

Aruna Sharma

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'Fate is in your wrist and not in your hand'

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Aruna Sharma is director-general of Doordarshan.

What does spirituality mean to you?

It has got nothing to do with religion. It is about goodness, about leading a good life, being a good person.

How does it manifest in your day-to-day life?

I don't discuss persons but their qualities. I mould myself, trying to keep myself away from gossip. And I believe that everybody has some good points.

I am a core administrator, that's basically what I am, and therefore the beauty lies in exploiting the positive points people have, instead of focusing on their issues. In the work culture, if you give someone a chance to use their good points, they will excel, and in the end it serves the organization well. It helps in reaching a win-win situation.

When situations are not black or white, how do you make decisions?

My sixth sense guides me and I have to say, it never goes wrong. If that warning comes and I do not listen to it, I invariably regret it later. My sixth sense is the correct analysis of the situation. And it has always stood by me. It is a logical thing, it is well informed, it is not only about intuition.

How did you figure out what you would do in life?

As a teenager you are too young to decide. I was quite confused at that stage. I wanted to be a doctor. But once admitted in medical college I realized I did not want to become a doctor. Basically I was a bit vague in life during graduation, not focused, enjoying my college life to the fullest. When I graduated I became a bit more serious and destiny kicked in, which led me to the IAS. I come from a family of engineers and doctors, there was no tradition of entering the services, nor a role model in my immediate surroundings. But we had a neighbor who used to observe me playing around. One day he called me and asked about my plans in life. He suggested I sit for the Indian civil service exams. He took me to some civil servants and senior bureaucrats and this convinced me to take that route, because I felt I could have a good impact in that kind of a job. That is when I decided to try that route and worked hard at it. That is what I call destiny, 100% destiny. Going that route was not in my thought process at all.

Is life 100% destiny?

No. I always say that fate is not in your hand but in your wrist. The strength you have in your wrist is what will decide your destiny, not the lines in your palm. There are some moments though which are instrumental in showing you the path — like that neighbor suggesting I join the services. But again, doing so once the suggestion was given was a question of hard work, not of chance or destiny.

So is there a guiding and protective force in your life?

Yes there always is but not in an esoteric way. The bad elements always have a networking because they survive and thrive on it. Yet the good elements with good thoughts also have a strong level of networking, which helps and guides them. And ultimately they are the winner. There may be hiccups, hindrances, problems on the way but on the longer run good always prevails.

You are an optimist!

Oh yes, I always am, I am a 100% optimist. If bad people seem to succeed more and faster, it is a temporary thing and if good people are hindered, it is a temporary hiccup.

Is there such a thing as God for you?

I believe there is a power, but it is more an internal one. You may be disturbed by all sorts of issues. Then for solace, you think of something like God. It is more like a self-analysis though, like talking to your subconscious. It is not an external force. It is very much an internal force, within everybody, that pushes you to fight it out, and that is the basis of your sixth sense.

You can deceive the entire world, but you can't ever deceive yourself. You know when you do something right or something wrong. You can fool the whole world but not yourself. And that is THE

force that guides you through life. If an individual can develop that force, it will guide him through life. And it also gives him peace. You are at peace with yourself.

How does one develop it?

First by believing in goodness. Then grow on it, get rewards as you get ahead in life and those rewards build it up, they make for a strong personality.

How do you connect to this inner power?

I do a bit of yoga and pranayama, I light a dia every morning and evening, and those few minutes make a difference, it instils a bit of discipline in me. Temples and other rituals though are definitely not my cup of tea. I am actually quite against them, I don't believe in them because when giving them too much importance, it is easy to get fully entangled and forget the essence.

Did some readings or encounters inspired you much?

I read everybody starting from Confucius, Kabir, the Bible and so on. But basically being a science student, I believe in a scientific approach and analysis of everything in life.

Is there such a thing as a specific purpose in life?

Nothing moves without a purpose. But to make use of it is left to each individual. "Life itself gives you only time and space, it is up to you to fill it". One may get an opportunity, but to use it is up to you.

Did you ever envision having an opportunity to become head of Doordarshan?

Of course, if you do not set objectives and have a vision, you do not work towards it and cannot get it. Nothing comes automatically. I was with the Human Rights Commission before and then this appointment came. Doordarshan is a public broadcaster, which means it has a responsibility to inform and broadcast the government's thinking, policy, execution, its impact. It is equally important to understand the Constitution and the law of the land. So my previous position definitely helps in this. When we make programs here or reflect the government's policy, the thinking process behind the policies is ultimately the good of the people of this country and that has to be reflected strongly in our programs.

Nobody else reaches that many people as Doordarshan, isn't that a huge opportunity and responsibility?

Our reach is indeed huge. We are the only ones with terrestrial reach. Our competition is only through satellites, and mostly for the entertainment part of it, and news. For all the public broadcasting, we are the only ones. But there is a scope of improvement for sure. With the opening of our economy, the public sector units tightened their belts and emerged much stronger. Similarly, we have to tighten our belt and have a robust system, standing up to competition and strengthening ourselves.

Private competition has changed your reality?

Absolutely. Private competition is an opportunity to introspect and improve without compromising on our distinct role and mandate. Our mandate is to give the correct information and convey the

government policy in the correct way, including the various schemes and programs devised for its execution. We have 17 centres and through them we can develop a feedback mechanism for all those policies. It is a wonderful vehicle to have such an arrangement.

Social issues and groups who need a constant assistance and exposure to take advantage of globalisation – government programs are there to enable them to do so. That is where the role of a public broadcaster in conveying the government's efforts is so crucial.

What about issues like domestic violence, female foeticide etc.?

I am thinking of a slot on Sundays for those issues, for instance children's rights, child labour laws, nutrition issues and so on. Similarly for women issues, or guaranteed employment, or food security issues. It is about exposing a web of issues, the government efforts to cater to them and their impact.

What if the government's programs are not efficient though, are criticisms allowed?

Of course. If gaps are there between intention and execution in some areas of the country, there are enough examples in other places where those gaps have been bridged. So we can show them as an inspiration for less efficient cases.

You are the first woman ever in this role, does that affect you in any way?

In my 26 years of service, I never felt a difference because of my being a woman. People look at me as an officer and an administrator. I never felt any discrimination. Much depends on how you conduct yourself, your body language and so on.

At times of difficult challenges, where is your anchor?

It has to be in your family and for me, it is my soul mate. I always say soul mate is the person you can be completely transparent with. I can be myself and do not need to hide anything with that person. It is difficult to find our soul mate, but it makes a huge difference. One has to be lucky to find that person. It is an effort towards it. And then it is reciprocal. You constantly have to work at it.

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

The way human beings have developed a society, full of inequalities – I do not blame God for that because He gave an equal nature to everyone. But the system we have developed is full of inequalities. So my question to God is why did You create a system that man could mess around so much?

God never distinguishes between rich and poor, healthy and unhealthy, man and woman. But men do. Every animal has a weapon while human beings don't, but they have a brain. Capabilities are something you acquire and develop. Environment moulds you. I strongly believe in equality at birth.

If you were to be reincarnated, what would you choose?

I would like not to come back and instead stay up there with God to help Him arrange His files a bit. It seems there is much mess and chaos in them. Some corrective measures are badly needed and

therefore there is an obvious need for some core administrator — so I can contribute! Basically, moving to the 21st century, the whole system needs to be redone.

Do you actually believe in rebirth?

I believe in science before anything else, so I am not sure I believe in it, because I do not see the logic in it.

What are your plans for this place?

There are some amazing people here, but some recomposition may be required to adapt to the new requirements, some loose ends require a new look and reframing. Also Doordarshan has to develop a character of its own. Besides, as it is a vehicle to spread information, we need channel drivers so that people come to the channel and then we can deliver our message. As people have a choice, with competition, our message won't reach anyone if people don't come! Some repackaging may be needed. The Commonwealth games are a huge challenge too.

Beyond DD, are there dreams you may want to explore in life?

Being an administrator, I like to talk about how we can converge various departmental schemes for a very strong impact and qualitative outcome. That is something I want to pursue, always. It is a mechanism through which the same amount of money could lead to much more results. You have to realize that every district of India receives 1,200 crores of Rupees, minus the salary component. That is a huge amount! Imagine a company had such a budget. But unfortunately it is spread over such a large number of schemes, that in the end, the essence is lost. The administration gets focused on processes instead of achieving objectives. That is my work and focus. When I analyzed all successful administrators this is what I saw: they converged all programs to focus on delivery efficiency. Everybody has a passion in life and that is my passion: what is meant for the people should reach them. I have no interest beyond that.

What is your idea of happiness?

If you are truthful with yourself. Because then you can be at peace with yourself. If you are not at peace with yourself, no matter what you achieve, you can't be happy.