

*All that we are is the result of what we have thought. The mind is everything. What we think we become.*

– Buddha (563 BC-483 BC)

*There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.*

– William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

*Those who know how to think need no teachers.*

– Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948)

## CHAPTER 7

### **You Become as You Think**

Each time he met someone who was articulate in English, Shinde felt inferior in comparison. Besides, he thought of English as a link language – a binding force. Somehow one felt empowered if one had a good understanding of the English language, he reckoned. He was consumed by a raging passion to master English, a skill he missed out on. He could never forget how he once interpreted war as 'cold war' in an elocution competition in college, evoking all-round laughter, because the topic meant 'war' as 'conflict' or as an antonym of peace. He became red-faced with embarrassment when his professor explained the connotations of the expression, 'cold war' to him. It was yet another instance when he realised that the English language was more layered and complex than the ordinary user could sense. His professor also told him that while it was difficult to develop the mastery that native users demonstrated, it was important to have good functional knowledge of communicative English. Shinde realised that if he had to get on and succeed especially as a lawyer, later in life, his understanding of English had to be much better.

He was through with an undergraduate degree in Arts from Dayanand College on the outskirts of Solapur. All through he had proved to be a very popular student. His gentle ways, soft-spoken manner, good looks and zeal endeared him to his fellow-students and faculty alike, both in Dayanand College and Sangameshwar College, where he pursued graduation. He managed to stay clear of needless controversies and petty politics, and this earned him the respect of all his college-mates.

Shinde stuck to a simple routine – he attended college, took notes in every single class and compiled them later in the day, and did not mingle with his classmates, any more than he needed to. He was in truth, ashamed of his poverty. He did not want others to spend any money on them, because he had an empty purse. It was as simple as that. Besides, he didn't want to lose sight of his dreams and was determined to pursue them. He remembered his mother's useful piece of advice – he had to stay away from distractions and not lose sight of his goal. He saw a number of young men losing their way at a critical point and falling prey to addictions, vices and other distractions and manifestations of waywardness.

Shinde passed B.A with Honours, a reward for scoring highest marks in the University, a rare achievement to a boy who failed S.S.C three times because of poor knowledge in English. The same person turned a master in English which proves how deep rooted dreams become a reality in life. Shinde still remembers how Bhogishayan, a master in English literature, introduced him to Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*.

He knew, however, that he had a long way to go and miles to traverse, before he could sleep. He had promises to keep – mainly to himself – and had to raise the bar further, in order to achieve something greater and nobler. His courtroom experience had created in him an admiration for lawyers and a burning desire to become one. The fire within him was raging with increasing ferocity and he steeled his resolve, constantly telling himself that he would not breathe easy till he reached the next rung on the ladder – a degree in law. He had to drive himself to this accomplishment. Solapur did not have a Law college and he would have to go elsewhere. Finally he did get a seat in Pune, but then found himself on the horns of a new dilemma.

If he pursued a degree in law, he would have to bid goodbye to his current job and his financial state was such that there was little leeway for such risks. On the other hand, if he forsook his ambition, he would have his job, but that would mean the death of this driving passion that had brought him thus far. He had to make a difficult choice. In his mind it was a tussle between Dagadu and Sushilkumar Shinde – between remaining where he was, in social, economic and geographical terms and moving on to gain a toehold in his long and arduous climb to success. Shinde's mother was distraught. She did not know much, but she didn't want her son to quit his job because she feared losing the little economic independence it gave them. On account of the long years of their relentless struggle against grinding poverty, Shinde's mother had developed a deep sense of financial insecurity. She was petrified of having to go back to the brink of deprivation that they had been pushed to some years ago. She still had traumatic memories of those difficult days, and did not want Shinde to make any such move that would turn the wheel backwards.

If things were minimally better now, it was only because of her son's job. She dreaded the thought of Shinde giving up the respectable job of a clerk at the court. He should plan to get married and 'settle' down as boys of his age ought to, she thought and was afraid of what seemed to be a rash and impetuous decision. She knew, in her heart of hearts, that Shinde was hardly prone to hasty decision-making, but at the same time, she was afraid of an error on his part.

Her fears were not unfounded but Shinde was equally determined to carve a bright future for himself. He was focused and clear – he had to extricate himself, not merely from the slums and poverty of Dhor Galli, but from the ghettoes of the mind that circumscribed one's thoughts and stifled one's personality. He had yielded to the persuasions of his mother and step-mother the previous year, when as a student of B.A. II

year, he got selected for service in the Army after clearing the Short Service Commission. However, both Krishnabai and Sakhubai were adamant – they would not let their Dagadu go. The Army was not the only option for him, they reasoned, and he finally relented, although he was indeed keen on taking up the job. This time around, he was determined not to let the opportunity pass and set his heart on earning a degree in law. He could not let his future be dictated by his emotions. As a lawyer, he would attain success, not only in financial and economic terms, but would grow as an individual. Shinde was certain of that. He saw the pursuit of his ambition as a means to evolve and was determined to battle it out. It might take a few years for him to achieve his goal, though. He convinced his mother and step-mother of the seriousness of his purpose and its eventual outcome. He explained to them the kind of life a successful lawyer would be able to lead, and the sort of emotional and intellectual satisfaction a correct career choice would give him. In the end, they left it to his wisdom, after having cautioned him for a considerable period of time.



There were days of uncertainty. Getting a job and leaving it without any guarantee was something unheard of and that too when both his mothers had opposed such a step vehemently. Having faced the days of poverty, they were afraid of the dark days haunting them. Again they tried to prevail on Shinde but he would not listen. He thought that he had to sacrifice something to achieve greater things. Shinde

knew that sacrificing alone would get him 'bigger' things. He also knew how risk rewarded people. Some sacrifice would fetch extraordinary achievement and he determined to leave Solapur for the better and what happened to him is illustrated in the following account. How Shinde developed a 'risk taking attitude' is not quite clear. He claims that he was driven by intuition and most of his decisions rewarded him well. It was something unusual for many of his relatives when Shinde decided to call it a day at Solapur court without having an alternative employment on hand, Nature has stored something for a person who takes risks. Sushilkumar says, 'risk pays and absolute risk pays absolutely.'

He quit his job from Solapur Court, where he had served for more than eight years, to pursue a course in law. Destiny had other plans for him, yet again. A lawyer, who was also an astrologer, prophesied that Shinde would become an important national leader later in life. At that time, Shinde laughed the prediction off, responding that it was unthinkable, as far as he was concerned – he had a career to focus on. Much later in life, when he looked back the prediction, he found it intriguing, more than anything else.

As it turned out, Shinde ended up joining the state police force. One day, when he was still obsessed with his dream of becoming a lawyer, he met his friend Subhash Vilekar, who always seemed to be in the know of things. He asked Shinde – "Have you seen the recent Advertisement for Sub-Inspectors?" Shinde sheepishly replied in the negative. Vilekar then added, "Let us go to the reading room in the library and check out." Sure enough they found the advertisement, published prominently in a Marathi newspaper.

There was a sudden and desperate need for policemen, especially Inspectors, during the 1965 Indo-Pak war. Shinde applied for the job – in reality, his friend had applied on his

behalf. A few days later, he was called for an interview to the office of the Inspector General of Police (I.G.P), Mr. Majeedullah, the highest in the force, in those days. The I.G.P liked Shinde who answered the questions posed to him with confidence. At one point, Shinde told the I.G.P that he was being asked questions based on economics, while his subject happened to be Political Science. The I.G.P retorted that since economics was also related to the study of 'political economy', he was expected to answer those questions.

At one level, he was very positive of his prospects of getting selected. At another, he didn't feel confident of getting the job. In fact, these mixed emotions got reflected in Shinde's reply to his mother who asked him how he had fared in the interview – "They have to invent an excuse to reject me. I am more than satisfied with my performance. But since I was a bit impertinent in my responses, I can't be very certain." He echoed the same sentiments to his friend, Vilekar.

However, he was in for a surprise. After a few days, he received a letter asking him to present himself for a medical review. Shinde knew that more than half the battle had been won. He cleared the medical examination and physical fitness round and got selected as a Sub-Inspector. On December 6, 1965, following three months of training, he was appointed as a Sub-Inspector on a salary of three hundred and fifty rupees a month. For a boy-peon turned peon turned clerk, who was earning a salary of one hundred and fifty rupees, the jump was an incredible leap. His appointment as a police officer was not just one more step – it was an important milestone in his long journey to fame.

While Shinde was admitted into a Law college in Pune, his dream of becoming a lawyer had to wait – he was weighed down by work and had no time for studies. Much as he craved to make time for his studies, he found it impossible to do so,

deluged as he was with work. He wanted to strike a balance, but the nature of his job did not help. Moreover, he was an earnest worker, eager to learn and as a result, more work came his way. His boss, Suryakant Jogi, once told him: "Shinde you are destined to succeed. Your hard work will ensure your success. Don't ever become complacent."

It was something of a puzzle to Shinde – here he was slaving away and happy to earn a word of praise and a pat on his back from his seniors, while many of his peers preferred a smug, laid back routine. Work seemed to be the last thing on their minds. Some of them thought he worked hard quite needlessly – "it's not going to earn you a promotion overnight", one of his colleagues told him. Shinde, however, reasoned that he had to familiarise himself with his work, and almost invariably, that meant working long hours. A promotion was hardly his immediate goal, he told his friends in the force. He desired to be good at his job, and that counted more than anything else. His work had no set schedule and intelligence-gathering was something of a challenge. Working late was an everyday affair.

But Shinde did not complain. He was not someone given to squealing and grumbling as a person. Such an attitude was against his grain. He worked hard to earn a name for himself as an earnest worker. He followed orders unquestioningly and won the appreciation of his superior officers in what he did. The job varied from situation to situation – if it was intelligence-gathering one day, it was crime detection or assisting in arrangements for a VIP visit, on another. Shinde's senior officers knew that they could rely on him to get their work done, and as a result of this confidence, he was saddled with more work. Shinde, however, took all of this in his stride. Policing was demanding and challenging, but nevertheless, interesting.





While he had little time for himself, he went to a play whenever he found the time. The artiste in him seemed to find an outlet of release in the theatre, and he was particularly fond of Marathi stage productions. He liked the quality of Marathi theatre, but then, such was the pressure of work that he hardly had any time for his favourite pursuit of going to see a good stage production.

As he could not commute regularly between Bombay and Pune, he sought a transfer to New Law College in Bombay, in 1968. Bombay was a busy city with a life of its own. Shinde was fascinated by the sheer pace and tempo of life in the big metropolis. It was a world in itself. Shinde once told his friend, Subhash, that the Bombay he encountered in real life was much like the Bombay one saw in films. It was a case of life imitating art, as they say.

His work in Bombay was no different – he was perpetually on the hop, as it were, in the line of duty and the nature of his work was such that he would have to make himself available at the oddest of hours. He was always on call, or so it seemed. After working for three days at a stretch without a break during the course of an emergency, he sat down on a bench, too

weary to get up. He didn't notice his boss coming, as he had closed his eyes for a wee moment. His boss patted him on the shoulder and asked him to take a break. As Shinde got up to leave, he added: "Thank you, Shinde. You bore the brunt of it," and nodded in appreciation. It was a difficult time and Shinde found it well next to impossible to manage both his pursuit of a degree in law and the sudden, unexpected demands of his job. But he took the accompanying difficulties of his job in his stride, as was his wont, and looked at the silver lining in his situation. Here he was, with an opportunity to pursue his longstanding aim of becoming a lawyer in the capital of India's commerce, the bustling city of Bombay – home to a million dreams and a zillion aspirations of all hues and kinds. He had to make the most of it. One of his relatives from Dhor Galli said that he had got the opportunity of becoming 'a prince.' He meant that working in the police force in Bombay was something special, a god sent opportunity to be made good use of. Shinde had other plans. He was not content with his Sub-Inspector's job, in spite of the fact that he was a diligent policeman, who had earned a name for himself with his hard work and integrity. He had resolved to become a lawyer and a successful one at that, and did not wish to get distracted. He had to stay focused.

He was bogged down by the sheer quantum of day to day work. Crimes, VIP movements, preparing intelligence reports, political activities – all kinds of things kept him busy. He had hardly any time for himself, but Shinde knew that he had to make time to study law. He went to the Vice- Chancellor Prof. N.V. Gadgil and requested him to allow him to complete his first year LL.B. by attending lectures in Pune every weekend. To his good fortune, Professor Gadgil took a lenient view of his situation and had words of appreciation for Shinde's enthusiasm. With the V.C's blessings, Shinde began thinking that he had already become a lawyer.

Shinde was over the moon. He could afford to be a full-time policeman and a part-time student of law – he attended college on Saturdays and worked very hard to make up for lost time. It was by no means a facile exercise, but he knew that there was no other way. His assiduity was his biggest strength and once again, he fell back on it to make the most of what he had. He managed to grab some time catching up on various facets of law which constituted a part of his curriculum. His experience as a policeman proved to be a critical learning tool. He asked his professors questions, based on situations which, he as a policeman faced in his day to day work. Though he worked hard as a police officer and as a part time student, he could not get through 1<sup>st</sup> Year LL.B. He could succeed only in the second attempt. Later he joined Government Law College in Mumbai and completed LL.B. Shinde's keenness and zeal coupled with his performance in plays, debates and elocution competitions made him a popular figure in college. He was also very fond of acting and this was a time that marked a high point in Marathi theatre. Plays like *Mr. Minnacha*, *Athya Dhai*, *Ekkah Pela*, *Samshayka llo*, *Kavirai Ramjoshi*, *Lagxlakhi Bedi*, *Vegla Mache Malo* and other landmark stage productions made a deep



*With Supercops J F Ribeiro, K P Medhekar, and D S Soman*

impact on his mind. They proved to have a lasting influence on his way of thinking and his philosophy of life.

Some of the plays had a powerful social message and Shinde was especially fond of such productions. He saw them more than once and fortunately, his friends Subhash and Vilas shared his interest in theatre. One evening, when he was returning from work at 6 pm. Subhash asked him whether he would be interested in going to a play. Shinde had heard of the play and was keen on going. But, he got premonition that he was going to become sick and it would be imprudent to go to the other end of the town to see a play. Nevertheless, he decided to shrug the sickness off and see the play – such was the level of his interest.

He was assigned government accommodation in houses meant for policemen. His mother and step-mother moved to Bombay and were pleased to find him growing in ability, skill, stature and confidence. He seemed full of self-assurance, quite sure of his interests and ambitions. Politics was far from his mind at that point – he was determined to become a lawyer. It was a single-minded pursuit and he did not wish to be distracted from it.

With his good looks, radiant complexion, Shinde had always been the cynosure of all eyes and as for the girls in his college, he was their heart-throb. Shinde felt drawn to some of his college-mates too, but he suppressed his desires, as he feared he might stray away from his primary objectives and goals and he would not let that happen, no matter what. There was the occasional temptation to throw caution to the winds and get swayed by emotions, but in the end, discretion prevailed and he remained true to himself. His friends would also egg Shinde on, but the moment he would think of taking one step forward, he would step back two paces in his mind. He refused to get carried away and that was that.

His 'mothers' were very keen to get Shinde married at an early age – they constantly reminded him that boys in their community were married off in their teens. It was something of a custom, a standard practice. Every other day, they would reel out the names of scores of their male relatives – Shinde's uncles, cousins and others who were married at what they considered 'the right time.' Shinde would not relent but would always listen to them with patience and understanding, and then gently persuade them to allow him to pursue his aims – he still had many miles to go.

It wasn't always easy, though. At one point Sakhubai and Krishnabai were insistent that he marry their niece – his maternal uncle's daughter – but Shinde refused to budge. He knew that his mother pressured him for two reasons – she was bound by tradition and secondly, wanted to rejoice in his happiness, but he had his own firm reasons for choosing to wait. Feeling frustrated by his attempts to stonewall her efforts to get him married, she would ask him whether he intended to remain a bachelor all his life. Shinde would always respond by saying that he would marry at an appropriate time. He was clear in his mind about one thing – he wanted to marry a girl from outside his community. It would enrich his experience and that of the girl, he felt at that time. He had no intentions of getting sucked into a small, insular world and build narrow walls around it. Besides, there was an inner sense which warned him against haste in this matter, an 'intuitive feeling' that his desire to marry outside his community would materialise. He only had to buy his time. He decided to do just that.

One may give it any name – fate, providence, destiny, chance, fortune, luck or co-incidence, but Shinde's good friend from Solapur, Subhash Vilekar's brother, Madhukar's in-laws, the Vaidyas, lived in Bombay. Shinde and Subhash Vilekar were good friends. They thought alike, had similar interests,

aims and concerns. Young Subhash Vilekar hailed from the Kayasth community and he and Shinde spent a lot of their time together.

They would spend long hours discussing their future, the state of the nation, historical events or a favourite film. Both were young men with plans for their future. He and Subhash Vilekar had a lot in common, in terms of interests and shared many similar pursuits and hobbies. Both were fond of good Marathi plays and both liked patriotic films and music.

Shinde once visited Solapur. He enjoyed Subhash Vilekar's company and would visit his family and relatives occasionally. One day when he went to meet his friend Subhash, he chanced to see a close relative of Subhash Vilekar, Ujwala, who was a Bombaite, and happened to visit her sister and brother-in-law in Solapur. The minute Ujwala stepped into the verandah where Shinde was waiting for his friend, their eyes met and were locked in a brief, intense gaze. It was love at first sight, as they say. Ujwala smiled coyly at him and the diffident Shinde smiled back. They talked for some time and found many a thing in common. The two of them hit it off very well and became good friends. They liked each other and met quite often in Bombay. Much as he tried to suppress his



feelings, he seemed to get attracted to her. He felt very awkward about his situation, though. He was treated very well – like one of them, or a member of the household – by all the members of his friend's family, and he did not wish to cause any hurt or embarrassment. He tried to carry himself with utmost poise and dignity, but deep within he had developed an emotional attachment to Ujwala that would not be easy to break. He did not wish to complicate matters, but he couldn't let go of her either. He was caught between the proverbial devil and the deep sea – between being true to himself and trying to abide by the unwritten, oppressive norms of society. Was it possible for him to block his feelings out? Should he try to take a decisive step towards realising his dream? He had to make a choice – and it would prove to be the most significant one of his life. But he had infinite capacity to take risks and life seemed to be giving him yet another opportunity. Once again, it was Shinde's positive manner of approaching a situation that helped him take a decision, as we shall learn in due course. How he developed this instinct to take tremendous risks is something of a mystery, but one can only attribute it to the fact that from the very early stages of his childhood, he always looked only at the positive and brighter side of life, even under the most trying circumstances. This is reflected in everything he did – working at Sonubai's house as a domestic help and continuing to study in the night school, working in the court and pursuing his interests in theatre and remaining content, but wanting to move on and setting his sights higher at each stage. Every single stage of Shinde's career is marked by this positive streak that dominates his personality, which helped him emerge as a leader. As a student, he would organise the staging of plays and the conduct of elocution competitions, leading college excursions, taking the responsibility upon himself and proving the point that initiative and drive must supplement vision in order to achieve something.

One important decision that changed the course of his career and appeared to be fraught with risks at that time, was his decision to quit his court job in order to join law college – a move that took his family members (mother and step-mother) and friends alike by complete surprise. They faulted him for being foolish and immature – his mothers told him that he was living in a fool's paradise. Shinde, however, stuck to his guns, driving home the point that perseverance is the only magic mantra to success, which he demonstrated repeatedly during the course of his eventful life, filled with risk-taking. His law degree was to prove to be great use in the coming years and invariably his risk-taking moves paid off bringing a change for the better – for instance, he got selected as a Sub-Inspector of Police at that time. He was denied the ticket to contest from the Karmala constituency, at the very last minute after having resigned his job in 1971 as a Sub-Inspector, a position he held for 6 years. Unfazed, Shinde took to practising law without losing hope. As luck would have it, he became a Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) from the very same constituency due to the sitting MLA, T.H. Sonawane's sudden demise. In other words, each risk he took was suitably rewarded by Mother Nature or Providence. Shinde recalls that he always listened to his 'inner voice' as he did when switched from B.A. (History) to B.A. (Political Science). He says today that he had always been guided by the Shinde within, shorn of guile and reasoning. His life can thus be seen as a journey marked by enterprise and a remarkable ability to take risks.



*All my successes have been built on my failures.*

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

*Anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new.*

– Albert Einstein (1879-1955)

*Mistakes are the portals of discovery.*

– James Joyce (1882-1941)  
Irish novelist

## CHAPTER 8

### **Failure is a Wrapper to a Success Story**

In spite of being very busy with his daily duties, Shinde could not keep away for long from Ujwala. He was, in fact, so enchanted by her that each time Shinde's eyes met Ujwala's, they seemed to light up. He went to their house one evening and found her dressed in a very simple, but attractive saree, humming one of his favourite songs from an old Hindi film. He asked her out for a walk and she shyly agreed. Day after day they spent time together and the bond of affection that developed between them, deepened further. They seemed to have a magnetic attraction for each other. Ujwala had all the attributes Shinde sought in the woman of his dreams. She was gentle, soft-spoken, committed and shared his tastes and interests in music, drama and literature.

As for Ujwala, she felt that Shinde was the man she had always fantasised about – handsome, mild-mannered, reticent, firm and most importantly, principled. They were keen on marrying each other and Shinde thought that he would soon broach the subject of their marriage with Ujwala's parents, at an appropriate moment. He could not predict how it would turn out, but he had to make a very serious effort, he told himself. Even before one realised it, one could lose such opportunities.

But reality soon was to take a turn that was stranger than fiction – Ujwala's eldest brother, Sudhir Vaidya, had married a girl from another community and the couple was leading a sedate, happy married life when tragedy struck. Sudhir fell down from a bus and died. His death, quite expectedly, devastated the entire family. Ujwala's parents and all the members of their extended family went into a state of deep



shock. What was worse and not wholly unexpected, was the fact that they ascribed Sudhir's death to his marriage to a girl outside his own caste or what in popular parlance, is known as an 'inter-caste' marriage. It was considered a bad omen that had cast its long, wicked shadow over the lives of the young, unsuspecting couple. This superstition proved wrong which readers would learn shortly.

Shinde understood that this would be an inappropriate time to broach the issue of his own proposal to marry Ujwala and therefore, decided to bide his time. There was no option, but to wait. Although he did not attach much significance to the event, he knew that Ujwala's parents and relatives thought differently. For one thing, they belonged to an older, more conservative generation. For another, they were greatly upset by the sudden twist in circumstances, as they saw it, and this change was apparent in their manner. Shinde decided to let them be for some time, and tackle the issue later.

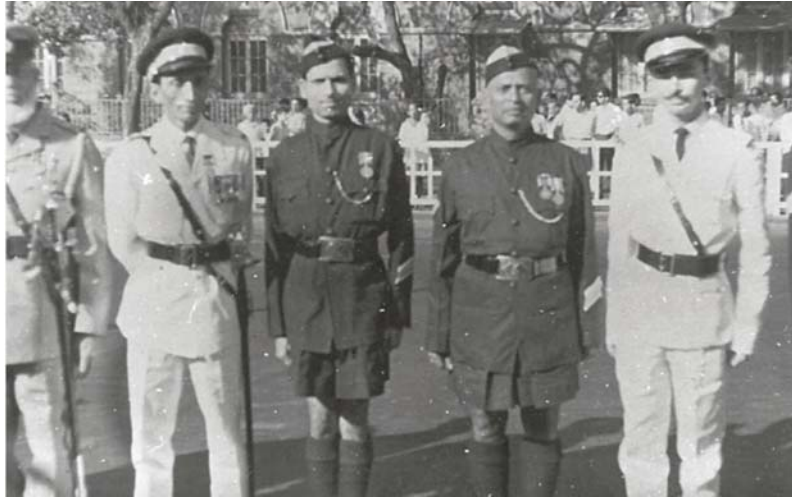
A month later, he visited Ujwala's house, as he usually did. This time he did not fail to notice that the customary warmth



and affection with which her parents greeted him, was missing. There was a marked coldness, a frosty distance, which seemed to 'put him in his place'. He realised something was amiss and could even guess what it possibly could be – he asked them whether he had done something wrong and what was the matter. Without beating around the bush, her father told him that they were not interested in getting Ujwala married to him – the family believed that such an act would go against the established norms of social and religious propriety and would bring them bad luck. Ujwala did not appear

on the scene, as she normally did, much to Shinde's disappointment. He had in fact, hoped that she would stand by his side in this hour, but from what transpired, he deduced that she was completely under the influence of her parents. She retreated into the shadows, leaving it to her parents to decide the matter for her. She would abide by their decision, it appeared. Shinde tried reasoning with Ujwala's father, but to no avail. He was firm and unrelenting. He had made up his mind and there was clearly no going back.

Shinde was heart-broken. He had imagined a life ahead with Ujwala and he knew that in her heart of hearts, he was the man of her choice. He wondered how social barriers could divide them and build such imaginary walls. Not that he was not aware of these things. Yes, they happened everywhere, all



the time. But, he thought things would be different when it came to him and Ujwala. He was full of hope and expectation, and thought that Ujwala's family, which seemed liberal and emancipated, and was very much aware of his social and economic background, would never reject his proposal in this outright manner. How did everything go so radically wrong? How did his simple, beautiful world turn upside down in a flash? He couldn't come to terms with these questions. Shinde simply could not get over the shock, try as he might. He spent long hours trying to think of ways and means of getting past this hurdle. Was there a way out of his predicament at all? Even his friends were at their wits' end.

This was a completely unexpected development – how was he to face this situation? All kinds of doubts tormented him. Would he ever be able to marry Ujwala? Was there any way he could convince her parents? Shinde's mother noticed the abrupt change in his manner and tried to probe the reasons underlying his sadness. But he could not confide in her. He shared his strife-torn mind with his friends, Jange and Purohit. They sympathised with him, but beyond that could offer no

solace. Shinde was crestfallen and thought that he had reached the end of the road. Life seemed incomplete without his beloved Ujwala.

It would be unnatural to assume that he was not hurt. Indeed, he was deeply hurt. But at the same time he was not the sort of person who would either develop hatred and bitterness towards someone or be driven by self-pity and take to alcohol and suicidal tendencies. He was not someone who would harm himself or others, nor would he blame others such as Ujwala's parents for his predicament. He was endowed with an exceptionally positive way of thinking and reacting. He took the attitude that whatever had happened had happened for the best. Neither he nor any of his family members pressured her family to reconsider their decision. This positive, affirmative manner of handling difficult situations that came his way at critical junctures helped him immensely in the course of his long journey in national politics. Let us see how his positive nature lay at the very root of his success.

*Sometimes only one person is missing and the whole world seems depopulated.*

– Alphonse de Lamartine (1790-1869)  
*French poet, writer and statesman*

*Love is life. And if you miss love, you miss life.*

– Leo F. Buscaglia (1924-1998)  
*American guru, tireless advocate of  
the power of love*

*Don't worry about failure. Worry about the chances you miss when you don't even try.*

– Katharine Hepburn  
*(American actress)*

## CHAPTER 9

### **You Miss the Bus to Catch the Flight**

Shinde returned to his house in Bombay with a heavy heart and resolved to get over this heartbreak and the humiliation that came in its wake. At first, he turned to work as the only source of solace and comfort – it helped him to focus on things unconnected with Ujwala and his distress. It was not easy though. Finally, one cannot take refuge from one's own self. He would ask himself the question – where does one go from oneself? There were moments of deep anguish and torment, and nothing on earth seemed to offer any solace to his distressed mind. Even when he tried to block her out of his mind, Ujwala seemed to step into his thoughts from some hidden casement or magical door deep in the innermost recesses of his mind. He pondered over many a question in his troubled mind – would it be right if he were to elope with Ujwala? How would her parents react if Ujwala married him against their will and consent? But at the end of it all, he concluded that he had too much respect for them in his heart. Would he ever take a step which would hurt them, or would be perceived as something amounting to tarnishing their reputation? He thought that happiness is not the one that is derived from someone's suffering. Shinde defines happiness: “Do anything and everything, anytime and every time, anywhere and everywhere as long as it doesn't give even the remotest discomfort to others in thought and deed”. So he had reconciled to the harsh ground reality.

This was the time a quote flashed in his mind, all of sudden, as if someone wanted him to remember, “Failure is nothing but a postponement of success”. He could sense that these thoughts triggered some chemicals in the body and felt somebody was pushing him forward. Without waiting



further, he went to the bathroom and while splashing water on his face, he imagined that the bothering thoughts were being washed away along with the water. He splashed again as if all the nagging thoughts disappeared while a new energy gushed into the body. He threw himself into his work with all the energy at his disposal and decided not to look back and brood over what had happened. He had to get on with his life, regardless. He engaged himself in staging plays, helping in their production, acting in and attending them.

He thought change in activities and place could pump freshness. Idleness was nothing but a deplorable attitude and he started searching for the things, events and memories that could bring back normalcy. Theatre art was the one that came into his mind immediately and effortlessly. (Later he was using this technique of downloading sweet memories to boost his morale whenever his melancholic moods tried to overpower him).

The theatre proved to be a major release – his involvement in a play, be it as an actor, a co-ordinator or a stage hand, had a soothing effect on him. His natural interest in theatrical productions, their technical aspects, the linguistic nuances and the quality of acting – he took interest in every single thing – helped him tide over a difficult emotional crisis. He plunged himself into the world of the Marathi stage with gusto and was welcomed by his friends and associates. However, the pressure to get married was unrelenting and Shinde had no means of escape from it, try as he might.

His mother, step-mother and his other relatives had been persuading him to get married to a girl from their own community. Shinde finally relented and several proposals came his way. At last, he zeroed in on a girl from a family whose surname was Khadke and in June 1968, Shinde got engaged to her. There was a great sense of rejoicing coupled

with relief in Shinde's house. He invited all his friends to the engagement ceremony and more significantly, invited Ujwala's parents as well, although he was quite certain that they would not attend the function. He had a two-pronged aim – to let her parents know that he was getting on with his life and would not be a hindrance or a source of inconvenience or an embarrassment to them. Again, this shows the affirmative nature of Shinde who always believes in looking at the positive facet of things.

Secondly, he wanted Ujwala to move on, as well and find someone else of her choice. To his surprise, Ujwala's parents attended his engagement and gave him their blessings. Khadke and Shinde met on a few occasions and soon became very good friends. He came to like her and she too found him to be a simple, good-natured person. Shinde told her about his past, his deep and abiding love for Ujwala and how it came to an abrupt and unexpected end. She appreciated his candour and simplicity. She even suggested that he should have consulted Ujwala before taking the next step – of marrying her, but Shinde told her that he had no access to Ujwala and that he did not intend to look back at what had happened. Khadke was disappointed at the way things had worked out between Shinde and Ujwala. Anyone else in her place would have thanked her stars and felt relieved, but she was a genuinely good soul, as Shinde recalls. He developed a deep sense of admiration tinged with respect for Khadke. Shinde's marriage was fixed for December 16, 1968.

A month ahead of the wedding, Shinde learnt that his fiancée had fallen ill and rushed to her.

After a thorough medical check-up, the doctors' diagnosis was unimaginably grim and absolutely shocking – she was suffering from cancer, which had progressed beyond treatment and recovery. Shinde was shattered. He thought

that he had found a partner at last and that life was beginning to get back on an even keel when this tragedy struck. He started looking for forms of treatment that could be of some help to her and could possibly cure her. He knew that the prognosis for cancer was seldom positive and had to hope against hope. He could not understand the quirks of fortune. First came the blow from Ujwala, followed by Khadke's grim illness, without a hope of recovery. Whenever he saw her suffering, the sight wrenched his heart.

Shinde made every effort to save her and to find an alternative mode of therapy and treatment. He ran from pillar to post for appropriate medical treatment, while Khadke suffered silently. Soon she was reduced to skin and bones. One day he learnt that after a two-month long battle with cancer Khadke breathed her last. Shinde was completely devastated – he had developed a bond of deep attachment and respect for Khadke, and performed her last rites with his head tonsured. When asked he said that he wished to perform her rites as would have been the case had she been his wife. He believed that her untimely death had prevented them from becoming man and wife and should not come in the way of his paying his final respects to her. This act of devotion on his part impressed his friends and relatives alike.

He had been profoundly touched by Khadke's nobility, kindness and understanding manner and it took him over six months to recover from the shock of her death. Her death had shaken him up as few events had, and once again he plunged into his work with all the enthusiasm he could find. But, the events of the recent months had cast a long shadow over his life and it was by no means easy to get over them. He was often weighed down by an overpowering sense of loneliness.

During this time, his friends proved to be of tremendous strength and support to him. They gave him a lot of quality

time, which counted a lot, and psychological support. In a sense, they were his emotional anchors and he leaned heavily on them for comfort and support. It was a period of trial, great pain and anguish, and at times Shinde wondered whether he would emerge from it emotionally unscarred. Work did not always keep him occupied nor did the company of friends, nor did his favourite pastime – theatre activity, for that matter. There were occasions when he did not feel like stepping out, going to work, meeting friends, watching a play or doing anything. He felt as though he had outgrown many of his interests and aged suddenly. A sense of ennui gripped him. Marriage seemed to be the very last thing on his mind.

However, he had unwavering faith in the ways of Providence and believed that destiny had some mysterious explanation, which he could not arrive at, at that point. He, as a means to divert his mind, took a book and started browsing. To his surprise he found a quote that prominently hit his eyes as if it was written only for him. The quote read: "Failure doesn't mean that God has deserted you, it means he has been setting an alternative path for you". That's all. Energy entered as if a flash of lightning pervaded his body and mind, giving a fresh twist to his mood. Later, on many occasions, Shinde discussed the potentiality of word power which could change the way of life.

Shinde's natural inclination of looking at the positive aspect of life, while accepting the ups and downs that came his way, helped him tide over this crisis in his personal life, as well. Looking back on this strange twist in circumstances, he says that it is important for every individual to be anchored in a philosophy that generates positive thinking, leading to positive actions which would subsequently bring happiness and contentment, apart from success and accomplishment, because nature can only bring good in contrast to human thought and action, according to him.



He decided to remain a bachelor and Shinde's mother stopped persuading him on the issue of marriage, assuming that time alone would heal his wounds. She knew that this was hardly the time to persuade him. She too was taken aback by the unexpected turn of events – the refusal of Ujwala's parents to accept her son, followed by the illness and passing away of her prospective daughter-in-law. Nothing seemed to be going right. She knew that they were going through a trying period and she had to stand by her son. It would not help to impose her thoughts on him – time alone would find a solution, she thought. There were inscrutable forces always at work. Her son had come a long way and was mysteriously led by fortune or providence, all along. She had tremendous faith in providence and hoped that God would find a solution to this seemingly knotty problem. Like all mothers, she wanted her son married and 'settled'. That was a natural, reasonable expectation. She was prepared to do her bit, but she knew that Shinde had to be more open. She prayed and hoped that God would find a way out and open a new door.

Shinde's work kept him busy and he had little time for himself or to be troubled by loneliness. In a way, his schedule suited him. It gave him no time to feel despondent and at the end of each day he was much too exhausted to think or get depressed. Usually he took a train or bus to get to Bandra, his final destination.

At the end of one long day, in April 1970, Shinde got into a Bandra-bound bus at Worli, as he usually did, to get to the Government Housing Colony, where his Police Quarters were located. His police Inspector's uniform made him conspicuous and all his fellow-passengers noticed his presence on the bus. He was used to that, as well. Each time he got into a bus in his uniform, people looked at him with some curiosity. What was a bit unsettling for him on this particular day was a familiar pair of eyes gazing at him from one corner of the bus – it took Shinde a while to figure out who it was. Suddenly, he responded with a glint of recognition in his eyes – it was Ujwala. He gave her a polite smile and she smiled back. She soon came and sat beside him and told him that she was going to Dadar. He was meeting her thus accidentally. Was it yet another coincidence? "No, it is vulgar to brand it as





coincidence”, said the inner Shinde. Then what could it be? The quote flashed again sending him to anchor strongly in the content of “Failure doesn't mean that God has deserted you, it means he has been setting an alternative path for you”.

They went on talking and the bus reached Dadar, but to his astonishment, Ujwala asked the conductor for a ticket to Bandra. Shinde seemed a bit surprised, but she allayed all doubts by flashing one of her endearing smiles at him, which seemed to convey to his throbbing heart that things would end on a pleasant note. He was unsure, but hopeful. It was difficult for him to think clearly, or to even assess his own feelings and emotions.

Shinde told her about his life over the past eighteen months – his engagement, his fiancée's illness and death and everything else that had been going on in his life at that time. He told her how Khadke had suffered as he watched silently and helplessly, how his attempts to get her treated came to nought, because she was stricken with cancer in an advanced stage, how this itself was discovered when it was too late to do

anything about it. Ujwala heard him out patiently and sympathised with him. His narration moved her to tears. She was touched by his concern, patience, and compassion and appreciated what he did for Khadke.

She, in turn, poured her heart out to him. She told him that she missed him all the time and simply had no strength to defy her parents at the time that they rejected his proposal to marry her. They did not give her any leeway and couldn't think of a way out. She was devastated too, but had neither the means nor the courage to voice her feelings. She loved him deeply, but coming from a conservative, middle-class family, she had neither the resources nor the psychological strength to stand up to her parents and convince them of her decision. She was terribly upset at the sad turn of events, but was powerless in the circumstances. There was no one to help her or guide her. She felt terribly guilty, helpless, depressed and downcast, but time marched on, relentlessly. She had to accept the verdict of providence, regardless of her own inclination, preference and aspirations. She simply did not know what to do under such circumstances. It was certainly not an easy period, just as it had been a difficult time for Shinde. She told him however, that he went through a much more trying time, in comparison.

Shinde and Ujwala got down at Bandra and walked to a restaurant close by. They went on talking about different things. Ujwala told him that she had been under tremendous pressure from her parents to marry. Over the past few months, she had declined many proposals of marriage. Rather coyly and diffidently she then asked him – “What have you thought about marriage?”

Shinde was non-committal and he replied – “I'll marry when the time comes. All in good time.”

“Do you have someone in mind?” Ujwala queried, to which he quietly said – “Yes.”



“Could that someone in your mind be me?” she asked, in all innocence and Shinde was stumped. It was a direct query and he couldn't deny the truth behind it. He didn't know how she was able to guess correctly and quietly responded – “yes”. He then told her that if she was earnest in her desire to marry him, they could go and buy a 'mangalasutra' (the bridegroom ties a sacred thread on the bride as part of the Hindu marriage ceremony) right away. Ujwala agreed and they headed off to buy a 'mangalasutra' to solemnise their bond. It was as informal and simple as that. No frills and fanfare; no song and dance.

They decided to get married in the office of a Registrar and go through what is commonly known as a 'registered marriage'. It was going to be a quiet affair. They planned their moves very carefully over the next few days, so as not to ruffle any feathers and in a low-key function on May 1, 1970, Shinde and Ujwala became man and wife, in the presence of a small group of close friends, at Shree Mangal Karyalaya of Ashatai Kulkarni, near Charni Road in Bombay. They first gathered at a friend's house as per plan, and then in a small convoy of three hired cars, the party set out from Keervani and reached the Registrar's Office at Grant Road.

Shinde's friends applauded as he tied the mangalasutra around Ujwala's neck and the Registrar sent a telegram to her parents, informing them of the marriage. Shinde and Ujwala went to see her parents the very next day to seek their blessings. They accepted them with open arms and welcomed Shinde into the family. Mr. and Mrs. Vaidya not only gave their blessings to the newly-weds but performed an elaborate, traditional wedding ceremony in the presence of a small gathering of family and friends. It was certainly a bit of a surprise, but a welcome one.



Shinde was well and truly on cloud nine. Suddenly, everything had changed and for the better. From a morose, downcast, depressed frame of mind, he swung into an ecstatic state. He had married the woman of his dreams, he found acceptance in her family, he had a job that he liked and he could not ask for anything more. He woke up each morning and thanked the Almighty for the blessings each day endowed him with. What more could life bring? He wondered where life would take him next – he simply had no idea, but he sensed that providence had worked in strange ways to make things happen for him and the inscrutable ways of fate forever remained a source of fascination for him.

Shinde's affirmative thoughts and positive philosophy are rooted in his unflagging belief in the ways of nature. He cites the example of how he took a similar view of events when he had to relinquish the Chief Ministership of Maharashtra. He believed in himself and in providence and knew that something equally honourable, in terms of a position in public life, would come his way. As it turned out, he became the Governor of Andhra Pradesh. Similarly, he did not expect to hold a position as important as that of the Union Power Minister, but left it again to the natural course of events and to his philosophical attitude on life that 'whatever happens is always for the better'. Shinde believes that this guiding



thought has been like a mantra that saw him through many a crisis and is something that everyone should follow to attain success, peace and happiness.

It will be befitting to share what Shinde is fond of recounting: a story that one of his village elders had once told him that 'whatever happens is always for the better'. The story revolved around a positive-minded friend of a prince, who no matter what happened, said that whatever took place was in the best interests of the prince, the principedom and its people. When there was famine one year and the prince was worried, his friend, companion and aide said that it was good for the prince, the kingdom and his subjects. A shocked prince asked him to explain the logic behind the statement. His friend said – “It will teach you better governance and take you closer to the people, their conditions and difficulties. It will teach your ministers and administrators to follow your example and your subjects will learn that adversity is an uncompromising teacher. They will learn about the worth and value of things, mainly the importance of living frugally and within their means.”

The fable continues further thus: When the ruler of a neighbouring kingdom was planning an assault causing the prince to worry, his friend, counsellor and aide told him once again that it was a good thing for the prince and his subjects. He told an irate prince that it would teach him and his army not to be complacent in matters of security and would also teach the people at large to be prepared for any eventuality.

Once, when the prince went on a hunting expedition, he accidentally cut his thumb. His friend, as always, observed that whatever happened was for the better and would prove to be good for the monarch, his kingdom and his subjects. The prince was furious and threw his friend into an abandoned well. Even as he did so, the man kept shouting that whatever was happening was in the best interests of everyone. This seemed to only infuriate the prince further. While the prince was returning a brigand encircled him and took him away. They decided to sacrifice him to propitiate the Gods. But when they noticed that he bore an injury they had to let him off, as he was deemed unfit for the sacrificial rite. With a sigh of relief, even as the prince resumed his journey, his curious mind wanted to know the fate of his friend.

To his surprise, he found him just as he had been left in the well, merrily singing the refrain that whatever had happened was for the better. When asked how this was so, he responded by saying that had he not been thrown into the well the brigand would have sacrificed him instead as he was fit to be sacrificed without a wound. His credo had never let him down. The prince was wonderstruck by the man's optimism and decided to reward him.

Let us see how “whatever happens is always for the better” philosophy brought tranquillity to Shinde's life.

*The wisest person is not the one who has the largest intellectual friends but the one who earns knowledge from them and enriches his wisdom.*

– Anonymous

*Character is so largely affected by association, that we cannot afford to be indifferent as to who or what our friends are.*

– Will Rogers (1879-1935)

*Cherokee-American cowboy, comedian, humorist,  
social commentator, vaudeville performer and actor*

*Show me the person you honour, for I know better by that the kind of person you are. For you show me what your idea of humanity is.*

– Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881)

*British historian and essayist*

## CHAPTER 10

### **Association is the Passport to Grow**

Looking back, Shinde recalls that those were the times of innocence, interesting as they indeed were. He had a busy schedule and was an earnest, duty-minded police officer. It was not always easy, but then early in life, he had learnt the lesson that nothing that was of consequence came easily. The police department was, in many ways, as bureaucratic in its ways, as rigid in its thinking and as fossilised in its style of functioning as it had probably been in Robert Clive's time. He took, however, everything that came his way with a smiling face and an easy manner.

Shinde was assigned what was known as the 'political beat', as a sub-inspector of police in the Crime Investigation Department (CID). His job entailed gathering information about politicians of all shades and hues – those in the ruling as well as the opposition parties. He then had to prepare reports for the consumption of higher officials. It was a long, arduous process. He had to have extraordinary patience, a good deal of stamina and the ability to work at a fast clip. Fortunately, he always rose to the occasion. At times, he had to handle subjects related to foreign affairs – related to Latin American and Asian countries – but these instances were few and far between, when a colleague went on leave, for example.

It was a tedious job and as in the case of most government offices, he discovered that there were two categories of employees – those who worked and those who didn't. It was not as though he was entirely new to this – his stint in the Solapur Court had given him enough experience of the ways of officialdom and bureaucracy to last a lifetime. Shinde found himself saddled with work day after day, but he took it in his

stride. There is a befitting and interesting anecdote to share with the readers. When this biography was in progress during Mr. Shinde's governorship, I had to attend an urgent incoming call, though I kept my cell phone in silent mode. This was the time Mr. Shinde too received a call. Both of us were talking over the phone. Later, seeing my disturbed facial expression, Mr. Shinde asked "Did anything go wrong?"

I said, "Shindeji, one of my police friends, R.P. Singh, IPS, is seeking for some help to let out his house on rent".

"Do so, what is the problem? Do you want me to tell some one?"

"No, Sir, I am a journalist. How do I find a suitable customer? It's not my cup of tea and at the same time I don't want to say 'no' to him... I am in a fix".

"Subas, the problem lies here. Don't undertake responsibility if you don't want to and once you take responsibility, go ahead in full steam. You will find some reward. Give an ad and find a way".

Accordingly, I inserted an advertisement in Deccan Chronicle (I learnt how to write an advertisement content), responded to a couple of calls (I learnt how to present and close a deal), entered a brief lease agreement (I learnt how to write) and ultimately ended with one Bas De Blok, a Netherlands business man who asked me to join him for dinner. While dining, he requested me to support him with an auditor and I obliged. (My friend Badrinath, Chartered Accountant, was happy to get another customer). Finally the businessman offered me a manager's post to look after his Hyderabad branch, but I politely requested him to extend this offer to my close friend, Chandrasekhran, who was unemployed at that time and he agreed. At the end of the dinner, Bas De Blok tried to give me an envelope containing 500 U.S Dollars and I didn't

accept the money even though he pressurised me.

He then left India only to invite me to his country. I was his guest for nearly a month touring the whole of Europe. The moral of the event is:

More responsibility '! more work '! more reward

Less responsibility '! less work '! less reward

No responsibility '! no work '! no reward

It is worth mentioning how Shinde took things as they came his way without any prejudice. When he was posted as sub-inspector CID, which is normally treated as a loop line posting, many suggested to him to try for the main stream posting such as law and order. Such a posting would have made him work as sub-inspector in some police station. Having graduated from the school of “whatever happens is for the good”, Shinde did not give much importance to such trivia. It is important to understand that his faith befittingly rewarded him when he continued his job in the CID, where he was to meet politicians very often which ultimately resulted in his coming close to Sharad Pawar, finally bringing Shinde into politics. Had Shinde listened to his friends possibly this writer would not have written this biography.

Shinde never shirked responsibility. If anything, he was someone who always accepted whatever came his way, with the belief that it was in his own best interest he was guided by this overriding impulse, which came naturally to him. As it happened, his “plate was always full”, as they say and he ended up carrying out dual or multiple responsibilities, right from the very beginning. At Sonubai's house, as a boy-peon, clerk, sub-Inspector of police, lawyer, legislator, minister, chief minister, governor and union minister, he simply did not say 'no' to additional work that came his way and was always





'rewarded' with more work, as a result. Therein, however, lies the secret of his success, as well. He was always trusted and considered safe to be entrusted with difficult tasks – eventually this proved to be the ladder that helped him reach greater heights. Had he been someone who shirked work and responsibility, or someone who was evasive, the course of his life would indeed have been different, but carrying out dual, triple and even multiple tasks had always been an integral part of his life and career. This ability to multi-task underpins his success at each stage, if we look at it closely.

Attitude, it is believed, holds the key to one's success and Shinde being someone who liked to take challenges head-on and never shied away from responsibility, possessed the right attitude from his early life. The nature of his work was such that he had to spend long hours 'reporting' various political events and on certain occasions, had to be on call, even on festivals and public holidays.

There was the odd play, the occasional movie and the quality time that he got to spend with his bride, Ujwala that

made up for the day to day drudgery that passed for his work. These were the moments he looked forward to, and helped him get over a weary day. Ujwala looked forward to such occasions too although she knew that Shinde had an exacting work schedule.

Shinde's work centred mainly on politicians and he was fascinated with the power that they wielded – their simplest wish turned into a command. Such was their position in the general scheme of things in Indian society. He was troubled by the fact that many of them misused the power that the law had invested them with, but there was simply no denying that the politician more so someone in power, had tremendous authority. The ease with which politicians got simple day-to-day things, which the bureaucracy had needlessly turned into a complicated process, fascinated him. These were simple, commonplace jobs like getting ration cards, *patta* passbooks or ownership documents and taxi licences for the common citizenry issues. There were many other small, but important jobs that were done through political intervention. This was something that appealed to Shinde. He realised that it was



*With mentor Y.B. Chavan*



possible for a politician to bypass convoluted bureaucratic procedures and help the common man.

Shinde began to see politics and politicians in a new light. Of course, there were many black sheep among the common class of politicians in the country, be it Maharashtra or elsewhere, but politics was also a medium through which the poor could be served – it provided a window of opportunity to someone who wished to serve the common masses with sincerity of purpose and earnestness of desire. The intention mattered – as he could see between those who made a difference to society and those who milked it. There were politicians of all hues, aspirations, intentions and motivations – there was no denying that.

Prominent among the politicians of the time he admired, was Yaswantrao Balwantrao Chavan – the stalwart of Maharashtra and national politics of the period. He was a statesmanlike figure, who commanded the respect of national politicians and leaders of the stature of Indira Gandhi. Chavan was once addressing a large gathering at a public meeting in



Mumbai in 1970, and Shinde happened to be 'covering' the event. Shinde was spellbound by Chavan's eloquence, as was the entire audience. Shinde learnt later that, like him, Chavan too came of very humble beginnings – his father had been a peon. That he could rise to such dizzy heights of leadership and power proved that he had sterling qualities, worthy of emulation. He became something of a role-model for Shinde.

Chavan's references to literary works, from which he quoted liberally, taught Shinde yet another valuable lesson - he badly needed to widen his range of reading in order to enrich his own understanding. Shinde began in right earnest, to read more books and journals and increase his understanding of current affairs. An added factor for Shinde's admiration and liking for the stalwart, Y. B. Chavan, was the leader's sense of commitment to a cause he espoused. That Shinde's 'reportage' of events he 'covered' was accurate and beneficial to his superior officers was borne out by the fact that they appreciated his work. His reports (of events) gained great credibility and as it indeed does happen with hard-working individuals, he was rewarded with more work. Shinde's efforts seemed to be paying off, in professional terms. But he simply had no respite from assignment after assignment and was usually drained of all energy at the end of the day. Fortunately for him, Ujwala proved to be an understanding spouse – she rarely complained about the demands his work made on his time. Shinde felt indebted to her for this. At the

end of a long day, the last thing he would have wanted was a spat between them and luckily for him, such a situation never arose. If Ujwala nagged him at all, it would be about his decision to skip a meal owing to the pressure of work.

His immediate boss was to become one of the country's high-profile cops and a household name, in the years to come – Julius Ribeiro. He had also served as the Superintendent of Police at Solapur and knew how Shinde had worked his way up from Dhor Galli in Solapur to the Police Headquarters in Bombay. He had also attended some of the plays that Shinde had acted in at Solapur. Shinde was proud to work with Ribeiro for whom he had great personal regard.

Ribeiro was pleased with Shinde's work and always gave him a generous pat on the back. After Shinde earned his law degree specialising in labour laws and politics, he sought from Ribeiro, a shift from foreign affairs to trade union and politics. Without a second thought, Ribeiro directed fellow-officers, Venkatachalam, to relieve him from foreign affairs and Suryakanth Jogi of Special Branch to assign Shinde, the beat he desired. Ribeiro was a policeman's policeman – meticulous, unsparing, honest, inquisitive, analytical and courageous. He stood up for his fellow officers and led by example.

Those were turbulent times – Chandrasekhar, Krishna Kant and Mohan Dharia, among others, were seen as the Young Turks of the Congress and were gaining national prominence. Shinde usually 'covered' their visits, meetings and activities. He came into contact with V. N. Gadgil, who was the Vice-Chancellor from his law college and the two of them hit it off very well. It was Shriram Lele, a resident of Dadar, a businessman and member of Sharad Pawar's inner circle, who introduced Shinde to the prominent leaders of Maharashtra, like Sharad Pawar. Gadgil liked the earnest young Shinde, who had a keen mind, full of ideas and

aspirations. In truth, both Gadgil and Pawar grew fond of him. There was something genuine and unassuming in this young police inspector from the Special Branch, they felt. As for Shinde, it was almost as though he was being initiated into politics. When they talked – even in their private conversations – they seemed so well informed, not only when it came to the twists and turns of national politics, but international affairs, as well. Sushil developed a tremendous admiration for them and earned their trust and confidence.

One day, which began as any other day, Shinde got a message from Gadgil and Pawar to meet them. There was nothing unusual about this, because such messages were often sent to him. But his sixth sense told him that this was not going to be one of those regular, run-of-the-mill meetings. He recalled how Sharad Pawar had, in the past, complimented him on his dynamism and how, very often, he commented that Shinde would be better off in politics, implying that he was cut out for a role in politics. It was with this mixture of uneasiness, anxiety and expectation that he went to the office of the Congress party. His initiation into politics was simple and direct. Both the leaders, Gadgil and Pawar, told him that they wanted younger people like him to take up politics as their vocation. Without much ado, they asked him to join the Congress party. He had a bright future ahead, they said. “We are quite aware of your background, abilities and dynamism”, both of them told him in unison. It was something of a big surprise to the young police officer. Shinde certainly had not expected an offer like this from the senior politicians. While he had expected this to be something more than a usual briefing, it was way beyond what he had imagined it would be. This meeting turned out to be something else, and as the years to come were to prove, an event of great significance – one that was to have a bearing on his own life and an impact on Maharashtra and national politics, as well.



Shinde, at that time, was unsure of how to respond to this, and replied that he hadn't really thought of taking a plunge into politics. He would think about it. They did not try persuading him and the matter rested there. They knew that Shinde had a mature mind and that he would make the right choice. On his part, he was pleasantly surprised. He saw it as a welcome development. Life seemed to open a new avenue for Shinde. He was being pitchforked into a new role and there was uncertainty writ large on the tidings that the next day would bring. He had to make a big leap and the question was – was he ready for it? In his heart, he knew he was. He was someone who trusted his instincts. There were times when he was tormented by self-doubt and a sense of uncertainty.

One winter morning in 1971, Shinde woke up earlier than usual and went to the beach at Juhu to be all by himself. He doodled on the sands of the beach, while thinking about the quirks of fate that brought about new twists and turns in his life. He was in a quandary. He was suddenly being drawn in a new direction by some mysterious force. The secure, sedate life that he had been leading as a police officer would now get thrown out of gear. Uncertainty and unpredictability might take over his life, he feared. On the other hand, he could opt for

what one might call a status quo, a quiet continuance of the existing mode of life, but he found himself getting increasingly attracted to politics. "Should he opt for the switch, or should he refrain from taking any risk?", was the question that dogged his mind.

Sushil spotted a childhood friend from Solapur, among the morning walkers on the beach. He was thankful to providence for this, because this was someone in whose judgment he had implicit trust. Shinde hailed him and they met with the warmth with which long-lost friends meet and greet each other. After exchanging notes and catching up on each other's lives, Shinde told him about the dilemma he was in – how he was torn between getting on with his current job and the lure of public life in the context of the rare opportunity that now presented itself. His friend asked him a simple question: "Where does your heart lie? What does it say?"

Shinde replied – "If I have to follow my heart, I would opt for public life."

"Are you clear about 'why and for what' you wish to join politics?"

For a while Shinde paused. "Clarity" was the most important and powerful mantra in life, he believed. He had crystal clear clarity and after asking himself 'why and for what', he said: "I am clear about my agenda, if I were to join politics."

His friend responded: "You have answered your question. You need to clear your doubts and misgivings and act on your impulses before it's too late." Shinde felt a fresh wave of positive energy coursing through his veins. He was glad he had met his friend: it was as if suddenly the mist had cleared and he could see his life in better light. He heard his own inner voice in the form of the counsel of his trusted friend. They went





to a restaurant nearby and had a hearty breakfast. Shinde told him at length about his contact with politicians, Pawar and Gadgil, in particular and the extent to which they reposed their trust in him. Shinde's friend added that such good fortune was rare and reiterated his own view and Shinde's notion that he should commit himself to a life in politics.

All his life, he had been led by a series of positive events, and this appeared to be one more. As in the past, he had no explanation – he thought that it had been his good fortune to be assigned the political beat, where he came into contact with these veteran politicians. Otherwise, he would have been a nondescript, run-of-the-mill police officer, with a routine, monotonous schedule.

As luck would have it, both the leaders had other plans for Shinde. Pawar wanted to build a team of his own loyalists – he was fast emerging as the strongman of Marathwada and to retain that position, he needed a committed band of followers whom he could trust. He wanted to grow into an unchallenged leader of Maharashtra and the possibility seemed imminent.

He needed to have people he could trust in his team. Shinde was one such young man he spotted. Pawar developed a liking for the fair, young policeman, who came across as a trustworthy individual. Besides, Shinde was a Dalit, which was also of great significance, considering the increasing clout of the Republican Party of India (RPI) among the Dalits of Maharashtra. But Shinde was made of different material. He did not believe in gaining any special political mileage out of his Dalit status. To him, the fact that he was born in a simple, poor Dalit family was an existential truth – there was nothing more to it. Politically, he had always been drawn to the Congress party's ideology. It was a party with a hoary history and a rich political legacy. It was a party that breathed history and he grew up in an atmosphere soaking up the spirit of sacrifice and idealism that the Congress represented. The RPI had no appeal for him in spite of the fact that its leaders made clear overtures to him and promised him a bright future. At that time, the RPI was beginning to gain ground among the Dalit communities of the state and was busy projecting itself as the sole inheritor of Babasaheb Ambedkar's legacy. It was very easy for Shinde to succumb to the temptation of joining RPI. After all, he was a Dalit and the RPI claimed to represent Dalits. Pawar reckoned and quite rightly thought that Shinde and others would provide a sort of counterweight to the growing influence and popularity of the RPI among the Dalit masses.

Pawar became something of a mentor for Shinde. He not only initiated him into politics, but spent a lot of time with Shinde, teaching him the intricacies of political equations. Shinde, on his part, was not only an eager learner, but backed the right political horse, intuitively, as he discovered by hindsight. He knew, as did Pawar, that a candidate from the minority community among Dalits, the 'Dhor' community, did not stand much of a chance without the patronage and support



of a political strongman like Pawar. Secondly, Shinde knew that were he to turn to the RPI for instance, he would be marginalised and confined to the sidelines, because the RPI was a hotbed of internecine caste rivalry among the Dalits, and a candidate from the 'Dhor' community (to which Shinde belonged) would simply be blown away, outnumbered as he would be by the others, notably the Mahar community. The underlying message from the RPI was clear – Shinde belonged to a minority community within the Dalits. The RPI wanted to see him defeated because that would show him (and by logical extension, the Congress party), 'his place'. The RPI was out to prove that it represented the Dalit majority and Shinde's defeat would underscore that point.

Pawar lobbied hard for a ticket for Shinde at a time when it was well-nigh impossible for heavyweights to get a Congress ticket. For Shinde, it was something else, in terms of experience. Intuition told him that he was heading in the right direction as it did when he switched over to politics from history in his B.A. course, a decision that proved to be of immense help to him in his career. Shinde once again saw that

destiny seemed to map out a course very different from the one that he had visualised for himself. To him Sharad Pawar was something of a teacher and he was a ready learner. Pawar taught him the tricks of the trade or to put it more aptly, he learnt the ropes from Pawar.

It was one of the most exciting times of Shinde's eventful life. He had his moments of unease and nervousness, though – for instance, when Pawar once asked him to second a resolution, Shinde was dumbstruck. Politics, the power word, did not spare even Shinde, the seasoned stage actor, who had never known stage-fright in his life could barely muster enough courage to walk up to the mike. Here he was, a nondescript politician in the making, sitting in the presence of national leaders like Chandrasekhar, Mohan Dharia and others and he just about managed to go to the mike and mumble – "I second the resolution". He couldn't even think straight to say a word or two about the resolution, as was the norm. All he could hear was the sound of laughter ringing in his ears, as he rushed back to his place on the dais.

These developments clearly reflect Shinde's capacity for affirmative decision-making and his positive thinking. This impulse to act decisively and seize an opportunity when it presented itself has always been one of his singular characteristics which helped him grow in stature at each stage of his career. It serves importantly as a lesson for all those seeking success.