bringing in a person from a scheduled caste community into the centre stage of national politics, thus exposing Shinde to fellow politicians of national calibre and the masses, as well. It may be noted that Shinde's elevation was not solely dependent upon the caste (SC) factor but equally based on the capability he demonstrated in every job assigned to him. Sharad Pawar, on the other hand, had always looked at Shinde, quite understandably, as his trusted protégé and Shinde had always given him his due. Shinde admired the veteran politician's political acumen, his ability to size up men and matters and his sharp, uncanny political sense. Shinde had come of age as a politician and was known as a mass leader not only in Maharashtra, but had acquired national prominence and eminence. His natural disposition to accept things that came his way, work untiringly for the success of any responsibility that he was offered and work as a good team player and dedicated soldier of the party earned him praise and rewards.

Loyal and efficient work in a great cause, even though it may not be immediately recognised, ultimately bears fruit.

– Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964)

Loyalty means nothing unless it has at its heart the absolute principle of self sacrifice.

– Woodrow T. Wilson (1856-1924)

28th President of the United States of America

CHAPTER 17

Loyalty is the Password to Prosperity

Electoral fortunes brought V.P. Singh to power as the tenth Prime Minister of India in 1989. Singh managed to cobble together a government following the defeat of the Rajiv Gandhi led Congress party. When the V.P. Singh government was brought down by the BJP, Chandra Shekhar became the Prime Minister with the Congress supporting his government without sharing power. Rajiv Gandhi's tragic assassination brought the Congress party back to power and Pamulaparti Venkata Narasimha Rao, known to be a Sonia Gandhi loyalist, became the twelfth Prime Minister of the country on 21-06-1991.

It was only when the Congress returned to power and during P.V Narasimha Rao's tenure in May 1992 that Shinde, widely known as a Sonia Gandhi loyalist, was brought back into the mainstream of the party affairs as the All India Congress Committee (AICC) General Secretary and placed in charge of the North-eastern states. He worked tirelessly during these years to strengthen the party machinery all over the country and in the states assigned to him, in particular. Congressmen from Maharashtra were also pleased that P.V. Narasimha Rao had rewarded a loyalist of the Gandhi family. Rao knew that Shinde enjoyed Rajiv Gandhi's confidence during his time, and that he was a Sonia loyalist. Besides, he was also aware of the fact that Shinde had been a member of the high-powered committee, formed to commemorate Rajiv Gandhi's first death anniversary.

Rao gave Shinde the task of strengthening the party's base in the north-eastern states of Assam, Mizoram, Tripura, Nagaland, Manipur, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh, as also in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal



Pradesh and Delhi. Shinde had 13 states to monitor and this responsibility kept him on his toes. With Rao's long years of experience in party matters, he ensured that problems related to the states were routed through the general secretary in question and sorted out in the presence of other functionaries who were placed in charge of state affairs. In some of the most influential states where the Congress party was in power, party men tried to bypass Shinde, but to Rao's credit, he would make sure that the general secretary concerned was present at the party headquarters, and keep the members from the states in question waiting on one pretext or the other. Mr. Rao tried to strengthen the power of the general secretary. If Shinde was seen as a powerful general secretary, the credit to a large extent could be attributed to Mr. Rao. He was to learn several lessons in party machinations and manipulations as the General Secretary of AICC. "You will learn lessons galore here", one of the senior politicians of Maharashtra had once said, referring to the political scene in Delhi.

It is worth recalling that Rajiv Gandhi's assassination created an indescribable void. Narasimha Rao, who was trying to fill this void, wanted to reward Shinde for being a Sonia

loyalist at an opportune moment. The hour had well and truly come and events, as they unfolded in Maharashtra, presented a very good opportunity. The Congress party in the state under the Chief Ministership of Sudhakar Rao Naik was driven by factionalism and to make matters worse, the Maratha lobby found its influence waning and dominance undermined. Waiting for the right moment to strike, lobbyists of this faction found the opportunity they had been looking for in the serial blasts that shook Mumbai in 1993.

The High Command's earlier assessment that Sudhakar Rao Naik would not be able to contain the fallout proved to be quite accurate. The feedback was that he needed to be replaced. Incidentally, Naik hailed from the Banjara (nomadic) community and belonged to Vidarbha. As it turned out, he was also Vasant Rao Naik's cousin. Being a politically astute leader, he read the writing on the wall, eight months after he became the Chief Minister – it was clear that he had to go.

In the eyes of Narasimha Rao and many others, it would not be an altogether bad idea to replace a Scheduled Tribe (ST) Chief Minister with someone from the Scheduled Caste (SC) community. Besides, it could be demonstrated and interpreted as one way of rewarding a loyal party worker, and one who was trusted by Sonia Gandhi – in this case Shinde. Many friends started greeting him but Shinde knew that he was not



With P. Chidambaram, Sharad Pawar and Murli Deora



going to Maharashtra and once again he missed the bus very narrowly. Shinde, on his part, had no regrets – he told his friends, associates, family members and party men in his usual manner, that whatever happened was for the better. Pawar, the Defence Minister, resigned and returned to Maharashtra politics and took over as the Chief Minister on 6-3-1993, but shortly thereafter, Manohar Joshi took over from him in a stunning defeat inflicted on the Congress by the BJP-Shiv Sena combine during 1995.

What was of consequence was the fact that Shinde enjoyed Sonia Gandhi's confidence. He developed a very good rapport with her during the course of interaction based on several years. On one occasion, P.V. Narasimha Rao had also mentioned to him that Sonia wanted Shinde to be entrusted with more responsibility, to which Shinde replied, "The honour is mine and the delay is yours".

Once, in the year 2001, he was invited by Bhajan Lal, the Haryana heavyweight, to attend a rally, which was supposed to be addressed by the veteran Congress leader, Pranab Mukherjee in Sonapat in Haryana. Shinde, at that time, was a

member of the Congress Working Committee or the CWC. Going purely by trust, Shinde lent his consent, not realising the fact that he, as a CWC member, had nothing to do with Haryana affairs. He failed to read the significance behind the bit of news that Pranab Mukherjee was planning to skip the rally. When Bhajan Lal called up Shinde and invited him to the rally, he readily accepted, went ahead, addressed the gathering there and returned to Delhi. The very next day he was pulled up for getting involved in party affairs beyond the pale of authority. He had to be more circumspect in dealing with others, even if they happened to be party men he knew, which meant that he needed to be less trusting of them. He did not quite relish the thought, but knew that he was left with no choice. Shinde felt as though this was his baptism by fire all over again.

He seemed to learn a lesson a day in Delhi. The entire experience was something new to him and his naiveté often got him into trouble. He had to be someone he wasn't – he had to be less trusting of everyone in general. A long and difficult journey lay ahead of him and if he had to survive, and more importantly, succeed in national politics, he had to play the game by its rules. Delhi was an experience in itself – a school where you mastered many an art that went into the craft of politics, a centre of intrigues, a stage for political battles and unlikely friendships.

Shinde knew that it was another opportunity to learn lessons after lessons and never tried to find fault with Bhajan Lal – rather thanked him for teaching him a lesson. This is how Shinde took every event as a message and grew vertically.

Luck to me is: Labour Under Correct Knowledge

– M.R. Rajamani

A senior citizen from Hyderabad

I'm a great believer in luck, and I find the harder I work, the more I have of it.

– Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826)

Third President of the United States

Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work.

– Thomas Edison (1847-1931)

*American inventor, entrepreneur
and industrialist*

If a man is called a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and Earth will pause to say, here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.

– Martin Luther King (1929-1968)

*African American Minister
and Nobel Prize winner*

CHAPTER 18

Short Cut to Success is Hard Work

Many inventions are made but still there are attempts to find whether there is any mechanism to amass money, and achieve name and fame without using the vehicle of hard work. No scientist, intellectual and creative mind could ever find an alternative to hard work. Shinde, who tasted hard work regularly and liberally, consumed this 'tonic' to achieve his target. Politics came handy to serve the people and he never let go any opportunity to convert this into a tool to reach landmarks in his political career.

Shinde became a member of the Rajya Sabha and rose up the echelons of the party, thanks to the encouragement he got from the party leadership, especially Sonia Gandhi. His stock was rising, commensurate with his efforts and his commitment. He tried to stay clear of controversies and preferred to remain a low-key, unassuming player on the scene. If he did his job and worked sincerely as a party general secretary, he was bound to succeed. He believed in himself, as always, and devoted himself to the task of consolidating the party base.

Shinde was someone who believed that his work would speak for him. From his early days he had been a *karma yogi*. No matter what his position, domestic help, peon, clerk, SI, lawyer or politician, he proved his mettle only on the strength of his work – a soldier always dedicated to the cause he served.

For his grit and determination, he serves as a role model, because he used nothing other than hard work, perseverance and sincerity as tools to climb the ladder of success. Creating landmarks or making his presence felt was one of his traits as he understood that 'he is here to perform or perish'. For



instance, as a Rajya Sabha MP, Shinde raised the highest number of questions (without being prompted to do so). This unusual performance brought accolades and Shinde was felicitated by Mother Teresa, on 9th March 1996, with National Citizen's Award for his parliamentary performance. His innate curiosity led him to 'probe and seek', in stark contrast to many veteran MPs (Members of Parliament) of the time, some of whom got elected for four successive terms.

Similarly, he was pro-active as a Chief Minister, refusing to postpone matters and in his short stint, got several legislations aimed at the welfare of the people, enacted. As he himself puts it, his mantra on work is to do today what you propose to do tomorrow, do now what you are supposed to do today, and what you thought of doing now, start doing it. He is presumably the only Chief Minister of Maharashtra who used his office and position not to amass wealth or promote relatives but to persuade industries and institutions to implement reservations in the private sector for SCs, STs and BCs, and he is the one and the only Chief Minister in India to introduce this system. He says that he firmly believes in the

principle that one should not desert one's relatives or parents if they become a liability or handicapped and by the same yardstick, it is the duty of right minded citizens to protect the under-privileged and deprived.

Shinde caught Sonia Gandhi's sharp eye and as his responsibilities grew, he became aware of this. Over the years, he developed an excellent rapport with her and earned her trust and confidence as a loyal Congressman. Earlier, under Shivajirao Nilangekar, who was the Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Shinde was the Minister for Finance, Planning and Environment. At that time Shinde's interaction with Rajiv Gandhi grew considerably and Rajiv came to like him. He relied on Shinde to a great extent when it came to political affairs of Maharashtra. Rajiv Gandhi had included Shinde in the delegation that was to represent India in New York at the 40th UN Assembly session. For someone from his background, to travel thus far was no mean achievement in itself, but he knew he had to move ahead and work with diligence and sincerity, if he was to make a mark in his new role. Back then, his speech at the UN, in English at that, in which he referred to the genocide perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge, was lauded by all.

Remember, Shinde had a burning desire to speak in a public forum locally and internationally. Having achieved his ambition partially, he had nursed the desire to address a world forum like the United Nations. As rightly said that a right intention when rehearsed often would blossom into a stunning reality, Shinde expressed, in an informal chat, his desire to Rajiv Gandhi who without second thought 'okayed' it, which once again showed how the 'law of effect' proved its worth. ('you become that' – "Thathvamasi") Shinde goes one step ahead to say that the whole universe will conspire for anyone who deserves.



Thoughts that fire individuals drive them to a higher state of perseverance and effort and prod them constantly, turn into reality when accompanied by serious effort and industry. Shinde always thought that English was his Achilles' heel. As a teenager, while working at Sonubai's house, he constantly dreamt of being able to converse in English fluently, especially when he saw their guests conversing and cracking jokes in English. Over many years, he had invested a lot of time and effort to acquire a fair degree of proficiency in the English language. He refused to be daunted by failures that came his way in trying to understand the language and its nuances. At no point in time did he give up. If kite-flying is an art to manoeuvre the kite to reach the highest point, Shinde says that the same is true of learning language skills. Practice, more practice and lot more practice is the surest route to success not only in acquiring language skills, but also in all the other areas of life, according to him.

Though his score in English in his Graduation was higher than all the other subjects, his ambition to speak in English and in an international forum at that time remained a dream until 1985. Rajiv Gandhi, who represented the country at the United

Nations as the Prime Minister of India, was accompanied by Sonia Gandhi, Shinde and Ujwala. Shinde, while speaking in UN Assembly, recollected how his dream turned into a reality and he was applauded by a large audience. When he returned to India after this memorable address, Shinde thanked the Almighty and all those who were responsible for the momentous occasion.

During the trip to New York, Shinde had many an opportunity to interact with Sonia Gandhi. He found her to be a perceptive and extremely intelligent woman, who seemed to be Rajiv's silent source of strength. As the General Secretary of the Congress Party, he continued to interact closely with Sonia Gandhi, although she held no formal position. She, in turn, treated him with respect and gave weight to his opinion.

Later Shinde represented India in South Africa, during 1998, when Atal Bihari Vajpayee was the PM and many foreign trips followed it.

This only goes to prove that a true, honest and righteous intention, pursued rigorously would attain the shape of reality and to this day Shinde relishes the sweetness of his dream





turning into reality. His credo is – “Think, think and think to set a goal and work towards it to reach it.”

When Shinde first stepped into the Rajya Sabha, he was awestruck by the ambience of the Upper House. It took him a while to come to terms with the fact that he was a member of the same House, where many a stalwart – Jawaharlal Nehru, Lal Bahadur Shastri, Indira Gandhi and others, who influenced him as a young man – had spoken, participated in debates and made stirring speeches. Rajya Sabha, to Shinde, was a slice of history – a hallowed place made sacrosanct by some of the greatest sons and daughters of the nation.

Even before he was sworn in as member of the Rajya Sabha, Shinde made two resolutions in his mind and decided to adhere to them under all circumstances. For one thing, he would always uphold the dignity of the Upper House, no matter how severe the provocation. Secondly, he would do his homework thoroughly on an issue before raising a question or responding to one. As a member of the Rajya Sabha, Shinde asked a record number of questions, but as was evident to all the members, he did his groundwork meticulously. Shinde

often turned to a Joint Secretary in the Rajya Sabha, Bharadwaj, for assistance in framing questions. In one instance, Shinde's active participation in a debate, backed up by statistical data, made the party bosses sit up and take notice of the Maharashtra politician, who was beginning to make ripples on the national political centre stage.

His ability to ask questions was something that went back to his days at the night-school in his childhood and he was glad that this habit had served him well. He was not in the habit of asking a question simply for the sake of asking. It was something like second nature to him and everybody noticed this. For the first time, some of his seniors and heavyweights in the party saw the earnestness behind Shinde's rise, the thoroughness of his preparation and his knowledge of men and matters. His work began to be appreciated, respected and recognised. Shinde's insight into the problems of the weakest of the weaker sections of society came from first-hand experience and this was evident.

Shinde's trait of empathising with the people is born out of regular introspection that he undertakes very often. This trait enabled him to put himself in somebody's shoes and brought visible changes in the life of the downtrodden and the poor during his tenure as Minister in various capacities. Most of his contributions in the form of legislations are born out of his personal experience. If one looks at the reforms or developments one can see Dagadu in one form or the other.

Kumher, a tiny village located in Bharatpur district of Rajasthan, made headlines in the national media in the year 1993, (P.V. Narasimha Rao was the P.M) when 12 Dalits were burned alive. It was an event that seared the collective conscience of the country. Public outrage coupled with active media coverage kept the gruesome tragedy in the limelight. The entire nation was shell-shocked by what had taken place.



Shinde felt that something had to be done and responding to the call of the nation, he piloted a debate in the parliament, through a 'Calling Attention' motion. The most interesting part here was that though Shinde belonged to the ruling party (Congress), he moved the motion, stunning the waves of surprise to opposition. Many wondered at this unusual move. His inspiring speech supported by data and his cataloguing of a series of atrocities on Scheduled Castes, giving a time-line of events, made the Parliament take notice of his presentation. His speech in Parliament came straight from the depths of his heart – there was no element of artifice or superficiality. Shinde compared the massacre to the Belchhi carnage and pointed out that the incident was the result of intelligence failure and could have been avoided, had a timely warning been sounded. He was not out to score a political point and even his adversaries could see that.

This became clear in the manner in which his presentation found all-round support. Human rights activists across the country complimented Shinde on his committed stand. The media also gave extensive coverage to his initiative and fellow politicians across the political spectrum conveyed their

support to him. The sheer barbarity underlying the tragedy and its scale and magnitude shook people from all sections of society. Shinde also raised the issue of the all-round devastation caused by floods. He made a very rousing appeal to the government to speed up relief work and to enlarge the scale of assistance.

He had not forgotten Dagadu's days of childhood. Once, as he sat alone in his bungalow as an MP, Shinde downloaded the past days of a child labourer. He mused on the long journey he had made from Dhor Galli to Delhi and recalled how he sat on the steps of the temple one morning at the break of dawn, driven by the urge to study and yet, forced into the role of a wage-earner. On that winter morning, at daybreak, some of the early worshippers had already started coming. One old gentleman, a regular visitor to the temple, stood in the courtyard, leaning on the arm of a young man – presumably his grandson, who had a small bag of jowar (sorghum) grain.

Turning to his young companion, the old man said: “Look at these pigeons. See, they've already started swooping down. They sense my presence.” Sure enough, dozens of pigeons



came flocking from all directions. He added "The day I cannot come, they go hungry and that bothers me". But what man can never have is their freedom. Only children have the sort of freedom birds enjoy," he said. His words had a powerful impact on Shinde and were to stay with him all through his life. At the time of piloting the legislation on the abolition of child labour, as also on Bonded Labour, Shinde's mind travelled to the steps of the temple. He recalled the old man's words and the nostalgic moment brought tears to his eyes. He knew of the woes of child workers in carpet factories, bangle and glass industries and fireworks manufacturing centres, among others – be it Ferozabad, Varanasi or Sivakasi.

He espoused with conviction and firmness of belief that a legislation should be brought for the abolition of child labour. Shinde was instrumental in getting a parliamentary act passed on this count, through the introduction of the Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation (Amendment) Bill on the 30th of July, 1993. It was not as though the thought of abolition of child labour came out of nowhere – it came from the depths of his own experience and was prompted by his inner voice. It was rooted in his own unhappy experience as a child worker, forced as he was to turn into a provider and bread-winner for his mother and stepmother, long before he should have been looking for a job. Throughout this period, from 1992-96, he raised a host of important issues, asked a spate of questions, regardless of the party in question in a particular state or at the centre, for that matter. (It was a congress rule and normally ruling party members never put their party in a fix with questions) Parliamentarians across party lines found him to be someone receptive to the cause of the poor and the backward. Every single question he raised was anchored in his personal experience.

Corporate Social Responsibility, now popularly known as CSR, was rarely practised in those days and Shinde thought

that society would gain much if private companies joined hands with Government programme to bring down the staggering figure of unemployment. His persuasion finally resulted in the introduction of a bill, first of its kind. 'The Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes & Backward Classes (Reservation of Posts in Private Enterprises) Bill, 1994' was a landmark achievement in the history of post- Independent India and in Shinde's own career. For the first time in the country (where successive Governments had failed to honour the nation's constitutional commitment to filling up backlog vacancies), Shinde blazed the trail seeking the changed role of corporate companies. While emphasising that no Government worth its name runs away from its responsibilities enshrined in the Constitution, he stressed the need for private companies to fulfil their corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a part of the corporate sector's contribution to social justice in the larger interest of the nation. This was a Herculean task and seemed a near impossibility to achieve, but Shinde, when he was the Chief Minister, used his personal rapport and goodwill to bring most of the leading corporate companies to the table to discuss how Maharashtra could show the way for the rest of the nation in implementing reservation in employment in the



private sector. He succeeded in pioneering this momentous initiative in social justice which has gained acceptance today by the corporate sector as a part of its social responsibility. Needless to add, it has in turn, impacted on the lives of millions of people belonging to the deprived sections of society, changing the course of their destiny forever.

He had heard and later seen the effectiveness of Affirmative Action (AA), a system like reservation in the United States to uplift those who are economically and socially backward. He learnt Lyndon Johnson's Executive Order bringing nearly a quarter million contractors and subcontractors of the US government into the ambit of Affirmative Action, thus making it mandatory for them to maintain parity and equality. Affirmative Action was a principle that accommodated the aspirations of the marginalised without compromising merit and he understood that such mechanism available demands an audit. He studied the issue thoroughly and dispassionately, without viewing it purely as a 'merit' versus 'reservations' issue. Shinde had read and later come across the success of Affirmative Action on the campuses of colleges and universities in the US. He studied closely a host of judgments from the US courts on the principle of Affirmative Action. It was evident to him that this step towards racial and social equality was taken seriously and earnestly by the judiciary in the US, as also the Executive. He also knew that the pulls and pressures of Indian society were vastly different from its western counterpart. He put pressure on his officials by halting fresh appointments till 1,38,000 vacancies of jobs reserved for the SCs, STs and BCs were filled up. Shinde also set up a control room in the General Administration Department to monitor the progress of the filling up of such backlog vacancies. Once again, it became evident that the Chief Minister was someone who was not merely paying lip-service to the notion of social justice and equality, but someone who meant business. For years, he had

been getting complaints about improper implementation of the filling up of backlog vacancies and as the Chief Minister, he was determined not to let this slothful and indifferent bureaucratic attitude continue. The filling up of 1,38,000 backlog vacancies during his tenure is considered a landmark achievement in the annals of post-independent India. Shinde took up the implementation of the filling up of the backlog vacancies of the B.C. communities immediately thereafter to make sure that his agenda of social justice ran its full course. It may be worth mentioning here that there are visible parallels not only in the life histories of Abraham Lincoln and Shinde, but also in their functioning and burning desire to uplift the underdogs. While Lincoln waged a war against racialism, Shinde did so against social discrimination. To this day, he is remembered for his commitment to the cause of the socially deprived.

Similarly, Shinde made sure that legislators from all political parties in Maharashtra rallied behind a law he wished to enact to usher reservation into the private sector. His efforts paid off and an Act was passed in the Maharashtra Assembly





on January 22, 2004, bringing Reservation for SCs, STs & BCs into the private sector, with a view to correct social imbalances and iniquities. He also met leading industrialists and businessmen and persuaded them to incorporate the principle of reservation in their organizations, without diluting merit and eligibility. All of them heard him out with great respect, even if some of them were skeptical at first. As it turned out, many industrialists and businessmen saw the merit in Shinde's argument. Some of them told him that they did feel that it was their social obligation to accommodate the weaker sections, as suggested by him. Their response brought Shinde a tremendous sense of satisfaction. He felt as though his long-held conviction had come true – that truth tempered with patience would emerge triumphant.

Shinde stressed the need to fill up backlog vacancies of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes & Backward Classes (SCs, STs and BCs) in Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) and Central and State Government run organisations, and pitched for industrial development in backward and tribal areas – again it was the voice of his conscience, rooted as it was in his own experience. It was nothing but an expression of his

conviction that private enterprises must support this important government initiative to educate and provide employment to the deprived sections of society.

Shinde's memory downloaded Dagadu's days of schooling. He took up the cause of providing free education to the poor – as a child he had gone through indescribable difficulties to get access to education and he did not want other children, especially those from deprived circumstances, to suffer.

During his tenure as the Chief Minister, he introduced a landmark scheme in Maharashtra. For the first time, the Government brought in a Vocational Training Guarantee Scheme (TGS), called *Magel Tyala Vyavasaya Prashikshan* in Marathi. Meant for youth from Economically Backward Class (EBC) families or backward classes (BCs), they were paid a subsistence allowance for the duration of vocational training. Each trained youth was also provided with a toolkit worth Rs. 1,000 at the end of training. Shinde's initiative did not come from thin air, but from deep within. As a young man, he had seen life from close quarters and understood the needs and conditions of the underprivileged as few politicians can.

Shinde's mind flashed back on the struggle that Dagadu had undergone. The long years of adversity, the strenuous effort it took just to get him a sound education, remained sharply etched on his mind. It had in fact, planted in him a raging desire to empower the socially deprived in India and in his home state with education. His sustained campaign to get a university established in Solapur must be seen in this context. He wanted education to be within the reach of the poorest of the poor. Apathetic officials and political rivals had for years stood in the way of his dream finding realisation. At last, in his reign as the Chief Minister, his vision took the shape of reality and Solapur University got established.

Though he advocated ardently that 'will power' could make the impossible possible, he knew one had to remain a Roman when in Rome. When some politician tried to stonewall his dream project of establishing Solapur University, Shinde played his card well to see that the University took shape. At first, Shinde got a University Centre started in Solapur to make it seem as though it was a mere shadow of a University structure without the substance. Later, during his tenure as the Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Shinde mandated that any University Centre which was in existence for a period of ten years could be upgraded to a University, and as a result, Solapur, Sanghli, Usmanabad and Latur were accorded University status. This deft move on his part, checkmated his opponents while ensuring that the purpose of getting a University established was served.

Shinde's childhood experience of being a school dropout followed by a sequence of struggles to get education for want of enough schools and impoverished conditions to continue studies made him introduce innumerable schemes to encourage education even among the poorest of the poor. Be it scholarship or insurance, free books, clothing, hostel facilities or training, Shinde's personal experience reflected in every social scheme he brought about.

The *Rajiv Gandhi Vidyarthi Suraksha Yojana* that sought to provide an insurance cover to nearly 22 million students all over the state – from the primary stage right up to the doctoral level – was an important initiative that he undertook as the Chief Minister, keeping in mind the needs and aspirations of the students. Similarly, Shinde's goal was to empower Maharashtra through computer literacy and to ensure that this mission begins in the remotest villages and tribal hamlets. More than 450 *ashramshalas* and over 300 hostels housing tribals were given computers to start with and the students were provided with training in basic computer applications, in

tandem with a programme in vocational training and education for tribal students. There were other important milestones as well.

- ♦ Shinde believed that education needs to be accorded more priority and therefore evinced profound interest in the subject. Among the many measures he pioneered was one to increase the capacity of BC hostels run by the government, by creating an additional intake of 1000 students.
- ♦ He also took the initiative of introducing an Ashramshala in each taluka for Vimukta Jati - Bhatkya Jamati students.
- ♦ For the first time, a system of reimbursement of full fees for the students belonging to SC, ST communities, Vimukta Jati – Bhatkya Jamati and BC categories studying in private medical colleges was introduced. The scheme also had partial reimbursement for OBC and EBC students. Again, this was a move that was triggered by his experience and observation.





- ♦ Aware of the fact that performance needs to be rewarded, Shinde brought in a special measure wherein BC students securing distinction in SSC examination would be paid an 'Excellence' scholarship of Rs. 300 per month for the 11th and 12th classes.
- ♦ Shinde was someone who knew from first-hand knowledge that all that a poor student needed was a helping hand. In one of his important initiatives, Shinde ensured that BC and handicapped students standing first in the general category in the State in SSC and HSC every year were to be honoured with the Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj Excellence Award of Rs. 25,000 each.
- ♦ Similarly, the education of 100 SC students in reputed National level Institutes was to be funded by Government for the first time. Shinde believed that at least 100 students should be able to rise above their levels of poverty and deprivation and not have to suffer, as he had to.
- ♦ Shinde had always dreamt of studying at a prestigious university abroad. However, his dream remained a dream

till the very end, as circumstances did not ever permit him to attempt to realise it. He introduced, for the first time in India, a path-breaking scheme under which any student whose income was below 2.50 lakh could go abroad and study in foreign institutions. 25 students in 2006-07, 45 students in 2007-08 and 40 students in 2008-09 have studied abroad in various disciplines. "Is it a dream?" "No, a refreshing truth", say the parents of the students who studied abroad.

- ♦ As a boy, Shinde often did not know who to turn to when it came to seeking help to get on with his education. His experiences underpinned all his actions aimed at alleviating the misery and deprivation of the underprivileged. One of the significant schemes Shinde introduced was by way of assistance extended to over 4,00,000 OBC students under Scholarship scheme, including Post-SSC scholarships. The important aspect of this measure was that there was to be no examination fee for such students.
- ♦ As a child and a teenager, he had seen for himself how the absence of vocational training handicapped young talented individuals, especially those drawn from deprived sections. Shinde drew up a proposal to start six advanced Industrial Training Institutes to be set up at regional levels, for imparting technical education to BC students. Every institute was to have an intake of 100 students. Administrative approval was granted to Nasik, Amaravati and Nagpur institutes immediately.
- ♦ He also took a decision to set up the Krantiveer Lahuji Salve Matang Community Study Commission.
- ♦ Similarly, one public school was proposed to be started at each division to impart quality education, because no one



understood as effectively as he did what it was to miss out on good education. Thus, six public schools were started.

- ♦ Shinde saw from his own experience that children from underprivileged families often felt ashamed of their shabby appearance. A Free Uniform Scheme covering 12 lakh primary students without any delay in implementation was taken up by the Gram Shikshan Samiti. The Scheme was devised for SC, ST, Vimukta Jati – Bhatkya Jamati and BPL students.
- ♦ As a child, Shinde had to borrow text-books and went through many an anxious moment in his years at the night-school. Millions of SC and ST students from 1st to 8th standards and Vasti Shala inmates were benefited and continue to benefit from the scheme which he introduced to supply text-books, free of cost.
- ♦ In yet another important measure, Shinde brought in a scheme whereby SC farmers who repay loans on time were paid 8 per cent discount on the loan amount by way of incentive. Over 30,000 farmers benefit each year from this measure.

- ♦ Punyashloka Ahilyadevi Sheli-Mendhi Vikas Mahamandal was a scheme under which Rs.10 crore was allocated for the distribution of goats and sheep to the educated unemployed belonging to small and marginal land-holders as well as BPL families. The idea came to him as he recollected the plight of some of his unemployed fellow-villagers and small landholders.
- ♦ Shinde, a true socialist, made visible service to the Muslim community by establishing a Wakf Board for the entire state, and Urdu language was included for medical CET exams.

Shinde took the initiative in introducing as many as 13 Private Members' Bills in the Parliament in his six-year term in the Rajya Sabha beginning in 1992, all of which were motivated by his concern for the poor and weaker sections. For example, as a poor Dalit, he had seen the ruthless exploitation of Dalit women and girls, who performed various menial chores. He remembered the instance of one of his neighbours, a young girl, who worked as a domestic help and was made to perform all menial chores and was harassed by her employers to such an extent that she became a psychological wreck. There were innumerable stories among his relatives of all forms of harassment by landlords and employers. The rampant exploitation, including sexual harassment of women and girls, tormented him and he decided to take the initiative of introducing two bills in the Parliament to curb both exploitation and seeking the abolition of bonded labour, one (referred to earlier) called, 'The Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation (Amendment) Bill', as also 'The Bonded Labour Abolition (Amendment) Bill, 1993.'

Shinde argued that strict enforcement of this law would automatically serve as a deterrent against exploitation. He argued that the poor should be provided insurance cover, help

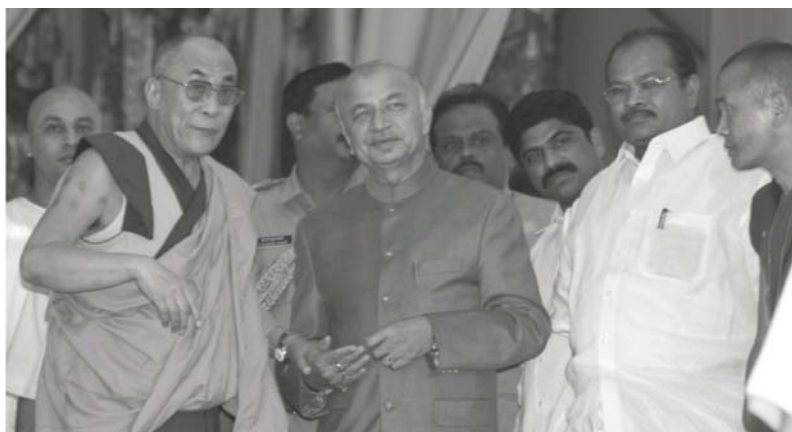
should be extended to the victims of militancy and disasters such as the Bhopal gas tragedy, the rights of the disabled, as also leprosy patients and those infected with the HIV positive virus, should be protected, among other important issues. Problems related to ecology and the environment were uppermost on his mind – again he saw them in the light of his personal experience, the man-made devastation that he witnessed with his own eyes, apart from what he had read over the years, on ecological balance, sustainable development and global warming.

As a young man, Shinde saw the farmers around Solapur struggling to make both ends meet. They had to battle against the elements, work in the scorching sun and cultivate crops in the most adverse condition. He remembered the case of one of his distant uncles, a small farmer, who toiled relentlessly to cultivate a small patch of land. Shinde would see him set out to his farmland morning after morning, and return at the end of a long day. He once told young Shinde that it was a curse to be a farmer – dependent on rain for survival, not to speak of the travails of growing one's crop and selling it, all too often, for a pittance. Eventually, he was overtaken by debts and penury and had to sell his tiny piece of land and die a broken man, in his old age.

Shinde felt that as an M.P., he should try and do his bit for the farmers of the country and took the initiative of introducing two bills on the welfare of farmers and peasants. For instance, he took the initiative to get the 'Seeds (Amendment) Bill' introduced in 1993. Under the Bill, a National Seeds Bank was set up with branches all over the country to make quality seeds available to farmers at reasonable and uniform rates. The Bill also sought to provide subsidy for farmers for purchasing seeds, and to provide insurance cover to them in times of floods, cyclones and droughts. He also introduced a bill seeking to provide a credit-

card to small and marginal farmers – "The Farmers' Credit Card Scheme Bill, 1993".

Shinde remembered how his mother wanted him to marry when he was just 18, working as a peon while studying. Though he could resist, he saw many of his Dhor Galli boys and girls become victims of the child marriage virus. He was waiting for a right opportunity and in 1993, he successfully piloted a bill banning child marriages – 'The Child Marriage (Prohibition) Bill, 1993.' Prior to the introduction, he sought medical opinion, which he cited in support of his move. According to doctors, the appropriate age for marriages, in the Indian social context, was 24 years for the average male and 20 for the average Indian woman. Shinde argued forcefully that banning child marriages, which were widely prevalent in the rural areas, would not only curb population levels, but would prevent teenage motherhood. In rural parts of the country, teenage pregnancies posed serious health problems for the mother, it was seen. He himself had seen the problems that teenage mothers faced both in terms of their health, as also the emotional trauma it put them through. The picture of some of his distant relatives, many of whom had suffered immensely on account of child marriages, continued to haunt him for



years. In fact, these haunting memories served as the motivation for the bill.

One of the important issues raised by Shinde was the scrapping of the cryogenic rocket engine deal through a calling attention motion on August 18, '93, in which he asked the Prime Minister, Rao, to explain the circumstances in which the deal with Russia had been unilaterally scrapped under obvious US pressure.

When Karl Marx compared religion to opium, he was not far from the truth because religion becomes a potent weapon in the hands of politicians if it is not properly and carefully addressed, in a pluralistic society like ours. No religion has ever preached hatred nor has any religion divided people with its philosophies. Religion is meant to be a source of discipline, aimed at bringing serenity and composure to people. Shinde thought the time had come for the government to caution the people not to fall prey to the evil machinations of some political parties.

One of the many issues that bothered him about the prevailing political situation was the use of religion to garner votes and Shinde felt that it was necessary to combat this trend. In his view, using community and religion for electoral ends was simply not correct. There had to be some kind of a political, legal check in place and therefore, he moved a motion seeking to amend the Representation of People's Act, so that this loophole in the existing system could be plugged.

Shinde's concern for the society is reflected in the form of bills that he introduced in the Rajya Sabha in his capacity as a private member. They are:

- i. The Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Amendment Bill, 1993
- ii. The Bonded Labour Abolition (Amendment) Bill, 1993

- iii. The Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill, 1993
- iv. The Child Marriage (Prohibition) Bill, 1993
- v. The Seeds (Amendment) Bill, 1993
- vi. The Farmers' Credit Card Scheme Bill, 1993
- vii. The National Commission for Disaster Management Bill, 1994
- viii. The Foreign Aids Fund of India Bill, 1994
- ix. The National Commission for the Handicapped Bill, 1994
- x. The Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes & Backward Classes (Reservation of Posts in Private Enterprises) Bill, 1994
- xi. The Constitution (Amendment) Bill, 1994 (to amend article 16)
- xii. The Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill, 1997
- xiii. The Constitution (Amendment) Bill, 1997 (to amend articles 19 & 51A)



Shinde was a member of the Joint Committee on the Constitution (Eightieth Amendment) Bill 1993, the Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill 1993, which focused on reservation for women and members of SC/ST communities in Panchayati Raj Institutions. Incidentally, he also presented the reports of both the Bills to the House, on behalf of the committees. Among other parliamentary committees that he worked on, were the Standing Committee on Defence and the Committee on Rules.

Apart from introducing a host of Bills, Shinde also made several Special Mentions, including Zero Hour submissions, on diverse subjects such as the murder of Ramesh Kini, the tenant of a building in Matunga in Mumbai, under mysterious circumstances in 1996, which caused a furor in the country. The harassment of expatriate Indian workers and the dubious methods employed by cheats and cowmen in the garb of man-power consultants, the need for setting up a Gold Bank and the desecration of the statue of Dr. Ambedkar, leading to protests and police firing in Mumbai.

One of the rare qualities that one finds in Shinde is that he has friends across party lines. From the time that he made his



appearance on the centre stage of national politics, until the time that this book is going into print, Shinde's interaction with leaders from other political parties has remained undiminished. If anything, it has only grown with time. He has always remained simple and unpretentious – which explains his popularity among the members of other parties too.

Shinde's rapport with the members of other parties became evident during his China tour. He was the leader of the Congress party delegation that was sent in response to an invitation from the Chinese government. The other members of the team were Ashok Gehlot, D.D. Lapang, Chowdary Ram Sewak, D.K. Tara Devi and Major Sudhir Sawant, the former parliamentarians. In October 1994, Shinde was nominated as the leader of a goodwill mission that was sent to China at the request of the Chinese government to participate in the anniversary celebrations of the Chinese independence. Chandresh Kumari, Mohsina Kidwai, B.P. Maurya, Surendra Singh Thakur among others, were also members of the team. Shinde also visited Korea, Sri Lanka and Israel that year.

Shinde's rapport with all political parties irrespective of ideological differences remained cordial and congenial. It is worth remembering that he represented India at the Geneva Labour Conference when Morarji Desai, the first non-Congress PM was at the centre. During 1998, it was Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the then Prime Minister, who selected Shinde to represent India in South Africa, though many other names were proposed. This in itself demonstrates Shinde's amiable relationship with the individuals and the party leaders. Most of the politicians agree with the statement that Shinde is an all-rounder who adapts himself to all situations and finds general acceptance.

As a member of the parliamentary sub-committee on defence, Shinde visited Siachen, Leh and Baramulla. It was an

experience of a lifetime and gave him a rich insight into the challenges that our defence personnel face in difficult and strategic places. He gained first-hand knowledge of the hardships that the soldiers faced at the frontier, particularly in such difficult locations. He made several strong recommendations to change the quality of clothing and footwear to help the soldiers endure the climatic difficulties at that altitude and his recommendations and suggestions were not only implemented, but were appreciated by members of the defence forces. He felt honoured to be elected ex-officio Chairman of the Institute of Defence Studies & Analysis in New Delhi.

When the Lok Sabha elections for Solapur were held in March 1998, the election committee headed by Sitaram Kesari proposed Shinde's name and there was unanimity of opinion on his candidature. Interestingly, he was a General Secretary of the Congress party and was entrusted with the work of managing Sonia Gandhi's election campaign in Amethi. True to his nature, Shinde did a thorough job to ensure that the campaign moved like clockwork and left no stone unturned. Sharad Pawar's unequivocal support to Shinde's candidature



for the Solapur constituency tilted the balance completely in his favour. Interestingly enough, this was a 'general' constituency, as opposed to a 'reserved' one and a BJP leader and spokesman, tried to stoke caste fires in an oblique manner by questioning the rationale behind fielding a Dalit candidate for a 'general' constituency. Solapur was considered a BJP bastion and it was felt that for a Dalit to win from a BJP citadel was going to be an exceedingly difficult task. It was also perceived that since most Dalit candidates choose to contest from 'reserved' constituencies, Shinde would have a similar preference. The obvious fact that he decided to buck the trend and take on the challenge, proved something hard to digest for many of his adversaries. When Shinde trounced his opponent with a margin of 1,04,372 votes, the message went home loud and clear – it was evident to all that Sushilkumar Shinde was loved and respected by the people of Solapur.

In October '99, Shinde did an encore and once again proved the point that it was on his own steam and the strength of his goodwill that he retained the Solapur constituency. Of course, Shinde spared no effort to mitigate the difficulties of the citizens of Solapur, be they related to drinking water, civic amenities, health, educational facilities, railway connections or basic infrastructure. He has been singularly responsible in giving a modern face to the development of Solapur and placing it on the map of the urban centres with promise and potential. If one goes round Solapur today or asks the local citizenry about the driving force behind this change, there is bound to be near unanimity of opinion in attributing it to Shinde.