

Shotgun shoots from lip: Like Mamata, but not joining TMC

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Kolkata: His fluent Bengali had convinced Mrinal Sen during the FTII days that Shatrughan Sinha was a Bengali. Today, the Bollywood star and Patna Sahib MP can still speak the language effortlessly and he still loves his murighonto and doi maach.

In town for the launch of his biography 'Anything But Khamosh', by Bharthi S Pradhan, at the Apeejay Kolkata Literary Festival, held in association with The Times of India, Sinha spoke to TOI about Modi, Mamata, Mrinal Sen and all those in between. Excerpts:

Mrinal Sen had selected you for FTII...

Yes. He was very fond of me. I am sure he must be fond of me now too. I don't know how he feels after I joined BJP (laughs). Two years after passing out of FTII, someone must have told him about my Patna connections. So, he asked me: '*Ki re, tui Bangali*

Subhojyoti Kanjilal



SPEAKING FREE: Shatrughan Sinha

noshh?' I said, 'I love Bengal but I am a Bihari'. Hearing that, he was in shock.

While in Bengal, what are your observations about Mamata Banerjee?

I won't speak much about her since the elections are round the corner, but I hold her in very highest esteem. She is very popular and capable. She is a real simple, down-to-earth person who has an impeccable image. Till date, there have been no allegations of corruption being made against Mamata Banerjee as an individual.

These are my personal opinions. But I know if I cross the line, there will be other talks. I have many friends in other parties. I am a great admirer of Kanshiramji. Mawayati was a great support to me during some elections. She is very affectionate. I am equally very fond of Sitaram Yechuri and Mohammad Salim. Many may find it contradictory. But fact is, both Sitaram Yechuri and I are very fond of each other. When I was sick in the hospital, he was most worried. He was calling up the most

to find out how I was doing.

Politician having friends from other parties was very common earlier...

But see what happened when I went to meet Nitish Kumar in Bihar! He is a friend. He calls me the pride of Bihar. Even my meeting with Laloo Prasad Yadav became an issue. I met Arvind Kejriwal for some work. People made it seem like it is some crime.

I am very fond of them and I will be this way. Earlier, questions weren't raised. Even Prime Minister Narendra Modi met up with Digvijay Singh. Questions weren't raised then. I think he attended an event of either Mulayam Singh or Laloo Prasad Yadav. Why doesn't anyone ask him if he is joining Mulayam's or Laloo's party?

Do you feel you are being singled out?

The personal friends in politics belong to the same society. Mamata Banerjee is not my enemy. I am fond of her. So, is she. But that doesn't mean she is joining my party or I am joining her's.

Do you feel artistes should be left out of the political debate?

Yes. War is no solution. Aaj nahi toh kaal milna toh hai. War is a problem. Dushmani jam ke karo par itni gunjaiyish rahe, jab kabhi hum dost ban jaye toh sharminda na ho. You can always fight now but don't overshoot the runway because once it's time to be friends, you shouldn't feel ashamed.

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