

D. Purandeswari

Minister of State for Human Resource Development

'Hinduism to me is a way of life'

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D. Purandeswari, Minister of State for Human Resource Development, MP from Andhra Pradesh, daughter of TDP founder N. T. Rama Rao.

What does spirituality mean to you?

In a narrower connotation, it would be about religion, but in a larger context, it is about compassion, responding to others' needs. It is about service to mankind. And dedication to what I do gives me tremendous satisfaction.

Religion plays an important role for me. Hinduism is in fact a way of life. Going back to the old scriptures, they say "let noble thoughts permeate me from all directions" and I firmly believe in that. It means being open to whatever best others can give me and do my best for whoever is willing to receive it.

The scriptures also say: "to a narrow minded person, it is always yours and mine but to a large-hearted person, the whole world is but one family". This saying is embedded on the Parliament's central dome and it clearly tells us what India stood for, all these years.

Do you believe you are guided and protected by a superior force?

I must say that fate has its own uncanny ways. This belief was firmed up in me after some significant events in my life. For instance, I never thought I would ever be in politics. Even one day before my name was announced as the Congress candidate, I was not aware I would be running. My father, N.T. Rao, and my husband had been in politics, but the need or aspiration to enter them had never even occurred to me. Circumstances had me do so, and as no one knew me, I was elected as "the daughter of N.T.R.". Once I entered the highest house of democracy, I never thought I would be inducted in the council of ministers. And one day, I was in Chennai attending a conference when I received a phone call prompting me to immediately come to Delhi. When I reached, I was told I would be sworn in. All this to me, proves the existence of a guiding force.

Do those twists of fate mean there is a special purpose to your life?

I am not thinking in those terms. I do not want to think of tomorrow and what it will give me or what it has in store for me, but rather live each day as it comes, and do my best when asked to perform a certain task. I take one day at a time and that is the way I have always been.

As a child, I used to dream of becoming an archaeologist, or a journalist, both professions my quite traditional parents would not deem acceptable for a girl, as it meant traveling a lot, and maybe in the company of men...

Later on, after my father's demise, as I was profoundly distressed, a friend convinced me to take on gemmology studies in Mumbai, instead of further sinking into depression. I then realized how challenging it is for girls desiring to study this science far away from home (in a foreign environment such as Mumbai) and decided to establish a Gemmology Institute in Hyderabad itself.

On the topic of women, how do you manage to combine your life as a politician, a mother and a wife? Actually, without the support of my family, I could never make it. My husband helped a lot without ever patronizing or spoon-feeding me when I first entered politics. And to this day, he is my staunchest critic, which helps strengthening me. He also helps in the constituency when I am away, keeping me abreast of things.

My children were a concern when I entered politics, as I had never been away from them during their childhood. I had to sit with them and explain what was happening, to which they reacted in the most supportive way, which gave me the necessary peace of mind to proceed. Otherwise, had I had to constantly worry about them at home, I could have never done it.

Also, I have a mother-in-law, and I make a point to call her every other day, telling her what is happening around me, so she does not feel neglected but rather, part of the team. That is how I keep my team going and how I can combine all those roles.

With such a busy life, how do you keep your centre and energy?

Every day I wake up very early in the morning and do one hour of puja, or rather, of meditation. It gives me the focus, strength, concentration and clarity I need for the day. It is not about praying to a particular god, but rather connecting to that unseen force I was talking about. It goes back to my childhood, when one day I went to my father and told him I was utterly confused: I would hear him talk about Lord Balaji, Siva, Vishnu, Krishna and so on. There were so many gods! He told me I did not

have to pray to any one of them in particular. He said that if there was a black spot on the wall and I believed it was God, then it would be God to me. So it is about my own conviction. And I connect to the idea of a larger unseen force.

Has some particular experience shaped that conviction?

I have had a number of uncanny experiences or intuitions, which showed me there is such a thing. For instance, one day as I was doing my puja, I suddenly felt the presence of my mother, just next to me. She had never come in the five or six years since her demise. And she was weeping. I was wondering why she had come, and why she was so sad. Immediately after, my father announced his second marriage. Such an uncanny experience definitely reinforced my belief in such an unseen guiding force.

What have been your main inspirations?

Of course my parents, and the values we saw in them. Having such a father means two things: I know fairly well I may never reach the pinnacles he reached, but at least I can aspire to it, and I derive commitment and dedication from him. I can see how some of his ideas are completely relevant today – look at how the two rupees kilo rice program or the farmers' power concessions programs are being implemented by the current government in Andhra. But on the other hand, people's expectations are extremely high, which is a tremendous pressure, and a very difficult one to bear. Those expectations can wear you down. So I keep telling people that he was who he was, and that I am who I am, that we should not be compared.

Besides, voters are now much more mature, more aware, we cannot hogwash them anymore and it calls for constant true work.

If you were to be reincarnated, what would you like to be reincarnated as?

I do not repent about anything I consciously did, and very much believe in myself. So I would want to come back as myself, born to the same parents!

If there was one question you could ask god, what would it be?

What are Your uncanny ways?

What is your idea of happiness?

Doing my work to my fullest capacity and commitment. When my voters thank me it gives me immense pleasure because this is the belief with which they have voted for me and here I am, able to deliver something to them.