

## *Excerpts from 'RSS: A Vision in Action' by HV Seshadri published by Sahitya Sindhu Prakashan-*

### **RSS: The Fountainhead of National Renaissance**

The history of the birth and growth of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is, in many respects, unique.

Founded in 1925 by Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar with a handful of young men, the Sangh has now spread to nearly 30,000 places - called 'Shakhas' encompassing a total of 50,000 actual working centres meeting daily or at frequent intervals, leaving no part of the country untouched. Also, no section or strata in the society - students, teachers, farmers, workers, traders, artisans, employees, industrialists, intellectuals or other professionals - has been left out of its fold.

Several factors have contributed to the fast-growing popularity of the Sangh. From time to time, the Swayamsevak have launched *jana-jagarana*- public awakening-campaigns on issues of vital national concern. They have also responded to the nation's call in all crucial moments of natural or man-made exigencies. Because of their dynamic role in various fields of national life they have built up powerful movements which have had remarkable impact on millions of our countrymen.

The perception of the nation's ills and the remedies thereof that forms the backdrop of the founding of the Sangh also has some distinctive features.

Dr. Hedgewar was a born patriot, and a fiery one at that. Even as a boy of tender age, sparks of protest against the foreign British rule flew from him. He braved rustication from the school, shadowing by the government informers and hardships to his uncle. He set out to Calcutta more to delve into the intricacies of the revolutionary movement than to study medicine. Back home as a doctor, he turned his back on personal and family happiness and plunged into the mass movements for Swaraj led by Congress at the time. Twice he courted imprisonment completing hard terms in prison.

Dr. Hedgewar's speeches were marked for their fiery character. Listening to the Doctor's defiant statement in the court in 'defence' of one of his public speeches for which he was hauled up for 'sedition', the judge remarked, 'Your defence is more seditious than your speech' and awarded him one year's rigorous imprisonment. That was in 1921. The 1930 movement again saw him courting imprisonment by offering Satyagraha - this time with some of his colleagues in the Sangh also joining him.

The desire to see the country free 'in his own lifetime and with his own eyes' remained a flaming passion with him till his very end in 1940. Those were the days of the Second World War when the British were caught in a life-and-death struggle. Dr. Hedgewar had sensed beforehand the gathering war -clouds and felt that the enslaver's difficulty could prove an opportunity to the enslaved to shake off the shackles of slavery. He urged all the Sangh workers to speed up the work and he himself toiled day and night to build a

mighty force in the shortest possible time. Even during sleep, he would sometimes pour out his anguish – “Time is fast running out and yet we have not reached the goal.”

Such was the intensity of his longing for freedom.

However, with all this flaming love of freedom, he was not carried away by the then prevalent slogans a short-cut to freedom. Those were the days when slogans like 'Hindu-Muslim bhai bhai', 'No Swaraj without Hindu-Muslim Unity', etc., were thick in the air. The chief concern of the Congress had become wooing the Muslims to its side, which in turn led it on the slippery path of appeasement. It was understandable that strategy demanded avoiding of a situation in which one would have to face both the opponents - the British and the Muslims - at the same time. As such, trying to wean the Muslims away from the British and drawing them to the nationalist camp was perfectly in order. Dr. Hedgewar himself maintained close and cordial relations with the Muslims participating in the nationalist movement.

However, Dr. Hedgewar was equally emphatic that winning over the Muslims should not end in compromising the spirit of nationalism. Undue pampering of the Muslims, he used to warn, would only further whet their communal and divisive mentality.

He was also convinced that ultimately the Muslims could be made to give up their aggressive and anti-national postures only when the Hindus became organised and powerful enough to make them realise that their interests were best served in joining the Hindus in the national mainstream. Strategies like dividing the enemy-camp have, doubtless, their own place during war, but in the final analysis, that which counts is solid nationalist strength. In the Indian context, therefore, the task of strengthening the Hindu people who formed the mainstay of the national edifice was to have received foremost priority - both for fighting the British and for bringing round the Muslims into the nationalist current.

It was here, however, that the Congress erred grievously. The strategy of winning Muslims to its side became the pivotal issue, the precondition for winning Swaraj, which in turn took a heavy toll of the nation's morale. The bitter fruits thereof appeared soon enough. While on the one hand the Muslim separatism was continuously fed, on the other hand the nationalist backbone was severely weakened. Foreseeing this, Dr. Hedgewar had decided to concentrate exclusively on the building up of the organised national strength of the Hindu people for achieving freedom.

It was this far-sighted blend of keeping the flame of freedom struggle burning even while strengthening the nation's backbone that marked the unique feature of the evolution of the Sangh-right from the time of its inception up to the quitting of the British.

In those times, there was a clear affirmation in the oath taken by the Swayamsevak that they were pledging themselves to the achievement of the freedom of Hindu Rashtra. When the Congress declared *Poorna Swaraj* as its goal at its Lahore Session in 1930, Dr. Hedgewar had instructed all the Shakhas to send messages of congratulation to the Congress for adopting that resolution. The circular stated *inter alia* that the *Poorna Swaraj* had been the goal of Sangh from its very beginning and as such it was natural that the Swayamsevaks should feel happy over the Congress resolution.

When Dr. Hedgewar plunged into the Satyagraha in 1930, he transferred the Sarsanghchalakship to another senior co-worker and declared that he and all the other

Swayamsevak-Satyagrahis were joining the movement in their individual capacity. On the eve of his departure for Satyagraha he did not forget to remind the Swayamsevak working outside to carry on the organisational work more vigorously than ever before. He cautioned that jail-going was not an end in itself, nor was it a badge of patriotism. Expanding and strengthening the sinews of Hindu consolidation, he said, was a much more essential task.

There was yet another basic feature of Dr. Hedgewar's approach to the freedom struggle. His thoughts went much further than the immediate object of achieving freedom. He had delved deep into past history and knew that those who refused to learn from their past blunders were condemned to repeat them. Our past history tells us that there was a time when our country was free and prosperous and had attained commanding heights in every walk of life. And yet, it found itself defeated and disgraced at the hands of a handful of foreign invaders. The lesson was clear as daylight. Several grave defects had crept into our national being and corroded our internal strength, making our country an easy prey to the foreign aggressors.

The most serious of such shortcomings was the absence of an intense unified national consciousness among our people. When, for example, the foreigners invaded any part of the country, the rest remained totally unconcerned. They had forgotten the first elements of a free national life: that freedom is indivisible, that its destruction in any one part endangers the freedom of the nation as a whole. Dr. Hedgewar used to say that if the same defect was to remain, the nation's freedom would be in jeopardy even after attaining freedom from the British yoke.

The technique of Sangh- called the Shakha - that Dr.Hedgewar evolved, therefore, was designed so as to remove this serious drawback and create an intense all-Bharat national consciousness. Common commands in Samskrit, common Samskrit prayer to Bharat Mata - the mother of all the children of this land-songs, stories and sayings of the great, talks and discussions on problems affecting the nation, emphasis on the venerated points of our national faith and values of life, the daily chanting of the *Ekatmata Stotra* and *Ekatmata Mantra* which highlight the unifying and harmonising aspects of our historical, cultural and spiritual traditions - these and similar other day-to-day programmes go on in thousands of Shakhas in cities, in villages and in the far-off forest and hilly regions.

Coupled with all these items, is the training camp called Sangh Shiksha Varga for Swayamsevaks at various levels wherein healthy *samskaras* of oneness are further strengthened so as to eliminate all kinds of sectarian, linguistic, caste or other differences. The third and final stage of training, for those who would have undergone the first and second stages in their respective regions, affords an effective medium for imprinting a clear all Bharat National outlook on their minds. Workers from every corner of the country, speaking different languages and dialects and accustomed to varied customs and habits, go to Nagpur; they all stay and play together, eat and chat together, sing and pray together, thereby actually experiencing the concept of 'nation as one family'. The institution of *pracharaks* spreading out from one corner of the country to another is yet another factor in strengthening the bonds of national integration. They become one with the local languages, customs, dress and food habits and move about as symbols of national union of hearts.

Imbued as the Swayamsevaks are with such unalloyed dedication to the nation, it is natural that their response to challenges to national freedom, sovereignty and security is quick and spontaneous. Several have been the occasions when this quality has come to the fore—both when the British were ruling over us and after they have left.

Dr. Hedgewar never tired of warning that mere quitting of the British would not in itself see the end of all our troubles. Especially, his analysis that a powerful, organised, resurgent Hindu society alone could furnish a firm guarantee for our continued national freedom and integrity is being borne out word to word by the developing situation, especially in regions where the Hindus have been reduced to small numbers or have remained disorganised and weak.

With the basic Hindu weakness continuing to plague us even after Independence, the facile assumption of the country's leadership that partition would see an end of Muslim separatism, has proved utterly hollow. The lack of Hindu awareness and the disintegrated condition of the Hindus have also encouraged the unscrupulous politicians to pamper the Muslims with an eye on their block votes. As a result, the Muslim separatism and fundamentalism is getting sharpened assuming new and more dangerous postures all the time.

The pampering of Muslim separatism in the name of minority rights has encouraged Christian missionaries also to come out in the open with their secessionist activities in the North-Eastern parts of our country stretching from Bihar to Mizoram.

Knowing that an overall Hindu morale alone could prove an effective antidote to all such anti-national challenges, Dr. Hedgewar was very keen on exploring every possible avenue to strengthen the same. He would never miss a chance of encouraging and participating in functions arranged for that purpose. He would also strive to see that top public men are associated with the movement for Hindu awakening. His close and intimate relationship with eminent Hindu leaders like Babarao Savarkar, Bhai Parmanand, B. S. Moonje, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and others not only helped substantially in expanding the Shakha network but in rousing the common Hindus as well.

All this helped to gradually project the Sangh as a dynamic movement of organised Hindu resurgence and not merely as a volunteer force. Shri Guruji, who succeeded Dr. Hedgewar as the Sarsanghchak, continued the tradition and even added a new dimension to it by involving in the Hindu movement leading personalities in religious, educational, social, literary, and various other fields. Now the many organisations founded by the Swayamsevaks in various spheres have further expanded the horizons of Hindu consolidation; with the result, there is now the phenomenon of a rising tide of self-awareness and self-assertion among Hindus all over the country.

Dr. Hedgewar was also very clear in his mind that in the prevailing situation it was imperative that the Hindus stood up valiantly in defence of their life and honour. In this context, his views tallied entirely with Gandhiji's views. Gandhiji wrote, after his first country-wide tour, "My own experiences but confirm the opinion that the Mussalman as a rule is a bully, and the Hindu is a coward; where there are cowards there will always be bullies." In that pithy statement Gandhiji had indirectly given a warning to the

Hindus that they should give up their cowardice, if they had to end Muslim aggressiveness.

Right from the inception of the Sangh, the Swayamsevaks had decided to put an end to this humiliating state of affairs. The first challenge came within two years of the starting of the Sangh. Under the pretext of taking out a procession in honour of some peer, the Muslims in Nagpur mounted a massive attack on the Hindus. With the police remaining mute spectators, the Muslims thought that they would have a field day. But the alertness and valour displayed by the Swayamsevaks soon turned the tables and the attackers were put to flight. In that heroic encounter a Swayamsevak fell a martyr. But, for the first time, Muslims got the taste of organised Hindu power. Thereafter, there has hardly been any Muslim trouble in Nagpur up to the present day.

Now, all over the country, the presence of Swayamsevaks signals an upsurge of tremendous self-confidence and organised resistance among the Hindus whenever any of their points of honour are attacked or their right sought to be trampled upon.

One of the vital spheres in which this Hindu awakening is being felt is in respect of halting the one-way traffic of conversation of Hindus to Islam and Christianity going on for centuries.

Awareness of the catastrophic implications of conversion and the resultant swelling of non-Hindu population is slowly coming over our people. Areas which turned into Muslim majority were, in course of time, sliced off from our Motherland. Gandhar which was very much a part of our territory became Afghanistan after its conversion to Islam. The partition in 1947 also came about on the same basis. Mohammad Ali Jinnah's statement that the seed of Pakistan was sown when the first Hindu was converted to Islam is significant.

In spite of these developments over centuries, till recently there had been no proper appreciation by the Hindus of the disastrous consequences of conversion. In our innocence, we had fondly believed that the faiths of the aggressors were merely different modes of spiritual *sadhana*; that they were similar to ours and tolerant of other faiths; that conversion to their faiths was just a personal affair. We never looked around to find out the fate of nations which had fallen a prey to the invasion of these faiths; how nation after nation with its culture, history, tradition and values was sucked into the aggressors' ways of life; and how, in short, the change to those faiths was not a simple case of religious conversion, but total alienation from and annihilation of the parental national society. Swami Vivekananda had even then warned, "Every man going out of the Hindu pale is not only a man less but also an enemy the more."

However, in recent years, there has been a fast-growing impact of Hindu awakening not only in respect of facing the onslaught of conversion but in reclaiming the converted back to the Hindu fold also.

Our post-Independence period has also witnessed challenges arising from within the Hindu society. The reasons for this are evident. The diverse languages and dialects, customs and traditions, ways of worship and modes of philosophical interpretations had, in course of time, turned exclusive as a result of the weakening of the central unifying current of our national life. The vastness of the country had added to the

difficulties in maintaining communication channels, especially with the hilly and forest regions. The British, with their policy of 'divide and rule', set about systematically exploiting these apparent differences and began sowing seeds of separatism in the minds of people. For example, the floating of theories of Aryan invasion and separate Dravidian, tribal, and sick identities was, as is well known, the deliberate handiwork of the British.

The British very well knew that these separatist appeals could strike root only when the various groups in Hindu society were made to disclaim and even oppose their common Hindu identity. It was with this view that, on the one hand, they began to defame and denigrate everything associated with Hindus and, on the other, initiated political incentives to such groups to dissociate themselves from the main body of Hindu society. The educational system initiated by Lord Macaulay was also motivated by the same de-Hinduising purpose.

However, the Sangh from its very inception was convinced that the basic undercurrent of Hindu appeal is too deep and enduring to be destroyed by superficial differences and political machinations. Diversities have, in fact, been a dynamic expression of the evolution of our society. It is just like the growth of leaves, flowers and fruits in a tree which, though apparently different from one another, nevertheless form its organic parts. So also, is the case with the life-tree of the Hindu society.

The Sangh has viewed the problems of various centrifugal forces raising their heads with slogans of various types of separate interests and identities as being due to the partial drying up of the unifying life-sap of our society. The best solution therefore to these internal stresses and strains lies in strengthening and nurturing the basic roots of Hindu ethos out of which all the various sects and creeds, languages and dialects, customs and traditions, philosophical doctrines and theories have emerged.

The approach cultivated in the Sangh towards strengthening the unifying and harmonising impulses of society is entirely positive in its content. Its guiding note is self-reformation and not laying the blame on others for our downfall and degeneration. There is no place in it for any negative feelings such as anti-muslim or anti-Christian, or even anti-British for that matter. Once a gentleman asked Shri Guruji whether the Sangh was organising the Hindus in order to counteract the various activities of the Muslims. He replied: "Even if Prophet Mohammed had not been born and Islam had not come into existence, we would have taken up this work just as we are doing it today, if we had found Hindus in the same disorganised, self-forgetful condition as at present."

"Emphasise the unifying factors and just ignore the differences"- this is another positive feature of the approach of the Sangh. The programmes of Sangh are so designed that the inherent oneness of the participants is invoked and an unbreakable social brotherhood forged.

The efficacy of this approach began manifesting itself right from the early stages of the Sangh. In 1934, when Gandhiji visited a 1500-strong Swayamsevak camp at Wardha, he was pleasantly surprised to find that the Swayamsevak were not even aware of the castes of one another, not to speak of any ideas of untouchability. The incident had left such a deep impression on Gandhiji's mind that he referred to it a full thirteen years

later. In his address to the workers of Sangh in Bhangi colony at Delhi on 16th September 1947, he said, "I visited the RSS camp years ago, when the founder Shri Hedgewar was alive. I was very much impressed by your discipline, the complete absence of untouchability and the rigorous simplicity. Since then, the Sangh has grown. I am convinced that any organisation which is inspired by the high ideal of service and self-sacrifice is bound to grow in strength." (The Hindu:17th September 1947)

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar too, when he visited Sangh Shiksha Varga in 1939, in Pune, was surprised to find the Swayamsevak moving about in absolute equality and brotherhood without even caring to know the caste of the others. When Dr. Ambedkar asked Hedgewar whether there were any untouchables in the camp, the latter replied that there were neither 'touchables' nor 'untouchables', but only Hindus. The ringing words of Balasaheb Deoras, the third Sarsanghchalak of the Sangh, with regard to untouchability-a la Lincoln's famous words in the context of Black slavery in America – "If untouchability is not wrong, nothing in the world is wrong", have resounded throughout the country.

Grounded firmly in this conviction, the Swayamsevak carry the same message to all sections of society through their persuasive contacts, talks and suitable programmes. As a result, pernicious evils like untouchability and casteism that have been eating into the vitals of our society for centuries are being gradually overcome.

The positive concept of social consolidation envisaged by Sangh has room for the Muslims and Christians of this country also. The Sangh harbours no hatred for anyone merely because he belongs to a different faith. The word 'Hindu', in Sangh's view, connotes the national entity of Bharat and not merely a religious faith. In this broad national sense, whoever identifies himself with this national life-current, irrespective of his creed, is a 'Hindu'. In simple terms, identification with the national mainstream of our country means: unalloyed devotion to the Motherland, a spirit of fraternity and identification of one's interests with all the rest of the countrymen and an attitude of adoration towards the great nation-builders, past and recent, and the values of life bequeathed to us by them. Indications are not wanting that self-confident and enlightened contacts with the Muslims and Christians can gradually draw them into the main national stream.

Inculcation of noble personal virtues which are held high in the Hindu tradition has always been an inseparable part of the mission of Hindu consolidation. As such, qualities like personal integrity, mutual trust, respect for elders, reverence for womanhood, devotion to God and holy men, uprightness in the dealings of public money, law-abiding nature, simplicity in living style, and absence of vices, etc., are ingrained in the Swayamsevak as a natural outcome of Sangh training. The Swayamsevak are able to disseminate the same among others, in whatever field they are working, is now well recognised. The aspects of character and conduct of the Swayamsevak form a very important factor in winning over an ever-widening circle of people in all their endeavours.

The spirit of loving brotherhood cultivated among the Swayamsevak has been at the back of their involvement in several facets of social transformation - ensuring social justice being one of the more prominent among them. The Sangh believes that where

there is a spirit of sincere love and amity there can be no exploitation of injustice indulged in by one section against the other in society. However, today, there are vast numbers in society who suffer from social, economic and educational deprivations and are easy victim of oppression and exploitation. At times, a mere appeal to the sense of justice and fair play may not have the desired effect on the exploiting agencies and as such, putting up organised resistance by the suffering groups becomes a necessity.

Swayamsevak have, on such occasions, taken recourse to struggles and pursued them through to success. But even while doing so, they take care that permanent marks of hatred or enmity are not left behind. After all, in the final analysis the one effective path to social transformation lies in the winning over of hearts and intensifying of social awareness among all sections. Theories of class or caste conflicts can have no place in this natural and healthy way of achieving harmony, equality and justice in every walk of national life.

Yet another manifestation of the intense love of society inculcated in Swayamsevak is in the field of social service.

Swayamsevak are trained to look upon the society as one single, vast, country-wide family. Just as every member of the family identifies himself with the joys and sorrows of the other members, so also is the Swayamsevak expected to behave in respect of other members of the larger family - the society.

Dr. Hedgewar in his address to Maharashtra Hindu Yuvak Parishat at Pune in 1938 had stated:

"A real servant of the nation is one who identifies himself totally with the nation. There are some who take pride in proclaiming their sacrifice for the sake of nation. Such an expression only betrays their feeling of being something distinct from the nation. Just as a person never says that he has made sacrifices for the sake of his son, so also any service offered to our broader national family does not amount to sacrifice. It is just a duty to be performed by us."

Shri Guruji, in his guidance to the workers engaged in the service of the neglected sections of society, wrote:

"Strenuous work springing from the heart and manifesting itself in the day-to-day behaviour, work on a spiritual, moral and social plane, is called for. "Let our workers work in the right spirit of Dharma making no distinction in doing service to whoever he may be, a Christian or a Muslim or of any other persuasion. For, calamities, distress and misfortunes make no such distinction but afflict all alike".

Having been moulded and firmly rooted in such samskars imparted by the Sangh, over fifty thousand of Swayamsevaks all over the country are today contributing their might to about twenty thousand service projects being carried on by several sister organisations.

The spontaneous manner in which the Swayamsevaks respond to calamities - natural or man-made - also stems from the basic social attitudes instilled in them by the Sangh. Sangh views society as a living organism. It is even described as 'Virat Purusha' - a single unified colossal personality marked by an organic relationship of the limbs and



organs with one another and with the body as a whole. Any deficiency in any part of the body is immediately sought to be set right by the rest of the organs making the necessary sacrifices. Such unifying consciousness in society alone can make for the spontaneous sharing of joys and sorrows among the people.

Imbued as the Swayamsevaks are with this genuine spirit of social consciousness, they rush to the immediate relief of the people whenever calamities overtake them and also plan for their rehabilitation as far as possible.

The national freedom that Dr. Hedgewar had envisaged was essentially positive in its content. Quitting of the foreigner was not to be its sole objective. Upholding of points of national honour and values of life, which had been desecrated or denigrated during the foreigners' rule, was its essence. Dr. Hedgewar, even while he was neck-deep in movements for political emancipation, was equally concerned about such aspects as well. In fact, he never differentiated the one from the other. For him, fight for independence was a fight for safeguarding our national honour and values as well.

The post-Independence era has witnessed many a campaign launched by the Swayamsevaks for upholding and refurbishing points of national faith and veneration in various spheres of life.

Dr. Hedgewar's view of the future set-up of Bharat under freedom was in tune with the essence of our national ethos. The jottings that he put down on the day the Congress adopted Complete Independence as its goal in 1930 are clear and emphatic:

“The Hindu culture is the life-breath of Hindustan. It is therefore clear that if Hindustan is to be protected, we should first nourish the Hindu culture. If the Hindu culture perishes in Hindustan itself, and if the Hindu society ceases to exist, it will hardly be appropriate to refer to the mere geographical entity that remains as Hindustan. Mere geographical lumps do not make a nation. The Sangh will co-operate with the Congress in the efforts to secure freedom, so long as these efforts do not come in the way of preserving our national culture.”

Shri Guruji, in his penetrating analysis of the directions in which the post-Independence Bharat was being led by her rulers, said: “Today we find everywhere attempts to recast our life-pattern in the mould of an American, English or Russian way of life. How can we call it *swatantrata* (freedom) which has no *swa* (our genius) in it? Then it is only *para-tantrata*. If Lenin is kept as the ideal, it becomes ‘*Lenin-tantra*’ and not *swa-tantra*. In fact, preservation and propagation of our national life-values, i.e., our *dharma* and *sanskriti*, have always been held in our historical tradition as the *raison d’etre* of *swatantrata*.”

Taking these as their firm guidelines, the Swayamsevak have been trying to manifest the nation's pristine genius in diverse fields of national endeavour.

It was also natural that when during the Emergency in 1975-77, our country was plunged in internal slavery and every single cherished value of free and democratic life was smothered, the Swayamsevaks rose as one man in the cause of the people. As

someone has put it, the heroic and self-sacrificing role the Swayamsevak played during those crucial days has made that historic occasion “the finest hour of RSS.”

Nor is the commitment of Swayamsevak to the sublime Hindu values nurtured in them confined to the boundaries of Bharat. Dr. Hedgewar used to tell the Swayamsevak: “Wherever and in whatever position you are, do not forget that you are a Swayamsevak. Always and everywhere consider yourself as a ‘Sangh *pracharak*’ - devoted to carrying the message of Sangh.”

The Swayamsevak going abroad were no exception to this spirit of Sangh. To all of them Shri Guruji's words showed the path of how to remain true to the *samskars* and disseminate the same among others. “It is necessary that our Hindu brethren who have imbibed right *samskars* here should continue meeting regularly with a view to keeping the flame of cultural pride and the awareness of our mission burning bright in their hearts.” A prayer that could be common for all Hindus abroad was also prepared which has now become a common feature all over the world.

Shri Guruji's guidance was extremely relevant from one other angle. He had warned, “The first thing that our brothers abroad have to bear to mind is that while carrying on a profession or an employment there, earning and amassing money should not be their sole aim. They should appreciate the problems of the local people and sympathise with their aspirations. Some portion of their earnings should be kept apart for promoting their welfare and enlightening them on the great principles and values of Hinduism. At the same time, they should, by their behaviour and living, demonstrate that they hail from the land of a great and hoary culture and thus set a personal example to others.”

The efforts Swayamsevak abroad are making to translate this message in their lives in as diverse situations as in the Western, the Caribbean, the African and the South-East Asian countries and races provide a pointer to the sublime content of Hindu ethos they had imbibed while in Bharat.

From a perusal of the various facets of the practical manifestation of the Sangh- thought indicated above, it should be clear that they constitute, in fact, a projection of the picture of the 'Swayamsevak in action'. For, the Swayamsevak is the sole medium through which the Sangh seeks to translate its vision into a reality. The view of Sangh, in turn, stems from its conviction that it is man who makes or mars the society. It is the level of the character, the calibre of the average man, that ultimately decides the level of the nation's progress. The Sangh, since its very inception, has therefore been concentrating all its attention on the task of moulding the right type of men.

Dr. Hedgewar, because of his long and intimate association with various public organisations, had occasion to study their workers at close quarters and know their serious drawbacks. Drawing suitable lessons thereby, he formulated the Shakha-technique so that the Swayamsevak may be free from such failings, and qualities and virtues necessary for all-round national re-construction inculcated in them.

To start with, there has been, for long, the commonly held notion that working and sacrificing for the sake of the nation is beyond the ability of the ordinary man. He feels that he is already burdened too much with his personal and family commitments to be able to share the nation's burden as well. But the simple and easy technique of Shakha - of coming together of persons every day for an hour and engaging themselves in interesting and illuminating programmes - has succeeded in dispelling this notion. The fact that people from all sections and strata of society are involving themselves in the Sangh, stands as a glowing testimony to the efficacy of the technique in mobilising the energies of the common man in the cause of the nation.

Then, there was the other equally serious difficulty of providing the motivation for public workers. It was - and is even now - hard to find one engaged in public activity inspired by a spirit of selfless service devoid of even the least traces of personal gain. The field of public activity normally presents the scene of either total abstention of workers and absence of activity or if there is activity one finds self-seeking considerations propelling it. No wonder, there is a yawning gap in the credibility of public workers between their profession and practice.

Dr. Hedgewar took special pains to evolve a suitable technique to see that the Swayamsevak are kept above all such personal lures. Systems like keeping apart at least one hour a day for service of the Motherland, the collective prayer to Bharat Mata invoking in oneself the spirit of total surrender at Her altar, and praying for virtues of invincible strength, character, knowledge, heroism and dedication to the ideal, offering *Guru Dakshina* in a spirit of selfless service to the society, practice of spending from one's own pocket while taking part in camps and other special programmes, and not going in for public funds for organisational expenses and much less seeking any kind of governmental favours - all these have helped in planting an unshakable spirit of self-reliance and self-sacrifice in the Swayamsevak and steeling their character. The trust and confidence the Swayamsevak enjoy in the public eye because of this strict training is ample evidence all over the country. The secret of the overwhelming response the Swayamsevaks receive from the people and the growing number of projects and programmes coming up with public participation lies precisely in this.

In our past history, indiscipline has been one more undoing. We lost many a crucial battle like the Third Battle of Panipat in 1761, or the great uprising in 1857 against the British, mainly because of this serious drawback. There was no lack of self-sacrificing zeal or heroism on the part of the soldiers or their captains. But the failure of the armies to maintain a strict code of discipline, whether in sticking to the orders of the commanders or their strategies, had reduced all their valour and sacrifices to nought.

This, however, does not mean that discipline is a trait expected merely of the army or the police. In fact, no single endeavour in any field of public life can succeed without the participants' observing a code of disciplined behaviour. The kind of discipline expected from the ordinary people is, of course, different from the one enforced in the armed forces. It is in the nature of a spontaneous self-restraint born out of one's awareness of higher obligations to social well-being. It is a self-willing attitude of rubbing off one's angularities and adjusting oneself to the demands of organised endeavour.

It is towards inculcation of this kind of self-discipline that the various aspects of the physical, intellectual and emotional training in the Shiksha are directed. The exceptional success this technique has achieved in this regard is by now so well known that people have begun to equate 'discipline' with 'RSS'. The atmosphere of disciplined and orderly behaviour of mammoth Hindu congregations or of sections like students and labour where the Swayamsevak take the lead is also widely recognised.

One of the main reasons for the continuous growth of the Sangh - without deflecting from its chosen path for over seven decades - can be directly traced to the tradition of 'organisation-oriented' instead of "personality-oriented" working style built into its technique. Dr. Hedgewar's farsightedness in this regard was evident when he placed the Bhagawa Dhvaj, the eternal symbol of our national culture and traditions, as the

supreme ideal - the Guru - and considered himself as one among the Swayamsevak devoted to that Guru. The tragedy of organisations and parties built around personalities in our country is now too apparent to need any elaboration. The phenomenon of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, on the other hand, is truly remarkable.

Dr. Hedgewar, the founder, passed away when the Sangh was just fifteen years old and had just entered the national arena. Many a system which he had initiated was in a nascent stage. The country was then caught in the throes of the Second World War. Under Shri Guruji, the next Sarsanghchhalak, the Sangh developed in various directions set out by Dr. Hedgewar. As a result of his 33 years long, single-minded tapasya, Shri Guruji raised the organisation to mighty proportions. In 1973, he left his mortal coil, handing over the charge to Balasaheb Deoras, who in turn handed over the charge to Prof. Rajendra Singh (Rajju Bhaiyya) in 1994. Shri Balasaheb had during his over two decades of stewardship contributed and presently Prof. Rajendra Singh has been contributing towards imparting ever new thrust in several directions of expansion of Sangh work. It goes without saying that the same remarkable tradition is continuing. There is no deviation, no doubts raised anywhere about the capacity of the Sangh to march ahead on its charted course.

This tradition of 'organisation-oriented' style of working has now permeated scores of organisations founded by the Swayamsevak in different fields of national reconstruction. People have come to view them, as a rule, as models of harmonious and co-operative endeavour free from personality-cult and groupism.

The will to succeed and triumph over every kind of obstacle and opposition has been one of the most outstanding marks of Swayamsevak since the inception of the Sangh. Probably no other organisation in our country today has undergone so many trials and tribulations as the Sangh. There has been no end to the campaign of vilification indulged in by every conceivable vested interest- especially the politicians in power - against the Sangh. Governmental harassment common during the British rule continued long after the attainment of freedom as well.

The organisation was thrice banned by the Government- once in the wake of the assassination of Gandhiji in 1948, the other during the Emergency of 1975-77 and thirdly in 1992, in the wake of the demolition of the foreign Islamic structure standing over the sanctum-sanctorum of Lord Sri Rama at Ayodhya. On all the three occasions, a virulent governmental propaganda was let loose in full blast against the Sangh. The Sangh, on its part, commanded no mass media, no all-India press, no radio, no publicity-campaigners. And yet, all the maligning and mudslinging failed to turn the popular mind against it. And it emerged from the ordeal every time brighter and stronger - a testimony to the invincible will to succeed which has become a second nature of the Swayamsevak.

Needless to say, Hedgewar's own personal example has been acting as the guiding star for all this multi-faceted unfoldment of the qualities and virtues of the Swayamsevak. His talks, his likes and dislikes, his behaviour, seen in his most informal moments-every one of these carried an inspiring lesson and has remained as a precious legacy for all the future generations of Swayamsevak. His total and complete self-effacement, the endless hardships that he endured, the dire poverty that he smilingly embraced, the

transformation that he brought about in his own fiery temper coupled with his incomparable skill in winning over to Sangh innumerable people with diverse natures and temperaments, his rock-like conviction in the divine nature of the mission he had embarked upon, and with all this, the utterly simple and unassuming manner of his dress and style of living-all these stand as the beacon-light guiding the steps of Swayamsevak in every single endeavour of theirs. And doubtless, it will continue to inspire them to press on without rest or respite till they shall have translated his dream of a glorious Hindu Rashtra into a living reality.

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