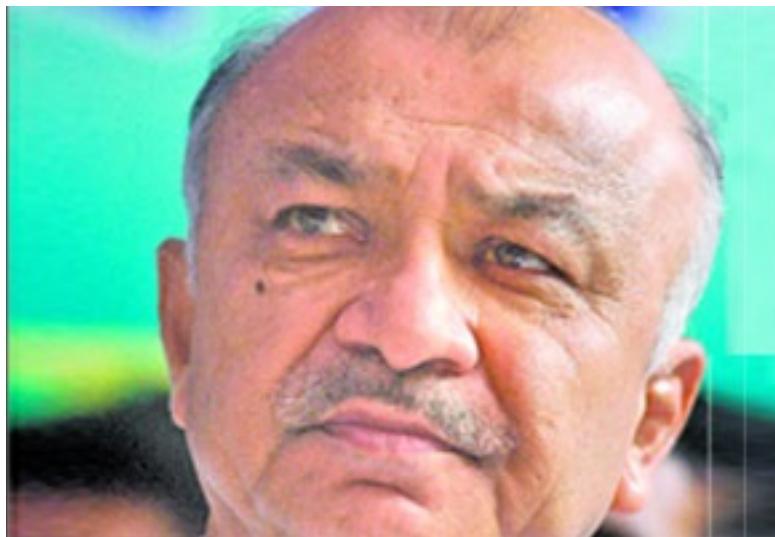


Sushilkumar Shinde

Union Minister for Power

'Spirituality should permeate every moment of the day'

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Sushilkumar Shinde is the Union minister for power.

What does spirituality mean to you?

Once upon a time, spirituality used to be equated with religion. Then, especially after the Industrial Revolution, a new thinking emerged about what belief should be and many thinkers pointed out that spirituality is not attached to a particular religion or sect. And I agree with it. If this tape recorder gives information and knowledge you might just as well call it God. The definition of spirituality is much wider.

So I do not think spirituality should be restricted to chanting, praying, attending a discourse or a temple, doing some ritual and then proceeding with the day. It should permeate every moment of the day.

How does it manifest for you?

In my work especially. In the spirit of what I try to do for others. In the fact that every morning when I go for a walk, I think for a while of what I should do for others, for a good cause.

Was your upbringing religious?

I grew up alone with my mother, there was no father. And we used to go to temples and religious places. When I went to college and studied political science my mind changed. I still attend pujas at times, but for instance I never ever took oath in the name of God. I always do solemn of admission.

Why?

Because we should not bring God in this day to day work. If you believe in God it is something you should keep private.

So, neither did I leave religion fully nor do I totally embrace it. What is in between ? Whatever good you can do and heal the injuries of the sufferer. That is spirituality for me.

So then why rituals or pujas at all?

Pujas morally give some strength. I will not refuse them if I happen to attend one.

What is God?

Nobody knows. But there is some power.

Is it external to us?

Sometimes you can achieve it inside. Supposedly by worshipping. What is worship? My own experience is that if you believe in your work as God then you succeed.

When you were a child did you have an idea of what you would want to do when growing up? Absolutely not. As a child I was in really bad company and had no ambition. But it increased over time, despite many challenges and many failures.

Basically, mine is a quite unusual story. I started as a boy peon when I was 15 at the Sessions Court in Solapur, Maharashtra. I was doing my schooling at a local night school. Then I was promoted as a Court Peon and later on as a Court Clerk. I developed over time a strong desire to become an advocate in the very court where I had started as a peon. So I resigned from the court after nine years of service and joined the Pune Law College. At the same time there was some advertisement for a State police Intelligence position. So I decided to join it and in parallel I completed my Law, passing the LLB in 1969.

In 1971 some unforeseen opportunity came when I was offered to join politics. I left my position in the Police in order to be a candidate from a reserved seat in Solapur. But at the last moment the candidature was changed by the Central Election Committee. So I lost both the job and the candidature. Instead, I ended up practicing in Mumbai. And in 1974 I again prepared myself to contest, but this time, I won. From one thing to another, I am where I am today.

Could you have ever dreamt you would sit in this chair one day?

Never. I never thought I would become Chief Minister of Maharashtra either.

What kind of an experience was that?

The whole country knows what I did during that time. And being CM of Maharashtra is like being in the number two position in the country.

Was it destiny, are things preordained?

Hard work has been there all along. And sincerity. But it cannot be enough to explain it. There must also be some other power, even though I don't need to call it God and I am not saying there is such a thing as God. But how can a peon become a Vice-Presidential candidate? There must be some power.

How do you maintain your energy in the face of challenges?

You have to be honest to your cause. That gives strength.

But sometimes you have to compromise, you have to be silent about things you would like to be vocal about etc.?

Yes, absolutely. It happens in politics. One has to do that.

How do you manage, what is your secret?

Compromise and flexibility are part of the solution. And sometimes you have to lie very low.

Someone said you need a thick skin to survive in politics?

That's not applicable to me because I am quite cerebral.

What if character assassination targets you?

I don't feel that bad about it. Let them talk. You can't shut people's mouths. At the end of the day people know what kind of work you actually do.

If you could ask God one question, what would it be?

You brought me to this place, I have achieved so much. I am content. I have nothing to ask.

You never revolt against God?

Even when I was poor and I was fighting I never revolted.

If there were such a thing as rebirth, what would you choose?

I do not believe in rebirth.

When I was Chief Minister, I passed a bill against blind beliefs. Because for instance some of them implied priests asking parents to bring their children to be sacrificed. But then I was transferred to Andhra as a governor, and the bill was not really implemented.

How do you explain all those blind beliefs?

Lack of education.

What is your idea of happiness?

Work. And service to the people.

What about balance with other dimensions of life?

Some power gives me the energy. I have been working 16 or 18 hours a day since I was 15 years old. I don't know how the energy comes.