

In a time of turbulence and change, it is truer than ever that knowledge is power.

– John Fitzgerald Kennedy (1917-1963)
35th US President

So give me a turbulent world as opposed to a quiet world and I'll take the turbulent one.

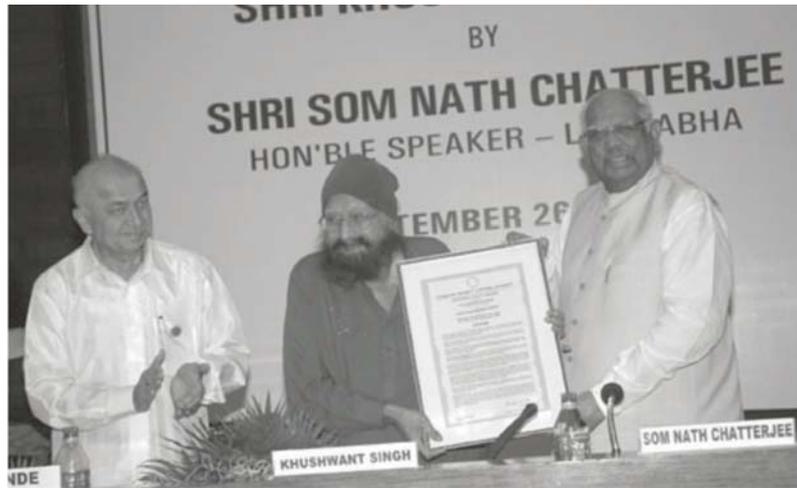
– Andy Grove (1936)
Chairman, Intel Corporation

CHAPTER 19

Turbulent Sea Makes a Master Sailor

The sitting Vice-President, Krishna Kant, died suddenly of a heart attack on July 27, 2002, and while the ruling government BJP decided to field Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, the Congress party was looking for someone acceptable to all political parties. It was a toothless election or one without much of a challenge, so to say. That the Congress candidate was sure to lose was a foregone conclusion, yet the norms of democracy required an election. The Congress party had to countenance the BJP's election move democratically. It could not give up the race without a fair, democratic fight, regardless of the outcome.

Shinde's name was in the air – tossed up by an opposition party – and word reached Sonia Gandhi that he might find common consensus as an opposition candidate. She reached out to the opposition parties to verify their position and sure enough, Shinde had all-round acceptance, which was precisely what the Congress wanted. The party wanted a candidate who would be backed by other parties and be capable of putting up a spirited fight. In fact, the Congress leadership expected some resistance to his candidature from one quarter or the other, and Shinde himself was pleasantly surprised to find his name gaining wide acceptance. He was thrilled beyond words, although he was aware of the fact that an uphill climb lay ahead. On his part, Shinde thought that to contest against Bhairon Singh Shekhawat was itself an honour. It gave him immense satisfaction to learn that the Communist Party of India Marxist, (CPI[M]), was very particular about the Congress party's nominee before assuring him of its support. The Left did not agree on a few names, but when Shinde's name came up, they readily agreed to it. Once again this



demonstrated Shinde's professional and personal relationship with different political parties. Shinde fought the election with a smiling face and with the foreknowledge that he was going to face certain defeat. If one knows about the outcome of one's attempt and remains unperturbed irrespective of the results that by itself is a measure of such an individual's capacity to lead a stress free life. Shinde, whose life was anchored in the philosophy that things happen only for the better and whatever happens therefore, is only for the good, applies to every event of his political and personal life. He thought this election was an essential event for him to find exposure on a broader level. He knew that he was now a known national figure and therefore looked at defeat as more of a message than a failure. Shinde remembered the energizing quotes: "Failure doesn't mean that you are defeated; it means you are yet to become successful", and "Failure doesn't mean that you haven't achieved anything; it means you have learnt some lessons".

Although he was aware of the outcome, Shinde had decided to abide by the party diktat and face defeat, gracefully.

He was the first to meet Bhairon Singh Shekhawat and extend his greetings.

Shinde who graduated from the school of "I can" never encouraged people to accept rather persuaded them not leave things or matters to fate, as he knows perseverance can bring miracles. He believed that people's participation is important and motivates them to be involved in the resolution of the various problems they have. It was difficult, considering how resigned people were to their 'fate'. They refused to get up (many, if not all, of them) and file a complaint on the bad state of roads or irregular supply of water or power outages and a number of day to day problems. The stock answer was that the authorities were in the know of things. If something wasn't working, it was not their fault, but that of the authorities. Shinde intervened personally wherever it was possible, as in the case of a widow whose pension claim was delayed. Shinde got after the officials, tracked the case and ensured that her claim was expedited. Similarly, when a retired worker developed a serious health problem Shinde spoke to the doctors personally to make sure that timely medical attention would be forthcoming. His intervention helped – Shinde felt very happy to see the man on his feet on his next visit to Solapur. There were thousands of such instances. People seeking various favours, help in chasing files in the government, arbitration, counsel and succour. To the extent that he could, Shinde tried to help them. He preached to them the importance of empowering themselves – being aware of their rights and learning to stand up to them. Some of them responded with enthusiasm; others remained cynical and unconvinced.

When we deserve, not desire alone, it is said, the universe will respond favourably. Yes! Shinde, though accepting things as they came, was fired by the hidden urge to become the Chief Minister of Maharashtra to fulfil a few social obligations that

had been lying unattended for a long time. He knew that the time was getting ripe for him to translate social agendas into a memorable reality.

Shinde's name had been doing the rounds as a prospective Chief Minister of Maharashtra for a long time. He had experienced quite a few of the proverbial slips between the cup and the lip, although not once had he ever been certain in all those times. When Vasantdada Patil resigned in 1985, the political grapevine had it that Shinde was among the three short-listed candidates. Although Shinde was aware of the veracity of this rumour, he preferred to play it down and ascribed it to wild speculation. He told his friends and others that he was still a political novice, yet to master the tricks of the trade. There were several veterans with long years in the party, one of whom would be the natural choice of the High Command. Shivajirao Nilangekar Patil became the Chief Minister on that occasion, and when he stepped down in 1986, Shinde's name once again figured among the prospective Chief Ministers. However, Shankarrao Chavan, one of the veterans of Maharashtra was given the post. During P.V. Narasimha Rao's tenure, Shinde emerged yet again in Congress circles, as a likely candidate for the Chief Ministership of Maharashtra. In fact, it was the Prime Minister himself who had set the ball rolling by telling Shinde on more than one occasion that he should be prepared to take over the reins of his home state. Shinde became one of P.V. Narasimha Rao's trusted aides on Maharashtra affairs and in 1993, while discussing a major crisis in the state, the Prime Minister told him in clear, unambiguous terms that he was to go to Maharashtra to don the mantle of Chief Ministership.

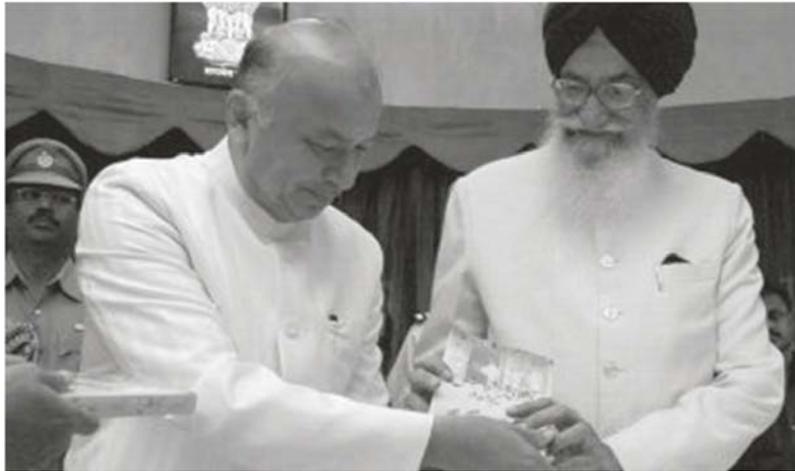
On February 3, 1993, Shinde was all set to take over as the Chief Minister of Maharashtra – or so it seemed. The very next day, the P.M. called and told him that he wouldn't have to go and Sharad Pawar would be sent to Maharashtra, instead. This

development hardly came as a surprise to Shinde. He did not go over the moon when the P.M. told him he was to take charge of his state, but decided to see for himself how things would unfold, because he had seen the Hitchcockian twists that his fellow politicians were capable of giving to the script. In Indian politics, you could not be certain of anything.

Sure enough, there came a slip between the cup and the lip, but Shinde was not disappointed – if anything he was happy that his political mentor, Pawar, the Union Defence Minister, would be at the helm of affairs in his home state.

There was an uproar in Maharashtra PCC and state leaders raised a war cry on the causes of the Congress Party's defeat in the elections even as Sonia Gandhi and the High Command got busy gathering information about the downfall of the Congress Party and its prospects in the forthcoming election. Meanwhile, Shinde's name was floated to gauge the pulse of the people and the response of party men.

Around this time, Himachal Pradesh was set to go for elections where there were a sizeable number of tribals' votes. The High Command knew that this could make or mar the prospects of the party. Also about the same time elections were to be held in Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Karnataka and Himachal Pradesh. Sonia might have thought that by appointing a Dalit as the Chief Minister in Maharashtra, the party could make an impact on the mind set of the voters in other states. Of course, it did make impact in Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Karnataka and Himachal Pradesh. A sizeable number of voters from Dalit and tribal communities brought Andhra Pradesh, and Himachal Pradesh back to power while Karnataka and Arunachal Pradesh improved their voting pattern. In other words, Shinde's campaign and oratory skills did bring visible change in electioneering.



After many slips and falls, in January 2003, Shinde was to become the Chief Minister of Maharashtra, but that was still a long way off. He had to bide his time and follow the dictates of the high command. He knew that his discipline and loyalty would be rewarded one day. It was simply a matter of time. As one of his old associates once told him, the position he held did not matter – what was important was how he conducted himself and what he accomplished, at the end of the day. And when the hour did come, on 18-01-2003, Shinde made every effort to rise to the occasion.

Earlier, Sonia Gandhi had sent observers to Mumbai to elicit the opinion of the party MLAs. The High Command not only wanted an SC candidate, but someone who enjoyed the support of the local MLAs, as well. There was near unanimity of opinion on the candidature of Shinde and the High Command therefore decided to field Shinde since he was from SC Community, a man of integrity, and one who enjoyed the support at the local and national level, as well.

A Dalit candidate as the Chief Minister of Maharashtra would certainly send a strong message to the voters across the

country. Needless to add, it would have a bearing in a State, Himachal Pradesh, which had a sizeable tribal population of twenty-five per cent. It was quite correctly predicted that the election results of Maharashtra would have a far reaching impact especially on the States which were to go to polls that year.

It was quite correctly assumed that sending in a Dalit Chief Minister would strengthen the voter base of the party across the State and would add to its image in other States, as well. At the same time, the most significant factor was that Sonia Gandhi wanted to reward Shinde, who was her Man Friday from the day one of his association. Loyalty pays and absolute loyalty pays absolutely. On 19-01-2003, Sushilkumar Shinde was sworn in as the 22nd Chief Minister of Maharashtra. As soon as he took over, he got down to work. He never wanted to remain a run-of-the-mill Chief Minister, who would leave things to their natural course. Of paramount significance, was the development of all the regions of Maharashtra in a just and equitable manner.

Shinde, unlike a politician of parochialism, analytically concluded that the regional imbalance was the root cause for national disintegration causing unrest among the people who in turn are demanding smaller states. He wisely allocated budget to all the regions without any bias to eliminate a regional tilt. He very well understood that a Chief Minister should not be biased to once region or the other but should be objective and take care of the interests of all the regions. This mental make-up was the outcome of his greater exposure to national and international politics.

Shinde went about his job meticulously to ensure that northern and southern Maharashtra, as well as Vidarbha, Marathwada and Konkan regions developed equitably to avoid regional imbalance, a major factor for disintegration.

Not only was it important to render justice to bring about balanced development, but it was necessary for his government to be seen as doing this, as well. His government announced a special development package for Vidarbha region along with an assurance that it would be upped for the region every fortnight, if the package was implemented in letter and spirit. This was a major initiative that spelt development for the entire region of Vidarbha.

Shinde's government also announced the Maharashtra Airport Development Corporation with the Chief Minister as its Chairman to monitor and ensure the early completion of the Mihan Project. Waiving electricity dues of industries in Vidarbha, granting incentives to farmers from the region and developing the infrastructure of Vidarbha were other important issues that were taken up in right earnest.

Another special package for the western Maharashtra helped the region to battle drought and famine. His government's decision to give financial aid to sugarcane growers and give them other incentives was a step that expedited the progress of western Maharashtra.

The special package known as Khandesh targeted to improve northern Maharashtra which included the districts of Dhule, Nandurvar, Jalgaon, Nasik and Ahmednagar. Similarly, a special package was allocated by his government to develop the region of Marathwada, and a special project worth crores was made to develop the infrastructure of the Konkan region.

He took a number of initiatives which proved that his government was one that was people friendly. Not only did he waive the interest on crop loans for farmers, but promised to reimburse their loans taken from banks. This was a result of the severe drought that had affected Maharashtra and had hit farming all over the state badly.

Shinde was also concerned about Maharashtra's prominent status as a model State in terms of industrial development. He drew up a number of plans to attract investment and his government offered special capital incentive to a wide range of industries, apart from putting in place an Information Technology and Allied Services Policy (ITASP) to promote integrated development of a growing area in contemporary industry. He told officials that the IT sector needed to be accorded prominence and therefore ITASP deserved close monitoring. He also paid particular attention as the Chief Minister, to the golden triangle of Mumbai-Pune-Nasik in terms of attracting more investments and creating new infrastructure services through the active participation of the private sector.

A series of administrative reforms and other special packages endeared his government to the people of Maharashtra. In a very short span of time, Shinde became one of the most successful Chief Ministers of Maharashtra, earning his place in history. Although he wears his achievements on his shoulders lightly, accomplishing what he did in a very brief





period was indeed a remarkable feat. Equally important, was the reputation of his government as an administration characterised by integrity. Shinde told his friends, associates and all his relatives that they should not do anything that would besmirch his reputation. As someone who had watched political dramas unfold as public spectacles, from far and from close proximity, Shinde knew corruption and nepotism could dent a government's image and reputation as few things could, and decided to be pro-active in his drive to provide a clean dispensation. He met all the important officials on a one to one basis and told them of his plans, programmes and commitment to serve the masses. For Shinde, it was a heaven-sent opportunity to demonstrate his gratitude to the people of his state and he was determined to utilise it to the utmost.

He tried to reach out to his party men – both supporters and dissidents and adversaries, as well. Shinde, as was his wont, would put his ego aside and deal with a problem. For instance, when one of his bitterest critics, Vijay Singh Mohite Patil of National Congress Party (NCP), and a well-known Pawar acolyte, opposed Shinde's candidature as the Chief Minister

and put Sharad Pawar in a real spot, Shinde decided to cut the Gordian knot himself. He went to Mohite Patil's house and met him. This face to face encounter did the trick – Mohite Patil realised that he was wrong about Shinde and backed his candidature.

It is Shinde's ardent belief that if one brushes aside one's ego and deals with thorny problems, human relationships become easier to handle. This is even truer of politics and politicians. Over the years he came to believe in the saying - "Politics is the art of the possible". As the Chief Minister, he knew that he had to take on the opponents from the ranks of the BJP and Shiv Sena, who had bitten the dust in the recent elections. Additionally, he had a host of thorns in his flesh in the form of his own party men – dissidents, who were hardly easy to please.

There were groups and groups within the party like the wheels within wheels, and each group and its members had high expectations. All of them thought they had to be appeased and it was a tremendous struggle for Shinde to walk the political tightrope. He made every effort to accommodate



demands which were just and reasonable and placated even hardened opponents from the Shiv Sena by sitting across the table with them. He organised frequent get-togethers and luncheons to keep in touch with all the parties in Maharashtra. This process of reaching out to opposition ranks earned him their goodwill and respect. At times, these get-togethers helped him to get to know the plans of the opposition. He outsmarted the Shiv Sena by announcing free power, when he became aware of their plans to make such an announcement and use it as an election plank. His sudden move took the wind out of their sails.

One of Shinde's successful traits of managing political comrades and adversaries was to understand their political predicament and try to accommodate their point of view. He did this even when it came to power sharing, allocation of portfolios and assignment of responsibilities. He made sure that Vilasrao Deshmukh did not harbour any ill-will against him. The strength of the Cabinet rose to all time high of 69 but the underlying idea in Shinde's mind was a fair representation of all sections and groups. He believed that no room should be given to resentment and discontentment and that dissidence



should be nipped in the bud. Although his Ministry looked large and unwieldy, and came in for some criticism, it gave adequate representation to all sections and pre-empted any kind of dissidence or rebellion in the ranks of the party and its allies.

A people-friendly administration was all he aimed at. He relied on the bureaucracy to deliver results with promptness and efficiency. Officialdom had its own set of problems. There were bureaucrats who were quick on their feet and put the government's programme into action and followed them up. There were others who were more laid back in their manner and excelled at passing the buck. And then, of course, there were officials who were completely indifferent to the government's plans and did little to justify their positions and responsibilities.

Shinde says that he also owes it to the political thinkers he had studied as a young man – Karl Marx, Engels, Lenin, Plato, Dange and others – who had shaped his thinking and influenced the politician in him. He attributed his farsighted, reformist political thought to them. He always maintained that





they were responsible – through their writings – for his progressive outlook, the reforms he introduced and his egalitarian attitude. By a strange quirk of fate, Shinde was assigned history as an optional subject in Sangameshwar College, Solapur. He managed to get it changed to political science and began to study political thinkers in right earnest.

Be it Plato's Republic and the notion of an ideal state or utopia or the egalitarian philosophy of Marx and Engels, Shinde owed his understanding of the political theories and concepts to his stint at Sangameshwar College. In later life, all of Shinde's attempts at enacting legislations and laws for the protection of the poor and the socially backward were predicated on this firm foundation laid in his student days in Solapur in his undergraduate classes. Of course, there was the obvious influence of some well-known politicians and his first-hand contact with them – among them Y. B. Chavan, Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, Sharad Pawar, V.R. Gadgil, Mohan Dharia and Chandrasekhar. Each one of them left his or her own distinct stamp on Shinde's mind.

He introduced English as a compulsory language from the first standard in all the schools in Maharashtra, emphasising



the global reach of the language. He told his opponents that the importance accorded to English did not in any way affect the pre-eminence of Marathi. English, with its universal appeal, opened new doors of opportunities to educated youth. Assigning land to the landless was another major priority. Shinde monitored the actions of his bureaucrats closely and made sure that there was an effective system of follow-up and feedback. Fortunately for him, he was backed by Sonia Gandhi and all the central leaders in everything that he did.

Behind all the schemes and welfare measures initiated by the government in his tenure, there was an element of humanism and social justice in the real sense. "A government must reach out to the man in the street – his voice must be heard and respected", Shinde told his team of officials once. It was a piece of advice that was a part of the larger philosophy of life that he had developed. His inner self never failed to remind him where he came from, how arduous the climb to power and fame had been, and how mute, deaf and blind, officialdom traditionally was to the poor and the deprived, who

understood this better than Shinde, who hailed from the depths of social and economic backwardness?

Shinde's 'humane' nature can best be understood by the following incident. One day Shinde was travelling from Pune to Mumbai and happened to witness a boy crying continuously after he was hit by a speeding lorry. Shinde took the boy in his Ministerial car, admitted to a hospital and resumed his journey. There are many more such examples that one can cite.

During his childhood days, Shinde was detained for hours to meet some officials. He saw the rich entering every office at their convenience and the poor waiting for hours to get appointment. When he became the CM, Shinde realised that no official would entertain the common public to get their grievances redressed and so thought of evolving a mechanism to reach out to these people.

As mentioned earlier, during his tenure as the Chief Minister one of the highlights of Shinde's style of functioning was his decision to keep the Mantralaya or the Maharashtra



State secretariat open throughout the day which was not the practice earlier. During this period, there was what was known as a daily mela with hundreds of people from the common public thronging the State secretariat. Shinde's directions to the officials were clear. They had to reach out to the commonest of the common man and address his grievances. He led by example and this was widely reported in both the print and electronic media. The bureaucracy had some reservations about Shinde's manner of functioning but eventually it came around and had to adapt itself to his directives.

Shinde is continuing this "open darbar" policy till today. "I can bet, try once for his audience, you will meet him", says R. Babu, an employee working at Shinde's residence. This writer is yet to come across anyone complaining that "The Power Minister" is not accessible to the public.

Shinde believed that the Chief Minister was not an ivory towered power-broker, blind to the harsh realities of rural India, but he, as one who knew alienation and deprivation and was connected to the grassroots in the true sense of the term and who had his pulse on the needs and aspirations of the poverty-stricken millions of his fellow countrymen, chose to act as such a Chief Minister and be remembered for such an approach as well. Yet, as it happens in the surreal world of Indian politics, a single election can overturn the fortunes of all the players on the political stage. The uncertainties of national and state politics always made it difficult to gauge the success of an individual or his work – much less predict the shape of things to come. If public memory is short, as they say, it could also be said of public life that it is replete with uncertainties. The Assembly elections of 2004 were to bear this out with telling impact on Shinde's 21 month-old rule as the Chief Minister of Maharashtra.

Often the difference between a successful person and a failure is not that one has better abilities or ideas, but the courage that one has to bet on one's ideas, to take a calculated risk - and to act.

– Andre Malraux (1901-1976)

French historian, novelist and statesman

When a man arrives at great prosperity God did it; when he falls into disaster he did it himself'.

– Mark Twain (1835-1910)

American humorist and novelist

CHAPTER 20

Success is a Journey and not a Destination

Sushilkumar Shinde led the Congress into the thick of the election battle against the disparate political forces rallied together by Mayawati, Mulayam Singh, and Sharad Pawar's NCP. Congress won the election but there was something in store for Shinde.

Shinde was not without political adversaries and opponents, even within his own party and home state, and he for one, knew it all too well. The Congress, as much as any other party, if not more, had its fair share of rumour-mongers and manipulators. There was no dearth of people who could turn a situation on its head and present in completely different light. Shinde fell a prey to one such diabolical political manoeuvre. Although he led the Congress through an election successfully, an impression was being given that the political misfortunes of the party had suffered under his stewardship and that the party could have done better. When the state's legislators held a meeting in the presence of the party high command's observers, Ghulam Nabi Azad and Margaret Alva, to elect their leader and by implication, potential Chief Minister, Shinde received a call from 10 Janpath, the residence of the Party President, Smt. Sonia Gandhi.

There were those who thought that Shinde had been cut down to size and was 'shown his place'. There were others who thought that he did not get a fair deal and that he deserved to have been given a fresh term. There were yet others, who expected him to raise a banner of revolt and question the party's wisdom in giving him the marching orders and 'packing him off ' to Andhra Pradesh. They told him that the gubernatorial office was a poor consolation prize for Shinde



who had served the party with such commitment, integrity and sincerity. Shinde told everyone he met that first and foremost, he was a loyal party worker, and everything else was secondary and subordinate to that overriding reality. If the high command in its wisdom thought that his services were needed as the Governor of Andhra Pradesh so be it. He, as a foot-soldier of the party, was prepared to go where he was asked to and perform the task assigned to him.

Sonia Gandhi told him that she would have to shift Shinde to the Capital or to another state. With characteristic loyalty, Shinde replied that she was his leader and he was prepared to serve anywhere and in any capacity that she wanted him to. Though he, against many predictions and prayers, brought the party back to power, something else was in store for him and he was asked to move as the Governor of Andhra Pradesh. As a trusted lieutenant of Sonia, without mincing a single word, he left the Chief Ministership and became the Governor of Andhra Pradesh on 4th November, 2004.



For Shinde, the Congress party was something of a banyan tree in whose luxuriant shade he had always drawn comfort, in the hottest of times and the most adverse of climes. It was inconceivable for him to consider questioning the discretion of the party high command. He was made of stronger mettle and had imbibed certain abiding values that he had always practised and lived by.

He took over as the Governor of Andhra Pradesh. The office of the Governor was indeed yet another feather in Shinde's cap and he went about his job silently, with the quiet confidence that a man of contentment possesses. His *Aide-de-Camp* (ADC), Sqn. Ldr. Amit Kaushik, told him on his very first day that as the Governor, he would not have much to do. Shinde told him that he was not someone used to twiddling his thumbs. The ADC said that a Governor worked for four hours on alternate days at that and had eighteen hours of rest and leisure. In other words, there was nothing for the Governor to do – simply because that was the very nature of the office. It was meant to be a position of retirement, away from the din and bustle of active politics.

Shinde told the ADC that he was made of different stuff. Even as the Governor, he would work for 18 hours and keep him busier than the army ever did! His ADC was, for a moment, taken aback by the enthusiasm the new Governor displayed, but appreciated his spirit very much. With time, his ADC saw the truth in Shinde's statement. Shinde too was eager to learn the art of time management from his ADC Kaushik



and was keen on dispelling the popular perception that politicians had no respect for time. Shinde had always believed that military personnel were punctilious. He had hoped in the past that there would come a time when he would meet someone from the defence forces from whom he would be able to learn a lesson or two in time management. As it turned out, Amit Kaushik proved to be the man he had been looking for.

As the Governor, he interacted closely with the State administration and lent a patient ear to the grievances of commoners. Dr. Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy, the then Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, would on occasion, seek Shinde's advice and hear him out with great respect. His remarks and observations on files and documents were taken with a sense of seriousness that is not normally associated with the functioning of a Governor.

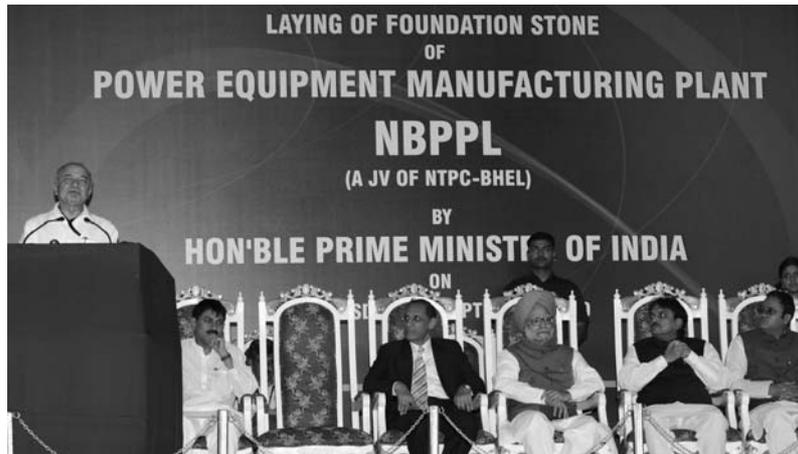
When the students belonging to ST communities sent him a fervent appeal asking him to intervene, when admission into the MBBS course was denied to them, he promptly directed the establishment to render justice unto them.

Their subsequent letters of thankfulness moved him. He thought once again as he always did – God gave him the opportunity to touch the lives of people by being of some help to them. He made it a point to tell officials, as he always did, that they needed to provide a human face to the administration. Politicians and administrators must never forget the fact that their primary accountability was to the people they served. If this simple fact was kept in mind, any government would be able reach out to the most neglected sections of society. All through his life, Shinde believed in this principle and had observed in practice, as well.

As the Governor of Andhra Pradesh, Shinde made every effort to reach out to the masses to see that he was, in reality, a Governor of the people. He did not want protocol to come in the way of his interaction with the masses. He believed that the Constitution spelt out a role for the Governor in which he was of some service to the people. Protocol, according to Shinde, should not become an obstacle or an impediment in the service of people. He did not let himself be dictated by the norms of protocol spelt out to him by advisors and bureaucrats.

As the Governor, Shinde made sure that relevant and important information was passed on to the President of India and that the Raj Bhavan truly remained a place where people could come without any hindrance. He knew that the Governor had special powers under the Constitution and was prepared to exercise them, should the situation arise, in the service of the poor and the deprived.

A controversy surrounded Shinde's granting of clemency to Gouru Venkat Reddy, a Congress Party leader who was serving a sentence in a murder case. His wife sent an appeal for clemency, which was forwarded to him by the Home Ministry. The inner Shinde reminded him how he blindly signed a move initiated by a few MLAs in Maharashtra claiming that it had



the blessings of AICC's Chief and that cost his MPCC presidentship. He learnt a lesson in the hard way. He read the file meticulously, as the Governor, and gave his consent to the decision of the officials, without taking a partisan stance either way. Besides, he was guided by the rule-book and not by self-interest in this context, since he did not even know the appellant on a personal basis. As the Governor, he was dictated by the Constitution, which laid down his functions and responsibilities quite clearly. He could not be swayed either by nepotism or by other means.

He did not wish to be influenced by either party and vowed to go strictly by the Governor's duties. All his life, he had been transparent and had been above suspicion. Although he was disturbed by the strident tone and trenchant nature of the criticism directed at him by some of his critics, Shinde took it in his stride. Many years ago he had learnt the bitter truth that a public figure could be turned into a whipping boy by the media in no time. He had seen the media play the role of judge and jury at times, making it difficult to sift fact from fiction. Time alone would reveal the truth and prove to be an accurate and dispassionate judge of character in public life.

Shinde believes in the philosophy that every human being is unique and one must give due respect to every individual irrespective of his/ her job. This trait, a very important tool to understand human psychology, elevated him to enviable heights. It is humanity that is important, not the post, he often says.

He was one of the few Governors who interacted closely with all the employees of Raj Bhavan, be they gardeners, drivers, cooks or guards. He made them feel, with his humility and unassuming ways, that he was one of them. He announced his decision to celebrate Diwali on November 12, 2004, with the employees of Raj Bhavan. Fate, however, had other plans. The Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat's death cast a cloud over the Diwali celebrations. Shinde shared the disappointment and waited for an opportunity to console the Raj Bhavan employees. When the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, visited Raj Bhawan, he requested him to overrule the objections of the security personnel and distribute sweets to the children of Raj Bhavan staff. The joy that this gesture brought to their faces was an unforgettable experience. He learnt that such an event had never happened – that he was the



first Governor who not only interacted with the Raj Bhavan staff, but pleaded on their behalf with the Prime Minister.

Similarly, when a Bengali cook asked with some trepidation whether the Governor would grace the Durga Puja celebrations, Shinde responded immediately in the affirmative. His presence at the Puja celebrations was a source of immeasurable happiness to all of them. It was yet another 'first' for them and their faces radiated with joy, as they found the Governor in their midst. In all these actions, he was guided by his sense of humanity. The joy and comfort that he could bring into the lives of common citizens brought him more solace than the authority of his office or the pomp associated with it. Power was a mere tool. If it could not be used to touch the lives of the weakest of the weak and the neediest of the needy, it served no purpose.

Shinde will never brush aside even if it is a trivial act or breaking the protocol. He travelled to Puttaparthi to seek the blessings of Sri Satya Sai Baba on 22nd November, 2004. A pilot,



who was an ardent devotee of Baba, wanted to be a part of the Governor's entourage, but did not have the courage to express his wish. He went up to the ADC and whispered that he wished to accompany the Governor. Even before Shinde could hear from the ADC, he asked him to join them and the pilot was overjoyed to hear what the Governor had said and attributed it to an inscrutable pattern of divine intervention.

The most interesting aspect of Shinde's tenure as the Governor of Andhra Pradesh was the fact that he showed the officials and the fellow-politicians how a Governor could be pro-active, without ruffling the feathers of the bureaucracy, the Chief Minister and his cabinet colleagues or the members of opposition parties. A Governor had an important constitutional role to play and he could do it without treading on the toes of others. Shinde had watched veterans like Ali Yavar Jung, Brahmananda Reddy and P.C. Alexander, among others. "A Governor requires tact, experience and maturity to succeed in his position," Shinde had once been told by a veteran politician. He remembered the truth behind that observation in his tenure in Andhra Pradesh.





Dr. Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy, Late CM of Andhra Pradesh, releasing the Telugu version of this biography

Shinde learnt a scintillating lesson from the appealing autobiography of his predecessor, Surjit Singh Barnala's *Quest for Freedom – Story of an Escape*, that freedom is the soul of the human being and without it one ceases to exist.

His stint as the Governor of Andhra Pradesh ended when he was recalled to the country's Capital to assume a new role – that of the Minister for Power at the Centre. On January 28, 2006, at 8:00 p.m., he received a call from the Prime Minister. Dr. Manmohan Singh told Shinde that he was needed at the Centre – he would be the country's next Power Minister.

Shinde, like a loyal soldier, adhered to Sonia's directives and left Maharashtra the moment she asked him to leave, throwing to the winds the ill advice of many of his so-called friends to rebel. As destiny would have it, Shinde rightly tuned with the philosophy of 'faith pays and absolute faith pays absolutely', was recalled to become the Central Minister. His unswerving loyalty to Sonia Gandhi paid rich dividends, setting aside the age-old convention that the Governor's post leads to political oblivion.

Shinde was pleasantly surprised by this development. He had not anticipated it and did not pay attention to the whispers that had been doing the rounds. He thanked the Prime Minister and Sonia Gandhi. He was relieved of his gubernatorial responsibilities by Rameshwar Thakur, his close associate and the then Orissa Governor, and left for New Delhi. He assumed charge as the Minister for Power at the Centre and got down to the business of familiarising himself with the task on hand. He brushed aside rumours that he had preferred 'Power' to 'Social Justice' ascribing them to idle prattle of the chattering political classes.

He was new to this subject and as in the past, met the specialists and experts to gain a deeper understanding of the subject. Officials of the ministry also briefed the new Minister at length and gave him a complete picture of the existing situation in the power sector. Shinde had always believed that one should bow to the men of knowledge, especially when one did not have a proper understanding of the subject. His



Shinde with the Author



philosophy was essentially very simple – interact with the specialists and experts and learn from them if you do not know enough about a subject.

He had his priorities clearly laid out – the country's energy needs had to be met. This was to be done with a sense of urgency that had been missing for many years. Power had to be made available to all the villages across the country, to the industrial units and households in cities, and had to be generated in an efficient and cost-effective manner. This is indeed easier said than done, Shinde himself once remarked, but the objective had to remain clear.

For the first time in the history of post-Independent India, an MOU was signed between the Government of India and Arunachal Pradesh to launch a 25,000 MW hydel project, the biggest project in the northeast region and one that had not been cleared for nearly two decades. Shinde's personal rapport with Apang, the Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh, which he had developed when he was a general secretary of the AICC, helped him get the project expedited. As a Minister for Power, Shinde, known for making a mark of his own in any

post that he held, drew up an ambitious, yet feasible agenda to improve the power generation at the national level, covering all the states and brought about revolutionary change in the area of power production.

After he took over as the Minister for Power nearly 35,279 Mega Watts (as on 06-04-2010) of power were added and as many as 8 ultra mega power projects were launched. Simultaneously, an ambitious plan to bring electricity to the villages across the country by 2012 was drawn up. This plan would ensure access to power for every household in the country. In other words, Shinde, being a man of action, firmly believes that he should make his presence felt not by mouthing slogans, posing for photographs or granting interviews, but by delivering on the ground.

His journey as a Power Minister is on. He is tirelessly working to mitigate the demand and supply divide. Taking over as the Power Minister (on 22nd June 2009), after the 15th Lok Sabha elections, he has drawn up a new agenda for "Illuminating India" that is a fresh challenge. We all shall witness the outcome in the coming days.

Thousands of candles can be lit from a single candle, and the life of the candle will not be shortened. Happiness never decreases by being shared.

– Buddha (563BC-483 BC)

While you are alive, conquer death, and you shall have no regrets in the end.

– Sri Guru Granth Sahib

CHAPTER 21

My Gurus

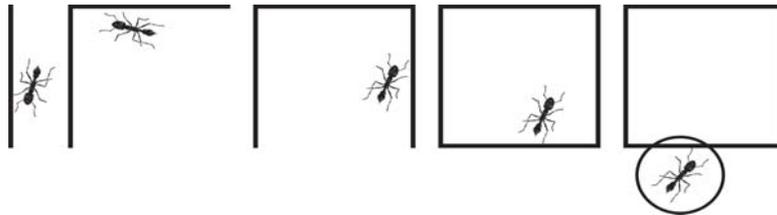
Guru means a light that removes darkness facilitating a person to continue his/her journey. In other words, the light guides you to achieve your goal. During our life's journey we may come across a small problem here or there, and then what do we do? We stop with the mistaken notion that the end has come. Look at those tiny ants which will teach us a lesson that is normally not taught in a school. This interesting anecdote is sure to unfold a new window by way of message.

I was sitting in the house garden of Dr. K. Chellappa, IAS, and discussing a personality development subject. This was the time we noticed a colony of ants. I interrupted the colony and in the process many deviated and moved away in different directions. One could fall prey to my design. I placed a small stick obstructing the ant's movement.

The ant took a right turn. Again I made an attempt to stall its movement with another stick. The ant, without waiting, turned to the right. Mr. Chellappa smilingly laid one more stick and the ant once again took a right turn. Finally I tried to block its move with a fourth stick but to our surprise the ant performed a super art. It did not take any more turns nor tried to find out what Subas and Chellappa were doing. It simply started climbing the stick and continued its journey. We were stunned for a few minutes and looked at each other.

Amazing! Unbelievable!! The ant continues to inspire us in the form of a Guru. Chellappa and I saluted the ant in silence for teaching us the art of overcoming the obstacles stoically.

Look at how Robert Schuller interpreted failures:



Failure doesn't mean that you are defeated;
It means you are striving for success.

Failure doesn't mean that you haven't achieved anything in the
journey of life;
It means you have learnt some lessons along the way.

Failure doesn't mean that you have lost your self-respect;
It means that you have the courage left to make many fresh
attempts.

Failure doesn't mean that you have nothing left;
It means that you can now forge new paths.

Failure doesn't mean that you should give up trying;
It means you have to put more strength and work hard.

Failure doesn't mean that you can't achieve,
It means that certainly you will, if you have the patience and
the grit.

Failure doesn't mean that God has deserted you,
It means that he has an alternative roadmap for a better future.

Failure does not mean you are fooled
It means you have enough faith to experiment.

Failure does not mean you are disgraced;
It means you have dared to try.

Failure does not mean you are inferior;
It means you, like others, are not perfect.

Failure does not mean you have wasted your life;
It means that you have an excuse to start over.

Failure doesn't mean that you have missed the bus;
It means you are finding your wings to fly.

Finally, failure is nothing but a postponement of success.

Shinde's approach to failure is something different from the conventional view. He took every failure as a message to impart worthwhile and purposeful lessons in the hard climb to success. Each failure marked a permanent lesson. In the beginning, in his childhood, he was not possibly aware of the visible or hidden message behind every event. As he grew older, he could anchor himself in the belief that every event is a means to learn the art of living. Though the list is endless, this is a random but critical selection of some of the events as also the personalities who helped Mr. Shinde evolve into the role-model of success that he is today.

Sonubai's house

It was a kind of Gurukulam or Ashram, as Shinde sees it, where he learnt the rudiments of cultural transformation. The desire of learning 'pure' Marathi and English took root here when he met learned personalities conversing in English. This is where his behaviour was Sanskritised. He was never reprimanded whenever he, the rustic Dagadu, unfamiliar with the ways of sophisticated society, raised foolish or what appeared to be trivial questions. Sonubai responded in a mother-like manner and was instrumental in introducing him to a world of musicians and singers, a world of high-brow culture which, Dagadu, a Dalit, would not have ever known, and thus it came to be that he developed interest towards theatre arts, because of the stint he had, as an assistant to the ladies club, courtesy Sonubai again, where he was exposed to an array of cultural activities he had not seen before. If there's a guru in the world of culture in Shinde's life, one who led him to

the new paths of creative fancy seen in the form of plays and cultural activities, it was Sonubai.

Dr. Vishnu Ganesh Vaishampayan

Dr. Vishnu Ganesh Vaishampayan is a noble soul, who patted Shinde on the back and showered affection on Shinde, although he was only a servant in their house. He encouraged Shinde in his extra curricular activities, such as listening to music and attending cultural programmes. In terms of lending moral and emotional support, Vaishampayan was, in Shinde's life, another important guru who unhesitatingly gave a letter of recommendation for his admission to a night-school. Without his letter, Shinde probably would not have joined a night school.

Vaishampayan deserves all appreciation because he readily agreed to give a letter of conduct also, which was crucial for Shinde's appointment as a boy-peon, which in turn, opened his eyes to the world of Indian judiciary, peopled by lawyers, judges, defendants, plaintiffs, appellants et al . The kind doctor knew that he would be handicapped by the loss of a loyal and trusted servant, but put the boy's interest above his own. Shinde always says that if only there were more people, like the worthy doctor, who could cast their net of magnanimity far and wide, there would be fewer suffering people and poverty could be alleviated. This should happen on such a large scale universally so that the nobility of such people should percolate to the lowest stratum of society.

School Inspector

Tears well up in Shinde's eyes and he bows his head in reverence the moment he thinks of Shelwankar, the school Inspector, who was responsible for his admission in the eighth standard of the night-school. Since Shinde was a school dropout with a three year gap in his education, he could easily have been a stickler for rules and glossed over the merits of the

case, going strictly by the book. But, he cast the rule-book aside when he heard the boy's account of his background and suffering. He could read in Shinde's sparkling eyes a yearning for accomplishing something and a longing to extricate himself from the quagmire of poverty and misery. He was magnanimous enough to use his discretionary powers and admit Shinde to the eighth standard. To Shinde's regret, he says, he could not pay his "reverence to this great soul who died prematurely without seeing how Dagadu became Sushilkumar Shinde". Again Shelwankar was something more than a benefactor – he was a Guru in the real sense!

Teachers at the Night-School

If somebody deserves to be called a 'guru' in the true sense of the term; then the teachers at the night-school at Solapur qualify eminently for the title. They not only imparted knowledge but were patient with Dagadu and his inquisitive nature and answered all his questions; no matter how irrelevant they seemed, for three long years, till he completed his tenth standard. It would not be an exaggeration to say that these teachers were the first to find the hidden talent in him and encouraged him to participate in elocution competitions which became a springboard for his entry into the theatre arts. Dagadu was an inveterate questioner. Had they snubbed him for his frequent queries, he would have probably gone into a shell or been more withdrawn and introverted. But, thanks to their patience, they goaded him to ask questions. "Though many of my questions were irrelevant and vacuous they never scolded me, as was the usual practice of the typical teachers, and went on answering whatever they knew and when they did not know they were honest enough to say that they didn't know", recalls Shinde fondly. He adds, "When they could not answer some of my questions, I went in search of someone, and learned more than what I deserved. In other words, these night school teachers were instrumental in exposing me to a new

world and that is something for which I shall always remain indebted to them”.

“Later”, says Shinde, “I understood asking questions was the basic trait needed for anyone to grow and the teachers' appreciation of this attribute of mine made me shed my inhibitions and inferiority complex, the two major speed breakers for anyone to grow”. The absence of stage fear in him is something he ascribes to these teachers. “I bow my head in reverence to them,” he says in all humility.

Friends and Fluency in English

Association makes or mars one's personality. How one's personality evolves depends upon one's associates. “I remember all my friends who were instrumental in helping me learn English”, says Shinde. When he performed badly in English during his school days these friends supported him whenever he needed their guidance. “ Do you know, the fluency of English during my college days was one of the factors in my selection in the police department”, he affirms. If gurus represent guidance, then his friends are his gurus to whom he owes his success in a substantial measure.

Successful Failure in SSLC

Though he put strenuous efforts to improve his English language during his school days, Shinde couldn't make it in the exams. English continued to be his tormentor, so to speak. “I was unable to secure the qualifying marks of 35 and failed three times in SSLC. This failure never led me to frustration, but rather prodded me further to work on my language skills. These three failures deepened my passion to learn English and but for these failures I couldn't have secured distinction in English during my graduation nor would I have attempted to find resources to improve my vocabulary”, he recollects. Besides, but for these failures he would not have made additional efforts to excel in grammar. In a sense, therefore,

these failures were instrumental in his education, the shaping of his personality and had a prominent role to play in his overall success. If failures could be characterised as launching pads to success, as indeed they are, Shinde says that there were few such authentic gurus he came across in his life as *the gurus of failures*.

The Pond Incident

“I remember that I was driven out when I took a bath in a village pond, purportedly owned by those belonging to the upper castes. My relatives and villagers pleaded for me and settled the case amicably by tendering an apology.” When he was in his teens he would often introspect only to learn the all-important lesson that one’s happiness should not be at the cost of someone else’s suffering. He says, “I never wanted to enjoy anything at the cost of someone’s suffering”. This was an ideal he practised meticulously throughout his life. “If gurus are here to teach the art of deriving happiness without causing inconvenience to others, then the owners of the pond are the gurus who taught me this philosophy and why don’t I bow my head to these gurus?” he asks.





Mr. Bora, the Judge

During his years of employment as a boy-peon, Shinde worked under many judges. He faced harassment from some of them, not because Dagadu was a dalit, but owing to their mental makeup. Mr. Bora, one of the judges, was a noble soul, very compassionate at heart. "He saw the manner in which I struggled, while I was working at his house and in the court. Sometimes he would notice that I was tired and couldn't iron his clothes for him. On such occasions, he would fold his clothes and place them under a pillow to give them the look of having been ironed. As a superior officer and a judge he could have so easily ordered me to do his bidding, but he had a heart filled with compassion.

"He very readily bore some of the inconvenience I subjected him to on the odd occasion. If love can be described as an expression of a guru, then Bora is indeed my guru."

Lessons learnt as Boy-peon

"I was employed as a peon in the district Sessions Court and the judges were kind enough to entrust me with different types of jobs ranging from menial work to shopping, filing,

postal work and so on. This exposure created enough confidence in me to handle things on my own and interact with others. I never said 'no' to anything though I was not well-equipped, because I was interested in learning things. I knew if I said 'no' to the judges, they would get it done by someone else but I would lose the opportunity to learn. Every errand or assignment is nothing but an opportunity to grow. And if gurus are as powerful as to give an opportunity to evolve, then most of the judges of the Solapur Court where I had worked can be characterised as my gurus."

Shinde vs Shinde: College Elections

While studying at Sangameswar College, Solapur, there was an election for the students' association. Shinde's peers pressured him to contest. Being a stage artist in the college, he enjoyed greater rapport with his fellow-students. "I thought it would be a cakewalk for me and I was careless; my ego clouded my sense of judgment and I cast my own vote in my opponent's favour. Later I realised that I lost the election by a single vote. During my introspection, it dawned on me that my blindness and overconfidence were the causes for my loss and I thanked my guru, the ego, which taught me a befitting lesson", Shinde says. A guru teaches through any medium and if the medium is one's 'ego' then there's little doubt it taught Shinde a valuable lesson for life. It was a lesson that he was not going to forget in a hurry and as a result he cultivated humility consciously, having learnt an unforgettable lesson early in life.

Unrequited love: an Important Guru

"I fell in love with Ujwala and I thought I would not face any problem in marrying her. But things went completely haywire. Normally such situations in love result in tragic endings and affect lives in many ways. I saw people turning into depression and committing suicides", Shinde observes. When he expressed his intention of marrying Ujwala, her parents did not shout or make a fuss though they did not

dislike the proposal. They were quiet in the way, then tried to reason with him and counselled him patiently. To be fair to them, they did not utter a single word belittling his family members or him. They suggested that he marry someone and promised to attend the marriage as well. "The way they handled things made me reconsider the situation, although my feelings were deeply wounded", he recalls. It brought a sense of equanimity in him so that he did not try to indulge in any action that could soil his reputation or that of his well-wishers. It was their mindset that made things easy and when he called on Ujwala's parents to invite them for his engagement to Kadke they graciously attended the function showing no traces of ill-will. "If gurus are meant to show the right path, how can I deny that Ujwala's parents were indeed among my gurus?" queries Shinde.

Kadke, Shinde's Fiancée

When he decided to marry Kadke, Shinde was transparent about his relationship with Ujwala and told her all about it. She was kind and magnanimous and gave him unqualified support. When he said that he would invite Ujwala's parents, she, to his surprise, agreed to the proposal. Indeed, they did attend the betrothal. "Love can conquer impossible situations and hurdles. Kadke was an epitome of tolerance and love and if gurus are visible in the form of teaching tolerance and love, then I submit my prayers to her for being a living guru in teaching me the art of love and tolerance", he says.

Additional Responsibility is a Pleasant Burden

When Shinde joined the police force as a sub-inspector, he also looked after an assigned beat. His enthusiasm for work made his bosses entrust him with new and additional responsibilities, which he accepted with a smile. These additional assignments were gateways to learning and enriched his understanding of a variety of related subjects. On the other hand, some of his colleagues avoided such

responsibilities under one pretext or the other and because of this, Shinde was saddled with additional work. "In the process, I gained useful knowledge, pertaining to the police department and I thank all those lethargic colleagues for opening new windows of opportunities for me to learn", he says and calls them his gurus.

MLA Ticket: Slip between the Cup and Lip

Sharad Pawar lobbied whole heartedly for Shinde to launch him as an MLA. But all his efforts turned into a futile exercise when Babu Jagjivan Ram wanted to field Sonawane as his candidate. Believing that whatever is happening is for the good, he gracefully accepted the denial of an assembly ticket. Further, without harbouring any animosity, he travelled along with Sonawane and canvassed for his success. In the bargain he learnt the art of public speaking at political meetings, acquired the skills of electioneering. He covered every nook and cranny of his constituency from where he contested later and won. "I salute my political mentors and masters – Jagjivan Ram, Sonawane and all the other stalwarts in politics who by denying me a ticket helped me gain rich experience", says Shinde.



In a film function

Patience Pays

Congress was losing heavily during the elections in the mid seventies and Vasantnao Naik, the Chief Minister of Maharashtra, campaigned during Shinde's election, assuring the voters that he would be elevated to the status of a minister and that he would not remain an MLA after the polls. "Had I got the opportunity to become an MLA without losing the ticket to Sonawane, I was sure of not getting a berth in the cabinet as a minister for cultural affairs. Every failure is nothing but a message wrapped with rewards and recognition. I became a Minister to fulfil my electoral promises", he recalls. Indeed the denial of the assembly ticket, re-launching him as an MLA later and making him a minister, were on account of gurus like Sharad Pawar, Vithalrao Gadgil, Yashwantrao Chavan and Vasantnao Naik. Shinde says that he puts them on the highest pedestal as gurus for elevating him politically and considers them his Gurus in more ways than one.

Literature is Inspiration

"During my tenure as sub-inspector of police, I would attend many political and literary lectures delivered by Y.B. Chavan and used to be enraptured by his scholarly speeches and the range of his knowledge. He was instrumental for kindling in me an interest towards arts and literature. Another important factor that drew me close to him was his family background – his father was also a peon", Shinde says. Chavan took a liking to the young policeman and patronised his interest in theatre arts and literature. "If at all I have acquired some recognition among Marathi writers, the entire credit goes to Mr. Y.B.Chavan", he observes. If gurus prod you on and enrich you with knowledge, then Y.B.Chavan is one of Shinde's important gurus and mentors.

Sifting Sands of Politics: Shinde as Landlord

Positive mental attitude is the abiding philosophy of Shinde. This attitude brought things unanticipated into his life. When Abdul Rahman Antulay and Babasaheb Bhosale became the Chief Ministers they did not include Shinde in their ministries for obvious reasons. "Many friends prevailed upon me to lobby but having tasted the ambrosia of the philosophy of 'whatever happens is only for the good', I made no effort and remained composed. This was the time a friend of mine who was about to lose a few hundred acres of land due to urban ceiling regulations suggested that I should buy a piece of land for a throwaway price and I immediately grabbed the opportunity and bought the land. For nearly two years I dedicated myself to the farm land and learnt many a thing about agriculture and maintaining a farm house. I also got exposed to the problem of farmers", says Shinde. This understanding later helped him bring forth legislations to protect the farmers – an initiative that won him the appreciation of everybody including Mrs. Sonia Gandhi for introducing creative legislation such as sending farmers





abroad for training, literacy programmes and many more progressive regulations. "Had I been included in the ministry, probably, I would not have bought the land and as a result would have missed the farming experience that most of the MLAs fail to gain", he says. If gurus are instrumental in enriching one's understanding in addition to helping one gain material success, Antulay and Babasaheb Bhosle can be seen as Shinde's gurus. "I can go one step ahead to thank them doubly for not inducting me in the cabinet because this was the farmhouse I bought where Soniaji stayed. I will again pay my regards to gurujis involved in my betterment", he reiterates.

The Power of Words

Words have supreme power and can cause irreversible damage." I have seen how a few words can cost someone the Chief Minister's post. Mr.Bhosale's words, *shand* (eunuch), *pund* (dadas), *gund* (gundas) aimed at some legislators boomeranged on him and he had to resign from his Chief Ministership. I learnt a very big lesson about 'word power' and became conscious and cautious while using words", Shinde

says. This event taught Bhosale a lesson the hard way and Shinde was fortunate to learn this important lesson. "If Gurujis are here to teach us the art of speaking without going to a special school or training, Babasaheb Bhosale was a guru who taught me the dos and don'ts in using words," he says and considers him his guru.

Learn from Others' Mistakes

Shinde recalls Lord Acton's popular aphorism "Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely". To overcome this power addiction one should know the art of managing a wild horse (Power) by holding its reins for a while but without allowing it to let loose till the rider reaches his destiny. "You should know when to leave the reins and when to pull them. If you do not know this technique, the horse will rear, toss you and take you literally 'for a ride'", says Shinde. An intelligent person learns from others' mistakes, he says. "Shivajirao Nilangekar, who was the Chief Minister, was drawn into a scam that cost him his political future and his Chief Ministership. He tried to jack up his daughter's marks in a post-graduate medical exam, an act for which the High Court





passed strictures against him. I have learnt the lesson that one should not entertain one's kith and kin or grant them undue favours, breaking norms. Had his episode not taken place, I would have been a blind person, possibly, and could have made some mistake or the other but I became doubly cautious for the rest of my life", he admits. This was yet another landmark event which he cites amongst his 'gurus'.

Failure to Become the Chief Minister

"It was my burning desire to deliver a speech in English especially in an international forum and my ambition had remained a dream for a long time. When I was a general secretary of AICC, my name was proposed for the Chief Ministership, but somehow it was not considered. As I very often say everything is for the good, I remained composed. This was the time (1985) Rajiv Gandhi was to attend UN Assembly, and I whispered into his ears my unfulfilled desire", he recalls. He adds: "As rightly said, a true intention is bound to blossom into a refreshing reality and my burning desire to speak in an international forum also turned into a reality." To Shinde it illustrated once again his belief that a

powerful dream would also take the shape of reality. Rajiv Gandhi immediately conceded his request and he delivered a speech at the United Nations General Assembly. Shinde considers those who stalled his bid for the Chief Ministership his gurus, because it was owing to them that his dream turned into a reality.

Ouster from Cabinet-Portals of Parliament

Shinde lost his Ministership, when he made the mistake of putting his signature to a letter seeking the removal of Sharad Pawar. Later he became the General Secretary of AICC. "I thought fate had something in store for me though I had to leave the Ministry of Urban Development and MPCC Presidentship," he says. He adds, "I never regretted doing so because I was sure that a better future awaited me and that I would be able to serve the common man better". Around this time he was nominated to the Rajya Sabha where he raised close to a thousand questions, a record in Parliamentary history. "I was given the National Citizen Award for 1993 and 1994 and piloted at least 14 private member bills that touched



many lives and brought in systematic changes”, he fondly recalls. His stint as General Secretary earned him many friends throughout the country which came in handy when he badly needed their service during his tenure as Power Minister. He points out that his association with the North East region during this time blossomed into a power agreement to launch 25,000 MW power unit, the first of its kind in India. “Had I not been a General Secretary of AICC, I don't think, I would have achieved this rare agreement. There are many more positive events that took place only because of my personal rapport that I developed during my AICC days”, he says. He regards many friends who helped him grow on the national political scene as his gurus.

Vice-Presidential Election: Flip-side

“Have you heard of someone playing a game happily only to lose? Yes, I did that - played a game only to lose but in the process I gained many invisible friends and experiences,” says Shinde. Contesting an election only to lose is in itself a big game. Everyone plays only to win but he played only to lose, and in the process was exposed to the national political scene. He travelled across the country, met many friends and ultimately lost the Vice-Presidential election in 2003. “I know this is the best part of my political life – to participate sportively in a match knowing pretty well that I was going to lose. This is a blessing of gurus who lent me psychological and spiritual guidance and shaped my thinking, helping my personality evolve,” he says. As a result he could accept defeat with a smile and without rancour. “I thank Soniaji, the living master, who brought me into political limelight,” Shinde adds.

Giving up Chief Ministership

After missing the bus many times, Shinde became the Chief Minister of Maharashtra as Mrs. Sonia Gandhi's choice. The moment he became the CM, he made historic achievements such as introducing reservations in private sector companies

for SCs, STs and BCs, bringing several legislations to empower the deprived and underprivileged and finally gave, in his tenure, a worthy administration in the eyes of the intellectuals, media and public without landing into any controversies. Shinde says "If gurus are here to promote disciples to an enviable stature, it is worth rendering pranams to my master, Mrs. Sonia Gandhi".

Becoming the Governor of Andhra Pradesh

Shinde recalls – "When Madam asked me to go to Andhra Pradesh as the Governor, even after winning the election, I smilingly left Maharashtra, ignoring the advice of those who in their lust for power wanted to use me as a pawn and tried to egg me on to rebel against the leadership. I refused to fall prey to their evil designs because I was already addicted to the philosophy of 'good alone happens'. During my tenure as Governor, I again made it a record of sorts in visiting all the districts within six months of my tenure." Shinde is aware of the popular thought that governorship signals the end of a politician's innings but his faith in 'good alone can happen' brought the Power Ministry his way. "All this reiterates my belief that gurus will reward you only when you undergo vigorous and rigorous tests and I bow my head to Mrs. Sonia Gandhi for relaunching me in national politics", he says.

As Shinde puts it, Gurus are everywhere – in one's thoughts, deeds, experiences, nature, successes, failures, pains, pleasures, ups, downs, births, deaths and so on. It is always up to the individual to learn from every step of the journey of life as his example tells us.